18 Interviews with Faculty from UCLA's Art Department & Design Media Arts Department

2010

Questions:

What are two elements that distinguish an education in art from an education in design at UCLA?

How do you structure the process of critique in relationship to expectations in your particular field of art or design?

In what way might the idea of transgression function differently within the art and design departments at UCLA?

At UCLA the answer to this question applies only to undergraduate education, because the Design Media Arts graduate program is really about media arts, and not about design as such. In undergraduate education, the distinction has to do with the different goals for art and design. If art is free expression, design is (to simplify) creativity channeled to the service of practical purposes. Design depends on specific skill sets (including understanding industry and economics) that can be applied by the student to serve clients. Design education emphasizes the need to learn to read reality as a semiotically coded sphere. Everything can be read as signs, and these have been arranged as coded messages waiting to be decoded by the observer. Design education may be more systematic in nature than art education. The students need to be able to adjust their skills and ideas witin re-existing molds. That said, really radical and successful design always questions such molds, breaks them, and re-casts them, which brings it closed to art.

I'd say that one key difference between the two disciplines would be an education in typography. For example, in design one learns about the history of type and how it can communicate ideas within itself disconnected from the language. That's one sense. Another example would be the way design communicates an idea with type and image. In a sense design is about solving problems with art, however; I think that from a primitive standpoint designers are making something for someone else. Designers have this constraint of the client, where artists are often making things for themselves. I wouldn't say that I know too much about art education since my experience is in design education. As a designer, communication and being able to talk about your work and ideas is important: you talk about that with your client. I think it's the same for an artist in that they have to talk about their work with their peers. So essentially there are some similarities there. In regards to design education, it's different per each design curriculum. Each design program will be different, but design still maintains a critical relationship with an original idea. We want to know what the work means. It's not all about seductive imagery, that's not interesting, at least to me it's not. Maybe in art it's a little more forgiving where something can simply be beautiful. But perhaps people can get away with that more in design education. I think that people are generally more critical of what art means compared to what design means. Art has been around a lot longer and people read art differently than they do design. Design isn't embedded into our culture like say it is in Europe. For example in Holland or Germany people are observant and are aware of design in every sense, from their currency to their postage stamps. The culture is aware of it, whereas here good design isn't embedded into the culture. The general population here is marginally aware of what constitutes good or bad design because when they're looking at it they're not thinking about it.

Ultimately, there's an idiosyncratic difference that can't actually be codified or fixed. So it's a verbal distinguishing thing, not necessarily a visual thing. I don't want to be clear about that because it puts things into a pedantic kind of relationship that's always being violated. To say that Giotto wasn't a designer when he painted the Arena Chapel is naive. To say if he was a designer and not an artist is naive. I think the differentiation between the two is not clear.

NONE

I think that design is invested in the idea of employability even if that's not what you really want to do. Even so, you'll acquire skills that you can make money off of and I think in general that is absent in an arts education. When I was in art school there was no focus on employment, with the exception of photography, but certainly not in the other plastic arts. That's I think kind of an important distinction because it changes in subtle ways all of the internal structuring of the curriculum, so you get less interdisciplinary training because you need to specialize in a particular discipline for the sake of employability. This also affects student understanding of what they're learning because in the back of their heads, they might be thinking "oh I can make websites for my friends and make a little bit of money or for my friend's band," and that's totally fine, there's nothing wrong with that, but I never thought that in painting class. As in, "I could do a portrait of my friend's band and make some money." But it just doesn't play a role and I think that has an impact on the student experience. I also remember that in arts education there was more emphasis on technique in terms of using things like repetition to become better at a practice like the classic intro drawing assignment where you go to the museum and reproduce some kind of drawing, you know, and you sit there and do it over and over again. But the role of repetition is totally different in the fine arts. You have a sketch book that you're trying to fill up because you have an idea that you're trying to work through and that doesn't seem to be a part of design curriculum.

I think that art education has to maintain at least a pretense of semi autonomy. The artist has to think of her or himself as existing as a kind of free entity untethered to social and economic strata or substrate. This may be fiction, but I don't see how art can do without it. Design education on the other hand has to deal with the centrality of constraint, and constraint not as a negative, but in fact the driving force of design. There's the myth of semi autonomy in fine art and a discussion of constraint as the driving force in design.

