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## **The ascent from the maelstrom: *Art Students Observed* and its descriptive resonance 40 years on**

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Between 1967 and 1973 Barbara Weinberger and Charles Madge undertook a longitudinal study of art students at Coventry and Birmingham Colleges of Art, incorporating pre-diploma to final year students and their teachers, with a focus on fine art students. This article revisits the study in light of accounts from participants, archival documents and reviews. It also looks at the study's value both as an accurate description of art school socialisation and its effectiveness as a piece of sociology. It then looks at some of the main issues raised by the study and how they have influenced writing since and their value today. The article aims to clarify some of the obscurities of the study and offer a critical context within which it can be read as a now unique historical document.

### **Introduction**

This article is in essence a review, 40 years on, of the study *Art Students Observed* by Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger, published by Faber and Faber in the summer of 1973 as part of the series *Society Today and Tomorrow*. It was the first attempt at a longitudinal, sociological study of art education in Britain, and therefore offers a unique slice of a specific circumstance at an interesting time in the development of fine art education, having just moved from a highly structured national system to a completely open one. The idiosyncratic nature of both the study and its principle subject make it problematic but interesting. Indeed, the study's main point of interest is the difficulties present in attempting to explain the complex mixture of what are termed in the study 'values' and 'roles' within the often self-contradictory social environment of the art school.

The study took place predominantly at Coventry College of Art (although some of the study also took place at Birmingham College of Art) in the academic years 1967/68 and 1968/69. In addition, family background and prior art education were both taken into account through less in-depth but much more generalisable interviews of A-level art students at 152 schools across the country and non-art students from 15 local schools. The study, after an introduction to the method of data collection, looks at both pre-diploma and diploma students in Art and Design (Dip.A.D.). The pre-diploma students are considered with respect to their intentions for further study; the fine art diploma students are then the focus of study with the graphic design diploma students used as a contrast. The authors state: 'It was our initial expectation that we would find the art college ethos in its purest and most

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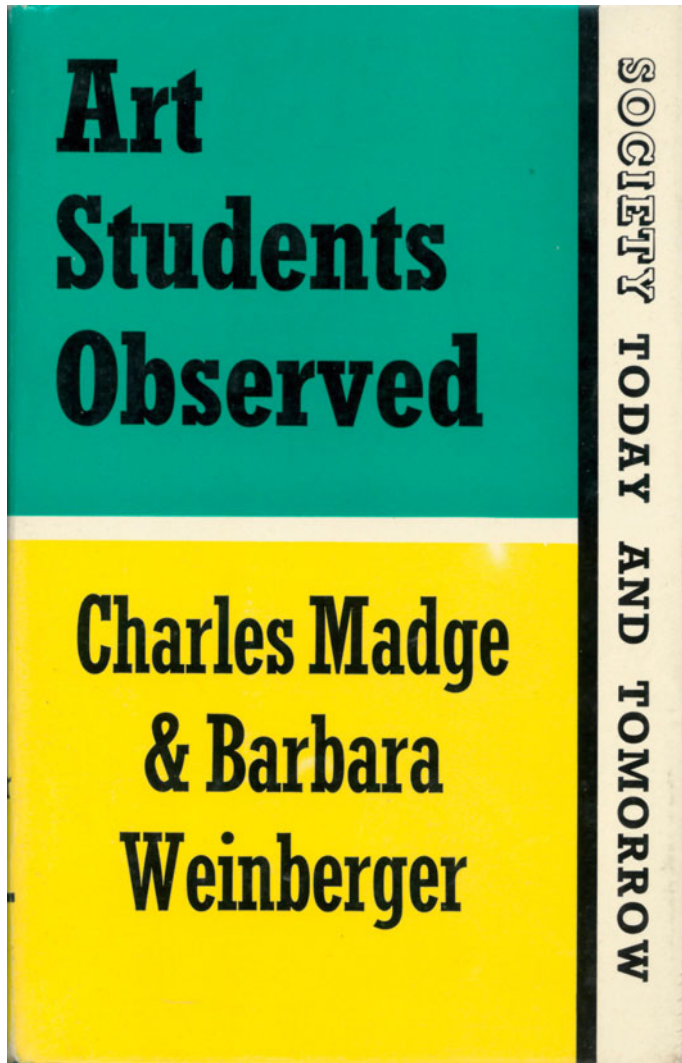
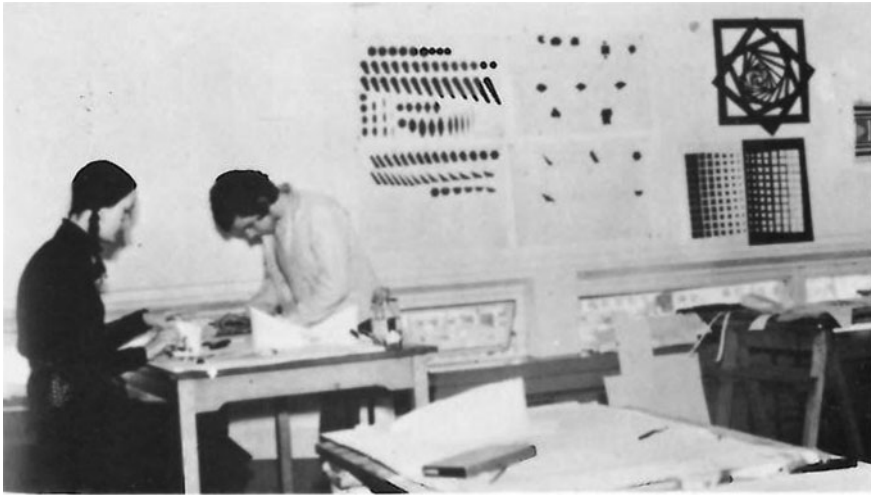


