

**Rainer Ganahl — Klasse Ganahl — in front
of the students at the Staatliche Akademie der
Bildenden Künste, Stuttgart, Germany.**

How long have you been teaching in general, and how long have you been in your current post?

It's a good question. Administratively speaking this is my second year in Stuttgart, but 10 years ago I was also an associate professor at the École des Beaux-Arts in Geneva. Teaching has been part of my artwork, so to a certain degree the artwork is teaching – quote-unquote. I started doing this work in about 1993 or 1994.

Why do you put it in quotes?

Because it's not institutionally framed the way my job is. There's not an academy that invites me. I have been doing my reading seminars and work I basically call linguistic services, where I teach a person, let's say, some language ... that is a kind of teaching.

Is that the S/L series?

No, it's separate from the *Seminars/ Lectures* works. In the *Seminars/Lectures* series I don't teach, I go there and I audit, or I listen.

What's the distinction you make between teaching in quotes and teaching administratively?

The differences are quite clear. The teaching that is institutionally framed comes with a salary, with students, with a curriculum and also a time frame. When I do it by myself I don't get paid, I can do it any time I want, and I have to look for students. I usually start with friends, and I say, 'let's do a reading seminar'. Interestingly enough we were supposed to read Foucault here today, this afternoon. That would have been a slight overlapping of doing the strand of work that I call a reading seminar – which is usually institutionally independent – while having it run through the institutionalised framework here as part of this professorship in sculpture. I'm teaching sculpture, by the way.

That's OK, isn't it?

I love it.

Is the reading seminar work meant to run counter to something?

It's not running counter, I'd say they cross.

What crosses?

The reading seminar work ...

[Phone rings.]

OK, the reading seminar work that is institutionally independent but not contrary ...

[A slight break for the phone call.]

... to any institution.

OK, let me go on and I'll get back to the thread of what I was thinking ...

Do you want to first finish with the previous question?

About this crossover?

Yes, the crossover, yes.

OK.

So again ... and you can always edit this ... I look at the institutional framework and I look at my practice and they are completely different. But I can do something within an institutional framework and outside of an institutional framework. That's what I've been doing. I do not make a difference in terms of performing, in terms of teaching. I always love to talk about teaching with a 'quote-unquote'. You asked me earlier, why quote-unquote? That's something I would like to come back to. I cannot ignore the fact that in one context you have an institution, and in another context you don't have an institution, that framework is important to keep in mind. With regards to your authority in relation to the people you're dealing with, with regards to payments, with regards to the fact that you know the selection process that goes along with it. If I'm invited to teach in Vienna, for example, I know that students there pay a lot of money. Here they pay 200 Euros, or not even that, and that's already difficult because we're used to not paying anything here. But in the West, people pay over 40,000 US dollars, and those are issues that to a certain degree I have to keep in the back of my mind.

Does this practice get rarefied or commodified, like the images in Venice, or was it *Documenta*?

Venice, Venice ... The images you saw in Venice are from the series called *Seminars/Lectures*. These are not my own seminars.

These are looking at somebody else's seminars?

In the Seville Biennale I had a reading seminar series, of reading Frantz Fanon, done over a couple of years; those are my own seminars. Even so, the images look similar because you're dealing with photos. What you don't have in my own reading seminars is the speaker. Sometimes a camera sits on the table and people photograph me too, so I can appear in those – I normally, at one point, appear in those photographs. It doesn't really matter who takes the photographs.

Are you recording all of these as well?

I don't record the *Seminars/Lectures*; I just listen to them. The reading seminars I usually record, yes. When you're teaching – again, quote-unquote – regularly, it comes with a certain kind of distribution of authority and power and there's a certain notion of implied mastery. The person who teaches knows that, and the people who don't teach don't know that. With the reading seminar that is not necessarily the case; you can't take it for granted. Quite often what can happen is that the people who are in the seminars know more than I do.

It's mastery in the sense of you convening and authoring the event. It's not necessarily about somebody knowing more than you do in the seminar. The same as the way you talk about learning languages; it's not necessarily the competence you have in each language, it's to do with the act of studying. So the mastery is in you convening and to some extent choreographing the event.

