

**On the methodologies of the adaptation of text for gallery exhibition**

**MPhil by thesis**

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## Abstract

In the twenty-first century, a mode of visual art making has emerged that utilises methodological practices of writing in order to explore the functions and readings of the fine art object. This thesis examines this practice, termed Art Writing, in three stages.

The first chapter of this thesis draws the origins of Art Writing. This chapter describes various moments in visual art history where technological process in print publishing enabled visual artists to create new, analytical contexts for reading contemporary art. Case studies in this chapter include the manifesto-based practices of Futurism and Vorticism publications around Conceptual Art, including *Semina*, *Aspen*, and *Interfunktionen*; and artistic practices from the 1970s and 1980s that merged literature and the visual arts, such as Neoism and Transgressive writing.

The second chapter of this thesis analyses the current moment of Art Writing, with a specific focus on Art Writing in the UK. This research aims to define the boundaries in which Art Writing operates. Having diverse historical origins – that include criticism, curation, fiction writing, and independent publishing – Art Writing has a variety of manifest forms. This chapter examines different styles of Art Writing and places it within a recognisable praxis-based infrastructure.

The final chapter looks at the institutional structures that have emerged in the twenty-first century that has enabled Art Writing to become a recognisable form of contemporary art making. This research includes analytical case studies of the growth and development of the contemporary art institution, independent publishing, coupled with trends in contemporary art that coalesce curatorial research as exhibitiv practice. Cumulatively, this thesis analyses the causes and effects of Art Writing in the UK and suggests its trajectory in the near future based on the findings of this research.

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**1:**

**The origins of Art Writing**

This thesis will explore the contemporary phenomenon of Art Writing.<sup>1</sup> This will be a contextual and critical analysis of the situation in which Art Writing developed and its relationship to evolving modes of gallery-based exhibition.

In 2008, London-based visual arts publishers Book Works published *The Happy Hypocrite*, a quarterly journal with the subtitle ‘for and about experimental art writing.’ Since that date, in the UK, Art Writing has appeared in galleries, as a residency-based practice, in exhibition displays, and as performance; an Art Writing MFA course began (and has since folded) at Goldsmiths, University of London; and examples of Art Writing have appeared as publications and have been subject to critique in the arts press. Across all this (and despite it) there is no fixed definition of what constitutes a work of Art Writing. The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to highlight, define and examine the common elements of works of Art Writing in order to understand it as a coherent, and potentially discrete, form of visual art making. The proposition then is whether Art Writing can withstand critical assessment as a structured art form, or if it is only able to operate in parallel to more traditional fine art forms.

Art Writing has occurred as a multidisciplinary practice. In *The Happy Hypocrite*, Art Writing appears as mini-essays, interview, autobiography, photography and illustration. At the single-evening event, *Volatile Dispersal: Festival of Art Writing*, held at Whitechapel Gallery in 2011, examples of Art Writing included sculpture, film, performance and spoken word. In a series of events organised by Goldsmiths’ MFA course in Art Writing, it appeared as criticism within public fora. The boundaries in which Art Writing defines itself must be made clear in order for it to be able to sustain itself as form of art making, as well as for institutions to understand Art Writing’s essential forms of presentation, display and interpretation. This thesis will examine the history of Art Writing, its present situation and will investigate how institutions in the UK have developed concerns parallel to those of Art Writing, but will question whether the two are on related trajectories for their futures.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis proposes to study ‘Art Writing’ as a distinct art form. It is for this reason that I have chosen to specify the term in capital letters, in order to differentiate the proposed art form from the more general art writing (i.e. writing in art that is criticism, biography, review, and so forth). As we will see later in this thesis, Art Writing as a multidisciplinary form may incorporate elements of art writing, but is specifically distinct from it, functioning as a primarily as a form of visual art making.

The narrative of this thesis is structured in to three chapters. The first chapter provides examples of the historical context from which Art Writing developed. This will be a survey of certain international art movements from the 1910s to the 1980s. The common narrative thread will concern artists creating writing and publications concurrent to an object-based fine art practice. As the twentieth century unfolded, developments in print technology, combined with the influence of Conceptual Art movements, saw the artists' text succeed alongside traditional fine art objects in contemporary art. This thesis suggest that, as result of this, towards the end of the twentieth century there saw a merging in practice between visual artists using text and authors working in a literary context.

Though the first chapter takes international examples, in order to focus my study of Art Writing, chapters two and three will use the example of Art Writing as it appears in the UK in order to reflect its wider situation. A central proposition of this thesis is that Art Writing has had a strong impact on forms of exhibition, display, presentation and distribution of contemporary art in the UK – arguably a stronger impact than it has had in its iterations in other countries (notably the USA and the Netherlands). That the term 'Art Writing', in regard to a specific form of art making, first appeared in the UK in the work of Book Works, lends weight to this proposition, as well as the fact that a number of Art Writing's leading proponents, internationally, are either British or UK-based.

The second chapter of this thesis will examine the contemporary situation of Art Writing, beginning with written and published works from the 1990s onward. This chapter highlights specific works, specific individuals and specific organisations that produced art that support the concepts of Art Writing. By analysing art works, their reception and their modes of public interpretation, the aim of this chapter is to settle on several elements common to works of Art Writing – regardless of the specific form the works may take. The third chapter will examine the sites in which Art Writing takes place: it will look at Art Writing through the contemporary art institution in England. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the contemporary institution sector in England has undergone widespread refurbishment, redevelopment and building anew. These 'expanded' institutions are required to show, keep and interpret a greater amount of art for increased audience numbers. This thesis proposes that Art Writing shares similar interpretive concerns to current trends in curating contemporary art. Art Writing's public face, as a discursive and dialogic practice, has been appropriated in to the core

interpretive programme of many contemporary art institutions in the UK, but as its use becomes ever more integrated, this thesis will question whether it remains an artwork defined as Art Writing.

### **What is Art Writing? Part one**

It is slightly problematic to talk about specific acts of Art Writing before the term was coined. Similarly there is a difficulty in imposing a retrospective analysis of Art Writing onto conceptually similar works before we have at least outlined what Art Writing is. In which case, it is useful at this point to identify the basic common element of a work of Art Writing: the artist uses words. These words are not simply displayed in graphic form; in order to be considered as artworks, they attain a sense of presence. In exhibition or performance the words have the function to transform a situation – placed in juxtaposition with other artworks and to be responded to by an audience. The words of Art Writing needn't facilitate rational comprehension of a topic – these are words that when placed in a specific situation affect transformation of the topic.

Artists' writings predominantly appeared at specific points throughout the twentieth century. These moments were tied to advances in technology, hence we see artists' publications appearing during the 1910s (as the cost of printing plummeted<sup>2</sup>, daily printed newspapers were a vital form of communication during this period<sup>3</sup>); as well as from the mid-1950s (when the first photocopiers began to become available for commercial use); to the 1980s (and the first home computers became commonly available, with home printing, and facsimile copying widespread). In recent years, the internet has enabled self-publication and -distribution to occur instantly and to no fixed schedule. Artists are using the internet to explore autonomous modes of distribution, however this thesis focusses on the creation of artists' books (as a distinct visual art practice) and its evolution into the gallery environment.

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<sup>2</sup> “History of Publishing – The Early 20th Century”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/482597/history-of-publishing/28638/The-early-20th-century>

<sup>3</sup> In the USA, as an example, total newspaper circulation doubled in the period 1900–1920. Richards, M., *America in the 1910s*, p.87 (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2010).

The most common forms of printed matter (particularly in contemporary art) are the poster, magazine and book. Often the creation of printed matter requires collaboration between an artist, a designer and a specialist skilled printer. More often, the creation of a book or magazine requires collaboration between a printer, designer and a group of authors, or an editor and a group of contributors. The printed artwork is most often not a solo activity.

Using the slim template above, we can begin to apply the tenets of Art Writing *avant la lettre*. Some of the earliest examples of Art Writing that fit this template are the turn of the century ‘manifesto movements’.

### **The manifesto: Futurism**

In 1909, and following the example of the Symbolist movement and their manifesto *Le Symbolisme*<sup>4</sup>, Italian artist Filippo Tomasso Marinetti wrote and published *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, first in the newspaper *La gazzetta dell’Emilia* and then again in *Le Figaro* (see fig.1), the French daily newspaper, two weeks later.<sup>5</sup> The publication of this, the first Futurist manifesto, marked the first instance of a shift in the priorities of artists working on the fringes of established fine art practices at the time. This manifesto’s publication was a seminal moment in formalising a European avant-garde movement that was later to have influence in the form of politically-charged expressionism and abstract figuration of artists including Georges Braque, Marcel Duchamp, and Wyndham Lewis. *Le Symbolisme* demonstrated how the print press could be an effective tool in propagating an artist’s political aims (in this case the aims of manifesto author Jean Moréas, who by publishing in *Le Figaro*, Paris’s oldest and France’s most widely circulated newspaper, was attempting to regain some of the authority and relevance that the Symbolist movement had lost with its association to the Decadent

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<sup>4</sup> Moréas, J., *Le Symbolisme* (The Symbolist Manifesto) (Paris: *Le Figaro*, 18 September 1886).

<sup>5</sup> Marinetti, F.T., *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* (Bologna: *La gazzetta dell’Emilia*, 05 February 1909); and as *Manifeste du Futurisme* (Paris: *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909).

literary movements<sup>6</sup>). *Le Symbolisme* attempted to highlight the inconsistencies of Romanticism in the then-artistic and political climate. Moréas wrote:

So Romanticism, having sounded all the tumultuous warning bells of uprising, had its days of glory and battle, lost its force ... any demonstration of art succeeds [in] ... becoming impoverished, in exhausting itself; then, of copy in copy ... the unprompted becomes banal and commonplace.<sup>7</sup>

In the first instance, *Le Symbolisme* was a document of art criticism, whose ultimate suggestion was that the leading movement of the day was suffering from a shrinking of new and original thought. It was a political document, insofar as its author suggested an alternative reality based on his own ideals of what art could mean in the future of the twentieth century. Fundamentally, *Le Symbolisme* sought to address what Moréas saw as stagnation in artistic thought. Though he ultimately created a document that promoted his own style of art above others, arguably he believed in the social benefits of symbolism. The manifesto paved new ground for a new form of artistic criticism, one which was further developed by Marinetti in *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*.

The manifestos presented propositions for the future of art by analysing the political and artistic situations of the period and offering suggestions for change: a new social ideal based on embedding the principles and morals from each movement's perceived 'ideal' of art. *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* defines avant-garde practice in one aspect by concurrently locating itself both within the sphere of the political and the artistic.

The first Futurist manifesto provided the textual aesthetic template that would become common to all subsequent artist manifestos (even if certain manifestos would dispense with one or more of these elements):

- An introductory narrative that forms the basis for the formation of the propositions that follow.
- A series of self-contained statements with suggestions on how an artistic 'revolution' could benefit society, and how this could be achieved.

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<sup>6</sup> Facos, M., *Symbolist Art in Context*, p9 (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Moréas, J., *Le Symbolisme* (The Symbolist Manifesto) (Paris: *Le Figaro*, 18 September 1886).



- A conclusion taking the form of a rhetorical speech act, defining the utopian ideal of the society based on the above propositions.

*The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* became immediately popular. A further sixteen manifestos would be written in Italy under the banner of Futurism<sup>8</sup>, that covered subjects including painting, sculpture, cinema, photography and cooking. Similar ideologies were promoted and manifestos written by Futurist movements in Russia,<sup>9</sup> and Futurism has very similar aesthetic concerns to German Expressionism of the same time period. Like Art Nouveau across Europe, there were regional variations on the seminal Futurist edict. The success of the first Futurist manifesto could also be claimed to be a document of political nationalism during a period of political instability in Italy.<sup>10</sup> Marinetti specifically used heated nationalist rhetoric, presenting the case for the establishment of a new artistic practice and social culture based on the perceived strengths that he identified as national character traits: Italians he saw exhibiting, “*All the strengths / All the weaknesses / of GENIUS.*”<sup>11</sup> The rise of Futurism occurred during a tumultuous social period in Italy, which came to a head with the working classes rioting and striking for seven days in favour of suffrage for the working classes (known as ‘Red Week’) in June 1914. The Government introduced a formal policy of neutrality in August 1914, only to be coerced into joining the Great War alongside the Allied Forces in 1915. This, with worsening economic conditions, led to unworkable conciliation attempts to bring together the political Right and Left. Among such a turbulent backdrop, the passionate nationalism of Futurism – which celebrated Italy and the Italians – became popular rhetoric.

The Futurists were enraptured by the mechanisation of industry and promoted its efficiency as a common aim for the country, “*We affirm that the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new*

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<sup>8</sup> A list of manifestos written under Futurism can be found here:  
<http://futurism.edublogs.org/manifestos>.

<sup>9</sup> Dadswell, S., “Re-approaching Russian Futurism: The Inter-Revolutionary Years, 1908-1915”, *Studies in Slavic Cultures (SISC) vol.IV: Bakhtin*, University of Sheffield, September 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Marinetti founded the Futurist Political Party (Italian: *Partito Politico Futurista*) in 1918. The following year, the party was absorbed into Benito Mussolini’s National Fascist Party. The FPP was anti-democracy. The relationship between Futurism, nationalism and the rise of fascism in Italy during the period is explored further in the paper: Conversi, D., “Art, Nationalism and War: Political Futurism in Italy (1909-1944)”, *Sociology Compass*, 3/1 (2009) online only: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1751-9020](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1751-9020); and in De Maria, L. (ed.), *F.T. Marinetti: Theory and Futurist Invention* (Milan, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Boccioni, U., Carrà, C., Marinetti, F.T., Piatti, U., Russolo, L. (aka Futurist Milanese Cell), *Futurist Synthesis of the War*, 1914, lithographic print.

*beauty: the beauty of speed ... We want to hymn the man at the wheel.*”<sup>12</sup> Marinetti predicted a vision of Italy as a world leader in the new century. His political association with Mussolini, which manifested formally with the merging of Marinetti’s Futurist Political Party and Mussolini’s Fasci Italiani de Combattimento in 1919<sup>13</sup> was based on both figures seeing Italy as necessarily required to intervene in the escalating tensions abroad in order to assert Italy’s power. With frequent proclamations in newspapers quoting their perceived marginalisation from mainstream politics, Marinetti and Mussolini developed a vision of Italy that was unrecognisable in the difficult economic and political period – and one that was becoming increasingly appealing to the Italian public. Both advocated war as the first step in the country’s rehabilitation.<sup>14</sup> Marinetti’s status as a high profile Fascist, affiliated with Mussolini and his party, was later to be a significant factor in the nation’s acceptance of Futurism. Ultimately, Marinetti would ensure that a large section of the Italian population would have access to his series of manifestos because they were printed cheaply and efficiently and in great number, as well as, where possible, in the press.

Using political and social rhetoric, and a mode of expression that was proud, nationalistic, charismatic, and clearly politically defined, Futurism sought a general public, whether arts-literate or not. With the publication and distribution of manifestos, such artistic movements that would otherwise have only had audiences in galleries, performance venues of the avant-garde, and in private, suddenly gained a more public spectatorship. This guaranteed a higher degree of visibility, particularly for artists and collectives whose work stretched beyond the visual arts and into more political spheres.

The political aspirations of the Futurist movement were met, through the combination of their artwork and their rhetoric. According to Peter Bürger, “bourgeois” art reaches the stage of self-reflection via aesthetics.<sup>15</sup> The avant-garde is the antagonist of “bourgeois” art, or art of the institution. Operating firmly within the avant-garde (in the years previous to the Great War, before Fascism became the

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<sup>12</sup> Marinetti, F.T., *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, (Bologna: *La gazzetta dell’Emilia*, 05 February 1909); and as *Manifeste du Futurisme*, (Paris: *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909).

<sup>13</sup> Elazar, D.S., *The making of fascism: class, state, and counter-revolution, Italy 1919-1922*, p.73 (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2001)

<sup>14</sup> Gregor, A.J., *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism*, p.199 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979)

<sup>15</sup> Bürger, P., *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p.48 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

national standard), Marinetti and the Futurists brought a cohesive vision to visual art (painting, sculpture, illustration), design (graphic, interior, structural, industrial design), film, fashion and textiles, music, literature, architecture, and even gastronomy. Italian Futurism was mechanistic, by design. Its works utilised formal and structural aesthetic constraints; it played with perspective and employed bold, primary colours. Futurist painting analysed its subjects in regard to their dynamism – a style that focussed on the properties of shape and that detached itself from Baroque-influenced Romantic, Neoclassical, and Impressionist painting that was popular in western Europe into the twentieth century. Futurism placed its onus on the motor, rather than the man. It was a radical break from the art developed under bourgeois institutionalism. Returning to Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, aestheticism denotes a detachment from the "praxis of life."<sup>16</sup> Efficiency of function, therefore, is the very centre of the modern age.

The Futurist manifestos are not aesthetic objects – they were created to serve a purpose, that is to serve as a directed guideline to a specific way of living (a 'praxis of life', as it were). In formal terms, the manifestos were printed either in newspapers, and therefore were required to fit each newspaper's layout – in single, double, or more columns. Or, were printed full justified on single-sheets of paper, with the title most often declaring: "Manifesto futurista della ..." followed by the subject of that manifesto.<sup>17</sup> The aims with the manifestos were to emancipate art from aestheticism (therefore from the bourgeois) to hand it back to general society (in order for society to empower itself in the face of the coming century – the age of modernism), and return the country's strength.

Futurism's popular decline coincided neatly with the end of the rise of Fascism after the Great War. It is noted that popularity is the neutralisation of the avant-garde,<sup>18</sup> because of the inherent paradox that once an avant-garde moment becomes popular it becomes much like the institution that it was created to undermine. Added to which, Mussolini, in 1923 Prime Minister of Italy, was vocal about his dislike of art beyond individual personal admiration, saying, "I declare that it is far from my idea to encourage anything like a state art. Art belongs to the domain of the individual. The state only has one duty ... to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Italian Futurism," <http://www.italianfuturism.org/manifestos/>. Accessed 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Bürger, P., *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p.80 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

encourage them [artists] from the artistic and national point of view.”<sup>19</sup> For Mussolini, like his Fascist peers among the Axis powers, art, design and architecture were for the benefit of supporting society, rather than leading it. It favoured the concept of ruin value, where Marinetti believed each successive generation should tear their cities down and start afresh. However, despite ineffectual long-term influence, Futurism did operate strongly enough to influence and maintain other avant-garde artists, works and movements that previously may have been marginalised but that now had readymade audiences.

### **The manifesto: Vorticism**

Vorticism, an avant-garde movement with motives similar to Futurism, began to gain traction in the UK during approximately the same period. In 1914, artist Wyndham Lewis led a group of artists away from the design company Omega Workshops after a disagreement with fellow member Roger Fry. Lewis named this breakaway group the Rebel Art Centre. Their aim was to present a new vision of Britain’s future in the twentieth century (in opposition to Fry’s Impressionist-influenced modernist painting). The Rebel Art Centre was first comprised of visual artists Lawrence Atkinson, David Bomberg, Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Edward Wadsworth and Jessica Dismorr. Together they collaborated with a wider range of writers and poets, including Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme and Ford Madox Hueffer (later, Ford). Later in 1914, Lewis began publication of *BLAST* (a journal that lasted two issues, between 1914-1915<sup>20</sup>) (see figs.2 and 3) under the group’s newly-given name: Vorticism. Though the Vorticists closely followed the development of Futurism. From 1910, Marinetti regularly lectured in London, and in 1912 The Sackville Gallery hosted the first UK exhibition of Futurist painting. The exhibition catalogue published three new Futurist manifestos, each declaring Futurism’s inherent innovative nature, above popular movements of the time (including Post-Impressionism and

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<sup>19</sup> Braun, E., *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism*, p.1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, W. (ed.), *BLAST No.1: Review of the Great English Vortex*, (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 02 July 1914).

Lewis, W. (ed.), *BLAST War Number: Review of the Great English Vortex*, London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 15 July 1915).

Cubism).<sup>21</sup> Following a second Futurist exhibition in London at the Doré Galleries in April 1914, and the publication by Marinetti and artist Christopher Wynne Richards Nevinson of the manifesto “Vital English Art: Futurist Manifesto” in *The Observer* newspaper, Marinetti listed his address as the Rebel Art Centre and Nevinson had even included Lewis’ name as signatory. It has been claimed that this act resulted in a schism between Vorticism and the Futurists, with the former group confronting and heckling Marinetti at his public engagements:

[The Vorticists] issued a letter to the daily press dissociating themselves and the Rebel Art Centre from Marinetti’s manifesto...precipitating the emergence of the term ‘Vorticism’ as the group’s name. With his flair for cryptic and abusive language, Lewis vilified Futurism in the pages of *BLAST* as Marinetti’s ‘Automobilism and Nietzsche stunt.’<sup>22</sup>

There were, however, strong similarities between Futurism and Vorticism. Both favoured a modernist, machine-inspired aesthetic, with bold colour, clean lines and distorted perspective in order to evoke dynamism and industry. Both movements celebrated industry and automation as future inevitable. Both believed that their present national political state was staid and archaic and required the vitality of mechanisation. However, Lewis’s politics were not as far right as Marinetti’s fascism. Further, the two differed on the application of technology in society. The Futurist sought to replicate speed and dynamism across all social and artistic fronts, the Vorticist looked upon technology as the perfect tool to capture energy. This difference was manifest in each group’s aesthetic: as Futurism was intended to act as a guide to social change, its works were direct, less abstract than the Vorticists, and were more influenced by industrial design techniques. Ultimately, the differences between the Futurists and the Vorticists were as pronounced as the difference between stillness and speed.

“The Vorticist Manifesto” (see fig.4) (1914) was published as part of *BLAST No.1* and was signed by Lewis, Pound, William Roberts, Helen Saunders, Atkinson, Dismorr and Gaudier-Brzeska. Keeping in line with one of the recurrent features of the artists’ manifesto, the document was written primarily by

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<sup>21</sup> Antliff, M. & Green, V. (eds.), Antliff, M. Gruetzner Robins, A., “‘Reforming With a Pick-Axe’: The First Vorticist Exhibition at the Dore Galleries in 1915”, p.58, *The Vorticists: Manifesto for a Modern World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.63.

the movement's *de facto* leader, Lewis, with assistance from Ezra Pound.<sup>23</sup> The artists' manifesto was defined in one aspect with its creation by a collective, led by a single author whose influence would be supplanted upon public distribution and reception by the consensus of the group. In the case of the radical, avant-garde artists' manifesto movements, the general political strategy (and this was true of Vorticism) was a form of social libertarianism, where communalism is so entrenched that at its most extreme it borders fascism (as in the case of the Futurists). The close-knit artistic communities (specifically here Futurism and Vorticism) were in favour of a state that shared work and resources and was fiercely nationalistic, to the point of exclusion of any foreign element. Vorticism, however, distanced itself from Futurism in a number of ways. Dismissing Futurism as "the latest form of Impressionism",<sup>24</sup> the Vorticists promoted anarchism and individuality based on primal, natural instincts as opposed to Futurism's fascination with automation. Technology was useful to the Vorticists as a means to harness natural energy. Confusingly, descriptions of Vorticism by Vorticists differ: as we will see here, there are many instances throughout the two volumes of *BLAST* where Vorticism is described in contradictory terms.

"The Vorticist Manifesto" lists a series of things that deserve either a "*BLESS*"ing or a "*BLAST*"ing<sup>25</sup> (often in contradiction of one another). This includes blasting England for its sins, its climates, and its canals, but then blessing England for its ships, seafarers, and for its "*cold, magnanimous, delicate, gauche, fanciful, stupid ENGLISHMEN.*"<sup>26</sup> Where Vorticism's primary aim was to advocate the sovereignty of the artist, it also celebrated communalist working ethics. Vorticism promoted the notion that if people were to follow their instincts, there would be no need for the State (i.e. Anarchism). Its ultimate contradiction was in building a community of artists with link-minded political beliefs and creating a collective artists movement with a communal manifesto – when that political belief was based on anarchism and individuality.

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<sup>23</sup> In the case of Futurism, though *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* was written exclusively by Marinetti, the remaining sixteen manifestos were written by a combined total of eighteen Futurists.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, W., et al., 'Long Live the Vortex!', pp11, *BLAST No.1: Review of the Great English Vortex*, (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 02 July 1914).

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, W., et al., 'Great Preliminary Vortex, Manifesto I,' pp24, *BLAST No.1: Review of the Great English Vortex*, (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 02 July 1914).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

What was the purpose of the manifesto in this instance? In previous examples, such as *Le Symbolisme* or *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, the aim was to use the manifesto as a strict guide with rules for everyday living, hence, for example, the Futurists created twenty documents that covered a range of cultural and social pursuits. The Vorticist Manifesto was not just contradictory, its statements and proclamations were vague, and would be difficult to implement (in one example, the Vorticists blast both the “the specialist” and “the amateur.”<sup>27</sup> Later, they bless experts.<sup>28</sup>) With the manifesto, the Vorticists demonstrate practical knowledge of the power of its form. Their language is deliberately provocative and declamatory – it is the only aspect of the written elements of the manifesto that are direct. That the reader is exhorted to either ‘bless’ or ‘blast’ a certain thing does not provide any middle ground. For the Vorticists, things are either good or bad, mediocrity is not an option. This is one of the common elements of the manifesto: that its rhetoric exceeds the technical qualities of the work produced. Martin Puchner points to this fact as a specific feature of Futurist art, saying that: “...[its] painting was less influential than the rhetoric of its manifestos and of its founder.”<sup>29</sup> As described above, a technique of the avant-garde is to strip away the aesthetic elements in order to focus on the content. In the instance of the Vorticists, the function of the content was to provoke. That its statements were contradictory and difficult to follow (in praxis of life) was beside the point. The Vorticists understood that the manifesto was a document that, when presented effectively, was created to undermine the status quo – here, the bourgeois elements of the English art institution (as espoused, for instance, by the Omega Workshops).

All art manifestos are a criticism of an existing artistic culture. Publishing, vocalising or publicising an argument counter to the mainstream, artists creating a manifesto intend to stir debate and potentially court controversy for their unconventional opinions. In cases where artists use manifestos to detach themselves from the popular trends (see either Vorticism or Futurism, both of whom rejected the then-popular trends of Post-Impressionism and Cubism), the manifesto is a political tool; therefore, the manifesto will not contain any reference to a specifically defined visual aesthetic. If we are to take the three core examples above (*Le Symbolisme*, *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, and *Great*

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.25.

<sup>29</sup> Antliff, M. & Klein, S.W., (eds.) Puchner, M., “The World and Stage in *Enemy of the Stars*,” *Vorticism: New Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

*Preliminary Vortex Manifesto I*), the reader is given an insight into the beliefs of modernist artists (and therefore may make assumptions of the kind of aesthetic the artists/authors favour), however none of these documents specifically outline rules to art making – such as form, composition, line, material, and so forth.

With print press publishing becoming easier to access, use and maintain throughout the twentieth century, artists' manifestos continued to be created from the period before the Great War onward.<sup>30</sup> The number of artists' manifestos published diminished as the century progressed, but saw resurgences in the wake of the two World Wars, which gave rise to opportunity for new forms of political visions and democratic free speech in western Europe. For example, the Inventionist Manifesto, by Argentine artist Edgar Bayley (1946), discusses the crisis in representative art, and that visual art needed collaboration with science in order to evolve. The manifesto states:

Art is currently in a dormant phase. There is an energy which man cannot convey. For this reason we call on all those in the world of science who know that art is a fundamental requirement for our species...[the system] is being replaced by another system...Each man will live in an organization integral to his work.<sup>31</sup>

The artists' manifesto has two aims: the first, it conceptualises a new vision of contemporary art; the second, it attempts to coalesce an artistic community. The discussion thus far has largely concerned the political direction of the language of the manifesto, but what of the manifesto as a work of art itself? The following sub-section will examine *BLAST* in further detail, and will argue that it was the first instance where the artistic merit of object of the manifesto and the rhetoric that it promoted were of coequal value.

