STROUD CORNOCK Towards a Methodology for Students of Fine Art

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The study of fine art

By the mid-seventeenth century the study of painting and sculpture had begun to take place within the framework of the liberal rather than the mechanical arts (Kristeller, 1951; 1952). Various practices including painting and sculpture began at that time to be referred to as the 'fine arts' (*ibid*, pp. 22f; Gimpel, 1969, pp. 4f), and a further index of the change was the shift from a discussion of technical matters to reasoning about metaphysical aspects of 'art' (*ibid*, p. 92). Within the academies knowledge began to be structured in ways which reflected the intellectual systems of the various professors (see e.g. Karel, 1974), and came to include theories of colour, perspective, chiaroscuro, sciagraphy, anatomy, etc.

However, from the earliest times discussion of paintings and sculpture has been made problematic because of a tension between theory and practice, between technique and inspiration, between that which can be put into words and that which cannot. Plato has Socrates declare that:

> . . . if any man comes to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses, persuaded that skill alone will make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity be brought to nought by the poetry of madness.
>
> (*Phaedrus*, trans. Hackforth, 245a)

Socrates anticipates that this is a view which will not be welcomed by the learned. An illustration of the antithesis of Socrates' view is provided by the highly technical and earnestly "sane" course of instruction published by the Department of Science and Art in 1854 (Ashwin, 1975, pp. 46–59). Sometimes the idea of art as a divine gift has prevailed; at others it has yielded to sober instruction.

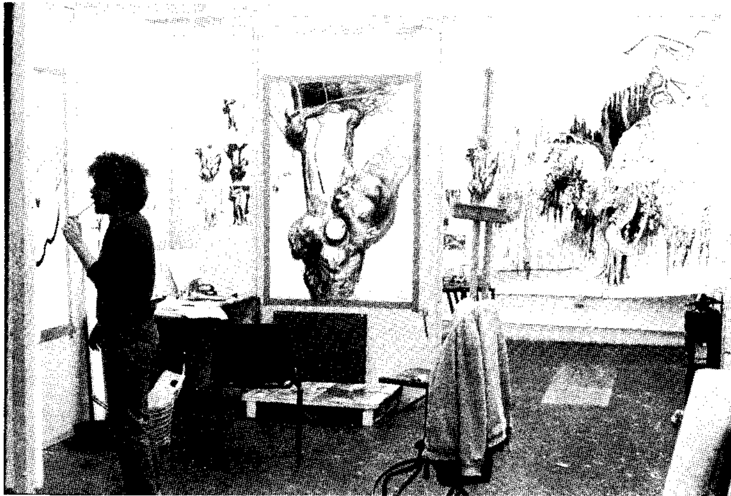
There was a decline in the systematic teaching of prearranged subject matter ('widespread abandonment of detailed syllabuses'—Ashwin, 1975, p. 71) within undergraduate schools of fine art in Britain during the period since 1960. The teaching of such subjects as life drawing, anatomy and perspective was abruptly replaced during that period by tutorial discussion between, on the one hand, individual members of staff (employed on the basis of their artistic rather than educational training or academic concerns) and on the other, individual students. In the course of such tutorial conversations references were increasingly made to such examples of the theory or practice of art as seemed to provide the best model for artistic activity. This shift of attention—from course content to wider questions about 'art' —allowed members of the art schools to develop a more cosmo-

politan stance, but it also heightened tensions and difficulties, for staff as well as students.

Student uncertainty stemmed from a sheer lack of guidance as to what was expected of an individual. Where once there had been a technical and stylistic canon within which the individual could demonstrate skill and variation, there now arose a proliferation of forms as bewildering as that within the art world of the period (see e.g. Rose, 1969). During the 1960's all concerned became anxious to avoid any tendency to fall back on any kind of 'recipe' for picture-making. Hence there was a general antipathy to technical facility; even clear and early indications of a continuity of development within the work of an individual might be treated as suspect. A vivid account of the atmosphere of uncertainty within which the student of fine art has on occasion had to work is given by Madge and Weinberger (1973), together with details of the pressures to which the individual student could be subjected in order to disrupt his work and cause him to engage in frequent and fundamental reappraisals of his development (cf. Daley, 1979; Whittington, 1979; Cornock, 1982a, p. 11). Not only had the methods of teaching changed, but the *aim* of art education had shifted from the passing-on of an artistic tradition, with its own set of skills, to '. . . a general devotion to the principle of *individual* creative development' (Thistlewood, 1981); the central purpose of an art education was no longer to provide knowledge and skills relevant to painting and sculpture, but to encourage what we shall refer to here as the 'personal development' of the individual student. During the period covered by their study (1967–1969) Madge and Weinberger found that:

> 'The belief with which the highest proportion—ninety-two percent—of students were in agreement was that "The value of an art education is in furthering personal development in whatever direction this may lead"' (1973, p. 25)

