



*The Academization of Art. A Practice Approach to the Early Histories of
the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca*

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Summary

This dissertation offers a comprehensive interpretation of the first official academies of art in Europe, the Florentine Accademia del Disegno (1563) and the Roman Accademia di San Luca (1593). In the past, the composite nature of these institutions in their early years – combining the goals and functions of guild, confraternity, client, and art school – has been perceived both as the cause for their limited effectiveness and as an obstacle to a clear and comprehensive understanding of their meaning and identity. Moreover, scholars have tended to focus on what the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca had in common with modern academies of art. This approach has led to reductionist and essentialist interpretations of these institutions, whereby their educational and cultural-politics functions are highlighted and their religious and guild activities obfuscated.

One of the central methodological imperatives for this study, which was borne out by the discussion of practice theories, was that of refraining from totalizing interpretations and ascribing fixed essences to the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca. Instead, the objective has been to uphold the pluriform vitality of interpretation. By conceiving the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca as crossing points of patronage, literary-theoretical, guild, educational, and religious-confraternal practices – most of which underwent transformations at the end of the sixteenth century – this study attempts to de-essentialize the art academy. The focus on ‘social practices’ entails the application of insights of theories of practice to a cultural-historical research object. The development of theories of practice is the second objective of this study, in addition to improving the understanding of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca in the early years of their existence.

Chapter One provides a historiographical overview of the literature on the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca and it explains how the application of practice theory can be seen as a next step in this development. Since Pevsner’s seminal book, *Academies of Art: Past and Present* (1940), three methodological innovations can be discerned: a switch from the artists’ to the rulers’ point of view (the cultural-politics tradition); the implementation of social theoretical concepts in the interpretations; and more systematic use of archival sources. While embracing the second and the third methodological development, practice theory is more skeptical towards the first innovation. Rather than focusing on a different type of individuals (rulers instead of artists), a practice approach focuses on the social practices, within which individuals are brought up and function.

A critical stance toward past interpretations of the art academies is put forward in Chapter Two. The general and common features of theories of practice are contrasted with previous studies of the academies, especially with their essentialist and reductionist tendencies. The turn to practices implies the application of a range of conceptions – of culture, subjectivity, objectivity, and meaning – that are convincing alternatives to outdated and modernist ones that have been used in the literature on the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca. What is more, by rethinking the relation between theory and practice, theories of practice can be relevant for understanding the academization of art and, especially, for understanding the theoretical treatises that were written in the academic context.

Chapter Three presents in more detail the interpretative framework that is used in this dissertation by going into some of the major differences that exist between theories of practice. The main protagonists of this chapter are Pierre Bourdieu and Theodore Schatzki. The theoretical framework that is adopted in this dissertation is mainly derived from Schatzki’s work, because his conception of social reality is more pluralistic than Bourdieu’s and, therefore, better suited for multi-causal explanations of the actions of individuals and institutions. Moreover, in contrast to Bourdieu, Schatzki does not construct his theory in relation to a particular society or culture. Therefore it is applicable to different historical epochs and

cultures, and thus also to the academization of art in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Florence and Rome.

The interpretative framework that is based on Schatzki's theory of practice focuses on the practical understandings (or skills) that were required from the participants of the various practices performed by the art academies, on the rules that were observed (or transgressed), and on the goals that were pursued by the participants (teleoaffective structure). This conceptual framework is completed with an element that is missing from Schatzki's work, namely the different forms of power that are at work in the practices under discussion. The analysis of power entails the implementation of a Bourdieusian element in the Schatzkian interpretative framework.

The reconstruction and analysis of the practices of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca is carried out in Chapters Four to Ten. Chapter Four contains a discussion of the material culture – i.e. buildings, objects, and artifacts – that belonged to the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca. The assessment of archival sources, in which their buildings and goods are discussed such as inventories, shows that at least four practices were carried out in these institutions in their early years: educational, religious-confraternal, guild, and patronage practices. These practices are reconstructed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five deals with the religious-confraternal practices performed in the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca. The goals (teleoaffective structure), rules, and practical understandings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious practices in Italy were dictated by the counter-reformatory Church. Most pertinent to the confraternal function of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca were the Church's confirmation of, and emphasis on, the veneration of sacred images and saints, the handing out of charity, and the celebration of the Eucharist. By carrying out these activities within their walls, the art academies participated in contemporary religious practices, albeit in adapted fashion. Compared to other confraternities such as the Virtuosi al Pantheon, the charity handed out by the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca was less frequent and less variable. For instance, they did not provide dowries for the daughters of impoverished members. Another aspect of charity played a greater role in the religious practices of the art academies than in those of other confraternities. This was the production of sacred images for their rooms and buildings.