Figure 1. *Art Students Observed*, front cover, 1973 (Madge & Weinberger 1973), Faber and Faber, London.

outspoken form in the Fine Art department' (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 23). This first large section of the book uses elicited answers to structured questionnaires, sentence completion lists and statements by the students and staff and tabulates them for comparison. The second half then focuses on a selection of 14 fine art students who, to the authors, represent seven students whose work is 'approved' by the teaching staff and seven who are considered 'mediocre' and generally working in a mode that is not approved. The study then looks at the possible effect of art history, complimentary studies and the contemporary art world on the students' opinions, knowledge and engagement with their practice and field. It includes some source material in the form of course documents and reproduced written assignments and ends with a brief summary and conclusion.



2. Pre-Diploma course students, with work.

Figure 2. Photograph of students by Barbara Weinberger from *Art Students Observed* (Madge & Weinberger 1973), Faber and Faber, London.

My encounter with the book was through my PhD research on the art college origins of the group Art & Language<sup>1</sup>, and consequently the role of theoretical work in art education. *Art Students Observed* covers the two-year period leading up to the short-lived ‘Art Theory Course’ that the group conducted formally from 1969–1971 at Coventry College of Art, before the part-time staff associated with Art & Language had their contracts discontinued. It was then left under the sole tutorship of Terry Atkinson until 1973, when he resigned. The post-script ‘Cross Currents and Uncertainties’ (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 262) – a product of the long gap between the end of the study proper (1969) and its final publication in the summer of 1973 – offers an interesting perspective on the ripples that this course of learning, and its decimation, produced.

To readers who have been through an art school education at any point in the last 45 years, the book is likely to be full of familiar attitudes, anxieties and assumptions. It is rich in description of a time when Coventry College of Art, then going through the transition into Lanchester Polytechnic, could be seen as most clearly typifying certain tensions between the values of teachers and students that were markedly different in character from those brought to a head in, for example, Hornsey, but nonetheless redolent of their time. With this review I would like to take full advantage of the 40 years’ distance between us and it, and look at the social and historical context of the study: firstly, at the conditions under which the study was conceived; secondly, the people and immediate circumstances that the study describes; thirdly, its immediate reception and subsequent use; and finally, the implications it brings up regarding the intervening 40 years of art education.