I haven't yet addressed the issue of studying and teaching languages. I think teaching languages is more like teaching, because if I'm in Russia I teach English, or in Japan I teach French, or in America I teach German. Obviously it's clear the way it goes. But when it comes to the reading seminar, you cannot automatically assume the position of somebody

who knows, because (a) I do not necessarily know my subject very well and (b) because that's one of the reasons I started doing these seminars. Today we were meant to read *Las Meninas*. I've read that text only once in my life and that was many years ago, but I would like to read it a second time. And the same with Lenin. I hadn't read anything before when I decided to start reading Lenin, I just had an intuition, a certain kind of idea. I knew he wrote interesting things about colonialism, and that was why I wanted to read Lenin. Not necessarily because of all the political aspects.

When you speak of mastery I don't think that's where the mastery resides; it's not a mastery over the text, it's in the convening of the event. That's where I think the mastery resides.

I'm not sure whether I understand you. We're still talking about teaching, teaching versus teaching ...

[Phone rings, Rainer answers it, phone call finishes.]

What I wanted to say about mastery is that usually in a classical teaching situation the teacher is the *supposé savoir* – the one who knows. In my reading seminars I try not to occupy that position. Even though I push the situation.

But let me ask you then; are the reading seminars different to the Foucault reading seminar planned for today?

That would have been the same thing.

But the authority is reinvested at that point, isn't it? Your students are here with you, otherwise there wouldn't be a class.

That's why I said that it can sometimes overlap. Here I have two types of authority (1) is the natural quote-unquote authority that results from knowing, or not knowing something, and (2) the institutional authority, which I undermine all by myself, by my behaviour, by how the place looks and by the kind of easy going atmosphere here. Sometimes I allow students to insult me.

Do they insult you?

Yes, I kind of joke about it. For example I say, 'this is the professor-cup so please give me that cup'. 'This is the professor-chair', but I play with it. So this is the kind of authority you don't have, or that doesn't come with it, when you do it on your own, when you do it with friends, or you do it in situations that are outside of the institution.

But I would still say it's of a different order. I don't think they're equivalent modes of behaviour, I think there's a different order of things when you do a reading seminar outside the institution and circulate that as image or video. Otherwise it just becomes about reading a text like anyone else reading a text, and who cares?

The way you rarefy things by recycling; by-products such as photographs, and the tapes, the recordings, that's another question. I agree with you. That's why I wanted to put the teaching in quote-unquote. Basically, if I teach here I maybe put single quotation marks, if I teach outside I put double quotation marks. Obviously I would question the very notion of teaching, but not necessarily by throwing it out of the window, but maybe by trying to redefine it.

Because you're not in the business of rejecting it, you're very interested in teaching ...

I'm very interested in it, absolutely.

So while you might be playing with the institution, it's not about undermining your own authority in any way.

In these questions, yes, and ...

You don't want them to throw you out, do you?

Yes, but this stands even apart from art. It also depends on what you teach. If I would just teach language skills for money, that'd be one thing. You can do it well, or you can do it badly, but it's a basic straightforward business. But when it comes to quote-unquote teaching art, we have larger issues beyond the pedagogical at stake. There are pedagogical issues, but also issues about what you can teach in the first place when it comes to art.

Let me ask you the question then: can you teach art?

Exactly, here we are.

Well, here we are.

I opened up the box with the worms myself. It's an interesting question that I could throw back at you in a nice manner.

You can't, because I'm the interviewer and I'm asking the questions.

I know ... It depends what you mean by art ... what you mean by this? I would say, of course! Everybody most likely answers you in this way. There are some famous artists who don't necessarily want to be reminded of it, but they are the results of their social networks outside the academy. Obviously a kind of teaching has gone on. One in particular was a rich lady – a woman of society. To a certain degree she was just like an accessory; everyone looked at her as one half of this artists-couple, they paraded at art fairs and in their best years were beautiful to look at. Behind their backs people said, 'wow, they're so rich, and all they do is shop.' So it's not an accident that this artist's work became all about shopping. Basically, she threw it back in their faces. And she did a very smart thing. She took this semi-negative comment as an affirmative gesture, and started to shop and made an entire career out of an exuberant consumption. The reason I mention her is as another way of quote-unquote teaching; someone becoming an artist outside the institution. Now I'm going to talk about teaching, about art, within this institution, within a specified context.

