INTRODUCTION

It is a commonplace of recent criticism that even before I begin, and in ways I cannot tell, I am captured by and folded inside the object of my research. However I attempt to stand at a distance and view objectively, the blindnesses of ideology and interest, the entanglements of identification and transference, and the traps of textuality lie in wait. It is easy for me to acknowledge the impossibility of distance here. My study is on the graduate training of artists in the American university (and in the degree-granting art schools fashioned in its image), and I have been captured by and folded into that object once before—bodily, and as its object. You might read what follows as a confession of my critical involvements and complicities, or, if you are of a different school, as an inside view.

I have a B.A. degree in studio art from a small liberal arts college. Most of my undergraduate courses were in painting, supplemented by a year of printmaking and two semesters of life drawing, in a course whose title, Drawing and Composition, was left over from a slightly earlier, yet more "modern" conception. The drawing program, a familiar one, proceeded from mark-making exercises to the nude model, rendered first in gesture and blind contour drawings, and then in increasingly extended poses. In printmaking, instruction was technical and craft based: I ground stones, scraped rollers, learned the uses of gum arabic, Carborundum, asphaltum. In introductory painting too there were mechanics, though fewer: how to build a stretcher and stretch a

canvas, how to apply gesso as a ground. I was asked to make a color chart. I learned how to glaze and stain, but these techniques I picked up later from other, older students. Working as a studio assistant for my painting teacher, I used a spray gun. Painting problems were given only in the introductory class: make a painting with only three colors. The unspoken problem of the course in painting as it advanced was to make something that was convincing as a painting. Not long after Painting 1, looking like a painting became an issue of scale; I made five-by-eight-foot monochromes and, later on, shaped canvases of equal size.

In class and out we discussed art, its physiological or anthropological or psychological necessity, its political and social value. What formed the discussion and continued in it was the question of what to do, a question at once personal and what might be called professional. The question "What should I do?" was also always the question "What do artists do?"[1] As students we were troubled by the title "artist," not simply because of our status, but also because of those attributes of "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" that, as reading Walter Benjamin would teach us in graduate school, "lead to a processing of data in the Fascist sense," a mythical sense as opposed to a historical one.[2] We were, for at least a while, "technicians" or "cultural workers." It was clear to us that something historical was at stake in the name we took. Long after our one visiting artist, a painter from New York, had departed, discussion continued about his insistence on identifying himself as a painter rather than an artist. The labels proposed different objects and different questions concerning what was to be done: a critical art practice after Duchamp, on the one hand, and a history of painting descended from Cézanne, on the other.[3] I would learn from the shop assistant in graduate school to run a few more power tools, but this was the sum of my technical instruction in art. It took place precisely where merely manual or specialized professional instruction was not supposed to occur, in an undergraduate liberal arts college.

What manual training I had in graduate school might be imagined as an updated, and markedly abbreviated, version of the master's workshop. Under the tutelage of the shop assistant, I learned to make maple frames and bases (for use by my department chair) and to hang drywall. That is, I learned to craft the edges and outsides and supports of art, or what Jacques Derrida has called, after Kant, the *parergon,* that "outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside. . . . the limit between work and absence of work."[4] The

frame is a particularly critical modern lesson; its enclosure extends from the page to the professional field, from Hans Hofmann's insistence that the "four sides of the paper are the first lines of the composition"[5] to Raymond Parker's observation that in art schools "teachers demonstrate how they participate in the art-world, or discuss how others do it. . . . [T]he art-world can be understood and taught as a subject."[6] My passage as an apprentice from maple frames to gallery walls might be read as an emblem for what is taught, and indeed what needs to be taught, in graduate school: again in Derrida's words, "the marking out of the work in a field."[7]

What took place outside my graduate school woodshop, in the program's seminars and organized activities and in the individual cubicles where we worked at doing our own work, was the teaching that Raymond Parker described, our training as participating artists in the art world. Artists are the subject of graduate school; they are both who and what is taught. In grammar school, to continue this play of subjects and objects, teachers teach art; in my undergraduate college, artists taught art. In the graduate school, I argue throughout this book, artists teach artists. Artists are, again, both the subject of the graduate art department and its goal. The art historian Howard Risatti, who has written often on the difficulties of training contemporary artists, argued not long ago that "at the very heart of the problem of educating the artist lies the difficulty of defining what it means to be an artist today."[8] The "problem" is not a practical one; the meaning of being an artist cannot be clarified and solved by faculty or administration, although across this book a number of professors and administrators try. Rather, the problem of definition is at the heart of the artist's education because it is the formative and defining problem of recent art. Artists are made by troubling over it, by taking it seriously.