### **The work of art, mechanically reproduced**

In the manner of the artists' book, *BLAST* was comprised of a series of individual artworks, brought together as a compendium, edited under an overarching theme. However, its form was more similar to a magazine than to a book. *BLAST* was a compilation of grouped or individual images, by a small

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<sup>30</sup> Significant European manifestos in the pre- and inter-war period included the Dada Manifesto (1916), the De Stijl manifesto (1918), the Surrealist manifesto (1924) and Art Concret (1930), to name just four.

<sup>31</sup> Bayley, E., et al. "The Inventionist Manifesto," (1946) published in Danchev, A., *100 Artist' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, (London: Penguin, 2011).



number of contributors, related by the theme of that publication's specific volume. Among these images were what could be described as 'feature' items – longer articles that extrapolated the theme of the issue in more depth, even authored by the publication's editor (in this case, Wyndham Lewis). We can point to differences and evolutions between *BLAST* vol. 1 and *BLAST* vol.2 to support the assertion that each volume was a distinct and discrete artwork and not, in the example of the Futurist manifestos, various aspects of a single theme. It is vital to state at this point that when considering *BLAST*, I am suggesting that it both contained the Vorticist manifestos and functioned in its entirety as the Vorticist manifesto. That it functioned as both a manifesto and an artwork is due to the fact that, by juxtaposing rhetoric with examples of Vorticist art, it was a comprehensive piece that foregrounded, contextualised, and displayed the complete range and variety of Vorticist work. *BLAST* vol.1 opens with the Vorticist manifesto. Through the remainder of the issue, prints of Vorticist artworks are juxtaposed alongside poetry, essays, a stage play, and various polemics. These juxtapositions are deliberate.

The first set of prints is comprised of reproductions of expressionist-influenced paintings by Edward Wadsworth. The first, *Newcastle* (1914), is placed incongruously within the pages of the manifesto. The next four, *Cape of Good Hope* (1914), *A Short Flight* (1914), *March* (1913-14), and *Radiation* (1913-14), come twenty pages later, after the manifesto and seven poems by Ezra Pound ("Salutation the Third," "Momentum Aere, Etc.," "Come My Cantilations," "Before Sleep," "His Vision of a Certain Lady Post Mortem," "Epitaphs," and "Fratres Minores"), and before five more examples of Pound's poetry. Wadsworth's abstract images suggest movement and travel. The greyscale reproductions are coarsely printed but each image presents aurae of light penetrating shades of grey. Pound's poems are booming, first person proclamations, declaring independence – from religion, from organisation, from obligation, and other socially imposed structures. Both of these following the manifesto, present the Vorticist as a bombastic, occasionally pompous, individual whose vision of oneself is above the conforming masses. The next set of prints, by Wyndham Lewis, follows the synopsis of programme for the stage play "Enemy of the Stars", also by Lewis. His images (*Plan of War*, *Timon of Athens*, *Slow Attack*, *Decoration for the Countess of Drogheda's House*, *Portrait of an Englishwoman*, and *The Enemy of the Stars*) though just as abstract as Wadsworth's are given some direction in their titles. They concern the machinations of war and their effect on humanity. Lewis's *Timon of Athens* is telling, in reference to the namesake Shakespeare play. The lead protagonist of

“Enemy of the Stars” is Arghol, a once powerful man who has found his energies reduced as the play begins. Like Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens* (a ‘problem play’) the work’s hero has to face a situation (in this case his loss of strength and worldliness) that is analogous of a contemporary social issue. In this instance, we can surmise that Arghol represents the artist, whose place in the contemporary world is beset by the perceived mediocrity of the bored romantic classicism of Post-Impressionism. Robert Hewison writes that Arghol is “*the pure individual,*” and that the play “*enacts Lewis’s Nietzschean vision of the negative relationship of the artist to society, of the master of the herd,*” and that its aim was for “*Vorticism [to] purge British culture.*”<sup>32</sup> Quoting *Enemy of the Stars*:

Every real individuality and excellence would welcome conditions where there would inevitably be a hierarchy of power and vitality. The Best would then be Free.<sup>33</sup>

The notion of the ‘aura’ is important here. Wadsworth’s images introduced glowing shards of light, pronouncing foregrounded elements in his compositions. We can expand on Lewis’ thoughts of the concept based on Walter Benjamin’s analysis in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

Hewison continues, “*Mechanical reproduction played a key role in shaping and communicating what became known as Vorticism.*”<sup>34</sup> Mechanical reproduction was vital in presenting and distributing the work and individual ethic of manifesto-based movements. However, due to the fact that there were only ever two specifically Vorticist-themed exhibitions, its legacy has been preserved and analysed predominantly through *BLAST*. This includes not just its written works but also in the reproduction of image-based artworks.

Arghol, ‘the pure individual,’ represents what Benjamin describes as “*a pure art*”<sup>35</sup>, a negative theology, in direct reaction to ‘art for art’s sake’. This ‘pure art’, writes Benjamin:

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<sup>32</sup> Antliff, M. & Green, V. (eds.), Hewison, R. p.72, *The Vorticists: Manifesto for a Modern World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011)

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, W., et al., “Enemy of the Stars,” p.51, *BLAST No.1: Review of the Great English Vortex*, (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 02 July 1914).

<sup>34</sup> Antliff, M. & Green, V. (eds.), Hewison, R., p.74, *The Vorticists: Manifesto for a Modern World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011)

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin, W., *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, 2008).

...not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter. An analysis of art in the age of mechanical reproduction must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitic dependence on ritual. To an ever-greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility...the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.<sup>36</sup>

The ‘aura’ of a (non-mechanically reproducible) work of art that Benjamin writes of may wither, however that is the first stage of its transformation across the intangible concept of what Benjamin calls “space-time”. The aura of a (non-mechanically reproducible) work of art may wither and decay when introduced to modes of mechanical reproducibility, but a work of art that is inherently reproducible does not allow for this decay to occur. Mechanical reproduction arrests any ‘decay’, because it strips the work of art of its ‘aura’. In regards to a mechanically reproducible work of art, this act is the first stage in transforming an artwork from “an instrument of magic”<sup>37</sup> to an object that is aware of its own functions. It is in this sense ‘political’. This is relevant to the Vorticists, because it highlights the difference between Vorticism and other manifesto-based movements (such as Futurism). Traditionally, the manifesto is a positional political document. *BLAST* converged the form of the manifesto with an art making practice. Vorticism was a self-reflexive examination of the politicisation of the self. Futurism (as an emblematic example of another manifesto-based practice) attempted to apply a dynamism displayed through art to various aspects of society. Vorticism did not present an external politics of how society should be formed, it addressed the perceived issues with society by interrogating art and its functions. Vorticism applied its examinations to its own works. It was not a representative art; Vorticism was an art of ideology and analogy.

*BLAST* was the manifestation of Vorticism as an ideology: of its art as an analogy of ‘pure’ artistic thought, and of the movement’s political aims. *BLAST* was a self-reflexive work of art, and the Vorticists’ practice has been described as representing “*the belief that force could be transmitted through form (if the form were created by the force)*.”<sup>38</sup> It functioned both as an outward projection of Vorticism, and as an inward analysis of the Vorticists’ idea of what British art in the new century

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Schneidau, H.N., *Modern Philology*, Vol.65, pp.214-227. Published by [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.jstor.org/stable/436470). Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/436470>.

should aim for – that is, to capture the essence of dynamism and apply it to the practice of art making. Therein, *BLAST* reflected the artists' intention back onto themselves and provided the spur for the evolution of Vorticism as a movement. *BLAST* espoused revolution which, coming from manifesto-based movement could be mistaken for social revolution. I suggest that the revolution asserted by the Vorticists was a metaphor, for a form of progress through self-reflexive analysis of the combination of ideology and practice.

The major difference between *BLAST* vol.1 and vol.2 is in the form each issue takes. *BLAST* vol.2: *War Number* is presented more in the style of journal. The manifesto of volume one is replaced by a formal editorial and a series of notices to the public from Wyndham Lewis. These pieces formally address *BLAST*'s audience and present a formal position for Vorticism. Lewis removes the ambiguities and contradictions of volume one. According to *BLAST* vol.2, the Vorticists are pro-war, and place themselves alongside Germany (Britain's wartime enemy) because of a shared intellectual ideal, that they prefer "*the Champions of melodramatic philosophy...on our side,*" rather than the "*Genial and Realistic Barbarians*"<sup>39</sup> – the British. *BLAST* vol.2 is more contingent on text – essays, poetry, short stories, chronicles and reports – than on imagery, its print has been formalised into a newspaper-style two-column format, and the issue has a more firm editorial control than the previous. *BLAST* vol.2, more reliant on opinion and report, is less abstract in displaying its processes than volume one.

Such formal development and direct proclamation through *BLAST* ultimately precipitated the demise of Vorticism. Later, in 1945, Ezra Pound was arrested on charges of treason. The court-appointed psychiatrist deemed Pound unfit to stand trial, saying:

We are dealing now with the end-product of an individual who throughout his lifetime has been highly antagonistic, highly eccentric, the whole world has revolved around him, he has been a querulous person, he has been less and less able to order his life.<sup>40</sup>

This description could easily apply to Vorticism as a whole. Hulme and Gaudier-Brzeska were killed in the Great War. David Bomberg, Lewis, Nevinson and Wadsworth all had negative wartime experiences, and despite the rhetoric (pro-war, pro-German), they could not reconcile this vision with

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<sup>39</sup> Lewis, W. (ed.), "Editorial", p.5, *BLAST War Number: Review of the Great English Vortex*, London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 15 July 1915.

<sup>40</sup> Pound, E., *Letters of Ezra Pound*. Published by The Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/LettersOfEzraPound1907-1941>.

the detached poetic romanticism that they had applied to Vorticism. Only Pound, a committed (literally) Vorticist, avoided direct contact with the war, and though he was affected by the deaths of Hulme and Gaudier-Brzeska, continued until 1920 to contact Lewis about publishing another volume of *BLAST*, and writing in *The Little Review* in 1919 that, “many half-caste reporters [claimed] that Vorticism was dead...Gaudier-Brzeska’s life work may have been stopped by a german [sic] bullet...but Vorticism has not yet had its funeral.”<sup>41</sup> It had, of course. Following the publication of *BLAST* vol.2, the only coming together of Vorticist work appeared in an exhibition at The Penguin Club, New York, in January 1917, in which the only major collector of Vorticist art, John Quinn, showed his acquisitions.

### **Ideology – Manifesto – Artwork: Wallace Berman’s *Semina***

Artists’ manifestos continue to be published. What *BLAST* offered that was unique at the time, and still to this day less common than solely an artists’ manifesto, was an object that could be read trilaterally as manifesto, as a publication and as an artwork. Later in the twentieth century, particularly in the post-war period (which, as noted above, was a time more open to a variety of political visions), we have further examples of works that extended the artistic language that *BLAST* created. These are examples of artworks that took the form of a multidisciplinary publication (that included text work, painting, photography, even sound and film work), that were centred on furthering a specific ideology, and that functioned both as a manifesto for and as a representative example of a culture.

*Semina* was a nine-volume journal created by American artist Wallace Berman and that ran between 1955 and 1964. *Semina Culture* was a collective based in Los Angeles headed Berman, its *de facto* leader, with a fluctuating range of local artists and writers, including Joan Brown, Bruce Connor, Jay DeFeo, Dennis Hopper, Jack Smith and Russel Tamblyn, among others.<sup>42</sup> The journal *Semina* was published, predominantly, as a means to distribute Berman’s own art, which he supported by including the art and writings of the artistic community that he was a part of. *Semina* promoted Berman’s vision of community society, which was based on the legacy of disruption from World War II. Closely related

<sup>41</sup> Hickman, M.B., p.100, *The Geometry of Modernism: The Vorticist Idiom in Lewis, Pound, H.D., and Yeats* (University of Texas Press, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> McKenna, K. and Duncan, M., *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and His Circle* (Los Angeles: Distributed Art Publishers 2005).

to Beat Culture, Semina Culture rejected social organisation and promoted experimentation with drugs and sex, it rejected materialism and promoted esoteric religious interests – in Berman’s own case this was Kabbalistic. Semina Culture sought to foster social liberalisation, libertarianism and non-conformity to social structures. *Semina*, the publication, was published as an attempt to coalesce the artistic community of Northern California at the time. In a major reconsideration of Berman’s work in 2005, comprising a touring exhibition organised by the Santa Monica Museum of Art and that travelled to the Berkeley Art Museum and the Grey Art Gallery, New York University, and an extensive exhibition catalogue, Semina Culture has since become a recognised term for the Beat-influenced visual artists and writers working in Northern California during the late 1950s/1960s.

*Semina* focussed on Wallace Berman as the ‘pure artist’, a model whose work extends beyond the professional aspect and into a culture – an ideal way of living that converges the artistic with the social.

Academic Stephen Fredman writes:

...Semina is the name of a context that encompasses ‘a new way of life’...To enter the Semina context involves dedicating oneself to an emerging way of life – in which aesthetic values become the basis for life decisions – and to the secret mission of overthrowing the mundane reality of the fifties and early sixties.<sup>43</sup>

*Semina* was an unbound, loose-leaf assemblage of poetry, photography and collage, collated and edited by Berman. The journal was distributed by post to approximately three hundred of Berman’s friends and acquaintances. *Semina* had no specific editorial remit, other than to exhort its readers to extricate themselves from the monotonous, structured routine of mainstream living. *Semina* demonstrated this by presenting artworks that addressed the alternative and that promoted unorthodox and marginalised subcultures. Issue five, for example, was dedicated to work inspired by the poet and playwright Antonin Artaud and his travels in Mexico and experimentation with psychedelic drugs in order to experience a direct relationship between nature and spirituality.<sup>44</sup> Issue seven took as its starting point the word ‘Aleph’, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the seed of the entire language. Jewish mysticism, particularly Kabbalah, was an important mode of artistic process for Berman and the ‘Aleph’ became her personal signature. Issue seven (1961) contained only artworks by Wallace

<sup>43</sup> Fredman, S., *Surrealism Meets Kaballah: The Place of Semina in Mid-California Poetry and Art*, (Philadelphia: PEPC Library Digital Edition, [http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Fredman-Stephen\\_Semina.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Fredman-Stephen_Semina.html), 2007).

<sup>44</sup> A full description of these events can be found in Artaud, A., *The Peyote Dance*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1976).

Berman. These works included the series *Radio/Aether*, a series of colour photocopied collages comprised of a hand (Berman's own) holding up an AM/FM transistor radio with a selection of different images copied onto its fascia. The images on the radio's front are largely images of the occult or erotic. Issue seven, authored solely by Berman, was an anomaly in *Semina*'s publication history. I suggest that it presents Berman's own idiosyncratic views of how true exclusion from mainstream can occur, and by what methods this can be achieved.

### *Semina 7*

*Semina 7* contains eighteen artworks, most either photography or poetry, with a line drawing. The envelope that contained the issue was printed with the words: "*ALEPH / a gesture involving / photos, drawings, & text.*" The cover image is a photograph of actress Susan Hayward depicting Barbara Graham (a criminal who had been executed by the state of California in 1955 for murder). Berman (literally) defaced the image, scratching away the actress's face, and printed the letter 'Aleph' over the white space of the photograph. The 'Aleph' appears on almost every page of *Semina 7*. Other images and collages to appear in the issue include portraits of Billie Holliday, Vaslav Nijinsky, Charlie Parker, artists Patricia Jordan and David Meltzer (both friends of Berman), and Berman's young son Tosh. One photograph is a self-portrait. The poetry includes short work by Berman, such as his *Untitled Poem*:

Spurred by what reason  
Do I leave this ark  
For the 'city of degenerate  
Angels' 500 miles south other than to die

His poem "Fairytale for Tosh":

*The wolf is dead      The wolf is dead*  
*The wolf is dead      The wolf is dead*  
*The wolf is dead      The wolf is dead*  
*The wolf is dead      The wolf is dead*  
*The wolf is dead*

*The wolf is dead.*

And written on a postcard address to David Meltzer (see fig.5), the opening lines to John Weiners'

"The Windows of Waltham":





evolution. The Aleph is a sacralising symbol in all of Judaism. It is the seed of all creation (in that it is the first letter of the Torah, coming before even the creation), and as the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, it is the seed of all language. Its symbolism is efficiently described in the short story, *The Aleph*, by Jorge Luis Borges (1949), in which the Aleph is a point from which all of creation can be viewed – all at once, simultaneously. In viewing the Aleph, a viewer’s position is transformed into one of privilege. Its role is to transpose a single point of view into one that displays its various constituent elements. Its form is chaos.

*Semina*’s form as a collage-based assemblage allows the reader to navigate the works on their own terms, albeit with limited guidance. There is neither formal beginning nor end to the publication. It eschews a linear narrative in favour of a exploring an artistic concept through methodological practice. It provides a mode of reception that appeals to the intuitive and is non-deterministic. The key concept that *Semina 7* examines, via presentation of various icons (including the symbol of the Aleph), is transformation through chaos. *Semina 7* dispensed with the traditional form of a manifesto – a document that provides a position from which to assess the contemporaneous social situation – and even dispensed with the form of the tripartite manifesto-publication-artwork – manifested by a document such as *BLAST* – by evolving into an artwork that, first, looked inward – is self-contained, self-reflexive, self-analytical – and, next, that projects outward, providing its readers with a new context by which to judge one’s own place within various social, popular, mainstream and esoteric cultures. In this sense, *Semina* was a cohesive political and cultural artwork than, specifically, a compendium document showcasing the works of visual artists, writers and poets.

From the analyses above, we can begin to define the origins of contemporary Art Writing, as outlined earlier in this thesis. First, we can note the development of the visual artist using words as their medium. Through the example of Vorticism and Ezra Pound, we can highlight how the word was used for its effect, as Scheindau notes, “*The statements [in BLAST] are usually bald, harsh, satiric in a crude and abusive way; they reflect quite obviously the Vorticist delight in insult. Once again we return to the primary impulse to insult, shock, and BLAST.*”<sup>48</sup> Coming out of the manifesto-based collectives and movements, the word was used to announce a presence. We have begun an examination of how the

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<sup>48</sup> Schneidau, H.N., *Modern Philology*, Vol.65, pp.214-227. Published by [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.jstor.org/stable/436470). Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/436470>.

written word, when printed, affects a transformation of a given topic. The mechanisation of production strips away the ‘aura’ of a work of art in order for it to take on extra functions outside of the sphere of art. This enables the work of art to be read in various, new contexts. The creation of new contexts is vital to Art Writing. Art Writing is a gestural impulse that acts as the pivot through which transformation of a given subject can occur. As an art form or art form subject (in chapter two of this thesis we will examine the place of Art Writing in the contemporary art sector), contemporary Art Writing can utilise a variety of media in order to affect the transformation of artistic concept. In order to examine how such transformation can occur, and what constitutes ‘transformation’, we can highlight specific historic examples that acted as a precursor and direct influence to contemporary Art Writing’s aims and functions.

#### **Using collage to examine contexts and to create new contexts: *Aspen***

For Berman, collage was a useful method of examining the various influences on his own work. Like in Borges’ “The Aleph”, if a person is able to see, at once, a thing and all its constituent and contingent aspects, that person is put into a position of privilege – a position that is more ‘pure’ and unfettered by structures learned and embedded through socialisation. In order to create a new context for one’s own work, based on one’s own history and belief system, a person must self-reflexively analyse their own processes. Personal, artistic evolution will occur once a person has the evidence of this analysis before them. In Berman’s case, this analysis was *Semina*, particularly *Semina 7*, as it contained no-one’s work but his own. The other issues of *Semina* allowed Berman the privilege of examining his work among that of his peers and those people within his artistic community – the context in which up to that point he had been making work.<sup>49</sup> I argue that the ultimate aim for *Semina* was to induce in its readers the same ongoing process of self-reflexive analysis of methodology that Berman was undertaking. In this, *Semina* sought to instigate an evolution in its readers: to reach a state of ‘pure’ artistry.

The concept of using juxtapositions to create new contexts for art to be read within continued following the publication of the final issue of *Semina*. The first issue of *Aspen* magazine was published in 1965, ceasing publication in 1971 after issue ten. Like *Semina*, *Aspen* was an assemblage of unbound, loose-

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<sup>49</sup> The notable exception is *Semina 3*, which contained only a single work, *Peyote Poem* (1958), by Michael McClure, a poem transcribed onto a scroll.

leaf artworks, objects and artefacts, packed in box and mailed to subscribers. Like *Semina*, which was created around Wallace Berman's Northern Californian community of friends, peers and acquaintances, *Aspen* was conceived to celebrate the culture of its North namesake North American town. Its publisher, Phyllis Johnson, wrote in the editorial to issue one:

The articles will be as surprising as the format, ranging from beautiful picture stories on nature and sports to the more esoteric subjects of art, humanistic studies, design, underground movies, music (always with a record), poetry, dance, architecture, gourmet dining. In other words, all the civilised pleasures of modern living, based on the Greek idea of the "whole man" as exemplified by what goes on in Aspen, Colorado.<sup>50</sup>

*Aspen's* unique selling point was that its form allowed it to function as:

...a storehouse, a cache, a ship laden with stores,<sup>51</sup>

reverting back to the original meaning of the word 'magazine'.<sup>52</sup> The letter, included with issue one, makes repeated note of the fact that *Aspen* was distributed in a box. Where *Semina* used its form as a manifest characteristic of its ideology, *Aspen* defined itself by its form. Johnson called *Aspen* "*the first three-dimensional magazine*."<sup>53</sup>

*Aspen* contained essays, written articles, music and spoken work issued on EP flexi-discs, and artists' moving image on a reel of super-8mm film. Further, its content was not constrained only to the visual arts and literature, but included music, architecture, sport and cookery, for example. The magazine was closely tied to the cultural development of Aspen and its original remit showcased the town as "an Athens of the mountains."<sup>54</sup> Issues one and two focussed on the town itself; readers are given guided tours around the domestic and professional lives of notable Aspen residents, such as architect Frederic Benedict in issue one, which also included extracts from extracts from thirteen papers presented at the

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50 Johnson, P., "A Letter from Phyllis Johnson", *Aspen no.1* (1965).

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 King, E., "A Portrait of Aspen, the original magazine in a box," *032c*, issue #6, Winter 2003-04.

15th annual Aspen Design Conference,<sup>55</sup> and a jazz recording by Peanuts Hucko, Yank Lawson, Clancy Hayes, Lou Stein, Lou McGarrity, and Morey Field, taped at the 1964 Aspen Jazz Party.<sup>56</sup>

Issues three to nine marked a definitive shift in focus. For these issues, *Aspen* functioned as a time capsule, archiving specific moments and movements in the late 1960s Conceptual artistic avant-garde. For each volume, a guest editor and art director was appointed. Together they would devise the concept for the issue and design the box. Successive issues included The Pop Art Issue, edited and designed by Andy Warhol and David Dalton; The McLuhan Issue, edited and designed by Quentin Fiore, which took as its point of departure the work of the Canadian media theorist; The Minimalist Issue, edited and designed as a museum in a box (a white cube) by Brian O’Doherty, David Dalton and Lynn Letterman; The Performance Art Issue, by Jon Hendricks; The British Issue, by Mario Amaya and John Kosh; The Fluxus Issue, by Dan Graham and George Maciunas; and The Psychedelic Issue, by Angus and Hetty MacLise. The most significant aspect of this fluctuating editorial and design policy is that it allowed the magazine to continually re-evaluate its purpose, message and tone in order to find the most effective method of expression.

We can take the content of Issue 3, The Pop Art Issue (dated December 1966) as representative of *Aspen* as a whole. I have selected this issue because its focus is on a visual artistic movement, but that has its reach in a variety of media. Its box, designed by Andy Warhol and David Dalton as an imitation of a laundry detergent box, is hinged. On the bottom of the box, on the interior, is a printed advertisement for Verve Records. The first item, titled *Music, Man, That’s Where It’s At*, is a folder (designed as a press kit for a rock and roll band) enclosing the next four items: an article about making rock and roll music, with images, by The Velvet Underground’s Lou Reed; an analysis of rock and roll as an art form by *New York Times* critic Robert Shelton; a walkthrough of a live rock and roll gig, by writer and Aspen resident Bob Chamberlain; and audio recordings by Peter Walker and John Cale. The next item is an interview by Bob Chamberlain with Chuck and Lydia Rand, travellers who built their own home just outside of Aspen. The next item is comprised of twelve reproductions of artworks held by collector Thomas Powers, with comments by the Powers and each artist on their work. The artists included are James Rosenquist, Bridget Riley, Gerald Laing, Roy Lichtenstein, Kenneth Noland, Andy

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<sup>55</sup> “Configurations of the New World”, *Aspen no.1* (1965).

<sup>56</sup> “Two Sides of Jazz”, *Aspen no.1* (1965).

Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Larry Poons, Jasper Johns, Willem de Kooning, Charles Hinman and Ernest Trova. Article nine is two flipbooks showing excerpts from the films *Buzzards Over Baghdad* (1951, Jack Smith) and *Kiss* (1963, Andy Warhol). The next article presents excerpts from fourteen papers given at a conference investigating LSD, held at the University of California, Berkeley (June 13-18, 1966). The final item was a single-issue newspaper, “The Plastic Exploding Inevitable”, by The Warhol Factory. The remaining items were commercial advertisements, including for music stores and for subscription to *Aspen*.

At the heart of *Aspen* magazine was the desire to recollect fragments of contemporary art and culture. It was a time capsule – contemporaneous cultural documents that could be preserved in their packaging. With the benefit of retrospective analysis, we can ask questions around the authenticity of the magazine in its contemporaneous situation. Arguably, *Aspen* intended to project itself as representative of the major visual artistic movements of its day, largely Conceptual Art movements. Phyllis Johnson is quoted to have said, “*Aspen should be a time capsule of a certain period, point of view, or person.*”<sup>57</sup> With the foresight to think about how these movements might be considered to future audiences, the magazine names what it believes to be the spectacles of the present. Frederic Jameson writes on evoking the past:

The list is not a list of facts or historical realities (although its items are not invented and are in some sense ‘authentic’), but rather a list of stereotypes, of ideas of facts and historical realities. It suggests several fundamental questions. First of all, did the ‘period’ see itself this way?<sup>58</sup>

Jameson names the phenomenon (in his writing of 1980s Hollywood film noir and its aesthetic relationship to the origins of film noir in the 1950s) ‘nostalgia for the present’. Though he references a “*paradoxical formulation [where] markers of contemporaneity are obscured, giving rise to the illusion that [the film] is of the 1940s,*”<sup>59</sup> a fundamental aspect of his theory can be applied to *Aspen* magazine. *Aspen* created the historical period in which future audiences will read these works. Contemporary

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<sup>57</sup> DiLeo, J.R., p.91, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013). This quote does not appear in *Aspen* magazine.

<sup>58</sup> Jameson, F., p.279, “Nostalgia for the Present”, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> Buchanan, I., “Nostalgia for the present”, *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

readers must question its authenticity as truly representative. Yet a paradox remains: it is a primary source of information, and therefore reliable to a large extent. As a time capsule and an historical object its function is to restore the moment that it canonises. As a time capsule (however reliable), *Aspen* is a living archive of aspects of what Walter Benjamin describes as the ‘just-past’,<sup>60</sup> specifically in the concept of resuscitating historical moments – those objects of the past that contain the essence of that time period and that have the latent potential to restore that moment for future generations.