Lecturing staff, for their part, were faced with the need to recruit students capable of this personal development. This was vital, since it is an organising principle of a student-centred course of this kind that a student who fails to embark upon his development could not be 'given' a pattern of development, ready-made. If students did not begin to make progress, or faltered in their development, then the response would be to wait for progress and eventually to decide that the individual concerned lacked some vital component (of 'talent,' 'commitment,' or what Madge and Weinberger call 'charisma'). Correspondingly, where a vigorous pattern of personal development could clearly be discerned, it was often difficult for the lecturer to ascribe any part of that success to his own efforts. Already in 1950 a fine art lecturer had declared that: 'An art school can develop talent but it cannot give it . . . ' (Brighton and Morris, 1977). Hence it was possible to find that: '. . . half the tutors and approaching two-thirds of the students of certain art colleges agreed with the proposition that art cannot be taught'. (Madge



1st yr. drawing project, Leicester Polytechnic.
Work by *Steve Derman*, 1981.

and Weinberger, 1973, pp. 72, 75). The situation seems to have been reflected in the university art colleges of the United States. In a survey of attitudes Risenhoover and Blackburn (1976) find that:

> 'the artist-professor (. . .) strongly doubts that what he feels obligated to teach can in fact really be taught by anyone. Since the artist-professor's insight rests heavily on non-verbalized knowledge, he has deep reservations about the very essence of instruction' (p. 202).

In America, as in Britain, the aim is apparently rather to develop some personal qualities possessed by the individual than to instruct. Hence:

> 'Students of painting are on the average mighty slim . . . Mediocrity can be very discouraging. When the bulk of your students are mediochre, that's unfortunate.'

The same professor, the painter Harold Altman, continues:

> I like a student with a fierce sense of independence . . . who doesn't look to the teacher for stimulation, for the spoon-feeding (*ibid*, p. 15).

Rudy Pozzatti, a professor of fine art printmaking, refers to 'charisma' as 'really one of the things that students need more than anything else' (*ibid*, p. 115). The American university art college is a place in which we should expect, according to Amy Goldin (1973), to find the type of 'course that has little or no programmatic content,' and in which the lecturers (whose training was again in art practice rather than in education) had as their 'major preoccupation' setting students to produce numerous artefacts. Specifically:

> 'In order to make the student produce a respectable amount of work most teachers are forced to develop authoritarian or seductive devices. Pure bulk is evidence that the student has overcome inertia and self doubt. Bulk demonstrates "involvement," the one quality art teachers prize above all others' (*ibid*, p. 46).

The type of art education prevalent in Britain during the period since 1960 was one in which the student was called upon to organise his own programme of study, which would entail the production of artefacts showing that individual's progress, or 'personal development.' This pattern has only been modified to the extent that some institutions have adopted the requirement that students attend introductory classes, e.g. in drawing. (Departures from this pattern have been seen at sub-degree and post-graduate level in Britain in recent years).

Some of the tensions and difficulties experienced by individuals have produced conspicuous problems for the institutions concerned. Perhaps the most serious of these problems are inactivity on the part of many students at some time during their course, and an inability or unwillingness to engage in constructive discussion related to study.

The first of these problems arises when an individual ceases (or is unable to commence) productive work. A student who 'gets stuck' may be increasingly reluctant to embark on new work—lacking the confidence with which to pursue tentative efforts. (See e.g. Cornock, 1982a, p. 8.)

The second arises when students of fine art feel constrained to *explain* their work, but find their central concerns difficult to verbalise. This may reflect the fact that it is not easy for students to find a common language in which to share their experience. One of the apparent obstacles to such discussion is the considerable variation between the materials and forms used by students of fine art during the last twenty years; another is the subjective basis for critical judgments offered by tutors, which may consequently be perceived as mutually contradictory. At root, however, these difficulties appear to stem from a fundamental difference between the modes of consciousness associated with visual and verbal expression. (This is a topic discussed elsewhere: Cornock 1982b.)

These primary sources of difficulty may be encountered by the undergraduate student of fine art as he faces the need to organise his activities, and particularly in his final year of study. For the lecturer in fine art the task which presents itself is not merely to teach a class of students *about* fine art, but also to help each individual both to identify his artistic concerns and to develop relevant working practices. This paper describes the preliminary stage of a research project, whose purpose has been to illuminate these problems of learning (based on an unpublished monograph: Cornock, 1978).

