

Jacquelyn Ardam

# ON NOT TEACHING ART: BALDESSARI, PEDAGOGY, AND CONCEPTUALISM

*The conceptual artist JOHN BALDESSARI (b. 1931) has had a career in teaching as prolific as his career in art-making. For over four decades, he taught art in a variety of settings including high schools, community colleges, arts schools, and universities. He helped found the Studio Art program at the University of California, San Diego, was an originating faculty member of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), where he chaired the Art department for over twenty years, and taught at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1996 to 2007. Baldessari's art practice and pedagogy are deeply intertwined, and a number of his best-known works explicitly thematize and engage in pedagogy.*

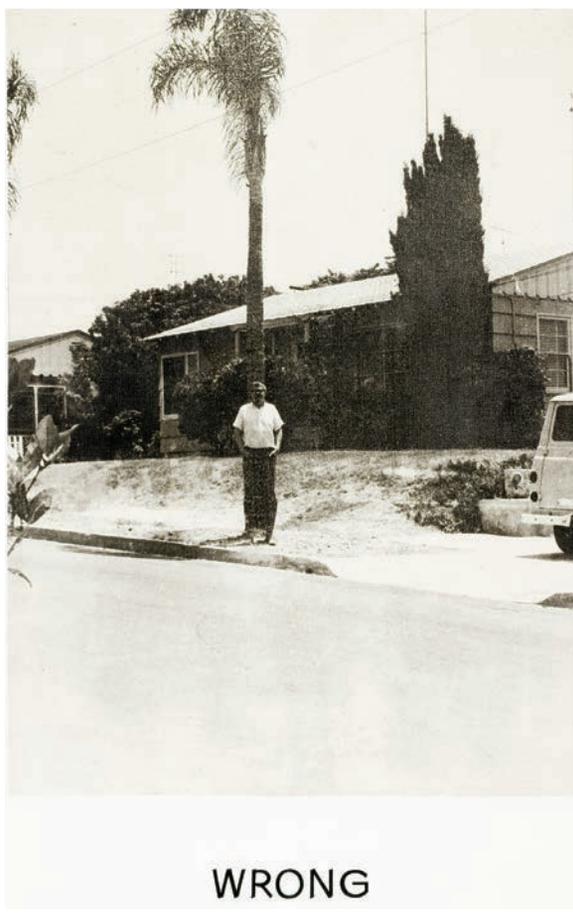
Consider, for example, the 1968 photoemulsion on canvas *Wrong* (Fig. 1), which juxtaposes a photographic image against text. In the image, a man stands in front of a palm tree such that the tree appears to be growing out of the top of his head. The image is dull and flat, and the figure is framed in the middle distance, just slightly left of center. The landscape is suburban, and the figure's face is somewhat obscured. If we

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look closely enough, we see that Baldessari himself is the subject. Beneath the photograph, we find the word "WRONG" painted in clear, large lettering in acrylic paint across the canvas. The judgment that this one half of the piece exerts on its other—a judgment so blatant that it reads as comically



**Figure 1.**  
*John Baldessari, Wrong (1967). Courtesy of John Baldessari.*

excessive—evokes the discourse of amateur photography guides and how-to manuals that espouse the “rightness” or “wrongness” of certain photographic compositions. Common wisdom advises against photographing subjects directly in front of trees, while the compositional rule of thirds advises against centering points of interest in the frame. Baldessari’s photograph disobeys both of these guidelines.

Baldessari’s *Wrong* has often been read as pushing back against what Abigail Solomon-Godeau calls “the protocols of amateur photography,”<sup>1</sup> and in so doing, the piece is explicitly didactic. The word “WRONG” suggests that, like an answer to an exam, a photograph can be correct or incorrect, right or wrong. Its claim is not that the photograph is “ugly” or “unappealing” or “uninteresting”; “WRONG” is instead a didactic claim, the kind of claim that can only be made when rules are stated and then disobeyed.

And this “WRONG” is authoritative not just in its brevity but also in its style. Baldessari explains: “Although I actually did teach lettering in high school and could have done it, I wanted to remove myself from it. I hired a professional sign painter and told him, ‘Don’t try to make it look like art. Just make it like “For Sale,” or “Keep Out,” or whatever. I just want it to look like information.”<sup>2</sup>

The aesthetic of the “WRONG” lettering is bold and clear, and comes without any explanatory discourse. As such, it opens a discursive sphere that spurs a number of questions from its viewers. What exactly is so “wrong” about this

photograph? That it does not follow the compositional rule of thirds? Or is the problem that the figure is standing in front of a tree? Can we imagine an instance in which a photographer might want a palm tree to appear to be growing out of his subject's head? Is the problem the image's muddy lighting? Or does the "wrongness" have more to do with the photograph's content? Is it "wrong" because it associates the artist himself with the banal suburban landscape? In designating the photograph within the larger canvas as "WRONG," is the work—the text/image juxtaposition as a whole—now "right"? And who is to make this decision about the photograph's wrongness or rightness? The artist? The viewer? A teacher?

The "WRONG" is both a part of Baldessari's composition and a commentary on it; it enacts a form of authoritative didacticism while questioning that very act of bad teaching. And in so doing, *WRONG* creates an occasion for *good* teaching. In this essay, I will examine a constellation of similar pedagogical tensions in Baldessari's art practice and pedagogy. I will suggest that we should read Baldessari's pedagogically oriented work—work in which he was also exploring conceptual practices, such as hiring a sign painter to execute his vision—alongside his classroom pedagogy, that reading his teaching opens up new avenues for understanding his and others' conceptual art of the early 1970s. Pedagogically oriented questions took on particular significance in the early 1970s as the tenets of conceptual art practice were being put into effect at radical arts institutions such as the California Institute of the Arts, where Baldessari taught. From its very founding, CalArts eschewed a long history of arts education practices, implemented a curricular policy of "no technique before need," and attempted to overturn hierarchies between teacher and student.

Through readings of several works that Baldessari created during the early years of CalArts, including *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* and *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, I will suggest that the artist is particularly interested in the possibilities for pedagogy in the studio art classroom during and after the advent of conceptualism. Despite his storied career as a teacher, Baldessari often claims that "[art] can't be taught";<sup>3</sup> this essay will examine the ways in which his artwork and classroom pedagogy belie such statements, particularly in the context of the intellectualism of the conceptual art movement. As conceptualists began privileging ideas over craft and aesthetics, their pedagogical priorities also demanded a shift, and Baldessari's work from the early 1970s traces the

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growing pains of teaching conceptual art-making within an educational institution. In the intervening years, art has only become more academicized, and Baldessari’s explorations of the methods and limitations of teaching art have become increasingly important now that artists are more likely than ever to be both student *and* teacher in the studio art classroom.

