



# BULLETIN

ASSOCIATION OF ART HISTORIANS

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## NEWS REPORT

# “Subversions’ Objects” Conference Report

“Subversions’ Objects” took place in Leeds, between 10–13 April. Indeed, as I write (on the afternoon of the 13th) AAH ‘battle buses’ struggle to direct a hard-core of conference-goers toward selected targets of art interest within Yorkshire and other northern constituencies. Undaunted they go, after three days of intense campaigning by over 185 men and women on their soapboxes, after three plenary sessions, given by Tim Clark, Anthony Caro and Griselda Pollock, and after a heavy schedule of drinking courtesy of Leeds Polytechnic, the University, and the City Art Gallery/Henry Moore Sculpture Centre. Twenty-one sessions took place at the conference this year, within a programme which tried to extend the usual curriculae of AAH academic business, with the inclusion of materials and speakers on design, television and video. The conference also emphasised sculpture and monuments of many kinds and, for once, painting lost its usual centrality.

The organiser’s perspective on the event, I now find, is profoundly unlike that of speakers, session organisers or those who have come to listen. For me, despite many kind reassurances, the whole business was a series of disasters and near-disasters in logistical, technological and communication terms. I won’t reveal the nature of these in too much detail, but one

example is indicative. The Student Union building at Leeds Polytechnic contained a large floor space which we intended to use for our first reception. I arrived on the Friday to find that it had been waxed twice, and was awaiting three more coats. Staff in the Union had not been briefed about the conference until the week before by their superiors on another site, despite the fact that I had made the initial arrangements six months ago and was constantly assured that everything was in hand. No one knew who to ask about how to proceed: to use the (slightly sticky) floor or not. I ran around like a headless chicken for an hour without resolving the issue of chain of command and responsibility. We made do. Luckily the weather was glorious on Friday and Saturday, and people spilled on to the grass outside. That evening I felt that Sartre’s concept of ‘practico-inert’ was worth a reassessment.

The conference included a crèche and an attempt to use a ‘signer’ for people with hearing difficulties. The former measure was a great success and should become a usual feature of these events in the future: it is both a real and symbolic action and provision that the AAH should take and make. Providing interpreters was a good idea, but practical problems intervened. The main hall, used for plenaries, could not provide enough light to allow both the

visibility of the slides *and* the signer at the same time. It was not clear if any one in the audience needed or wanted the signer’s tenacious work, and many, many more people could not see the visuals. The signer found the job of ‘translating’ Tim Clark difficult and decided herself not to return on Sunday for Griselda Pollock. A wise decision, as severe arm-strain, along with vexing issues of hermeneutic, would have ensued. Because of the problems with microphones, lights and timing, I think it’s true (and proper, actually) that the real quality and value of the conference lay in the papers given by our brave 185, and within the interactions between them and their smaller, more manageable audiences.

Before the event, with such a large number of speakers, I was concerned that speakers would outnumber audience by two to one. Luckily this wasn’t the case. Without knowing the exact number, the conference was attended, over three days, by more than 500 people, including some from Australia, North America and mainland Europe. We tried to keep the conference fees as low as possible and are gratified that many postgraduates gave papers and could afford to listen to others as well. The success of the event (of which I have been assured) was also due to the immense amount of work and creative effort put in by our graphic designer, David

Baggaley, who teaches design history and theory as well as being what Anthony Caro called a 'hands-on' man. Our administrator, Mary Donovan, was also a crucial part of our organisational coherence and direction, and she devoted many hours of work selflessly and in great humour.

In conclusion I would like to comment on the tradition of AAH conference planning and management, within the spirit of Theo Cowdell's drive to 'professionalise' the organisation. It seems almost absurd now that amateurs like Tony Hughes and myself took on a job which we knew nothing about. Although we may conceive the intellectual framework, and a set of academic vehicles for examining the framework, the actual organising of the physical reality of the event (the nuts and bolts of hiring equipment, room booking, communication and transport) requires the expertise of competent and experienced people. We managed, but I believe *only just*. The

problems may not have been too visible, but they are there, like nine tenths of the iceberg that sunk the *Titanic* (which departed on its journey towards submergence also on 10 April). The conference could have been subverted by the consequences of our inexperience. I propose that the AAH permanently employ a professional organiser, who works with academic consultants. The College Art Association's planning and professional staffing is worth considering. Perhaps a study could be undertaken. I don't propose the wholesale adoption of the US model (we could never afford it), but they get some things right because they have professionals in the posts. Deadlines for *Bulletin* and Conference Brochure material should be fixed more rigidly and much more in advance. We got our conference packs back from the printers at 5.30 pm on Thursday 9 April. A power failure the day before could have resulted in the stuff being

ready when it would no longer be needed. Margins of error, or risk ('what chance is there of that plane crashing on landing?') need to be assessed and steps made to lessen the chance of disaster.

