

Adapting Techniques of Studio Critique for Arts Management Pedagogy

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At a minimum, Arts Management intersects with the fine and performing arts, art history, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, cultural economics and management. Each of these areas has evolved distinct canons and delivery systems. Depending on the bundling they have embraced, arts management programs have different emphases, in addition to the fact that degrees encompass BA, MA, MFA, MS, MBA or PhD options. Here is a selection of program titles:

Art Business; Arts Management; Arts Leadership; Arts Administration; Visual Arts Administration; Theater Management; Music Management; Arts and Media Administration; Arts Administration and Policy; Cultural Policy and Management; Creative and Cultural Management; Arts, Entertainment and Media Management; Cultural Resource Management; Cultural Production; Management of Cultural Assets and Activities; Cultural Economics and Cultural Entrepreneurship; Arts and Heritage: Policy, Management and Education; Economics and Management for Arts, Culture and Communication; Festival Producing and Management; Cultural Tourism; Cultural Studies and Entrepreneurship; Creative Industries. (1)

With minor appearances of urban development/creative industries inflected terms such as entertainment, tourism, entrepreneurship and ‘creative’ in adjective form sprinkled about, one frequently recurring program title term is culture, chiefly characterizing the humanities side of curriculum, and management in the predominantly administrative quarters. One ubiquitous reference, that to art(s), stands for what is often least present in curricula, art history and theory, as well as for something that appears to be largely absent, references to

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art practices, in spite of the fact that a good number of students in the field do have a background in art history and as practicing artists. In that light it seems that it could be promising to explore Fine Arts pedagogies for the delivery of elements of Arts Management curricula. In a first step towards that exploration, the department of Arts Administration and Policy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago has begun to introduce a modified studio critique process into graduate thesis preparation and assessment, taking advantage of a school-wide studio critique week scheduled towards the end of each semester. Through that, traditional academic symposium style presentations followed by Q &A's at the conclusion of individual advising cycles have been replaced by two sets of 45 minute, public, in-depth presentations to and conversations with a group of professionals in the field.

The following two sections about Arts Pedagogies and Management Pedagogies will specifically focus on juxtapositions of techniques by which professional practice is taught in academic contexts with other academic traditions, eventually co-locating critique and reflective critical thinking as desirable methods that are needed to supplement a more technological rationality.

Arts Pedagogies

As a visual artist who teaches in an arts administration program situated in an art school, I am interested in using my art specific knowledge to inform arts management pedagogy. What it is that artists know and how they know it are of course contested questions. (2) Until fairly recently, Marcel Duchamp's dictum could be seen as typical: "All his [the artist's] decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out" (Lebel 1959, p. 77). Duchamp relegated the evaluation of the results of the artist's intuitive work - objects or performances - to posterity. This is where literary language has its place, spoken and written. It can be observed when peripatetic docents give tours in museums, both lecturing to and interacting with audiences in front of the artworks. Seminars and lectures take place in schools and museums, often looking at reproductions from a lectern. Pitches are presented as items are paraded at auction. Sales conversations happen in the back rooms of galleries. Critics and historians publish reviews, articles and books. But in spite of

Duchamp's provocative statement, thinking, speaking and writing is very much at the center of art making.

Artists' letters are published, often posthumously. Artists' statements are an extensive genre of art writing, and artists increasingly publish critical writing. In addition, a variety of verbal exchanges take place regularly in and around art making as well, each has conventions attached. The artist talk is an often rather formal presentation, accompanied by a sequence of digital images, about a body of work by an artist to an audience. It occurs in conjunction with exhibitions, as part of teaching programs, or as a job talk. It often is followed by a question and answer session with those in attendance. Moderated conversations between artists and curators, or artists and writers, are an extension of that genre, shifting the burden - or the opportunity - to organize the narrative away from the artist. Studio visits - visits to sites of art production, by critics, curators, dealers, patrons, colleagues, in groups or individually, allow for any number of discussions, from interpretation of the work at hand to career planning. Studio critiques, critiques, or short, crits, are related to studio visits, but with the more explicit goal to critically assess and contextualize the artwork and an artist's trajectory. Critiques are a central and complex pedagogic tool in arts education.

The basic elements of a critique are:

- A designated site - this might be a cleaned up classroom, a gallery, a hallway, or the student's studio environment.
- A designated time - for example a regularly scheduled, biweekly, mid-term or end of semester event, or a singular meeting. Durations are often strictly limited to 30 – 60 minute time slots, but may also be open-ended.
- One or more artworks in any medium, in process or completed, formally arranged and displayed, for example chronologically or thematically, or informally presented in the context of other objects.
- The student who is working on or has completed the artworks must be present, ready and willing to enter into a conversation.

