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STATES OF EXCEPTION

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Just for a moment, let's consider one striking difference between an art academy and a military academy. In "The Means of Correct Training," an essay that Michel Foucault wrote at the time of his research into the punitive controls of the state over the bodies of its citizens, he itemizes the different behaviors that lead to punishment in military schools and remarks: "It was a question both of making the slightest departure from correct behavior subject to

punishment, and of giving a punitive function to the apparently indifferent elements of the disciplinary apparatus: so that, if necessary, everything might serve to punish the slightest thing; each subject finds himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality."[1]

The art school, on the other hand, is a coddling environment in which no disciplinary action per se is carried out—or so it would appear. It is an environment in which there would seem to be complete indulgence of the students' unique and eccentric expressivity. Even the most basic aptitudes involving physical skills of craft or intellectual abilities to formulate concepts are patiently indulged without leading to obvious punishment. Yet while the highly detailed levels of punitive cause are implicit in the practice of the military school's discipline, in the art school there are more lenient, yet nonetheless punishing, practices built into the training of the artist. The range of the student's expressions may be indulged, even at the risk that the work may dip below the bar of acceptable proficiency. But if the faculty is too patient or is even unable to say what is good enough because of the current state of aesthetic pluralism and indeterminacy, there is of course the gauntlet of the marketplace—should the young artist get that far. In fact, I'll argue that the ruthlessness of the market reaches into the art school, making implicit demands of acceptability as a "value-giving measure," as Foucault calls it, which confers either positive or negative status on the artists. Narratives of artistic strategy, logic, and "progress" are used within the art academy as measuring rods to appraise students' levels of potential and achievement, as well as to beat them with—meaning expulsion from favored circles, denial of grants, or withholding recommendations as assistants to established artists or to galleries or for teaching opportunities after graduation. These disciplinary measures aren't codified in a litany of standardized offenses and punitive actions, like Foucault's list culled from French histories of military schools, but are subtly imposed on the basis of visible signs of difference—difference that may be a matter of inferior talents and skills or difference that is more slippery, having to do with personality, inarticulateness, and other evidence of difficulty.

Despite the generosity of tolerance for the expression of artistic temperament, there is a minimal threshold of acceptable practice that is, after all is said and done, the basis of an insidious discipline that is ultimately ruled by the market, since the market now drives aesthetics more than the other way around. Furthermore, the rituals of studio critiques and the final thesis show, which remain standard procedure at art academies throughout the world, are by definition an exercise of power over the student. The final crit is essentially

juridical. The crit and thesis show don't level the hierarchy between teacher and student but affirm the faculty's authority for the purposes of guidance, which is in practice well intentioned on the scale of personal dynamics, while on the macro scale of the art world nevertheless remains a mechanism of adherence to established conceptions of art making in preparation for the executive domination of the marketplace. Am I overstating the case? In fact, don't graduating artists make whatever they please, transfixed before the private foundries of their imaginations? Perhaps. Yet with grinding regularity, the marketplace grants or sublates the privileges of success to its subjects, and so young artists enter the field.

No doubt, the liberal ideal of the art school as a laboratory free from the constraints of the world is advantageous to the ethos of the institution and the morale of its exclusive membership. But the ideal goes only so far. The behavior within art schools, as I say, may appear to allow any kind of experiment, but also as I say, indulgence is the luxury of those willing to ignore at their own risk the market and its powers of legitimation. (Even the temporary ebb of the market in its cycles of boom and contraction barely lessens its pull.) Especially in the United States, there is an enormous peril for art students who take on crushing financial debt for their M.F.A. and make art, if they're of the mind and ability, that sits outside the market's tastes—hobbling them as they enter a competitive pool so deep and thick with bodies that the world has never seen anything like it before. The debate over the predilections and sway of the market in relation to the purported cloister of the art academy admits nothing of this final truth: graduate-level students focused on their futures as artists may follow their own creative instincts, but they're rarely willing to deny themselves—and why would they?—the potential critical and financial opportunities of a world increasingly unable to parse fine degrees of quality and covetous of the seductions of celebrity and spectacle. The agonistic distinction between commercial interests and critical pathways of expression rings less true now. Precedents as far back as Marcel Duchamp, and after him of Pop Art and particularly of Andy Warhol, make these distinctions largely moot (though of historical interest)—even to artists focused on intellectual abstractions, on conceptual practices with little material production to sell, and on works that inhabit the rarefied domain of the spiritual.