This seems very negative. After 9 April that's understandable. Places like Beckett Park might have to *become* conference centres, rather than higher educational establishments, because of that disaster. But the conference – with its intensity of intellectual activity, of social interaction, and of a myriad of pleasures experienced and shared – is, like the best forms of education, a kind of glimpse of what another society could be, a vision of a better life. Nearly one in two people attending the conference gave papers. Participatory democracy, rather than parliamentary representation?

Jonathan Harris  
April 1992

## Closure of the National Art Slide Library at the Victoria & Albert Museum

Since the time of reporting in the last *Bulletin* the Working Party set up by the Executive has been busy attempting to find a way of ameliorating the problems raised by the announced closure of the National Art Slide Library at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Further to the letter of protest written to the Director of the V&A, Mrs Elizabeth Esteve-Coll, by the Chair of the Association, a meeting was held between Mrs Esteve-Coll and the AAH Working Party on 7 February. At this meeting it became clear that there was no real possibility of the V&A continuing to host the National Art Slide Library as it has done to date. Subsequently the Executive decided that any further efforts made by the Association must be two-pronged. First, and most urgent, was the need to find a solution to

the problem of the total closure of the Slide Library for 18 months, either by finding a way of delaying the announced closure or keeping it open in a partial form. Second, in the long term, there must be an effort to see if a more accessible and practicable permanent home, other than Leicester Polytechnic, could be found, preferably in the London area.

With respect to the most immediate needs Mrs Esteve-Coll has been approached by the Association to ask if a temporary delay of closure can be agreed to tide over regular users during the period of the 1992 summer term, as this would greatly ease some of the most acute problems. The efforts to find a permanent home in the London region for a core collection are progressing, and the Working Party has been in contact with a number of institutions

and organisations which might provide a permanent venue for the Slide Library collection.

Finally, the Working Party would be grateful for any further proposals from members or interested organisations/institutions concerning a solution of the problems raised by the plans projected last November for the National Slide Library. Please address these to Professor William Vaughan, Department of History of Art, Birkbeck College, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PD.

Working Party (Prof William Vaughan, Dr Francis Ames-Lewis, Ms Clare Ford-Wille, Dr Deirdre Robson, Ms Monika Puloy, Mr Howard Hollands).

March 1992

## Leeds AGM – Important Decisions

Some important decisions were taken at the Association's Annual General Meeting which I would like to be reported to the membership.

### The Polytechnics, Colleges and Universities Sections

As many members will be aware, the Government has recently ended the so-called binary divide between on the one hand the Universities and on the other the Polytechnics. Many Polys are applying for University status and the public funding of many of these institutions is to be undertaken by a single agency. Since its early days, the AAH has sought to support different sectional interests by means of special interest groups represented by Sub-Committee Chairs sitting on the Executive Committee. Over the past year the Chairs of the University Sub-Committee and of the Polytechnic and Colleges Sub-Committee have been

attending each others' meetings to keep in touch with developments; the AGM agreed to build on this process by effectively merging the two committees and asking the new joint committee to evaluate future needs and make suggestions about a new structure. These will be considered by the EC and offered to the 1993 AGM for discussion and ratification. Until the constitution is amended, the Chairs of the old Sub-Committees, Gillian Elinor and Will Vaughan, will continue to sit on the EC. Please send your thoughts and ideas to them.

### The 1992 Research Assessment Exercise

The Executive of the AAH were delighted when the University Funding Council approached the association just before the Leeds conference asking us to nominate members to the panel that will undertake the above exercise. Time was very short but we undertook as extensive a process of

consultation as was possible and at various conference meetings an extremely useful set of criteria was established. Our nominees were to cover the necessary areas of research, to be based across the country, to have skills across all the media related to the history of art, architecture and design, to use a range of methods and approaches and to represent not only universities but also other tertiary sectors and museums. We also wanted women on the panel. It was agreed that potential nominees should not be discussed in public but names were passed on confidentially to the sub-committee established to draw up the AAH's list. This has now been passed on and we await the announcement of the chosen panel with interest.

Nigel Llewellyn  
Chair

## CONFERENCE NEWS

## The Adam Achievement: Creation and Innovation

With the year 1992 marking the bicentenary of the death of Robert Adam, the Architectural Association is holding a one-day conference on Saturday 30 May. Starting at 9.30 am, this event will reassess the Adam achievement and consider Robert Adam as an outstanding creator and innovator.

The Conference will address the intellectual, cultural and commercial scope of the Robert Adam enterprise, in which his father William Sr. and his brothers John, James and William Jr. played an important part; but it will also consider Robert's later work, much of it only in project form and

remaining unbuilt, due largely to the unsettled state of Britain in the later years of the eighteenth century.