I'm not an expert on design education but my expectation would be that design is focused on some element of functionality. In general art does not have a functional element. I don't know how much of a role it plays in education but in the real world of design there's normally a client too, who has a lot to say about what the results are. In the art world it's not that there aren't clients but it's kept at much more of an arm's length relationship.

I paraphrase Charles Eames: design is an expression of purpose, it addresses itself to need.

I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT DESIGN EDUCATION NEVER HAVING PARTICIPATED IN IT. THE EASIEST WAY TO DIFFERENTIATE ART FROM DESIGN, IF YOU WANT SOMETHING GENERAL, IS THAT DESIGN TENDS TO BE REQUEST BASED. SOMEONE COMES TO YOU WITH A REQUEST AND YOU MEET THEIR NEEDS. THAT'S THE BASIC DIFFERENCE. IN AN ART CLASS YOU MIGHT BE GIVEN REQUESTS OR ASSIGNMENTS, BUT THE UNDERSTANDING IS THAT EVENTUALLY YOU'LL FREE YOURSELF FROM THAT STARTING POINT. IN EFFECT, YOU'LL MAKE YOUR OWN REQUESTS. WITH DESIGN YOU HAVE A CLIENT, YOU HAVE AN ANTERIOR OR EXTRA, OUTSIDE OF THE ART OBJECTIVE, A TASK. IF YOU HAVE A CLIENT, THEN THE FUNCTIONALITY THAT YOU'RE TRYING TO CAPTURE AND ENGINEER IS A PURPOSE. ART QUITE OFTEN, IT'S VERY DIFFICULT TO TELL WHAT THE OBJECTIVE OR PURPOSE IS.

Artists are probably more independent since they don't have to work for clients. Art education is completely different because you don't have specific subject matter that you work for. In art you're basically free, which is a questionable thing too, but which is what probably distinguishes it. When you're teaching art there's no real goal, it's a bit vague.

Well, that's a tough question because I don't know anything about design education. What I imagine would be a difference is that I think a lot of design education revolves around a kind of defined problem or project that implies a kind of client or implies a particular function whether it's for graphic design, industrial design, or product design. Whereas art education tends to be much more open ended than I imagine design education would be. In art education students are given assignments where the goal is to develop a very sort of individualized self-motivated practice. So, that's what I imagine the main difference to be but again I don't know anything really about design education.

That's a very good question. I think that art and design perform two different functions. design being primarily utilitarian and needing to be very specific in its communication and art abetting a lot more freedom and being open to interpretation. Since it's open to interpretation it's more open to a wider variety of techniques. Design is more concerned with solving specific problems. Whether they be in terms of two dimensional design and communicating a message, or three dimensional design in terms of creating something for human use- whether it be a chair, interesting architecture, the way elements inside architecture relate to each other- I think they really deal with two completely different spheres.

Design often focuses on some sort of prompt or initial circumstance that requires a design solution. Art education, even if there a type of prompt, ultimately the solution comes from the artist and their interests and perspective. In design education students come to expect direction and in art education students expect freedom, or are pushed to explore their own ideas. Design often requires some amount of expertise or a good amount of knowledge of an outside topic. Art can do that too, but art can also be completely circumscribed by the artist's emotions or just referring to the art world in general. A lot art refers to art history and it's this insular thing. Design is more about solving outward problems, and to solve those problems you have to know something about them.

We teach design + media arts, this makes the answer a little more complicated. An element that sometimes distinguishes design from art and media art is that design is created for a client. The art work in design is more collaborative, the work beeomes a collaboration between the client, the designer and the partners who make the work. Media art is a new field that is constantly evolving, it deals less with clients. Certain media artists make art with technology while others focus on technology, research and tool making. With all this said, our students are encouraged to find their own path, interests and obsessions.

It really depends on the level of education for one. In community college you're dealing with design elements and technical achievement that enable you to transfer to a four year institution which encourages critical thinking about art making. You really have to have the foundations of being able to put something together, being able to do constructive work before you can make art. UCLA is about design. I feel the art department is about design and executing that design. Like I mentioned, I think community college departments are more based on learning how to make something technical. I think art making here is a big part of the design department but I think design in education is critical at all levels.