The art school lives in a "state of exception"—a special use of the term. The phrase traditionally refers within legal and government circles to a "constitutional dictatorship" instituted in a time of social crisis, in which citizens have fewer democratic privileges and the government grants itself more of them.

There's a wonderful sentence written by Giorgio Agamben in his book on the subject in which he states that "as a figure of necessity, the state of exception therefore appears . . . as an 'illegal' but perfectly 'juridical and constitutional' measure that is realized in the production of new norms."[5] In other words, it safeguards by force its own norms, its own rules of production. By analogy, what I mean by the state of exception is that the art school becomes a de facto and paradoxical dictatorship of freedom for its student-citizens outside the realm of the everyday. The artist is granted the privilege of his or her creative prerogatives over and above the norms outside its walls. In a sense, this state of exception by dictum is given its permission by the mandate of modernism in which the deconstruction and disavowal of constraints on the imagination are considered the "constitutional" right of artistic exception that is inherent in modernism's investment in upheaval, rejection of the past, and invention—as every vanguard manifesto of the twentieth century reveals instantly.

To say this suggests that the art academy is an island or a fortress, but it relates (and has to relate even more strongly, as I'll discuss shortly) to various communities: the local cultural and civic communities; the local, national, and international professional communities, both physical and online; and the alumni community. These communities are invited to assimilate the parameters of the aesthetic experience provided by the art school. In this process of continual assimilation (at least in the idealized case), the communities vicariously or directly share in the academy's state of exception. The ambition for the school in providing this opened space of exception is to relieve the community of its daily habits of aesthetic conventions. Those habits for people outside the professional art world are typically inculcated through the media and the marketplace. For the cognoscenti within the art community, the current tastes of the market rule, along with art historical models that may preclude an open view of the newest expressions that appear below the market's radar.

But there is an important catch, a caveat that the presence of the art market forces on my idea of the art school's state of exception. In truth, this may turn out to be a false state of exception because the dominance of the marketplace holds the power to determine the course of artistic production—and does so with impunity to the judgments of the critical press and with curators often walking in lockstep with the most powerful collectors and art dealers. True, the ways that students are taught (the heritage of the Bauhaus model most obviously) are tied as inextricably to social and political influences as much as to the intrusions of the market. Yet the realpolitik of the art school is that its teachers and the reception of all artistic practices (including visiting artists who show

their art and influence student production) are subject to the acceptance of the marketplace, which is juridical in its powers. By the light of this logic, the school-as-laboratory, free from outside strictures, is not a real likeness or full description. The school only *seems* to be in a state of exception, and its myth of exception is a vestige of the Romantic cult of genius in which all true artists are imagined to live outside the impassive walls of social norms. Still, it seems to me that there is a middle ground between intention, appearance, psychological effects, internal morale, and realpolitik that must be figured into this equation of the actual status of exception.

So, a question: What is the obligation of the art school in its state of exception to a larger entity—for example, its situation within the larger bureaucracy of a university? Does the state of exception allow autonomy to the school if it's bound by the norms and bylaws of the university? This in turn presses the question of what academic freedoms are within the university, an institution (at least in the democracies of the West) that intends to be a bastion of intellectual freedoms. The truth is that the regulation of the production of students—as is the case with the Bologna Process in the European Union and with the standardized credits system toward graduation in the United States—impinges in laborious ways on this spectral promise of autonomy: teachers must satisfy state requirements; curricula must meet state and federal standards; budgets must go through layers of review and acceptance; facilities must meet standards for insurance purposes of liability; and so on. The state of exception becomes an ever more straitened ideal. As a blueprint for all art schools that want to be autonomous, nomadic, counter-bureaucratic, partially curricular or noncurricular, etc., the state of exception is a crucial concern lifted from the echelon of legalistic concern to the philosophical and back to the practical realm of execution.