The experience of seven students

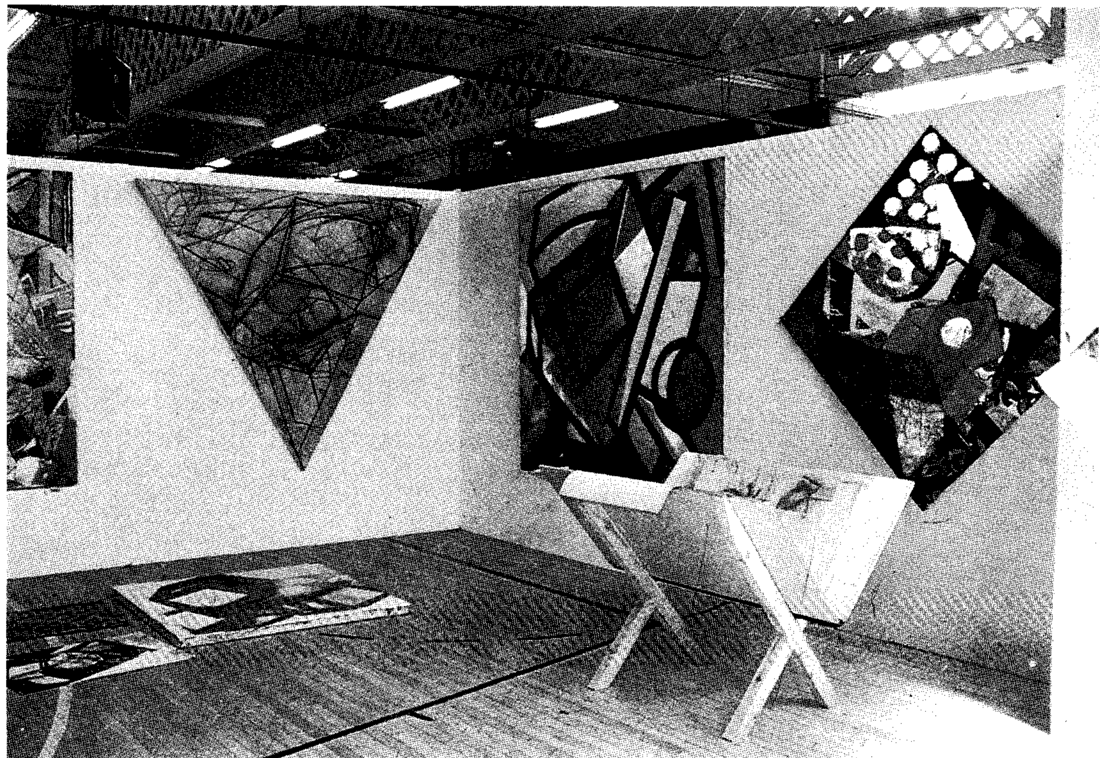
It was decided to approach the problem by seeking to understand the situation as it had been experienced by a small group of final year students. An abiding problem faced by those engaged in the *Verstehen* mode of enquiry is that of grasping a social reality at a level which transcends the individual yet

remains rooted in lived experience. There is something of a dilemma here, for there is a danger of becoming immersed in the subjectivity of individuals yet, if individual experience is ignored then results could be seriously distorted by the enquirer's unconscious imposition of selection and emphasis. These difficulties have been tackled by social phenomenology, and by its transatlantic counterpart, participant observation.

The phenomenological method is a subjective and intuitive effort to suspend the customary attribution of meaning to a phenomenon, and instead to approach it naively so as to apprehend its 'essences' (cf. Speigelberg, 1965, p. 659 *et seq.*). In contrast with those sociological approaches that set out both to establish a distance between observer and subjects and to assemble their observations in a disinterested manner, it is argued by Alfred Schutz (in his account of *The Phenomenology of the Social World*) that it is essential to build up our sense of the realities of the actors in a social situation on the basis of a "we-relationship"; this is the relationship established in communication or in the joint practice of a skill (Schutz, 1932). A practical consequence of this way of approaching social reality is to rely less and less upon third party reports; less and less upon impersonal data.

In 1924 Eduard Lindeman introduced the concept of the 'participant observer' to refer to a member of a social group being studied who shares with that group a vital interest and who reports to an outside sociological observer on the group's activities, subsequently correcting that outside observer's analy-

Fine art degree work, Leicester Polytechnic
Work by *Trevor Flynn*, 1978.



Fine art degree work, Leicester Polytechnic
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sis and observations (1924, p. 192). Objectivity was not seen by Lindeman as a problem because what a group really does is an integration of what it objectively does and what it thinks it is doing. 'Participant observation' later came to refer to a method whereby the observer shares the experiences of the people under observation (Bruyn, 1966, pp. 9–22 *passim*). This intimate involvement is exemplified in the field-work of the pseudonymous James Patrick within a Glasgow street gang (1973) and clearly raises a range of practical, reporting and ethical problems—discussed in a collection of papers (Filstead, 1970)—so that the results of participant observation are likely to be both copious (Becker, 1958, pp. 652–660), and of such subtlety and intimacy that their communication calls for the skills of the novelist or dramatist (Glaser and Strauss, 1965; Maurice Stein in Filstead, 1970, p. 319). The participant observer not only runs the risk of being regarded by his subjects as a spy (Patrick, 1973; Filstead, 1970, 235–282 *passim*) but, like all sociologists engaged in field work, he risks the accusation of bias—of being identified with and over-sympathetic toward (some of) his subjects.

In 1977 a group of six final year students of fine art (whom we shall refer to as Case Study ("CS") 1, CS2, etc.) accepted an invitation to participate in an enquiry into their learning experiences, and a seventh announced her intention of joining the group. Two immediate requirements present themselves at the commencement of the study: first the need to elicit intimate accounts of each student's view of his learning experience; and, second, the need to build a model of the pattern of student

learning in this context. The aim was to enter the learner's experience of the act of learning so as to begin to understand the basis upon which learners interpret it (cf. Cornock, 1980, pp. 19f; Marton, 1981, pp. 181, 189).