#### ART PEDAGOGY AND THE ELEMENTAL

When John Baldessari began teaching at the California Institute of the Arts in 1970, he put together a list of “art ideas” for the students in his now-legendary “Post Studio” class. The course had no syllabus, no assignments, no grades, and no predetermined subject matter. Baldessari’s suggestions for his students, titled “List of Art Ideas for 1st Class of CalArts, Post Studio (If They Have No Ideas of Their Own from which to Make a Piece),” are sometimes useful, often hilarious, and they illuminate both Baldessari’s artistic practice and his approach to pedagogy. These “art ideas” include commands: “Disguise an object to look like another object”; abstract and open-ended questions: “Can one give and take away aesthetic content?”; and somewhat obtuse phrases: “Ecological

guerrilla art.”<sup>4</sup> This intriguing list, which has 109 entries, may help us understand why Baldessari, perhaps more than any other visual artist of his generation, is famed both for his own work and for his teaching; the recent publication of the two-volume *More Than You Wanted to Know About John Baldessari* provides a wealth of information about his art practice in and out of the classroom. From the mid-1960s onward, Baldessari taught at public schools and

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community colleges, art schools, and universities across southern California. Accounts of Baldessari's art practice invariably turn to teaching at some point, and many contemporary artists, including James Welling, David Salle, Barbara Bloom, Matt Mullican, and Mike Kelley were students in Baldessari's CalArts Post Studio classes in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> While Baldessari has developed a reputation for his singular pedagogy, his work in the classroom is very much of the institution's founding ethos and rhymes with the practice of other early CalArts faculty members.

CalArts was incorporated in 1961 by Walt Disney, and the school was born out of the merging of the Chouinard Art Institute with the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music. It was unique in that it offered programs in both the visual and the performing arts. Its first academic year was 1970-1971, and it opened with a "radical educational model" (still in place today) that "favors independent artistic work over rigid curricula, collegial relationships among a community of artists over hierarchies of teacher and student, and continuous interaction among the different branches of the arts over the self-containment of each discipline."<sup>6</sup> Founding dean Paul Brach is more explicit in articulating the rationale for this model: "Over the years I'd seen too many art departments dominated by faculties of middle-aged men who compensated for their limited, or non-existing, professional careers by the most authoritarian control over their students. I wanted a climate of learning that was free of fear and repression."<sup>7</sup> Miriam Schapiro, who co-founded the Feminist Arts Program at CalArts, describes her pedagogical approach: "Ultimately I accepted myself as a facilitator. My growing philosophy of education was based on the idea that [my students] had as much to tell me, as I had to tell them."<sup>8</sup> CalArts' radicalism lay in its dissolving of disciplinary boundaries and its leveling of hierarchies.

The Institute's educational philosophy was articulated most powerfully in a special issue of the University of Wisconsin's progressive journal *Arts in Society*. The issue, titled "California Institute of the Arts: Prologue to a Community," is a collection of letters, memos, application essays, plans for projects, news articles, and photographs that documents the creation of the Institute in a non-linear and non-hierarchical fashion. "Prologue" offers perhaps the clearest statement of the CalArts mission extant:

California Institute of the Arts is more than a professional school; it is a community with a new concept.

Our students will be accepted as artists. We assume they have come to develop the talents they bring. They will be treated accordingly and be encouraged in the independence that this implies.

The emphasis will be on projects or individual work under faculty guidance. Methodology will vary with purpose so that craft will inform knowledge and knowledge may work its way into craft. There will be no grades. . . .

Interaction among the schools is fundamental to the Institute and the resources of each school will be available to all students.<sup>9</sup>

In breaking down traditional student-teacher hierarchies, encouraging diverse methodologies, and valuing interdisciplinary work, CalArts thus positions itself against many forms of oppressive, boundary-enforcing practices. In so doing, the Institute aligns itself with the philosophy of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated into English in 1970, which, among other things, calls for the dismantling of the hierarchical relationship between student and teacher.<sup>10</sup> "Prologue" does not mention Freire, nor any other educational theorists, but Judith Adler's ethnography of the founding of CalArts makes clear that the school was formed with a radical pedagogical intent; she writes that "Institute students and staff saw themselves as subjects of a Utopian experiment in the reorganization of their education, work, and life."<sup>11</sup> As Adler argues, CalArts was heavily influenced by the counterculture and social movements of the 1960s, and imagined itself as a community of "aesthetic radicalism" that could be an antidote to the dominant order.

While CalArts has evolved toward more standard educational practices in the age of neoliberalism, one of the central tenets of the CalArts philosophy *has* persisted: the valuing of critical thinking above and beyond traditional artistic skills, or, in Ian Burn's terms, the valuing of "forms of knowledge" over "manual dexterity."<sup>12</sup> The CalArts mantra was, and still is, "no technique before need;" at CalArts, traditional skills such as drawing and painting were and are taught only *in service* of ideas. Baldessari has described the Institute as having a "think-tank model" of education.<sup>13</sup> This model not only complements but indeed stems from the contemporaneous "intellectualism" of conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s. These artists began expressing a bold desire to escape aesthetics and operate only in ideas, to disavow the optics of art and concern themselves only with meaning, presenting, in Blake Stimson's terms, "the work of art in already-interpreted

form.”<sup>14</sup> This concept-centric art produced enormous amounts of text, both within and about the art; conceptualists were fond of incorporating written language into their pieces as well as issuing manifesto-like documents.

In the influential “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” for example, Sol LeWitt declares that “[i]n conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work” and that “the execution is a perfunctory affair.”<sup>15</sup> Ian Burn similarly affirms that “viewing is an experience outside of the idea and its structure, visual interest has become arbitrary.”<sup>16</sup> Joseph Kosuth, tracing conceptualism’s tradition, locates its roots in the work of Marcel Duchamp: “With the unassisted readymade, art changed its focus from the form of the language to what was being said.”<sup>17</sup> It is telling that Kosuth uses a linguistic metaphor to describe the field of visual art; for him, the “form” of conceptual art is “what [is] being said”: the signified, not the signifier. In these early theorizations of conceptual art, artists authorize what Burn first identified as the “deskilling” of art, in which aesthetic skill is downplayed and rendered immaterial and “perfunctory.”<sup>18</sup> The term “deskilling,” however, may be misleading; what is at stake in conceptual art is a different set of skills with, in Burn’s phrase, “forms of knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> In 1968, Lucy Lippard and John Chandler describe this shift in other terms, writing famously that “the studio is again becoming a study.”<sup>20</sup> Although it would be naïve to presume that conceptual art could do away with optics and questions of aesthetics and craft completely, it cannot be denied that conceptual artists both conceived of and framed their art in terms of ideas—in terms of the study, rather than the studio.<sup>21</sup> And with this turn toward intellectualism came a simultaneous turn toward the discursive; major conceptualists such as Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner took on language as both medium *and* subject. While conceptual artists were by no means the first to incorporate text into their visual work, this practice is a hallmark of conceptualism, and the intense focus on language mirrored the linguistic turn in Western philosophy and critical theory that so defined the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>22</sup>

The shift in skill-sets (from studio to study) become especially visible when we compare them to traditional studio art pedagogy and curricula which Baldessari and other CalArts faculty members (including Allan Kaprow, Nam June Paik, and Michael Asher) overturned as they explored the tenets of conceptualism in their artistic and pedagogical practice.<sup>23</sup> This history is long and varied, and each country has its own traditions of education, art-related and otherwise. What

the many schools and camps of arts education have in common, though, is a commitment to a sequential idea of pedagogy, to the idea that there are fundamentals to art and that they must be learned in a meaningful order.