### Reforms in art education

The impetus for *Art Students Observed* arrived largely from problems seen as arising out of the Coldstream Report of 1960. The problems were many and they have been

constantly debated ever since. However, those that loom large within *Art Students Observed* are:

- (1) The introduction of a separate 15% written requirement, putatively more ‘academic’: ‘... all the subjects taken must be of a kind which can properly be studied at the equivalent of undergraduate level’ (Coldstream Report, in Ashwin 1975, 97).
- (2) The handing-over of specific assessment and curriculum responsibilities to individual art colleges; the previous National Diploma in Design had been centrally administered and examined.
- (3) The propagation of increased student numbers and the continuation of liberal Fine Art values at the core of the art college: ‘Fine art teaching in a school ... can serve, as we believe it should, as a focal point of strength and inspiration for the whole school’ (Ashwin 1975, 98).

By 1967 the Dip.A.D. in Painting at Coventry had been running for four years, Graphic Design for three years, and the Dip.A.D. in Sculpture had just been approved. The approval was largely based on staff numbers and facilities available, sculpture having less provision initially. Beyond this assessment of adequate provisions, the National Council for the Diploma in Art and Design (NCDAD) left the colleges to their own devices.

There was a gradual growth in numbers within the art schools and the expansion of this higher-level course, at the expense of the vocational course, was expected from the start. This exacerbated the fear that art schools would produce an ‘unemployable proletariat of artists’ (Piper, 1973), a fear that can be traced back further in time to the beginnings of public art education.<sup>2</sup> The first detailed records of the destinations of diploma graduates were also beginning to be recorded by the NCDAD at the time and a very full survey was undertaken in 1970 (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 243). As an indication of this growth, Fine Art courses in the UK produced 495 graduates in 1968 (*ibid.*, 244); during the following years the employment records held by the NCDAD show an increase up to 895 Fine Art graduates by 1972 (NCDAD 1972). It seemed that the main destination for graduates was the Art Teacher’s Diploma courses, which accounted for roughly 30–40% of students in 1968–1972 (NCDAD 1970). This would obviously cause some worry about the future of these individuals but also about the sustainability of such a system.

The Coldstream reforms, among other things, caused a wake of journal or magazine articles and interest in art education. This was largely because it was so dramatic a change but specifically because, as Anthony Everitt remarked in 1972, post-Coldstream art education had its ‘Thermidor built into the annual curriculum’ (Everett 1972, 176) and therefore seemed in jeopardy from the start. This had possibly its most infamous manifestation in Patrick Heron’s *Guardian* article ‘Murder of the Art Schools’, which is reproduced in *Art Students Observed* (266–268). Indeed, much of the debate took place within the covers of *Studio International*, and a few articles were published specifically on what was by then Lanchester Polytechnic during the early 1970s. These debates arose from both the Hornsey demands and sit-ins of 1968 and the subsequent 1970 Joint Report, which offered clarification and some development, in light of Hornsey, of the Coldstream

guidelines. This brought to the fore issues of theoretical study and its relevance, art college integration into polytechnics, and the access to and purpose of art education. Read alongside *Art Students Observed*, many of these articles offer an interesting critical counterweight, none more than Charles Harrison's article 'Educating Artists' (1972). Harrison anticipates much of what is brought out of the study, notably the relationship between the encouragement of self-expression or individual fantasy in the art student and the effect the tutor–student relationship has on the graduate. The article is worth quotation:

[T]he typical fine-art student is cast adrift in a world for which his studies have in no way prepared him ... he becomes a dummy in a sequence of evaluating processes and market relations ... he may come to miss and desperately need the 'benevolent' aggression formerly supplied by those adopting the teaching role in the art therapeutic relationship. (Harrison 1972, 222)

Here we see pre-figured, albeit more critically, the prevailing message of much of what is implicit in *Art Students Observed* which, in its opening paragraph, declares that '[s]ocialization into art is ... socialization into nobody quite knows what' (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 15). This sense of art education relying on 'educational osmosis' (Harrison 1972, 223) as the dominant method of art teaching is vividly described in *Art Students Observed*. Indeed, *Studio International* offers many polemical adjuncts to the book, putting its rather equivocal empiricism in some critical context.

