WHO SERVES THE SURVEY?

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ABSTRACT

_Who Serves the Survey?_ is an intimate contemplation on the art history survey. In it, I examine art history's flagship books and courses through their capacity to structure knowledge. Fastening first on what, borrowing from Foucault, might instructively be termed the "art-function" and the "story-function", I cogitate on the capacity of each ("serving under" and "serving up" the survey) to constrict, constrain and contain conceptions of vision, visualization, visual representation and visual comprehension. From there, I delve into the beginnings of the modern art history survey and probe a number of points where it (the survey) both produces and is, in turn, produced by the national, the archival, the financial, the social, the pedagogical, the professional/professorial and (tangentially) the psychological. The last section is analytical and prescriptive in that it poses questions inspired by the advent of visual culture/visual studies as an alternative and an intervention. Key among these, is the vital theoretical and pedagogical query: How might visual material be introduced and studied otherwise? In my judgment, visual cultural studies, growing out of two mutually influential tendencies in Britain: critical art history and cultural studies, provides the best option for reconceiving the study and teaching of visual representations. It has two distinct advantages. Unlike the comparatively rigid methodology of art historical surveys, visual studies refuses to impose a predetermined method or system, choosing instead, to affirm the inquiry process itself by allowing the researcher/bricoleur to track down, cook up and cobble together whatever methodologies fit the task at hand.
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PROLOGUE: WHO SERVES THE SURVEY?

It's obvious that the title is a play on the homophonic relationship between the words "serve" and "survey". Yet, I'm also interested in how the question resonates with understandings of subjectivity and subjecthood, especially as they pertain to social constructionism. "To serve" is a transitive verb in this usage, but the act of serving is neither voluntary nor spontaneous. Tightly circumscribed by station and obligation, with connotations ranging from assistance to subservience, service problematizes notions of passive and active, compulsion and agency. Some questions this meditation on meanings and slippage generates for me are: Who "serves up" the survey? Who "dishes it out"? Who serves the survey in the sense of being in service or servitude to it (servant or slave to master)? Who attends to the needs, wishes and desires of the survey? Who renders obedience to it? Who serves the survey by delivering it (like a writ in law or a ball in tennis)? Who serves the survey by being hired to mate with it (as a stallion "serves" a mare)?

And, of course, who is the "who"? Who would serve a survey? (Are they servile?) Why would a survey need or want to be served? Who do they become in the process of serving it up or out; of bringing it forward; of serving their time? More importantly perhaps, who's served by it? Is it serviceable? For me, the notion of being in service to a survey conjures up another array of associations. Some of the traits identified with surveys are systematization, organization, scope, comprehensiveness, contextualization, measurement and analysis. All of these place surveys in the realm of the rational, objective, verifiable, reliable and scientific. Can history courses, or more particularly, art
history courses, qualify as surveys? Is any survey trustworthy? Surveys convey, too, the notion of the superior (supervisory) view; of overview and oversight. Although their etymology is different, I’m reminded of surveillance. Do art historians trained in survey methods delivering survey courses become surveyors (inspectors)? Is it possible to produce or dispense the survey without being produced or dispensed by it? Since surveys discourage other kinds of looking, do we owe it to students to dispense with surveys instead—to let learners look without inspection or correction?
FOREWORD

What is activated and regulated by the presence and persistence of art history surveys in educational environments? They (the surveys) may be “orthodox” or “reformed”, taking the shape of textbooks, instructors’ manuals, test banks, slide collections, films, broadcasts, videos, Web sites, interactive software or digital files. No matter how cautious, suspicious or equivocal, it’s my contention that historical surveys of art inevitably betray their dependence on historiographic, chronographic, ethnographic and biographic configurations that originate in, and authorize, European and/or Eurocentric ascendency.¹

Unavoidably, I speak about the physical spaces and psychic structures of/for teaching and pedagogy as if they could somehow be cordoned off from other areas, or separated out from other varieties of cognition/perception. I realize, however, that this is

¹ Similar criticisms have been advanced for close to thirty years. Notable precedents in applying Foucault, Lyotard and Bourdieu to the issue of art history and cultural domination are Nicholas Green’s and Frank Mort’s “Visual Representation and Cultural Politics” (1982) and Jon Bird’s “Art History and Hegemony” (1986). Appearing in Block during the hard line neo-liberal era of Margaret Thatcher, echoes of Bird’s conclusion are audible in my introduction.

The delegitimization of the master-narratives of art history—the white, male; the artwork: autonomous, transcendental; art history: linear, evolutionary—opens up the discourse to the flow of difference, thus recognizing the attempt to arrest the process within the social thought of a symbolic field traversed by antagonistic forces accessible to hegemonic articulation. (Bird, [1986], p. 82)
patently absurd; comparable in a sense to claiming that learning is something that only happens in appropriately designated sites under the supervision of experts trained to kick-start and guide it to fruition. Nonetheless, it’s one of the fictions we operate with (and under). Therefore, the device deserves acknowledgement beyond the feeble gestures I direct below towards the art museum and the “private lives” of art historians. I’m also painfully aware that students are, at best, liminally inscribed here. All the same, I like to think, given my recurrent (habitual? chronic?) student status, that what follows is animated by an unashamed—and not entirely unearned—advocacy.

Disclaimers are fecund, but I’m going to continue in the confessional vein regardless. Considering that my place of residence and professional activities are in Canada, what justification do I offer for a heavy reliance on American scholarship? Availability is one. Influence is another. A vast amount of research is done and published in the United States. It is the art historical powerhouse, and ignoring or dismissing the heft and clout of its institutions or the collective weight of their output is unthinkable. Canadian, British and European scholars’ preoccupations are conditioned by, and responsive to, what’s going on in the United States. I’m not suggesting—nor would I—that they’re homogenous though, and I’ve endeavored to distinguish the Canadian situation by injecting Canadian perspectives whenever and wherever I could find them. My focus is, as I’ve said, on the pedagogical discursivity of art history surveys. Hence, I’m conscious of tensions or fissures between disembodied, theoretical explorations of language, epistemic trends or tendencies and group behaviors, on the one hand, and practical deliberations on teaching, individual courses or classes and personal proclivities, on the other. Might there be a phantom similitude here relatable to the
separation of an essentialized or monolithic art history from particularized, specialized or even atomized histories of art; from the survey as art historical testament/testimonial and the exegetical acrobatics of its highly skilled apologists?
CHAPTER ONE: MEANS, MOTIVES, METHODS

What is my topic and how will I approach it?

A main objective in this dissertation is to describe and discuss the art history survey textbook and the curriculum it presumes and promotes as a discursive formation that constructs particular understandings of art history (and therefore, of art and history) for art historians and their publics. Courses like these have traditionally been organized around a canon of works presented in chronological sequence according to all, some or any of the following: artist, style, movement or period. The best-known and most common is the introductory or “universal” survey. But there are many variations ranging

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1 I should say something off the top about footnotes. You’ll quickly discover that I’m fond of footnotes. They are copious and lengthy (at times longer than the primary narrative) in this document. Some reasons why I like them are that they’re dialogical and digressive; they perform as texts within texts; they help loosen up the tight formality of the academic essay (as does the first person active voice); they interrupt and interpose; they allow unexpected juxtapositions; they encourage the interplay of voices and voicings; and they enable unauthorized and delegitimized reading practices: reading around, reading through, reading under, reading against.

2 Its organization is borrowed from the Louvre’s programmatic display which is replicated in most large state-funded art museums. In their classic article “The Universal Survey Museum” (1980), Carol Duncan & Alan Wallach reflect on the symbolic significance of these buildings, their collections and our passage through them.
from overviews of individual artists, genres, groups or schools to curricula delimited by
temporal units as short (in relative terms) as a decade, a lifetime or a century or as long
as an era. Such epochs are highly variable and unstable classifications bearing names like
Ancient, Medieval or Modern. I've chosen Foucault's phrase "discursive formation"\(^3\)

When people use the term art museum, it is this type of museum they
usually have in mind. The universal survey museum is not only the first in
importance, it is also the first museum type to emerge historically, and
from the beginning it was identified with the idea of the public art
museum (p.452) . . . In the museum, the work of art now represented a
moment of art history. It exemplified a particular category within the new
system of art-historical classification . . . The new art historical
programme partially democratized artistic experience since in theory
anyone could learn the system of classification and the unique
characteristics attributed to each school and master. Without the museum,
the discipline of art history as it has evolved over the past two hundred
years, would be inconceivable (p.456) . . . The history of art—primarily
understood as a history of artists—demonstrated the claim that history was
the history of great men. The museum organized as a historical monument,
not only made this claim visible, it also enforced it as a universal truth; as
defined by art history, art could speak only of individual genius and
achievement. The museum thus institutionalized the bourgeois claim to
speak for the interests of all mankind (p. 456) . . . The museum prompts
the visitor to identify with an elite culture at the same time as it spells out
his place in the social hierarchy. (p. 457)

\(^3\) Foucault elaborates on his use of the terms discourse, discursive formation and the
relationship between the two in \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on
Language} (1972). Clarifying a reference made earlier in the book, he writes:

discourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they
are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular
modalities of existence . . . [and] the law of such a series is precisely what
because it suggests to me a narrower categorization within discourse and a generative relationship to/with discursive practices. Both "discursive formations" and "discursive practices"\(^4\) can be construed as existing/functioning within a broader disciplinary and institutional matrix, either of which could be usefully identified as a discourse. Selecting the term discursive formation is at once relational (to the task at hand) and contingent (on the set of circumstances I'm interested/invested in, and on the narrative configuration I'm imposing/inflicting on it).

While the project draws on Foucault and, as such, is keenly attentive to how language articulates power relations, it is not an archaeological or genealogical study in the Foucauldian sense. I am interested in the development of surveys and the trajectories they've followed, but I'm more concerned with their contemporary functions—as

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I have so far called a *discursive formation* [emphasis in the original] . . . [T]his discursive formation really is the principle of dispersion and redistribution, not of formulations, not of sentences, not of propositions, but of statements (p. 107).

\(^4\) Although this category was introduced to English-speaking readers in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1974, p. 46), Foucault defined it more succinctly in a later essay:

Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories. Thus each discursive practice implies a play of prescriptions that designate exclusions and choices (Foucault, 1977, p. 199).
representations—and with the knowledges and knowledgeabilities they produce. Deconstruction, as theorized by Jacques Derrida, another thinker identified with the so-called "linguistic turn"\(^5\), extends and complicates Foucault’s propositions on institutional representations of/as knowledge. In Nicholas Royle’s words: “Deconstruction—which is never single or homogeneous, . . .—is concerned with the lucid, patient attempt to trace what has not been read, what remains unread or unreadable within the elaboration of concepts and the workings of institutions” (Royle, p. 160). Or, as Derrida himself describes deconstruction, with reference to literature (but equally applicable to any literature as a body of knowledge or mode of classification):

In short, deconstruction not only teaches us to read literature more thoroughly by attending to it as language, as the production of meaning through différance and dissemination, through a complex play of signifying traces; it also enables us to interrogate the covert philosophical and political presumptions of institutionalized critical methods which generally govern our reading of a text . . . It is not a question of calling for the destruction of such institutions, but rather of making us aware of what we are in fact doing when we are subscribing to this or that institutional way of reading. (Derrida, 1984, p. 125)

Foucault and Derrida seem the obvious choices for an endeavor like this one partly because their critical interventions have had—and continue to have—a pervasive and persistent impact on the academy. Further, their critiques of the essentialist and foundationalist presumptions of modernism as a system of thought (including such

\(^5\) Richard Rorty’s *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical method* (1967) popularized the phrase. It refers to the philosophical tendency to see culture, human subjectivity and therefore, reality as constituted in/by/through language.
conceptions as the autonomous individual, the generalizability of experience [temporal or otherwise] and the existence of universal truths) disrupt conventional notions of history and art. And since the survey schema in its customary form has a symbiotic relationship (dependent and supportive) with modernist (as opposed to contemporary) constructions of each—history and art—the challenge they pose to established pedagogical practices in art history is easily recognizable. Art historical pedagogy also appears to be an arena in which the threat posed by poststructuralism's insistence that language, knowledge and power can’t be isolated from one another has been widely perceived, though its implications (as I discuss below) have often been mystified and/or misconstrued. Few American or Canadian art historians have been willing to advocate—publicly (in print) and recently (since the 1980s) at any rate—dispensing with survey courses altogether.\footnote{I should stress that my comments are based on personal experience with art history surveys in Canada; on informal conversations with colleagues here and in the United States; on prepared responses to a questionnaire sent to art historians teaching surveys in Canadian institutions last year (see Appendix); and on published statements in books and journals directed to a North American readership. I’m not addressing the situation in Britain or in other English-speaking nations. The British critique of art history (largely internal) was virulent and sustained from the mid 1980s, and a number of academic institutions responded with unprecedented changes to departmental structures and programs. However, scholars were positioned (and positioned themselves) differently on this side of the Atlantic. Political and historical conditions were also dissimilar. There was no comparable tradition of radical dissent in higher learning; the role of the public intellectual was relatively undeveloped; and both exclusive private—and “open” public—post-secondary education were equally (if distinctively) conservative and intractable. (Axelrod [2002] compares the trajectories of British, American and Canadian universities in the twentieth century [pp. 24-33], and Guillory [1993] advances some reasons why scholars have a low profile in North American society [pp. 248-255].) Yet, arguments and events in the United Kingdom were...}
Instead, the majority have called for revising their content to include a broader range of materials or “reforming” their orientation and operation to include a plurality of perspectives and methods. For me, these deflections confirm the survey’s importance as a disciplinary mode, a theoretical paradigm and a pedagogical tool, for selecting, containing and ordering data and images. Custom, habit and convenience have likely served to inculcate and perpetuate the surveying (surveilling?) gaze as a mechanism for aesthetic appropriation and hegemonic historicization. There are also serious disincentives in place to prevent deviating too far from a discursive structure that continues as normative in private and public collections; research activities and resource allocations; publications and curricula throughout most of the western and much of the non-western world.

It’s virtually impossible to consider the socio-cultural dimensions of a university curriculum devoted to high art and great artists without taking the work of another French followed in North America and their influence was felt. Getting at their effects on the care and conduct of art history and art historians in Canada is hampered because no general history of Canadian universities or of art history has been written. Let me accentuate, however, that, while the existence of these documents would have made my job easier, I have not set out to address that insufficiency by cobbling together a piecemeal report on academic life or art historical activity in this country. Although historians and sociologists appear prominently in the following pages, their aims are not mine. I’m an educator engaged in—and by—education in all its mysterious complexity. My predilections are unapologetically pedagogical, and my priorities are learners and learning.
theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, on social reproduction and cultural capital into account. Bourdieu's theorizations have been criticized for denigrating popular culture and for what detractors consider their lack of portability beyond the French context and its specific societal and institutional peculiarities (Fowler, 1997, p. 4; Readings, 1996, p. 107; Swarz, 1997, p. 289). Regardless of these putative limitations, however, Bourdieu's studies were among the first extensive examinations of taste as an institutional and institutionalized phenomenon; as an acquisition or asset capable of being transmitted, converted and exchanged; and as a performance of social differentiation inscribed and deciphered as class distinction. I find it necessary to start with these three intellectuals who proceed from a similarly materialist and to some extent anti-rationalist position (but whose formulations are, in other respects, irreconcilable) because much of the criticism that has been directed at the "art historical narrative" (which students become familiar with through surveys) has been provoked by their ideas. Naturally, proceeding in this manner leaves me open to the charge of conducting a survey of the survey. To a degree, I'm willing to concede the point; any general study has features that resemble an overview, but obvious differences in theoretical premises, organizational priorities and writerly strategies—not to mention motivations, positions, practices and principles—should become apparent as the discussion unfolds.
Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu will act as touchstones, then, as I bring texts from a variety of literatures into play to contest a model which I argue has enough shared features to be treated as a singular configuration: an object of inquiry. One of my tasks will be to isolate and define those traits. Clearly, it would be disingenuous to claim that I characterize them objectively or that I’m advancing them as “evidence”. I bring interpretations of these theorists and their writings/ideas forward and “tart them up” (as I do everything else) as part of an interested and invested demonstration aimed at querying canonicity and troubling ultramontane art history. Each is a rhetorical device that is (I

7 In this respect, my methodology has unmistakable affinities with the technique of bricolage. Joe Kincheloe explains:

When bricoleurs bring the social, cultural, political, economic, psychological, discursive and pedagogical together with the emotional, affective, value-laden and normative, they know that they will be faced with the tension of dissimilar narratives and interpretations. Central to more Cartesian-oriented empirical models of research is the resolution of conflict and difference. Such complexity and contradiction does not lead bricoleurs into a nihilistic funk, but instead pushes them to a new level of hermeneutic creativity that values the generative interplay of dissimilar perspectives. An awareness of diverse ways of understanding and constructing the social world is necessary knowledge for bricoleurs in their pursuit of rigour. Such insight is invaluable in their challenge to monolithic forms of “common knowledge” and their detection of alternate knowledges within any canonical construction or research finding. In this aspect of the bricolage the arrogance of the empirical expert is abandoned for the humility of diverse perspectives. The conflicts and differences valued by the bricoleur continuously generate a sense of curious uncertainty. Such a critical uncertainty insists that nothing is beyond questioning and that even what was just found in our research remains perpetually open to reconsideration in the light of what else could be, what was, and what should be. (Kincheloe, J., 2004, p. 35)
hope) cleverly planned and cunningly placed to persuade readers that art history survey textbooks, the programs of instruction they encourage and traditional art history’s grand narrative work to reinforce exclusivity (and exclusion) and discourage criticality. A reflexive and self-critical text tries to expose—or at least, points to—the processes it employs and their entanglement with/enmeshment in ideology as it negotiates for space, access and audibility. As well, it foregrounds a fluid, permeable, transient and vulnerable notion of “self” aimed at precluding and expunging the independent, confident, rational and authoritative voice. Since teaching is a rhetorical (and performative) practice, crafting language to represent doubt, anxiety, discomfort and struggle serves to draw attention to their mandated absence from the classroom. If teachers thwart convention and admit these feelings and experiences, students gain permission to acknowledge them too.

Why is the survey model so entrenched?

Curricula recounting the gradual and progressive evolution of art may have escaped serious scrutiny, but during the past decade, several of the discourses on/from which it depends have begun to be noticed, studied and queried. Art, as a concept and a typology, has been examined and revealed as a distinctly western and remarkably recent development (Carroll, 2000; Danto, 1997; Errington, 1998; Mortensen, 1997; Shiner, 2001). Art history too has been probed and criticized for an inflexibility rooted in historicism and modernism (Belting; 1987, 2003; Mansfield, 2002; Minor, 1994; Moxey, 1994, 2001; Preziosi, 1989, 1998). Although the survey has come up infrequently in these investigations, their relevance and usefulness is obvious, and they constitute valuable
resources. Studies on the societal functions of taste and aesthetics (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1996) as well as critiques of canonicity (under Bourdieu’s influence and impelled by cultural studies)\(^8\) began a bit earlier, and these too, it seems to me, help elucidate the survey’s persistence and its virtual invisibility.

Debates over the definition of—or justification for—art history are ongoing, and they’re not the primary focus of my study, but they are a salient part of its milieu and a distinguishing feature of the matrix into which I insert it. Thus, I’ve chosen the following two examples of issues that, to my mind, constitute threats to the discipline and its mission which, if taken seriously, would force radical reconceptions of its terms of reference, its composition and its methods. In 1989, Donald Preziosi took aim at the humanist criteria art historians have traditionally used to identify a particular kind of human creativity as art production and to validate the attention they lavish on it (through its philosophical and its elevated character). Preziosi asserted—and substantiated—that creating items which make targeted appeals to the sense of vision is neither an intellectual pursuit, nor is it exclusive to humans.

It would seem that the evolutionary scenario resulting in things we call representational image making was very long indeed and that such practices or habitual behaviors do not in themselves comprise a hallmark of *Homo sapiens sapiens*: If *Homo erectus* was doing what he did 300,000 years ago, he was articulating a visual environment according to principles grounded in perceptual self-awareness (the ability to construe marks as

\(^8\) The first extended interrogation appears to have been Kampf & Lauter’s *Politics of Literature* (1972) which challenged the literary canon.
things) of a sort equivalent if not identical to what would evidently be required to paint figural images of bison or horses. (Preziosi, 1989, pp. 132-133)

But his book caused only a momentary flurry of interest in the academic community when it appeared.

Similarly, Larry Shiner’s (2001) description of art as a uniquely European and modern phenomenon that came into existence near the end of the eighteenth century has received little attention and scant comment in art historical circles. Could this have to do with the fact that Shiner’s well-argued and well-documented thesis drastically shrinks art history’s legitimate purview? In place of a universal phenomenon evolving globally over many millennia, he describes a palpably commercial product designed to serve the social aspirations of wealthy elites in a single populous and prosperous region (western Europe). Visual materials were once woven into the fabric of people’s everyday lives, but art, according to Shiner, was—and is—deliberately and self-consciously separate. Aestheticized commodities were first designed for conspicuous consumption in a new and uniquely configured marketplace in France and Britain, but the “art system”, as Shiner refers to it, has only been around for about two centuries (pp. 75-77). Preziosi’s ruminations raise vexing questions about how visual creation has been construed in the modern west and whether it can be characterized as species-specific behavior. It tests

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9 It has to be said though that the notice it did engender was much greater than that accorded its predecessor, Preben Mortensen’s *Art in the Social Order* (1997).
fundamental tenets of humanism and contests the art historical enterprise as we know it. Shiner too is concerned with problems of classification and chronology, and his contention that the west appropriates and commodifies works from other times, places and cultures is not new. Ultimately, the statement’s veracity is irrefutable which probably explains why the issue isn’t brought up more frequently. If art itself was invented and developed in a single region during the modern era, Art history’s foundational premise: that art is a global phenomenon with a 50,000 year pedigree, is fatally compromised. Even admitting that histories of any kind are inevitably ideologized fabrications, how can we rationalize presenting and promoting this nugatory narration as credible or superior? Why shouldn’t it be taught as one among many—and measured on its merits?

It must be stressed that Preziosi and Shiner have not been alone in pointing out the difficulties involved in isolating and/or explaining the product that art history claims as its object (Bann, 1986; Belting, 1987, 2003; Clifford; 1988; Green & Mort, 1982; Gretton, 1986; Rifkin, 1986; Rogoff, 1996; Rosler, 1997; Soussloff & Franko, 2002; Tagg, 1986). Expressed as queries, some of their concerns are: Does the art object exist?

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10 As early as 1940, George Boas “objected to the tendencies of art historians to collapse historical, cultural, and social differences in visual imagery to a single abstract category of ‘art’ . . . . This, he argued, reified a modern western practice into a universal, ontological category” (Proceedings of the Informal Conference on the Arts, Dec. 16-17, 1940, Hotel Biltmore, New York (as cited in Preziosi, D. “Introduction to Part III”, fn. p. 149, Smyth & Lukeheart (Eds.), 1993).
If it does, what is it? How is art distinguished from non-art i.e. from other creations that solicit the sense of sight? Why should it be differentiated? If art is discoverable and identifiable in the modern and contemporary west, what basis is there for its transcendent transferability? What basis is there for considering art to be transhistorical, transregional, transnational and transcultural? Why are we willing to endow art with these properties and invest (literally and figuratively) in it—and them? Perhaps Preziosi's and Shiner's critical interventions have received less recognition than they deserved, but, as practicing art historians, Preziosi and Shiner prove that the profession isn't as homogeneous nor as insular as is often presumed. Departmental policies tend to promote concentration and specialization (As a graduate student in the 1980s, for instance, I found it peculiar that courses in history, sociology, and film studies—to name just a few—could be taken for credit in theater and creative writing, but not in art history.), but individual art historians are often eclectic in their interests and knowledgeable in a number of areas. Indeed, though *Meditations on a Coy Science* and *The Invention of Art* are trenchant and acerbic by comparison to most studies of art history’s disciplinary conventions, they draw on—and push against—a long tradition of introspection and self-criticism in art historical scholarship. Further, the formation of canons of art and the functions of these discourses of canonicity have been explored by numerous art historians over the past three decades (Camille, 1996; Davis, 1992; Gouma-Peterson & Mathews, 1987; Green, 1990; Nelson, 1996; Nochlin, 1971; Parker & Pollock, 1981; Pollock, 1988, 1996; Steiner, 1996, to name just a few). Preziosi's, and later Shiner's, research is rightly seen as contributing to—and participating in—a boisterous and contentious interchange about art history's province and its priorities between traditionalists and dissenters.
How did I come to choose this topic?

A complicated question. When I applied to the doctoral program, I had already made the choice. There are few issues to which I’ve given more thought and probably none I’ve revisited so often. Some personal history (two fraught words, I know) is in order, so I’m using this as the segue to the first of several narratives that portray experiences from “my” “past” and try to reconcile them in some fashion with what I’m thinking and doing “here” and “now” in this disjuncted (and dissentient) dissertational enterprise. Working with words in the postmodern present entails a “postist” posture of self-awareness and a near-obsessive fixation on the mechanics of meaning-making. Taken to its ultimate conclusion, a social constructionist consciousness of semantics and semiotics conjures up two equally unattractive and unproductive alternatives. The first would involve putting scare quotes around almost everything; the other could conceivably generate a volume made up of a single opening paragraph followed by hundreds of pages of explanation and interpretation. I will exercise neither of these stultifying options. However, employed judiciously, some preamble may help contextualize and complicate the first of several ruminations and reminiscences.

Derrida’s interest in—and elaborations on—memory surely played a role in the prominence it began to assert in historical and cultural studies beginning in the 1980s.¹¹

¹¹ For Klein, the appearance of Yerushalmi’s Zhakor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (1982) and “Between Memory and History”, an introductory essay to the collection,
And the presumption here could logically be that its popularity related to Derrida’s example of the supplement. For Derrida, writing supplants and supplements memory, negotiating between the presence and absence that both memory and writing represent, since each is always already a supplement. However, Kerwin Klein’s commentary on this development (prompted to some extent by expressions of millennialist angst when it appeared in *Representations* in the year 2000) provides a corrective assessment. He writes: “Where history is concerned, memory increasingly functions as an antonym rather than a synonym; contrary rather than complement and replacement rather than supplement” (Klein, pp. 127-128). Perhaps the following passage from Klein’s article is doubly resonant—as symptomatic summary and as cautionary tale.

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*Lieux de Mémoire* by Pierre Nora in 1984 precipitated a “scholarly boom”. By the end of the decade, the journal *History and Memory* had come into being, demonstrating, in Klein’s view, “the crystallization of a self-conscious memory discourse” (Klein, p. 127).

12 This is my summation of themes developed by Derrida in numerous books, essays and interviews. I’m not aware of a single passage that neatly encapsulates them. However, Derrida enlists his conceptions of différence and trace in *Positions* to point up the instability of all texts because they inevitably and ineluctably defer both presence and meaning (Derrida, 1981, p. 8). For Derrida, writing—and cultural production in general—is understood through suspect distinctions including those between the oral and the textual (extendable to the visual and the pictorial). Binary couplets: past/present, here/there, author/reader, artist/viewer, you/me, are integral to attaching fixed meanings to these processes and their products, but they are inherently unstable; incapable of restricting access, containing excess or curtailing the infinite potential of signification.
Our use of memory as a supplement, or more frequently as a replacement, for history reflects both an increasing discontent with historical discourse and a desire to draw upon some of the oldest patterns of linguistic practice. Without the horizon of religious and Hegelian meanings, memory could not possibly do the work we wish it to do, namely; to re-enchant our relation with the world and pour presence back into the past. It is no accident that our sudden fascination with memory goes hand in hand with postmodern reckonings of history as the marching black boot and of historical consciousness as an oppressive fiction. Memory can come to the fore in an age of historiographic crisis precisely because it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse. (p. 145)

While I aspire to galvanize the supplemental or supplementary potential of memory, I'm all in favor of—and will happily settle for—"a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse".

Like many people, my initial exposure to the art history survey took place in the first year of university (for me, that was 1966-1967). Considered "artistic" by family and friends as a child, and "arty" as a youth, I enjoyed drawing and experimenting with color from a young age. My parents encouraged these interests, and I attended Saturday morning art classes at the Vancouver Art Gallery and later at the Vancouver School of Art. An avid museum-goer, I spent many hours poring over the collections at the Gallery (then on Georgia Street) and at the Vancouver Museum (now the Carnegie Center). In high school, I was almost never without a sketchbook. My majors were art and history, and I read widely in both areas. By the time I reached university, I'd visited famous museums in Canada, the United States, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. Therefore, I was excited at the prospect of learning still more about a subject I found fascinating and stimulating. This is why the actuality of the first-year course in art history came as something of a shock. As one of hundreds of students straining to make out the details of faraway projections and pinching themselves awake during tedious
early morning lectures, I found the experience visually impoverished and emotionally
deadening. Appropriately bound in gray, our textbook\textsuperscript{13} had a plethora of photographs,
but they were mostly small, black and white, and unengaging. Horst W. Janson's prose
was as aloof and abstruse as the instructor's remote and recondite commentary.

Thus began my misgivings about this curriculum as a means of addressing and
interpreting visual representations. For me, the classification "art" included wondrous,
sensuous objects capable of eliciting a wide range of physical and emotional responses;
of firing the imagination in unexpected ways, of triggering fantasies, of stimulating ideas,
of suggesting possibilities, of raising questions. Yet, contrary to my hopes and dreams, I
found that here at the University of British Columbia in the mid to late 1960s such things
were approached in a cool, disinterested and clinical fashion as if they were specimens. It
seemed to me that art objects were treated, not like the vital, potent, evocative devices I
believed them to be, but like cadavers or remains—the residue, inert and spent, of the
human agents who'd created them—with evidentiary and moral value (art makes you
better)—but without the capacity to rouse or stir in the present moment.

\textsuperscript{13} Horst Janson composed this volume in 1960-61 ("Preface and Acknowledgements",
1962, n.p.), and the book I purchased in 1966 was in its seventh printing. Janson's—and
his publisher's—confidence in the stature and stability of the "masterworks"
treated in its pages and in the abiding validity of its methodology (stylistic description
and iconographic analysis) may help explain why the volume could be reprinted twenty
times with no additions or revisions. An expanded and revised edition finally appeared
At this point, as an Anglo-Canadian reared in a city that still retained its Edwardian appearance and ambience and remained tightly bound to its British colonial heritage, the approach taken in *History of Art* struck me as merely dull and disagreeable. There was nothing inherently disturbing about presenting this narrowly conceived and strategically constricted segment of visual production as comprehensive and definitive. Despite its title, Janson’s tome included almost nothing that wasn’t Euramerican. The only notable exceptions were Egypt, the Near East and Mesopotamia. Artifacts from aboriginal cultures were relegated to an eight-page sub-section (Janson, 1962, pp. 24-32) entitled “Primitive Art” at the end of a brief first chapter in *Part One: The Ancient World* called “Magic and ritual—the art of prehistoric man”. Immediately preceding it was Janson’s introduction, “The Artist and His Public” wherein examples of men of genius like Picasso, Michelangelo and Manet were enlisted to demonstrate the importance of learning to distinguish art from craft, creation from mere “making”, talent from aptitude, originality from duplication (p. 12), audiences from customers and experts from laymen (p.17). Sandwicched between a hymn to the European tradition celebrating the glories of connoisseurship and two “stage-setting” chapters on Egypt and Mesopotamia (in their familiar teleological roles as precursors to the flowering of Classical civilization), the sixteen pieces in “Primitive Art” were assessed (unsurprisingly) according to a western fine art aesthetic and found wanting.

What I recognize today as primitivist/modernist attitudes (derived to a large extent from Romanticism) ensured that fetishes, idols, guardian figures, portraits, masks, armor, housefronts and healing symbols were readily conflated. Deemed the naïve and spontaneous products of unchanging and virtually interchangeable societies, a single
piece was sufficient to stand for the output of the entire Australian continent and a half
dozens each did nicely for the Americas and non-Arab Africa. Temporal and conceptual
inconsistencies I find glaringly obvious now didn’t phase me then. Although categorized
as either “prehistoric” or “ancient”, for instance, only four of the fourteen sculptures and
neither of the two paintings included under this heading predate the nineteenth century
and—of those—none is earlier than 1,000 B.C. Therefore, neither classification is
accurate, at least as these categories are normally understood and employed. Another
slight digression was an even briefer section called “Islamic art” that opens Part Two:
The Middle Ages (pp. 184-194). I knew enough about history and geopolitics to realize
that Janson’s treatment of rich and complex traditions was absurdly reductive. However, I
had neither the skills nor the confidence to criticize choices made by a recognized expert,
nor to question accounts published in a required textbook. Instead, vague misgivings
contributed to a growing sense of distaste and discomfort. Looking back, I can only guess
at the impressions I formed then. What did I make of the fact that half of the ten mosques
Janson described were in Spain? What did I infer from the presence of the Taj Mahal—
built by the foreign Moslem conqueror of an indigenous Hindu population—as the only
item worthy of attention in an entire subcontinent?¹⁴

¹⁴ Publications of this kind have come under fire for three decades or more, and as the
best-known, History of Art has been the object of some recent criticism from a
postcolonial perspective. Feminists have been by far its most voluble critics however,
and Janson has been pilloried for his refusal to include women artists. Its highly
Why does the issue interest me and why is it worth exploring?