Since the 1960s the visiting artist program—the display of the exemplary artist—has been crucial to teaching artists.[9] I address a logic of the visiting artist in Chapter 6; here I want only to note the most obvious of that artist's functions: to embody a link between the school and a professional community of what graduate schools refer to as "national" artists. Visiting artists are chosen by students or faculty from national journals and magazines, from the pages of *Flash Art* or *Art in America,* and they speak to students, whatever they say, in the shared language of those journals and that community; their speech constructs that community. The visiting artists who spoke to me and my peers modeled for us what an artist was. Our assignment, as we watched and

listened, was not secret, or no longer seems so. In graduate seminars we researched artists in the magazines, presenting to the class our favorites or least favorites, making clear and verbal the relations and positions we needed to plot for ourselves within that field emblematized by drywall and maple frames. In one assignment we were asked to invent an artist of another type than we imagined ourselves to be—since we were to know ourselves as types—and then to produce an oeuvre, to make slides and do the talk, to model a speech or slouch. We learned to run our own careers as well, to produce cards and catalogues and slides, and to attend openings, which were staged like rehearsals every other week in the fall, every week in the spring.

Although I hold a Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture, I do not have the traditional skills of the sculptor; I cannot carve or cast or weld or model in clay. I think the question that I began this book to answer is, why not? In some sense, I must admit, my inability was not my program's fault. The tools and skills of sculpture were available to me as options. If I needed them to do my work as an artist, to address the issues or make the objects I wanted to make, there were people who could teach me. But it was clear at the time that the craft practices of a particular métier were no longer central to my training; we learned to think, not inside a material tradition, but rather about it, along its frame. The problem of being an artist occupied the center. The question I posed to my teachers, and that they posed to me again and again, was not how to sculpt or to paint, but what to do as an artist, and as "my work." Perhaps this is where my program failed me—after all, I am not an artist; at the time, however, I imagined that its failure lay in its outmoded map of recent art and its issues, in its parochial roster of gallery exhibitions and visiting artists. I am still not sure why, but at some point not long after graduation it became very difficult to imagine myself as an artist, or to be convinced by what I made.

Although this book is predicated on my own experience, and on my own failings, it speaks now to a set of less self-absorbed questions: what constitutes training as an artist now, and what has determined its shape? What did my training mean, historically and ideologically, and what was it in? To forecast the ground where I look for answers, I sketch a narrative of education that, like my own, takes place in a college and university, stresses theorization and a verbal reenactment of the practices of art and the role of the artist, and is rewarded by a degree. Artists have not always been trained and credentialed on university campuses, or at art schools that envision themselves, not as ateliers

or academies, but as "universities for the arts" and "aesthetic think tanks."[10] The basic assumption of this project is that where and how artists are educated now—and, indeed, where art and its criticism take their places now—makes a difference. It is currently making the difference labeled postmodernism: criticism and text are important products in departments across the university. But it has also ensured that the practice of art in America is even more fully modern, that is to say, more specialized, more rationalized, and more historically conscious, endowed with an ever fuller and more critical sense of its position.

My interest in the sites and practices of art in the university is not only personal. In looking to the institutional formation of artists as a way to understand recent art, I am following Ernst Gombrich's advice that a "study of the metaphysics of art should always be supplemented by an analysis of its practice, notably the practice of teaching."[11] But what emerges throughout the book, I hope, is that teaching does not come without a metaphysics. It is not offered, nor is it heard, outside an ensemble of representations, values, and beliefs woven in and out of course assignments, studio critiques, and modeled roles; this ensemble might be called, after Gombrich, a metaphysics, but it is more precisely an ideology. The university too has its representations, its discourses of service and citizenship, of independent research and *Bildung,* and there are types and legends of the artist that it cannot easily include. The first assignment of this book is to examine how the practices of art and the identity of the artist are fashioned in the discourse of the American university, fitted to the image of the liberal arts college, the university-based professional school, and the research university in America. The artist, or artistic subjectivity, is the university's problem and its project. From the turn of the century on, it has offered a series of new artistic subjects, written over and over in the likeness of the university professional.

The chapters that follow address not only the various images of the artist on campus but also the arguments those images advance for the place and position of art as a study in the university: its likeness to university scholarship and theoretical research. On campus, art cannot be a calling or a vocation. To be included among the disciplines, art must give up its definition as craft or technique, a fully trainable manual skill on the guild or apprenticeship model. At the same time, it cannot be purely inspirational or simply expressive: the work of genius is unteachable and self-expression is untutored. Moreover, art in the university must be different from a certain "common sense" of its problems

and procedures. Whatever has called a student to enter the department—the love of past art, an excitement about the process of creation, a desire for personal growth, the ability to draw—one of the primary lessons of the graduate program is that art can no longer be seen as a simple response to, or merely the repository of, those needs and excitements. Among the tasks of the university program in art is to separate its artists and the art world in which they will operate from "amateurs" or "Sunday painters," as well as from a definition of the artist grounded in manual skill, tortured genius, or recreational pleasure. Moreover, art in the university must constitute itself as a department and a discipline, separate from public "lay" practices and equal to other studies on campus.