The development of sociology as a more varied, qualitatively rich discipline and its recent expansion within British universities, coupled with the recent establishment of the Social Science Research Council in 1965, which funded *Art Students Observed*, and funding especially associated with departments within universities meant that attention was in general turning towards the institutions of education as a subject (Fox 2005). Institutions such as the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies (CCCS) opening in Birmingham in 1964 also showed an interest in demystifying everyday cultural life, and a broadening of both theoretical frameworks and empirical research possibilities. There was also a renewed interest in the history of public art schools in Britain, and the historical development of art educational ideas. As Mervyn Romans (2004) observes, many of the most influential texts on the history of art education in Britain were written between 1963 and 1975. Indeed, discord and sweeping reform had brought the implicit conceptual makeup of art education to the fore, creating the perfect environment within which to carry out the study.

### **Barbara Weinberger and Charles Madge**

The field research was conducted largely by Barbara Weinberger, the study being initially designed, and afterwards written up, by both Barbara Weinberger and Charles Madge. Apart from two assistants (Penny Child and Diana Wolfenden), hired one year into the project, who were largely responsible for conducting the studies of design students and secondary school visits, this is the sum total of the team.

Before Barbara Weinberger had studied Social History and started work in Sociology, she had initially gone to art school, studying textile design (British

Library 1996). At the time of the study both she and Madge were employed by Birmingham University and she would produce a couple of other studies after *Art Students Observed* using similar methods, most notably her oral history of the police force (Weinberger 1995).

The ability to use Coventry College of Art was most likely facilitated partly by the painter Harry Weinberger, husband of Barbara, who was Head of Painting at the time. Harry Weinberger held largely conservative views of art production, being suspicious not only of conceptual art but also performance art, minimalism and seemingly all types of abstract art. His approach to art education was reasonably liberal, however, approving as he did of an art college's ability to foster development in many directions. He started teaching in 1964, when the new Diploma in Art and Design was first introduced, having previously taught and studied under the centralised and medium-specific National Diploma in Design (NDD) system. The deregulation and decentralisation instigated by the Coldstream reforms of 1960 meant that, in such a free-for-all situation, Harry Weinberger became the representative of a tradition of expressive, figurative easel painting within the college. The emptying out of many of the basic tenets that made up the daily activity of art college education during the NDD period – those of easel painting, life drawing, objective study – and the divesting of responsibility to fill that gap onto the individual colleges caused him great concern (British Library 1996). It is reasonable to assume, then, that it would have been through Harry's experience that Barbara would have been introduced to the college, filtered through the accompanying problems he found teaching there, and sensitising her to the interesting and inchoate state the college was in.

Barbara's familiarity with the students and the college was one of the main reasons for her suitability as a quasi-'participant observer', and students I have subsequently interviewed remember her as an unobtrusive and friendly presence. As Charles Madge stated in an interview a few years later:

Barbara Weinberger was able to be a more or less completely unobtrusive participant observer ... she was the wife of one of the teachers there and she was well-liked by the students, so they didn't think she was snooping on them. (Charles Madge, in Cobb 1979)

Charles Madge was one of the founding members of the Mass Observation movement in 1937, an organisation that pulled together a disparate array of people to perform a kind of ethnography on everyday British life. Along with the influence of more international sociological trends, the tone of Mass Observation, then shelved or at least co-opted by market research, can be detected in *Art Students Observed*, most easily demonstrated by the use of 'Midville' as a pseudonym for Coventry and Birmingham, which is very reminiscent of 'Worktown' used in their observations of Bolton.<sup>3</sup>

