



Stop.Stop.Stop.Stop.

“... time is always time / And place is ...”

Anthony Elms in conversation with Anthony Huberman

Anthony Elms' mid-February notes:

Get away from compare and contrast in order to spiral. The goal is to be out of the circle. Working between I know and I care: this is why I am interested. Published texts display the fundamental relationship between the structure of storytelling and the unfolding of the narrative. At the start of a novel you know it is going to move forward.

August reflection:

Curator Anthony Huberman's The Artist's Institute is now beginning a second year. Designed by Dexter Sinister, the Institute's graphic identity is a single, large capital T, a letter that has come to serve as shorthand for the organization. The Institute links a seminar Huberman teaches at Hunter College in New York to "the culmination of ten years of a particular way of thinking about art and knowledge." Students help develop programming. At the Institute, a year is split into two six-month seasons. The work of one artist, the anchor, is presented amidst that of other artists, lectures, screenings, and so on, in order to invite participants to think with the anchor through his or her work. This thinking together is crucial. The fall 2010 anchor was Fluxus artist Robert Filliou, accompanied by, among others, Gerry Bibby, *PROVENCE* magazine, Julia Robinson, and a night of ping-pong. During the winter and early summer of 2011, American painter Jo Baer was supplemented with Silke Otto-Knapp; Anne-Mie van Kerckhoven; Lynne Cooke, Katy Siegel, and David Reed; recordings of Michel Foucault; an orchid sale; and more. The Institute texts are compact essays in a tone inimitably Huberman's. During the first year, these appeared on small discrete plaques in the space. Now, working with designer Scott Ponik, a concise vinyl wall text is accompanied by printed handouts.¹

Huberman and I gathered for a series of conversations. Some I forgot to record; for some I took notes, scribbling furiously; in one, we moved around so nothing much was captured; and one, funny enough, was perfectly preserved. Editing a straight story was pointless, as we mostly kept beginning again, points outside circles, sketching diagrams.

[mid-July recording]

Anthony Elms: *So the storytelling language starts. How do you start the story? "In the name of ___, we are going to tell the story of ..."*

Anthony Huberman: Yes. And then, over the course of the story, we will be interrupted by a series of toasts. I think toasting is a good word in this context. You know what it is like at a big dinner: you are talking with a friend about something—ding ding ding ding—you are interrupted. Someone says something. Five minutes later, you are back to your conversation and you can pick up where you left off, or perhaps you'll refer to something the person said during the toast. That interruption is going to push you a little to the left or to the right, which is what we are doing at the Institute. Right? Every interruption seeks to bump the direction of the conversation, to nudge it over somewhere else. Then you go on talking until you are interrupted again. I started to think about the Institute as something akin to the toast that interrupts your dinner conversation.

AE: ... *the flow* ...

AH: ... Yes. And actually the point is not just what you say in the toast but how it will guide the flow of the conversation.

[pause]

January notes:

The Institute is "an education institution that has an exhibition department, not the other way around." What is a university exhibition platform? Why do so many university museums and galleries function no differently than unaffiliated museums and galleries? How to make a space around thinking itself? Thinking that is object-based. What are the small ideas that produce big effects?

August reflection:

Hardest task to date is reconciling the learning aspect of the Institute with its publicness without allowing pedagogical or curatorial methodology to wrongfully come to the fore. In effect, the Institute is three spaces for three different audiences: Huberman, the students, the public. These three spaces deceptively look alike, speak alike, and cohabit. To get beyond talk of methodology, I latch on to many metaphors: *Storytelling. Toast. Meeting space. Think-tank. Homage. Attention span. Patience. Proposal. Failure. Lens. Proposition.*

Failure? By April, it was clear that the anchor generates distinctive kinks. When events at the Institute look like typical exhibitions, solo or group, these kinks halt *doing*. *The Institute is time with an object* rather than a *display about objects*.

[early-April recording]

AH: ... I'm eager to do a season with an artist who is not only in town, but really active. The session would almost become a six-month open sketchbook, which the anchor could use as he or she wants.