What degree of exception the art school may have within the hegemony of the university or in keeping with obligations established by state and federal educational certification is a matter that leads to a certain preciousness, by which the "cloister" of the art school is in fact not a way to keep the world out but a way that the bureaucracy ensures that nothing escapes its binds. This isn't entirely disadvantageous. After all, the university *does* protect academic freedoms and takes on the threats of liability that those freedoms may incur. At the same time, the price paid is full autonomy, and so the state of exception is compromised, constrained, a contrived and bloated fiction. As I've noted, there are other impositions on the art academy's state of exception that can make it false—primarily the ultimate intrusion of the marketplace.

Within the school itself, this can be thought about in terms of the administration of knowledge.

From an essentialist perspective, the art school, as with every other school, is an administrator of knowledge. It is established not only to teach but to administer *what is to be taught*. A curriculum is a delimiting exercise of control, placing markers at the boundaries of "useful" knowledge and subtly impeding access to other knowledge through the apparatus of "busyness," by which the load of work demanded of the student precludes significant time to explore counter-knowledge; through the means of emphasis, by which ideological imperatives are fixed in the students' minds and make other ideologies appear less powerful, meaningful, moral, useful, expressive, and applicable; and through artistic practice, by which styles of expression picked up in the course of the curriculum's discourse and studio work exert their hold on the imagination. But this administration of knowledge isn't only exercised through the curriculum. It is exercised even more so in the pedagogy itself—the methodologies of teaching that shape the epistemological field and sanction certain speech acts while denying others their prestige.

In effect, the status of these speech acts and the methodologies that bring them into the epistemological field are managed through the halo effect of the marketplace. By this I mean that the constant need for new works by the market demands an infinitely diverse production of objects and visualized concepts, which are based on an endless vista of knowledge. These objects, concepts, and their variants are continually circulated and recirculated; they are like eddies that flow, crest, withdraw, and flow forward again. The nature of this flow is derived in part from the steady wave of practitioners introduced into the art school's knowledge-acquisitive environment. The market drives the organs of visibility: press, exhibitions, critique, collection. Through these means, the market shapes which practitioners are patronized, lionized, and distributed like fluid through pipelines into the art school, as elsewhere, and subsequently affect the visions of student practitioners.

This is the administration of knowledge in its most powerful and pervasive form. It has a multiplier effect. The introduction of these seductive knowledges is then multiplied by the many students who take them up and distribute them through their own practices and spread them throughout the world. Only the mechanism of collective accumulation stands in the way of chaos (the destruction of hierarchical order within the art world) at this point. That's to say, the status of the production of any given artist is dependent on the buildup of language and acts around their work. The accumulation of positively inflected

language and acts of exhibition and collection determine the influence of the artist on others, and this is a time-based process. Even in a culture of instant global dissemination, the appreciation of an artist's work still appears to take place over a duration of time and remains dependent on the legitimation of the artist through an anthropological process of validation that's determined by "elder" figures of power, whether specific collectors, dealers, museums, or publications. This proscribed professional community elevates its producers to acclaim for different lengths of time, underwriting their visibility within larger communities—and ultimately within the less time-bound community of posterity. While it is the dispensation of the school to administer the breadth of knowledge that it chooses to offer, it is the protocol of the marketplace that provides the points of entry through which that application of knowledge, which is the work of art, will be acknowledged and supported—or not.

Another question then: What experiential spaces are this compromised state of exception and this administration of knowledge inhabiting—what spaces of *living and doing*? True, there are many variations of experiential space that art schools offer, yet there are also some givens that every school shares regarding what a young artist is doing there. There is a term that the philosopher Edmund Husserl used in a far more extensive way: *life-world*. He talked about the concept as "the 'ground' of all praxis," as the place of the "pregiven," and he said, poetically, "To live is always to live-in-the-certainty-of-the-world."[1] I want to use the term, as I did with the phrase *state of exception*, as a special case because this sense of alertness to the qualities of life and place and the givens that we associate with them, this life-world, are precisely what I'm thinking about within the art academy. These pregivens of the art school include teachers from whom one will acquire knowledge, whether manual technique, historical references, intellectual concepts, or professional connections and how to use them. These different forms of knowledge will improve the student by broadening understanding, technical proficiency, and professional opportunities. These are deemed improvements, and the purpose of improvement is to make the student-artist more "fit" to enter the professionalized world of art making afterward, to succeed in a number of ways: critical success, commercial success, becoming part of the public discourse, applying creative skills to other fields, or becoming a teacher in turn and carrying on the transmission of knowledge.