My encounters with art history surveys have taken place in various roles and from multiple perspectives including those of student, scholar, teacher, traveler and queer-identified spectator. Since these took place over decades, I can’t claim they’re aspects of a single, consistent or containable self. Nor can I legitimately posit a unified or univocal narrative voice in what is patently a painstakingly performed allocation/allocation. Ambivalence—not towards images or ideas—but towards what happens to them in academia has made my “paper chase” a convoluted and conflicted journey. I realize that I’m not alone in this because I have friends whose trajectories through the halls of academe have notable similarities. But I learned long ago that articulating such feelings of discomfort or dissatisfaction within the university itself amounts to a faux pas. Chipping away at degrees has consumed a good deal of my adult life, and my intermittent training has required periodic readjustment and reorientation to philosophical and methodological shifts in art history.

The history of style (history as style) and tracing, identifying and defining motifs (iconography) predominated when I was slowly slogging towards a bachelor’s degree (mid 1960s to mid 1970s). (Inheriting a horror of debt from my parents whose mortgage successful predecessor, Ernst Gombrich’s *The Story of Art* (1950), also excluded females.
was the only substantial amount of money they ever borrowed, my pattern was to attend until the dollars ran out, find a job, save up and come back.) Comparing literature and art was about as daring as we got. The "new art history" was in full swing when I was admitted to UBC's master's program in 1982. Marxist critical theory (descended from the Frankfurt School) was the favored approach, but feminism and semiotics were also topical and viable. From 1982 through 1984, I worked as a teaching assistant for what was then Fine Arts 125, a first-year introduction to "world art". Although the textbook we used wasn't Janson, and the professor was capable of modulating his voice, the subject matter was nearly identical. However, the instructional dynamic had undergone a dramatic change because, for half of their class time, students had direct contact with people (graduate students) who were charged with teaching them in smaller groups and in regular classrooms outside the lecture hall. In contrast, the only acquaintance I made in my first year with embodied art historical knowledge had been with someone who hardly ever looked up from his notes or emerged from behind the podium. In a cavernous auditorium, we scrutinized hazy projections which I surmise were supposed to be illuminated or enlivened by a monotonous catalogue of compositional features, technical data, stylistic markers, obscure allusions and hagiography intoned by a distant figure, dimly discernible on a faraway stage. Contrastingly, I and the other TAs at the University of British Columbia were fired up at this time (the early 1980s) by our
exposure to a generation of radicalized art historians (Marxist and feminist essays in non-
traditional outlets like *Screen* and *Block* and non-canonical instruments like *Art
History*—all in Britain—were eagerly awaited, circulated as photocopies and avidly
digested at UBC during these years)\(^\text{15}\). We followed the careers of many academics, but I
recall four: Nicos Hadjinicolaou (1978), Griselda Pollock (1978), Fred Orton (1981) and
Nicholas Green (1982)\(^\text{16}\) whose works were read with special attention and
enthusiastically discussed. Thus, although nominally or officially, our responsibility as
dutiful inferiors, novices and trainees was to build on what had been imparted to all those

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\(^{15}\) *Screen* had previous incarnations, but its masthead has remained unchanged since
1969. During its twenty years of affiliation with the British Film Institute (1969-1989),
it became a controversial and influential journal. Ostensibly, its mandate was to
provide a forum for debates on film and television, but *Screen* published articles on a
variety of themes from young left-wing academics. Current German and French theory
was mostly unfamiliar to English-speaking readers, but *Screen* presented these ideas in
a lively and accessible format. This made it a hot commodity. The brainchild of
disaffected, mainly Marxist lecturers on art and design history (who were almost all art
school graduates), *BLOCK* was an agitprop vehicle devoted to disrupting established
canonical and pedagogical structures. A number of its articles built on the percipience
of Foucault and Bourdieu, but they were also influenced by feminism and
postcolonialism (through the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies)
and by Jacques Lacan’s and Melanie Klein’s reinterpretations of Freudian
psychoanalysis. (Bird, et al., 1996, p. xi). *BLOCK* was shorter-lived than *Screen*;
lasting for only ten years (from 1979 to 1989). Founded in 1978 by the Association of
Art Historians, *Art History* was/is a peer-reviewed periodical. As an official organ of a
professional body, its scope was narrower, but, because it located itself well outside the
mainstream from the beginning, *Art History* attracted writers whose views were
unconventional and/or radical.

\(^{16}\) Hadjinicolaou was then a classical Marxist, whereas the others’ materialism was more
nuanced. Pollock and Orton were influenced by feminism, and Green moved into
uncharted territory, assuming an outsider stance similar in some respects to what we
now call queer theory.
enrolled during the authorized and authoritative oration in the theater by our superior, the expert trainer/mentor, we chose instead to provide a salutary alternative (or antidote) to his rhapsodic recitations and adulatory anecdotes.

In Canada, the modern university evolved mainly from nineteenth-century British higher education which had adopted (and adapted) the national/cultural impetus of German Idealism. Less empiricist and more literary than scientific and philosophical, the prototypes of Oxford and Cambridge were influential and widely emulated here and in the United States.\footnote{See Readings (1996), Chapter 6, “Literary Culture”, pp. 70-88.} Secularization of Canadian post-secondary institutions was largely complete by the late 1950s (Bruneau, 2005, p. 25), but the classist tenor of English literature and criticism (Arnold, 1932; Leavis, 1948) with its reverence for high culture and distrust of popular and mass culture appear to have been stronger and more pervasive here, ensuring that canons of literature and art wouldn’t be challenged as frequently or as openly as they have been south of the border (Readings, 1996, pp. 84-85). At any rate, Sarah Parsons recollects TAing at York University (Toronto) in the mid 1990s\footnote{Notably, Margaret Dikovitskaya has identified the early 1990’s as a transitional phase during which art history’s deficiencies had been exposed by cultural studies, but “cultural studies scholars felt . . . that they did not have the mandate (or sufficient expertise) and could not compete in the analysis of the arts” (Dikovitskaya, 2005, p. 27). Albeit, there were art historians working on topics soon to be designated visual cultural and scholars without art historical backgrounds (her examples are Norman Bryson, W. J. T. Mitchell and Kaya Silverman) migrating into art history departments.} in circumstances eerily similar to my own.
My first three terms as a teaching assistant were for large introductory survey courses, which are referred to by the disenchanted as “Masterpiece Theater”, complete with a hypnotic voice and a dark, warm sleeping chamber for the students. The lectures often include as many slides as possible while the professor offers varying degrees of biography, description, analysis and evaluation. In these cases I found politicized teaching to be an almost “natural process” . . . . My pedagogy worked, but it relied on the monolithic tradition offered in lecture. I felt comfortable with the material because it was being taught just the way I had learned it as an undergraduate. I knew without looking at the syllabus what was to follow at any given point. I knew what sort of questions would be asked on tests and what the students’ answers were likely to be. I could quickly review lecture material . . . and then stop to offer other perspectives and provoke deeper debates around certain images. Mine was a reactive and dependent pedagogy . . . but this was all done in relation to an unchanged canon. Students got a sense of continuity even if the neat trajectory of Western art was sometimes put into question . . . . He [the professor] liked the fact that the TAs jazzed up the course—on the side, of course. Knowing the TAs were providing the reactive critique meant that the main course material never had to change. I could see the only honest title for my statement of teaching philosophy would have to be “True Confessions of an Oppressive Pedagogy Enabler”. (Parsons, 2002, pp. 159-159)

I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve taught the first-year survey in the more than twenty years since those early attempts, but the uneasiness it produces in me continues to increase. One consequence of my lengthy involvement is that I’m familiar with all of the major textbooks (and most of the minor ones) in the genre, either because

Oddly and interestingly (in light of Parsons’ revelations) York University had a combined Department of Art History and Cultural Studies at a point when interaction “between art historians and cultural studies researchers in the professional magazines or at the disciplinary conventions, even between those under the roof of the same institution” was almost nonexistent in the rest of North America (p. 27).
I’ve used them for reference or designed curriculum around them.\textsuperscript{19} While I no longer teach this introductory-level class in “real time”, I’m still teaching two variations based on \textit{Gardner’s Art through the Ages} (2005).\textsuperscript{20} Frequently, major components of such offerings are inherited, and in these, my input (apart from grading and online communication with students) has been limited to composing seminar topics and more recently, essay topics. The two-volume textbook (one for each course in the age-old disposition of cave murals to frescoes [Lascaux to Lorenzetti] for one semester, and illusionistic painting to appropriated installations [Hugo van der Goes to Hans Haacke] for the next) was imposed, as were the outdated and formulaic final exams.

Literature as a category, its canonical texts and their supporting narrative have been seriously challenged for several decades under the influence of poststructuralism and later of New Historicism.\textsuperscript{21} And art history has not been immune to theoretical developments, but, while so-called “radical” or “social” art historians based their critique

\textsuperscript{19} Stokstad’s \textit{Art History} is the exception. It and Adams’ \textit{Art Across Time} are the least established of the standard surveys. They were first published in 1995 and 1999 respectively. Although I’ve owned a copy of Stokstad since it came out, I’ve never instructed a course that required it.

\textsuperscript{20} First published in 1926, Gardner’s has been in continuous publication longer than any of its rivals.

\textsuperscript{21} Stephen Greenblatt is likely New Historicism’s best-known exponent. A scholar of Renaissance literature, his 1987 essay entitled “Towards a Poetics of Culture” was widely influential. Greenblatt’s interest in Foucault and Derrida impel his suggestion that historical interpretation necessitates paying attention to language and its functions as they articulate and negotiate social behaviors and cultural codes.
on similar philosophies (Marxism and feminism) as did critics in other fields, it wasn’t nearly as cohesive or exhaustive, and mainstream practices—at least in North America—seem to have weathered this smaller, more diffuse storm. The impact of cultural theory and Continental philosophy eventually led to radically altered programs in English and history, many of which bear little resemblance to the traditional overviews that preceded them. Yet the emblematic history of art, its masterpieces and the story of their creation (the distinctive “progression”—of artists, styles and periods) has endured. Art history survey textbooks have reacted by interpolating other objects and other makers from different cultures. Yet, such additions merely reinforce the centrality of the “greats”, allowing the habitual hierarchy to retain most, if not all, of its authority. Even when the legitimacy of existing canons is critiqued from within, questions capable of contesting the viability of the art historical project itself are rarely raised. This thesis will consider some possible explanations for art history’s apparent resistance to reflexivity and its seeming reluctance to face its demons.

I find the longevity and resilience of this singular curricular formation both intriguing and astounding. One of the most surprising things is that issues raised by critics in the 1970s and 1980s remain applicable to many—if not most—art history survey courses being taught today. Another is what seems to be (at least judging from the literature) either a reluctance on the part of art historians to engage this particular disciplinary paradigm (i.e. the structural features of the survey itself) or an inability to appreciate its influence on how they conceive—and conduct—their practice. I’m interested in the roles surveys play (systemically and categorically) in constructing an identifiable, and to a remarkable extent, ubiquitous, art historical subjectivity. My
approach to intersections of language, knowledge and power (discourse and discipline) is influenced by the adaptation of poststructuralist sociology (in particular, social constructionism) by British cultural studies (notably by Stuart Hall) to the task of theorizing representation (Hall, 1997; Hall & Evans, 1999; Morley & Chen, 1996; Storey, 1996).

It should be clear from what I’ve written so far that I believe surveying anything in this manner has consequences that are at once problematic and disturbing. Few, if any, of my colleagues seem to share these misgivings, and although some find conventional surveys outmoded or irritating, their concern is with content or delivery rather than design or structure. In other words, they usually don’t object to the survey format as such, but to what’s in the survey and to how that’s expounded. Since my position can be perceived as extreme, it may be worthwhile, not only to attempt to clarify what I am saying, but also what I’m not saying. I’m not claiming that survey courses aren’t (or can’t be) informative, illuminating and insightful. Nor am I asserting (a common challenge) that historical influences, stylistic labels, artists’ biographies and chronological charts are irrelevant or that they don’t have their uses. Nor do I intend to imply that art historians

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22 I’m referring here to associates at Emily Carr Institute in Vancouver, British Columbia. Most of them have been doctoral students at the University of British Columbia taking on sessional contracts at universities and colleges to beef up their resumés and augment their student loans.

23 I do insist, though, that an approach that admits of little else (like Janson’s) is limited and limiting; confined and confining.
who support and teach these modules are lazy, inflexible, uncritical or reactionary. What I’m proposing doesn’t set out to dismiss or condemn; it’s neither supercilious nor accusatory. After all, effective teaching and meaningful learning can—and do—take place in varied and diverse circumstances. If the objective is a curriculum that promotes inclusion and a pedagogy that provokes students to think critically about images in culture, I will argue that the art history survey is an unnecessary and detrimental burden; that learners who take courses derived from—or dependent on—survey textbooks (or even those where they’re required to read them) contend with a formidable amount of baggage. In art history survey texts, this may (and usually does) include a deeply entrenched idealism and an unreflective positivism, so confident in its ability to judge and explain that it can instill a comforting sense of certainty. This, in turn, may foster a reluctance to scrutinize claims when they appear to represent consensus or to interrogate positions when they’re supported by the weight of tradition and/or promoted by prestigious institutions.

What have been/are the implications of exposing generations of students to art and art history using a template developed in the nineteenth century? Since the general features of what’s often referred to as “the art historical narrative” are known by a wide range of people (thanks to writers like Gombrich and Janson), surely it isn’t audacious to suggest that this configuration has social and cultural effects far beyond the numbers of people who register for and complete post-secondary classes in art history. Television programs such as Civilization (Gill & Montagon, 1969), Art of the Western World (Cash & Snell, 1989) (and Sister Wendy’s Story of Painting (Willcock, 1997) (to name just three) and their companion books have been significant contributors to the dissemination
of this "story of art" to a mass audience. Thus, institutions such as the art museum and industries such as entertainment, travel and publishing provide a broad, general context for my investigation, while universities, colleges and art schools constitute its narrower, more particular one. How and why has this triumphalist saga of heroic geniuses, timeless masterpieces and proud empires retained its dominance over the popular and, to a significant degree, the scholarly imagination?²⁴

Two factors that leap immediately to mind (to mine, anyway) are expense and expediency. Almost every contemporary campus has rooms of various sizes designed and built to accommodate illustrated presentations. Although most aren’t used by teaching art historians, they could be—and their layouts attest to art history’s influence. Art historical talks typically utilize parallel projections²⁵ and a screen situated behind the speaker. This arrangement is widespread today, and it’s broadly conceived as providing the conditions required for talking about (with and/or to) images. Despite added costs and expanded capabilities, so-called “smart classrooms” start from and augment that basic template. Since investing in technology is more easily justified in the current climate than hiring faculty and support staff or funding curriculum development, it remains to be seen if the

²⁴ Although I won’t investigate it here, I believe the latter to be a crucial question because the glamor, romance and excitement of this scenario continue to exercise a tantalizing effect that goes largely unnoticed within the academy.

²⁵ This protocol was pioneered by art historians. I’ll have more to say about it in Chapter Two.
flexibility and versatility of the digital revolution will impel or retard pedagogical change.\textsuperscript{26}

Art history survey courses are standardized, interchangeable commodities. They’re predictable, convenient and they process legions of students at bargain basement prices. With the advantages they proffer on the institutional level, perhaps it’s unrealistic to expect telling adjustments to these old standbys beyond modification or emendation in the near future. Kodak stopped manufacturing slide projectors two years ago\textsuperscript{27}, and slide libraries are on the road to obsolescence, but visual resource systems are archival and classificatory. They participate in and contribute to a long-established discourse. Recently, Sarah Parsons has waxed optimistically on the anti-canonical potential of ARTstor (a database derived from a bank of 200,000 pictures possessed by the University of California at San Diego) and CAMIO (previously AMICO, the Art Museums Images Consortium, which when launched in 2004 contained 300,000 works from its members’ collections) (Parsons, 2005, p. 118) as repositories of digitized representations open to being searched creatively and critically (p. 119). While I appreciate the promise and

\textsuperscript{26} One interesting transformation has already become evident. Power Point supports side-by-side comparison poorly (images are reduced in size and shown together on the same screen). As a result, teachers who depend on this software often revert to showing a sequence of single images instead (Parsons, 2005, p. 115). It’s hard to say whether frustration with Power Point will trump its ready availability and ease of use and strengthen demand for versatile but costly licensed programs like Insight (by Luna) or MDID (Madison Digital Image Database) (Sundt, 2004, p. 38).

\textsuperscript{27} The last Kodak carousel slide projector rolled off the assembly line in Germany in June, 2004 (Howard, 2004, p. 17).
prospects high-quality scanning affords teachers and students alike, my fervor regarding its pedagogical ramifications is more restrained. Reservations are in order here, I feel, and Christine Sundt has articulated hers (which I endorse) simply and cogently.

Today’s students and newer faculty members are indeed familiar with digital technology, having grown up with it. That all students benefit equally from technology has yet to be demonstrated or documented. Until then, the classroom remains a place where content—not the mode of delivery—is “smart”. (Sundt, 2004, p. 39)

Parsons is justifiably enthused about the exciting and liberatory possibilities for instruction, research and study a diverse and seemingly limitless assortment of previously unavailable visual material (especially from non-western cultures and popular media) might ignite. Yet, while she does complain that licenses and subscriptions are dauntingly expensive and user fees (pp. 117-119) are often exorbitant, I’m not sure she gives enough thought or space to the corporations and foundations who anticipated this demand, scrambled for—and secured—copyright and are, as a result, “sitting on a goldmine”. The Mellon Foundation (p. 118) and Bill Gates (p. 123) are named (though not the Getty), and they and others are the same moneyed and prestigious players who invest heavily in art as a system, as an industry and as a source of social and cultural capital. As I’ll discuss in Chapters Two and Three, the art history survey has been—and remains—a linchpin that keeps each one of those shiny vehicles intact, functional and running smoothly.

Even if the descendants of America’s robber barons or its contemporary monopolists don’t participate directly in the production, sale or distribution of art history
survey textbooks (issued in new editions every couple of years and “cash cows” for their publishing houses\textsuperscript{28}) they sell the the reproductive rights to the hundreds of illustrations they contain. Parsons takes heart in using “Bill Gates’s much maligned Corbis or the equally maligned Bridgeman Art Library . . . against the grain” (p. 123), but she evokes a context that I fail to find heartening. “These companies . . . now control images through a huge network of licensing agreements with libraries, museums and universities [and] their structures limit access to reproductions” (p. 123). Is it hopelessly cynical or just cautiously skeptical to conceive an electronic archive on this scale as an extension/expansion of that continuously ballooning “museum in a book”\textsuperscript{29}: the modern art historical survey?

\textsuperscript{28} Up-to-date sales figures, including eight million copies for Gombrich’s Story of Art alone, can be found in Peers, 2006. An indication that sizeable amounts of money are at stake is a growing reliance on quantitative data and its analysis. As Peers reveals, this may even determine which art historians are contacted and contracted.

Stokstad—a specialist in Spanish and medieval art, a former CAA [College Art Association] president, and a prizewinning teacher—is a newcomer to the party. After market research showed that art historians wanted an alternative to Janson written by a well-known midwestern female professor, she was approached by Pearson/Prentice-Hall in the early 1990's to write Art History. (Peers, 2006)

\textsuperscript{29} Peers also alludes to the condition of engorgement, distension or bloat that has evidently afflicted art history survey textbooks, noting that the twelfth edition of Gardner’s Art through the Ages amounts to 1,179 pages (Peers, 2006).
What part have the institutional politics and policies of the university and played in implanting and imposing the survey?

It’s fair to suggest that my study doesn’t attend enough to how universities have evolved and functioned and the circuits of power within them. I link early exemplars of the art history survey, first as books and later as programs, to German idealism, German nationalism and the training of Germany’s educated elites. And I affirm that institutions of higher learning in the United States have followed a system put into operation in nineteenth-century Germany. However, congruity may be amplified at the expense of divergence. For Bill Readings (1996), the American university, not only emulated its predecessor, it also charted a new direction. “American civil society is structured by the trope of the promise of contract rather than on the basis of a single national ethnicity” (p. 33). Readings is a brilliant polemicist, and, while he overstates his case here, his distinction clarifies two matters related to my thesis. Firstly, it sheds light on why the canon has been so contentious in the United States and, by extension, on the resistance to giving up art history survey texts in favor of continuing (and continual) revision and expansion. Secondly, Readings envisions the American university as a vessel, the shape

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this promissory structure is what makes the canon debate a particularly American phenomenon, since the establishment of cultural content is not the realization of an immanent cultural essence but an act of republican will: the paradoxical choice of a tradition. Thus the form of the European idea of culture is preserved in the humanities in the United States, but the cultural form has no inherent content. (Readings, 1996, p. 35)
of which harks back to its heritage, but which, being empty, can be filled up with anything. This condition, he believes, is allowing the transformation of the late modern university into a globalized (a word he equates with Americanized) container for corporate capitalism under the rubric of “excellence” (pp. 12-14). If we accept that accountability has come to be determined through accounting (Readings’ contention31), the ensconce ment of the art history survey, a highly profitable venture: for administrators, funding bodies and governments; for publishers, media conglomerates and museums (increasingly corporatized themselves) is eminently explicable. Like Readings though, I’m less concerned with what administrators are saving through fiscal efficiencies or corporations are gaining through convergence or economies of scale than with what students are losing in terms of opportunities for critical reflection and exigent discussion.

**What has been published recently by art historians about teaching their subject and the survey’s place in that practice?**

Preziosi’s and Shiner’s critiques were introduced because I consider them important challenges to “business as usual” in art history, but I’d like to turn now to works by two other art historians who focus on matters more directly related to my main concern in this undertaking: the study and teaching of art history. One of very few books

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31 “The social responsibility of the University, its accountability to society, is solely a matter of services rendered for a fee. Accountability is a synonym for accounting in ‘the academic lexicon’” (p. 32).
I’ve encountered that sets out to examine how the survey as a historical configuration shapes art historians, their research and their teaching is James Elkins’ *Stories of Art* (2002). As a professor of art history, Elkins is an oddity in his field because he writes (and prolifically at that) on art historical topics for a general audience. Although his disquisitions sometimes seem patronizing, it’s apparent that they provide Elkins with opportunities to explore themes he might not take on if he was addressing his peers. Art’s history is presented in several prominent and competing narrations, but as Elkins asserts, there is one that contains elements of each—what he calls “the standard story of art history” (p. 63)—that dominates. Ernst Gombrich’s *The Story of Art* (1950) was the prototype for this account, and its salient features are familiar to almost everyone with the slightest acquaintance with the visual components of the western canon. Elkins’ “Foreword” informs that *The Story of Art* “has never been out of print”, and although each new edition is “more lavish than the last, . . . the text has remained essentially unchanged . . . It is still, for many people, the story of art.” (Elkins, 2002, p. xi).

Prominent among those “many people” are art historians. As Elkins maintains, “it . . . is a telltale sign of how deeply Western the discipline of art history still remains . . . [that] the overwhelming majority of art historians think in terms of the major Western periods and megaperiods.” (pp. 18-19) Although, oddly enough, Elkins doesn’t mark the connection, surely the perpetuation of a standardized art historical narrative can’t be unrelated to this circumstance. It must be more than coincidence that this periodization remains central to the classification of art; fundamental to organizing and assembling art historical information, and that the Gombrich-inspired overview retains its pre-eminence.
Elkins, as popularizer, adopts an informal and conversational tone, writing in an accessible, anecdotal and frequently wry style. In *Stories of Art*, despite the fact that he’s a relatively young man, his attitude to his audience strikes me as avuncular. He indulges the affectations of the art historical narrative by making witty excuses, extending this generosity to his readers whom he entertains with those gossipy and mildly irreverent tidbits only available to an insider. Elkins admits that survey textbooks and survey courses are absurdly narrow in their focus, that they ignore controversy, dissolve complexity and deny diversity. Rather than being disturbed or alarmed by these tendencies however, he accepts them as if they were the endearing foibles and eccentricities of an old friend.

The survey texts are simplified, compressed, conventionalized, and toned down, so they tend to be disparaged by serious art historians. But historians still use them. Some major universities have experimented with ways of avoiding survey texts, but the results have been less than successful. The root cause is the beginner’s need for chronology, and—the most essential from my standpoint—a story. (p. 57)

I find the language arresting here. Elkins’ reference is an aside; describing the kinds of experimental curricula instigated by these departments doesn’t appear to interest him, and he characterizes their efforts in negative terms. To Elkins, they weren’t so much attempting to explore new possibilities or expand existing parameters; they were finding “ways of avoiding survey texts”, and he implies that such efforts are both misguided and futile. Since they were doomed to fail anyway, Elkins seems to be saying, we’d be better off just reconciling ourselves to the survey’s inevitable and unavoidable dominance. He cites no specifics, but it’s interesting to note that Elkins was himself involved in developing an alternative program in the mid 1990s—not at a “major university”—but at
his home institution, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Elkins, 1995, p. 54-57).
Devoted to melding art historical scholarship and studio preparation for artists, it was
conceived as a new option for the Bachelor of Arts degree. Organized around concepts
and themes, these became narrower, less procedural and more conceptual and
philosophical as students moved from lower to upper-level offerings. While first-year
students were still required to take a survey, it was the only one. Second year began with
a year-long overview called “Concepts of Art” which set the pattern for the rest of their
studies. My impression is that the decision to introduce art history by means of the survey
was arrived at because it was already entrenched and because replacing it would have
been disruptive, not because Elkins had any special attachment to it. Indeed, he asserted
his belief that “The art history survey . . . cannot be salvaged in a theoretically
supportable form” (p. 57). As far as I can tell, the Parallel Art History/Studio Program
(as it was called) was never implemented, and I can’t help wondering if *Stories of Art,
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32 Elkins wrote: “From the viewpoint of the art history student, the thematic courses have
the virtue of exposing the large themes out of which disciplinary art history is built
(some examples are ‘Figure and Ground’, ‘Pictorial Space’, ‘Time’, ‘The Concept of
Drawing’, ‘Contrapposto’, ‘Chiaroscuro’, and for higher-level courses, ‘Narrative and
Ideology’, ‘Transcendence and the Sublime’, and ‘The Limits of Ambiguity’)” (Elkins,

33 Elkins’ stance five years prior to the publication of *Stories* is closer to that assumed by
Patricia Matthews in her contribution to *Art Bulletin*’s “pedagogy issue”: “What
matters in art history?”. “Art historians have fetishized a chronological, diachronic
model based on causality and often teleology that supports a linear model of history
and an elitist, exclusive lineage of art. Are the questions of who did what when really
the most important information for a student to absorb in their first art history course? I
think not” (Matthews, 1995, p. 52).
published seven years later and advancing an argument remarkably unlike his earlier stance, might have been part (perhaps the final stage) of a lengthy process whereby Elkins came to accept the failure of that curricular initiative.

Foucault’s account of doctrine from “The discourse of language” likely applies to the systemic regulation of enunciative behavior in a variety of areas, academic and non-academic. I find it relevant to subject positions I’ve occupied as a graduate student, a teaching assistant and an instructor in art history. Maybe it’s also pertinent to the situation Elkins found himself in.

The speaking subject is involved through, and as a result of, the spoken, as is demonstrated by the rules of exclusion and the rejection mechanism, brought into play when a speaker formulates one, or many, inassimilable utterances; questions of heresy and unorthodoxy in no way arise out of fanatical exaggeration of doctrinal mechanisms; they are a fundamental part of them. But conversely, doctrine involves the utterances of speakers in the sense that doctrine is, permanently, the sign, the manifestation and the instrument of a prior adherence—adherence to a class, to a social or racial status, to a nationality or an interest, to a struggle, a revolt, resistance or acceptance. Doctrine links individuals to certain types of utterance while consequently barring them from all others. Doctrine effects a dual subjection, that of speaking subjects to discourse, and that of discourse to the group, at least virtually, to speakers. (Foucault, 1972, p. 226)

Returning for a moment to Elkins’ general remarks on surveys quoted above, I’d be curious to discover what chance these approaches were given to gain acceptance. Considering that surveys have been offered for over a century; that they’ve been ubiquitous for most of the last fifty years and that they retain much of their hegemony, it’s unlikely that a year—or two, for that matter—would be a reasonable trial period for any innovative model. It’s relevant to think also about what criteria would have been enlisted to determine whether they were “successful” or not, and to what extent those
standards were informed by perspectives conditioned by/and appropriate to the linear and chronological framework favored by what Elkins then referred to as "disciplinary art history" (Elkins, 1995, p. 55). Such considerations apply equally to "the beginner's need for chronology". In addition to deliberating on the difficulty of explaining a word like "need", not to mention figuring out whose job it should be to detect its presence, isn't it worth asking why students would "need" it and what they might "need" it for? I'm getting a little ahead of myself though because, before I ask that, I should try and figure out who "the beginner" is. Is Elkins talking about anyone with a casual interest in art and its history or is he thinking instead of a college or university student who's intrigued by visual representations? Or maybe "the beginner" is someone who chose art history as an intriguing elective or an artist in training for whom it's a dreaded requirement or a budding scholar who's already decided she wants to major in art history. Do they all "need" chronology? Do they all "need" this particular brand with its bar graphs indicating lifespans, styles, movements and periods? And, if they do, do they all "need" such a giant dose of it?

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the passage is Elkins' insistence that the second requirement after a trusty timeline is a timely tale. "The root cause [of why the survey can't—and mustn't—be replaced] is the beginner's need for chronology, and—most essential from my standpoint—a story." (2002, p. 57). Far be it for me to quarrel either with the human attraction to—or predilection for—narratives, but Elkins isn't suggesting that any story will do, and he certainly isn't implying that we ought to create our own stories. Although he goes on to advocate additional accounts, he consistently defends the value of the one initiated by Gombrich. As problematic as he admits it is, it's
nonetheless “the standard story of art history” (p. 63) and “the core Western story” (p. 69). Elkins’ outlook is pragmatic—even cynical—but it’s also one of very few texts I know that’s willing to own up to art history’s deep-seated parochialism.

Elkins’ conflicted and oddly configured little book is imaginable as a synecdoche, both of widespread efforts in the field to reform or replace the survey and of Elkins’ personal struggles to imagine and/or implement alternatives. *Stories of Art* briefly examines Stalinist, colonialist, and eastern European histories of art, first as interesting oddities, but then as hopeful indicators that the “standard” version could one day be augmented by regional or political stories which, though morphologically similar, would at least have distinctive inflections and introduce unfamiliar works (pp. 89-108). Elkins contends (and I agree) that non-western representations are inaccessible to western art history because of its Hegelian outlook and its secular orientation.

To my mind, the most peculiar section is Elkins’ final chapter entitled “Perfect Stories”. Master narratives have never been as widely or as thoroughly distrusted as they are at this moment. Yet, perhaps these twenty-three pages (pp. 117-139) are needed to drive home, not only the extent of art history’s investment in them, but also the degree to which it’s defined by them. Here, Elkins outlines what he sees as the eleven major problems a new survey would have to overcome and proposes six “ideal” solutions. Predictably, all are deficient in Elkins’ estimation, and his confessional conclusion is called “Why No One Wants the Perfect Survey Book”. In it, he propounds three summative arguments: “first, that art historians do not really want multiculturalism; second, that multiculturalism, even in theory, is impossible anyway; and last that art
history, as an *enterprise*—an activity that generates jobs and fills seats in classrooms—is irremediably Western.” (p. 147). He continues:

Most teachers and students don’t want multiculturalism, or equality in gender representation or even race representation; otherwise the consensus would shift and art historians would stop studying, teaching, and writing about Michelangelo, David, Manet, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Picasso and all the others, and start looking at some genuinely exotic objects instead. This goes to the question of why art history is written, and who the art historians are who write it: it’s written mostly by Western Europeans and North Americans, and its root purpose is to chronicle, preserve, and sometimes promote the kind of culture that the authors find valuable. Multiculturalism is only a recent and relatively untroubling form of guilt for the choices we continue to make. (p. 148)

Elkins’ admission reveals an understandable interest in self-preservation, but, although I can appreciate why he takes the stance he does, I find the premises for his arguments untenable. They also impress me as (deliberately?) theoretically naïve. As Elkins has repeatedly pointed out, the art historical narrative is powerful and pervasive. Yet, there’s no mention here of cultural discourses and the role they play in forming subjectivities. Western art and its official history are inseparable from power relations at both the micro and macro levels, and students are well aware of the social, political and institutional authority assigned to them. Even if they disagree with the amount of attention canonical artists and their works receive or with the reverence they’re expected to show them, there are any number of constraints in place to limit—or preclude altogether—the voicing of those opinions. Everything from enormous and expensive textbooks to hushed and darkened lecture halls to temple-like museums reinforces the status and value of western art, operating to condition a predictable response; to discourage unsanctioned reflection and to deflect pointed criticism.
Hans Belting is another scholar of art history who has responded to the problems faced by the discipline by considering its allegiances and alliances, the effects they have on its practitioners and what they might portend for its future. As a German living and working in the United States, Belting’s perspective is broader than Elkins’ and, though invested, he approaches his subject area and its pretensions with skepticism. His 1987 book *The End of the History of Art?* was an early entry in the millennial “endist” sweepstakes, and his 1995 reworking of this text has recently been published in English under the title *Art History after Modernism* (2003). Belting points to inescapable difficulties with the usual overarching narrative as a prelude to his prediction that multiple histories, more flexible and interactive, will likely replace the august and all-encompassing compendium. As illustration, he points out that the conventional romance has been fraught with difficulties from the outset, an evident one being its starting point.

long before any of the known historical cultures, including our own, there existed the prehistoric culture of the *Frühzeit des Menschen* (early mankind), . . . . For obvious reasons, the latter culture resisted any attempt (including Theodor W. Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*) to integrate it within a history of art. The question of art and the aesthetic phenomenon implicit in today’s term was always out of place there. Our art discourse was not invented for and did not apply to prehistoric material. So-called art history is thus a discourse with a limited use for a limited idea of art. (Belting, 2003, p. 67)

Belting’s conclusions reiterate Preziosi’s, but his enthusiasm for—and grasp of—contemporary art affords insights into what he calls its “revolt against art history” and how this compounds the situation art history finds itself in. “Mass culture is not merely a topic for art’s new iconography but has become a challenge for art to such a degree that we may ask how this transformation can be coped with by traditional art history” (p. 79). Near the end of his study, Belting sums up what I take to be the quandary Elkins may
have found himself in as an academic schooled in precise disciplinary paradigms (regardless of their inadequacy and inflexibility) and charged with propounding them to artists in training.