- An individual or a group of experts, whose task is to act in response to the work at hand. They may be peers or faculty, or external visitors, artists, art historians, curators and others. Common formats are individual critiques with one advisor or visiting artist, and group critiques, either as part of a seminar during which the instructor acts as a moderator for peer conversations, or as formal event at which a panel of experts interacts with one student while other students observe, at times take notes for their peers, or may be invited to contribute to the conversation.

Standard elements of interaction include the following:

- The artist may choose to give an introduction to the work that is on display, including mention of motivation, inspiration, and the work's genesis.
- S/he may ask to receive feedback on specific elements, or may request a 'cold reading' of the objects at hand, in which case no introduction is presented.
- Often, stated intentions and observed results are compared by the visitor(s).
- Suggestions may be offered for alternate approaches, both intellectual and material.
- Practice and results are situated in relation to historical and contemporary art world contexts, often in reference to the specific areas of expertise represented by visitors.

Critiques are expected to accomplish certain tasks, both in furthering and assessing student work:

- They should describe and help to clearly perceive the various material, tactile, visual, auditory and other qualities of works that are presented.
- They are expected to aide the student in clarifying the methods and processes of art making s/he employs, and the implications those processes have for reading the work.
- They help discern and contextualize the motivation for making these particular works/types of art, mobilizing the student's broader interests and contexts, both personal and intellectual.
- They may be expected to help determine the quality of work/assess the promise a student shows, also as part of advancement and/or graduation requirements.

Successful critiques may leave those involved refreshed and elated, having collaboratively accomplished an affective and intellectual exploration that benefits not just the artist at its center, but all participants. Of course these are the critiques that are of interest.

But a critique can also go wrong. The work may be in very early stages and not warrant much discussion yet, the student may be ill prepared to present it or not ready to listen and engage if insecure or even fearful, panelists may be impatient, insufficiently attentive, prejudiced, self-centered, or just poorly matched, peers may be disinterested or inarticulate. Thus, critique is met with a variety of attitudes. Art Historian Howard Singerman (Singerman 2002), for example, presents a dismal picture indeed, lamenting critique's current function as name-dropping occasion that allows students to situate their work in art market mapping exercises, which is a notch down from his earlier assessment of a cruel, personalized and psychologized “ad hominem” form of critique as a disciplining mechanism (Singerman 1999, p.211) in higher art education. Manuals are published to suggest proper procedure, to help protect students from such excruciating experiences.

Outside of higher education, a discourse is growing up around critique that looks at it in more fundamental ways. One reason for that is the burden on art education in primary and secondary schools to justify its existence and usefulness. For an analysis of critique in those terms, I will turn to community-based educator Elisabeth Soep, who has conducted an “analysis of critique as a window into the relationship between art and assessment and that between learning within and beyond school, build[ing] on 13 years of ethnographic research and discourse analysis carried out in more than 20 community-based youth arts collaboratives [...]” (Soep 2005, p.40) She finds that critique flourishes under the following conditions: "First, the outcome of the work at hand needs to matter enough to those involved [...]"(Soep 2005, p.58) While this seems obvious, it is crucial that all those who participate in a critique session are sincerely engaged. "Second, critique is most meaningful in situations where the criteria for judging are themselves subject to scrutiny, debate, and possible transformation. When standards are entirely predetermined and fixed, critique fails to identify new directions for aesthetic and intellectual projects [...]"(Soep 2005, p.58) What is stated here is that critique cannot follow a rote process. Both content

and format need to be open to reflection, and participants have to be free to engage in a discussion of the process itself, modifying it if necessary. "Third, accountability [...] circulates [...]"(Soep 2005, p.58) In addition, how a critique is conducted depends on the participant's ability and willingness to take responsibility, to step up to expressing their perceptions and associations - and to permit their peers to do the same thing. This can be aided by a moderator, who can read a group and is able to ensure that the lead can shift around a room. "Fourth [...] critique predictably emerges when the creative process itself requires a display or performance." (Soep 2005, p.58). She then reiterates, "assessment through critique does more than evaluate performance; it is itself performed." (Soep 2005, p.59). The crucial shift Soep introduces is one towards systemic self-reflexivity that emerges from a shared interest not in judgment against professional standards, but in the terms of the conversation itself - critique as a creative technique. This is compatible with an approach presented by Donald A. Schön in the 1980's (Schön 1983), paralleling situated, professional assessment in the arts and in management by describing processes of reflection-in-action that among other tools deploy generative metaphors and analogies from a repertoire of previously experienced situations, to both teach and solve problems. He opposes reflection-in-action with academic technological rationality and Positivist epistemologies that he perceives as dominant in the professional field of his time. Under this perspective, it could be stated that Arts Administration pedagogy could benefit from a more explicit integration of professional techniques into an academic framework, and that studio critique presents such a professional technique. At the same time, the relation of professional and academic procedures is subject to a reevaluation. In the following, a parallel challenge to academic traditions is presented.