You're going to tell me if you can teach art?

Yes, if you can teach art, exactly. Within the academy, that's the question, since we've already talked about teaching art outside the academy. A lot of people actually become artists outside of the academy through social networking. So what do you actually teach when you teach art? You provide a platform where social networks can incubate, so it's a nurturing ground for networking, for knowledge transfer, for certain kinds of practices. I come from a university context, so we really had to study and do homework, and I always made fun of art students, that all they learn is posing. Whether you're cool or not, in university, it's not about this – its not about how you pose and who you hang out with; your authority and the way you are looked at is established through the way you master the subjects you're supposed to master. I could argue in class, and I got respect for that. But when I came to art school and I didn't have that kind of habitus

at all. I was not acquainted with being a cool artist, I was like a complete outcast there in that respect, and they hated me. I didn't get along, and they basically chased me out of town; I left Vienna within six months.

So can you teach art?

Again, what is art? We can provide a context in which artists can develop, in which a group of people can assemble and call themselves artists and act like artists and produce stuff that we consider, or don't consider, or discuss, or don't discuss, as art. It's a kind of game in a Wittgensteinian sense, in the sense of a Wittgensteinian *Sprachspiel*, or language game. When you're an artist you have to assert yourself with whatever you do; gestures, objects, dance steps, lovemaking, which you define as art. This is what then becomes, or is supposed to become art. You need a community for that and I would say the university, or the art school, is like a springboard for a lot of people. The reality today in the West is that art schools do play a role in the affirmation of young talent. There are certain academies that are considered very hot, while others are considered as less hot. I went to the Whitney Programme in New York and was shocked when I learned that when they looked through new applications, they would just scan them – even Ron Clark, people who are supposed to be beyond all this – all they did was look at university associations. So obviously all the people from the Art Institute in Chicago and CalArts – at that time the art school at Columbia University didn't exist yet – would get interviews. But if you came from Ohio or Kentucky ...

What if you came from Stuttgart?

Stuttgart is a wonderful place. Stuttgart is a very strange city, because in a weird way it is almost like an unrecognised capital. You have the best industries in the city like Mercedes, and Porsche, which controls Volkswagen. So you basically have the main German car industries here. You also have Puma, Adidas and Hugo Boss, three major fashion companies and nobody knows that. And the same goes for the academy; it's a quite wonderful place, but we don't have people applying here. Other schools have 500 applicants between 20 professors, and we have 20 applicants between five professors. It's perverse. We don't have enough applicants for sculpture. This year we had 12 applicants for sculpture, between five professors, can you imagine?

How many did you take?

There are two more here.

You refused 10 of them?

We refused a couple of people ... it's not that everyone shows up here. But we didn't take everybody.

When you look at students' work, do you know quite quickly which one is the 'artist'? And I'll put that in single quotation marks.

These are very interesting, sensitive, challenging questions. No, of course I do not know.

So on what basis do you choose?

I try to look at the person and I try to look at whether the person is interesting to a certain degree, and whether there's a link between the person and the work. Obviously I like people who have idiosyncrasies, particularities, or have some kind of obsession or question, some kind of intrigue or secret that is not obvious. And of course you have people who come from the street, without any prior art school training as well as people who come from other schools, who transfer. I prefer people who come with questions.

Can only artists do this ... teach art?

I am an artist and I mean it's ...

Well institutionally you're here right now as an artist.

Exactly, that's how they define me ... I mean that question is interesting because when I gained my core identity in the first half of my twenties – when most people really get formed, between 20 and 25 – I was in a university context. I had no intention of becoming an artist. I didn't identify with being an artist. So when I actually entered an art academy, more or less by accident – I followed Peter Weibel, I followed the teacher – I got in through a theoretical door. I didn't qualify through doing what these people – namely artists – are supposed to do. I'm not able to do a drawing, I'm not able to do anything, basically.