I still think that design is largely a service providing profession. The relationship with client and audience is way more apparent, however, I do think artists should relate to an audience. Yet in design, you're a vessel for someone else's message. I teach students to bring their own personal voice to their work and encourage them to find clients that fit their voice. We add a level of authorship, but in art that's what it's all about. The environment that your work ends up in, for us that's hardly ever gallery based. For the artist in most cases it is unless you're a media artist or performance artist. I think those are the two biggest elements that distinguish the two.

As long as we're talking about designing real things in the world for people to use-- the fundamental difference between design and art is that art has the strange privilege of not having to be understood. That is, there are generally few and only rarely direct consequences of it's interpretation. Meaning in art is always up for debate-- which is one of the ways art still represents a profound kind of freedom.

Design, at some point, has to have an objective, a target, a function, a use-value, etc.. Design is about how we use things, how we interface with information, how we (and our information) interface with the world. Art is about how we look at things and interpret them-- how we make things mean other things.

For me art is a field that can deal with the unknown, that's non-specific, or that doesn't have a defined purpose. Although art and design have shared concerns, they also have different concerns. Art education has to include a dialogue that's rather undefined, whether that's the unknown, or something unformed. You can have all of these different ways of talking about it but it needs to actually communicate with things that are outside the parameters of having a specific function.

Critique, especially in the one-on-one dialogue is at the center of arts and design pedagogy as it has developed in the US over the past 60 to 70 years. Critique is the single hardest thing to teach students, especially undergrads, where you have to teach the importance of being direct with one another. Art, along with architecture, can often have stronger critique cultures than design. The thing I try to teach students to avoid when they're critiquing each other is to give each other too much credit for how hard they worked. Sometimes the best work is the stuff you dash off on your way to class and you just got lucky, or you're good, and the thing that someone has agonized over for days is terrible. It really doesn't matter and this is particularly important for people who are involved in working with new media. The tendency is to give too much credit for simply accomplishing something with these new technologies- but that's not critique. I also train my students to develop a professional self. A self that can take the battering that a good critique brings to bear without it affecting a kind of interior soul. Again, this becomes much more complicated in the distinction between fine art and design critiques, where in fine art it can be more difficult to find that professional self to put on. It can make fine art critiques that much more brutal to live through. I'm also very interested in redemptive critique but I don't think there's anything wrong with brutal critique. I always say, if you want somebody to tell you how much they love your work show it to your mom.

I want people to explain what their idea is in a concise manner. I want to hear it in two sentences. I want to hear what the problem was and how they solved it. I also like people to be as critical as possible. I think that a lot of students take critiques really personally when they shouldn't. When you open up the gates and tell the students that they can't say anything good about the work, I think that actually loosens people up. Then they start looking seriously at the work and thinking about how to improve it. This instantly starts making people think about the work more critically and then no one gets their feelings hurt. You learn more that way than from hearing people say, "I like it, it's cool." It may look cool but no one wants to say why, whereas if someone says something looks bad they're willing to explain themselves. It's important for a young designer to get comfortable with criticism since on a professional level there will be a lot of criticism. From this point on they should be comfortable with defending themselves.

Critique is focused on communication with an audience. What is the work about? Does the work express its intension.

In graduate critiques, and I do this for senior undergraduate classes as well, the presenter doesn't speak. I tend to think it's most valuable to set up a situation where the group is responding to the work as directly as possible, and there are no blank slates because all the students have prior knowledge about students and their project. Within that environment what I try to encourage students to do, although this rarely happens, is kind of outline four, five basic modes of critique. One being formal analysis, the second being what could be called semiotic analysis or decoding of the sort of symbols and signs within an artwork. The third I would call positional analysis which has to do with locating the work within a field of contemporary, historical, artistic practices, or positions. The fourth would be a more sociological approach which I do sometimes, which has to do with thinking about the work in more sociological terms, which for me includes what kinds of competencies the artwork demands and what kind of economy it would exist within. And then the last approach which is the one I'm kind of gravitating toward more these days is more of a psychological one, which, although it's not necessarily psychological, starts out by reflecting on what is the experience of the artwork. How does it make you feel? Does it make you confused? Does it make you feel embarrassed? Does it make you feel happy and satisfied? Does it make you feel anxious? Not that the end point of the critique should be about feeling, but that that experience and the affective dimension of that experience is basic data to reflect on in terms of how the work is functioning and what it is really doing. Because with those other modes, what we get into is trying to reconstruct the artist's intention, which for me isn't a very interesting or satisfying mode of spectatorship or we become engaged in a kind of formal investigation the end point of which would be something like aesthetic quality or aesthetic pleasure which nobody I think has ever been able to do define in a satisfactory way. So that's basically how I approach critique.

