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**TERMS AND STRATEGIES OF ENGAGEMENT:  
PERSPECTIVES ON CONSTRUCTING MEANING  
AND VALUE IN CONTEMPORARY ART**

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requirements of Nottingham Trent University  
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## Thesis Abstract

Contemporary art is made meaningful by the discourses that mediate practice, which also renders the physicality of the work less significant. By combining references, artefacts or concepts, artists can claim to be drawing attention to pertinent issues. Yet through intentional ambiguity, the work remains open to unlimited meanings. Given the lack of consistent structures to guide meaning making, audiences might be left unable to construct a coherent understanding of the work and its value.

By drawing upon a selection of historical and theoretical discussions of contemporary art, the context for this research is outlined. Work from economic theory, organisational and knowledge management studies, psychoanalysis, sociology, linguistics and social theory provide additional models for new ways of thinking about art's context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with contemporary artists, art critics, an art historian, a gallery owner, an arts journalist and an art journal editor. Interview analysis revealed three key themes that were reflected in the contextual review: The social roles of those within the field, the construction of meaning by the field and the socio-economic values associated with contemporary art.

The findings suggest that the field of contemporary art can be conceived as a game, with artists employing strategic rules of engagement in order to succeed. Measures of success are dependant upon the artists' objectives and vary according to the scene in which their practice is located. Engagement in the field or game is dependant upon adoption of a belief structure, that allows one to challenge the beliefs of others outside the game, but does not allow for a refusal to play or a challenge to the game itself. The artists are less interested in defining a critical theoretical position for themselves, and focus their efforts on pitching and gaining visibility.

The respondents generally disparaged notions of aesthetics, signification and visual intelligence, leaving them even more dependant upon mediating discourses. Detached from aesthetic signifiers, art's reifying discourses allow it to be experienced in a particular way, so long as one is willing to commit to learning the language. As art appears grounded in nothing other than itself, players in the field require confidence to determine arts meaning and value. Struggles occur for control of the discourses that mediate contemporary art practice and enable strategic position taking. To further confound matters, artists do not always intend these discourses or their practices to be coherent or understood.

As the number of scenes or communities within the contemporary art world multiplies, the discourses employed to mediate contemporary art practices also proliferate. This results in the diminishing possibility of establishing a meaningful encounter with much contemporary art.

The increasing irrelevance of aesthetics to the dialogues of contemporary artists means an outstanding challenge also remains: is there a viable model for the judgement of quality within contemporary art practice? Furthermore, we may need to scrutinise why artists might produce art which is intended to dismantle that which binds human experience and which makes understanding impossible through the evasion of meaningful signifiers.

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# Chapter 1

## Coming to terms with contemporary art

### 1.0 Research focus and questions

This research enquires as to how contemporary art practices are made meaningful and are validated, specifically by looking at the discourses used by those within the field. It examines perceptions of 'contemporary art' and how understanding of contemporary art is constructed. This includes the discursive practices and subjective positions which are created as a result of the complex process of that construction.

The research was inspired by personal experience of contemporary art education. That experience involved understanding contemporary art practice as the act of bringing together disparate or, sometimes, related concepts, artefacts or signifiers, so as to enable connections between these to be made by the viewer. It was the outcome of this process which results in the work's meaning, for such an understanding of contemporary practice acknowledges that contemporary artworks are not themselves imbued with meaning but provides a challenge for the viewer, or at least food for thought. Art education was experienced as heavily weighted toward theoretical understanding. It involved much discussion about the use of 'theory' and probing (or avoidance, depending upon one's position) of the question 'What is art?' This research aims to illuminate why there is such dependence on theory in this educational context during the early 21st century and to consider what role is played by the discourses which form a substantial part of it. It identifies changes within the art field during the 1960s and 1980s as crucial factors in creating this dependence.

The shifts that have been highly influential in setting the scene for today's contemporary art education and practice could be seen as beginning during the 1960s. They have been described variously, as a shift from conventional art practice with its notions of form and experimentation to conceptually based practice or enquiry; as a shift from specific to generic practices; as having occurred at the point where art degrees were introduced in the universities; and as the collapse of Clement Greenberg's ability to articulate his notions of formalism and modernism together.

However, Elisabeth Sussman in *ArtForum*, cited the 1980s as the point in which a 'shift to theory-driven work' occurred (Sussman, 2003, p.209). This research aims to unpick the implications of the trend described as theory-driven work, by exploring the triads or stages through which art has passed. The 1980s prove to have been highly influential because of the institutionalisation of theory within art education that seems to have taken place during this period.

The shifts of the 1960s and 1980s led to generic practices in which artists set their own conventions or rules. The audience for contemporary art has to grasp the discourses that mediate the practice of it, in order for the art to become meaningful. This research reflects upon the difficulties faced by contemporary arts audiences, and explores claims that these audiences are diminishing as a result of the greater difficulty of making contemporary art practices meaningful. The audience is considered alongside the situation in contemporary art education where students have been encouraged by tutors to perceive themselves as making work primarily for other artists.

Existing debates in the field about these issues are acknowledged. Some of these debates have been portrayed by Thierry de Duve as exemplifying a split between the last partisans of the avant-garde and the traditionalist reactionaries. Examples of 'reactionary' responses to contemporary art occur regularly in the UK national press and never more than annually in response to the Turner Prize, when the reality of the art world really collides with public opinion of contemporary art. The phrase confidence trick has been used to describe work shown at this event (Jenkins, 2005). Although this expression is used in this thesis with reference to Mark C. Taylor, similarities between Jenkins's article and the present research are superficial, because Jenkins resorts to contrasting contemporary art unfavourably with the work of Samuel Palmer, the landscape artist who died in 1881. He takes the position that contemporary art practice is incomparable and so he simply dismisses it (Jenkins, 2005). Other discussions on the Turner Prize, suggest that there is a need to address contemporary art and its failings rather than just to dismiss it; Rachel Cooke states that which is found to be problematic 'deserves to be unpicked' (Cooke, 2005). This research has attempted to do just that: to unpick and address issues within the field and explore the views of those both within and outside the field. Some of the theoretical approaches drawn upon in this research, such as that of Roy Harris, take as their basis the continued public consternation over, and distrust of, contemporary art, which is seen as evidence of its imminent and unavoidable collapse. This research assumes that it is best to look to the practitioners themselves for insights into the nature of contemporary practice and its discourses and also to compare their portrayal of their practice and of the field with literature drawn both from within and outside the field.

The theoretical models to be introduced in chapter 3 were selected for their appropriateness to this enquiry; awareness of many of these models was a result of discussion with research students working in disciplines such as information science and linguistics. The approach is an attempt to utilise understanding current in other disciplines, rather than drawing upon thinking which other disciplines recognise as outdated; enquiry into art practice can sometimes be guilty of this. The research investigates a broad area of enquiry and should be seen as an attempt to offer some basic ways to explore issues relating to the meanings and values in the contemporary arts field which are faced by those within it.

## **1.1 Thesis structure**

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. There are six appendices, which include an example of an interview transcript and other material related to the arrangements for data collection. The full transcripts for every interview are available in a PDF on the accompanying CD. The bound thesis is structured as follows:

**Chapter 2** introduces the context for contemporary art, and offers operational definitions of the terms ‘discourse’, ‘art theory’ and ‘contemporary art’. The context this chapter provides is drawn from a variety of sources ranging from academic studies, magazines and art journal articles, to responses from the national press. Through discussion of context, the chapter introduces the research focus: that is, the problems faced by the discipline and the professionals within it.

**Chapter 3** provides an outline of the theoretical models which were considered useful tools with which to probe and unpick some of the problems raised in chapter 2. These include approaches from diverse sources such as the situated learning and communities of practice theory of Etienne Wenger; the work on the cultural field by Pierre Bourdieu; Roy Harris’s perspective on contemporary art and an understanding of this through Integrational Linguistics; Mark C. Taylor’s work on complexity theory, markets and art; and the consideration of aesthetic value offered by Jonathan Vickery.

**Chapter 4** addresses the methodological approach taken by this research and that suggested by the theoretical models introduced in chapter 3. The research questions and area of focus are outlined in greater detail. The chapter presents the research strategies and explains why this approach was taken,

and notes other research which has used similar methods. The process of making contact with the respondents and the process of analysis are described.

**Chapter 5** is the first of three chapters of analysis. It draws out themes that became apparent throughout the interviews and includes occasional reference to material not directly drawn from the transcripts, in order adequately to contextualise the discussion. The first section of this chapter outlines the field and acknowledges analogies made by the respondents between contemporary art and games, such as chess. It also raises the notion of a struggle for control of mediating discourses and the language game that this entails. It considers the actual discourses employed by artists in the struggle and used as part of the language game, and the ways in which artists come together to create communities of practice or 'scenes', in attempts to raise their visibility and advance their positions within the field. This chapter concludes by addressing the way the context for contemporary art has changed in recent years, and focuses specifically upon the widened contexts for practice.

**Chapter 6** explores how those within the art world and the interview respondents make their activities meaningful. It also explores how individual artworks, or more specifically certain artists' practices, come to be seen as meaningful, whilst recognising the importance of context for this negotiation of meaningfulness. Themes that chapter 6 address include: overarching notions of how the meaningfulness of contemporary art practice is negotiated; consideration of Etienne Wenger's model of negotiating meaning within communities of practice; what knowledge a viewer of contemporary art might require to have meaningful experience of contemporary art; and the role of the viewer in the construction or negotiation of meaning in contemporary art.

**Chapter 7** explores the beliefs and values the respondents seemed to hold about contemporary art, which are seen to give rise to the way in which contemporary art is validated and made meaningful. The chapter explores 'value' in a way which assumes two meanings: first, the inherent worth of contemporary art as an activity, and second, its resultant monetary worth; and it will be assumed that the establishment of the latter depends upon the former. The chapter focuses on the beliefs and values of the respondents and considers how they share and disseminate those beliefs and use them to facilitate the creation of audiences. It explores artists' attempts to be 'beyond judgement', and to gain control of the discourses in the struggle that epitomises the language game (as identified in chapter 5). It develops the discussion about the existence and role of value judgements in academic and broadsheet journalism and criticism and considers the vital role of the dealer in establishing the value of contemporary art. Chapter 7 concludes by addressing issues of accessibility and exclusivity and

compares the respondents' agendas with contemporary perspectives that see art as an aspirational tool.

**Chapter 8** elaborates the key themes that arose in chapters 5, 6 and 7 and explores these in relation to appropriate theoretical debates. Not all the themes that appeared in the previous three chapters are developed in chapter 8: instead it focuses exclusively on those themes considered of greatest relevance to this thesis. The aim of this chapter is to present an overall picture of the research findings and provide a deeper understanding of the interview material.

**Chapter 9** presents the conclusions of the project and summarises and reflects upon the research process. It also highlights the contribution that the research makes to the field and explores the ways in which this study confirms and or challenges other perspectives. Chapter 9 concludes by discussing suggestions for further work related to this area of enquiry.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The context of Contemporary Art Practice**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter establishes the context within which this research is to be located and includes definitions of the terms 'discourse', 'art theory', and 'contemporary art'. These terms are important in providing an explanation of the focus of the research and its aims.

The nature of contemporary art practice and contemporary art education is considered, drawing upon a variety of sources including magazine and art journal articles, books from a variety of disciplines, and responses to contemporary art from the national press. The changes that have taken place within the discipline since the 1960s are discussed, as is the impact of these changes upon the role of the contemporary artist.

#### **2.1 An operative definition of contemporary art**

As this research focuses specifically upon contemporary art, it is necessary to begin by outlining how the term 'contemporary art' is to be interpreted and how this label is to be applied. This will be achieved through a brief outline of the distinctions between modernism and postmodernism and reflection upon the views of various scholars.

Mark C. Taylor notes that the category or notion of 'fine or high art' did '...not emerge until the end of the eighteenth century' (Taylor, 2004a, p.31). This emergence was seen by Taylor as concurrent with the collapse of the patronage system, which led artists to develop ways to support themselves and saw them producing art for 'the newly emerging art market'. This new kind of art market paved the way for the contemporary art practices familiar today. He has suggested that the evolution of this market was accompanied by the notion that genuine art had to be '...produced primarily for the enjoyment of other artists and had to remain untainted by market forces' (Taylor, 2004a, p.31).

Contemporary art, as John-Marie Schaeffer has recognised, refers not only to art made recently, but also to a particular type of art. He expressed this succinctly:

The notion of 'contemporary art' is also largely historicist, because for most art critics the expression 'contemporary art' does not mean 'art that is created today' but refers only to that part of current art-making which is supposed to be in tune with a sense of history (Schaeffer, 1998, p.31).

Here Schaeffer recognised something of which many are implicitly aware: that whilst the term 'contemporary art' may present itself as a descriptive expression, in fact it contains a value judgement. This value judgement seems to go unnoticed, yet – as Schaeffer made clear – the use of the term implies what he believes to be a 'powerful hidden hierarchy' (Schaeffer, 1998, p.37) in which 'contemporary art' is aware of the whole history of art and reflects it in some way through modernism and postmodernism. In order to be included within the category of 'contemporary art' therefore, an artist's work must conform to certain notions of contemporary art practice.

If we seek to develop Schaeffer's notion that contemporary art is that produced with awareness of both the history of earlier art, and of modernism and postmodernism, we must first acknowledge that distinctions between modernism and postmodernism are exceptionally difficult to pin down, and may vary according to who one is speaking to. The main focus of uncertainty and debate centres upon the alleged collapse of modernism, and the beginning of postmodernism.

Modernist art's greatest champion was Clement Greenberg, who believed Kant's *Critique of Judgment* to be the foundation of his modern aesthetics. At the heart of this theoretical approach lay the assumption that the essence of modernism lies '...in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence'<sup>1</sup> (Greenberg, 1961). Greenberg considered that modernist artists could prevent their art from being assimilated into entertainment by focusing upon what was unique and specific about their medium. The aim was to render their art form 'pure'; this was enacted as a progressive stripping-away of the dispensable conventions of the medium.

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<sup>1</sup> Greenberg, quoted in Gaiger. From *Modernist Painting*, 1961. Reprinted in Greenberg, C., *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4. John O'Brien, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.85.

Thierry de Duve has offered what has been described as 'the most important and lasting book on recent art' (Schwabsky, 1997, pp.40-42), revisiting Greenberg's modernist writings in a sympathetic reconsideration of their basic premise, which he considers to have lost its validity. De Duve seeks to explore and discuss the relevance of a thinker such as Greenberg, whose thinking was inspired by Kant, within the context of contemporary art.

De Duve's argument suggests that the 1960s led to a shift, which is often mistakenly or too simplistically understood as a split between formal experimentation and conceptual enquiry (Gaiger, 1997). De Duve shows how Greenberg faced a crisis in his thinking when he encountered Frank Stella's black paintings at MOMA in New York in December 1959, along with his all-aluminium works shown at the Leo Castelli Gallery in September 1960. These works disturbed Greenberg and de Duve suggests that this was because whilst previously Greenberg's notions of formalism and modernism had been articulated together, these works made this no longer possible. Greenberg's 'Modernism' was used to describe a historical tendency to which works of art either did or did not belong. 'Formalism', on the other hand, according to de Duve, requires an aesthetic judgement that approves or disapproves of the form in which a particular work adapts its historical conventions. Stella's work is thought by de Duve to have shown how Greenberg's account of modernism could be developed as a progressive 'logic of painting' (de Duve, 1997, p.222). Thus by identifying the next stage in painting's development, or even its logical end-point in the blank canvas, artworks could be produced in accordance with a given set of criteria. De Duve suggested that faced with Stella's work, Greenberg had only two options:

Either ... making and appreciation of art require nothing but a mere identification predicated on the conceptual 'logic' of modernism, and aesthetic judgement is no longer necessary; formalism would have to be betrayed; or ... aesthetic judgement is still necessary. But the pressure that the conventions of painting had put on its practice is now nil, and one is forced to allow for an art that is no longer the outcome of its specific history, a generic art. Modernism, this time, would have to be abandoned (de Duve, 1997, p.222).

De Duve argued that Greenberg reluctantly opted for the second of these options and that this led him to redraw the line between 'art and good art' (de Duve, 1997, p.222). Identifying the crisis which affected Greenberg also allowed de Duve to proceed to interpret subsequent developments in the art of the 1960s, in particular Marcel Duchamp's influence through its revised significance offered by Joseph Kosuth and thus the expansion of art to include broader forms of practice no longer tied to any specific medium. De Duve claims that Kosuth took forward the first option relating to the crisis experienced by Greenberg, contending that the activity of art rested not on formal appreciation and practice but upon 'declarative

intentions and on conceptual knowledge of the “logic” of modernism’ (de Duve, 1997, p.376). Joseph Kosuth sought to push art beyond the logic of modernism that Greenberg had set for it and by so doing attempted to substitute a linguistic model for an aesthetic one and to transform art into a ‘philosophico-linguistic’ discipline (Gaiger, p.615). Kosuth seems to have envisioned a new role for artists in which they would investigate and question the nature of art, something which was not possible if one was busy questioning the nature of painting. Precisely because the word ‘art’ is general and the word ‘painting’ is specific, he sought to broaden practices acceptable as art (Kosuth, 1969, p.80). In this way he expanded the category of art, and according to de Duve, ‘...made it a professional activity that addresses other professionals but excludes practically everybody else’ (de Duve, 1997, p.377). Once formalism and aesthetic judgement had been abandoned, ‘...nothing is needed to make or judge art except intellectual curiosity and a knowledge of its conventions – art fades into “art theory”’ (Gaiger, 1997, p. 613).

Instead of concentrating on the decline of modernism, of course, we could also frame this debate by considering an equally difficult problem, that of defining the beginning of postmodernism. As the art historian James Elkins asserted in an interview for *Circa*, he believes a distinction can be made between ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ postmodernists (Elkins, 2000). In his view, improper postmodernists believe that postmodernism behaves like other periods, and proper postmodernists believe that the best way to describe postmodernism is as a ‘anti-rational operation that exists within Modernism from the very beginning’ (Elkins, 2000). Elkins would include theorists such as Thomas Mc Evilly, Arthur Danto and Thierry de Duve as improper postmodernists, and Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain de Bois as proper postmodernists.

John Rajchman has also puzzled over the beginnings of postmodernism and he addressed its questions, roots and successes by asking in *ArtForum* whether the 1980s were ‘the post-modern decade?’ (Rajchman, 2003, p.61) He reached the conclusion that postmodernism began some time around the early 1970s, and originated out of the discipline of architecture. Rajchman views Jean-François Lyotard with his key text *The Post-modern Condition*, first published in English in 1984, as one of the first proponents of postmodernism. Yet despite being renowned as one of the instigators of postmodernist thinking Lyotard was quick to grow ‘increasingly dissatisfied over the massive preoccupation with the post-modern that he had unwittingly helped to instigate’ (Rajchman, 2003, p.230). In fact Rajchman believes Lyotard tried to ‘give up the whole idea of the post-modern but to no avail’ (Rajchman, 2003, p.230) It seems that postmodernism’s problem was, as Hal Foster states, that it was ‘treated as a fashion’ which meant it quickly became ‘démodé’ (Foster, 1996 p.206).

As these assertions suggest, the beginnings of postmodernism are still widely debated. The confusion seems to stem from the fact that the period of postmodernism is not conceived of as embodying a particular period in the history of art. For this reason it is suggested that just as contemporary art is not descriptive, nor is postmodernism, as it too contains a value judgement, in that it refers to art which is thought to possess postmodernist qualities. Ultimately there is often little physical difference between art labelled modernist or postmodernist, but rather such a distinction is often based upon theoretical ways of discussing the work.

## **2.2 Art Educators and the construction of artistic identities**

The shifts in art practice described above will be considered in light of contemporary art education, and the role such education plays in the changing nature of contemporary art practice. Suggestions will be made about ways in which teaching styles, strategies and discourses may have impacted upon the nature of contemporary art practices. De Duve's analysis of art education is presented here at length because it is believed to question the dominant paradigms of art education more thoroughly than most other available accounts, which instead tend to privilege a theory : practice dichotomy. His analysis also underlines a profound sense of crisis when it comes to the formulation of a definitive core philosophy to teaching agendas.

Commentators such as Paul Gough (2000), Louise Parsons (1999) and Howard Singerman (1999) agree that the greatest changes in art education stemmed from the introduction of art degrees by the universities during the 1960s. However, de Duve's argument also situates changes during the 1960s but points to the demise of formalism within the professional arena outside education. This he considers was the point when Greenberg faced his theory crisis; the result of which means it is possible to conceive how and why form has been described as having become attitude. De Duve stressed this perspective in his paper 'When Form Has Become Attitude – And Beyond', which takes its name from the exhibition 'When Attitudes Become Form; Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information' held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in 1969. De Duve saw the teaching of art since the nineteenth century as having passed through three distinct historical phases in which, he believed, there was always a 'distinct model for the training of the artist' (de Duve, 1994). The first of these he posited as the 'talent – metier - imitation' triad or academic model, which he considered to be 'a traditional academic model based on the practice of a metier' (de Duve, 1994). The second he called the 'creativity – medium - invention' or modernist model 'associated with the Bauhaus, where medium-specific innovation was the goal' and the third

he described as 'a contemporary model informed by critical theory and born from art institutions such as museums and art schools'. He referred to this as the 'new triad of notions: attitude –practice – deconstruction' in which the attribute of 'attitude' was seen as primary (de Duve, 1994). He considered the collapse of previous models, such as the Bauhaus, as the point at which a fundamental shift occurred in the training of artists. Yet he reserved his most scathing criticism for the last triad, which he described as the 'imploded paradigm' and believed this to be due to the development of art education since the 1970s, and the earlier emergence of conceptual art.

He saw the academy model as being aligned with talent, not skill, because skill could be 'acquired', whereas talent on the other hand could not. Talent was thought of as 'a gift of nature' yet such talent could neither 'develop nor express itself outside the rules, conventions, and codes provided by the tradition' (p.19). De Duve considered such traditions to have been shattered within less than a century, in a period which gave rise to the Bauhaus model and the avant-garde. Because art had become over-academic, de Duve suggests that artists began to turn inward, seeking a way to not observe and imitate the outside world, but to observe and imitate their own very means of expression. The modern artists to whom he refers put the aesthetic traditions to the test and '...one by one, discarded those by which they no longer felt constrained' (p.20). With the changes and the challenges this new art brought to the academic art of the past came 'creativity' in place of 'talent'. De Duve saw 'creativity' as the modern name used to describe 'the combined innate faculties of perception and imagination'. Perception was seen as 'already cultural', and therefore, by nature, 'a basic reading skill', and imagination the 'basic writing skill'. Since the child was seen to have more creativity than a cultivated adult, 'the ideal art student, the artist of the future, came to be dreamt of as an infant' –in particular an infant 'whose natural ability to read and write the visual world needs only to be properly tutored' (p.20). The notion of a visual language of art took hold.

In such a climate the notion of talent had been replaced with that of creativity, which was regarded by de Duve as 'going hand in hand with the idea of democracy and egalitarianism' (de Duve, 1994. p.22). Although no one admitted it, talent was seen as having been based upon 'inequality' (de Duve, 1994. p.26), so that the shift to the notion of creativity meant that the ability to become an artist became open to all, as 'everybody is endowed with creativity' (de Duve, 1994). 'Creativity' then led to the slogan, repeated throughout the history of modernity, that 'everyone is an artist' (de Duve, 1994).



This position or model was maintained for many years within the art teaching establishments, and de Duve has argued that many pedagogues of this century have built upon it. As he asserts, school reformers, philosophers, and thinkers, from Froebel to Montessori to Decroly, and from Rudolf Steiner to John Dewey, have focused their attention on creativity as the starting point for education (de Duve, 1994). Others, from Herbert Read to E. H. Gombrich to Rudolph Arnheim, have devoted considerable energy to breaking up the 'visual language' into its basic components, in the attempt to demonstrate its universality and its perceptive and psychological 'laws' (de Duve, 1994. p.21). What de Duve made apparent was that the modernist model and belief in creativity, is a philosophy, which he believed to be 'biased', and 'dated' (de Duve, 1994. p.21). However, he considered such a model and its assumptions are still informing the art education practices of today. De Duve is aware of his 'oversimplification' of the 'postulates underlying the teaching of today', and recognises that this model was never carried out with the 'radical purity' of his description. He acknowledges that this shift in emphasis from creativity to attitude occurred 'with considerable differences depending on national and local circumstances'. Yet he concludes that in general, 'With or without the conscious or unconscious complicity of their teachers, what had started as an ideological alternative to both talent and creativity, called "critical attitude", became just that, an attitude, a stance, a pose, a contrivance.'

De Duve considered that by the late 1980s the previous models were no longer functioning adequately, so that another model began to pervade art schools; the triad of 'attitude – practice - deconstruction'. (de Duve, 1994. p.26). It is this shift that concerns de Duve most, and which motivates this thesis. Whether one wishes to refer to it as a paradigm shift, as de Duve begins to suggest (de Duve, 1994. p.26), or as a stage in the development of art and art education, there is a certain marked difference between it and that which came before. He describes how amongst the artists emerging from our art schools today, there is a subversion or '...a derision of all the notions, derived from creativity, such as originality and authenticity, without, for all that, necessarily displaying more talent' (de Duve, 1994). Instead what is thought to pervade art schools is now 'the disenchanted, perhaps nihilistic, after-image of the old Bauhaus paradigm' (de Duve, 1994. p.26). De Duve believed that attitude could be thought to have taken the place of the concept of creativity, and that it was 'critical' in order to enable art to be 'progressive' (de Duve, 1994. p.27).

De Duve's outline of the models of art education in the late 1960s–early 1970s stresses the importance of Duchamp's growing reputation as the first conceptual artist, and of theorists such as Lukacs, Adorno and Althusser, who enabled the notion of attitude to be reaffirmed. The introduction by Jeremy Stolnitz in the late 1960s of the concept of 'aesthetic attitude' led aesthetics to be 'pushed

aside altogether' whilst allowing for the retention of 'the notion of attitude' (de Duve, 1994, p.27). The tendency towards a reorganisation of Fine Art courses which plays down the separation of traditional studio disciplines and media (the familiar trio of painting, print and sculpture) may be seen to be part of this foregrounding of critical attitude or critical process. The much-vaunted interdisciplinarity of contemporary educational initiatives may do service for a great number of conflicting agendas, and can in itself become merely a stance or a pose. Whatever the case, it is clearly exemplary of de Duve's third paradigm of art education.

De Duve recognised, as have many others, the importance of the introduction to the art world of theory from many fields, including linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, Marxism, feminism, structuralism and post-structuralism, which entered art schools over a period of time. De Duve also believed these succeeded in displacing or sometimes replacing studio practice while renewing the critical vocabulary and intellectual tools with which to approach the making and appreciation of art. A premise of this research is that the significance of this displacement is not to be underestimated. However, de Duve saw this introduction of theory not as responsible for current practice, but as a symptom of a model or way of thinking about practice and art education. De Duve sees the shift from creativity to attitude as having taken place during the mid- to late 1970s, and certainly as having been completed by the mid-1980s, which is precisely the point at which others site that moment of change which paved the way for contemporary art practice as it is today. It also seemed to be agreed by Thomas Crow, Thierry de Duve and Howard Singerman, that at this time, Goldsmiths, London, was 'the place to be' (de Duve, 1994, p.27).

De Duve acknowledged, that art schools such as Goldsmiths began to attract 'students who went there because of the instant rewards they were seemingly able to promise them' (de Duve, 1994, p.27). While he does not proceed to speculate on the complicity of the teachers, he acknowledged how 'critical attitude' '...became just that, an attitude, a stance, a pose, a contrivance' (de Duve, 1994, p.27). He recognised that this phenomenon was not confined to the few art schools he mentioned and in fact believed it to be 'rampant throughout the whole academic world', in particular within the humanities (de Duve, 1994, p.27).

The discourses used to describe that which is valued or not valued within this new model, are also revealing. Art became a taboo word, guilty of 'conveying some of the "essence" of art', which was not what the art of this period was intended to do. De Duve suggested he meant it revealed 'the existence of some transhistorical and transcultural common denominator among all artistic practices'

and due to the approach taken having been 'radically relativistic' such a belief was denied (de Duve, 1994). This suggests that the artistic practice of today seeks to sever links between itself and the art of the past, as it has become seen as just another 'signifying practice' (de Duve, 1994. p.29). Such shifts from terms like 'metier' and 'medium' to 'practice' also reveal a little of the underlying assumptions adhered to by those who use them. As de Duve notes, 'practice' is a word that has its roots in 'French theory', and he acknowledges it as a general word, somewhat less specific than the words it replaced.

The impact of what de Duve referred to as theory, or 'so called "French theory"', was felt not just in the changing terms that came to be used, but also in the approach taken (de Duve, 2004, p.27). He also considered that deconstruction became *de rigueur*, as we moved beyond invention and creativity to imitation and artistic practice based on a particular attitude, so that what was needed was a theory of repetition and difference capable of 'thinking these concepts anew, transversally so to speak' (de Duve, 1994, p.30).

De Duve commented on his experience of one school, where the entire purpose was to 'deconstruct' anything that came into the classroom' (de Duve, 1996, p.30). The paralysis resulting from this was considered by de Duve as 'not just sad', but 'revolting' (de Duve, 1996, p.30). He considers that art education, organised around the dissipation of critical theory and the like, is in part responsible for the contemporary context for art practice. His anger is directed not at contemporary artists themselves but rather at the art schools that have produced them (de Duve, 1996. p.456). He argues that it was within such schools that contemporary artists were

... fed on a critical discourse that stopped midway in its deconstruction of modernism and forgot to reconnect the utopias of modernity, along with their failure, to their historical roots (de Duve, 1996, p.456).

He recognises, however, that this failure of the educational institutions was not deliberate but was 'a well-intentioned discourse' (de Duve, 1996, p.456). It was an academic discourse nonetheless, and he suggested it backfired somewhat on those who encouraged it. De Duve likened the teaching of critical theory and 'not much else' to teaching advertising students solely Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*'. Although de Duve recognised that his criticisms of the state of art education and of art, under the imitation-deconstruction-attitude model, may be met with criticisms accusing him of 'wanting to go back in time' or of 'resorting to nostalgia' (p.29), he stresses that it is significant that

independent discourses which once belonged to the avant-garde have now become 'largely institutionalised' (p.29).

Dennis Atkinson and Howard Singerman have also offered insights on how to explore the process of art education and on the possible genesis of the 'artistic attitudes' to which de Duve refers.

Singerman was driven to conduct his research as a result of the questions he was left with when he graduated as a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in sculpture. Upon completing his degree, he recognised that he did not have the traditional skills of the sculptor, being unable to '... carve, or cast or weld or model in clay', and the most significant question he was left with was 'why not?' (Singerman, 1999, p.187).

He argued the significance of the change of focus, from the academy project based on fundamental principles in art and design and requiring the acquisition of technical skills, to art schools which 'do not allow mastery over image or material; rather they promote unmastery' (Singerman, 1999, p.145). He considered how the project in the academy would have resided in the realm of the visual, while the now commonplace 'art school project' is in contrast 'spoken, and often written' (Singerman, 1999, p.145). Singerman referred to the same shifts highlighted by de Duve, the only difference being his explanations for them. Singerman invokes a cause not addressed by de Duve: that is, the introduction of the group crit. Singerman suggested Clyford Still should not be credited with the origination of the teaching method known as the 'crit', but should be acknowledged as someone who recognised this new teaching method and sought ways to speak of it. Still considered that a teaching method such as the crit was necessary as:

Almost no one, I have found, can read more than superficially the real content of today's paintings...It is an effort to bring some honesty into a confused-even sordid-situation, that I assign myself the discipline of speaking, call it what one will (Still, C. Quoted in Singerman, 1999, p.143).

Still was referring to the art of the 1960s, when he devised this method. It was intended to address art of a modernist tradition, which had 'claimed for itself a purity or spontaneity that places it or its essence beyond classification, beyond words' (Cazeaux, 2002, p.44). Despite having been devised with modernist practice in mind, this teaching method is still prevalent today; this causes confusion due to having been intended to address different concerns to those of practice today.

Singerman's study of art education experiences is based primarily within the USA and specifically upon the MFA programmes run there. His concern is with the internalisation of the art education experience, and in studying this he recognised that 'artists are both the subject of the graduate art department and its goal'. He has determined that visiting models, who also form part of British art education, act as exemplary artists, serving to provide a link between the 'school and a professional community' of artists. Therefore, when these artists speak to the students they do so in the shared language of the art journals, and of that community: 'their speech constructs that community' (Singerman, 1999).

Singerman attempted to reveal the nature of this language. His explanation is that the teaching techniques of the British art schools like the US schools, meant that the art college tutors 'did not spell out what exactly they expected or wanted from students...[and] quite deliberately did not explain their criticisms' (Singerman, 1999, p.145). He explains how

The artist's speech in the teaching of art – precisely in its ambiguous excessive relation to the work of art and the task of instruction – called on students to position themselves, it demanded they place themselves in a professional relation to the speaker (Singerman, 1999, p.144).

Singerman asserts how by the late 1960s the goals of the art schools of Britain were '... to get students to loosen up, open up, and relax and, more deeply, to get them to leave what they know and draw on or draw out something they do not know' (Singerman, 1999, p.145). Singerman described how one of the British tutors recalled his teaching practice as having been designed to 'disconcert the student, thereby breaking down his preconceptions' (Singerman, 1999, p.145). This sense of listening to tutors and visiting artists providing eloquent descriptions of what is happening in the art scene, and having to figure out how this relates to one's own practice is a familiar scenario in today's art schools. Students are therefore asked to absorb information related to their interests and which they believe will be useful in helping them determine what sort of artist they wish to become. In so doing they begin to establish their own artistic identity, an experience many find difficult if not highly frustrating.

This type of art education, which appears to work by exposing students to other practising artists rather than by following a specific educational curriculum, has become a form of learning by osmosis. Singerman described how this process began during the 1960s it should be noted that such approaches to teaching are still prevalent now. The researcher suggests that a form of social learning might be the sort of learning that such teaching practices are intended to encourage. In art schools

that offer contemporary art courses today, just as was the case in the period described by Singerman, successful learning is measured by students' abilities to perceive themselves as competent practitioners within the professional field.

There are recognisable difficulties afflicting contemporary art education. It is possible that the teaching and learning approaches offered throughout secondary education, that is, before the student embarks on any kind of undergraduate degree, rely upon an entirely different approach to learning. Such an approach might be based upon the 'reception' (Carnell, E. & Lodge, C. 2002) or 'banking' model of learning where the learner is perceived as a passive recipient of knowledge transmitted from the teacher (Friere, P. 1993). It would seem that independent learning is rarely undertaken before tertiary art education, at least not to the extent that students determine what they need to learn. This could be said to produce conflict when students begin a contemporary art degree course, as they seek a definition of what is required; if none is forthcoming there can be frustration and disillusionment.

This thesis will explore the possibility that art school curriculums are based on teaching the strategies of engaging in the game successfully, by learning to speak about work rather than learning to make it. Discourse is therefore highly important in art education, and is referred to within the field as a means of validating contemporary art.

### **2.3 Definitions of discourse**

Due to the importance of the term discourse in this research a brief definition of the way it is to be interpreted will now be offered. Chris Christie has proposed that by the act of speaking speakers must 'inevitably take up one of the subject positions made available by the specific discourses they engage in' (Christie, 2000, p.48). Christie believes that Sara Mills offers a 'comprehensive and accessible introduction to the various uses of the term *discourse* (Christie, 2000, p.46).<sup>2</sup> She also attributes to Mills the point that poststructural use of the term is predicated on a distinction between the notion of discourse as 'an overarching theory that is called on to explain how we come to have beliefs and knowledge that are characteristic of a given society at a given point in history' and 'the idea that there are distinct ways of speaking that inscribe sets of beliefs and values that can be categorised as

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<sup>2</sup> Her book *Discourse* outlines how 'discourse' is a term often used within a range of disciplines, such as sociology, linguistics, philosophy, social psychology and critical theory. Mills recognises that the term has become common currency in a variety of disciplines in which it is frequently left undefined as if its usage were common knowledge (Mills, 1997, p.1).



“discourses” ’ (Christie, 2000, p.46). In relation to this distinction, Mills cites Foucault as referring to discourse as an ‘individualized group of statements’ (Foucault, cited in Mills, 1997, p.6).

Mills considered Foucault to have used this definition when discussing particular structures within discourse, or ‘groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common’ (Mills, 1997, p.6). This means of describing discourse accounts for the description of a ‘discourse of liberalism’, or a ‘discourse of feminism’ (Mills, 1997, p.6). Crucially, Mills also stresses that discourses not only provide our sense of reality, but also ‘our notion of our own identity’ (Mills, 1997, p.13). Christie offers Coates’s work as an example of how an ‘individualisable group’ of statements can be defined, by describing it as ‘a system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values’ (Coates, quoted in Christie, 2000, p.47).

It is with such a system or group of statements, as they are utilised by artists and other arts professionals, that this research will concern itself. The intention is to explore the way such statements allow for the construction of identities and of meanings and values that are common to all those who employ them.

## **2.4 Definitions of theory**

Theory in the context of the art world has many connotations, but in the early twenty-first century seems to be most widely recognised as poststructuralist and postmodernist. Terry Eagleton has suggested that the ‘vague word “theory” floated into existence’ for want of a way to describe thinkers such as Raymond Williams, Susan Sontag, Jürgen Habermas, Julia Kristeva or Michel Foucault (Eagleton, 2003, p.82). Such thinkers’ work can, in his view, not easily be categorised, and indeed he asserts that this is part of its significance: because it addresses fundamental social, political and metaphysical questions it inevitably crosses disciplinary boundaries (Eagleton, 2003, p. 81).

Elkins, for the purposes of his book, *Whatever happened to art criticism?*, tried to establish the key art theories employed within discourses surrounding painting. Unfortunately, as he admitted, he found this much more difficult than expected, despite which he offered a model through which one can recognise a few modes of theory. Among these he included serious art criticism, art writing, experimental art history (previously known as the New Art History) and what is often referred to as Visual Theory, which includes the writings of those associated with the art journal *October*, for example Alain de Bois, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh (Elkins, 2000).

There was agreement amongst Crow, Schaeffer, Sussman and Bois that art theory was prominently associated with the American art world of the 1980s, in which it was thought to have 'achieved a certain celebrity' (Joselit, 2003, p.208). Elisabeth Sussman recognised this 'shift to theory-driven work' which she associated with the 1980s (Sussman, 2003, p.209) Alain de Bois also described in *ArtForum* how he

... arrived in America in 1983 and was immediately struck by the strangely hypertrophied hold that what was then called "French theory" already had in academic discussions and was beginning to have in the art world (Bois, 2003, p.267).

He thought the same was true of poststructuralism, and that what was striking was the lumping together of a whole array of writers, who, he recalls, included Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Barthes, Kristeva, Deleuze, Althusser and Lyotard, all of whom he thought may have shared a 'universe of references, but were by no means speaking the same tongue or even agreeing on a lot'. Bois was therefore amazed by the 'gross misconceptions surrounding the so-called poststructuralist corpus' that he witnessed in graduate seminars. What is most poignant is how Bois described the 'fashion-driven pressure to transform complex texts into sound bites', the outcome of which he described as resulting in 'the hodgepodge that became the lingua franca of the art world for a few seasons'.

Renee Turner, a contributor to the 1998 symposium called Think Art Theory and Practice, also criticised artists for using theory, in particular continental theory, as a form of 'pastiche' (Turner, 1998, p.158). She described it as having become 'another consumable good' in which issues addressed by artists tended to become themes, or 'thematics', which became tied to fashion and could go 'past their sell-by date' (Turner, 1998 p.159).

The organiser of that symposium was Jean-Marie Schaeffer, who suggested that in contemporary art the 'difference between art and theory tends to become blurred' (Schaeffer, 1998, p.14). He also quite rightly pointed out that we should refer to 'art theories' and not 'art theory', as there exists no unified 'theory of art'. Rather, art theory consists of many diverse discourses drawn from varying disciplines, with different goals, all of which are adopted by artists and critics in order to contextualise and expand on the thematics apparent in visual art practice. These broad ranges of knowledge used to contextualise visual art practice include some dominant theoretical modes such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, and poststructuralist theory. Contributors to the book *The New Art History*, first published in 1986, saw it as a convenient way to sum up the impact of 'Feminist,

Marxist, Structuralist, Psychoanalytic, and Socio-political ideas' on the discipline of art, which accounted for much of what Bois was complaining about.

The context for this research is the impact and subsequent breakdown of dominant modes of theory, within the field of art, as has been acknowledged by Sarah James (James, 2004). James has asserted that psychoanalytical theory 'reduced to indulgent theoretical word play' became 'entirely absorbed into the excessive discourse theory that has dominated the reading of cultural artefacts since the rise of poststructuralism' (James, 2004).

## 2.5 High theory and the 1980s

As has been acknowledged (see 2.4, above) theory made up of a number of modes of discourse took precedence during the 1980s. *ArtForum*'s survey of the decade offered a way of considering the role of these increasingly widened theoretical and contextualising discourses. Thomas Crow outlined his views on artists' use of theory in his article, 'Marx to Sharks', included in *ArtForum*'s survey, in which he stated that nothing recalled the 'fractious discursive climate of the 1980s better than that single imperfect word "theory"' (Crow, *ArtForum*, 2003, p.44). Crow's article outlined the 'theory' introduced to the art world during the 1980s, in particular that associated with *The New Art History* (1986). He also considered the importance of the theories that arose out of *Screen* magazine, including semiotics, the journal *October* and the thinkers it attracted, and the work of those associated with the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies including the subcultural theory of Dick Hebdige.

It is argued that the artists of the 1980s found ways to challenge contemporary society's values, which involved strategic and canny use of new forms of art-historical discourses. As Thomas Crow has suggested, artists began to release texts which could be called upon to provide the appropriate 'product packaging' (Crow, 2003, p.45). Artists such as Peter Halley, and others associated with the Neo-geo group in New York, provided references to theorists such as Baudrillard, which gave artists of the 1980s work instant power confirmed by 'heavyweight theorising' (Crow, 2003, p.45). Because of the prominence of Baudrillard's thinking, John Roberts referred to this period as the 'simulation paradigm' (Roberts, p.5). The work of this period focused on the social reality within which the artists of the 1980s found themselves; rather than offering a transcendence or escape from reality, these artists focused on reflecting the social climate back on the consumers and audiences for art.

Crow suggests that artists gained awareness of critical ways of thinking, nurtured mainly in Britain at Goldsmiths and in the USA at the American Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP), and utilised this knowledge to produce work that was strategically planned. They became aware of the need for product packaging as a result of theory such as that discussed in *The New Art History* (1986), which revealed new ways to interpret the context of reception and subject matter of the Impressionists' art, which focused 'almost exclusively on the spaces of newly organised leisure, scenes where demarcated free time was packaged into "experiences" of sport, tourism, shopping, and entertainment' (Crow, 2003, p.45). This awareness transformed the perception that the Impressionists' work was 'a pure art of light and air, optical naturalism and colouristic intensity applied to a gambit of otherwise ordinary subjects' and provided awareness that moments of leisure time and consumption had become seen as the more natural and liberated moments of one's life. The modern consumer economy began as an enterprise limited to those with the free time and ready cash to occupy the new spaces of 'organised leisure' and he suggested:

The new department stores – at once the encyclopedias and ritual temples of consumption – grew spectacularly by supplying the newly affluent with the necessary material equipment and, by their practices of sales and promotion, effective instruction in the intangible requirements of this novel sphere of existence (Crow, 2003, p.45).

Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1998) recognised that a fundamental change meant that the paradigmatic setting where artworks were encountered had now also itself become leisure time. This was the opposite of the magical or ritual settings in which the consumption of art had previously taken place (Schaeffer, 1998). Taylor also recognised that art became a 'profitable investment for people with excessive money' as a result of the buoyancy of the markets during the 1980s, and that this was linked to increased leisure time (Taylor, 2004a).

Crow argued that artists turned this awareness of consumer society around on consumers of art, through recognition that the right packaging of heavyweight theorising could act as an effective form of instruction to enable their art to seem important, powerful and interesting. Such packaging enabled art audiences to satisfy their needs and their desire to reaffirm their status as the leisured or upper classes through an ability to employ relevant knowledge in order to comprehend complex art. Such knowledge could have been used as what Bourdieu terms 'cultural capital', enabling privileged art audiences to differentiate themselves from those who were not able to understand the work or to fully appreciate it. This assertion is supported by Taylor's suggestion that

'The post-war economic boom quickly raised the standard of living for the American middle class. With social distinctions becoming harder to draw, intellectuals and leftists formed an unexpected alliance with the so-called upper class by turning to the works of the artistic avant-garde for cultural markers that would set them apart from the supposedly unsophisticated masses' (Taylor, 2004a, p.40)<sup>3</sup>.

Crow argued that art was strategically planned to make the viewer and art historian question their response to a work. Damien Hirst has overtly stated that he wants 'the viewer to do a lot of work and feel uncomfortable. They should be made to feel responsible for their own view of the world rather than look at the artist's view and be critical of it' (Hirst, quoted in Stallabrass, 2001). This puts viewers in a difficult position, for if they comment that the work 'is not art' this may reveal a conservatism of which few would wish to be accused.

The art historians associated with *The New Art History* (1986)<sup>4</sup> had assumed an elevated position that could survey the historical imbrication of avant-garde art within a society of consumption, and the historians were then left redundant, as a good portion of their authority had depended upon the assumed blindness of the artists they had been surveying. The artists who were being surveyed then became the ones to do the surveying (Crow, 2003, p.52).

Crow suggested that, left with no option, unable to support or denounce the work, these art historians turned their backs on the artists and their work. Crow considered Stallabrass's book *High Art Lite* a later exemplification of this dismay (Crow, 2003, p.52).<sup>5</sup> In this work, Stallabrass alluded to Crow's awareness that artists had strategically subverted understanding of the art that the new forms of art history and theory had provided. Roger Cook also suggests that Stallabrass appreciated how artists had begun to use the awareness gained in education, such as critical theory, as 'intellectual capital'. The only other option to artists theoretically informed practice, Crow believed, was for left-leaning thinkers to do as Benjamin Buchloh did and launch an 'ever more stringent examination of the commodity transactions at the core of nearly all artistic practice'.

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<sup>3</sup> This view is conveyed elsewhere in Mark C. Taylor's book *Confidence Games*, 2004, for example, the comment: 'As the bourgeoisie sought to mark their social status by consuming traditional art, upper social classes started buying avant-garde art to secure their distinction from those they deemed their social inferiors' (Taylor, 2004, p.96).

<sup>4</sup> Crow suggested these included a network of dissenting art historians working across Britain in a variety of institutions.

<sup>5</sup> However, *High Art Lite* has not been without its critics; both Roger Cook and David Rimanelli have criticised Stallabrass for making sweeping generalisations and lacking an adequate theoretical framework. Rimanelli in particular accuses Stallabrass of 'some rather droopy observations, reeking of *Schadenfreude*, concerning the alleged decline of art criticism', Rimanelli goes on to ask how 'someone can be so sickeningly ill informed?' Roger Cook states that Stallabrass's book lacks 'an adequately academically grounded theoretical framework to make the kind of analysis that is needed, and states it is not that the means are not available. He cites the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose writings on taste and the field of cultural production would have provided a structure' for Stallabrass's stated objectives' (Cook, 2000).

## 2.6 Contemporary practices and the demise of theory

Whilst the 1980s can be understood as an era in which there was promotion of heavily theoretical strategic work, the 1990s has been declared as a period in which this theory became institutionalised. At this time it became clear that contemporary art, particularly in Britain, was beginning to rebel against its theory-driven precursor. John Roberts drew attention to certain artists practising in London in the 1990s whom he described as

... playing dumb, shouting 'ARSE' and taking your knickers down [which] has become an attractive move in the face of the professional institutionalisation of critical theory in the art of the 1980s' (Roberts, 1996).