Another problem in dealing with art in modernism is the discrepancy between what we know and what we like to think in terms of the broad lines of what happened. The history of progress easily accommodated to a linear narrative in which individual artists, manifestoes or "movements" confirmed the success story for modernist art all too easily. In the meanwhile we may ask ourselves whether it only serves its own purpose. Modernism did not constitute a story of freedom but also entertained regression and defense. The various attempts to submit living art to political restraints have determined its past as also have the interests of the art market. But such insights did not cause the respective historians to rewrite what happened. Perhaps a professional body departs only reluctantly from the boundaries of its discourse, because only within such bounds can it keep its authority. (p. 170)

Persistent objections to postmodernism are that its requirements for an awareness of self coupled with a seemingly contradictory interrogation of "self" (as a construction) as well as a meticulous attention to positions and positioning stifle inventiveness and forestall critical action. This is arguable. It's more defensible, I'd say, to contend that many art historians have reached a similar impasse, but that they arrived there for a completely different set of reasons. Preziosi and Shiner alluded to two of art history's foundational premises: the humanistic belief in creativity as a secular, individualistic, cerebral and uniquely human pursuit and the capitalistic devotion to a novel and exclusive commodity—the art work—a rare, "useless" and context-free object as the ideal product of/f for a speculator's market. What room is there in either of these scenarios for introspection and/or reflexivity, especially by scholars whose subjects are historical/canonical art or the universal survey?
In offices and classrooms, however, it’s imperative to reiterate and reaffirm that there are art historical researchers and teachers of art history in appreciable numbers embroiled in productive and provocative engagements with culturalism\textsuperscript{34} and other recent developments. What they’re studying and how they’re doing it would have been remarkable a decade ago and close to inconceivable a decade before that. As Stephen Melville and Bill Readings adroitly observe in their introduction to *Vision and textuality* (1995),

all the objects, periods and styles that emerge and vanish in these pages—
are readable then as so many points of flight, so many gestures towards instituting one or another art history . . . : so many ways of sighting, and siting, the work of the university as if “departure from” could come to be a way of saying “department of”, as if the task now were to realize Art History as its own depart-ment. (p. 17)

\textsuperscript{34} Culturalism, as it has come to be understood, describes a philosophical position and a scholarly orientation devoted to studying representational processes in a given culture. It investigates the codes and conventions through which texts (representations) become meaningful along with the meanings assigned to them. Jeff Lewis locates culturalism’s inception in the work of Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson which was taken up and extended by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the mid 1960s through the late 1970s (Lewis, 2002, p. 124) under its first directors: Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall.

Culturalism, in this sense, suggests that a social group’s behavioural and social patterns can be revealed through the analysis of textual production and documented practices. For many analysts today culturalism also implies a broader interest in questions of ideology and hegemony as they are articulated in popular culture (p. 124).
What I'm reacting to then may simply be what I take to be a lack of noise; a disquieting quietness. What happened to the anger, outrage, embarrassment and guilt of the seventies and eighties? Shouldn't there be some discussion of the inherent conflict and the (personal, pedagogical, scholarly) consequences of having to teach the canon if you've lost interest—or faith—in it yourself? If your own research is on newspaper photographs (to choose a hypothetical, but readily conceivable, example)? Is there a parallel to be drawn here between Belting's account of art's "revolt against art history" which he locates in the early 1960's\(^{35}\) and what's happening in today's art history departments? Are deans quietly dealing with rebels in their ranks: practitioners who no longer respect the traditions of the discipline and/or are unwilling to accept or adhere to its established terms of reference?

A number of the themes raised by Elkins and Belting will be dealt with in greater detail below, but my primary emphasis will continue to be on deconstructing knowledge and reconstructing curriculum. And this can be approached most effectively via the production of subjects (learners at all stages) in language and discourse and through institutions as cultural formations. Based solely on perusing these offerings by Elkins and

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\(^{35}\) Chapter 9 of *Art history After Modernism* is entitled "The Mirror of Mass culture: Art’s Revolt against Art History" (pp. 74-84). For Belting, Rauschenberg's *Persimmon* (1964) is one marker of this repudiation. "... Rauschenberg combines reproductions from art history effortlessly with those from everyday life, and thus levels the one and the other by the gaze he offers us... This kind of discourse placed the perception of the world in the cultural framework shared by the artist and his audience. It is clear, however, that this is no longer the framework called art history" (p. 82).
Belting (I haven’t met either of them), our orientations, aims and experiences appear to be quite different. (I can’t be sure of the degree to which this is true, but neither could I if I knew them.) At any rate, this hunch or suspicion ensures/enforces a certain disassociation from—and a conspicuous lack of identification or involvement with—their writings on my part. While Belting’s text is more contingent, more nuanced and therefore, more appealing, Elkins’ is more confessional, and it deals directly with the trials and tribulations of a teaching art historian. In *Stories of Art*, Elkins maintains that mainstream art historical scholarship and pedagogy in the United States (where the majority of art historians live and work) remains wedded to its Hegelian, modernist, positivist, structuralist roots. My sense from reading, attending lectures and symposia and traveling to conferences leads me to support his evaluation. At the same time however, I harbor nagging reservations because, as I’ve mentioned, Elkins’ analysis ignores the myriad constraints he operates under and their capacity to affect—and perhaps determine—his performance. It’s tempting, for instance, to endorse his opinion of the durability of Hegel’s influence on art historical scholarship, but I have to ask if Elkins is

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36Hegelianism infers that ideas underlie all forms of reality, that all events must be perceived in terms of steadily evolving principles, and that the entire historical process is a rational and necessary development leading to the emergence of a self-knowing, divine spirit, hence the labels “idealistic” and “metaphysical” usually applied to the theory . . . . From this viewpoint, art develops according to an intrinsic logic which is intelligible to the historian, the history of art can be seen as one of the most important ways of understanding the process of world history (Fernie, 1995, p. 342).
willing to confront his own professional and institutional entanglement. Is it possible, for instance, to accept incoherence and incomprehensibility as believable deterrents without a discussion of what shape lucid and understandable commentary should take and who ought to determine that? Are there reliable and universal criteria to decide this? Elkins' pronouncements, not only indicate that he believes there are, but that he has privileged access to them—an access that allows him to evade responsibility.

Hegel is one of those insidious problems that seems easy to solve; after all, can't I just say that I will stop assuming art progresses or that all arts are tied to a central spirit? It turns out that I can say it but I cannot write that way, because the resulting lecture or book will sound incoherent. Listeners, viewers, and readers expect sense and structure in their art history, and so far at least the overwhelming majority of attempts to write different kinds of art history have failed . . . . Many answers have emerged but so far none of them look or sound like art history. At best, they are evocative, inspiring and challenging; at worst they sound impressionistic ill-organized and pointless . . . . The only answer is just to write art history, concentrating on the works and the ideas and not on Hegel's ghost hovering above them. (Elkins, 2002, p. 55)

Since Stories of Art is not intended for a scholarly audience, Elkins isn’t compelled to defend his intuition on public expectations or strengthen his claim that art history can’t break Hegel’s stranglehold. Taking into consideration the impressive amount of work generated by thinkers in the so-called “emerging” fields of visual culture and visual studies (to which he makes two brief references in 152 pages)\(^{37}\), perhaps it’s

\(^{37}\) What Elkins calls “visual theories” appear as number six in his list of twelve “goals for an optimal book of art history”. This objective is to “find places for visual theories such as psychoanalysis, semiotics and deconstruction”. (p. 118) To Elkins, they’re obviously add-ons, and he returns to them (dismissively) a second time on page 126.
not unreasonable to ask if Elkins has been looking in the right places. Indeed, given the wave of publications that appeared in the mid to late 1990s with “visual culture” in their titles and the amount of interest and controversy they precipitated, this is akin to dissimulation on Elkins’ part. It bears asking too whether his assertion about “works and ideas” presumes a straightforward relationship between them; one that art history is uniquely situated to discover and explain. Is he disinterested in—or does he reject outright—visual theorists’ concentration on the encounter between viewer and image as the ever-changing site where meanings are negotiated and assigned?

If the literature of art history has, with a few notable exceptions, ignored the survey or accepted it as inevitable by making excuses for it, what kind of critique has been mounted by scholars in visual studies?

I’ve been surprised how little overt criticism of art history survey textbooks and courses I’ve come across in publications by scholars of visual culture. Could shifting their focus away from the image as object be partly responsible for this apparent neglect? Since the survey textbook advances a rigid structuralist paradigm which is largely, if not completely, irrelevant to their interest in spectatorship as exchange, might this help

Here, he lumps them together with other efforts tangential to the real business of art history: “and there is no lack of books with titles like Critical Terms for Art History, Visual Theory, Visual Culture, and The Language of Art History to serve the sixth goal.”
explain why it's seldom mentioned or discussed? Or, given their ongoing relationships with art history departments and art historians, are academics working in the field of visual culture/visual studies unwilling to confront the survey model directly and problematize it because of institutional politics and/or because it would embarrass their colleagues?

Nicholas Mirzoeff, through the popularity of an anthology he edited called *The Visual Culture Reader*, (1998; 2002) is perhaps the person most widely identified with this burgeoning field. Mirzoeff (alluding to Foucault) has described visual culture as “a tactic with which to study the genealogy, definitions and functions of postmodern everyday life” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 5). In his newer introduction, he clarifies visual culture’s tactical and critical function:

Globalization cannot mean that Western scholars now have the entire globe as their domain as a form of intellectual empire . . . . What matters is being constantly aware of the global dimensions of the work that one is doing (Appadurai). In visual culture, this means looking with a transverse glance from multiple viewpoints across and against the imperial perspective. (Mirzoeff, 2002, p. 16)

Mirzoeff doesn’t name the survey outright, but his aims for visual culture and the approaches he advocates disqualify it. Visual theorists in general have been oddly reticent on the art history survey text’s capacity to narrate cultural supremacy and prorate artistic achievement; on the socio-political ramifications of its Darwinian tale of art’s evolution

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38 Although Mirzoeff came to visual culture from art history, he (like many of visual culture's proponents) was initially schooled in a different subject.
from the “crude” murals in the “galleries” of Lascaux and Chauvet (European cave sites) to the “refined” inventions in modern western museums today. But an essay by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (both of whom teach film studies at New York University) entitled “Narrativizing Visual Culture: Towards a Polysemic Aesthetics” breaks the mold.

In our view, visual culture as a field interrogates the ways both art history and visual culture have been narrativized so as to privilege certain locations and geographies of art over others, often within a stagist and “progressive” history where realism, modernism and postmodernism are thought to supersede one another in a neat and orderly linear succession. Such a narrative, we would suggest, provides an impoverished framework even for European art, and it collapses completely if we take non-European art into account . . . . Traditional art history, in this sense, exists on a continuum with official history in general, which figures Europe as a unique source of meaning, as the world’s center of gravity, as ontological “reality” to the world’s shadow. Endowing a mythical “West” with an almost providential sense of historical destiny, Eurocentric history sees Europe, alone and unaided, as the motor, the primum mobile, for progressive historical change, including change in the arts. An arrogant monologism exalts only one legitimate culture, one narrative, one trajectory, one path to artistic creation. (Shohat & Stam, 1998, p. 27)

Shohat and Stam’s piece is included in the first and in the second revised edition, and it’s evident that Mirzoeff approves this position and acknowledges its importance. He writes: “Here they [Shohat and Stam] offer one means of reconceptualizing visual culture that moves away from the Euramerican progression . . . to a polycentric, globalized field of study. The need to abandon this Eurocentric modernist version of history is perhaps the greatest single challenge of the emerging practice of visual culture” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 11). I’d say the pedagogical ramifications of this statement are clear. Further, Mirzoeff’s honesty about the effects aggravations like copyright problems and limited funding can have on a compilation like this one reveal a forthrightness that is as
uncommon in academic teaching as it is in scholarly writing and publishing. Nowhere is self-disclosure of this sort more discouraged than within the structured presentation of the art history survey, based as it is on presumptions of objective knowledge and aesthetic certainty. Mirzoeff's editorial philosophy is revealed in how he's shaped the anthology and what he hopes it will do, and it's easily equated with a pedagogical orientation that is appropriate for visual culture and inappropriate for the survey. "My introductory essays will show how I connect the different contributions without pretending to exhaust their richness. If the book succeeds in provoking passionate argument and dissent, I shall judge it to have been a success" (p. 11).

While the very existence of visual culture can certainly be construed as a challenge to art history, few of its practitioners seem willing to criticize art history's priorities and preferences directly. However, Amelia Jones, editor of The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader (2003) is another exception to that rule. She introduces her anthology by revisiting the development of social art history and situating the evolution of visual culture against it. Initially supported by left-wing and feminist intellectuals, it soon became clear that this "new" art history's adherence to the artifact and the systems that sustain it fatally compromised its transformative potential. Rather than undoing canons and unsettling surveys, traditional programs only needed to be expanded and reconfigured.

this volume takes visual culture as offering a deeply, if differently, historical understanding of the visual images of past and present. Rather than confirming social art history's conception of the image as superstructural—as conveying through its own formal logic and subject matter the economic or social "facts" of its own making—the cross-disciplinary concept of visual culture and its newly broadened field of
objects provides an alternative, less instrumentalist, model of thinking historically (p. 5).

Both Mirzoeff and Jones allude to the storm of abuse unleashed by art historians when the journal *October* invited submissions on the topic in 1996. It seems evident that this had a chastening effect, and the cursory nature of their remarks might reflect their reluctance to risk a reprise. Jones summarizes briefly and somewhat sadly:

Art history seems to have the biggest stake of all the related disciplines in warding off the incursion of visual culture as a rubric and mode of understanding visuality. It is a conservative field to begin with, staging its boundaries in relation to what can be considered art, and what cannot, and is deeply interested (as the *October* series makes lamentably clear) in a very limited conception of what constitutes history. (Jones, 2003, p. 6)

It may be too that these writers are refusing to be drawn into the apparently endless rounds of prescriptive navel-gazing that art historians (and art educators) have resorted to lately. Choosing—sensibly—to simply move on.
What are the characteristics of the survey today?

The task of this section will be to describe common qualities of art historical overviews in their recent and/or current configurations. I'm relying mainly on contemporary accounts in American books and journals in the discipline to determine these traits. What I find most remarkable about such courses is not how much they've expanded their scope nor the efforts they've made to acknowledge the impact of developments in cultural theory on research and writing in art history. Instead, what impresses me is the almost overwhelming sense of déjà vu I experience when I'm in an art history classroom today while curriculum of this kind is being delivered.

The standard way in which art history has organized and presented works of art is as part of a single narrative of evolutionary progress structured around individual artists—their biographies, oeuvres and movements—a structure arguably traceable to Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* written in the sixteenth century. (Edwards, 1999, p. 3)

As Edwards also points out, this canonical formation operates far beyond the confines of the discipline; it informs how art works are displayed, viewed and discussed wherever that takes place in western societies (p. 2). Most people have been introduced to art history according to this model. Characteristics of the art historical narrative such as the image of the artist-hero (based on the lives of the saints), the conflation of national interests with aesthetic supremacy and the analogical relationship between artistic development and human maturation have continued to be defining features of art history survey textbooks (Adams 1999; Elsen, 1962; Gardner, 1926; Gombrich, 1950; Janson, 1962; ; Honour & Fleming, 1982; Stokstad, 1995) and art history survey courses. This
attests, not only to the staying power of these constructs, but to the wealth and authority of the elite institutions that sustain them.

There are striking similarities in how many of us have been initiated, and to some extent, incorporated into this discourse\(^1\) whether or not we ever sat through a lecture in art history or leafed through a hefty, lavishly illustrated textbook on the subject. However, these commonalities are amplified among those of us who have. We share the experience of a dimly lit lecture hall and a continuous series of paired projected images of variable quality. Accompanying these photographs of paintings, statues and buildings, almost all of which are radically out of scale (and, as a result, artificially commensurable), we hear a lecturer’s commentary. Classically, this disembodied voice details formal properties and stylistic traits, opposing one member of the binary couplet against another to demonstrate the superiority of the privileged piece. Canonical works are glorified through lengthy, elaborate and sometimes overawed descriptions. They serve as markers of their creator’s emotional state and thus, his individual style, at particular stages during his lifetime. Other historical details might be included, but if they are, they’re frequently bracketed off from “more important” information such as

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\(^1\) Colin Gordon expands on Foucault’s conception:

The rules for the formation of discourses are linked to the operation of a particular kind of social power. Discourses not only exhibit inmanent principles of regularity, they are also bound by regulations enforced through social practices of appropriation, control and policing. Discourse is a political commodity (Foucault (1980), p. 245).
anecdotes about precocious talent, formal or technical innovations or examples of intense concentration which serve to signal the artist’s giftedness or confirm his reputation as a genius.

These have been, and to a certain degree continue to be, the typical elements of an encounter between students at colleges, universities or art schools and art history (at least at the undergraduate level). On the whole, the accounts I’ve read demonstrate little concern for how curriculum of this kind functions culturally or how it affects individuals in society (unlike, for example, the attention which has been paid to the triumphalist saga inscribed on/in visitors during their pilgrimage through the “stations” of western civilization in universal survey museums like the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Duncan & Wallach, 1980; Duncan, 1993; 1995). Even the textbooks designed to mimic this progress seem to have been criticized more thoroughly (Hills, 1976; Collins, 1990; Moore, 1992; Schwarzer, 1995; Nelson, 1997; Pinder, 1999). What is seldom critiqued in the literature I’ve perused however is the foundational formulation itself: the progression of world history impelled by a world-spirit and manifested in art through a

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Nelson concurs that survey texts and courses (as ubiquitous as they are) have been overlooked; that the prominence and prevalence of these sizeable and lucrative tomes (and the courses based on them) merits more study.

Yet these books, as publishing phenomena and art historical surveys, and the courses they accompany continue to be largely ignored by the art historical profession and its conferences and journals. Until the recent Art Journal issue of Fall 1995, there have been few investigations of this genre in comparison with the studies that have been made of the textbooks in other fields. (Nelson, 1997, p. 34)
predestined and predetermined succession of styles and movements, each epoch peopled by artistic geniuses who are ideally and uniquely equipped to aid its inevitable evolution toward perfection; whose outpourings of genius are beacons of spiritual growth illuminating the inexorable “forced march” of European civilization.

**How has the survey model been criticized by art historians?**

I’m going to mention Kymberley Pinder’s appraisal here for two reasons. I can’t make it fit anywhere else, and it raises the problem of audience—an important one that deserves more consideration than I can give it in this chapter. Pinder takes survey texts to task for their promulgation of racist stereotypes, but in the process, she poses two general queries that apply equally to the classroom. Near the beginning of her piece, she encapsulates some of her misgivings in a single sentence. “It is true that like most grievances with the survey, my observations reflect the inherent problems and contradictions of the construction of an art history predicated on chronology, nationalism and other problematic concepts” (Pinder, p. 533). In order to raise such issues as who is addressed by survey textbooks and in survey lectures and the constraints invoked regarding what can be shown and said to them, Pinder quotes a bold passage from Robert Hughes’ consciously populist overview, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (1997), on how racism conditioned the reception of Basquiat’s work. For the

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3 Kimberley Pinder currently teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She’s best known for editing the anthology *Race-ing Art History* (2002).
Feminist and Marxist scholars have theorized the ideal viewer posited by—and constructed in—a variety of circumstances. Examples of the former that spring to mind are the gallery-goer and museum visitor (Duncan & Wallach, 1980; Garb, 1993), the boulevardier or flâneur (Benjamin, 1973; Clark, 1985) and the cinema patron (Rose, 1986; Mulvey, 1988). The reader being targeted/fashioned has been hypothesized and analyzed in a similar fashion for various literary genres including the realist novel (McCabe; 1992), the “bodice-ripper” (Radway, 1984) and the detective story (Belsey, 1980). Queries about who the student addressed by the survey course is, how he or she is produced or who the textbook takes as (and makes) its reader have generated less interest. Pinder asks “what might such honesty reveal about the reticence of more ‘scholarly’ work and its audience? Could not the average college survey student be considered a ‘general intelligent reader’?” (Pinder, p. 535).

These inquiries suggest others that are equally pertinent. How is dissent regulated within disciplines? How do conventional understandings of who undergraduate students are and what they’re capable of influence curriculum? What attitudes and behaviors are encouraged and reinforced by first and second year courses as they’re usually organized and delivered (large classes, rote learning, predictable essay topics, formulaic testing)? Although I won’t be delving deeply into these, I want to flag them as questions which are asked infrequently and receive less notice than they deserve. By no means are they restricted to art history surveys, but they’re the instances with which I’m best acquainted.
In Chapter One, I related impressions of my first exposure to an art history survey textbook as a freshman in the 1960s. My next encounter with this material was when I taught it for the first time six years later. Research on audiences reinforces how dangerous it is to take a single instance (or a small sample) as indicative and extrapolate from it, and the last thing I want to do is discount the imaginative and ingenious uses which are made of varieties of media that may not inspire or absorb me. And one point I must drive home before proceeding is that—as off-putting as my inauguration into art history may have been—it didn’t put me off. Ultimately, images resist restriction and refuse regimentation. In spite of everything, they were and continue to be at once appealing and intriguing.

Back to the survey proper. To date, the most extensive discussion appeared in *Art Journal* over a decade ago (54(3), 1995) and was mostly concerned with revamping the art history survey to make it less obviously and embarrassingly out of step with the expanded scholarly interests of art historians themselves (evident in upper-level seminars) and with offerings in other departments. *Art Journal* is the more broadly based and less scholarly of two periodicals (the other is *Art Bulletin*) published quarterly by the College Art Association which claims to have over 15,000 members—both individual and institutional. According to the Association, these are people who “by vocation or avocation are concerned about and/or committed to the practice of art, teaching, and research of and about the visual arts and humanities” (CAA). The special issue mentioned above came out in the fall of 1995 and detailed problems with survey courses in their conventional form. It includes a short history of the evolution of the standard survey textbook, arguments for why the survey ought to be transformed and personal
narratives (including suggestions and timetables) about the creation of new curricula and how it was designed and delivered. Nearly all of the articles were written by college and university instructors in the United States who had been teaching undergraduate surveys for some time. Most outlined what they perceived as the shortcomings of the existing templates and what they felt they had achieved by revising them.

What then, did these educators consider to be the most serious deficiencies in the way art history was being (and by and large, still is) taught? What led to their disaffection with these well-established and widely taught courses? Such discontent may be seen as a response to misgivings by theorists and critics about the limitations of the survey (and surveys in general) in the face of demographic change and an altered intellectual landscape—a somewhat belated reaction to the so-called “crisis in the humanities” brought about by poststructuralist and postcolonialist critiques (Hall, 1990; Mitchell, 1983; Zerner, 1982; Rees & Borzello; 1986). While most of the writers in this unique edition of Art Journal advocate some expansion of the field of enquiry, it isn’t surprising that none go as far as the relatively younger and considerably more radical field of cultural studies does to suggest embracing all of the visually-oriented items and events from popular and mass culture. Insecure about disciplinary boundaries and about their position within the Academy, many art history departments have (during the 1990s especially) been concerned about becoming irrelevant or redundant as lectures and seminars in other subjects (particularly English, history, the social sciences, and cultural, women’s and minority studies) have incorporated increasing amounts of visual material. (This is probably an important reason why—in spite of the optimism of Brad Collins, the Art Journal’s guest editor, who referred to it as “the first of what is hoped will be a
number of issues dedicated to the topic of pedagogy” [Collins 1995, p. 23] the publication has declined to repeat the experiment, returning instead to its previous focus on scholarship and criticism.)

Collins delineates the terms of reference in a short editorial entitled (conservatively enough) “Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey”:

The conception of art as a manifestation of large sweeping historical forces has largely been rejected by so-called new art historians for one that emphasizes its complex embeddedness in the lives of its makers and users. Whether the old survey vehicle can accommodate this new artistic paradigm is the larger question that implicitly stands behind the articles and reports that follow. (Collins, p. 23)

While it’s true that these essays specifically address the format known as a global or universal survey—the initial overview which has, in the majority of schools, been both a prerequisite for fine arts and art history majors and a popular elective—they also pertain to much of the other course work in art history. Even graduate seminars have, in my experience, been organized along similar lines. Obviously, the periods were shorter and other limiters like a particular medium were usually imposed. Yet, the central systematizing principle remained a preordained and predictive timeline along which key works succeed one another like “landmarks on the scholarly terrain” in Horst Janson’s memorable phrase (Janson, 1962, p. 7). To anyone conditioned to—and by—art history’s disciplinary conventions, this configuration may well be customary and unremarkable enough to render it almost undetectable.
Following Collins’ brief introduction, *Art Journal*’s investigation continues with Mitchell Schwarzer’s foray into the origins (in nineteenth-century Germany) of what’s known as the universal survey text. These were the first of their ilk used for undergraduate courses in universities, and in them “The arts of Oceania, Africa, Asia and the Americas . . . were preparatory, flawed stages along the route toward artistic culmination in classical Greece, medieval Christianity, and modern Europe (as a combination of both)” (Schwarzer, 1995, p. 28). Later, they became the model for American textbooks which “echo the developmental lineage and elitist aesthetic sensibilities of their nineteenth-century predecessor” (p.28). Schwarzer concludes by asking how such totalizing narratives with their emphasis on “trans-historical structure, inter-national hierarchies and universal values for art and perfect beauty” can still be relevant in what he terms “a postmodern world characterized by aesthetic relativism and cultural pluralism”? (p. 28). An expert in German architecture and art theory, it’s telling I think, that Schwarzer ends with a question. He wants to avoid being prescriptive, but, aware that these works continue to promote the ideological agendas of racial and cultural superiority which fueled nineteenth century nationalism and imperialism, he’s also convinced that such important issues must be addressed.

The title of Mark Miller Graham’s analysis: “The Future of Art History and the Undoing of the Survey” makes a pointed statement by conflating the fate of scholarly endeavors with what Graham views as the necessary dismantling of an apparatus “in outright contradiction to the advanced practices of art history today” (Graham, 1995, p. 30). Although Graham starts by mentioning Foucault’s explorations of power relations and their potential to raise concerns, not only about the survey but about the subject area
itself, he’s careful to keep his queries confined to those parameters laid out by Collins in his introduction. “What paradigms drive survey lectures day after day across America? ... can the survey be reformed? Or, failing that, what can we envision in its place?” (p. 30) Graham’s specialty is Pre-Columbian art, and his career-related preoccupations seem readily apparent. Centering his critique around four topics: canonicity, chronology, closure and subjectivity, each of which has far-reaching implications, Graham is adeptly parochial in how he makes use of them. Canonicity is castigated for its western bias and chronology for its relentless adherence to a linear model (at the expense of spatial or synchronous systems). Feminist theory and psychoanalysis are brought to bear on closure which Graham pairs with chronology as the dual components of “a kind of machinery that can be likened to, or are actual expressions of, the quest for (male) sexual release” (p. 31). Masculinism, if he had been inclined to pursue the theme, could have led to an interrogation of prevailing assumptions about creativity, proficiency and the politics of representation that are foundational to the activities of collection and display that make art scholarship possible.

Investigating subjectivities to any significant extent would have been risky. Graham does allude to the particular subject positions enforced by the régime of art which he castigates as authoritarian and intimidating to poor or marginalized students. But he avoids confronting the imperialistic origins of the modern concept of art or the topical and controversial (especially in his area) issues of cultural appropriation and repatriation. For all Graham’s postmodern posturing, his position is resolutely modernist, resting as it does on a positivist faith in unstoppable and beneficial progress. His description of the new art history resembles early twentieth century paeans to the
modernist avant-garde. As a “progressive” art historian, he bemoans being weighted down by the reactionary tendencies of outmoded institutions because they prevent him and his bright young colleagues from forging ahead into a new era of limitless potential.

Art history in America today may be more intellectually robust and inventive than at any time since it began . . . . But we have to see the older texts for what they are: the individualized, quirky summations of distinguished careers, now more suitable as records of art history’s past than as maps for art history’s future. (Graham, 1995, p. 34)

What are they doing differently in their classrooms as a result?

Up to now I’ve focused on philosophical statements, but in the following section I want to turn to texts which are more directly concerned with instruction. To start, I remark on the Art Journal contributions that stand out as innovative in this regard. This is followed by an assessment of the collection as a whole. From there, I conclude by considering the handful of pieces art historians (apart from the ones solicited by Collins for Art Journal) have written on the subject of teaching survey courses. These constitute a tiny corpus, considering how long surveys have been around, their durability and how many practitioners of the discipline are occupied with delivering them. However, this is not incompatible with art history’s general disregard for pedagogical matters.

The periodical contains reports on courses implemented (for one semester or two) in institutions that ranged from community colleges and universities to art schools. On smaller state-funded campuses or in large and/or prestigious universities (like the University of Texas and Yale), alternatives were devised and introduced to classes varying in size from thirty to three hundred. These experiments met with combinations and degrees of rejection or acceptance within venues that had—and have—divergent
student bodies, values and expectations. Nearly all retained most or part of the survey structure, though they altered its form or supplemented the textbooks with other readings.

Only three courses abandoned the usual chronological narrative altogether. Interestingly, the most radical departure appears to have been at Harvard where the administration also mounted the most active resistance. Constructed and taught collaboratively by Irene Winter and Henri Zerner, the title of the course, "Art and Visual Culture", reveals its hybrid nature. Some of what distinguished this course from the others: two instructors instead of one and visits to museums and public installations every other week, can be attributed to the fact that it’s an affluent Ivy League school, but more exceptional still was the inclusion of a section entitled “the diversity of systems of representation” (Winter & Zerner, 1995, p. 42).

Just how contentious such deviations from curricular tradition can be is also indicated by the following disclaimer by Hollis Clayson and Michael Leja about the inauguration of their “Introduction to visual culture” at Northwestern in 1993: “This model was not officially endorsed by the Northwestern Department of Art History at large, nor does it represent the views of all members of the department” (Clayson & Leja, 1995, p. 48). While there was a conscious attempt by the instructors to bring in imagery that wouldn’t normally be classified as art, most of their paper emphasizes well-known fine art images and familiar techniques such as formal analysis. It’s possible to argue that treating mundane objects as art aestheticizes them, and that incorporating them into the art system—as “honorary art” so to speak—perpetuates its hegemony.
Finally, Patricia Mathews in her “Approaches to Western Art History” at Oberlin appears to have tried to disguise a course that sought to introduce several controversial features behind a conservative-sounding name. She expresses profound reservations (which I share) about how art history has evolved and how it functions in society.

Art historians have fetishized a chronological, diachronic model based on causality and often teleology that supports a linear model of history and an elitist, exclusive lineage of art. Are the questions of who did what when really the most important information for a student to absorb in their first art history course? I think not. (Mathews, 1995, p. 52)

And yet, though her stated desire is to foster critical thinking (p. 52), the design she puts forward locates this offering firmly within the province of the “new” art history. There is never any question about the centrality of art, bolstered as it is here by Mathews’ intrepid conviction that democratizing high culture has the potential to elevate and liberate the masses. The result is an attempt to marry neo-Marxian theory with the defining project of American arts education⁴.