AE: *A residency?*

AH: Not a residency because the artist could use

it as a place not to show his or her work. The Institute could be a notebook. It is another way this space could be dedicated to thinking with another artist for six months. I think this is the crucial distinction: thinking with an artist, instead of thinking about an artist. The Institute is not asking the question: "Who is interested in this artist?" Instead, it is asking the questions, "What is this artist interested in?" and allowing that to animate the research and the events.

AE: ...*In that case, would the artist have work on the wall? We know that you have said that in the context of some of the events, this [pointing to an early Minimalist diptych] may not be the right Jo Baer painting to have in the room.*

AH: Yes, I've thought about what it would mean to not have work by the anchor artist at all, but I think this would make everything too discursive. I want to make sure that this space is dedicated to art objects, not just conversations about art objects.

[pause]
[mid-July recording]

AE: ... *The Institute might be more hardcore without an object produced by the anchor artist. But if you say boldly, "Today, I am thinking about Jo Baer with this object," and not necessarily, "We are thinking about Jo Baer with Jo Baer's objects," you force me to have a relationship: to think with this.... You make me understand that I am not looking at Jo Baer, I'm thinking about Jo Baer, and Jo Baer has lead me to look at Anne-Mie van Kerckhoven.*

AH: Yes, Jo Baer is the lens. So perhaps when the interruption happens, Jo Baer could exit the room for a short while to leave us with Anne-Mie. But still, on the wall, is a clear statement in big vinyl letters: "Today we should be thinking about Jo Baer."²

But it turns out that I need to restructure the events for the next season. The Lynne Cooke lecture on Jo Baer needed to happen at the very beginning of the season, not at the end as it did. All that is close to the topic—the anchor—should happen at the start, before we begin spiraling outwards from that. For the next season, for example, we'll begin with a lecture by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev about Jimmie Durham.

AE: *It depends if every event is an interruption. We talked last time about not always having the anchor artist's work on display. In this situation,*

as the revelry takes over, Lynne Cooke stands up to remind us why we are together: "Remember this painter Jo Baer?"

AH: But imagine that a work by the anchor artist is the one constant thing that is on view. Then, on Friday, this gets interrupted for a Paul Chan lecture, right? We take down the work. Then, first thing the next morning, we're open to the public again with the Jo Baer work back on view.

[rewind]

August reflection:

The solution is now clear: one object at a time will keep the focus on the anchor or the person toasting the anchor. Still, the difficulty surrounding engagement with the anchor artist is only a symptom of the problematic time warp at the Institute. During the first year, students developed ideas for a season already set and underway at the beginning of the class. By contrast, the visiting public always had plenty of time—six months—to consider a position. As if through a funhouse mirror, the students had no time—weeks, days—to have an associative response to the anchor; and Huberman's fixation is constant. A tight snap back didn't always bring everyone back to: Only. Ever. One. Thing.

AH: The class will get structured more like a conventional fellowship, students will know the artist in advance and apply to be a fellow with an idea. "Here's what I am putting on the table regarding what you are discussing and this is what I propose to do over the semester." There's nothing new here, this is how research institutes work.

AE: *That change sets up a base of investment before the "thinking with __" begins.... The student will not be antagonistic to the range of questions.*

AH: Yes. Well, they may be detractors of the topic. Opposed.... And share working.

[pause]

August reflection:

To *share working* in a small, garden-level space on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Dexter Sinister, "you'll immediately notice the steel fence and its gate that surround what looks more country cottage than city shop."³ This summer, a wall was torn down to reveal a fireplace; the roughshod front desk removed completely to expose a crooked pipe. Thankfully the characteristic cof-

feemaker remains, an ever-ready proposition of hospitality.

AH: The discovery of the fireplace was very important...because I think a fireplace says what the Institute is trying to say: it's about spending time with things. The Institute, I hope, establishes a place for *spending time* with art, spending time with ideas, and spending time with people.

AE: ... *Keep the metaphor [of the toast], as long as you provide coffee and alcohol....*

AH: Right!