Still, there are two principal forms of success among the pregivens of this life-world. The first is to identify within oneself the "true" artistic voice, which is historically an Enlightenment concept of the positing of an authentic self that

can be brought into self-recognition through devoted consideration. The second used to be dependent on the first because once the authentic self had been revealed in the work through the artist's revelation, the power of expression would launch the artist into these forms of success—critical and commercial. Of course, with the analytical deconstruction of the self that has its forebear in Andy Warhol and the many ways in which postmodern thinking has taken Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" as a sacrosanct text (and which was, in turn, based on Sartrean existentialism), the necessity that a "true" artistic self is the only way to success is no longer required. That has become another pregiven of the life-world of the art school. The self is more fluid, cagey, unattached to this old form of truth, this authentic self. The artificial, the "Photoshopped" notion of the world in which everything is potentially transformable, speaks to the sense of the inauthentic as a normative condition now, as, paradoxically, a new, acceptable form of trickster authenticity.

In the same way, another pregiven is that the young artist's identification with any particular discipline has undergone an almost complete eclipse in the schools considered to be the most advanced over the past two decades, such as Goldsmiths in London, California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles (CalArts), and Columbia in New York (which is not to say that aesthetic tendencies, like art schools, don't have shelf lives). This pregiven is based on the belief that I've already mentioned: after Duchamp, the concept is more important than the medium through which it's brought to visibility, and so a conceptually based practice, which is the air that artists breathe today, is given to a disciplinary ecumenicism, a penchant for the nomadic to traverse disciplines and media freely in the expression of the idea. Then there is that pregiven of the young artist's will to iconoclasm, the natural temperament of difference, which is a sign of the urge toward inner discovery that is perfectly in keeping with the art school's focus on its inward tasks, its cult of discovery, its laboratory environment. That this life-world is now more infringed on than ever before by the market's demands for production and its effects on the process of inner discovery is also a pregiven that can't be ignored—and of course it isn't.

The many compromises that touch the art academy's life-world and its presumed state of exception need to be confronted now head-on. I'm not saying that there aren't real values within the compromised or semifictitious narrative of this life-world, with its coddled appearance of the liberal laboratory of free experiment. Students and faculty engage each other in this narrative of ludic possibility, of the modernist dream of forgetting the past and entering a creative state of oblivion from which they emerge with the New Thing. Or they

tell themselves that they can remember the past as they invent a disruptive present in this ideal state of creation in which they're informed but not enthralled. Nevertheless, the question isn't *whether* there are compromises, but what these compromises mean, how they can be overcome, or if they need to be. Is it the case that the old antagonisms between the market and the art school's sanctum of invention are "old school," that they're no longer at odds in any meaningful way with cultural production because society and culture themselves are so changed? And if that's so, then what are the new ethics of the art academy, and how should they play out within the life-world of the school and be projected outward in relation to its communities?

To think about this, there's a crucial notion that has to be scrutinized too about the way that an artist is seen within society, and that's the notion of *use*. If we look at the Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus, the trajectory of their educational practices was toward the contribution of the artist to the state and to industry—the artist as worker, as a cultural production machine. In both historical cases, the struggle came to disastrous endings; the artists were crushed by the will of the state, forced into exile, or their work was suppressed, their practices altered, their schools closed. After World War II, Joseph Beuys reconceived this notion of usefulness with his idea of "social sculpture" and its renovation of the German spirit through democratized imagination—everyone a creative presence whose production contributes to social health. Warhol, with his signature perversity and brilliance, commodified this idea by fusing industrial and cultural production in an amalgam of the artist's wares and the artist himself as goods to be sold, as products for useful, even glamorous, consumption. And more recently, the art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics and my own theorizing about what I call service aesthetics throw light on the artist's social usefulness as an agent of productivity who contributes a service of value to the community.[4]

