

Chapter 12

Bodies of Work and the Practice of Art Making

A dramatic shift occurred in the evaluation of student art in New South Wales secondary schools during the late nineteen seventies. Previously based on tasks designed specifically for evaluative purposes art assessments began to refer to works made by students outside of invigilated examination conditions. The subsequent use of art diaries and portfolios of artwork, similar to those employed in the Arts PROPEL project in North America, widened the scope of “in school” assessments in NSW. The inclusion of diaries and portfolios moved assessment beyond the compilation of finished art works to include diverse material incidental to the processes involved in their origination (Gardner 1990, p. 44).

12.1 Process as the Incubation of Artistic Ideas

“Process” approaches claim to sample the incubation period of artworks (Bellanoff and Dickson 1991). The claim is based on the assumption that ‘lead-up’ routines to the production of more significant works provide a way of observing the artistic abilities of students more directly. Process assessment is prompted by doubts that aesthetic judgements made about finished works provide a satisfactory basis for inferring the cognitive resources used in their making. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, there is a belief by cognitive theorists that cultural agenda underlying the aesthetic judgements of the assessor are quite likely to overstate or understate the latent artistic motives of young children (Freeman and Sanger 1995). Secondly many educators believe that, when set against a theoretical backdrop of late

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modernity, aesthetic judgements provide an overly narrow approach to framing the relationship between the intentional properties of artworks and those of artists. On the face of it, then, assessments of process are believed to enhance the validity of artistic evaluation. This is because they not only model a commonly used practice of annotation in Western art making, the artist's diary/notebook/portfolio, they open up a more transparent and thus fairer window into artistic ability (Taylor 1960).

12.2 The Nature of Process

Is the role of the artistic process in externalising student's ability justified? The search for true achievement in art making is coloured by the artifice of the 'artistic process'. It is further clouded by the historical uncertainty of the "artistic disposition" that these processes are designed to make visible.

To begin with it is unclear that the incubation process in art making can be differentiated as a distinctive class of artistic activity (see Wollheim 1980, pp. 61–62). Artistic performances and works classed as preparatory are often differentiated from their companions by the fact that they are comparatively unresolved. For this reason measures of "process", far from eliminating the need for inferential judgements in assessment, can compound the requirement. Furthermore, the assumption that artistic processes are complemented by a distinctive set of internal artistic dispositions is a historically fragile one in art education.¹ This fragility is exhibited, for example, in the tradition of favouring imaginary over theoretical explanation in the artistic process. The favour shown to imagery has down played a conceptual role in art making and led to the privileging of behavioural and social over cognitive references in the educational assessment of art). (Duncum 1999).² Legitimising one class of processes in art making tends to naturalise, or universalise the abilities to which they refer. The tendency to naturalise artistic ability conceals the ethical basis on which value is imputed from work to student in artistic assessment.

12.3 Assessment and the Representational Duality of Art

The assessment of student performances in art is marked by the complexity of the relationship between the artwork and its student maker. Problems of attribution in this relation spring, in part, from representational duality within art itself. It is often the case that, by its artfulness, the more successful a work in disclosing its meanings the more securely it hides its means of doing so, including the artistic abilities employed in its preparation. Assessors realise they must look to the significance of

¹One only has to think of the demonisation of copying in the middle of the twentieth century.

²The current cultural studies agenda in art education, with its emphasis upon the "art of the everyday", partitions off cognition from the making of art. See Duncum (1999).

the meanings as well as to the signifiers in assessing student works. They understand that the artistic performance of a student makes little sense if it is assessed independently of its critical success within their artwork (Harrison 1978, p. 184). While it may, for example, seem churlish to deny students credit for their devotion to the task, a quality of aesthetic dishonesty in a work is hard to reconcile with a sincere performance in the student, no matter how earnestly committed the actual process of its preparation (see Wollheim 1987, Chapter 2).³ Thus it is reasonable to assume that the artistic ability of students is emergent within the meanings of their work to some degree.