My project requires that I at least begin a history of professional training in the university, although I do not pretend to tell it fully or in strict order: there are over a hundred and eighty universities and degree-granting art schools now awarding the Master of Fine Arts in studio art. The first M.F.A.s were awarded in the mid 1920s at the Universities of Washington and Oregon; Yale and Syracuse, the nation's oldest campus-based art schools, place their first M.F.A.s in the late 1920s.[12] But the Master of Fine Arts did not become widespread, nor did it become the terminal degree in studio art that it is now, until much later. At the beginning of the 1940s there were 60 graduate studio candidates enrolled at eleven institutions; in 1950–51 there were 320 candidates at thirty-two institutions. Many of these students worked toward advanced degrees with other names: the Master of Creative Arts, for example; or the Master of Painting; or, at Ohio State, a studio art Ph.D. Only in 1960 did the College Art Association approve the "M.F.A. rather than the Ph.D. as the terminal degree for graduate work in the studio area."[13] In that year 1,365 students were enrolled at seventy-two institutions. Thirty-one new M.F.A. programs opened in the 1960s, forty-four in the 1970s. In 1994–95 there were at least 7,100 students enrolled full-time for the M.F.A.; more than ten thousand degrees were awarded between 1990 and 1995.[14] If these statistics suggest the unchallenged administrative success of the M.F.A., that victory has taken place in the midst of a continuing debate over the place of the artist and of graduate training in the university.

The chapters that follow examine the discourses that surrounded and shaped the history of studio training in the university that is abbreviated in these numbers. Recorded in assignments and lectures, in papers presented to College Art Association meetings, in essays in the *Col-*

lege Art Journal or *Arts in Society,* and in the mission statements of the new art departments, the debates over art and artist in the university and the calls for reappraisal and reform bear witness to a set of unresolved contradictions. These thread through the book as recurring motifs. I introduce them here with a quotation from Walter Gropius, who founded the most influential art school of the century, the Bauhaus, which—to broach one of the contradictions—although it changed the way artists were made, did not acknowledge itself as a school for artists. Making artists was a problem; indeed Gropius insisted it was impossible: art is not a "profession which can be mastered by study"; it "cannot be taught and cannot be learned," even if the "manual dexterity" of the craftsman can and must be.[15]

Gropius's insistence that art cannot be taught is repeated again and again by American educators through mid century, most often by artists teaching in increasingly well organized and articulated university art departments. By 1951 it was "widely held opinion" in the pages of the *College Art Journal* that "all one can teach are techniques, but that artistry is completely a matter of endowment and self-induced personal growth.[16] That same year, a teacher from Bard discounted the possibility of even much effective technical instruction: "All but the most elementary techniques are fundamentally not teachable."[17] So did the dean of Washington University's degree-granting professional school: "There just isn't enough to teach—enough that can be taught—to justify six years of an artist's life."[18] The contradiction between the triumphal history of the M.F.A. and the doubts—or certainties—expressed by its teachers should be obvious, but the strongest and strangest effect of this argument might be its displacement of art, the first of a series of displacements at the same site. Gropius's equation makes technique and dexterity necessary to the practice of art, perhaps, but it assumes, as well, an essential separation of art from technique: art is the name of that which escapes teaching; technique, as the name of what can be taught, is destined to become "merely" technique.

In insisting that art is not a profession, Gropius targeted both the teaching of the classical academy and the presumption that acquiring the skills of representational drawing and its accompaniments—perspective, chiaroscuro—was becoming an artist.[19] He sought, like many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century educators, to displace the figure and technique of academic drawing with the objects and rigorous skills of the craftsman. The artist isolated in his studio would be replaced by, or reborn as, a skilled craftsman; moreover, he would be liberated by a

new audience, a broad general public trained, in Gropius's words, in a "common language of visual communication . . . made valid through general education."[20] The express goal of most of the new art departments, and of their new methods, was the visual education of the nonartist. One of the corollaries of the equation that art cannot be taught is that everyone can be taught, if not manual techniques, then visual fundamentals. In the aftermath of the Bauhaus, in the idea of design and the visual arts—the assertion of a "language of vision," and of teaching as "training the eye to see"—the craft skills that Gropius had earlier forwarded as a cure for the academic isolation of the artist are themselves displaced, replaced by the field of vision and the rectangular canvas plotted in its image by the foundations and fundamentals of art.