In assembling some of the latest research, themes which will be examined will include the formative years Robert Adam spent in Italy, the attempted integration of the arts within the furnished interiors, draughtsmanship and the office practice, the Adams' as speculators, leading to Adams' progressive and inventive later works, themes that will be seen within the historical and cultural context.

Contributors to the Conference will include John Wilton-Ely, Robin Middleton,

Eileen Harris, Giles Worsley, Frank Kelsall, Alistair Rowan, John Newman, Peter Thornton, John Harris and Margaret Richardson. The day will be organised around presentation papers, respondent sessions and discussion periods.

ENTRY FEE (*Coffee, light lunch and tea will be provided*): AA members £30.00; Non-members £35.00; Non-AA students £10.00 (lunch not included); enclose copy of student ID card).

For further details contact the Adam Conference Secretary, Graduate School, Architectural Association, 36 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3ES.

# Les Ateliers des Interprètes – European Initiative for art historians – & Institute for Cultural Studies, Vienna

## 5th European Seminar: *Art history and contemporary art models of interpretation from 1860 to the present*

5–8 September 1992

*The seminar will take place at the Kunstraum Buchberg,  
Niederösterreich and Vienna*

Les Ateliers des Interprètes is a private association. Its aim is to encourage international contacts among younger scholars in art history and neighbouring disciplines, the comparison of different methods, as well as the treatment of topics neglected by established research programmes, is made possible during 3-day seminars organised once a year. The papers and discussions

results are published in the yearly review.

The Institute for Cultural Studies Vienna, co-organiser of this year's seminar, was founded in 1990 and organises research projects and lectures – as well as education of postgraduates for a museum curator's career. In autumn 1992 the second course of four semesters in the education of museum curators will begin and, for the first time, a

course concerning 'communication in museums and exhibitions' will be offered. The Kunstraum Buchberg at Schloß Buchberg am Kamp (Niederösterreich) is this year's conference location. Since 1979 there has been a centre for international constructive and conceptual art. In addition to the development of a collection, yearly exhibitions and symposia take place.

### Topics

1. Interpretation of selected works of art at the Kunstraum Buchberg.
2. Historical examples of art historians dealing with contemporary art.
3. Art historical methods of interpretation of contemporary art.

Each conference participant will prepare a short paper, of approx. one or two pages, consisting of one of the three topics (slides may be used). The papers are presented to the whole group and will be followed by intensive discussions.

### Contact and information:

Martina Sitt  
Marianneng. 15/8  
A-1090 Vienna

Philip Ursprung  
Leonhardsstr. 22A  
D-1000 Berlin 19

Matthias Waschek  
3, rue Myrtha  
F-75018 Paris

Jean-Loup Korzilius  
22, rue Bucourt  
F-92210 St Cloud

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## *The Conservator and the Art Historian* UKIC (Wall Paintings Section) Conference

20 June 1992

Unicorn Theatre, Abingdon

The main object of the conference is to demonstrate the historical information that conservators can uncover during conservation. Many small finds are made by conservators working on buildings of national importance and frequently never get published, so the conference is designed as a platform for revealing such discoveries.

The papers concentrate on conservators' methodology when faced with problems of historical interest; the papers will be published in the Conference Transactions (being produced by UKIC) together with a bibliography of published work by conservators concentrating on the work of Dr E Clive Rouse.

Early evening drinks will be followed by a concert of 14th-century music in St Helen's Church (where the painted ceiling of 1391 has just been restored) in aid of the church.

For further details contact Anna Hulbert, 1 The Green, Childrey, Wantage, Oxon OX12 9UG. Telephone Childrey 602.

## ‘Our lost realism . . . ’

Have any other members of the Association noticed that, since about 1955, a general coterie enthusiasm for artistic innovation has held sway and carried all before it? What, alternatively, could have been construed, to great advantage, as the central thread of British painting has been lost, I hope only temporarily, while the cognoscenti flounder about looking for it in all -isms other than the optimum one: realism.

That kind of realism found in Claude Rogers, George Sweet, Richard Eurich and many another under-rated painter, coming directly out of the Camden Town Group and Euston Road School and, perhaps equally importantly, out of the diffuse influence of Slade School graduates on provincial art-teaching, has just been lying about in limbo.

So I write from the advantageous position of the provincial: a position, perhaps, of easier objectivity. I see a wider public hugely ignorant of any kind of art, or else atavistically averse to any innovation in it; asleep at Hodgkin and Hoyland, incredulous at Richard Long and Carl André and vivid at Cotman and old photographs of the

locality. I see a wider public clinging to reality and realism where these can be perceived as conventionally pleasant. I see a small group of powerful experts excluding realists and realism on the grounds that they are, all of them, tame and derivative.