Nevertheless, the work of most children is sheltered from the influences of time, reflection, failure, persistence and revision that shape the production of mature artists. Limitations in the breadth of children's educational experience of making art deprive their work of the opportunity to benefit from the character and continuity these influences afford. The art children make in school forms a body of work that falls between the stools of process and finish in a way that, by comparison with their mature colleagues, under-determines the scope of their artistic ability.

12.4 The Need for the Body of Work

12.4.1 *Challenges to the Validity of a Single Work*

At a meeting of a syllabus evaluation committee of the *NSW Board of Studies* in 1998 the Dean of the *Sydney College of the Arts*, Professor Richard Dunn, expressed concern at the validity of apportioning grades in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination based on only one submitted "major" work. He argued that the evidence provided by one "overworked" object was of little use as an indicator of artistic performance and was a poor basis for an assumed knowledge of the field. Traditionalists from the Board replied that the conventions of curatorial selection and the entry of single works into competitive art prizes was an accepted practice in the world of art and, more than this, was a process not dissimilar to competitive examination in schools. Dunn went on to draw a distinction between the educational uses of artistic assessment and its competitive use in the world of art. He was surprised, for example, that the Visual Arts Process Diary, a mandatory component of the Visual Arts syllabus in New South Wales, was formally excluded from student's final grade. Although students are obliged to maintain a "diary" throughout years 11 and 12 (a kind of portfolio annotating their developing ideas) the Board claims that it wants to confine the use of the diary to in-school assessments. It argues that shielding the diary from public exposure in the external examination is a way of protecting its personal function from formularisation. Dunn, however, claimed he

³Richard Wollheim's concept of "fulfilled intention" in which a property in an art work is not only intended to be seen by the artist in a particular way but is furthermore a property able to be seen by beholders in the way intended.

was not so much mandating reference to a diary, notebook or portfolio in artistic assessment, but arguing in general that a single work provided insufficient evidence for the assessment of artistic identity. The HSC, he says, no longer entirely reflects the legitimate purposes of art.

Others agree arguing in addition that, in line with other subjects in the curriculum that the Visual Arts and, in particular the single finished work, is increasingly obliged to service the corporate goals of school education rather than the discipline it represents.

Unless they work at home, and even then, students in New South Wales have their artistic identity shaped by the structure of their art experiences in school. Schools in turn are increasingly obliged to satisfy the demands of “national standards”, “outcomes based learning” and other low inference curriculum ‘reforms’. These reforms, foremost in New South Wales being the implementation of the McGaw Report in 2000, are conducted within a context of devolving school management and in a climate of competition among individual schools. Compliance with the McGaw Report has concomitant effects upon the subject matter, teaching and student experience insofar as the major performance indicators listed in its reforms are satisfied by levels of achievement described in terms of subject content within the syllabus. The “three unit anomaly” in the recently amended Visual Arts Syllabus, and the emergence of *ARTEXPRESS* details the impact of recent educational reforms on assessment in the Visual Arts in New South Wales.

12.4.2 *The “Three Unit Anomaly”*

The McGaw (1996) review of the New South Wales Higher School Certificate Examination drew attention to what it saw as a major flaw in the validity of the examination—that there was no demonstrable link between the rankings achieved by candidates in the HSC examinations and the level of conceptual demand embedded in the content examined. Of all subjects Visual Arts was one of the most poorly defended against McGaw’s claim. According to McGaw there was insufficient differentiation between the content of “three unit advanced” and “two unit ordinary” study in the practical art strand. In principle, three unit Visual Arts was supposed to present students with more challenging work. However, the examination rules for three-unit study in art merely required the submission of two artworks as opposed to one. Thus there was neither additional content nor more rigorous criteria applied to the assessment of three unit works by comparison with two unit works in the HSC. As it was impossible for examiners to show how the artistic abilities of two unit candidates differed from three unit candidates, merely by the submission of an additional work, the case for the retention of three unit Visual Arts collapsed.

The Visual Arts has always applied a system of panel ranking as the means of apportioning grades in the HSC. In panel ranking a brace of high inference aesthetic judgements are used to place each work into ostensive (comparing one with the other) relation to all others in its category. Ostensive ranking of this kind is a valid

and reliable assessment procedure in the Visual Arts that, nevertheless, translates poorly into predictable criteria. Ranking is retrospective. As a grading procedure it is unable to explain in anticipation how grades attracted by three unit candidates would fall two to three standard deviations above the scores in the two unit exam.