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⁴ Thomas Reese has credited the evangelical zeal of this combined legacy (Progressivism and elements of John Dewey's educational philosophy) with being responsible for "some of the best American art history, which is characterized by a strong moral content and dedication to inspiring in students a sense of the social and political value of art" (Reese, 1995, p. 547).
I subscribe to an art historical approach that acknowledges the dynamic, fluid, varied nature of art and its interaction with culture. Not only the canon, but those excluded from it, play a fundamental role in the production of cultural meaning. In my view art history should teach students about the role of art in the formation of culture, about the diversity of approaches and meanings that constitute the art of a given historical moment, and about the interpretative modes used to understand it. (Mathews, 1995, p. 52)

I can’t help but wonder—even though there are few texts specifically addressing non-art—whether Mathews’ students, after reading Barthes and Cornel West or some of the more provocative art historians such as Carol Duncan and Eunice Lipton⁵, were content with projects such as creating and evaluating self-portraits or reviewing campus architecture.

There’s a revealing disjunction, as I see it, between theory and practice in these Art Journal narratives. Their authors can be divided into two sets: those who chose (or were chosen) either to write about the historical underpinnings of the survey, their hopes for its revision, renovation or eventual replacement and those who recounted their own involvement in implementing change. The qualities of the articles are correspondingly distinctive: the first being (perhaps predictably) more reflective, more removed and more consciously academic. Written mainly in the passive voice, they function as position statements and strike me as self-absorbed and polemical. Despite some acknowledgement of recent or current developments in theoretical knowledge, these articles adopt a detached and relatively unreflexive stance. The security of private,

⁵ These were readings assigned by Matthews.
abstract engagements with ideas contrasts sharply with the uncertainty of public and concrete negotiations with other human beings.

Speaking for your subject area is, after all, quite different from speaking as a practitioner within it. It's difficult to resist the tendency to generalize or not to feel compelled to make pronouncements regardless of whether these are stated as requirements. On the other hand, many teachers will eagerly communicate what they've tried in the classroom—successful or not—and in a situation like this one (which involved some innovation), it might be hard to shut them up. Perhaps this has something to do with why just three are theoretical pieces, and the other thirteen are first-person descriptions. Doesn't this discrepancy confirm that subjectivity and self-awareness are the key elements in what remains at heart a deconstructionist enterprise? If the aim is to undermine the authority of grand narratives, we have to thwart the tendency to simply replace a crusty and distasteful version of events with another totalizing account, no matter how fresh and palatable it might seem at the moment, and force ourselves to speak (as much as is possible) as ourselves and for ourselves.

While heated debates may have been taking place at conferences and within individual departments, published criticism of the survey paradigm was, as I've mentioned, infrequent. Scott Heller's piece in ARTnews in 1997 provides an update on "Art and Visual Culture" at Harvard two years later, taught then by Henri Zerner with a

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6 I'd like to inject a couple of thoughts on this title. "Art history" is cordoned off from "visual culture", enforcing, not only its separateness and distinctiveness (freedom from
new collaborator, Norman Bryson. Heller's description of Bryson's lecture situates it within what Michael Zimmerman has called "the anthropological turn of art history" (Zimmerman, 2003, p. 168.). This tack might be described as a further attempt to find refuge from the ongoing aftershocks of the so-called "cultural turn". If the example Heller relates is any indication, demands for inclusion of other materials and acknowledgement of difference has been answered by using non-western art (or in this case architecture) to re-valorize the canon by means of transcultural comparisons. I'm reminded of the boxed asides which began to appear in survey texts in the mid-1990s and have now proliferated to the point of absurdity. These "oh, by the way" additions serve a similar purpose—to defray accusations that the achievements of other societies are being ignored—but they have the effect of visibly performing the very marginalization they purportedly set out to address.

7 Stokstad might not have initiated these, but her Art History (1995) appears to have been the first survey text to employ them extensively. A habit subsequently picked up by Adams in Art across Time (1999) and Kleiner, Mamiya and Tansey (2001) in Gardner's Art through the Ages (2001).
To make his point, Bryson analyzes two structures, the fifth-century B.C. Parthenon in Athens and a 20th-century mud home common among the Batammaliba people of Togo, West Africa. With a slide of the Parthenon on the screen behind him, Bryson describes the building’s history, especially its elaborate sculptural program of friezes and relief sculptures, touching on the way in which Greeks depicted male and female nudity. But instead of analyzing the sculpture in terms of style and technique, he lectures on how the arrangement of figures spells out a “civic ideology” that values Greek over Asian culture, marriage over unregulated sexuality.

He then shifts gears, putting up two slides of the Batammaliba home. Though it is vastly different from the Parthenon, Bryson wants to draw out similarities: that the house serves as a kind of temple in Togo’s egalitarian village communities, its various parts echoing parts of the body; that like the Parthenon, it provides a ritualized way for a community to pass on its values. “Their house becomes a dramatization of the history of its inhabitants,” says Bryson. (Heller, 1997, p. 290)

According to Bryson, the main reason that Harvard abandoned the first-year survey was because the addition of non-western works made the course “unwieldy” and virtually unteachable (p. 289). Despite the fact that it “abandons chronology” (p. 289) and that the range of images has been expanded, pedagogical procedures identified with the art history survey like dual slide projection and comparative analysis remain. And the deck appears to be stacked in the traditional manner. Heller seems surprised (and impressed) that Bryson shows photographs that detail the Parthenon’s sculptural program but refrains from describing these reliefs in stylistic or technical terms. Still, while students may gain insight into the symbolic meaning of West African domestic structures, I’m left with a number of troubling questions.
Given the framing devices in operation here, what kinds of learning are possible? Since classical anthropology and ethnography were challenged early on for their unreflexive characterizations of the Other (Asad, 1973; Stocking Jr., 1983; Clifford & Marcus, 1986), how can an inquiry like this one be undertaken without some exploration of positionality and its consequences? Surely the backgrounds and class affiliations of the Harvard undergraduates who make up Bryson’s audience are not irrelevant factors. Under these circumstances, what understandings can they achieve of Batammaliban belief systems as they’re represented in the houses they build? West African cultures and West African domestic architecture have to be granted enough singularity and respect to merit investigation on their own without needing validation through a contrived link to the Classical past. This presentation was given a decade ago, but it illustrates how attempts to rectify the art history survey can amplify its most disturbing traits. Traditional art history’s Eurocentrism; its predilection for contrasting the modern with the so-called “primitive”; its modernist appropriation of the “primitive” through/as primitivism mark this exercise. Evinced here is an unselfconscious binarism. The first slide is a photograph of the most celebrated building in the most prominent city-state in antiquity—both named and both situated in the century know as the “Golden Age of Greece”—and the lecturer expounds on the structure’s history, unraveling the puzzle of “its elaborate sculptural program”. The second slides are pictures of a “20th century mud home common among the Batammaliba people of Togo, West Africa”. We don’t learn whether this edifice or its type have names in the Batammaliban language, nor are we told the name of the community where it’s located. There’s no mention at all of its lineage, presumably because such dwellings are thought to have been constructed identically in this
changeless land. How could a near-contemporary house be compared with a 2500 year old temple *unless* it was assumed to be static and timeless (and we won’t get into the significance of gauging mud against marble). What we find out about the Batammaliban abode and its symbolic and social function is completely determined by its “similarities” to the Parthenon and the “civic ideology” of ancient Athens. Cross-cultural comparisons (and the presumption of commensurability itself) invariably “other”. Without teaching the survey per se, Bryson is performing and prefiguring the survey textbook’s box in a tokenistic and patronizing “United Colors of Benetton” riff. In pointing out how a Togan residence “becomes a dramatization of the history of its inhabitants”, he reinforces difference by eliding it. There are, unquestionably histories and histories, and this one isn’t privileged and isn’t ours. Greek (and Euramerican in general) temples are made of substantial, sometimes valuable, materials, and they don’t have “inhabitants”.

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8 United Colors of Benetton was a series of advertisements for Benetton, the Italian clothing company, centered around a series of extravagantly aestheticized photos by Olivieri Toscani which began in 1984. They were attacked (by Henry Giroux among others) for homogenizing difference and perpetuating stereotypes.

Depicted in these photographs of children hugging and holding hands is a portrayal of racial harmony and difference that appears both banal and sterile. The exaggerated precision of the models and primary colors used in the advertisements renders racial unity as a purely aesthetic category while eliminating racial conflict completely in this two-dimensional world of make-believe. Within these ad campaigns race and ethnicity are both accentuated and fixed. (Giroux, 1993, p. 10)
Living in a culture that idealizes ancient Greece and surrounded by neoclassical buildings (they were probably sitting in one)—what would Bryson’s students derive except confirmation of their own supremacy. More to the point perhaps, how much would they care? Comparisons are odious because they tend to become contests. Bryson’s intention may have been to emphasize correspondences, but my suspicion is that his pupils’ familiarity with Classical Greek art (It’s also evident from Heller’s description that a pair of representations was considered sufficient to illustrate houses in Togo, whereas an array of photographs was required to depict ancient Greek architecture and statuary.) would almost certainly confirm the impression that, regardless of functional similarities, ancient Greek buildings as well as ancient Greeks themselves (and by association, European architecture and Europeans) were/are manifestly superior.

I realize that the interpretation I present here may seem unfair or even unscholarly since it’s based on Heller’s reactions alone. It might be argued that I should have compared it with other accounts or that I ought to have tried to get access to Bryson’s lecture notes. Yet, a sympathetic art historian’s first-hand assessment of a lecture given as part of what was being touted as an innovative alternative to the standard survey is, I think, completely appropriate to my purposes. Assumptions that Bryson’s own version would be less “removed” or more “reliable” than Heller’s brief summary are problematic, to say the least. What I hope this exercise calls attention to is the manner in which the means of representation (photography), the technologies (dual projection, lecture format) and the techniques (comparative analysis, scientific method, evidentiary value) of this “anti-survey” have become naturalized and therefore imperceptible (or nearly so) within art history as a discursive formation. In my view, art historians have learned to play the
role of the investigator who places art works under surveillance in search of clues which will eventually provide solutions to their various mysteries. This is predicated on (as well as demonstrating and replicating) the desire to manage, order and contain. In this scenario, “survey” operates as a verb rather than a noun, and as such, it helps clarify, not only the extent of its institutionalization but also the virtual inevitability (and therefore, the ubiquity) of its reproduction.

Though we position ourselves very differently, Robert S. Nelson has also remarked on the relationship between art history’s institutional mechanisms and their importance in the formation of subjectivities.

If these structures are seldom noticed, much less studied, they are always present. They are revived and replicated whenever a student attends an introductory class, reads a survey book, or follows a prescribed curriculum, whenever a colleague retires, a chair justifies and a dean endorses a replacement position, and a recent Ph.D. is hired, and whenever the discipline or a subfield, such as Renaissance or medieval art, convenes its members or publishes its journal—acts of scholarship but also of ritual, with their attendant consequences for the production of social meanings and identities. And they are in operation whenever someone looks for a book on a library shelf, or when a visitor to an art museum walks through its symbolically charged spaces, thereby enacting and embodying a narrative of art, as Carol Duncan has recently explained. (Nelson, 1997, p. 28)

As I’ve said earlier, these circumstances went largely unacknowledged in Art Journal’s anthologized efforts to “heal” the survey, and Michael Schwartz’s 2001 piece (a longer version of a paper he presented to a panel at the Southeastern College of Art Conference in Richmond, Virginia in 1997) continues to ignore them. What’s different about Schwartz however is that he’s more concerned with changing the way the survey is delivered than with revising the course itself. For Schwartz, the survey is relatively unproblematic. An expansion of the field and some tinkering are all that are required, and
he suggests “changing the canon [and] shifting our analytic frameworks” (p. 104). Though these very general propositions are all that Schwartz proposes, their direction is analogous to the submissions to *Art Journal*.

Schwartz’s avowed aim is to increase student autonomy by increasing learners’ confidence as interpreters within seminars that encourage the exchange of ideas in a non-threatening environment. Yet, the degree of independence acquired under this plan is questionable, and it isn’t cheap.

Fewer artworks are shown during class meetings than with the standard lecture format; but students achieve a far greater depth and complexity of understanding. Moreover, students are held responsible for all works reproduced in the art-history textbook; during exams they are expected to apply their skills and knowledge to artworks not discussed in class. Paper assignments further exercise skills in description and interpretation. (Schwartz, 2001, p. 110)

Memorizing the details of a canonical corpus under the aegis of coverage and mastery remains the student’s primary obligation, and why this information should be absorbed, what it represents or whether or not the task or its results are compatible with Schwartz’s stated objectives are issues that are never addressed. Neither does Schwartz say anything telling about student response. I’m curious to know just how “autonomous” participants really feel in his “facilitated seminars”, not to mention what they actually talk about when he leaves the room for twenty to thirty minutes (p. 110).

Once again, questioning having a survey at all is apparently out of the question. What is conceivable for Schwartz is “recasting” it so that the “themes of the survey course should directly engage issues at stake within our own visual culture” (p. 104).
Reformatting the survey in such ways is therefore not only an act of pedagogical reform but a political move as well; it requires that we as teachers, even as we introduce themes of study like sexual politics and pictorial mimesis, must give up our institutional role as the final jury and judge in matters of art historical truth and openly celebrate the creativity and autonomy of student thought. This is not easy to do; for we are deeply socialized into imposing our authority. But the well-being of our students demands that we try. (Schwartz, 2001, p. 116)

If radical “interventions” like attending to the origins, meanings and functions of terms such as art, art history and universal surveys are off the table (as Schwartz tells us they are: “the necessary rationale of the art history survey is to speak the truth of art. And in this regard the teacher’s greater experience with art-historical matters is simply requisite for guiding discussion and modeling learning” (p. 109)), how is it possible to comprehend the “deep socialization” Schwartz mentions or how this inculcates art historians into their “institutional roles”? (Bal, 1990; Foucault, 1972, 1974, 1977, 1980; Messer-Davidow et al., 1993).

**Given the survey’s persistence and art historians’ demonstrable allegiance to it—no matter how reluctant, conflicted or inadvertent—what theoretical discussions suggest effective strategies for contesting its dominance?**

Inseparable from the modern episteme (in this case, enterprise seems a more appropriate term) is the conviction that lofty vantage points ensure far-sightedness which, in turn, enables informed classifications, perceptive definitions and astute explanations. The suspicion that, like every interpretation, these too might be conditioned (and conditional), deploying rhetorical strategies to promote “interested” ideological agendas was aroused by critical theory and has been compounded by poststructuralism. My focus here has been on the survey paradigm and its operation as a disciplinary convention in teaching and learning about art history. The art historical literature I’ve encountered
which treats the survey directly suggests that professional art historians are engaged (to varying degrees) in retrenchment. Even Kymberley Pinder’s piece does little more than pose some trenchant questions, suggesting to me that its presence in Art Bulletin (as an essay on black representation in survey textbooks buried in the book review section) may have more to do with that publication’s desire to appear current and relevant than any genuine interest in her critique or its implications.

Enlightenment legacies of claiming the “high ground” to scope out scholarly terrain or of configuring the past to conform to the present are by no means exclusive to art history. However, art history could well be the most resistant field in today’s academy\(^9\) to democratizing the study of culture. Should we put down the persistence of—and continued investment in—reductive blueprints and formulaic outlines on the part of art historians to apathy or intransigence? Or is this behavior dedicated to sustaining and promoting what Larry Shiner referred to as “the system of art” (Shiner, 2001, p.11). Pierre Bourdieu has another way of describing that structure in his The Rules of Art (1996) which seems germane here. While the idea of art as a secular religion has been articulated since the nineteenth century and perhaps earlier (Shroder, 1961; Charlton, 1963; Honour, 1979; Duncan, 1995; Shiner, 2001), Bourdieu takes it up as a metaphor for comparing the organization of the art world and its professionals to an institutionalized faith with sacred traditions and devoted functionaries. Thus, he provides

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\(^9\) Classics is the exception, but it has a much lower profile.
what is likely the most fully realized account of the mystification of the artistic realm and its socio-cultural implications. Artists are the prophets in art’s church, and art historians perform rituals of consecration by enlisting the forces of genius and inspiration to spiritualize ideological functions through commodity fetishization. “The work of art, like religious goods or services, amulets or various sacraments, receives value only from collective belief as collective misrecognition, collectively produced and reproduced” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 172). Or in Bridget Fowler’s gloss: “aesthetic categories, considered as analytically separable from ethical meanings and empirical propositions, are conferred by the ‘social group’ or owing to the absence of an academy [such as the Royal Academy of Art in the nineteenth century, for instance] in modernity, by specialized professionals, private gallery-owners or dealers, etc., who regulate canonicity or battles over value” (Fowler, p. 62).

In the previous chapter, I mentioned Hans Belting’s contention that contemporary artists (whose relationship with art history has long been fraught) have effectively distanced themselves from art historians and what they do since the 1980s (Belting, 2003, pp. 74-84). Having taught art history, visual culture and cultural theory in an art school

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¹⁰ Carol Duncan has written instructively on this issue with regard to museums. Once we question our Enlightenment assumptions about the sharp separation between religious and secular experience—that one is rooted in belief while the other is based in lucid and objective rationality—we may begin to glimpse the hidden—perhaps the better word is disguised—ritual content of secular ceremonies. (Duncan, 1995, p. 8)
(Emily Carr Institute) for well over a decade, I’d say that most teachers and learners there consider art history’s traditions and presumptions arcane and immaterial. Cultural, visual and media studies, on the other hand, excite widespread interest among artists as areas in possession of useful and productive models for thinking about images, their characteristics and their consequences. In addition, these fields are easily integrated into studio projects because students realize that the constructs explored in/by them influence and inform the activities of artists they admire. It’s my feeling that survey courses persist in the art college environment for a number of reasons. Among these are institutional inertia, instructors who are either reluctant or ill-equipped to teach differently (or both) and resources such as audio-visual collections which fit the survey mold and were/are designed to support it. Yet, students I’ve spoken to appear unengaged by—and Elkins’ proposal (outlined in Chapter One) was designed to address “studio practice [which] he calls a “conceptually unruly, heteromorphous arena . . . [that] is the genuine Other of art history” (Elkins, 1995, p. 55). Strikingly unlike his stance in Stories of Art, here Elkins eloquently defends his plan to depart from—and disturb—the institution’s and the discipline’s expectations.

there are no themes that course through history and cross cultures unaltered, and there are no hermeneutic guides to the moments when the meaning of a theme metamorphoses and becomes illegible. But this cannot be used to argue in favor of conventional course divisions and curricula or to argue against the Parallel program’s thematic organization, because the entirety of art history is built on the possibility of just such continuity . . . . The “Great Books” mentality is built into the fabric of diachronic, disciplinary art history as it has grown out of connoisseurship and formalism . . . . By producing these themes as questions in their own right . . . Parallel Art History/Studio courses are . . . designed to be self-reflexive, so that curricular debate is built into the curriculum itself of remaining a disruptive outside influence. (Elkins, 1995, p. 56)
unenthused about—curricula of this sort. They’re only willing to tolerate an archaic and inflexible format if they find the material exciting. When the works are current and philosophically complex issues and the time frame is short, then fusty pigeonholing and a fussy fixation with style are no less irritating, but there’s a powerful incentive to put up with them.

Even so-called “anti-surveys” which claim to promote a critical engagement with canonical systems and linear master narratives in order to challenge or deconstruct them are misled in my opinion. Critiquing the canon or proposing alternative or oppositional canons leaves the issue of canonicity itself unquestioned, and “great works” from a few western European nations retain their centrality in these scenarios; they continue to control the discourse, regardless of what’s said about them. It will never be possible to open up previously unexplored (or underexplored) areas of inquiry, include subordinate or marginalized perspectives and activate the widest variety of interpretations without moving away from these (structuralist) paradigms. Challenging the dominant models can—and must—be part of this endeavor, but a preliminary one. Only by radically de-centering this corpus (and I’d venture to say the category of art itself) can we forge relationships to the visual that move away from containment, exclusion and isolation toward engagements that are expansive, inclusive and collaborative.
CHAPTER THREE: ART HISTORY SURVEYS - THEIR POSITION IN/AS THE DISCIPLINE

What role has the universal survey played in the evolution of art history as a discipline?

Although I’m putting forward this query, I have to say off the top that I don’t expect to answer it. Instead, I’ll point toward some ways in which it has been expounded in the literature and to suggestions about morphological similarities between the art history survey as a curricular technology and other educational/cultural mechanisms such as the slide library and the museum. Here, the reasons why the question can be addressed and explored but not resolved, exceed what might be claimed about any question or about questions in general: their nature, the functions they perform and their incorrigible unanswerability. In this instance, the survey, as pattern and method, is so thoroughly implicated in art history’s formation and development, it’s impossible to disentangle it in order to examine and consider it as something separate (or separable). Structured overviews in this mold continue to be both the prototypical offering and the typical fare when it comes to art historical instruction. This situation persists in spite of evidence that scholarly priorities are changing, research interests are expanding and pedagogical experimentation is taking place in most—if not all—art history departments. Recently, as outlined in Chapter Two, some attention has been paid to the survey as curriculum, but these exercises only attest, in my opinion, to how thoroughly integrated/implicated this delineation has been in establishing, developing and promoting art history as a distinctive and autonomous academic subject. This sequential narrative continues to anchor professional and instructional practices (to an extent that many art historians seem unable
to recognize or unwilling to acknowledge) because it legitimizes and sacralizes products made for—and traded on—a specialized speculative market.

Art history as a subject to be taught and studied discretely—as opposed to being defined solely through its relationship to the practices of production, exhibition and/or collection—is said to have originated in the German-speaking nations (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) in the 1830s (Minor, 1994, p. 20). Textbooks on “general art history” (or allgemeine Kunstgeschichte), as the art history survey was called in its birthplace, began to appear a decade later. They predated art history departments, and their primary role at this time appears to have been to connect a totalized—and totalizing—view of human history to a newly unified Germany, providing a long and glorious heritage to validate a nascent national identity. Initially, the target audience for such books was the bureaucratic elite; they were only introduced to university students as instructional tools sometime after 1871 (Schwarzer, 1995, p. 24). Hegel’s idealist conception of art’s

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12 According to Schwarzer, “The texts . . . exhibit a striking affection for classical Greece and medieval Germanic Christianity. Their moralizing tone was intended to inspire belief that modern German art and culture was the child of an inspired marriage of Hellenic realism and Christian theology: that the Romantic German artist was a form-making and sacred genius” (p. 28). It should be noted that Kugler’s tome was unillustrated although a compendium of engravings entitled the Kunst-atlas intended to accompany the Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte was issued in 1858 (Karlholm, 2001, p. 555), and even late in the century when photographs were common in other publications, art historical works in German were sparsely illustrated or sometimes only text (Hamber, 1995, p.111 and fn. 44, p. 120). Johann Winckelmann’s History of Ancient Art (1969) had set the precedent nearly a century earlier for discovering correspondences between the temperament, achievements—and even the appearance—of the ancient Greeks and the Germanic peoples.
history as the evolution of a global spirit (Hotho, 1975) and Schlegel’s Romantic conviction that “In the history of art one block of material is only explained and clarified by another” (Schlegel, 1968, p. 107) motivated accounts in which art constitutes a relentlessly progressive “chain of meaning” (Schwarzer, 1995, p. 24). And Franz Kugler’s Handbook of Art History (1842) set the pattern for the linear, chronological four-stage narrative (early, classical, medieval, modern (Renaissance to contemporary)) that endured virtually unchanged for the next 125 years.13

By 1900, although delivered in the departments of classics or archaeology, many American universities and colleges also had offerings in art history. “Art history entered late as a professional subject in the American curriculum, following many other fields that were established in the period between 1885 and 1910, when the modern American university was built on German models of disciplinary specialization and devotion to research” (Reese, 1995, p. 545). Divided into chronological surveys for majors and thematic courses for non-majors, the emphasis in these early days was firmly on ancient art. Charles Eliot Norton at Harvard is probably the most famous figure in American art history from the first part of the twentieth century. Norton designed his lectures around the theories of John Ruskin, stressing the “ennobling” and “improving” nature of art and

13 In the twentieth century, it provided the template for the two survey textbooks that went on to become the sales leader and the academic favorite, Ernst Gombrich’s The Story of Art (1950) and Horst Janson’s History of Art (1962) respectively (Schwarzer, p. 25).
promoting a canon of masterworks borrowed from that English critic. Included were the standard works from ancient Greece and the Italian Renaissance, but the inclusion of works from Medieval Venice and Norton's departure from a strictly classical program attest to Ruskin's influence. Ruskin had lived and written in Venice, and these pre-Renaissance pieces were examples of the simple "primitivism" he favored along with colleagues like William Morris and others in the Arts and Crafts movement. Norton took Ruskin's nostalgic historicism even further though, by asserting that little, if anything, noteworthy had been produced since the sixteenth century (Minor, 1994, p. 21).

Graduate programs in fine arts in the United States were introduced only a few years after illustrated slide lectures made their first appearance at Harvard and Yale (1885 and 1886, respectively) (p. Bohrer, 2002, p. 250). This occurred almost simultaneously in America, Germany and England, where "photography's mechanical objectification of art was essential in qualifying it as a positivist discipline, and was the virtual badge of its entitlement to intellectual respectability." (p. 250). However, as Frederick Bohrer goes on to illustrate, these claims of disinterested and systematic accuracy contrasted sharply with the emotionally charged histrionics of Heinrich Grimm at the University of Berlin. Grimm's were the first widely attended lectures to integrate lantern slides with their descriptions before a seated audience.
The extroverted, late-Romantic Grimm's approach was anything but scientific. Instead, he used slides as the basis of what were dramatic performances, whose goal was a sort of ideal presence, magically transporting audiences to Raphael's frescoes or Michelangelo's sculpture, in search of a spiritualized, cultural-historical vision. (Bohrer, 2002, p. 250)

This contradiction remains in effect, and the style Grimm introduced continues to be a feature of the art historian's persona. All teachers are story-tellers, and there is probably a theatrical streak in the dreariest of pedagogues, but in no other academic field or profession outside of the performing arts, is showmanship so integral or so evident. In Grimm's day, the darkened theater was a recent German innovation (introduced by Wagner at Bayreuth in 1876), and the uses of artistic biography and art historical narrative to promote cultural nationalism were by now well-established (Duncan, 1993; Duncan & Wallach, 1980; Preziosi, 1998; Kauffman, 2002).

Yet, one element of Grimm's presentations was notably different from the way a typical art history class is conducted today. His images were shown and seen singly and consecutively. Dual projection was pioneered by his successor, Heinrich Wölfflin, whose formalist comparative techniques went on to become a mainstay of standard art historical exposition (Bohrer, 2002, p. 250). Wölfflin was almost as theatrical as Grimm, and wrote frankly about the value of exaggeration as a means to drive home a point, but also to entertain (Wölfflin in Bohrer, p. 251). Beyond this, because projected images are difficult to discern at a distance, the lecturer's view reinforces his position as the only one capable of providing detailed description and hence, authoritative explanation.
The images are held together not merely by an optical effect, but by the student’s very investment in them and acceptance of the professor’s authority. In this sense, an art history lecture never merely illustrates art objects, but also illustrates an authority’s power over them, and over their audience. Hence the ironic situation is that the art history lecturer fixes for the audience what he or she is in the least privileged position to actually see. (Bohrer, 2002, p. 254)

Nothing suggests that the power relations embodied in these conditions troubled Grimm or Wölfflin; on the contrary, they apparently relished them.¹⁴ Nor has there been much recognition or discussion of the naturalization of similar arrangements in art history departments today or of what they might signify.

Over the next three or four decades however, a momentous change occurred in how art history was conceived and taught in American universities. As interest in earlier eras declined, the now familiar periodization of Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and Modern became entrenched. Art after the fifteenth century outstripped anything prior to the Renaissance in popularity, and every sizeable institution with a focus on the humanities established an art history department with its own curriculum, hiring specialists to teach in it (pp. 22-23). German-trained art historians such as Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) Walter Friedlander (1873-1966) and Richard Krautheimer (1897-1994) who emigrated to America during the 1930’s, imbued the field with a new sense of authority by bringing erudition and rigor to the practice of art history. Yet, it’s doubtful

¹⁴ “For Wölfflin . . . the very format of the slide lecture specifically (in his own term) empowers the professor over the darkened listeners . . . it also solidified the very roles of active speaker and passive listener thereby engendered” (Bohrer, p. 251).
whether this rigorous attitude had as much impact on students as it did on colleagues. Although Panofsky was quick to criticize the pragmatic character of American higher education, his old world pedigree attracted an elite whose pursuit of cultural capital ensured high enrollment. Panofsky and his countrymen may have added scholarly credibility—and cachet—to the discipline’s research programs, but instructional activity in art history remained committed to its tale of trailblazing artists and canonical masterpieces as signifiers of history’s inexorable progression toward the telos of Euro-American cultural dominance.¹⁵

In the earlier part of the century, lectures would have been organized around biographical detail, connoisseurship (personal style; characteristics of particular schools or movements; historical materials and techniques) and aesthetic quality. However, the translation of Wölfflin’s Principles of Art History (1915) into English in 1932 provided the impetus for a new kind of curriculum with a distinctly different focus. Nicknamed “art-history-without-names” (Kultermann, 1993, p. 177), Wölfflin’s methodology

¹⁵ My comments here are specific to art historians who emigrated to the United States before or during World War Two. I’m aware that contemporary art historians have evinced new interest in their “roots”. Panofsky and Aby Warburg (who, unlike his countryman, traveled to America but continued to reside in Europe) have excited the most attention. Panofsky’s symbology and Warburg’s forays into ethnography have been recruited to legitimize art history’s recent attempts to align itself with research on material culture (primarily, I would venture, in response to visual studies’ validation of experiential culture). Both Panofsky and Warburg were, however, Eurocentric, deferential to high culture and dedicated to the project of acquiring and dispensing cultural capital. (See Claire Farago’s essay (2002) for a trenchant reflection on the racist and colonialist attitudes Warburg displayed during his sojourn in New Mexico to study the Hopi serpent ritual.)
reinforced the classical canon and the conventional artistic periods, but it made classification by style its paramount objective. Wölfflin maintained that typical stylistic traits could be easily learned and provide the basis for a relational "scientific" analysis of pictures, statues and buildings. Specific knowledge of biography, history or society was relatively insignificant nor was it necessary to have access to the original art works themselves. Wölfflin's system of side-by-side comparison (best known through his contrast between Renaissance and Baroque) was embraced in the U.S. as democratic, efficient and progressive (Panofsky described the attitude it appealed to as "Anglo-Saxon positivism" [Panofsky, 1955, p. 32]). As Bohrer stresses, the approach exerted a lasting influence on the pedagogy of art history that continues into the present. Attention in nearly every art history class has been and still is directed at a pair of projected images. This setup has many ramifications; among them, the perpetuation of binaries of resemblance and disparity—Wölfflinian and otherwise. While American art historical research eventually broadened its scope to include aspects beyond the object's mode of creation, its ongoing pretensions to scientific neutrality or objectivity and its objectivist orientation assumed their familiar form under Wölfflin's influence.

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16 Recently (per my remarks in Chapter One), exceptions have begun to proliferate.