Management Pedagogies

According to Michael Reynolds, it does not overstate matters to claim that traditional academic management instruction guards against encouraging strong habits of critical thinking. In his 1999 paper "Grasping the Nettle: Possibilities and Pitfalls of a Critical Management Pedagogy" he addresses a conundrum that arises if that tradition is adjusted. Clearly a proponent of a critical approach that explicitly calls out issues of power and social justice by, for example, "foregrounding the processes of power and ideology subsumed

within the social fabric of institutional structures, procedures and practices” (Reynolds 1999, p. 173), he nonetheless points to psychological stresses suffered by students

[...] as a result of the dissonance which was generated from critical reflection. These experiences included feelings of 'impostorship' - doubting one's worthiness to question the ideas of eminent scholars, feelings of 'lost innocence' as personal taken-for-granted were questioned and found wanting, despair in contemplating the consequences of undertaking a radical analysis of their professional context, and the experience of 'cultural suicide' – encountering other people's resentment or hostility to their new-found enthusiasm for critically questioning accepted practice (Reynolds 1999, p. 179).

In response to those effects, Reynolds proposes not to reduce critical approaches, but to challenge “[t]he academic tradition, which implies that ideas can be seen as separate from the person who holds them, hardly provides the support necessary for students who experience the more disruptive effects of engaging in critical reflection - anxiety, loss of self identity or marginalization.” (Reynolds 1999, p. 181). Following Giroux’s radical pedagogy (Giroux 1981), Reynolds centers on a call for pedagogic reflexivity – awareness of institutional structures along with a self-conscious undermining of teacher authority and respectful acknowledgement of student positions – to “achiev[e] consistency between content and method, avoiding the contradiction between a critically based curriculum and an educational method which has left the authoritarian nature of staff student relationships - assessment procedures included – undisturbed.” (Reynolds 1999, p. 180). From this pairing of critical content and process, students may emerge emancipated, able to engage critically and to address potentially threatening workplace demands for loyalty and even conformity as “ ‘tempered radical[s]’ [...] [who] stand for their beliefs without becoming marginalized, ‘struggling to act in ways that are appropriate professionally and authentic personally and politically’.” (Reynolds 1999, p. 182). Reynolds presents academic management studies as a discipline that encompasses both development and analysis of effective solutions to management problems and is beginning to embrace a critical, qualitative evaluation of its contexts. The conflict he pinpoints is caused by formal, academic theoretical instruction that discounts the psychological needs of students who will face vocational, real-world challenges.

Reynolds calls out psychological challenges that arise when critical analysis is introduced without further mediation into management education, in a context where students may not expect it. Critical analysis here means that personal and contextual assessment of texts and other situations are admitted. Contrary to that, art historian Singerman finds psychological stress in a situation that seems to use a flattened critique format, one that may favor management of art world allegiances and a regression into superficial psychologizing over the well mediated and highly individualized analysis art students might expect and would benefit from. Both findings support the benefits of contextual, collaborative and professionally inflected learning. Thus, it is of interest that Soep offers strategies to make studio critique beneficial again, by attending to its own, reflexive structures. With that, her understanding can be aligned with Reynold's proximity to Giroux's call for a 'discourse that affirms the critical but refuses the cynical, and that affirms hope as central to any sense of human agency and critical practice but eschews a romantic utopianism.'" (Giroux, Shannon, 1997, p.2). This meeting suggests that the structures of critique, carefully laid bare, can be fruitfully integrated into arts management pedagogy.

First Experiences - Adapting Studio Critique for Arts Administration Pedagogy

The department of Arts Administration and Policy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago offers a two-year MA in Arts Administration and Policy, and a three-year Dual Degree in Arts Administration and Policy and Modern Art History, Theory, and Criticism, jointly administrated with the Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism. The program is located in an art and design school, where studio critique is a central, pedagogic tool. Institution-wide, all faculty members have the opportunity, and most are obligated to participate in studio critiques at least once per semester. All current full time faculty members in the Department of Arts Administration and Policy have MFA degrees, some of us have taught in studio departments for many years and are thus intimately familiar with critique processes, having had both good and bad experiences. Thus, it did not seem to be far fetched to consider bringing studio critique into our program, something we pioneered in 2009. A good number of students in the field of cultural management have undergraduate or graduate degrees in visual art, and some have an ongoing artistic practice.