Madge's lack of involvement in the hands-on research can be inferred from his retirement at this time from academic life and his move to the south of France, the lack of coverage of the project within his private papers and from my own interviews of participants in the study, none of whom remember seeing him (personal communication, 2013). Indeed, the study was remembered as being a solitary enterprise by Barbara Weinberger, and her friendly, innocuous style could have contributed to a lack of engagement in her questions, as some students I interviewed have intimated and as Terry Atkinson remembers:



The Charles Madge study I do not remember as being under his name. But it may have been a pseudonym or a front man for a survey Barbara Weinberg [sic] did, certainly at Coventry and maybe too at Birmingham. I remember her interviewing A&L members. As I recall we gave spoof responses, we did not take it very seriously. (Terry Atkinson, email to Lynda Morris, quoted in 'Midville' [Morris 2013, 9])

It is interesting to consider how these spoof answers may have skewed the study. For instance, the high proportion of students who answered that they had no interest in other art seems strange when compared to the copious writing the Art Theory students did on minimalist, anti-form and abstract art subsequently and the engagement some students showed in the teaching of Barbara Reise, who was present during 1968–69 and whose interests spanned many artists.<sup>4</sup>

Passages in the book, however, which refer to the introduction of art history and liberal studies (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 202–206), show that, as is discussed in many reports by the NCDAD and vocalised famously by Niklaus Pevsner and Norbert Lynton (Lynton 1970, 168), the means to introduce a meaningful theoretical programme at the time were simply not there in most colleges. Two teachers at Coventry during this period were Courthauld-trained specialists in the Baroque and Waterhouse, and in the questionnaires only 12% of all Fine Art students were favourable about Liberal Studies and 22% were favourable towards Art History (see the table reproduced in Figure 3). Most of the criticisms amounted to a feeling that they were both disorganised and irrelevant, despite initial attempts from both Art & Language affiliated teachers and the recently employed art critic Barbara Reise (Tate 2013), from different standpoints, to redress this.

**Table 11.9**  
**Students' opinion of 'Liberal Studies' on DAD**  
**Graphic Design and Fine Art courses**

	<i>Favourable</i> %	<i>Unfavourable</i> %	<i>Mixed</i> %	n=
<b>Graphic Design students</b>				
First Year	44	19	37	16
Second Year	25	25	50	16
Third Year	6	56	37	16
<b>Fine Art students</b>				
First Year	3	83	7	29
Second Year	16	47	37	19
Third Year	22	33	39	18
<b>All Graphic Design students</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>All Fine Art students</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>ALL STUDENTS</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>114</b>

Figure 3. Table showing collected data on Liberal Studies through questionnaire. From *Art Students Observed* (Madge & Weinberger 1973), Faber and Faber, London.



The extent to which participant observation was a substantial part of the study has been criticised (Sleigh 1974), as there are few extended passages or analysis of this type of data when compared to extensive use of responses to questionnaires and statements from the tutors or students. The study was small in scale and the size of its main focus quite small in numbers so, as with many studies, I think that the unanswered questions and ‘don’t know’ categories probably hide some of the opposition to the very terms of the question that some of the students and teachers may have had and therefore not answered. In order to look at some of the (sociological or otherwise) shortcomings of the study, I want to turn to the critical reception of the study when it was published.

### **Initial reception of the book**

Reviews *Art Students Observed* from 1973, as far as I have found, occurred within two sociology journals and in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, *Studies in Design and Craft Education* and *Studio International*. The study was immediately recognised as interesting and problematic in equal measure. Andrew Dewdney points out in his review in *Studio International* (1973) that the process of creating pseudonyms for the college and staff was questionable in terms of both anonymity and, if this was intended, as a suggestion of the study as generalisable. The review gives a sense that the reader was left to feel, in 1973, unsatisfied by the explanations and feeling that there was much still to be done in the process of demystifying art education. Indeed, constant adjusting to the implications of the Coldstream and Summerson reports within art college curricula and various experimental courses would continue into the subsequent decades.