However, the application of predictable standards and benchmarks to the Visual Arts is of concern to many art educators (for example, Music Educators National Conference 1994). Outcomes based approaches to learning treat knowledge in the Visual Arts as if it was formulated and agreed. Outcomes approaches applied to the Visual Arts raise questions as to what is being judged. If a correlation is fixed between specified abilities of students and certain properties of their works what, if any, are the 'ability-determined' properties that a high scoring creative work should possess? There is resistance to the very idea of this kind of prediction in the creative arts. The selective post examination exhibition *ARTEXPRESS* helps allay this question. It provides a kind of holistic scale or benchmark to which HSC candidates in subsequent years can refer in making their works. This existing 'scale' militates against indeterminacy in grading the Visual Arts.

12.4.3 *ARTEXPRESS*

The prestigious exhibition *ARTEXPRESS* is selected from among student art works ranking in the top fourteen percent of HSC candidature. Exhibited at large museums and in other "world of art" settings, *ARTEXPRESS* serves as a benchmark of high artistic achievement in the HSC.⁴ *ARTEXPRESS* plays a large role in setting the standard, content and character of student art in New South Wales insofar as it has become as much a determinate as a reflection of HSC performance in the Visual Arts. Over recent years the popularity of the exhibition, along with pressures to satisfy the commercial agenda of its sponsors, has split the exhibition into specialisations such as multimedia, drawing and so on. Institutions exhibiting *ARTEXPRESS* select from within these specialisations on the basis of their own curatorial criteria. In recent years the "curators" of *ARTEXPRESS* have requested more control over the way student works are chosen for the exhibition. Some curators have asked the Board if they can choose works scoring below the fourteen percent cut off. Curators believe there are as many pieces worthy of exhibition falling outside as inside the top ranking entries. If the curators of *ARTEXPRESS* were permitted to sample from the full range of submitted works in the HSC curatorial policy would mount a serious challenge to the status of traditional HSC assessment. The challenge arises from the differences in process between curatorial choice and ostensive ranking as a way of distributing value to works. While the curatorial approach adopted by *ARTEXPRESS* pays lip service to the value of each individual work, and so to the ability of the student who made it, the single work is regarded more as a unit of curatorial policy than a representation of the individual abilities of students. Thus

⁴Exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington DC in 1999.

the curatorial policy driving *ARTEXPRESS* institutionalises the relation between the artistic ability of students and the properties of their submitted works. By idealising the single work, yet simultaneously viewing it as a functional unit within its curatorial agenda, *ARTEXPRESS* conceals a conflict in its agency.

The desire by *ARTEXPRESS* to include works below the fourteen percent cut off is evidence, on a grander scale, of its emerging belief that the artistic identity of students is represented more convincingly by a diversity of works. *ARTEXPRESS* is increasingly disposed to treat the single, finished submissions of individual candidates as if they cohered into larger bodies of work. Through curatorial approaches to ‘assessment’ *ARTEXPRESS* is able to simulate a body of work that exhibits those influences of time, reflection, failure, and revision, and thereby feign the influences that shape the works of mature artists.

12.4.4 The Facade of the Single Artwork

The “three unit anomaly” exemplifies the way the single polished work currently struggles to satisfy the evaluative demands of contemporary curriculum. In its struggle the submitted work is increasingly revealed as a facade of the outcomes it purports to assess. It hides its dysfunction by retreating even further into the unanalysable uniqueness of the aesthetic object. The single work idealises creative authenticity thereby fostering a romantic understanding of artistic ability. The romance of the single work represses significant educational and late modern contributions to the process of art making that might otherwise be legitimately declared. Symptoms of concealment in senior school art is found in the:

- unhealthy repression of valuable influences on student’s work including educationally significant teacher collaboration in the production of ideas;
- privileging of intuitive expression in works that are diversely driven by a variety of historical, cultural and disciplinary motives;
- understatement of conceptual knowledge as a referent of the abilities assessed in the making of artworks;

In sum, the single work faces a growing range of expectations in the NSW HSC that it is unable to meet alone. As a vehicle of assessment the single work is caught in a circle of conflicting obligations to curriculum that compromises its authenticity.