Giles Auty, writing in *The Spectator* of 7th December, 1991, calls for artistic rehabilitation in Britain, claiming that the apparently crypto-esoteric in modern art is too thick on the ground and so baffling for most of us that we ignore it: choose simply not to look, any more, at the emperor's new clothes. He points out, quite accurately, that a restitution of more traditional values in the teaching at art schools would relegate the fashionable, and prestigiously competitive, to more reasonable positions in the scheme of things – and eventually eradicate the current widespread, albeit sublimated, dissatisfaction with the ‘inexplicable artefacts’ of modernism. Instead of fastening on to what glimmer of recognition the wider public shows, what passes for our intellectual leadership has set realism aside. And now it needs very badly to be taken up again – if only as a means by which to wean our wider public on to new

departures and inculcate in it an appreciation of the truly excellent.

I would, of course, be very interested in other members' response to this, as I see it, major problems of our lost realism. They may think there is no problem: that the realists I have mentioned are of only relatively little significance and so on – or that, through shows like ‘The Hard Won Image’ or the retrospective of William Coldstream – or big shows of Freud, the brave lads of configuration have been kept ticking over. They may even genuinely think that realists have always been adequately hung and sung. Auty, criticising Lord Palumbo's ‘modernist zeal’ (loc. cit.) over Paternoster Square, prefers ‘artistic excellence’. Our artists, present and future, the length and breadth of Britain, unhung and unsung, who are not, and who will not be, obsessed with breaking new ground for the sake of it, might well provide us with that ‘artistic excellence’ through realism.

Quentin Williams  
Spring 1992

## 18th Annual Conference of the Association of Art Historians Leeds, 10–12 April

The amount of discussion time that plenary session speakers allow for is an important issue that needs to be highlighted in relation to this conference.

The opening plenary session on Friday afternoon was given by T J Clark. It seemed intended to open up debate about the current state-of-the social history of-art. It encompassed a wide range of issues around the theme of capitalism as a regime of representation – from an explanation of the all-too-recent election results to the specificity of art historical discourse on 19th-century painting. It left ample room for thought and application of some of the issues to the academic sessions which were to start later. The speaker spoke for about an hour, leaving half an hour for discussion.

The space for debate which followed was seized by the speaker for the closing plenary session, Griselda Pollock, who decided to make an intervention on behalf

of all women and other Others. This in its turn was subverted by the p.a. system's decision to end the discussion by lapsing into noise.

The intensity of debate in the academic sessions which followed on Friday, Saturday and Sunday seemed to indicate that some of these issues were alive and well. The final plenary session, a lecture on 19th-century painting, was aimed, it was revealed finally, at setting up a separate womens' art historians association, under the tutelage of the speaker who decried the Oedipal scenario she believed to be witnessing of ‘the boys’ killing off and replacing their fathers in art history. This lasted for the full hour and a half slot of the closing plenary session. There was no time for response to this or for any other issues arising from the conference to be aired.

One important relevant issue needs to be addressed here. Does feminism want to

become a dominant discourse – one of power – which seeks to monopolise the terrain with the same aggressive methods that masculinist discourse consisted of? If so, how can the dissenting voices on a variety of issues make themselves heard or even oppose the terms in which they are represented (to echo T J Clark on how capitalism as a system of power and domination works)?

Should plenary sessions be allowed to be used for these ends? If feminism is to be an empowering discourse and practice perhaps it would be appropriate at conferences to encourage those who have not yet found a voice (with which to speak) and have a round of applause for the tea ladies, crèche workers and security staff.

PRAXITELLA

## Towards a Strategy for the Association of Art Historians

Most of us, at least those who work in organisations, are increasingly familiar with the language of corporate activity. Strategy is (Johnson & Scholes, 1989) concerned with matching an organisation's activities to its resources and its environment. An organisation's mission is what it wants to do. A strategy is a systematic plan of how to achieve its mission. The AAH is now a 'mature' organisation, and having established itself, it now needs to consider where it wants to go next. This paper is intended as an invitation to debate.

The Association of Art Historians was founded in 1974. It now has a membership of around 1,000 among those who are directly concerned with the advancement of the study of the history of art and design whether by profession or avocation. The Association is the professional organisation for British scholars in the field of the visual arts; it is active in representing the interests of its members with government, the Arts Council, the various Library organisations and with many other bodies. It works in close co-operation with conservation societies and other pressure groups as well as with international organisations for the History of Art such as the College Art Association of America and the Comité Internationale d'Histoire de l'Art.

*Association of Art Historians.*

The Association is a charity whose aim is to advance the education of the public by the study of the History of Art and by publishing the useful results of such study.

*Association of Art Historians.*

Constitution Para. 2.