As I already mentioned, semiotic skills to read reality as something constructed and artificial is very important. I think student work should bear evidence of advanced skills to explicate and defend one's choices, and to understand the manifold layers of meaning - there is not just the denotation, but many connotations, additional meanings, as well. Good design should be subtle and layered, not simplified propaganda like a punch in the nose. Self-understanding of one's creative process and its cultural, social, economic, political etc. implications is extremely important.

NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PHOTO OR OTHER WORK...CRITIQUE IS A DISCUSSION OF IDEAS

We had a critique today. Because I'm teaching a printmaking class and because the students have not had printmaking before it's important that they understand the first thing we're looking at is their technique. Unlike a lot of the classes at this school, I'm not really driven by theory. The critiques are driven by an analysis of the artist's technical abilities. I try to teach them that there are very coherent formal parameters to what we do and what a plate should look like and what a print should look like. I have a classical orientation in terms of understanding the historicity of prints. In the first class we run through a power point presentation on the history of etching, starting at the 1500s and showing that there is a real distinct level of mastery that we try to emulate. We try to understand how they did it, and consequently after four or five weeks into the quarter a student can look at the plate at get a pretty good idea of what it's going to be like and when they ink it up they have an idea of how to optimize what they've done in the plate. My critiques are based on evaluating how well they see what they're doing. If they can see what they're doing while they're doing it the result will generally be pretty good. The students at UCLA are here because they have already demonstrated certain amount of talent so the aesthetic isn't a question of catching up to the technique, it's a question of the technique really catching up to the aesthetic. It's rare to find a student at UCLA who by week five doesn't really click into what they're doing and really be able to understand what they're doing. The techniques we use ensure that the process of the hand eye coordination is really effective and serves their general artistic practice.

I don't have a critique program that I apply to every context. My approach to critique derives from a back and forth process of dialogue with whatever is being presented. I try and begin by taking it on it's own terms and then go from there.

First, you have to get to know the person and their goal and then you structure your critique around that; unlike when you give an assignment where the critique is based on whether the assignment has been fulfilled or not. I always teach advanced classes where the projects are always self-initiated. My critiques are structured around the student.

The focus is execution of the idea and resolution of the problem. So, when I assign a project I want to look at the elements of your execution. I mostly want to see your interpretation of that assignment. I think that the structure in critique would be the observation or the interpretation of the problem given.

It's important that students experience themselves making meaning as much as actually making things. That is-- making the work is part of the endeavor. Interpreting it-- and the work of others-- is the other part.

Part of what I teach is semiotics. The version that I teach deals with analyzing how we look at things, specifically through three stages of looking. First, is the aesthetic level, second is the referential level, and the third one is the discursive level where things create meaning. I teach that because it gives students a tool for how to discuss a work. So that they can look at it with a little bit more of an objective point of view as in, "What do I see here? How does it all add up? Do I get the message?" For me, critique is embedded in the classes. If crits are really clear it could immediately improve your work on so many levels. In design, because it's way more structured than art, you can actually improve those things to make your design better - or more understandable and therefore better. Sometimes design work can be so mind blowingly pretty or angry, or whatever expression you want to give it, and sometimes there is no rational as to how these elements work together. If that expression gets into the work, and you can't really tell why or explain it from a technical aspect, then something really great is happening. I love these moments where all structures or all ways of talking about a work become obsolete and you're just faced with this thing in front of you. In most cases though, we try to give students a way to understand why something works the way it does.

Often times the notion of personal expression is disconnected from the design process. Design students seem to be more sensitive than they used to be. It's very different from when I was in school. You could be criticized without feeling that it was a personal attack. My intuition tells me that this might be more of a generational thing or a lack of a critical culture here because it wasn't quite that way at Cooper Union. It was a lot more aggressive in crits.

I'm in a weird position to answer that question because I teach from my perspective, an art class within the design program. I run critiques like art critiques because I think it's useful for designers to have some taste of that intellectual rigor behind images. I think we can get a little lost in this department with technique and aesthetic. When you bring in a lot more rigorous conceptual critique which I think is more founded in the arts, it really inspires people over here and changes the way they think about imagery in particular and also about their own agency as creators.