Ross Longhurst, in his review for *The Sociological Review*, is most critical in methodological terms. He points out that there is no real statement or indication of a hypothesis and that ‘... as a sociological study the work is really not up to standard. Its approach is completely empiricist ... no serious attempt is made to provide a sociological explanation of the anomic situation in art colleges’ (Longhurst 1973, 153). He suggests that it did not develop its naturalistic, empirical methodology into one that could have critical import or use as a sociological study (152). Large sections of the book do simply publish responses to questionnaires with little analysis; many chapters end merely with a succession of responses by participants (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 103). Charles Madge references such difficulties in an interview a few years later: ‘It did in fact ... bring home the difficulties of using the material when you’ve got it – the difficulties of processing it’ (Cobb 1979, op cit.). There are summaries and short critical statements scattered throughout the book, and these tend to be the statements that have subsequently been quoted, but Ross Longhurst’s review does highlight the study’s ambiguity and rather fusty, value-free equivocations.

Situating the issues of *Art Students Observed* firmly within those perennial to art education, Phillip Meeson, in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, focuses on the study as evidence of how much art education is ‘dependent upon the word’. There is some fuzziness with which terms like ‘cognitive’ are used within *Art Students Observed* and this review may have picked this up. A sentence that captures the internal contradictions of the study particularly well is: ‘... Art at Midville, in short, has become as nearly cognitive as it can get without ceasing to be art’ (Meeson 1974,

174). I like to think that this statement is ironic as opposed to nonsensical, although it is difficult to tell. The author nonetheless teases out many of the more fundamental issues that *Art Students Observed* touches on, specifically that there was assumed to be a fundamental disconnect between artistic and cognitive activity, an assumption that was being challenged by Art & Language but which was deeply entrenched.

The review in *Studies in Design Education* is interestingly by Robin Plummer, who became Dean of the art school in question when it became Lanchester Polytechnic in 1970. He correctly points out another assumption of the study: the blunt instrument with which the authors subdivide the art world into 'formalist' and 'avant-garde' tendencies (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 18; Plummer 1975, 59). As with Harry Weinberger, who could not be seen as within either of these categories, there were, within the staff, more varied identifications with more subtly fragmented artistic positions than the authors account for. Another interesting point about Plummer's review, as it is in a design journal, is that he picks out the fact that many design-oriented students were being 'destroyed ... or channelled into Fine Art' (59). He also devotes a considerable part of his review to dealing with his view of the later developments of art theory within the school. This, no doubt, further added to the apparent confusion that the teaching within the study and that of Art & Language were coterminous.

The book was received with the full knowledge from the beginning that Midville represented Coventry, which, as the above discussed reviews demonstrate, requires a minimal amount of deduction on the informed reader's part. That it was therefore seen as something with which to prove that the teaching of Art & Language was the chief catalyst for this situation of depressing uncertainty is not surprising, but is something of a cart-before-the-horse conclusion. The book demonstrates quite well how frustrating it would be to have some ambition (as Art & Language did) within art education at the time, it being such an inchoate enterprise.

### **Anomie in the art school**

The term 'anomie', used in the study and picked up by a couple of commentators since as truly the central subject of the study, is useful. As a term it is often glossed over and was particularly popular during the 1960s, although used in many ways (Olsen 1965), and it is arguably still often used wilfully to mean a number of things (Puffer 2009). Durkheim's use of anomie was initially in relation both to the breakdown of functional, consensual rules within the division of labour in a social system, and later, in his study of suicide, in terms of the breakdown of moral norms and regulative forces within a rapidly changing culture or economic situation, and 'anomic suicide' was directly related to moments of high economic irregularity. Anomie itself refers to the state of a lack of credible rules in a given society, not, technically and in the original usage, to the individual psychological state resulting from this. This original and, following Marvin Olsen (1965), dual meaning of anomie is meaningful to the social conditions studied within *Art Students Observed*. The dominant criticism of the Dip.A.D. structure was that it had a 'laissez-faire', empty approach to the curricula of courses (Atkinson and Baldwin 1971, 32). It is exactly this relationship between the 'deregulation', if you like, of British art education and the tension produced from this apparent complete laissez-faire policy and the onset

of unspoken and capricious rules that seemed to fill this void that caused much of the confusion we see evidence of in *Art Students Observed*.