The institutionalisation to which Roberts referred could be that which took place on M.A courses at British art schools such as Goldsmiths. This assumption is supported by Roberts's referral to these artists' privileged exposure during the 1980s and 'the systematic incorporation of contemporary art theory and philosophy into art education, particularly at post-graduate level' (Roberts, 1996).

The inclusion of critical theory within art education eventually led to its institutionalisation, as was recognised by Gavin Butt and the contributors to *After Criticism: New directions in criticism* (2004). The awareness and concern of these contributors about the 'ossification of critical *theory*, particularly within the arts and humanities' led them to question whether art has in fact passed through 'the moment of its encounter with theory' (Butt, 2004. p.2). Accordingly they suggested that there was a need for novel, less overtly theoretical, ways of writing about art (Butt, 2004. p.2). Butt argued that this was a result of the loss of any 'privileged' or 'authoritative' viewpoint for the theorist to occupy (Butt, 2004. p.2). He considered this to be a result of the theories of postmodernists and poststructuralists, such as Derrida, who declared that there is no position outside of the text, which is not already implicated in the cultural text, from which to survey contemporary art. Modes of theory were developed as a means to 'critique various forms of power and authority within cultural and artistic representations' yet having become institutionalised they were credited with a 'kind of authority *of their own*' (Butt, 2004. p.4). As a result of this Butt considered theory to have become 'doxa, the very state it set out to subvert' (Butt, 2004. p.4). Butt was aware that the artists of the 1990s, notably the YBAs (Young British Artists) all but abandoned any idea of the 'artist as critical commentator' (Butt, 2004, p.3) and referred to John Roberts' description of how such artists embraced

... a practice of making that celebrates the unassimilated vagaries and affects of individual subjective existence: all without feeling the need to somehow comment upon it from any avowedly 'critical' vantage point (Roberts, quoted in Butt, 2004. p.2).

Artists that Roberts believed rejected the 'dominant discourses of modern art' (Roberts, 1996, p.10), as a 'matter of ethical positioning', include those associated with BANK, Gavin Turk, Gillian Wearing, Dave Beech and David Burrows. Roberts recognised, however, that accusations of anti-intellectualism have been thrown at such artists. He asserts that this could be merely because 'they are not writing mountains of texts and quoting Fredrick Jameson'. He argued that contemporary artists' intentions should be seen as a rejection of dominant discourses, associated with a wish to 'unsettle the bureaucratic smoothness of critical postmodernism'. It is recognised that as trends often go full circle, a rebellion against the heavyweight theorising of previous years was in some respects inevitable.

A debate over a 'crisis in art' began as a result of Victor Burgin's asserting 'The end of art theory' in 1986 at a conference held at the ICA in London. The conference was described as a response to the crisis in art that was thought to have been prompted by British critics. Awareness that it was critics who initiated the conference led J.J. Charlesworth to describe it as a 'projection', suggesting the crisis was in fact in criticism itself and not in art (Charlesworth, 2004). The same debate continued in a series of articles in *Art Monthly*, and has included contributions by Dave Beech, Michael Archer and Sarah James. This debate was thought to be of international significance, as J.J. Charlesworth argued with reference to an article by the American critic Raphael Rubinstein (2003). Charlesworth suggested, Rubinstein's American nationality, proved that this was in fact 'a global debate' (Charlesworth, 2004).

Archer asserted that the nature of the crisis depends on where you stand, suggesting that one's positioning in the field affects one's stance on such an issue. He criticised the journal *Third Text* for having again raised the notion of a crisis, and suggested he could not understand how this crisis was being recognised (Archer, 2003. p.6). He suspected that the meaningful art that the publication *Third Text* suggests is lacking is art which is found not to be meaningful because it does not 'signify in a particular way' or 'function in a certain approved manner'. He agreed with Rasheed Areen's comment that contemporary artists are 'like juveniles, clowning and buffooning', and yet he said: 'I want the juvenile. I want clowning and buffoonery'. Archer's perspective seems apathetic as he suggested: '... there is a lot of art and much of it is not really very good, but this situation is perennial' and concluded that 'what is there is what needs to be looked at'.

Dave Beech, an artist and another contributor to *Art Monthly*, has criticised the assertion of a crisis of any kind, suggesting instead that there is a wish to maintain something traditionally valued about art. Beech argues that 'champions of the status quo' are 'two a penny in art criticism' (Beech, 2003), and warned of 'conservative art critics' who cannot all be easily identified due to their 'writing with a plum in their word-processor' (Beech, 2003). What these art critics, whom Beech perceives as traditionalists, may be responding to is suggested by Beech's own remarks on contemporary art. He states that '...high-spiritedness and low taste' have turned their backs '...on aesthetic and saintly visions of spiritual sublimation, of noble pleasures and purified souls' (Beech, 2003). There have been declarations of a crisis in contemporary art and Beech's assertions suggest possible reasons why they might have done so. As he stated, the 'lover of wisdom would find the lowest of indulgence in the emergent art' (Beech, 2003). There is an awareness in Beech's comments, that certain groups within the art world will respond negatively to the forms of contemporary art which are currently being engaged in. Archer has suggested, however, that if such art fails to meet expectations, then it may be that 'the expectations are misplaced' (Archer, 2003). Archer's view reflects that of Mathew Arnatt's both have expressed distaste for writing that 'imposes any requirement on art to be other than it is' (Charlesworth, 2004). Any notion that things can be improved through critical intervention, Charlesworth suggests, has been met with indifference. Art writing is seen instead as a 'professionalised act of mediating between art and readers' (Charlesworth, 2004).

Rubinstein's (2003) article in the magazine *Art in America* reaffirms this by suggesting that there is an absence of discussion about artistic value and a notable decline in interest in making 'transgenerational match-ups, among observers, critics and artists alike' (Rubinstein, 2003). Charlesworth believes the slippage in terminology from 'art criticism' to 'art writing' reflects this (Charlesworth, 2003). He feels too that there is a lack of engagement in discussion about how art is valued and that the 'vexed question of value judgement' is at the root of this (Charlesworth, 2003). Charlesworth suggests that art writing predominantly discusses artists' self-declared subject matter, which is often only vaguely conceptualised. Mark Wilsher also recognises what he refers to as 'current strands' of contemporary artists' discourse that make

... a virtue of its avoidance of straight answers, and could be said to deploy a conscious strategy of vagueness with the aim of producing work which resists being over-explained and ultimately subdued by the weight of rationalisation (Wilsher, 2005, *Art Monthly* 286, p.8).



One wonders whether the fear of rationality suggested by Wilsher is justified. Could such work be killed off by rationalisation, and if so, how or why? Is it the fault of the work or of the way society imposes rational expectations and determines value? Notwithstanding these questions, awareness of such strategies of vagueness in artists' discourses is a motivation for this thesis. It is suggested that certain contemporary artists carefully monitor what is said about their work so as to keep open options about its meaning; the thesis will explore this in greater depth. As it does so it will also explore assertions made by Wilsher which suggest that some artists recognise that one 'viable way of gesturing at the content and character of their art [is] by saying nothing definite and leaving all avenues open' (Wilsher, 2005, p.9). Wilsher is arguing that contemporary artists deliberately avoid saying too much about their work because they believe it is better 'to say nothing than to risk saying the wrong thing and alienating those who control the purse strings' (Wilsher, 2005, p.9).

Grant Kester has also written specifically about contemporary art, and in particular about socially engaged art practice, or discursive art practices. Kester suggests that certain artists have tended to believe that what is 'graspable by the viewer is also saleable' (Kester, 2004, p.38). Therefore, artists often attempt to avoid easy interpretation, and consequently the risk of having their work absorbed within the mass market, by producing work which displays 'resistance to socially shared meaning or communicability' (Kester, 2004, p.38). This surely makes it more difficult for the critic to engage with the work and for anyone to attempt to elucidate a meaningful interpretation or reading from it.

There is a clear recognition that it has become difficult at times to make sense of contemporary art. Linda Weintraub, writing about contemporary practices in *Art Over the Edge* (1997), suggested that most artists 'have transformed art so radically that few people can decipher meaning in the work they produce' (Weintraub, p.10.) Weintraub proceeded to suggest a common argument in defence of complicated contemporary art and the difficulty of understanding it. Visual languages, she argued, 'like verbal ones, have never been static constructions'; artists, according to Weintraub, 'respond to change by inventing new art syntax and grammar that are capable of conveying their experiences' (Weintraub, p.10). This argument is based upon the notion that contemporary art evolves as a form of language and, as such, resorts to the modernist model as outlined previously (see 2.2) which valued creativity, perception and visual language and yet was replaced with the current model of attitude – practice – deconstruction.

Weintraub did attempt to address the inability many have to decipher contemporary art's meaning, but she does not go far enough in offering a sound explanation for the problem. The awareness that artists might

purposefully remain vague about their practice could be an attempt to influence and control the representation of that practice. The crises that are declared could be the result of shifts of power between critics, other arts mediators and artists.

## **2.7 Summary**

This thesis asserts that the notion of contemporary art does not refer merely to art produced within a historic period but that the phrase is a descriptive expression, which contains a value judgement. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term 'Contemporary Art' refers to that which is made with awareness of the histories of modernism and postmodernism. Distinctions between modernism and postmodernism are exceptionally difficult to secure, as postmodernism is not a period that behaves like other periods. Instead it is a stance or position that exists within modernism. Modernist art, as Greenberg portrayed it during the 1960s, was focused upon reducing medium-specific practice to its purest form, so as to entrench it in its own area of competence and protect it from being assimilated into broader forms of culture. A crisis in Greenberg's thinking occurred when he confronted the work of Stella in 1959 and 1960. Greenberg had previously been able to articulate the concepts of formalism and modernism together, but Stella's work left him with only two options. The first was to accept that making and appreciating art required nothing other than identification of the conceptual 'logic' of modernism, in which case aesthetic judgement would no longer be necessary. Formalism would thus be betrayed. The second was to assume that aesthetic judgment was still necessary; in this case one is forced to accept that art is no longer required to be the outcome of its specific history. De Duve believed Greenberg had opted for the second of these options and Kosuth for the first. Kosuth sought to transform art into a 'philosophico-linguistic' discipline, in which the aesthetic model was replaced with a linguistic one. De Duve saw art as an activity that investigated the nature of art and excluded all but the professionals involved in the process. With nothing needed to produce art other than knowledge of conventions and intellectual curiosity, de Duve's argument suggested art had faded into art theory.

The shift introduced by de Duve became manifest in art education and was explored in light of three historical phases. The first was the traditional academic model based on talent, which de Duve believed had shattered within less than a century, and which gave rise to the modernist Bauhaus model which replaced talent with creativity. This, second model focused upon the notion of a visual language, since as perception was an aspect of creativity it was believed to be a basic reading skill. The concept of visual language developed from this. Art became open to all and as everyone is

endowed with creativity, anyone could theoretically become an artist. This creativity model was used within many establishments for many years, and considerable energy was devoted to breaking down the visual language. The last of the three models was described as the attitude – practice – deconstruction triad, which de Duve suggested marked a paradigm shift that dominates contemporary art schools. Formalism has been replaced by an approach which involves disparaging notions of creativity, including originality and authenticity, yet without restoring notions of talent so that this attitude appears nihilistic, or at least disenchanted. Art schools such as Goldsmiths probably attracted students by promising them instant rewards, the nature of which de Duve was not explicit about. The discourses employed changed to reflect the new climate; the term art became taboo as it conveyed some of the essence of that nature of art that had been left behind and practice gained wider use as it denotes something less specific, and more general. Singerman also offers an explanation of the process of constructing this attitude, which depended upon art school projects that were spoken and written rather than visual. He acknowledges the importance of the crit as a teaching method, one which involved ambiguous discussions, through which students could determine how broad topics related to their situation. The ability to place themselves in a professional relation to the speaker, through shared use of the language of that speech community, allowed them to perceive themselves as competent practitioners within a professional community. Inability to achieve this resulted in frustration and disillusionment.

An operational definition of discourse comes, by way of Foucault, Mills and Christie's work, which sees discourse as a group or system of statements, which cohere around common meanings and values. The process of art education was described as using discourses that became crucial to the construction of an art student's sense of identity, and reflected the social roles occupied by the individuals who used them. Christie suggested that someone who does not have a subject position within a discourse would be simply unable to speak in that context because they would not have a subject position that sanctioned their speech.

Theory was acknowledged, particularly during the 1980s, as a vague word used to describe a broad range of thought addressing questions of social, political and metaphysical importance. It crossed disciplinary boundaries and in relation to art ought to be conceived as plural 'art theories' rather than singular 'art theory', as it existed in no unified form. It was drawn into many forms of writing which accompanied contemporary art including normal art history, experimental or new art history (sometimes just referred to as visual theory or just theory) serious art criticism, and subsequently commercial art writing, which was thought to be broader than all the other forms combined. The

consequence of this excess of theory was that complex arguments were reduced to sound bites, or theoretical word play tied to fashion, which were seen as pastiche or a consumable good.

Theory took precedence over the art object during the 1980s, exemplified in *The New Art History*, *Screen* magazine, the journal *October* and thinkers associated with the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, as well as with the interdisciplinary thinkers previously referred to. Crow suggested that artists used this heavyweight theorising in strategic and canny ways, and that it provided a kind of 'product packaging' for the art of the period. Artists such as Peter Halley of the New York scene utilised references to theorists like Baudrillard in texts that accompanied their work, as a result of which Baudrillard became commonly referred to in art education. The influence of this theory made artists aware that art was experienced in the context of leisure time, for those who had money to spare because of the buoyancy of the markets saw art as a profitable investment. The theoretical product packaging, utilised as cultural capital, enabled art to be seen as powerful and interesting, and satisfied its audiences' wishes to differentiate themselves from the supposedly unsophisticated masses. Yet artists such as Damien Hirst turned to making the viewer feel uncomfortable about his or her response to the new forms of art. Left with little option art historians eventually turned their back on such work and Stallabrass's writing exemplifies this dismay. There was awareness that artists had used as intellectual capital the awareness they had gained from their education.

De Duve saw theory as having become institutionalised at some point by the late 1980s, which led artists to rebel against it. Developed as a means to critique various forms of power, theory had gained an authority of its own. Artists soon abandoned any idea of the artist as critical commentator and in so doing rejected the dominant discourses of modern art in their desire to unsettle the bureaucratic smoothness of postmodernism. These artists faced accusations of anti-intellectualism and a crisis was declared within art. Others argued that this was projection on the part of the critics and that the crisis was, in fact, in criticism. This was seen to be an international debate whose significance depended upon one's position within the field. The suggestion that there was a lack of meaningful art was met with apathy, in the form of the assertion that what is there is what needs to be looked at, even if not a lot of the art produced is good. Archer suggested that those who expected more from art had misplaced expectations. In short, there was a notable lack of will for writings on art to impose requirements upon it that it should be anything other than what it was. This apathy was linked to awareness of the absence of any discussion of artistic value and a dissociation from value judgements. Instead, art writing seemed to engage in avoidance of straight answers and explanations.

The discourses on art appeared to be carefully monitored and often involved leaving many avenues open so as not to restrict meaning-making surrounding a particular work. An argument in support of complex meaning, which few people can decipher, suggested that artists have developed complex languages involving new syntax and grammar, capable of conveying their experiences. Yet such an argument was clearly based upon outdated notions of art evolving as a language, which were themselves tied to notions of creativity and perception and have since been replaced with alternative arguments. The suggestion that art can be seen as a form of language will be explored in the next chapter.

The context for contemporary art practice from within the literature of the discipline has now been outlined, and the chapter that follows will explore theoretical approaches that provide differing ways of understanding this context.

## Chapter 3

### Thinking in the Contemporary Context

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter surveys a range of theoretical models that appear to offer alternatives to the approaches taken by those within the field in interpreting the contemporary art world and the practices within it. These approaches stem from social theory, through linguistics and organisational theory to complexity theory. They include Etienne Wenger's *Communities of Practice*, Roy Harris's Integrational Linguistics and artspeak, Mark C. Taylor's *Confidence Games* and his work on Complex Adaptive Systems, and Jonathan Vickery's discussion on the construction of aesthetic value. These ways of thinking will be introduced by a summary of the understanding they provide and their relevance to this enquiry. Most of these models are from other disciplines, and the researcher will note how she came to be familiar with them. Where appropriate, there will be discussion of how the thinking was received within the disciplines from which it originated and were relevant from the field of contemporary art. Chapters 8 and 9 offer critical reflections on the approaches and discuss not only how this research unfolded, but how useful the various approaches were in unpicking the problems thrown up by the research.

#### 3.1 Communities of practice

Involvement with researchers in other disciplines led to familiarity with current approaches relevant to those in other fields, such as Etienne Wenger's *Communities of Practice* approach. Wenger's work is primarily a theory of social learning, which challenges the assumption that learning is an individual process. In his book *Communities of Practice* he aims to establish how learning takes place and what is required to support it once it is recognised that human beings are social creatures and that learning is a social phenomenon (Wenger, 1998, p.3). Participating in a community of practice involves being an active participant in the *practices* of that community and constructing an identity in relation to this (Wenger, 1998, p.4). Such participation is thought to shape what one does but also who one is and how one interprets what one does (Wenger, 1998, p.4).

Etienne Wenger uses the term *communities of practice* to describe the way in which people come together 'at home, at work at school, in our hobbies' (Wenger, 1998, p.6). Wenger asserts: 'Some communities specialise in the production of theories, but that too is a practice', implying that those who write about art may also be seen as *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998, p.48). He considered that we are all part of several *communities of practice* at any given time (Wenger, 1998), and believed that belonging to a community of practice was a way in which we survive together and those who belong 'develop or create a sense of themselves that they can live with' (Wenger, 1998, p.6). Wenger stresses that *communities of practice* should not be idealised, and does not suggest there will always be a climate of 'harmony or collaboration' (Wenger, 1998, p.85). *Communities of practice* are thought to be pervasive and yet rarely come into specific focus (Wenger, 1998, p.7). Although this means of describing them may be new, the experience of communities of practice is not, and Wenger believed he had been involved in giving form and expression to what people already knew (Wenger, 1998, p.xiv). The understanding provided by the 'communities of practice' approach is a way to explore how groups of artists and theorists come together and engage in shared practices which impact upon their sense of identity even when they do not define themselves as communities.<sup>6</sup>

Wenger referred to the process of 'participation' within a *community of practice* as falling within what he believed to be common understanding of the word. He offered a dictionary definition of participation: 'To have or take a part or share with others (in some activity or enterprise, etc.)' (Wenger, 1998, p.55). As belonging to a *community of practice* involves taking part with others in action and connection, he referred to his use of the term as a way to describe 'the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises' (Wenger, 1998, p.54).

Wenger described engagement in communities of practice as occurring through participation in practice, and asserted that concerns with issues of practice go back to Karl Marx's use of the term 'praxis' (Wenger, 1998, p.281). Wenger considered the sociologist/anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu to be the most 'prominent practice theorist'. Because of the understanding that Bourdieu can offer a field such as contemporary art, which is centred around practice, his work is considered to be another appropriate model to use in this research (see 3.2). This thesis will consider whether groups of artists who come together, through mutual interests and conceptions about art, are describable as a

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<sup>6</sup> The opportunity arose to discuss the application of Wenger's thinking to the art world with Wenger himself. Wenger was supportive of the application of his approach, and encouraged the researcher to perceive the groups or communities of professionals within the field as a constellation of communities.

'community of practice'. Whatever form of practice is engaged in by a community, Wenger takes the view that it is, '...first and foremost, a process by which we experience the world and our engagement in it as meaningful' (Wenger, 1998, p.51). Wenger suggests that all sorts of activities are involved in practice, such as 'a canvas, brushes, colour pigments, and sophisticated techniques' are used in producing a painting (Wenger, 1998, p.51). Yet he considered that 'in the end, for the painter and the viewer, it is the painting as an experience of meaning that counts' (Wenger, 1998, p.51).

In considering meaning, Wenger did not limit himself to a discussion of the word according to its dictionary definitions. Rather he approached meaning from the perspective of a negotiation of a meaningful experience, in which 'practice is meaning as an experience of everyday life' (Wenger, 1998, p.52). Wenger conceived of meaning as located in the process he termed 'the negotiation of meaning' (Wenger, 1998, p.52). He thought this process occurred through the interaction of what he termed two 'constituent processes' which he called 'participation and reification' (Wenger, 1998, p.52). Wenger emphasised that he thought 'human engagement with the world is first and foremost a process of negotiating meaning' (Wenger, 1998, p.53). As he explained, language may be necessary in the negotiation of meaning but the construction of meaning does not have to be 'limited to language' (Wenger, 1998, p.53).

Wenger used the term 'reification' in a much broader sense than its dictionary definition. The dictionary definition is 'to treat (an abstraction) as substantially existing, or as a concrete material object' (Wenger, 1998, p.58). Wenger, however, employs this term to describe 'the process of giving form to our experiences by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thingness"'. Reification as Wenger understood it was about employing particular terms, to allow a certain understanding to take form and therefore to be communicated. He considered that these abstractions often seem to become active agents, and would argue that in everyday discourses, abstractions such as 'justice' or 'the economy' are referred to as active agents. This is exemplified in such a sentence as 'the economy reacted slowly to the government's action'. Wenger determined from this that we 'project our meanings into the world and then we perceive them as existing in the world, as having a reality of their own' (Wenger, 1998, p.58). This thesis will suggest that the word 'art' is such an abstraction or active agent.

Whilst Wenger's description of negotiating meaningfulness is useful, it is recognised that it sets up a dichotomy between participation and reification in which reification (and thus the making of meaning) cannot be considered in isolation from practice.



The following example, based upon Wenger's personal experience, exemplifies how reification is used in practice. When offered a glass of wine by a friend and asked how it was, he replied, 'good thank you' (Wenger, 2004, p.9). Yet this response, he considered later, might have been somewhat offensive to his friend, who, although Wenger was unaware of it at the time, was an experienced wine-taster. Once this became apparent Wenger's friend began to describe the experience of the glass of wine as it was to him, referring to 'hazelnuts, strawberries, oak, and colours in different places in the mouth and in the nose'. This awareness suggested to Wenger that his friend was experiencing the wine in a way to which he had no access. Whilst Wenger could hear the words, he was unable to engage in the process of reification, which was necessary to make the experience meaningful. In order for Wenger to engage with the wine in the way his friend had, he knew he would have to spend 'hours of participation in tasting and discussing taste to be able to really understand this practice'. As a result of this awareness Wenger knew he was left with two options: either he could dedicate time to becoming a member of a wine-tasting community, thus enabling him to communicate his experience of the wine as his friend was able to, or he could decline, recognising he was not a wine taster (Wenger, 2004, p.9).

It is important to explore Wenger's suggestion that once people had learnt how to gain access to the community's process of reification, the result would be a shared, meaningful experience. Wenger asserted that agreement 'in the sense of literal shared meaning is not a precondition for mutual engagement in practice, nor is it an outcome' (Wenger, 1998, p.84). The approach of Integrational Linguistics, developed by Roy Harris (to be introduced in section 3.3 of this chapter) supports Wenger's assertion, as it shows that literally shared meaning, whereby two people understand experience in the same way, is unfeasible.

The process of reification of practice was seen to rely upon the use of discourses and Wenger outlined how his concept of discourse drew upon the definition by Michel Foucault (Wenger, 1998, p.289). There would appear to be an affinity between the concept of discourse as defined in section 2.3 of this thesis, and how it was conceived by Wenger. He noted his interpretation of discourse as that which 'reflects an enterprise and the perspective of a community of practice, but it is neither a set belief nor a model of the world that individuals have in their heads' (Wenger, 1998, p.289). He considered discourse as an interactive resource used for constructing statements about the world and coordinating engagement in practice (Wenger, 1998, p.289).

Wenger was aware that any attempt to deal with the social world must confront issues of power, and his conception of this was 'centred on the notion of identity' he did not address directly the concerns of traditional theories of institutionalised power in economic and political terms (Wenger, 1998, p.284).<sup>7</sup> He considered his own conception to be more in line with Bourdieu's thinking, which considered power relations in the symbolic realm, for example in the form of symbolic or cultural capital (Wenger, 1998, p.284). These forms of capital and Bourdieu's thinking are to be explored in the next section of this chapter.

### 3.2 The cultural field

The work of Pierre Bourdieu enables us to conceive of the art world as a 'cultural field' in which every practitioner, theorist, critic, writer or other professional has a position. These positions are thought of as constituting the field, and 'every position, even the dominant one, depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constituting the field' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.30). If one were to think of the art world in Bourdieu's terms one might imagine it as a field of positions, in which strategies are employed by occupants of these positions in order to 'defend or improve their positions'. Once change occurs every position within the field feels the impact, as the availability of alternative positions within the field is affected. Bourdieu considered that new groups of artists may make their presence felt through the use of 'political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics'. The field can therefore be described as a *field of struggles*, which is impacted upon according to the 'strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement'. Throughout this thesis the strategies employed in the struggle for advancing one's position will be explored, with the art world being referred to as the field.

In the *Production of Belief: Contributing to an Economy of Symbolic Goods* Bourdieu argued that the cultural field could be thought of as a 'disavowal of the "economic" present' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.74). Bourdieu viewed the cultural field as built upon a 'refusal' of the 'commercial', that could be conceived of as a disavowal of the economy. He contended that this had led to a duality within the field, manifested in the players as 'disinterestedness' or 'self-interest' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.74). The refusal of the commercial, according to Bourdieu, hides the player's actual economic interests. As a

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<sup>7</sup> Here he was thinking of examples such as private ownership or class relations, as they have been addressed by thinkers such as Marx (1867), Weber (1922), Lukacs (1922) and Latour (1986), or state apparatus with legitimization of authority and use of force as explored by Parsons (1962), Althusser (1984) and Giddens (1995).

result of the masking of these interests, the most important undertaking for those within the field was the accumulation of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital, according to Bourdieu, is to be understood as

... economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a 'credit' which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees 'economic' profits (Bourdieu, 1993, p.75).

Those who are able to 'recognise the specific demands of the universe' can therefore conceal from others the 'interests at stake in their practice' and aim at deriving 'profits from disinterestedness' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.75). Bourdieu suggests that accumulating symbolic capital can be equated with 'making a name for oneself, a known, recognised name'. Achieving this is a way of gaining the power, or ability, to be able to 'consecrate objects', either with a trademark or signature, or through publication or exhibition. He specifically referred to the art dealer as someone for whom accumulating symbolic capital is crucial.

Gaining symbolic capital, according to Bourdieu, can occur by way of a "'charismatic" ideology' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.76). Bourdieu saw this charismatic ideology as the 'ultimate basis in the belief of a work of art', and in turn the basis of the 'functioning of the field of production of cultural commodities'.

In light of Bourdieu's work a contemporary art dealer can be thought as having to 'invest his prestige' in an artist's practice (Bourdieu, 1993, p.77). In so doing they could be said to invest the symbolic capital they have accumulated (Bourdieu, 1993, p.77). Bourdieu argued that the only capital held by an artist new to the scene 'is their conviction' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 76). He suggested that as a result of this lack of symbolic capital, they have to establish themselves in the market 'by appealing to the values whereby the dominant figures accumulated their symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.76).

For Bourdieu, works of art exist 'as symbolic objects', and are works of art only if they are 'known and recognised' as such (Bourdieu, 1993, p.37). They are dependent, therefore, upon the existence of spectators capable of 'knowing and recognising them' as art (Bourdieu, 1993, p.37). He suggests that art is in fact encoded and that consumption of art works is a process of communication which involves deciphering the code (Bourdieu, 1984). He asserted that 'a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded' (Bourdieu, 1984. p.2). He also suggests that a beholder who lacks this cultural competence

will be unable to pass beyond the primary meaning one can 'grasp on the basis of ordinary experience' to the secondary meaning, the level of what is signified (Bourdieu, 1984. p.2). He considers that which is required to enable one to move beyond the first, basic stage of experience is 'concepts', an 'act of cognition' or a 'decoding operation' which necessitates the use of a 'cultural code' (Bourdieu, 1984. p.3). The process of encoding and decoding meaning and operative use of concepts as a code will be explored throughout this thesis from the perspective of Integrational Linguistics, to be introduced in the next section of this chapter.

Bourdieu contended that any study of art and or literature has to take as its focus of study not only the material outcome of that practice, but also the 'symbolic production of the work' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.37). In effect, it must study the production of 'the value of the work', or - which he considers amounts to the same thing - the 'belief in the value of the work'. Therefore what should be of interest are not only the primary producers but also the communities of interest or the 'producers of meaning and value', for example, the

... critics, publishers, gallery directors, and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognising the work of art as such (Bourdieu, 1993, p.37).

Consequently, he insisted, one needs to comprehend the work of art, as a 'manifestation of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning are concentrated' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.37). This study acknowledges Bourdieu's assertion, and seeks to address the wider context of contemporary art production, including the involvement of critics, gallery directors, the whole set of agents, thought of here as communities of interest.

It is the gallery director or art dealer who, according to Bourdieu's model, literally introduces the practitioner or producer into the 'cycle of consecration' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.77). The role of the art dealer is, in Bourdieu's view, exceptionally clear: it is he or she who literally has to 'introduce' the artist and his work into ever more select company (group exhibitions, one-man shows, prestigious collections, museums) and ever more sought-after places. According to Bourdieu, the 'less visible the investment, the more productive it is symbolically'. This, he argues, means that the 'promotion exercises, which in the business world take the overt form of publicity, must here be euphemised'. The publicity strategies employed within the cultural field must, therefore, be deliberately vague or elusive. He suggests that these euphemised forms of publicity may include 'receptions, social gatherings, and judiciously placed confidences'. Part of the process of validation and promotion of

contemporary art, in the form of the creation of symbolic capital, could be seen to occur in contexts such as the private view. Stallabrass's observations would support such an idea. He has suggested that much of the creation of contemporary arts, value and status is created through the discourses which occur at private views, parties and openings and which he describes thus:

... the circuits of art, and the money that flows with it, are also circuits of discourse between favoured members of an elite, and [that] those events at which they circulate and talk are venues for the confirmation of value (Stallabrass, 2005, p.2).

Stallabrass recognised that as the art market and art world lack many of the formal features typical of other markets, 'parties are central to the art economy' (Stallabrass, 2005, p.2).

As Stallabrass asserts, it is the discourses at these parties which validate contemporary art. Bourdieu considers that the basis of the value of the work of art is generated both within the 'incessant, innumerable struggles to establish the value of this or that particular work' – predominantly produced through discourse – yet also in the 'conflicts between agents occupying different positions' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.79). Sometimes different positions may also require the use of different discourses.

### 3.3 Integrational Linguistics

Current thinking from the field of linguistics introduced the researcher to *The Necessity of Artspeak: the Language of the Arts in the Western Tradition* (2003). This text applies Integrational Linguistic thinking to the field of contemporary art. Roy Harris is considered quite a controversial figure within his own field of linguistics. Yet *The Necessity of Artspeak* was seen as reactionary within the field of contemporary art and received limited review coverage. The sole review from the discipline was in the *Jackdaw* and as Harris himself said, it 'unfortunately, missed the main argument of the book' (Harris, 2005). Harris has also asserted that 'art historians in particular can't afford to take what it says seriously, because that would undermine the whole basis of their profession' (Harris, 2005). The responses to *The Necessity of Artspeak* were discussed with Harris personally, as were other current linguistic approaches which were considered for application to the field, such as Dan Sperber's and Deidre Wilson's *Relevance Theory*. Harris felt this to be an outdated linguistics approach, as in his view it leaves the language myth (to be explored in this section), intact.

Harris wrote *The Necessity of Artspeak* as an attempt to explore whether contemporary art theorists and critics were speaking a language that had lost its meaning (Harris, 2003). He was aware that conceptualism had 'ushered in a new era in the relations between the work of art and verbal comment' and that words had become vital in the consecration of art (Harris, 2003, p.125). He recognised that this had promoted 'art theory to a position of superiority with respect to the production of art' (Harris, 2003, p.125).

Harris believed that by the late 1960s verbalisation had supplanted execution as the main concern and activity of at least one area of the contemporary art world (Harris, 2003, p.131). Harris utilised the term artspeak<sup>8</sup> to refer to 'the whole range of discourse about works of art and their appreciation (or disparagement)' (Harris, 2003, p.xii). Harris was questioning whether the function of the arts in modern society was still discernible. He sought to show how the problems of aesthetics and artistic judgement have, as their sources, linguistic assumptions that underlie the terms and arguments presented. The aim was to reveal how artspeak, as the discourse that accompanies practice, has continued to be manipulated to serve the interests of particular social groups and agendas, and is used in the promotion of the latest fashions and trends in the contemporary arts to the exclusion of the public.

The use of artspeak by members of the art world was seen as a 'language game' being played out in competition with other language games within the cultural arena (Harris, 2003, p.196).<sup>9</sup> Entering into the game was described as a way to maintain one's position within the field (Harris, 2003, p.196). The language game necessitated making others believe things about art, almost as they would believe certain religious doctrines. The game of words, Harris considered, was revealed most clearly when new practices appear (Harris, 2003, p.195).

He also suggested that some arts featured much less prominently in the discourse of western artspeak and asserted that this was because they do not require an elaborate rationale to justify their existence

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<sup>8</sup> The term Artspeak was first used by the art historian Robert Atkins who popularised the term in 1990 as a means to discuss the current buzzwords used by critics in certain sectors of the art world (Harris, 2003, p.xii).

<sup>9</sup> Harris asserted that both Saussure and Wittgenstein showed convergence in the belief that one of the most enlightening analogies in understanding how language works was the analogy between a language and a rule-governed game. Yet he recognised there is no 'commonly accepted term for this assimilation, which would clearly be out of the question in any society which did not have the institution of games in the sense in which European society recognises chess, tennis, bridge, etc. as games' (Harris, 1988, p.xi). Given the lack of a term, Harris suggested one could speak rather loosely either of 'the games analogy' or of 'the games perspective' but recognised that 'the language game' was a better phrase. Harris had previously thought that the disadvantage of this term was that it was associated specifically with Wittgenstein, suggesting that a Wittgensteinian interpretation was being used. However, he has since begun to use the term more frequently, suggesting that this now concerns him less and that he is seeking to appropriate it into his own approach.

(Harris, 2003, p.194). Harris argued that the more useful an art form is, the less need it has to shelter under the umbrella of a supercategory, or lay claim to virtues it does not possess.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary art would be seen as being at the farthest end of the practicality scale, lacking any obvious usefulness or other social value. For example, Harris was quite scathing of the social value of submerging dead animals in formaldehyde in public museums, as exemplified by the work of Damien Hirst, unless for scientific purposes.

The beauty of the language game was thought to be its ability to enable any item or event to be re-described in such a way as to validate it as art. An example of the confusion this can cause was the schoolboys who mistakenly ate 'what appeared to be sweets' left on a shelf in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and thus destroyed the work of the artist Graham Fagen (Harris, 2003, p.159). Another example would be the cleaner at Tate Modern who in 2004 accidentally threw away a bag of rubbish that was in fact an artwork by the artist Gustav Metzger. Harris would argue that these people are ridiculed for making a category mistake, but anyone who has not been corrupted by artspeak can see that in fact it is the other way around: the sweets were sweets.

Success was seen by Harris as dependent upon the dealer system, where the dealer became 'the essential intermediary who negotiated the status of the artist in the marketplace today', often convincing people to part with large amounts of money in order to assert their status and power (Harris, 2003, p.126). As he puts it: '... the artist was free to be as iconoclastic and revolutionary as he or she might wish, provided that the resultant painting and sculpture could be marketed as expensive *chic*' (Harris, 2003, p.126).

Harris outlined what he called the flight from meaning, and spoke of the origins of conceptualism, which he thought of as resulting from artists' choosing to eliminate formal elements of their practice, particularly painting, to prevent their practice being interpreted in a formal and narrative sense rather than as an expression of their understanding of the world around them. Harris considered that what counts is not so much the work of art but what you can say about it (Harris, 2003, p.90). He quoted Kosuth (1991) as having stated:

[This] meant that you could have an idea of an artwork, and its formal components weren't important. I felt that I had found a way to make art without formal components

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<sup>10</sup> The supercategory is as described by Harris as a 'metalinguistic construct which arises from the attempt, at different times and places for different reasons, to integrate different – and superficially incompatible – forms of discourse' (Harris, 2003, p.191).

being confused for an expressionist composition. The expression was the idea, not the form – the forms were only a device in the service of the idea (Kosuth, quoted in, Harris, 2003, p.129).

The phrase 'art for art's sake' was said to have evolved from Henry Crabb Robinson who, on his return home from a dinner party in 1804, used the canonical saying 'l'art pour l'art' (Harris, 2003, p.81). Harris saw the doctrine 'art for art's sake' as having resulted from artists feeling as though they were being pitted against machines. He asserted that it signalled 'a retreat of the artist into a tour d'ivoire where the only valid criteria of judgement are deemed to be those of "art itself" '. He considered there to be an obvious problem with this as he was aware that it was unclear exactly what 'art itself' was and thus how it could be pursued 'for its own sake'. He questioned the core of the doctrine of art for art's sake, asking whether it was opposed to 'art for beauty's sake'. If it were not, Harris argued, its theoretical stance would immediately be compromised.

Harris describes Kosuth as having been unaware that the thesis of art as a 'language' had already been explored critically with far more sophistication and in far greater detail by a number of writers, from Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*, 1938, to Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art*, 1968 (Harris, 2003, p.130). Harris explores how Kosuth wanted art to be seen as an item of 'discourse' and yet felt he had failed, for even at this simplistic level, Harris suggests, the analogy did not hold (Harris, 2003).

Harris also refers to the notion of art as a challenge to what art can be and determines that this discourse about art, based upon the assertion of art for art's sake, and art as a continual challenge to what we expect from art, has reached the end of its life. Harris considers this to be because the public, or many of those who could, would or should be surprised by such contemporary art, no longer feel challenged (Harris, 2003). Art can now be anything, and once anything is acceptable as art, there is nowhere for this discourse to go. Some would argue that this suggests postmodernist art has run its course.

Harris considered artspeak and the language game to have evolved from the language myth, which is a belief in a proposition such as:

Linguistic communication is a matter of knowing a verbal code, by means of which one individual may transmit precise thoughts, feelings, etc. to another, on condition that the other individual likewise knows the verbal code in question (Harris, 2003, p.140).



In such an assumption, knowledge of the code is required both to encode the message and to decode it upon receiving it. Integrational Linguists refer to the proposition that communication occurs by means of a code, which allows meaning to be transferred directly from one person to another, with 'intentional disparagement' as the language myth (Harris, 2003. p.14). Harris's assumptions about discourse disclose an integrationist approach to language. The basis of this approach is to take issue 'rather radically with some of the basic presuppositions that are accepted in orthodox linguistics' (Harris, 2003, p.139);<sup>11</sup> integrationists insist that communication, whether verbal or non-verbal, has to be understood in any given instance by reference to particular activities involved in those particular circumstances (Harris, 2003, p.188). They do not believe that meaning comes from 'outside' activities but that it varies according to circumstances and as such will change from person to person and occasion to occasion. Meaning is thought to be different for each person; no two people will experience and understand a building, for example, in the same way, particularly if one is the building's inhabitant and the other a passer-by (Harris, 2003). Integrationists believe that integration of the differences between people's experiences takes place through and requires language (Harris, 2003).

Integrationists challenge the language myth because they believe the basis of this myth is a process of telementation, in which a meaning originating in one person's mind is thought to be transferred to another's (Harris, 2003, p.140). This process of telementation depends for its success upon a fixed code, which underwrites it (Harris, 2003, p.140).

Those who believe in the language myth, are thought to have spent considerable effort trying to determine how the form and meaning of the signs are established, as these are considered necessary for a message to be conveyed and understood (Harris, 2003, p.141). Harris considers that supporters of the language myth have also questioned how the meanings of these signs arose in the first place. The answers, he believes, are based upon one of two premises (Harris, 2003, p.141). The first of these he describes as the theory of the linguistic code, which he believes underlies traditional artspeak from Plato to Hegel. He refers to this as 'surrogational' (Harris, 2003, p.141).<sup>12</sup> The second he refers to as 'contractual' and he considers that this has dominated western artspeak in the 19th and

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<sup>11</sup> Integrationists believe that language can be self-reflexive, in a way that music or a painting cannot be. Language is seen as one of 'humanity's basic communicational resources, and also one of humanity's basic forms of artistic activity' (Harris, 2003. p.189). The notion of a self-explanatory work of art is thought to be the ultimate illusion generated by the western communication myth (Harris, 2003. p.189).

<sup>12</sup> This approach was thought to be based upon the belief that linguistic codes have their source in nature and reflect the way the world is (or is conceived to be) (Harris, 2003. p.141).

20th centuries (Harris, 2003, p.141).<sup>13</sup> Neither surrogational nor contractualist artspeak can reveal where the supercategory 'art' comes from (Harris, 2003, p.191).

The supercategory was described by Harris as a metalinguistic construct that arises from 'the attempt at different times and places for different reasons to integrate different – and superficially incompatible – forms of discourse' (Harris, 2003, p.141). Such integration has been thought necessary to justify activities and claims which would otherwise lack a convincing rationale (Harris, 2003). Harris conceives of the supercategory 'art' as a means to 'integrate the activities of those who present themselves as artists or art lovers into a wider political agenda' (Harris, 2003, p.193). The nature of the supercategory allows people to 'play political football with it', in order to advance a partisan agenda of their own (Harris, 2003, p.193).

Harris believes that the 'language game' has spiralled out of control because too many practices are attempting to shelter under the supercategory (Harris, 2003 p.203). The cause of this he attributes to attempts by the field to integrate too much, (leading him to see it as a discourse in a state of 'disrepair') (Harris, 2003, p.201). He considers that the supercategory, which formerly held all these practices together, has become unsustainable because of the burden placed upon it (Harris, 2003, p.201).

He suggests that the only way to rescue oneself from artspeak is to conceive of it as integrational and recognise that the discourse serves a purpose in the context in which it is offered (Harris, 2003). In such an understanding discourses cannot be separated from the social, political, and economical circumstances in which they occur. Harris considers 'anyone who believes that the arts, politics, religion, and economics can be divorced must be living in cloud-cuckoo land' (Harris, 2003, p.207).

### **3.4 Confidence games and network cultures**

Emerging ideas about Complexity theory led to awareness of Mark C. Taylor's work, which not only offers the application of complexity and network thinking to the field of art, but also relates this to work on economics, religion and politics. It offers a way to reflect upon the interrelatedness of the issues to which Harris draws attention.

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<sup>13</sup> This approach was thought to depend upon linguistic codes being the products of human conventions, irrespective of how the world seems to be (Harris, 2003, p.141).

Taylor had become convinced before writing his two books that the subjects of complexity, economics, art and religion were interrelated in 'much more complicated ways than traditional reductive analysis suggested' (Taylor, 2004a, p.xv). Taylor also offers an alternative way to consider the deconstructivist thinking so often associated with contemporary art practice, referred to by de Duve in what he considers to be art's most recent triad (see 2.2). Taylor suggests that some 'supporters on the left and critics on the right have misunderstood' the vision of a theorist such as Derrida (Taylor, 2004b). Taylor argues against what he describes as the 'misleading clichés' surrounding deconstruction, which portray it as a way to describe 'a process of dismantling or taking things apart'. Instead he considers that when deconstruction is responsibly understood, its implications are quite different. Whilst he acknowledges that the basic premise of deconstruction is that 'every structure –be it literary, psychological, social, economic, political or religious –that organizes our experience is constituted and maintained through acts of exclusion', and that these structures inevitably leave things out, he argues that we must not 'forsake the cognitive categories and moral principles without which we cannot live: equality and justice, generosity and friendship'. Taylor suggests that it is a mistake to see Derrida as a nihilist because he insisted 'that truth and absolute value cannot be known with certainty', and that this does not have to result in undercutting 'the very possibility of moral judgment'. What is so relevant here about the understanding Taylor offers is that he suggests we require cognitive categories in order to shape our experiences but that these must be acknowledged as having unavoidable limitations and inherent contradictions. As a result of this, he suggests, they must be kept constantly open to questioning and continual revision.

Taylor's thinking offers a way to re-consider possible reasons why theorists such as Lyotard, have felt frustrated with the pre-occupation with their thinking, and with concepts such as the post-modern and or deconstruction which they have helped to instigate (see, 2.1).

Taylor began writing about art, architecture and religion in the late 1970s as a result of his work on Hegel and Kierkegaard. His research led him to the work of leading French poststructuralists, whose influence he found had spread 'rapidly from literary studies to other fields in the arts and humanities' (Taylor, 2001, p.6). This led him to attempt to map what may seem a rather unlikely relation between the continental philosophy and literature from which poststructuralism emerged, and major trajectories in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology.

He explored the histories of art, religion and architecture in the eighteenth century in order to shed light on the twentieth century. He concluded that as a result of the Industrial Revolution, artists came

to be seen as religious prophets. Influential members of what came to be known as the avant-garde advanced 'utopian visions, which, though not acknowledged as such, were actually artistic versions of the kingdom of God' (Taylor, 2001, p.7). The most important question became whether the utopia is imagined as 'immanent in, [or] transcendent to, natural and historical processes' (Taylor, 2001, p.8). While some artists advanced the notion that art should be socially and politically effective, others argued for art to be socially autonomous. Taylor recognised that the substance of the avant-garde's visions changed but the task of the avant-garde artist was seen to be 'to lead the struggle to transform the world into a work of art' (Taylor, 2001, p.8). This, Taylor believes, has now become a reality in late-twentieth-century America, albeit in 'totally unexpected ways' (Taylor, 2001, p.8).

Marcel Duchamp is cited by Taylor as the artist who signalled the end of art, through his creation of the work *Urinal*, which showed that an everyday object could be elevated to the status of a art object. For Taylor, it is clear that the implications of Duchamp's readymades became unmistakable. He argued that for Warhol, 'post-war consumer capitalism is the parodic fulfilment of the avant-garde's effort' (Taylor, 2001, p.8). Taylor attributed to Warhol much of the credit for having taken art on to the streets, and for having further eroded the boundaries between high art and popular culture. He was aware that Warhol had been 'lacking a theoretical language with which to express his insights' (Taylor, 2001, p.8), and suggested that Baudrillard had been able to act as a stand-in, since he seemed to provide the terms with which to discuss Warhol's work. Despite lacking a theoretical language, Warhol was quoted by Taylor as stating:

Business is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called 'art' or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist (Taylor, 2001, p.9).

The implications of such a comment, Taylor believed, stretched far beyond the art world. He believed the currency of exchange was seen to be 'image', and in the new economy, use value was transformed into exchange value. In such an economy buying and selling images create wealth, as does trading information mostly contained as data or on computer screens.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Taylor thought that 'art had become thoroughly entangled with economics' (Taylor, 2004a, p.3). Pop art, he stated, collapsed high art into low, but most interestingly it began to market itself with 'strategies that were often indistinguishable from advertising'. Taylor also believed that after pop art conceptualists and minimalists had tried to break

the 'alliance between art and commerce' by transforming the work of art into 'an industrially produced mechanical product or a plan or program whose material realisation was less important than its conceptual formation'.

Taylor argued that in the subsequent decades, '...the play of signs prefigured in late modern and post-modern art and architecture expands to encompass the world of finance' (Taylor, 2004a, p.3). This world of finance was, however, what Taylor described as the 'financial economy' rather than the 'so-called real economy'. In this financial economy, money had become increasingly virtual, resulting in webs of circulating images and information.