It's very difficult. My class today is going to be about the frustrations of the student not being able to differentiate, or not wanting to differentiate failure from success - or good from bad. It's not like memorizing a multiplication table. Generally speaking, in the Newtonian world 2 X 2 is 4. It's not always the case in what I'll call here a poetic discipline. If 2 X 2 doesn't equal 4 it questions the nature of belief and it becomes more about the spirit than it does about reducing things to an essential, scientific denominator.

THE OBJECTIVE OF CRITIQUE, DEPENDING ON WHAT GRADUATE LEVEL, IS DISCUSSION. THE BEGINNING LEVEL IS TRYING TO PROMOTE DISCUSSION BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE YOU KNOW SKEPTICAL ABOUT IT. PEOPLE WHO STUDY ART OFTEN FEEL THAT THEIR EXPRESSION OF ART IS PRIMARILY VISUAL AND ARE LOATH TO DISCUSS THEM OR AT LEAST THEY'RE NOT USED TO IT. HOWEVER IT'S IMPORTANT TO TRY TO PROMOTE DISCUSSION. BUT MORE BROADLY, CRITIQUE IS TO ENCOURAGE INQUIRY. INQUIRY MIGHT HAVE TO DO WITH A DISCOURSE OR INTERROGATION, INTERROGATION OF ONE'S WORK.

I think it's important for the critiques to be constructive. Everyone goes around the room and ostensibly asks a question that's meant to be supportive. Taking into consideration that everyone's involved in a work in progress. Students are also encouraged to express thoughts or concerns about the work in a supportive way and they also need to be open to those comments.

Critique is based on intent, message, meaning, values, history, and taste. The sessions are structured in different ways, depending on the goals of the critique.

The first question is to determine what you mean by transgression. If by transgression you mean (Epite le bourgeoisie?), that's been the stock and trade of art for a century and if anything, it's expected. If it's a kind of transgression of form, sometimes I find that very interesting. I can remember teaching a designer whose major was transportation design at my former institution, where they design clay models. His transgression was to create the most ungainly, least aerodynamically thought through hunk of clay that anyone had ever seen. I found it very interesting though he got an "F." He's since gone completely mad and now I think he's changed his name and is studying for a yeshiva in Hawaii. It's very weird. That's what happens. Transgression in design is a style, in other words, one of the things I try to teach is that there's no such thing as revolutionary form. All revolutionary form can be co-opted - sometimes within 15 minutes. If you look at Deconstructivist type from the 1980s within ten years it's being used to sell milk. The same thing can be said too about Dadaist performance strategies being used on television within 30 years to also sell milk. I think that the major issues of transgression rarely come up with students in either one. There's little chance that a student at an art school is going to fundamentally challenge this capitalist environment and these social restrictions that they're engaged with because frankly they're in an elite institution where they're striving to get "A"s. Transgression is something else that we teach here.

EVERY NEW IDEA TRANGRESSES

I don't know, transgression is such a tricky term in art discourse at this point. I teach new genres, and new genres is an area I gather most art majors are anxious about because they don't know what it is. I think that art majors tend to be anxious about performance particularly if one doesn't have experience with performance. I think that a lot of people who go into the visual arts are much more comfortable being in the studio and behind the scenes and are anxious about putting themselves out in front of an audience. In the area of new genres in particular, I both want to try to deal with that anxiety but also to encourage people to take risks and to challenge themselves to do those things that are anxious for them to do. I see new genres as being an area that's the kind of institutional, educational home for a whole range of avant-garde traditions which are very much identified with transgression. To encourage the students, it's like well you're all reading about this stuff and learning about it in your art history classes, don't you want to see how that feels? How does it feel to go into a museum and do something unauthorized. That's a requirement when I teach beginning new genres, all of the students are required to do something in a museum or gallery context, most likely without permission, and to do something in public space. It doesn't have to be performance, but particularly in a museum or gallery context doing something without permission is going to involve breaking a rule or two, probably. Not that I want to encourage all students to take that approach, but it's really important to create a space for that in art education. I think that some people see it as a contradiction that transgression would be taught but it's not a contradiction at all. Educational institutions have for a very long time been an important site in society just like museums in an art context have been for challenging conventions. Universities were the location for a lot of anti-war protests and free speech movement and so one. I don't see it as a contradiction at all, that's a centrally important part of what educational institutions can and should encourage.