Those readers who do not want to engage in the rhetoric of management theory may now wish to turn to the concluding paragraphs and recommendations. However, I think it quite useful to look at a number of theories which can be used to consider the AAH's role as an organisation.

The AAH, as a voluntary association, subscribes to Buchanan and Huczynski's (1985) definition of an organisation as a social arrangement for the controlled performance of collective goals. A selected

number of members are elected to roles (as officers and members of the Executive Committee) designed both to fulfil the organisation's objectives and to control its performance. The Association is also a non-profit organisation, in that it is a registered charity (unincorporated), so defined under the 'advancement of education' heading which includes aesthetic education in culture and the arts (Phillips, 1984). To become a charity the AAH had to satisfy the Charity Commissioners that the organisation's purpose falls *entirely* under one of the recognised headings (the others of which are the relief of poverty, the advancement of religion and other purposes beneficial to the community). The dissemination of research for public benefit is one important objective which qualifies the Association for charitable status. Moreover, its status means that it has to ensure that there is no net surplus overall in respect of the true income and expenditure account of its charitable activities.

Under the terms of its constitution the AAH welcomes as members Art Historians by profession or by avocation and those directly concerned in the advancement or the study of, and education in, the history of art . . . . The AAH is managed by an Executive Committee elected at Annual General meetings of the Association, and consisting of a Chair, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, nine elected members, ex-officio members and up to six co-opted members. The Editor of *Art History* (a quarterly international academic journal with a subscription linked to AAH membership) and of the Association's *Bulletin* (a quarterly news publication) are ex-officio members of the Executive. The Director of Publicity and Administration and the Assistant Treasurer also attend meetings of the Executive, without voting rights. Other than the officers and ex-officio members no member of the executive can serve more than 5 consecutive years. The Executive Committee has the authority to create sub-committees and working parties from among the membership. There are at present sub-committees concerned with Schools, Students, Polytechnics and Colleges, Universities, Museums, Freelance Art & Design Historians and the Artists' Papers

Register (a research project).

The AAH organises a major annual conference. The venue alternates between London and provincial cities, although recently venues abroad have been proposed (the 1990 conference was in Dublin). These conferences are designed around a programme of research papers, usually adopting an overall theme for the event. Receptions, interest group meetings, 'keynote speakers' and the Annual General Meeting make these conferences useful events for those attending, the numbers of whom usually range between >200 (provinces) to >500 (London). Abstracts of papers are published in the AAH's *Bulletin*. From time to time additional, specialised conferences are organised to highlight and discuss topical issues of interest to sections of the membership and others.

### History of the Organisation

The founding of the AAH occurred at a time when Art History was consolidating itself as an established academic discipline in Higher Education. Certain University Heads of Departments had for some years met informally, and when a suggestion was made to form an Association there may have been some initial surprise at the warmth of the response. Art History was beginning to reap the benefits of the expansion in demand confirmed by University course developments and by the subject's role in Colleges of Art (many of which became parts of the new Polytechnics in 1969). The National Diploma in Design (NDD) was transformed into the Diploma in Art and Design (Dip.AD) 1965-7, which was in turn translated in to B.A. status in the early 1970s. Not only was the History of Art (then often associated with 'complementary studies') given a mandatory role – usually some 20% of the curriculum – in studio-based courses, but some of the groups of academic staff involved with such work developed their own academic degrees, a number of which were approved by the Council of Academic Awards (CNA) in the 1970s. Some of these were already multi- or inter-disciplinary, e.g. the History of Art, Design & Film B.A. at Sheffield City Polytechnic (1976). In the absence of an association which might serve the inter-

ests of everyone professionally engaged in Art History, the AAH was formed in 1974.

In the early years the social function of the Association was, members may recall, as important as its professional usefulness. It provided a good opportunity to 'keep in touch' – 'informal networking' as we may call it today. Conferences have always provided as much opportunity to socialise as to provoke controversy or generate papers for additions to *curricula vitae*.

In the 1970s and 1980s the discipline itself was also in the process of change. It is important to realise that the extent to which the existence of different schools of thought *within* the profession can have important repercussions. Until the early 1970s the Courtauld Institute of Art can be said to have provided a certain focus, even a kind of orthodoxy for Art History in this country. Rees and Borzello (1986) illustrate the traditional art history, its preoccupations with style, attributions, dating, authenticity, reconstructions etc. by reference to Mark Roskill's book *What is Art History?* that was published in 1974. The values and methodological approaches represented by Roskill's text were challenged quite radically in subsequent years, first by T. J. Clark's concern with the social context of art, and then by an increasing number of different perspectives. The first issue of *Art History*, the Journal of the AAH, appeared in March 1978, and professed a desire to

... provide the subject with more room for growth, and this means that in the exploration of new fields for research no materials, no tools, no methods and no language will be excluded

Editorial, *Art History* Vol. 1 No. 1  
March 1978 p. i.