If we return, for a moment, to Art Writing and my assertion that its invocation is a gestural impulse that affects a transformation of the artwork to having different or extra functions, it means that the work of Art Writing is only determined in the moment of its display. Therefore, it would be impossible to project any interrogative analysis onto it without relying on nostalgia for its predecessors. Thorough analysis of a work of Art Writing (and, indeed, *Aspen* magazine) would only be able to be made by a viewer- or readership in attendant at the moment of its creation or initial publication. The object that is *Aspen* magazine contains precisely that moment of transformation, and its reading in a contemporary context is significantly different than its reading in its contemporaneous situation – a difficult task, and one that presents contemporary readers with a riddle created by the passing of time; where the reading of a work of Art Writing is reliant on the analysis of its predecessors, the critical reading of *Aspen* magazine is reliant on the analysis and the situation in the creation of all its constituent works. Any interrogation of contemporary Art Writing must be aware of a burden on its history. *Aspen* magazine was reconsidered recently in a retrospective exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery, London (September 2012 – March 2013) (see fig.6). The exhibition comprised a display of all the documents contained in every issue of *Aspen* sealed in vitrines. (Whitechapel Gallery has been closely aligned to the growth of Art Writing in the U.K., as we will explore further in chapter two. This exhibition took place in Whitechapel Gallery’s Archive Gallery. The curators did not distinguish the fact that the *Aspen* exhibition had any correlation to the gallery’s Art Writing programmes, though as we will explore later, the practice of Art Writing permeates through all Whitechapel Gallery’s interpretive programmes.)

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<sup>60</sup>Benjamin, W., *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002).

As a physical object, *Aspen* lends itself to retrospective analysis. However, even in its reconsideration of Asian art in issue ten, the critical discourse it displays is light and the magazine attempts inquiry into the subject by juxtaposition alone. If *Aspen* magazine represented a core concept of Conceptual Art,<sup>61</sup> it was the notion that Conceptual Art is a ‘pure idea’, and, first, a new way of encountering the art object, and, secondly, a means of distributing information in a way that was direct and ‘pure’ in itself.<sup>62</sup> It was an object of contemporaneous review and not an object that prompted attempted analysis or examination. In presenting a series of thematically related works, it proposed that the reader instigate their own analysis. Its primary concern was with form and reinvented itself in every instance accordingly. If we take Sol Lewitt’s *Sentences on Contemporary Art* (1969) – a series of sentences that describe tendencies of Conceptual Art – as a guide, we learn that the ideal work of Conceptual Art is a unique idea and a standalone object (or series of objects). There is no secondary text, extending beyond its creator; as Lewitt writes: “*The artist’s will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion.*”<sup>63</sup>

*Semina* was a cultural artefact, an artwork that took the form of a magazine. It collected together a variety of art forms where *Aspen*, though covering different cultural disciplines could be defined as ‘multimedia’ – the latter showcased work across a variety of art forms as well as in a variety of media, distributing, for example, LPs and film reels. As a showcase for work of a range of artists and writers of the period, *Aspen*’s position was closer to exhibition than magazine presentation. The box at once displayed artwork and was itself a discrete artwork. As we will continue to examine of Art Writing, its current form has developed to become an umbrella term for the concurrent or juxtaposed display of a series of multidisciplinary works – which may include film, performance, poetry, spoken word, sculpture and installation, for example.

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<sup>61</sup> Lucy Lippard famously wrote on how Conceptual Art as a ‘pure’ idea lasted only between 1966-1972, almost the precise publication period of *Aspen* magazine. Lippard, L.R., *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966-1972*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>62</sup> Jan Verwoet writes how Conceptual Art aimed to emancipate art from Modernism and the idea that appreciation of art relied on “*the senseless custom of having to initiate oneself into hermetic codes of connoisseurship and taste.*” Verwoet, J. “Secret Society: Cracking the codes of Conceptual art”, *Frieze*, issue 124, June-August 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Lewitt, S., “Sentences on Contemporary Art,” *Art-Language*, vol.1, no.1, 1969.

As noted throughout this thesis so far, self-reflexivity (taken as tactical evaluation of the art object) has been key to the publications described – *BLAST*, *Semina* and *Aspen*. Contemporary Art Writing follows the same convention – it is a practice in constant flux. A significant proportion of Art Writing occurs ephemerally, as events. This can be seen as a deliberate tactic to distance itself from conforming to a set paradigm (its efficiency in achieving is contingent on the success of the work itself). The work of Art Writing necessarily requires precursors, and these can be found in, for one, Conceptual Art. A major trope in the legacy of Conceptual Art (both in terms of praxis and exhibition) is that it displays its own devices in order to expose the frailties of its own manifestation.<sup>64</sup> Art Writing continually examines its own methodologies. Like the Conceptual Art object, Art Writing is the product of the interrogation of a process. Similarly, Conceptual Art’s evaluative processes are undertaken during its of creation, therefore its objects are ‘complete’ or ‘pure’ ideas. As Lewitt demonstrates in the quotation above, the process of creation supersedes even the artist’s own will. To take this a step further, the artist must be at once aware of the interpretive elements that can be projected onto the artwork (individually and *in situ* in exhibition), and yet must resist from acknowledging these potential elements within the object’s formal aesthetics. The Conceptual Art work is both against interpretation (of itself, its influences and forebears) and is a mode of its own interpretation. It is a model that represents a form of methodology.

### **The (traditional) magazine as art object**

*Semina* and *Aspen* came from a North American culture that lionised publishing as a mode of free expression. Critic and writer Benjamin Buchloh noted, in regards to visual art, that in Germany, during the same time period as *Aspen*, “there was no real magazine culture”.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> In the essay “Exhibition Rhetorics: Material speech and utter sense,” Bruce W. Ferguson states that “*Exhibitions...are narratives which use art objects as elements in institutionalized stories...The ‘voices’ heard within exhibitions...constitute a highly observable politics, with representations as their currency...ideologies and their attendant social agendas are most hidden within imagistic forms.*” The ideas discussed in this essay explain that recent exhibition practices have tended to display their exhibitiv processes in order to analyse the complex expressions of institutions. Ferguson, B. “Exhibition Rhetorics: Material speech and utter sense,” Greenberg, R., Nairne, S., Ferguson, B.W., (eds.) *Thinking About Exhibitions*, (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> Moore, A.W., *Talk: “Interfunktion” and “Avalanche” discussed at MoMA panel, post.thing.net*, <http://post.thing.net/node/1206>, December 2006. [Accessed December 2012.] This text references the event *Experimental Magazines and International Avant-Gardes, 1945-1975* held at Museum of Modern Art, New York, 11 December 2006.



Buchloh was the co-editor of *Interfunktionen*, a German publication that ran between 1968-1975. The magazine was started by Friedrich (Fritz) Heubach after he, Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell and others marched on Documenta 4 in 1968 to protest against the perceived ‘insularity’ of the exhibition. In his introduction to issue one of *Interfunktionen*, Heubach warned of restrictive criteria of institutions, such as Documenta, impeding the research and experimentation of art.<sup>66</sup> Inspired by Vostell’s magazine *Decollage* (1962) and collaboration with French anthropologist Michael Oppitz, Buchloh explains the conceptualisation of *Interfunktionen* as:

[aiming] at the transformation of visual arts practice into a linguistic practice, to turn objects into text...Conceptual Art was the only legitimate strategy of the late 1960s.<sup>67</sup>

Alan W. Moore notes how Buchloh saw:

...the idea of distribution of art outside the market – a ‘fantasy’ of the 1970s – and also popular dissemination of art ideas – ‘one of the great delusions of the moment of conceptualism’ – he believed that ‘making a magazine constructed a new space’.<sup>68</sup>

Moore also notes that:

*Interfunktionen* did not publish commentary or critical writing.<sup>69</sup>

Like *Semina* and *Aspen*, *Interfunktionen* was comprised of a series of objects and documents. Unlike both, *Interfunktionen* was bound (cheaply, by glue) yet did include foldouts and “loose enclosures”.<sup>70</sup> The content of issue one included photo documentation of event activism (such as on-site protests, and the reprinting of placards) undertaken during Documenta 4, by artists including Jörg Immendorf, Chris Reinecke, Wolf Vostell and Fritz Heubach, among others. The issue also featured a ‘Manifestoes’ [sic] section, with alternative flyers produced for visitors to Documenta 4. Reserved for limited edition prints of the magazine, a special section entitled ‘The Postcard Affair’ contained prints banned from the official Documenta bookstore, including works by Vostell and K.P. Brehmer.

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<sup>66</sup> With no funds allocated for the creation of new work, Documenta 4 was criticised for its focus on commercial art.

<sup>67</sup> Moore, A.W., *Talk: “Interfunktion” and “Avalanche” discussed at MoMA panel*, *post.thing.net*, <http://post.thing.net/node/1206>, December 2006. [Accessed December 2012.]

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Mehring, C., “Continental Schrift,” *Artforum*, May 2004.

Buchloh as stated that the aim of the magazine was to turn a visual arts practice into a linguistic practice<sup>71</sup>, and *Interfunktionen* was an attempt at deconstructing the signs and signifiers of the institutional visual arts. Its won language was the written word, interrogating contemporary visual art as a structural form. Largely, *Interfunktionen* published documentation of works of art undertaken in the public realm and written works that responded to art and activism. Examples include works by Keith Arnatt (*I'm a Real Artist* [1969-72], and *Self-Burial* [1969]), Marcel Broodthaers (*La Pluie [projet pour un texte]* [1969]), a series of Gilbert & George Living Sculpture performances from the early 1970s, and a range of Joseph Beuys performances, including *Celtic +---* (1971) and *Taff-Rhine* (1970). If, in the case of any secondary text, any work that was under consideration for the magazine, Heubach insisted that it fit the magazine's specific print layout without requiring the original artwork to be manipulated in any form in order to maintain the magazine's integrity as a site of exhibition and display. As the magazine developed, it would begin to incorporate philosophical writings, in a section entitled 'Theory' (beginning in issue three), and open-submission responses to art-world politics, in a section entitled 'Information'.<sup>72</sup> Each document within the magazine functioned as a discrete artwork, as well as acting toward a component toward an overall editorial direction.

To understand the editorial policy, we can look at the quotation above, the notion that Conceptual Art “was the only legitimate strategy of the 1960s.” Issue one included a postcard by Dieter Ruckhaberle with the slogan: “What’s left to do for artists of a nation that wages a criminal war such as the one in Vietnam...other than to make Minimal Art?” This notion was extended throughout the magazine. Heubach was heavily influenced by post-structuralist theory and *Interfunktionen* was a demonstration of this interest. The magazine presented a diverse range of artist-activist practices present in Germany at the time. Its content was specifically multifaceted, incorporating a variety of media and artists. Heubach says:

*Interfunktionen* – that meant multimedia, audio and visual theater, and so forth. ‘Inter’ was in. Today one would call it ‘global,’ back then ‘inter’ was enough,<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Moore, A.W., *Talk: “Interfunktion” and “Avalanche” discussed at MoMA panel, post.thing.net*, <http://post.thing.net/node/1206>, December 2006. [Accessed December 2012.]

<sup>72</sup> Mehring, C., “Continental Schrift,” *Artforum*, May 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

The magazine had to function in one aspect as an analysis of contemporaneous practices. Through Heubach's editorial, it achieved this by publishing distinct art objects and documents that represented a particular mode of artistic thought. Its aim was not to act as a manifesto or self-contained artwork (as *Semina*), nor was it to document the movements of the period (as *Aspen*). It sought to expose the workings of established visual artistic practice by using representative examples of visual art that were ironic, subversive, analytical and critical. When Buchloh says that Conceptual Art was the only legitimate strategy of the period, and when Ruckhaberle writes of the importance of Minimalism, they are saying that in order to expose the hypocrisies of the system one must break the system down into its component elements and identify the multiplicities of meaning behind the established mainstream art-world displays. *Interfunktionen* was, in essence, examining its own processes as contemporary art and translating these processes into linguistic form, in this case, a perlocutionary speech act, defined as a mode of linguistic performance that has the effect of impressing, convincing or persuading a particular mode of thought onto the receiver.<sup>74</sup> We will return to this theme, in particular regard to exhibition dynamics, in chapter three of this thesis. Using linguistic phrases (performative or written) is key in understanding how language can contribute to the mainstream adoption of contemporary visual art, and this is a fundamental proposition of contemporary Art Writing. In order to introduce this for further investigation, we must look at the development of *Interfunktionen* during its period of publication.

Fritz Heubach says:

...the acceptance of contributions was never guided by the notion of presenting...a representative picture of what was going on in art at that period... [though] there was a mounting pressure to make the journal serve a representation function...*ars longa, vita brevis*.<sup>75</sup>

Heubach goes on to say that he considers Buchloh's "*personalized explanation attempts in the context of art obsolete*,"<sup>76</sup> and that his criticality was based on attempts at psychopathology. Personal attacks aside, this points to the fact that, under Heubach's editorship, *Interfunktionen* had concurrent functions as a device for display and presentation of artists' works and as a device for extrapolating the

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<sup>74</sup> Austin, J.L., p.118, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>75</sup> Heubach, F.W., Pelzer, B., Moure, G., *Behind the Facts*, pp51–52, (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2004).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

contemporaneous moment of art and activism. Under Buchloh, *Interfunktionen* took on an extra function as an organ for critical analysis. This can be clarified with examples from the magazine that include the streamlining of Heubach's multidisciplinary approach with Buchloh's introduction of themed issues, and, in a specific example, of the publication of a text by Dan Graham exploring the concept of book as art object. A more direct (and controversial) example is Buchloh's inclusion of Anselm Kiefer's *Occupations (Besetzung)* (1969) series of photographs (in a 1975 issue), which shows the artist performing the Nazi salute before a series of classical European monuments. This critical work was a marked departure from Heubach's artwork documentations and commissions.

These departures indicate toward a more analytical shift in editorial thinking, and it may not be surprising that under Buchloh's editorship *Interfunktionen* sustained only two further issues (1973-1975) (in a deal made between Heubach and Buchloh, the latter agreed to publish at least three issues after Heubach). In focussing on the more critical and analytical forms of address, display and presentation, Buchloh turned the focus of analysis onto the magazine itself. As a magazine documenting art and activism, *Interfunktionen* was outward looking, under Buchloh its focus turned inward. The magazine's editorial stance could not sustain distribution of artworks, as under Heubach's editorship, and maintain the same level of social critique. *Interfunktionen* went from being magazine of art to a magazine that served art. Buchloh could not sustain the magazine's own political/artistic stance. When Buchloh speak of "*the popular dissemination of art ideas – 'one of the great delusions of the moment of conceptualism'*", he may be incorrect in focussing too directly onto the mode of presentation and distribution and should instead look to what is being presented and distributed – in this instance 'art ideas'. Heubach successfully managed to establish a mode of presentation and distribution for these art ideas, in artworks themselves. Says Heubach:

We didn't sit down to create a magazine. It developed out of the context... We thought, we'll make a documentation.<sup>77</sup>

Like *Semina* and *Aspen*, the major characteristic of form was its diversity and multidisciplinary: a collage of distinct artworks, curated together under a specific editorial remit, resulting in the fashioning of a new context. *Interfunktionen*'s shift in critical focus was a deliberate tactic to distance political interpretation of art away from the object and toward wider social commentary. The earlier iterations of

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Mehring, C., "Continental Schrift," *Artforum*, May 2004.

*Intefunktionen* explored the politicisation of the artist through their works. It examined self-reflexivity not just of its own medium through the works that it presented and contextualised together. It demonstrated politicisation of the self, rather than imposing a political argument onto the artwork. This had a manifest influence on Art Writing, but first it needed the effects of postmodernism and literature to act as its transformative moment.

### **The riddle of the artwork**

Maria Fusco was the founding Director of the now-defunct MFA Art Writing course at Goldsmiths (2008-2013). She was the founding editor of *The Happy Hypocrite* (2008-present), an experimental journal “for and about art writing.” In a 2009 talk from the series *Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism*,<sup>78</sup> she describes her Art Writing practice as reimagining the art object as sharing ontological qualities with the riddle, and that to achieve precision when writing in relation to the art object the aim is:

...to elicit, to unlock, to induce its essential obscurity with essential obscurity. Prospecting Maurice Blanchot’s observations on the image as a cadaver into a potential ‘stylus’ for the production of contemporary art criticism.<sup>79</sup>

Demonstrated in this quotation is the notion that the work of Art Writing specifically resists direct explication, in a manner similar to Fritz Heubach under his editorship of *Interfunktionen*. Both used original artworks in new contexts and juxtapositions in order to transform a single editorial position into a variety of modes of examination of a given topic. The criticality they both espouse was embedded in the art object (usually a text) and not in the discourse that surrounds it. The work of Art Writing, therefore, needs to motivate its audience to draw out this criticality, to capture its moments of self-reflexivity. However, this task is not made any easier by the fact, as Fusco highlights in the above quotation, that the work of Art Writing is deliberately obfuscatory. It wraps itself in modes of

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<sup>78</sup> Organised by *Fillip* and Artspeak at Emily Carr University, Vancouver, Canada, February 27–28 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Fusco, M., “Say Who I Am: Or a Broad Private Wink,” *Fillip*, July 2009, podcast, <http://fillip.ca/podcast/2009-07-31>.

established modes of interpretation as a tactic designed to meet a visual arts-literate audience.<sup>80</sup> An example of this can be found in Art Writing's preoccupation with the 'name'.

In an interview with artist and musician Cosey Fanni Tutti by Maria Fusco,<sup>81</sup> she repeatedly returns to questions around Tutti's stage name, and her public persona. Examples include:

I'm sure you're really fed up with talking about your name, but...

Are you known by more than one name now?

Your name's not quite a 'brand' but it does have a separate life from yourself.

Paraphrasing a quote from *Finnegan's Wake* Joyce writes, "Who gave you that numb?" with the idea of being struck by your own name...

Did you feel Cosey was numbing in a good way, rather than numbing in a bad way?

Do you think that names make you freer? I'm obsessed by class you know, an important aspect of what we're discussing is your nomenclature...Cosey doesn't exist outside of language...

I have a quote for you from Elaine Showalter..."A woman is a producer of textual meaning and in that including the psycho-dynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problem of female language,"...

I love [your] track titles – *Apocalipzo*, *Spectrofeelya*, *Fantasteek*...

Presets aren't precise enough.

The notion of questioning definitions of linguistic performances is a theme throughout Maria Fusco's Art Writing practice. As the founder of two of the most prominent organs of Art Writing in the U.K., she has to a large extent defined the boundaries in which Art Writing operates. The title of the journal for and about Art Writing, 'The Happy Hypocrite,' is taken from an 1897 fable by Max Beerbohm, in which a man tricks a woman into marriage by wearing a mask and changing his name, from Lord George Hell to Lord George Heaven.<sup>82</sup> This is an early precursor to Neoist thinking, a movement discussed below that had a direct and manifest influence on Art Writing, which is based on ideas of pseudonym, shared identity, contradictions and authorial fakery.

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<sup>80</sup> It is important that the audience is visual arts literate. As we will explore in chapter two of this thesis, Art Writing is a narrow field that promotes itself to audiences already knowledgeable in visual art.

<sup>81</sup> "Maria Fusco in conversation with Cosey Fanni Tutti," *The Happy Hypocrite, volume 1: Linguistic Hardcore*, (London: Book Works, 2008).

<sup>82</sup> Beerbohm, M., *The Happy Hypocrite: A Fairy Tale for Tired Men* (1897), <https://archive.org/details/happyhypocritea00beergoog>. Accessed December 2012.

In volume five of *The Happy Hypocrite* (2010), revealingly subtitled “What Am I?”, (see fig.7) Maria Fusco interviews Chris Kraus.<sup>83</sup> During the interview, Fusco cites the essay “Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity”<sup>84</sup> by author and poet Daniel Tiffany as useful in “thinking about how to write objects”.<sup>85</sup> In this essay, Tiffany writes of the “*significance of lyrical poetry’s role in coaxing an object to speak in riddles*”; the riddle as a paradigmatic structure at once conceals itself while exhorting the reader to give it a name, what Tiffany calls the object’s “*verbal identity*.”<sup>86</sup> The riddle presents us with an image of itself that it itself has deformed. Stephen Muecke, writing a year later in *parallax*, brings a similar analysis to fictocritical writing,<sup>87</sup> a form of experimental writing that merges theory and social critique into a fictitious story. He attributes this trend of deforming an artwork’s visual identity to the convergence and “*significant influence of new post-structuralist philosophies and post-modern literary experiments*,”<sup>88</sup> as we have seen in the self-reflexive politicised work of Fritz Heubach’s *Interfunktionen*, and as we will now see in Neoist and transgressive literature. Muecke also responds to Gilles Deleuze, who claimed that “*criticism uses concepts and fiction uses precepts...[they] chase each other around successively masking and unmasking*.”<sup>89</sup> This form of writing is both commentary and analysis; it is a form of metafiction that exposes its own literary devices. Like the work of Conceptual Art, its processes are on display to the audience, yet this form of metafiction deliberately deforms its processes to create a multi-layered art object.

Precise definitions of Neoism are disputed; naturally, for a movement that is based on experimentation with identity. A precursor of Maria Fusco’s *The Happy Hypocrite* was the magazine *SMILE*, launched in London in 1984 by writer and artist Stewart Home. *SMILE* was closely affiliate with the Neoist movement. This cultural network attempted to defy convention and order with the use of shared pseudonyms and identities. They created art works that showed clear evidence of paradox and

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<sup>83</sup> “Chris Kraus and Maria Fusco talk about ‘What Am I?’” *The Happy Hypocrite, volume 5: What Am I?*, (London: Book Works, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Tiffany, D., “Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity,” *Critical Inquiry*, volume 28, no.1, Autumn 2001.

<sup>85</sup> “Chris Kraus and Maria Fusco talk about ‘What Am I?’” *The Happy Hypocrite, volume 5: What Am I?*, (London: Book Works, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Tiffany, D., “Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity,” *Critical Inquiry*, volume 28, no.1, Autumn 2001.

<sup>87</sup> Muecke, S., “The Fall: Fictocritical Writing,” *parallax*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp.108-112, 2002.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Muecke, S., “The Fall: Fictocritical Writing,” *parallax*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp.108-112, 2002.

plagiarism, and that contained multiple and contradictory definitions of the work itself. The titles highlighted the authors' interests in parody. *SMILE* was a spoof of *FILE*, a magazine of Mail Art (itself a descendent of *Semina*) published by the Canadian art group General Idea between 1972 and 1974, whose members were Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson (co-founder of Printed Matter, Inc., who we will return to in chapter two of this thesis as a major proponent of Art Writing in North America). *FILE* itself was a play on the magazine *LIFE*, which was also parodied by magazines *VILE* and *BILE*. *SMILE* took further titles, including *Limes*, *Miles*, *Emils*, *Snarl*, *Slime*, *Smirk*, *C-Nile*, *Lisme*, and *iMmortal LIES*. This deliberate misnaming was a major aspect of Neosim. Home believed that every magazine should be called *SMILE*, and though only producing eleven copies of his own, other versions appeared across Europe and North America and was continued to be published in various forms until 2008. *SMILE*'s major publishers and contributors were Monty Catsin and Karen Eliot, pseudonyms adopted by Neoists. This examination-through-parody is the most immediate and apparent influence on *The Happy Hypocrite*. In the more detailed examination of contemporary Art Writing practice that I will undertake in chapter two of this thesis, I will return to the concept that continuous self-reflexive analysis, masking and unmasking, ultimately undermines the stability of the art object. That itself is a feature of avant-garde practice: in order for it to continually antagonise the mainstream and to not be accepted into it, it must resist stability. Vitality, though, it faces becoming a parody of itself.

Transgressive literature, a wider form of postmodernist writing, involves, in one aspect, writing fiction that self-consciously reflects on itself.<sup>90</sup> Examination of society-at-large is often conducted by an examination of the self within society. The self, in works of transgressive literature, is dystopian and engages in 'antisocial' acts, which may include alcoholism, excessive drug use, extreme sex (perhaps even illegal sexual acts), violence and murder. Transgressive literature expands on Neoist thinking by being iconoclastic, rejecting any conventional (artistic or social) morality. Its morality celebrates plagiarism and fakery, but also profanity and extreme violence, drug use and sex. In an interview with

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<sup>90</sup> Transgressive fiction as it appeared within postmodern literary theory includes novels such as *Crash* (1973) by J.G. Ballard, *The Adult Life of Toulouse-Lautrec* (1978) by Kathy Acker, and *Factotum* (1975) by Charles Bukowski. More modern examples include *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis, *Fight Club* (1996) by Chuck Palahniuk, and *Trainspotting* (1993) by Irvine Welsh.



Sylvère Lotringer, poet and novelist Kathy Acker explained transgression of established codes by way of copyright infringement:<sup>91</sup>

If I had to be brutally honest I would say that what I'm doing is breach of copyright – it's not, because I change words – but so what? We're always playing a game. We earn our money out of the stupid law but we hate it because we know it's jive. What else can we do? That's one of the basic contradictions of living in capitalism.<sup>92</sup>

What is the purpose of plagiarism in the context of this art form? In Acker's 1975 novel *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec by Henri Toulouse Lautrec*, she reincarnates Lautrec as a woman in modern-day Paris, relating the life of her brother, Vincent Van Gogh, while accompanying Hercule Poirot in a murder mystery hunt of the city. Other characters to appear include Jacqueline Onassis and James Dean, who enters into a love affair with a nine year old Janis Joplin. Acker's use of these characters and a scenario lifted (verbatim, in a fifteen hundred word passage) from *The Pirate*, a 1993 novel by Harold Robbins, is an act of artistic appropriation and undermining. Acker's postmodern spin is the appropriation of contemporary objects; that is, the multimedia world of celebrity iconography. Each of the characters is used as commodity, valued at a point of exchange between artist and audience. Acker's plagiarism is the self-knowing act of mediation. This is a representative example of an aspect of transgressive literature, a fiction which specifically resists aestheticism for a more conceptual siting; one that is reference-heavy and is comprised of a set of signifiers that compose a whole. It is a work of collage that operates on an individual character basis, as well as in groups and as an overall body. Like any avant-garde practice, the aim is to subvert established norms to create the context which the art in question needs to be understood. The utilisation of plagiarism is distinct tactic, used in order to mask the work's aims. It deliberately veils direct explication of the narrative so that the reader is forced to focus on the writer's methodologies.

The major analytical challenge lies in attempting to re-use literary criticality within a visual art history. A useful precursor that can be called on is the work of BS Johnson, a British writer active in the 1960s. His novel *The Unfortunates* was first published in 1969 and reissued in 2008. The book is a loose-leaf collection that is contained within a box. It is an assemblage of twenty-seven chapters with only the

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<sup>91</sup> Acker frequently appropriated sections of writing by novelists including Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Charles Dickens into her own work.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Sylvère Lotringer, "Devoured by Myths," pp.12, *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*, Lotringer, S. (ed.), (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991).

first and last chapters specified (see fig.8). The chapters range in length from a small paragraph to up to twelve pages. Its plot concerns an unnamed protagonist, a sports writer, sent to his hometown to report on a football match. There, he is beset by memories and the (figurative) ghosts of his past. The book is a thinly-veiled autobiography from a period of time when Johnson was writing on the sports desk of *The Observer* newspaper and asked to cover a match in Nottingham, his own hometown, which is alluded to in *The Unfortunates* through descriptions of local monuments. As the book's protagonist mourns the death of a friend through cancer, Johnson's own return to Nottingham was upset by the death (of the same causes) of his friend Tony Tillinghast.<sup>93</sup> *The Unfortunates* can be read within a similar analytical framework to both the transgressive literature that followed it, and the visual art of publications such as *Semina* and *Aspen*.

*The Unfortunates* is a novel about memory, and its form deliberately plays with the notion that memory can be erratic, random and inconsistent. Johnson imagined each chapter's typeset heading as being an individual image, in order to detach the novel from any literal meaning.<sup>94</sup> Johnson's written practice has more in common with the abstraction of the visual arts than linear novel writing. Johnson's writing is less to facilitate rational comprehension of a topic and more to deliberately obfuscate a first-person *a priori* knowledge. *The Unfortunates* is a prime example of Deleuze and Guattari's concept/precept theory in practice.<sup>95</sup> The novel's narrative arc (its concept) is continually undermined by its form (its precept), therefore requiring ongoing negotiation with its reader in order for the reader to reach satisfactory conclusion. With twenty-five movable chapters there are a large number of narrative permutations through which the reader can gain specific insights and understandings. It is a collage of narratives, each juxtaposition providing a new context in which the work can be read.