The definition of anomie that was possibly more popular in the 1960s was that formed by Robert Merton in his 1938 essay ‘*Social Structure and Anomie*’ (in Merton 1996, 132–152) in which the state of anomie within a society can be reached through various deviant responses to a mismatch between the goals a society deems desirable and the availability to people of the means by which to reach those goals (132–133). This different conception of anomie perhaps sheds light on the idea of the mismatch between the romantic, over-inflated role of the individualist artist (the goal) and the seemingly stymied, futile and unpredictable attempts of students to find a normative means to achieve that role. Without going into detail here, Merton’s sketch of responses and ways of dealing with such a situation and the anomie that ensues from such behaviour make an interesting post-hoc theoretical model for *Art Students Observed*.

### **The afterlife of the study**

Since its publication the study has lurked in the bibliographies of many histories of the period and I would like to briefly look at how it has been used by some authors in the intervening decades. The study does not, however, seem to be referenced in Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1976) empirical study on art students in Chicago, probably the most significant study of its kind at the time but much more focused on the creative process of ‘problem finding’ than the social issues of art education. It was also much more firmly based in rigorous sociological method, which *Art Students Observed* was seen to be lacking. Two decades on, however, Elizabeth Chaplin looked in detail at the study as paradigmatic of an early empirical study ‘of the routine, mundane, taken-for-granted social actions of visual art personnel’ (Chaplin 1994, 161) in opposition to a more broad or critical approach. Along with Lisa Tickner, looking at Coventry in contrast to the Hornsey sit-ins (Tickner 2008, 98), Chaplin also gives due attention to the inherent chauvinism and bullying of the female staff. Both acknowledge that the study would have been very different a few years later, after ‘feminism had begun to reshape the discipline of sociology’ (Chaplin 1994, 165). Indeed, the ‘patriarchal ideology of Romantic art’ (ibid.) is ever present in the material, the staff being 90% male. It is with regards to the mysticism and posturing of such an approach to teaching that Howard Singerman, in his study of the history of the art student in America (1999, 145), brings the study in. He explains the ubiquity of this inheritance from abstract expressionist teachers such as Robert Motherwell and Clifford Still. By the late 1960s in Britain the method of convening ‘crits’ and ‘breaking down the preconceptions’ (ibid.) of students through intense discourse had become very common. Even though, as *Art Students Observed* tells us, ‘expressionism (both “abstract” or “otherwise”) ... are generally discouraged’ (Madge and Weinberger 1973, 18), their teaching style lingered and became a default method.

The place of the ‘crit’ in art school education is another interesting aspect of the study that has been used since. The dependency of art practice on the discourse around that practice, picked up by reviewers at the time (Meeson 1974), and the discussion and justification of artistic practice (which is unavoidable when you are questioning people about their practice) has been looked at and demystified since

this study on two fronts. Firstly, the work by Bernadette Blair (2006), among others, looked at the way teachers and students negotiate the 'crit' experience, and how it can induce various negative emotions; a similar argument to Charles Harrison's accusation of it leading to psychological dependency (Harrison 1972). James Elkins has also done much to demystify the 'crit' in *Why Art Cannot Be Taught* (2001), in which he dedicates a whole chapter to breaking apart the usual assumptions and mystifications inherent in a 'crit'. Both authors cite *Art Students Observed*, and for empirical or practical research in art education it acts as a vivid marker as to what the atmospheric tensions and attitudes of a school of art could be. As should be clear by now, Coventry College of Art does come across as peculiar, perhaps more enervated and resigned than other colleges, but this I think makes it a good indicator of the tensions that could underlie such institutions of the crit.