12.5 The Concept of the Body of Work

12.5.1 Working Documents

An artist’s work provides the grounds but not the reasons upon which judgements of their artistic ability are based (Toulman et al. 1979). Although it is a function of artworks to shape our knowledge about artists, artworks themselves are not

responsible for the functions attributed to them. Neither is the artist. It would be as naive to believe that art works speak for themselves about their artists, as it is to believe that artists are fully accountable for their works. Thus it is impossible to conceive of artists intelligibly outside of some functional system of their works; that is, to conceive of artists outside some view of what their artworks tell us about them. Our capacity to capture an artist's ability is limited, therefore, by the purposes and values we believe are enacted through their works. Recovering artistic abilities always depends on some form of interpretation of their works. An interpretative practice decides what properties of a body of work are attributable to the artist, and what properties ought to be left out. For example, the portfolio, the diary and the theme are three functional representations of the body of work that impose correspondingly different interpretations upon the kinds of artistic ability that underlie it.

12.5.2 The Body of Work, the Portfolio and Artistic Ability

Portfolios do more than simply bundle works together indiscriminately they sample them. Portfolios are largely designed to function as a kind of marketable presentation. 'Unsuccessful' works are usually omitted from portfolios. To represent a body of work as a portfolio is to place editorial conditions on what is significant about it and to adopt a particular interpretive point of view towards the works it contains. Artworks represented within portfolios serve specialised rhetorical purposes. For example, many works included in portfolios are reproduced and reformatted for reasons of size and convenience. Changes in scale through reproduction are notorious in their seductive effect upon a body of work. Works in portfolios are not passively 'contained' within it but are 'chosen' because they demonstrate either diversity or coherence relative to the others. For instance, the portfolio is able to imply a 'series' in a body of work where none is originally intended. The need to complete a 'series' implied by companion works in a portfolio can act like a fetish for the original body of work. A portfolio can determine the direction of new works. For these reasons artistic abilities denoted in the making of portfolios are quite distinctive from abilities involved in the production of a body of work. This is not to discredit the portfolio. It is to point out that portfolios have a readily detectable agenda that once understood can lead to formulas in their production.

12.5.3 The Body of Work, the Artist's Diary and Artistic Ability

Diaries, like portfolios, are artefacts that bring purposes of their own to bear on bodies of work. The artistic purpose of a diary is not necessarily confined to its preparatory phase in the production of more substantial works. Diaries are used as much in reflection on past practices as they are used to test solutions and to collect data. Diaries are not neutral mediators of artistic thought, however. Notebooks and

diaries borrow from the annotative conventions of natural history, conventions that rub off onto the artworks and the artists who employ them. Diaries lend an intimate, responsive, notational, and abbreviated character to the art making process. The purposefulness of diaries shapes the representation of artistic ability into its own functional image. When observing artistic ability from the perspective of a diary we tend to see only what the diary allows us to see. Students readily come to understand this and quickly learn how to produce a ‘good’ diary. The artistic abilities learned incidentally by students in the production of diaries and notebooks are as much imposed by the annotative convention of diaries as by the content they annotate.⁵

12.5.4 The Body of Work, the Heuristic, and Artistic Ability

Heuristics (systems of educational inquiry used by students) also add function to bodies of work. When sorted into different kinds of heuristic, a body of work can appear to call upon different kinds of artistic ability. For example, by calling upon problem solving such as—“works produced as freestanding objects 500 mm in height that meet the following conditions”, or by calling upon knowledge of semi-otic referencing—“artefacts with masculine references in the landscape” a work can be framed to exercise different artistic abilities. By imposing different thematic and heuristic functions on a body of work through simple changes in pedagogical design, teachers can manipulate the artistic abilities that underlie the process of artistic production. Themes and heuristics can also be imposed retrospectively as well as prospectively. By posing questions such as “what problem is being set by the student in these works?” the assessor is framing the body of work against an established set of cognitive assumptions that carry with them a baggage of pragmatic artistic abilities. Without consulting any of the processes actually entertained by student artists themselves the assessor can make the body of work serve particular kinds of artistic ability.