Today, what the art school is in its particular state of exception, which is aesthetically underwritten by the marketplace, is a benign factory. Its products offer several kinds of usefulness—among them, of course, aesthetic pleasure, social critique, and therapeutic release, but also the supreme prowess of its fungible quality as a liquid instrument of capital. It is worth noting that after the crisis in the United States that erupted in the mid-1980s over Andres Serrano's photograph *Piss Christ*, which had been supported inadvertently by the National Endowment for the Arts and consequently caused draconian cuts in arts funding, there was no chill across the country in the making of artworks that were critical or confrontational nor was there any prolonged chill in the growth of the art market. The art market has only expanded globally on an exponential scale, and what's crucial is that twenty-first-century market culture is able to tolerate and ingest oppositional work without softening the art's critical bite or suffering from it.

This takes me back to my earlier question concerning the idea of overcoming the "crisis" of compromise in the art school's state of exception. And my thought here is that this can be considered a compromise today, in the reality of the current situation, only if it's seen from the nostalgic perspective of an antagonism between the artist and society, between art and the market, with modernism's antiquarian itch to shock the bourgeoisie still intact—while in truth, that shock has largely been eradicated by a surfeit of images and videos of every kind broadcast everywhere through innumerable wired and wireless devices. The deficit of our actual situation is the inability of people in general, and art students as a subset of the populace, to maintain their attention spans in a spectacle culture of short memory, with its lack of interest in history and the knowledge of it, giving way to a thirst for quicksilver fashion and trendlets that can't be slaked. Yet the benefit is an unrivaled freedom to create as long as it's understood that whatever is made will be subject to the market's assimilation or the risk of uninterest and oblivion. In any case, these varieties of use, enlarged by a market that only continues to grow despite the occurrence of temporary troughs, are the basis of a different ethics within the art school just as they are outside it.

This transformation recognizes the flow of society's life and art's changing place within it, much as art once served kings, then served industrial kings, then its merchants. It isn't that "resistance is futile," but that the focus of passionate concerns changes with the change in society itself. The art school's space as a place of production has been altered throughout the twentieth century, and now the twenty-first, by its own inexorable waves of fascination that have incrementally encompassed more attributes: crafts; technologies; attitudes toward the handmade, the conceptual, and the outsourced; and explorations of art and artists' relations to the social sphere's ideological, political, and economic movements. Yet the majority of art academies across the world only half-acknowledge this breadth, this porosity, by maintaining the priority and myth of their state of exception, of their cloistered sanctum of creative freedom. The process of conversion from isolation and from its roots in the strains of modernism that championed a formalist aesthetics of isolation is clearly under way. Given the indomitable fact of exterior influences that are ineluctably breaking down the inwardness of the art school, the question has to be asked:

What is the goal that the art school as an institution should have in involving itself with its communities?

The public sphere, as the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas conceives it, is the assembly of private persons to form free opinions, to negotiate and act on matters of common interest without being coerced by the state.[3] The point of these communicative utterances is to comprehend a worldview that can accommodate differences and yet encourage collaboration for the public good. One role for the art academy today is to reach out to the public sphere and engage in the forum of opinion—specifically to share and propagate its accrued and continually shifting interpretations of the world that are made manifest in the knowledge embedded in its cultural productions. This is what the formation of an ethics is: the projection of beliefs, customs, and practices that define a community in its daily observances and routines. To reach out to communities, as the art school must, is an acknowledgment of its agency, of its ethical input through cultural practice. Anything less than this is passivity. Anything less than this more narrowly defines art making and its teaching as a species of entertainment—a component of the good life that may also have a transformative value but is not essentially political in the sense of communicating the will of the polis to direct its fate as a social organizer and overseer of behaviors and actions.