In his latest book, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption*, Taylor has presented an understanding that draws upon Adam Smith's attempt to pull together religion, art, and economics to form the modern theory of markets. In so doing, Taylor considers how the market functions as an integrated system in which individuals pursuing their own interests also promote the good of the whole. From this perspective the market becomes a self-organising system that regulates itself. In the introduction, Taylor often describes those involved in the economic market as 'in the game' and his use of this terminology may in part reflect the technological innovations of the 'finance economy' (Taylor, 2004a, p.43). Taylor cites von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern's work *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* (1944) as a significant move in the bringing together of 'information theory, cybernetics, and game theory' which created new ways of understanding human behaviour (Taylor, 2004a, p.43).

Taylor also stresses how as the market became more about image and less about substance, 'the players quietly admitted that investing had become more of a confidence game than ever' (Taylor, 2004a, p.9). The art world was in a similar phase, with art seen as one of the 'most important currencies in the realm' (Taylor, 2004a, p.10). In such a conception of the economy the market is understood as a 'complex adaptive system' (Taylor, 2004a, p.10).

The notion of complex adaptive systems, initially identified by Complexity Theorists and which Taylor applies, offers insights into the study of contemporary art. Such systems are seen as 'complex large-scale behaviours from the aggregate interactions of less complex parts' (John Holland, quoted in Taylor, 2001, p. 164). Another description would be that they are relational webs in which order and disorder emerge within and are not imposed from without. They are self-organising systems, in which the order that emerges arises from the interactions of individual agents 'acting in their own

interests without any reliable understanding of the markets as a whole' (Taylor, 2004a, p.12). A familiar example of a complex adaptive system would be an ants' nest, in which an individual ant has

... stereotyped behaviour; and it almost always dies when circumstances do not fit the stereotype. On the other hand the ant aggregate – the ant nest – is highly adaptive, surviving over long periods in the face of a wide range of hazards. It is much like an intelligent organism constructed of relatively unintelligent parts (Taylor, 2001, p. 165).

As John Holland's comments in Taylor's book reveal, complex adaptive systems can be found in 'natural, social and cultural phenomena' (Taylor, 2001, p.165). Such systems tend, it seems, to share a common logic, which Taylor attributes to the 'adaptiveness characteristic of complex systems'. It seems initially that these complex adaptive systems share, at least superficially, some similarities to Wenger's notions of communities of practice and constellations of practice. They also resemble the structure of what Harris describes as the supercategory 'art', which acts in just such a way, though those within the category, such as artists, curators and critics cannot all be described as relatively unintelligent parts.

Taylor outlines the crisis in confidence that has emerged in the following terms: '... signs and symbols, be they monetary, religious, artistic' are 'no longer grounded in anything other than themselves' (Taylor, 2004a, p.22). Thus they are able to 'become insubstantial and float freely in currents, which often become turbulent' (Taylor, 2004a, p.22). It could be suggested that such a crisis in confidence is occurring in the field of art as a result of a situation where things seem to happen 'as if by accident' (Rubinstein, 2003). As Taylor describes it, 'everything seems to have become a confidence game' (Taylor, 2004a, p.23).

As art has reached a similar stage to the financial economy Taylor's descriptions of this economy can usefully be applied to the contemporary art world. Taylor describes the relevance of Martin Shubik's use of game theory to formulate a comprehensive account of money, in which money is 'what money does' (Shubik, quoted in Taylor, 2004a, p.45). What money does is also conceived of as being 'inseparable from the rules of the game that enable it to circulate' (Taylor, 2004a, p.45). Therefore money-ness, whatever that may mean, is a 'systematic property that depends upon the rules of the game' (Taylor, 2004a, p.45). It is argued that such statements might also be true of contemporary art.

From this perspective Taylor offers a somewhat unlikely link between postmodern art and religion, arguing that, in contrast to abstraction, which turns people inward, utopian art turns people outward

'by projecting another world intended to surpass the limitations of contemporary experience' (Taylor, 2004a, p.328). Taylor believes such art exists in two forms, the first being the artist who 'projects a world that can never be realised... which bears a thoroughly negative relation to the world as we know it', and the second being for art to provide 'the vision for social and political change' (Taylor, 2004a, p.328). The challenge for this type of work is not to 'escape or negate the world but to transform it into a work of art' (Taylor, 2004a, p.328). Taylor argues therefore that postmodernism is the unexpected realisation of the modern avant-garde's dream of transforming the world into a work of art, in which the artist must 'leave the studio and move to the factory or turn to the street' (Taylor, 2004a, p.329). Thereby, as Taylor conceives it, 'when the utopia arrives or the Kingdom comes, the world will be redeemed by becoming artful'. Taylor argues that the distinction between high and low art has collapsed and that all of culture has become 'a work of art'. However, it is here that Taylor's argument betrays some confusion, as he acknowledges that far from resisting market forces, 'art becomes a commodity, and artists in turn become businessmen and entrepreneurs skilled in the art of finance' (Taylor, 2004a, p.329).

Thus, Taylor argues that 'these developments mark the end of art' and a point 'when indistinguishable from non-art, art appears to be dead' (Taylor, 2004a, p.329). However, as Taylor himself points out, there is another view, in which it is assumed that 'if non-art cannot be distinguished there is nothing that is not art' (2004a, p.329).

One might counter by saying that if Taylor thinks art is not discernible from non-art, and is indistinguishable from other forms of cultural production, then perhaps all has not become art but rather, art has been subsumed under market pressures and capitalist endeavour. Thus, those artists who continue to practise are either those, mentioned by Taylor, who are skilled in the art of financing entrepreneurship, or those he warned against, who attempt to 'find refuge in the simplicity of a bygone era' (Taylor, 2004a, p.330). It is the somewhat restrictive nature of these two options available to artists that this research hopes to examine.

### **3.5 The construction of aesthetic value in contemporary art**

Jonathan Vickery's work was considered a relevant attempt from within the discipline to explore ways of constructing the aesthetic value of contemporary art in a way that related it to knowledge from other fields. Vickery's (2004) work has portrayed the need to draw upon organisational theory and particularly, on the study of management organisations to look at contemporary art. He was thus

considered to offer a model for exploring the application of organisational theory, such as Wenger's work, to the field of contemporary art.

Vickery acknowledged three ways of investigating art, all of which, as he recognised, appealed to a distinct category of 'aesthetic value' (suggesting that he considered aesthetics were still relevant in determining value). Vickery identifies three ways of investigating contemporary art and its aesthetic value: (i) *material organisation* - the technical or material construction of the work of art and the physical structures within which the viewer's perceptual activity is orientated; (ii) *aesthetic organisation* - composition, or the aesthetic characteristics of the object's material organisation; and (iii) *hermeneutic organisation* - art's interpreted meaning as configured within or in relation to existing systems of thought or institutional practice.

In relation to the intellectual nature of much contemporary art Vickery assumed that the hermeneutic organisation of a work was of most importance. He described the hermeneutic approach as a broad range of concerns that refers literally to the methods of interpretation available to the viewer. The focus here is upon the way the object is made to yield meaning, something that may be achieved through considering the compositional content of an artwork. This would include symbols, iconography, metaphors, allusions, associations, narrative and its socio-cultural and political contexts. These contexts can be categorised as (i) the contexts of *production* - the social milieu of the artist, the demands of the market or patronage, the location, and all the other ways in which the social, economic or political circumstances act as determining factors in the form and content of the work; and (ii) the contexts of *reception* - the intellectual milieu of the artist, the circulation of influential ideas, professional networks of activity, criticism and art historical assessment, and other social, economic or political circumstances acting as determining factors in the way the work is understood. The kind of value we can identify in the category of the hermeneutic is, broadly, *cultural significance*: the way in which the modes of meaning and experience generated by the work of art extend beyond the confines of the physical object and its artistic context and relate to culture or society in general.

Vickery proceeded to state that 'it is commonplace to note that in the case of contemporary art technical innovation and artistic conventions of composition have been evacuated as sources of value; moreover, the hermeneutics of reception have largely supplanted the hermeneutics of production'. The increasing emphasis this places on the theory and conceptual elements of artworks seems to leave the physicality of the work redundant.



In a slight twist to his argument Vickery added that despite this, in the case of minimalist art he has found arguments which have 'ostensibly privileged the object itself (rather than its function) in institutional discourse as a locus of value' (Vickery, 2004, p.14). However, as he proceeded to explore these arguments he eventually reached the conclusion that even Krauss's notion of 'aesthetic experience' relies upon 'art world justifications'; therefore, in his view, art world justifications perpetually lead to a 'circular appeal to its own authority' (Vickery, 2004, p.18). Vickery's subsequent observations suggested that aesthetic value is constructed through complex or 'unexplained and seemingly arbitrary relationships: between the specific work of art and the institutional discourse or "theory" ' (Vickery, 2004, p.19).

Whilst Vickery's work provided useful insights into possible combinations of ways to establish the value of contemporary arts, there appears to be a weakness in his argument. This particular paper was included in a special issue of *Tamara: Journal for Critical Postmodern Organisation* on art and organisation theory, and the author began by stating that it would 'draw attention to the way the study of management organisations is central to the study of contemporary art' (Vickery, 2004). However, despite drawing attention to the need for this type of enquiry he failed to engage in one himself, although this was what was basically needed. In the concluding paragraph of his paper Vickery stated, '... any serious investigation of contemporary art needs an organisation theory of aesthetic value' (Vickery, 2004, p.19). Why then did Vickery not offer us such a theory, or at least suggest where such relevant thinking might arise? What Vickery's paper did , however, was to establish a need that this thesis may begin to address, with his acknowledgement that:

... both art and the art world are constructed in and through discourse and professional networks, not merely physical institutions, and involve a complex and changing relation between language, administrative structures and organisational activity (Vickery, 2004, p.19).

To acknowledge this reaffirms that the considerations which guide this research are well grounded, or at least resonate with the views of others within the field. Such an assertion also suggests that the application of Wenger's and Taylor's organisational thinking are appropriate and indeed necessary models to employ in this enquiry.

### 3.6 Summary

Singerman suggested that the speech used within art education constructs the community of art professionals and that part of the aim of contemporary art education was to develop a sense of one's own identity as part of a community of professional artists (see, 2.2). Wenger's theory of *communities of practice* might offer a way to consider how communities are constructed through the use of certain discourses. *Communities of practice* may be hard to pin down, but as Wenger suggested, many people might in reality be able to identify those to which they belong. Wenger considered that belonging to or taking on a role in a community would impact upon one's sense of identity, and that active participation in the practices of that community would result in an experience of social learning. It seems it is this experience of social learning, as described by Wenger, that occurs within contemporary art education. This is in contrast to the 'reception' or 'banking' models of learning, referred to chapter 2, which many would have experienced prior to their undergraduate education (see, 2.2). Wenger's thinking could therefore offer a means to explore the type of learning enacted within contemporary art education and the communities of art professionals.

Wenger also suggested that participation in practice may combine with reification to enable the negotiation of a meaningful experience. His work might therefore also provide a way to explore the construction of the meaning of contemporary art. He asserted that discourse was involved in the process of negotiating meaning, enabling members of *communities of practice* to give form to their experiences and to share them with other community members. Wenger considered that we project our meanings into the world, yet then perceive them as existing as active agents in themselves. Taylor also believes that virtualisation means that concepts such as money take on their own agency, so he, in much the same way as Wenger, considers that concepts become seen as active agents. This would account for the way that those within the art world have given agency to the term 'art', which has begun to have a life of its own. The concept of 'art' was seen by Harris as a supercategory. Art is certainly a concept that has gained its own agency. The extreme outcome of arts agency is the philosophy of 'art for art's sake'. Yet Harris considered that while there is this notion he was unsure how art could be pursued for its own sake, if it was not apparent what it was. The agency attributed to art is particularly evident when Harris describes it as having reached the end of its life. This assertion is seen to be a result of the public's unwillingness to continue to expect anything from contemporary art, and their inability to be shocked by art that did not meet expectations.

Attempts from within the field to integrate the practices of diverse practitioners were recognised by Harris as being tied to political and social agendas. He saw such attempts to integrate ever more diverse practices under the shelter of the supercategory as marking the end for artspeak. He considered that the burden on the supercategory would be too great, and that any attempt to rescue oneself from artspeak required acknowledgment of the interrelatedness of the arts with political, religious, social and economic factors. Wenger recognised that addressing issues of power was an unavoidable task of any work that investigates the social world, and he considered his conception of power to be closely aligned to Bourdieu's description of power relations in the symbolic realm. The work of Mark Taylor also allows for exploration of the interrelatedness of notions of art, religion, social and economic factors, in relation to both meaning and value.

Reactionary responses to contemporary art as offered by Jenkins, (see 1.0) may result from a lack of the means to make contemporary art meaningful. As a way to explore this possibility, Wenger offers an understanding of how someone unfamiliar with the discourses of a particular community may be able to hear the words used to reify practice, yet lack the ability to make meaning from them. This suggests a model for exploring the difference between communities who have, or do not have, the ability to make contemporary art practices appear meaningful. Wenger's example suggested that where two members of a community are able to engage in a negotiation of meaning, through participation in practice and reification, they would share a meaningful experience. Yet it was not assumed that this experience would be the *same* for both members. As Harris made apparent, a message imbued with a meaning is not transferable to another person's mind through the use of a fixed code. Integrationists such as Harris consider meaning to be an individual experience that is not directly communicable to other human beings; in their approach, language is seen as an attempt to bridge or integrate the differences in our experience.

The work of Bourdieu offers a way to consider how practitioners establish and maintain positions for themselves within the field. Singerman also made apparent that in social learning students are required to position themselves or take on a particular role in relation to the exemplary artist, and thus Bourdieu's work allows exploration of how students might negotiate establishing their own positions in relation to the existing positions of the exemplary artists to whom they are exposed. Bourdieu sees each position within the field as dependent for its existence upon other positions, the total of which constitute the field. Bourdieu believed that those who hold positions employed strategies to defend and/or attempt to improve those positions. He suggested that once new practices appeared within the field, strategies such as manifestos, polemics and publicity might be used to enhance or secure

positions for those advancing such new ideas or practices. The impact of this would be felt across the field.

Bourdieu also believed that the art world was involved in a disavowal of the economic present, and a refusal of the commercial, all of which he described more broadly as a disavowal of the economy. This refusal, he thought, hid the players' actual economic interest so that a duality existed between what was portrayed as disinterestedness and a player's masked self-interest. Because self-interest was disguised in this way, one of the most important undertakings within the field was the accumulation of symbolic capital, which in Bourdieu's view equated to making a name for oneself and thus gaining the power to consecrate objects as art. The art dealer, for example, focuses upon the accumulation of such symbolic capital in order to invest this prestige and capital in artists and works of art. Like Bourdieu, Harris recognised the importance of the dealer system, and the dealer's role as one who mediated art in order to convince people to part with money.

The discourses used in validation of art occur at social gatherings and receptions, as was apparent in Stallabrass's awareness that parties are crucial to the art economy. The creation of symbolic capital was therefore recognised as occurring through validation by way of discourses that circulate and confirm value. Bourdieu considered that works exist only as symbolic objects and thus are identifiable as art only if they are known and recognised as works of art by a competent audience. The literature supports Bourdieu's assertion that the masking of economic interests means that the process of consecration of art, or the publicising of it, involves invisible or deliberately elusive forms of promotion. Wenger's concept of '*communities of interest*' who surround those engaged in practice, can be called upon as a means to describe the critics, theorists, journal editors and writers who seem to be involved in contemporary arts validation. The importance of locating how art is valued in this social and professional context becomes more apparent.

Harris's investigation into artspeak provides a means of exploration of these elusive circuitous discourses utilised by art world insiders. Harris's work provides a way to address whether the social function of contemporary art is discernible, and whether problems of aesthetic or artistic judgement have their roots in assumptions that underlay the discourses used. Harris considered that by the late 1960s verbalisation had supplanted execution in the concerns of certain communities of practice within the art world. He declared his view that conceptualism had established a new relationship between art and verbal comment, resulting in art theory being elevated in the production of art. His awareness echoes that of de Duve, who also suggested that the 1960s were crucial in the shift from

formal to generic practices. This shift was acknowledged to have been seen by some as a shift from formal to conceptual concerns (see 2.10). Harris believed there had been a flight from meaning within art in which artists had chosen to eliminate those formal elements of their practice. This resulted in what could be said *about* the work becoming paramount. As form became less important – since what was prized instead was the idea inherent in an artwork – it becomes possible to use Harris's thinking to consider the whole range of discourse about works of art. He describes these discourses as part of a language game, engagement in which enables one to advance one's position. The language game was envisioned as a means to re-describe almost any object or event so as to validate it as art.

Just as de Duve and others (see 2.1) saw Kosuth as a crucially important figure in the expansion of viable practices which one is able to describe as art, Harris explored Kosuth's attempts to transform art into a discursive practice. Harris offers a means to consider Kosuth's claims, in which art is likened to a language, in light of current thinking from the discipline of linguistics. He rejected Kosuth's attempts to elaborate upon this theory, by suggesting it had been explored at greater length and to a more satisfactory degree by other thinkers.

The language game requires confidence, and the ability to persuade others of one's view of art is most clearly revealed when new practices were introduced to the field, and the struggle ensues to incorporate them under the supercategory 'art'. For this reason, Taylor considered occasional crises in confidence to be at some stage inevitable. Some art forms were found to feature much less prominently in artspeak, and Harris suggested that a possible reason for this was that they did not require an elaborate rationale to justify their existence. However, contemporary art was an example of a practice did need to continuously defend its social value.

Vickery suggested that attempts at exploring the construction of aesthetic value need to employ organisational theory or management organisation theory. He referred to three distinct characteristics of aesthetic value, including material organisation, aesthetic organisation and hermeneutic organisation. He considered the hermeneutic approach to be the most important as it addressed the broad ways in which art was thought to yield meaning. The hermeneutic approach involves the compositional content of an artwork, the contexts of production, the social milieu of production, and the intellectual milieu of the artist. The kind of value he considered one could associate with the hermeneutic was cultural significance, in which the work extends beyond the physical confines of the object and relates more broadly to culture or society in general. Vickery suggested that Krauss's

notion of 'aesthetic experience' could be seen as an example of how art world justifications rely upon their own authority, thereby maintaining a self-perpetuating circularity. Acknowledgement of such an assertion by Vickery might allow for consideration of whether others within the field rely upon similar justifications of their own authority, or who else has authority in determining how one ought to relate to contemporary art. Vickery's argument suggested aesthetic value was to be constructed within a complex, unexplained and seemingly arbitrary relationship between the specific work and its accompanying discourse or theory. This supports the recognition by Rubenstein and Charlesworth that there is an absence of discussion about aesthetic value and a lack of willingness to engage in discussion about how value is attributed to contemporary art (see 2.6). Vickery suggested a possible remedy to address this situation was to employ approaches from organisational theory able to assess the discourse and professional networks through which the value of contemporary art is constructed. In this research, use of Taylor's, Wenger's and Bourdieu's work should be seen as an attempt to do just that.

Considering the literature in light of the approaches introduced in this chapter has led to the emergence of three themes: Roles, including relations between those within the art world and beyond; Meaning and how it is established, including how contemporary art relates to its audiences; and Value, including a consideration of the means by which value is attributed to contemporary art and the relevance of value judgements. It will be under these headings that the analysis of the interviews will be conducted in the following chapters.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Strategy**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter will introduce the means by which the research was undertaken. It will explain the practicalities of the chosen research methods and the specific process of attempting to apply such methods to the contemporary art field. The pilot study will be described, as will the main series of interviews, against a discussion of the reasons for conducting the research using the chosen methods. Discussion of alternative means to conduct the project, with the benefit of hindsight will be left until chapter 9.

This chapter will initially reflect upon the research focus and research questions in relation to key issues identified in the previous two chapters, with the intention of exploring their relevance to this research enquiry. The methodological approach of this research will be outlined and will be explored in relation to the epistemological basis of the theoretical models introduced in chapter 3. The available methods suited to research such as this will be explored and those considered appropriate will be outlined. There will be a consideration of research that has utilised similar approaches and methods, some of which also shares similarities in topic and focus. The selection of respondents will be described, as will the process of the negotiation of interviews. The means of data analysis will then be explained, including the conventions used in transcription and coding.

#### **4.1 Research focus and questions**

This research will address whether the contemporary art world can be perceived as a structure or field, and if those within the field could be said to hold positions which might be constructed and maintained through discourse. The possibility of conceiving of the contemporary art world as a field comprised of a network of possible positions will therefore be explored. The understanding of discourse, as introduced in section 2.3, allows for these utterances to be seen as crucial to the obtaining of a position within the field, which then sanctions one's speech. The research will explore the construction of meaning and value in the contemporary arts, as it arises from the circuits of discourse engaged in by

those who possess symbolic capital, and in particular by those who are able to confer it upon others. The research will explore the visible and possibly invisible means of consecration of value to the work of contemporary artists. It will also consider what discourses are called upon to facilitate this consecration. There will be consideration of the approaches artists employ to advance their careers and promote their practices. This is of particular interest in light of Bourdieu's belief that artists employ strategic tactics in attempts to advance or secure better positions within the field (see 3.2). The research will reflect upon the assertions of de Duve about the irrelevance of aesthetic judgement to contemporary art, as introduced in section 2.1. The thesis will explore whether discourses on aesthetics are in actuality no longer relevant to the passing of judgement in contemporary art, and, if so, by what discourses they have been replaced.

The research questions to be addressed are:

1. What insights can be provided into the relationships between contemporary art practice and the discourse or theory that circulates within the field?
2. Do the discourses used by artists and other professionals within the field reveal insights into their beliefs and values about art?
3. Are the discourses utilised by artists and other professionals within the field used in attempts to advance partisan social, economic and or political agendas?
4. How is value attributed to the work of contemporary artists?

## **4.2 Research methodology**

In order to establish a methodological approach for this enquiry the ontological and epistemological claims upon which the research rests must be explored. These claims, which are the assumptions about what social life is and how we come to know about it, constitute the research's claims about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired and possessed. The research is inspired by a constructivist epistemology, and the theoretical approaches drawn upon and the methods of data collection and analysis used are considered to reflect this. Such an epistemology assumes:



... that knowledge is not something we *acquire* but something that *we produce*; that the objects in an arena of inquiry are not there to be discovered, but are invented or constructed (Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy, 2000, p.111).

A constructivist approach does not consider that truth as such exists in the world, but it also does not deny reality or objectivity. Instead it reworks these terms so that they suggest a view of knowledge that is centred upon people's specific understanding and use of knowledge rather than a universal rational knowledge. Such a research approach follows in the tradition of a number of thinkers such as Karl Mannheim, who attempted to analyse how particular views of reality evolve out of the concrete situations of particular social groups.

Certain research approaches assume that discourse is neutral until one imposes a meaning or interpretation upon it. However, a contrasting view to this forms the basis of this research, which sees discourse as never being neutral. This view was acknowledged by Fiske: 'Our words are never neutral' (Fiske, 1994). Instead they are seen to be quite fundamental in the building of the meanings, constructs and identities through which we negotiate our relationships and social positions.

The research proceeds from the basis that the information collected as part of this project did not exist in the world, in the form in which it is presented here, prior to its collation by the researcher. It is recognised that the information collected is in part constructed by the act of compiling it, just as it is dependent upon the nature of the interview, which relies on the construction of meaning at a particular moment in time. A constructivist approach allows for discourse to be conceived as responsible for the creation of meaning in context, by members of a community.

A clear model of the way in which this approach operates has been demonstrated by Wenger's theory of situated learning. This has been described as based upon a co-constructivist epistemology. The goal of a co-constructivist educational approach is that '...students reach an understanding that is particular to them, which fuses their individual perspectives with those of others'. Co-constructivist approaches to learning therefore 'deprecate notions of remembering and regurgitating information', since they consider information to exist 'only in the ongoing processes of construction at work in society'. These approaches therefore seek to replicate this process in the more artificial atmosphere of the educational environment.

Wenger was aware of the advantages of an approach that focuses on structure 'over specific actions and actors' which he considered to be characteristic of many approaches that do not claim any

specific allegiance to structuralism (Wenger, 1998, p.281). Wenger thought that there had been attempts at resolving the dichotomy between structure and action, most motivated by the work of Giddens's 'structuration' theory. Wenger also asserted that he works 'within assumptions similar to Giddens's' which he believes to be based upon a basic idea that 'structure is both input to and output of human actions, that actions have both intended and unintended consequences, and that actors know a great deal but not everything about the structural ramifications of their actions'.

So although constructivism alone proved to be a relevant and interesting theoretical approach, it could be argued that it lacks the descriptive capability to elaborate upon how discourse is used to enable social change to occur. Structuration theory as an alternative allows one to recognise that discourses are inherent in the construction of social meanings, the forging of relationships, and the reinforcement of social relations and positions of power.

A continued exploration of how the epistemological assumptions underlying the theoretical approaches introduced in chapter 3 could be brought together or compared led to the recognition that the descriptions of the epistemological assumptions of 'constructivist structuralism' or 'structuralist constructivism' by Norman Fairclough could provide a useful model for this enquiry (Fairclough, 1999). To avoid confusion it must be emphasised that the structuralism referred to by Fairclough was not classical structuralism à la Lévi-Strauss and Saussure. Fairclough's description of this approach took its lead instead from Bourdieu, in arguing for both interpretivist and structuralist social science to be transcended, or blended, in 'constructivist structuralism' (Fairclough, 1999). Michael Toolan, an Integrational Linguist, has described constructivist structuralism as '... a way of seeing and researching social life as both constrained by social structures, and an active process of production which transforms social structures' (Toolan, 2001). It enables aspects of the conception of knowledge developed in constructivism to be explored, alongside more in-depth attempts to explain how discourses are made operational and social change enabled. Fairclough reflected upon how constructivist structuralism emerged from the thinking of Bourdieu, whom he referred to as one of its pioneers.

Wenger's interest in Giddens's structuration theory, which develops the notion of the importance of structure in considerations of action, seems to resemble a constructivist structuralism approach which also values the importance of seeing social life as constrained by structures. It became apparent that the 'constructivist structuralism' perspective, identified as the methodological foundation most often associated with thinkers such as Bourdieu and the Integrational Linguists, clearly forms a basis for

many of the theoretical models introduced in chapter 3. The researcher therefore considered that the alignment with the assumptions of 'constructivist structuralism' allowed for the bringing together of many of the diverse theoretical approaches introduced in chapter 3. Assumptions of constructivist structuralism guide the research and underpin the way the researcher considers knowledge to be acquired, possessed and transferred.

### **4.3 Research methods**

This section outlines the possible research methods appropriate to the research concerns and explains in detail why those selected were considered the most suitable. The chosen approach was intended to facilitate exploration of the unique worlds of a number of individuals working within the field, the complex relations between them, and the social context within which they operate. As this research formed part of a developing research culture in art and design, a subsidiary aim was that methods might be revealed which are particularly suited to specific inquiry into art and design.

Stallabrass's and Bourdieu's assertions (see 3.2) made it apparent that naturally occurring informal discourses at gallery openings and parties might be responsible for the consecration of meaning and value in contemporary art practices. Discussion with the team supervising this research project reaffirmed the belief that the relevant art world discourses which this research sought to document and analyse may take place in informal conversations in varying contexts internationally: the dinner party in Rome, the pub in England or the private view in New York. Therefore an ethnographic approach, in the form of observation and documentation of such discourses, was considered. It was recognised that if such an approach had been used a form of analysis would have been required which acknowledged the importance of infiltrating the social context in which such speech occurred naturally. An approach to analysis such as Ron Scollon's mediated discourse analysis might have been suited to such a method, which involved recording naturally occurring speech. This approach assumes that mediated actions and discourses are 'unique and unrepeatable and therefore must be caught in action to be analysed' (Wodak and Meyer, p.23). Scollon has also been involved in nexus analysis and considers mediated discourse to be specifically related to social interaction, so his approach may have allowed for the bringing together of the thinking of Bourdieu with an analysis approach. However due to the difficulty of accessing and recording such discourse in order to allow for analysis to be conducted, such an approach was considered unviable.

A similar approach, involving the observations of discourse *in situ*, could have been utilised to explore the assertions by Singerman and de Duve (see 2.2) that art education had evolved in such a way that critical attitudes were being fostered through use of critical theory, which might be being used in inexplicitly reasoned ways. Various forms of group 'crits' within art schools could have been observed and analysis of these could have involved the documentation of the forms of language employed by art students, with the specific aim of recording occurrences of abstracted reasoning which drew upon critical theory. A trial of such an approach was conducted as part of a pilot study in which possible methods were tested. As a result of the pilot study, the use of documentation of art education methods such as group crits was rejected, as it was determined that it could not reflect the broader use of discourse within the field, and was seen to fall outside the specific concerns of this research. The decision was taken that the research would focus solely upon the professional discourses that pervade the art world. However, a study of such art education discourses would make for interesting future research.

An alternative approach to exploring aspects of the field was the use of quantitative methods to examine claims such as those made by Stallabrass (1999, p.261) that interviews with artists in art journals were increasing. An analysis of such interviews was attempted, but did not yield the detailed insight necessary. It was therefore concluded that for the researcher to conduct a series of interviews was a more effective way of learning how artists and other professionals perceive the discourses of their world. This acknowledges Stallabrass's assertions, and a wider perception, that artists have increased power or freedom in representation of their own practice. The awareness that perceptions rather than numbers needed to be explored made it apparent that qualitative methods were more suited to such an enquiry than quantitative.

Whilst there were possible alternatives, a decision was made that semi-structured, in-depth interviews would allow for the co-construction of meaning between researcher and respondents that was so important to the methodological approach taken by this research. The method developed reflected the awareness that the construction of meaning and knowledge takes place in context and through discussion and collaboration. The awareness and themes that emerged as the interviews were conducted were intended to inform and shape questions asked in later interviews.

The artists' interview as a form has been used in many other contexts, such as art journals and exhibition catalogues. Such use of interviews in journals could be said to differ from the use of interviews as a social science research tool, yet the differences have yet to be adequately

documented. The interviews conducted for this research used respondents' acquaintance with the artists' interview to its advantage, enabling the research process to seem unthreatening.

It was decided that the interviews used ought to be open-ended as well as semi-structured and that they would take place in the familiar surroundings of the artists' studios, or other art world professional's work place, so as to limit disruption to the respondents' natural working environment and working practices. The length of the interviews was to be approximately one hour. It was made clear that the respondents were free to terminate the interview at any time or continue for as long as they felt necessary. The interview technique to be employed was semi-structured to facilitate rapport. Before the interviews the artist respondents were to be informed of the methods to be used and the purpose of the study. Their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time was confirmed.

Before the main phase of interviews a series of pilot interviews was carried out. These interviews were conducted during April 2003 with five artists, drawn from the geographical region of the research base. One of these was self-trained, one was a mature student who had attended the BA Fine Art degree course at Loughborough University, one had completed a BA degree in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University, and one had completed a degree in Visual Communications at the same University. The interview questions put to these respondents are recorded in the appendices, along with one sample transcript, the full transcripts for all other interviews can be found on the accompanying c.d.

Both the pilot interviews and the main study interviews were recorded using a portable minidisc recorder; permission for this was sought prior to each interview. Audio recording was selected rather than video recording, as it was felt this might create less disturbance of the respondents' natural environment. It was considered that an audio recording machine was more likely to be forgotten and might go entirely unnoticed as the interview progressed.

Silverman (2001), Chivers (2003) and Rapley (2001) have all explored the use of open-ended in-depth interviews. When approached from a social constructivist perspective, such as in this study interviews can allow for the exploration of the entire interview interaction, including the interplay between the interviewer and the interviewee.

#### 4.4 Previous application of similar methods

When artists' interviews, have been used in research studies they have tended to reflect the preferred approach of art journals, are seldom analysed and instead left to speak for themselves in an edited, transcribed form. The assumption appears to be that this method reveals direct insights from the artists themselves and thus analysis is considered unnecessary.

A study which made use of this approach was Linda Weintraub's (2003) *In The Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Artists*. Weintraub interviewed a number of contemporary artists and presented these interviews alongside essays in book form. This research, whilst valuable, did not subject the interviews to any kind of analysis, leaving the reader to establish their meaning and read it into the purpose or nature of the interactions.

This thesis is based upon the assumption that whilst the interview method provides insights, analysis of these interviews is also necessary if rigorous enquiry into the contemporary art world is the aim. An approach involving interviews without analysis could perpetuate the belief, held by commentators such as Charlesworth, that artists have more freedom than ever to write and speak about or represent their own practice (see 2.6).

A research project with concerns similar to this research is the project 'We did stir things up: the role of artists in sites for learning'. This was conducted by Emily Pringle for the Arts Council of England in 2002. Pringle is currently completing a PhD thesis *The Practitioner as Teacher: The role of the artist within gallery education* at the Institute of Education in London. The Arts Council project investigated what Pringle described as the 'considerable interest in lifelong learning and the contribution the arts have to wider political and social agendas' (Pringle, 2002), as well as the 'nature of creativity and participation in arts activity'. The project involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with artists involved in arts initiatives such as the Visual Arts Department's 'Artists in Sites for Learning Scheme' (AiSfL). Pringle selected interviews as a means 'to identify what meaning certain experiences had for the artist participants, given the contexts in which they are located' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). These interviews were analysed in a similar way to those in this research, as Pringle asserts that 'an initial reading of the interviews revealed particular key themes that appeared to provide a useful framework on which to locate further analysis' (Pringle, 2002).

The director of the National Portrait Gallery, Sandy Nairne, has also compiled a book of artists' interviews entitled *Art Now: Interviews with Modern Artists* (2002). In a similar format to other volumes of its kind, the interviews stand alone, accompanied by an essay which is described on the cover as offering 'a comprehensive overview of the state of contemporary art, highlighting how the six artists manifest some of the best recent and emerging art in Britain today' (Naire, 2002). Again the interviews are left un-analysed. This seems to represent a trend within the discipline to present interviews in such a way.

The tendency toward unedited artists' interviews or artists' representation of their own practice, has not gone unnoticed. It is the subject of the conference session 'The Artist Interview: contents + contentions in oral and art history', to be held as part of the AAH (Association of Art Historians) annual conference, scheduled at the University of Leeds for the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Jon Wood of the Henry Moore Institute, Rob Perks of the National Sound Archive and Bill Furlong of Audio Arts proposed the session and have made an obvious yet interesting assertion. They suggest that the introduction of the 'Philips audio cassette in the early 1960s', and 'the widespread availability of recording equipment' are possible reasons for the rise of oral testimony in the form of artists' interviews (Wood, Perks and Furlong, 2005). They also believe this has meant that scholars, and indeed anyone with an interest in art, can not only listen to recordings and read transcripts, but also easily conduct such interviews themselves. In turn, they suggest, this has resulted in artists having been more easily able to speak for themselves, both in conversation and on record, and thus to bypass critical and historical assessment by a third party. Their session is aimed at examining the implications of such issues and at considering the artist interview as an interesting place of intersection for art criticism, art history and histories of contemporary practice. The session will also address the problems of 'missing' content which occurs as the result of differences between the edited and unedited versions of interview transcripts. Another issue the session will consider and which is also to be addressed in this thesis, is how to explore the 'authenticity' of the artist's voice and the character and directness of the spoken word (Wood, Perks and Furlong, 2005). Yet in contrast to the premise of this research, those investigators suggest that the artist interview may be seen 'not only as primary source, but also as a work of art in its own right, inseparable from artistic practice' (Wood, Perks and Furlong, 2005). What they do not do is to talk about the means of analysis that might be used with these recordings to take them beyond speech.

As the session organisers have acknowledged, the volume of material which includes artists'

interviews in transcribed form includes: Katharine Kuh's *The Artist's Voice* (1960), Patricia Norvell's *Recording Conceptual Art* (2001), Kersten Mey's *Sculpsit: Contemporary Artists on Sculpture and Beyond* (2001), and Judith Olch Richards's *Inside the Studio* (2004). A number of archives of recordings from the last few decades also exist, and have been compiled by organisations such as 'Audio Arts' (established in 1973) and the 'Artists' Lives' project (established in 1990) at the National Sound Archive.

#### **4.5 Respondent selection**

The sample for the main data collection included an array of professionals within the contemporary art world: a number of artists, a critic and art historian, an arts journalist, an editor of an art journal, a curator and a gallery owner. The following section will detail the reasons for this final sample selection and give a brief description of their practice or their career.

The research needed an accessible sample of successful artists, whose practices were validated and recognised by others within the field and who had thus secured recognition and/or notable reputations. The sample was intended to include contemporary artists working within the field at an international level of success. It was also felt that the sample should reflect the wide range of contemporary art practice currently in circulation. As it was acknowledged that art critics, theorists, art historians and art journal editors also play a highly significant role in the construction of an artwork's meaning and value, it was intended that a number of such professionals also be included within the sample. It was not the aim of the study to define a typology of artists, but to produce valuable insights into the experiences of a number of professionals. The selection of the sample was limited but not constrained by the researcher's prior awareness of possible respondents' positions within the field.

Another way of describing the selection, drawing upon the theoretical underpinning of this research, would be to suggest that those contacted had a significant amount of recognisable symbolic capital and held notable positions within the field (see 3.2). The recognition of the specific symbolic capital and positions held by each of the respondents will be discussed later within this section of the chapter. The interviews were conducted in two phases, which took place between January - May 2004 and March - May 2005.



Due to difficulty in obtaining direct personal mailing or email addresses for the selected contemporary artists the majority were contacted via the galleries that represent them. The American and European, (non-UK), galleries were notably more helpful than the galleries based in the UK in providing contact details for the artists they represented. Within the first phase between January and May 2004 the intention was to secure six interviews, and it was acknowledged that by approaching twelve artists the possible 50% response rate would provide the required number of interviews.

Those artists contacted in the first phase received an email or a letter (see Appendix 2) with an accompanying project brief (see Appendix 3) either via the galleries that represented them, or directly if their contact details were available on the Internet.

Before beginning the second phase of interviews a review was made of the process of contacting the relevant professionals. The lowest response rate in the first sample was from the British artists; it was acknowledged that this sample thus lacked appropriate comparative material. It was apparent from the first phase of interviews that the artists were careful to consider how their involvement with the project would impact upon their positions within the field. It was suggested by Mark Harris, a former supervisor of the project, that artists might respond more positively to being asked to engage with the project directly, by having been referred via a mutual contact. When contacting certain respondents for the second phase of interviews, an email was sent stating that Harris had recommended them as appropriate subjects for this research. Other potential respondents for the second phase received communication without such a recommendation, but the text sent articulated their suitability for the project far more explicitly than had that sent to those contacted in the first phase. Direct correspondence with these respondents was possible because email or postal details were available on the Internet.

For the purposes of confidentiality it was agreed that no names or other identifying information would be included in any publication or made publicly available without the respondents' prior consent, apart from the present thesis.

The potential respondents of the study contacted in the first phase included: Mamma Anderson, Claire Barclay, #####R1, Matt Collishaw, Nigel Cooke, John Currin, #####R2, David Falconer, #####R3, #####R4, #####R5, #####R6, #####R7, #####R8, Jessica Stockholder and James Turrell and #####R9.

Those contacted for the second phase of interviews included: #####R10, #####R11, #####R12, Marcia Farquhar, Mathew Laurette, #####R13, #####R14 and #####R15 and #####R16.

The potential respondents included a number of artists based outside the UK, to enable the research to reflect the international nature of the field of contemporary art. The following parts of this section provide a brief introduction in chronological order of the respondents who replied to the request for an interview and with whom an interview was conducted.

**R8** is an art historian at the ##### in ##### and has also taught at the ##### at the University of #####. He was associated with the *New Art History* and ##### considered his book ##### to be a rejection of the art of the contemporary period and an example of how earnest exponents of 'a social art history' could turn away from this art with dismay (Crow, 2003) (see 2.5). Since the interview R8 has asserted in ##### that in the contemporary arts, meaning and value is accorded at parties. An interview with R8 was sought in order to explore #####'s assertions and to ask R8 to elaborate upon the assertions he made in #####, particularly those relating to the focus of this research. It was the intention to probe R8 about what he considered might be the possible causes of the crisis that many saw as existing in the field of art (see 2.6).

The researcher sent an email directly to R8 at the ##### to which he replied stating that he was willing to meet for an interview in London. An interview was later arranged and took place at the ##### on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2004.

**R6** is a painter who was born and still lives and works in #####, Brazil. She exhibits and shows her work internationally, and represented Brazil at the ##### Venice Biennale. She also exhibited work in the international biennale of #####, Brazil in #####. R6's practice was relevant to this research in part because of the way it had been contextualised by a number of international gallery press releases and reviews, such as the press release for the exhibition #####, shown at the ##### Gallery, London, in September 2000. It has been stated that R6's work offered an alternative to the many examples of ironic or illustrative social realism. Her work was seen as an alternative to that which was described by Beech (see 2.6) and of which Crow and de Duve had been dismissive (see 2.6). She had written very little about her practice herself, which suggested she was bucking the

trend for artists to write about themselves as a way of securing a position within the field. It seemed appropriate to attempt to interview R6 to explore how she locates her practice or contextualised it in relation to other contemporary painters and broader trends within the international art world.

An email, which included an attached project outline and covering letter, was sent to R6 via the ##### Gallery who represent her, and a response was received which stated that R6 was prepared to be interviewed. The interview was conducted in a London hotel lobby on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2004. In a personal communication afterwards R6 said that one of the reasons she had agreed to be involved was because of the statement in the letter that the artist R2 had been willing to commit to an interview. Since R6 included this as a reason for agreeing to become involved, later letters sent to artists included a list of other artists who had already expressed a willingness to engage with the project. It was considered that R6 had become interested in associating herself with the project because an artist she respected was already engaged with it, and that this process might repeat itself and thus increase the response rate.

**R4** is an abstract painter and was a key member of the group of artists which came to prominence in New York during the 1980s. The work of their movement was discussed in chapter 2 (see 2.5) in relation to the increase in theory within the field of art during the 1980s. During the 1980s R4 wrote many essays which foreground his paintings and in which he made reference to thinkers such as Baudrillard. Within #####'s panel session on the 1980s he was referred to as one of the most important artists of the decade. He resides in New York, where he publishes ##### and is the ##### in the School of Art at ##### University.

An email request for an interview was sent to the ##### gallery, which represents R4, requesting either that the letter and project outline be forwarded to him or asking them to provide his email address or contact details. The gallery provided an email address and he was contacted directly; he agreed to be involved with the project and a meeting time was arranged with his personal assistant. An interview took place at his New York studio on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2004.

**R7** is an artist who lives and works in New York and who has an international reputation. Her work was included in the exhibition #####, shown at the ##### at the beginning of 2003. Attention was drawn to this show, which included the work of two other artists based in different European cities, through the intentions stated in the show's press release. This described how the work sought to 'raise issues' such as the 'global economy, culture and cultural exchange' (Ware, 2002). The

exhibition was negatively reviewed by #####, with the reviewer questioning the extent to which these artists might actually address these issues or deal with such grand notions. He also queried how artists presume to attribute grand meanings to fairly banal artefacts.

Contact was made with R7 directly via email. R7 agreed to an interview, which took place on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2004 at her studio in New York. An arrangement was made to telephone R7 upon the researcher's arrival in New York to schedule the interview. In the course of this telephone conversation R7 stated that her plans had changed and that if an interview were to take place it would have to be in the next hour and could not be recorded. The interview with R7 was therefore somewhat more informal than the other interviews and as a result of the withdrawal of permission to record the meeting no transcription of this interview exists.

**R3** was contacted via the website for the art magazine ##### on which he was listed as their interview specialist. An interview with R3 was sought to explore Stallabrass's assertion about the rise in artists' interviews and opportunities for artists to represent their own practice in art journals. R3 agreed to an interview in Nottingham, which took place on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004.

**R9** is an artist, writer and curator. He has written about the artist Tracey Emin and produces articles and reviews for *The Independent on Sunday*, *Frieze*, *Modern Painters*, *Art and Text*, *Untitled*, *Flash Art*, *Art Review* and *Art Monthly*. He curated an exhibition at the Liverpool Biennale called ##### (2002) which included the work of artists such as Matt Collishaw, The Chapman Brothers and Derek Sprawson. An interview with R9 was considered relevant partly because of the provocative press release he wrote for the New Religious Art exhibition and it provided an opportunity to interview someone involved in the London art scene, from which few positive responses or agreements to interviews had been received. He agreed to an interview taking place at his studio/office in West London on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

**R1** is the editor of the art journal ##### and was contacted via its website. She agreed to an interview, which took place at the ##### offices in ##### on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004. R1 was considered an appropriate professional to interview as part of this research due to the need to explore the assertions made in the interview with R3, particularly in respect of the relationships between the top art journals and the galleries who advertise in them.

**R9** is an artist, a lecturer at ##### University and a contributor to #####. He has written about alternative modes for attending to contemporary art practice which do not privilege what he might describe as traditional aesthetic ways of attending to art. He has been referred to as an artist who during the 1990s sought to reject the dominant discourses which had been associated with the work of artists such as Peter Halley during the 1980s (see 2.6).

An interview with R9 was sought because of his art practice and association with artists such as ##### during the 1990s, and his contributions to #####. In ##### he had entered into a debate over the value of art. He asserted that the lover of wisdom would find little to please them in contemporary art and the interview sought to question what he meant by such assertions. R9 was contacted by email, and he agreed to an interview, which took place at his office at ##### University on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2005.

**R11** is an artist who lives and works in London. He was a member of the artists' group ##### during the 1990s, and an MA graduate of Goldsmiths College, University of London. An interview with R11 was considered appropriate since it would present an opportunity for the exploration of an artist's experience of studying at Goldsmiths and starting out in the London art scene during the late 1980s and early 1990s. R11 was contacted through an email which stated that Mark Harris had suggested him as an appropriate artist to invite to become involved with this research. R11 replied and agreed to an interview at his studio in East London. An interview took place on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2005.

**R14** is Director of the ##### Gallery in #####. He established the gallery in 1967 and was responsible for representing and promoting the art of highly conceptual artists during the 1970s. Contact was made with R14 via a supervisor for the project who sent a request to him on the researcher's behalf. R14 agreed to an interview at his gallery on the understanding that he would not be able to offer an entire hour of his time, as had been requested in the initial email correspondence. The interview took place on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2005 at the ##### Gallery in ##### Street, #####. The opportunity to interview R14 was sought because he is widely regarded an important and influential gallery director in the international art world.

**R15** is described by a contemporary online encyclopaedia as one of the YBA's who received lesser notoriety (#####, 2004). He is a conceptual artist based in London and his work has included performance pieces such as ##### (1999) and ##### (2003). R15 was sent an email requesting his involvement in the project, which also asserted that Harris

considered him highly appropriate for this inquiry. R15 agreed to an interview and this was conducted at his home and studio in East London on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2005. An interview with R15 was sought because of his involvement in the London art scene during the 1990s and because his practice offered a contrast to that of some of the other respondents.

**R16** describes himself as an artist–curator. He curated the exhibition ##### at ##### Art Gallery (September to November 2002). The researcher met R16 whilst attending the conference ‘Show Hide Show’ organised by ICE (Institute for Curatorship and Education) at Edinburgh College of Art, at which both she and R16 gave presentations. R16 was contacted by email and agreed to an interview, which took place at the University of #####, #####, on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2005.

There were five artists with whom contact was made and discussions entered into about the possibility of an interview, yet with whom for a variety of reasons an interview did not take place. These artists included R2 with whom an interview was scheduled but who had to cancel because of unexpected and unavoidable long-term family commitments. Another artist who was contacted but with whom an interview did not take place was Matthieu Laurette, who replied after the second interview phase of interviews had been completed.<sup>14</sup>

**R12** was another artist with whom contact was made via email yet with whom an interview was not conducted: he could not commit to an interview in person but said that he might manage a telephone interview. The offer was turned down due to the difficulties of recording a telephone interview, and the resultant inconsistency of approach with the other interviews.