Each member of the group presented a detailed and matter-of-fact account of his activities as a student. A convention was adopted that the group would restrict itself to a consideration of what would come to be referred to as the 'working processes' of each individual (so that, although this entailed occasional reference to the artefacts produced by students, neither the originals nor reproductions of them were viewed, and discussion excluded aesthetic comment and criticism).

The following is a synopsis of the discussions, commencing with an outline of the participants and the nature of their work on the course.

CS1. Commenced his studies using photography, but later found greater involvement using manual techniques, specialising in non-representational constructions in three dimensions, using transmitted light and some simple switching devices.

CS2. A painter who suffered long periods of uncertainty and a tendency to become withdrawn into reading.

CS3. A painter who constructed large, simplified and familiar images into bold patterns. This student specified very clearly a number of activities which she pursued in sequence in producing her works. In this she emphasised her concern to maintain an emphasis on the process of manipulating images rather than upon the content of the final product of her efforts. CS3's view was that the process yields the art, and that art does not, therefore, emanate from the objects produced.

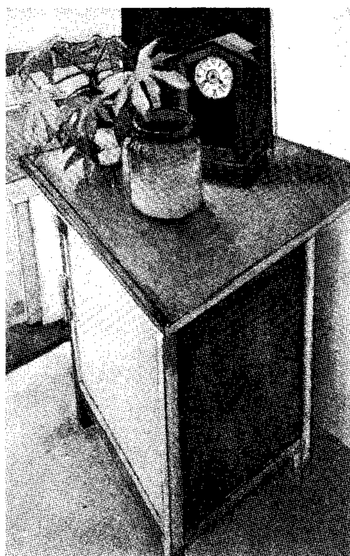
CS4. This was a slow quiet and painstaking painter whose work as a student was wholly figurative. A thoughtful person, he consulted many exhibitions of (to him) relevant paintings *and* their associated catalogues. This student's approach was to preconceive a painting and then to continue working until the result corresponded with the preconception. His efforts were uncompromising and led to long periods of work on each picture.

CS5. This student accepted the invitation to participate in the study because she considered herself to be unsystematic in her approach to her work, which took the form of ambitious abstract paintings on a large scale. During her second year of study she had preconceived each piece but, during the final year, there was a basic change. Now the work commenced with execution, conceiving the canvas as an arena within which to generate problems. As problems were thrown up on a large canvas so CS5 moved to smaller canvasses so as to examine separately those ideas. During this process she found it necessary to document progress in each "arena" for immediate reference (using photography). Speaking of her third year work CS5 reported that she managed to surprise herself in the process of painting because it did not involve preconception. The third year of study created conditions which accelerated her development.

CS6. The work of CS6 appeared precise, bold and unusual, attracting the attention and approval of tutors. Yet her contribution to this enquiry revealed her considerable sense both of confusion and insecurity: this had caused her to accept the invitation to participate in the enquiry. CS6 explored one subject matter deeply over a long period, finding or being stimulated by a subject matter and not wanting to generate ideas. Despite confusion and anxiety she did not seek tutorial guidance. The final year of study created additional confusion as CS6, unable to achieve what she could consider to be a meaningful synthesis of form and content, anticipated with concern the approach of the degree exhibition (terminal examination).

CS7. This student's approach—a curious mixture of romantic impetuosity and an earnest, almost scientific quest for 'truth'—presented the tutorial staff with special difficulties. He described his early paintings as produced in response to his feelings and declared that he had tended not to know 'what to do next?'—or how to judge what he had done. His feelings he could equally associate with everyday experiences as with paintings. CS7 decided on the need to affect a change in his approach, and therefore changed his tutor (!). The new tutor set tasks which were carried out without the student being able to guess either their significance or likely outcome. His earlier concentration on studio activity gave way to a critical self-consciousness which lent a sense of self control. His later work brought this student to a standstill or what he called a 'state of creative nothingness.'

Some of the participants *planned their studio activities* so as to make the most effective use of available resources (CS1, CS3, CS4, and—despite her doubts—CS5); each of the remainder sought to work in response to the currents of his stream of consciousness. Again, some of the participants made serious efforts to *organise their thinking about* the aspect of art or self with which they were concerned: CS2 stressed the need to separate 'philosophy' from practice (something he had not managed to do); others used card notes (CS4) and schematic diagrams in the attempt to record and to accord priority to their systems of thought (CS2, CS4, CS7); or stressed the value of theoretical studies in helping them (CS3, CS5, CS7) to articulate ideas about their work, i.e. those theoretical studies in the History of Art and Associated Studies programmes, which form 20 per cent of all CNAA validated art and design first degree courses.



Fine art degree work, Leicester Polytechnic
Work by *Ian Glassbrook*, 1978.

What issued from the group discussions was the beginnings of a picture of the learning milieu which was then criticised and 'corrected' in further discussion and correspondence continuing well after the participants had graduated.