Johnson believed that the structure of *The Unfortunates* (mirroring the 'random' workings of memory) bore a closer relationship to 'truth,' in that, because there was less linearity there was also less artifice – the aesthetic was stripped away to its 'pure' conceptual idea.<sup>96</sup> As a novelist, Johnson played a pivotal

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<sup>93</sup> Coe, J., "Introduction," Johnson, B.S., *The Unfortunates*, (London: Picador, 1999).

<sup>94</sup> McMillan, I, *The Verb*, BBC Radio 4, 15 October 2010. Accessible: <http://www.theunfortunates.net/bsjohnson/theverb.mp3>. [Accessed January 2013.]

<sup>95</sup> Described as 'affect' in their book, Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum International, 2004).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

role in translating the modernism of early twentieth century artists, such as Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, for a post-war, late twentieth century audience. Johnson kept stylistic elements of content – for example juxtaposition, irony and satire – and the more stylistic elements of form – omniscient narrative, first-person perspective, fragmented narratives and false objectivity – while demonstrating a reflexive self-analysis as author all within the milieu of social commentary (broadly, that concerns the rejection of traditional ideas and social expectations). This form of Modernist writing sought to use social shifts as a mirror for self-examination. Postmodernist writing, such as the work of Acker, Johnson and William Burroughs, was vital to the development of Art Writing because it focussed the scrutiny of the artist inward and projected their personal and emotional crises outward as a means to understand the fractured nature of late twentieth century society. The focus of the work shifted onto the writer, who was expanding the field of storytelling into interpreting fragments of their own emotion and personality. Writing was becoming an artisanal, crafted, and self-reflexive practice.

**2: What is Art Writing presently?**

Having explored the broad terrain of Art Writing's origins, this chapter will focus on specific Art Writing practice as it has emerged in the twenty-first century. In this chapter I will look at Art Writing's development as a distinct form of visual art making, to examine how a work of Art Writing can be demarcated as such, and I will define its interpretive elements – the aspects that define how it is read and contextualised within broader visual arts practice.

This chapter will focus on Art Writing as it has developed in Britain for specific reasons. First, Britain has been a location where Art Writing has strongly announced itself. From the work of London-based art publishers Book Works, the founding and publication of *The Happy Hypocrite* (2008-present), “the experimental journal for and about art writing,”<sup>97</sup> the founding, and subsequent dismantling, of the MFA in Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London, and in the wide range of gallery-based Art Writing programmes (of which we will explore in this chapter), Britain has enabled and supported a form of visual art making that has been specifically defined as Art Writing. We will even interrogate the broad, yet formal, definitions of Art Writing that exist and have been published in Britain in recent years, as well as drawing on the critical debate of Art Writing as a practice as it has occurred in the British arts press.

As we began to explore in chapter one of this thesis, contemporary Art Writing has wide variety of influences – many of them international. In the case studies and interviews that I will draw upon throughout this chapter, we will see that Art Writing has a significant existence across the world, particularly in North America and in western Europe. However, the boundaries in which Art Writing operates have been more discretely defined than in any other place where Art Writing takes place. For much of the twenty-first century, Britain has been institutionally supporting the development of Art Writing as a visual art practice. I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of this institutional support, and provide suggestions for Art Writing's future trajectory based on this analysis.

Art Writing, as a distinct term, came to prominence with the founding of the journal *The Happy Hypocrite*. It does have its immediate forebears, particularly in the previous work of its publishers,

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This is the subtitle attached to every issue of *The Happy Hypocrite*.

Book Works, who have been producing artists' publications since their establishment in 1984. One of their most significant artists' publications is the book *Erasmus is Late* (1995) by Liam Gillick.

***Erasmus is Late and the artist as writer***

*Erasmus is Late* is a novel by Liam Gillick (see fig.9). Its eponymous character is the brother of Charles Darwin, who throughout the entire narrative is running late to a dinner party at his own house. His guests are Robert McNamara, former US Secretary of Defense (1961-1968); Masaru Ibuka, co-founder of the Sony Corporation (1946-1976); Elsie McLuhan, mother of philosopher Marshall McLuhan; and Murry Wilson, father of The Beach Boys' Brian, Dennis and Carl Wilson. The novel meanders temporally between 1810 and 1997, while all the characters remain in its 'present' (whichever time period may be evoked at any given time). Though Erasmus is absent from the dinner party he occasionally communicates with his guests via a form of telepathy induced by opium use. Despite always being within two miles of his house, his reason for being late is that he is consistently being distracted and diverged from his walking route through Central London. He is sometimes accompanied on his walk, at other times he acknowledges the existence of the reader.

This novel was the result of one of Book Works' earliest open submission competitions. In 1993, the organisation (a publisher, exhibitor and bookbindery) placed an open call for artistic projects that combined creating a book and a site-specific installation in London. Although *Erasmus is Late* won the competition, the publication was not accompanied by a site-specific installation; instead Gillick proposed that the book itself function as an artwork that addressed and responded the site of the novel's setting: London's West End.

Erasmus Darwin undertakes and narrates a tour of Tottenham Court Road and its surrounding area. The story begins at Erasmus' final destination, at a house on Great Marlborough Street, before the reader is taken to his actual location, walking between Centre Point to Tottenham Court Road to view some electronic equipment. Later Erasmus will visit and pontificate on the historical relevance and meaning of other local sites, including a nightclub on Charing Cross Road, The Poster Studio, the tunnels under Centre Point, a Goodge Street wine bar, and the home of Marxist social scientist Richard Wolff. The

novel is illustrated throughout with line drawings of photographs of the locations, taken by Gillick. Gillian Gillick, Liam's mother, herself a commercial illustrator, created the line drawings.

A core theme of *Erasmus is Late* is in understanding how history has developed. Erasmus leads a tour of contemporaneously insignificant monuments that at one time were close to the site of an event in history. His dinner party guests have all been involved in significant acts of cultural evolution (musical, philosophical, technological, political), though never directly. Their actions led another person to advance a field of achievement. As outlined in the novel:

Erasmus is a parallel historian. No longer involved in parallel activities but capable of understanding what they can achieve.<sup>98</sup>

Often, he describes one of his interests as futurology, however in matters of projecting the future and understanding the past, Erasmus is dilettante. His thought processes drift, are indirect, in the same manner as his walking route, his attempt to get home for the dinner party that he is supposed to be hosting, and very much like the science understood and advanced by his brother.

Also within the novel, temporal aspects are similarly imprecise. Erasmus describes himself as a Georgian. Though an Erasmus Darwin was active in the late eighteenth century, this Erasmus was a noted philosopher and physiologist. He lived in the East Midlands and was the grandfather of Charles Darwin. Another Erasmus Darwin fits the description of the book's character, however this Wm. Erasmus Darwin, though "*eccentric and entirely unselfconscious*,"<sup>99</sup> was Charles Darwin's son and born in 1839. It makes thematic sense that the book has its point of origin in the Age of Enlightenment. As a work of Art Writing, its style is a pastiche of that period. As a reflection of the character of Erasmus, the age of Enlightenment was hitherto one of the most scientifically forward thinking, scientific evidence could be printed more easily with developments in print press technology emerging for non-specialist use and with new distribution networks being created across the country. Erasmus in Gillick's work is an embodiment of a rich, quasi-cultured aristocrat: more an enabler of people rather than the great mind that he thinks he is.

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<sup>98</sup> Gillick, L., *Erasmus is Late*, p.26, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London: Book Works, 2000).

<sup>99</sup> Gwen Revert, p.176, *Period Piece*, 1952. Project Gutenberg:  
<http://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/raveratg-periodpiece/raveratg-periodpiece-00-h-dir/raveratg-periodpiece-00-h.html>. [Accessed December 2013.]

*Erasmus is Late* is an example of a form of Art Writing before the term. In order to demonstrate this, we must situate it as an artwork. Gillick's work is associated with the concept Relational Aesthetics, which attempt to describe open networks of interpretation and discourse that have as their point of origin an artwork or series of juxtaposed artworks. Curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics*, describes the concept as addressing:

...a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.<sup>100</sup>

*Erasmus is Late* specifically emphasises the implied relationship between disparate individuals who are only connected by a common theme, they are, however, connected by the site-specificity of attendance at a gathering. The character Erasmus, in walking around the city in which they find themselves, provides their context for gathering. Gillick describes the function of *Erasmus is Late* as:

...a condensed central core of ideas rather than original research material or commentary.<sup>101</sup>

This returns us to one of the central ideas of the publications explored in chapter one of this thesis. *Semina*, *Aspen*, and *Interfunktionen* all presented existing work, juxtaposed together to create new contexts for reading these works. Similarly, the concepts expressed in *Erasmus is Late*, and the characters used by Gillick to express his concepts, are not part of, as he describes it, "original...material or commentary." They are part of an existing history – in the cases of McNamara and Ibuka, they are part of a very well-documented history. Their siting together is the artistic gesture made by Gillick that allows us to read *Erasmus is Late* retrospectively as a work of Art Writing. Drawing on a history of artists' or visual art publications, Gillick addresses visual art concepts through a literary form. *Erasmus is Late* functions undoubtedly as a novel; it also functions as a work of art that challenges historical survey. In the novel, Erasmus states that:

A later argument will be that the most interesting activity embodies a set of guidelines that are apparent within the physical quality of the result.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Bourriaud, N., p.113, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998).

<sup>101</sup> Gillick, L., *Erasmus and Ibuka! Realisations 1994 to 1996*,  
<http://www.liamgillick.info/home/work/mcnamara-erasmus-whatif/erasmus-and-ibuka>.

<sup>102</sup> Gillick, L., *Erasmus is Late*, p.31, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London: Book Works, 2000).



Using almost cryptic language here, Gillick (through Erasmus) seems to be telling the reader that the ‘truth’ (or ‘a truth’) can only be ascertained after its occurrence. Contemporaneous readings will be muddled by the aura – or chaos – of the present. It is difficult to analyse *Erasmus is Late* – a novel of multiple themes, voices, temporal strands and philosophical projections on history, technology and the arts (yet one that specifically resists being “original research material or commentary”) – until it has finished. That is, until its final juxtapositions have been made apparent; until it has become complete. Like a curated display of artworks, *Erasmus is Late* is successful once a series of relationships between its disparate elements and concurrent themes can be identified as occurring at once and then analysed accordingly. It is a presentation of concepts and one that requires an audience to determine the relationships between these concepts in order to find its resolution.

The key questions that I address regarding *Erasmus is Late* are ‘Is the novel Art Writing?’ (before its definitive naming) and if so, ‘What makes it Art Writing?’ Is it Art Writing because it is a novel written by a visual artist? Is it Art Writing because it is distributed in the context of the art world? Is it Art Writing because it shares the same intellectual ambitions? An aim of this chapter is to outline the boundaries within which Art Writing operates. Via a recent history of similarly-themed works and a sketch of its present situation, we will examine how Art Writing emerged, what it constitutes, what the critical response to Art Writing has been, where it sits in the contemporary art sector.

### **Book Works: Developing a culture and style for artists’ books in London**

When Book Works was founded in 1984 by a group of five practising bookbinders, its aim was to fill a gap in the London art scene by creating a place (what was then an exhibition space) that focussed specifically on the book as art object. Jane Rolo, director of Book Works today, is the only remaining founding member. Of Book Works origins, she says:

I had been to New York...and I was excited by Printed Matter.<sup>103</sup> It wasn’t like it is now; it more like a reading room. Not much selling went on, it was a place where self-publishing was happening. There were other places that inspired the beginnings of Book

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<sup>103</sup> Printed Matter, Inc. is a New York-based publisher, distributor, exhibitor and education organisation that focusses on the visual arts through the art book. It was founded in 1976 as an art bookshop and is currently the world’s largest resource for artists’ publications.

Works in New York at that time. Franklin Furnace, a performance space with a huge reserve of artists' books. The Center for Book Arts was a hybrid of a bookmaking workshop. They ran workshops, hired equipment and had a gallery space.<sup>104</sup>

Artists' publications operated between two poles in the early 1980s. On one side were independently produced, published and distributed zines: assemblage publications, comprised of collages and found and recycled images, that became popular through an economy of free distribution (the model that Berman used when distributing copies of *Semina* to a list of approximately three hundred people). The aim of freely-distributed,<sup>105</sup> disposable publications was to develop a community of relationships between people interested in avant-garde arts and sub-culture. The process for creating zines was a lo-fi electronic version of traditional print press techniques at the time and as described above: text would be written onto a sheet of paper, images would be pasted onto the same sheet and this 'master sheet' would be photocopied. Each page of the zine would be created in the same manner and the resulting compendium may either be bound cheaply (stapled, in most instances) or not at all. Conversely, at the other end of the artists' publications spectrum were publications that were created in the legacy of Conceptual Art and were considered as limited edition art objects. We can take the example here of a book such as *Carl Andre, Hollis Frampton: 12 Dialogues, 1962-1963*, published in 1980, in which the two artists took turns responding to one another at a typewriter. Their responses took the form, mainly, of question-and-answer, poetry and loose, unstructured essays. Interspersed between the texts were images of works by Carl Andre photographed by Hollis Frampton, including works from the former's "Dog Turds" (1962) and "Pizza" (1961-62) series'.<sup>106</sup> This book is functions as a display and presentation of an artists' work, and the contextualisation of this work by both the artist himself, and another. It is a discrete art object, created to be less expendable than its opposite, the zine, and largely to be of interest to a visual art-literate audience; again, unlike the zine which was distributed haphazardly.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Jane Rolo, interview with the author, July 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Most zines were distributed free at music gigs or art exhibitions. Of course, the mail art movement required postage payment.

<sup>106</sup> Buchloh, B.H.D. (ed.) *Carl Andre, Hollis Frampton: 12 Dialogues, 1962-1963* (New York: NYU Press, 1980).

<sup>107</sup> There was, and remains, a market for expensive, extended monographs of artists' works, but because, largely, these are produced to refer and critique artworks rather than function as artworks, they do not form a part of my analysis.

We can use these models as a starting point to understand the situation of artists' publications at the time that Book Works began operating. They were interested in using the organisation to bring together the separate forms of the artist book. As such, common themes in publishing artists' work had to be drawn out and expanded upon. To use *Erasmus is Late* as a prism to understand this convergence, Jane Rolo explains how:

...that book [*Erasmus is Late*] was Liam attempting to think through a series of problems and questions in his own mind that would later lead to his sculptural and video work. The book was a catalyst for ideas.<sup>108</sup>

In a significant aspect, *Erasmus is Late* functioned as a form of artists' sketchbook, in which the artist could entertain and process preoccupying concepts that could be expanded upon across various media. Gillick chose to use the form of the novel to begin to understand how relationships can form and be maintained between artistic concepts, and can manifest in various characters when placed in new contexts and new situations. Book Works continued to publish an open submission series, under the title *New Writing*. Guest edited by author Michael Bracewell, the *New Writing* series was tacked with the strap line: "A no man's land between art and literature." A core strand of Book Works' publications were visual artist-authored works that were produced to sell in the same range and at the same price point as a paperback. The aim was to make artists' publications available to a wider, commercial market and extend the distribution network of artists' books into more mainstream outlets.

### **Widening the market: artists' journals**

From the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century, the number of artists' publications in the mainstream market was increasing. As we will see in chapter three of this thesis, a significant aspect of this was due to an increase in galleries, museums and institutions of contemporary art being redeveloped, refurbished or built new in Britain during this period. A common feature of the contemporary art institution in Britain is a bookshop, dedicated to artists' publications. Also, because of technological developments, self-design and self-publishing was becoming commercially available for desktop computers and becoming easier to use for non-specialists. Into the twenty-first century, significant artists' publications began appearing on a regular basis. These were journals that were

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<sup>108</sup> Jane Rolo, interview with the author, July 2013.



Here Bailey explained precisely why, for him, contemporary graphic design as a field of critical inquiry has to be expanded. If the widespread perception of the field is that it is reliant upon commercial interests, which diverge from artistic research, contemporary graphic design needs to be placed in new contexts in order to define a field of work that is concerned with graphic design solely as an artistic discipline. *Dot Dot Dot* sought to fashion those contexts.

Issue one comprised an editorial; an op-ed by design critic and editor Max Bruinsma, which looked at the state of graphic design and its relationship to magazine publishing since the 1970s; an essay by Paul Barnes that describes idealism in British design; an interview with Tom Unverzagt about the journal of Swiss typography *Typografische Monatsblätter*; an interview with designers Form + Zweck by Jürgen X. Albrecht; collage and essays by Peter Bil'ak and Stuart Bailey; a conversation between Bailey and Richard Hollis; and a (non-comprehensive) encyclopaedia of twentieth century design periodicals by the editors Bailey and Bil'ak.<sup>111</sup> As *Dot Dot Dot* evolved, so did its general remit, beyond graphic design and into wider cultural aspects of culture. For example, issue six (2003) included a text version of Ryan Gander's performance lecture *Loose Associations* (2002), a talk that “draws an intriguing line between seemingly disparate points on a cultural map that includes J.R.R. Tolkien, Inspector Morse, London's Barbican Centre and Gander's Aunty Deva;”<sup>112</sup> issue seven (2004) included an article on Brian Eno by Michael Bracewell; issue nine (2005) reprinted a fiction text, “Introduction,” by B.S. Johnson; and issue eleven (2006) contained a screenplay written by Gerry Beegan, and an article by Werner Herzog, *On Truth and Fact in Documentary Cinema*.

The publication of *Dot Dot Dot*, and the widening of its editorial position in order to incorporate aspects of cultural examination has been described as such by editors Bailey and Reinfurt, “Since its conception in 2000 DDD has immatured into a jocular-serious fanzine-journal-orphanage based on true stories deeply concerned with art-design-music-language-literature-architecture and uptight optimistic stoppy/revelatory ghostwriting by friendly spirits mapping b-sides and out-takes pushing for a resolution in bleak midwinter through late summer with local and general anaesthetics

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<sup>111</sup> Bailey, S., Bil'ak P. (eds.), *Dot Dot Dot*, vol.1, April 2001.

<sup>112</sup> Beasley, M., “Focus: Ryan Gander”, *Frieze*, issue 86, October 2004.

wound on an ever tightening coil.”<sup>113</sup> This, jocular description essentially informs the reader that the journal is concerned with capturing the moments where art making across various media collide. *Dot Dot Dot* was one of the earliest examples of this kind of hybrid practices in the twenty-first century. There are others that took a very similar position after the launch of *Dot Dot Dot*.

*F.R. David* is a journal edited by Ann Demeester, Dieter Roelstraete and Will Holder. The publication focusses on the state and situation of writing in contemporary art practice. It was founded in 2007 and is published biannually by De Appel Art Center, an institute for contemporary art in Amsterdam. Like the later issues of *Dot Dot Dot*, *F.R. David* is concerned with writing as a mode to explore various, multimedia art practices. In one aspect there is a difference between the editorial positions of *F.R. David* and *Dot Dot Dot*, in that the latter self-reflexively altered its editorial position with each issue; *F.R. David* had an overarching editorial position which has been interrogated in a series of themed issues. The point where both publications converged was in their ongoing analysis of how language is used in the context of contemporary art. Issues of *F.R. David* included themes such as love, communication, the internet, poetry, commentary, mythology, and intention. Contributors to the journal have included filmmakers Anja Kirschner and David Panos; artists Janice Kerbal, Cory Arcangel, Cally Spooner, Yoko Ono and Robert Indiana; academics Donald L. Cleland, and Kodwo Eshun; as well as containing reproductions of texts by writers including Roland Barthes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, and G.K. Chesterton.

The concept behind *F.R. David* is to examine how writing operates in the gallery-based world of contemporary art, and whether the function of objects can be undermined or disrupted by language. In this sense, *F.R. David* centres itself on the contemporary visual arts. However in order to provide a wider, comprehensive reading of how art works within diverse media, its content is not specifically visual arts-related. To give an example, issue two features a series of short stories by artist Michael Stevenson, including one called “The Bull and the Beginning of the World”:

Leaving the pastures one evening the Bull came upon The Beginning of the World resting peacefully in the fading light of the day.  
“Who are you to sit in my way!” roared the Bull as he stamped the ground with his hoofs. “Move, or I will end your miserable life with the powerful thrust of my horns!”

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*Dot Dot Dot* online, <http://www.dot-dot-dot.us/>. [Accessed December 2012.]

“Do as you please,” The Beginning of the World replied calmly. “But behold that when you do to me what you are threatening the end of this day will be the end of your days too, for never again will there be a new beginning.”<sup>114</sup>

This story, told in the style of a parable, has little bearing on the overall theme of the issue (which considers the status of language in relation to fine art practice) and the exploratory examinations of the journal as a whole. Instead, the meaning and function of the story is activated when read in the context of a later section, where Stevenson corresponds with Will Holder, one of the journal’s editors. Stevenson writes:

[These] were written for my project at the Kröller-Müller [a museum in Holland founded by art collector Helene Kröller-Müller]...They encourage a more metaphorical reading of the installation [at the Kröller-Müller Museum] – that is their most basic usefulness – Beyond this they are specific descriptions of the situation...between patron and state...for us the bull is the bull market – the beginning of the world...is also of course some kind of description of the original creative act.<sup>115</sup>

In the context of Stevenson’s art making practice, the inclusion of the story in this publication has three functioning outputs: a concept through which he devised an artwork; the completed artwork installation at the Kröller-Müller Museum; and the allegorical story that links the concept with the completed piece.

A range of magazines and journals began publication in the early years of the twenty-first century: publications that focussed on the function of language and writing in the context of the visual arts, and which responded to the art object. For example, launched in New York in 2000, *Cabinet* is a quarterly magazine that also publishes books, curates exhibitions and holds public events. It describes itself as a magazine that:

...confounds expectations of what is typically meant by the words “art,” “culture,” and sometimes even “magazine.” Its hybrid sensibility merges the popular appeal of an arts periodical, the visually engaging style of a design magazine, and the in-depth exploration of a scholarly journal to create a sourcebook of ideas for an eclectic international audience of readers, from artists and designers to scientists, philosophers, and historians.<sup>116</sup>

The editorial team at *Cabinet* use a quote from Michel Foucault to further elucidate their position:

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<sup>114</sup> Stevenson, M., “The Bull and the Beginning of the World”, Roelstraete, D., Demeester, A., Holder, W. (eds.) *F.R. David: “The Stuff and Nonsense”*, issue 2, winter 2008.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> “Cabinet: Mission Statement,” *Cabinet*, <http://cabinetmagazine.org/information/>

Curiosity...the word, however, pleases me. To me...it evokes ‘concern’: it evokes the care one takes for what exists and what could exist...a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things.<sup>117</sup>

Another magazine that we can highlight is *Fillip*. Based in Vancouver, *Fillip* began publication in 2004 (formerly, publication was quarterly; it is currently biannual), in 2009 it started publication of artists’ books, and the organisation hold public events, including panel discussions and seminars. The magazine does not provide any formal mission statement, as in the example of *Cabinet* above, apart from their submission guidelines:

We are searching for vital, intellectually rigorous art and cultural journalism. This in no way need preclude humourous [sic], personal, or lyrical responses to cultural objects and experiences. We welcome writing that is aware of current discussions on key debates and issues so as to expand on or challenge these discussions.<sup>118</sup>

There is nothing in this description which would not apply to all magazines that address critical theory and textual analysis in contemporary visual arts. To take an example of its content, issue one (summer 2006) contained an article on the nature of the meme; an item on the project *Swiss-Swiss Democracy* (2004) by Thomas Hirschhorn; an analysis of the use of words in the film *As the Hammer Strikes* (1982); and a reflection on flyposted images of Soha Bechara (a militant activist) in Lebanon.<sup>119</sup>

We can notice here a trend, wherein a series of publications were launched whose focus was on how the functions of contemporary art could be questioned, destabilised, stimulated, or given any affect, through the use of language and writing. Further, we can see that this was a trend of the early twenty-first century, with particular focus in North America, Britain and western Europe. In Britain, magazines and zines appeared, including *Elephant* (2009-present), a quarterly magazine that analyses trends in contemporary art; *Implicosphere* (2003-2008), edited by Cathy Haynes and Sally O’Reilly, that described its aims as to “*unearth and revive compelling, illuminating and curious ideas in the form of image and text...[our] collage effect combines often incompatible shards of thought in webs of association that tangle the meaning of those words;*”<sup>120</sup> London’s Institute of Contemporary Art

<sup>117</sup> “Cabinet: A succinct statement on curiosity by Michel Foucault that sums up Cabinet’s mission better than we can,” *Cabinet*, <http://cabinetmagazine.org/information/foucault.php>

<sup>118</sup> “About Fillip: Submission Guidelines,” *Fillip*, <http://fillip.ca/about/submissions>.

<sup>119</sup> *Fillip*, issue one, summer 2006.

<sup>120</sup> *Implicosphere*, <http://www.implicosphere.org.uk/>.



launched *Roland*, a magazine that addressed the wider content of the works on display in the ICA's exhibition programme.<sup>121</sup> An independent network of support began to appear, including a variety of new publishing organisations, including Four Corners Press, The Coelacanth Press, and Copy Press; supported by art book publishers in London, not only at the major art institutes (such as the Koëning Books-run shops at Serpentine Gallery and Whitechapel Gallery) but also at venues in London such as Donlon Books, X Marks the Bökship, and two branches of Artwords. In 2009, artist Ami Clarke founded Banner Repeater, a bookshop, reading room and project space on platform one of Hackney Downs rail station.

Anticipating this trend, Book Works published *Put About: A Critical Anthology of Independent Publishing* in 2004, edited by Maria Fusco and Ian Hunt. The book contains newly commissioned and existing texts by artists and writers including Lucy Lippard, Stewart Home, Lynne Tillmann, Michael Bracewell, and Matthew Higgs, and artist pages displaying works by Maurizio Cattelan, David Osbaldeston and Aleksandra Mir. *Put About* presented a consideration of the history, development and contemporaneous situation of publishing across a variety of media, including traditional literature, online blogging, zines, and magazines. It tapped into that trend succinctly, analysing the relationship that the written and performed word had to the art object, and whether the art object could be more accurately contextualised in various linguistic styles and across a range of different media. In *Put About*, Maria Fusco variously describes Art Writing as “writing about art,” “writing in art,”<sup>122</sup> which she then extended with “writing as a lens through which to look at art.”<sup>123</sup> These are three very specific and distinct forms of interpretive thinking of the art object. The fundamental editorial policy of *Put About* was to explore the examples of the most effective ways of practising and disseminating these forms of writing. I would argue that Art Writing developed out of practical research on the subject of writing in and about art, with *Put About* demonstrating various examples across media and form. The outcome of this research yielded Art Writing: a form of writing which in itself was a form of analysis of art, interpretation of the art object, and was itself a form of art making. We can substantiate this by noting that the publication of *Put About* led directly to the foundation of Art Writing, as a form of art

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<sup>121</sup> *Implicosphere* and *Roland* were distributed for free. The final five issues of *Implicosphere* were distributed in copies of *Cabinet* magazine.

<sup>122</sup> Fusco, M., Hunt, I. (eds.) *Put About: A Critical Anthology of Independent Publishing*, (London: Book Works, 2004).

<sup>123</sup> Quoted by Caro Howell, interview with the author, January 2012.

making. This is exemplified by the practice of Maria Fusco – the founding Director of the now-defunct MFA programme in Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London, and the founding editor of *The Happy Hypocrite*, the self-styled “experimental journal for and about art writing.”<sup>124</sup>

*The Happy Hypocrite* commissioned new and reprinted existing imagery and texts across a variety of forms, including essays, interviews, fiction, theatre or film scripts. Comprised of short-form writing, issue one outlined how one aim of the journal was to defy specific nominative terms, viewing Art Writing as a preserve of avant-gardism. It is necessary that *The Happy Hypocrite* resists definition of what Art Writing is in specific terms, because the overarching theme of the journal is that it demonstrates an attempt to analyse the methodology and research processes of writing as a practice. *The Happy Hypocrite* is an exercise in structural self-analysis.