Can you draw now?

I do draw but there are certain kinds of drawings that would qualify as regular drawings.

You seem to disclaim and say a lot about what you're not. You have always been interested in languages, from the age of 10.

But I'm not a linguist.

You draw, but you're not really trained to draw.

Maybe I could call myself a professional dilettante in nearly everything I do; I'm a fake academic, I'm a fake everything.

No, you're actually a real academic and a real artist; there's nothing fake about it, but there seems to be an idea of fakeness that you're interested in.

It's absolutely true what you say, and when I use the 'f' word for fake I play with the so-called – quote-unquote – traditional notions of the artist. What I'm actually doing is not necessarily disclaiming being this or that, but I am trying to problematise and question that very notion. I keep myself at a certain distance, yet still having to identify with being an artist. There are situations in which I speak of being an artist in an affirmative way and defend that role. I'm not someone who hates art or artists. But when it comes to those contexts in which artists become rarefied and commodified, and are part of this *Bildungsbürgertum*, this German notion of the petty bourgeois artist, I hate that and I talk against it.

I wonder when the amateur turns professional, and whether yours is a temporary visit to the academy?

It's a six-year contract. But there are two views; there is how you see yourself, and then there is how students see you. Students, at least when they're not dealing with me, just see me as a professor; there's never any ambiguity. When it comes to the students who work with me, they sometimes forget since I do not necessarily occupy that position and play it in the traditional way. And it's the same with me; I also partially struggle with keeping the distance to make it work properly. So again, it's not me who decides that;

institutionally speaking, it had been decided already for me, and I knew that when I applied for and when I accepted the job.

There's no doubt about ...

There's no doubt about the function of the job, so there's no imposition in that sense.

Let me ask you another question.

Teaching art ... did I answer you anything about that?

No, you didn't.

I started to answer it by saying that you provide a social context where people can develop, where people can learn habitus, where they can network, where they get to know people and learn how to self-organise and start an exchange. In the end it's a big exchange market, it's a *Börse*, like a stock market. In German you can say *Börse* and it doesn't necessarily imply the stock market, whereas when you say stock market in English it's just financial. It's a place for the exchange of information, of people, of affections, of affinities, of ideas. Not necessarily even a physical place that's bound to a city because for some of these programmes – the Erasmus programme – the academy is a travel agency. One of our next projects is that we go to New York and we'll do some work there. We've also started on a project to travel around the world. I like to make fun, to comment on these travel activities. Jankowski's class moved over to San Francisco. Today's successful art students are just on aeroplanes; they already have the same lifestyle as artists. The confrontation with people is important for students; the professors for example, and you coming by, or other visitors. But it's never straightforward, teaching; I teach by having you teach for me.

What you're talking about is becoming a conventional way of teaching. There is the ghost of the master who instructs from above, but the more vibrant challenge is coming from what you're describing.

I hope so, but I'm not completely sure that's the case. One of the modernist legacies is to de-skill; in the twentieth century, art has gone through a massive deskilling operation, which also deskilled the professors. In terms of art making, there's a

re-skilling on the way. People like me are fine to a certain degree, but if everybody were like that then we'd have a problem. Students would rightfully ask for people who know how to do something technically.

It's not yet at saturation point by any means, the position you work from. I think it will take a while for that to reach saturation point. I'm not meaning to generalise your practice.

You think there could be more Ganahls, is that what you're saying?

I wouldn't say more Ganahls ...

... or more people who work like this.

I would say people who are working within the institution yet seeing it as embedded, or immersed in the world rather than apart from it.

Yeah, yeah.

In an interview with Anna Sansom you say that universities are very important interfaces, where society produces and reproduces itself. Can you talk about this and particularly in relation to how socially useful an art academy like Stuttgart is?