Our primary concern had been to identify 'work' as a set of activities (rather than as a set of artefacts). Two main classes of work activity were identified: physically productive work, and intellectual (or reflective) work. Most confined physical activities to the period between 9 am and 5 pm on weekdays, although

for two (CS3 and CS6) the need for extended periods of uninterrupted studio work meant that the evenings and (where possible) weekends were important. Unanimity was expressed on the importance of planning the working day in the studio so that the right materials and conditions are to hand to meet chosen objectives (e.g. to stretch a canvas); stress was placed (by CS1 and CS5) on the need to plan for work on more than one artefact on a particular day—the common experience which this maxim reflects is that of meeting an unexpected obstacle which bars progress on a particular artefact on a particular day. (CS5 went further and recommended a division of available studio space with a screen so as to create separate working lights and "atmospheres".)

Agreement was expressed on the most significant characteristic of physical work: that it generates a sense of involvement and motivation. Physical activity requires and (pursued, vigorously) creates confidence. Approached physically work is bustling and seemingly confused and out of it will emerge (what will later be identified as) elements of meaning.

Discussion revealed intellectual or reflective work to be separated for the most part from physical work, often taking place away from the studio, perhaps during travel. Intellectual work takes two forms: on the one hand the students were conscious of thinking about ideas, forms and images, separating and recombining them in an exploratory way leading (it is hoped) to the recognition of new possibilities; on the other hand the student has to a greater or lesser extent to plan or design both a series of artefacts and the execution of individual artefacts so as to realise his intentions.

In contrast with the effects of generative activity, analytical and reflective activity appeared sometimes to be associated with a decline in involvement and a loss of a sense of the meaningfulness of the work in hand. The circumstances in which people become inactive and confused strongly indicate that analytical and reflective activities tend, particularly in the early stages of an art student's course, to retard his development.

The joint set of physical and intellectual work activities tends to fall into a cycle. This not only generates artefacts (paintings, etc.) but a developed set of ideas and continuity of purpose from one artefact to another. Hence, when a senior student refers to "his work" he will be referring not only to the sum of his material production but, obviously enough, to that developing continuity of purpose as well. The latter is particularly difficult for the student to "capture" and express because it is constantly unfolding. The ability to identify and develop his work at both of these levels marks an increasing ability to consider particular artefacts in a wider—even an art historical—context. Attention shifts to a higher level of abstraction than that of the artefact; the ability to do this may show itself quite suddenly, marking in some cases a profound change in the student's attitude.

The consensus was that a systematic record should be made of

work and ideas, not only in the form of drawings and trial artefacts but also as notes on the intellectual developments taking place. Under the influence of a tutor serious efforts had been made by some members of the group (and by later participants in the enquiry) to formalise these notes, and to integrate them with the act of drawing (Buzan, 1974).

When studio activity proceeds with vigour a large number of ideas and forms are generated which, away from the studio, continue to preoccupy the student of fine art, who continually reviews and reorganises them. It is, seemingly, at this stage that the planning activity is necessary: planning a piece of work is analogous to the planning of an experiment in which the objective is to test the effects of a particular configuration of ideas and forms. Approached in this way, it was reported, the realisation of a piece of work can indeed surprise the maker.

Considerable attention was given to difficulties experienced by students when seeking to present and defend their development in critical discussion or assessment; the direct approach is to use the artefacts on show as a springboard to discussion of the difficult-to-articulate continuity of purpose (or lack of it), but some students sought to predispose their critics towards a consideration of hidden concerns by presenting written statements alongside the artefacts.

Those whose strategy had been to approach their work through thought and writing (CS2 and CS7) had given a corresponding weight to the History of Art and Associated Studies components of the course. Some had managed to integrate the requirements for a major piece of work with artistic practice (CS4 and CS5). The value of such an integration was thought to be considerable (particularly in view of the disruptive influence which this extended essay had been seen to have on the artistic practice of many students on the course in question). Several members of the group discovered an interest in and affinity with contemporary British artists, whose work they explored with some resourcefulness.

Lessons drawn from the discussions of the students' experience

Students of fine art are more than ever responsible for organising their own advanced study, in consultation with tutors. Their studies appear to centre in the production of more or less artistic artefacts: to be, in fact, a craft. But in examining the experiences of the students described above it was decided that it would be more useful to regard the study of fine art through the practice of painting, etc. as a process of developing individual learning strategies. That is the view adopted by the group in the course of its discussions. Having heard about the several approaches to work of the members of the group attention turned to an analysis of the patterns of learning which could be recognised, on balance, as having been successful in furthering study, and

those which had not. What were sought were some principles or procedures which might be said to guide productive study in this field. In seeking such principles and procedures it is of course important to remember that people tackle many complex and demanding tasks whilst relying on their experience, and in doing so find well-ordered yet informal ways of carrying out those tasks. We are not seeking to replace the common-sense approach with elaborate techniques but rather to render those well-ordered procedures and the underlying principles explicit.

So the specific objective of the enquiry was to produce a methodology which might guide the actions of students experiencing difficulty. 'Methodology' is used here to denote a set of strategy rules relevant to actions which embody some empirical facts about a situation and which:

> ... are usually heuristic only. That is, they generally provide neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for reaching a solution (Petrie, 1968, p. 251).

The aim of this project was to produce a methodology which would share some of the characteristics sought in a longstanding research programme at Lancaster. That is:

> ... it should be capable of being *used* in actual problem situations; it should be *not vague* in the sense that it should provide a greater spur to action than a general everyday philosophy; it should be *not precise*, like a technique, but should allow insights which precision might exclude ... (Checkland, 1981, p. 162).