I don't know how transgression functions in the design area so I don't really know how it would be different for them, or different for us. It's hard to make these direct comparisons because I only have experience in one of the departments. I think that some students want to do things that are transgressive because they're interested in pushing the boundaries of what's acceptable. I think that in arts discourse in general transgression has become something of a cliche. Of course there always has to be the possibility of transgression. I'm not sure of the value of transgression for it's own sake, there has to be some reason to transgress if there's going to be transgression.

I would not want to speak for another department. To me transgression is about creating interest by breaking the rules. It can also be be about finding the boundaries for freedom. This might not be a departmental idea, it seems more personal.

N/A

A lot needs to happen for art and design to get close to each other, at least in this country. Where I'm from all of these disciplines are seen as art disciplines. Whether you do dance, theater, or design, there's no real separation of the fields. These fields have always been bridged somehow. Of course the most used quote about the difference between art and design has always been that there are no clients in art, but this argument is almost obsolete. If you show in the gallery world and the buyers almost become clients. Painters like Ed Ruscha sell their work before it gets painted and they have a waiting list. On the other hand, I also make graphic design products that do not have a client. What is that then? Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer are classic examples of people who work with text but also have a relationship with the graphic design industry. I know a lot of media arts students are interested in art, or in art making. But for the other way around, I hardly see examples of that and this has to do with how these departments look at each other. The image of the artist-designer seems so clear even though it has changed a lot. You see a lot of designers who work as artists and artists working as designers. There's a separation because there's so much misunderstanding about design. The biggest separation would be advertising and art and I hope they never come together. One of my colleagues and I were thinking how interesting it would be to make the arts and design one department again. The separation is never good, however I think there are some courses that could be merged. We talk about semiotics and I think it's equally important for artists. I think what is really nice about some designers, artists, and architects is that they can navigate around all of these disciplines and therefore do really special work. It's not that I'm totally against this separation, but it also means that I'll encourage students to explore these differences.

In one way, art is becoming this idea of a profession where economics don't play a role. It's sort of a very noble cause, but at the same time, of course it plays a role. Somebody was just telling me how disgusted they were with the arts because there's a music industry, there's a film industry, but, if you were to say there's an art industry the artist would say absolutely not. However, there is in fact an industry. The art world is a little bit more ego driven, while I think the design world is actually more of a social cause, meaning that they work for a purpose. Whether you're designing a subway, or furniture, or whether you're designing a space you have another function in mind; there's a different obligation.

I think that for art, transgression is very close to the surface. Art must break boundaries, and to question existing forms and truths to remain viable and avoid lapsing into decoration (a bad word). In design, transgression may not be so obvious, because of the instrumental goals design plays. Much of design serves somebody or something else, and clients don't necessarily appreciate overt transgression. However, the field of design has been changing, and its most radical manifestations have been approaching art. There is more socially conscious experimental design that refuses to be a slave or whore to big business or the military-industrial complex. Art and design (or at least some of its forms) have grown closer to each other.

That's a good question. In design, transgression might involve doing weird things with type. Or you know, screwing with type in a certain way, or laying things out and chopping things up in ways that alter the content and make the viewer have to really think through it and think harder. In the books of Brian Roetinger who's a visiting professor here now, he goes out of his way to challenge readers to look at things differently, to kind of push up against them instead of just doing the conventional "Here's some Times on a white background." But transgression in the fine arts I think is a lot more at the conceptual level and not simply focused on technique.

I would say that art is motivated by pushing a concept, absolutely pushing a concept, and executing that concept whether its written or performed. In design, well everything we see comes from design. Everything starts there. As far as transgression functioning differently between the two, the design department's sole purpose is to educate a student to be able to fabricate something that's going to be either functional or for the sake of advertisement of function.

Well transgression in design - in design it's like it either works or it doesn't. Nobody wants to sit on a chair that is not comfortable okay? There's interpretation in terms of what color you're going to paint a wall. I worked in one of the early Frank Gehry buildings at Gemini here in LA and it was a very interesting design but it leaked everywhere. So I think it's important in design that form follows function. It has to function well. In art there's a lot of room for transgression. I think that a lot of times, particularly in student work, students will mimic the transgressive and so much of the past thirty years has been fueled by the transgressive that students feel they have to push that envelope further and further. In this class I don't really think that this comes into play like it might in new genres or in painting. We've had some pretty explicit sexual imagery, but that certainly doesn't bother me but I wouldn't call that transgressive.

