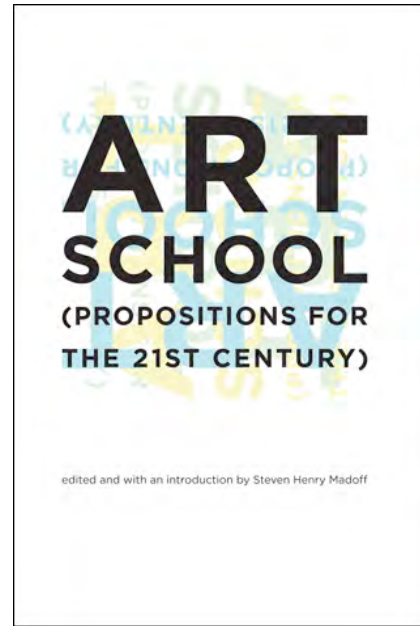




# Book Review: There Will Still be a Studio Problem

by Noah Dillon

Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century  
ed. Steven Henry Madoff  
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009  
384 pages, \$32.95



Despite its faults, *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century* is spectacular. Edited by Steven Henry Madoff, the anthology captures representatives of every point in the art school matrix: students and teachers, theorists, critics, curators, and so on. There are great contributions from older educators as well as neophytes. The disagreement among its authors is entertaining and challenging. Questions concerning Ph.D. studio programs, the role of interdisciplinary research, and the theory/practice divide are given several contradicting answers, and yet satisfy.

The book is intended as a companion to symposia sponsored by the Anaphiel Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to integrating new technologies and new ideas about artistic labor into arts education. Symposia participants were commissioned to produce essays, which are scattered throughout the book, rubbing against each other at varying paces. In addition, nine past, present, or unrealized art schools are profiled over the course of the book. Some of those schools that have flopped or never got off the ground heighten the stakes and underline the unlikeliness of new institutional models. Architect Charles Renfro herein proposes a school of colliding, mutating, infinitely supportive spaces. "The art school must accept new methods of intellectual and physical production without knowing them ahead of time," Renfro gushes. Demands for innovative spaces appear largely as a backlash against "traditional" products and modes of production, by writers who eschew painting and sculpture for Internet-based or conceptual works. Some

<http://artcriticism.sva.edu/?post=book-review-there-will-still-be-a-studio-problem>

contributors rush with vague terms to encourage logistically-improbable sites for research and craft. Renfro, for instance, ignores the likelihood that colleges and museums wealthy enough to invest in experimental laboratories are probably too conservative to do so.

Four interviews are included. Among the most intriguing is Daniel Birnbaum's "Teaching Art: Adorno and the Devil," an imagined conversation between an unidentified "He" and "I." Less satisfying, the commiserating dialogue by Michael Craig-Martin and John Baldessari offers limited pedagogical insight. Most essays are more enlightening: Robert Storr's "Dear Colleague" provides a history of the varied correlations culture ascribes to artist and education. Unlike many of the other contributors, Storr is disinclined to tamper with educational structures. The clarity of his essay stands out against many included here, being more insightful than excitatory.

"Nobody Asked You To Do Nothing/A Potential School," by Liam Gillick and his students is sharp. At once goofy and unreservedly critical, Gillick's pupils imagine an impossible school of questionable theoretical grounding. Necessities, daydreams and inescapable downfalls are given equal credit. Quoting the class, Gillick writes:

Concrete, wood, and water will be combined in most of the buildings and structures. [...] A thesis show will continue forever, with work being added every year. There will be a frustrated desire for consistent knowledge from the beginning of the year. There will be an encouragement of nondirected energy. [sic]

Furthermore, the project exemplifies the promise of increased classroom collaboration, a proposition sponsored by many of the book's contributors with less-enunciated defenses.

Near the conclusion are questionnaires answered by art world luminaries such as Fred Wilson, Shirin Neshat, and Paul Chan. Most of them attended an art school and nearly all teach at one. For all the fretting about the future of arts education and the propositions for sweeping re-constructions in preceding pages, there is little regret in their responses. Few express a desire to change their own educational track. Some answers are counter-intuitive to the book's project, perhaps inadvertently. Paul Chan points out, "Precisely because [the art school as an institution is] conservative, it forces students to be progressive." If the academy isn't broke, why fix it? Or maybe it's broke just right.

~Noah Dillon