Issue one of *The Happy Hypocrite*, entitled “Linguistic Hardcore,” opens with a double-column single-page text by Stewart Home called “Say What You See.”<sup>125</sup> In this piece (later to become a regular column by Home), he describes an object – in this case a videotape ordered from overseas – in terms of the cultural significances of its design. “Say What You See” is an exercise in defying nomination by searching for specifically that. In the first instance, it translates an object into words (an attempt at shifting the object into a linguistic form). The written piece is both a representative and figurative portrait, in that it purposefully involves itself in the mundane detail of the object to the point that its whole form is obfuscated. Detail is usually essential in describing an object; here it is a distraction from the object. The reader is given the challenge to guess what the object is (answers are provided in each successive issue). An example from the text:

The packaging is lurid: an artist’s full colour impression of a screaming woman with her right hand raised in self-defence is juxtaposed against a bloodstained brick wall. One might expect to find the term ‘murder’ among a jumble of English words used to sell this product, but it isn’t there. As a consequence, the object I’m holding feels every bit as truncated as the life expectancy of a serial killer’s victim.<sup>126</sup>

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124 The ever-present sub-title to the publication.

125 Home, S., “Say What You See,” Fusco, M. (ed.), p.3 *The Happy Hypocrite, volume 1: Linguistic Hardcore*, (London: Book Works, 2008).

126 Ibid.

As descriptive as this is, Home tells us as much about what is not on the packaging as what is. Home's approach to representative figuration is deliberately contradictory. In describing the packaging, it could be an interesting tactic designed to meet a visual arts audience partway in the act of interpreting a given object, but ultimately it is deliberately complicated.

This brings us back to the question of the name, as highlighted earlier in this thesis. Art Writing's preoccupation with names is further illustrated in "Linguistic Hardcore" with artist Gerard Byrne's piece, which examines the methods of how a photographer takes pictures; Farhad Ahrarnia's work *Tehran 1969* (2008), depicts a series of newspaper headlines from that city and year; and two diary entries, which serve to define certain moments in time for Byrne and Ahrania. All of these serve to potentially distance the reader from a more complex – and ultimately politicised mode of address. Though the subject of the individual artworks may be politically oriented, that the artists are demonstrating a self-reflexive analysis of their own artistic methods, they are one step removed from making a direct commentary on their subjects.

### **What is Art Writing? Part two: 11 Statements Around Art Writing**

So far, we have been able to identify contemporary art works, written texts, zines, magazines and journals that have provided the means for Art Writing. We have looked at examples of works that could be described as 'Art Writing' before the term was coined (in this context) and we've identified certain common aspects of these works in order to provide a basic understanding, thus far, of what areas Art Writing operates in. In order to go further, we must ask what definitions of Art Writing are currently being used.<sup>127</sup>

At the end of the 2009-10 academic year, Maria Fusco and the faculty of the MFA in Art Writing at Goldsmiths decided to create a mission statement for the course that would then be published in the student course book for the following academic year. The course had graduated two cohorts of students and Fusco identified that period as the moment where both the student body and the teaching staff were

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<sup>127</sup>

The answer to which is 'not many,' and those that are are largely abstract in nature.

keen to specify more precisely what kind of art making practice they were undertaking.<sup>128</sup> Fusco and her fellow teachers – Yve Lomax, Adrian Rifkin and Michael Newman – individually wrote a series of statements over the summer and Fusco edited the resulting work together into a manifesto.<sup>129</sup> In October 2011, Maria Fusco was approached by Jennifer Higgie, co-editor of *Frieze*, who asked to publish the manifesto on the Frieze blog. In full, the manifesto is:

### **11 Statements Around Art Writing**

by Maria Fusco, Michael Newman, Adrian Rifkin and Yve Lomax

‘Eleven Statements Around Art Writing’ is co-authored by the teaching team – Maria Fusco, Michael Newman, Adrian Rifkin and Yve Lomax – of MFA Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. It proposes a moment in contemporary production: writing as art practice.

Art Writing emerges as a practice.

Art Writing is a possible form of the liberty of the image.

Art Writing names an approach within contemporary culture that, in wanting new potentials, embraces writing as a problematization of the object of art, its dissemination and forms of exhibition.

Art Writing does not take modalities of writing as a given, rather it tends to, and experiments with, non-division between practice and theory, criticism and creativity.

Art Writing sustains all forms of art criticism, including the experimental and the hybrid. The art work may be intensely engaged with, or it may be the starting point for fictional and poetic developments.

Art Writing is the situation of a fulcrum.

Art Writing is an anthology of examples.

Art Writing is re-invented in each instance of Art Writing, determining its own criteria.

Art Writing addresses material literary forms, which draw attention to the spatiality of writing and the physicality of its support, but the interests of Art Writing diverge from those of literature.

Art Writing involves relations between people, as discursive. In so far as it is art, Art Writing can engage public space no longer sustained by ground, including that of truth.

Art Writing institutes such public space without truth, and sometimes disappears into it.<sup>130</sup>

Reflecting on the context in which the *11 Statements...* were written, Maria Fusco says:

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<sup>128</sup> Maria Fusco, interview with the author, December 2013.

<sup>129</sup> The word ‘manifesto’ in reference to the *11 Statements...* was not used in public though was used by Maria Fusco in my interview with her in December 2013.

<sup>130</sup> Fusco, M., Lomax, Y., Newman, M., Rifkin, A., ‘11 Statements Around Art Writing,’ *Frieze* blog, <http://blog.frieze.com/11-statements-around-art-writing/>, October 2011. [Accessed October 2011.]

To find our feet more clearly it was necessary that there was more transparency, and for us it was useful to develop something that plotted the coordinates. Mostly though it was for the students because it stopped us [the faculty] going over the same material, ‘What is Art Writing?’, ‘Am I doing Art Writing?’ It helped to define a loose area and tended towards the working methods – editorial methods, actually.<sup>131</sup>

As, arguably, the leading proponent of Art Writing (as a form of art making with that specific name), Maria Fusco defines Art Writing in the terms above as both a taught practice and as a demonstration thereof via *The Happy Hypocrite*. We can test the *11 Statements...* with both. She continues:

That the Goldsmiths course and *The Happy Hypocrite* coincided with each other was not deliberate but it indicated toward there being something in the air about interest in Art Writing and it’s important to recognise it as a significant moment. *The Happy Hypocrite* and the Art Writing programme would only be pertinent for a certain period of time. For me, it was about making a statement about the visibility of a practice...I think you can only increase excellence in practice by doing it yourself and facilitating other people.<sup>132</sup>

Fusco extended her practice beyond Goldsmiths and *The Happy Hypocrite* as a freelance writer and undertaking a series of gallery-based writing residencies, notably being the inaugural Writer-in-Residence at Whitechapel Gallery from 2009-2010, an Art Writing programme that was embedded as interpretive events alongside the gallery’s public programme. We will discuss Art Writing in a gallery context in further detail in chapter three of this thesis.

When the *11 Statements...* were published, Dan Fox (then Senior Editor of *Frieze*, now co-Editor) commented about the opacity of the language used, and interrogated five aspects of the statements: first, asking if Art Writing (capital ‘A’, capital ‘W’) emerges as form akin to ‘Art Film’ or ‘Art Music,’ and then specifically extracting four statements for further clarification.<sup>133</sup> One of the major criticisms of the *11 Statements...* is how its language is deliberately obtuse, and that they are ‘plotted coordinates’ that are a discussion ‘around’ the subject and therefore not exemplary of the subject itself – returning to the often-made point that Art Writing specifically defies nomination or description. To take an example from the *11 Statements...* is the statement “Art Writing is in the situation of a fulcrum” sufficiently

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<sup>131</sup> Maria Fusco, interview with the author, December 2013.

<sup>132</sup> Maria Fusco, interview with the author, December 2013.

<sup>133</sup> (Dan Fox) (10 October 2011) [online forum comment] Fusco, M., Lomax, Y., Newman, M., Rifkin, A., ‘11 Statements Around Art Writing,’ *Frieze blog*, <http://blog.frieze.com/11-statements-around-art-writing/#comment-331557356>, October 2011. [Accessed October 2011.]

legible enough to both withstand critique and is it sufficiently critical to be pointed toward a work of Art Writing? In short, does it make sense?

It is possible to use a fulcrum (defined as “a prop or support...the point against which a lever is placed...upon which it turns or is supported”<sup>134</sup>) as an analogy, noting that thing that is central to activating a situation. However, to be “in the situation of a fulcrum” is something more specific. It seems to imply that Art Writing balances and directs one thing toward another. Art Writing is a mediator, then, leveraging that thing which approaches it, and then points, directs (and subsequently, defines) this thing’s outcome. I would argue that this statement is awkwardly compounded, in which case this statement actually refers more succinctly to the event of an artist composing a work of Art Writing than to the work itself. The act of Art Writing is a transformative event that takes existing modalities and applies its own methodology. The work of Art Writing is the analysis of that methodology.

The language of Art Writing attempts to skirt the topic itself by making statements ‘around’ the subject. Critics have argued that the language used for the *11 Statements...* is generic and well within the conventions of general artistic academic study. Brian Dillon, writing in *Frieze* notes that the *11 Statements...*, “...shuttles among criticism, literary experiment and art as such...[with] familiar academic shibboleths: hybridity, materiality, ‘practice’.”<sup>135</sup> Sam Thorne writes of how, in the relationship between writing and contemporary art, professional hybridisation is the norm, and that art writing is ambiguous about defining its own idiosyncratic practice.<sup>136</sup> Dan Fox comments on the statements:

If...these could be an example of how ‘the sharing of knowledge is an art practice,’ then I reckon it’s fair to ask what kind of knowledge is being shared...Even if they are not a ‘pure presentation of a stance of art-criticism pedagogy,’ and even if the ‘11 Statements’ are a kind of hybridized writing...I think we should ask what value is in hybridizing certain approaches to language. The worry I have with this kind of thing is that it skirts

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<sup>134</sup> ‘fulcrum, n.’ Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>135</sup> Dillon, B. “‘Style & Substance: On teaching criticism and ‘art writing’,” *Frieze* no.158, October 2013.

<sup>136</sup> Thorne, S. “Call Yourself a Critic?” *Frieze*, no.145, March 2012.

too close to being arts and culture equivalent to the language financiers or politicians use.<sup>137</sup>

The reaction to the *11 Statements...* drew no public comment from anyone affiliated to the MFA Art Writing course. Fox's criticism reasonably asks what form of art making the authors refer to – considering that they have noted Art Writing's position as 'fulcrum,' which directs existing modalities, it makes this a relevant concern. It is not the duty of an artist to defend their work in public. However, later in the comments, Fox does note that, as education professionals specialising in Art Writing on a dedicated Art Writing course, it is fair to ask the authors what their use of certain words means. There was no subsequent comment on the *Frieze* blog or anywhere else from the statements' authors. The statements, though, were given a much more rigorous analysis in a series of seminars on Art Writing at Whitechapel Gallery, organised by Maria Fusco, in her role as Writer-in-Residence, and run by the MFA Art Writing programme at Goldsmiths. *Seminar Series: Art Writing* ran between 2011 and 2013. Each session, led by one of the MFA Art Writing faculty members in collaboration with a guest speaker, focussed on one specific statement from the *11 Statements...* Participants were supplied with reading material in advance of the session, and regular participants included students on the MFA Art Writing course.

Though this was an attempt to open up in public the debate of what Art Writing – the first public events of its kind<sup>138</sup> – there was not enough space for many people outside of the MFA Art Writing programme to attend, and those people that wanted to were subject to a vetting process. A notice on the Whitechapel Gallery website stated that due to “a very limited number of places available for guests,”<sup>139</sup> potential applicants were asked to submit their interest in attending by emailing a letter with a hundred word statement of interest and a hundred word biography, with a deadline of a week prior to the applicant's desired session. In addition, successful applicants were charged £10 for a ticket.

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<sup>137</sup> (Dan Fox) (10 October 2011) [online forum comment] Fusco, M., Lomax, Y., Newman, M., Rifkin, A., '11 Statements Around Art Writing,' *Frieze* blog, <http://blog.frieze.com/11-statements-around-art-writing/#comment-338351799>, October 2011. [Accessed October 2011.]

<sup>138</sup> Maria Fusco organised a one-day event at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, in March 2010, called *The Cosey Complex*, which sought to examine the artist Cosey Fanni Tutti as a methodology, <https://www.ica.org.uk/whats-on/cosey-complex>. Another event, *Volatile Dispersal: Festival of Art Writing*, took place at Whitechapel Gallery in November 2009. Both comprised readings and performances. Both were demonstrations of Art Writing, rather than analysis.

<sup>139</sup> “Seminar Series: Art Writing is an Anthology of Examples,” *Whitechapel Gallery*, [http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category\\_id/1/product\\_id/1087](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category_id/1/product_id/1087)

Ultimately, the Art Writing seminars were populated largely by staff and students affiliated with the MFA Art Writing course (its student body was not obliged to take part in the application process). That the reaction to the *11 Statements...* drew no public comment from anyone associated with the MFA programme, and that the Art Writing seminar series was open only to those people specifically familiar with Art Writing, its terms of reference and use of language implied a sense of protectionism being imposed on the subject by those charged with making it public. Its public, by these examples, was only semi-public. Debate with its (self-defined) practitioners took place only among their known circle in their self-organised space. Art writing can be generally understood to mean any writing that occurs in relation to art – theory, criticism, biography, for example. So what precisely is Art Writing?

In an article for *Frieze* magazine in October 2014, Brian Dillon examined what ‘art writing’ meant at that point, two full years after the initial publication of the *11 Statements...*<sup>140</sup> Noting the statements’... “opacity” and recalling the essay “International Art English,” published in *Triple Canopy* in 2012,<sup>141</sup> Dillon berates contemporary art writers and critics for drawing too readily on theory to explain artistic reasoning and context, and he blames a nature of non-confidence in practice and application that ultimately only undermines the writer’s work. He writes:

It’s as if we’re afraid to look at the words themselves for fear of what we might find – or not find...It is the very soul and struggle of writing (therefore thinking) itself, a hole into which all your ambitions, all your programmes and all your manifestos will fall.<sup>142</sup>

In light of Dillon’s claim, the fact that the *11 Statements...* were defined as operating ‘around’ what Art Writing is, its non-specificity, threatened its attempts at even loosely aiming towards a working (or practical) understanding of the form. Despite being official proclamations from the only education programme specialising in Art Writing (a practical, visual art making course), as well as being included in the programme’s official student handbook, the fact that there is a clear reticence by its faculty to denote precisely Art Writing’s boundaries, indicates that the eleven statements cannot serve as sufficient analytic tools.

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<sup>140</sup> Dillon, B. “‘Style & Substance: On teaching criticism and ‘art writing’,” *Frieze* no.158, October 2013.

<sup>141</sup> Rule, A., & Levine, D., “International Art English,” *Triple Canopy*, issue 16, May–July 2012, [http://canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/16/contents/international\\_art\\_english](http://canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/16/contents/international_art_english).

<sup>142</sup> Dillon, B. “‘Style & Substance: On teaching criticism and ‘art writing’,” *Frieze* no.158, October 2013.



### What are the boundaries of Art Writing?

Further discussions and criticisms of Art Writing have appeared in the arts press. One specific criticism is that it is a form separate to literature; as one of the statements reads, ‘Art Writing addresses literary forms but its interests diverge from literature’. This is a difficult concept. Many ‘Art Writers’ come from literary backgrounds, including some of those addressed in this thesis: Stewart Home, Lynne Tillman, Kathy Acker, and William Burroughs. An early critique of Art Writing by John Douglas Millar was published in *Art Monthly* in September 2011. Millar says of the article:

The essay originally came out from my thought that art was not being well served by writers. It feels like Art Writing places itself in a very opposite category to literature, and we understand literature, but then what is the category of Art Writing?<sup>143</sup>

John Douglas Millar’s essay, *Art/Writing*, introduces a set of questions that seek to examine why experimental writing remains popular in the art world, but always on the fringes. It opens with a quotation from Roland Barthes’ *Writing Degree Zero*: “*Literature is like phosphorus, it shines with its maximum brilliance at the moment when it attempts to die.*”<sup>144</sup> Millar runs through a quick analysis of various novelists involved in visual art – a wide roster that includes Tom McCarthy, Guillaume Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein, André Breton, Georges Bataille, Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, Georges Perec, JG Ballard and BS Johnson – before shifting onto a question of the consequences of this for art.

What trends of symptoms can we delineate? The most startling is the rise of so-called ‘art writing,’ as both a recognised practice and an academic discipline, and with the growth in the market for a quasi-literary journal.<sup>145</sup>

Millar’s choice of words is hesitant though negative to Art Writing’s potential benefits before having undertaken an analysis of what it is. In outlining the kinds of content commissioned for and reproduced in publications such as *F.R. David*, *Dot Dot Dot*, *The Happy Hypocrite*, *2HB*, and *Cabinet*, Millar describes the nature of content found in these publications, very generally as, “*A sample from a graphic*

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<sup>143</sup> John Douglas Millar, interview with the author, August 2013.

<sup>144</sup> Barthes, R., *Writing Degree Zero*, 1953, quoted in Millar, J.D., “Art/Writing,” September 2011, *Art Monthly* no.349, September 2011.

<sup>145</sup> Millar, J.D., “Art/Writing,” *Art Monthly* no.349, September 2011.

novel, an experimental theatrical script, an interview with an architect, a short skit by Mark Twain, and a seemingly obligatory reference to Buckminster Fuller...In other words anything at all.”<sup>146</sup> He quotes author and editor of visual art and writing website *VerySmallKitchen* David Berridge describing a:

...diverse range of publications, but connected by some shared working principles: the form of a piece of writing is directly related to its content; new writing is always in relation with a sediment of previous texts; “writing” on the page is a shifting, uncertain engagement with the diversity of ways language operates in the physical, mental, and virtual environment.<sup>147</sup>

Berridge here is describing what Millar calls “*the magpie editorial policies implemented by these publications.*”<sup>148</sup> The above quotation is revealing. It points to a series of publications that demonstrate multiple forms of written content that are joined by ‘working principles’ – methodology. That methodology is not described but necessarily focussed on the importance of editorial policy as artistic content – policy as content. On the Submissions page of the *Cabinet* website, their guidelines for writers are as follows:

We welcome historical material that sheds light on current cultural issues and are also interested in non-artistic practices that carry an aesthetic surplus. We publish a wide range of voices, ranging from the academic to the surreal. Our approach is to juxtapose high seriousness with the playful (“joco-serious,” as it were).<sup>149</sup>

This broad and indefinite description reinforces John Douglas Millar’s notion that editorial policy amounts to anything that might be culturally interesting. Like the ‘public’ practice of the MFA Art Writing course at Goldsmiths, this non-specificity can also be taken as a protectionist policy against potential calls of, amongst other criticisms, cronyism or plagiarism. Issue 9 of *Dot Dot Dot* reprints a quotation from the BS Johnson novel *Christie Malry’s Own Double-entry*, “‘Your work has been a continuous dialogue with form?’ ‘If you like,’ I replied diffidently.”<sup>150</sup> The insouciant manner as demonstrated here is the subject of another criticism of Art Writing that extends from Millar’s point and beyond. It is an attitude that is wilfully carefree of imposed boundaries of definition, despite that being the core criticism of Art Writing as a whole – and potentially the aspect that would give Art

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146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Submission Guidelines, *Cabinet*, <http://cabinetmagazine.org/information/submissions.php>

150 Johnson, BS, *Christie Malry’s Own Double-entry* (1973), p.166, reprinted on the cover of Bailey, S. & Reinfurt, D. (eds.) *Dot Dot Dot*, issue 9, April 2005.

Writing the stability to expand its influence and enhance itself as a structured form of art making. The same insouciant manner regarding its own state seems to be the impetus behind Art Writing's attempts at what Millar describes as "*wilful acts of obfuscation*."<sup>151</sup> So if Art Writing wilfully rejects boundaries, yet extends into a range of different forms of writing, how can we situate it?

Sally O'Reilly is a writer, editor and events organiser. She was also the second Writer-in-Residence at Whitechapel Gallery in 2010-2011, following Maria Fusco. O'Reilly describes Art Writing within the parameters of art criticism. She notes that it has characteristics that include being "*critical*," "*fictive*,"<sup>152</sup> "*experimental*,"<sup>153</sup> "*descriptive*," "*contextualising*," "*interpretive*," "*autobiographical*," and "*mimetic*."<sup>154</sup> This is a very broad list of functional descriptive terms, and could be applied to a range of art forms. Art Writing, as demonstrated in examples above, bears close resemblance to forms of experimental or avant-garde literature. Stewart Home, for example, is a novelist whose work can be described as Art Writing depending on the contexts in which it appears.

Home was the editor of Book Works' series *Semina* (2008-2013), short Art Writing novels that each bore the tagline, "Where the novel has a nervous breakdown."<sup>155</sup> *Semina*, indeed, took its inspiration from Wallace Berman's namesake publication. In their open call for submissions, Book Works wrote:

We are looking for experimental prose that draws inspiration from art as much as it does from literature; for writing a radical and extremely selfconscious [sic] understanding of itself; work that takes itself both beyond and behind the mid-twentieth century après-garde...as well as the more recognizably post-modern experimentation. We aim to publish work that will cross any and all genre boundaries, that is unable to recognise differences between poetry and prose...and that continually reforges the passage between formalism and sensuous activity...<sup>156</sup>

The *Semina* series draws on both a visual art history and the history of literature, and aims to merge both and extend the practice thereafter. Book Works' approach to commissioning, with series editor Stewart Home, is inspired by the model of traditional artist patronage, wherein writers were

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<sup>151</sup> Millar, J.D., "Art/Writing," *Art Monthly* no.349, September 2011.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Also a common description, notably as the subtitle for *The Happy Hypocrite*, "For and about experimental art writing".

<sup>154</sup> Sally O'Reilly, "On Criticism," *Art Monthly* 296, May 2006

<sup>155</sup> Various editors, *Semina* series (London: Book Works, 2008-2013)

<sup>156</sup> "Semina: Where the Novel has a nervous breakdown," *Critical Network: Opportunities*, <http://www.criticalnetwork.co.uk/opportunities/bookworks/bookworks.html>. [Accessed October 2012.]

commissioned based on their methodologies of writing, as well as the subject area that they were keen to explore, and on how their commission would fit alongside the other eight books in the series. They would then be provided with support to create their work. As much as each individual novel is written by an individual, Book Works authors the entire series, fashions its context and publishes it within that defined context, that is Art Writing as literary exploit. Stewart Home's writing straddles this line, and it has been commented as such. Jenny Turner, in her review of Home's novel *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* (2002), wrote:

Most of the following will be present in [Home's novels]...political theory, borrowed from an out of copyright source and spliced into the middle of something completely different; pornography, of varying degrees of unpleasantness, also appropriated and pasted in; references to post-surrealist art movement; quotations from punk-rock artistes; citations from texts that appear to be real, but aren't; occult conspiracies; pseudonymity; unprovoked attacks on writers Home happens to taken a dislike to, such as Will Self. There are also dozens of shorter texts published under aliases – Karen Eliot, Luther Blissett, the Neoist Alliance, and so on.<sup>157</sup>

This method of writing bears a strong similarity to the collage techniques of art making, and printing, that Wallace Berman (and others) used in the mid-twentieth century publications described earlier in this thesis. Home's writing is intensely personal (often written as autobiography in first-person narrative), but is also unreliable as factual source. His novels blur the line between fact and fiction. Nicholas Lezard reviewed Home's novel for the *Semina* series, *Blood Rites of the Bourgeoisie* (see fig.11), for *The Guardian*. He quotes the same Jenny Turner review as above, and adds:

Not all of these things are present in this novel, but *Blood Rites* isn't exactly wildly different...Let's call this a "novel" for the sake of convenience...the Home devotee is not going to be disappointed...as Jenny Turner also said, "I really don't think anyone who is at all interested in the study of literature has any business not knowing the work of Stewart Home."<sup>158</sup>

This quotation is confusing – at one point calling *Blood Rites of the Bourgeoisie* a novel, then a "novel", then again calling upon the study of literature in which to examine Stewart Home's work. It is also emblematic of the problem that Art Writing faces in defining its boundaries. We'll return briefly here to Daniel Tiffany's analytic example of the riddle as a way to coax an understanding from the object itself. Tiffany writes of using language to conceal an object's true identity (as we also saw in the

<sup>157</sup> Turner, J., "Aberdeen Rocks," *London Review of Books*, vol.24, no.9, 9 May 2002, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n09/jenny-turner/aberdeen-rocks>. [Accessed December 2012.]

<sup>158</sup> "Blood Rites of the Bourgeoisie by Stewart Home," *The Guardian*, Saturday 26 June 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jun/26/blood-rites-bourgeoisie-stewart-home>. [Accessed November 2013.]

example of Home's contributions to *The Happy Hypocrite*, "Say What You See") as vital to the power of poetry. At the core of his argument is that the artifice of writing, and the demonstration of methodology, is key in order to heighten the experience of the written word. It is in the demonstration of writing that the reader can feel the aesthetic of the object that is being written of. As the open call statement released by Book Works for *Semina* noted, the series (and by extension this demonstrative form of Art Writing) has an extremely self-conscious understanding of itself (as an art form) and seeks to merge and extend upon its predecessors. John Douglas Millar speaks of the boundaries Art Writing shares with literature.

My first degree is in literature and, at the time I was studying, the questions that were being asked by the visual arts were not being addressed by the literature departments. The idea of the art world was that it was a place that was more open, and it seemed more interesting to say what can literature do when put in the context of art, rather than vice versa.<sup>159</sup>

This is not a unique point of view. Speaking about Book Works' "New Writing" series, Jane Rolo notes the decision to employ author Michael Bracewell as the series' guest editor:

I had seen him [Bracewell] talk and I liked what he was saying. He spoke in a literary context and talked about the dearth of exciting things in avant-garde literature and how there were many more exciting opportunities for writers in the visual arts.<sup>160</sup>

Artist and writer Jeremy Millar (and the author of the book *Confessions* [1995], published by Book Works under the "New Writing" series) made a similar point at the conference *Christine Brooke-Rose: Remade*, organised by Natalie Ferris at the Royal College of Art in April 2013. In the plenary panel discussion alongside John Calder, Rick Poynor, Ali Smith, Tom McCarthy and Brian Dillon, on asked why the work of Brooke-Rose was being revisited not only a) after her death, b) decades after her most prolific publication period (which was between 1960 and 1990), and c) in the context of a further education art college and not in a literary context, Millar noted how "*the art world is more promiscuous in its appropriation of sources.*"<sup>161</sup> This has its benefits and its drawbacks. The openness of art world audiences mean that certain overlooked or particularly innovative works may find an audience in a visual art institution (with its diverse range of display techniques, as we will investigate

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<sup>159</sup> John Douglas Millar, interview with the author, August 2013

<sup>160</sup> Jane Rolo, interview with the author, July 2013.

<sup>161</sup> Jeremy Millar, 'Panel: All Speakers', at the conference *Christine Brooke-Rose: Remade*, 19 April 2013, Royal College of Art, London.

in detail in chapter three of this thesis) that may not have a 'natural' place in any other public setting. Conversely, there is the danger that the visual art institution becomes a dumping ground for bad art. The visual arts is a well-supported yet uncertain terrain, particularly for works that might be difficult to place.