We can begin with the French Academy, which was founded in 1648. The academy held classes at the Louvre and taught only drawing. The curriculum unfolded in a strict sequence: first students drew from other drawings, then from plaster casts or antique sculptures, and then finally from live models. In the eighteenth century, the sequence at the French Academy became even more narrowly prescribed, not just in terms of models, but in terms of approach; students first had to master drawing specific body parts before attempting to draw the whole body; they had to draw noses, ears, lips, and so on before they could take on the whole human figure.<sup>24</sup> This sort of sequential curriculum values representational skill, not originality.<sup>25</sup> And while the influence of the Romantics expanded the mediums of art taught in schools beyond drawing, curricula remained sequential, and almost always began with drawing. Take, for example, Britain's National Course of Instruction from the mid-nineteenth century for its schools of design: the course consisted of twenty-three stages of instruction, twenty-one of which were "strictly imitative."<sup>26</sup> The course began with drawing. Stage 1 was "linear drawing with instruments," while Stage 2 was the "freehand outline of rigid forms from the flat copy." It wasn't until Stage 9 that students took on "anatomical studies,"<sup>27</sup> and only a small fraction of students ever even made it to Stage 10 (which finally introduced shading).<sup>28</sup>

While the skills taught in art and design programs would continue to change, the underlying structure of a sequential set of masterable skills would persist into the twentieth century. Perhaps the most influential art school of the modern period was the Bauhaus, the German institute that was opened in 1919 by Walter Gropius. The Bauhaus, which taught a combination of fine arts, design, architecture, and crafts, ran until 1933 when it was shut down by the Nazis. The heart of the Bauhaus curriculum was the *Vorkurs*, or Basic Course, developed by Johannes Itten, which was a six-month introduction to the fundamentals of art and design. The Basic Course covered Bauhaus-designated fundamentals such as color, materials, composition, and abstract formal techniques that could be applied in any and every field, from painting to architecture to textile work. The goal of Itten's Basic Course was to "liberate the student's creative powers" by teaching her the foundations of art (subjects such as "textures," "materials,"

and “value”); once those had been learned, she could be “free.”<sup>29</sup> While the exact exercises varied from teacher to teacher, the rationale behind them was the same: every artist, artisan, and designer must have an understanding of the fundamentals first. The Bauhaus pedagogy was so influential that James Elkins goes as far as to say that he is not sure “that there is any such thing as a post-Bauhaus method of elementary art instruction.”<sup>30</sup>

Note Elkins’s use of the word “elementary”: it may come as no surprise that Itten’s Basic Course, and indeed the philosophy of the Bauhaus in general, was influenced by the nineteenth-century reformer Friedrich Fröbel’s conception of kindergarten.<sup>31</sup> Fröbel’s kindergarten curriculum was organized around a strict sequence of what he called “Gifts and Occupations,” in which the young students would receive “gifts” in a set order: first a set of six yarn balls attached to strings, then a sphere, cylinder, and cube attached to a bar, then four wooden blocks (and so on). There were twenty gifts in all, and they increased in complexity as the sequence progressed. Kindergarten teachers encouraged students to use the toys to interact with and, eventually, to represent their environments.<sup>32</sup> Norman Brosterman has argued for the impact of Fröbel’s kindergarten influence on the Bauhaus; he suggests that the underlying structure of the foundational sequence, the idea of the elemental in pedagogy, the belief in a set of accumulative skills evident across the

Bauhaus curriculum, is visible in the work of Bauhaus teachers and students such as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and László Moholy-Nagy, and in the art and architecture of modernists such as Josef Albers, Piet Mondrian, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier.<sup>33</sup> Both Fröbel’s kindergarten and the Bauhaus curriculum, then, are structured by discrete steps in a meaningful order that eventually promise a teleological goal of mastery.

It is important to understand CalArts in the context of this sequential and skills-based educational theory; the Institute’s “radical educational model” rejected

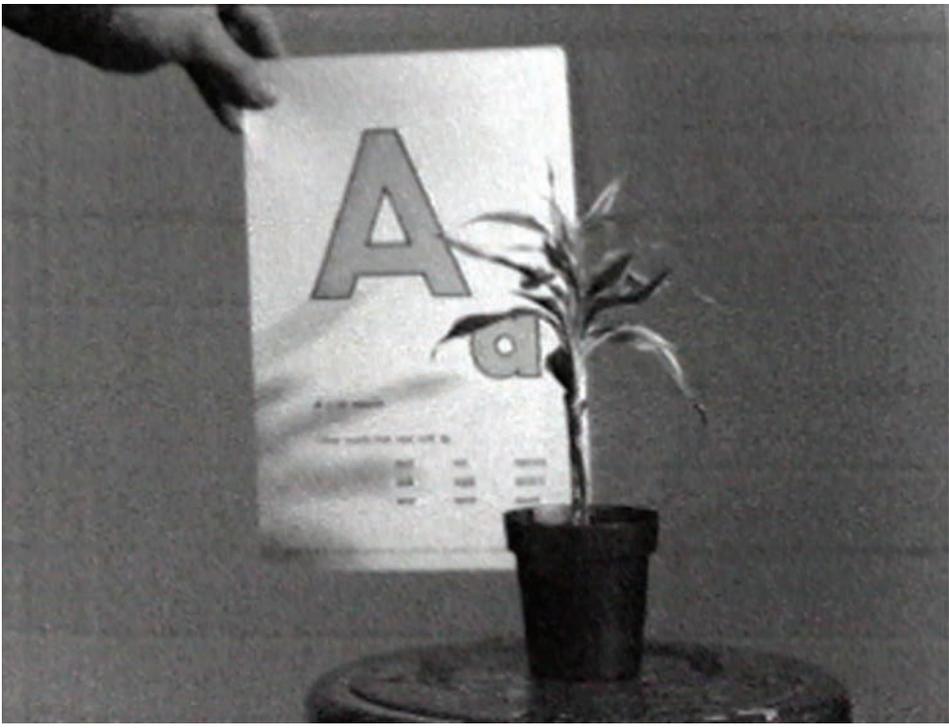
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hundreds of years of arts education, including the Bauhaus model. In its founding, CalArts overturned the curriculum of its direct predecessor, the Chouinard Art Institute, which focused on “classical art techniques and drawing skills.”<sup>34</sup> When Chouinard merged with the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music to become CalArts, and when the new institution revolutionized the traditional art curriculum and did away with all requirements, it decided not even to offer a drawing class in the first year that it was open.<sup>35</sup> It did, however, offer a course on joint rolling. Not only did CalArts displace drawing as the foundation of arts education, it negated the very idea that art could be broken down into a series of skills that could be mastered.