17 Objectivism, as Robert S. Nelson recounts, "maintain[s] the Western gaze and grid of interpretation . . . History becomes a landscape or a stage. The observer imparts to the action observed or the practice made object his/her relations with the object. These new "objects" are then made to interact with other similarly constituted entities" (Nelson, 1997, p. 37). He links his remarks to those made by Bourdieu's twenty years earlier.
Donald Preziosi argues that the technologies of photography and projection “became determinative of the directions in which art history developed”, allowing the development of “encyclopedic archival systems for the classification of artworks” which were “an indispensable component in thinking art historically” (Preziosi, 1993, p. 221)

Every item in this disciplinary archive is, in short, a still in a historical film portraying the evolutionary progress of art over the ages. And each item is meaningful, in this system, in a differential manner. Objects known and unknown will (eventually) have their fixed and proper locus in an encyclopedic and universal history of art projected onto the horizon of the future. (p. 233)

“Thinking art historically” then has also to be considered as constituent to—and constituted by—the orientation and methodology of connoisseurship which, not only depend on this archive, but use it to sustain, maintain and extend the modern canon. No connoisseur is more renowned than Bernard Berenson, whose working methods are described by S. J. Freedberg:

It is also a weighing of the process toward objectivity that the stage that must follow on the connoisseur’s assimilation of the evidence—

Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a point of view on the action, who stands back to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone, in which all interactions are reduced to symbolic exchanges. The point of view is the one afforded by high positions in the social structure, from which the social world appears as a representation (in the sense of idealist philosophy but also as used in painting or theatre) and practices are no more than “executions”, stage parts, performances of scores, or the implementing of plans”. ([Bourdieu (1977)]) in Nelson, 1997, p. 37)
assimilation to the evidence as well, . . . is that of comparative reference to an established, and, in practical effect objectified, body of visual material to which a given work appears to have a relationship. (Freedberg, 1989, p. 11)

In a later essay, Preziosi calls to mind Foucault’s understanding of the archive (as a mechanism for generating meaning) to elaborate art history’s ascendancy.

essential to the articulation and justification of art history as a systematic and universal human science in the nineteenth century was the construction of an indefinitely extendable archive, potentially coterminous (as it has since in practice become) with the ‘material (or “visual”) culture’ of all human groups. Within this vast imaginary museographical artifact or edifice (every slide or photo library as an ars memorativa)—of which all museums are fragments or part-objects—every possible object of attention might find its fixed and proper place relative to the rest. Every item might thereby be sited (and cited) as referencing or indexing another or others on multiple horizons . . . . The set of objects displayed in any exhibition (as with the system of classification of slide collections is sustained by the willed fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent ‘representational universe’, as signs or surrogates of their (individual, national, racial, gendered) authors. (Preziosi, 1998, p. 521)

Such a “willed fiction” of coherence and universality is exemplified in the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard described by Preziosi in “The Question of Art History” as “the first institution specifically designed to house the entire disciplinary apparatus of art history in one space” (Preziosi, 1994, p. 205). Those systems became the prototype, not only for art history departments across the United States, but eventually around the world (Jones, 1985, pp. 15-30). And the first year-long global art history survey anywhere was initiated by—and delivered at—the Fogg Museum during the 1912-1913 academic year (Preziosi, 1994, p. 207). Thomas Reese (in a contribution to Art Bulletin) has chronicled the rapid growth of art history in the United States, without once referring to the survey course or to its inauguration at Harvard. However, it’s the only curricular formulation
capable of meeting the nation's expectations and fulfilling the requirements of its academic institutions as he describes them.

In America art history's offerings have typically been broad chronologically and geographically because of the distinctive and problematic role the discipline has played in constructing national identity in terms of America's role as the inheritor (and even the inventor) of Western civilization . . . . To survive and grow, the history of art in college of arts and letters had to assure its autonomy as a scientific discipline vis-à-vis archaeology, history, classics, and aesthetics by differentiating itself methodologically so as to demand departmental status, while simultaneously avoiding any perception of a narrowing of its scope that would relegate it to the status of a "subdiscipline" and give it the aura of a "special history". (Reese, 1995, p. 546)

What influence has the longstanding dominance of the survey model had on art historians as teachers?

As I've indicated, Preziosi is the art historian who (building on earlier work by British art historians like Pollock [1988], Rees & Borzello [1986], Tagg [1986; 1992], Tickner [1988], Green & Mort, [1982]) has maintained the most consistent and relentless critique of his own field. His observations figured prominently in the previous section, and they open this one.

Art history and museology . . . have aimed at the dissolution of the troubling ambiguities about the past by fixing meaning, locating its source in the artist, the historical moment, the mentality or morality of the age, place, people, race, gender or class, and by arranging or formatting the past into rationalized genealogy; a clearly ramified ancestry for the present, for the presence that constitutes our modernity . . . . Both are practices of power wherein the desire for constructing the present is displaced and staged as a desire for knowledge of the past such that the present itself may come to be pictured as ordered and oriented as the effect and product of progressive and inevitable forces . . . the discourse of art has been deeply concerned, implicitly and explicitly, with the promotion and validation of the idea of the modern nation-state as an entity ideally distinct and homogeneous on ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural grounds . . . . At the same time, art history and the museum have worked to promote the idea of a historical period as itself unified and
homogeneous, or dominated by a singular family of values and attitudes. (Preziosi, 1994, p. 223)

As demonstrated in the literature, dissatisfaction with the survey stretches back three decades or more. It has recognized in some degree that, intentionally or not, the apparatus itself continues to promote a "singular family of values and attitudes" as an attribute of both historical and contemporary communities. How can any "comprehensive overview" be anything but a panoptic inspection, enacting its superior position as overseer and enforcing its prerogative to scrutinize, evaluate and summarize? But (and I flag/flog it as a revealing and consequential "but") almost without exception, attempts to "deal with" the survey's problems refuse to relate the ideological functions it performed in the past with the ones it carries out today. In lieu of examining how they're positioned by/in/through the trajectory they delineate and elucidate, art historians busy themselves instead with reconfiguring their archival resources, refurbishing their technologies and revising their pedagogical strategies. Larry Silver's recent lament in Artnews follows what has become a predictable and formulaic pattern of deflecting attention away from the project itself and its implications (the "how" and "why") onto its materials (the "what").

"The standard textbooks do not begin to address our needs," says Silver. Despite the reprintings and the minor changes to the canon, "the art history survey has remained virtually unchanged for half a century or more. In the meantime, the students who take art history have become increasingly diverse—with interests more engaged with gender or social issues than a generation ago—and they have wider backgrounds". (Peers, 2006)
Even though its commitment to diversity may be superficial or perfunctory, public education has moved away from overt support for similarly reductive and restrictive constructs. Yet, universal histories of art, as remote from most students’ lives as the eighteenth century aristocrat’s Grand Tour (which they emulate) and no less arcane, continue their promotion of what Carol Duncan has labeled “establishment humanism”.18 An important reason why they persist is their usefulness to the professional caste who validate creative work as art and to the corporate elite whose prestige is maintained and reinforced by collecting it.

In her short essay, “Teaching the rich” (which first appeared in 1973), Duncan describes how, in the late 1960s, she lost her first job as a lecturer at a small, wealthy college because she displayed an “inappropriate” interest in the context of art works. Perhaps this wouldn’t happen today, but Duncan’s account of the evangelistic expectations surrounding the “gospel of art” retains its resonance.

the claim that art, literature and music are civilizing or socially beneficial agents finds its greatest traction in expensive liberal arts colleges . . . . Here, if anywhere, are the students whose backgrounds and future lives make relevant a classroom experience in which all art, past and present, is

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17Establishment humanism and its related cult of individualism . . . while extolling the value of individual creativity, . . . certifies creative activity only in the form of objects or acts produced for the contained spheres of the art world, implicitly justifying the absence of aesthetic values in so-called common experience . . . . Thus establishment humanism protects and the perpetuates the value of art in forms that ensure its existence as a subculture conserving both its authentic spiritual rewards and its real social prestige for the rich and those who serve them. (Duncan, 1993, p. 140)
approached as if it were explicitly made to be looked at in the vacuum of the museum or acquired from one's own pleasure. Here, traditional, undergraduate art history finds its best audience as it presents the history of art as so many objects, bracketing and magnifying stylistic qualities, extolling the innate genius with which each great master solved a formal or iconographic problem, drawing an occasional parallel from philosophy or another humanistic discipline, and extracting the World Views and Ideas that furnish the realm of abstract, universal truths—all the while avoiding or playing down the social matrix of art and turning the anti-art intentions of much twentieth-century art to aesthetic profit by treating them as 'formal advances' to be appreciated for their own sakes. (Duncan, 1993, p. 139)

Unfortunately, Duncan doesn’t go into detail about the dissonance she experienced between her own class origins and/or political beliefs and the roles she was hired to perform. She does, however, disclose a gap between her attitudes and affiliations and those of her employers that proved unbridgeable. Art historians’ efforts at attending to how they’re positioned, socially and culturally, have rarely extended to the work they carry out in the lecture theater or the seminar room, and Duncan’s piece was anomalous in the early 1970s. Today, if anything, they’re less forthcoming about conflicted feelings in those environments than they were twenty or thirty years ago. A roundtable discussion on teaching the art history survey (conducted via e-mail and moderated by Peggy Phelan) which was published in *Art Journal* in 2005 is illustrative. Prefaced with the Carnegie Foundation’s intriguing discovery that “80 percent of college teaching faculty listed teaching as their primary interest”, Phelan’s opening remarks refer to “radical transformations” in the items and issues now being explored by scholars and their graduate students in the field of art history (Phelan, Concannon, Costache, Desmond, Little, and Shipps, 2005, p. 33). She alludes also to the disparate backgrounds, insights and abilities learners bring to their studies on today’s campuses. Phelan concludes her introduction with several comments, two queries and an open-ended invitation.
Given these changes, it would seem logical that the survey would become an obsolete, archaic technology in a postmodern world. I know it is cost-effective for universities to offer these large courses, but I think there is more than money behind the surveys' persistence. Many students love to take survey courses, and many people love to teach them. Have you observed this? If so, to what do you attribute this? And if this is not your sense of things, I would like to hear your thoughts about successful alternatives or replacements for the survey. (p. 33)

In the exchange that followed, I was pleased to note that every respondent (there were five in all) challenged Phelan’s simplistic claim about the “love” surveys often ignite in those who take them and those who teach them. David Little altered her verb to “are hungry for”, going on to maintain that “They [students] want a body of knowledge and desire facts, landmarks, and themes to hold together the complex histories of artistic practices, institutions and aesthetics” (p. 33). Steve Shipps related that distinctly different emotions could be unleashed ranging from “varying states of bewilderment, even unto outrage”, adding “if that happens, . . . a lot fewer are pleased to have taken the course by the time it’s over than loved it when they arrived.” He continues: “survey courses like the two that I took in the mid-1960s . . . are, I think, obsolete anachronisms, . . . . Though surely a lot of them still exist, unreconstructed, taught perhaps by junior faculty who have ‘higher’ scholarly aspirations and often don’t love doing so” (p. 34). As a full professor, Phelan is more removed from—and therefore, less aware—of the power imbalance between untenured or itinerant teachers than the discussants. Irina Costache finds it incumbent to remind Phelan (and us) that the survey is roughly equivalent to academic KP duty: tedious, repetitive, bearing “a certain stigma, and few senior faculty are interested in teaching it” (p. 34).
In certain respects, this forum is refreshingly candid. To wit, all the participants concur that art is considered increasingly irrelevant and marginal by the vast majority of college-age students (pp. 36-37). Further, each member of the group regrets the absence—or woeful inadequacy—of pedagogical training for art history graduates and concedes the effects of this deficiency on teaching and learning. So, it can be asserted that terrain was explored here (in the American context) that was not touched on in *Art Bulletin*’s pedagogy issue (1995). More striking than this slight movement is the quintet’s consistent dedication to art and (with minor variations) its amended canon and its revised, but still reassuring, narrative. Despite a general consensus on the necessity of fostering "critical thinking", the closest anyone gets to a probing assessment is to pose a few unsettling questions which are never taken up.

The survey has remained mostly Western, with some sporadic links to other cultures, and often colleges offer a separate survey of non-Western art (this raises other important issues, too). However, the students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds are very diverse. The art used in these courses has become an almost unquestionable visual trajectory. But does this art journey make as much sense to our students as it does to us? (p. 46)

Surely, if the group is serious about critical evaluation, these are precisely the kinds of challenges they should be taking on. Why are there two surveys? Why is one central (core curriculum, a number of sections) and the other peripheral (offered sporadically, a few classes [or only one])? I believe the “Why?” questions are the important ones here, but it might be useful to ask “What?” first. What, if any, sense does “this art journey” make to students? If it is completely senseless or nonsensical to them, can they put into words why they find it meaningless and/or ridiculous (What is confusing or absurd about it)? On the other hand, shouldn’t we also be asking: If, indeed, we find the “story of art” sensible and meaningful, how do we defend or justify our belief
in its plausibility and substance? The last query is similar to the one I started with in Chapter One and, I’m convinced, considerably harder to answer.

Regardless, not one of these experienced pedagogues voices serious doubts about the integrity or consistency of this litany of names, titles, dates, traits and terms. What’s more, these educators are obviously and proudly dedicated to convincing their classes that its possession will enrich their lives. Nowhere is there any consideration given to the personal and social consequences a prolonged investment in structuring knowledge—or knowledge structured—in this fashion might have for either group. The circumstances remarked on by Carol Duncan in the eighties have accelerated rather than abated.

If academia is today more open to the critique of values, it is also, as a community, more closed in on itself, more specialized in its language, and more driven by the competition for jobs, promotions, foundation grants and other visible signs of success and status. It is less able and, given the political pessimism of the times, understandably less willing than ever to consider its own social practice. (Duncan, 1993, p. xv)

Duncan and many other art historians have relationships with their field—its institutionalization and their own—which are uncomfortable and under negotiation. Academics who consciously “turn away from conventional art history” but continue to practice and profess as mavericks or eccentrics depend on the limited forbearance of employers, funding bodies, faculty organizations and colleagues. Their ability to “push the envelope” not only belies the harsh reality that they need the envelope more than it needs them, but the extent to which they are the envelope. Duncan’s assertion: “Not that I ever wished to work these ideas [Marxism and feminism] into a complete, authoritative theoretical system that could fully account for all the data and be rigorously applied to any situation.” convinces. And her description of the monolith she confronts: “a seemingly solid wall of prejudice that, in the name of ‘objectivity’ or ‘scholarship’ or
even ‘theory’ is blind to the moral and ideological implications of its own project” (p. xiv) is daunting and familiar. That said, her refusal or inability to comment on her own biases; her own incorporation into ideology; her own enactment of the “objective’ theoretical’ ‘scholar’ raises doubts about whether her visual acuity is quite as keen as she seems to think it is.¹⁹

**How is the survey implicated in art history’s disciplinarity? What is the relationship between the art history survey (in genealogical/ideological terms) and the system of obligations and expectations within which art historians practice and teach?**

Based on the material I’ve perused, narrating the emergence of—and reorientations within—art historical discourse has taken precedence over examining the operation of disciplinarity on/in it. My contention is that rigid essentialist conceptions of linear time, coupled with fixed and fixative classificatory grids (predicated on homogenous historical, national, temperamental and stylistic identities) act to cement representations in place like proverbial flies in amber. To some extent, this applies to modern discursivity in general, but it’s especially applicable to its institutional and archival manifestations. However, as I’ve already said, art history, because of its dependence on/allegiance to/immersion in totalizing, universalizing and colonizing surveys, constitutes an instructive example. Since it’s demonstrable that art history as a discursive formation and as a discipline is shaped by this fabrication perhaps more

¹⁹ I’m holding Duncan to ridiculously high standard here (for rhetorical purposes) taking into consideration that this was written more than thirty years ago.
decisively than by anything else, the survey is, in turn, reproduced in art historians themselves. As an active component in/of their professionalization, it actively regulates and constrains their scholarly and pedagogical activities, and their art historical subjectivities are, to varying degrees, formed by and through it.

David Carrier is an art historian who has studied and written on how and who art history disciplines. In his own words, Carrier’s 1991 book *Principles of Art History Writing,* “seek[s] to identify the implicit assumptions defining reasonable discussion within art history” (Carrier, 2002, p. 115). I want to embroil a more recent essay by Carrier in a consideration of art history’s boundaries and boundedness; to think about what it precludes/excludes; to contemplate the usefulness of surveying and surveillance in controlling standards, containing meaning and curtailing dissent. “Professors of art history know how to argue in ways their colleagues find convincing” Carrrier avows. He enlists L. R. Velazquez’s *Rembrandt: The Man in the Golden Helmet* (1994) as an example of an effort by an “outsider” who “argue[s] in strange ways, discussing the ‘wrong’ questions” and “failing to “appeal to shared standards” (p. 116). From Carrier’s standpoint, this is inarguably true. What’s noteworthy from my location, however, is that Velasquez obviously understands the preoccupations shared by art historians, art history and the art world, and there’s a high probability that his awareness of these priorities and the actions they provoke stems from his familiarity with the survey or surveys. As a former police officer and crime scene investigator, Velazquez identifies his approach and his abilities with the art historian’s because each objectively scrutinizes evidence in search of clues. Here, Velazquez searches out a painting’s true identity, and his task is to clear the cloud of suspicion away from the work under suspicion by confirming its
attribution to Rembrandt. Velazquez appreciates exactly what has to happen before this can occur, and his book carefully and methodically links biographical with stylistic detail to verify the painting's authenticity. The detective cum art historian solves his case through a fortuitous discovery: a self-portrait skillfully concealed in the image. For Velazquez (and for most of art history), the validity (and bankability) of the artist's (Rembrandt's) representation of himself is unquestionable because it establishes a direct conduit to his melancholic temperament, his troubled psyche and his uniquely personal genius.

Following Preziosi\(^{20}\), I maintain that the core beliefs of the dominant art historical community are readily discernible. They include faith in stylistic consistency; in the systematic categorization of creative activity and output; in the supremacy (and universality) of a single Eurocentric conception of time; and in the possibility of recreating past situations and/or apprehending lost meanings. These are also the raw materials of the survey. Carrier condescendingly compares non-academics to astrologers (p. 116), but is it foolish to ask why one set of outlandish convictions should claim greater credibility and respect than another? In opening his essay, "Holy Terrors and

\(^{20}\) A number of other art historians have also drawn on French theorists (especially Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu) in their efforts to describe the machinery of art historical discourse and its juridical effects. Feminist historians of art, for instance, were among the first to undertake such analyses, and Carol Duncan (1995; 1993), Griselda Pollock (1999; 1995; 1988) and Michael Ann Holly (1995; 1990; 1984) are three who regularly address this theme. I'm enlisting Preziosi because his engagement has been both prolonged and extensive.
Teleologies” (2003), Preziosi suggests that, for art history, distinctions between pre- and post-Enlightenment systems of thought aren’t nearly as clear-cut as many suppose.

We assume that our astronomy is rightly seen as superseding astrology, that our history constitutes a break with mythology, or that the disciplines of physics, biology, botany and so forth have superseded and to a great extent broken with and redefined the earlier divisions of knowledge production of the old medieval trivium and quadrivium . . . . But it can be argued that in the case of some modern disciplines, and especially art history, the break may not have been as clean as we might have assumed or might once have preferred to believe. (p. 29)

Not unlike the truistic elephant in the room, Preziosi rarely brings up the survey, yet its unmarked presence is problematic and unsettling. Strikingly, the routines and the procedures are carefully—even elegantly—delineated, but they give every appearance of maintaining and perpetuating themselves. We’re given nothing about the people who respect them and carry them out, nor is any sense conveyed of what the consequences of being initiated into tautological logics and teleological certainties (whether accepted or rejected in the long term) could mean—either for groups or individuals.

From my reading, in spite of frequent references to reflexivity, the question of who art historians are collectively, who they are, professionally as well as professorially, and how both identities combine, intersect with and inflect their working lives and their personal proclivities has not been addressed. More than that, it’s so baldly absent, I’m tempted to conclude that it has been (and is being) scrupulously avoided and/or studiously ignored. Why might this be? Preziosi is plainly more comfortable dealing (intellectually at any rate) with “families of metaphors” than with human affiliations. The passage below is a penetrating summation of the art historical “self” confabulated in art history surveys by art historians, but how is the art historian subjectified and where is the art historian as subject in it or anywhere else?
Underlying and fueling this teleological labor has been a family of metaphors reflecting and fabricating and promoting a certain vision of an ideal human selfhood—a communal persona with an indelible style of its own through the ages, with an exterior aesthetic face directly expressive of and consonant with an inner spirit, mentality or essence. What stamps the art of a people at one period will ideally be reflected at another time many centuries removed. Similarly, the mark, say, of Picasso’s persona will be adduced as much from his signature as from his ceramics, glasswork, sculpture or painting—even his doodles or sketches on café napkins or laundry lists, not to speak of the essence marketed by the perfume company of his daughter Paloma. (p. 33)

A near-Olympian aloofness has been singled out as a distinguishable trait in art historical writing (Elkins, 1997; Preziosi, 1989); a cool, impersonal detachment oddly out of keeping with much of its subject matter. In survey books, the boisterous, bawdy and flamboyant is dealt with hastily and awkwardly. A prudish embarrassment permeates these halting descriptions, and they contrast strikingly with fluent commentary on the rational idealism or “perfect naturalism” of Classical Greece or Renaissance Florence. Donald Preziosi chose the adjective “coy” for the subtitle of his Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science to refer to his discipline’s flirtations with semiotics (p. xiv) and the tendency of its American branch to “shy away” from the issues raised by poststructuralism (especially by Foucault) (p. xvi). But it could as easily be applied to established art history’s reticence in the face of bold or rude imagery; its reluctance (or its inability) to abandon decorum and enter that orbit. Appreciably less demure, James Elkins (1997) brashly decries the aridity and remoteness of art historical writing.
What accounts for these attributes? Are they tied to the cumbersome weight of art history’s social contract; to its inherited obligations to foster national identity or bolster civic pride? Perhaps there’s a requisite level of seriousness or formality that accompanies discharging such duties. Whatever explanation is proposed, the upshot is that, in many cases, art historians’ expositions on images squeeze the life out of them. By trying to pin them down; to answer the questions posed by art history (but which some art historians imagine are generated by the objects themselves) art scholars attempt to tame and transfix the evocative and ambiguous work; to relieve its obscurity and resolve its contradictions. A “discursive framework based upon centrality, homogeneity . . . [and] the continuity of self-identity”\textsuperscript{23}, the survey is art history’s neutralization machine; an antiquated humanistic technology that grinds the edges (and edginess) off of visual representations bear on imagining, imaging and images from relatively marginalized sites needs to be loudly proclaimed here. Their politicized critiques have blazed the trail for postcolonialist, postmodernist and queer theorists to take up residence in mainstream or midstream art history’s increasingly crowded margins or latterly to pitch their tents with wandering visual culturists.

\textsuperscript{22} “Coy” also fits art historians’ diffident dissimulation over the extent to which politics and economics direct and/or influence their professional activities. “Art: money: power is . . . a recognized constellation. The same is not true of art history: power: money. With regard to this set of associations, art historians have been considerably more coy” (Pointon, 1997, p. 17).

\textsuperscript{23} Another of Preziosi’s well-turned phrases, this phrase occurs in an indirectly interrogatory passage that deserves to be quoted in full. “At issue is the question as to whether any history articulated within a discursive framework based upon centrality, homogeneity, or the continuity of self-identity can be other than oppressive” (Preziosi, 1989, p. 44).
and grounds art historians in a dispassionate relationship to coloristic works that is
taxonomic and forensic—technical and clinical. Do disciplinary disincentives preclude
and/or prevent intimate confessional writing? Or does the tradition of ekphrasis—of
voicing the piece—of bringing art into being gradually efface (or erase) the art historian?
What are the long-term results of hiding in the shadows, speaking to/as the light and
enacting disembodiment?
CHAPTER FOUR: INTRODUCING VISUAL CULTURE - EVALUATING TEXTBOOKS AND ANTHOLOGIES

What should a visual culture textbook look like/at?

My general goal in this chapter is to evaluate the theoretical value and pedagogical potential of a number of books that have made claims on/to visual culture since 1995. There are three readily identifiable streams in visual culture studies: art historical, cultural and sociological. Since writers on visual culture (like historians of art) rarely address curriculum or teaching directly, much of this section will assess how visual culture is characterized by particular theorists and try to determine the consequences those characterizations might have for teaching it. More particularly, my litmus test will be their relationship to the model of the art history survey. What, if anything, do they say about it? Do they adhere to all or some of its conventions or do they thwart them?

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24 I restate that, while I dip into histories, I’m not trying to write one. Indeed, I’m not convinced they’re possible, let alone reliable. Accordingly, the origins of visual culture are not set down here. (Margaret Divovitskaya’s Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn (2005) contains her rendition of these details.) Rather, I begin with a crude categorization of visual culture theorists based on how I define who they are and what they do as well as how they define visual culture. I do this in an effort to sort items into the groups that I go on to select from and assess individually. In the end though, this doesn’t (as you’ll see) preclude volumes in my “least favored” group from emerging as “contenders”.
Who writes on visual culture?

Regardless of training or affiliation, a longstanding interest in visual expression, the scholarly examination and theorization of which has until the last decade or so been dominated by art history, almost always ensures that visual culture theorists have some experience of—and with—that discipline. Many art world professionals conceive visual culture as a broadened version of art history, but there is marked variation in the degree of expansion they support. Some believe that imagery of every kind should be within art history’s purview (Bryson, Holly & Moxey, 1994; Carson & Pajaczkowska, 2000; Cherry, 2000; Mitchell, 1994; Moxey, 1994). Others favor limited extensions of art historical authority to include more examples from their own areas of interest such as design or architecture. (Barnard, 1998; Walker & Chaplin, 1997). Needless to say, there are notable differences between the two. For one thing, the former are more concerned with the origins and development of art history. They also seem to be more philosophical and introspective than the latter. However, both groups appear to identify professionally as art historians, artists and/or writers on art and demonstrate their membership in those communities through a degree of commitment to the appropriate institutions. One explanation for the appeal of an “art history redux” to this constituency could be that traditional aesthetic criteria can remain in force. With the exception of Mitchell’s, each of these books is configured much like a survey and moves sequentially, chapter by chapter from the distant to the recent past, and under their schematic, there’s every reason to assume that the survey course (with well-placed additions) could—and would—continue as the definitive curricular formation.
A second group includes a number of academics with similar credentials, but there's greater diversity in how they categorize what they do and in how they're classified by others (Bloom, 1999; Bordo, 1997; Hall, 1997; Hall & Evans, 1999; Jones, 2003; Mirzoeff, 1998, 1999, 2002; Rogoff, 2000; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Although all might legitimately be referred to as *cultural theorists*, their interests range from body studies to communications and from cultural geography to performance art. Their work is distinctive because of the attention it pays to popular culture and mass media; because it contends with the field of art history and because it promotes an agenda that's overtly transdisciplinary.

While this is only a sampling, there is also a third camp that should be factored into the discussion. These are the social theorists who claim that both art historical and cultural approaches are inappropriate and inadequate to studying visual culture. They argue that objects acquire significance in/through society and, as a consequence, must be treated as social phenomena using conceptual models developed in/by sociology (and to a lesser extent, anthropology). Chris Jenks (1995) and Gillian Rose (2001) are probably the best-known proponents of this stance.

I'm aware that I've been somewhat dismissive of the first set, whom I'm going to refer to as the "art historians", but their version of visual culture is hamstrung by its

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25 Norman Bryson and Mitchell came from English Literature—I admit—but, since each has taught art history for some time (since the early 1990s) and since the research and publishing they're primarily identified with has been devoted to art and other visual materials, I believe it's legitimate to include them in this group.
location inside art history departments (renamed or not). Visual studies as promoted by
the “cultural theorists” is the only one of these constituencies that’s transient, which
increases its ability to be disruptive. However, even the “social theorists” seem more
willing to accept the uncertainty of poststructuralism and the contingency of
postmodernism than those who profess art history. So, I’ll spend the rest of this segment
on an admittedly adumbrated exploration of how visual culture is conceived in the second
and third instances. Specifically, I’ll examine books written by theoreticians and
educators in these two communities that are intended (or have been used) as texts for
courses in visual studies. Since the survey model provides an almost ubiquitous and
readily identifiable morphology for the art historical narrative, discussing whether (and
how) these works emulate or advocate it, where these scholars position themselves in
relation to it and their willingness to develop and apply unconventional interpretive
strategies provides a convenient means of evaluating publications on visual culture. I’m
less interested in gauging their contribution to the field itself however, than I am in their
usefulness as aids to learning.

How do visual culture theorists distinguish their introductory texts from the art
history survey? Do they critique the survey directly? If so, how?

I begin here with Mirzoeff’s An Introduction to Visual Culture (1999) which was
the first book to identify itself as a resource for entry-level instruction in this field. Its
opening essay bears the same title—“What is visual culture?”—to his preface to the first
edition of The Visual Culture Reader (1998) but at three times the length, Mirzoeff can
expand on themes he merely touched on earlier. In so doing, he situates visual culture
within, and in relation to, the recent history and politics of the Academy and articulates some of its goals.

It is true that visual culture will not sit comfortably in existing university structures. It is part of an emerging body of post-disciplinary academic endeavors from cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, to African-American studies, and so on, whose focus crosses the borders of traditional academic disciplines at will. In this sense, visual culture is a tactic, not an academic discipline. It is a fluid interpretive structure, centered on understanding the response to visual media of both individuals and groups. Its definition comes from the questions it asks and issues it seeks to raise. Like the other approaches mentioned above, it hopes to reach beyond the traditional confines of the university to interact with people's everyday lives. (Mirzoeff, 1999, pp. 4-5)

Mirzoeff clarifies visual culture's aims and interests by comparing them to concerns and objectives that remain customary in certain classes within the humanities (lower-level English and Philosophy, for instance) and may even be taken for granted. Immediately recognizable as typifying what was once the core curriculum in the humanities, art history survey courses belong to a dwindling handful of remainders/reminders of a vanishing past. The universal survey can be likened to a hoary artifact trapped in an airless vitrine, a replica of the nineteenth century museum that inspired and sustains it.

the task at hand is not a futile quest for "origins" of modern visuality in past time but a strategic reinterpretation of the history of modern visual media understood collectively, rather than fragmented into disciplinary units such as film, television, art and video. In place of the traditional goal of encyclopedic knowledge, visual culture has to accept its provisional and changing status, given the constantly shifting array of contemporary visual media and their uses. (p. 13)
Art history's historical affiliation with textuality, structuralism and semiotics contrast sharply from Mirzoeff's and visual culture's points of departure.

There is not and cannot be a “pure” sign theory that will successfully cross the borders of time and place. Structuralism was in the end unproductive . . . . Although literary criticism has moved on from structuralism, it continues to play a surprisingly important role in visual criticism . . . . Yet in discussing specific works, this approach fails to convince. For in concentrating solely on linguistic meaning, such readings deny the very element that makes visual imagery of all kinds distinct from texts, that is to say, its sensual immediacy. (pp. 14-15)

Mirzoeff's monograph is reflexive, self-critical, politicized and consciously postmodern, and even one of these traits would be difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the survey model as we know it. Mirzoeff is acutely conscious of how knowledge is shaped and conditioned, and for him, any category is useful only when (and to the extent that) it can be interrogated and problematized. Fittingly, culture is probed from a number of different angles and challenged in a variety of ways before (and during) its deployment. In the following passage, Mirzoeff questions fixed meanings such as those that supposedly pinpoint cultural identity and their ability to provide a basis for comparative analysis. “Both the anthropological and artistic models of culture rest on being able to make a distinction between the culture of one ethnicity, nation, or people and another” (p. 24).

The rush to condemn culture as a frame of reference for visual studies relies on its being possible to distinguish between the products of culture and those of art. However, any examination of the term quickly shows that this is a false opposition. Art is culture both in the sense of high culture and in the anthropological sense of human artifact. There is no outside of culture. Rather than dispose of the term, we need to ask what it means to explain certain kinds of historical change in a cultural framework. How does visual culture relate to other uses of the term culture? Using culture as a term of reference is both problematic and inescapable. Culture brings with it difficult legacies of race and racism that cannot simply be evaded by arguing that in the (post)modern period we no longer act as our
intellectual predecessors did, while continuing to use their terminology. Nor can an assertion of the importance of art—whether as painting, avant-garde film or video—escape the cultural framework. (p. 23)

This excerpt directs attention to the importance of language and proposes that confronting visuality in all its tortuous entanglements is necessarily messy and may well be uncomfortable. I’ve taught countless art history surveys, and the issue Mirzoeff refers to here as “terminology” has remained, for me, a troubling one. Many colleagues have confided over the years that they’ve felt like hostages, held captive by a régime they couldn’t condone and forced to express tacit support for racist, sexist or classist values they despised.

Does Mirzoeff’s book hold promise as a textbook for an entry-level visual studies course?

An Introduction to Visual Culture has three main divisions: “Visuality”, “Culture” and “Global/Local” which vary in length and organization. Of these, “Visuality” alone follows a chronological arrangement inside each of its three subsections and in their succession. This sequence is more circular than linear however, centering as it does on Chapter Two: “The Age of Photography” (Mirzoeff, 1999, pp. 65-89) to which Mirzoeff assigns the dates 1839-1982. Only for photography, however, does Mirzoeff write an (ironic?) anthropomorphic account of its “life story” from birth to death. Elsewhere, the ordering is quirkier and comparatively unpredictable. In Chapter One, “Picture Definition: Line, Color and Vision” (pp. 37-64) for instance, Mirzoeff doesn’t describe the evolution of pictures over time or the history of linear or painterly effects but chooses instead “to consider how the key components of color and line come to constitute an image by resemblance or representation, looking at certain critical moments in the early
modern period (1650-1850) when these definitions were challenged or changed” (p.37). The legacy of poststructuralism is apparent in Mirzoeff’s genealogical technique and his fascination with points of tension or rupture in representations of modernism’s development. While the book has many flaws (including Mirzoeff’s predilection for overly broad or rash statements, a lingering scientism and a slack-jawed captivation with gadgetry [that, admittedly, he does try to temper]), it’s readable and thought-provoking. However, because of its eccentricity in content and shape, it could be daunting for students and wouldn’t be easy to build curriculum around. The introductory essay is its most useable (and widely quoted) feature, and I could envision assigning a few pages like those on perspective (pp. 38-51) as a seminar topic, but not much more.