**R13** who runs the project and gallery space ##### (at which R15 showed his work ##### in 2003) was contacted via email at the suggestion of Harris and agreed to be interviewed. Despite this a fixed date and time was never confirmed and an interview was ultimately not conducted.

**R5** is an Argentinian artist who lives and works in New York and who creates works that he describes as #####. An *ArtForum* critique described R5’s practice in terms of freezing or embalming the process of making whilst concurrently maintaining the activity through his

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<sup>14</sup> The reason that the email was caught in his spam filter was presumably because it had been sent from an AOL account. This was due to Nottingham Trent University’s student email accounts having an address consisting of just an obscure number. The researcher believes that had this University email account been used, rather than the AOL one, it would have resulted in a considerably *lower* response rate.

engagement in painting (#####, 1994). An interview with R5 was suggested by R6, who was familiar with his practice because she had shown work alongside him in the '#####: #####' exhibition at Tate Liverpool from April – June #####. She considered him to take a more theoretical approach to practice and she felt that he would therefore make a good contrast to how she had conveyed her own experiences of contemporary practice. An email was sent to R5 requesting his involvement with the project to which he responded by saying that he would be happy to agree to an interview. Unfortunately due to the date of the researcher's travel to New York having been brought forward, and R5 having returned only that day from over three months of work-related travel, he explained at the last minute that he was too tired to be interviewed.

#### 4.6 The process of analysis

Open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respondents, each of which lasted between thirty and eighty minutes, with the average being nearer eighty minutes. The interviews were conducted around a series of between five and sixteen questions, which were devised by the researcher in consultation with the supervisory team. The questions asked were influenced by the findings of the pilot interviews, one of which was found to be particularly influential, and led to the emergence of initial themes, which can be described by the following phrases:

- Everything I do is art / embodied practice.
- Strategic representation of oneself and ones practice, made manifest in the interview interaction, by game playing through discourse.
- The importance of conceiving of oneself as an artist, and of convincing others of this.
- Failure seen as success by way of a reversal of typical notions of success.
- Strategic decision making involved in art practice. Setting rule within which to practice

In the main series of interviews the respondents were asked some general questions, some questions derived from the research questions and pilot analysis themes, and other questions based specifically upon statements made in existing literature. A list of the questions asked of each respondent with whom an interview was conducted can be found in Appendix 4. Some respondents received copies of the questions before the interview, either because they requested this, or because it was appropriate to the circumstances. These included R10, R8 and R11. During the interviews the questions acted as prompts to encourage rapport and dialogue, rather than being a rigid list of questions to be addressed in order. Each interview followed a unique pattern or structure in which themes were able to arise and

were explored freely within the discussion. During the interviews the researcher tended to volunteer information about her own experiences and views, an approach informed in part by awareness that meaning is co-constructed. Reference was also made to earlier interviews with other respondents, and in some instances respondents were asked to comment on the researcher's account of previous interviews. This was easily facilitated, even sometimes unavoidable, as many of the respondents were known to one another either as friends or through professional working relationships.

Initial reading of the transcriptions of each interview led to the identification of new topics or themes that were then raised in the interviews that followed. The interviews were transcribed using a simplified version of the Jefferson system, which was a compilation of transcription convention symbols developed by Gail Jefferson. The conventions adhered to can be seen below:

1.           (.)       Noticeable pause
2.           (.3), (2.6)       Examples of timed pauses in seconds
3.           word [word  
[word       Square brackets aligned across adjacent lines denote the start of overlapping talk. Some transcribers also use "]" brackets to show where the overlap stops
4.           wo(h)rd(h) is a try at showing that the word has "laughter" bubbling within it
5.           wor-       A dash shows a sharp cut-off
6.           (words) A guess at what might have been said if unclear  
              ( ??????? ) Unclear talk.
7.           R:       word=  
              I:       =word The equals sign shows that there is no discernible pause between two speakers' turns or, if put between two sounds within a single speaker's turn, shows that they run together



8. ((sobbing)) Transcribers attempt to represent something hard, or impossible, to write phonetically

The system of transcription used in this research was developed from the guidance provided by Charles Antaki and Jonathan Potter (Potter, 2003). Antaki's online tutorials in methods of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Potter's advice on transcription techniques and use of the Jefferson System provided a useful resources for developing the research methods (Potter, 2003) Potter advises the use of line numbers to identify lines of speech, as opposed to tape counter markers, which denote how much time has elapsed (Potter, 2003). Line numbers were used in this research. The appearance of the transcripts can be seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** A sample page from a transcript, detailing what information each column contains

Interview with Neal Brown, 20 May 2004			
1.	R	Well, thank you for agreeing to let me come down to interview you. (??????). erm (.), I know that some of the things that are, I put at the beginning of the questions were things that we talked about when we met in Nottingham, erm, but really I would just be keen for you to run through the responses that you may have given then. If you can (.) remember [at all, not at all?]	1 6.3.1. 6.3.2
2.	A	I probably can't remember. I'll probably say something completely different [now	6.2.2
3.	R	that's OK]	
4.	R	Can you remember?	
5.	A	Well, I think I just asked you whether you thought there'd been an increase in theory in relation to art practice, and you started saying that you thought that there had, erm, and you mentioned (.) about thinking that it was something to do with trends and fashions and you compared it to, erm, existentialism and abstract expressionism, and that you thought that we might look back on this decade as being the one that was so (.) we're we were all wrapped up with theory. (I think).	2
6.	A	Yeah.	
7.	R	That's pretty much all I can remember	
8.	A	OK	
9.	R	((laughs))	

Throughout chapters 5, 6 and 7 the respondents are referred to by their code number. The use of line numbers was considered preferable to the alternative use of time counter numbers, which would have marked how much time had elapsed on the recording. When quotations from the interviews are

referred to in subsequent analysis chapters, they include a reference, in brackets, to the line number that marks the point at which the speech occurred within the transcript.

It is acknowledged that the researchers own experience, knowledge, understanding and agendas will have influenced the identification and interpretation of themes drawn from the statements made by respondents. Elaboration of the researcher's position has not been privileged within the analysis, and the research approach has interrogated the thematics as they have emerged. It should also be noted that the interview interactions were often characterised by a discourse of an ambiguous and elusive nature. In addition different respondents engaged with the researcher in different ways that actually reflect some of themes that emerged in the analysis.

The themes identified in the interview transcripts are detailed below. The numbering and sub-numbering system resulted from the initial intention to write the analysis as one chapter. This would have been chapter 6, in which each of the sub-numbers would have corresponded to a theme. As a theme was identified the section that it would comprise in chapter 6 became its referent. Once the coding scheme was complete and a number of themes had been identified, occurrences of these themes within other interviews were considered. When a theme was identified within a new transcript it was marked with the corresponding number, which was entered into the right-hand column. As the analysis progressed it soon became apparent that due to the volume of material, the analysis would comprise more than one chapter. By this time it was too late to do away with the numbering system, which had been initiated in relation to chapter 6, as it had been applied to too many transcripts. The main coding system was as follows:

## **Coding Themes**

### **6.2 Roles**

#### **6.2.1 Art as a game – use of cultural, symbolic capital – networks, communities, comments about how we can understand the social productions of art.**

Is there any differentiation between artists as professionals and their lives? – Does being an artist define who you are? It becomes more than an occupation. – apparent in the pilot transcript.

#### **6.2.2 Instrumentality of discourses, and issues of power struggles - Is theory implicated or used as cultural capital?**

The way in which artists enlist theorists to support their ideas, to give form to their notions (see Wenger and Bourdieu). The creation of discourses to enable our actions to make sense to those around us (see Harris). There is the example in Harris's book of Freud rejecting the surrealists eventually, just as

##### finally rejected R4 and the ##### movement. Has this pattern changed? Do artists still depend upon theorists or mediators in the same ways now? Are there struggles for control of mediating discourses?

How are the discourses implicated in the interviews? Are there struggles for control of the discourses in the interviews – as there was in the pilot? An example of this would be when R9 started to interview me.

#### 6.2.3 New artspeak emerges – artists writing – broaden contexts for artists to represent themselves.

Do artists seek to promote themselves through their writing? Does such writing act as did artists manifestos? Does it pave the way for their practice? Does it become crucial in how their work is received?

#### 6.2.4 How do the roles of art magazines, curators, and artists' self-promotional material compare?

Do artists promote or contextualise their own practice? If not, who does it for them?

#### 6.2.5 Artists making themselves visible - related to taking a position.

Artists' relationships to the market – the way in which many artists no longer make anything. Are those artists who do not produce work for the market, influenced by the other sources of funding now available? Is the dematerialisation of the art object related to the virtualised financial economy and the trading of information? Does the importance of branding as it occurs within business translate to the art world?

#### 6.2.6 The role of art as a supercategory - how it has it changed/ is it changing? – how does that affect the artist's role? and

How artists are able to affect the structure of the supercategory.

How trends become accepted. How delays in these changes have effect.

R9 remarked upon his old-fashionedness – what that might mean, modernist values? He had an interest in beauty, etc. (see de Duve's model). What is expected of contemporary art – artists become attitude only, where is the art? Some don't even bother to make any.

#### 6.2.7 This was moved to 6.2.5 – and comes within arenas for making art visible, art education – providing strategies for making yourself visible, – models after the avant-garde, anti institutionalism.

### 6.3 Meaning

#### 6.3.1 Art is intended to be discursive. Is it intended to communicate something?

Are aesthetics any longer relevant in the way art is made meaningful?

#### 6.3.2 What might art audiences need to know in order to make sense of contemporary art?

#### 6.3.3 The intention to make art to educate viewers.

#### 6.3.4 How might art communicate?

#### 6.5 Contradictions in discourse – (this was shifted into how discourse is implicated, 6.2.2)

#### 6.3.5 Artists willing to acknowledge any readings of their work, anything that can be found in it is there R15 saw gaps as the interesting part of art. Striving for non-sense. R11 - Non-sense more difficult to achieve now, as everyone is striving to find sense out of non-sense.

R9 - perpetuated the idea that artists don't always know what they are doing – building mystification (was previously 6.5, contradictions).

## 6.4 Value

### 6.4.1 Is there a crisis in art criticism?

### 6.4.2 Attributing value to the work of contemporary artists.

How are value judgements made about contemporary art? Who makes them?

### 6.4.3 Do market or commercial transactions play a role in according value? Do the market or funding sources influence artists practice strategies?

### 6.4.4 How socially, politically influenced positions affect value judgements. Some respondents like R9 and R4 want to keep art for a minority, others want to broaden access – Does this effect the way their art is valued?

## 6.6 The relationship of the interviewee to institutions

As is clear from the above coding system, the themes were organised into Roles, Meaning and Value. When working through the transcripts and drawing out new themes, coloured post-it note strips were used to mark the point at which they occurred, and these corresponded in the following ways to the coding system:

1. Pink: Roles – relations, positions, networks within the field, including power relations, responsibilities, identity, communities and boundaries

2. Orange: Meaning – including communication, how communication may occur, artists' intentions, use of cultural capital

3. Lilac: Value – including worth, success of artworks, judgement, success, how we judge attitudes

The initial reading of the transcripts was accompanied by a second review of the literature to test the validity of the themes. This reconsideration of the key texts involved identifying within the literature how and where the emerging themes were discussed. Specific texts were also marked using the same coloured post-it note marking system as was applied to the transcripts. This reconsideration of the literature brought about a new understanding of how the themes that emerged from the interviews related to the field and the ways in which others had previously portrayed them. The greater understanding of the themes was then incorporated into the questions compiled for the subsequent interviews.

The ways in which the themes which emerged from the transcripts were found to be manifest in the literature will now be briefly outlined here. With regard to the conception of roles, Bourdieu described those within the field as inhabiting certain positions, which were thought to vary and to determine the role one played in the field. Bourdieu's approach allowed for consideration of the interrelatedness of the various roles assumed by those within the field and how these impacted upon contemporary arts validation. Wenger's work related more specifically to the co-construction of meaning, allowing for exploration of suggestions by respondents that artworks are not imbued with meaning that requires extraction, but rather that meaning might be co-constructed between artist, artwork and viewer (see 3.1). The concept of value in relation to contemporary art was intended in two differing senses. The first definition of value relates to value as a measurement of worth, which can be described as either a social or an economic value. This way of conceiving of value necessitates the making of value judgements. The second way of conceiving of value relates to the values or beliefs of the respondents, and these values could be said to underlie or facilitate the making of value judgements. Thus a differentiation can be made between value, as a measure of worth, and a value, as a belief that one might hold about art; yet these two differing meanings interrelate and the latter is thought to underpin the former.

In recent years there has been interest in the possibility of value judgements in contemporary art. Current interest in the issue is evidenced by de Duve's comment on how aesthetic judgement became detached from the logical progression of modernism. Rubenstein explicitly called for more judgements within the field of contemporary art, as he considered validation seemed to occur as if by magic. The significance of this as an issue is also reflected in the organisation of the symposium 'The Good, The Bad and the Ugly - Judging the Value of Art' held at the Whitechapel Gallery in collaboration with *Art Monthly* on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2005.

Such themes, as they emerged from within the interviews and the literature, will be drawn out in chapters 5, 6 and 7. A number of themes considered central to the focus of this research are then considered further in chapter 8, particularly in relation to relevant theoretical approaches, such as those introduced in chapter 3.

## 4.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the research questions and the research focus as well as discussing the practical aspects of the research process. It has reflected upon how the theoretical approaches introduced in chapter 3, which originated from various disciplines, can be seen to share a similar epistemological basis. These shared an understanding that discourse is inherent in the construction of social meanings, and the perspective of constructivist structuralism appears to be the most appropriate way to convey how differing approaches conceive social life as constrained by structure yet are also active in the process of transforming that structure. The assumptions upon which this research is based were outlined: as the supposition that knowledge is never neutral, and that it is fundamental to the co-construction of meaning. The research is based upon the premise that the knowledge presented within this thesis did not exist in its current form in the field prior to being collated for this study. Instead, the research could be said to have probed issues identified as pertinent to the field and, in bringing this information together, to have influenced the way such questions can be understood.

The chapter has also introduced the methods appropriate to this research enquiry as well as those that were considered and rejected. Whilst it was apparent that parties and private-view gallery openings were contexts in which validating discourses occurred, it was not possible to gain access to such discourses in a way that would enable them to be analysed. As an alternative to observing such naturally occurring speech, semi-structured in-depth interviews were considered the best means of recreating a natural discursive interaction within the social community. Such interviews were seen as able to provide insights into the art world community's use of symbolic, cultural and intellectual capital. The researcher offered her own views during the interviews as well as relaying comments made by other respondents to the interviewees. She benefited from the advantage of being familiar with art world discourses through her previous training. The strategies for making contact with the respondents and arranging interviews developed as a reflection of the researcher's evolving understanding of the social networks and the roles of professionals within the contemporary art world.

Interviews with artists have been conducted as part of other research studies in this field, yet they have tended to resemble the approach to artists' interviews taken by art journals, which involves their being transcribed in an edited form and presented alongside essays without being subjected to analysis. Examples of studies where this approach was taken have been discussed. Where such

approaches have been taken, the emphasis appears to have been upon providing the transcribed interaction as an extension of an artist's practice, which fails to acknowledge the possible strategic use of language by artists in such circumstances. An extreme but prevalent view of artists' interviews, which also applies to artists' writings, became apparent. This involved seeing the artists' interview as an extension of art practice and even as an artwork in its own right. An understanding emerges from the field that encourages the perception that an artist's life and art cannot be separated. One of the artist respondents interviewed for the pilot interview specifically conceived of his life and his art practice as inseparable.

The chapter has explained how five pilot interviews and twelve main interviews were conducted, all of which were semi-structured and in-depth. The analysis, an ongoing process, began as early as the transcription stage of the pilot interviews in April 2003, and the themes were developed throughout the research process including during the stages of writing up the main interview analysis. The questions asked of the respondents varied and evolved as the analysis progressed and the researcher gained new understanding of the field and the area of research focus. The respondents for the main interviews were selected for their appropriateness to the research focus. This chapter has outlined the process of analysis, and begun to suggest the relevance of the emerging themes to the field. A detailed analysis according to the identified themes is to be presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7, which follow.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Establishing Identities**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This, the first of three analysis chapters, will draw out themes that have become apparent throughout the literature and the interviews. These themes were originally developed under the headings roles, meanings and values, but will now be organised under the new headings of 'the art of game playing', 'making meaning', and 'beliefs and values'. Occasional references may be made to material not directly drawn from the transcripts in order adequately to contextualise the discussion, but full elaboration with reference to theoretical underpinnings will be undertaken in chapter 8.

Within each section of this chapter material may be drawn from more than one of the interviews. Topics evolved as the interviews were conducted, so that not all respondents were asked the same questions. Where possible the questions asked have been included to convey the context in which the respondents' remarks were made. Full copies of the interview transcripts are included on the accompanying CD.

The first section of this chapter outlines the field and draws upon analogies to games such as chess. The second and third sections address notions of the struggle for control of mediating discourses and the language game that this entails. The third section also considers the actual discourses employed by artists in the struggle and utilised as part of the language game. Sections four and five consider the way artists come together to create communities of practice or scenes in attempts to raise their visibility and advance their positions within the field. The last section addresses the way the game has changed in recent years and focuses specifically upon the widened contexts for practice.



## 5.1 Game theory

In considering the roles and social conditions surrounding the production of contemporary art, the comments of R9 will be drawn upon heavily. He described how he thought 'chess was very important' (R9, 284) and suggested that

If anyone wants to understand, write about contemporary art, best thing that they can do is go and learn to play chess, and play a few games, it's the fastest introduction to understanding contemporary art (R9, 284).

Although R9 did not specifically outline the ways in which a game of chess resembles the use of ideas in contemporary art, he pointed out that 'Duchamp played chess', thus suggesting that this was of some significance (R9, 288). He was presumably intending to assert the influence of Duchamp, since his delayed reception during the 1960s, on the way art practice has evolved. It could certainly be argued that Duchamp's influence is in part responsible for the way that contemporary art can be envisioned as a game. A common understanding of chess allows us to draw conclusions about the qualities R9 might here be attributing to contemporary art by making this connection. Contemporary art can thus be seen as a game of strategy in which one must make considered moves to advance one's position.

R9 was asked about contemporary art, which is often compiled 'from objects that could be found in everyday life', as the researcher's intention was to discuss art in which it is 'the idea and the title' that actually elevate an ordinary object and allow it to gain its status as art (Researcher, 331). Asked specifically whether he considered the art to be in the idea or in the object, or in a combination of both, R9 responded by stating: 'Some people just write the idea and stick it on the wall these days' (R9, 332). Thus, he suggested, there is no longer a need to elevate a non-art *object* to art status, as often the *idea* alone is enough. Acknowledging 'that's where chess comes in' (R9, 334) he considered that 'It's a game, it's a fun game, quite a beautiful fun game' (R9, 334). Asked whether artists such as Martin Creed might be thought of in that way (Researcher, 335), he responded by saying 'Yeah' (R9, 336).

This excerpt suggests that when R9 spoke of the importance of an understanding of chess he was referring to contemporary art practice in which the idea alone suffices. Success within the field, perceived as a game, can, as he suggested, be thought of as strategic, just as in Jonathan Eburne's comments in relation to Duchamp's art:

Like the gamesmanship of a skilled chess player, Duchamp's art can be as basic or as difficult as its opponent, the viewer: it has the remarkable ability to rise to the occasion. (Eburne, 1998,)

This suggests that the tactical nature of art referred to by R9 and Eburne is not limited to the promotion of work and engagement in the field, but also relates to the relationship between the work and the viewer.

If one considers contemporary art as a game, there needs to be a reflection on the rules of the game; as Mark C Taylor asserted, '...the *game* is simply the totality of the rules which describe it'. R15 asserted that he gave himself certain rules within which he allowed himself to practise (R15, 72). The setting of one's own rules is a means to reduce the possible options for practice from an infinite amount, to a structure within which choices are more restricted and less daunting. The rules an artist adopts could be seen as a framework for practice and this could be said to vary according to the way an artist seeks to play the game, and ultimately his or her objectives.

R9 commented upon rules when responding to the question 'Do you think a work of art can actually embody some form of knowledge?' (Researcher, 291), to which he replied, 'Well, in a sort of (.) new-agey sort of way, yes' (R9, 292). He considered that:

If you look at all art, going back, in all societies, at all types it all [...] is a – it is in accord with the [...] social and political, well, whatever kind of rules make up its society (R9, 292).

The suggestion that art embodies the rules of society implies that if craft skills were prized within a society then one would expect them to be apparent in the art that society produces. Similarly, if the rules of contemporary society relate to the transferral of information and virtual trading, then contemporary art should reflect this. Mark Taylor's argument suggests such a contemporary reality and gives a perspective on how things have become more virtual, leading to a situation in which 'everything seems to have become a confidence game' (2004, p.23).

R9 commented upon the confidence or 'the charisma of the artist', suggesting this was something else 'that goes around the work of art' (R9, 290) and that this might be thought to take precedence over other attributes required by the contemporary artist. Such an argument resonates with Thierry de Duve's view, which stressed the importance of the artist's attitude within a contemporary art context.

In this climate, art becomes founded upon image, myth, and reputation rather than practical outcomes. Once things become abstracted in such a way and are 'no longer grounded in anything but themselves' (Taylor, 2004a, p.22), then faith can be seen as a fundamental aspect of practice. Art, like the economy, 'becomes a matter of faith' (Taylor, 2004a, p. 22). One needs to retain faith in the artist and his or her intentions in order for the art to be meaningful. As R9 described it, art becomes 'like religion' (R9, 346).

R4 was asked whether he thought a viewer of contemporary art would have to be initiated into the relevant knowledge in order to understand a specific piece. In response he tried to explain the way he understood arts audiences and the accessibility of art at length because he considered the way he understood it to be a 'powerful model' (R4, 36).

R4 began by suggesting that when he was a student he always had this dream that he could make a work or a painting that 'would appeal in the kind of democratic populist way to everybody' (R4, 30). However he recognised 'quite [early on]' (R4, 30) he 'encountered some more sociologically-oriented art history and art criticism. [...] In fact one of the very first was a guy who's British, er Michael [Baxendall]' (R4, 32) which influenced and changed his view, by making him aware of the ways in which

...the development of the Florentine Renaissance, with a perspective [...] influences some painting texture and individuality and so forth was very much tied to the subculture of the [...] newly rich Florentine merchants (R4, 34).

In graduate school R4 also encountered the work of the Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset, whose two 'dramatic points' made an impression on him (R4, 34). The first of these points was that 'modernist art' could be seen 'as intentionally coded' (R4, 34). Since Ortega was writing in the 1920s and 1930s, 'when communism, fascism and all kinds of dictatorships were raging' R4 understood this to mean that artists had 'decided to code the narrative in their work pretty much to avoid trouble from a kind of vast misunderstanding majority' (R4, 34). Ortega suggested that these artists sought to 'offer their work only to an initiated sort of intelligentsia rather than the sort of insensitive [...], bourgeois' (R4, 34). He believed this to be pertinent, and it influenced his thinking about the accessibility of art. The second of Ortega's points to influence R4 was that:

Democracy is not a system to serve the interests of the majority but rather to protect minorities from being killed by the majority. The symbolic act of defeatism transformed from death to voting (R4, 34).

R4 considered this 'a very foreign vision' for him, as an American, with all that he 'grew up with' (R4, 34). He reasoned that 'coupled with the poststructuralism' he read later on, 'it had an effect' (R4, 34). He also began to read about 'the role of the subculture in [...] twentieth-century contemporary society' (R4, 34), and was taken with the idea that people might come together to form subcultural groups. This might be because 'they were interested in some kind of cultural [...] activity, which could be art or athletics or music and or religion' (R4, 34). He saw these subcultural groups as in direct 'opposition to the sort of vast banal homogeneity of maybe mass culture media culture – whatever you want to call it' (R4, 34). He also recognised that more recently, 'These subcultural groups have become not only more prevalent but really crucial to people's sense of identity' (R4, 34). R4 saw the interview process as a case in point, of membership of a subcultural group, and he explained:

What we're doing here is in a way an example of that, because you know you've come from 3000 miles away and I haven't met you before, but because of our shared interest in this vast city you can, you know, directly come here and sit down with me or go to an art gallery and perhaps meet somebody you've met before (R4, 34).

R4 argued that 'the other thing that developed at the beginning of the twentieth century' was 'modernist art' and he considered this could be conceived of as the 'first of these subcultural groups' (R4, 36). He stressed that 'one could posit it as a group around Picasso or even Van Gogh and Gauguin' (R4, 36). Picasso he considered to be an example of how this could be understood, as it was 'notorious that he never really showed publicly he didn't participate in the salons and his audience and [...] his supporters were this very small de-alienated intelligentsia' (R4, 36).

R4 reflected 'on the fact that the cultural experiences that meant a lot to him were those that 'very few other people were interested in' (R4, 38). Therefore the idea of 'a minority cultural experience or [...] shared by – shared by a – I guess self-identifying group' became, in his mind, 'a positive model' (R4, 38).

The notion that art is made by a self-identifying group resonates with the 'communities of practice' model conceived by Etienne Wenger. R4's remarks also resound with the argument put forward by Bourdieu, in which those involved in the production of contemporary art intend to push the "bourgeois" to the point where they are incapable of appropriating these works for themselves'

(Bourdieu, 1993, p.169). This perspective was also echoed in other literature from within the field, such as the views offered by Thomas Crow (See, 2.5).

R9 offered a similar view to that presented by R4, by commenting that art was in some ways 'like pure science', by which he meant 'it's difficult' and 'people aren't quite sure what it's all about' (R9, 254). He suggested 'pure mathematics might be a good example', as he believed 'these guys go away and brainy guys go and study these fucking stupid arithmetic, mathematical, [...]go on their mathematical adventures and no-one knows what it's all about' (R9, 266). His alignment of art to pure mathematics provides him with a way to legitimate artists having freedom to pursue their activity without being hindered by needing to explain their actions and activities to the masses, yet his use of language did not suggest he valued such a model. He valued the perspective as it meant art is seen as 'intrinsically good' and as an activity that 'a small number of humans are given this privilege to do' (R9, 268). Often, R9 considered, artists are just trying things out, and just 'seeing what will happen' without, he supposed, really knowing 'what they're doing even' (R9, 254). R9's overall perspective, then, was that art should not have to be 'about easy communication.' (R9, 254).

R4 also suggested that 'generally speaking the process in art and science would be the same' (R4, 56). He suggested one could even 'get into a kind of game theory' (R4, 56). When speaking of the differences between innovation in contemporary art and science he introduced the notion that one could think about or liken contemporary art to a game. He suggested one could be speaking about 'physics' or 'talking about [...] innovation in painting' and that 'one could almost imagine structuralist rules that [...] governed innovation in both areas' (R4, 56). He went so far as to suggest that:

One could im– even perhaps even know nothing specific issues in either discipline and almost guess what moves would be considered innovative because of [...] because of rules or patterns that seem to regulate art ideas about innovation (R4, 56).

These rules highlighted by R4, which he thought might govern innovation, could be seen to relate to the social climate that R9 suggested was so important. The interviews suggested there are multiple ways of playing the game and that these can be otherwise thought of as artists' strategies. The following quote by R4 suggests that the two terms, strategies and games, are for him at least interchangeable: 'Some of the games are or strategies are almost what like a 8-year-old child might do with – with– in painting class in school (R4, 172). It may be that all one might need in order to enter the game is to be able to learn certain ways of talking. In the next subsection we will consider

the ways in which the respondents suggested that discourses and ways of talking impacted upon engagement in the game.

## 5.2 Language Games

R4 asserted that: 'All art is coded in so far as [...] one has to be able to read the signs if one is to understand the piece' (R4, 23). He considered that, prior to the twentieth-century, form, representation and space in art acted as signs, the combination of which worked as a code. Yet since the beginning of the twentieth century, he argued, what 'began to take off' was 'that the codes that artists created were – were to use the word in a different sense, coded' (R4, 23). He elaborated on this by saying: 'In so far as if you didn't have some sort of experience of or access to the key, their language game would not be intelligible' (R4, 40).

R4's use of the term 'language game' suggests some resemblance to the language game described by Harris, thus implying there is some accuracy in Harris's argument (see 3.3) He argued that without access to this language game contemporary art would not be intelligible. When asked where he would see access to the language game coming from (Researcher, 41), he replied 'Within the subcultural group' (R4, 42). When asked whether art education might serve to reveal the codes by introducing people to the subcultural group, he suggested that it could, but voiced concern about this. He thought art education could be linked to public support for culture, of which he was in favour, but he added that, looked at in a broader way, it could be 'indoctrinating people who might actually not otherwise be inclined to have those values' (R4, 50).

R4 was acutely aware that art education institutions, including ##### where he is a professor, no longer teach form, which he equated 'in art, with syntax' (R4, 234). One might argue that what is focused upon in contemporary art education is instead access to the language games referred to by R4 and Harris.

In focusing upon the language codes that surround contemporary art practices, we can further reflect upon R4's remarks, which suggest there are more codes or rules governing contemporary art practice than one might expect. R4 exemplified this when he said, 'I think you said if one knows how to read the code but there tend to be multiple codes' (R4, 56). These codes he considers are often 'competing and [are] to some extent even possibly mutually unintelligible' (R4, 58).

R4 differentiated between the visual codes of formal devices and signifiers and language-encoded meaning in the form of artists' writings and statements, press releases and text accompaniments to work in galleries. The rules which artists set for themselves, he thought, provide the key to encoding the meaning of their practice, but these rules are not always readily accessible or apparent. Due to the individualistic way in which artists set rules within which to practise, there may be limitless ways in which contemporary arts meaning is encoded; the ways an artist sets rules and thus encodes meaning may be said to differ depending on his or her objectives.

### **5.3 Control of mediating discourses**

R10 highlighted a tendency for artists to write about their own practice which he thought began in the 1960s and 1970s, in an attempt by artists to 'shift power away from the critic' (R10, 129). He suggested this was because the only people who really knew enough about 'contemporary art practice to write about it at that time were artists' (R10, 131). He spoke of artists writing about other artists work (R10, 135) and considered that those who wrote about practice at that time would have been 'just as enthusiastic about the work' as they would have been also 'making the same kind of work' themselves (R10, 135). He considered this to be 'a really healthy, interesting, emancipated [...], kind of situation to, to aim for' (R10, 135). He seemed to value a situation in which artists write about other artists, yet he denied believing only artists should ever write about art.

R10's remarks make it possible to map out the way he understood the struggle for control of arts' mediating discourses during the last 40 years. He suggested a shift occurred during the 1980s due to the way 'art criticism had become so (...) Bugged down with postmodern references' that you 'couldn't, you couldn't turn without Baudrillard being, being referred to 7 or 8 times in a .. Review of some painters work' (R10, 135). Consequently, he determined that art criticism had become 're-professionalized' (R10, 135). R4 offered a contrasting view to this in response to being asked if he was partly responsible for the increasing reference to Foucault or Baudrillard within art discourses during the 1980s (Researcher, 111). To which he replied 'Only Baudrillard' (R4, 112). This could suggest that artists rather than critics were partly responsible for the re-professionalisation of contemporary art discourses.

Whilst still speaking of the same era, R10 suggested that people like 'David Salle and [...], Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach', didn't necessarily know 'how to talk in a way that the critics were talking about their works' (R10, 137). He argued that some of these artists began to deliberately 'talk in a

colloquial way' (R10, 137), in order to not be 'professionalised' in that sense (R10, 139). As a result of this split in the discourses, he seemed to suggest that, art criticism and practice became reconfigured, and the critics maintained a role as mediators of practice.

Yet it could be argued that, the critic did not – as Coupland and Crow suggested – regain control of the mediation or judgement of art practices during the 1980s. In many discussions of Jeff Koons's work in particular it has been suggested that 'one either gets Koons or one doesn't', and that 'If you do, you do, and if you don't, you don't' (Coupland, 2003). Coupland considered:

...half the artworld does (and loves his work), and half the artworld doesn't (and stares uncomprehendingly at vacuum cleaners in plexiglass cases, balloon bunnies and porcelain puppies), and the twain will never meet (Coupland, 2003).

He suggested that '... people, when confronted by Koons's work, can't rid themselves of the suspicion that the artist is ridiculing them' and attributed this to the way he presents himself in interviews (Coupland, *Eyestorm*, 2003), during which he offers:

... maddeningly espousing warm, gooey, puppy love for his creations - and he answers every pointed question with the same beatific smile, like the Pope playing poker. While the work can sometimes appear dazzlingly, shamelessly shallow, he himself tells us that it possesses untold hidden depths - the polar opposite of Warhol. Koons's work is detached yet also sentimental. Or... is it? (Coupland, *Eyestorm*, 2003).

Coupland's discussion of Koons's work could be thought to be typical of the frustration faced when confronting the work of the contemporary artists of his era, and some of that of today.

According to R10, things changed again from the mid-1990s, when there was a resurgence '...especially in Britain, of artists writing about art' (R10, 139). He argued therefore that if 'certain critics feel that we've put them out of a job then that's great I think' (R10, 141).

R1 considered that artists seeking to challenge the power of the critic, in attempts to take control of the mediating discourses, was directly influenced by Joseph Kosuth. She recalled, he had said to artists: 'You've got to cut out the middleman, you've got to mediate your own work, why should you always wait upon the gallery, the critic, and that structure?' (R1, 522 and 524). R1 considered it misleading to think that artists were not familiar with mediating their own practice. She recalled Donald Judd's involvement with *Art Magazine* and Umberto Boccioni's 'futurist manifesto of



sculpture' and contended it mistaken to suggest that 'writing is not part of the discourse in which artists all work' (R1, 522).

R11 revealed a wish to negate art criticism and its discourses in a way similar to R10, commenting that he was not very 'interested in criticism anymore' (R11, 191). This led him to ponder: 'Maybe it's necessary and maybe it's im- important', but he recognised his lack of interest in it, from which he felt he could not go back (R11, 193). Instead R11 sought to be 'beyond judgement' (R11, 243).

In relation to this wish to be 'beyond judgement', he referred to a famous essay called 'Beyond Judgement' by Gilles Deleuze. The influence of this essay led him to suggest that in order for 'criticism to be interesting it would- it would have to kind of reposition itself in relation to art at the moment' (R11, 183). R11's complaint is a result of his belief in art criticism: 'There's this kind of meta-debate' or it becomes 'like a trade magazine or its description' (R11, 181). By 'judgement' R11 was apparently referring to 'a kind of position where [...] disinterestedness'<sup>15</sup> [was] still maintained within criticism' R11, (181 and 183).

#### 5.4 Verbalising meaning

The experience of contemporary art has been found to require the application of certain forms of discourse, often drawn from other disciplines, to plug the gap in competency required to verbalise meaning in the arts. R6 spoke of her painting by way of a typically formalist discourse and referred to difficulties introducing stripes to her work, which she described by means of an analogy from music. In her descriptions of practice she focused upon process, as necessitating concentration 'on practising instead of thinking what you are going to do' (R6, 88). She saw a need for a connection with the theoretical, or an understanding of where your work fits in relation to the history of art (R6, 4). The motifs she employed were chosen for their formal attributes rather than their meaning. For example, she stated she might put a flower in the corner of a painting, but 'it's not the flower it's the colour' (R6, 136). She also considered the title to be 'the last motif' (R6, 270).

R6's comments suggested she still valued visual language and found it still relevant in thinking and speaking about practice. However R9 asserted: 'The world's forgotten about the idea of visual

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<sup>15</sup> For a full elaboration on the notion of disinterestedness see Bourdieu, P., *The field of cultural production*, 1993, Page 75

intelligence' (R9, 400) and the idea of 'craft skills and a visual sense' was 'disparaged' (R9, 104). In light of this and the demise of formalism (see 2.1), there could be need for exploration of the alternative vocabularies available to contemporary artists with which to talk about contemporary practice.

R4 stated that he did most of his writing in support of his practice, 'between about the age of 27 and – oh, I don't know, 40 or something like that'. He was clear that within even that period, most of his writing was done 'between 27 and the early 30s' (R4, 96). This was, as he recalled, during his 'first four or five years' back in New York (R4, 96). He described how the writing acted as a way to 'both have a voice in the art world' to 'sort through what I was seeing here' and to 'clarify my own ideas as an artist in so far as I clarify through writing what I was thinking' (R4, 96). Artists like him working during the 1980s, took their positions through writing.

Yet R4 no longer feels the need to write and stated: 'Well, I should say I don't write anymore' (R4, 92). He also asserted that he had 'hardly written a thing in ten years' (R4, 94). He described how 'instead' he publishes 'the magazine and edit[s] a bit' (R4, 96). Once R4's position within the art world had been established, he no longer needed to write to support his practice. Artists such as R4 may have previously felt the need to write about their practice, whereas contemporary artists establish themselves within the field in different ways, such as by making themselves necessary or visible using strategies such as pitching.

Drawing upon theorists' work is often a way artists find to make sense of, or 'to find a vocabulary with which to talk about' current art (R4, 132). An example of the role of critical theory during the 1980s was emphasised in R4's comment, 'if Andy Warhol were to write a book of theory it would come close to those years of Baudrillard' (R4, 86). Critical theory seems to have been called upon to plug a gap in the discourse competencies of certain groups of artists, and this seems to work, unless the theorist decides that he or she wishes to denounce their association with the art in question. This was the case when Baudrillard publicly disassociated himself from the work of the neo-geo artists. When asked about Baudrillard's assertion that 'it was a misunderstanding taking him as a reference for situationist artworks or artists work' (Researcher, 63), R4 commented that it had 'bothered' him 'quite a bit', and that he had in fact 'met him at the time and heard the same thing from him personally' (R4, 64). He elaborated upon the unease Baudrillard had with the appropriation of his work, and quoted him as having said, 'simulation is like a jewel – it can't be touched'. Baudrillard suggested it remain 'inaccessible' or a 'hidden-away thing' (R4, 66). Baudrillard's main point was

that 'simulation argued with the notion of representation' and 'had nothing to do with works of art in so far as they still purported to represent' (R4, 70). However R4 argued that that he didn't think contemporary artworks really do 'purport to represent (...) necessarily in a traditional way' (R4, 70 and 72).

R4 was determined that discussion of art is governed by historically bracketed thematics, and when asked to elaborate upon the assertion that nature was a no longer a relevant thematic he answered by stating that he wasn't prepared to say 'that nature doesn't exist (.) that that river isn't flowing out there' but he considered that it 'no longer seems like a relevant area for allegory' (R4, 146 and 147). In R4's view nature gained force as a relevant thematic 'around 1800' and lost its currency during the 1920s and 1930s (R4, 152). He was also aware that his understanding of the relevance of a thematic such as nature was greatly influenced by the fact that he comes from and makes work in New York City (R4, 158). He asserted that on 'a very naïve (.) almost obvious level the formal elements in my work very closely correspond to my visual environment' as is apparent from looking at his painting the conduits were influenced by the bars on windows in his former studio (R4, 160). For both R4 and R15, making art is about taking inspiration from or using directly material that is 'within arm's reach' (R15, 60). R15 asserted that that which he is interested in is that which is 'on hand, [...] you know, stuff that basically I'm constantly filtering through, as a – as a person as much as an artist' (R15, 60).

Deleuze is very much a current thinker widely invoked in discourses surrounding contemporary art. However, R8 referred to being struck by the 'attachment' or 'lack of [attachment,] for that matter' that he considered 'so many people still have for Deleuze and Guattari's work' (R8, 24). In his estimation, an attachment to use of a theoretical model is not always accompanied by accurate interpretation of its meaning.

In response to a question aimed at establishing possible reasons for Deleuze's prominence, R11 stated: 'Deleuze is a sort of a thinker of the new and that's why he's, he's so interesting' (R11, 233). He also added: 'The big thing I think for people now is [...] new subjectivities', and this is what he considered Deleuze offers people (R11, 231). He thought that artists' wish to rethink the new was 'not just in aesthetics but in politics' (R11, 213). His comments suggest Deleuze offers contemporary artists a shift from 'other models like negation and Marxism and deconstruction' which R11 considered were 'about kind of deferral' (R11, 201) and tended to shut down any notion of making something anew.

These previous models, he considered, did not allow any kind of engagement with what he referred to as the 'affective power of the artwork' (R11, 203). The affective power of an artwork, R11 declares, is for some people seen 'in terms of aesthetics' (R11, 205). However, he believes it is really 'the sensory element', an example of which would be the effect, '[which] could be something like a knife has [...] the affect of a cut' (R11, 207). R11 proclaims that Tracey Emin 'uses affect', and he considers her work has a 'lot of affective power' (R11, 211). R11 intends his own work to have an affective power and sees it to exist in a way in which the 'figure and ground begin to break down and [...] your senses become overwhelmed, and it doesn't allow you to step back (R11, 253). An example of R11's attempt to do this would be his show ##### in which he 'put like glitter everywhere' (R11, 271), the intention being that 'when you walked in, it – it kind of dazz–, it kind of dazzled you and the – and the point was to make a kind of (vertigo) I guess, and [...] and to have a kind of bodily effect upon you' (R11, 273).

R10 was aware that the researcher intended to interview R14 and he questioned R14's 'commitment to post-conceptual art' suggesting it was due to 'a love of the way that some of it looks' rather than a 'commitment to its theory, or its discourses or its debates' (R10, 1). This revealed R10 valued a commitment to the discourses and debates that surround contemporary art practice. There are clearly numerous ways to engage with contemporary art practices; but the artist respondents often spoke about their work in terms of the discourses which were relevant to them.

## 5.5 Creating a scene

R9 suggested that the way contemporary artists respond to one another's actions is key to their success. R11 also stressed the importance of 'making a scene' and of 'making yourself more visible' (R11, 125 and 84), but did not think of this as 'a conscious thing' (R11, 117). Instead he considered that people came together, forming or 'making a scene' or a 'community or a dialogue or a discourse' (R11, 129). He was aware that all those who commit to a scene are 'not necessarily all friends with each other' (R11, 129). This is supported by Wenger's model, which also asserts that a community of practice is not to be interpreted as an idealistic notion in which everyone gets along. R11 was also aware that 'you can't pin it down, it doesn't have any kind of centre, or whatever, but there is something within that scene that is – that is kind of shared or common' (R11, 131). A community or a scene then evolves out of what might be considered shared goals, or objectives; R11 revealed his

awareness of this when he spoke of the transformation of Vilma Gold from an artist-run space to a gallery. He stated:

I think there – there is a kind of community there, but it's kind of [...], a more [...] its goal, [...] what it envisages for itself is, is much more kind of [...] normative in terms of its aim, what counts for success and whatever (R11, 389).

These scenes or communities of artists could be thought of as having evolved various ways of playing the game, dependent upon differing aims and objectives, reflecting Wenger's recognition that groups are drawn together as a result of shared practices, interests and motivations.

R11 also asserted the importance of 'national communities and national identities' and the need for what he describes as these 'imagined communities where a myth is made' (R11, 403). He viewed these communities as creating myths and was aware how significant it was that the myths of London and the YBA (Young British Art) had occurred concurrently during the 1990s (R11, 403).

R11 recalled that the interesting thing about making art in the 1990s was 'the multiplicity of the scene that was taking place' (R11, 117). He considered 'Live Life' at the Pompidou Centre (1996), to have been a particularly important show, which, he recalled, had included 'basically the whole of the London artist-run spaces scene' and 'artists important to that scene' (R11, 117). He felt this led to a 'sort of quite romanticised' sense that artists 'were doing things [for] themselves, or, as he thought, 'working through a sort of Thatcherist entrepreneurial spirit', or 'a sort of punk thing' (R11, 125).

He recalled how not all the artists in this scene wrote, or made work thinking, 'that R14 would pick them up' (R11, 125). As a result of this he considered R14 'had to respond to the scene a bit', which he did by putting on the show '#####'. Yet despite this attempt by R14 of showing the work of 'thirty, forty young artists', R11 felt it was too late, partly because before this he had stuck 'with his sort of old dinosaur rock conceptual artists' (R11, 125). R11 regarded R14 as having been 'caught a bit unawares by the whole YBA thing' (R11, 127) and suggested this would have been an uncomfortable situation for R14. He stressed that 'once you make a scene', as the ##### gallery did, there is a need to replenish that scene so as to resist becoming 'redundant to the culture' (R11, 127).

R14 responded with some hostility to the suggestion that he was not interested in supporting the YBAs, asserting that he was not 'unsupportive of them' (R14, 78) or uninterested, but believed them to be 'another mini-movement' (R14, 78). He suggested they were not 'an international movement'

but 'a local one' (R14, 78). R14 stressed that since what he described as the 'great post-war movements of abstract expressionism, pop-art, minimalism and conceptual art' all that was left were what he termed 'national internationalism and mini-movements' (R14, 44).

The model or game advocated by R14 encouraged artists to believe in their art and to continue to support it even if it took them 10 years or 20 years (R14, 374). After this wait he argues that 'the money will eventually, the economy will eventually follow' (R14, 368) on the condition that 'the work is good enough' (R14, 366). He considered the need for work to be 'original enough and good enough' as 'criteria for [work]' (R14, 366) but recognised himself he was not clear 'whatever the hell that means' (R14, 238). R14's vagueness on criteria for good art suggested that even the supposed experts do not always know the criteria for good contemporary art. The implication is that they may not know good art when confronted by it and thus it may be difficult for anyone to discern.

R1 remarked that the dealer Jay Jopling 'found that yuppie 80s tranche of people on the edge of pop, fashion, rock and roll', who had money to spend on art (R1, 414). She asserted that by engaging this audience, Jopling 'found a new buying public' (R1, 416); because he did this, she saw him as having 'cracked something most of the other dealers could not crack' (R1, 418). As a result of this, the YBAs went about creating a scene in London during the 1990s that was a direct challenge to this model or the game described by R14; it could be argued that these artists had shifted the rules of engagement in the game.

Other changes within the field have since occurred, one of which is the emerging research culture within the universities. Artists working within a university, despite engaging in contemporary art practice, may have to employ different strategies in order to achieve their objectives, which are different from those within other scenes. One such artist is R16, who recognised how he has 'never had success with the market in that sense, [...] as an individual selling things,' (R16, 238). As a result of this R16 recognised that he could:

... make more money from [...] from trying to get fellowships or that type of research position at university or – or just getting commissions, commissions and fees for doing different types of projects (R16, 240 and 242).

One of R16's objectives was to broaden the audience for contemporary practice, which he thinks would in turn benefit him, as it would mean that more money would become available for practice such as his. He suggested: 'If you could convince the whole country to be interested in contemporary

art more taxpayers' money will be spent on art' (R16, 686). He saw a possible advantage of this as being

... that the more people would invest in art, the more art we could all make and [...] the bigger, the better, the more sophisticated, the more time, the more people we could work with, we could— and that, that makes the scene (R16, 688).

It does appear that artists employ different strategies in order to succeed, depending upon the scene in which they are practising, and therefore the nature of the game in which they are engaging. R16 described the means by which a scene is created as in part due to putting oneself into a 'larger system' and making 'yourself necessary in some ways' (R16, 90). R16 seemed to be making himself necessary to an institutional 'research' context and also to a wider international art research context.

In order to make oneself necessary within a larger system by creating a scene, one has to grasp the rules of that game or its associated objectives, and to achieve this, it seems one has to take a position. The attempt to take a position was described by the artist respondents R4, R10, R16 and R11 as something achieved through language or discourses. This could be described as the language game or struggle for the control of the discourses that mediate practice, referred to by R4 (R4, 40) (see 5.2).

R16 described the process of making oneself visible within the art world as a 'game' (R16, 104). This was also suggested by his comments about the artists' group BANK, whom he considered had 'pretty cleverly worked the visibility game' (R16, 104). BANK are described as having played the game successfully because they 'produced themselves as key people to be involved in projects' (R16, 106). R16 also believed BANK had 'mapped out some new ideas for other... 'artists', 'curators' and even 'the market to respond to' (R16, 106). The way in which the market may respond to such 'pitches' will be considered in the next section of this chapter.