Also that it should be such that information and activities relevant to the study of fine art could be included in the methodology for use if appropriate in a particular situation. Thus the research was not designed to prescribe a set of actions to undergraduate students of fine art, but to give strategic guidance in the form of 'a set of *principles of method* which in any particular situation have to be reduced to a method uniquely suitable to that particular situation' (*ibid*, pp. 161f). This is to recognise that, above a certain level of complexity, each individual must act in a series of unique situations, each of which has its own logic, and that the value of methodology lies in its enhancement of the user's ability to interpret those particular situations. Not only will methodology influence interpretation—it will itself be modified by the experiences interpreted (cf. Parlett and Dearden, 1977, p. 147; Elton and Laurillard, 1979, pp. 90–93).

The most striking aspect of the students' experience lay in their apparent need to strike a particular balance between the visual and the verbal. That is, between those areas of experience which are rooted both in tacit perceptions and in the recording of visual all-at-once patterns of information (via drawing, etc.); and those other areas of experience made up of perceptions which are the product of analysis and reflection, and which find expression in symbolic discourse (speech and writing). The profound difference and sometimes destructive interaction be-

tween these tacit and articulate modes of thinking are discussed elsewhere (Cornock, 1982b).

The importance of the distinction manifested itself in contrasting approaches to work. Where one student (e.g. CS3) would plunge into the physical act of making and so leave until later any effort to understand or discuss the work, another (e.g. CS2) would instead agonise over the nature and purpose of possible work, thus giving thought and writing priority over the

1st yr. drawing project, Leicester Polytechnic.
Work by *Steve Derman*, 1981.

1st yr. drawing project, Leicester Polytechnic.
Discussion of work, 1981.

production of physical evidence of even the most provisional kind. This is a distinction which has been recognised by later participants in the enquiry (e.g. CS9, CS10, CS11), and to which we may therefore draw attention by clearly dividing the learner's activities into sets:

(i) 'generative' activities (mostly physical, and undertaken in the studio)—so called because the reports received strongly indicate a tendency for physical work in the studio to generate ideas, enthusiasm for further work, and a sense of the significance of forms and images thrown up in the course of physical work; and

(ii) 'analytical and reflective' activities.

However, before examining the constituent activities forming these sets, it will be useful to describe a general finding which forms an essential part of the methodology.

From the reports received it appeared to be possible to identify at least one developmental stage which we should expect all students to achieve whilst on a fine art course, and preferably during the second year of study: it seems that the maturing student artist not only engages in a vigorous pattern of generative activities but also seeks to 'capture' and express in words some sense of 'his work'—not merely as the sum of the artefacts produced, but in the form of an emerging continuity of purpose from one work to another. This continuity of purpose is closely bound up with an emerging set of forms, materials and ways of handling them peculiarly associated with the content of the work. It therefore seems appropriate to identify as a stage of development to be achieved by the student of fine art the acquisition of a "working process". With its achievement it becomes possible for the student to begin to consider his own ideas and artefacts in a wider context: of, for example, art history and art criticism. Among members of the original group those whose reports embodied descriptions of a personal working process, and whose course work showed a marked ability to integrate both tacit (generative) and articulate (analytical and reflective) aspects of study were CS3 and CS5; two members of the group who seemed painfully aware of having failed to achieve a working process were CS2 and CS6. A detailed set of concerns and practices providing an example of a developed working process forms a case study (23) described in Cornock, 1982a, pp. 13–16.

So we return to that part of the working process which forms the set of generative activities centred mainly in the studio. What follows is a summary account of the methodology as it emerged from an analysis of reports from the group (based on Cornock, 1978).

Stage 1: Generation. The manipulation of materials and forms in the studio. Serves to generate the vital elements out of which all work is synthesised. Such activity is generative in its apparent association with involvement and confidence. It is also primitive, in the sense that exploratory *playing* both with physical materials

and with fragments of image, form, colour, tone, texture, etc. stands logically prior to the other activities described below. (The distinction between logical and temporal priority is discussed later in this section.) A simple example of a Stage 1 action would be the mixing of paints of differing degrees of viscosity, their application with different utensils, and observation of the differing effects.

Stage 2: Selection. The manipulation of materials is accompanied by an effort to select (identify, or recognise) significant elements of form and pattern. That is, the conscious putting-aside of examples of the effects produced by particular ways of handling materials, tools, images and forms for future consideration. This is an activity which embraces the identification of significant elements of visual subject matter. Prior to the achievement of what has been termed a working process it may be observed that some students become so anxious in their concern to conceive, or to justify, *complete* works (paintings, sculptures, etc.) that scant attention is paid to the visual elements of earlier works, contents of sketchbooks and raw materials in the studio, with a consequent failure to recognise their latent potential.

Stage 3: Synthesis. The selection process is complete when the number of possibilities thrown up in the course of manipulating materials is such as to give a sense of readiness. Now attention can shift from the elements of form and pattern to the conceptualisation of a work, which will embody a synthesis of those elements into an organised whole. This stage of work may throw up a number of possible works and, if so, a further period of manipulation, selection and synthesis will precede a decision (exemplified in the approaches reported by CS3 and CS5). When a decision has been made the final task during this stage of work is to plan the execution of the work.