Stuart Hall, trained as a sociologist, is better known as a founder and former director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham. A prominent Marxist scholar, Hall is recognized for his contributions to the critical analysis of communications. In recent years, he has turned increasingly to problems of visual representation. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* appeared in 1997 as one of several textbooks for Sociology D318 offered by the Open University. A broad-based investigation into how culture and technology intersect, this course straddles two subject areas (themselves interdisciplinary): cultural studies and media studies. Though too extensive for first-year students, portions of *Representation*

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26 The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS.) was founded in 1964 by Richard Hoggart.
would be easy to incorporate into an introductory offering in visual culture. In fact, the first chapter “The Work of Representation” (pp. 15-74) is so effective a primer that an inaugural course might almost be based on it alone. *Representation* is extensively illustrated, written in straightforward accessible language and logically organized; it also contains concise and lucid explanations of terms and concepts, compelling images, activities centered on thinking and looking and excerpts from texts by influential interpreters of culture. What may be especially telling however is what *isn’t* in this book. There are very few photographs of paintings, for instance; maybe half a dozen. Instead, the vast majority are the kinds of photos we see every day in newspapers or magazines, on billboards or in any number of public places. Rounding these out are stills from television and film as well as prints, posters, cartoons and shots of museum installations. While their specific content might vary, the types of visual material *Representation* focuses on would, I think, be familiar to nearly all of its readers.

*Hall’s compendium disrupts many textbookish orthodoxies. Can it be entrusted then with the responsibility of exploring the processes involved in constructing and construing cultural products that appeal to us primarily through vision?*

Whether or not *Representation* deliberately avoids the conventions of the survey, it combines text with imagery in ways that demonstrate the restrictive rigidity of the survey format. By forcing us to confront and think about what we expect when scholars address pictures, Hall and his team defamiliarize the standard arrangement—one we’ve come to accept as necessary and inevitable. In this manner, what has been/is presented and recognized as general and neutral is exposed as particular and invested. In Hall’s words,
Representation functions less like the model of a one-way transmitter and more like the model of a dialogue . . . . What sustains this “dialogue” is the presence of shared cultural codes, which cannot guarantee that meanings will remain stable forever—though attempting to fix meaning is exactly why power intervenes in discourse . . . . We should perhaps learn to think of meaning less in terms of “accuracy” and “truth” and more in terms of effective exchange—a process of translation, which facilitates cultural communication while always recognizing the persistence of difference and power between different “speakers” within the same cultural circuit. (Hall, 1997, pp. 10-11)

While each chapter of the volume is organized identically: ideas under separate headings, summaries, learning activities, short excerpts from relevant theorists and a conclusion, each is attributed to a different author or authors. And although the readings are disparate and clustered in appendices at the end of each section (Chapter One’s are by Bryson, Barthes, Laclau and Mouffe and Showalter.), they’re discussed throughout, rendering any single overarching narrative impossible. Another effect of this invitation to read ahead and read back is that concepts and comments intersect with one another, and the notion of authorship is exposed and explored in an environment of collaborative inquiry. There is no single authoritative voice, and no predetermined outcome. Neither can a consistent chronology be imposed nor the component parts, marshaled into a continuous linear pattern.

Two years after Representation, Hall teamed up with Jessica Evans to edit the compilation, Visual Culture: The Reader (1999). Once again, it’s an Open University resource, but this time for Sociology D850: “The Image and Visual Culture”, a module in the Master of Arts program leading to a graduate degree in Cultural and Media Studies (Evans & Hall, 1999, p. i). As a volume of readings for an advanced course, the focus is on the texts themselves, and instructional or explanatory material is minimal. The book begins with a short preface called “What is Visual Culture?”, but most of the editorial
content appears in the introductory essays (two by Evans and one by Hall) that open the anthology’s three main sections: “Cultures of the Visual”, “Regulating Photographic Meanings” and “Looking and Subjectivity”.

Useable or not?

Evans and Hall maintain that visual culture hasn’t received the attention it merits in cultural and media studies, and much of their five-page preamble elaborates on how and why this has occurred. They don’t get around to commenting on the term itself until almost the end of the piece. Interestingly, the characteristics of indefinability and itinerancy decried here are celebrated as strengths by other scholars of visual culture (Jones, 2003; Mirzoeff, 1998, 1999, 2002). This odd remark is followed by a paragraph recounting the origin of the phrase “visual culture” (recalling the many “firsts” which feature prominently in art history survey texts). Both strike me as peculiar lapses, but Hall and Evans carry on to construct visual culture (somewhat contradictorily perhaps, in light of the expectations they express here for its future) through its capacity to

27 It seems likely that, for many, the notion of “visual culture” is grandiloquent, even fallacious. In part, this is due to the fact that it denotes an area of nascent study whose objects and modes of analysis are not yet consistently or clearly delineated, nor whose territory is established. (p. 5)

28 I suspect Evans’ contribution here because *Representation* which Hall edited on his own doesn’t have these problems.
complicate. Visual culture's relationship to the broadened range of intellectual concerns and readjusted priorities impinging on the Academy are summarized in an astute observation from the notorious *October* questionnaire (Buck-Morss et. al., 1996): "What is noteworthy for [Hal] Foster in the displacement of art history by visual culture is the dual shift from art to visual and history to culture" (p. 6). And Hall and Evans further endorse transdisciplinarity in their conclusion: "visual culture cuts across specific media and the teleological narratives of the individual disciplines constructed around them"(p. 6). All things considered though, this is the least convincing description of visual culture I've read, and anyone searching for intelligible information on what visual culture is; what it wants to do or why, would be hard pressed to find it here.

One thing that is effective in Hall's and Evans' prelude is their insistence on the unboundedness of the image and the separateness of visuality and textuality. Evans continues to develop these themes in her foreword to "Cultures of the Visual" (pp. 11-20). Ostensibly writing about photography, she uses the collective term "images" to assert that pictures and language operate in radically different ways. Art history has long been accused of a textual bias which may explain (at least in part) its initial attraction to

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29 Though art history isn't singled out in this remark, the preoccupations with style, technique and "anticipation" that order art history survey texts are well-known, setting the pattern for spin-offs such as design history.

30 Art history's humanist vision of high culture has historically been fourteenth-century Florence as rendered in the poetry of Dante and in Boccaccio's life of Dante (via the German historicism of Burkhardt and Auerbach). Its historiography has close ties to
semiotics, but Evans enlists John Tagg and Victor Burgin\textsuperscript{31} to fill us in on why sign theory is both inappropriate for—and inadequate to—the task. Burgin puts the position as regards images-as-language succinctly:

there is no “language of photography”, no single signifying system (as opposed to technical apparatus) upon which all photographs depend (in the sense in which all forms of spoken and written language in English ultimately depend upon the English language) . . . . So, . . . there is a heterogeneous complex of codes upon which photography may draw—only a few of which are peculiar to photography . . . and therefore most of which are not. (Burgin, cited in Hall & Evans, p. 14)

Evans goes on to discuss how the western intellectual tradition from Plato to Marx and the Frankfurt School has been marked by fear, distrust and suspicion in the face of the mysterious and often unacknowledged potency of images (pp. 17-19). Paradoxically, high culture and its institutions praise and revere the pictorial, but they’re also intimidated by it.

In modern times, there is a fear that images will overwhelm us, partly because they are both extremely immediate in their impact and powerful in the meanings and feelings they convey, yet their precise meaning and reference remain somewhat unfixed. They float or hover within the purview of the image, without our being able quite to offer an interpretation of how this power works on us which fully explains and exhausts its potentiality—its \textit{potentia} . . . . Of course, the discourse of the iconoclast is often self-excepting, imputing to others a seduction by the

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each of these traditions (Soussloff, 1997, p. 72), and its practice has longstanding associations with the literary genre of biography (p. 144).

\textsuperscript{31} John Tagg and Victor Burgin have written extensively on photography and contemporary critical theory.
image to which they themselves are immune, having attained the learned and educated response of critical detachment. (p. 17)

Rarely raised by art historians, let alone admitted, this threat is one that I’ve often felt must have been implicated in art history’s own history through its espousal of a rationalistic, empiricist demeanor—its relentless drive to categorize and classify; its need to contain and control—all of which can be appreciated as anxious responses to the elemental unruliness of visual representations. The transgressive energy of sexuality—particularly female sexuality, but any unsanctioned or unregulated desire—might be taken as analogous to the unpredictable dynamism of the image. In such a scenario, the survey text and unreflective survey courses (and the surveillance they put into effect) have acted like the strict regimen imposed by family, church and state on sexual expression to police the conditions under which art (in this case) can appear in public and ensure that it’s perceived and interpreted in a manner that is both polite and refined.

*Visual Culture: The Reader* has been castigated for the prominence it gives to photography (Jones, 2003, p. 6), but this aligns with the priority cultural studies affords popular culture, everyday life and contemporary experience. Beyond this, the fact remains that what we know about the vast majority of the visual artifacts we study has

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32 I’ve worded this carefully and deliberately because, starting in the mid 1980s under the impetus of feminism and poststructuralism and later informed by the evolution of gender studies and queer theory, a great deal of research has been done by art historians (too numerous to list) into the implications of sexual difference and libidinal energy for the study of images. Michael Camille, Whitney Davis, Griselda Pollock and Jennifer Doyle are four scholars whose writings on sex and the history of art have been consistently provocative and intriguing, but there are dozens of others as well.
been gleaned from encounters with photographs. Given that the experience we have of such objects is multiply mediated, perhaps there’s a case to be made for paying more attention to our relationship with the photographic image than we have in the past. Evans and Hall have argued that just as visual culture has received short shrift within cultural studies, the photograph has been denigrated within visual culture (p. 2). Its availability, its familiarity and its ubiquity have rendered it unimportant, invisible or both. Photographic theory, as Evans lays out in her prologue to “Regulating Photographic Meanings” (pp. 127-137) has also been hampered because it has blindly conformed to the same bizarre collection of teleological, hagiographic, positivist and modernist ideals that construct and confine narration in the art historical survey.

The . . . predominant perspective on the history of photography . . . presents us with a story populated by technical innovations and objectively captured truths, buttressed by romantic-aesthetic discourses of self-expression, innovation and creative genius. These values . . . are anchored in a historicist model of the “history of photography” akin to the “history of art” with its succession of art historical movements culminating in the art of our time; the underlying premise being that an underlying essence of “photography” is manifested in the unifying discourse of “the history of photographs”. The main character in this story is the isolated figure of the photo-pioneer, struggling at one and the same time against vague but implacable odds to establish a unique vision of the world, and to impose this on a necessarily abstracted and equally unspecified audience. (p. 134)

In his opening remarks to “Looking and Subjectivity” (pp. 309-314), Hall conveys the intricacies of making meaning as continuous, incomplete and multidirectional.

the meaning of the image cannot be seen as fixed, stable or univocal across time or cultures. Also, the subject itself is not a completed entity but something which is produced, through complex and unfinished processes which are both social and psychic—a subject-in-process. (p. 311)
Flux and indeterminacy are constants that must be recognized and accepted, but within these conditions, Hall underlines the importance of culture in forming subjectivity.

culture comes into play at precisely the point where biological individuals become subjects, and . . . what lies between the two is not some automatically constituted “natural” process of socialization but much more complex processes of formation. These constitute “subjectivity” historically, in different periods, and rarely deliver a completed or normatively secured end-point. (p. 312)

Could it be any plainer that, under this view, images, meanings, subjects and history itself are “unsurveyable” (at least in the ways to which we’ve become accustomed)?

In contrast with the painstaking explication of Representation, this book complicates by confronting methodological matters head on and by casting up vexing philosophical and historiographic issues for readers to delve into and debate. This is a pedagogical strategy that suits its intended audience and runs counter to the essentializing and totalizing nature of survey textbooks. Neither does this text expound one consistent position. Indeed, as I’ve indicated, my impression is that Hall’s and Evans’ outlooks are sometimes at odds with each other. Even in team-taught art history surveys this would likely be deemed improbable and unworkable. What’s usual in such situations (which are themselves unusual) is for one area, period or genre to be presented by a lecturer who has special expertise. Occasionally, survey textbooks and instructors admit that other perspectives exist, but as a rule, disagreement is scrupulously avoided and contradiction or controversy are anathema. The semblance of internal consistency must be constantly and carefully guarded when an edifice is as fragile and unstable as this one.

Marxism, Continental theory and feminism have likely been the most influential currents in the evolution of visual culture (and in the changes to the academy itself since the 1960s), but it isn’t possible to keep these philosophical tendencies separate nor to
craft a neatly sequential account of their impact on its development. Curiously perhaps (given its perceived link with identity politics), feminism has proven to be the most vital and pervasive of these forces. And it’s noteworthy that the brief list of writers and editors working on visual culture in the youthful tradition of cultural studies I’m placing before you includes only two men.

All of these books place more emphasis on the particularities of spectatorship and the specifics of looking (two things which remain noticeably absent in art history survey books and those art history survey courses that blindly follow their lead) than they do on the objects themselves. As Lisa Bloom points out in *With Other Eyes* (1999), the work done by feminist thinkers such as Laura Mulvey (1975) on the politics of the gaze in the 1970s (under the influence of reception theory) initiated the sort of looking at/into looking which continues to motivate visual studies (p. 2). Before this could take place, the neutral, dispassionate, universal “eye” had to be exposed as belonging, not to any one individual, but to an ideal viewer with distinguishable characteristics such as gender, race and class that confirmed his entitlement to dominance and appropriation. This exposure enabled viewing to be conceived as an activity which is conditioned, engaged and inflected. And viewing positions to be understood as distinctive, nuanced and complex.

Bloom’s situation is a conflicted one however because she’s devoted to recuperating art history, and her collection also contains more art than any of the others. Although she teaches in women’s studies and doesn’t think of herself as an art historian (p. 5), she articulates her stance in a fashion that resembles academics who do (Deborah Cherry [2000], Keith Moxey [1994; 1995; 1999; 2002] [and Griselda Pollock (1996; 1999), one of the contributors to *With Other Eyes]*) are three who come to mind).
I find that much of the impetus behind putting together an anthology such as this one comes out of my personal investedness in intervening in the discipline of art history, and what I have come to see as its ideological assumptions. Since I have found cultural studies and feminist theory so genuinely responsive to both my intellectual and pedagogical concerns, specifically how they shift awareness away from the consumption of knowledge to the production of knowledge, I wondered how it would be possible for the field of art history to change to become compatible with feminist cultural studies but with an emphasis on the visual arts. (p. 5)

Can Bloom's book meet the criteria? Will it provide students with tools to think about visual materials as sites where encounters take place rather than timeless icons?

Bloom is placed here rather than with the “art historians” because of her openness to other theoretical tropes (postcolonialism, postmodernism, queer studies), her willingness to struggle with the problematic character of her own vantage point and her resistance to the survey paradigm through the selection and publication of this offbeat and jarring mix of texts. Yet, equally compelling arguments could be made for why she doesn't belong here. Bloom gives every indication, for instance, that her version of visual culture is a (mightily) expanded art history. Indeed, it’s hard to comprehend how the zeal she evinces for breaking down hierarchical distinctions can be reconciled with a subject area that depends on them.

I use the term visual culture rather than art, film or media to signal a shift in emphasis in the visual arts towards work that broadens conventional notions of “high cultural” agendas to include the so-called impure visual practices (television, video, popular culture, photography, advertising, computer technologies, junk, altars and so on). Such work by its very nature dispenses with hierarchical cultural distinctions such as high versus low, elite versus mass, modern versus folk, Western versus non-Western, as well as with academic departmental divisions like film versus television, theater versus performance studies, art and art history versus communications. (p. 6)
Bloom's compilation is a hodgepodge of pieces that seem neither to adhere coherently nor push against each other productively. Even if it's unlikely to advance her reformist agenda, *With Other Eyes* can at least be applauded for disorderly conduct. Combining essays on Clement Greenberg, Saartje Baartman (the "Hottentot Venus"), Anita Roddick and Sandra Bernhardt in a single volume constitutes an assault on (but not an alternative to) the survey as the organizational principle that anchors art historical authority.

Unlike Bloom, Amelia Jones teaches art history, and she's willing to be known as an art historian. She also defines visual culture, feminism and the relationship between them differently than Bloom does.

Visual culture is a rubric and a model of critical thinking about the world of images saturating contemporary life . . . . Both modes of thinking—feminism and visual culture—are . . . driven by political concerns and focus primarily on cultural forms as informing subjective experience. While feminism is a broader initiative encompassing all levels of cultural experience, its insights have become so central to our understanding of the world that it informs most modes of visual culture analysis at this point, whether this dependence is acknowledged or not. At the same time, feminism has long acknowledged that visuality (the conditions of how we see and make meaning of what we see) is one of the key modes by which gender is culturally inscribed in Western culture. Feminism and visual culture, then, deeply inform each other. (Jones, 2003, p. 1)

Jones' goal is not to reconcile art history and feminism, but to borrow from each whatever can be useful to interpreting the relations we have with objects that address us visually. This irreverent eclecticism signals her affinity with the aims and methods of cultural studies, but the allegiance is not unconditional, and an important objective of *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2003) is to prevent feminist and non-white perspectives from being sidelined in visual culture as Jones believes has occurred in cultural and media studies (p. 3). Visual culture may use some of the same analytical
techniques as these earlier formations (her examples are Marxist theory, semiotics, psychoanalysis), but Jones explains that, as a relatively recent development, visual culture’s politics have been more influenced by what she calls the “rights discourses” of feminism, anti-racism, postcolonialism and queer theory (p. 2).

Can Jones’ anthology meet the challenge of undoing and unthinking the art history survey to rethink images through their interactions with power?

In highlighting the value of feminism’s contribution to visual culture, Jones seems also to be gesturing toward art history’s (and the survey’s) inherent inability to confront the most basic aspects of the feminist critique. “Far from pretending to be comprehensive, The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader must admit to its own partialities, the crucial political impulse behind feminism itself being a refusal of claims of omnipotence, universalism, or comprehensiveness of point of view” (p. 4).

The so-called “new” or “social” art history (Rees & Borzello, 1986; Harris, 2001) constituted an effort at reform, but Jones doesn’t appear to believe that it has met (or can meet) the challenge.

this volume takes visual culture as offering a deeply, if differently, historical understanding of the visual images of past and present. Rather than confirming social art history’s conception of the image as superstructural—as conveying through its own formal logic and subject matter the economic or social “facts” of its own making—the cross-disciplinary concept of visual culture and its newly broadened field of objects provides an alternative, less instrumentalist, model of thinking historically. (p. 5)
As well, Jones is both poststructuralist in her acceptance that meanings are uncertain and conditional and postmodernist in her fascination with reflexivity.

I wanted to represent as many theoretical and political points of view as possible: . . . as wide an array of positions within (and sometimes even oblique to) feminism as possible, including the voices of those critiquing the limitations of feminist visual theory; and as wide an array of visual culture examples as possible—including photographs, advertisements, architecture, magazine imagery, toys, television shows, movies, dance, video/performance/theater, and the Internet. (p. 4)

What could be less survey-like? It isn’t difficult to ascertain from its direction and its construction that *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* was compiled by an academic historian, but, as someone intimately acquainted with the standard art history survey, Jones has produced a work that takes issue with it on almost every front.

*Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* by Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright is only the second volume in this group that qualifies as a textbook in the habitual sense of the word (the other is Hall’s *Representation*) and not an edited set of readings or a body of connected essays. *Practices* also identifies itself as an introduction, and unlike *Representation*, Sturken and Cartwright are jointly responsible for the entire manuscript. Predictably, more introductory volumes that try to delimit the field, “cover its basics” and generally scope it out have been generated by the “art historians” and the “social scientists”. Often identified with transience, impermanence and methodological promiscuity, visual culture retains the capability to trouble through its resistance to settling in/on a fixed location or stance. Thus, all of the other books make use of assemblage or pastiche in some way; flexible forms which facilitate the kind of unexpected interactions frequently prohibited or discouraged by standard study materials and methods. Readers and collections of essays such as these don’t stipulate or impose a
curricular direction or format. They can be included in—or added on—to an existing course or provide the nucleus for (or a unit of) a new one.

*Practices of Looking* is structured more like a conventional textbook than any of the readers or volumes of essays. Although this resemblance is superficial and, to some extent deceptive, it may help to account for the book’s rapidly increasing popularity.\(^\text{33}\) Consecutively organized and gradually building in complexity, Sturken and Cartwright’s book displays no interest in charting the visual material itself. Rather, they propose “an overview of a range of theories about how we understand a wide array of visual media and how we use images to express ourselves, to communicate, to experience pleasure, and to learn” (Sturken & Cartwright, pp. 1-2). Stressing the usefulness of ideas along with the serviceability and adaptability of images immerses their project in active interpretation and creative interaction rather than polite anticipation or passive adulation. Chapter One begins by usefully identifying looking as “a practice much like speaking, writing, or signing” (p. 10) that exists within—but is distinguishable from—seeing. To look voluntarily involves choice and may include a capacity to influence, but looking, according to Sturken and Cartwright, inevitably “entails a play of power” (p. 10) and unleashes consequences that range from desultory to devastating.

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\(^{33}\) I began using *Practices* shortly after it was published (in 2001), and copies were scarce then. The following year, some of my students had to share books because Oxford University Press couldn’t meet the demand.
Each of the first three images they discuss, not only illustrates the distinctive characteristics a picture possesses and the evocative effects it can produce, but also the importance of theoretical concepts to enhancing and complicating its interpretation. First is a photograph of a crime scene showing only the witnesses where the title *Their First Murder* is the only clue to what we presume to have just taken place (p. 11). We’re invited to think about this depiction in relation to dramatic narrative, emotional impact and the lure of what is proscribed and/or hidden. Second, a photo of a coffee mug the surface of which is entirely covered by a detail from Van Gogh’s *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890) is introduced, and we’re requested to consider the variety of technologies used to produce and reproduce imagery, the kinds of experiences they make possible and the visual cultures they create (p. 12). We may also be aware that *Wheatfield* was the artist’s last finished work and that the murder of crows has been interpreted as ominously foreshadowing his suicide. Or we might have seen John Berger’s famous demonstration using two photos of this painting—one with no information below followed by another on the next page with a handwritten caption “This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself”—highlighting the abilities of text and context to alter meaning (Berger, 1972, pp. 28-29). Third, the contention that representations and representational systems construct the social networks we know as cultures is put forward, and a seventeenth-century Dutch still life is explored through the notions of mimesis, illusionism and symbolism (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 13-14).

Imbrication and implication are critical concepts in cultural, media and visual studies, and like most theorists in these areas, Sturken and Cartwright are reluctant to assume or enforce the isolation or separation of vision and visuality from other sensory or
sensuous events. They foreground the artificiality of such limitations, the hierarchies involved (apparent in much descriptive language including the verb ("foreground") I’ve used here) and how these construct and constrict the analyses that they’re able to carry out and qualify the conclusions they can draw from them. Again, we find an attitude in stark contrast to the confident near-omniscience which is the requisite prerogative of the surveyor permitting her or him to forge connections within and across cultures and through time and space.

Does Sturken and Cartwright’s effort avoid the pitfalls of the survey and offer an accessible—but theoretically sound—beginners’ manual on visuality?

Sturken and Cartwright visit and revisit the word “practices” throughout their book, and the emphasis they give to action and performance arises from a notion of what images are, what they do and how they mean that’s far removed from the understandings advanced by art history survey textbooks. In their words, “It is one of the central tenets of this book that meaning does not reside within images, but is produced at the moment that they are consumed by and circulate among viewers” (p. 7) The authors don’t comment on the curricular mechanisms of art history directly and what they do say about the field strikes me as cautious and complimentary about its commitment to change. Nonetheless, how they deal with art/art history and where they bring it into their discussion is revealing. Its first appearance (properly, to my mind) is as a function/feature of the marketplace, but art receives a slightly more extended treatment in Chapter 4: “Reproduction and Visual Technologies” (pp. 109-149). Here, it’s related to scientific innovation through the rise of perspectivalism, the subsequent dominance of realism, the
invention of photography and the impact of mechanical (and later electronic) reproduction.

This brief segment is the closest Sturken and Cartwright come to an ordered chronology. Mostly, they resist and/or subvert such tendencies. Despite this, their modular configuration of thematic chapters containing descriptions of terms and ideas is easily adapted to the requirements of semestral instruction. Each is arranged by heading and linked to suggested resources; the language is accessible, the lengths, manageable, and there is extensive cross-referencing between newly introduced terminology and their thorough glossary and from section to section. *Practices of Looking* is the closest I’ve come to finding an antidote to the survey. Students have told me that they find it demanding, yet approachable. It’s also as non-linear as is possible within a fairly restrictive format. This makes it possible to read a lot or a little in any order and for each reading to be comprehensible, but comprehended differently.

What do sociologists of visual culture say to novices about the difference between their methodology and art history’s—or more pointedly—the art history survey’s?

A set of essays entitled simply *Visual Culture* (1995) edited by the British sociologist, Chris Jenks, may have been the earliest book devoted entirely to this theme. While not all of the contributors are sociologists, Jenks introduces the investigation as a sociological enquiry, but an expansive one. Laying out what he considers the problematic presumptions that drive western ocularcentrism, Jenks is concerned about the mundane acceptance of visual conventions in everyday life, but more particularly in research done by social scientists. The conceptual conservatism (born of positivism) he identifies in social theory, one example of which is the unproblematized acceptance of observation,
has been equally if not more intransigent in art history, compounded as it has been/is by glorification of connoisseurship and the so-called "good eye".

the social theorist has for too long adhered to the classical view of science predicated on three anachronistic principles: (1) a mechanistic view of the universe as a whole interrelated totality; (2) a principled acceptance that an intrinsic order resides within phenomena as external forms; and (3) the necessary contingency being that understanding proceeds through the "independence" of an observer’s sight. (p. 4)

Jenks alludes frequently to art history: to its alignment with the viewing and reading habits of bourgeois realism wherein paintings become transcriptions of reality and/or systematized containers of meaning. Once more though, while certain remarks are relevant to the art history survey (such as the above), nowhere does he mention it by name. Some however, I find particularly applicable to the survey as a mode of spectatorship (configuring both the act and the actor) and to visual culture’s capacity to interfere with it.

Semiotics cannot proceed on the basis that signs mean different things to different people; on the contrary it depends on a cultural network that establishes the uniformity of responses to/readings of the sign. This network is our scopic regime. It is essential that we cast our critical gaze upon constellations of interests inherent in and protected by any social order of signs and images, or rather the consensus world-view that they seek to promote. (p. 15)

What are universal survey museums, textbooks and courses if not pervasive and persuasive “constellations of interests” well funded and well guarded by the most powerful “order of signs and images” in our culture and dedicated to “promoting a consensus world-view”?

The phrase “visual culture” isn’t addressed until late (p. 16), and Jenks distances his own and his fellow contributors’ understanding of the term from the meaning it has taken on in art history to refer (as he puts it) to “a late-modern broadening of that
previously contained within the definition of ‘fine art’” (p. 16). According to Jenks, he and the other scholars he’s brought together in *Visual culture* deal with visuality as inquiring, voyeuristic and enmeshed in power relations; they explore the social and cultural dimensions of the relationship between “the ‘seeing’ and the ‘seen’” (p. 16). In light of these aspirations and Jenks’ claim that “they calculatedly transgress the polarity between high and mass culture” (p. 16), it’s disappointing that so much of what’s offered here is not noticeably transgressive and that high modernism remains a dominant preoccupation. Eight of the thirteen pieces are devoted to such familiar territory as modernist painting (five in all), modernist aesthetics, avant-garde film and the flâneur. Admittedly, some re-examination or re-theorization of these subjects may be necessary and justifiable, but this imbalance is out of sync with Jenks’ stated intentions, and it raises the specter that Jenks’ variation on visual culture might be just another attempt at appropriation—in this instance as an enlarged arena for the sociology of art.

Would this set of essays edited by Jenks be an effective initiation (or part of one) into visual culture/visual studies?

On balance, Jenks’ initial concern with the assumptions underlying what vision is and how it works, and their cultural effects, hits many of the right notes, and these themes reappear and come under useful and enlightening scrutiny in the ruminations that follow. Any critical assessment has also to keep in mind that this is likely the first endeavor of its kind. All the same, while I could imagine asking students to read selected portions or passages from *Visual Culture*, the book as a whole doesn’t come close to meeting its own expectations—or mine. Surveillance is treated by several of the dozen plus one men writing here, and there are few superficial similarities in its overall design to the art
history survey. Ironically though, it pretends to a level of self-awareness that it doesn’t attain. As I’ve mentioned, the thematic range in *Visual Culture* is disconcertingly narrow and esoteric. Despite its pretensions, there is nothing that could qualify as activist scholarship. Marxism, feminism, queer theory and postcolonialism are unmentioned and undetectable, and that refined and detached liberalism long associated with the scientific attitude (and the male authorial gaze) prevails. These are qualities it shares with the art history survey in its archetypal form (still largely intact) along with the premise that the production and interpretation of culture are spheres of activity that are (and should be) controlled by privileged, well-mannered males with similar educations, cultural backgrounds, class interests and ideological orientations.

The last in the series of books I’ll appraise here is *Visual Methodologies* (2001) by Gillian Rose. Rose is a Senior Lecturer at the Open University, and although (based on the blurb on the book jacket) *Visual Methodologies* is directed at undergraduates, it grew out of curriculum Rose developed and taught over a three-year period at the Graduate School for Social Science in Edinburgh (Rose, 2001, p. ix). Although, it follows the formatting conventions used in textbooks for Open University courses (It’s very similar in layout to *Visual Culture: The Reader* for instance), it wasn’t commissioned for one. Neither could I turn up courses anywhere (based on a quick Web search) where it has been—or is currently being—used as a textbook. I can’t say this comes as a surprise.

Rose’s avowed aim is to “offer a methodological guide to the production of empirically grounded responses to particular visual materials” (p. 2). Her mania for ordering, for trying to enforce clear-cut distinctions extends as far as vision and visuality themselves which are barely and only provisionally separable and as thoroughly
intermingled and indistinguishable from each other as the larger, related categories of perception and interpretation.

Vision is what the human eye is physiologically capable of seeing (although it must be noted that ideas about that capability have changed historically and will most likely continue to change: see Crary, 1992). Visuality, on the other hand, refers to the way in which vision is constructed in various ways . . . the ways in which what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed. (p. 6)

What I can’t help noticing here is Rose’s own immersion in the culture of science. She can both qualify contemporary notions about vision as historically engaged and produced and retain her faith that vision is something which is definable, containable and autonomous.

The confidence Rose has in classification and categorization is evident from the outset. She begins her first chapter with “an introductory survey of the ‘visual’” (p. 5) followed by a section tracing the development of visual culture. Moving on, Rose equips us with a box of “methodological tools” (p. 16), ending with a chart (composed of concentric circles that depict the three modalities: social, compositional and technological, as we journey toward the center which is a small blank disk) (p. 30) to help us choose the method we need and the right gear to make it work.34

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34 This reminds me of the well-known “map” drawn by Alfred Barr to illustrate and illuminate the emergence of modern art. Barr used it as an aid in his lectures, and it graced the dust jacket of his catalogue for the Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1936 (March 2-April 19).
Is Rose’s contribution a viable alternative to the art history survey? Would it help students develop the confidence to confront visual representations and admit/accept their complexity?

*Visual Methodologies* offers an overview of approaches to visual materials and the techniques used to analyze and interpret them. In Rose’s “introductory survey of the visual”, she attempts to condense and summarize theories of visual representation and their impact on the social sciences since the 1970s. While she doesn’t replicate the format of the art history survey, Rose’s work does share several of its defining characteristics; it’s chronological, cumulative and progressive. Within the contracted parameters of the final three decades of the twentieth century, Rose presents a canonical collection of researchers whose insights build on one another contributing to the development of an ever richer, more complex and sophisticated exegesis. Rose is also very concerned with coverage (as is the survey), and the impression is conveyed (to me, at any rate) that interpretive competence and eventual mastery are attainable, incrementally, if learners devote themselves to learning and implementing each of the tactics she outlines. While most visual theorists support critical analysis as a technique that can be taught, Rose’s presumption of a hierarchical arrangement with the professional, institutional interpreter at its apex is also reminiscent of both art history and the art world. *Visual Methodologies* is a handbook of sorts that holds out the promise of becoming a “successful interpreter” in/on Rose’s terms (p. 32).

Rose signals her allegiance to the cultural studies community with phrases like “Interpreting images is just that, interpretation, not the discovery of their ‘truth’” (p.2) and “visual imagery is never innocent” (p.32). Warming to her theme, Rose explains that
the interpretive process requires a critical engagement with those societal and cultural forces which generate and regulate meaning (Neither can we rely on a single process to accomplish the task. In fact, her final chapter is entitled “Other Methods, Mixing Methods” [pp. 186-203]). These are the main reasons why, according to Rose, quantitative procedures receive less attention in her study than qualitative ones (p. 3). Each of the systems Rose covers is assessed by the same standards, and she spells these out early on.