A key aspect of the discussion with R16 was how he described his relationship with other artists. He was looking for work which he saw as, an 'interesting challenge' (R16, 42), and he explained how he saw other artists as 'competition' (R16, 46). He referred to how he would hope to 'outdo them' (R16, 46) and 'keep one step ahead' (R16, 50), stating that everywhere he goes he is looking for that 'fascination in the competition' and that he hopes to 'benefit from that and learn from it and move on from it' (R16, 52). He said he would then pass that 'information back' to other artists 'as a challenge' (R16, 54) and he saw this as 'natural'. He admitted that being 'competitive' is just how he thinks (R16, 56) and yet considered it rude to speak of things in such terms, as he suggested people

'in the art world shy away' from talking about it (R16, 62). He found the alternative suggestion, that some may engage in art practice for the love of art, amusing (R16, 76).

The nature of competitiveness will be taken forward into chapter 8, where it will be considered whether the way R16 relates to other artists is typical of the way contemporary artists relate to one another. The possibility of a relation between this notion and de Duve's triad of 'attitude–practice–deconstruction' will be considered in chapter 8.

## **5.6 Visibility and positions**

R11 considered that the situation had changed a lot since the avant-garde model, where 'being an avant-garde artist or being like [...] a critical theorist of the Frankfurt school or whatever you occupy a position' (R11, 51). He argued that from a position within the old avant-garde model an artist would have to present things to 'the institution that the institution might like, but you sort of position yourself outside the institution' (R11, 53). In contrast to this, R11 considers that now artists 'pitch', which he likens to 'throw[ing] something or a pitch is like a market stall or advertising' (R11, 57). R11 did not think 'you weigh the response up' to a pitch, instead he suggested that the 'whole avant-garde model collapses' (R11, 63). By this he meant that 'the sort of game that was played say fifty years ago' in which 'the sort of space you want to get into is the [...] museum' and in which there was 'no broad coverage of art really in terms of [...] avant-garde art' becomes 'very different' (R11, 63). He argued that this is because of the way the art has become 'embraced by the media and is mediated' and also because it has had 'to work in mass-media, fashion, education, workshops' (R11, 65). One could be thought to pitch so that it's 'off-key, or on-key', so things became 'much more performative' and 'much more about voice', giving artists freedom to '[try] out different voices' (R11, 59).

R11's recognition that it is a 'very different game', in which visibility has become 'such a key thing' (R11, 73), reiterates Michael Corris's comments, made at the 'Who's afraid of red white and blue?' conference in 1998. There, Corris stated that instead of trying 'to make communities or institutions', as 'his generation did' (R11, 73), artists now seem to be 'going for visibility and for celebrity'. R11 considered this a 'quicker way; it's like putting your foot on the accelerator' (R11, 73). The implication is that this is 'a quicker way to power' or to gaining a stake within the field (R11, 75).



R11 clearly asserted that he thought 'a very specific [...] move was made by a lot of people away from institutionalised theory' (R11, 43). This, he argues, was in part because of the 'daily reality of sort of making art and trying to catch the media's attention' (R11, 43), which meant that you 'just couldn't maintain that voice so you just looked ridiculous' (R11, 43).

He admitted that Robert Garnett came up with the term 'pitch' as a means to describe an alternative to 'positioning yourself in an avant-garde' model in which you had a 'kind of critical project' and 'occupied some position' and made art (R11, 45). He referred to Langlands and Bell as an example of how a position might be occupied, but saw them as merely 'illustrating Foucault' (R11, 45). Instead of 'occupying a position' (R11, 49) he recalled 'a pressure to kind of be visible' and of shows that were 'not about selling'. He stressed: 'No one ever thought that you would sell anything' (R11, 77). Instead a successful show in 1994 was about 'getting reviewed, and being in magazines and fashion magazines and, and [...] high-brow theory journals' (R11, 77).

In considering the visibility game R11 thought it might not be obvious at first, but 'your press release has to kind of grab attention' and do more than just explain the work. He argued the importance of using the press release 'as a kind of work' (R11, 95). R11 recalled the artists' space 'Milch' as being 'quite an interesting' one, because 'they sent a milk float round with the milk bottle as an invite to galleries in Cork Street' (R11, 97). R11 recognised this as a 'gimmick that an advertising bureau would [...] come up with' (R11, 97 and 99). Yet it was seen to enable the creation of 'an identity within the [...] thousands of things that would get sent out every month' and thus raised their visibility (R11, 99). The aim of this was to 'get reviewed and your work [...] talked about' as 'that then makes you feel like you have a stake' (R11, 101). The notion that reviews act as validation for contemporary art practice will be returned to in chapter 7.

R11 also made it apparent that as an artist 'you were in dialogue' with artists and 'in dialogue with [...] with the scene and what was going on' (R11, 79). This he argued then 'shut down' what he considers was the more heavily theoretical model that he 'was working with [...] when I first went to Goldsmiths' (R11, 79). In another instance during the interview R11 described the climate at Goldsmiths, when he began doing his MA in the early 1990's, as a prevailing 'kind of critical distance, and [...] it was sort of – it was informed by post-modernism' (R11, 5).

The approach of the artists of R11's era was to try out a multitude of voices rather than seeking a definitive voice to accompany practice. The type of writing R11 favoured was the 'Zombie Golf'

press release by John Roberts, which he saw as a 'crappy novel that [...] someone in the suburbs might read about people on a golf course but zombies attack it' (R11, 59). He recognised this was a 'long way away from the essays you'd have to write' (R11, 79) which were 'mostly done in the voice of a critical theorist, kind of thing, I guess' (R11, 61).

There are various ways contemporary artists can become visible and R11 stressed this can be vitally important as, '... if you're not somehow within the structure' or, 'if you don't have some kind of place in the structure' (R11, 91) then you are powerless. According to R11, visibility 'provides you with an [...] opportunity, status. [...] If you're invisible, you – you know it's not just within art, it's within, [...] all culture' and therefore, 'you're completely powerless' (R11, 87 and 89). Despite this, he recognised there are 'lots of people who are invisible yet who have power in the art world' (R11, 91), such, he considered, as dealers. R9 emphasised how dealers 'keep their own profiles down' (R9, 142) and suggested they are 'manipulators' and that it is not in their interests 'to be too conspicuous' (R9, 142 and 144).

What form this power may take was discussed with R10 and R11 and was raised briefly in the interview with R8. Stallabrass wrote in *High Art Lite* that an increase in artist interviews in art journals was a sign of artists' gaining more power over the discourses that mediate their practice. When asked about this possible increase in artists' power, as suggested by Stallabrass, R10 argued that artists have very little power to influence what gets made visible within the art world and considered:

If you look at the actual percentage of artists who you know, got any positions of power, who are on committees for instance, you know [...] you might get the odd one; Mark Wallinger may be on some sort of committee somewhere. You know, [...] but artists don't get on committees (R10, 145).

R10 was convinced that 'artists don't tend to get those positions of power' (R10, 145). Yet R11 would refute R10's claim, suggesting instead that it 'depends how you think of power' (R11, 115).

R16 also felt that what R11 had described was in fact happening, and he believed 'pitching is exactly the right word' (R16, 86). R16 acknowledged he had also worked in this way (R16, 88) and that he 'saw this as a way to produce a scene' (R16, 88). R16's outlook was slightly dissimilar to R11's notion of 'pitching', in that he considered it was not enough simply to make oneself visible and argued instead for the need to become necessary. When asked if R16 considered himself part of a group, or whether there are other practitioners that that he would affiliate his practice with, he stated

that 'it's quite funny' because he and 'R10 and Mel Jordan, Andy Hewitt, Mark Hutchinson, Becky Shaw, we just formed a gang' (R16, 30). R16 considered this funny because of the name they gave themselves – '#####'. This he described as being, a 'bit of a joke' (R16, 34), since they took this name as a result of their wish to 'oppose' Gustav Metzger's proposal for the exhibition East International 05<sup>16</sup>, to be held at the Norwich Gallery. The curator at the Norwich gallery, Lynda Morris, stated that: 'Artists working as individuals are able to do things before they become formalised in institutions and I think that's what Metzger is tapping into with this exhibition' (Morris, 2005). R16 felt that a submission to *East* by this group named 'The Transformation Gang' was humorous, as it meant that rather than aligning themselves with Metzger's proposal they were in fact challenging his attempt to survey a trend amongst artists. R16 was challenging to the power of the selector, or the curator of an exhibition, who is seeking to portray a particular agenda through an exhibition, yet R16 often acts as just such a selector / curator himself.

The approach taken by Metzger, and R16's attempts to subvert it, could be likened to what R11 described as 'pitching', because both showed an investment in what is current and exemplified a wish to be associated with it by making their associations with certain types of work and ways of thinking visible. It is suggested therefore that it is not only artists who 'pitch', but also theorists and curators alike. R10 suggested that the language and terminology of the curator and theorist Nicholas Bourriaud could be considered a pitch, and his texts were also described as 'pitches' by R16 (R16, 88). R16 believes them to be attempts at trying to 'show his investment' (R16, 88) in that which is happening at present.

## 5.7 Changing scenes and changing games

R1 stressed how much the contemporary art scene has changed, yet she elaborated upon how the role of the journal she edits has remained 'extremely clearly defined' (R1, 4). She felt it was 'the world around it' that has changed and suggested there has been an increase in the number of publications that deal specifically with contemporary art (R1, 4). She contrasted this to the number of magazines around when ##### began in ####, of which she suspects there 'were only about two' namely, ##### and ##### (R1, 6). She recalled how she 'used to go to private views to the

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<sup>16</sup> East is an exhibition held annually at Norwich Gallery, for which Metzger is acting as this year's selector.

same five galleries seeing the same eight people' whereas now the numbers involved have 'exponentially increased' (R1, 496). As part of this shift, she also noted the contexts for artists to represent their own practice had 'exponentially increased' particularly 'if you include magazines', and that the contexts for showing work are greater due to the 'number of galleries' also having increased alongside 'agencies, like (Locust Plus) in Newcastle' and Artangel, 'who enable work to be made that can't otherwise' (R1, 496). She knew that 'for good and ill, the public art phenomenon has mushroomed' and that 'artists can make good money out of public art which can sustain their practice in a way' (R1, 496).

R1 also considered the scene to have changed in relation to economic factors, yet felt 'you can't distinguish between the [...] changed economic factors which give rise to new contexts like university galleries and publications, for RAE exercises' (R1, 506). She argued that there is a 'plethora of new magazines, which have to fill pages', such as institutions like Central St Martins School of Art, working in partnership with a publisher to produce *After All* magazine (R1, 510). She also suggested that 'Local authorities are more willing for artists to do things in the public realm, public sphere, say, hire a billboard or an LED' or 'stage events in public parks without being necessarily marched off by the police' (R1, 512). These things come together, she maintained, to mean there are 'any number of contexts' for artists to work within (R1, 512).

R11 also recognised and commented that the scene had changed, including with it a shift away from the philosophical discourse that he felt was evident at Goldsmiths when he began studying there. He believed these philosophical discourses did not become 'inadequate as such', but were moved away from because the 'art sphere' shifted (R11, 83).

R14 considered that the art world was breaking down into 'smaller – into smaller and smaller groups' (R14, 160), which he described as 'mini-groupings', or 'mini-families' (R14, 160). These he saw as comprising 'like, thinking people' (R14, 162) and might be an 'international grouping of twenty people, or ten people including one or two galleries, one or two curators, a few artists, collectors, et cetera' (R14, 164 and 166). He saw this as 'a sign of globalisation' (R14, 168), in which there are 'thousands of markets with dozens of clients' (R14, 170).

R11 was told by his gallery of the need to 'think of [himself] ... more internationally', so that 'they could do their job properly' (R11, 377). He acknowledged the reason for this as being because he

thinks of himself 'as like a scene artist' (R11, 379). If he does not begin to think of himself more internationally, he recognised this would cause him to remain working 'at that level' (R11, 385).

It is suggested that as this breakdown of the art world into smaller groupings occurs, the ease with which art can be made meaningful will diminish. The more diverse the scenes or groups, the more diverse the discourses which mediate them, till finally they become meaningful only to limited communities of practice and interest.

## 5.8 Summary

This chapter has revealed how contemporary art practice reflects the strategic aspects of a game like chess. The rules of the game seem to be set by artists themselves, in light of the actions of other contemporary artists.

The art that preceded contemporary practice was seen (by R4) to be coded through formal devices and symbolism. In the contemporary art world, just as in the financial economy, signs and signifiers have become detached from any grounded meaning, so that confidence and charisma have become vital qualities for the artist. What is said about art works becomes paramount. In order to convince someone that a glass of water on a shelf is to be conceived of as an oak tree,<sup>17</sup> one needs confidence. Contemporary art has become a confidence game and the mediating discourses can be described as a language game. Without a key to these games, contemporary art can seem unintelligible.

Disquiet with the critical theory model (first presented at Goldsmiths) left many artists seeking different ways to relate theory to their own practice. Rather than using theory to create a critical position from which to launch one's practices, as had the artists of the 1980s such as R4, younger artists such as R11 have sought to use theory to test out possible voices.

The interviews revealed that the art world has changed in recent years. The number of groups of artists practising has proliferated and the whole avant-garde model has collapsed. The sort of game that was played fifty years ago, in which the space you wanted to get into was the museum, is no longer played. There is now much broader coverage of contemporary art and artists aim not simply

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<sup>17</sup> One might think of Michael Craig Martin's work, *An Oak Tree* of 1973.

to sell work at shows, but to become visible and necessary. The game has changed and artists now focus on promotion, visibility and advertising strategies.

The media have embraced contemporary art, and as R1 pointed out, there are now far more contemporary art journals than ever before. R9 stressed that there has certainly been an increase in the 'bumph' which accompanies exhibitions. However, he found it difficult to explain this satisfactorily, merely insisting that because printing is cheaper now, anyone can get 'any old bollocks' printed (R9, 314). There has been a proliferation of the mediating discourses that accompany contemporary art practice. Artists struggle for control of the discourses that mediate their practices. Instead of waiting to be picked up by a dealer, they engage in pitching, attempting to become visible, to create a scene, and to change the game.

The groups of artists that come together through shared interests and humour do not have harmonious relationships, yet may engage in mutual promotion and pitching. R16 revealed that contemporary art involves an element of competitiveness. The lack of harmony between members of a contemporary artists' community may relate to the competitiveness inherent in contemporary art practice. Thierry de Duve has suggested a triad of 'attitude–practice–deconstruction', and in particular referenced a 'critical attitude' that may describe the attitude evident in some of the respondents' comments.

The artist and curator R9 suggested that some of the discourses employed by contemporary artists are intended to be beyond understanding. Similarly, the artist R15 admitted that he sought to produce work that focuses on the gaps, and that he hopes his work comes over as nonsensical. Where does this leave the audience of viewers of contemporary art practice, faced with artists whose approach is strategically intended to confuse and flummox their viewers?

There has been a proliferation of promotional and mediating discourses that accompany contemporary art practice, in the form of journal articles, interviews, catalogues and critical essays and artists' writing. Contemporary artists cannot be said to be using these contexts to carve out a critical position as did their forerunners, but are instead trying out various voices within them. These voices form part of the language game, which codes contemporary art and makes it possibly unintelligible to the layman. As the art world advances into globalisation these discourses will continue to proliferate.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Making meaning**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter will explore how the art world and the respondents for this study make their activities meaningful. The chapter will also explore how individual artworks, or certain artists' practices, come to be seen as meaningful, whilst recognising the importance of context for this negotiation of meaningfulness. The discourses which are employed in the mediation, reification and contextualisation of contemporary art are explored, including critical theory and the role of aesthetics.

The initial discussion will concentrate on an overarching notion of how the meaningfulness of contemporary art practice is negotiated by those within the field. In order to achieve this, there will be occasional re-consideration of the themes identified in Etienne Wenger's description of negotiating meaning within communities of practice. The role of the viewer in the construction or negotiation of meaning in contemporary art will be considered in sections 6.1 and 6.2. Sections 6.3 and 6.4 will explore what knowledge or modes of attention a viewer might require in order to have meaningful experiences of contemporary art. The theme of meaningfulness within contemporary art is then summarised in section 6.5.

#### **6.1 Sense and non-sense**

When looking to the question of sense and non-sense, there is a comparison to be made between the outlook of R10 and R11 and that of R9 who seemed to regard art as being aligned with more traditional notions of aesthetics such as beauty; he asserted a number of times that he was 'old fashioned' (R9, 18, 280 and 294). His outlook is reflected by comments such as this: 'No matter how much people dislike the idea, there's still an idea of beauty' (R9, 282). He sees what we have now as:

... intellectual beauty. I think that's something, intellectual beauty, a beautiful idea, not the content of the idea, but the way the idea works. And the idea of beauty is central,

so although works look, often look, ugly, or shocking, or frightening, or whatever, there's still a kind of beauty going on there that people are striving for (R9, 284).

R9's interest in retaining something like these traditional notions of beauty meant that he advocated a view quite different from that of some of the other interviewees, such as R10, who called for the end of aesthetic discourses on beauty. R9 made it apparent that he felt 'one of the things theory does [...] is establish a prestige, an intellectual prestige' (R9, 400). He would argue that this prestige is needed because he feels that artists, or the world at large, no longer 'like the idea of – they've forgotten about the idea of [...] visual intelligence' (R9, 400). This, he argues, is because there is 'no status accorded to that, and theory is a effective way of artists' gaining intellectual prestige' (R9, 402). He links this to 'artists historically [having] been regarded as quite dim' (R9, 404). This use of theory as a form of prestige has led, he considers, to 'the crossover between art and writing' having become 'quite considerable these days' (R9, 404).

It is not that R9 has any aversion to critical theory; in fact he stated that he sometimes finds it 'very imaginative and beautiful', it can be 'quite exalted'. He considered it all right for the 'theorists themselves writing it' but declared that 'for artists to invoke it, it's a dodgy little science' (R9 (454). When asked in what way he thought it was dodgy, he replied: 'It's supposed to be beyond understanding, a lot of it' (R9, 458). He thought it was 'supposed to be a prompt', which sought to reveal the impossibility of understanding' (R9, 462). He suggested that Phillipa Berry's book *Shadow of the Spirit* (which he made clear he had not read in detail) 'talked about this' and as such might have been worth having a longer look at (R9, 460 and 462).

When asked to elaborate upon what is meant by aiming to be beyond understanding, he suggested that the intention was 'precisely that, it's not designed to be understood' (R9, 464). Such an assertion poses many questions; why would artists employ a discourse that is intentionally beyond understanding? He suggested that the situation 'excuses everybody', including artists presumably, from accusations of incoherence (R9, 467). He suggested 'current theory' was about a 'sort of defeatism' (R9, 472) and considered there was a tendency in many current theorists, such as Deleuze and Derrida, towards nihilism (R9, 475 and 478).

R8 drew attention to a post-theory movement within contemporary culture generally, an example of which he considered, was 'David Boardwell and the Sokal affair (R8, 196). He explained that the Sokal affair was a result of the physicist, Alan Sokal, having written 'a piece of nonsense, on quantum gravity and postmodernism' (R8, 198) which he then submitted to a journal called *Social*



*Text* that is arguably one of the 'main organs of post-modern theory' in the United States, 'where it was accepted and published' (R8, 200). He commented upon how this caused a 'huge stink' and also raised questions as to whether

... certain kinds of postmodernist theorising were merely being used, you know, used complicated language to sort of intimidate the reader, and without, you know, really knowing what they were saying (R8, 204).

The Sokal affair was in R8's view a reaction to the state in which postmodernist theorising had found itself. He believed the theorist Terry Eagleton had also explored such issues, and that his book *The Illusions of Postmodernism* made 'an interesting read' (R8, 206).

In addition to the use of postmodern where it is unclear what is intended, R15 admitted presenting himself in a way that avoids both easy association with and restrictions on the way his work can be interpreted. He considers these to be a disadvantage. He is careful to position his work as contemporary art and happy to present himself to sculptors as 'a conceptualist', and to conceptualists as 'a sculptor' (R15, 150). He likened this practice to Groucho Marx's famous quip: it is like not wanting to 'be a member of any club that would have him become a member' (R15, 150).

A rather cynical interpretation of this unwillingness to advocate any consistent understanding of his practice, was that by allowing an infinite number of readings or associations to exist, the work remains open to all audiences and therefore all potential buyers. For R15 specifically, it seemed important to retain confusion around his works' meaning. He suggests that he is interested in 'the gaps' (R15, 102), which seem to be describable as the spaces left open for the viewer to contemplate the possible meanings of the work. He suggested that one of his former weaknesses was that he always used to think that 'all the gaps needed filling' (R15, 104). It seems that, through a slow process, he came to realise that for him it was actually 'the gaps that work', and which 'make it more interesting as art rather than theory [or propaganda]' (R15, 106 and 108). He considered the media, including television, radio, newspapers and magazines, to be more interested in filling these gaps, in attempts to 'make things seamless' (R15, 114). Yet he felt life would be more interesting if they did not desire to do this. He also described how he had realised that for him, 'art's about trying to make nonsense' (R15, 118), and how he believed it to be 'a lot harder to make nonsense' than sense (R15, 120).

In contrast to R15's view, R11 argued that it is 'not a question now of, of a game of not making sense,' (R11, 69), but instead he considered it really hard not to make sense, because he considered 'there's load, loads of people [...] trying to make sense of nonsense' (R11, 71). Within the literature there is evidence of contemporary artists who intend their work to be nonsensical and this will be explored in chapter 8.

R15 talked of how his projects evolve from a conceptual beginning. They start as what he called 'linguistic ideas', that 'literally could exist as a text' (R15, 154). This suggests that R15 believes that the ideas that inspire work have existed, at some point, in a way which can be communicated directly, thus falling into the communication myth trap as outlined by Harris (see 3.3). R15 considered these ideas could then be complicated through the making process, which allowed them to become open to a greater number of readings. In giving descriptions of his practice he seemed to be attempting not to reveal the initial ideas which had inspired a particular work, so as not to give too much away. This was expressed in his awareness that he has previously tended to 'over-elaborate' and to give too much away, therefore not allowing for 'gaps' (R15, 100).

R6 also allowed meaning to be created through the gaps in the connections she makes within her work. She did not intend her work to convey any particular meaning but considered it as open-ended (R6, 109). In order to elaborate this idea she drew upon the Brazilian concept of anthropophagi (R6, 88). This originates from the Greek words *anthropos*, meaning 'man or human' and *phagein* meaning 'eating, consuming, or destroying' (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2005). R6 stated that this word is often used by Brazilians and is often translated into English as 'cannibalism' and yet, she argued, this was an inaccurate translation as it is used by Brazilians to mean consuming cultural influences from a wide variety of sources such as literature, art, dance movies and other different forms (R6, 96).<sup>18</sup>

Whether through the use of theory intended to act as a prompt to the impossibility of understanding, or through actively trying to avoid consistent meanings becoming associated with their work, many of the respondents sought to create an air of non-sense to surround their practice. Yet where might this leave the viewer? Does this build upon the awareness that the viewer co-constructs the meaning of the work, or does it actively seek to undermine this?

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<sup>18</sup> In modern Greek *Anthropophagos* (singular) and *Anthropophagoi* (plural) means 'cannibal'.

## 6.2 Co-creating meaning

In a discussion on the various audiences for contemporary art, R10 was asked who he considered his audience to be. He responded:

You can have addressees, you can be making work that addresses certain people or certain kinds of people or certain debates and discourses [...] but those things change, you know, so for instance, if you made a work that, that addressed the contemporary art audience today, then that would be stupid, because the art world is going to change in five, ten, fifteen, twenty years' time (R10, 663).

He suggested that you cannot expect work to 'survive if you're only addressing the art audience of 2005' (R10, 665). Contemporary artists must accordingly be addressing more than just their peers, they must also be 'addressing something else' (R10, 667). He rationalises this by saying 'to a certain extent you're, you're always addressing an audience that doesn't yet exist, because you're addressing an audience that you hope will come into being' (R10, 669). He thinks it would be very difficult to make art 'that didn't have any audience at all, because you're part of an audience yourself' (R10, 671), however he acknowledges that

... you might be making work that is even difficult for you to understand what you're doing, in which case you're [...] struggling to find something that you're trying to say and at the same time struggling to become a different kind of audience (R10, 671).

A different sort of issue is outlined by R8. He suggested that it could be seen as 'invidious' and 'not merely a matter of artists producing work that is then contextualised by curators' if artists produce work 'which [...] is designed from the beginning to be contextualised in a particular way, by curators' (R8, 338). When this was suggested to R10, he commented that not knowing who one's audience is 'gets calculation out of it altogether' because, he argues, 'you can't calculate that this is what the art audience wants to see and this is what's going to work for them' (R10, 671). If you were to make art for one audience and 'narrowed it down' that much, he stressed, you would 'kill yourself off' (R10, 671 and 673). This is because, he insisted, you would 'make crap work', as it would only be 'interesting in one aspect' (R10, 697).

R10 also stressed that one might be making work to be looked at in a number of ways. For example he felt you needed to be clear about whether the work was intended to be 'looked at from an aesthetic point of view', 'looked at from a political point of view', or 'from a relational aesthetics point of view' (R10, 671). R10 also felt that by making work to be understood in a diversity of ways,

one would prevent making clichéd art, which he understood as art that ‘already had a fixed meaning’ (R10, 677). A way of avoiding this, according to R10, is ‘to work on several aspects of the work all at the same time’ (R10, 679). An artist whom he cited as appealing to an aesthetic and political audience was Mark Titchner. He considered his work would interest an aesthete who had no interest in politics at all, who could look at Mark Titchner’s work and say ‘that’s beautiful’ (R10, 679). Or the work might be of interest from a political perspective, to which a response might be: ‘I don’t care how – how nice it looks but it’s a really good message’ (R10, 679 and 681). He thought knowledge of this, while somewhat ‘cynical’, was also ‘really valuable’ (R10, 683).

R7 commented that she was happy for her work to be re-contextualised in various ways, as she considered each counteracted the other. R15 also acknowledged that he tended to try to ‘steer clear of a kind of [...] you know, rationale’ (R15, 370) because he considered it ‘tends to stick’ (R15, 372). R6 suggested that contemporary artists fear that once a rationale has been provided for their practice, it may stick and will result in them being pigeonholed. R6 described how she felt her work was for a time, ‘categorised’ as ‘decorative art’ and ‘beauty and things like that’ (R6, 400 and 402). She thought it took her a long time to ‘escape from this’ (R6, 402), but did so by refusing ‘to be part of shows that connected with this’ even though she was only just starting out (R6, 404).

The indication is that contemporary artists hope to make their work relevant to as many contexts as possible, and for it to remain open to as many readings as possible. This would include encouraging as many diverse meanings or readings to arise from the work on as many levels as possible.

R11 acknowledged how he used bright synthetic colours and a kind of sensuousness of material ‘to engage you on a [...] level before you kind of think what it is’ (R11, 243). For R11 this seems to represent a decision to make work that is accessible on different levels, which requires the viewer to employ knowledge of different codes or rules. He described how he may have made work that is ‘quite childish and stupid’ but says that would be saying something like ‘the spirit is Something, so it will say the spirit is a café latte’ (R11, 245). Some audiences would respond by saying, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve just been reading Hegel’ (R11, 245), which meant they would ‘know what spirit means’ and would ‘relate to it on that level’ (R11, 245). He also stated that in other instances people such as collectors have bought work and – as he put it – they have ‘not really realised that there was a text in there’ (R11, 245). These examples confirm how he supposes that ‘the work kind of exists on [...] different levels’ (R11, 245), so some may recognise philosophical comment or arguments within the

work and others will relate to the work on a more purely visual level. He said that one reason to make work like this is so that everyone can embrace it.

R10 commented how he found it useful to see someone like Jeff Wall 'operate' (R10, 683) and offered a recollection of 'a dinner after a Jeff Wall private viewing' at which Wall was 'surrounded by art critics from all over the world' all of whom had 'different ideas' and had 'invested their theories in his work' (R10, 683). These included 'a Marxist', 'a formalist' and 'a history of photography writer' all of whom had written about Wall (R10, 685). During the evening they each offered somewhat contradictory interpretations of his work to which R10 claimed Wall replied to all 'you're absolutely right' (R10, 687). R10 believed Wall to have asserted that they were all correct because no artist would want to be in a position where someone says they can see something in your work, and you say 'no, it's not there' (R10, 693). R10 felt that if 'they've seen it' then 'it is there' (R10, 695).

The artist respondents argued that if one finds something meaningful in a work of contemporary art, then that opinion is valid because that is what it means to you. From such a conclusion further questions arise such as: 'Is contemporary art really so open that any interpretation of a work is as valid as the next?'

### **6.3 Contemporary art and aesthetics**

Despite openness to differing meanings, there is still some sense in which mediating discourses of aesthetics were regarded by some respondents as retaining currency (R4 and R6). Others clearly saw aesthetics as a mediating discourse within the language game (R11 and R16) and R10 considered it irrelevant. R10 and R16's comments located them in a community of practice that consciously opposed aesthetics as a discourse to mediate contemporary art practice. R16 had little familiarity with the term 'aesthetics' in discussing practice and considered it 'a form of philosophy' that he hadn't read and a 'language' that he didn't speak (R16, 156). He used the term vaguely, to describe those visual or formal aspects of art, which he considered were 'slightly secondary' (R16, 170), yet could be used to deal with ideas to some extent (R16, 178).

R10 dismissed aesthetic discourse on the basis that it had for too long monopolised what were legitimate responses to art by setting out 'what a proper statement about art would be like' (R10, 255). R10 sought to challenge the way aesthetic discourses allow us to engage with art and negotiate

meaningfulness in the contemporary arts. He suggested that a response to art such as 'he did it for the money' (R10, 257) should be as valid a statement about art as any aesthetic statement. He was aware that for an aesthete such as Wollheim such a statement would not be considered an aesthetic response as it is a 'statement about causality' (R10, 259) which would, R10 argued, 'leave it excluded from the proper discourse of art' (R10, 261). For R10 however, statements about art are nevertheless

... still valid and are still true and are still relevant and still tell us important things about art which are not aesthetic, which are not about taste, which are not about form, which are not about all these supposedly artistic things, they are about all these other things that are – That might even be the majority of the picture of art (R10, 261).

Such a comment offers an insight into R10's perspective, in which aesthetic discourses are seen to be redundant.

In a similar vein, R11 revealed a resistance to philosophers who, he considered, had dictated the way in which artists relate to aesthetics. This was evident in his response to being asked about the visual appearance of his work, in relation to comments by Peter Osborne, who had stated that visual appeal should only be reintroduced to art if one introduces a critical element to it, such as an anti-aesthetic use of aesthetic materials. To which R11 responded rather sarcastically: 'It's very nice of him to allow that (I think)' (R11, 239).

Despite dismissing aesthetes such as Osborne, who seemed to him to be trying to dictate rules for art, R11 did refer to the relevance of aesthetics to his practice. He noted the importance of affect in his work, described as the 'affective power of the artwork' (R11, 203). To have an affective power has been seen 'in terms of aesthetics' (R11, 205), but R11 argues that it is 'really a kind of the [...] sensory element, [...] than, an affect could be something like a knife has – has the affect of a cut' (R11, 207). He contends that one could therefore think about 'affect through the body, an affect could be, you know, like the colour red being really bright or something' (R11, 209). As an example he asserted that 'even Tracey Emin uses affect, affect has – her work has a kind of, has a lot of affective power' (R11, 211). R11 is interested in producing work which has a dazzling effect on you, in which 'the point was to make a kind of (vertigo) I guess [...] and to have a kind of bodily affect upon you' (R11, 273). As he is so interested in creating something new, he felt 'you have to believe in the possibility that you're going to make [...] some new world and new modes of attention' (R11, 277), which he considered maybe 'naïve', but which 'involves an act of sort of forgetting as well' (R11, 277).

In an article in #####, in 2005 R10 described R8 as being motivated by the rejection of art. R10's view was in part motivated by what he considered was R8's lack of faith in aesthetics or in art's ability to transform or to engage in politics. In the interview R10 conceived of R8 as taking the view that if 'what aesthetics says about art is what we should say about art' then 'on the basis of that, let's get rid of art because we don't want that kind of stuff in the world' (R10, 273). Instead R10 would argue R8 wants other stuff, 'like politics', or 'transformation' (R10, 275).

R10 proposed that aesthetics might be a 'false picture of art' and suggested art could be 'like Raymond Williams talks about it', such as 'a wall, a building, a road' or even 'having a union meeting' (R10, 277). If R10 were right, if all that were art, then – as he put it – art would not be 'equivalent to what aesthetes call art' (R10, 277) and if this were the case we would have an expanded idea of what art is and what we can say in response to it. R10 argued that if this were achieved we would not need to reject art as he considered R8 wished to do. He argued that it would be possible to 'transform the conditions under which we can engage with art' (R10, 279); his aim was to enable art to become a 'much broader, normal thing rather than being this kind of highfaluting aesthetic thing which is separate from everybody else' (R10, 281). He suggested if you reject art then you lose the opportunity of 'transforming art' into something 'more normal' (R10, 283).

When asked for his views on attempts to revive aesthetics, R10 responded by saying that he has not really come across 'anyone who's trying to revive aesthetics' in order 'to render art more normal' (R10, 285). He saw such a revival of aesthetics as an attempt to 'protect art from things like politics and from ordinary discourse and from popular culture... and from the untrained eye' (R10, 287).

R6 still found aesthetic, or specifically formalist, discourses an appropriate means to discuss her practice. She also protected her work from political readings, suggesting she was an artist who favoured aesthetics and wanted to protect her work from politics. She described how she didn't want to have 'flags', by which she seemed to mean she did not want to convey particular political messages, or to reflect a certain political position.

Working from a position between some of these extremes R4 was interested in reconsidering notions of form in relation to art. He considered form or visual incidents in a work add up to its syntactical makeup, and therefore felt that one ought to know how something was formally constructed if one were to understand either its meaning or its effect. He suggested that form ought to be reintroduced to

art school curricula, but acknowledged that he was not yet willing to initiate that at ##### (see 5.2). He felt it needed to be reintroduced to the critical language first, meaning that art critics needed to attribute some currency to it (R4, 262). While R4 recognised that notions of form were important, he could not be thought of as interested in a complete revival of aesthetics.

A revival of aesthetics was considered impossible in relation to R10's agenda, as he believed aesthetics would have 'to become bigger than art, or bigger than the inherited concept of art' (R10, 291). Such a role for aesthetics would have to account for a much broader 'range of pleasures and a much broader range of sensations' (R10, 291). If aesthetics were a broader concept, he suggests one would be able to speak of the aesthetic pleasure of art or of 'reading Tolstoy' and of other experiences such as 'being drunk' (R10, 291). He saw a revival of aesthetics as being 'about narrowing what art can be, and narrowing what we can say about art' (R10, 293). He argued that 'if we start talking about art in all these other [...] normal ways, then art turns into something quite normal as well' (R10, 263 and 265). His views on widening the appeal of contemporary art through making it more accessible seem to coincide with the views of Tessa Jowell, as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Jowell, 2004). However his attempts to normalise art, to make it no different from ordinary culture, would result in doing away with the complex aspect of it that Jowell valued.

Bourriaud's inclusion of the word 'aesthetics' in 'Relational Aesthetics' and the book of the same name, led R10 to conclude that 'aesthetics is the primary word for him' (R10, 303). He argued that whilst the work is relational 'because of the form', for Bourriaud 'what's important about it is its aesthetic' (R10, 307). He considered the 'relational aspect' of Bourriaud's thinking to be accidental and 'not what he really wants to talk about', as he considered that what Bourriaud really wanted to talk about is 'the aesthetic' (R10, 309 and 310). R10 asserted that Bourriaud as a critic is 'an aesthete' (R10 310) and as such is constantly looking at artists' work in terms of the aesthetic, despite being aware that 'what they're doing is social' (R10, 313). He considered that Bourriaud's aesthetic account of such work 'trivialises any social content it has' (R10, 329). It might be suggested that Bourriaud's aesthetic account of art was motivated by awareness that such practice seeks to be defined as art and to shelter under the art supercategory, which has typically been differentiated from other activities and made meaningful through aesthetic discourses. Yet it is aesthetics that was at stake when R10 contended that if Bourriaud thought 'about what these artists are doing in terms of citizenship' and 'of being part of a community' then 'the aesthetic part will disappear' (R10, 317). He suggested Bourriaud was not interested in trying to make the art more accessible by speaking about it



in this way, but was attempting to do the 'exact opposite' (R10, 319). He argued by speaking of the work in this way, 'he's just making up something for art historians to erm, (.) to contemplate' (R10, 331). R10's views relate to a comment by R16, in which he assumed that 'most people when you're approaching the work you'd think relational concepts, or relational something or relational is the most important' (R16, 167). By conflating the terms, 'most people' and 'you'd', R16 located himself within a group who, he thought, would agree with this assertion. His sense that his assumption is logical, and would be for 'most people' revealed how he takes his assumption to be universal.

Following on from the discussion of Bourriaud, R10 was asked why an artist such as Jeremy Deller would need the arts organisation Artangel to transport people from the London art world to watch *The Battle of Orgreave* (Researcher, 334). He replied:

Artists [...] need critics, you know, because [...] it's really important that your work is distributed to a wider audience than the people that see it first-hand, and [...] that it's down on record and all those kinds of things. And, you know, [...] the people living in Orgreave are not going to write reviews for *The Guardian* and *Art Monthly* and *Frieze* and so on' (R10, 314).

If R10 wants contemporary art to become more normal, less highfaluting and aesthetic, one might wonder why publicising that art through the usual art journals and organs of advertising, validation and promotion is so important to him. Perhaps he is challenging the way that the game is played but not the notion of the game in itself. He is still playing the game, but is attempting to change the rules and thereby shift how art can be defined.

It is arguable that art will not become the same as everyday culture, if it continues to be validated in contexts such as *Frieze*, *Art Monthly* or *The Guardian*. What is of interest is whether the attempts of R10 and other artists to make arts discourses less elitist actually have the desired effect. Would a person who has not gained the ability to converse in art world discourses be any more able to engage with a painting by R6 or R4 or with a re-enactment piece such one of Jeremy Deller's, or indeed a work by R10 himself. This issue will be explored in greater depth in chapter 8.

## 6.4 Cultural capital and practice

The ability to converse in the appropriate discourse is in effect, the ownership of some cultural capital, as seen in R10's conception of cultural capital as a relationship 'where someone quotes something in order to, [...] prove [...] their cultural value' (R10, 589). They do so, he argues, through

the use of or 'conspicuous use of' certain types of knowledge (R10, 591). In such a relationship he considers one would do this to 'impress other people' (R10 595). He regards this as quite different from 'using Lacan because it's the best way of thinking about certain kinds of hidden motives' (R10, 595). If Lacan is the best theory we know of, then he considered one must not refrain from using it:

Just because you're afraid that someone isn't going to understand what you're saying – you use it because it's the best knowledge, and then if someone doesn't understand it you engage in a dialogue with them in order to help them to understand what you're trying to say (R10, 597).

In this approach even if 'someone doesn't understand', you would, according to R10, have 'a different relationship with them', (R10, 601) which would ideally be 'one of trying to explain yourself, which we should do all the time anyway' (R10, 603). He therefore claimed one would then be 'using that knowledge as knowledge rather than using the knowledge as a weapon' (R10, 605).

The discussion with R10 then considered the conception of 'the philistine' as proposed by Dave Beech and John Roberts. This model conceives of 'the philistine' as a mode of attending to art in which cultural capital is not needed. R10 was unwilling to attempt give examples as to how this might be possible in practice, as he considered the 'empirical thing' as being 'kind of a problem' (R10, 199), but did eventually give an example of how he thought it might be understood. He considered that the idea was developed out of Marx's notions of researching or considering capital in the form of money. According to R10, Marx argued that in order to understand money one needed to look at those who had none. R10 recognised as a result of this that all attempts to comprehend culture begin with art, so he sought to invert this and began with what he termed 'ordinary culture' (R10, 211).

R10 outlined a rationale for the use of the phrase 'philistine'; it was an expression that had been out of circulation for a while (R10, 211), and did not have the connotations of terms such as 'mass culture', which might be considered to have 'ulterior motives to do with making money' (R10, 211). What is striking about this assertion is that R10 seemed to fail to acknowledge that contemporary art is, for many people actually tied to ulterior motives such as making money. If one were seeking to compare like with like, then mass culture and its motives might have been an appropriate term for Beech and Roberts to use. R10 did consider that art was still seen as a magical and esteemed thing, but he particularly wanted to look at the culture of those people 'whose culture is not magical, is not special, is ordinary' (R10, 207). He believed that such an approach enabled one to begin to establish

what kind of culture this 'special culture art is' (R10, 207). R10 saw the 'philistine knowledge' as that which we draw upon when looking at art, and it is, he considered, 'absolutely essential, all the time' (R10, 273). However this is not the knowledge that we 'give credit to'; instead we credit that which makes 'us different from other people' as both R10 and Bourdieu were aware (R10, 237).

R10 argued that 'you don't need any cultural capital to engage in art' (R10, 609) and that it would not depend at what 'level you engage' with it (Researcher, 610). Rather, he argued, you need cultural capital only if you want to have 'authority over' (R10, 615) art, for example if you wanted to become a 'curator at the Tate' (R10, 613). In his view, for

someone to look at an artwork and to enjoy it, to engage in it, to criticise it, to stick it on their wall, to do whatever they want to do with it, you need absolutely no cultural capital whatsoever. If you look at a work of art and you don't even know it's by Picasso, but you say, 'I like those colours', then you've engaged in it. If you look at a work of art and you say 'I've got a child like that' as in that photograph on the wall there, then you've engaged with that work (R10, 617, 619 and 621).

However, he stressed that if one only gives value 'to the kinds of responses to artworks where you say, you know, that picture reminds me of Dutch still-life painting' (R10, 625) and one considers that that is the only 'legitimate thing to say about it' or the only 'legitimate discourse you can have on it' then one would need 'cultural capital in order to engage' with art (R10, 627).

He argued that if you consider there are 'loads of other interesting things' you can say about art which 'have nothing to do with that cultural capital' then 'you don't need any cultural capital in order to engage in works of art' (R10, 627). However, despite R10's assertions he also commented, as we have seen, that it was necessary for Deller to have the art crowd present at his work the *Battle of Orgreave* because the local people were not going to write reviews for the art journals. This could be said to reaffirm that those who approach art from a philistine perspective, without the cultural capital that equips them to discuss the work, have an experience of the work different from that of those who do have cultural capital. In practices which employ more ordinary or normal materials as their media it is argued that those without cultural capital are left with less possibility of engaging with the work on a level remotely similar to that of the art experts. The gap between the art-world discourses and the experience of the philistine audience is thereby widened.

R11's argument offers an alternative perspective to that of R10, as he suggested 'a lot of what Dave [Beech] and John [Roberts] wrote was very on the [...] button' but 'it kind of only goes so far',

because he considered 'the mode of attention of the philistine always comes back to something that is socially created' (R11, 259). He believed he would be a 'candidate for philistinism' (R11, 259), as his 'first sort of [...] encounter with art' was 'through the TV' (R11, 259), because his 'family is sort of –we're not educated' (R11, 261) and he considered himself to be of a 'petit-bourgeois background' (R11, 261). Neither he nor his parents knew 'what high culture was' (R11, 259) so once he came across art he saw it as a way to 'escape the – the [...] world that was offered' to him had he followed in his parents' footsteps (R11, 261). R11 was nonetheless 'not entirely happy with [...] the philistine' because he considered 'it suggests you occupy this type of class position' (R11, 261) He elaborated upon how he conceived of the philistine as problematic, due to its becoming

a kind of over-reaching theory which [...] you then catch all these artworks and you see them as, as [...] kind of proving the theory, but they might have had – some things that have been produced might have potential for time travel for instance, I think, and I'm interested in Mirror travel from Robert Smithson and [...] Kusama, I don't know if you know Kusama' (R11, 285).

This quote from R11 was typical of the way the artists spoke which included reference to theoretical or cultural sources that presumably had enabled him to form his beliefs about practice and on which he grounds his own ideas. R11's references included the artist Robert Smithson's essay 'Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan, published in *ArtForum* in September 1969. Yet the way R11 combined these references was confusing and almost nonsensical; engaging in this type of discussion requires specific cultural capital. It also seemed far removed from a discussion of modes of attending to art practice.

R11 saw the philistine as 'indexing certain pleasures and recognising certain pleasures and repeating them', something he does not wish to be involved in (R11, 323). The problem for R11 with the notion of the philistine was that it 'can't escape [...] the kind of social constraints if you like of [...] the producer or the social that produces the philistine in those relationships' (R11, 279). He stressed that once you 'try to transport philistinism' to another cultural context it fails, as the 'philistine debate is very much rooted [...] in a very specific culture' (R11, 357). This weakness was evident in R10's argument, as he suggested that 'even people who are trained into looking at art use those kinds of philistine ordinary knowledge all the time when they look at works of art' (R10, 221). The example he gave was awareness that the painting of Myra Hindley by Marcus Harvey 'is actually of [...] a child-killer' (R10, 221); being aware of this, he believed, was 'part of its meaning' (R10, 223). He argued that one 'can't just look at it in terms of its form and [...] its use of tone and all that kind of stuff' simply because one is a 'trained in art' and cannot therefore assume it isn't necessary to 'even

know who Myra Hindley is' (R10, 225). Yet awareness of this philistine knowledge would definitely require socially-specific knowledge, that would not transcend international cultural boundaries and as such supports the flaw suggested by R11 in the philistine mode of attention. Ultimately, in response to his own practice and his use of affect on the audience, R11 declared that one

could say that's philistine, because [...] within the kind of Kanti-, within the um, debate of the philistine and [...] you could almost trace it back to Kant and taste, I guess I would be a philistine (R11, 275).

However he asserted that he 'wouldn't want to be one' (R11, 281) as his disassociation with the philistine discourse places him in a position in which he was clearly uncomfortable. R10 was known to have previously commented that R8, as a rejecter of art, saw art only as a multiplication of cultural capital rather than as a challenge to it. He was therefore asked how he thought art could offer a challenge to cultural capital to which he replied 'it's really impossible' (R10, 559). He suggested that the only way to do this was for people with 'cultural capital' not to draw 'on it' (R10, 561). He argued it was like financial capital, in which 'capital produces capital' (R10, 563). Cultural capital keeps 'reproducing itself' and so he believed the only way to challenge it is for,

artists, art critics, everyone involved in art [...] and academic institutions instead of playing that game where we're constantly drawing on our cultural capital in order to make little victories ... over each other and other the rest of the population that don't have the cultural capital, is if we don't draw on that cultural capital, is if we start actually investing in ordinary culture, and then that cultural capital starts to count for less (R10, 569 and 571).

Despite R10's intention for art to resist cultural capital, R9 spoke of how he considers certain audiences attend to art solely because it increases their cultural capital (R9, 158). As R9 understood it, collectors either buy art 'because they love art, and it's good art' or 'because it's fashionable, because they get to meet interesting people' (R9, 158).

## 6.5 Summary

A commitment to the discourses and debates that accompany contemporary art practices was seen as at least as important as a visual engagement with the work. These discourses may take many forms, including aesthetics or formalism. Both of these however refer to a visual language, or means of coding meaning (through the use of signs, for example) but this visual intelligence, according to R9, has been

disparaged. R6 continued to use such language, but could be seen as in a community divergent from that evident within the contemporary art scene in London. The discourses used to mediate contemporary art were often drawn from critical theory, yet some theorists, including Baudrillard, have denounced their association with the artists who had utilised this thinking.