[fast forward]

Mid-March notes:
Not explanation.

Mid-April notes:
"Knowledge complication machine." What determines failure? How do you answer these questions: How to welcome visitors? Does the curatorial method lead away from the artist? What does risk mean?

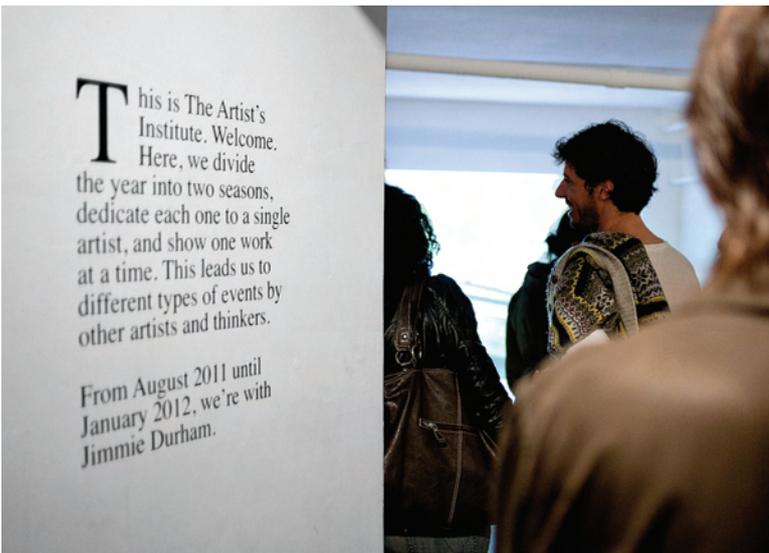
AH: It's so much simpler to execute something that you know works well. What we're doing is far more exhausting. But of course this is how learning works. And the Institute is about learning. It's a part of Hunter College, after all.

AE: *This is why you wanted to do the Institute. You wanted the exhibition to start at the opening.*

AH: Exactly. I wanted an exhibition that could keep learning about itself while it lived its life in the world. I learned that for myself with the exhibitions *For the blind man in the dark room looking for the black cat that isn't there* and *Grey Flags*. When the exhibition opened, I would give tours to the board, visitors, and friends. Two months later, I would choose very different words to describe the show. For me, that meant that something about the exhibition had succeeded. The exhibition was living its life.

AE: *The exhibition is succeeding but this success is also troubling because the institution will not let you account for that change. The institution is structurally unable to adapt to the life of the exhibition.*

AH: No museum is ever going to let me write the press release on the last day of the exhibition. I would love to do that someday... [*Both laugh.*] Somehow, marketing works in such a way that this just cannot be allowed. It challenges the law of cause and effect.



[fast forward]

AH: Have we talked about castillo/corrales' re-titling? It is a simple way to reflect the exhibition's evolution. The show gets a different title over time. It will eventually be titled after a phrase that emerges as the actual exhibition lives its life: the thought that bubbles to the top.⁴

AE: *This renaming can be both maddening and brilliant. I love the fact that they redefine themselves in relation to each show in published texts, "castillo/corrales is run by a group of artists, curators, and writers in Paris, based on the principle ..."* They are dedicated to a different principle with each show.

AH: The Institute definitely started with some of these ideas. It is a matter of finding the simplest form to make these ideas manifest. We can go beyond all the talk about the relationship to pedagogy, we can get rid of the curatorial model crap, and make a simple assertion: we are a space that dedicates itself to one artist for six months and creates a context for thinking about the questions and ideas raised by that artist gradually, slowly, and carefully. We are thinking with one person and toasting him or her every once and a while with the help of other people. It is artist-centered.