By “critical” I mean an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of cultural significance, social practices and power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging. Those criteria then provide the means by which the various methods in this book are evaluated. For each method I ask: How useful is it in achieving a critical methodology of visual images? (p. 3)

On the surface, Rose’s objectives might seem similar to my own, but structuralist techniques dominate Visual Methodologies (There are two chapters on discourse, but the rest are given over to compositional, content, semiotic, psychological and audience analyses.) Moreover, Rose discloses the distance between her orientation and visual culture’s with her legitimation of connoisseurship and the “good eye” in Chapter Two (pp. 33-53). Putting philosophical and political objections aside, the volume is impossible to recommend for other reasons as well. It assumes too much foreknowledge to be useable by the undergraduates for whom it was supposedly written, and its theoretical premises are confused and confusing for readers and at any level. Rose may start with the disclaimer: “Successful interpretation depends on a passionate engagement with what you see. Use your methodology to discipline your passion not to deaden it” (p. 32), but her book seems guaranteed to do just that.
So, what are my qualified and contingent (agonized and agonistic?) choices?

My intent has been to bring cognizance of the manner in which subjects (as individuals, as topics and as categories) are provisionally located, created, bolstered and maintained through ongoing contention and negotiation to three proceedings. Firstly, I looked at widely distributed books by cultural theorists and social scientists to see how visual culture has been portrayed in them. Secondly, I tested their commitment to founding a transgressive visual studies by searching for textual correspondences with the paradigmatic art historical survey. Thirdly, I used these results to estimate their value as instructional tools capable of expanding the discourse on/to all things visual. It’s imperative, I think, to acknowledge that this exercise is artificial and manipulative regardless of what justifications I might employ. My affiliations and allegiances can’t be discounted, nor should they be. There’s much to recommend in each of these publications, and I’ve handled them roughly and treated them badly. With that off my chest, I can also say that cobbling together a textbook drawn from all of them might be the best option. But that’s not what I set out to do here, and using the template I’ve so selfishly devised, three works stand out: Hall’s *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), Sturken & Cartwright’s *Practices of Looking* (2001) and

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35 Doing this avoids the problem of students (or teachers) becoming too invested in a single resource. Every template has benefits and drawbacks and selecting from several helps forestall a situation in which the interpretations offered in any one are taken as definitive or the examples it includes begin to assume canonical status. Such fears may explain why large numbers of postsecondary instructors go to the trouble of assembling coursepacks instead of settling on/for a single book.
Jones' *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2003), which, though flawed, satisfy most of my demands.

Visual culture can be profitably introduced using *Practices of Looking*. I've found the themes it treats to be engaging, approachable and logically organized, while the classes and seminars I devised from it were some of the most energized and animated I've delivered and/or facilitated. Of the volumes I've assessed in this chapter, it's the smallest (though at almost 400 pages, not the shortest), the least intimidating in appearance and the most conveniently laid out. Chapters are consistently brief and made up of six to eight subsections ranging in length from two to eight pages. These bite-size chunks are ideal for a single sitting and fairly easily digested. They're a boon to both student and teacher because they're readily browsable, transportable and transposable. Beyond this, costly color plates have been eschewed in favor of a maximizing the number of black and white photographs (there are close to 200). Varying from postage stamp sized to full page, these jostle against the authors' prose and run the gamut from magazine covers, news events, ads and posters to film or video stills, animation cells and screen captures to paintings, sculptures, performance art, craft and graffiti to charts, diagrams, computer-generated and medical diagnostic imagery. Such an array of visual representations and juxtapositions across a variety of media simulates our image-rich cultural environment and stimulates students to appreciate, enjoy and engage its complexity.

Perfect books don't—and can't—exist, and nowhere does that point need more reinforcement than in the first-year classroom. *Practices of Looking* comes closest to overcoming my reservations about endorsing any single volume over putting together a
purpose-built set of readings. I’ve outlined some of the reasons why. In a general sense, it differs from a number of the other offerings by being informal, by emphasizing understanding over expertise and by carefully demystifying terminology through an extensive, plainly worded glossary. Sturken and Cartwright encourage critical appraisal and discourage dependence on any one source. Yet, disclaimers like these won’t prevent some learners from depending on it too much and elevating it to scriptural status. This rarely, if ever, happens with course packs. However, given its focus on exploration over explanation and exposition and its inquisitive rather than disquisitive or definitive attitude, Practices of Looking has succeeded in calming my disquiet even if it hasn’t completely quelled my fears.
CHAPTER FIVE: ART HISTORICAL SUBJECTIVITY AND THE SURVEY - PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

What can be said to sum up what (in my view) is the art history survey textbook's dedication to propagating and protecting knowledges of—and for—a prohibitive class of objects sanctioned and sanctified as art?

Introductory-level art history survey courses are frequently mandatory for art history or fine arts majors, but they're also popular electives for students from elsewhere in the university. Traditionally, narrower, more focused upper-level surveys were designed to provide learners with an overview of a period or style as a basis for further specialization. Non-majors with a particular interest in the subject (and the necessary prerequisites) who don't require the credits, and who may not intend to pursue the history of art any further, occasionally take these as well. However, unlike the numbers who register for the first-year offerings, they're rare exceptions. From what I can tell, this continues as the norm at most Canadian colleges and some art schools and universities. Increasingly though, surveys are complimented by other curricula: thematic courses (which can often be picked out by the terms "issues" and "topics") or classes given over to specialized inquiries that may cross disciplinary boundaries.36

36 Three titles in this vein from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design’s 2006-2007 calendar are “Narrative and Craft”, “Philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement” (p. 35) and “Modernism/Postmodernism” (p. 36).
Almost without exception, catalogs from universities which have arts faculties list art history surveys, as do those for art schools. Nearly every college with an academic curriculum also offers them. Continuing studies and distance departments affiliated with post-secondary institutions invariably include them too, and they appear on night school schedules and in programs for seniors' centers. And I haven't touched on their informal delivery through popular media like the Web, television and publishing. Suffice it to say that legions of people are exposed to what Elkins (2002) appropriately terms the "standard" art historical narrative in one form or another. It isn't easy to gauge exactly how many, but a recent estimate of the combined sales of four major survey textbooks (Gombrich's *The Story of Art*, Janson's *History of Art*, Gardner's *Art through the Ages* and Stokstad's *Art History*) was seventeen million copies (Peers, 2006). Considering the extent of the survey's influence, it has a miniscule presence in the scholarly literature. One of the few to have commented on that situation, Robert S. Nelson singled out Janson's text to stress that neither the commanding position occupied by the *History of Art* nor the throngs exposed to it annually have been considered worthy of interest—let alone study—by art historians.

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37 I've perused countless catalogs, and I've yet to discover an institution of either variety that doesn't.
Books like the Jansons’ . . . continue to have a significant impact on the history of art that the discipline imparts to thousands of students each year. Yet these books, as publishing phenomena and art historical survey, and the courses they accompany continue to be largely ignored by the art historical profession and its conferences and journals. (Nelson, 1997, p. 34)

The art history survey’s dominance is well-established and longstanding. It is institutionally, culturally and economically entrenched, and broadly supported. It saves educational administrators money, and it generates huge profits for publishers and museums. This is art’s sacred text, and it includes its creation myth. Standing at the axis of the edifice of art—it functions as the central support beam. Without it, cracks in art’s foundation start to appear, and the entire structure becomes precarious, unstable, and threatens to collapse. Therefore, critical investigation into what the survey is (and does) or unflinching interrogation of its principles and its products can’t—and aren’t—undertaken. Those activities are approved for just about anything else, but the “taken for grantedness” of artistic lineage and artistic quality; what they are, how they generate and guarantee the art object (Bourdieu calls this doxa38) shield the art history survey from

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38 For Bridget Fowler, Bourdieu’s formulation of doxa is a specific elaboration on—and refinement of—Foucault’s freighted use of discourse that illuminates the resemblance between their theoretical orientations.

Both [Foucault and Bourdieu] . . . have started from the assumption that the Enlightenment conception of ideological mystification obscures the taken-for-granted representations through which humans apprehend the world which are overwhelmingly collective in character and the product of socialization. Such elementary classifications structure the universe by means of categories of time, space, law, nature, etc.: when universalized,
vigorous critique and rigorous challenge. Mind you, revision is completely acceptable (indeed, it’s almost endemic) and reform is conceivable, but the saga itself remains. Additions are more than welcome (after all, they add authority to the canonical account and highlight its singularity) and other tolerable alterations include novel juxtapositions or inventive learning activities as long as they don’t raise objections about—and, therefore, pose no danger to—habituated absurdities like “natural” aesthetics, stylistic chronometrics and hagiographic hierarchies.

Who is the art historian?

One of my aims has been to bring Foucault’s thinking on institutional and institutionalized discourses into a consideration of the art history survey, its situation within the Academy, its “situatedness” as an identity-function for/of historical art (and the professions that perpetuate and depend on it) and its site-specificity as a discursive formation dedicated to producing knowledge in—and about—society. Art is by definition exclusive. We know what is and what isn’t art because there are experts whose job it is to maintain and defend the classification and its boundaries. It is a category and a territory that is carefully delineated, scrupulously delimited and assiduously guarded. My...

they produce what Foucault calls the “never said” and Bourdieu . . . calls “doxa”: unquestioned social conceptions which acquire the force of nature. (Fowler, 1997, p. 92)
description begs the question put forward in the last chapter: who, then, is the art historian, or to put it more generally, who is the art expert? Could the vocation exist or flourish without aligning itself with wealth and privilege? An art scholar is a person whose economic capital is nearly always outweighed to a substantial degree by her cultural capital. She's also someone whose chosen expertise serves the interests of financial and political elites. It's tempting to speculate about her hopes, doubts and fears. Is she outrageously idealistic, relentlessly pragmatic, hopelessly cynical; or none or all of these?

Artist Andrea Fraser’s alter-ego, Jane Castleton, created for the 1989 performance piece, “Museum Highlights”, springs to mind as a character who embodies conflicts between class origins and class loyalties, between frustration and constraint, between desire and disdain. Jane is a volunteer docent for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and thus, as Fraser notes, she acts as “a figure of identification for the primarily white, middle-class audience” (Fraser, 2005, fn. 3, p. 111). Isn’t the teaching art historian a person (white and/or middle-class or not) who stands for a similar public and for its access to the treasure houses of high culture?

The same year (1989), Wendy Wasserstein’s play The Heidi Chronicles won a Pulitzer Prize and the Tony award ensuring that its principal character, Heidi Holland, would become fiction’s most famous art historian. Middle-class, Jewish and female, Holland struggles against depression and oppression as she strives to be successful in her professional and personal lives. A professor at Columbia, her pedagogical delivery is informal and unorthodox (something she’s been soundly castigated for by Robert S. Nelson [1997]. Apparently, Nelson expects even imaginary art historians to toe the line.),
and she encourages spontaneous engagement with the projected images. As a feminist, Holland seeks a place in the pantheon for female artists, and as a humanist, she identifies their plight with her own, affirming a bond of transhistorical sisterhood. In Holland’s milieu, belief in art’s intrinsic value (the values art supports and the values that support art) is unassailable. Direct correlations between Holland’s hermetic individualism and her unbridled careerism, on the one hand, and her feelings of isolation, dissatisfaction and incompleteness, on the other, aren’t drawn. At the end of the play, Holland decides to adopt a child; an action which could imply that Holland’s relentless drive to achieve “self-actualization” has been misguided. Whether Holland’s life-altering choice will force her to re-examine her priorities or merely provide another means to pursue them is a dilemma left unstated and unresolved.

Many flesh-and-blood art historians are also secretive about their personal histories. Carol Duncan’s (this vignette is discussed in Chapter 3) and Eunice Lipton’s frankness are uncommon, and Lipton’s memoir Alias Olympia: A Woman’s Search for Manet’s Notorious Model and Her Own Desire (1992) was unprecedented when it surfaced and remains extraordinary. Jewish and another New Yorker, Lipton’s parent

39 Catherine Soussloff has studied the prominence of Jews in art history. See her article, “Projecting Culture: Jewish Art Historians and the History of Art History” (2000) and Judaism 49(3), and the edited collection, Jewish Identity in Modern Art History (1999), pp. 352-358.
were working-class Latvian immigrants who supported the communist party until 1946 (p. 18). Lipton attended City College in the 1950s that had a long history of left-wing radicalism, but, during her sojourn there, she recalls being, along with her classmates, disillusioned, apathetic and escapist.

We knew at City that just a generation earlier people had gone to our college for important reasons, for political reasons . . . . We knew. And we were sick of this knowledge and ashamed that we didn’t care. We wanted the poems, the music of that nineteenth-century language as foreign to our ears as our parents’ Eastern European accents were familiar. We wanted the pleasure of those words. And the shelter. (p. 22)

As a child and as a young woman, Lipton pursued high culture with a vengeance. She shared (or absorbed) her father’s contempt for her mother, Trudy, and Lipton feared that somehow, someday she would begin to resemble this woman whom she scorned and spurned. Trudy came from rural peasant stock, smoked, and read trashy pulp novels. In contrast, Lipton’s cultivated father, Louis, had grown up in the capital, Riga. Louis sought to impress captive listeners with his grasp of Russian literature, and he escorted his young daughter to the opera. He also heaped verbal abuse on his wife and took mistresses. One afternoon, Trudy simply disappeared, and Lipton’s disgust deepened into hatred and resentment (pp. 23-30).

Lipton refers frequently to the consolation she derived from romantic fantasies of Paris: the Paris of Puccini, Bizet, Balzac, Zola, Degas and Renoir (p. 30). Yearning for prestige, elegance and acceptance, all of which she dreamily associated with the “city of light”, Lipton tried to attain them through marriage. Her husband was rich, good-looking, sensitive, Harvard-educated, and “he had class” (p. 32). But Lipton was intimidated by his circle of urbane, self-confident friends, and the relationship began to falter. Lipton took refuge in art: “I ran off to a museum . . . to bury myself in paintings”; and she began
teaching art history (p. 33). Passionate about language, Lipton’s true ambition was to be a writer, but her sense of inferiority (her class, ethnicity, gender) precluded that, and she settled for what she saw as second-best. For Lipton, professing art history was/is a variety of stagecraft with an undeniable (and for her, comfortable) resemblance to salesmanship—to hucksters and hawkers—to promotion and marketing.

So, I took to talking instead. I became a professor. It was more manageable [than writing]. In a way, I followed in my fathers’ footsteps. For among his many jobs, selling was the one he was best at and enjoyed the most. First it was costume jewelry and Christmas lights at farmers’ markets on Long Island, then appliances and furniture on Gun Hill Road in the Bronx. At the end, he had his own furniture store in Manhattan. My father was a seductive man; he could sell anything. Teaching is a lot like that. (p. 33)

A peculiar trio: Duncan, Holland and Lipton (two actual; one fictional, if that differentiation is remotely meaningful) are portrayed in three dissimilar texts: an essay on art education, a hit play and an intimate reminiscence. There are points of intersection, though, and, given the scarcity of such testimonies, I glean from them what I can. Holland and Lipton are feminist art historians who, in all likelihood, regard themselves as “new” or “social” art historians. While this offshoot isn’t (as has already been pointed out) a radical departure from the “old” art history, it does contain a spectrum of academics whose concerns vary. Within this mélange, Holland could be pegged as moderate and Lipton, conservative. Duncan is both more critical and more rebellious than either; she has also been flexible enough to borrow methodologies from elsewhere (sociology, anthropology), a maneuver I suspect would be unimaginable to either of her peers.
Each is the hero of their respective tales, but Duncan is the only one whose analysis of power relations goes beyond essentializing gender to confront institutional and pedagogical politics as they intersect and interact with personal principles and professional aspirations. Ironically, (of the three) Duncan is also alone in revealing and reviling the misogyny of modernist art (Duncan, 1982; 1989). Finding a few inconspicuous places at the all-male banquet for well-behaved women to bathe in the glow of male genius appears to be enough for Holland and Lipton. Their professorial dedication to duty entails and enacts a deeper deference to the post-imperial “civilizing mission”. As Duncan has demonstrated, art history’s grand narrative is a ruse manipulated by state museums to convince citizens that attendance increases their cultural capital. Civic virtue is thus transformed into permission and possession, and every gallery-goer symbolically acquires equal access to, acquaintance with, and proprietary rights over, precious objets held “in trust” for them by a democratic and benevolent government. Duncan is succinct: “the political passivity of citizenship is idealized as active art appreciation and spiritual enrichment. Thus the art museum gives citizenship without having to redistribute real power” (Duncan, 1991, p. 94).

Accordingly, art historians (including, presumably, Duncan herself) are ideologues¹ (though some are evidently reluctant or resistant) who are variously interpellated into enacting the civilized and “civilizing rituals” (Duncan, 1995) of the

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¹ In fairness, this could be said of any and every public intellectual.
capitalist/corporatist state. Research brings them into coveted proximity with art; they get
genuine contact with pricey and priceless goods and opportunities to peruse them
closely—albeit in controlled and secure settings. Extending Duncan’s contention, the
limited privileges enjoyed by art historians are emblematic of ownership; metaphors for a
fantasized ideal of unfettered connection. Do they, simultaneously, stoke reveries of
luxurious surroundings and princely holdings? It’s not unusual for art historians to be
small-scale collectors, and numerous and notorious systemic similarities (including
nepotism, inflated prices and insider trading) exist between the art world and investment
banking.  

To be an art historian is to deal in a knowledge field that is mapped by
price tags . . . and no amount of polemizing changes that. Histories of
this relationship, were they written, would necessarily include the power
exercised over research objectives, and by extension over the
undergraduate syllabus, not only of he large-scale commercial publishers
but also the university presses; the funding bodies’ priorities; the relations
between dealers and public galleries, museums and scholar. (Pointon,
1997, pp. 17-18)  

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2 A debacle that is still making headlines is the case of Marion True, former Curator of
Antiquities at the Getty Museum in Malibu, California who faces charges of receiving
stolen goods and knowingly exporting looted artifacts from Italy (Bloomberg.com, 2006).

3 Predictably, Pointon is less than revealing about her own imbrication. She tells the tale
of a formative event in her youth that carried a hard lesson. It caused her to realize that
a scholarly life demands an unyielding singlemindedness akin to callousness. Her final
plea is for art historians to dedicate themselves to intense self-examination and
reflexivity (though, as I’ve said, this essay isn’t exemplary in either respect) combined
with the unabashed elitism vital to protecting “pure” research.
Mystification's robust efficacy is brought home to me every time I find myself shocked or astonished to discover that "objective" findings by art historians have caused the revaluation of works belonging to powerful individuals and corporate or institutional bodies with whom they're affiliated (and [coincidentally?] their own) and prices to skyrocket.

**Which art historians teach art history surveys?**

In the first chapter of this thesis, I confessed that the bulk of my teaching career has been spent teaching art history surveys. Therefore, I'll examine my situation and draw on my own experience to try and identify the group most likely to teach surveys and to teach more surveys than anything else. Preparing, instructing, testing and grading sizeable undergraduate classes of any stripe is arduous, time-consuming, and often unrewarding, but art history surveys present singular challenges. Although united by the same (omnipresent) overarching art historical narrative, the first-year version is normally split into two segments: pre- and post- Renaissance (one per semester), and each makes patently different demands on the instructor. Since the pre-Renaissance epoch begins with the Paleolithic, this component spans over thirty thousand years. Delving into the domains of anthropology and archaeology, it's also concerned with a geographical terrain that includes Egypt and the Near East. The Renaissance and post-Renaissance portion, on the other hand, is almost entirely focused on western Europe—until the twentieth century, that is, when the spotlight shifts to the United States for the modernist finale.
College freshmen want and expect their textbooks to be comprehensive and definitive and their professors to be encyclopedic polymaths. Rarely do they evince any awareness that post-secondary institutions encourage specialization and discourage generalism. As a result, they're usually shocked to learn that the art historians who write survey textbooks have a finite realm of expertise (in one period, style or school of art); that they don't really know everything about all the world's artifacts. No individual is capable of mastery\(^4\) on this level in either the longer, wider ranging scan of visual production or the shorter, relatively regionalized one I allude to above. Yet, the art history survey persistently supports and promotes the humanist fantasy of homo universalis through curricula like these. And, no matter how absurd I find these claims and the vehicles that disseminate them, they have a currency within popular culture that appears to be increasing (witness the insatiable demand for anything to do with Leonardo—*The da Vinci Code* simply being the latest manifestation). Art history's stake in mainstream mythology is under-remarked, and it manipulates seemingly commonsense understandings of how vision works and what pictures do which are cringe-inducing to anyone with a modest acquaintance with current theory. It (art history) also

\[\text{\underline{\text{\footnotesize \hspace{1cm}}} \text{\footnotesize \hspace{1cm}}}\]

\(^4\) The concept/construct of "mastery" is closely linked to understandings of—and beliefs about—expertise and authority which have been broached in earlier chapters. Suffice it to say, that the ability to encompass a field—to hold sway over it—is incompatible with poststructuralism. But the masterly and the masterful are indivisible from hallmarks like old masters and benchmarks like masterpieces. The mastermind, the master hand and the master stroke are intrinsic to art history's heritage and inherent and insistent in many of its museological and pedagogical practices.
has more ties to mass culture and spectacle than other long-established subject areas in
the humanities, and the dramatic allure of monarchs and empires, wealth and grandeur,
madness and mayhem puts “bums in seats” at school as successfully as it does in theaters
and airplanes.

What does any of this have to do with who takes on these assignments, you may
well ask? Institutions support conventional surveys because they utilize existing
resources; because they distribute a “safe” product to a large number of students; and
because they deliver “bang for the buck”. But expectations are wildly unrealistic, the
workload is inhuman and the goals are hopelessly unattainable. It isn’t surprising that in
venues that don’t require high-ranking professors to take them on, comprehensive first
and second year surveys devolve to sessionals, part-timers and untenured or junior
faculty. Senior, tenured department members frequently have choices when their less
advantaged colleagues don’t. Teachers who have to teach survey courses—whether they
want to or not—are generally deficient in something: experience, credentials, seniority, or
status.

So, what happens to the poor sod saddled with the unenviable chore of furiously
weaving the cave paintings at Lascaux, the Great Pyramids, the Villa of the Mysteries,
the Book of Kells and Milan Cathedral into a single seamless fabric called “art”? I’m
forced to revert to anecdote, auto-ethnography or self-fiction (whichever you prefer to
call it) at this point. However, I’ve compared notes with dozens of my Canadian
colleagues over the years, and they relate similar reactions and behaviors. If you’re new
to the game (the first three years or so in my case), you panic, you do exhaustive
research, you write reams of minutely detailed lecture notes, you try to anticipate every
question that could possibly be thrown at you; every challenge that might be raised. After
that, you panic some more, you arrange and rearrange your slides, you reorganize and
rewrite your notes, you design and distribute informative handouts, you stay up until four
every morning before lectures and do mental reviews for those few hours before you have
to get up. For some, the anxiety lessens a bit or a lot, but the basic pattern doesn’t change,
and it becomes a mode of being. I began to intensely resent the position I was in and
started to talk about it; to build disclosure into the format of every lesson I delivered. I
also deliberated on how I felt about learning: what it was, how it occurred and who I
believed was responsible for it.

Of those who teach art history surveys, who likes teaching them because they
approve of and/or believe in them?

I don’t have a lot to go on here, but my research indicates that the mass of art
historians in the United States have an allegiance to—and an investment in—the
customary content and established format of the global survey. I don’t presume to know
where that dedication comes from or how deep-seated it is. Conceivably, institutional
resistance to change which has repeatedly thwarted individual attempts to experiment
has forced accommodation and reconciliation. Whatever the reasons, the question I’m
asking probably isn’t one they would think to ask of themselves. For a significant
number, the survey is bedrock—and art history is inconceivable without it. Based on the
submissions to *Art Journal* (1995) treated in Chapter Two, some find the survey
embarrassing and want to institute superficial or cosmetic changes to counteract any
impression that art history has fallen behind philosophical and curricular changes in other
departments. A few are openly conflicted about it (This may be a small group, but I’d say
Schwartz [1995] is one.), and others (Elsen [2002], for example) have come to the conclusion that it’s a necessary evil [“better the devil you know . . . ”].

A shortage of publications by art historians on teaching has granted the Art Journal testimonials an undeserved prominence in this inquiry. All came from fully institutionalized career academics, several of whom are famous. They rose to the challenge of contriving solutions to the “problem of the survey”, and the agendas they planned, the syllabi they developed and the classes they taught were primarily “one-off” experiments. Other pieces were solicited to fill in historical context or summarize current debates on the issue of the survey. Although the exercise has a certain fascination, it doesn’t shed much light on the opinions of those who inhabit survey classrooms on a regular basis.

Anticipating a scarcity of data on the thoughts of educators themselves, I prepared a questionnaire to solicit this information. My poll consisted of nine queries (See Appendix A) and was sent by e-mail to between forty and fifty art historians whom I confirmed were scheduled to instruct an art history survey course in the academic year: 2005-2006. These instructors worked in universities, colleges and art schools throughout British Columbia and, for balance, at several institutions in Toronto (University of Toronto, Ontario College of Art and Design) Montreal (McGill, Concordia) and Halifax (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design). Everything about this process (except sending the e-mails) was entirely new to me, and I was chagrined at what I thought was a paltry response: ten replies over a period of roughly five months. Experienced pollsters have assured me in the meantime that my rate of return (approximately twenty percent) is about average.
Perhaps there’s no need to stipulate my reservations about quantitative measurements. It should go without saying that they enter this space, not as provable factual “evidence” with cumulative statistical weight, but as anecdotal reportage; as creative and conditional self-representation. The separation I enforce here is qualitative rather than evaluative. My desire is not to diminish their standing in or standing for, but rather, to recognize and reinforce their situated particularity in the face of any allegedly verifiable scientific (or scientistic) weight. This disclaimer is needed, I feel, to offset the unanimously affirmative replies to Question #2 which asked: “Do you enjoy teaching it/them?” (i.e. the survey or surveys) followed by a request for elaboration and another question: “Please expand on this a bit. What do you like or dislike about it/them?” Every respondent answered, but what they said should not (and can not) be reduced to straightforward consensus.

Not surprisingly, subjects within my sample didn’t comment on their economic situations nor their positioning within the academic hierarchy nor other socio-political factors in the brief statements they put together to clarify why teaching the survey is “enjoyable” for them and what they like or dislike most about doing it. What they took pleasure in varied with their backgrounds, personal preferences and teaching philosophies. There was also divergence according to discrepancies in the curricula

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5 Two probable causes are that, firstly, the wording of the question doesn’t specifically solicit this information, and, secondly, although I promised anonymity and confidentiality in my cover letter, it’s conceivable that security may have been a concern.
which included two less extensive surveys (nineteenth century and Renaissance), one hybrid of art history and visual culture and one in which significantly greater weight was given to non-western content (substituting spatial [east-west] for the usual temporal [Medieval-Renaissance] division to bisect the school year) and one modified for distance delivery.

Among those who taught the conventional curriculum using one of the stock textbooks, a sessional at a small university praised it for being comprehensible and exposing students to cultural history "as it is encompassed by art history". She commented on the irony that this also frustrated her because "It is a kind of "pat package" that is very classically oriented". A college studio instructor valued the opportunity to study the masterpieces of European art in detail to contextualize contemporary art-making: "It helps me draw a larger picture for the students regarding their studio practice". Two of these teachers voiced direct commitment to referencing the archive through a systematized succession of events, labels and dates. "It lays out historical chronology; gives them a sense of places and times", and "I enjoy teaching these courses because I believe that a thorough historical grounding in Art History is fundamental to any student who wishes to pursue the discipline". While these two contributors offered unqualified support, a couple of others expressed reservations. A part-time instructor at a suburban university college complained that "Too much time is covered; the structure doesn't allow in-depth exploration; reviews are difficult; [the survey] jumps from place to place, culture to culture without enough points of reference for students with no background in history." And a senior professor (of Mesoamerican art) at a major university, working to ensure survey students get exposed to something other than the
routine European fare, adopts the stance that a good number of veteran art historians seem to hold. Art history surveys are apparently, for them (and him), contradictory, paradoxical, unavoidable and unattainable. As such, the only workable choice is to accept them and their flaws. "I love the openness of the first year curriculum (because a true survey is impossible)."

Reflective and (cheerfully?) resigned, this perspective appears to me to be more likely among people in the comparatively luxurious situation of having fewer onerous obligations and more flexible options. They haven't been provided with a preset course outline—or signed a contract that obligates them to stick to it. A tenured professor at a large, well-funded university, for instance, is capable of envisioning and implementing a survey that tampers with "straight" chronology and melds it with a topical thematic approach.

I find the historical trajectory gives students a spine on which to peg thematic issues and key historical moments. This is never organized around artists, however. Thus it is not the development from say, Giotto to Michelangelo. On the contrary, the topics have to do with things like Early Christianity and changing ideas of the body, or structural changes in altarpieces that are caused by exchanges with the East.

Regular continuing faculty members at art schools in large Canadian cities also seem to have greater leeway. Their submissions attest to technological, and a certain amount of methodological, innovation. Comments from two such instructors: a department head and a division chair, respectively, are indicative.

I like the opportunity to influence students new to the study of visual culture. I enjoy using Power Point to illustrate work and explain concepts. While many criticize it, I find it to be quite useful and creative in its potential integration of text and image. I also like working with seminar leaders who bring their own approaches to teaching.
Her students don’t escape the survey or its structuration, but they’re not responsible for learning it in detail, and, if it’s still the core or the heart, at least it’s acquired a host of quirky non-canonical and non-art appendages. Art schools are generally more focused on contemporary art, and it’s permissible for individual instructors to veer away from internationally famous “art stars” to highlight their own selections. Art history’s complicity with cosmopolitanism and critical cachet effectively excludes or dismisses lesser-known creators and genres, including regional and local practitioners, but the same biases don’t always inhere in art institutes.

I like the opportunity to present a well organized and critically thoughtful presentation of art historical material from a period (20th century) that I personally find fascinating, and which is of most immediate interest to my students, who are almost all studio students in an art school. I also enjoy teaching this material in such a way that fully integrates art practice throughout this period with its social and political context. Many of my students know nothing of history, and don’t know how art is related to it in any specific ways. I get a great deal of satisfaction from making it clear to them throughout the course, that the history of art is not just the history of ART, but that history itself is inescapable in relation to art. This is myth-destroying stuff, and I love destroying such myths.

Since the survey is unrelated to the ideas and activities of most contemporary artists and many art historians, how is it sustained and why does it persist?

André Malraux’s Museum Without Walls (1967) celebrated photography for the unprecedented global access he believed it provided to artifacts of every description from far-flung corners of the world. For Malraux, those images were captivating and inspiring because, sharing the same medium, format and tonal values, the objects themselves might be equalized and become commensurable. In Hal Foster’s phrase, their “cross-cultural affinities” could be revealed (Foster, 1996, p. 97). Today, Malraux’s work is discussed as predictive of the expansive “connectedness” of the Internet or as a harbinger of the virtual
museum (pp. 97-99). A famous photo of the French writer, adventurer and politician (reproduced in Foster, p. 98) depicts him from above in an elegant high-ceilinged room flooded with diffused light from tall windows with sheer curtains leaning on his grand piano. He scrutinizes a page, presumably of photos chosen to appear in the book and stretching out in front of him are dozens of others in double-leaf sets neatly arranged, row after row, on a thick plush carpet. Emphasized here is the availability and abundance of photographic simulacra along with the enjoyment and insights to be derived from inspecting them at leisure. While Malraux has already chosen the pairings for us, a further implication is that these conflations will be informative as well as striking, inspiring us to discover dichotomies of our own. What occurs to me about this historical “moment” is not the promise of being able to “bring the works home” from the bookstore instead of having to scour the planet to find them (the photographers having done the arduous part and Malraux having obligingly chosen and grouped the best of their efforts). What impresses itself on my psyche is that Malraux’s opus provides the visual precedent for Janson’s widely distributed *History of Art*, the core of the first broadly attended art history survey courses in the newly expanded post-secondary sector of the 1960s.

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6 Malraux, the immaculately dressed aesthete is shown in a lavish drawing room surrounded by all the markers of “refined” taste: expensive furniture and books, paintings and sculpted heads collected in his travels. Another connotation is certainly connoisseurship, and the implied possibility that, through application, the reader may acquire a “good eye”. An insightful analysis of the phenomenon of the “good eye” is Chapter Two of Sally Price’s *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (2001) entitled “The Mystique of Connoisseurship”.
Malraux’s imaginary museum was based, to some degree, on the Louvre, and amplified by his affluent upbringing and his elite education. However, a decade after Malraux’s reverie, broadened admission policies for baby boomers swelled student populations throughout the western world ushering in a situation wherein millions of students—and thousands of teachers—learned the discourse of the universal museum long before they ever entered one. In Alex Alberro’s description, Jane Castleton “enacts the internalization of discourse that defines entering an institutional sphere” (2005, p. xxvi). Therefore, I’d say, as does Bennett (crediting Foucault), that the operation and enactment of museal structures and strictures may recall or refer to buildings and schematics, but it doesn’t require them. Conceptual architecture is at once intangible and discursive. This mental museum including its walls, its consecutive galleries and our programmed progress through it is common among westerners who attended college anytime during the past forty years. Its tall well-lit rooms and periodized displays have been assembled and configured through study sessions with weighty, lavishly illustrated textbooks in which each momentous artistic achievement is properly positioned as a developmental stage leading up to the “glorious” present. The lecture hall too inscribes the museum by mimicking embodied spectatorship as we peruse projected images, note what we’ve learned to recognize as their distinctive features, compare and contrast a

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7 Alex Alberro teaches art history at the University of Florida. His specialties are contemporary and conceptual art.
codified set of similarities and their differences in a simulated and orchestrated “stroll” from older to newer; from crude to refined, from naïve to sophisticated.