Rees & Borzello's (1986) reference to the AAH as 'prestigious' by 1980 should not be taken as an indication of the existence of a unified organisational culture. By the 1985 conference, Joe Darracott (the organiser) was making a deliberate effort to accommodate both the traditional and 'new art history' sectors of the membership. The natural love of conceptual models, theory, argument and dialogue, (which Vaill, 1989, terms 'dialexia'), usually to be found

amongst professional academics, calls attention to the existence of different, internal constituencies within the AAH.

It is invariably a mistake to assume the 'natural' homogeneity of any association, although the implication of homogeneity may be useful as a rallying cry (a point made of the concept 'people' in Canovan, 1981). Within the AAH we can identify a number of distinct groupings. The AAH itself recognised the existence of functional sub-groups when it developed a system of sub-committees with responsibilities for different interest groups. On another dimension (although in this case it is more difficult and perhaps unnecessary to formalise it) there are professional differences between groups of members, both between areas of specialisation *within* art history, and between ideological and methodological preferences and belief systems. The Executive has recently announced its intention of updating membership records to include indications of members' different interest groupings and activities.

The AAH is now facing a changing environment. Developments and changes are legion: in the Higher Education system; in the 'New Art History' (to use an established shorthand with which to refer to the growing number of methodologies and perspectives which have informed the subject in recent decades); in academic patterns of study (e.g. part-time courses, Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme opportunities); in multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary courses (Pointon, 1986, notes that art history relates to other disciplines, e.g. sociology, psychology, history, anthropology etc.); in demographic participation trends. These all pose strategic questions for the Association at a time when its membership remains at some 1,000, arguably too small to carry real political weight but too big and well-established – few would question the perceived *benefit* of its conferences, for example, – to disband.

### Professionalism and Professionalisation

The AAH constitution's reference to art historians by avocation (see appendix) implies the existence of a calling. This is one of the dimensions of an ideal professional

type discussed by Bennet & Hokenstad and by McKinlay (Halmos, 1973). McKinlay actually challenges the concept of avocation: he argues that this is a vestige of clericalism which does not lend itself to disproof, and becomes something of a circular argument.

The constitution's reference to art historians by profession is an acknowledgement of the desire to professionalise the practice of art history since the 1970s. According to King and Raynor (1981), the notion of being in a profession is central to the concept of the middle class (an early survey of AAH membership by the late Peter Fitzgerald found that the 'average' member was middle class, a 19th-century specialist, and lived in the South East of England), albeit the idea of 'a profession', like the concept of 'middle class' is not very precise. Various definitions of professionalism exist. T. L. Johnson (1982) reviewed attempts to define professionalism under the headings: the 'trait' and the 'functionalist' model. 'Trait' models produce lists of attributes which are held to represent the common cores of professional occupations. 'Functionalist' models concentrate on identifying characteristics associated more with community than with individual interests (an approach which can be used to justify the charitable status of professional organisations such as the AAH). W. S. Bennett, Jr. and M. C. Hokenstad, Jr. also considered the sociological literature which has attempted to define professionalism in their essay on full-time workers and the concept of the professional in Halmos (1973). They suggest that there is sufficient consensus to agree three major criteria with which to define professionalism: the possession of an esoteric knowledge base; an ideal of service (altruism in some form); the existence of public trust and/or personal autonomy.

As McKinlay has pointed out (Halmos, 1973), the twentieth century has seen an unprecedented expansion of the numbers and influence of the professions. Traditionally the definition of a professional has been understood in terms of e.g. doctors and lawyers: authority figures dispensing wisdom, a curious mixture of social service

and hierarchical power. An increasing number of occupations have, and are trying to achieve professional status (Child 1982), and so the definition has been widened to include engineers, managers etc. In various ways professionalism has been seen as beneficial for society, although both McKinlay and Johnson (1982) assert that too many studies have ignored the importance of understanding professional occupations in terms of their power relations within society. Johnson asserts that it is possible to redefine professionalism as a type of occupational control rather than as the expression of the essential nature of particular occupations. However, although it may be possible to view e.g. the British medical profession in this light, it would be hard to apply such a model to the AAH, which has no validation or control function over its profession. The AAH has, however, endorsed the principle of establishing guidelines for the professional practice of art history (Kemp, 1990), although they are not intended to be legally prescriptive or proscriptive. There is some evidence to support the suggestion that the public generally attributes expertise (which itself can confer power) to 'professionals'. King and Raynor (1981) note the way in which the term 'professional' still retains vestiges of high status. Durkheim and other sociologists have associated the term with moral communities whose members are supposedly imbued with the spirit of altruism and service.