Baldessari’s video *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* (1972) (Fig. 2) is a response both to the new form of arts education that Baldessari was involved in implementing at CalArts and to conceptualism’s valuation of an intellectual and discursive



**Figure 2.**

*John Baldessari, Teaching a Plant the Alphabet (1972). Copyright John Baldessari. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York.*

art practice. The black-and-white video opens on a small, even scrawny house plant in a black pot sitting on a small circular table, positioned slightly off-center in the screen, in front of a grayish wall. Thirty seconds into the start of the video, Baldessari's hand appears in the top-left corner of the screen, holding a flashcard printed with a very large uppercase "A" and a smaller lowercase "a." Underneath these "A"s on the flashcard are indistinguishable words. We see the shadow of the plant on the card. When his hand appears, Baldessari, who is otherwise completely off screen, begins to speak, and he says, over and over in a forceful, insistent monotone "A. A. A. A. A." He repeats the letter "A" a total of forty-one times. Then, the hand disappears and reappears with a similar flashcard for the letter "B." We hear Baldessari say "B" thirty-nine times. Baldessari works through the entire alphabet like this, repeating each letter between thirty-five and fifty times, ultimately repeating "Y" forty-four times and "Z" fifty times. Baldessari's repetitions are mostly mechanical, but are not perfectly regular; he sometimes speeds up or slows down, and we can often hear him pause to take a breath. The intervals for each letter vary from twenty-five to forty seconds, though most intervals hover around thirty-three seconds.

Baldessari's speech is fairly flat and affectless, and when he repeats letters such as "B" and "C," "I" and "U," he resists playing on the homophonic resonances that these letters might offer. Within the tight structure of the video, in which we see the letter printed boldly on a flashcard, and hear the letter repeated so often, "C" never seems to suggest, for example, "see" or "sea." These are letters that resist being read, that by virtue of the sequence in which they are located, resonate as arbitrary phonemes, not as words. The exception that proves the rule, however, is the letter "Y"; I detect a slight plaintiveness (or maybe just desperately inscribe one myself) when Baldessari repeats "Y"—easily heard as "why"—forty-four times at the end of the video.<sup>36</sup> The video lasts just short of nineteen minutes. The only movement in the frame is Baldessari's hand—the camera is most likely on a tripod—and the only sound is Baldessari's voice. Once Baldessari has made his way through the alphabet, the camera holds its gaze on the solitary plant for another thirty seconds. When the video ends, we have no indication of whether the plant has learned the alphabet.

For Baldessari, the alphabetic sequence is a multivalent signifier; it is a stand-in for language more generally, and it is also a figurative manifestation of the sequential methodology behind arts education that had been in existence for

hundreds of years. In this video, that sequential pedagogy is a failure. Baldessari's rote repetition of the letters of the alphabet at uneven and arbitrary intervals in *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* is not just a poor way to teach language, it is, in this allegory, equivalent to the kinds of repetitive, sequential, and arbitrary practices promoted by a long history of art educators. In the video, Baldessari

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creates an unflattering portrait of the pedagogue as a remote, repetitive, and nearly disembodied authoritarian presence that can only bark out subject matter like a drill sergeant. Imagine that a plant could learn—and this is Baldessari's absurd but nonetheless articulated goal—is repeating the letter “A” forty-one times really the best means for teaching the alphabet? Not only does the plant have no eyes with which to see the flashcards and no ears with which

to hear Baldessari's voice repeating them, but is this sort of rote repetition even the best that a teacher can do? Drill “A” into a student's head, then “B,” then “C”? Consequently, is the best way to make art to begin by drawing eyes over and over, and then noses over and over, as in the eighteenth-century French Academy? Or, to take this allegory into the 1970s: why must a student learn figure drawing—the supposed foundation of art practice—when what she really wants to be doing is make videos? To be fair, Baldessari's characterization of the student is as unflattering as his portrait of the teacher; the student's figuration as a “potted plant”—which is not so much an objectification but a de-anthropomorphization—does not exactly put much faith in her learning capabilities. But this remote teacher and unlearning student provide a neat allegory of the problem with traditional arts pedagogy as Baldessari sees it: the unthinking studio art student is inseparable from the unthinking sequential pedagogy that made her.

### BEUYS, BALDESSARI, AND THE NEGATION OF EDUCATION

Art pedagogy was not just a concern in southern California in the 1960s and 1970s; the question of how to teach art was very much a concern in postwar (and post-Bauhaus) Germany as well. Joseph Beuys's performance piece, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), which Baldessari cites as an inspiration for *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, explicitly thematizes the question of how to teach

art to the viewer, not to the artist.<sup>37</sup> At the beginning of this piece, which was performed as part of the artist's first solo exhibition in a gallery in Düsseldorf, Beuys locked all of the visitors out of the gallery so that the audience could only see the performance by peering in the windows. His head eerily covered in honey and gold leaf, Beuys began slowly walking around the gallery while cradling a dead hare on his arm and whispering to it. The performance lasted for three hours.<sup>38</sup> Critics have tended to read the piece within Beuys's mystical, hermetic system of signifiers—he often used hares, honey, and gold in his pieces—and Valerie Casey explains that the artist “emphasized the productive potential of the animal consciousness to reach spiritual transformation.”<sup>39</sup> Beuys himself offered readings along these lines, suggesting that “the idea of explaining to an animal conveys a sense of the secrecy of the world and of existence that appeals to the imagination. . . . [E]ven a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stubborn rationality,”<sup>40</sup> and “I explained [the pictures] to [the hare] because I do not really like explaining them to people. . . . I told him that he needed only to scan the picture to understand what is really important about it.”<sup>41</sup>

There is thus a deep ambivalence in Beuys's piece; it registers both as an earnest attempt at cross-species communication and, more interestingly, as a provocative send-up of the art world. Casey suggests that the dead hare is a stand-in for the museum-goer—“an anesthetized and flaccid figure to be carried and directed, supplied with the prosthetic vision of curatorial interpretation,”<sup>42</sup> and the piece poses the possibility that we humans are perhaps no better than a (dead) animal in our appreciation and understanding of art. Beuys makes his approach to understanding art known in his statements about the piece; in reaction against human “stubborn rationality,” his reported “explanation” to the hare is not about the history of art or aesthetic theory or a cataloguing of his pieces' signifiers. He purportedly tells the dead rabbit that “he needed only to scan the picture” to understand it, that understanding art is in some sense intuitive. This sort of context-less appreciation of art relies on both the ability of the artist to transmit information and the ability for the audience to understand it without an art historical or critical apparatus. If the work of art does not communicate directly with the viewer, Beuys's piece asks, how much is there really for the artist to explain? What is the worth of an audience that needs such explanation? Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* both produces and questions the complex set of relationships between artist and audience,

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human and non-human, pedagogue and student. It is also worth mentioning that Beuys, like Baldessari, considered teaching to be an important part of his identity as an artist; in a 1969 interview for *Artforum*, Beuys announced, “To be a teacher is my greatest work of art.”<sup>43</sup>

Baldessari credits Beuys’s piece as one of the catalysts for *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*; in a 2005 interview, he says that “I was certainly aware of Joseph Beuys’s teaching and his famous performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. Also back then people thought they could talk to plants. You might start out in a very elemental fashion and teach the plant the alphabet first and then simple words and so on [*laughs*].”<sup>44</sup> Sidra Stich, the interviewer, goes on to speak of Baldessari pushing Beuys’s piece from “mysticism into a realm of absurdity,” but to see Beuys’s piece only as “mystical” overlooks the deep absurdity of Beuys’s performance and the critique of the art world that it engenders.<sup>45</sup> Honey- and gold-covered head aside, can we really say that to teach a plant the alphabet is absurd, while to explain pictures to a dead hare is not? (Baldessari’s plant is, at least, alive).