Art Writing is a critical practice. In published form, placing new and/or existing works together, fashioning new contexts by juxtaposition, opens up new ways to talk about art and the contexts in which art can occur. It is vital to remember that Art Writing does not only occur in publication form, but also as events that, taking our sample from Britain, are led by the contemporary art institution. The Art Writing seminars held at Whitechapel Gallery, and organised by the MFA Art Writing programme at Goldsmiths, are an example of this.<sup>162</sup>

Despite the issues surrounding the openness and visibility around the discussion of Art Writing in these seminars, they were a forum held in a public institution in which Art Writing could be subject to critical analysis based on its own terms and methods. Criticism, interpretation and contextualisation can, and do, occur in the gallery space and can themselves take very different forms. Common forms of critical analysis in the contemporary art institution include seminars, panel discussions and conferences. Predominantly, these are highly academic examinations, or form of the basis of ongoing academic research. Art Writing incorporates elements of interpretation, analysis and critical judgement, yet as a form of art making it is not embedded specifically in the academic world. Caro Howell was formerly Head of Education and Public Events at Whitechapel Gallery (2005-2010). With academic Marquard Smith, she organised a series of salons that comprised part of the gallery's education programme, and that took place in the gallery's café while the institution was undergoing reconstruction. The salons were created on the principle to attract people who were eager to learn about critical theories and philosophies around visual art but who could not commit to formal study. One particular salon, led by Maria Fusco, was on Art Writing. Says Howell:

It was packed...the discussion was really interesting, it was really multifaceted, there were lots of different views coming through. Maria [said] that to her the programme was

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As we discuss the relationship between the contemporary art institution and Art Writing in Britain in the twenty-first century in the next chapter, a more detailed event analysis will take place later.

about writing about art, writing as art and writing as a lens through which to look at art.<sup>163</sup>

As we've looked at in this thesis, Art Writing involves (though not specifically) creating a collage of different voices, different influences and often different media. This is a style of Art Writing, and one that often results in the art object being obscured by noise that pertains to the object but is not the object itself.<sup>164</sup> The act of interpreting a work of Art Writing involves stripping away the layers that obscure the object and that, individually, comprise the object's creation.

As part of her Writer-in-Residence at Whitechapel Gallery, Sally O'Reilly organised a range of events that sought to deconstruct notions of representation. These were, essentially, a series of free, public events that attempted to strip away the external properties of the art object and return to an analysis of its core concept. One example was the *3-Sided Football Match*, held in Haggerston Park, London, in May 2010. The football match was played by three teams, on a hexagonal pitch, as proposed by Danish Situationist Asger Jorn. The idea around three-sided football, as Jorn saw it, was to present an alternative to class struggle in which the referee is purported as 'neutral' in the political process. The rules of three-sided football include not counting the goals scored, but counting the goals conceded in order to find a winner; throw-ins and corners are awarded to the team whose goalmouth is closest to the ball at the moment it goes out of play; in regards to referees: "*The game deconstructs the mythic bipolar structure of conventional football, where an us-and-them struggle mediated by the referee mimics the way the media and the state post themselves as "neutral" elements in the class struggle, however there will be two referees making discerning philosophical judgements,*"<sup>165</sup> and the game goes on until the players get bored, or three thirty minute 'halves' are played (whichever comes first).<sup>166</sup> Sally O'Reilly's game of three-sided football was played in the run-up to the 2010 General Election in the UK, and the three teams present were representing the three main political parties. In mind of the game's Situationist roots, the idea around this game of three-sided football was to examine the rules that govern an environment. It was a rejection of the economic materiality of football, a commentary

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<sup>163</sup> Caro Howell, interview with the author, January 2012.

<sup>164</sup> Speaking in these terms, the object of Art Writing could be a notion, a hypothesis or a point of view that the artist wishes to express. Like the subject a novel, it needn't be a physical object.

<sup>165</sup> "It's a Game of Three Halves," *Whitechapel Gallery*, <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/downloads/WIR/TSMF.pdf>.

<sup>166</sup> "3-Sided Football Match," *Whitechapel Gallery*, <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/projects/writer-in-residence/sally-oreilly/3-sided-football-match>.

on social and class conflict, it was an demonstration of how events are mediated, and, ultimately, it was an analysis of rule-making. Sally O'Reilly's *3-Sided Football Match* was an example of a participatory public event in which the fundamental notion was to highlight the absurd nature of artifice and how that imposes an inflexible nature onto a core concept. The *3-Sided Football Match* was a demonstration of how it is possible to maintain a relational status quo in a situation in which rules are flexible or non-existent.

This kind of event is an example of how the contemporary art institution in Britain in the twenty-first century has adapted to include Art Writing events into its core curatorial remit. This is an event that has participatory elements, is interpretive, but wider in nature than simply focussed upon the art object – it has expanded to involve a discussion around how the rules of art can be examined, analysed and inverted. In this examination and inversion, it is possible to expand how we talk about art and about how art is represented in the public sphere. This is another example of how Art Writing operates within a separate boundary: as well as bordering on the literary and on art criticism, Art Writing can be curatorial. We will discuss the contemporary art institution in more detail in the next chapter, but in the context of the siting the variety of Art Writing practices we can introduce this concept now.

In broad strokes, Art Writing is the act of dialogue, between participants with the art object or concept at the centre. It is a mediated message that goes through the artwork, and the message ultimately becomes a responsibility of the audience for its reading and interpretation. As mentioned above (in the context of *Semina*, by Wallace Berman, and Liam Gillick's *Erasmus is Late*), Art Writing functions as a gestural impulse which can take a variety of forms, but which is ultimately a message mediated through an artwork. Coming from the legacy of Conceptual Art, Art Writing in a curatorial context is a message mediated by an institution or exhibiting gallery in which it is the modes of representation of art that are being interrogated.

One aim of Art Writing is to instigate a discourse through a series of newly-created, or collected, or collaged objects. This bears similarities to curating. The aim of curating has shifted significantly in Britain with the expansion and development of the contemporary art institution over the past twenty years. This shift has opened up definitions of curating to include direct interpretation of artworks, in



addition to the traditional, core duties involving evidence management, archiving, conservation and indexing. As evidence of this shift from the academic year 2014-15, Goldsmiths, University of London, are offering research degrees in Creative Curating, a course in which:

...contemporary curatorial practices...reflect upon representations of contemporary visual culture – above all those in which art practice forms a central element...The Department distinguishes practice at research level by its modality, which should be reflexive and contextualising.<sup>167</sup>

The language used in this quotation, with particular emphasis on modalities of art practice, contextualisation and reflexivity, reflects the central themes of Art Writing methodology. A practice-based research degree in curating indicates towards the notion that exhibition making and the discourse that it elevates can be considered an artistic practice.

Kit Hammonds is a tutor on the MA Curating Contemporary Art programme at the Royal College of Art. He is “*a freelance curator with a practice that stages exhibition-making, events, residencies and publications.*”<sup>168</sup> In 2004, Hammonds, with curator Emily Pethick, co-founded Publish and Be Damned, an independent book publishing fair. With funds from Cubitt Gallery and Studios, where Pethick was Curator, the two collected three hundred and fifty international, independent art publications and zines for material towards a book fair in which they could provide participants stands free-of-charge. The fair’s popularity has seen it continue on an annual basis at different venues. Since its inception, in addition to travelling to venues across the UK, Publish and Be Damned has toured to fourteen venues internationally. Hammonds says:

Publish and Be Damned has grown into something that focusses on self-publishing; another is a project-based exhibition; and the third is my own artistic practice. For example, I’ll get invited to give a talk about Publish and Be Damned and I’d turn it into a performance – some kind of performative presentation of other people’s work. I set up rapid-fire book launches, one after the other in quick succession. Most of the publishers that we work with do activity-based work – whether that’s just a talk or a workshop or a making session as a form of their presentation. It’s not just about setting up a stall and selling a book.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> “MPhil & PhD in Creative Curating,” *Goldsmiths, University of London*,

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mphil-phd-creative-curating/>

<sup>168</sup> “Staff”, *Royal College of Art*, <http://www.rca.ac.uk/more/staff/kit-hammonds/>

<sup>169</sup> Kit Hammonds, interview with the author. March 2012.

In instances such as these, the defining line between the artist and curator has been blurred. Where historically there have been many instances of the artist being responsible for the curating of exhibitions and the direction of exhibition spaces, we are now seeing moments where the curator takes the responsibility of creating interpretive frameworks that function as artwork. In the context of the institution, the curator is often the instigator of discourse and the selected artist is their agent. This shift has not only occurred due to the development of curatorial strategy. However, the shift of agency from the artist to the curator may not have occurred had there not been an artistic tendency to accommodate curating as a practical strategy.

*Volatile Dispersal: Festival of Art Writing* was a one-night, free-to-enter, public event held at Whitechapel Gallery in November 2009 and organised by Maria Fusco (who soon thereafter was appointed as the gallery's inaugural Writer-in-Residence). The festival was comprised of a series of talks, lectures, performances, temporary exhibitions and installations, seminars, readings and book launches.<sup>170</sup> The festival was staged to utilise the entire platform of the newly-expanded Whitechapel Gallery, which reopened that year having partially closed in 2007 for extensive redevelopment.<sup>171</sup> All gallery spaces (even those with exhibitions-in-progress), the library, reading room, café, bookshop, auditorium, and education spaces functioned as sites of activity. In describing the Festival, Fusco asks the question: "Maybe the world's first Festival of Art Writing?"<sup>172</sup> In a further demonstration of the contradictory tensions that comprise the foundations of Art Writing, this question both asserts and questions the assertion that it is the first event of its kind. Fusco goes on to describe her taking an "editorial attitude"<sup>173</sup> towards the Festival's curation.

...[asking] question after question (not so interested in searching for something that has the characteristics of an answer) this Festival of Art Writing allowed me to edit, or again to stage a journal in real time.<sup>174</sup>

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A fuller list of events and participants can be found here:

<http://mariafusco.net/events/volatile-dispersal-festival-art-writing/>, as well as in the publication Fusco, M. (ed.) "Primer: Volatile Dispersal Festival of Art Writing," (London: Book Works, 2009).

<sup>171</sup>

Full details can be found here: Blunstone, R., 'Whitechapel Gallery by Robbrecht en Daem and Witherford Watson Mann Architects,' *dezeen magazine*, <http://www.dezeen.com/2009/04/01/whitechapel-gallery-by-robbrecht-en-daem-and-witherford-watson-mann-architects/>

<sup>172</sup>

"Volatile Dispersal: Festival of Art Writing", *Maria Fusco*, <http://mariafusco.net/events/volatile-dispersal-festival-art-writing/>

<sup>173</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>174</sup>

Ibid.

As Fusco states here, the aim of *Volatile Dispersal: Festival of Art Writing* was not to look for resolution but to maintain an engagement with the narrative of a the context of siting a series of existing and newly-commissioned artworks, and discursive events juxtaposed alongside one another in the environment of a contemporary art institution. Over thirty events took place in a single location within the space of four hours. With such a wealth of content a single, unified theme was difficult to pin down. As such, the audience was not expected to reach any conclusion about the current state of Art Writing, except perhaps that it did have a current state.

The concept of *Volatile Dispersal* was that it questioned the nature of the art event – it was Art Writing as curatorial investigation. Art Writing is concerned with the creation and dissemination of interactions. In order to get a comprehensive understanding of how efficient a specific methodology is (and Art Writing is similarly concerned with its own methodologies), Art Writing needs to be applied and tested in real time. Hence, we can see higher visibility for writer-in-residence programmes at contemporary art institutions, and interpretive events around exhibitions that incorporate live writing,<sup>175</sup> and the criticality around various forms of critical writing practices, including site writing. The shifting ontologies of Art Writing and curating as an artistic practice demonstrate a change in emphasis in how an artist (also, curator) explores new modes of gallery-based communication, one that incorporates the audience as vital and reciprocal part of the institutional framework. The boundaries of Art Writing are more mutable than curating, whose boundaries are necessarily set in place by an exhibition institution, gallery or public space.

Currently, the trajectories of ‘creative’ curating and Art Writing appear similar. Their similar use of terminology and modes of gallery-based exhibition mean that the context which describes one could also describe the other. Both are a proven strategy for sustaining engagement in contemporary art.<sup>176</sup>

Daniel Hermann is Eisler Curator and Head of Curatorial Studies at Whitechapel Gallery. He says that demand for curating courses have created:

...a situation where you have to expand the definition of curating; not because it's the right thing to do, or because it's interesting, or because it's a political decision, but

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<sup>175</sup> For an excellent example of live writing, albeit not in conjunction with a public exhibition, see Dillon, B., *I am Sitting in a Room (Twenty-Four Hour Books)*, (New York: Cabinet, 2012)

<sup>176</sup> This applies largely in an institutional context.

because it becomes an economic decision...we are creating a situation where we have more graduates in curating than there are reasonable options to work in the field.<sup>177</sup>

The contemporary art institution has supported the development of Art Writing in Britain significantly, and it can be argued that because Art Writing is dependent on discourse between people (with or without a physical art object in place) its costs are lower than the staging of exhibition, and therefore its development was similarly contingent on economic factors. But if 'creative' curating is fundamentally institutional, and Art Writing operates across an unstable territory that includes curation, criticism, participation and literature (and specifically resists definition), what does the future of the institution look like? And can we expect similar support for Art Writing in the future based on the state of the contemporary art institution in Britain today?

**The British contemporary art institution today, and its relationship to the future of Art Writing**

In order for Art Writing to have reached a moment in Britain where its status has been analysed, interrogated and assessed both in public fora and in the arts press, it has had to reach an audience on a wider scale than just that of the distribution networks of independent arts publishers. As we have seen above, there are instances where Art Writing takes place as an event within a contemporary art institution. The development of Art Writing has been supported by the growth of the contemporary art institution sector in the UK, which itself has seen significant development over the past twenty years.

Between 1998 and 2014, twenty-six contemporary art institutions in England have either undertaken significant refurbishment or redevelopment work or have been built new. A further fifteen national museums underwent reconstruction work between 1991 and 2013.<sup>178</sup> Large-scale redevelopment throughout the museums and galleries sector has led to the contemporary art institution evolving its core remit in order to fulfil a new and expanded sets of functions and responsibilities. We will see shortly how recent developments in curatorial strategy have supported the contemporary art institution in fulfilling these new functions and responsibilities, but we'll first outline what the 'new' contemporary art institution in Britain looks like. Its increased list of responsibilities means that the 'new' contemporary art institution has functions that situate it between the museum, contemporary art gallery, Kunsthalle (i.e., a temporary exhibition space without an art collection), archive and educational resource.

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<sup>178</sup> The list includes work undertaken at the following venues (with date of the completion of development in parentheses): National Gallery, London (1991), Eureka! The Children's Museum, Halifax (1992), Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (1995), British Library, London (1997), Geffrye Museum, London (1998), Serpentine Gallery, London (1998), Milton Keynes Gallery, Milton Keynes (1999), British Museum, London (2000), National Portrait Gallery, London (2000), New Art Gallery, Walsall (2000), Tate Modern, London (2000), The Lowry, Manchester (2000), Victoria & Albert Museum, London (ongoing since 2001), Tate Britain, London (2001), Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester (2002), BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (2002), New Art Exchange, Nottingham (2003), Chinese Art Centre, Manchester (2003), FACT, Liverpool (2003), Camden Art Centre, London (2004), National Gallery, London (2005), Arnolfini, Bristol (2005), Museum of Childhood, London (2006), Rivington Place (comprising Iniva and Autograph-ABP), London (2007), mima, Middlesbrough (2007), BFI Gallery, London (2007), Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange (2007), Whitechapel Gallery, London (2009), Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham (2009), The Showroom, London (2009), Hayward Gallery, London (2010), The Public, West Bromwich (2010), South London Gallery, London (2010), Café Gallery: Dilston Grove, London (2010), firstsite, Colchester (2011), Turner Contemporary, Margate (2011), Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield (2011), The Photographers' Gallery, London (2012), Serpentine Sackler Gallery (2013), Cornerhouse, Manchester (2014).

### What is the ‘new contemporary art institution’ in England?

Of the five resources listed above, the contemporary art gallery and Kunsthalle are the most interchangeable, however there are differences. The contemporary art gallery is a place of exhibition and display. The larger contemporary art galleries are usually comprised of a number of exhibition spaces, each with a different remit and function (which we will explore in more detail later in this chapter). The Kunsthalle will generally tend to show monographs or solo shows by mid-career contemporary artists. It does not have its own permanent collection and therefore full historical contextualisation of its exhibitions is limited, but the various galleries that comprise the Kunsthalle (which may be showing concurrent displays) allows for a range of different voices to interrupt and enter the interpretive debate instigated by each exhibition’s curator. The smaller Kunsthallen (such as The Showroom, in the UK, or Portikus in Germany) may only have a single gallery. In such instances, the director assumes the responsibility to curate a cohesive annual programme that may address a specific set of concerns in order to incorporate a multiplicity of voices and their potential effects on the reading of work. The Kunsthalle as a exhibitiv framework has an more extended responsibility than that of traditional forms of display:

[It] ...differentiates itself from both the commercial gallery and the art museum by being both non-commercial and without an obligation to research, collect and preserve art. A kunsthalle [sic] promotes innovative and experimental contemporary art and it is not only an exhibition space, but also a conveyor of issues that may arise in a contemporary social debate.<sup>179</sup>

It is this, final, distinction that underscores the role of the Kunsthalle in contemporary art, it is what architect Manuel Shvartzberg, in his analysis of Turner Contemporary and Kunsthhaus Graz, called “proto-civic” architecture. He writes:

...Turner Contemporary...idiosyncratically mobilizes concepts of ‘the public’ and thus inscribes itself within the mythology of social-democratic design dignity; a myth which finds suitable expression in the typology of the ‘Kunsthalle.’<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> “The Role of the Kunsthalle in Contemporary Art,” seminar held by the Danish Association of Art Centres in November 2013. <http://kukua.dk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Invitation.engelsk.pdf>. [Accessed February 2014.]

<sup>180</sup> Shvartzberg, M., “Mythopoetics of the Kunsthalle,” *Architecture\_media\_politics\_society*, vol.1, no.2, October 2012.

Though Shvartzberg here expresses concerns around ascribing such civic duty to the architecture of the building, the tenets that underline the programme of any given Kunsthalle are based on openness and dialogue with their audience. Learning and active interpretation are particularly vital in this exploit; the Kunsthalle is specifically reliant on a diversity of voices. It is the mixture of the architecture of the gallery and the ethos of the Kunsthalle that comprises Britain's new contemporary art institutions.

### **Whitechapel Gallery: A brief case study of its ethos**

To coincide with the reopening of Whitechapel Gallery,<sup>181</sup> the organisation published the book *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*.<sup>182</sup> The book is structured as room-by-room guide to the core features required (as defined by Whitechapel Gallery) in the modern contemporary art institution. According to the book, the typical art institution should comprise of, at least, a reception area, galleries for temporary exhibition, site-specific commissions, collections galleries, a bookshop, café, theatre/screening auditorium, education spaces and archives.

The core hypothesis of *A Manual for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Art Institution* is that the modern institution must provide something to audiences that goes beyond the direct processes of exhibition, display and the informal learning and education of contemporary visual art. Since reopening, one of Whitechapel Gallery's aims has been to embed the notion of interaction between bodies – audiences and individual audience members, artists, curators, even the site itself – as a key method of engagement.<sup>183</sup> This is a method that is underpinned by the concept that knowledge production is a mode of artistic creation. Therefore, not only is the audience a key factor in the exhibition, display and interpretation of a work of art, but the site of exhibition – the place where guided, active interpretation occurs – is vital.

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<sup>181</sup> Whitechapel Gallery partially closed in 2007 for major reconstruction work. It reopened in 2009 with 78% more gallery space. See Blunstone, R., 'Whitechapel Gallery by Robbrecht en Daem and Witherford Watson Mann Architects,' *dezeen magazine*, <http://www.dezeen.com/2009/04/01/whitechapel-gallery-by-robbrecht-en-daem-and-witherford-watson-mann-architects/> for further details.

<sup>182</sup> Sharmacharja, S. (ed.), *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, (Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König GmbH & Co KG. Abt Verlag, and London: Whitechapel Publications, 2009).

<sup>183</sup> Whitechapel Gallery Education and Public Events Department Policy, 2008. (Unpublished.)



Caro Howell, formerly Head of Education and Public Events at Whitechapel Gallery, says of the expansion:

The gallery would be open all year ‘round, there would be a range of gallery spaces and that even through the two main galleries might be being rehung there would be other galleries open. So we would be open all the time. It would completely change the character of the gallery.<sup>184</sup>

To close east London’s only major public visual art gallery for a period of two years and at a cost of £13.5 million was a major undertaking (see figs.12 and 13). Its directors had to be sure that upon reopening the gallery would not only live up to the potential of its increased space but that Whitechapel Gallery continued to act as a contemporary art institution with international influence. Therefore, its experimentations in participatory or pedagogical practices were measured, and based on developing curatorial strategies. The following section will examine the ethos of these strategies and will explore its applications in, first, Whitechapel Gallery through the form of Art Writing.

In the early 2000s a curatorial strategy that involved transforming the gallery into a site of participatory dialogue became popular in Europe. This form of dialogue-based curatorial strategy had previously been practised through interpretive activities supplementary to events, expositions and biennials of contemporary art: summits, symposia, seminars, conferences and fora. We’ll explore the history of this phenomenon later in this chapter but, for the moment, we will explore the curatorial engagement strategy as propagated by directors at a number of small-scale European Kunsthallen, and latterly dubbed ‘New Institutionalism.’ The term was taken from the sociological study of how institutions interact with and have an effect on society.<sup>185</sup> In a visual art context, new institutionalism sought to expose the devices of the institution in order to create exhibitions that functioned as tripartite collaborations between curator, artist and audience. Similar in practice to the relational work described by Nicolas Bourriaud and practised by artists including Liam Gillick and Rikrit Tiravanjia, new institutionalism attempted to emancipate art from the hermetically-sealed environment of the white cube and shift the focus to using the art object as a mode through which to explore concepts, and to use

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<sup>184</sup> Caro Howell, interview with the author, January 2012.

<sup>185</sup> New institutionalism in sociology came to prominence in the late 1970s with the publication of the paper, Mayer, J.W. & Rowan, B., “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.83, no.2, 1977. <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwilker/571/571readings/MeyerRowan.pdf>.

art as a modality in which to learn about wider social fields.<sup>186</sup> Examples of venues that practised forms of new institutionalism include the Nordic Institute of Contemporary Art; Kunst-Werke, Berlin; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo; the Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius; Kunsthalle Helsinki; and the x-room, Copenhagen.<sup>187</sup> In order to operate according to a variety of concurrent functions and to fulfil its responsibilities to its various stakeholders, the contemporary art institution therefore must have various points of entry in order to meet the needs of multiple audiences, each with differing agendas. Curator Charles Esche, after taking directorship of Rooseum, Malmö, in 2000 said:

...the term 'art' might be starting to describe that space in society for experimentation...[Rooseum] has become an active space rather than one for passive observation. Therefore the institutions that foster it have to be part community centre, part laboratory and part academy, with less need for the established showroom function.<sup>188</sup>

In saying how Rooseum has become aware of the need to foster reciprocal dialogues with audiences, and therefore 'activating' a space that had previously been 'passive', Esche implies here that audiences require guidance in order to become involved in dialogic participation with the gallery. The aim of participation in the context of new institutionalism is to maintain engagement with audiences over a prolonged period of time, in exhibitions with a variety of artists, and be one element of a series of public programmes that have a related line of enquiry.

The Rooseum exhibition *Vi: Intentional Communities* (2001) was one of Esche's first at the Kunsthalle to examine these concepts. It comprised a series of works that explored communal social spaces, the dynamism of collective action, and its impact on the work of art itself. The accompanying stated that the exhibition will:

...instigate an overall policy by practically testing Vito Acconci's pivotal statement from the 1980s: "A gallery could be thought of as a community meeting-place, a place where community could be formed and called to order."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Two excellent analyses of new institutionalism are Farquharson, A., "Bureaux de change," *Frieze*, issue 101, September 2006, [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux\\_de\\_change/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux_de_change/); and Möntmann, N., "The Rise of Fall of New Institutionalism, Perspectives on a Possible Future," *eipcp.net*, August 2007, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en>.

<sup>187</sup> Möntmann, N., "The Rise of Fall of New Institutionalism, Perspectives on a Possible Future," *eipcp.net*, August 2007, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en>.

<sup>188</sup> Esche, C. "What's the Point of Art Centres Anyway? – Possibility, Art and Democratic Deviance," *Republic Art*, 2004, [http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/esche01\\_en.htm](http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/esche01_en.htm).

<sup>189</sup> Exhibition text (2001), *Vi: Intentional Communities*, *kunstaspekte* <http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?tid=4871&action=termin>

Though the two quotations above cover the same theoretical bases, there are significant differences between them. Notably, the first quotation is a curator speaking about a form of artistic practice; the second is a curator appropriating the words of an artist in order to legitimise a curatorial strategy for research in participation. The second quotation evidences a subtle shift in the balance of power in the relationship between artist and audience, mediated by the curator and the space of exhibition; the focus is placed on the gallery over any specific art works or artists. A gesture of curatorial mediation, as demonstrated above, seems out of place in the context of Rooseum. Such a gesture may be a necessity within the larger-scale international art event – a biennial, for example – in which guidance and direction must be explicit for huge numbers of visitors, the large proportion of which will be casual visitors. Rooseum, a small-scale Kunsthalle in Sweden’s third city, relied on a core, loyal audience and return visitors, the majority of whom live and work in the local area.

There is the challenge within this curatorial strategy to ensure that the language of the institution remains open and is not restricted to those audiences who already speak the language of the institution.

Lars Bang Larsen wrote in a review of *Vi: Intentional Communities*:

“*Vi*” ran the risk of saying that the way for the audience to identify themselves as a community was by being a Rooseum audience. This was probably unintentional but contained a necessary logic, given that corporate thinking, for better or worse, is the most dominant form of group identification today.<sup>190</sup>

This form of curatorial engagement seemed to heavy-handed for Rooseum’s audience. Larsen’s point sounds more accurate: that the community is deprived of autonomy if it can only be called into being by the institution. It appears that Rooseum wanted to create a ‘safe’ environment for participating in dialogue around contemporary art. This may be a tactic employed by the institution to attempt to ensure consistent audience figures across a public programme however there is the inherent danger that the institution’s voice dominates.

The question of sustained engagement is key to the new British contemporary art institution. The application of new institutionalism, as demonstrated briefly in the example of Rooseum above, is

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<sup>190</sup> Bang Larsen, L., “Vi: International Communities,” *Frieze*, issue 64, January–February 2002, [http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/vi\\_international\\_communities/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/vi_international_communities/)

dependent on the strong curatorial voice of the institution's director. The concept of building a specific audience for each institution, and developing a public programme that supports repeat visits and a growing sense of education through a diverse array of visual arts is good and comprehensive. To return to the example of Whitechapel Gallery above, as the book *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution* demonstrates, the modern contemporary art institution must have various sites of engagement – that sit within the visual arts and outside of it in order for audiences to obtain some rest. The difference between new institutionalism as exemplified at Rooseum, for example, and the foundations it set in curatorial practice, for venues such as Whitechapel Gallery to evolve from, is that, taking its cue from the contemporary art gallery (which may have a variety of different exhibition spaces to attend to), the institution's voice is not singular nor authorial. The new British contemporary art institution presents an array of voices, each of which was coming from of display, and each had its own distinct form. Says Caro Howell:

[Whitechapel Gallery was] trying to be a platform for art and ideas...and ideas happen both in debate and in silence...and the gallery needed to provide the totality: the chat, the debate, the ideas, the feedback and then also the quiet. In the same way, the galleries have different rhythms...there is an archive gallery, the collections gallery, the commissions space, the main galleries...They focus on different things. The interpretation, both guided and self-directed needs to sustain all the tempos, where in some places it would be more overt than in others.<sup>191</sup>

That the Whitechapel Gallery was built in order to maintain and sustain a multiplicity of voices was key to its engagement with Art Writing, and it was for precisely this reason that Howell introduced Art Writing to the gallery's public programmes, saying of the Art Writing salon that she and Marquard Smith programmed during Whitechapel Gallery's reconstruction:<sup>192</sup>

I thought rather than putting the responsibility, the sole, ubiquitous voice – in terms of interpretation – on the gallery, would it not be more interesting to, on an annual basis, bring in a creative practitioner to throw a different light and respond in a different way to ideas about writing, language and interpretation?<sup>193</sup>

As we have seen in examples earlier in this thesis, including the Art Writing seminars at Whitechapel Gallery; the Cosey Complex at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London; and *Volatile Dispersal: Festival of Art Writing*, a recurring aspect of Art Writing as an event-based practice in galleries and

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191 Caro Howell, interview with the author, January 2012.