Deleuze seemed to be a popular theorist in mediating contemporary art practice, because he offered a way to conceptualise 'new subjectivities' and to think in terms of affect and the new, but primarily the theory employed by contemporary artists served to establish an intellectual prestige. R9 asserted the beauty in the use of ideas in contemporary art, but also considered the use of critical theory by contemporary artists a 'dodgy' science, as much of it was intended to be beyond understanding. Instead of being comprehensible and acting to illuminate the practice it accompanied, theory acted as a prompt to the impossibility of understanding. Theory was about a kind of defeatism and despite R11's assertion that Deleuze allows for the re-consideration of the new, R9 was sure that Deleuze's primary impact was its nihilism. There was recognition that theory can be unproductive, as when R8 recalled the Sokal affair and spoke of interest in a post-theory movement.

Contemporary art was described by R1 as a discursive practice, by which she meant that each new piece of art that is produced has to be aware of and respond to the art of its predecessors. A remark by R6 revealed how she, at least, does not intend her work to convey a particular meaning. Instead of conveying a particular meaning, the artist respondents seemed to want their work to remain open to as many readings as possible.

R6 and R7 were both wary about how their work was positioned and with what it was associated, and employed different strategies to deal with this. R7 allowed her work to be re-contextualised in as many ways as possible to enable them to cancel each other out. R6 refused to show work with certain groups of artists, as she felt exposure with them would restrict her works' meaning. R10 asserted that to narrow your focus as an artist is to kill yourself off. He explained how you are addressing an audience that does not yet exist and may hope to create an audience through the process of making work. He also dismissed the assertion that contemporary artists might predetermine who their audience is and produce work solely for them. As an artist himself, he thought of his role as part of the audience for the work.

R11 suggested that his art worked on many levels, as he employed both visual affect and philosophical references. R10 particularly noted how an artist could strategically support all possible interpretations of his work.

The struggle for the control of mediating discourses was evident within this chapter. R10 challenged discourses of art such as aesthetics, in developing his notion of the philistine. R11 was less inclined to identify with the concept as he felt it was limited in its transferability and was very much socially-specific.

Aesthetics was considered irrelevant by many of the artist respondents. R10 and R11 both challenged what aesthetics made it impossible to say about art, as they considered it too limiting. R10 felt that art should become a more normal thing, and referred to Raymond Williams, who argued that culture is ordinary. R10 insisted that a revival of aesthetics was impossible unless it became a much bigger concept than art. He recognised that if this were possible, it would have to accommodate the ordinary, physical pleasure of being drunk along with such aesthetic pleasures as reading. But ultimately, he considered any revival of aesthetics to be about limiting what art can be.

There was also an acknowledgment from R10 of the need for contemporary artists to engage with two audiences. These included the work's immediate audience and also the art audience, or those who write for the journals and make the work accessible to the art audience through promotion and validation. One might argue that if R10 is aiming for art to become more normal he needs to challenge the power of the journals which fuel the elitist discourses that mediate contemporary art practice and make it meaningful.

If, as a result of what we have seen so far, one were to outline the rules of the game of making contemporary art, one might begin by suggesting that there is a need to make something that is *not obvious*. It seems that, while it is possible to develop contemporary art out of a concept, at some point a complication of that idea needs to be introduced, with the result that the meaning of the work will not reveal itself immediately. This may involve finding some way to complicate the initial idea, but one does not have to assume that one is aware of all that it is possible to read into the work. What does it mean for there to be no definitive reading of contemporary art? Do these findings suggest that objective value judgements related to contemporary practice are impossible? Whether one can make such judgements, and how the value of contemporary art becomes established, will be the focus of the next chapter. The chapter will also consider the way mediating discourse helps to spread and

establish certain values and beliefs amongst communities of practice and interest within the art world. It will consider how these beliefs and values were manifest in the interactions with the respondents, and how they might influence what contemporary art is valued, how and why.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Beliefs and Values**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter will explore the beliefs and values held by the respondents about contemporary art. It will be argued that these beliefs and values give rise to the way in which contemporary art is validated and made meaningful. Investigating the beliefs of the respondents should help to illuminate the ways in which they value contemporary art. As Bourdieu has recognised, it is 'all too obvious that the price of a picture is not determined by the sum of its production costs' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.76). The value of contemporary art is not based upon production costs, but on a work's significance in the field of possibilities defined by the players. In this chapter the term 'value' assumes two meanings: first, it denotes the inherent worth of contemporary art as an activity, and second, refers to resultant monetary worth; and it will be assumed that the establishment of the latter depends upon the former. The chapter will focus on how the respondents share and disseminate their beliefs and use them to facilitate the creation of audiences. It was suggested in chapter 6 that this was a part of the artist's role, and that audiences need to exist in order for contemporary art to be recognised for what it is. The chapter will therefore be developing Bourdieu's notion of the importance of symbolic capital and inquiring into the forms of promotion needed to create adequate audiences.

The first section of this chapter addresses the discourses of the field which express the respondents' beliefs and values and underwrite their activities. The focus is upon artists' attempts to gain control of such mediating discourses, and their attempts to challenge critics, so as to be 'beyond judgement'. The control of these discourses is crucial in the struggle that epitomises the language game, as identified in chapter 5. Section 7.1 considers the specific role of art criticism, and the respondents' views on the role that they consider criticism should play. Section 7.2 develops a discussion about the existence and role of value judgements in academic criticism and broadsheet journalism. The interviews revealed that within art journalism, there are invisible forms of control which determine which contemporary practices get validated. These will be explored in 7.3. The vital role of the dealer in establishing the value of contemporary art is acknowledged in section 7.4. In conclusion, section 7.5 addresses issues of accessibility and social agendas, along with the possibility of aligning

institutional aims of broadening access to art, with some artists' interest in its remaining exclusively aimed at a restricted audience.

## 7.1 Writing and criticism

R10 referred to R8's position as that of a 'debunker of art' (R10, 269), indicating that he was not clear that this was a genuine position, by suggesting it might merely be 'his strongest suit in a way', (R10, 271) or the 'card that he plays in order to win arguments' (R10, 273). R8 himself had reservations about the mediation and contextualisation of art by artists, including 'artists' statements' (R8, 340). He thought that artists' writing and press releases contributed to the problem and felt that if we consider the purposes of these writings, 'certain instrumental answers' which could be 'more or less cynical' could be reached (R8, 342). He felt these answers were 'more or less about career-building' (R8, 334). He spoke of art schools as places which, by introducing strategic use of such contexts, have 'made a lot of effort to help their students compete within the art world, gain attention' (R8, 398). He cited Goldsmiths as the obvious model, from where he felt artists have gained strategies derived from teaching, which included 'tactics of promoting yourself' and 'the skill to talk intelligently about your work' (R8, 402). He suggested that speaking intelligently about your work, which might at first seem an innocent skill to teach, could mean that artists learn to throw up some kind of 'plausible theoretical [...] support' for their work (R8, 404).

R8's cynicism could be due to awareness that contemporary art is valued or made meaningful through the theoretical support that is provided for it. With traditional notions of skill, quality and craft forgotten, and awareness that criticism can act as validation, artists are equipping themselves with the contemporary skills required to play the game.

R8 commented that 'one of the fundamental objections' that he had 'to art criticism and maybe more broadly to the use of criticism to support art', was 'precisely that it's used to support art' (R8, 160). He considered that much contemporary criticism is generally 'thoroughly in sympathy with the art' that it is supposedly critiquing (R8, 160) and considered it was being 'used for promotional purposes of a more or less sophisticated kind' (R8, 160).

R11 considered art criticism was 'not so interesting at the moment'. He thought *Art Monthly*, was 'kind of collapsing in on itself', as a result of its writers 'writing about each other' (R11, 173). He

considered that this led to a situation in which the journal and arts discourses 'don't make sense' to those outside the loop, or indeed to 'a lot of younger artists' (R11, 175). A crisis previously declared in art criticism and discussed by Victor Burgin, Rapheal Rubinstein, James Elkins and J J Charlesworth, (as noted in chapter 2) was recently debated in *Art Monthly* but is considered to be a global debate (see 2.6). The sentiments of this more recent discussion resonated with R8's position. This 'crisis' was referred to in the interview with R10, who responded to a question about his views on the crisis by denying the existence of either a crisis in art criticism or one in contemporary art (R10, 31). He suggested instead that

... a new generation, or old generation with new energy, has decided that the way that we've developed art criticism over the past twenty to fifteen years or whatever it is [...] doesn't – doesn't allow them to say what they want to say, or doesn't allow them to say, to speak the way that they want to speak (R10, 35).

R10 saw this as a 'cry on behalf of the aesthete within the art critic', who, he believed, now feels as though 'certain kinds of art criticism' have been closed off. As a result of this they see themselves as having been silenced (R10, 35). In his view, the assertion that these critics are prevented from writing in a particular way is ill-founded. Despite this, he added that he is 'not interested in doing the kind of things that they want to do', (R10, 37). R10's comments suggest that such critics are not literally prevented from writing in certain ways, but that their writing does not currently attract the support or recognition they seek. J J Charlesworth has himself pointed out that those who saw a crisis in art or art criticism did so because the terms they valued had lost 'the authority they once enjoyed' (Charlesworth, 2004).

R10's main criticism, of contemporary art critics was that he perceived their interest to be about writing, rather than about art. He argued that they are writing, not *about* art but '*through* it, around it, under it, over it, in any other relationship apart from *about* it, because they don't want the writing to be secondary to the art' (R10, 43). He considered such critics to be predominantly interested in the 'sculptural aspects of writing' (R10, 39). He regarded them as wanting their writing and the reading of that writing, to be a 'kind of creative experience in itself' (R10, 45).

R10 suggested that there are 'issues and debates and problems and questions which arise from making art, looking at art, organising exhibitions on art' which all need to be written about (R10, 45). Writing about art, in R10's view, is part of the process of making art: 'It comes out of and then goes back into the whole context of making and looking at art' and is part of what he terms, 'being part of that [...] art world' (R10, 45). He assumed one might 'go to a show' in which something may strike

you about the work, '... so you write about it, then you read someone's writing and you think "I'm going to make my art differently now"' (R10, 45). His conception of writing about art was based upon 'dialogue', situating it within the experience of looking at and making art (R10, 47). This suggests that the process of art criticism has become more of a dialogue between practitioners, rather than a forum for critical debate intended to assess the value of contemporary art practices.

R10 asserted that he saw his practice of writing about other artists' work as a way to express ideas which he had developed initially based on his own practice (R10, 161). He stated that he had written about notions of narrative developed in relation to his own practice, but recognised that it was necessary to 'find somebody else's work where I could attach these ideas to' (R10, 161). He considered that as an artist 'you're writing about other people's work all the time, even though you're writing about your own ideas' (R10, 165).

Comments by R11 supports R10's assertion that art writing and criticism are intended to benefit other artists in the form of a dialogue. R11 referred to John Russell's 'frozen tears project' as something he was interested in, because it 'got artists to write and they wrote sort of stories or whatever' (R11, 183). He advocated this sort of writing or project and commented that he thought there should be 'a journal or a magazine that was not [...] kind of, on any model that *Frieze* or *Art Monthly* explored but was a bit more, kind of wild' (R11, 183).

R8 has misgivings about artists having such freedom to write wild, personally inspired writing in the context of criticism, or to write about their own ideas with regard to others' practices. He has argued in the past that such writing allows artists to take promotion into their own hands (R8, 162). In #####, he talked about the numbers of interviews with artists, which he linked to the increased freedom for artists to represent their own practice. When asked about this during the interview, he acknowledged that he became 'impatient' with artist interviews because they promote

concentration on monographic subject matter again rather than a kind of attempt to come to a larger consideration of what's going on in the art world or wider culture... So there's that kind of focus again on the personality, on subjectivity, on very individual subject positions (R8, 106 and 108)

He also disagreed with artist interviews because of the 'old Marxist contention' or 'ideology of a period actually', which suggests 'that [...] you don't take at face value what people say about themselves, least of all artists I would have thought' (R8, 110).

R8 asserted that 'artists' statements about their own work then become part of that process', i.e. of self-promotion (R8, 340). He queried whether artists should engage in promoting their own practice because of the way it empowered the artists involved. R11, however, disagreed with R8's notion that artists gain power through the use and control of discourse in the mediation of their practices. He implied that he thought R8 was out of touch, by saying, 'For me ##### misses sometimes what happens within art' (R11, 117). Despite R11's assertion that 'people make a scene', he did not consider this to be 'a conscious thing' (R11, 117), implying that this was a response to R8's suggestion that contemporary artists engage in such acts consciously and quite strategically.

Another of R8's concerns was his recollection of Dietrich Dietrichson's point that 'mostly people write about their friends' (R8, 300). R1 also implied she was aware of this tendency, and raised it as a concern when asked whether the journal she edits had a particular editorial policy. She stressed that she wouldn't have even mentioned it a year ago, but was aware now that elsewhere people who have had significant involvement with a show, for example the curators or even the artists, are often left to write about it. She was keen to stress that ##### 'do not allow anyone who's had any involvement in a show to write about it' (R1, 56).

It was implied by R8 and R1 that there exists an element of insidiousness within writing about contemporary art. R1 was adamant, that whilst this may be a problem elsewhere, at ##### there is no tolerance of self-promotion or of writers writing about friends. However, in contrast to R1 and R8, R11 however acknowledged that such writing might indeed be about promotion, but that he was comfortable with this reality. He commented that when 'someone writes about their friend [...] there is probably' a 'genuine engagement and [they are] trying to promote [...] what is going on there' (R11, 117). This suggested he assumed it was the seriousness of the engagement with the work that was under scrutiny, rather than the fact that it seemed to serve as unfettered promotion and validation.

The criticisms levied at this type of writing were that it is of a 'celebratory and un-critical kind' (R8, 350). Yet despite these reservations R8 asserted that we cannot really expect any 'kind of critical contextualisation to emerge from within the art world itself, in any [...] consistent fashion', or, at least, 'not in the situation where the art world is reasonably settled and kind of content with itself' (R8, 346). He suggested we should not expect much critical discourse to emerge 'if there's a boom

going on and everyone's very happily selling, buying and selling paintings and other comodifiable works' (R8, 350).

R8's scepticism over artists' engaging in self-promotion implied that there might have been a previous model of criticism that worked differently from the current way; he suggested the following scenario:

Artists would go to art school and they would be encouraged to [...] develop their own individual talents which would then, you know, [...] if they had them, would then be recognised by the taste-makers (R8, 396)

Yet as R8 acknowledged, this is an idealistic conception of how things within the art world might work and it depends, for example, upon many uncertainties. One such uncertainty is whether the knowledge is available to enable someone to identify artists who are talented and worthy of recognition, in a contemporary sense. In order to have an ability to recognise 'valuable' artists and practices, he would argue one needs an 'overall view for the art world' (R8, 288). R8 suggested that in this model, critics would be responsible for 'identifying or supporting' or at least, 'having tendencies' (R8, 279 and 281). He considered that

... if you have a consistent view of how you feel the art world should be moving, as Greenberg for instance did, then those critical judgements kind of slot into place [...] and are supported by an overall theory which you either agree with or disagree with, but at least it kind of makes [...] internal common sense (R8, 286).

He recognised that critics who achieve this are few and far between, and mentioned Benjamin Buchloh as one of the rare few around at present. R3 had an alternative perspective on the ideal put forward by R8, and suggested that the notion of having an overarching view of the art world within which judgments about art could slot into place, was 'absolutely inconceivable' (R3, 198). In R3's opinion this would not be possible, unless – as R8 had suggested – one were in a position such as the academic one which Benjamin Buchloh inhabits, which allows a degree of freedom, as he is not reliant upon his critical writing for his living.

There was, however, a recognition by R3 that you cannot hope for a world full of academics writing art criticism, because realistically, as he put it, 'It's not going to happen' (R3, 200). So whilst he believes R8 is correct in his view that if anyone has the freedom to act in this way it is Buchloh, R3 asserted that this freedom is not available to all. He was able to identify only a few others whom he

feels have acquired some degree of freedom, including the critic for the *New Yorker*, Peter Schjeldahl.

## 7.2 Value judgements

When asked who accords value to contemporary art practice, R9 stated that in the current, neo-conceptualist and 'post-Duchampian [...] environment' value is 'contextual', meaning that the process involves the conferral of power (R9, 132). He believed this was the opposite of more craft-based kinds of art, which he described as a 'less subjectively immeasurable' kind of art, to which value is accorded by 'general consensus' (R9, 132). This consensus would comprise the views of 'collectors, dealers, critics, the public' (R9, 134), whom he defined as the 'educated middle class' (R9, 136).

R8 suggested that art criticism should play a greater role in the attribution of value to contemporary art than it currently does. He considered that 'non-academic and populist art criticism' tended to be subjective and included value judgements as opposed to academic criticism, which he regards as lacking in such judgements (R8, 304).

There were thought to be differences between the nature of criticism in art journals and magazines and that within the national press, and also between the artists who depended upon these varying approaches for approbation and validation. R6 commented that she would rather have others write about her work than speak about it herself, as she was not 'theoretical at all' herself (R6, 322). When asked which critics she felt understood her aims, she named Roberta Smith, Adrian Searle and the Brazilian Paulo Herkenhoff.

Both R6's favoured critics, Smith and Searle, write for national newspapers rather than academic journals, and R8's opinion was that their assertions carry little weight. Searle's writing was seen by R8 typically to reflect

Non-academic and populist art criticism which tends to be highly subjective and overtly subjective and full of value judgements but that those value judgements are only sort of left in the air<sup>19</sup> (R8, 304 and 306).

R8 argued that this was partly because Searle does not relate his opinions to any larger art world structures; in fact he considered Searle not to be exploring anything beyond 'his own personal reactions' (R8, 306).

R8 did not comment on the criticism of Smith, but Rapheal Rubenstein's remarks illuminate Smith's approach. He considers Smith to be one of only two critics who have escaped delegitimisation and the educational temptation<sup>20</sup> (Rubenstein, 2003). He also suggested that both Saltz and Smith, who happen to be husband and wife, 'take judgement-making very seriously' (Rubenstein, 2003). Rubenstein added that Smith exhibits a willingness to tackle institutions and make judgements on their undertakings, and cited Smith's 'recent critique of the Whitney' in support of this assertion (Rubenstein, 2003).

As has been noted, the two critics whom R6 favoured wrote for national newspapers, rather than art journals. This could differentiate her from the contexts in which the work of the artists R10 or R11 was received and validated. Rubenstein's discussion of the art critic Roberta Smith, to whom he referred as taking value judgements very seriously, could be said to support R8's assertion that those writing in the national press are more willing to make explicit value judgements.

The respondent R3 himself is an arts journalist for a UK national broadsheet and for a number of professional art journals. He suggested that those who write for national newspapers ought to have integrity and freedom, but recognised they are 'quite obviously tied in some way because you sort of have to cover the big shows' (R3, 332). He also recognised that to enable this, one would need to 'keep out of the pockets of the galleries' (R3, 206). In order to elaborate on what was meant by this comment, R3 explained how he 'heard something quite astonishing':

A critic who works for a national newspaper [...] wrote a very good review of a prominent, [...] artist's work, and the gallery then rang up the critic and said, we like what you wrote, thank you very much [...] we'd like to quote you on the back of our book (R3, 208).

The problem R3 saw with this was that the reviewer agreed, but on condition that she would get '£100 for it' (R3, 210). R3 considered this 'hideously corrupt', because he felt one could, 'just then

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<sup>20</sup> The other is Jerry Saltz of the *Village Voice*.



go round picking off, picking off people's [shows to review] who, who are likely to want to use your quotes to back their work, and then charging them money to do so' (R3, 212 and 214).

In contrast to such overt validations, R8 was disconcerted with academic art criticism, because he considered it contains fewer 'value judgements generally' (R8, 294) and those it does contain are of a 'very veiled kind' (R8, 296). Unlike critics from national newspaper, whose remarks can be used as plaudits, in academic criticism, R8 argued, what was most important was being written about. Inclusion in itself works as a 'form of validation' (R8, 296). He found this the more frustrating because, as was emphasised previously, he believed 'people mostly write about their friends' (R8, 300). A lack of value judgements was replaced therefore, in his view, by promotional writing written by contemporary artists' friends.

R3 believed 'there is space' for proper criticism of contemporary art in some instances, but not 'necessarily in certain magazines' (R3, 98). In some contemporary art journals, he thought it was possible you might 'never ...read a bad word about anybody' (R3, 98).

These views are similar to those of R8, with both asserting that merely being included in certain journals acted as validation of one's practice. However, R3 recognised that not all art journals carry the same weight, instead noting that 'there is prestige value for some of them' such as '*Art Forum* [...], and *Frieze* to a lesser extent' (R3, 12). According to him these journals have become 'talking shops' (R3, 12). R9 also thought that mere inclusion of one's name and discussion of one's practice within certain journals constituted some sort of 'validation' (R9, 203).

The interviews also revealed how it might be difficult for these magazines to offer critical value judgements as opposed to mere validation. R3 suggested that magazines such as *Frieze* simply do not exist to be critical (R3, 386). Instead, he argued, they exist 'to showcase people' (R3, 388). The magazines are there to 'talk about the work of artists they feel is of value' (R3, 140). It is interesting that R3 a critic by profession, employs the term 'they'. It is assumed he is referring to art journal editors. In a later remark he suggested that the journals' validations seem to 'follow the whims of the editors' (R3, 430). So it is the journal editors, rather than the critics, who have the power to pass judgement on what is of value within the field.

In summary, the respondents' views suggested a perspective which saw a 'prestige value' (R3, 12) associated with being written about in certain art journals. In Britain specifically, the art journal

*Frieze* was referred to on a number of occasions as a context in which this prestige and validation could be secured.

### 7.3 Forms of Control

R3 revealed how he understood that ‘the galleries’ have ‘some sort of control over the [...] magazines which isn’t quite visible’ (R3, 186). He made it clear that he considered the worst case as when money is accepted directly for a gallery’s use of a critics comments as an ‘approbation’ (R3, 226). He also described working relationships between galleries and reviewers and how, as he put it, ‘galleries go out and pick off’ all ‘the value journalists’ (R3, 216). He believed this happened at Camden Arts Centre, which had just reopened and had been publishing ‘little pamphlets [...] introducing the artists’ written by some of these ‘value journalists’ (R3, 216). He asserted these critics would include writers like Jennifer Higgie, Martin Herbert and Sally O’Reilly.

There also appear to be ties between galleries who advertise in particular magazines and those galleries whose shows are reviewed. R3 asserted that galleries will advertise in a magazine’s listings page and that the magazine will in turn continue to review what that gallery shows, no matter whether it is thought to be an important gallery or artist or not. R3 stated that ‘this happens all the time’, referring particularly to *ArtForum*, who he believed sent Barry Swabsky around to ‘all of these galleries ticking off [...] the advertisers’. As he stressed, this is not ‘because the artist has any worth but because the gallery advertises, pays them a fair bit of money’ (R3, 116 and 118). R3 felt that if this was happening in London it could be happening in Chicago, in Los Angeles and other places too (R3, 120).

R1 was keen to make clear that ##### does not engage in this practice. She stressed that while they have an annual contract with the ##### Gallery for advertising, they do not engage in promotion of the ##### Gallery as a result of this contract. She spoke of how they do not ‘get any special treatment’ (R1, 120), and emphasised that R14 ‘complains like everyone else’ (R1, 122). She considered this is quite right, and declared that ‘The minute he stops we’re doing something wrong’ (R1, 124). The assumption from the gallery on the other hand is, as was exemplified by R14’s hopefully good-humoured remark, that if that is the case ‘we should stop advertising there’ (R14, 300).

As well as providing an understanding of the working relationships between galleries and art journals, R3 asserted that 'the magazines have even more control over the journalists which isn't quite visible' (R3, 186). He considered himself 'bought', to some degree, by the magazines he writes for (R3, 336) and gave examples of how this might affect what he writes. For instance, he was asked to review an artist and told he was to receive a 'good wage' (R3, 336). Because of the nature of the magazine and the nature of the request, R3 knew the editors wanted his writing to be positive. He stressed that they clearly seemed to 'like this artist' (R3, 340). However, because of his dislike of the artist's work, the review that he returned to them was 'very lukewarm' and 'damned him with feint praise' (R3, 344 and 346). This, R3 suggested, was the only way to negotiate such an awkward situation. R3 stressed that the format of most contemporary art journals encourages critics to, 'just promote' the artists they write about (R3, 396) but Art Monthly was seen as one of the only contexts in which writers are given, 'total freedom' (R3, 436).

In most instances contemporary arts journalism and the coverage of artists' practices seems to come down to what R3 described as 'the whims of the editors' (R3, 430). These are thought to determine what, and whose work, is included in the journals and thus validated and promoted. He also suggested it is clearly apparent that contemporary journals they 'have 'house styles' (R3, 232). This may initially suggest they are restricted to 'just their mates' (R3, 236) and this might be true, 'to an extent' (R3, 236).

It seems somewhat contradictory that while R3 refuted the notion that house styles and inclusion were based upon friendships, he later acknowledged that familiarity with the editors often results in more frequent coverage of one's own art practice. He recalled a personal experience in which he was asked to review a show that seemed to have received 'tons of coverage in the magazine over a period of time', and whose creator he subsequently recognised as 'a friend of the editor' (R3, 438). Information available in the public domain suggests that friendships and relationships do impact on journal coverage of an artist's practice even those who deny that this practice occurs.

## **7.4 Dealers and persuasion**

These friendships and relationships seem to reflect what R14 described as an 'international inner core of the art world' (R14, 120), which is where he considered 'contemporary judgement is made' (R14, 124). He included himself among the members of this inner core, which he also referred to as 'the international family' (R14, 116). It was difficult to determine who comprised this family or core,

apart from R14, or what criteria they might use to determine what contemporary practice is valuable. According to him, there is the possibility of a 'conflict of judgement' and/or of a 'conflict of opinion' within the inner core (R14, 126 and 128). But ultimately, he believed it wise to go with the opinion of those he respected; as he stated,

If the people who are sceptical about a group of artists or a movement are [...] the ones you respect then obviously [...] and you, you are s- thinking the same thing, then [...] clearly you've probably got it right (R14, 130 and 132).

R14 undoubtedly had faith in the views of those he respected, and suggested they shared an understanding of how contemporary art should be valued. Perhaps this understanding would be based upon shared knowledge or beliefs. As well as asserting that this core group has an ability to discern valuable art, R14 argued that they are capable of detecting less successful work. This could often be achieved, in his view, by attending to the declarations of groups whose views oppose those of the international 'family'. He stated that if 'the people who you don't respect think it's fabulous' and 'you don't respect what they are thinking, or what they are saying, it's probably, ultimately it's going to be wrong, but it'll fly for a few years on the strength of that' (R14, 136).

Ultimately, then, R14 believed that while other groups within the art world had the ability to identify art that would be successful for 'a few years', he posited that the group he belonged to had the ability to identify the timeless, the classic and the all-time great artists. He suggested that the ##### Gallery is a dependable classic brand, which strives to sell work that will stand the test of time. The implication of R14's remarks is that his brand exists in contrast to the younger market, in which one may have to take more of a risk, and hope what one has bought is going to retain its value. Bourdieu, too, suggested that the art dealer can be thought of as a 'trademark', which is perceived with 'more or less clarity' by clients or customers (Bourdieu, 1993, p.78).

Deciding which dealer to purchase from is an important part of buying contemporary art. As R9 recognised, a dealer is a label. He stressed that just as 'people will buy clothes because [they have] a label on' in contemporary art 'the dealer is, it's a bit like a label' (R9, 166). Purchasing from certain dealers, or labels, 'inspires confidence, or prestige, [in] people thinking of purchasing art' (R9, 170).

If the ##### Gallery is a dependable brand which seeks to identify work that will stand the test of time, how might R14 achieve this? What knowledge might he draw upon to identify timeless art? This question is worth further consideration, particularly in light of R14's admission during the

interview that he had ‘a great moment of understanding’ (R14, 226) when he visited the Beuys retrospective held at the Tate earlier this year.<sup>21</sup>

If R14 were among a privileged elite few, able to identify valuable art, it would follow that these people would be astute enough to be able to identify and comprehend the meaning of contemporary art ahead of others. However, R14’s comments openly expose the reality that he has spent what ‘must be at least thirty-five years’ ‘knowing this work’ (R14, 224) by Beuys, yet only in 2005 was he able to say ‘I know what this is about now’ (R14, 228). He asserted that he ‘never understood Beuys before’ (R14, 228).

R14’s remarks are insightful because although he has been championing conceptual art for more than thirty years, he has only recently grasped the work of Beuys, arguably one of the most influential artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A defence of R14’s position could be that great art continues to reveal insights and intricacies over prolonged periods of time, but one might have assumed a dealer of such stature would have been able to grasp such important work far sooner than his comments suggest. If one reads R14’s comment as revealing that he lacks some of the expertise he lays claim to, one can see why R9 may assert that ‘dealers are manipulators’ (R9, 140).

R1 also described the role of the dealer as ‘hugely important’, and stressed that she ‘personally find[s] that dealers are much, much weirder than artists’ (R1, 372). By this she meant that ‘so many of [...] the romantic clichés about artists are actually not applicable to artists’ but she considered they are applicable to dealers (R1, 376). This was because

... a lot of them are failed artists and they almost hate the artists they represent, it’s a strange love—hate relationship, almost, some [...] dealers want to be the artists they represent, some are really comfortable running a big business, or a small shop (R1, 376).

She noted that certain artists may end up ‘showing with a gallery who does, ‘scuse my language, fuck artists over’ (R1, 354), or that there may be artists who are not ‘strong enough to stand up to a dealer’ (R1, 356). She thought it unhelpful when dealers say ‘do more of the same’ (R1, 382). But she does know of dealers, ‘as rare as hens’ teeth’ (R1, 386) whom

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<sup>21</sup> The exhibition ran from the 5<sup>th</sup> of February to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2005.

... everybody dreams of, who [are] the one[s] who can sell work, place it, not just sell it, but place it well, and with whom you can have a marvellous dialogue about your art, who'll support you when you're not being supported critically perhaps, when your art's taking a different direction (R1, 384).

Ultimately, however, dealers are businessmen or -women, and as R1 said, they 'do business well' (R1, 378). R9 saw the art market in which these dealers work as 'pure, it's capitalism in its purest form' (R9, 154). He thinks of it as a

very interesting example of pure capitalism. And, where, basically where money rules and the dealer [...] encourages, solicits, manipulates, persuades, introduces people with money to art and the idea of buying it (R9, 156).

R9 argued that there are 'very particular conventions and, [...] ways of proceeding when it comes to selling art' (R9, 164). He considered it 'not an easy thing to do, sell contemporary art' particularly 'New contemporary art', which he thought requires those involved to have 'evolved very sophisticated ways of doing it' (R9, 164). This process involves the dealer having premises, which R9 asserted, '... fundamentally, is a shop' (R9, 162).

Acknowledgement that commercial galleries are shops leads one more easily to comprehend R9's remark about capitalism in its purest form (R9, 154). R1 describes herself and the approach taken by the journal she edits as 'never shying away from dealing with the market' (R1, 28), and 'quite critically' (R1, 30). This is because she also sees the market as a 'major, major factor' (R1, 28).

The respondents' responses to the need for contemporary artists to market and promote themselves were inevitably influenced by their political leanings. This is clearly exemplified by the different attitudes towards artists' interviews held by R8 and R1. R8, a self proclaimed Marxist, thought interviews perpetuate the celebrity status of the artist, by focusing on a 'monolithic subject' (R8, 106). R1, who defines herself, and the journal she edits, as having a 'left-wing bias' but not a Marxist one, readily accepts artists' interviews as 'too important a primary source' of information about contemporary artists and their practices to ignore (R1, 66). R1 and R8 both trained as art historians, which suggests it is their political stance that help determine their attitudes toward artists' interviews and self-promotion rather than training or occupations.

R14 thought contemporary artists 'behave as if they're not interested' in money (R14, 42), but, while they may act as though their practice has 'really nothing to do with money', he notes that when you

mention money to artists, 'their eyes light up' (R14, 38). R14 insisted they are usually 'very delighted to see money thrown in their direction' (R14, 40). Despite this, he suggested that artists retain a demeanour which implies they 'are above, we are above this, [...] we are, you know, [...] we are on a great mission searching for our own holy grails' (R14, 46). This attitude could be related to Bourdieu's idea that the cultural field, in its entirety, is based upon just such a disavowal of economic interests (see 3.2)

R14's tone suggested that he considered the artist's relationship to money to be somewhat surprising or peculiar. Yet it could be argued that he himself, as a dealer, has to maintain a certain degree of disinterestedness to mask his own self-interest, just as these artists are doing. There is some evidence that culture has traditionally been seen as rebellion or resistance to capitalism. Terry Eagleton signalled that 'culture has traditionally signified almost the opposite of capitalism', suggesting that the relations of artists to money was not unpredictable (Eagleton, 2004, p.24). However, awareness of the artist's traditional opposition to capitalism is an interesting issue to take forward into chapter 8, in light of the contemporary artist's employment of advertising, promotional and marketing strategies.

## **7.5 Accessibility and agendas**

Before exploring that (potential) contradiction, governing principles were also seen to inform other agendas. The respondent R9 considered that democratic agendas for art to be an 'ancient' or 'old problem' and he asserted that 'the democratic principle is an obstacle to getting things done' (R9, 254). He also commented that 'in fascist countries things, trains run on time' (R9, 254). His position was to consider that trying to 'make things [...] accessible and fun and understandable' is 'not necessarily what art's about' (R9, 254). His comments suggested that art ought to remain difficult, protected from comprehension by the masses. He referred to David Bachelor's writing in *Frieze* magazine, which defends 'the need for art to be difficult' (R9, 274).

Despite his interest in art's remaining difficult (see 5.2), R9 was aware that 'the government [...] wants institutions to be accountable for the money that they're receiving, and [...] seen to be a benefit to the wider community not just to [a][...] privileged elite (R9, 264).

Contemporary art is often valued, it seems, for how it can transform or educate its viewers. The personal essay by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, entitled 'Government and the Value of Culture', encompasses just such a view. Jowell recognised that it is

the 'lack of mass demand that is mocked as the criterion for subsidy', (2004, p.4)<sup>22</sup> but states that it is not enough to base funding decisions upon subjective value judgements. Instead, she is aware of the need to '... find a way to demonstrate the personal value added which comes from engagement with complex art – "culture" in my defined sense' (2004, p.5). This statement seems questionable if those within the art world are not able to explain how and why certain art is valued or made meaningful. In referring to the important reasons for 'grappling with great art in any medium', Jowell refers to the benefit that can be gained in the form of a 'sense to add to those of touch, taste, smell, sound and sight' (2004, p.6). Grappling with 'complexity' is therefore assumed to be almost 'always the necessary condition of access to that enriching sixth sense' (2004, p.6), and is therefore assumed to be a 'value of what this exposure to culture gives' its audiences (Jowell, 2004, p.14). She argues that this may stay with a person 'for the rest of their lives' and sees complex culture as a way to encourage society to develop its aspirations. The experiences she describes are the reasons why she considers it to be valuable.

In contrast to this, comments made by R16 and R10 suggested that they did wish their work to be aspirational and educational. However the language R16 used, specifically in the following comment suggests these aspirations are sometimes influenced by the commissioning body. In reference to a project in which a young man accused him of trying to educate him, R16 stated,

There was an education element to it, it was definitely there, it was definitely there in the commission, that's what they wanted, people wanted to educate the youth (R16, 540).

R16's use of the terms 'they' and 'people' indicates that the wish to produce art intended to educate, is beyond just his own desire. He locates the responsibility for this aim with the commissioners of the work. In so doing R16 asserts the importance of art outcomes acting in an educational way for those who fund such contemporary art practice.

Another example of this was evident in his previous work, particularly a piece that was intended to 'educate people how to use a city' (R16, 500). R16's descriptions of his objectives seem to suggest he hopes to 'educate' his viewers in 'a certain way' (R16, 512). His description of his aims seems somewhat strange, as he also said 'It's very manipulative [...] and I think that's [...] undervalued in art' (R16, 514). When asked what he meant by this, he responded by saying:

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<sup>22</sup> From: [http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive\\_2004/Government\\_Value\\_of\\_Culture.htm](http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2004/Government_Value_of_Culture.htm)



Artists could be more manipulative, they could make more use of [...] the skills that they may have, or the ideas, that they could manipulate on a larger scale, they could affect people on a larger scale (R16, 516).

The ##### exhibition was a project R16 intended to have 'an educational aspect to it'. He wanted to 'come up with a marketing campaign for improving the [...] use of art in – across the UK' (R16, 536). Ultimately, he recognises, this is something which is 'impossible to do' (R16, 536). He intended the exhibition to 'tangentially sort of play off that idea', and to 'prove why art is so important to society, and that that could be an educative tool' (R16, 536). R16 hoped the show would 'educate the audience' for Wolverhampton University and the Wolverhampton gallery but he acknowledged this was not a realistic aim as he considered, that an exhibition 'at Wolverhampton art gallery just isn't going to educate enough people' (R16, 538). He considered 'you've got much more chance if you did it at [...] Tate Modern or you set up something with the Open University or something like that' (R16, 538). Accordingly, to achieve those aims he felt one would need to 'set up something that was about mass media' as he considered it had 'to be on that level really' (R16, 538).

One could tentatively suggest that there are perhaps two ways of approaching popularity and accessibility in contemporary art. Both of these relate to differing ways of or reasons for valuing art and culture. The first way might assume that art ought to remain difficult, and the second might uphold the view that art should become more accessible, and in so doing should be educational, aspirational, and a transformative experience for the viewer.

It appears that the values of those who financially support practice become embedded within the practices of the artists they fund. The main source of funding for an artist such as R16 comes via the Arts Council. His values and beliefs could be said to be more in line with the government's agenda than were those of some of the other artist respondents, particularly those whose practices are supported by the commercial market. It could be suggested that accessibility and therefore popularisation would, as he was well aware, in turn result in securing him greater access to funding. This aim is revealed by R16's remark: 'If you could convince the whole country to be interested in contemporary art, then more taxpayers' money will be spent on art' (R16, 686). This, he believes, is a 'scene position' (R16, 684), as the 'more people would invest in art' (R16, 684) the 'more art we could all make', the 'more time' and 'the more people we could work with' would make 'the scene' (R16, 688).

Grant Kester has presented an argument which suggests that publicly funded contemporary art practice is caught up in New Labour's values and strategies (Kester, 2004). In these values and strategies art is conceived as a means to educate and to raise the aspirations of its viewers. It seems, therefore, that one's beliefs about whether art should be difficult or accessible may differ according to the rules by which one is playing the game and the objectives one is seeking.

There are problems associated with artists' attempts to educate and illuminate others, as some of the remarks by R16 revealed. An example of these was his comment that those in the communities for which the work is made, 'should not worry' that they are paying 'a hundred thousand [pounds]' out of your taxpayers' money, 'to make an art project' because they need to recognise how 'little a hundred thousand pounds is' (R16, 706). According to R16 'It's, it's nothing, (a hundred thousand [pounds]) if you are aware 'how much money is moving around the country' (R16, 708). The ability to recognise this reality was thought to be 'an education thing' according to R16 (R16, 706). Yet it might be argued that the educational aspect needed to result from R16's recognising that, for these communities, one hundred thousand pounds might be considered a lot of money. R16 contested that it should be thought about '... more in terms of our society should be able to [...] produce things at a whim'; he argued:

We should be able to[...] risk anything (at any time) because we're all so sophisticated, our society is able to earn and produce and come up with new ideas all the time, and we should let people be able to make ideas all the time, that's what makes us a healthy society (R16, 708).

It could be argued that in contrast to this artists should produce work that really engages these deprived communities by recognising their realities, rather than attempting to impose another reality upon them. The need to make such groups recognise the artist's reality was described by R16 in educational terms, suggesting he thought that what he could reveal to these groups, was how things really are. It could be argued that this discounts the social groups' own views and values, and shows that R16 sought to replace them with his own. As a result of these remarks and the exposure of such views, questions were asked in the interview with R10 about how as an artist one may avoid such a sense of superiority over the social group with which one is working.

The avant garde has been seen as 'having a cultural superiority complex' (Beech, 2004), which R10 did not think 'the current crop of socially orientated artists' exhibited (Researcher, 514). He was asked how as an artist he might 'encourage people to transform themselves' without 'coming across

as having some sense of superiority' (Researcher, 514 and 516). In response to this R10 recalled a project in which he himself went into schools as an artist. He stated that at first he 'didn't want to go to the schools to meet the kids because' he 'didn't want to be "The Artist" coming to the school' (R10, 517). This was because as the artist, he figures,

... you have a certain role, and you have a certain cultural esteem because you're an artist and that's a special thing and they don't know any artists, but they know that artists, you know, have shows in museums and they get on TV and they go in magazines and all that kind of stuff, and they think it's some kind of special thing (R10, 519).

So initially R10 was 'very against the idea of going in as an artist' (R10, 519). Yet he recognised that he needed to do the project himself, so he did go into the school and reasoned 'so long as I don't act like an artist, or like what they think an artist is, then I can quite quickly get rid of all of those preconceptions about the artist being special' (R10, 519). Therefore though his superior status as an artist was not actually removed, he considered that 'not having a sense of superiority is a kind of [...] it's a deliberate act' or became a deliberate act in this instance (R10, 525).

R10's notion of the artist's superiority was reiterated in R16's comments, when he stated: 'So, it's only – it [...] comes down to superiority, it's just that I've got better ideas than somebody else' (R16, 750). This notion of the artist as culturally superior is something that will be taken forward as a theme to explore in chapter 8, where it will be argued that this attitude has an affinity with Thierry de Duve's triad 'attitude–practice–deconstruction'.

A notion was evident in the respondents' remarks that art and the artist were valued because of an ability to 'present information that we already [...] are kind [...] almost subconsciously aware of that is thought to need 'that sort of slight [...] emphasis or refocusing for you to become conscious of it' (R15, 62). R15 supposed that this involved 'dragging the information from your subconscious into your consciousness' (R15, 62). This view suggests that the respondents saw the role of the artist as about enlightening his or her audiences or encouraging them to see things in a new light.

This attitude also seems to permeate the view that contemporary art can enable its audiences somehow to transform themselves. As R10 stated: 'The viewer [...] is] presumed to be, I guess, some sort of active self-transforming subject in the sense that you know, I can, I transform myself by looking at other things' (R10, 459).

R10 was asked to comment upon R16's intention to deconstruct notions of identity and multiculturalism within a group he was working with. It was suggested to R10 that he had, 'pulled apart their logo' and 'basically pulled apart their understanding of why they were in this group' (Researcher, 394 and 396). To this R10 commented that 'in principle it sounds like R16 [...] was behaving badly', but he suggested that this approach might have been warranted at the time as it 'might be that there was a certain culture there that was so complacent that there was no way he could talk it out of it except with a shock' (R10, 407). He considered shock to be a 'perfectly legitimate artistic technique' (R10, 409). He also remarked that the artist has a 'whole range of techniques available' or a 'range of positions you can take' but one wouldn't want to 'restrict the role of the artist working socially to having to be [...] kind, considerate, benevolent' (R10, 405). The respondent's views suggested that the artist acts to make more apparent things which occur in society anyway, and does so with the intention of transforming its audiences. However, once combined with remarks such as R10's, on the possible existence of a 'culture of complacency', and notions of the superiority of the artist, one may question whether the respondents, and contemporary artists more generally, consider themselves to inhabit a higher state of awareness which they seek to impart to society.

It was suggested to R10 that within the literature, with specific relation to socially engaged art, Miwon Kwon spoke of artists seeking to 'almost shock, raise questions, unsettle viewers and make them uncomfortable about who they are' (2002, p.146). She warns that such approaches may (as is detailed in question 7, in Appendix 4), 'affirm rather than disturb the viewer's sense of self, and leave them victimised yet resilient' (Researcher, 414). A psychotherapist's perspective was also shared with R10, which suggested that one

... can't shock somebody into reconsidering who they are and their identity and those kind of things [...], we spend our entire lifetimes building up a sense of who we are and, um, if you shock somebody in that way then you're not offering them an alternative, they need to have built, built up some sense of an alternative before they'll be willing to budge on the things that they believe in [...] so in a sense [...] it'll probably just reaffirm who they are and they'll probably just come back quite defensive (Researcher, 418).

R10 replied to both perspectives by commenting that they sounded 'a bit mechanistic' (R10, 419), by which, he stated, he meant it 'sounds like a binary opposition' as you have 'shock and you've got affirm' (R10, 423). He argued if that were 'true, if we only had those two possibilities as artists then we'd run out of things to do pretty quickly' (R10, 425). This theme will be taken forward and developed in chapter 8.

The involvement of the public in socially engaged art was also called into question in the interview with R10, in reference to the work of Jeremy Deller, specifically *The Battle of Orgreave*. R10 responded by stating that not 'everything he did as part of *The Battle of Orgreave* [...] was only about you know, [...] the community of Orgreave [...] and the miners' (R10, 367). R10 contended that artists need not be too concerned with the utilisation of communities in art, or one would get into a 'hypocritical situation'. He argued it was all right for

Frank Auerbach to do what the fuck he likes with a paintbrush [...] but as soon as you start working with the public then you've got, then you can have no ulterior motives, you can have no interest in anything else other than the people that you're working with, um, I mean, social workers don't even do that, you know' (R10, 367).

He stressed that just as 'social workers have got their own reasons for doing what they do which [are] not just about caring for people', artists should not have to 'give up everything just because they've decided that they don't want to make art objects [...] only with the art world in mind, you know' (R10, 369). He argued that Deller was 'talking in two languages at the same time' (R10, 375) by 'making a piece of work that is genuinely [...] caring about the people of Orgreave' and also addressing an art audience (R10, 375). That he has those two things to consider does not mean, as R10 suggested, that 'he's giving any less attention to the people of Orgreave'. As R10 considered, 'You can do that absolutely perfectly, make no mistakes and still have other things on your mind' (R10, 379).

## 7.6 Summary

The respondents for this study showed a range of perspectives on the ways in which artists have sought to control the discourses that are understood to mediate art practice. It was understood that the impetus for this might have derived from the views of the artist Joseph Kosuth, who sought to encourage artists to mediate their own practices. A way of perceiving the struggle over discourses and the struggles between art critics and artists was offered by one of the respondents with particular reference to the 1980s. However he viewed that criticism as having become re-professionalised during the 1980s, because of the way critics deployed critical theory; yet this was challenged by the perspective of R4, who offered a contrasting view to R10's view of artists as unable to talk the talk of critical theory, thus excluding themselves from engaging in the mediation and consecration of

practice. R4 claimed for himself part of the responsibility for the introduction of such critical theory references, into artists' discourses in the New York scene.

Further support for the notion that the artists of the period were not excluded from these mediating discourses came from the discussion of the artist Jeff Koons, offered by Douglas Coupland. It could therefore be suggested that artists are certainly strategic in the way they present themselves and their work through discourse, and that they consider the way use of certain forms of discourse will impact on the communities of interest that surround them. Another model comes from the artist respondents who expressed a wish to be entirely beyond judgement, thus suggesting the will to maintain a degree of power of consecration for the artists.

An assertion was made by R8 that contemporary artists seek to mediate their own practices as part of self-promotion and in the process of career-building. R8, an art historian, had no trust in artists' strategies, and considered artists' interviews to focus too specifically on monolithic subject matter. The artist R11 asserted a position contrasting with that; he considered artists do not gain power through mediating their own practices. The artist R10 also asserted that he considered art criticism and writing to be a context for dialogue about practice, for artists, rather than for those who have little interest in art to demonstrate their writing skills. R10 and R11 both seemed to advocate a more discursive form of writing about practice, possibly based on artists' stories.