For those students, the process of critique is already familiar, but still needs to be translated into their new field of study. In the following, I am interspersing student comments on their critique experiences with my description of our processes and goals. Clearly, work remains to be done, but the trajectory is highly promising.

Our critique format has been directly modeled on the semester end graduate studio critiques that span a full week during which most classes are cancelled, allowing both first and second year MFAs to have critiques. Critique week is usually scheduled for the second to last week of the semester. Panels of 5-6 faculty members that may include external guests and one graduate student make the rounds on campus, interacting with each student in a setting deemed appropriate for the work, in most instances the student's studio or a screening room, sometimes a communal critique area. For graduating students, critiques often take place in their culminating, MFA exhibition.

In the Arts Administration and Policy Program, currently only second year graduate students who are working on their theses receive critiques during critique week, both in the fall semester during which initial thesis research takes place and in the spring semester just before thesis completion. In preparation for their own critiques in their second year, first year graduate students are asked to attend as observers (3). Each student presents pending/almost completed thesis projects and/or research to a panel of 4-6 experts, comprised of faculty members, including the student's primary thesis advisor who moderates and advocates where needed, and invited external visitors. Students are permitted to bring a guest expert of their own choosing, to join the panel in addition. They also assign a note taker from among their peers. By inviting first year students to observe and encouraging second year students to attend their peers' panels, we also hope to diminish the intimidation factor. According to feedback, this strategy largely succeeds.

My thesis panel fell in the middle of the three-day long presentation session. Thus, I was able to sit in on other classmates' panels the day prior to mine. This did wonders to allay anticipatory nervousness. My presentation was designed with the intention of appealing to the respondents' very diverse backgrounds, interests, and areas of expertise. It's almost like a new iteration of the classic joke set-up: "A contemporary Cuban Art historian, a

practicing visual artist/curator from Germany, an art critic based in Singapore, a social scientist focusing on racial politics, and an experimental jazz presenter sit in a room...what conversation do you have with them?" Ultimately, I realized that I never could have fully anticipated the discussion that followed my presentation—and this, in fact, ended up being one of my favorite aspects of the thesis critique and an important auxiliary lesson learned as I continue to craft language about this new arts organization for various audiences.

Our Thesis 1 seminar in the student's third semester also serves to prepare students for the critique process. We test out narratives and slide presentations, and consider which key information the panel needs to enter in a meaningful conversation. Soep's invested group needs to be actively created. The following student feedback reflects this point:

In my academic career, rarely—if ever—have I presented works-in-progress in a context similar to that of studio critiques. The possibility was enticing and I approached the trial run with many of the same questions I asked of the project itself. There was a certain amount of enhanced agency inherent to the situation that helped me engage with the material in a different way. Knowing fully well that it would be impossible to truly encapsulate all of the research and work I had done to this point within the context of a 20-minute public presentation, the question became more how much is necessary to lay the groundwork for a rigorous discussion about those aspects of my project that are difficult to grapple with on my own.

This is of course also helpful preparation for future, academic conference contributions. We dissect critique dynamics. That includes presentation demeanor and how to deal with fear of public speaking. Advised to be prepared to take charge of the critique situations, paralleling Soep's point that accountability circulates, students are encouraged to prepare questions to initially guide the panel discussion. The allotted presentation time is 15-25 minutes, with questions and discussion following, for a total of 45 minutes. 5-6 students are critiqued per day, over several days. The following feedback, also from a student, who had just participated in the first round of critiques, indicates that even more attention needs to be paid to this point.

Whereas I had understood critique as a defense, the professors saw it as a critical conversation [...]—a co-questioning of what was experienced during the critique. The panelists were aiming at asking questions *with* me, and not

directing them *at* me. I believe they were trying to make the critique experiential [...], which I was not prepared for. It is only in hindsight I have come to understanding process-oriented critiques as having emancipatory pedagogical implications as they may position the student in equal standing with the panelists in that the student is initiated as an expert of their specific field of research. While I believe this type of critique “as process” can be a powerful platform for personal and academic growth, a more in-depth participatory preparation process would be helpful.

The above comment addresses the shift from the expectations associated with a traditional, academic review, to the collaborative and performative practice that a critique situation enables. It may be the case that the only preparation for that aspect is to experience it repeatedly.