### **The enduring issues**

Many concerns brought up by *Art Students Observed* can be seen as looming large upon the development of art education after publication of the book. As Paul Wood, in his oft-quoted essay 'Between God and the Saucepan...' (2008, 165) points out, both the overall structure of art education and the social image, if you like, of the art student have changed very little since the 1970s. Several issues, then, can be identified as still interesting and problematic today and their formulation can offer us some way of measuring how much the art student has managed to wrest herself from what the authors called the 'maelstrom' of the art school.

How has the role of theory and history developed as a useful tool for the Fine Art student in the intervening 40 years? It has definitely become richer, savvier and more complex but perennial questions as to the integration and separation of practice and theory point to a lack of satisfactory resolve. Fiona Candlin (2001) charts various stages of educational reform from the Coldstream Report onwards with a particular view to the relation of theory to practice, writing that 'arguably work that integrates theory and practice is now commonplace' (307). This is true, but still students see writing as a chore; it is still a case of a marginal amount of history and theory taught outside the studio in lecture theatres at most art colleges. Hopefully, the response to art history and theory is somewhat better than in 1967 (see table), but the tension between the rise of a research language and the PhD within Art & Design (as Candlin narrates in her thesis), and the anti-intellectual attitude of many undergraduates and undergraduate courses to written work, mean the same contradictions still simmer away.

At the beginning of their study Madge and Weinberger write: 'It was our initial expectation that we would find the art college ethos in its purest and most outspoken form in the Fine Art department' (23). Is the role of Fine Art within the art college as the art college ethos 'in its purest form' still an accurate assumption? At Coventry especially, the Fine Art department has not grown very much at all, while the university structure around it has grown exponentially. Automotive Design is most indicative of the art school presently. Similarly, other colleges have become predominantly about illustration, fashion or product design and rarely have they become more Fine Art orientated. The growth of the higher education sector has provided a concurrent rise of administration (Wood 2008, 186) and a managerial class of academic, which are both completely at odds with the 'fine art sensibility'

that was seen as essence-like in the 1970s. As Paul Wood noted in his assessment of the contemporary state of art education, the ‘open-endedness’ of the subject and ‘overwhelming bureaucracy’ (2008, 187) of the institution cause a similar structural instability, on different terms, to that caused by the initial freedom of the Coldstream Report.

What effect would this have on the modern-day customer-student? Coupled with an expanded field of art, a more heterodox culture of Fine Art than ever, what of the anomic world described in *Art Students Observed*? Lynda Morris (2013, 11) writes: ‘Almost the entire culture has learnt to live with this sense of anomie in the four decades since the early 1970s’. Through living with this anomic situation within the art school, there have risen more contradictions within the ‘laissez-faire’ structure. This open structure has, therefore, acted as a perfect condition for an administrative mind-set to occupy such an amenable state of confusion (see Wood 2008 and Candlin 2001).

These questions seem to me important ones to keep asking, ones that are prompted by *Art Students Observed* and which tell us why, partly because of the lack of critical analysis in the book, it offers us an invaluable rich description of a very particular situation but, when read alongside the wider, possibly more indicative debates of the time, it provides us with a marker from the past as to how art education has changed and what are still endemic contradictions within its teaching.

## Notes

1. Art & Language were a group of four artists (Michael Baldwin, Terry Atkinson, Harrold Hurrell and David Bainbridge) established in 1968 and initially associated with the Conceptual Art movement. They quickly established an output through the journal *Art-Language* in 1969 and became a transatlantic collaborative enterprise. The group has changed scope and membership several times in the intervening four decades.
2. Such as the tensions between largely design-based disciplines and fine art values traced in most historical studies of art education (MacDonald 1970).
3. ‘Midville’ was recently resurrected by Lynda Morris to mean regional art activity, or, as Lynda Morris puts it, ‘not London’. An amusing alternative association is that with John Wyndham’s ‘Midwich’. Lynda Morris also wrote her MA thesis partly on the Art Theory Course at Coventry in 1973.
4. Most notably her long-time engagement with the work of Barnett Newman, and her many reviews and writings for *Studio International*.

## Notes on contributor

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