Guild practices are the topic of Chapter Six. The members of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca pursued the goal of protecting and controlling the art market through a system of rules that governed who could legitimately practice the profession and carry out appraisals in the city, the organization of workshops, and the artists' relationships with patrons, art dealers, pupils, and assistants. Whereas in Florence civil cases concerning professional disputes were handled by the tribunal of the Accademia del Disegno, in Rome this was not a responsibility of the Accademia di San Luca, as these cases were brought before the tribunal of the cardinal vicar. The records of the civil cases in the archive of the Florentine academy and the difficulties encountered by the Roman institution to control the market show that the rules were frequently broken. Rome had traditionally attracted more foreign artists than Florence, because of the ancient monuments that could be studied and because of the presence of many potential patrons, i.e. wealthy prelates and aristocrats. This situation made it more difficult for the Accademia di San Luca to enforce their guild rules on the artistic community and, thus, to effectively control the market and the profession.

The different aspects of the relationship between the notions of theory and practice in the art academies are discussed in Chapters Seven to Nine. Chapter Seven compares the theoretical and literary practices of the art academies with those of contemporary universities and cultural academies. Like other Italian cultural academies, the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca were more practice-oriented than the universities, which were focused almost exclusively on theories and texts. This means that cultural and art academies were the venues of the transformation of the traditional and hierarchical opposition between theory and practice. An example is the process of the invention of the *impresa*, with the help of which academicians aimed to express the essence of their institution by combining a verbal (motto) and a visual (emblem) element. The Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca were more formal and less playful than most cultural academies. This has to do

both with their respective connections to the Florentine state and the papacy and with the fact that the activities employed by the academicians were not part of their leisure time – as with the activities in the cultural academies for *their* members – but concerned their livelihood.

In Chapter Eight the discussion about the relationship between theory and practice focuses on the educational activities performed within the art academies. The Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca organized lectures for their members about mathematics, natural philosophy, and the principles of the arts as part of the educational program. The art academies combined this activity, which they took over from cultural academies, with practical instruction, during which young students learned the various stages of *disegno*. The Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca substantially transformed artistic educational practices by integrating theoretical and practical instruction. The Florentine academy focused more on the instruction of mathematics, while the Roman institution paid more attention to natural philosophy and copying plaster casts.

Chapter Nine focuses on the notion of *disegno* as it is elaborated in theoretical treatises that originated in the context of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca. Although working from within the same Aristotelian conceptual framework, in their treatises the artists presented different accounts of *disegno*. The meaning attached to *disegno* in the treatises ranged from the practical drawing of the human anatomy (e.g. Allori and Cellini) to the intellectual process of knowledge acquisition and concept formation with the help of the senses and drawing pens (e.g. Zuccari and Cigoli). The authors' different interpretations of *disegno* reflect their different views on the role of the artist in society: should he be content with producing works of art or may he also engage in theoretical debates about his profession?

Furthermore, it is argued that these treatises, written by academic artists, functioned in two social practices. In the context of artistic-educational practices, these texts defined *disegno* as the common ground of painting, sculpture, and architecture and they laid out the correct path for acquiring the necessary artistic skills. The treatises also had a meaning in contemporary literary practices, insofar as they revealed the literary and theoretical aspirations of their authors. Together, Chapters Seven to Nine show how the integration of artistic-educational and literary practices, a general feature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian culture, evolved in the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca.

Chapter Ten reconstructs the role of the art academies in contemporary patronage practices. It does so with the help of concepts from recent publications in patronage studies. In particular, the notion of cultural broker makes it possible to analyze the fluidity of patronage relationships and the change of functions of the academies. In their early years, both the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca performed the function of client in relation to the grand duke and the pope, respectively. The Accademia di San Luca also performed the function of cultural broker by constituting a site where professional artists and potential patrons came together and discussed artistic matters in the form of lectures, debates, and the instruction of *disegno*. In contrast to the Roman academy, the Accademia del Disegno did not assume this function from the start of its existence, because its membership was reserved for practicing artists and because the patron-client relationship between the Florentine institution and the grand duke was more dominant than that between the Roman academy and the pope.

In addition to a recapitulation of the main results of the preceding chapters, the Conclusion offers an analysis of the integration of and conflicts between the social practices that were carried out in the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca, a discussion of the *various* types of power at work in these institutions, and a reflection on the use of the practice-theoretical interpretative framework and suggestions for further research. Regarding the integration of social practices, the Conclusion especially focuses on the increasing overlap of literary and artistic practices in the Italian art academies, as this development was reflected in the artists' discussions about the *impresa* for their institutions, their theoretical treatises, and the disagreements between artists who maintained that they practiced a liberal profession and others who they attempted to control.

This last point also exemplifies one of the forms of power relations that were present in the art academies, namely that between different types of artists in the context of guild practices. Other forms of

power were revealed by disagreements among artists, and between artists and representatives of the rulers, about the curriculum the sequence of the artistic training in their treatises, and differences of opinion between artists and *letterati* about the desirability of the former's intellectual endeavors. By analyzing various types of struggles and related types of power relation, this study moves beyond existing interpretations, which focused exclusively on the relationship between the institutions and their patrons.

Finally, the Conclusion maintains that the reconstruction of the social practices of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca shows that practice theory can be fruitfully applied to historical sources, and it provides several directions for future research: a systematic analysis of how Bourdieu's notion of power can be related to Schatzki's theory; an analysis of other art academies on the basis of the reconstruction of the social practices carried out in this dissertation; and an interpretation of the current academization of art, i.e. the development that artists can obtain PhD degrees on the basis of artistic research.