Another response is cautionary as well:

Although the panel seemed interested in the topic, I could tell that it was difficult to provide feedback. It seemed difficult to find an entry point into my topic and therefore the feedback was wide and varied and in the end not very helpful. Some questions seemed irrelevant while others seemed confusing. Some advice was spot-on and I would have liked to stay with one particular panelist. I felt that my problems were larger than the issues that were raised by my panel and wished that I had the presence of mind to steer the direction of the critique. Although my challenges were mentioned in the presentation, I feel like I should have stressed where I needed the most direction. I benefited more from follow-up interviews with the panelists and the feedback from my peers who watched the presentation than I did with the experience itself.

In this case, the student was not able to become accountable in the situation, while the moderator failed to introduce sufficient reflexivity on the process to turn it towards a more fruitful mode of inquiry on the spot. Still, the student managed to extend the conversation beyond the 45 allotted minutes and salvaged benefits through that - an example of self-reflexivity in action, even if delayed.

Instituted in the fall of 2009, feedback from the first generations of students that participated in the full process shows that, while initially intimidating to some, the format particularly helps to determine the range in which the individual student’s sets of interests,

inclinations and concerns confidently intersect with the multiplicity of voices, methods and stakeholders that comprise arts administration, while simultaneously modeling that breadth. In responding to a request for feedback, one student wrote:

Thesis proposal crit, although nerve-wracking, was very helpful. The points raised in the discussion helped me expand my research and clarified the thesis direction. The final crit was a different experience. I remember feeling a lot more confident about the process since we'd already presented our work at the proposal crit. For me it was more of an opportunity to present the work that I'd been working on for almost a year instead of looking for ways to make major changes to the thesis (although had any major changes been advised, I would have given them some thought).

The process leads to improved, personally relevant selections of field(s) of expertise and, forward looking, supports subsequent placement. This is supported by the following response:

I found the thesis proposal crits helpful in getting feedback to help shape the continued direction of my research for the second half of the year - it was a much-needed check-in point. It was very valuable having questions coming from a variety of perspectives to understand how different audiences (with different backgrounds) received my work. This was particularly useful for me since the purpose of my research was [to find out] how people from opposing fields interact and collaborate. It was also beneficial to practice presenting my research. One concrete lesson I learned about the thesis proposal crits is that the visual aids I selected actually distracted the audience from focusing on the questions I was grappling with in my thesis.

Critique, if managed well, offers a framework for an emancipatory self-reflexivity that can help establish a circle of colleagues, including both the entire cohort of students and the panelists. Thus its benefits extend beyond the traditional academic defense.

While some departments hold private critique meetings, the public nature of our critique week panels was absolutely crucial to its success. I certainly feel that I would not have benefited to the extent that I feel I did had I not attended nearly all of the 17 other presentations during that week. The variety of the 18 students in my class's interests became blazingly apparent during the entirety of critique week. Just as had been apparent throughout the course of the semester, we as students stand to learn much about our own projects when we are thinking through others' projects.

What I gather from the comments I collected is that those students benefited most from the critiques, who had been sufficiently enabled to grasp the performative nature of the critique. That means that a highly invested panel and the presenter worked together on the intriguing problem posed by the student, allowing for exploratory, playful, critical and speculative responses that are explicitly situated in intersection with the panelists sets of expertise. These observations are in line with Soep's four points, which can be summarized as investedness, self-reflexivity, cooperation or team-play, and performativity. One task is to further improve preparatory processes, both for students and participating faculty. Continued practice, accompanied by reflection, will serve that purpose.

Currently, a larger curricular restructuring discussion, now in its very early stages, explores teaching especially the management portion of the program in ways that reflect the interdisciplinarity, project focus and connection to the professional environment of the School's studio program even more closely. Further inclusion of critique will be closely tied to those developments.

Notes:

(1) Compare: Association of Arts Administration Educators, "Find a Program" page, <http://www.artsadministration.org/find> and Arts Management Network, "Course Directory" page, <http://www.artsmanagement.net/index.php?module=Education>

(2) Following a long hiatus after the first attempt to comprehensively address that question, by Alexander Baumgarten in this *Aesthetica* (1750), arts epistemologies are only recently finding interest, mainly in the context of the "Art as Research" discourse. See, for example, Sullivan, Graeme, 2010. *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*. Edition 2. Sage Publications, and Biggs, Michael and Karlsson, Henrik, 2010. *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*. New York: Routledge.

(3) The critique situation is limited to this setting, since it's further expansion would necessitate extensive curricular adjustments - for example giving first year MA students

access to individual advisors, as MFA students have. We are currently carefully exploring curricular changes across the program that are inspired by the studio situation.

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