



The European Graduate School
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Seminar with Robert Brewer Young (4.5 ECTS credits)
Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought
October Session/October 29–31 2019

The Thinking of Craft: Poiesis, Politics and Praxis

The seminar will combine close reading and practice, as an extension of the cello project and recent violin laboratory held in Saas-Fee. We will work together in addressing a group of selected readings that speak to the socio-political and philosophical meaning of craft.

Poiesis

The calling and practice of “Craft,” like that of “Art” and “Philosophy,” are impossible to delimit or contain, yet constructively approached through perspectivism, creation, and a non-binary approach to the intersection of these activities.

In the seminar, variable illustrations of these terms will be drafted with the tools and media of text, translation and individual handwerk.

Politics

Issues that we will confront include:

The role of the machine, the master-apprentice relationship and possibilities for subverting this through dialogue, the ambiguity and plasticity of skill, the self created myths surrounding “solitary” figures who craft their own image, like Constantin Brancusi and Rodin, the privileged economy of the artisanal in contemporary society and the attendant emptiness of “pure craft,” the possibilities and paradoxes of craft activism. We will also review

early Buddhist sculptural theory as a way to explore notions of the self and non-bivalent logic as they appear in representations that tradition and its relationship to non-violence.

Praxis

The seminar will also be a laboratory and workshop for actual craft, where the creation and assemblage of a conservatory quality violin will be undertaken with students. No experience in woodworking or making music is required to complete a personal instrument as part of this project.

In order to serve musical movements around the world, where the greatest lack is actual instruments to perform on, "The Open String Violin" project aspires to make an instrument from recycled, donated and sustainably harvested materials - using a combination of advanced technology and individual handwerk - with the Braga/Chanot, guitar shaped Stradivari from 1726 serving as a model.

The project is being developed using the resources of Cambridge University's Claire College engineering department and a pantographic laboratory in Stuttgart, Germany, where parts are created for hand assembly, refinement and completion by players and parents in underserved communities.

We will dedicate a small part of each seminar day to violin making, completing one instrument together, varnishing another, and tonally adjusting a third.

The violin laboratory and workshop will be a platform for dialogue about the philosophical, political and practical issues we raise while considering various texts and traditions, using these to challenge our conceptions of craft.

Violinist, luthier, and actor Antonin Stahly will be present during the seminar to provide musical interludes from different world traditions and to bring the finished instruments to life with the seminar participants.

Christopher Fynsk will also join the conversation again (his past contributions have been on the topic of craft and thought) to discuss the role of craft and practice in an institution such as the EGS. Specific reference will be made, in this context, to the fact that the EGS is frequently compared to the fabled Black Mountain College. Professor Fynsk will seek to address the potential meaning and significance of this reference, which becomes more relevant with the increasing importance of practically-oriented projects (such as hands-on work in research on interactive environments, with Sha Xin Wei, film-making with individuals like Rick Alverson, and the ongoing violin project featured in this seminar).