12.5.5 Documenting Works

ERIC and *MERILYN* are two successful artists providing frank reports of their school experiences in art for use as examples in this section. *ERIC* is a university professor at the forefront of innovation in the field of video gaming in New York and the son of distinguished art educationalist Professor Enid Zimmerman. *MERRILYN* is a university professor and distinguished multimedia artist in Sydney. *ERIC’s* and *MERILYN’s* work, referred to in this publication are neither portfolios, nor diaries nor themes. They are case studies. *ERIC’s* case is presented as a biography written as a biography and *MERILYN’s* is presented as an autobiography. Biography

⁵Foucauldian understanding of textual practices is significant to the development of this point.

achieves its ends through narrative. Professor Zimmerman's struggle to is noteworthy. The unifying story she tells about *ERIC* is of his pursuit of artistic authenticity in the face of educational adversity. The actual chronology of *ERIC*'s artistic development is nonetheless haphazard and deeply affected by external influences and his progress is marked by many false starts and regressions. The development of *MERILYN*'s body of work is chronologically, if not aesthetically, incoherent as well. Her work seems to embark on a number of different directions simultaneously. While there appears to be an over-arching purpose to her artistic progress, many of her new works are creatively opportunistic. At certain moments in the process, even at the moment of their exhibition, some works inexplicably sever all connections with their past. That both *ERIC*'s and *MERILYN*'s artistic lives often seem lacking in continuity is no fault of the candidness of the narratives. Each narrative reveals an intimate acquaintance with the inchoate events surrounding the process of production—often speaking through the subjective voice of the artist. Each maps the process faithfully. Nevertheless, the function of a case study is to tell a coherent story even if it is one of discontinuity.

Nor is there any reason to believe that *ERIC*'s ability as an artist is more validly represented by descriptions confined to events surrounding the origination of his works. Faithful descriptions are obliged to make sense of the relations between inchoate events insofar as even originating events do not speak for themselves. Making sense of descriptions entails the use of an appropriate interpretive practice of which the narrative of authenticity in the visual arts qualifies as a mature form. However, the artistic abilities disclosed about *ERIC* in Zimmerman's narrative of authenticity are no less an interpretation of his artworks than are the abilities projected onto a body of work by the portfolio and the diary. *ERIC*'s work acquires its authority to function as an agent of his artistic ability through Zimmerman's narrative of authenticity.

12.5.6 The Counter-Intuitive Way in Which Art Works 'Make' Students

What, then, are the proper terms under which the properties of a body of work are attributed to properties of the student? The answer is that there are no privileged ways of accessing artistic abilities through a body of work. Artistic abilities are inevitably imputed from the meanings attributed to artist's works. Bodies of work cause artistic abilities as a condition of these attributed functions. This counter-intuitive proposition is qualified by the fact that the capacity of artworks to determine artistic ability is a function bestowed on them by an interpretive practice. Most importantly, these practices change.

The retreating tides of interpretive practice litter the shores of art education with abandoned artistic abilities (Korzenik 1995). Premature obsolescence in an interpretive practice can be mitigated by framing the evaluative function of works from

a number of different points of view. The adoption of some evaluative perspectives, however, requires courage. Unorthodox functions attributed to bodies of work may be subject to censure by the field and risk being labelled as heresies. One function of assessment currently in danger of falling into this category, the “teacher”, is worthy of closer inspection.