If Beuys channels his absurdity into otherworldliness and creates a tension between sincerity and absurdity, then Baldessari’s piece revels in this very tension. *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* “was done,” Baldessari explains, “during the hippy times. There were books about how to communicate with your plants. I thought, okay, I guess I’ll start with the alphabet and then we’ll talk.”<sup>46</sup> There is an absurd logic that undergirds Baldessari’s plan for communicating with his plant. He will “start out in a very elemental fashion” and then teach the plant the alphabet before teaching it “simple words and so on.” Baldessari’s level of commitment to this goal—that he has mapped out a pedagogical approach to teach his plant—is part of what makes the piece humorous. But, of course, we humans do not learn to speak by learning the alphabet; our acquisition of spoken

language almost always precedes our development of reading and writing skills. The foundations of written language—the letters of the alphabet—are *not* the foundations of speech. The video thus engages in a method grounded in ideas of sequential mastery while, in its choice of plant-as-student, parodying it. This is the same double gesture of Baldessari's *Wrong*; Baldessari's target is ultimately not the projected amateur student who has taken the "wrong" photograph, but the disembodied didactic voice who makes that declaration. Similarly, the target of *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* is the disembodied authoritative teacher. The problem in both these pieces is the unimaginative pedagogue who cannot see past his own ineffective and repressive methods. By parodying this kind of teaching, Baldessari sets himself apart from it, as if to say that at CalArts in the early 1970s, faculty members are *not* teaching plants the alphabet, at least not in this manner.

Critics are fond of describing Baldessari's video by quoting Coosje van Bruggen, who calls it "a rather perverse conceptual exercise in futility."<sup>47</sup> But to begin and end analysis here is limiting. We can think more critically about Baldessari's piece in the context of Beuys's performance, which was originally titled *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt*. Beuys's titular verb is "erklärt," or "explain," while Baldessari's is "teaching." While "explain" suggests a unidirectional transmission of information from subject to object, Baldessari's "teaching," while not exactly a reciprocal term, allows for more of a discursive exchange. "Explaining" only allows for one speaker, while "teaching" allows for more than one. Further, there is a sense that Beuys's piece is doubly instructional; he is explaining pictures to a dead hare, but he is also demonstrating "how to" explain pictures to a dead hare to the audience of gallery-goers. The title's didactic tone is borne out in both the original German and English titles. And in performance, Beuys makes the two registers of audience clear by separating himself and the hare from the gallery-goers, and the title suggests that the audience learns from Beuys. How to explain pictures to a dead hare? Watch Beuys and learn.

The scene of teaching is structured differently in *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*. Baldessari's title does not ask us to watch and learn "how to" teach a plant the alphabet; there is only one scene of pedagogy in Baldessari's piece. And chances are that viewers of Baldessari's video will already know the alphabet (the subject to be learned) while they may not already know how to "explain pictures." There

is thus a sense of possibility in Beuys's piece—not for the dead hare, but for the human audience—that doesn't exist in Baldessari's. We might learn something from Beuys, but the possibility of learning something new is foreclosed upon in

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***The effective pedagogical move  
of the video is metatextual.***

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Baldessari's video. It is perhaps for this reason that *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* is so often described in terms of futility, while *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* is not. That being said, I want to suggest that *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* functions similarly to *Wrong*. In offering another exaggerated gesture, Baldessari sets up the pedagogical methods within his artwork for critique. He effectively declares the methods of the remote teacher in *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* “wrong,” and in so doing, activates a question: what pedagogical methods might be right? The pedagogy within the video may be a failure, but the larger move of the video is to open up a sphere of discourse about arts pedagogy, the sequential structural foundations of which were just beginning to be challenged in institutions such as CalArts. The effective pedagogical move of the video is metatextual.

The shift in subject matter between Beuys's and Baldessari's pieces is also telling. The analogue for Beuys's “pictures” is Baldessari's “alphabet.” When we consider Baldessari's piece within its very specific context, we see that what is at stake at CalArts in the early 1970s is no longer pictures—it's language. Discourse, which we see manifested in the valorization of conceptual thought beyond traditional artistic skills, is now at the heart of the CalArts (non)curriculum, and the alphabet functions in the video as a synecdoche for language more generally. *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, I want to suggest, is an allegory that asks how art can be taught under the conditions of conceptualism, in which language is both medium and thematic concern, and ideas are meant to supersede aesthetics. In this environment, the rigorous elemental training that characterized arts education from the French Academy to the Bauhaus no longer seems relevant. The very idea of elemental and foundational knowledge in art-making, and the structure of the sequential curriculum that relies upon this idea, is made irrelevant by CalArts' “radical educational model.”

*Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, then, is not a generalized critique of teaching art. It is a targeted critique of a specific traditional arts pedagogy that also functions as a rationale for doing things differently at the newly-founded CalArts. But all

of this raises the question: What and how does one teach if there are no more foundations? In terms of art education, this question then becomes: what can teachers replace a sequential curriculum with? To answer these questions, we can look a little more closely at Baldessari's teaching philosophy. Speaking about *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* in 2005, Baldessari explains:

Well, the whole idea was to raise the question what do you do in an art school? And you say, "Well, what courses are necessary to teach?" and that is question begging in a way, because you can say, "Well, can art be taught at all?" And, you know, I prefer to say, "No, it can't. It can't be taught." You can set up a situation where art might happen, but I think that's the closest you get. Then I can jump from there into saying, "Well, if art can't be taught, maybe it would be a good idea to have people that call themselves artists around. And something, some chemistry, might happen." And then the third thing would be that to be as non-tradition-bound as possible, and just be very pragmatic, whatever works. You know, and if one thing doesn't work, try another thing. My idea was always you haven't taught until you see the light in their eyes. I mean, whatever. Extend your hand, that's what you do. Otherwise, you're like a missionary, delivering the gospel and leaving. [laughs]<sup>48</sup>

While Baldessari may begin these remarks by suggesting that art "can't be taught," in this interview and many others, he (seemingly) unwittingly goes on to articulate his particular pedagogy for teaching the kind of art that to him seems un-teachable. If Baldessari feels that there no longer are foundational elements of art, then he certainly does have methods for creating "a situation where art might happen." And these methods are indeed a kind of pedagogical practice, even if the artist doesn't recognize them as such. What becomes clear in remarks such as these is that for Baldessari, learning is all about the creation of a discursive community where artists communicate with one another, collaborate, and work through ideas. This is distinctively *not* the pedagogy of *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, which is more like Baldessari's figurative "missionary delivering the gospel and leaving" through a (thwarted) unidirectional transmission of knowledge; Baldessari's critique echoes Paulo Freire's condemnation of the "banking concept of education," in which the teacher "deposits" knowledge into the students figured as empty bank accounts.<sup>49</sup> In comparison, then, Baldessari's real-life pedagogy is active, ideas-based, and multidirectional. His "pragmatic" approach encourages experimentation and exposure, and a refusal to make art

precious. We can see his “List of Art Ideas for 1st Class at CalArts, Post Studio” as an elaboration of this philosophy; the list of ideas encourages work in many different mediums—including photography, drawing, writing, performance, and video—while refusing to hierarchize them. The list is arbitrarily ordered, and it asks as many questions as it prescribes practices and activities.

