



THE TEMPORARY DEPARTMENT FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Academic Aesthetic Breakout Session
1712 North Second Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122

TEST

To: PIFAS Faculty, Community

From: John Muse

Date: August 14, 2008

Subject: "Taking Tests, Making Tests"

Answer **3** of the following **5** questions in the space provided.

1. A most likely spurious but nonetheless compelling etymology links the word "testimony" to the word "testicles." The Latin "*testis*" means both "witness" and "testicle" because, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, "the Romans placed their right hands on their testicles and swore by them before giving testimony in court." By this association, the word for witness, "testis," became the word for these glands. Another etymology links "test" to "testicle." Both would derive from the Latin "*testum*," a small pot or shell. In such a pot gold would be heated with lead and assayed, i.e. tested, for purity, but the pot's shape also lent the word to this part of male genitalia. Comment on the constellation of terms, "test," "testimony," and "testicle," taking seriously the posited relation of truth to virility.



2. What's the difference between a good test and a bad one? In your answer take care to consider these further questions: "good or bad for *whom*?" and "good or bad for *what*?" You are free to reject the presumption that tests are *either* good *or* bad, but fully explain your reasoning.
3. Explicate the following brief passage from Avital Ronell's *The Test Drive*, a book about the power, prestige, and pleasures of science: "One side of testing is as assertive of its findings as the other is vulnerable when counting its losses. There is the test that stands its ground, standardized, and equipped with irrefutable results. So it claims and so it stands. There is the other test that crashes against walls, collapses certitudes, and lives by failure—lives by dying or, at least by destroying." [Ronell, 18]



4. Choose one of the following two answers. First provide a compelling question and then evaluate the fit of this answer to your question. The answers are, a., contemporary art, and b., "because I say so." Your response may include a diagram or illustration.
5. "Cheaters never prosper." This proverb seeks not only to chasten the would-be cheater, but also to reassure the others of their own virtue—whether the professor fearful of being duped by conniving students or the resentful neighboring student who vividly imagines the cheater's success balancing his own failure. Do tests, whatever their ostensible aims, necessarily breed suspicions and thus anxious relations to others? Go autobiographical if your answer so requires.