12.6 Reassessing the Functional Shape of the Body of Work

12.6.1 *The Functional Relation Between the ‘Teacher’ and the ‘Student’ in the Body of Work*

Professor Zimmerman narrates the positive and negative influence different teachers have had upon the development of *ERIC*'s work. She reports that *ERIC* did not get on very well with his high school teacher and makes it clear that the break down in their relationship had a negative impact upon his work. It follows from Zimmerman's interpretation that teachers may exert an agency in the production of student works that is quite separate from the one they intend, insofar as it is likely that *ERIC*'s teacher believed she was doing her best. According to *ERIC*, however, his art teacher fell short of the ideals of best practice. It is reasonable, therefore, to attribute the declared beliefs of the ‘person’ teaching and the ‘teacher’s’ influence on the student being taught, as only two among a number of contributing ‘teacher’ functions. In other words, the performance of the teacher is a function that needs to be recovered from the body of work through interpretation, as indeed Zimmerman's narrative does. It is the task of those engaged in the assessment of a body of student work to put forward a strategy for recovering the ‘teacher’s’ role. To begin with, the ‘teacher’ function recovered in a body of work is not fixed. Ideals of best practice and nationally standardised routines are merely two interpretive practices for accrediting ‘teacher’ functions to a body of work. Nor is the teacher reducible, as *ERIC*'s case implies, to the romantic testament of the actual teachers and students involved. National standards and romantic attributions are not the only legitimate teacher attributing functions to a body of work.

Once it is accepted that some properties of *ERIC*'s work are attributed to the teacher by Zimmerman's narrative, the way is clear to address dilemmas in the orthodoxy of teaching the creative arts (Gardner and Nemirovsky 1991). For example, what is the authentic relation between the teacher and the student in artistic production? In the atelier of Jacques Louis David, for instance, apprentices were expected to produce work of a standard that brought praise upon the teacher (Crow 1994). Today that direction of praise is reversed even though many of the teaching methods remain the same. How would *ERIC* fair in David's class? In short, the ‘teacher’ is attributed to a body of work as the extension of some evaluative precept. Properties of a body of work are neither necessarily (logically), nor naturalistically (empirically) co-extensive with the artistic ability of students and, even if they are, it remains to be determined which ones shall be allowed to count.

At various moments in the assessment of students we can attach additional functions to their body of work such as the “state curriculum”, the “assessment criteria”, and the “conventions of contemporary art”. These functions mitigate in favour of student ability only to the degree that functional properties are attributed to them. The ‘student’ can acceptably claim—“the conventions of contemporary art” as a property of their artistic ability, for instance, only insofar as two conditions of interpretive practice are met with respect to the body of work. One, that the “conventions of contemporary art” are accepted as a legitimate extension of a ‘body of work’ for students in school. Two, that a relationship is understood to exist between the ‘body of work’ and the ‘student’ that admits “the conventions of contemporary art” in their work as evidence of artistic ability.⁶

12.7 Assessing a Body of Work

In recent years cognitive theory in the visual arts has focussed on the challenges to understanding presented by different kinds of artistic knowledge (see Karmiloff-Smith 1995).⁷ Within a cognitive framework the relation between a body of work and its student maker are considered as an extension of the influence exerted by the epistemology of the visual arts upon the psychological disposition of the art student.

Consider the following example. When linked together the two properties “conceptual strength” and “material resolution” form into a provisional system for the assessment of a body of work. Note, however, that “material resolution” and “conceptual strength’ are functionally attached to the body of work for a particular evaluative purpose. They serve as a basis for the imputation of artistic abilities. The interrelation between these two properties can be schematised in the following manner (Fig. 12.1).

12.7.1 *The Epistemic Properties of the Body of Work*

The reproduction of different kinds of artistic knowledge in a body of work makes little sense when it is teased out for its own sake. Knowledge reproduced in a body of work not only differs widely in its individual nature; it is rendered complex by its integration into strategic relationships. Innovative knowledge, so prized in the visual arts, is nonetheless dependent on artistic conventions and protocols. Nevertheless, the strategic expression of knowledge in art calls upon the integrating mechanism of conceptual and material resolution. Knowledge in portraiture, for example, is

⁶Franz Cizek was notorious for denying students access to contemporary imagery in the making of their works.

⁷See Chapter 11 on Karmiloff-Smith’s concept of “representational redescription”.