The first three ('generative') stages of this methodology are closely interrelated in the form of a cycle of activities leading to the production of an artefact. Because during these stages we are overwhelmingly concerned with the visual elements (of painting, sculpture, etc.) this cycle of work cannot readily be verbalised, and attempts to do so during the cycle of manipulation, selection and synthesis may in fact prove damaging; the attempt to explain or to justify a work during the course of its generation (whether to another person or to oneself) may have a seriously inhibiting effect. We move now to the set of analytical and reflective activities.

Stage 4: Articulation. The fourth stage of the methodology is the student's effort to conceptualise his work as it incorporates a continuity of concerns. A developing body of individual artefacts will embody the characteristic forms and ideas which have been more or less systematically explored. These can now be reviewed by the student so that those aspects of his work which he deems significant can be described verbally; the product of this review will be an explicit, articulate grasp of 'the work' in the broadest

sense—of the working process. Whereas at an earlier stage of his personal development a student artist is likely to be inhibited by the effort to plan and justify works in advance, once the cycle of production has been firmly established a review of the resulting artefacts will (almost inevitably) lead to the formulation of some general strategy affecting future works. Knowledge and theory enter the working process at this stage of the methodology.

Stage 5: Presentation. At an early stage in a fine art course a student is likely to be asked to assemble a group of artefacts for critical assessment. Such a show can be treated as evidence of the student's engagement in the first, second and third stages described above. However, as that cycle of studio activity begins to yield what we have called a "working process" it will become increasingly possible (and important) for him to impart to an exhibition of his artefacts a coherent sense of his continuity of concerns. At this stage the available pool of artefacts, preparatory material and concepts can begin to be orchestrated so as to engage critical attention at the appropriate level.

Stage 6: Critical Discussion. We have sought to establish a clear distinction between (i) the tacit dimension of artistic practice; and (ii) the associated development of an articulate sense of working processes. The tacit dimension is one in which one learns by rehearsal (aided perhaps by example), but a working process represents the student's sense of the meaning and purpose emerging from his work: the working process can be considered as a *verbal model* of "the work" being done by that student and, as such, *it* becomes the locus of critical discussion. Thus the individual artefacts which are the ostensible points of reference in such a discussion are in fact referred to through the articulate conceptualisation of it which is used by the author of the work. It is clearly vital to his interests that he develop an articulate sense of his working process if he is to make a coherent presentation of his work; he and his critics (lecturers, other students) will only be able to engage in a relevant debate on the work if they share an understanding of the author's concerns (and express that understanding in mutually understandable terms). The critical debate will influence the student's conceptualisation of his work, either by helping to strengthen its integral characteristics or by placing it within a wider frame of reference than had previously been considered in relation to that working process.

A diagrammatic representation of the foregoing will help to separate the component activities and to indicate their logical interdependence (Figure 1). The arrows on Figure 1 lead downward from an initial engagement in physical manipulation to a selection of elements of form and pattern, which leads back into the physical activity (arrow at left), and the further development of that form and pattern. The first three activities lead directly back and forward into one another. Together they form that part of artistic study which can be observed. The other and

less visible part of artistic study forms the lower cycle of three activities. The two sets of activity are connected by:

(i) forward progress from the first three to the articulation of a working process; and

(ii) reiteration from articulate (verbalised) activities back into making, selection and conceptualisation.

This is to draw attention to a logical (and not of course to a temporal) sequence of activities. So that—although we may often observe that an individual in a real-world situation will turn from, say, the completion of one painting ('synthesis') to the 'selection' of forms and images which will form the basis of a further painting—the *logic* of the situation is (in terms of the methodology) that 'selection' *precedes* 'synthesis'.

The methodology

The pattern of artistic activity emerging from the discussion is one of *generation* leading to *selection* and *synthesis*, and ultimately to the presentation of work and its critical discussion. In its