Despite Gropius's protest but according to his logic, I would again claim art as a profession: the privileging of overarching principles over specific technical competencies—the grounding and guiding of art practice in visual fundamentals and the fashioning of individual works as experiments, researches, proofs—echoes the severing of articulated theory from manual labor that characterizes the process of professionalization. But if the themes I highlight in my educational story—university education, the theorization and formalization of knowledge, and the receipt of a degree—are the hallmarks of professionalization in the United States, nonetheless the label professional does not easily correspond to our image of the artist. The idea of the "artist born" runs long and deep, from Pliny's Lysippus, who had no teacher, to Dürer's Geertgen tot Sint Jans, who was "a painter in his mother's womb,"[21] and even to Gropius's declaration that art is not a profession but, rather, the "grace of heaven."[22]

The image of the artist that we have inherited from the nineteenth century—a driven, alienated, and silent individual—clashes directly with the idea of a university-trained professional artist. Indeed, that inward figure is a particular target of those who champion the artist on campus. For both critics and supporters, the university stands for the presence of language and the production of formal knowledge, and against the silence and inspiration of the born artist. I spend a good deal of time in the chapters that follow on language as it displaces both manual craft skills and traditional academic skills, the drawing of an earlier version of the professional artist. Whether the language of the university displaces technique—becomes the technique of a new art—or displaces art itself in the practice of criticism, I leave an open question.

The question posed most insistently in these pages is whether the artist is a professional and, following from it, what the struggle with that word—its acceptance or rejection—might mean for the fashioning of artists. Finally, I take the M.F.A. at its word that it is a professional degree. But even that clear answer poses other questions, raised by both recent training and recent art: What is that profession and (a corollary) where is it practiced? Is art a profession learned in the university and practiced outside it, like medicine or, closer to home, architecture? Or is it a profession in and of the university, an academic discipline, like history or mathematics or, perhaps, literary criticism? Still other questions follow from these, most obvious among them, how does that difference change what is taught and learned in school?

While the themes I have introduced with Gropius's insistence that art cannot be taught—the displacement of academic figure drawing and craft skills, the place of language and the questions of professionalization—cross the text from beginning to end in different guises, *Art Subjects* proceeds, sometimes roughly, chronologically, falling into three sections of two chapters each. The opening chapters stress the university's discourse on the problem of the artist, the language with which the products of the European academy and the avant-garde were caricatured. Chapter 1 charts the vision of a new college-educated American artist across the often conflicting demands of the undergraduate college and the high university, and it rehearses their shared disdain for the nineteenth-century European artist (or for a broadly drawn stereotype of that artist), the academy that trained him, and the studio that housed him. The university's artist, like the university-trained models he is offered, is always male; the excessive artist lampooned by educators is marked and marred by the "problem" of femininity. Chapter 2 examines that problem as it both covers for and reveals the structuring role played by women art educators and women's institutions—and by the women who, as students, continually outnumbered males in art schools and university departments—in shaping the practice of art in colleges and universities.

The middle chapters, too, turn around language, the "language of art," and the discourse that supported the Bauhaus and its foundation course. Chapter 3 addresses the difference written in the shift from the "fine arts" to the "visual arts," a change that embeds the work of art making in the eye and signals the displacement of the figure and the practices of representation. It traces that shift—and certain specific practices—from the nineteenth-century schools of design and the industrialization of artisanal training; the grids and type forms of schools of

design become the symbols of science in the Bauhaus and after. Chapter 4 links the "trained eye," gridded by the fundamentals and grammars of art, to the "innocent eye." The innocent eye is at once the intrinsic, necessary source of the fundamentals of vision taught as grammar, and a tabula rasa that must be trained and gridded. This chapter also begins in the nineteenth century, not with industrial education but in the kindergarten classroom, and continues through early-twentieth-century school art to general education in the postwar college.

The closing chapters once again focus on language; not a discourse on the artist, but of the artist. A central character through them is the artist who speaks as a teacher, a student, a visiting artist or lecturer. Chapter 5 argues that the rapid expansion of the New York art world's influence after World War II was reciprocally related to the equally rapid expansion of university-based graduate art programs. It also looks closely at the teaching of the artists of the New York school, and the work of speech around the work of art, as its displacement or extension: forcing the student to find his or her place in that speech becomes the teaching of professional subjectivity. Chapter 6 returns to those debates of the 1950s and 1960s over art practice in the university that cast the tension between the artist and the university as a struggle between vision and language. That same struggle between vision and language has, of course, characterized the question of postmodernism in the visual arts, and the chapter maps the questions of the earlier debate with the answers provided by the theorization of postmodernism in the 1980s. Finally, Chapter 7 returns to the autobiography I started with, and to the question of professionalization, by asking one more time, "What does the M.F.A. certify?"