R8's other concerns regarding contemporary art writing echo Dietrich Dietrichson's point that 'mostly people write about their friends' (R8, 300). The editor of #####, R1, asserted her familiarity with this as a trend, and condemned it. The artist R11 was less concerned about the tendency for artists to write about and to promote friends' practices, which he saw as a genuine engagement with their work. There was however an acknowledgement by R8 that one could not really expect any critical reflections to arise from within the discipline when things are ticking over so comfortably in a commercial sense. He also suggested that in order for any critic to pass judgement on what was valuable within the field, an overall view of the possibilities within that field would be necessary. R3 denounced the possibility of such a notion, which he described as inconceivable, unless all art criticism were to be written by academics.

R8's antipathy toward the self-promotional methods employed by contemporary artists suggests he envisages that there once was, or could be, an alternative. He implies that in such a model, success may be granted to 'talented artists' who develop their talents, and are then recognised by the

tastemakers. Such a model sounds akin to that described by R14, in which he was in part responsible for identifying talented artists, and artists were not encouraged to take promotion and marketing into their own hands to any great extent.

This chapter has considered the differences in the use of value judgements within academic art criticism and arts criticism in the national press. R8 argued that academic art criticism contains fewer overt and more veiled value judgements than does art criticism in the national press. Within academic art criticism there was thought to be a prestige value in being spoken of, with inclusion in certain journals alone acting as validation. In contrast to this, national newspaper coverage of art was described as highly subjective and full of overt value judgements. R3 described it as difficult for national arts journalists to stay out of the pockets of galleries, and to not accept money for use of their affirmations as plaudits. Both of the critics favoured by R6, the artist respondent, write for national papers, the writing of one of whom was subject to criticism by R8. This differentiated her from a number of the other artist respondents whose work is mostly written about or validated in professional art journals. In professional art journals, R3 considered it was often unlikely one would hear a bad word about anyone. He argued that these journals did not really exist to be critical but to showcase people. R3 revealed how the galleries have a control over art journals that is not quite visible, just as the journals have some control of the critics whom they employ. Galleries were thought to pay for advertising with an expectation of receiving reviews of shows they exhibit, no matter their value or importance. R3 described how he could be bought by the magazines for which he writes. For example, he would be asked to write a review of an artist he did not rate highly yet who might be a friend of the editor. He might then write something not exactly critical, but clearly lukewarm. The power of the editor to include within their journal the work of artists with whom they have friendships should not be underestimated, when the shows that are covered may be decided by the editor.

R14 referred to an inner core of the art world as the international family and he asserted that this core is able to discern the value of contemporary art. His remarks suggested that the ##### Gallery could be thought of as a classic brand, this was confirmed by another respondent who stressed the need to conceive of a dealer as a brand. Yet in order for R14 to identify the artists he needs, one would presume that he would have expert knowledge. He remarks that he only recently understood the work of Joseph Beuys, may thus appear disconcerting. R14's knowledge of contemporary art was brought into question and provided the impetus to reconsider the remark that dealers were

manipulators. Ultimately, the dealer was acknowledged to be a businessperson with shop premises. Thereafter the art market can be seen, as R9 suggested, as capitalism in its purest form.

R14 asserted that the artists he knew all behaved as though they were not interested in money. However, despite maintaining this disinterestedness they were ultimately very keen to make money. This awareness that artists exhibit a disavowal of economic interests will be explored further in chapter 8, particularly in light of Bourdieu's work.

There was evidence that the respondents considered democratic agendas to get in the way of art practice; R4 and R9 considered that art should be intended for a limited, sympathetic audience. R9's remarks suggested that he advocated that art should remain difficult. R4 had quite early on in his career relinquished the idea that he could make art that would in a democratic, populist way appeal to everyone. He encountered socially-orientated art history, and reasoned that modernist artists had coded their work to avoid trouble from a vast majority who might easily misunderstand it. R4 saw art as an activity engaged in by subcultural groups, in opposition to mass culture and homogeneity; with its audience and support as a small, self-contained intelligentsia. However, as governments and institutional agendas seek to popularise what they see as this complex, intrinsically valuable culture, controversy reigns about its accessibility. The agendas of the artist respondents, whose funding stemmed directly from these sources, seemed most aligned to their aims to make this art accessible. This was in contrast to the views of R9 and R4, who even argued that popularity in the arts may encourage those who would not otherwise have these values. R16 attributed the wish to produce educational work as his objective, by referring to this as almost a requirement of the commission. By being complicit with the commissioning bodies' agendas and aims, R16 suggested he would stand more chance of increased funding and the proliferation of the scene within which he practises.

The danger in producing art which is intended to educate and raise aspirations was revealed in the interviews. Work that has these aims also has, as one of its objectives, some transformation of the viewer. Therefore it was asked how that might occur and whether shock or deconstruction could really be deemed the best way to enable viewers to transform themselves. R10 considered that there are a number of ways in which this can be undertaken, but that if one is confronted by a culture of complacency then shock may be the only appropriate method. R10 and R16 were both asked about the possible avoidance of the superiority complex, identified and associated with the avant-garde by R10. To this it was suggested that its prevention was a deliberate act, thus signifying that R10 still thought of himself and his role as an artist, as superior. R10 also thought that when working with



members of the public, the artist ought not always to act in a considerate and benevolent manner. In the chapter which follows this, key issues that have arisen within this chapter, in particular those referred to as needing to be explored further, will be tied together along with those raised in the previous two chapters, alongside a reconsideration of dominant themes identified in chapter 2 and chapter 3.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Discussion**

#### **8.0 Introduction**

This chapter will elaborate the key themes that have arisen in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 by exploring them in relation to appropriate theoretical debates. Not all the themes that appeared in those chapters will be developed, only those considered of greatest relevance to this thesis. The intention is to present an overall picture of the research findings and provide a deeper understanding of the interview material.

#### **8.1 The art of game playing**

In this study of the field of contemporary art a perspective emerged that saw practice as groups of like-minded artists coming together as a 'community' (R10, 129) or 'sub-cultural group' (R4, 34) (see 5.2, 5.4 and 6.6). While it was hard to pin down exactly who and what made up these communities, they were thought to comprise those who had shared values and common beliefs about art (see 5.4). The groups or communities that formed were not always harmonious but acted as a scene, in which artists worked together to become visible and to raise their profiles (see 5.4). It became apparent that one could appropriately describe the field as practitioners engaged in a game (see 5.1).

The way ideas are used within art could also be likened most accurately to a game (see 5.1). The significance of the notion of a game was linked to the impact of Duchamp upon the field (see 5.1) and suggests the relevance of Kosuth's assertion that all art after Duchamp is conceptual in nature, as 'art only exists conceptually' (Kosuth, 1969 p.80). Notions of beauty, having previously been disparaged in relation to visual intelligence, can now be related to the use of ideas in art instead (see 7.4). This view echoed Jason Gaiger's comment on de Duve's consideration of the delayed reception of Duchamp, in which he determined that nothing is needed to 'make or judge art except intellectual curiosity and a knowledge of its conventions' (Gaiger, 1997, p.615). Gaiger considers that such art quickly 'fades into "art theory"' (Gaiger, 1997, p.615).

The likening of art to a game is supported by Taylor's suggestion that 'as the industrial age gave way to the information age, Greenberg's notion of the artist as engineer must be changed to the artist as information processor and game player' (Taylor, 2004a, p.43). Taylor's exploration of von Neumann and Morgenstern's attempts at bringing game theory into relation with economic theory (see 3.5), ties in with the importance of chess, as a game of strategy and a means of describing how contemporary artists engage in the field (see 3.5 and 5.1).

The analogies made between art and chess, and other such games, raise questions about relationships between artists, artworks and viewers because they prompt the use of terms and notions such as competitiveness or 'opponent' (Eburne, see 5.1). It is suggested that the notion of opponent appears quite fitting to relations between artists and their public (see 6.6). Competitiveness was also acknowledged between practitioners who must anticipate and respond to other artists' moves (see 5.4).

The artist Cady Noland has also described the field of art as a game, utilising this analogy when reflecting on of the art world in her essay *Towards a Metalanguage of Evil* (1992). Francis McKee included reference to Noland's text in an article for *Variant*, where he asserted that 'for the contemporary artist the game is vital' (McKee, 1997).

The game can be thought to involve a struggle, which enables the continual reconfiguration of what can be classed as art or non-art (see 3.2 and 3.3). The purpose of the struggle is to maintain the category art (see 3.3) by developing or perpetuating viable theoretical frameworks within which contemporary artists may frame their practice (see 5.2 and 5.3). As was recognised by Taylor, art creates the game that creates the category art, which perpetuates the game (see 3.5). Bourdieu's description of the field as a self-governing system can be said to work only if one remains aware that the 'generative, unifying principle of this system' is 'the 'struggle, with all the contradictions it engenders' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.34).

The struggle involves the shifting of rules, which can be seen to determine what would be considered innovative within the field (see 5.3). A perspective emerged in which artists set their own rules, or showed hostility towards the rules of others such as experts or critics (see 5.1). In all instances the rules that governed what may be considered innovative, valuable or interesting were thought to shift, and to be imposed from within rather than outside the field (see 5.1).

There is no definitive guide to the rules, or shared understanding of them, that permeates the art world, but art was described as coded and to recognise the code in play was said to reveal the rules that governed the practice (see 6.6). This process of coding was thought to offer meaning only to those who could recognise the code, and to withhold it from the uninitiated (see 5.2). The reason that the rules are thought to shift is that the permissible in art evolves through successful attempts at challenging what art can be. The game could be said to exist as a result of the rules that underlie it, which are formed from the currently successful belief structures that have taken hold. If the guiding belief structures are challenged in a way that cannot be integrated into the game through careful use of language, the continuation of the game itself could be threatened. Bourdieu has argued that while the players of the art game, can 'call into question ways of playing the game' for example by challenging other artists and previous strategies, one cannot refuse to play the game or challenge 'the game itself and the belief which supports it', as this is the 'one unforgivable transgression' (see 3.2).

In Noland's description of the contemporary art world as founded on a game, she also suggested that the rules that govern practice are hidden (Noland, 1992). McKee's interpretation of Noland's text suggested that 'the game and its rules continue whether we like it or not, and we must acknowledge its existence if we are to play it successfully or change it' (McKee, 1997).

An understanding of the rules can be gained through a process of inference as artists anticipate others' moves or second-guess the best way to contextualise their practice so that it fits within the current rules of engagement (see 7.4 and 7.5). In order to be successful one would need to react to the way the rules of engagement and codes continually shift (see 5.5).

The codes employed by artists are often thought to be 'competing' and even mutually unintelligible (see 5.2). Irvine (2004) and Bourdieu have also recognised that contemporary art is coded (see 3.2). These codes require cultural competence to discern and Irvine considers that they only work in certain learned cultural contexts (Irvine, 2004).

Because its meaning and rules of engagement are concealed, art can be described as being in a somewhat insular category of activity, as was recognised by both Taylor and de Duve (see 2.2 and 3.5). Since those within the field set the rules that perpetuate the game, the art world can be

conceived as a self-governing system, and it has been likened by Taylor and Irvine to what complexity theorists describe as a Complex Adaptive System.<sup>23 24</sup>

Engagement in the game was revealed to involve strategic behaviours and competitive struggles enacted through dialogues or discourses (see 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). The struggle for the control of these dialogues and discourses was described as the language game (see 5.3 and 5.4).

The game is self-perpetuating because of the way artists shift the pattern of play and introduce new ways of defining art. This notion of art was acknowledged by both de Duve and Harris, who have likened it to an 'esoteric game of ping pong' (de Duve, 1998, p.459) and 'an organism determined by its own internal teleological drive' (Schaeffer, 1998, p.29) (see 3.3).

Consequently we can recognise that this struggle for position and for a monopoly over discourses is crucial (see 5.1 and 5.2). Participation in the struggle and the effects of that process can be thought of as establishing criteria by which to determine whether a work belongs to what Bourdieu described as 'the field of position-takings' and whether the creator or originator of that work should be considered an artist (Bourdieu, 1993, p.34). Successful engagement in the game and the struggle it entails might result in a position for oneself within the field, and in having one's work consecrated as art. The strategies employed vary according to the goal an artist seeks (see 5.4) and communities could be said to differ depending upon what aims they envisioned for themselves and what they considered as success (see 5.4).

If one wished to enter the game during the 1980s one needed to have shown an investment in current ideas, discourses and debates by demarcating a certain position (see 5.4) after which one would make artwork which inhabited the space opened up by the text (see 5.4).

This was mostly done in the voice of a critical theorist (see 5.5) and often achieved through drawing upon vocabularies from critical theory and the work of theorists such as Baudrillard (see 5.4). These

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<sup>23</sup> The notion of a Complex Adaptive System is employed in complexity theory to describe something which always emerges at the edge of chaos they are 'far from equilibrium, are not static but are in a state of continual evolution' (Taylor, 2001, p.16) See page, 142 of Mark C. Taylor's 'The moment of complexity: emerging network culture' for a concise yet comprehensive definition of Complex Adaptive Systems, as provided by David Depew and Bruce Weber.

<sup>24</sup> A contemporary artist Teike Assenberg, whose art revolves around interaction with business and whose art company uses awareness of organisational theory to instigate artist-led interventions sees her work as existing because she as an artist has 'developed a method of working and then fitted it to a self-chosen situation' (Assenbergs, 2005). She could be said to have developed her own structure or rules within which to practise, thus changing the game and the way in which artists interact with business (Assenbergs, 2005).

discourses or theories were thought to stand in for the writing artists might have done themselves to explicate the meaning of their practice, if they had been so inclined (see 7.1).

During the 1990s some artists felt uncomfortable with the popular 'heavily theoretical' or 'philosophical' discourses, advocated and developed in New York by artists such as R4 (see 5.5). This was in part because they originated out of a scene that was too far removed from the one these London-based artists inhabited (see 5.7). A perspective emerged in which contemporary artists began to focus instead upon visibility, which was an option because of the widened contexts for dissemination of ideas and practice (see 5.5). Visibility was thought to be important, since to be invisible was seen as compromising one's power to affect which art was made visible (see 5.4). Attempts at becoming visible were made, through a process described as pitching (see 5.4). Artists pitch ideas into a space; some of these ideas were described as being deliberately off-key so as to try out different voices, some of which may contradict one another (see 5.4). In relation to this Bourdieu's thinking offers a way to describe how specific positions were sought by artists during the 1980s (see 5.5), but is less useful in exploring the approach of artists who pitched, and thus aimed to be position-less.

## **8.2 Language games**

One enters the game through discourse, either in the way one defines practice or in the way one assumes a position. Yet positions in contemporary art have been found to be less determinate than they might previously have been (see 5.4). The discourses we employ are typically thought to demonstrate our professionalism, education and subject-specific knowledge and to be acting to reaffirm our subject position and identity (see 3.2 and 3.3). However the positions those within the field adopt may be the ones which they consider the strongest available to them (see 5.7) by being the most productive, rewarding or profitable (see 5.7). It was during a pilot interview, conducted in April 2003, in which the language was at times strategically vague and contradictory, that awareness emerged that artists might play games when engaged with others in conversation about practice. As a result of this, specific attention was paid to the use of language in the main interviews (see 4.1). Art before the 20<sup>th</sup> century was seen as coded through use of signifiers and representation and since then has become encoded by way of strategically-used language (see 5.2). A commitment to the discourses and debates that accompany contemporary art practices was seen to be at least as important as visual engagement with the work (see 7.1).

Having a meaningful experience of art was thought to depend upon one's cultural competence, or ability to discern the codes in play (see 7.5 and 7.7). It is suggested that transformation of experience of an object was thought to occur as a result of membership within a community of practice by means of a process of practice and reification (see 3.1). This explanation could account for why Marcel Duchamp's *Urinal* 1917, Michael Craig Martin's work *An Oak Tree* of 1973 or R15's ##### 2003 or other contemporary art, can be experienced by some as works of art. It also accounts for why others who remain outside the art community, or constellation of practices associated with contemporary art and are thus uninitiated, remain baffled by such works and unable to experience them as art (see 5.1, 6.2 and 6.6).

One could think of shared understandings in contemporary art as being enacted within and through the process of reification, using language or discourse (see 3.1). As Wenger asserted, had his friend not spoken of the way in which he experienced the wine differently, he would have 'missed the reification structures he was using to make sense of his experience' and been unaware of the differences in their experiences (Wenger, 2004, p.9).

In the reification of art, language has included aesthetics discourses, which some have now been rejected, however, on the grounds that what they allow us to say about art is too limiting (see 7.6). Two of the respondents suggested that all discourses and ideas associated with art have been historically bracketed, a notion based upon awareness of French structuralist theory (see 7.3). Some discourses used in the process of reification of contemporary art practices were evidently drawn from critical theory, psychoanalysis or other disciplines (see 5.3 and 5.4).

Wenger recognised that communities try to draw upon languages or vocabularies from across community boundaries in order to plug the gaps in their knowledge competences (see 3.1). Therefore when one community's discourse becomes inadequate, that community seeks to learn from another (see 3.1). Wenger noted that the words that his wine-tasting friend employed were not in themselves alien to him; they were words borrowed from common language and mutually understood. However, they were employed at a 'different level of scale' (Wenger, 2004, p.9). Wenger argues that they had been imbued with very specific meanings in the context of wine-tasting (Wenger, 2004, p.9). He therefore had access to the words but not to the participation that would have allowed him to understand their meaning. Such awareness can be applied to contemporary art practices if we think of the way certain language terms are employed to discuss contemporary practices which, though common, have acquired new and specific meanings. The term 'philistine', for example, as adopted by R10 to describe modes of attending to

contemporary art practice, originated, as he was aware, from common language and had gained meaning through its use in cultural studies, yet he considered it had fallen out of use (see 7.7).

Harris has also made apparent that often the existing vocabulary of a 'neighbouring art form is drafted in to plug the gap', as he considered was the case when photography borrowed from painting (Harris, 2003, p.121 and p.124). This could be thought to occur as respondents attempt to find vocabularies with which to talk about artworks (see 7.1).

Many artists since the 1990s were found to favour the writings of Gilles Deleuze as a theorist through whom to consider and with whom to associate their practices. One perspective on this was that he enabled them to reconsider notions of 'the new', such as 'new subjectivities' and also 'affect' (see 7.3). One view was that when theoretical material, such as that of Deleuze, is appropriated by artists, it is not adequately comprehended or understood (see 7.3). A possible outcome of such inadequate understanding is that some theorists have gone so far as to denounce their association with the art with which their thinking has become associated, as did ##### with the work of R4 and neo-geo (see 7.1).

The transformation of an experience as a result of access to practices and discourses of reification suggests that meaningful engagement with contemporary art can be likened to faith (see 5.1). Some respondents, indeed, regarded belonging to a certain artistic community as a means of engaging in an act of faith (see 5.1). This act of faith involves believing that others within a community meaningfully experience a particular object in a way divergent from one's own, even though in an everyday context the object may not be physically different (see 3.1). It is in describing ways to attend to such objects and in sharing beliefs about their importance and value that discourse becomes paramount, as it is the way in which a community distinguishes an experience, and describes it to new members. We have to assume that Wenger's friend really was able to taste strawberries in his glass of wine, and in this way we engage ourselves in an act of faith. If we restructure the example offered by Wenger (see 3.1) and replace wine-tasting with experiencing a work of contemporary art, we may agree with Schaeffer's statement that asserted that art becomes 'a belief structure' (Schaeffer, 1998, p.45).

In order to persuade others that yours is the best way to conceive of contemporary art practice and the definition of art, one would need confidence (see 5.1). Mastering the language game cannot be entirely about what discourses one uses, but must also be about how one employs them. That there is a crisis in contemporary art practice and art criticism suggests attempts have failed to maintain a hold



over the way in which certain forms of discourse have been used to mediate practice (see 5.1). Taylor has argued the inevitability of a 'crisis in confidence' in a landscape in which that confidence leads to the grounding and validation of practices (see 3.5). As Taylor reaffirms on a number of occasions, when art, like money, has become grounded in nothing other than itself and those within the game have to rely upon the confidence of the players, there will inevitably be the occasional crisis in that confidence (see 3.5). The use of the phrase 'confidence game' by Taylor reaffirms that the skills required by the contemporary artist relate to an ability to pass oneself off as a member of a certain community or scene (see 3.5).

Confidence, as considered by Taylor, can be linked to Bourdieu's notion of a 'charismatic ideology' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.76). The importance of the way artists employ the languages or discourses with which they choose to engage can be linked to the view that artists ought to make more use of their manipulative power (see 6.6).

As Bourdieu has pointed out, the possibility of producing audiences or consumers capable of knowing and recognising the work of art as such, may be greatly reduced as the discourses they need to access in order to comprehend the work become ever more disparate (see 3.3 and 5.5). With this proliferation of discourses comes the need to be able to pass oneself off as a competent member of these various communities, able to comprehend the various codes in play and engage with diverse work. Yet this inevitably results in embarrassing incidents in which one might be caught out, recognised as lacking some of the competence one had been claiming. The use of the reification discourses, which mediate and make contemporary art practices meaningful, are therefore employed as a form of cultural capital (see 6.4). The confidence to use these discourses strategically is an important part of the game.

This suggests that if one wishes to engage meaningfully with such pluralised groups as those within the art world, one may find they are having to pretend to an awareness of the means of reification of that group, one which they do not actually have.

Noland and McKee refer to deceiving others by means of what they term 'the mirror device', a label originating from psychoanalyst Erving Goffman. They argue that Goffman uses this mirroring device to explain how to 'pass' (McKee, 1997). This 'passing' is the process of coming to be seen as an acceptable member of a certain community or group with which one wants to identify oneself. Noland and McKee see this ability to pass oneself off as a member of a group or community as an

important survival strategy in the contemporary art world. 'Passing' is a tactic employed by the contemporary artist. Goffman has pointed out that passing oneself off is possible until 'an embarrassing incident' occurs, perhaps if one is caught claiming to know about a person one has actually never heard of (Goffman, 1963, p.95). Goffman's notion of passing can be likened to Wenger's notion of the importance of social learning, and of belonging to a particular community to define one's sense of self. This is because Goffman also recognises that when one leaves a community of which one may have been a part for some time, 'a personal identification' gets left behind (Goffman, 1963, p.98). Thus Goffman is suggesting, as has Wenger, that membership of a community is crucial to a member's sense of identity.

### **8.3 The struggle of participation**

There are professionals for whom this struggle is still vital, who include contemporary artists and critics and those working within the professional contemporary art world. The struggle enacted within language games has involved strategic attempts by artists to take control or effect mediating discourses such as art writing and criticism. Awareness emerged out of artists' endeavours to write for themselves during the 1960s and 1970s in order to shift power away from the critic (see 5.3).

One perspective suggested art discourses became re-professionalised and that critical theory dominated writing about art during the 1980s. Artists such as Halley were thought to have embraced and encouraged this use of the thinking of critical theorists such as Baudrillard (see 5.3 or 6.2). Crow saw this as the means by which such artists were able to add heavyweight theorising to their practice and thus provide the appropriate product packaging (see 2.5).

This period was followed by what the institutionalisation of what were previously avant-garde critical theoretical approaches (see 2.4 and 2.5). Socially orientated art history coupled with postmodernism is thought to have been responsible for artists' having developed self-conscious approaches to practice that resulted in the feeling, described by Coupland that the joke is on the viewer or the uninitiated person (see 6.2).

As was suggested previously (see 8.1), some artists felt disillusioned with the heavily theoretical discourses employed by artists in the New York scene such as Halley. Such artists, of both national and international standing, employed ambiguity, faux-naivety and childishness as a strategy to counteract being professionalised in that way (see 6.2). One perspective suggested that artists such as

Koons began to talk in a deliberately colloquial way in an attempt to fend off the re-professionalisation of arts mediating discourses (see 6.2).

Some found the tactics these artists used difficult to fathom, as they often involved artists employing a knowingly colloquial discourse and what might be considered mock sincerity (see 5.3 or 6.2). Coupland described how this left some within the art world concerned that they had missed the joke (see 5.3 or 6.2). As Crow suggested, the artists being surveyed became the ones doing the surveying, since any critics who denounced this art were reviled as revisionist, reactionary or at worst conservative (see 2.5). Crow considered the position faced by art critics and art historians to have been one of dismay, and suggested Stallabrass's book *High Art Lite* could be seen as a response to this situation (see 2.5).

R8 was particularly negative about what other respondents portrayed as the current situation, in which artists have freedom to mediate their own practice in the ways best suited to serve their career interests (see 6.2). In an alternative view, this freedom was supported, implying that writing about art should simply serve to facilitate discourse between practitioners and audiences (see 6.2).

It was proposed that there should be a development of writing about practice such as that orchestrated by John Roberts, in which artists were to be encouraged to write stories (see 6.2). This resonates with Wenger's concept of the importance of storytelling, which he sees as better than reification, since it allows for the extraction of meaning from events as though one were a participant (see 3.1). Advocating the use of stories as a form of art writing by artists can presumably be advocated only if it is assumed the stories are based on artists' personal experiences (see 3.2). Otherwise it would be less likely that this approach would facilitate any greater identification by other artists (see 3.1).

The notion of story-writing, or what was described as a wilder form of writing as a suggested accompaniment to contemporary art, echoes a performative trend in artists' writing. Such a trend was evident at conferences, such as the Tate symposium, 'Writing in the context of art' organised by Kate Love in 2004. This is echoed in Gavin Butt's collection of essays *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* (Butt, 2004) to which Love also contributed. However it might be suggested that such performative writing, occurring after what Butt describes as the theatrical turn, may adhere to the notion of a craft of writing that might become more about writing than about art. One respondent strongly opposed writers writing about art whose main focus was thought to be the craft of writing, yet this seemed to be acceptable in the case of artists (see 6.2).

The performative style of writing advocated in one perspective was that associated with the notion of pitching into a space (see 5.5). In this sense writing was thought to include artists' press releases and statements, and use was made of strategies such as those of advertising agencies (see 5.5). This way of working was thought to involve both the creation of an audience and the development of one's visibility within the field (see 5.5 and 7.5). Such an approach might remove the risk of producing clichéd art, as it would not involve producing work aimed at an existent milieu (see 7.5); clichéd art was thought to result from having a fixed meaning, context and or audience in mind before the work was produced (see 7.5).

To narrow one's focus or the meaning of one's practice was thought to be fatal (see 7.5). A perspective emerged that suggested that as a contemporary artist one needed to be addressing an audience that did not yet exist, and in fact may hope actually to create an audience through the process of making work (see 7.5). Contemporary artists were thought to address audiences they hoped would come into being, and considered themselves as part of this audience for the work (see 7.5).

A perspective emerged that saw contemporary art setting up interesting combinations of information, thus providing unlimited ways of making meaning (see 7.5). Possible meanings or references, suggesting the codes in play, were thought to become accessible on various levels and thus in a variety of ways (see 7.5). It was made apparent by Michael Archer that contemporary art often 'says more than one thing' and that these things may 'conflict and interfere with one another' (Archer, 2003). Archer also acknowledged that any attempt to restrict the reading of the work to just one of those viewpoints was in his view 'an exercise doomed to failure' (Archer, 2003).

There was apparent a shared understanding of the importance of avoiding a clearly defined interpretation of meaning in contemporary art (see 7.4). Instead, the aim seemed to be to leave open all possible interpretations and meanings (see 7.4). There was reluctance amongst some of the contemporary artists to commit to making statements about views, or to associate themselves with any fixed positions; this was in contrast to the clearly defined position R4 had aimed at developing for himself (see 7.5). It was seen as positive that the meaning of contemporary art remained in flux. This suggests a possible explanation for the reluctance shown by some artists to being recorded in an interview, which would have involved making statements about practices that they may have regarded as fixed.

Attempts to remain vague in relation to meaning reflects Wilsher's view that 'some artists have discovered a viable way of gesturing at the content and character of their art by saying nothing definitive and leaving all avenues open' (Wilsher, 2005, p.9). He considered this to be an 'oppositional stance' which protects the contradictory condition of art against being read too simplistically and in the over-theoretical way favoured during the 1980s. The notion that it is an oppositional stance reflects the use of language as a game based on opponents and strategic moves. The suggestion that it might be cynical to see how Jeff Wall 'operates' when discussing his practice at a dinner party further suggested an awareness of artists strategically monitoring their use of language (see 7.5). Wilsher also described a means 'to embrace ambiguity' by staying outside the 'once helpful frames' and being 'difficult, eccentric and silent' (Wilsher, 2005 p.9). This could explain Koons's alternative strategy in which he chose to stay silent about his practice by avoiding interviews. Such an approach was recognised in R6's decision to avoid writing about her own practice and to leave contextualisation to others.

Some respondents valued retaining the contradictory character of contemporary art (see 7.5). Attempts to maintain ambiguity over meaning included having work shown in various different exhibitions and written about in diverse ways which would cancel one another out (see 7.5). In some instances no remarks were made that would allow one to pinpoint a view or suggest the occupation of a certain position (see 5.5). Assertions were made that art was not intended to convey any particular meaning (see 7.5). Generally, meaning in art was encouraged to remain in flux, contradictory and complex, and this stance was continued in discussions about practice, which sometimes resulted in a lack of definitive answers. There was interest instead in the gaps or 'gappage', as it was in these in-between spaces, where interpretation and intention were not spelt out, that meaning was thought to be created (see 7.4). An extreme aspect of this perspective was the suggestion that art *ought* to be nonsensical (see 7.4).

Despite these views another position emerged that suggested that to strive for non-sense is no longer what the game is about, as there are too many people aiming to do this (see 7.4). It was recognised therefore that aiming directly for ambiguity is no longer a valued rule of engagement. This has also been recognised by Wilsher, who has suggested it is due to the quality of ambiguity having 'come to mean almost nothing in itself' (Wilsher, 2005).

## 8.4 The relevance of aesthetics

Aesthetics was seen as a language, rather than something purely experiential. Acquiring understanding of aesthetic discourses required knowledge of certain texts (see 7.6) and aesthetic discourses employed in the mediation of practice could be said to be part of the language game (see 7.6). One respondent described aesthetics as a language that he did not speak (see 7.6), whilst others used aesthetic language without acknowledging it as such (see 7.6). The opposing positions identified in the research reflected the division of thought on the relevance of aesthetics within the field described by de Duve during the 1990s (see 2.2).

Some of the respondents were opposed to aesthetic discourses on the grounds that they limited what could be said about art practice (see 7.6). R10 recalled how R8 had asserted that on the basis of what aesthetic discourses do, he didn't want art in the world (see, 7.6). However there was also scepticism over how convinced R8 was of his position, and it was suggested he might adhere to this view because he saw it as his strongest card (see 7.6). This assertion is another analogy that supports the likening of arguments or position-taking to strategic moves in a language game (see 5.2).

Those who opposed aesthetics stated that they sought to make art more ordinary in part by expanding what are considered valid responses to contemporary art (see 6.6, 7.6 and 7.7). So the collapse of the category of art predicted by Harris may not be as accidental as he implied. The contrasting position to this advocated an art that remained far less accessible to wider audiences and saw the democratic principle as an obstacle to practice (see 6.6).

Those who wanted to broaden possible responses to art sought the freedom to discuss it in ways beyond the supposedly artistic (see 7.6). The suggestion was that these broader responses to art, which included statements such as 'he did it for the money', could in fact be what contemporary art is mainly about (see 7.6). Such a view could be said to reflect the wave of 'aesthetic atheism' identified by Jonathan Watkins, in which notions of art as embodying extraordinary creativity, or as somehow transcendent or occupying a high place in human culture, have been rapidly losing ground (Watkins, 2004).

Schaeffer recognised that recent developments in contemporary art suggest that it 'seems to be aiming to dissolve into visual culture or everyday life' (Schaeffer, 1998, p.39). Schaeffer's assertion suggests that R10's position reflects a wider interest within the field in dissolving art into everyday

life. In seeking to make contemporary art more ordinary, R10 refutes aesthetic discourses which he equates with elitism (see 7.6). His argument is that aesthetics could not be reconciled with art without becoming a much bigger thing than art itself (see 7.6).

Aesthetic responses to art were seen as elitist because they excluded those unable to converse in aesthetic discourses (see 7.6). It was argued that one needed to be familiar with such discourses only if they sought to gain authority over art (see 7.2). However there was a contradiction in this position as it was accompanied by the suggestion that a response to art which was not based on cultural capital such as aesthetic discourse, might be one in which someone looked at a painting and said 'I like those colours' (see 7.2). An inadvertent acknowledgment was made that aesthetic experience is accessible to all, even if not everyone is able to discuss it by conversing in aesthetic discourses (see 7.2).

It was thus suggested that even where one did not have access to aesthetic discourses one might still have an aesthetic experience. Isobel Armstrong has also referred to aesthetic experience as something that falls outside the acquisition of cultural capital by acknowledging the possibility of an aesthetic experience which is not theorised (Armstrong, 2000, p.161). She also recognised that in thinking of aesthetic experience as universally accessible, one runs the risk of offering a mystification of aesthetic experience as something 'ineffable' and 'unnameable'. Such a notion might therefore be the broader conception of the aesthetic, which as R10 asserted it would have to become if it were to escape the charge of elitism, and as such this notion of aesthetic experience is something that might be evident in everyday circumstances and accessible to all.

In defining aesthetic experience it may be necessary to consider how it might encourage experience of what it means to *be* in the world. Winnicott has referred to the experience of being as 'the simplest of all experiences', and as something that is passed on through generations (Winnicott, 1971, p.80). 'Being' in this sense is seen as coming before doing, and is about what *is* rather than what one *does*. Sarah James has discussed Armstrong's notion of Radical Aesthetics in *Art Monthly*, emphasising Armstrong's assertion that the basis of a democratic aesthetic must result from the four components of aesthetic life: 'playing and dreaming, thinking and feeling' (James, 2005).<sup>25</sup> These, Armstrong asserts, are common to everyone, and are the foundation of the experiences that keep us alive. She suggests they can also be thought to be common to what Marx called 'species being' (Armstrong, 2000, p.3). It appears that by 'species being', Marx was referring to our essence of a species, the

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<sup>25</sup> Armstrong also phrases this in another way as; 'ceaseless meditation endows language-making and symbol-making, thought, and the life of affect, with creative and cognitive life' (Armstrong, 2000, p.2).

notion of being-in-the-world, as something that is common to us all. Armstrong's attempt to rebuild a radical aesthetic draws upon the work of John Dewey whom she favours because he founds his work on the nature of experience, and whom she sees as demonstrating the limitations of Kantian aesthetics (Armstrong, 2000, p.162).<sup>26</sup>

Due to his awareness that aesthetic experience can be conceived of as something much broader than art, Watkins has asserted that the outcome is that 'many of the most interesting artists working today don't believe in art' (Watkins, 2003). He places emphasis on certain artists' awareness that although their work might communicate an unexpected profound or beautiful moment, we do not need art for this (Watkins, 2003).

Aesthetic discourses retained currency for R6, R9 and R4, despite in some instances not being acknowledged as such (see 7.6). R4 was more aware of the history of aesthetic discourses and was keen to assert the distinction between himself and the formalist artists working in the 1950s (see 5.4 and 7.6). It could be argued that his eagerness to differentiate his interest in reintroducing notions of form to critical language was an attempt to make clear he did not seek to go to revive 1950s notions of formalism, or that it was not a result of his being unaware of how arts discourses have developed (see 7.6). Thus, despite being devalued and having lost currency in the main body of critical discourses, a number of the respondents still thought of their practices in aesthetic terms.

It was evident that aesthetic interests do continue, and that without aesthetic discourses we may be left without adequate means to discuss such work. Armstrong has acknowledged: 'Halting the construction of theoretical models that deal with the aesthetic leaves us without a valuable resource with which to analyse contemporary culture' (James, 2005).

One way in which contemporary artists seem to be challenging aesthetics is by exploring notions of ugliness (R9, 302). In Beech's review of the show 'Nausea: Encounters with Ugliness' (2002) he described it as, an 'intellectually sturdy exhibition', because it was founded 'largely on Mark Cousins's Lacanian theory of Ugliness', which he considered to be 'amongst the most vital and provocative around' (Beech, 2002). R11's work was included in this exhibition, and Beech described it as reflecting the view that '... things aren't ugly; we are'.

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<sup>26</sup> She asserts that she flounders for terminology in discussing his work, because the vocabulary inherent in our culture for describing relationships is, she considers, exiled, and limited to 'subject, object, consciousness, self, artist'. These, she asserts, are all too individualistic for Dewey.



In order to outline his notion of the Ugly, Cousins begins by describing the process by which an object can be thought to represent and thus signify for the subject. For the object to signify, Cousins argues that it has to act as a mirror. It is in this process that he draws upon the notion of narcissism. Cousins argues that for the object to resonate with the subject, allowing it to signify, it has to engage the subject in a way that enables him to recognise something familiar, something of himself/herself in the object. Schaeffer also offers an explanation of aesthetic experience in which he asserts that what attracts us to artworks experienced aesthetically is the hope that we will 'be able to relate them to our lives' (Schaeffer, 1998, p.53).<sup>27</sup> In this way Cousins describes the object as allowing enough narcissism for the subject to 'appreciate' the object. Narcissism is seen as that which allows us to comprehend ourselves as separate from the world, or the way in which we make things meaningful by running them through our beliefs, behaviours and histories.<sup>28</sup>

The object which we appreciate is that which resonates for us in some way and confirms or reveals something about ourselves with greater clarity. Schaeffer has suggested that an aesthetic experience is regulated by the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction it induces and that this is not manifest after the experience but is part of it (Schaeffer, 1998, p.53).<sup>29</sup> This experience is thought to induce a holding experience, related to the 'being'.<sup>30</sup>

Cousins describes the ugly, on the other hand, as something which does not resonate for us, and which reveals our mortality in a way that either overwhelms us, or is found to be lacking. That which overwhelms us in its excess, Cousins argues, 'closed in on me and blotted out the minimal extent of narcissistic self-possession which I need in order to be separate in the world' (Cousins, 1994). The ugly prevents the affirmation of one's subjectivity: as Cousins argues, it lacks 'that which I need in order to be', and 'robs us of our conviction that we exist'. This experience of ugliness he describes as

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<sup>27</sup> He considers that the extent to which we relate them to our lives may vary according to the person and the moment, and he states: 'Sometimes we are simply curious; sometimes we are looking for fun, for divertissement; sometimes we are in search of consolation; or we want to know things about the world; or we feel an urge to expand our inner lives. At other times we are looking for artworks that will help us to transform some aspect of our own lives' (Schaeffer, 1998, p.53).

<sup>28</sup> Narcissism is the only way in which we can experience the world as meaningful, and becomes pathological only when that experience takes over and we are not able to recognise the other.

<sup>29</sup> Schaeffer insists that satisfaction elicited from the aesthetic experience is not a matter of all or nothing, but a very complicated regulation that shifts continuously. It may depend upon a variety of casual factors, such as personal dispositional attitudes acquired in multiple ways, possibly through the process of social learning (Schaeffer, 1998, p.53).

<sup>30</sup> In trying to consider what might be a holding experience for someone we must bear in mind that a holding feeling may be similar for many, but what will encourage this feeling may differ greatly.

a negative experience, which in its coldness 'robs us of our substance' and encourages us to lose our footing. In this, he argues, we glimpse our lack of life, and 'the death of what we need to love' and as a result the subject is threatened with the fate of becoming the ugly object, and recognises that it needs experiences that signify or it will become 'the trace of meaning without a life' (Cousins, 1994). The experience of the subject is then thought to be one of internal incoherence, the only response to which, he considers, is indifference.

R11 asserted that he hoped his work would overwhelm the viewer (see 7.3); thus there was an affinity with Cousins's notion of the ugly as that which overwhelms in its excess. In the catalogue for R11's show *New Life* it is stated that his work is intended to act as 'an experimental device aimed at dismantling the strata that binds [sic] us and constitutes us as "human" (our habitual states of being and responding)' (O'Sullivan, 2004). It is suggested that R11 is interested in attempting to disrupt our notion of subjectivity and in exploring this concept in new forms (see 7.3 and 7.5). The intended response from the viewer to such practice is difficult to determine, as the thinking behind such work suggests that the aim is to remind one of some chaotic stage before the development of subjectivity.

Winnicott seems to offer a way to explore the experiences related to what Cousins describes as the separateness needed to 'be' in the world and that ugliness is thought to challenge. The importance of Winnicott in considering aesthetic experience has also been recognised by Armstrong (Armstrong, 2000, p.39). Winnicott considers that the child uses a transitional object to enable them to progress through the process of 'being able to accept difference and similarity' (Winnicott, 1971, p.7). The object must in some way signify to the subject and make them aware of themselves as separate. Winnicott goes so far as to suggest that after the transitional phenomena have become diffused, a third space is opened up which is that of play. Winnicott (1971) recognises that this widens to include 'artistic creativity and appreciation amongst other activities. He suggests that we do in fact surround ourselves with transitional objects, such as artworks or certain pieces of music, or other items that act to bridge our sense of who we are and the new meanings we create.

That which acts deliberately to disrupt our sense of 'being', serves to sever us from whatever connects us to the world and enables us to experience it as meaningful. As such it cannot serve as a transformational object and can therefore not allow a viewer to grow, or to evolve as a result of the experience. Engagement with practice intent on dismantling that which binds us as human beings, and on not representing or signifying, could be considered a destructive rather than productive experience for the viewer.

## 8.5 Judging the value of art

If there is to be any possibility of making judgements about the value of contemporary art, there needs to be reflection upon what is necessary to define something as being art. The game of maintaining the supercategory 'art', and the maintenance of the division between art and non-art is vital (see 3.1, 3.2 and 8.1). Two perspectives emerged: one which supported the notion of retaining the divide between art and mass culture, and one which claimed that it wanted to make art more ordinary (see 6.6 and 7.6).

Harris suggested that art does not carry with it a permanent signification. Thus, the supercategory art may have to be reconfigured to accommodate new practice. Harris also suggested that the more useful an activity is the less it would need to shelter under the supercategory, or lay claim to virtues it does not possess (see 3.3).

Jowell, in her role as Secretary of State for Culture, has recognised the need to justify contemporary art and this view has led her to assert that it is essential to 'find a way to demonstrate the personal value added which comes from engagement with complex art – "culture" ' (Jowell, 2004, p.5). What Jowell means by her idea of complex culture is unclear, but perhaps that theory has come to represent the prestige associated with complex culture that may previously have been assigned to visual skills and visual language.

It is also uncertain how compatible Jowell's understanding of art – as something that ought to raise one's aspirations – is with the awareness that contemporary art can be perceived not as purporting to represent, but as more interested in notions of abjection or the ugly (see 8.4 and 7.6). One respondent also suggested that the role of the artist working socially need not always be benevolent or considerate (see 6.6).

There was evidence that some respondents felt that institutions needed to be accountable for the money that they are receiving and that the art shown ought to be seen to be benefiting the wider community, rather than just a privileged elite. Yet this awareness was accompanied by the view that this was not necessarily the most productive situation for artists. The need for art to be difficult and as such not accessible to all was in some instances defended (see 6.6).

R10 edits a journal, #####, which publishes work that R16 described as having formed a gang (R16, 30). The journal could be said to represent the shared values and beliefs about art and the role of the artist that brought this group together (see 5.5). An article in this journal, suggested that inclusion and quality are two opposing issues. They also suggested that anyone seeking to criticise the inclusion issue is likely to be accused of elitism.

The other perspective was considered by them to be elitist as it confronted inclusion by considering art to be in opposition to mass culture, and saw democracy as an obstacle to getting things done (see 6.6). Adherence to this view was in one instance accompanied by the suggestion that artists should have more freedom, as R9 suggested mathematicians have (see 6.6).

The interviews suggested that those who seek to retain the separation between art and ordinary culture were those who had secured a position for themselves within the commercial art world, or were those for whom this was a goal (see 6.6). One artist who advocated such a stance was R4 who has established his clientele and audience and for whom it is of interest that the objects he produces remain luxury goods, and thus retain the complexity which comes from having meaning accessible only to the initiated (see 5.1).

Returning to the view which sought to widen access to art and to make it more ordinary, it is apparent that those artists for whom this was an aim did not make objects for the market. One of them suggested that his shift from thinking that his practice had to be studio-based was 'probably partly affected' by having had no success producing objects for the art market (R16, 236). There was thought to be an alignment between the type of art that these artists made and the agendas of the sources that funded them, such as the wish to support art that acted to educate the youth (see 6.6).

This perspective seems to suggest that society needs artists more than it needs art. In such a scene emphasis was also placed on the quality of one's ideas more than one's ability to produce interesting objects (see 6.6). Those who adhered to this view saw the artist's role as being to point things out to the masses that were not apparent to them beforehand (see 6.6). Again comments from the *Internationaler* further support the perspective offered in the interviews, by stating that 'an artist's job is to notice those things in the world that other people pass by unnoticed in their daily lives and to point them out to the most human among the artist's fellowmen' (*Internationaler*, 2005). What is most striking about the assertion that the artist appeals to the most human among us – and this reflects an attitude apparent in the interviews – is that a moral assertion is being made. Another

comment from the same article elaborates this further: 'All an artist can do is to take something that is already in the world and show it in a different light, point it out to some sensitive souls' (*Internationaler*, 2005). It is being suggested that the artist and those who attend to such work are more human and sensitive than those who dismiss or do not attend to it.

Such art, intended to help others transform themselves whilst aiming to be more like normal culture, retains the notion of superiority or elitism. However, it is in a more covert form than that of artists who want art to remain reserved to the minority. The suggestion that artists may need to use confrontational tactics when opposing a possible culture of complacency reveals that artists who profess to be acting in support of the community are just as much opposed to the masses as those who admit to it overtly (see 6.6).

There seemed to be a contradiction in the perspective which sought to make art more ordinary, as what was described as a challenge to elitist discourses seemed in practice merely to transform these discourses into another guise (see 6.6). The control held by aesthetes seemed to be shifted to those perpetuating new discourses and notions, such as the philistine. There was recognition here that it is impossible to challenge cultural capital, and that all one would achieve thereby would be the multiplication of it (see 7.7).

There was a feeling that the only way one could engage with a work of art without cultural capital was via aesthetic experience (see 7.6 and 8.4). The perspective presented by R14 suggested that all art is visual and some art is more conceptual than other art. He also suggested that he was less interested in anything that was 'neo' rather than original, thus suggesting that for him at least, modernist notions of originality have not lost their relevance.

The interviews indicated the perception that artists who are visible within the contemporary art world are so only because of the influence of art journal editors. The art critic's role seemed to be in publicly validating those who had made themselves visible and known to the editors of the appropriate journals. Commercial galleries who pay for advertising in art journals were thought to receive a certain amount of coverage of their shows, and of their stable of artists. In a field where mere inclusion in the right journals can be vital for artists, this could be highly important (see 6.3 and 6.4). National press journalism was seen to be the only arena in which there was more freedom to make judgements and to oppose any validations made within the art world which are thought to be ill-founded (see 6.3. and 6.4). The closing example given by Harris suggested that the national press

had already begun to abstain from playing the artspeak game, by choosing not to report on Tracey Emin's bed when it was entered for the Turner Prize in 2000.

Those respondents who advocated that artists should become visible, and who sought to be beyond judgement, recognised the importance of making themselves necessary for the next step (see 5.5). The fact that awareness of this and the way in which artists practise can be led by funding agendas, and even described as being not primarily about artistic things, suggests that the game is taking over. Just such an awareness was offered by de Duve, and reflected upon by Gaiger, who suggests that without the role of judgement, there is the risk that evaluation of quality is forgone in favour of establishing the logic of the next move in the game (Gaiger, 1997, p.615).

## **8.6 Summary of research findings**

The field of art was seen by the respondents as one in which communities or groups of artists came together to raise their visibility and their profiles. It was considered appropriate to describe the field as a game, an important aspect of which was the way that ideas are used both as contemporary art and in support of it. The analogy of art to a game raised the notion of opponents and suggested an element of competitiveness between artists as well as with their audiences.

