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"On the Future of Art School": Store

ArtForum, Summer, 2007 by Rachel Withers

In 1993, in an essay reprinted in Frances Stark's Primer, compiled for the University of Southern California's recent symposium "On the Future of Art School"--an inspiration for Store's group show, which included work by Primer contributors Dexter Sinister and Mai Abu ElDahab, among others--Thierry de Duve sketched a pessimistic picture of contemporary art teaching. He argued that it was premised on a poorly understood deconstruction, "a symptom of the disarray of a generation of art teachers who have lived through the [postmodern] crisis of [creative] invention and have never themselves been submitted to the discipline of imitation [of canonical models]." This stance, he warned, risked forcing students into attitudes of postmodern suspicion before they'd yet constructed an artistic culture to deconstruct. A caricature, de Duve admitted; nevertheless, it seemed reborn in one of Chris Evans's goading contributions to Store's exhibition: An Anonymous Submission to the Exhibition "Tutor with an Idea," 2007, a gawkily modeled plaster sculpture of a human arm, crooked at the elbow and gesturing campily with a crumpled cigar. Cornered, drunk, at the pub, one might imagine, the prof drones on about Kippenberger and postdisciplinarity: Evans's work mocks the art-school authority figure while (if we accept de Duve's characterization) bodying forth aspects of the legitimating discourse the tutor is probably promulgating.

If this is the future of art school, the prognosis seems gloomy. Another Evans work, Coptalk, 2006, hits the nail on the thumb equally heavily. The artist organized police recruitment talks at various art schools; a documentary photo of the lecture to Manchester Metropolitan University art students suggests a good turnout. Coptalk raised the question, What working conditions do art schools implicitly teach art students to accept? Few of those MMU students, maybe none, will go on to make a living from art. All, one anticipates, will have been taught to question crude oppositional thinking and transgressive posturing. Police work

might offer excellent scope for the sustained practice of relational aesthetics. Why not? It frees one from the stress of making art while acting as one's own fund-raiser, publicist, curator, project manager, driver, guard, caterer, Web designer, and archivist, while holding down a paying job.

Ryan Gander's *Missing Slide Projector*, 2007, likewise casts a jaundiced eye over art-school practices. It replicates a Slade School of Art notice board, predictably arrayed with tutorial timetables, gallery flyers, and announcements about competitions and career sessions ("Fact: Artists are incredibly innovative [about making money]"). An architectural plan of a hypothetical, quasi-panoptic art-school building, conceived by Gander in collaboration with Bell, Travers, Wilson Architects, London, is partially printed over the various notices. The absurd circular maze centers on a central, apparently doorless, administrator's room--the dean's office? This center overlies a notice pleading for the eponymous projector's return. Gander's model has a hole in its heart.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

In contrast, an untitled work, 2007, by the duo Dexter Sinister (David Reinfurt and Stuart Bailey) eschews irony. A photocopier allowed visitors to copy portions of an aborted publishing project, Bernd Kluser and Katharina Hegewisch's useful-looking 1991 anthology *The Art of Exhibitions*, a collection of essays on thirty pivotal twentieth-century art shows. Also available were other Dexter Sinister-related texts, including Stark's *Primer*. In and of themselves, all excellent reads; and the project, an efficient exercise in the practical dissemination of critical ideas based on an avant-garde preference for exhibiting practices over objects, made a nice riposte to de Duve's dismissal of the contemporary art-school notions of critical attitude, practice, and deconstruction, showing his position to be merely modernism in bad faith.

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