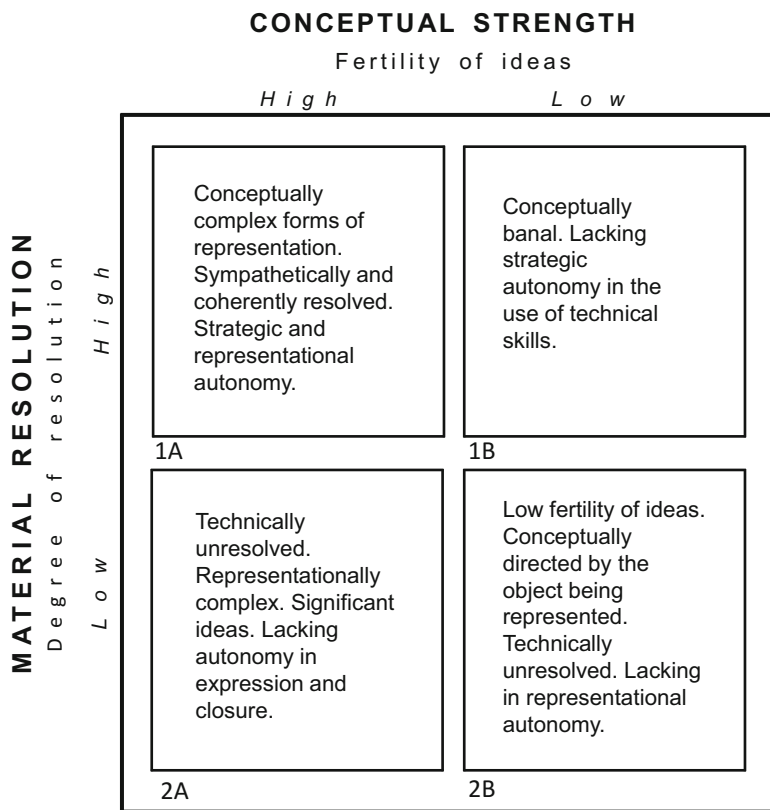


Fig. 12.1 The body of work

characterised by different genres of aesthetic integration. Students must be conceptually as well as technically ready to participate congruently in the genre of portrait painting demonstrating what Ellen Winner et al. (1986) refers to as levels of domain awareness. As children emerge from the developmental constraints of naive realism they begin to understand that making portraits, for instance, poses difficulties that close attention to the sitter cannot resolve. Different kinds of pictorial references to the sitter set constraints on their artistic representation within the portrait. Abstract references to the sitter such as gender, race, class and politics, have a largely theoretical presence that is opaque within the perceptual properties of the sitter's pose. Putting race into pictorial use in a portrait, therefore, calls upon high levels of representational autonomy in order to act independently of the sitter's appearance.

In recent decades artistic dependence on aesthetic intuition has been diversified. Different systems of artistic reference provide students with alternative mental strategies for the collection of creative resources in their works. For example, although many students may continue to search for artistic references within their aesthetic experience, late modern concepts of art authorise them to borrow from creative resources that were previously outlawed in the field of art education. By contacting

alternative systems of signs, citing the imagery from existing art works, and integrating the traditions of other cultures, students can uncover a wealth of artistically legitimate resources that are otherwise opaque within traditional aesthetic forms of reference. Qualities of warmth may still be sought within the subjectivity of felt experience. But they can also be collected from the ‘labels’ of other representational forms. Borrowing through experience calls upon quite different artistic abilities than collection through the readership of symbolic labels.

Thus the quality of material resolution in a body of work is responsive to different ways in which artistic knowledge is contacted conceptually. Artistic abilities are correspondingly believed, intended, entrenched, dreamt, felt, encoded, simulated, projected, theorised, represented, imagined, or expressed in sympathy with the demands imposed by different conceptual frameworks of artistic reference. In this sense, then, the function of a body of work is structured by the background knowledge underpinning it, including both the material and conceptual skills required in its expressive resolution. It is by means of these functions of the work that claims of artistic ability about the student are validated.

12.7.2 *Psychological Properties of the Body of Work*

Cognitive theory establishes an intimate relationship between knowledge and knowing (Efland 1995; Wolf 1989). The provisional interpretive system schematised in Fig. 12.1 above provides a way of inferring the cognitive performance of a student. Conceptual complexity refers to the representational layers of meaning as well as to the sheer fertility of the ideas imported into the work. Material resolution refers to the skills deployed in its expressive achievement. When brought into interrelationship these two properties function within a body of work to form the beginnings of an integrated psychology of artistic ability.