Elliott (1972) represented the professional end of the non-professional and professional continua as using theoretical knowledge to make autonomous decisions for altruistic ends. The professional is supported by his/her occupational group because professional work is the individual's main interest in life and provides him/her with his/her sense of purpose and achievement, the product of an extensive education. The majority of AAH members belong to Elliott's (1972) category of the (expanding) 'lower' professions – e.g. those who are generally salaried employees. This status, however, produces its own problems for employees. Charles Handy (1985), one of the most influential writers on organisational theory,

unfortunately uses the professor as the stereotype of person-oriented individual working in a role culture: he/she will use the organisation as a means of helping him/her fulfil ambitions, but organisational service will never be the professor's main motivation. Just as the professional discussed by Handy (1985) may give the appearance of using his/her organisation merely as a convenience, AAH Executive members and officers may be tempted to use their involvement with the Association to further their individual aims and ambitions. This may indeed be necessary, in that their memberships of and roles within the Association need to be interpreted by individuals as benefits of membership. On the other hand, as Liz Miller, the present AAH Hon. Sec., has pointed out,

... if management is achieving results through other people, isn't every educator in some sense a manager ... ?

(letter to the author, 29.03.1992)

### Strategy

Mintzberg (1983) is quite explicit about the problems of strategy in a professional bureaucracy: because the professionals' 'outputs' are difficult to measure (and many of us have experience of the ways in which institutions have attempted to use various systems of measurement) it becomes difficult to agree their goals, and the idea of a strategy can lose a lot of meaning.

The situation is further complicated in the context of an organisation largely composed of professional academics. The culture of such an organisation is influenced by the academics' commitment to discourse. Vaill (1989) maintains that our traditional concepts of culture are being modified by a society which he terms 'dialexic' – increasingly prone to comment on everything we do and to discuss all alternative ways of thinking about it. Such is the turbulence and complexity of the modern environment that we are frequently driven to reflect on its problematic 'white water'. Dialexia can be described as an anxiety-ridden condition in which a love of concepts, models, studies and intellectual analysis does its best to avoid concrete situations, and instead obsessively turns

problems round and round, thinking about how to handle them.

Relationships between 'professionalism' and 'management' can, therefore, be difficult. Such problems were addressed by Raelin (1986), who wrote of the 'clash of cultures' between corporate and professional philosophies. Such a culture clash is likely to be experienced in some measure by all those AAH members who are working as salaried professionals in corporate institutions. It is manifested in the Art History lecturer who maintains that he/she is 'a lecturer, not a manager'. Mintzberg (1983) noted that administration is neither the forte nor the interest of the operating professional. Professionals usually draw some power away from formal organisational authority by virtue of the degree of autonomy they enjoy in their work. This culture may be changing, but the change is likely to be slow. To my knowledge, very few AAH members, for example, have volunteered for management training as part of their career development, although this situation is beginning to change (e.g. members in the museums service are increasingly drawn into professional management training). Further, the individual may feel tension, if not conflicts of interest between personal aspirations, corporate demands of employment, and professional (more altruistic) demands. The relationships between these are complex. Sometimes it appears frankly incestuous. Many AAH members, for example, work in organisations, mostly professional bureaucracies, which are responsible for the education of those who become eligible for Association membership.

### Conclusion

There is, therefore, ample room within the AAH for a mass of conflicting (which may be termed political) interests. Although these are not often surfaced in the Executive Committee, which tacitly assumes a consensus (democratic) approach to decision making, there is still at present little time at meetings to discuss policy and strategy. The order of business, which attempts to combine a constituency reporting system with the consideration of ongoing projects,

## OPEN FORUM

is inevitably dominated by information and by operational tasks. This might appear all the more surprising given the existence of a perfectly adequate quarterly *Bulletin* circulated to all members, but members of the Executive, as much as the general membership, seem loath to contribute to an information system which would be of direct benefit to the membership. The insistence on verbal rather than written reporting and communication merely detracts from the strategic efficiency of the Executive. It is extremely difficult to identify any 'total' strategy, any directional 'thrust' in this context.

Our environment is changing rapidly. It is, therefore, all the more important to establish a way of making strategy which will enable the Association to pursue its aims effectively. I suggest that the AAH should be looking to the following:

- devoting more effort to finding out what the membership wants. The Association loses most of its *raison d'être* if it cannot respond to the needs of its membership. The process of designing ways of finding out more about the membership and its needs has already been started, as reported at the 1992 AGM.
- establishing a more effective communication culture for its membership. Effective communication is a major problem in many organisations. In my opinion every issue of the *Bulletin* should publish an update on the activities and concerns of the Executive Committee, as well as other items of general interest to the membership. Since the AAH has established a number of sub-committees and working parties, I suggest that those bodies have a *responsibility* to the membership. All segments of the membership should be regularly informed of developments, given some leadership in appropriate situations, and stimulated into public debate within the Association.
- using the Executive Committee to address issues of policy and strategy, rather than as a reporting forum. The latter function could easily be performed via

other information channels (e.g. *short* published, regular reports - we are, after all, usually working within a context where the written word is a fairly common form of communication), although it is obviously important that the Executive is able to discuss and comment upon reports.