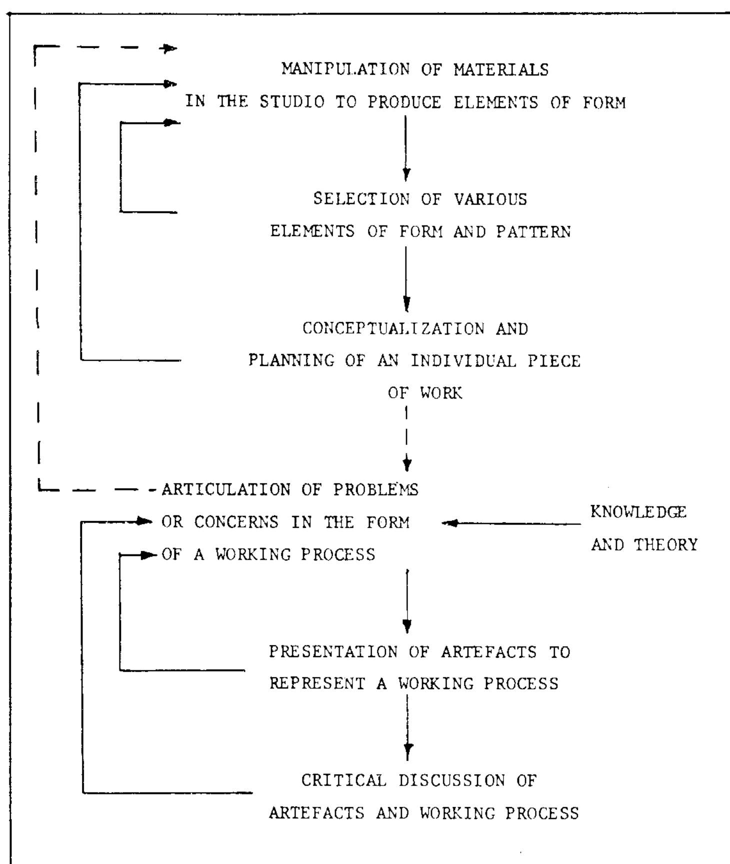


FIGURE 1. The emerging methodology. The broken arrows indicate the transition from the first three stages to the second three stages, and vice versa.

earlier stages a student's work can only be discussed as it is embodied in individual artefacts, but as the pattern of artistic activity is developed so it begins to be possible to glimpse that student's *working process*. Prior to this stage a student may make comparisons between individual artefacts of his own and those of others, but the influence on his work is likely to remain one of style and craft. With the advent of his consideration of 'work' at a higher level of abstraction the student will be able to attempt the *articulation* of his ideas in a wider context of knowledge and theory. Only at this stage of personal development will the student begin to grapple with *presentation* of his working process leading to its *critical discussion*. This then, is the methodology: summarized in diagrammatic form in Figure 2.

The origination of this project lay in a desire to establish a basis for the constructive tutorial discussion of the difficulties encountered by undergraduate students of fine art, and one which would allow those concerned not only to set aside considerations of personal taste but also, in extreme cases, to facilitate constructive guidance in the virtual absence of recently produced artefacts.

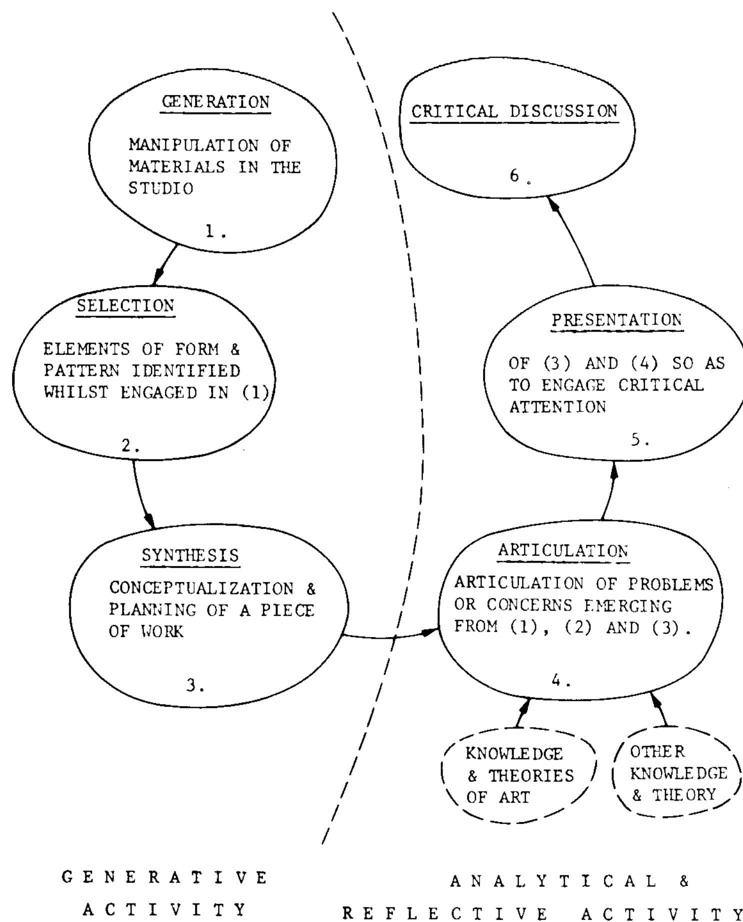


FIGURE 2. A diagrammatic summary of the methodology.

Any constructive contribution to this kind of debate is likely to be of some value in view of the obstacle placed in the path of the student in this subject area by his sense of exposure during the critical formative stages of personal development. The student tends to regard the artefact as a token or index of his personal worth, and does so in a society which tends to bring to discussion of the arts an expressionist *Weltanschauung*. Thus, in the words of Karl Popper:

> 'The expressionist view is that our talents, our gifts, and perhaps our upbringing, and thus "our whole personality", determine what we do. The result is good or bad, according to whether or not we are gifted and interesting personalities. In opposition to this I suggest that everything depends upon the give-and-take between ourselves and our task, our work, our problems, our world 3; upon the repercussion upon us of this world: upon feedback, which can be amplified by our criticism of what we have done. It is through the attempt to see objectively the work we have done—that is to see it critically—and to do it better, through the interaction between our actions and their objective results, that we can transcend our talents, and ourselves.'

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