I'm convinced that the university and the art academy are a subgenre, and are an important medium for society to reproduce. The art academy selects people to become artists, and whatever their role is – they do play a role. I want my students to first of all know what's going on in the world and to have a relation with the world that is self-sustaining, that is productive, that is useful in every sense of the word. I want them to be able to survive, to have a voice, to become critical, or not. I was once in an art school where I was 'accused' of being critical. In Los Angeles they said, 'oh, this is so passé, this is critical'. And I asked them, 'well, what do you want to do? What interests you?' And they said, 'shopping' – that was in 1995 or so. We then spent over three months reading books about shopping, which was quite interesting. So depending on the time, even the word criticality can become suspicious. To a certain degree I understand why, but if the school quote-unquote produces ... if it enables people to become successful in whatever way – I don't even expect them to become artists, but if they don't, I want them to be successful in what they do – then I think the school does very well. That doesn't necessarily

mean they'll start a revolution, but it means that they are able to resist forces that turn things negative. I want them to have a successful life, whatever success defines. What art really does, is it redevelops notions of success. I'm suspicious of commercial success. If people are able to withstand current, dominating notions of traditional success, for me that's successful. It doesn't mean I don't want them to have success, of course I want them to make money and to get along with each another and to be productive, and to change things for the better. But I don't want them to suffer, because a lot of people who enter art school enter an ideological framework that makes them crazy. When you subscribe to a given notion of success – showing in big galleries, getting written about, being famous and making money. The issue is not that you should reject it. What I'm trying to teach people – and it applies to me too – is to basically withstand that. It's destructive when people want something too much, because then everything they do becomes extrinsically motivated, extrinsically conditioned, in that sense.

You're talking about a certain kind of focus?

Yes.

So is that what you're teaching when you teach art?

I teach a lot of things. What I'm teaching is to read texts, and I hope I teach people how to think and to look at things and develop a relation to objects, a relation to their surroundings, to the symbolic world that we live in. We have the privilege, or we're expected to intervene in the symbolic world. When you are just a reader, you don't necessarily directly intervene, but if you're an artist, or a writer, you intervene; you create. That is what I teach people first. But in a naïve way I can imagine that there are many paths, and some paths are very seductive and you want to follow them. I want everybody to just succeed. But most people don't. Sometimes artists fail, and they then become bankers. I have a friend in London, for example. She's an artist, but she's also one of the most successful British bankers. She makes tons of money, but she is not happy. She thinks all the time that she has to be an artist and she suffers. Obviously she can't stop it because once you're in that machine you have the costs of houses and mortgages and expenditures. It never ends. She supports a family and she supports some other people who are doing the creative thing.

Are you always working?

I could also say I never work. I don't necessarily work. It's difficult to say when I work and when I don't work. Is it working when I answer my emails, which pile up? I don't really consider the work I do as work. I was a ski instructor and I instructed very interesting people and obviously there were no restrictions to what to do with them afterwards, so it was a lot of fun. I really love teaching and I don't think it's work. Duchamp, for example, he sustained a myth of not doing anything, but he was a chess player.

He was also an art dealer, he edited catalogues and he taught French ...

He sold all the Brancusis to Philadelphia. He did a lot of things. I don't think you would meet many people who would say in an interview, 'yes, I work all the time.' It looks much better when you say, 'I never work.'

What I'm curious about is when things become other things; when you're working, when you're not working. Does everything fold into everything else?

I have more the problem the other way round. Once someone said, 'Rainer, we are making a book about recipes, show us what you eat.' You can find that one on my website. There are few domains that cannot be recuperated as art. I started my studies very early on and they were very tied to pleasure; studying languages were a way to get out, they were a way to speak, or a way to love, a way to get around the world. Reading is a pleasure. And now even the bicycle ... I've always used the bicycle, simply for transportation reasons, but at one point I started to play around with it. I had this little disaster with some girlfriend and I used that too. And then I made this work about dreams, so even sleeping is involved. There's very little that is exempt from art. I could say that teaching is exempt to a certain degree, now you're making it public. I never tell anyone I teach, but now more and more people seem to know it.

I think it's pretty public.

Yes, but that's recent. A lot of people say, 'what? You're teaching?' I don't put it on my website, because I still feel too embarrassed about it. If you talk to Lawrence Weiner about teaching he'll be very negative about it.

It seems to me to be consistent with your art practice that you would teach.