While the single finished work strives to satisfy the conditions implicit in Cell 1A, a body of work is more likely to register significantly across all four cells. For instance, Cells 1B and 2A form a diagonal of artistic incoherence insofar as the functional relation between the two properties is uneven. However, in this instance incoherence is not always bad within the context of a body of work. Incoherence between the two major functions can be a sign of risk taking and is often the pretext to experimental advances in artistic ideas. Incongruity in Cell 1B can also arise when a student seeks expressive resolution of their ideas within an artistic genre lying outside their conceptual understanding. The reverse is also true. *ERIC*'s high school teacher, for example, failed to allow for sudden *advances* in the subtlety of the artistic references *ERIC* brought to his work.

Levels will vary holistically. Naive realists typically occupy Cell 2B. The imagery of naive realists is conceptually guileless and narrowly directed by the objects it represents. With some notable exceptions naive works are consistent with a range of energetic, often meticulously laboured, cognitively resourceful, yet nearly always technically vernacular skills (Berti and Freeman 1997). There comes a

point, however, at which any body of work can regress into this category. Regression may occur as a consequence of radical departures in artistic direction by the artist. For instance, students often find difficulty in transferring into digital technology graphic skills they have refined for use in conventional media. Lack of technical expertise has a retrogressive impact on the autonomy with which imagery can be representationally redescribed (Karmiloff-Smith 1995). Being thrown back onto an explicit use of the technical rules in art compromises their tacit use in the imaginative re-composition of artistic ideas.

On the other hand it is quite possible that work falling into Cell 2B could possess high levels of aesthetic merit. For instance, assessors often project high levels of artistic value on the fortunate, but unintentional, ‘accidents’ of naive artists (Gardner 1980, p. 11). However, it is equally possible that art works made by school age children at early developmental levels may possess high degrees of artistic coherence. This is consistent with their location in Cell 1A. Even though their work may appear aesthetically simplistic by mature standards the symmetry of its conceptual and material resolution, adjusted for developmental constraints, may satisfy high levels of expressive coherence (Berti and Freeman 1997). Thus some functional attributions of artistic ability may apply to the aesthetic quality of student’s works in ways that have little functional significance for students. In other words cells 1A and 2B demonstrate how there is no automatic correlation between artistic value and artistic ability. Although there is a correlation it is one that is functionally moderated in assessment by interpretive practice.

A full discussion of the permutations within the four cells of Fig. 12.1 is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the following point needs to be kept in mind. Even though the four cells represent the extreme poles across a continuum it is incorrect to regard them as a bald system of ranking works. It is a misrepresentation implicit within the rhetoric of the single finished work, and of the portfolio, to regard the four cells as a graded hierarchy in which 1A is awarded to the ‘best’ work, B2 for the ‘worst’ and so on. The four cells contextualise the variations in cognitive demand that are normally anticipated within a body of artistic work. These four cells are emblematic of the two nominated functions of the body of work that, through varying degrees of resolution, characterise the artistic abilities of students. Thus while aesthetic judgements based on ostensive ranking reliably predict the relative merits of student works, there is no necessary reason why this ranking should be expected to say much about the abilities of students.

12.8 Summary

In sum, the assessment of a body of work differs from the assessment of other assembled modes of student artworks. Although the body of work brings fewer interpretive assumptions to assessment than the single finished work, the portfolio or the diary, it is more accommodating of different interpretive practices. Zimmerman’s narrative of authenticity and *ARTEXPRESS*’ curatorial policy are

advanced as two functions of artistic ability that are allowed a more flexible assignment within a body of work. Portfolios, on the other hand are, to some degree, beset by the desire to assemble the most coherent presentation and to put the best gloss on the artworks they contain. When assigned provisional functions such as “conceptual strength” and “material resolution” portfolios are more likely to edit out the kinds of unflattering work that would fall into cells 2A and 1B. In these cells, unhappily, it is the very asymmetry between the two functions that is most revealing of the student’s cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

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