[fast forward]

AE: *I don't know if you read the Raul Ruiz text I assigned. I enjoy finding stories that go nowhere.⁵ The more I think about what you sometimes call the failures of the Institute and the more I hear you talk of storytelling, the more I wonder if this story has, in Ruiz's description, "too many heads and tails"?*

[fast forward]

AE: *The duration of the seasons at the Institute disperses the temporality of reception. Now it is summer, July, we are all driving home from dinner, the toasts are behind us. Or we are in a cab. We are a little tipsy ... and thinking, we each have a little nugget. The spiral is only now picking up speed. You have made me come to see Anne-Mie while whispering "Jo Baer" in my ear. The Institute didn't give me just one thing or just one event. The Institute's spirals are dirtier, messier, and tenuous. Baer is gone and you haven't even given me every question you plan to ask by her example. I side with the Dexter Sinister guys: time is the big T.⁶*

AH: I'm working on a talk about my practice in general, or about art, right now. The lecture is going to be called: "The Letter T," using that to give me words, whether it's time or thinking. Whether it's *table*. Whether it's *tiny*. All the different words I have progressively thought T could stand for, and how dramatically that has changed, from *Tony's* to *Toast*.

[end recording]
[rewind]

Mid-February notes:

A different "next" than the typical. Against: "What is next?" "Who are you showing next?" Be. Here. Now.

AE: *The spiral is not just motion, not just gravity, not just physics, not just interruptions and digressions; it is also time. It takes time to get from here to there. The sad truth might be: you start at the center with Jo Baer; by the end of the six months you might only have gotten a coil-and-a-half out into the spiral.*

AH: Interesting.

AE: *If we think of the usefulness of this space as a model, I could say that the typical exhibition does whatever spiraling it is going to do by day one.*

AH: No! In a normal exhibition, there is no spiral. It is a block that sits there.

AE: *No, no, no, no. What I mean: all the research, all the interruption, and the digression happened ahead of time.... The spiral is what you have on display. Inert. The sad part of doing the Institute in the name of the artist, with the class, with the published texts, with events: people come and have thoughts and the season has ended just when the spiral is taking shape. The students then take Jo Baer the rest of the spiral. Those who did events, like Anne-Mie, who may be a little more cognizant of Jo Baer and thinking differently about a relationship with her, now each start a spiral.... I have received a bunch of emails that repeatedly reminded me of Jo Baer for a couple months, and this is more than I have read about Jo Baer in the last three years.*

AH: Great!

AE: *It is stubborn.*

AH: A great stubbornness.

[stop]

August reflection:

Moving forward, any digression propels a commitment with the anchor artist forward, even if it does not always appear that way. During a recent trip to Stockholm, I clearly recognized the generative quality of "a great stubbornness." Stockholm is built on a series of islands—big and small—linked by bridges, walking directions by necessity indirect. Artist and musician Carl Michael von Hausswolff told me how to get to the Vasamuseet from the skate park where we stood watching his son Julius. "You walk along the water there toward that far bridge with the trains. Get a coffee along that bank over there, maybe a beer somewhere else, cross the bridge to the old city, walk diagonally across that island, cross another bridge and island, then behind that steeple in the distance. It should take about three-and-a-half hours."

I could see the top of the museum and I expressed surprise at the length of the trip. "How long if just walking directly to the museum?"

"Um, 45 minutes. But why would you do that?"
[Laughs.]

NOTES

1. All texts can be downloaded at: www.theartistsinstitute.org.
2. Since fall 2011, the mission statement asserts: "This is The Artist's Institute. Welcome. Here, we divide the year into two seasons, dedicate each one to a single artist, and show one work at a time. This leads us to different types of events by other artists and thinkers."
3. From the exhibition plan document for Dexter Sinister, *A Note on the T*, Milan: Triennale Design Museum, 2011.
4. castillo/corrales is a collaboratively run exhibition space and bookstore in Paris, France. On its website, under "previously," past exhibitions are listed by sentences or phrases that differ from the original exhibition titles. See: www.castillocorrales.fr.
5. Raul Ruiz, "Central Conflict Theory," *Poetics of Cinema 1*, Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 2005.
6. Dexter Sinister, *A Note on the T*, 2011.

An artist and writer, Anthony Elms is also the Editor of *WhiteWalls Inc.* publications and a frequent contributor to ART PAPERS. He was recently appointed Associate Curator at the ICA Philadelphia.