My answer to this is related to the way these two departments are set up here. I think the answer could be different at any other school. At DMA there's a real push outward. There's this expectation that students engage with things that are new and risky. That can mean the sciences, the social sciences, or even down to hardcore computer programming. And so there's some amount of expectation that people engage in that. For instance, in my class I have an assignment where students go to science labs, discuss the research that happens there, and then produce images that talk about what's happening there. In the art school I do see some things like that happening, but I think it's a much more self-contained world where it's happy to be what it is and to create things that react to itself more than something outside. That's good and bad, and some artists can benefit from that. I was really interested in DMA's risk taking, and it fails sometimes, but at least it's staking out new territory. I think that not only empowers interesting and creative projects, but also I think that it makes students more confident when they're out of school to take something on that they haven't necessarily studied before. DMA leads the way for people to reach outside of this place. It's the places where artists are staking new territories and saying "yes I can make art in a lab" or "I can make art in an activist context." I see that happening here a lot and I think that nobody knows how to deal with it all the time, but it's encouraged and I'm encouraged by that.

I don't know. I haven't been involved with the design department so my understanding of it is probably very superficial. I think transgression in art is something that I'm not so interested in, in terms of a very direct or new way.

I don't think this is a question with answers that split along departmental lines. Any discipline within the Humanities at a research university would have a thick, historical and contextual relationship to not only the "idea of transgression" but also its realities.

YOU'RE ASKING ME TO DESCRIBE ANOTHER DEPARTMENT I PAY LITTLE ATTENTION TO IN TERMS OF THEIR FUNDAMENTAL PHILOSOPHY. I THINK IT'S NECESSARY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN TRANSGRESSION AND INNOVATION. I THINK THAT DESIGNERS ARE UM A LITTLE BIT LESS LIKELY TO THINK OF THEIR INQUIRIES AS TRANSGRESSIVE AND MORE AS INNOVATIVE. ARTISTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO TRANSGRESS OR AT LEAST THERE'S A LARGE POPULATION OF THEM WHO FIND IT AS A KIND OF GUIDING PRINCIPLE. THERE'S ALSO TRANSGRESSION FOR IT'S OWN SAKE WHICH LEADS TO ANOTHER AREA OF CONCERN WHICH IS OFFICIAL BAD BOY-ISM WHICH IS A STYLE, IN EFFECT IS A MANNERISM.

I don't know really anything about the art department. I think in design education, students should be aware of contemporary design but also should be willing to push the envelope and try things that they think will fail. In a professional position you usually don't have that opportunity because clients often want to play it safe. They want to cover their own ass and they don't want to try things that could potentially go wrong and waste money. When you're making projects in school you should just try things because you aren't wasting anyone's money. The simplest way that I would put it is to try and just fuck things up. Try and make things that will probably fail and also look at other things besides design. A lot of designers just look at historical design and try to interpret ideas that they've already seen. Maybe they should look at other mediums and other forms to see how that might influence their ideas in design. Here though, technology is at the forefront, especially in this department. Technology is moving so quickly that it's changing the way that we think about and read design. With the iPad, in five years will people have the attention span to read a four hundred page book? Maybe not. Does that mean that the four hundred page academic monograph is then done? How will that effect the ways in which we think about design and technology? It used to be that design held hands with printing. Anything that was printed was graphic design. Now graphic design's relationship is to the computer. Books had a relationship to printing, now books may have a relationship to the e-reader. It's no longer the technology of printing, but the technology of the device which moves much quicker than the technology of printing. Printing has been around for hundreds of years and hasn't changed much, it's still paper, ink, and rollers. In five years the iPad will probably feel obsolete. Digital formats for books are going to be obsolete. First records, then eight tracks, cassettes, CDs, and now mp3s. What will happen when mp3s go away? It'll be something else. It's the same with books. Technology moves so fast that who knows what the next form of the book will be. We rely so much on the technology of things to effect the format that it's hard to say what will be next.

All fields are kind of migrating disciplines, and to be stuck without questioning what you're doing is not to be frustrated and anyone who isn't frustrated isn't progressive because frustration is a hallmark of being contemplative and of being alive. The other is knowing and being fundamental and unquestioning. There should always be, and maybe I wouldn't put it in terms of transgressive activities, but there always has to be questioning of what you're doing in the arts and design.