192 See footnote 156.

193 Caro Howell, interview with the author, January 2012.

institutions relies on a multiplicity of concurrent voices, sometimes contradictory, but when placed in juxtaposition with one another allow for a variety of new readings of a concept or art object. But what of Art Writing as a core exhibitivite discipline, as practised by artists in collaboration with curators and audiences? We will explore this further, with examples from other new contemporary art institutions in Britain, in the following section.

### ***Sensorium Tests at MK Gallery, and the ‘uncatalogue’***

MK Gallery (formerly MK-G) was one of the first British contemporary art institutions newly built around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>194</sup> Anthony Spira, its current director (appointed in 2009), explains that though he had no specific remit to fulfil when taking the role, his primary challenge was to respond to criticisms in the local press that complained that the gallery was isolationist and elitist.<sup>195</sup> His response was to create a exhibition programme in close collaboration with education and public programmes. He notes how an understanding of an artist’s background, research and methodology is vital in developing an interest and sustaining engagement with exhibition for an audience – that it allows even a non-visual arts literate audience to gain an insight into the processes behind contemporary art. Spira says:

I’m always keen to get [artists’ research]...more visible for visitors. It might be inappropriate in some instances but generally...it’s quite an insight into their way of thinking. I try to do that as much as possible.<sup>196</sup>

Acknowledging that there may be times when exhibitions may not require such specific contextualisation but, by and large, the greater extent of exhibitions follow these similar curatorial explorations. Further, Spira highlights the fact that:

We do almost exclusively solo exhibitions. We focus largely on UK artists...the first substantial exhibition of an artist who has ten years of work behind them. With people who have got serious bodies of work you can do proper research...I find group shows tricky, and I think that the size of the building lends itself to a solid solo show, often the first artist monograph.<sup>197</sup>

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194 MK-G, as it was known at its founding, was opened in 1999.

195 Anthony Spira, interview with the author, February 2012.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid.

Since taking directorship of MK Gallery, Spira has shown the first major UK survey exhibitions of artists including Gerard Byrne, Andrea Büttner, and Marcus Coates, where examples of shows prior to Spira's appointment include selected periods of work by generations of artists older than those Spira is interested in exhibiting, including John Riddy, Alison Turnbull, Sigmar Polke, and Ian Hamilton Finlay.

In 2012, MK Gallery showed the exhibition *Sensorium Tests*, a solo presentation by Daria Martin.<sup>198</sup> The exhibition was comprised of four moving image works, including the premiere of her latest film, which also lent its name to the exhibition. The 16mm film *Sensorium Tests* examines the phenomenon of mirror-touch synaesthesia, a condition in which sufferers experience physical sensations when observing objects or other people being touched. MK Gallery produced and published a corresponding book, under the same name as the film and exhibition, edited by the artist and Anthony Spira, to coincide with the show. Spira explains the book:

It doesn't make any sense to *display* anything related to Daria's work in an exhibition, that's why it's done in text form...In this publication I asked Daria to pull together a mini-anthology of texts that have been influential in her work [because] she's quite an academic artist.<sup>199</sup>

The film *Sensorium Tests* centres on a clinical test for mirror-touch synaesthesia being administered. It has no formal narrative other than the test itself, through it implies an intuitive sensory perception between two unnamed protagonists. For the creation of the film, Martin conducted first-hand accounts and drew upon second-hand academic, scientific, and interview-based research with sufferers, their friends and families. As a conceptual narrative, the film deliberately constructs a barrier to formal, linear explication. It is not apparent in *Sensorium Tests* the extent to which Martin has researched the phenomenon of mirror-touch synaesthesia; when Spira speaks of Martin as being an "academic artist" it means that there is a history of information that she has acquired that is not necessarily explicitly apparent in her final works. The exhibition is completed with three of Martin's earlier films, *Closeup Gallery* (2003), which focusses on an uncanny reversioning of a card-trick magic act; *Soft Materials* (2004), where the relationship between man and machine is explored through dance performance; and *Harpstrings and Lava* (2007), an animation developed through research in dream imagery. Each film is

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<sup>198</sup> Daria Martin, *Sensorium Tests*, 20 January-08 April 2012, MK Gallery.

<sup>199</sup> Anthony Spira, interview with the author, February 2012.

concerned with the sensory relationships between people and objects, and how this might be able to be explained through performance. These are abstract, concept-oriented artworks that Spira felt necessitated further, explicative, examination through an artists' publication. Publication of a corresponding exhibition catalogue would be customary for a major exhibition at a public visual arts institution, the book accompanying *Sensorium Tests* fulfilled enhanced functions, and, by being able to operate in areas distinct from the site of the gallery, becomes an artwork in and of itself. In other words, it behaves as Art Writing.

The book *Sensorium Tests* expounds on the history of the creation of its namesake film and provides a context for its research; in this sense, the book closely fits the model of the exhibition catalogue, also containing a commissioned essay siting various aspects of the film in an art historical context. However, the book extends on this basic premise by also presenting the artist's research: reprinting Daria Martin's interviews and research notes, and she herself was commissioned to write an essay on mirror-touch synaesthesia and her research processes. Here, we can begin to see elements of self-reflexivity being taken on. As a linear process, Martin undertook a period of research, created an artwork from this research, and then returned to the research to extend upon it and the artwork in new form. Artists writing about their own work is not a defining part of an exhibition catalogue; it is with this last example that we can see the book *Sensorium Tests* begin to operate in a separate sphere. In a further example of the book demonstrating the artist's self-reflexive process, the final section of the book reprints classic texts selected by Martin that influenced her research and working processes. The texts include work by figures including Mary Shelley, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Wayne Koestenbaum and Laura Mulvey. These texts outline the context in which Daria Martin initiated the project – therefore this edited selection refer inward, to the research and making of the film; and still the texts project outward, defining the broad and varied contexts in which this film is able to be read: from the scientific, to the filmic, the visual artistic, the sociological and the historic. The book, more than the film, allows for the juxtaposed multiplicity of voices that is necessary in a work of Art Writing, in order to provide new readings of each work's contexts.

### **The 'uncatalogue' demonstrated outside the exhibition**

The work of Art Writing will always be its own discrete object, but this section will look at how the object of Art Writing interacts with gallery-based events, exhibitions and ‘traditional’ artworks. It will look at the object of Art Writing not as a catalogue of an artwork or art exhibition, but as an object which takes the place of a catalogue and creates its own identity as an artwork. Having looked at the ‘uncatalogue’ in the context of an exhibition above, I will examine its place alongside a gallery-based event, and an artwork series: respectively, *Cosey Complex*, edited by Maria Fusco and Richard Birkett, and published following the day-long performance event of the same name held at London’s Institute of Contemporary Art in March 2010; and the artwork series *Performance Nude* by Fiona Banner.

*Cosey Complex*, as a gallery event, invited contributions that took as their point of origin the idea that the stage name assumed by musician and artist Cosey Fanni Tutti can be taken as the demonstration of a working method. Participants in the event included artists and writers Gerard Byrne, Diedrich Diedrichsen, Corin Sworn, Chris Kraus and Clunie Reid. Gerard Byrne’s contribution, *Dialogue for Three* (2010) (see fig.14), was a staged theatrical performance for three actors – two men and one woman – that looked at power relations between people through the prism of projected sexuality. It was inspired by the Harold Pinter play of the same name (1963). The three characters interact in fragmented phrases, not as linear dialogue, and the situations that they speak of is similarly divided. The effect on the audience is one in which, through the characters’ words, they are transported through various times and various places. Byrne, whose primary art form is photography, takes a fragment of his version of the stage play and re-enacts it in the book *Cosey Complex* as a photographic comic. The characters speak to one another in a different form of fragmented communication: in speech bubbles across graphic novel-style panels. The panels are laid out in a similarly non-linear form – either triangular or as parallelograms, no two the same shape, and each page displays anywhere between three and nine panels. Corin Sworn’s performance piece, *Prologue: Endless Renovation* (2010), was a slideshow and presentation that looked at historical contexts of feminism and its photographic representation. As reproduced in the book *Cosey Complex*, the piece is a written script of the presentation (an updating of Sworn’s spoken elements) after the event:

#### **Interior–Afternoon Lecture Theatre**

(Note: numeric chronology of slides is inaccurate and should only be used as a loose guide)



**Lecturer**

Improvise 1 min: Introduction

**Slides: 1A, 0B**

I'd like to begin with this slide. It is probably the most unusual in the collection in that it is the only noticeable mistake.

It looks as though someone has, inadvertently, taken a picture of the ceiling.

**Slides: 1A, 1B**

This act is not particularly uncommon, most of us have accidentally photographed the corner of some room.<sup>200</sup>

Sworn's piece is reprinted without imagery: as a slideshow presentation, the script spoken by the artist is reliant on its corresponding imagery to make sense. Throughout the piece, Sworn refers to "this image."<sup>201</sup>

There are examples in the book *Cosey Complex* wherein a presentation made for the event is documented, for instance the pieces "Entertainment Through Pain" by Diedrich Diedrichsen and "Panda Porn" by Chris Kraus are reprinted as performed. However in the two examples given above – Gerard Byrne's and Corin Sworn's – the format of the book allows them to extend a linear performance piece into an artwork that conceptualises the original work and allows tangential readings to occur. *Dialogue for Three* reflects on its inspiration from Harold Pinter's original play but is itself an adaptation of an adaptation. It allowed Gerard Byrne the opportunity to select passages of the performance in which concepts of fragmented discourse and atomised social interactions could be specifically highlighted. In this sense, the format of *Dialogue for Three* in the book – that of a photo-story graphic novel – reflects on its narrative as well as that of its predecessors and inspirations. In the same way, Corin Sworn's piece as printed in the book is a self-reflexive attempt to analyse one's own efforts at public performance. The piece in the book is stripped of its core performative element: its imagery. Instead, its contextualising imagery are those pictures that are interspersed between all the contributions to the book. The reader is challenged to make the connections between Sworn's narrative (which lacks depth without its contextualising slideshow) and the rest of the pieces in the book using only the common thematic imagery that links the book's articles together. It is a similar technique to the one used in the book *Performance Nude* by Fiona Banner. This book, which documents *in situ* a

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<sup>200</sup> Corin Sworn, *Prologue: Endless Renovation* (2010), as reproduced in Fusco, M. & Birkett, R. (eds.) *The Cosey Complex*, (London: Koenig Books, 2012).

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

series of related artworks in galleries and museums, uses imagery to punctuate text – to place new contexts for the written elements that follow.

Described in the colophon of *Performance Nude*, the book:

...is based on one project, which took on various forms between 2006 and 2009. The first nude performance, at the Port Eliot Literary Festival, was an experiment with an audience between Marianne Hyatt, my model, and me. Since then, I have instigated several performances in the studio, and more publicly. During this time, I have worked with various people in the spirit of collaboration...<sup>202</sup>

The works contained within *Performance Nude* relate to a series of works in which artist Banner writes in ink or paint on a wall, board or paper, describing (in both figurative and abstract terms) a nude model standing before her. In public, these ‘live writing performances’ occur before an audience as a gallery-based event. The text that Banner writes may describe the nude model in figurative terms, with language ranging between poetic and pornographic; she may write in as prose or poetry; shaping the text or more formally in paragraphs. The book contains photographic documentation of Banner performing one of these events; a scanned excerpt from a previous book by Fiona Banner, *War Porn* (2009), in which she splices together detailed descriptions of porn and war films; there are renderings of some texts created for nude performances reproduced specifically for this book; there are scripted, timeline documentations of nude performances that have previously occurred; and the book contains a newly commissioned text by Michael Bracewell, and the transcription of a conversation between Banner, Stewart Home and Cosey Fanni Tutti.

Like *Sensorium Tests* and *Cosey Complex* which functioned as documentation catalogues of their respective exhibition and event, *Performance Nude* is a document of an artist’s project. And like the former examples, *Performance Nude* extends beyond its foundational function and uses the format of an artist’s book to harness what Banner describes above as a single project that took place over several years in various incarnations. In one sense, *Performance Nude* is a document of ephemeral, event-based artwork creations; in a wider sense, the book utilises an editorial process to highlight specificities of individual performances in their overall context, juxtaposes the nude performances in the context of Banner’s development as an artist, and brings in a range of voices to aid interpretation and siting of the

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Banner, F., *Performance Nude*, (London: Other Criteria: 2008).

nude performances as a whole. It works, in this respect, as a survey of Banner's nude performances whilst at the same time becoming the ultimate art object of the nude performances. The book is, cumulatively, documentation, analysis, contextualisation, and presentation of the artwork series. With the exception of one DVD produced to display alongside a performance nude text in gallery exhibition, there is no other 'official' documentation of any of the works. As such, each is an ephemeral event – the book, *Performance Nude*, and similarly in the example of *Cosey Complex*, becomes the space in which this series of performances occurs.

**How has the evolved gallery space supported the development of Art Writing? Outreach and education.**

As we have seen throughout this thesis, Art Writing is a broad field that operates across a variety of disciplines: art making, documentation, art criticism, research, and interpretation, among others. In the environment of the gallery or contemporary art institute, Art Writing has often been utilised because of its educative or interpretive functions – consider the examples of the Art Writing seminars at Whitechapel Gallery; of opening up the interpretive debate around a series of artworks to involve audiences, in the example of new institutionalism; or in a more abstract, concept-based form of education in the examples of the events organised by Sally O'Reilly in her tenure as Writer-in-Residence at Whitechapel Gallery. Gallery educator Felicity Allen speaks of such pluralist tendencies as a fundamentally political act, and that this form of educative practice:

...is an individual strategy [connected to the liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s] among many (including, for instance, small-scale exhibitions, small press and magazine publishing, alternative libraries and archives), to shift art from a monolithic and narcissistic position into a dialogic, open [process] that renegotiates issues of representation, institutional critique, and inter-disciplinarity.<sup>203</sup>

The period of the 'liberation movements' that Allen references (specifically, post-1968<sup>204</sup>) predate formal gallery education strategies. Early instances of dialogic processes between artist, curator, artwork and audiences occurring in the context of exhibitions can be taken from the international art event.

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<sup>203</sup> Allen, F., "Situating Gallery Education," *Tate Encounters*, February 2008.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

As outlined in chapter one of this thesis, Fritz Heubach and his artistic collaborators attempted to disrupt programmes at Documenta 4 due to their perceptions that the exhibition was inhibiting professional artistic progress by focussing only commercial art. In the wake of the 1968 protests and the increasing anti-elitist, socialist sentiment, the mode of thinking that defined the artistic direction of Documenta 4 had become outdated. Documenta 5 (1972) demonstrated the potential of visual artistic education and interpretation with a central series of programmes that propagated dialogue and openness. One of the most well-known examples of work presented at Documenta 5 was Joseph Beuys' Information Office for his project *Office for Direct Democracy by Referendum*. The *Office...*, founded in 1971, expounded upon:

Beuys' expanded concept of art [inspired by] the theories of anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner about a "threefold social organism." This organic structure of society draws parallels to the threefold human organism of head (center of nerve and sense activity), rhythmic system (breathing and circulation), and metabolism. Steiner's analysis examines three independent spheres of society: the cultural life (science, art, religion, the educational system, information), the rights life (legislative, executive, judiciary, state, and politics) and the economic life (production, distribution, and consumption of goods). He observed in 1919 that the current social order is dictated by economics, which is the cause for unlimited profit-seeking, permanent inflation, unjust distribution of wage and property, and the unequal position of the human being before the law. Only when each sphere is organized under its own principle--freedom, equality, solidarity--the healing of the social organism can occur.<sup>205</sup>

Beuys (who once was quoted as saying, "*To be a teacher is my greatest work of art,*"<sup>206</sup>) had a practice that, through the *Office...*, was based on eliminating the spheres of hierarchy based on distribution (of wealth, of education, etc.) At Documenta 5, Beuys set up the *Office...*'s Information Centre. Based in the Fridericianum, the main exhibition hall at Documenta, Beuys' held public 'classes' for ten hours a day for the duration of exhibition. The aim of the Information Centre was to initiate conversations with visitors to Documenta 5 around society, politics and art based on their personal experiences.<sup>207</sup> The same year that Beuys' set up the *Office...*, artists John Dugger and David Medalla founded the Artists Liberation Front (ALF) in London. Also participating in Documenta 5, the ALF were photographed sat atop the Fridericianum with their organisation's banner, which featured the slogan, "socialist art through socialist revolution," beneath a row of images of figures including Karl Marx, Friedrich

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<sup>205</sup> Brenner, R., "Political Activism," *Walker Art Centre Archive*, <http://www.walkerart.org/archive/F/9C4309B0B50D8AA36167.htm>.

<sup>206</sup> "Joseph Beuys in conversation with Willoughby Sharp," *Artforum*, no.4, 1969.

<sup>207</sup> Schlingenseif, C., p.13, *Art Without Borders*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2010).

Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.<sup>208</sup> In the garden of the Fridericianum, Dugger and Medalla constructed, with the aid of a team of local workers, the “People’s Participation Pavilion,” in which visitors, having trawled through a water tank (installed in order to “deter arts bureaucrats”<sup>209</sup>), were invited to sit with one another and the artists and discuss arts and society in a less pedagogic setting than Beuys’ Information Centre.

Despite the existence of documentation of these projects, very similar works have surfaced at Documenta in the twenty-first century. At Documenta 12 (2007), co-artistic directors Roger Buergele and Ruth Noack created a site within the Fridericianum that they termed ‘Circles of Enlightenment,’ where ‘art mediators’ introduced visitors to the setting of the exhibition, specific works and their history, and took their questions and responded with their own based on this interaction. At Documenta 11 (2002), artist Thomas Hirschhorn worked with visitors to the exhibition and local construction workers to build and manage the sculpture-cum-library-cum-snack bar-cum-TV studio *Bataille Monument* (2002), which aimed to create a space for the discussion of art and its place in current society whilst at the same time embedding the practical vocational experience required to construct a small public building. Both Documenta 11 and Documenta 12 took place during new institutionalism’s popular moment – the moment where relational concepts entered into curatorial dialogues. It would be easy to say that current educational strategies occurring within exhibitions are ahistorical (though, for example, Joseph Beuys’ Information Centre for the *Office for Direct Democracy by Referendum* is widely recorded, I have only been able to find documentation of Dugger and Medalla’s “People’s Participation Pavilion” in the book *Left Shift*, by John A. Walker, and in a biographical list of works by Dugger from his gallery, England & Co.), however as gallery educators Felicity Allen and Carmen Mörsch have separately noted,<sup>210</sup> until the late 1980s the majority of galleries did not have full-time education workers, resulting in a dearth of ongoing critical attention to gallery-based education practices.

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<sup>208</sup> Walker, J.A., p.87, *Left Shift*, (London: IB Tauris & Co., 2002).

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Allen, F., “Situating Gallery Education,” *Tate Encounters*, February 2008, and Mörsch, C, “At a crossroads of four discourses,” *Documenta 12 Education: Between Critical Practice and Visitor Services*, 2007 (Open Access) <http://www.diaphanes.com/buch/detail/178>.

There is an argument to be made that spatial and administrative issues were a contributing factor in limiting educative practices alongside gallery exhibition programmes. Today, any issues regarding the space in which education can take place, and the administration (or in current terminology, the curation) of education programmes are being alleviated. Due to its limited exhibition space, many of Serpentine Gallery's non-exhibition projects have taken place off-site: in Hyde Park, online, in publication form, and, notably, in schools. In 2009, Serpentine Gallery opened its first satellite gallery: the Centre for Possible Studies. The venue is the permanent base acquired by Serpentine Gallery to house their long-term off-site project *Edgware Road* (2009-present). The centre provides a space for the display and exhibition of work created by artists in response to the project. Also, the centre hosts a regular series of events related to both the project and the area itself. The centre works closely with schools, community groups and the local authority to examine the diverse cultural heritage of the Edgware Road area of London. The concept for the Centre is to explore how research and study can create and "negotiate" a series of "artistic transactions"<sup>211</sup> with the local area:

We are led to the idea of 'studies' through the histories of the Edgware Road itself. Echoes of the experimental, collaborative and participatory 'study' in Marie Paneth's 1940s [sic] *Branch Street*<sup>212</sup> ... offer a way of understanding how a 'study' can function as both a mode of artistic practice and knowledge production as well as an exercise of self and group reflection. [See footnote for a brief description of *Branch Street*.]<sup>213</sup>

The Centre for Possible Studies situates itself (curatorially) between a zone for learning and knowledge production, traditional artistic creation, and sociological study. Furthermore, it is a centre for informal artistic research run as a gallery space, overseen by curators and administered off-site by a public visual art institution. *Edgware Road* builds on Serpentine Gallery's previous outreach project *Dis-assembly* (2002-2006), where work was conducted and created at a school, the North Westminster Community School, and upon its completion was displayed both in the school and in Serpentine Gallery. The creation of *Edgware Road*, with its own discrete strand of public programmes, at its own gallery space, represents a specific positioning by Serpentine Gallery to demonstrate the exhibitiv qualities of

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<sup>211</sup> "About," *Centre for Possible Studies*, <http://centreforpossiblestudies.wordpress.com/about/>

<sup>212</sup> *Branch Street* (1944) was a sociological study conducted by Marie Paneth in observation of a group of children attending the play centre that she managed. 'Branch Street' was a fictional location created Paneth in order to preserve the anonymity of the children. The actual location of the play centre is believed to be somewhere in the mile-long stretch between Edgware Road and Lisson Grove, West London.

<sup>213</sup> "Events, updates & Archive," *Centre for Possible Studies*, <http://centreforpossiblestudies.wordpress.com/about/>

research, dialogue and pedagogy. In 2008, Sally Tallant (formerly Head of Programmes at Serpentine Gallery and instigator of both *Dis-assembly* and *Edgware Road*) oversaw the dismantling of the various programming departments at the institution and their collapsing into a single curatorial collective. She says:

It's very different to [what] you would have in a bigger institution. The Programming team is one team; they all sit in the same office...and they work together and they're all managed by the same person. It makes a huge difference. When there's an idea about doing an exhibition everyone is involved about how it will be rolled out through the various strands...there will be a discussion around how it will engage the Centre for Possible Studies, how it will engage families, and so forth. It's all one big discussion.<sup>214</sup>

Janna Graham, Projects Curator at Serpentine Gallery, and lead curator at the Centre for Possible Studies, notes how this restructuring was an attempt to define a moment where Serpentine Gallery shifted from experimentation in strategic and gallery-based learning to erecting educative structures directly into the organisation's main exhibition programme.<sup>215</sup>

There is a massive benefit in dedicating gallery space to long-term education and outreach programmes; the most prominent being that it (in theory, should) allow for ongoing record and documentation to take place and be stored in archive. All work can be recorded, archived, and re-addressed on an ongoing basis. This form of practice demonstrates a self-reflexivity of practice and embeds critical analysis in each iteration: curators, artists, students and other participants can learn from their previous moments. Above all, the institution maintains a cohesive curatorial strategy across a diverse range of programming and through a multiplicity of participant voices.

**How has the evolved gallery space supported the development of Art Writing? Funding the institution.**

With the widespread development of the contemporary art institution, space for programmes is becoming plentiful and, in certain instances, institutions are opening their own education-specific exhibition and event galleries. Alex Farquharson is the founding director of Nottingham Contemporary, a newly built English contemporary art institution that opened in 2008. He notes some of the benefits

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<sup>214</sup> Sally Tallant. Interview with the author, January 2012.

<sup>215</sup> Steedman, M. (ed.) *Gallery as Community: Art, Education, Politics*. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012.

and drawbacks of participatory and education-based curatorial strategies – the major drawback being that these strategies are difficult to maintain other than in conditions of relative economic freedom.<sup>216</sup>

He says:

It's our job to engage that larger public and see if we can create a kind of engagement through exchange... We try and create a situation – and, of course, we are not unique in this – where there are multiple levels. Our mandate [based on Nottingham Contemporary's public funding award] is to build and develop audiences. These [are] very real political agendas coming from the Government, which I think are often utterly valid in that [we] are responsible to a public that is, in the main, already not interested in art and the issues around it.<sup>217</sup>

In one aspect, public funding awarded in the UK is contingent on developing and growing audiences, and sustaining engagement with audiences in order to increase the number of times per year a person will undertake a cultural activity.<sup>218</sup> Public capital funding has decreased significantly since the international recession that began in 2008, and is now awarded by Arts Council England in periodic rounds of open application rather than by strategic distribution. The Capital application round 2013-2015 awarded sixty-five grants, totalling £71 million – a significant amount, but one that is significantly less on a per-year average than a decade earlier.<sup>219</sup> A general result of this decrease in funding has seen organisations that received capital funding adjust programme budgets (including exhibitions and public programmes funds) in order to rebalance the real-term loss made against the drop in capital funds. Hitherto, one effect of this has been an increase in paid-for public programme activities running parallel to main exhibitions.

### **Art Writing and the institution**

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<sup>216</sup> Public capital funding for new building projects was at its peak in the UK between 1994-2009, during which time approximately £1.4 billion was awarded – across art forms (see “Arts Council England Annual Review 2009, p.36). Of this amount, approximately a quarter was allocated to the visual arts. This figure includes the £33 million awarded to The Public, a contemporary art institution in West Bromwich, which opened in 2010 but closed, citing insurmountable administrative issues, in 2013.

<sup>217</sup> Alex Farquharson. Interview with the author, February 2012.

<sup>218</sup> High arts engagement is defined, by Arts Council England, as visiting a cultural venue or event three or more times a year, “Taking Part” survey, <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/research-and-data/arts-audiences/taking-part-survey/>.

<sup>219</sup> “Announcing our investment plans for 2015 to 2018,” *Arts Council England*, <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/arts-council-news/announcing-our-investment-plans-2015-2018/>.



All this indicates towards two trends. The first is how educative practices have been reintroduced into the gallery environment alongside an increase in popularity and visibility of relational visual art practices. The second is relates to gallery practices in response to public funding. The period between the mid-1990s and the first decade of the 2000s saw the massive growth and development of the contemporary art institution sector across Britain. Over three hundred million pounds was awarded in public funding to grow and develop this sector during this period. Immediately following the allocation of these funds, the international credit recession saw central government significantly decrease public funding for the arts, with Arts Council England (the central public funding body in the United Kingdom) reducing grant-in-aid funding by 29.6% in 2010 for the period 2011-2015.<sup>220</sup> A further cut of 1.17% was made for the final year of that period.<sup>221</sup> Significant cuts to funding filter through the exhibiting organisation and have, in this case, significant impact on programming. It is my assertion that Art Writing became visible as a practice at an opportune moment for contemporary art institutions, and it was in the exhibiting institutions' benefit to support and develop Art Writing as a nascent form of making. There are a number of factors that account for this.

Art Writing is a broad and diverse practice that operates at a number of boundaries, but that intersect at moment of juxtaposition (of objects or media texts, of voices). As such, Art Writing is a practice that, at certain boundaries, can be displayed or presented in an exhibition or event format. In addition, because Art Writing is (not specifically but largely) contingent on the collation or editing together of a range of participant voices this creates a variety of outcomes. For instance, Art Writing utilises itself as a self-reflexive practice for constructive educative purposes. Further, this self-reflexivity allows space for critical examination of itself as a form of art making. Art Writing resists strict definition because it consistently undermines or builds upon itself in order to extend its efficacy as a public-facing practice.