As Hooper-Greenhill (1992), Bennett (1995), Preziosi (1998) and others have remarked, the museum performs the unseen (and unseeable) archive. In turn, the survey textbook and the survey course mimic the museum. In his essay, “The Exhibitionary Complex” (1995) Tony Bennett likened public collections to other methods for controlling the movements and the conduct of working class subjects during the nineteenth century. Yet, management of behavior was carried out differently in and by cultural institutions than it was in workhouses, jails and asylums. There, technologies of supervision and surveillance yielded an evident and an actual omniscience, whereas exhibiting institutions relied on “a set of cultural technologies concerned to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry”:

Through the provision of object lessons in power—the power to command and arrange things and bodies for public display—they sought to allow the people, and en masse rather than individually, to know rather than be known, to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge. Yet, ideally, they sought also to allow the people to know and hence to regulate themselves; to become, in seeing themselves from the side of power, both the subjects and objects of knowledge, knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation. (Bennett, 1995, pp. 62-63)

More fully technologized in their adherence to and reliance on photography, survey courses can rightfully be regarded as moving to fulfill analogous functions, especially from the mid-twentieth century onwards. Liberating the museum from its physical confines (—Malraux’s fantasy) also vastly expanded its regulatory capacity—its ability to restrict visual input, restrain imaginative response and curtail critical engagement—in the interests of turning out and training up the civilized, “appreciative”
and discriminating viewer. Tasteful discriminations are, according to Bourdieu, "the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference . . . when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively by the refusal of other tastes. In manners of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 3).

Universal surveys as an art historical mainstay have resisted the gradual democratization and diversification of curriculum that has taken place in the academic environment as a whole over the last half century. In the previous chapters I’ve proposed several reasons why—notwithstanding the self-imposed isolation demanded by their position—art historians have refused an intensive and/or sustained examination of the programs and practices with which they’re most closely identified. Such dependence on a “tried and true” formula underlines art history’s economic and political dependence on a conservative patron class and its symbiotic relationship with the traditional ideological objectives of established national museums. From my vantage point, the ritual and performative dimensions Carol Duncan assigns to traveling a predetermined path through a bricks and mortar museum to visit and admire (revere) the “highest achievements” of western art are amplified in the facsimiles furnished by professors’ selections from—and expositions on—the latest edition of Janson, Gardner’s or Stokstad. As I’ve said, performativity has been a noteworthy component of art historical delivery from its earliest days. Art historians model how to respond appropriately to the art work; how to assess—and attest to—its quality; what terms are suitable for describing it; what sorts of questions should (and by implication—shouldn’t—be asked of it); which meanings can legitimately be attributed to it (and which can not).
I have argued the ritual character of the museum experience in terms of the kind of attention one brings to it and the special quality of its time and space. Ritual also involves an element of performance. A ritual site of any kind is a place programmed for the enactment of something. It has this structure whether or not visitors can read its cues. In traditional rituals, participants often perform or witness a drama—enacting a real or symbolic sacrifice. But a ritual performance need not be a formal spectacle. It may be something an individual enacts alone by following a prescribed route, by repeating a prayer, by recalling a narrative, or by engaging in some other structured experience that relates to the history or meaning of the site (or to some object or objects on the site). Some individuals may use a ritual site more knowledgeably than others—they may be more educationally prepared to respond to its symbolic cues [my emphasis]. (Duncan, 1995, p. 12)

Duncan goes on to relate visiting large public art museums to a theatrical experience wherein spatial organization, temporal sequence, art objects themselves, lighting effects, props and architectural features “provide both the stage set and the script” (p. 12). Again, it’s possible to propose parallels with the premeditation and prearrangement that preface the art history survey class, combining as it does armchair travel and guided museum tour; cultural initiation and secular devotion. Another apt comparison (and probable precedent), in Duncan’s view, is the medieval pilgrimage during which:

pilgrims followed a structured narrative . . . through the interior [of a cathedral], stopping at prescribed points for prayer or contemplation. An ambulatory adorned with representations of the life of Christ could thus prompt pilgrims to imaginatively re-live the sacred story. Similarly, museums offer well-developed ritual scenarios, most often in the form of art-historical narratives that unfold through a sequence of spaces. Even when visitors enter museums to see only selected works, the museum’s larger narrative structure stands as a frame and gives meaning to individual works. (p. 12)

By giving the museum primacy, I believe Duncan downplays the less impressive and seemingly less visible (to art historians anyway) job being carried out by post-secondary education in preconditioning museum spectatorship. The “larger narrative
structure” is, to my mind, significantly more extensive than she allows, and its ability to delimit the discourse on art and contain its potential to proliferate meanings reaches far beyond the interior of the museum. Duncan vividly portrays art museums and public galleries as teaching machines, but it must be asked if the autonomy she affords them is attainable or sustainable. Is it reasonable or justifiable to study the efficacy of the museum as an ideological apparatus in the so-called “liberal democratic state” in isolation from other complementary apparatuses in the rest of society? Is it credible that training in sacramental aesthetics or ceremonial citizenship could or would be relegated to a single venue? Even if the inquiry were restricted to major institutions alone, isn’t it implausible that schools and the media go unremarked and unconsidered?

**Why does any of this matter?**

My total experience teaching art history surveys amounts to around sixteen years. Four of those years were spread over two decades, but the last twelve (since 1994) have been consecutive and continuous (including summers). One consequence of this recurrent, though sometimes sporadic, involvement is that—if I include my dealings with similar courses as a student—I’ve been taking or teaching a survey or surveys (at times simultaneously) in each of the past five decades, starting in the 1960s. (If a statement like

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8 The term is from Louis Althusser’s celebrated essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971) and designates those institutional (in the broadest sense) forces that reproduce dominant ideologies through staging subjectivity and managing consent rather than through coercion.
that doesn’t make me feel old, I don’t know what will!) So, I’ve pondered them from multiple vantage points (sometimes concurrently); conformed (unwittingly or unwillingly) to their designs and configured them; worked within their limitations and determined them; met their requirements and set them.

Therefore, a considerable amount of my studying and working life has been spent negotiating this predictable instructional landscape. It’s consequential for me, then, because of the investment I’ve made in it up to now and the stake I retain. My increasing interest in cultural, visual and educational studies: in their intersections and interactions, has motivated an investigation into art history’s premiere courses and the taut grip they maintain and strive to impose on viewing and interpreting images. Theories of culture (mainly French and British) with their persuasive (and useful) analyses of language, institutions, ideology and subjectivity (subjectivization, subjecthood, subjection) have assisted in illuminating art, art museums, art scholarship and the normative narration of art’s story by art historians. This has enabled theorists of visual culture (mostly American) to apply the precepts of culturalism (especially social constructionism, genealogy, discourse, deconstruction and reflexivity) to the task of elucidating the visual object as a locus of exchange; a sight/site where procedures of/for picturing and signifying are activated and negotiated—both individually and socially. The resulting implications are manifold and sweeping, not solely for reconsidering what we look at and when, where, how and why we look, but, in addition, for revising and re-visioning ourselves as lookers, thinkers and teachers.
What pedagogical justification is there for impugning the art history survey’s standing as the “natural” and accepted interpreter of visual representations?

Diversity and multiculturalism, empowerment, ethics and empathy are buzzwords; part of a lingo that has, through abuse and overuse, become clichéd. However, as a teacher in two establishments with much larger contingents of marginalized and disadvantaged learners than regular colleges and universities, this vocabulary isn’t banal or trite to me. In classic Bourdieuan terms, acquisition of cultural capital reproduces an elite worldview and suppresses difference. Claiming that a single unqualified declaration such as this one accounts for what art history surveys do and how they do it would be as superficial and reductive as I believe they are—at their worst. Yet blunt simplicity alone doesn’t preclude an utterance from being illuminating or edifying. Isn’t it worthwhile to ask what learning might resemble if we put our energies into expanding interpretive possibilities instead of reducing them; if we encouraged thoughtful and provocative responses rather than recoiling from them; if we respected and validated the worldviews of communities and belief systems other than our own (or what we’ve been conditioned to accept as our own) in lieu of slighting or discounting them?

Lawrence Grossberg (1994) calls for a critical pedagogy along these lines:

a pedagogical orientation that is attuned to and informed by theory, but that doesn’t presume method, prejudge direction or predict outcome. Approaches suggest themselves or emerge; they are assembled and/or disassembled, collated, collapsed and/or collaged. This is an affective pedagogy, a pedagogy of possibilities (but every possibility has to risk failure) and of agency. It refuses to assume that either theory or politics, theoretical or political correctness, can be known in advance. It’s a pedagogy which aims not to predefine its outcome (even in terms of some imagined value of emancipation or democracy) but to empower its
students to begin to reconstruct their world in new ways, and to rearticulate their future in unimagined and perhaps unimaginable ways. It is a pedagogy which demands of students, not that they conform to some image of political liberation nor even that they resist, but simply that they gain some understanding of their own involvement in the world, and in the making of their own future. Consequently, it neither starts with nor works with a set of texts but, rather, deals with the formations of the popular, the cartographies of taste, stability, and mobility within which students are located. It does not take for granted the context of specific cultural practices nor the terms within which they produce effects. It is a pedagogy which draws unexpected maps of the possibilities of and constraints on agency as it intersects with both everyday life and the social formation. (p. 18)

Criticality is required, and hospitality, geniality, humor are beneficial. But humility, acceptance and consideration are indispensable. Kenneth Mostern (1994) apprises the situation well.

the critical pedagogue is always someone who teaches from where the student is at. This does not mean that the teacher denies his or her pedagogical intentions or specific expertise, but merely that s/he respects the myriad expertise of the students that s/he does not share. (p. 256)

Gaining access to these abilities depends on a stimulating, non-threatening and collaborative environment in which students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own and each other’s learning. Instructors need to be enthusiastic but not overbearing and sensitive to the unique dynamics of the group. Creating a space where everyone has an equal opportunity to participate requires teacher/facilitators to shut some speakers down (including themselves) so that the shy or reluctant student can be drawn out. Developing an intuitive grasp of who is thick or thin-skinned requires a willingness to take risks, to fail and to beg forgiveness. All of these activities contribute to a common goal of advancing the interests of the collective by boosting the confidence of its least assertive members. In my experience, efforts along these lines pay huge dividends. However, authoritarianism, arrogance; inflexibility, intolerance; the dogmatic and the
doctrinaire (in ourselves) have to be confronted and addressed. Strangely enough, judging from the few faculty meetings I’ve attended where pedagogical concerns are aired, every one of my teaching colleagues has none of these traits to deal with because they dealt with them long ago, and they never have those problems now. Maybe I should be grateful to be confronted by self-awareness on this scale and praise my good fortune to be working in a place where students are given so much responsibility for their own learning. But it’s tricky to reconcile such blithe assurances with the complaints I hear from students and what I witness in classrooms. And whenever I propose sharing strategies, pooling resources, teaming up or just dropping by, there are no takers. Orientation towards—and dedication to ideological critique—might be laudable, but they’re nowhere near enough. An openness is mandated that only perpetual unlearning and relearning can achieve. Grossberg (1994):

the elitism of so much critical work is not defined by its theory or even by its esoteric vocabulary. People are uninterested, not because they can’t do the work—in most cases, the so-called jargon is in the dictionary—but because they see no reason to; they don’t care about the questions we ask. The elitism of intellectuals comes, not merely from our assumption that we already know the answers, but even more from our assumption that we already know the questions. It would, however, be too easy to assume that we simply need to ask our students what the questions are. We need to use our authority, mobilized through a pedagogy of risk and experimentation, to discover what the questions can be in the everyday lives of our students, and what political possibilities such questions open up. We have to be willing to enter the terrain of everyday life, the terrain of dispersed Others, in order to make sense of the realities of their (our) lives. Only then can we prize open already existing contradictions, “thereby renovating and making critical an already existing activity”. (Gramsci, cited in Grossberg, p. 20)
What attracts me to this passage is Grossberg’s recognition that a questioning attitude and the formulation of appropriate, applicable questions is vital to fostering curiosity, stimulating involvement and sparking activism. In this and the earlier excerpt I quoted, Grossberg implicitly acknowledges (through language accentuating evocation and suggestion; the possible and the probable) that queries are admirable objectives in and of themselves; that their merit and appeal exceeds their utility; that they’re more than hastily improvised tools to be exploited once, tossed away and forgotten. Our society is plagued, in my estimation, by an instrumentalist mindset related to the widely held belief that there is a technological solution to every predicament and a scientific explanation for every mystery. Consequently, the purpose of thinking, studying and doing research is equated with solving puzzles and discovering the underlying causes for phenomena. Discovering or uncovering the “facts” will fulfill a quest for transparency by removing ambiguity and contradiction from the world; by rendering it explicable and self-evident.

A completely explicable universe—without secrets, overt, prosaic, unambiguous—is the last place I’d want to live. Nor am I convinced it should be the utopian objective of education and educationalists. Many years ago, as an undergraduate, I read John Holt’s riveting indictment of North American schooling, How Children Fail (1964). Holt’s sharply rendered image of a philosophy of teaching predicated on the presumption that “filling in the blanks” was a praiseworthy activity and had some meaningful relationship to thinking and learning; intelligence and aptitude, was startling. His condemnation of the “cult of the right answer” and our society’s commitment to it left an indelible impression. We pay an inordinate amount of attention to—and place our trust in—answers, definitions, explanations; evincing a belief that every question is
answerable and that, while there is an endless supply of wrong answers, there's a single correct answer, and it is wholly and incontrovertibly accurate and true. This revelation simmered in a stew of misgivings and disillusionments until I had my next opportunity to teach, and, for over two decades I've organized every lesson around questions, performing my distrust of clever retorts and glib replies in the interests of insistent skepticism and scrupulous qualification.

Are there tactics that are particularly useful for highlighting the modalities of supervising and surveying?

Mary Schmelzer (1993) affirms the unsettling potency of questions and their disruptive potentiality. Pondering how they're composed, framed and positioned, she considers the resounding repercussions of querying the unquestioned and the unquestionable.

Asking students questions that call their expectations into question changes students. Who told them they should be comfortable? What is it to be comfortable? Why is the meaning of a text more significant than any other of its attributes? How can what an author meant when she wrote something be available to a reader? What constitutes meaning? Does the author always know what he means? Can anyone say what he means? If nothing is taken for granted, everything is open to speculation. When students take these kinds of questions seriously, they begin to reshape their world and their panoptic position. They are less able to tick off the answers on an evaluation sheet when they see how inside a set of unexamined assumptions the expectations of questioners are; they take their questioning to other classrooms (thus introducing a virus into the network). Once this happens, such students no longer see only from the position that the system reserves for them; they can focus, instead, on the system itself and disrupt the circulation of power. (p. 135)
Interjecting my instructions for the first Web Discussion in Fine Arts 104, one of two art history surveys I teach may underscore affinities between the tensions Schmelzer plays up and those I accentuate; the techniques she advocates and those I employ. While she isn’t examining a text directly here, her attention to the paradoxical intermingling of interestedness and indeterminacyparallels my own.

Gardner’s (12th edition) is an improvement over earlier editions because it acknowledges how little is known about Paleolithic peoples and the objects they created. This said, I’d like you to consider the following two excerpts from the text (both on page 17) in context by reading the paragraphs immediately preceding and following them:

“The aim of the earliest painters was to create a convincing image of the subject, a kind of pictorial definition of the animal, capturing its very essence, and only the profile view met their needs.”

“But for Stone Age representations, no one knows what the artists had in mind.”

The first passage comes after a description of what’s known as the Apollo 11 plaque from Namibia, and the second is part of a discussion of a carved human figure with a feline head. Nonetheless, do you think the second statement contradicts the first? If not, how do you reconcile one with the other? Why do you think only two of thirteen reproductions of Paleolithic artifacts are from Africa? Is it significant that they are placed before any of the others, even though they date from a more recent time than several pieces that appear later in the chapter?

It’s fitting too that Schmelzer enlists a visual analogy—Foucault’s celebrated panopticon—to clarify the disposition and dispersal of the panoptic gaze in the modern university to discipline the disciplines.

Its [panopticism’s] operation is distributed to every body in a system of power relations that constitute an institution. It works pervasively and invisibly. Every I in that system becomes an eye that sees what the institution asks it to see, in a request so naturalized that it often little more than a subliminal echo. Panopticism blinds to other ways of seeing and controls gazes and gazers. It most blinds a body to its own objectification, to its having become a site and a sight line. Moreover, panopticism seems to work most efficiently when bodies are in opposition. (p. 128)
Art history classes—as they're regularly disposed and conducted—are exemplary (if aberrant) panoptic regimes, enforcing the regimentation and reinforcing the regimens of panopticism. Routine equipment consists of two slide projectors with carousel trays, at the back of a rectangular chamber, a screen with a podium on one side at the front and banked rows of chairs or desks. Since the hall is ordinarily dark or darkened, teacher and pupils are limited in their capacity to monitor each other. Nominally, concentration is directed towards the screened (and pre-screened) images, but the I/eye in this “show and tell” is the art historian’s, and amateur viewers (emulators) watch themselves watching. As in Schmelzer’s scenario, this ideologically sophisticated permutation doesn’t replicate Bentham’s tower; the operations and connotations of concealment/exposure and invisibility/visibility have been transformed.

A carceral correlation might be posited between image and observer, but here control is maintained mostly by manipulating accessibility and monopolizing authority. Art history and the art historian regulate the field of vision, and knowing is equated with speaking; exposure with exposition; disclosure with display; revelation with research. A scopic regime is instituted in which interactions between spectacle and spectator are specified through strictly circumscribed conditions of spectatorship. The

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9 The art history professor is regulated by institutional and disciplinary discourses, but has some capacity to maneuver within these and within the space of the classroom. The student is restrained and constrained by her assigned position as neophyte, her subordinate role in the hierarchy and by the chair (Her only options are to withdraw attention, be contentious or leave).
demonstration/ritual of the slide lecture, in turn, regulates and reinforces the survey’s
invocation of the archive and its enunciation of doxa.

As a Web instructor, I communicate with another person sitting at a computer
whose visual resources are photographs—in the text or online—and whose linguistic
materials are the textbook, the course materials and Web sites. Hence, Gardner’s Art
Through the Ages is the supreme arbiter, and—as designated by the curriculum—my post
is that of acolyte to its authors: the high priests of art. This is a mantle I refuse to don; a
circumstance that causes consternation and irritation among many of my students. Rather,
I encourage them to pore over photos and descriptions; to tease out anomalies and
discrepancies; to bring their own thoughts and reactions into play; to suggest alternative
avenues for relating to and understanding the images; to mull over what’s emphasized in
the prose they’re reading and what’s downplayed or ignored; to speculate on why these
priorities are in place and not others; to reflect on whether or not that’s significant and if
they decide it is, what it could mean.

Why should we be concerned about the discourse of art, reproduction of power in
the cultural field and their combined capacity for containing difference? Today’s
art history survey texts already touch on theoretical and methodological matters in
their introductions. Wouldn’t expanding on this and profiling selected theories at
strategic spots be sufficient? Isn’t directing new queries at old art enough?

I’ve addressed the first of these above. Critical pedagogy furthers the aims of
cultural studies by complicating allegedly uncomplicated readings and problematizing
supposedly straightforward and unproblematic facts or truths. Stokstad (1995) was almost
certainly the most “theoretical” of survey textbooks prior to the appearance of The
Oxford History of Western Art (Kemp (Ed.), 2000). Indeed, art history survey texts seem
to have been almost immune to theory. That’s why *The Oxford History* appears, at first, to be an anomaly. Edited by Martin Kemp, Oxford’s entry is an emendation of the survey that takes the dramatic and unprecedented action of dispensing with a periodization that had been virtually mandatory. Kemp’s bold innovation is to divide his volume into what he calls “five big phases”, explaining that these “have been selected specifically to serve the history of art, not history in the broader sense or other branches of history” (p.5).

Given that three of the events determining Kemp’s arrangement: the fall of Rome in 410, its sack in 1527 and the First World War “could [as he puts it] serve as markers in many branches of Western history” (p. 5), this proviso speaks to me of the delicate dance Kemp is performing. Rationalization and mollification are both in order because *The Oxford History* is an unmistakable departure from the global introductions we’re accustomed to as well as to their counterparts that are devoted exclusively to the western tradition.

Earlier in his “Introduction” (pp. 2-3), Kemp tackles the task of defining “art” and “western” by confirming his dedication to aesthetics and humanism while arguing their practical utility for his project. However, it’s doubtful if any amount of forelock-tugging will excuse or justify his frequent forays into the applied arts or the noticeable absence of biographical detail on individual artists to hardliners. Veering away from traditional

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10 Of this group, Laurie Schneider Adams’ *History of Western Art* (1994) is widely known and commonly used.
“style-driven history” (p. 4) and closer to visual studies, each of Kemp’s “phases” sets the stage for between seven and thirteen short essays on unconventional themes authored by art historians from a pool of more than fifty. Their research interests are diverse, ranging from archaeology and architecture to design and decoration to photography and sculptural documentation to linguistics and artspeak to the art market and seventeenth-century forgeries. Here, it would seem that the danger posed by interdisciplinarity is countered with intradisciplinarity. Kemp’s museological references to “a kind of extensive visual tour” might extend some reassurance though. Despite protestations that the jaunt is “not so much through a procession of individually ‘great’ works, but through juxtapositions that create visual environments”, richly contextual re-creations like these are instant reminders of period rooms—featured in scores of museums that adhere to the universal survey mold.

Kemp’s experiment is without doubt a laudable addition to the reference shelf of anyone who’s curious about what an art history, informed by and mindful of visual culture, might resemble. I’d venture to say, however, that it would be almost impossible to arrange a course around. It could enhance curriculum nicely, and I can anticipate assigning its more provocative readings to stimulate lively and fruitful discussions. I’m tempted to ask, though, what the point is of preserving aesthetics, style and the humanist orientation that Kemp is so determined to defend. Why restrict the contributors to art

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11 Part Two (pp. 68-177) is entitled “Church and State: The Establishing of European Visual Culture”.
historians? Is there a rationale (aside from territoriality) that precludes opening this conversation up to an unprecedented and unanticipated extent? Why can’t we admit that visual stimuli affect every one of us and that the most intriguing and incisive observations often come from viewers without the benefit (?) of diplomas and degrees?

What is the broad transformative potential of moving beyond the artfully crafted and constricted conceits governing visual invention and reception that have been—and are—promoted by art history surveys?

It should come as no surprise that I anticipate generous gains and negligible losses from taking a step which, in my judgment, is long overdue. Inclusion on an impressive scale is made possible and higher levels of participation are enabled than ever before. Starting from where students are and exploring the visual environment they/we are exposed to every day engages and excites them like nothing else. Being frank about the arbitrariness of hiving the visual off from other sensory input is an excellent place to begin. It’s a truism that we can’t study everything at once, but treating anything in isolation doesn’t tell us much either. Our apprehension of the visual is minimally physical, maximally cerebral and overwhelmingly cultural. It is substantially produced through a peculiar, locatable, historically developed and socially inflected visuality. Images impinge on our consciousness and are rendered meaningful as a result of complicated and elaborate processes. Allusive and elusive, they resist confinement and containment, and detaching them from their opulent embeddedness in the cultural world denatures and denudes them. Sturken and Cartwright (2001):

We feel that it is important to consider visual culture as a complex and richly varied whole for an important reason: when we have an experience with a particular visual medium we draw on associations with other media and other areas of our lives informed by visual images. (p. 2)
Sturken and Cartwright’s *Practices of Looking* stresses that vision is an embodied performance predicated on acquired skills and learned behaviors. Lacking in the literature on visual representations (simply because *that*’s what it is) are instances of how vision is performed; how picturing is done; how envisioning occurs outside of dominant groups. Over the past three or four decades, some scholarly attention has been diverted to the gendering and gendered gaze. Even here, though, the discussion is overburdened by white middle-class art historians. Recently, queer looking and queering the activities of looking have attained a certain prominence. Once again however, this titular expansion has been censured for treating queerness as an ethnically and socio-economically consistent condition. And it must be said that the field of visual culture/visual studies has been roundly and soundly criticized for the same reason. Nonetheless, I place my faith for gestational and generational change in a pedagogy of visual culture: reflexive, critical and performative, and its capacity to unleash the pesky virus alluded to by Mary Schmelzer (1993), an organism that infects and inflects students with justifiable skepticism and discerning disbelief.
EPILOGUE

In Margaret Dikovitskaya's estimation, radical art historians in Britain presented challenges to art history during the 1980s that led eventually to the formation of visual culture in the mid 1990s. Rereading the wise and angry contributions assembled by A. L. Rees and Frances Borzello in *The New Art History* exactly twenty years ago, Dikovitskaya's hypothesis is not improbable. Nor is it likely that Rees and Borzello's choice of John Tagg's "Art History and Difference" (pp. 164-171) as their final offering (salvo?) was offhand or fortuitous. As a faculty member at the University of Leeds, Tagg directed the nation's first MA program in the Social History of Art (founded by T. J. Clark in 1978) for five years (1979-1984). Who, then, was better positioned to deliberate on that initiative's successes and failures?

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1 If you're wondering if you somehow missed my conclusion—you didn't. The closest approximation you'll find in this document is the end of Chapter 5. These last two sections reinforce an ongoing and undiminished commitment to circularity and indeterminacy.

2 She credits Nicholas Green and Frank Mort's "Visual Representation and Cultural Politics" (1982) with "offer[ing] a concept of visual culture"; of "go[ing] beyond the notion of the object as art and . . . [being] concerned about the continued practice of test-based disciplines that focus on single texts of visual arts, film, literature and so on" (Dikovitskaya, 2005, p. 20).
The debate [over art history] has not just lain in the realm of theory. It has been institutional and it has had a history . . . we are going to have to understand art history as itself a cultural practice, and concern ourselves with more awkward questions of where and when it is done, by whom and for what purposes (p. 168) . . . No singular strategy can do anything but conceal the inherent complexities and the necessary diversity of response. What emerges most strongly, however, is the need to grasp the role within the state, in its national and local manifestations, of the cultural practices and institutions of which we are a functional part. Indeed, it only makes sense to talk of a cultural intervention and struggle in relation to societies which have developed certain forms of the state and in which governmentality rests, at least in part, on the effect of a range of cultural institutions in securing the social relations on which the social formation depends. (p. 171)

Remnants of an unrecoverable past, Tagg’s sentences are cited here, not in the guise of a “link” to vanished thoughts, nor to commend his—or their—prescience. Conditioned by his enmeshment in situations and conditions that were mutable and shifting as he wrote, Tagg’s words persist. Yet, they acquire appropriateness or applicability in this textual context only if and when I invest them with either or both. Instead, my choice, at this instant, is to endow the quotation with emotive energy; to read it as a reminder of art history’s “tragic flaw”. Trapped within its own hierarchical (“art”) and utopian (“history”) terms of reference, art history was/is ontologically irreconcilable with the aspirations of many of its dissident practitioners. From early in the last century when art history integrated into British and North American academies, this philosophical deadlock became more and more evident. Apologists have tried to mystify or justify the
standoff (Keith Moxey (1994) pleads its utility as postmodern paradox and/or rhetorical rebarbative), but, in spite of everything, it remains; insuperable and insupportable.

If anything, my distrust of history is even greater than my skepticism over art. Inevitably however, I’ve been forced to deal with historical contingencies: diverging and converging histories; the variant and variable discourses and discursivities of ideas, institutions, institutional instruments, individuals. Superseding these has been my concern for the pedagogical sphere; the art history survey as conserved, consigned and consumed; the activity/act of teaching and the teacher as actor/subject on/of art history. Goaded by a perception (which has been amply confirmed) that these matters have a negligible presence in the literatures of art history and visual culture, I was determined to launch into this underexplored territory. What I set out to do was to expose and interrogate these substantial deficits, to identify (construe) their import for pedagogy and to propose

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3 As discussed in Chapter One, art and history are essentialist and totalizing by definition. Conflating them into one category sets in motion a perpetual, self-referential and perplexing circularity. Art historians have been arguing over the qualities that determine “art-ness” (recently manifest in a rash of titles defending transhistorical standards of aesthetics and beauty. Three among them, all from 2001, are Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics [B. Beckley & D. Shapiro (Eds.)] On Beauty and Being Just [E. Scarry] and Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth-century Art [W. Steiner]) and whether art has—or can have a separate and viable history—(theorizing art and other philosophical musings tend to overshadow contemporary disputes over history or historiography in these. Again, three titles will have to suffice: The End of the History of Art [H. Belting, 1987], Art has No History! [J. Roberts, 1994] and “Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History” [W. Davis, 1994].) for decades with no end in sight.
remediation. Already ambitious, there could be no thoughts (can there ever?) of “doing justice”; of completion or of resolution.

Curiously perhaps, what hasn’t garnered (pace Foucault) as much consideration as it might have here are the relations (often ponderous) between institution and pedagogue; the capacities and constraints disclosed and imposed by an institution’s negotiations with its most and least powerful stakeholders and constituents. It’s not inappropriate then to grant penultimate pride of place to a striking parallel between how undergraduate art history surveys and graduate programs in visual culture bring near-identical benefits to those institutions that house and deploy them. Visual studies graduate programs have been—and are being—exploited by university administrators in the United States to avoid hiring new faculty (Dikovitskaya, 2005, p. 99). It’s more than a little ironic that abandoning a quixotic fixation on coverage and unsettling the canon is prudent (or parsimonious) at the post-baccalaureate level while its opposite: the all-inclusive juggernaut peppered with laudable “gems”, is the cautious or thrifty option in the undergraduate realm.
AFTERWORD

I can’t plead that this is an inconclusive thesis because it proceeds from—and advances—a definite point of view. What I do want to disavow though is finality, finalizing and finalization. Open-endedness is a prerequisite for everything I’m advocating here, and the dissertation is, if nothing else, a volley against closure. Until you set out to consolidate your thinking by composing a treatise of sorts, it might honestly be said that you’re not sure who to admire. Anyone who has stuck with me this far won’t be at all surprised that I’m choosing to end (I don’t deny that ends are special and poignant; my point is not that they shouldn’t be marked or honored, but that we must appreciate the demarcation and the celebration as contrived and endowed.) by referring to Donald Preziosi. Endings and our addiction to resolutions, to neatness; to the tidy wrapping up and tucking in of loose ends have to be met with extreme caution. Preziosi has proposed that the fiction of art history is a Doppelgänger of the bourgeois realist novel (Preziosi, 1998, p. 140). They share identical fixations on acquisition, evolution and outcome. These middle-class niceties are perpetuated in products of popular culture like Hollywood movies which repeat nineteenth century plots and dénouements—a circumstance consolidated by the museum and the art history survey in their emplotted imprisonment of images.
References


Appendix A: Questionnaire on Teaching Art History Surveys

1. Do you currently teach an art history survey course or courses? (Y/N)

2. Do you enjoy teaching it/them. (Y/N)

3. Please expand on this a bit. What do you like or dislike about it/them?

4. Do your course outlines follow a chronological narrative (e.g. prehistoric Europe, Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Medieval Europe, Renaissance Italy, etc.)? (Y/N)

5. If you adhere to this basic structure with some deviations, what prompted the changes? Describe one instance of a departure you consider important.

Are you using a standard survey textbook or textbooks? If so, which one(s) and why?

6. If not, why did you make this decision? What do you use instead? If it’s a course pack (or course packs) does it (do they) include readings from areas other than art history?

Please provide the titles and authors of two articles or excerpts (from any field) for each survey that you consider especially useful or valuable and a sentence or two on each explaining your reasons for these selections.

7. If you’ve organized your course content using a different model (from the survey), why did you make this change? How would you classify the curriculum you’ve put in its place? (Choose one.)
   a. aesthetic
   b. stylistic
   c. technical
   d. thematic
   e. conceptual
   f. other

Please provide a brief explanation
8. Which of the following terms best characterizes your course in its present form?

(Choose one.)

a. traditional art history
b. critical art history
c. visual culture
d. visual studies
e. visual anthropology
f. media and communication studies
g. cultural studies
h. other

Please add explanatory comments if necessary.

9. If you had the time and resources to reconceive and reformat this course completely, what would be its most significant difference from what you’re teaching now?