It's consistent, but it's very funny; for nearly 10 years no one invited me. I'm here because of Christian Jankowski; I owe him a lot. He's the person who decided – there were actually 20 people who decided it – but he was the one that told me to go for it. He didn't just tell me, he told other people too. Five more people from his gallery also applied. But he was definitely the one who motivated me to do it. I wasn't actively looking for a job. I never applied in the West to anything. Though my life changed. I would say it fundamentally changed due to a teaching situation. The first time it happened and I taught in Geneva I really had no money; I was living on 100 dollars a month in a storage space. I don't come from a moneyed background and when I was in Geneva I was so used to not having money that I didn't touch the salary. I kept all the salary in the bank for two years and that allowed me to purchase an apartment in New York. I bought it 10 years ago in Harlem, when it cost nothing. It changed my life; I can afford to live in New York today due to that appointment and that gives me the freedom to just sit at home and do nothing. I mean do nothing quote-unquote, do my work and not have to care about savings or doing commercial work. It really changed my life.

If you're offered a further contract after six years, will you take it?

It used to be that you got the teaching post forever; Christian has his forever. After two years a committee gave him the OK. In my case, it seems that they want to do it for six years and then have a look again. It can be prolonged. I think they'll do it forever, but I don't know.

I was wondering about the kind of emphasis you put on teaching as it seems to be doing two things: teaching as a platform for producing work, and teaching as a means to have a transformative influence on education ... in Stuttgart at least.

I hope I also change the life of my students, but this job changed my life. I'll give you two examples: I've been here for one year and due to the fact that I'm here I got this exhibition in the museum in Stuttgart. That was for me a major thing, because the work started to go in a certain direction; I did everything on the bicycle and began developing something I wouldn't have done otherwise. Next door here, we have the

ceramic workshop, and the bronze workshop and all these other workshops, which I've started to use. I also learned a lot from the students. I got connected to Mercedes too and now I'm trying to develop a prototype of a bicycle, a car, a machine. So on that level, it's phenomenal for me. And it brings me to Europe. I didn't come to Europe that often, now I come over every other month and it reconnects me. I get to speak German and it doubles my life, to a certain degree. And look at this studio. I wouldn't have that otherwise. I'm not even talking about the financial aspect; it pays well but I'm not even talking about that kind of security. It's just very funny, it really did open things up. Even the fact that you're sitting here, I think is interesting. I didn't know you, we get to know each other, and then it becomes this book. It's a great book, I already like it a lot. It's this concatenation of anticipated events that can end up in amazing situations. I got the job in Geneva because I was invited to a lecture at the Pompidou, where a person who saw me invited me to Geneva. It's very funny how things can happen sometimes. Talking about success; you do an exhibition and nothing happens. Now I have all these major group shows. I'm currently in one Biennale after another; Moscow, Seville, Istanbul, Venice. I always have the feeling nothing happens. But things can have an effect. I'm sure they will have an effect. Maybe you're just here because you saw my name on these lists, who knows? I would get desperate – and obviously every artist has a tendency to just be desperate – if I were to compare myself to the really successful artist, who makes the real money, which sometimes they don't even make, then you become desperate and that's something I'd advise people not to become, and I try myself not to become. When I do an exhibition I now define success as being able to do a new work. Being able to learn something. Opening something up. I'm working on a show at Le Laboratoire in Paris, for example which already defines itself as completely different from a regular exhibition platform, because they do not ask you for an exhibition; they literally ask you to develop a work. The emphasis is all on research. I know exactly what I want, but I don't know how to do it and it's a big challenge. I want to do a play; I'm working on Alfred Jarry and the bicycle stuff. I want to do a film; I want to do a bunch of things.

Is this connected to Lenin and the Cabaret Voltaire?

Yes. It is because of Lenin I got there. I learned something there, and that for me is

interesting. Lenin happened because I was invited to Bucharest and you don't expect dealers there. But the curator from the Cabaret Voltaire was there and he invited me to come to Zurich and that's when I started to develop that kind of work. These little events can become a highway into another direction and that's enriching for me. That is something we could also define as success.

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