As a practical application of the power of the art school as a public institution, which is the power, as I've said, to formulate and distribute knowledge, this is hardly an unlikely activity and result. Art schools have had this influence perhaps once, with the creation of the Bauhaus. Yet particularly at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when there is a fundamental shift toward social platforms such as social networks, wikis, and blogs that are having a tremendous influence on social community and opinion, there should be no question that the art academy as a knowledge institution can also enter strategically into the social discourse and present its creative visions of the world. (Clémentine Deliss's Future Academy is an example of just such a program that throws itself into the issues of the art school's social ethos in relation to its local community and beyond.) The art academy of the twenty-first century, if it's to be an agent not only of artistic growth but of social relevance and enhancement, has to understand plainly that this reciprocity between inside and outside is essential to its future. It must invite the community into its discourse. It must invite the community in to actively take part in the discussion of the faculty's art and the students' art. At strategic moments within each phase of the year, it must include the formal participation of the local community and the professional community. I use the word *phase* to propose that the very notion of semesters and the duration of study needs to be reconsidered. Why should an art school *necessarily* follow the established norms of these term lengths? Why shouldn't its faculty and students convene only for an intense period—say, for the summer, as is done in the M.F.A. program at the Bard College of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York—with the rest of the year devoted to individual practice, to making a living in the world or following one's own plan for reflection and work? And why should an academic degree be a limit? Why shouldn't there also be a formalized program of return in which alumni rejoin the ethos of the school and its knowledge environment during scheduled periodic residencies?

All of these questions, and no doubt many more about the pregivens of the life-worlds of art academies, must be addressed now in light of the true nature of the state of exception. In fact, it's better to say *states* of exception: The purity of the art academy laboratory is mythic, not actual, and the degree to which any art school invites or resists exterior influence isn't fixed. In any case, there are already new educational models that have taken form. Anton Vidokle's Unitednationsplaza and the sixth Biennial of Mercosur in Brazil, both in 2007, are exemplary. Both were exhibition platforms that were used to inscribe art education programs, while another hybrid model, the Mountain School of Arts in Los Angeles—which is an ongoing lecture and discussion series about art issues particularly relevant to art practitioners and offers no course credits or certificate or degree—is held in a bar. For five years, I've been working on a series of symposia and inquiries at the behest of the Anaphiel Foundation in Miami to reconsider art education for the new century, which has been essential to the formulation of yet another model: an educational program in which conversation replaces curriculum—a residency that offers no degree and is essentially a two-year, theme-based colloquium. It focuses on knowledge exchange between artists and experts from every discipline of the humanities, social sciences, hard sciences, and technology in order to provide intellectual data that contribute to artistic production, collaboration, and the cultural enlargement of the local community. New models needn't be implemented only from the outside in. A temporary but nonetheless iconic sign of this took place in 2007 at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, when the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija transformed the school for a few days into an inn, a *gasthof*, where students and guests slept, cooked, and hung out, talking about social issues, art making, and undoubtedly much more. These projects eschew the domination of the old routines.

André Malraux spoke in his 1947 book, *Le Musée imaginaire*, of the "museum without walls." Now we need to think about the art school without walls—or the art school whose walls are pierced and opened because the trajectory of global culture is obviously toward the extraordinarily pervasive distribution of every kind of information and market influence, a market influence that holds more dominion than the sovereignty of national governments and flows through them, lifting some up and leaving others impoverished in its wake. It would be utopian to think of the final state of exception as no state of exception at all or, more precisely, of a social structure in which no state of exception is necessary because the ultimate distribution of control and influence is so fluid and deliberative that a democracy of exchange is entirely heterogeneous and autonomous and yet joined by a common devotion to enlightened social collaboration. The art school we need now can accommodate this larger purview; it needs to be more open, more diverse, denser. But then this is the organic evolution of art making as it has always been: iterative, excursive, slow in the cycles of its ecology, with eruptive historical moments and long periods of gestation. The benign factory of the art school is now in the midst of reformulation, pressured hydraulically by the forces of a larger life-world to recognize the changed field and reimagine a more socially complex state of exception, engaged in the dynamics of community, unafraid to allow itself to be provisional, and aware of what "free" means.