Says Maria Fusco:

The very idea of Art Writing is how you experiment and test things in public... The MFA at Goldsmiths was like a studio programme and the students came with concerns and these were tested against one another and the people that visited the course. The school of art is a good place for this because I saw Art Writing as a practice and the school is the site where intellectual work happens. In that environment you have to try to be more

<sup>220</sup> Press release, "*Arts Council Announces Funding Decisions for the Arts in England*," Arts Council England, <http://press.artscouncil.org.uk/Press-Releases/ARTS-COUNCIL-ANNOUNCES-FUNDING-DECISIONS-FOR-THE-ARTS-IN-ENGLAND-451.aspx>.

<sup>221</sup> Smith, A., "Arts Council England Announces more funding cuts in 2014," *The Stage*, <http://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2013/12/arts-council-england-announces-funding-cuts-2014/>.

precise about testing things and going over and over things, like pebbles on the beach getting cleaned.<sup>222</sup>

This notion is supported in the eleven statements around Art Writing written by Fusco and the faculty of the Goldsmiths MFA Art Writing programme, with the two statements: “Art Writing is re-invented in each instance of Art Writing, determining its own criteria,” and “Art Writing is an anthology of examples.”<sup>223</sup> Again, there are no hard-and-fast definitions of what Art Writing is however, as Fusco notes above and as these two statements declare, Art Writing occurs and it is dependent on the moment of its occurrence – the temporal aspect. Upon its (performed or displayed) completion, it takes the form of archival resource ready to be undermined, replaced or updated depending on its outcome. It is easier described as a work of Art Writing is only an example of Art Writing – it is illustrative of an aspect of what the entire form of Art Writing is attempting to achieve – and because there is no strict definition of Art Writing there is no paradigmatic example of it as a form.

So Art Writing is educative and critical. For the contemporary art institution, the fact that Art Writing necessarily involves a range of outside participants, is reliant on the discourse of contemporary art as its mode of operation, and is able to be exhibited, it involves several agendas that contemporary art institutions can use to quantify their public programme in order to justify their public funding award. Certain criteria must be met in order to maintain levels public funding award in the long-term, and these include audience figures, the targeting of programmes to specific social groups (for instance, those groups whose annual arts engagement level is defined as ‘low’ – in that they visit one or fewer art events per year; the socio-economically deprived; and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds – that term as used by Arts Council England, despite its terribly divisionary groupings); and the targeting of arts education programmes to these audiences and general gallery-going groups. Art Writing allows galleries to employ external specialists on a per-event basis; an event that spans across several of the institution’s priority criteria: public programmes, education, outreach and (if the event is one in a series, for instance the Art Writing seminars organised at Whitechapel Gallery by the MFA Art Writing programme from Goldsmiths) sustained, retentive engagement.

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<sup>222</sup> Maria Fusco, interview with the author, December 2013.

<sup>223</sup> Fusco, M., Lomax, Y., Newman, M., Rifkin, A., “11 Statements Around Art Writing,” *Frieze blog*, <http://blog.frieze.com/11-statements-around-art-writing/>, October 2011.

There is a second reason that Art Writing seems to be popular in this moment of reduced funding: that writing and discourse, as practices, are less expensive and administratively demanding than the borrowing or acquisition of objects. Maria Fusco addresses this also:

Art Writing is a visible practice, and it's quick too. It's to do with the velocity and visibility of production. Art Writing is mobile. And it's cheap. When I was doing the residency at Whitechapel Gallery I made sure that people got paid for their work but the gallery liked us because everyone was cheap. A year's programme cost them a few thousand pounds. If I was an 'artist' I would have much more potential to make money than as a writer. I write at an international level but I wouldn't be able to sustain myself without a good academic post. I think the reason that galleries like writers (and writers-in-residence) is less to do with the intrinsic interest in the work (which there is) but there is an economic concern to it too. You can believe what Caro Howell says about education and access because that's true as well, but I wouldn't be able to admit this in public because it sounds like I'm being negative.<sup>224</sup>

Despite Fusco's concern that her opinion sounds 'negative,' I would argue that this assessment is realistically pragmatic for an institution that, first, is newly expanded and that has extra gallery and event space to programme; second, that is experiencing a cut in funding (because all organisations in on regular public funding contracts felt a real-term decrease in award); and third, is dealing with an exhibitivite practice that is low-cost and that fulfils specific criteria on the organisation's public funding mandate.

There are, naturally, benefits to bringing Art Writing into the institution for the institution itself and not that have some quantifiable aspect for its funders. In the article "Bureaux de Change" Alex Farquharson writes about the rise of independent curating, its effect on museums and galleries and:

...the transfer of the idea of auteurship in curating from the level of exhibition to the institution.<sup>225</sup>

In the article, Farquharson lists a brief overview of the practice defined as 'new institutionalism.' He writes (and I quote at length):

One of the defining traits of 'new institutions' is that exhibitions no longer preside over other types of activity. The 'new institution' places equal emphasis on a range of other functions...(catalogues, guides, tours and so on). Many 'new institutions' run...residency schemes for artists, curators and critics under the same roof as their exhibition spaces...Production necessarily happen prior to and remote from presentation; it happens

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224 Maria Fusco, interview with the author, December 2013.

225 Alex Farquharson. Interview with the author, February 2012.

alongside or within it. Reception is...dialogic and participatory...exhibitions take a highly dialogic mode, giving rise to new curatorial hybrids. 'New institutions' are deeply interested in education in its widest sense: learning consists of equal exchanges among a peer group...Many 'new institutions' publish journals that bring together the strands of their programmes within a common interpretive frame or act as separate platforms for a parallel exploration of ideas.<sup>226</sup>

The form of curation that Farquharson describes in this quotation could almost word-for-word describe the intellectual ambitions of Art Writing as I have defined it throughout this thesis. It is a form of self-reflexive "*institutional critique as theorised and practices by artists since the 1970s*,"<sup>227</sup> which even taking the artistic practices as highlighted in the Documentas of 1967 and 1972, and 2007 and 2007, follows Farquharson's analysis almost to the date (written in 2006, "Bureaux de change" even predates Documenta 11). What Farquharson describes above, as new institutionalism, is the collection and juxtaposition of participant voices into the interpretive framework of not just the exhibition but the institution as platform for the dissemination of contemporary art.

As a critique of this, it is worth returning to the critiques of these earlier practices, most notably "Exhibitions of an exhibition," a response to Documenta 5 by Daniel Buren.<sup>228</sup>

In this short text, Buren criticises Documenta 5 director Harald Szeemann for creating an exhibition that is too reliant on the form of the exhibition and that:

...establishes itself as its own subject, and its own subject as a work of art. The exhibition is the 'valorizing receptacle' in which art is played out and founders, because even if the artwork was formerly revealed thanks to the museum, it now serves as nothing more than a decorative gimmick for the survival of the museum as tableau, a tableau whose author is none other than the exhibition organizer.<sup>229</sup>

This quotation is taken from an updating of the text by Buren, called "Where are the artists?" published in *e-flux* in 2004. In this, he writes:

Judging from a tendency that could already be felt in 1972, today we can assert that the proclivity of most exhibition organizers is to conform as exactly as possible to what this

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<sup>226</sup> Farquharson, A., "Bureaux de change," *Frieze*, issue 101, September 2006, [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux\\_de\\_change/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux_de_change/)

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> This text, in its original language, has the title "Exposition d'une exposition," and has also been translated as "Exhibiting Exhibitions."

<sup>229</sup> Buren, D., "Where are the artists?," *e-flux*, [http://www.e-flux.com/projects/next\\_doc/d\\_buren\\_printable.html](http://www.e-flux.com/projects/next_doc/d_buren_printable.html), 2004

text was already anticipating. So much so that it has become a sort of stylistic epidemic, an artistic genre in itself, a rampant competition in which the organizer proclaims as loudly as possible that he or she is the artist of the exhibition, and to such an extent that Harald Szeemann, who found my 1972 text attributing to him the role of principal artist of the exhibition inappropriate, today claims to be an “author of exhibitions...”<sup>230</sup>

Daniel Hermann, Eisler Curator at Whitechapel Gallery, notes that this shift is endemic in the contemporary art institutions sector currently. He says:

Our students [on the MA programme Curating the Contemporary, run in partnership with London Metropolitan University] all understand the death of the author – that’s taken for granted. At the same time, I see a restitution on the sole author figure under the guise and under the mantle of the curator. We’re at a point in time when the curator has been put on the same pedestal where in the 1960s the artist was shoved off it... People like Mark Dion use the epistemological tradition of curating and turns it into an artistic statement – that’s interesting. But there is a bizarre effect today where there are an ever-growing number of curatorial study courses in the UK, including the one we run, that are generating a supply of people who identify as professional curators for which there is not always the demand, which then kicks into gear the entire idea of creating a demand for the supply that is not there.<sup>231</sup>

It is in these last quotations that we reach the crux of the issue. The contemporary art institution has undoubtedly supported the development and growth of Art Writing – as have the arts press, book publishers and independent spaces for production. In order for Art Writing to have reached a level of visibility in the contemporary art world (in Britain, at least, as this thesis demonstrates) it has required institutional endorsement. Through series of events, exhibitions and publications Art Writing has received a great deal of visibility and has been discussed and debated in public and in publications. Art Writing has been made legitimate as a form of art making.

However, Art Writing has been made legitimate by the contemporary art institution as a form of art making because it occurred at an apposite moment: when public funding was slashed; when curatorial trends involved embedding dialogic, participatory practices around exhibitions; and when the role of the curator was beginning (again) to be seen as the instigator of these discourses. Which leaves the question: can the contemporary art institution continue to support Art Writing?

Art Writing is difficult to situate, deliberately so. Certainly, the institutional support that it has received over the past decade been significant for Art Writing for many factor, for example in receiving

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230 Ibid.

231 Daniel F. Hermann, interview with the author. February 2012.

funding.<sup>232</sup> Further, a being ‘legitimised’ as a formal visual art practice by international renowned institutions that include Whitechapel Gallery and Goldsmiths, University of London, means that the leading figures in Art Writing were able to expand its notions and bring in a wider range of practitioners and therefore potentially increase excellence in the field. Maria Fusco speaks of the fact that she has received enquiries from a number of further education institutions internationally interested in developing their own Art Writing programmes.<sup>233</sup> Whether any of these programmes come to fruition is one aspect to consider – and if so, the form of Art Writing that will be taught is by no means guaranteed to have the same fine arts-studio based practical elements as taught on the MFA Art Writing programme at Goldsmiths. Art Writing exists, but is mobile, permeable and open to interpretation within the boundaries described above.

In the UK, the link between Art Writing and the institution is at its weakest since before the founding of Goldsmiths MFA programme. First, because that programme closed at the end of the academic year 2013–2014. No formal reason was given, though new funding regulations from central Government for universities saw a cut in award of approximately 13% across the sector (a real-term loss of approximately £800 million),<sup>234</sup> with student tuition fees being raised by approximately 300% in the same period.<sup>235</sup> Core teaching modules the MFA Art Writing programme was subsumed into the MA Fine Art course. In Art Writing’s other iterations, Whitechapel Gallery changed their approach to the Writer-in-Residence programme following its fourth cycle with artist-filmmaker Ed Atkins in 2012–13. From 2014–15, the programme became a bi-annual project. The Writer-in-Residence for this time is poet Caroline Bergvall, whose introductory statement proposes a more traditional form of gallery-based interpretation, “*investigating how writing, reading and listening can be understood within the context of visual art through a series of events and online interventions exploring language and*

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<sup>232</sup> An example includes the public funding awarded to Maria Fusco for the founding and continued publication of *The Happy Hypocrite* (2008–2010), as well as for the regular programme funding Book Works received from Arts Council England that supported their national touring exhibition *Again, A Time Machine* (2011–2012).

<sup>233</sup> Maria Fusco, interview with the author, December 2012.

<sup>234</sup> “Datablog: University funding cuts: which institutions are worst hit?” *The Guardian*, 17 March 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/mar/17/university-funding-cuts-institution-hefce-universities>; and “Higher education funding cut by £800m,” *Public Finance*, 21 March 2013, <http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2013/03/higher-education-funding-cut-by-800m/>

<sup>235</sup> *The Funding Challenge for Universities*, Universities UK, November 2013. <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2013/FundingChallengeForUniversities.pdf>

performance.”<sup>236</sup> For Bergvall’s residency, she has so far announced a performance, *String of Words*, to held at Whitechapel Gallery in November 2014, in which she will invite a “relay” of artists to present the artwork or text that has most influenced their work.<sup>237</sup>

Book Works ceased publication of the bi-annual *The Happy Hypocrite* for three years from 2010, with issue 6 “Freedom” (2013) following the publication of issue 5 “What Am I?” in 2013. This move was precipitated by Maria Fusco, the journal’s editor and arguably Art Writing’s most visible proponent in the UK, taking up a new academic role at Edinburgh College of Art – a fellowship role comprised of a five-year tenured post in which she undertakes self-prescribed research into a given topic, in her case the analysis of methodology and process through writing. Guest editors will oversee issues 6, 7 and 8 of *The Happy Hypocrite*, which will now be published annually – writer Lynne Tillman edited issue 6. The aim of this shift is to begin to incorporate a new and diverse range of directional voices into what has become the established form of Art Writing. In her roles as programme director of the MFA Art Writing at Goldsmiths, the founding editor of *The Happy Hypocrite*, and as the inaugural Writer-in-Residence at Whitechapel Gallery, Maria Fusco has been instrumental in forwarding the concept of Art Writing as a recognised form of art making. She admits:

When I started *The Happy Hypocrite* it was capturing a moment and giving a type of work an international platform and I needed to make that moment forthright and very obvious so that people could feel comfortable confiding in it. In order to do that – to secure funding and to give it visibility – you have to push it personally, really put your personality behind it, to secure funding and to give it visibility.<sup>238</sup>

No discipline can advance without the incorporation of a diversity of voices in order to widen the sphere of criticality of a topic. We have seen how the insularity of dialogic curatorial practices of the international art event in the 1960s and 1970s, such as in Documentas 4 and 5, led to criticism and the closing off wider participation in favour of a cyclical discourse supported by the institution, and how this was reappropriated by institutions early in the twenty-first century. As Alex Farquharson writes of new institutionalism in “Bureaux de change:”

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<sup>236</sup> “Projects, Writer-in-Residence 2013–2014: Caroline Bergvall,” *Whitechapel Gallery*, <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/projects/writer-in-residence/caroline-bergvall>

<sup>237</sup> “Performance: Caroline Bergvall: String of Words,” *Whitechapel Gallery*, [http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category\\_id/196/product\\_id/2055](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category_id/196/product_id/2055).

<sup>238</sup> Maria Fusco, interview with the author, December 2013.

...it is institutional critique practices from the inside... to [some people] the idea of an institutional critique being practised by institutions themselves would have been oxymoronic: institutional critique, by definition, was something conducted from the outside.<sup>239</sup>

In Nina Möntmann's essay "The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism," she points to the fact that severe funding cuts saw the replacement of many of the museum and gallery directors who supported the curatorial movement, and even the closing of some institutions.<sup>240</sup> She says that, "*Criticality didn't survive the corporate turn.*"<sup>241</sup> This may be the case (as noted above, Farquharson also states that new institutionalism can only exist in times of relative socio-economic freedom). However, returning to Art Writing as a similar mode of dialogic, gallery-based, participatory form of visual art making and interpretation, despite the fact that institutions can pick apart its component elements to incorporate into their public programmes, or education programmes, or exhibition curatorial discourse, Art Writing remains – nascent following its institutional dismantling, yet it exists, embedded into the work of a group of artists, publishers and arts organisations. The institutions may be bracing themselves for the future among the current funding crises, but Art Writing projects a different trajectory. Currently back on the fringes of the mainstream visual arts, this moment of respite is a necessary shift, so that Art Writing can reflect upon itself as a practice and return with visibility as a form of art making again – perhaps under a different name, but as we have seen that trend occur since the manifestos of the early twentieth century Modernists.

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<sup>239</sup> Farquharson, A., "Bureaux de change," *Frieze*, issue 101, September 2006, [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux\\_de\\_change/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux_de_change/).

<sup>240</sup> Möntmann, N., "The Rise of Fall of New Institutionalism, Perspectives on a Possible Future," *eipcp.net*, August 2007, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en>.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.





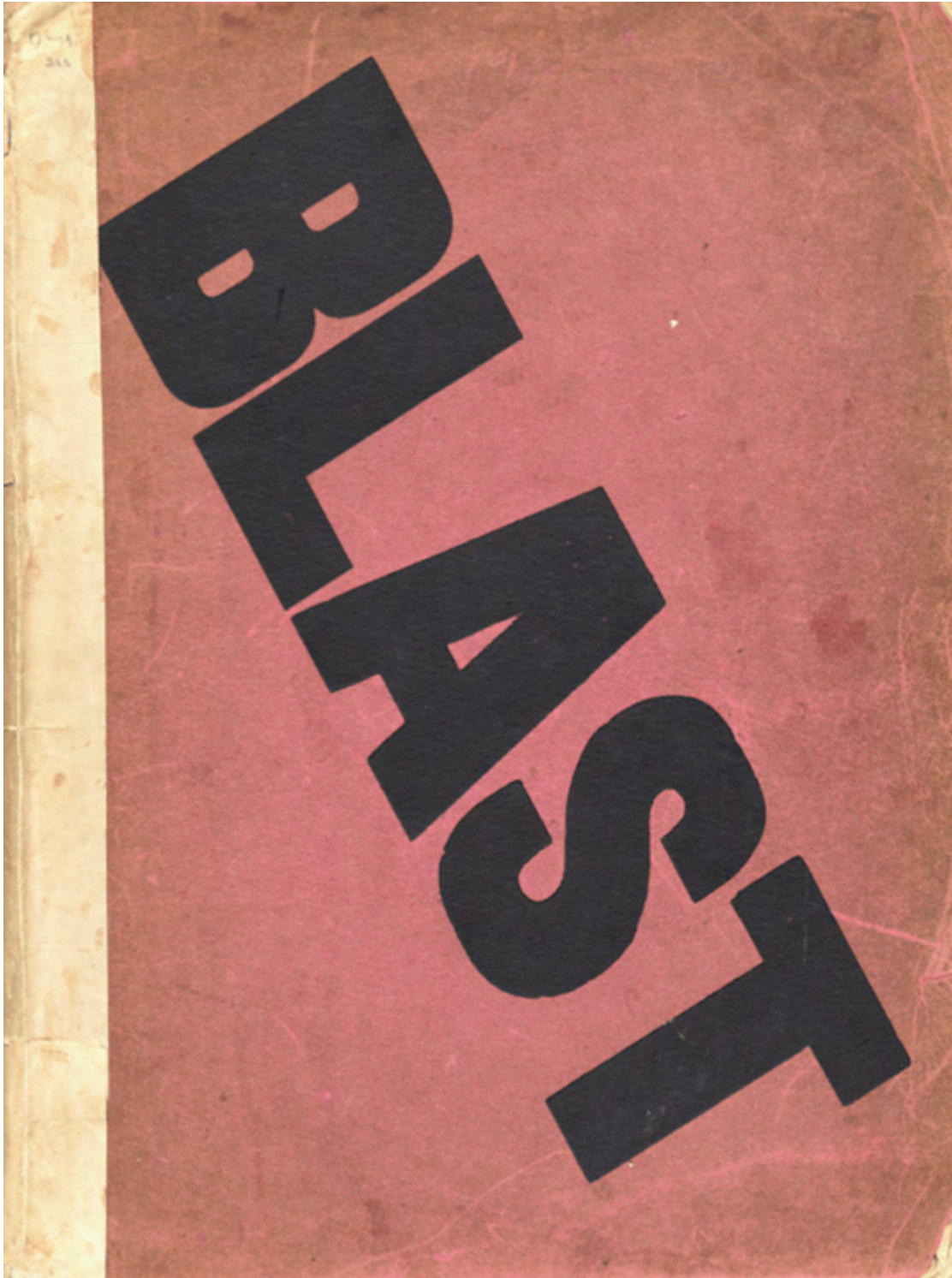


Figure 2: *Blast*, 1914. Front cover.





Figure 3: *Blast* vol.2, 1915. Front cover.

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**BLAST First** (from politeness) **ENGLAND**

**CURSE ITS CLIMATE FOR ITS SINS AND INFECTIONS**

**DISMAL SYMBOL, SET** round our bodies,  
of effeminate lout within.

**VICTORIAN VAMPIRE, the LONDON** cloud sucks  
the **TOWN'S** heart.

**A 1000 MILE LONG, 2 KILOMETER Deep**

**BODY OF WATER** even, is pushed against us  
from the Floridas, **TO MAKE US MILD.**

**OFFICIOUS MOUNTAINS** keep back **DRASTIC WINDS**

**SO MUCH VAST MACHINERY TO PRODUCE**

**THE CURATE** of "Eltham"  
**BRITANNIC ÆSTHETE**  
**WILD NATURE CRANK**  
**DOMESTICATED**  
**POLICEMAN**  
**LONDON COLISEUM**  
**SOCIALIST-PLAYWRIGHT**  
**DALY'S MUSICAL COMEDY**  
**GAIETY CHORUS GIRL**  
**TONKS**

Figure 4: *The Vorticist Manifesto*, page one, 1914. Printed in *BLAST*.

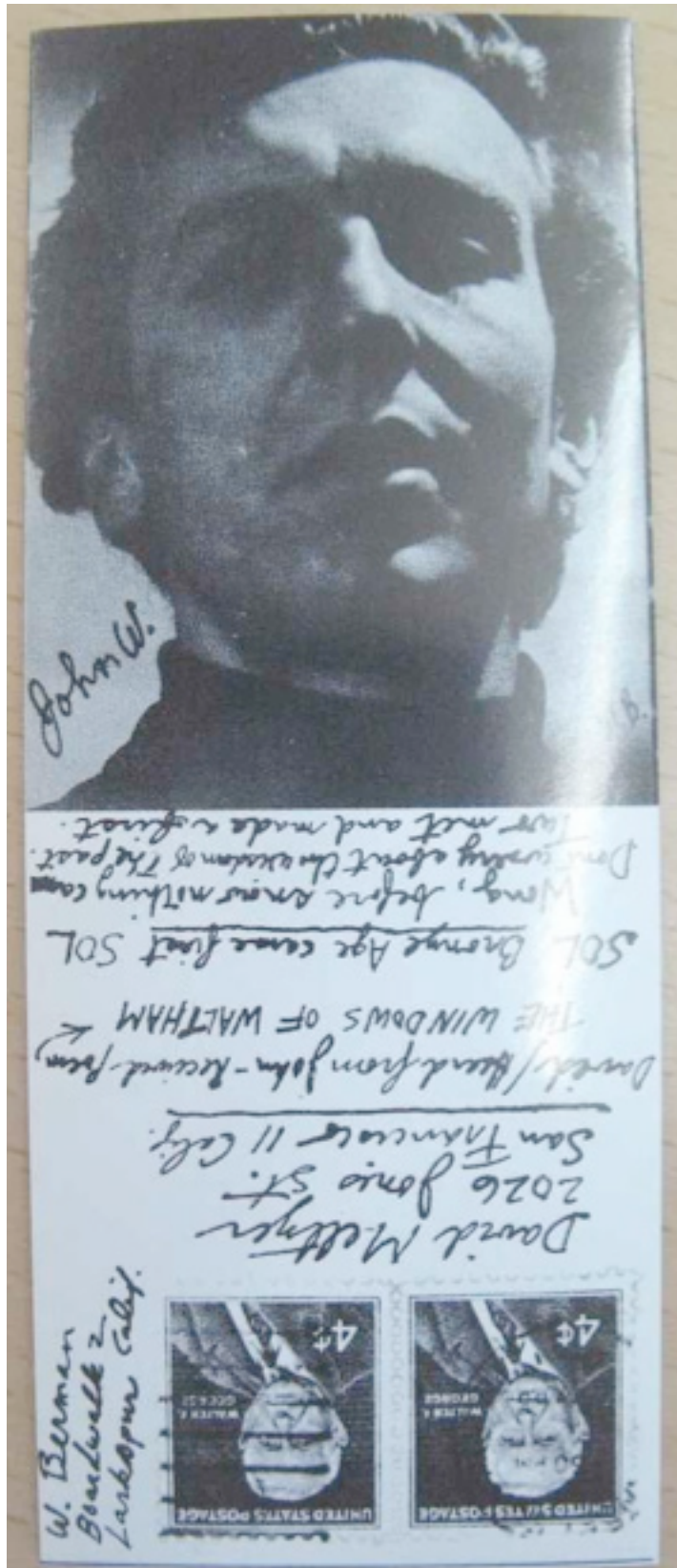


Figure 5: Wallace Berman, mailer to David Meltzer. Photograph of John Wieners; handwritten text: John Wieners, "The Windows of Waltham," poem.





Figure 6: *Aspen Magazine*. View of the installation in the Pat Matthews gallery at the Whitechapel. Photograph: Patrick Lears. Courtesy of Whitechapel Gallery.

– The Happy Hypocrite –



for and about experimental art writing

Figure 7: *The Happy Hypocrite*, vol. 5: What Am I?. 2010. Courtesy Book Works.



Figure 8: BS Johnson, *The Unfortunates*, 1999, book. Photo by JRS Morrison.



Figure 9: Liam Gillick, *Erasmus is Late*, 2000, book.

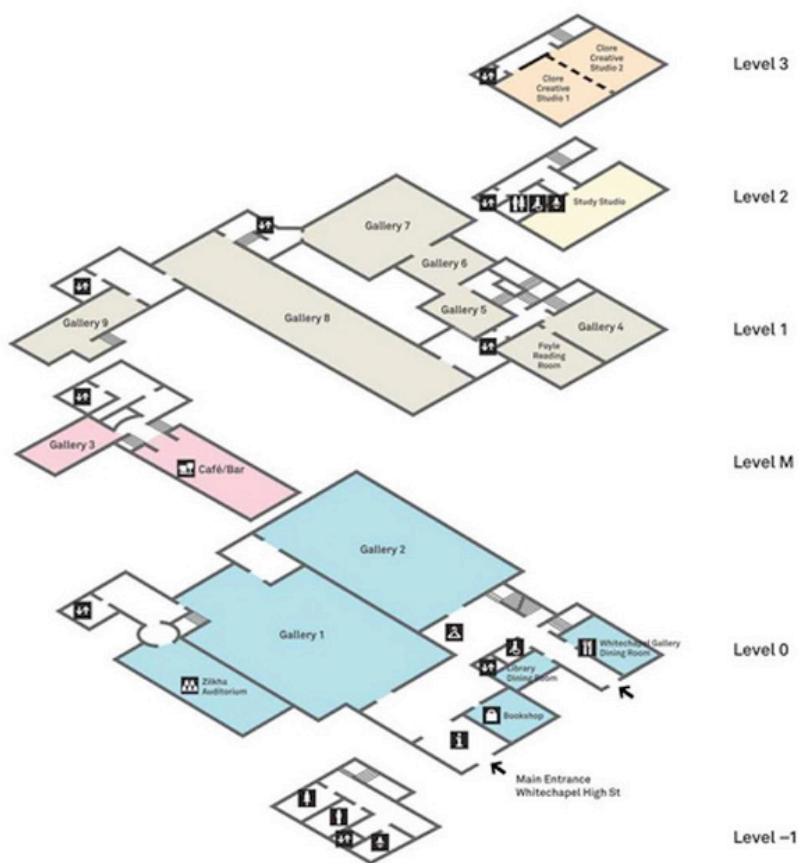




Figure 10: *Dot Dot Dot*, 2001, front cover. Copyright Stuart Bailey and Peter Bil'ak.



Figure 11: Stewart Home, *Blood Rites of the Bourgeoisie*, 2010, book. Courtesy Book Works.



Figures 12 and 13: Cross section and floor plan of the Whitechapel Gallery extension by architects Robbrecht en Daem and Witherford Watson Mann Architects. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery.



Figure 14: Gerard Byrne, *Dialogue for Three*, 2010. Performed as part of *The Cosey Complex*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, March 27, 2010. Photograph by Tom Medwell.

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