Baldessari says that he approached teaching in the same way that he approached his art practice: “I was going at my class much like I would do art, which was basically trying to be as formed as possible but open to chance.”<sup>50</sup> The artist would show students slides of contemporary art, bring back catalogues from art exhibitions around the world, bring visiting artists into the classroom to talk about their work, and go on many, many field trips. He developed a collegial relationship with his students, explaining that at CalArts, “we’d break down this relationship of student and teacher. We just had more years on them, that was all, but we fully accepted them as artists, and that helped a lot, too.”<sup>51</sup> Baldessari’s is an untraditional arts pedagogy for sure, but a pedagogy nonetheless. And as we will see, Baldessari is serious when he says that he “go[es] at” his class with the same intensity as he does his own art; he eventually manifests several of the prompts of his “List of Art Ideas” in his own practice.

While Baldessari does not cite contemporaneous proponents of radical pedagogies such as Freire or Ivan Illich (*Deschooling Society*, 1971) in his notes or in interviews, it is clear that his pedagogical practice is aligned with the work of such thinkers. Current CalArts faculty member Janet Sarbanes has recently linked Baldessari’s practices to the theories of Freire and Illich, and also to Jacques Rancière’s writing on the liberatory pedagogies of Joseph Jacotot described in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987, trans. 1991).<sup>52</sup> Although Baldessari shares much with these thinkers, it would be a mistake to claim that they have influenced him directly. It seems more plausible that Baldessari developed his pedagogical methods by enacting in the classroom the same techniques as he was enacting within his conceptual art practice, and that he both helped create and was influenced by the declaredly radical environment of CalArts. Baldessari’s emphasis on creating the conditions *for* art—“a situation where art might happen” not through lessons, but through conversations, field trips, art experiments, and so on—seems not just appropriate, but ideal for the teaching of a kind of art that CalArts valued at its inception, and still does: art committed to criticality of culture, institutions, and the aesthetic tradition.<sup>53</sup> At least in theory.

## PEDAGOGY AND PUNISHMENT

While *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* opens up a space for critical evaluations of studio arts pedagogy, not all of Baldessari's pedagogically oriented artwork from the early 1970s is polemical in this way. Baldessari's best-known piece from this time period, and perhaps his best-known work in general, is *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* (Fig. 3), which was manifested in two different iterations in the early 1970s. Baldessari was commissioned in 1971 by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University (NSCAD)—a Canadian arts institution similar in ethos to CalArts—to put up an exhibition, but the college was unable to fund his trip to Canada and offered only \$50 for his work.<sup>54</sup> Baldessari chose not to visit on his own dime, and instead sent instructions for NSCAD students to create a new iteration of a video piece that he had recently completed. In the video, Baldessari writes the phrase “I will not make any more boring art” neatly



**Figure 3.**

*John Baldessari, I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art (1971). Copyright John Baldessari. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York.*

and repeatedly on a piece of paper. Once the paper is filled, he pauses, and then begins again, writing the phrase four more times on another piece of paper; the video cuts off as he writes the phrase a fifth time. The process takes just over thirteen minutes.<sup>55</sup> Baldessari reports that he had originally written the phrase in a notebook. He explains: “I was very much interested in language, but what I saw as a bad road to travel on was making the language very academic and boring. I thought artists could deal with language but in a nonboring fashion.”<sup>56</sup> But then he seems to contradict himself, explaining his command in terms of futility: “It struck me that it was like one of those elementary school punishments inflicted on young kids, like ‘I will not throw rocks in the playground.’ You know it’s not going to cure you if you write it enough times.”<sup>57</sup> Baldessari had been toying with the idea for this piece for at least a year; one of the prompts that he distributed to his students on his “List of Art Ideas” lays out the concept quite clearly:

44. Punishment: Write: “I will not make any more art”  
“I will not make any more boring art”  
“I will make good art”  
(or something similar)  
1,000 times.  
on wall.<sup>58</sup>

Whether or not any of his CalArts students took up this particular prompt in their Post-Studio course, Baldessari sent NSCAD students instructions to create their own iteration of his video piece: they were to write “I will not make any more boring art” on a gallery wall. And so they did; NSCAD students joined together and spent several days completely covering the walls of a gallery with the phrase “I will not make any more boring art.” The extent of their commitment surprised Baldessari, who has said in interviews that he was stunned by the students’ initiative to cover the gallery walls. In one interview, he reports that he thought the students would write the phrase “as many times as they wanted, punishment-style, repetitively,” and was surprised that they chose to go as far as completely covering the walls.<sup>59</sup> In another interview, he says that he thought that the instructions “would be just an intellectual exercise,” and that the gallery walls would be “bare.”<sup>60</sup> Although he remembers his expectations about his instructions differently in different interviews, one thing is clear: Baldessari did not expect the response he got, and, in his words, the instructions “str[uck] a nerve.”<sup>61</sup>

Although Baldessari's memory may be hazy, the original instructions for the NSCAD students were quite clear, and are now published in *More Than You Wanted to Know About John Baldessari*. In a letter addressed to NSCAD gallery director Charlotte Townsend, Baldessari outlined his instructions for the NSCAD students:

I've got a punishment piece. It will require a surrogate(s) since I can't be there to take my self-imposed punishment but that's okay since the theory is that

punishment should be instructive for others. And there's a precedent for it in Christ being punished for our sins and many others. So some students as scapegoats are necessary.

If you can't induce anyone to be sacrificial and take my sin upon their shoulders, then use whatever funds there are (\$50) to pay someone as a mercenary.

The piece is this: from ceiling to floor should be written by one or more people, one sentence under another the following sentence: "I will not make any more boring art." At least one column of sentences should be done floor to ceiling before the exhibit opens and the writing of the sentences should continue every day as possible for the length of the exhibit. I would appreciate it if you could tell me how many times the sentence has been written after the exhibition closes. It should be handwritten, clearly written with correct spelling. I'd like to have photos of my stand-ins. This self-flagellation of mine should not be meted out by you as a punishment to students who have done badly, but only to holy



**Figure 4.**  
*Courtesy of the NSCADU Anna Leonowens Gallery Archives, Mezzanine Fonds.*

innocents who will do it for pay, but it should be money that would normally go to me. I prefer the former, that you will find students who will freely take the punishment.<sup>62</sup>

While in the video iteration of the piece, Baldessari puts himself in the position of a (possibly penitent) student writing lines, in the NSCAD iteration of the piece, Baldessari becomes the remote pedagogue who, instead of “delivering the gospel and leaving,” takes this bad pedagogy one step further; he never even shows up to NSCAD, and “delivers the gospel” via the postal service. In commanding students to take on the “punishment” and “self-flagellation” that he himself has performed, he enacts the very pedagogy that he critiques in his video. The power hierarchy between teacher and student that Baldessari sought to dispel in his own classroom is enacted by his command to write the phrase on the gallery walls. The NSCAD students, echoing Baldessari’s video gesture, and following the commands of his letter faithfully, fill their given space with the phrase “I will not make any more boring art.” They bend to the authoritarian control of the teacher (not even their NSCAD instructor), who is even more powerful and remote from the distance of several thousand miles away. The performance piece was well-documented, and a lithograph of the phrase was produced by NSCAD.