- regularly reconsidering our current strategy in the light of the Association's mission and in the context of its changing environment. Management studies can provide many models for environmental analysis. It would not be a particularly difficult task to agree a number of dimensions which would serve the needs of the AAH (complex as they may be), if the membership would care to help define those needs.

I would welcome responses to this paper.

Theo Cowdell  
April 1992

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 27th Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: 1982-1990

This report has just been published by HMSO and is available from the Commission at Quality House, Quality Court, Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1HP. The report includes the following of interest to members of the Association.

The National Register of Archives with all its indexes has now been edited, enlarged, reorganised and computerised. It should be available for on-line access in the mid-1990s. The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust was launched in 1989 to fight decay in historical manuscripts in libraries and record offices. The acquisitions and work of the Commission is described in many hundreds of entries in the Appendices: the following (with their National Register of Archives No.) caught the eye:

Design records of Courtaulds (NRA 30126, 30957) BBC management & administration records (NRA 31050); Viscount Portman papers (Annual Review 1988-89); amongst dozens of estate papers, the Melbourne Hall papers – Lamb, Cowper & Coke families (NRA 30228); Papers of the artist Sir William MacTaggart (now at the National Library of Scotland); Papers etc of the art historian Kenneth Clark (provisionally allocated to the Tate Gallery Archive, 1987); Papers etc of the artist Gwen John (sold to the National Library of Wales, 1984); Architectural plans of Detmar Blow (sold to British Architectural Library, RIBA, 1987); Papers of the artist Augustus John (sold to National Library of Wales, 1988); Papers of Brierley, Leckenby, Keighley & Broom, architects of York (sold to Borthwick IHR, York University, 1989).

### Important Change of Phone Number

Please note that Kate Woodhead's (Director of Publicity and Administration) telephone number has changed. Should you wish to contact her ring 0606 835517. She has not moved house, so her address remains the same!

### Thesis Prizes 1992

The Committee for Polytechnics and Colleges is intending to launch a thesis prize event this year. The prizes will be for students studying predominantly practical courses in Architecture, Art and Design. The closing date for submissions will be 31 August 1992.

For further information please contact Gillian Elinor at the Polytechnic of East London, Department of Art and Design, Greengate House, Greengate Street, London E13 0BG.

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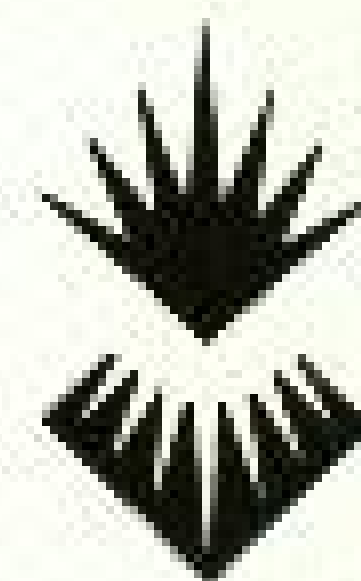
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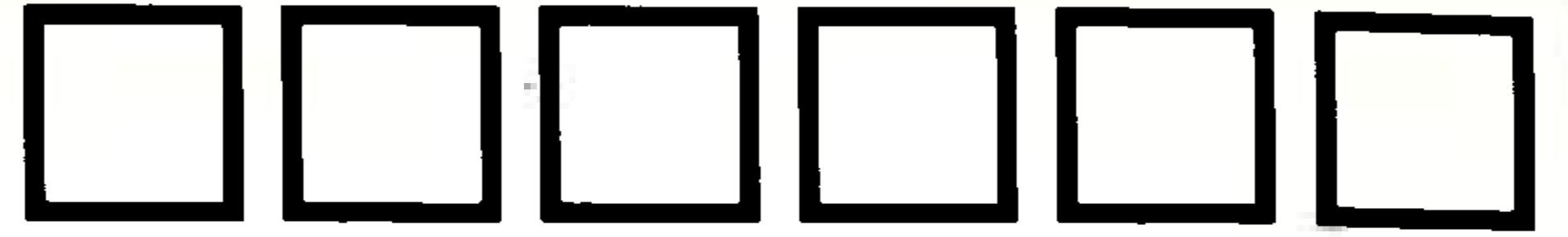
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