There is humor in Baldessari’s video, as well as in his letter, of course, but we would be mistaken if we read the piece only as humorous, to read it only as an exercise in futility; Baldessari knows that this sort of pedagogical exercise “is not going to cure you” of anything. Historically, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring*

*Art* has been read within the context of Baldessari’s 1970 *Cremation Piece*, a documented performance in which the artist burned the majority of his artwork created up until that point, and thus heralded in a conceptual turn in his practice. In the context of the *Cremation Piece*, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* is a promise—winkingly naïve but a promise nonetheless—that conceptual art has something “nonboring” to offer.<sup>63</sup> But I want to suggest that

we have something to gain from reading the two iterations of this piece in the context of Baldessari’s pedagogical art and classroom practice as well. In other words: does *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* have a lesson to teach?

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***Baldessari knows that this sort of pedagogical exercise ‘is not going to cure you’ of anything.***  
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We can begin to answer this question by observing that the scenes of pedagogy in the two iterations of the piece are remarkably different. In the video, we see only Baldessari's hand writing the phrase over and over, without instructions or context. Here, Baldessari is the student who has been punished, and we have access to no other information, visual or otherwise. The NSCAD iteration, however, provides us with much more information and context; Baldessari provides detailed instructions, the event involves numerous students, the performance lasts for days, and the whole project is well-documented. And, most importantly, in the NSCAD iteration, Baldessari switches positions. No longer the student pushed into a state of penitence, he is now the off-screen pedagogue. He is the punisher rather than the punished. And Baldessari is very aware of the positionality of his students; he calls the NSCAD students "surrogates" and "stand-ins" for himself. But what Baldessari fails to see is that his relationship to the NSCAD students reads much less as a relationship between student and student-surrogates than as a relationship between *teacher and student*. Baldessari—and not a figure of Baldessari—is the remote, authoritarian teacher; the NSCAD piece, I want to suggest, is not just a piece about bad pedagogy, but is also an enactment of bad pedagogy by Baldessari himself. He is an actual teacher commanding actual students. In other words, in *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, Baldessari was a figure of a bad teacher using a bad educational model; in *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, he is a punishing teacher, inflicting his own issues, concerns, and history onto his students. It is Baldessari who felt the need to cremate the majority of his early works, not the NSCAD students—which begs the question: were NSCAD students concerned with "not making any more boring art" before Baldessari suggested, by virtue of the syntax of his sentence, that they *were* making boring art? It is worth noting that this phrase has had a material effect on the culture of NSCAD; a 2016 article notes that the phrase is "etched into the NSCAD alumni ring, printed on the wallpaper in President Dianne Taylor-Gearing's office, and provides the name for the Bill M[a]cGillivray 1988 documentary on the school. It continues to resonate, acting as a constant reminder to students, faculty and alumni to push, question and critique—and to make art that's anything but boring."<sup>64</sup> *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* has had a recognizable impact on the NSCAD pedagogical culture.

As viewers of the NSCAD piece today—which exists in the documentation of the performance, the lithograph based on the gallery walls, and Baldessari's

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***[...] what becomes painfully clear is that the student will one day become the teacher, and that she may—or more likely will—inflict her own punitive pedagogical experiences on future students, and that those future students will take on that punishment willingly, even happily.***

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letter—we are not so much addressed by the piece, but instead invited to witness a scene of pedagogy (as we are with Beuys’s *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*). And by reading the piece as a scene of pedagogy, what the piece has to teach us is that the act of teaching is structurally authoritarian and punishing. Even in the heyday of the conceptual art movement, and even in the context of the radical arts institution, and even at an institution that teaches joint rolling, teacher and student cannot help but reproduce the system that Baldessari, Brach, Schapiro, and others at CalArts want to overturn. And when we read the two iterations together, what becomes painfully clear is that *the student will one day become the teacher*, and that she may—or more likely *will*—inflict her own punitive pedagogical experiences on future students, and that those future students will take on that punishment willingly, even happily. Whereas the pedagogies that involve proscribed judgment and rote repetition that Baldessari so effectively skewers in pieces such as *Wrong* and *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* can be resisted at the radical arts institution, the hierarchical structures between teacher and student cannot.<sup>65</sup>

This argument about pedagogy is significant because the rise of conceptual art coincided with the increasing academicization of art practice; Judith Adler suggests that this is no mere coincidence, that conceptual art “appears to be a genre of academic art finely adapted to the pressures of the new university habitat.”<sup>66</sup> As studio art became increasingly taught in the university in the latter half of the twentieth century, art became increasingly conceptual, hence Lucy Lippard and John Chandler’s dictum: “the studio is again becoming a study.” And as conceptual art heralded in an era of privileging ideas over craft, and at CalArts specifically a philosophy of “no technique before need,” the teacher-student relationship became ever more important because the rules of the

game were changing; artists were, and are, more likely to be both students and teachers in their lifetimes. The logic of the art market has for decades resulted in the academicization of art; artists at all levels are more likely than ever to have received degrees in art (BFAs, MFAs, now even PhDs in Studio Art), and the increase in degree programs, has come, of course, with an increase in the numbers of artists who are also teachers. “Situation[s] where art might happen” are just as likely, if not more likely, to occur within a studio art classroom as without, and this is a trend that we can trace back to the early 1970s. I want to suggest that the academicization of art, the linguistic turn in art, the conceptual turn in art, a rising interest in pedagogy as a thematic in art, are all part and parcel of one another. Never before had teaching been a concern as conspicuously present in visual art as it became in the age of conceptualism.<sup>67</sup> By interrogating pedagogy’s methods and structures, Baldessari’s work from the early 1970s upholds as much as it dismantles a long history of arts education, and suggests that pedagogy, even at CalArts, has a long way to go in fulfilling its promise to its students.

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/ **Notes** /

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<sup>1</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Rightness of *Wrong*,” in *John Baldessari: National City*, ed. Hugh M. Davies and Andrea Hales (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art/ New York: D.A.P., 1997), 33–35.

<sup>2</sup> Sidra Stich, “Conceptual Alchemy: A Conversation with John Baldessari,” *American Art* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 63.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Christopher Knight, “A Situation Where Art Might Happen: John Baldessari on CalArts,” *East of Borneo*, Nov. 19, 2011, <https://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-situation-where-art-might-happen-john-baldessari-on-calarts>.

<sup>4</sup> John Baldessari, “List of Art Ideas for 1st Class of CalArts, Post Studio (If They Have No Ideas of Their Own from which to Make a Piece),” in *More Than You Wanted to Know About John Baldessari*, Vol. 1, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist and Meg Cranston (Zürich: JRP|Ringier, 2013), 76–88.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the history of Baldessari and his students at CalArts, see Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009); and Richard Hertz, *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia* (Ojai, CA: Minneola Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> “History,” *CalArts*, accessed Dec. 19, 2016, <http://calarts.edu/about/history>. For more on the history and rationale of the founding of CalArts, see Nicholas Houghton, “Fine Art Pedagogy after Modernism: A Case Study of Two Pioneering Art Schools,” *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 13, no. 1 (April 2014): 7–18; and Janet Sarbanes, “A Community of Artists: Radical Pedagogy at CalArts, 1969–72,” *East of Borneo*, June 5, 2014, <https://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-community-of-artists-radical-pedagogy-at-calarts-1969-72>.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Brach, “Cal Arts: The Early Years,” *Art Journal* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 27.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Bowman, “A Grand Melee of Radical Procedures: Miriam Schapiro on CalArts and the Feminist Art Program,” *East of Borneo*, Nov. 24, 2011, <https://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-grand-melee-of-radical-procedures-miriam-schapiro-on-calarts-and-the-feminist-art-program/>.

<sup>9</sup> “California Institute of the Arts: Prologue to a Community,” *Arts in Society* 7, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 1970): 16, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Arts.ArtsSocv07i3>.

<sup>10</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (1968; London: Penguin, 1996). For an elaboration and critique of Freire, see bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Judith Adler, *Artists in Offices: An Ethnography of an Academic Art Scene* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1979) 23.

<sup>12</sup> Ian Burn, “The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath (or the Memoirs of an Ex-Conceptual Artist),” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 395.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York: Norton, 2009), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Blake Stimson, “The Promise of Conceptual Art,” in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, xli.

<sup>15</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Burn, “Dialogue,” in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, 110.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy,” in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, 164.

<sup>18</sup> Burn, “The Sixties,” 395. For a more recent take on deskilling, see John Roberts, “Art After Deskilling,” *Historical Materialism* 18, no. 2 (2010): 77–96.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–43. See also Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> For studies on the relationship between image and text in visual art, see John Dixon Hunt, Michel Corris, and David Lomas, *Art, Word and Image: 2,000 Years of Visual/Textual Interaction* (London: Reaktion, 2010); and Simon Morley, *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Other influential visual arts faculty members of the time (not necessarily associated with conceptual art) include Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, who co-founded the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in 1971. For accounts of Michael Asher's "Post-Studio" class, see Mark Allen, "Notes Toward Socratic Gardening," in *In the Canyon, Revise the Canon: Utopian Knowledge, Radical Pedagogy and Artist-Run Community Art Space in Southern California*, ed. Géraldine Gourbe (Lescheraines, France: Shelter Press, 2015), 81-86; and Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> James Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook for Art Students* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 17-18. For more on the history of the French academies, see Arthur D. Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> For more on the rationale for this kind of pedagogy, see Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*, 18-27.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), 188.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 388-99.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>29</sup> Marcel Franciscano, *Walter Gropius and the Creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 191; Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*, 33. For more examples of the results of these exercises, see *Bauhaus Weimar: Designs for the Future*, ed. Michael Siebenbrodt (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Fröbel in turn was building on the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. In books such as *ABC's of Anschauung* (1803), for example, Pestalozzi argued that drawing should be taught in parallel to alphabetic writing through a sequence of "synchronized, repetitive exercises." J. Abbott Miller, "Elementary School," in *The ABC's of Bauhaus: The Bauhaus and Design Theory*, ed. Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>32</sup> In the words of W. N. Hailmann, an American "kindergartener," "The gift gives the child a new cosmos, the occupation fixes the impressions made by the gift. The gift invites only arranging activities; the occupation invites also controlling, modifying, transforming, creating activities. The gift leads to discovery; the occupation, to invention." Quoted in Norman Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 36.

<sup>33</sup> See Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten*, particularly chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>34</sup> For more on Chouinard, see Gerald Nordland, "Drawing and the Art School," *I. M. Chait Auction catalog*, March 2003, <http://www.chouinardfoundation.org/home/la-times-articles-magazine>.

<sup>35</sup> Karen Wright, "John Baldessari," *Art in America*, Oct. 23, 2009, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/john-baldessari>.

<sup>36</sup> John Baldessari, "Teaching a Plant the Alphabet," 1972, 18:41, *UbuWeb Film & Video*, [http://ubu.com/film/baldessari\\_plant.html](http://ubu.com/film/baldessari_plant.html).

<sup>37</sup> Stich, 80.

<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed description of the piece, see Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 101–05.

<sup>39</sup> Valerie Casey, "Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum," *TDR: The Drama Review* 49, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 78.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, 105.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in *The Artist's Body*, ed. Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones (London: Phaidon, 2000), 77. For more on the mystical signifiers across Beuys's oeuvre, see Annie Suquet, "Archaic Thought and Ritual in the Work of Joseph Beuys," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 28 (Autumn 1995): 148–62.

<sup>42</sup> Casey, "Staging Meaning," 78.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in *Conception: Conceptual Documents 1968 to 1972*, ed. Catherine Moseley (Norwich, UK: ARTicle Press, 2002), 159.

<sup>44</sup> Stich, 80.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Jessica Morgan, "Somebody to Talk To," *Tate Etc.* 17 (Autumn 2009), <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/somebody-talk>.

<sup>47</sup> Coosje van Bruggen, *John Baldessari* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990), 78.

<sup>48</sup> Baldessari, "A Situation Where Art Might Happen."

<sup>49</sup> Freire, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Baldessari, "A Situation Where Art Might Happen."

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Janet Sarbanes, "Educating for Autonomy, Educating for Art: Some Evocations of Radical Pedagogy," in Gourbe, *In the Canyon*, 23–28.

<sup>53</sup> For a critique of conceptually-oriented pedagogical practices such as Baldessari's, see Steven Leuthold, "Conceptual Art, Conceptualism, and Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 37. For an account of the (limited) available research on methodology in studio art classrooms today (including conceptually-oriented methodology), see Stacey McKenna Salazar, "Studio Interior: Investigating Undergraduate Studio Art Teaching and Learning," *Studies in Art Education* 55, no. 1 (2013): 64–78.

<sup>54</sup> For a history of NSCAD, see Garry Neill Kennedy, *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968-1978* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012).

<sup>55</sup> *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* chimes with Marcel Broodthaers's 1969 video *La Pluie*, which features Broodthaers in a similarly Sisyphean task of trying to write while rain washes ink off the page.

<sup>56</sup> Stich, 81.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>58</sup> Baldessari, *More Than You Wanted to Know*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Wright.

<sup>60</sup> Stich, 80.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Baldessari, *More Than You Wanted to Know*, 140–41.

<sup>63</sup> For a reading of Baldessari's work and the aesthetic category of the interesting—or, we might say, the “nonboring”—see Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 158–59.

<sup>64</sup> “The Next Chapter for The Last Art College,” *NSCAD University*, accessed Jan. 11, 2016, <http://nscad.ca/en/home/abouttheuniversity/news/thenextchapterforthelastartcollege.aspx>.

<sup>65</sup> For another critique of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, see contemporary poet Divya Victor's *Goodbye John!*, a text-based piece with an accompanying short essay that argues that by collapsing the classroom and gallery space into one another, Baldessari not only enacts authoritarian teaching methods, but commands students create his art to his material benefit. Divya Victor, *Goodbye John!*, 2012, <http://dl.gauss-pdf.com/GPDF047-DV-GJ.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> Adler, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Howard Singerman, for example, claims that “the university stands for the presence of language and the production of formal knowledge, and against the silence and inspiration of the born artist.” Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 8. For more on the academicization of art, see also Elkins, *Why Art Cannot be Taught*; and James Elkins, “Theoretical Remarks on Combined Creative and Scholarly PhD Degrees in the Visual Arts,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 22–31.