The game was seen to involve a struggle in the form of the use of discourses that were used to continually reconfigure what could be classed as art. The purpose of the struggle was the maintenance of the supercategory art and the development of new frameworks for practice. The game was seen as self-perpetuating, and the language game was thought to be most apparent at stages when those within the field struggle to justify how new forms of practice could be accommodated under the current definition of art. Artists such as Kosuth were thought to have opened up or expanded the space to which the supercategory art could lay claim. Whilst it was possible to challenge the way art was defined, with new forms of practice, to challenge the game itself was seen as the ultimate transgression.

Artists were said to set their own rules to govern practice, and these were not thought to be easily discernible. Often one had to be initiated into the discourses with which they associated themselves in order to discern these heavily encoded rules. This encoding of practice was seen as a way to withhold the meaning of work from the uninitiated audience. Comprehending the codes was thought to require

a degree of cultural competence, as a result of which the game was seen as a continual to-ing and fro-ing of ideas between the initiated.

If one sought to enter the game during the 1980s, it was suggested that one would have done so by carving out a position within the field by way of a critical stance presented through language in the voice of a critical theorist. During the 1990s, however, there was disillusionment with these heavily theoretical discourses and artists began instead to use pitching to focus upon their visibility. So whilst Bourdieu's conception of the field was effective at a time when specific positions in the field were sought, it became less useful once the aim was continually to shift one's position. Some within the field were thought to present views which were not authentic but which seemed to offer the greatest prospect of success in gaining them visibility and credibility.

The discourses which accompanied practice were thought to serve to transform the experience of a work of art, which might not otherwise have been discernible from another exactly similar object in an ordinary context. This was seen to require an act of faith. It was these reification discourses which were thought to be the process of encoding meaning after the demise of visual signifiers or representation. Lack of awareness of these discourses would be seen to result in bafflement when confronted with certain works of contemporary art. The terms used in reification were often thought to derive from common language and to have been imbued with new meanings in such contexts.

There was awareness that communities often draw upon discourses from other fields to use in the process of reification when they find their current discourses lacking. The work of Gilles Deleuze was currently found to be popular amongst artists as a means to elaborate the meaning of their work. There was found to be concern about the degree of comprehension some artists had of the discourses they appropriate. It was suggested that this might have at times been responsible for certain theorists withdrawing their support from the art with which their thinking had become associated.

Success in the language game was determined by confidence in use of the discourses which accompanied practice. Because art had become grounded in nothing other than its own reification discourses, confidence was thought to be vital and occasional crises in confidence were seen as inevitable. The ability to pass oneself off as having the appropriate cultural competence was a required skill, particularly because increases in the numbers of communities of artists had led to their discourses having becoming discordant.

Belonging to a community of practice, though not always harmonious, or even definable or self-identifying, was thought to be crucial to one's sense of identity as a result of which the struggle and language game were seen as vital to professionals within the field. One's ability to affect the rules or definitions of what was permissible as art was crucial to enable one's practice to shelter under the validation of the supercategory. In order to make this process easier, artists were thought to have challenged the power of the critic during the 1960s and 1970s, giving them greater freedom to effect the struggle.

The discourses which accompany art became re-professionalised during the 1980s, as a result of the introduction of high theory. For some artists such as R4 this was positive and his use of Baudrillard's thinking was thought by Crow to serve as heavyweight product packaging. Other artists seemed to respond to this situation by employing strategies such as faux naivety, childishness and ambiguity. Embracing ambiguity seemed to involve having work contextualised in conflicting ways so as they would cancel each other out, or by remaining silent and letting others contextualise one's practice. These approaches resulted in artists' occupying no position within the field, and could be seen as attempts at pitching by taking opportunities to make oneself visible without limiting how one's work could be interpreted. Vaguer, more performative forms of artists' writing were seen to accompany practice in the 1990s and those of today and served as dialogue between practitioners; these contrasted sharply with the heavily theoretical discourses of the 1980s. This approach to writing about art was thought to allow for the creation of a new milieu and with it the formulation of new audiences, of which the artists themselves were thought to be part. This way of working was seen to avoid the trap of the production of clichéd art, which was described as that which was conceived with a fixed meaning or audience in mind.

Contemporary art was seen to set up combinations of information in such a way that unlimited connections could result in different viewers making meaning from the work in various ways. A perspective was apparent in which there was an avoidance of any attempt at clearly determining arts meaning. Artists wanted the meaning of their practice to remain in flux, and this suggested a possible reason why they would avoid committing to a recorded interview, which might have resulted in any interpretations that they offered of the meaning of their practice becoming fixed. The wish to say nothing definitive about practice was thought to protect the contradictory nature of contemporary art; artists were believed to have used language strategically to maintain ambiguity. Meaning was thought to have been created within the gaps between interpretation and intention so that it was felt that intention was best left vague rather than spelt out. Despite the prevalence of artists who sought



ambiguity, this was seen by other respondents to have lost some of its currency as a means of practice and tactic of engagement in the field.

A challenge to aesthetic discourses was revealed, which was based upon an assertion that they limited what could be said about practice. Aesthetes were thought to have dictated the ways in which art could be spoken of in solely artistic terms and in so doing had discounted other responses to art. Through the need to be familiar with aesthetic discourses to discuss practice, aesthetics was considered elitist. Yet an example was given of a response to art that would not depend upon cultural capital, which commented upon the colours of a work and thus was actually a statement about the *lack* of cultural capital required, and therefore about the universal accessibility of an aesthetic response to art. This example suggested that aesthetic experience was available to all, and thus that aesthetics was an important aspect of art, particularly in relation to issues of exclusivity. By expanding the notion of aesthetics, by recognising that it is part of everyday life and as such is a much broader thing than art, there is the risk of making it indescribable. Once this is recognised we can acknowledge how aesthetic experience might allow us to develop our experiences of being in the world. Aesthetic experiences were thought to be about the degree of satisfaction elicited from an experience of an object and its ability to enable people to transform themselves by relating their experience of the object to past experiences, beliefs and values.

Some contemporary artists were interested in employing notions such as the ugly and the abject in an attempt further to subvert classical aesthetics. Although aesthetic discourses have been disparaged by some artists, there needs to be recognition that many other artists still employ aesthetic terms in discussion of their work. Without the development of alternative discourses that address these aspects of art we are left at a loss how to relate to such practice.

Two perspectives emerged, one of which sought to retain the divide between mass culture and high art and another which aimed at dismantling the barriers between the two. The view that sought to broaden access to art seemed aligned to government and funding agendas. In this view the importance is placed on the role of the artist rather than the role of the artwork. The artist is seen as someone who points things out which may go unnoticed by the general population, enabling them to see the world in a new light. One criticism of this is that it assumes a position of supremacy for the artist, as someone able to notice things others may not.

There was recognition that some arts institutions had to account for the funding they received. The means to achieve an assessment of the worth of art was to consider the 'added-value' it offered. However, Jowell's model of art which could raise the aspirations of the nation was at odds with the perspective where the role of the artist was seen as not always having to be benevolent or considerate. The aim of art could be to dismantle the shared understanding that might be said to be the basis of empathy and aspiration.

The art which gets made visible is often that which is validated by the appropriate channels of visibility, such as art journals. The views emerging from the respondents suggested that as art practice seems to be inevitably guided by funding sources, and is part of the vitally important continuation of the game, the game itself and the market may dictate what gets seen and made.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Summary, conclusions and further work**

#### **9. 0 Introduction**

This chapter reflects upon the research process, highlights the contributions that the research presents to the field and explores the ways in which it confirms or challenges other research. Throughout the chapter there is a discussion of the implications of this study for further work in this field.

#### **9. 1 Reflections on the research process**

The interviews in this research, unlike most interviews with contemporary artists in previous studies, were subjected to systematic analysis (see 4.3 and 4.4). It is also important to stress that the use of artists' interviews for research purposes is distinct from the artists' interviews published in art journals, or those otherwise presented in edited form (see 4.4).

Semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate method for this research because of the difficulty of accessing and recording naturally-occurring discourses as they take place, in contexts such as at the private view, in the pub or over a meal (see 4.3). The respondents were familiar with being interviewed as a result of the increasing use of interviews by art journals. The use of semi-structured interviews was considered successful, in that it drew out content which had previously occurred naturally in discourses.

An acknowledged limitation of using semi-structured interviews was that the research questions were developed in accordance with insights gleaned from the literature and from the various interviews themselves, and thus not every topic was raised with each respondent (see 4.6). As a result, some respondents did not have the opportunity to express views about certain issues, yet certain of their comments, made in connection with other issues, did reveal in some instances how these respondents positioned themselves in relation to other respondents. This limitation is considered a minor consequence of an otherwise useful approach. The semi-structured interview would appear to be the only way in which the interview questions, and thus the thesis, could have

reflected the insights gained during the three years and the understanding which evolved as a result (see 4.6).

The respondents were clearly keen to bear in mind the implications for the promotion of their practice of associating themselves with the research agenda. It was recognised that a couple of the respondents engaged with the project because they knew they would be associated with other artists whose work or approach they respected (see 4.5). The significance of association became apparent when, once certain artists had agreed to commit to interviews, others followed. Making contact with potential respondents was also found to be much easier when done by recommendation (see 4.5).

Indeed, understanding how keen the respondent artists were to influence the way their practice was represented led to some specific conclusions. It became clear that the field of contemporary art really does resemble a game in which strategic moves and use of validating discourses come to determine success (see 5.1 and 8.1). This project has demonstrated the care with which contemporary artists have allowed their work to be contextualised and/or strategically associated (see 6.2). The phrasing of the letters and project outlines sent to prospective respondents allowed them to determine for themselves the premises on which the research was based and may have influenced their willingness, or unwillingness, to participate in the research. The ability of artists and professionals within the field to discern the assumptions that underwrote the research was initially underestimated. Any future work would do well to consider carefully the phrasing of project outlines, and the connotations which certain words have for those within the field.

There was a realisation that the respondents were constantly questioning the motivation behind this research. This could be because it was assumed that this research belonged in one or other of the two perspectives de Duve described. It became apparent that previous investigations into the contemporary art field had adhered to one side or the other of what de Duve described as a divide between historians and art critics. He saw the field as divided in a battle of words between the revisionists, who claim tradition, aesthetics and universality, and the last partisans of the avant-garde, who claim anti-tradition, anti-aesthetics and non-art (1996, p.437). He was also aware that such arguments meant that the use of certain words automatically puts you in one camp or in the other, as if words had fixed referents (de Duve, 1996, p.460).

It was clearly not possible to engage with professionals from within the field without entering the game to some degree; a researcher's language and approach are read as a means to position them

within an increasingly institutional culture of research. R9 and R1 in particular expressed hostility towards this culture of research or associated institutions (R9, 256 and 420) (R1, 498). It could be worth exploring whether it is possible to transcend the language divide described by de Duve, which sees the last partisans of the avant-garde as retaining a vested interest in the critique of art institutions (de Duve, 1996, p.460). It seems time to acknowledge that there is little of art tradition remaining to critique, since all conventions have been dissolved to the point where it is often difficult to discern who is the artist and who is the audience.

A further reflection on the research process has to acknowledge that another researcher might have drawn different conclusions from the transcript material. There may be alternative explanations for the strategies identified through this analysis. What is clear from discussing the transcript material with people beyond the field, is that contradictory positions were presented and there was a general sense of conscious manoeuvring.

The transcripts did present the opportunity to explore the actual language used by the respondents, it was clear from this material that certain respondents did demonstrate specific tendencies. For example, R4 often used the first person 'I' and thus clearly took a position whereas R9 and others rarely used this way of talking. This clear indication of another level of analysis was beyond the scope of this present study but the material collected would enable this to be undertaken at a later date.

## **9. 2 Re-addressing the area of enquiry**

The postmodern paradigm was seen to have replaced the modernist paradigm, although not entirely, through the collapse of artistic conventions and practice distinctions, such as those between painting, printmaking and sculpture, during the 1960s (see 2.2). There was evidence that the respondents believed that formal aspects of art are still considered, and are relevant to contemporary practices whether such aspects of art are explicitly spoken about or not. However, such artists were unwilling to allude to these formal aspects in discussions of practice unless discussion of formal aspects were first reintroduced to the critical language dictated by art journals and the arts press (see 5.2 and 6.3). If there is no way to discuss aspects of visual practice visual and formal understanding will be pushed further into the realm of secret knowledge (R4, 256).

The research supports the assertion by de Duve that we are still in the same paradigm, whether one calls it modernist or not, but that we are 'minus faith, plus suspicion' (de Duve, 1994, p.30). Whilst an understanding of the split between modernism and formalism was found to be useful, the actuality of contemporary practice was found not to fall definitively within either of the two options he described. The interviews with the respondents showed that some are engaged in specific practices which mean that, for them, aesthetic judgement is still applicable (see 8.4). Others are engaged in generic practices and consider aesthetic judgement an irrelevance (see 8.4). De Duve has asserted that modernism has not been completely betrayed; however, this research suggests that confusion arises as a result, since contemporary practice exists in a reality that involves a combination of the remnants of two conflicting modes of discourse.

This research has shown how the generic word *art* came into use as a way of providing the structure required for the game to continue once the specific forms of art-making, such as painting and sculpture became irrelevant to some. The generic phrase *practice* also came into use as a way to refer to generic forms of art-making. The concept of art has been seen to take on a new significance, as a supercategory, which acts as the structure providing the field with its meaning (see 3.3). Harris felt that those within the field seemed to be engaged in a game which necessitated attempting to maintain the supercategory 'art' and thus thesis has confirmed this (see 3.3, 5.1, 8.1 and 8.2). The current discussion also asks why, if one aim is to maintain the supercategory, there have been so many attempts to describe the end of specific practices such as painting or even of art itself. It is tempting to see these as attempts to pre-empt collapse and in so doing, to offer ways forward. The respondents for this study revealed how part of the game is a quest to gain a monopoly over the discourses which mediate contemporary practices (see 5.2 and 8.2), and how success within the field resulted from this. Bourdieu's concept of a struggle is demonstrated here, with the respondents trying to influence their positions within the field (see 3.2 and 5.6). We saw one respondent accusing artists of attempting to advance their careers, yet another respondent referred to that writer as perpetuating certain arguments himself, specifically to strengthen his own position within the field (see 5.6, 7.1 and 8.4).

The research also drew attention to the way that contemporary artists are aware of the need to develop discursive strategies to enable them to adapt the game or supercategory to accommodate their own practices (see 5.1, 8.1 and 8.2). Harris suggested that because of attempts to integrate diverse forms of practice the meaning of the word 'art' has been challenged to such an extent that the supercategory is collapsing. It would be interesting to explore the ways in which communities within the field come to the rescue of art when it appears to be collapsing under the strain, and to explore

specific instances where discourses are stretched to accommodate new practices. Awareness of such an understanding of the role of moves to shift the parameters of art, and the need to contain such practices under the supercategory art, do seem to be becoming evident within the discipline. Nick Stillman's comment in a review of Glenn Kaino makes this apparent; 'The looming tussle on Kaino's chessboard implies an intellectual battle where instigators make their moves and backslappers mull over how to contain them' (Stillman, 2005).

The philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), particularly his theory of play, might be another useful tool to support further exploration of the parallels between the field and a game. In his theory of play, Gadamer also sees the notion of the game as self-perpetuating, as identified within this research. His model supports the model described here and makes it apparent that 'the nature of the game itself is defined far more by the structure that determines the movement of the game from within than by what it comes up against' (Gadamer, 1975, p.107). The structure of the movement of the game seemed to be determined by artists who having shed dependency upon conventions, then developed a need for conceptual justifications in the form of discourses, (which Harris has referred to as artspeak) in order for their practices to be defined as art (see 3.3). The research revealed how a number of the artist respondents were conscious of needing to set their own rules, as a result of working within a lack of conventions (see 5.1 and 5.2).

It was revealed that without familiarity with the conventions which govern practice, art became coded. This served to exclude certain audiences, sometimes deliberately (see 5.1). Wenger's concept of reification, the use of discourses as an accompaniment to practice in the negotiation of meaning, was found to be a useful way to describe how discourses within the field were used to transform the meaning of ordinary objects into art (see 8.2). Although it has been asserted that those not 'corrupted' by artspeak would determine that a piece of work was nothing more than an ordinary object, those within the field seemed rarely to doubt the validity of the claim that a work referred to as art was anything other than art. Gadamer again offers a way to consider the power that the game exerts upon those who enter into it. He states that: 'The attraction of the game, the fascination of a game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game masters the players' (Gadamer, 1975, p.106). Thus the game requires belief and is thought to take hold of those who enter into it. This is supported by Wenger's view of identity as entwined with the communities with which we associate ourselves.

Gadamer's thinking acknowledges 'the purpose of the game' as not being to do with solving tasks, but with 'ordering and shaping the movement of the game itself' (Gadamer, 1975, p.107). His understanding therefore reflects that of Bourdieu and of Harris who recognised how important it was for professionals to focus on developing and advancing their position whilst ensuring the continuation of the game. This enquiry suggests, as Bourdieu acknowledged, that those within the field have little ability to challenge the game itself, only to try to change it minimally or to shift the rules (see 8.1). The most significant aspect of this insularity of the art world is the lack of scope for surveying the field or even the lack of a position from which to observe. The research has revealed that the field can be seen as exceptionally closed; it was referred to by de Duve as an esoteric game of ping-pong, which seems a fitting analogy (see 8.1). It is considered self-perpetuating, in part because professional artists act as models on undergraduate courses and teach by example (see 2.2).

The problems facing contemporary artists art are not applicable solely to this field; others who engage in generic practice are contemporary musicians, who have also rejected certain conventions. As a result of this rejection of conventions, listeners may sometimes be at a loss to know what to expect if they are unfamiliar with a musician's self-imposed rules. An example of this was the music of Matthew Herbert, as discussed by Isobel Hilton on Radio 3's programme Night Waves on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2005. Hilton acknowledged that Herbert's music was intended to be seen as protest music of the future, and that it required an awareness and comprehension of the rules, the codes which Herbert had set himself, in order for the sound to be related to his stated political agenda. Hilton questioned whether this process was necessary and whether it really transformed the sound into something any more interesting to listen to.

The research revealed a perspective among the respondents that saw contemporary art as intended for a small elite audience of other producers. There was an acknowledgment that artists may produce work which is intentionally coded, in order to avoid misunderstanding by a mass audience (see 5.1). As a result of this awareness and the breakdown of conventions, which resulted in the need for discourses that convey an artist's self-imposed rules, further exploration of the space left for the viewer in contemporary art is necessary. It might be useful to focus on how audiences make meaning from their experiences of art, to determine whether this is a process which requires initiation into the diverse rules and conventions of practice.

The respondents R9 and R4 had advocated that contemporary art remain difficult, complex or inaccessible (see 5.1 and 7.5). R4 saw popularity in contemporary art, or popularity encouraged by



government, as being detrimental to practice, as he considered it might result in some art audiences being exposed to values they might otherwise not have (see 6.6). R9 expressed hostility toward the Tate, which has been responsible for contributing to the popularity of contemporary art in the UK in recent years; this consumer-oriented approach conflicted with his view that art ought to remain challenging. The artists argued that art was produced primarily to be appreciated by a specific sub-cultural group, who can be conceived of as a community with shared cultural interests that go against the grain of mainstream culture (see 5.2). Many of the respondents who advocated that art remain difficult were engaged in producing specific forms of practice, such as painting, and had a connection with the market (see 5.2 and 7.5).

In contrast to this there were those respondents such as R16, R10, and R11, whose relationships with the market were less secure and who taught at universities partly to provide an additional source of income. These respondents also shared a wish to make art that was more accessible to wider audiences (see 7.5 and 8.5). R16 in particular recognised that broader support for contemporary art would result in greater funding and the expansion of the scene within which he practised (see 7.6). Such generic forms of practice, not supported by a comparable market, appeared to gain financial support from funding bodies whose agendas and guidelines can encourage particular types of practice. One respondent in particular made an inadvertent acknowledgement that he had on occasion aligned his agenda with that of the funding body or commissioners (see 7.6 and 8.5). The research thus made apparent that arts funding guidelines and agendas may influence artists' practice, and further work might explore the extent to which this occurs (see 7.6 and 8.5).

As an aside to this, it seems pertinent that the most generic and thus unmarketable of all the respondents' pieces of work was ##### by R15. This work comprised the detritus of social gathering attended by influential people within the art world, who are the very people who would support generic practice such as that of R15, who produces nothing for the market. R15 had cut the work to the bone, so that all that was left was the networking itself. By leaving the detritus with the list of names, he made these connections apparent for all to see.

Some respondents, like R10, who are engaged in generic practices, expressed a wish for their art to become more ordinary. This would mean communicating to all its audiences the rules or conventions adopted. R10's argument is that he is on the side of an ordinary perspective, that of the masses – in short, he wants to appeal even to the philistine. Yet because of the challenging nature of his practice he could be said to be alienating ordinary people, who find themselves unable to engage with work

like his or to see it as art. The research findings suggest that those who argue for the ordinariness or accessibility of contemporary practice would do well to acknowledge that such generic art, lacking in traditionalist conventions, may appear more inaccessible than they realise to those whom they seek to engage. And if such art is found to be accessible after all, this may be due to it being experienced as something *other* than art. The public will then ask what it is funded *as*, and why. R10 suggested that a viewer did not need cultural capital in order to engage with contemporary art practice, yet the analogy he drew came from painting, rather than the generic practice in which he or his fellow artists engage.

A position of cultural superiority was claimed by a number of the respondents, who were confident in their ability to educate the masses by pointing things out to them (see 7.6 and 8.5). What was at issue was not whether art ought to be exclusive or accessible; rather, it was whether artists genuinely believed that art ought to be accessible or whether they were interested in such agendas because they were the agendas of a number of arts funding bodies.

This research has focused upon a specific area of the art world, which could be described as the area made visible in and by the leading art journals and galleries. As a result of this the study should not be seen as representative of all contemporary art. R9 questioned who ought to be defined as the 'real artists': those visible 'people in the art magazines who have the state and fame' or those who make work that 'is sold and [that] ... ordinary people in their real lives like' (R9, 380). Yet despite the existence of these other arenas for practice, those within the arena focused upon in this study have been heard to suggest that theirs is the only art world worth attention and that other artists' practices, not visible within this arena, ought to be recognised as second-rate. As R9 commented: those outside this arena are typically 'despised by the – what might be called the elite' (R9, 382). It was certainly apparent at times within the interviews that those within this field did indeed consider themselves part of an elite, as this was reflected in the superior stance adopted by some respondents towards their audiences. Although many of the respondents in this research could be said to possess a high degree of cultural capital, R9 expressed frustration that this should be seen as translating into economic rewards (R9, 380). The degree of cultural capital possessed by players within this field was difficult to determine, but the way in which people within this milieu appear to be, has been commentated upon by Adrian Dannatt of the *Evening Standard* who suggested that:

[Neal] Brown is a 3D living hologram of pure west London myth, the throbbing embodiment of the social—cultural nexus that currently makes up the modish upper

reaches of the capital's art mafia, a man with more network than David Seaman (Dannatt, 2000).

The degrees of cultural capital possessed by those within this world and by some of the respondents seemed to be influenced by the communities within which they practised. An artist who has a high degree of cultural capital within one community may not have that cultural capital recognised when they move in other circles, or other communities of practice within the art world.

Thus the existence of various communities of practice within the art world became apparent. This supports the usefulness of a model such as Wenger's in exploring the roles of people within a field like contemporary art. The work of Jonathan Vickery called for the application of organisation theory to the field of contemporary art production (see 3.5), and the present research has responded to this call by applying Wenger's model of communities of practice to the field. The context of contemporary art could then be explored in light of the roles of those who actually engage in art practices and those involved in the production of the discourses which mediate, promote and validate those practices. The project supports some of the notions developed by Wenger and shows their application to a wider range of disciplines than Wenger may have initially intended.

Many of the respondents also identified the various communities to which they considered they belonged. R14 described how he considered himself part of the core of the international art scene, referring to it as the international family (see 6.5), and asserted that this core deals with work of international repute and interest (see 6.5). R4 could also be said to work within the international art market, but within a slightly different community from R14. The artist respondents R10, R11 and R9 are, however, not necessarily working within this international arena. Indeed, R11 recognised that he needed to work on his international appeal, as had been specifically requested by FA Projects, the gallery who represent him and who saw his appeal as being limited because he was perceived as principally a London scene artist (see 5.7). It was acknowledged that the increasing numbers of communities of artists within the field, referred to for instance by R14 and R1 (see 5.7) will lead to art practices that will be comprehensible only to those who have familiarised themselves with the artists' conventions or self-imposed rules. To those from other communities, the work may appear incoherent.

The research has drawn attention to assertions that art schools were partly responsible for producing students able to espouse fashionable theories to promote themselves. Further research might investigate the nature of the 'instant rewards', which de Duve suggested are provided by attending

such institutions. This research has been partly motivated by awareness of undergraduate students strategically appropriating lecturers' discourses in order to contextualise and validate their own practice in ways that would gain them recognition. Noland commented that she was familiar with this strategy, and referred to it as 'passing off', saying that it was believed by the students concerned to be part of the game (see 8.2).

A variation on the practice of 'passing off' was clearly apparent in the interviews. Many contemporary artists were willing to agree with any new ways in which their work was interpreted, and went on to employ these readings of their work on later occasions. Whereas artists such as R4 was keen to advance a coherent position on his practice, this was found to be less relevant to younger respondents (see 5.6). Instead, there have been attempts on the part of contemporary practitioners to shift their position deliberately, so as to avoid restricting how their work is read, supposedly to broaden the appeal of their practice. It would be interesting to explore in greater depth how Bourdieu's notion of position-taking could be developed to account for these shifting positions (see 5.6). Would Bourdieu argue that the respondents' positions within the field actually remained more consistent than they claimed at interview?

The way artists positioned themselves often depended on the use of theory, but R9 considered artists' use of contemporary theory a 'dodgy science' (see 6.1). From the evidence of this study contemporary artists seem to be using theory as a means to promote the impossibility of understanding. Such a conception of how understanding occurs, or how it can be considered impossible, is linked to theories from other disciplines. It does seem of concern that artists use contemporary thinking in ways that involve a perpetuation of these theories, that they seem to be illustrating contemporary thinking rather than adding to it or indeed opposing it. There was acknowledgement that understanding how another person experiences the world, and thus a work of art, is impossible. Yet R15 suggested, and others implied, that art should create more 'gaps' and perpetuate this 'gappage'. This makes it impossible to understand and is not about seeking ways to overcome such boundaries (see 6.1 and 8.3). R15 suggested that the media attempt to make communication seamless, and saw this as a flaw. Yet Harris, and Wenger have recognised that communication can never be seamless, since the 'gappage' referred to by R15 is an inevitable part of communication. Language and art can be seen as ways to bridge the gaps that separate our individual understandings of the world. Therefore, the perpetuation of 'gappage' does not need to be deliberately encouraged by artists such as R15, as it occurs whenever two people look at a painting or other conventional artwork and do not experience it in the same way.

The research has considered how the viewer might respond to contemporary art as an aesthetic experience and how they may respond to the work of an artist like R11, whose practice aims to dismantle any shared sense of human understanding (see 8.4). Armstrong has suggested that aesthetic experience is based upon a subjective relationship to art, but R9 considered contemporary art to be 'subjectively immeasurable' (R9, 132). A number of the contemporary artist respondents were found to have strategically moved away from art that might have elicited a subjective response, with R11 explicitly stating that he sought to be beyond judgement (see 5.3 and 8.6).

It would be pertinent and interesting to explore artists' motivations for producing art which does not signify and is intended to dismantle that which is thought to bind together human experience (see 8.4). Gadamer's work, and that of writers such as Armstrong, gives us tools to perceive the work of art in relation to experience and being. This might offer us ways to develop positive models for the future which encourage the type of art that does engage and does resonate for its audiences. Since human consciousness is conceptual but knowledge of reality is based on sensory-perceptual experience, art can be seen as a way to translate our values and experiences of life, as well as the meanings put upon those experiences, into a form that can be experienced by others with the sensory immediacy of direct perception.

This research has contributed to the understanding of the processes by which art is validated and promoted. Contemporary art practice was found to be validated not as a result of the imposition of value judgements (see 7.2) but rather, as R3 made apparent, by validation through being included in the appropriate art journals and shows (see 7.2). Art critics were not perceived as being free to assert critical judgements but instead were seen as validating art for a fee at the request of art journal editors (see 7.3). Ties that usually go unnoticed were found between art galleries and art journals as a result of advertising contracts, which, while not entirely visible at first, were thought to be responsible for determining much of what gets included in the journal pages (see 7.3). Far from being an alternative to the way in which other fields of cultural production operate, the art world was revealed to be, as one of the respondents described it, capitalism in its purest form. It became apparent from the interviews that the contemporary artists were aware of the need to employ strategies that allowed their work maximum exposure concurrent with the position they sought for themselves within the field (see 5.1 and 5.2).

Archer's view – the art that is there is what ought to be looked at – needs to be challenged. One might pose the question: how does the art that is there get there in the first place? Further work would be

useful on the viability of judgements of quality within the field of contemporary art, not for the benefit of professional practice but better to serve those in art education. An exploration is needed into how reputations are established and how the rewards of pitching or making oneself visible within the field enable success. Further work might also reveal more about the role of art journal editors who, as R3 suggested, are highly influential in dictating which art gets seen and validated.

R9 was aware that value judgements are not imposed upon contemporary art, but rather that value is accorded by the conferral of power, or in a contextual way, by choosing whether to place a work of art in a gallery (R9, 132). Such attempts to equate validation with the conferral of power, so as to avoid issues of subjectivity and taste, seem unsuccessful. As de Duve has suggested, the statement 'this is beautiful', an objective statement which denotes that the object to which it is applied is beautiful to all, is thereby transformed into the statement 'this is art'. The consecration of an object as art is therefore seen as objective, as the assertion 'this is art' implies not that this is what the viewer alone considers to be art, but that this thing must be recognised by all as art. There is clearly scope for further exploration of how de Duve's assertion relates to R9's understanding that the art world still adheres to an idea of beauty, but in the form of 'intellectual beauty' (R9, 284).

De Duve has offered a useful model for the exploration of contemporary art practice and recognises, too, the need to bring together some of the problems he raised and to suggest a possible explanation. He suggests that human beings' need for art is that it offers us a means to communicate the shared experience of what it is to 'be', based on a need to form relationships with others. This has been supported by the assertions of Armstrong and Winnicott, amongst others. However the elaboration of this which de Duve chooses to present might be considered obscure. He argues that what 'forces humans' to seek to communicate this experience or as he calls it, 'an ethical behavior instead of an instinctual freedom' is a result 'of the handicap of humans being born prematurely' and thus without the real capacity for autonomy (de Duve, 1996, p.440). He therefore suggests that humans develop a need for culture that other species do not.

A contrary argument to this, from the behavioural and brain sciences, would suggest that because of their consciousness, humans are driven towards art just as they are toward language. As it is our consciousness that makes us aware of our subjective experience of the world, and our experience differs from others' experiences, both art and language can be seen to offer ways to bridge the differences between us and our fellow human beings.

A possible way to further develop our understanding of our field might be to link our understanding of contemporary art with that of other disciplines in such a way so as to make the most of what they can currently tell us about subjective experience and consciousness. This might be achieved by looking to fields such as cognitive science, linguistics, knowledge management, clinical psychology and brain and behavioural psychology, in a way that moves beyond illustration or analogy, to a more integrated model.

Existing and current research relevant to this area of enquiry has focused upon what David Chalmers has referred to as the 'hard problem' (Chalmers, 1996) and researchers such as Jeffery Gray have explored ways of understanding our subjective experiences or 'what it is like to be' from the activity of brain cells. Gray has considered ways of explaining the redness of red, or the smell of lavender, or the qualities of experience that philosophers call qualia. Ramachandran and Hirstein have explored the possibility of 'using a "bridge" of neurons' to enable them to gain knowledge of the qualia another person is experiencing (Ramachandran, V.S., and Hirstein, W., 1997). They also claimed to be able to offer 'a hypothesis about the relation between qualia and one's sense of self' (Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1997).

This type of interdisciplinary approach could be a useful way to counter the feeling expressed by respondents such as R8: 'Art theory, and the theory that is used to support art works, tends to lag behind [...] the [...] cutting edge of theory in other disciplines' (R8, 22).

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## **Appendix 1: Pilot interview questions**

### **Interview topic sheet used by the researcher in the pilot interviews**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. The questions are here to act as a guide to the topics I am interested in discussing with you.

1. Can you briefly describe what type of creative practice are you engaged in?
2. Where and how do you feel you draw influence /inspiration from for your creative practice?
3. What role do you feel these influences play in the actual making process?
4. Do you regularly read art journals, art reviews in newspapers, online journals, artists statements, or visit exhibitions?
5. Do you relate theoretical concepts to your creative practice?
6. What role do you see theory playing in the actual making process?
7. Do you think there are similarities / differences between the way you and other practitioners draw upon influence?
8. Do you think there are similarities / differences between the way you and other practitioners relate to theory?
9. Do you discuss the theory and influence relating to your practice with anyone, what motivates you to do this?
10. Do think this type of research would be helpful to you and your practice, would you be interested in hearing what other practitioners have said about their practice?

## Appendix 2: Sample letter sent to respondents

Miss Abigail Diamond  
Nottingham Trent School of Art and Design  
Victoria Studios  
Shakespeare Street  
Nottingham  
NG1 4FQ

Tel: 07879 465911  
Email: [AbigailDiamond@students.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:AbigailDiamond@students.ntu.ac.uk)

19 December 2003

Dear #####,

I am currently undertaking research for my PhD in Visual Art at Nottingham Trent School of Art and Design. The focus of the research is an exploration of theoretical discourse and writing surrounding contemporary visual art practice.

I wondered if you would be willing to spare some time an interview to explore the contextualisation of your practice in an interview? An interview would take approximately one hour and would be arranged at a time and location convenient to yourself. My hope is to conduct the interviews between January and March 2004. A brief outline of the project is enclosed for your consideration.

This project is being supervised by Professor Judith Mottram. She would also be happy to be contacted should you have any queries about the work.

Please could you let me know by email, phone or letter if you are willing to be involved in the project, or if you require any further information

Kind regards

Miss Abigail Diamond  
PhD Researcher  
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## Appendix 3: Example of project brief sent to respondents

**Abigail Diamond**

Nottingham Trent School of Art and Design  
Victoria Studios

### Project Outline

In the last twenty years there have been significant changes in the means by which we theorise, discuss and contextualise visual art practice. We now seem to draw upon a broader range of bodies of knowledge to contextualise visual art practice, including dominant theoretical modes such as psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, postmodernist, and poststructuralist theory. These theoretical modes are used in conceptualisations of visual art practice by students in art schools, as well as appearing regularly in artist's statements and in published transcripts of interviews with artists.

The role these modes of theoretical contextualisation play in understanding contemporary visual art practice could be described as somewhat unclear. In some circumstances they may serve as a bridge between an artist and an interviewer providing a shared platform for discourse, or in others between an artist or lecturer, with a funding body or student, as illumination or explanation. Theoretical contextualisations can be seen to replace or be incorporated into an elaboration of fundamental thematic issues an artist feels they are addressing. This research will explore what motivates artists to employ such theory to contextualise practice, and its strategic application in interviews and statements. What is certain is that these theoretical modes of contextualisation have become institutionalised. The focus of this research is to explore in particular the increasing use of psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory in discourses surrounding contemporary visual art. I am especially interested in how these modes of theoretical contextualisation tend to focus upon conceptual aspects of art practice, often at the expense of consideration of the visual elements.

The project to date has included pilot studies with Nottingham based artists, and future work will include a content analysis of contemporary visual art journals. The main body of the research will comprise of interviews with eminent contemporary artists. ##### has said he would be happy to help with the project and other artists to be approached include Tony Oursler, Mamma Anderson, Jessica Stockholder, #####, James Turrell and Eric Fischl. The data resulting from the interviews will only be used for the doctoral thesis and participants in the interviews will be anonymous. If any parts of the thesis are developed for subsequent publication, the artists will be contacted and they will not be identifiable without their agreement.



## Appendix 4: Interview questions

### Respondent: R8

1. In '#####' you made an assertion that there has been a significant increase in the number of artists interviews in comparison to critical reviews, could you tell me what research this assertion was founded upon, or what led to say this?
2. Do you see the elusiveness and ambiguity, you described in #####, as surrounding contemporary artists, to be a purely British phenomenon?
3. At least one of the artists I have spoken with regarding this project believes they are working from within a Modernist frame. What do you think are the implications for artists working from differing paradigms and yet being included in exhibitions and having their work analysed and discussed from a postmodernist point of reference?
4. Artists' commitment to an expression of their perceptions, perspective and the resilient belief in arts ability to affect its audience, is this completely lost in contemporary arts post-modern irony and subversion?
5. As art education encourages ever-greater engagement with theoretical issues do you think art is in danger of becoming nothing more than an illustration of that theory?
6. What about the current trend for favouring ideas over aesthetics?<sup>1</sup>
7. As you have emphasised there is currently interest from business in intangible assets such as creativity, knowledge, learning, and innovation<sup>2</sup>, because of this it seems, an increasing fear seems to have developed among practitioners that research is not aimed at benefits intended for them. Would you agree with this?

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<sup>1</sup> #####

<sup>2</sup> See. Ahmed, A.M & Abdalla, H.S. 'The role of Innovation in Crafting the vision of the future', *Computers and Industrial Engineering*, Oct 1999, vol.37, no.1 And Mo. J.P.T & Zhou, M. 'Tools and methods for managing intangible assets of virtual enterprise', *Computers in Industry*, June 03, vol.51, no.2

**Respondent: R6**

1. Could you tell me a little bit about what motivates and or inspires your work?
2. I noticed the artist's book you produced titled ##### included poetic song lyrics. Is music an inspiration to you? (This doesn't seem to have been discussed or picked up on in the reviews about your work)
3. Are there any particular artists you feel have inspired you?
4. How do you go about making your paintings?
5. Is the process by which you make your work intended to result in a specific effect?
6. Do you read the reviews about your work?
7. Do you intend to convey any particular meanings through your paintings?
8. How do the titles relate to the works?
9. Is there intended to be a critical address in your work?
10. Would you associate irony with your practice?
11. Would you consider yourself a feminist artist?
12. How would you locate your work in relation to feminist thinking or theory, is it something you consider?
13. How do you consider the role of the intellectual and the visual in contemporary art?
14. Has the reception of your practiced varied from country to country?
15. Has the nature of what has been written about your work varied from country to country?
16. How would you locate your practice in relation to other contemporary artists, or particular trends or movements?

## **Respondent: R4**

1. You don't seem to write specifically about particular paintings I wondered if you could tell me about the relationship of your writing to your painting?
2. I am interested to here your response to Baudrillard's rejection of the linkage of yours and other artists practice to his writing?
3. I believe, if I have understood this correctly, that you are interested in the models we seem to be dependant upon in order to make sense of the world or to experience something in other disciplines such as science for instance. Is this correct?
4. I was considering our dependence upon models to make sense of the world, in relation to your comment about art being for the initiated viewer, and I wondered if you thought one has to be initiated to meaningful relate to art?
5. If so would this mean that the viewer of art also requires a model of how to understand or experience artworks, and therefore do not experience them specifically either?
6. Could you tell me a little about why you have said you don't feel nature is viable theme for contemporary art?

**Respondent: R7**

1. How would you define your practice? As it has been referred to in reviews as conceptual art, political art, intervention art and performance.
2. A number of people have made comments about your work which relate to your "sincerity, utopian faith and belief in art for the benefit of human kind" how do you feel about these comments?
3. In the press release for the ##### exhibition, it mentions that the group of you "question, explore and raise issues" or "address" very wide issues such as globalisation, could you tell me a little about how you feel your practice actually goes about "addressing" these issues?
4. ##### described your work as mock serious, parody agitation yet also in another statement he stated it was political art. Could you tell me a little about the relation of humour and political agenda?
5. I am interested in the fact that your practice is based upon interventions and therefore you seek the skills you require to execute a particular work from other people. Such as in the ##### project. Does this still allow the space for the ideas to develop, and happy accidents to occur as they may if you were working more exploratively with a specific medium?

## Respondent: R1

1. What do you see as the role of art journals such as #####?
2. Do you have a particular editorial policy?
3. Do you ever commission writers to write about or interview certain artists?
4. How do you decide which artists are to be written about or interviewed?
5. Is there a large number of writers you call upon to write for the magazine?
6. If a writer has written a critical review of an artist before would that stop you asking them to write about or interview that artist in the future?
7. How would you classify the different types of texts that are included in the magazine, such as a Q&A, profile, review etc
8. Would you consider there to have been an increase in any particular form of writing in your magazine in recent years?
9. It has been commented that there has been an increase in artists interviews in recent years would you agree with that?
10. Would you consider there to have been an increase in the contexts in which artists are able to represent their own practice?
11. Harrison refers to the task of the art writer as being 'to follow the signpost' from the artwork 'into the social context, to gather references and background information and to draw out the resulting material as an account of the work'. Would you agree that this is a fair description of the role of art writing?
12. Do you feel art criticism is still viable?
13. Who do you see as being responsible for making value judgements of artworks?
14. Do you think the social conditions of arts production are understood?
15. Do you think the art world conceals these?
16. An institutional theory of art sees an art object as 'art' due to it being embedded within 'a circuit of theories' of art, and as a result of someone within the art world with cultural power conferring identify on that object as such. Who would you see as having this power to confer the status of art on an object?
17. How do you think contemporary artworks work?
18. Some commentators have said that they see contemporary art as 'discursive' others have said they see it as 'merely stimulating linguistic reasoning' could you comment on this?

**Respondent: R3**

Could you tell me about the process of an artists interview for an art journal such as

#####?

1. How many times would you actually meet with the artist?
2. Is an artist paid for an interview?
3. Could you tell me a little bit about the editing process of an artists interview?
4. How much control does the artist have over what is finally published?
5. Is it any easier or more awkward to edit an interview than write a review?
6. Do you feel there has been an increase in artists interviews in art journals in recent years?
7. What purpose do you feel the artist interview serves?
8. Do you feel there is room for critical discussion of the work in an artists interview?

## **Respondent: R9**

1. When we spoke previously you mentioned you agreed that there has been an increase in theory surrounding contemporary art, could you just reiterate a little about how you feel this has been apparent?
2. You also mentioned that you thought this may be linked to fashions and trends, I wondered if you could elaborate a little on this.
3. Do you feel there has been an increase in artist's interviews and or in artist's opportunities to represent their own practice?
4. It has been suggested that there has been a rise in the power of the curator; do you see this in anyway related to the increase in art theory?
5. An institutional theory of art sees an art object as 'art' due to it being embedded within 'a circuit of theories' of art, and as a result of someone within the artworld with cultural power conferring identify on that object as such.
6. Who would you see as having this power to confer the status of art on an object?
7. Who do you see as being responsible for making value judgements of artworks?
8. Do you think the social conditions of arts production are understood?
9. Do you think the artworld conceals these?
10. How do you think contemporary artworks work?
11. Some commentators have said that they see contemporary art as 'discursive' others have said they see it as 'merely stimulating linguistic reasoning' could you comment on this?

## Respondent: R10

I'm interested in finding out your views on what seems to be a merging of roles within the art world. Including those of the philosopher, the art historian and the art critic, whose roles have been subject to the apparent crisis declared by some and debated in art monthly, and in relation to those of the artist who often seems to inhabit the role of curator, and of theorist/ art writer.

1. I am sure you are aware of the debate in art monthly about the apparent crisis in art criticism, do you agree that there is a crisis in art criticism or not?
2. When one reads about the apparent crisis it often seems those writing are in fact commenting on a crisis in art, would you agree?
3. You mention in your book "#####" that your concept of the ##### would seem, superficially to share some of Crow's history and cultural reference points'. However, you also add, 'Crow's position exhibits many of the problems of theorising art's other in terms of positivistic exclusions', could you say a little bit about this, and suggest others who you think may approach art as you consider the ##### might?
4. Could you explain the differences between the approach to art taken by a debunker of art, and that of the philistine?

The following questions are posed in relation to #####'s article published alongside yours in ##### this spring, and in light of your article in #####. The art I am thinking of includes what you've referred to as the new socially orientated work and therefore the work associated with Bourriaud's term 'relational aesthetics' or interventionist art more generally. As ##### suggests, Bourriaud 'refuses to address the ways in which they participate in, or resist, a dominant social order'.

5. Do you believe this art can actually escape or act critically against, the dominant capitalist economy? If so, how do you consider it can achieve this, and resist what have been referred to as 'commercialised and spectacularised inter-personal relations'?
6. How might Rirkrit Tiravanija's or R15's work avoid reinforcing this commercialised and spectacularised inter-personal relations or social events, by turning them into art? That's assuming you consider it can achieve this, you may not think so...?

Miwon Kwon speaks of art, which I assume could be likened to the socially orientated art you refer to, as trying to 'raise questions', 'unsettle viewers' and make 'them uncomfortable about who they are'. Yet she warns that these artists' approaches may 'affirm rather than disturb the viewers sense of self' and leave them 'victimised yet resilient'.

7. Do you consider it realistic to assume this art can, disrupt a viewers' sense of identity and self?

In the article '##### you state that, ##### talks about 'art's power in anachronistic terms', which you see as more reminiscent of TS Eliot or the Bloomsbury Group, than Jeremy Deller and Bank.



8. What terms would you use to describe art's power in relation to Jeremy Deller or Bank?

In an article in #####, ##### also refers to the avant garde's 'cultural superiority complex', which ##### implies ##### doesn't seem to think 'the current crop of socially orientated artists' share.

9. How do you perceive them as having moved away from this?

I am also interested in your comment in #####, in which you state, 'people are no more excluded from art than they are playing chess, or reading philosophy'.

10. Is it not more difficult to gain the cultural capital necessary to comprehend contemporary art than it is to learn to play chess, or to read philosophy?

You say art's debunkers only see art as a multiplication of cultural capital rather than as a challenge to it.

11. How do you see art as offering a challenge to cultural capital?

## Respondent: R11

As I mentioned I am interested in exploring the nature of the discourses which surround contemporary art.

1. I wondered if you could say a little bit about those discourses, which have been described by some as having once been avant-garde independent discourses that have now become 'largely institutionalised'?

Some such as Peter Osborne and I think Dave Beech, would argue that claims by those such as Danto among others that art has ended, stem from an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the prevailing philosophical discourse on art (namely, 'aesthetics'). Beech obviously advocates philistinism as an alternative discourse or mode of attention for considering art,

2. Would you agree that there is need for a new discourse to consider art?
3. If so what would you advocate instead of aesthetics?
4. Your work seems very visual, what is the role the choice of visual aspects of the work, what are the reasons for the choices of colours and materials?
5. Would you say you make work which has visual appeal with the knowledge described by Peter Osborne of '1) the ineliminability but radical insufficiency of the aesthetic dimension of the art work; 2) the necessary conceptuality of the art work; 3) the critical requirement of the anti-aesthetic use of aesthetic materials' ?

The following questions are posed in relation to and by drawing upon terms used in Anna Dezeuze's and Dave Beech's articles published in Variant this spring, and the recent book by Alexander Alberro, 'Conceptual Art and the politics of publicity'. In the book Alberro argues, argues, that 'the idea that political economy of conceptual art sought to eliminate the commodity status of the art object, while highly provocative, is mythical'. (p.4, Alberro) As Alberro sees it there was never a moment when these artists did not seek to market their art. In his article Beech uses the term 'New socially orientated work' and Dezeuze refers to the way in which Nicholas Bourriaud 'refuses to address the ways in which the artists associated with the term 'relational aesthetics' 'participate in, or resist, a dominant social order'

6. Do you consider that the conceptualists' work was even intended to be anti-commercial? and do you believe that art can actually escape, resist or act critically against, the dominant social order (or capitalist economy)?
7. Can art resist what Anna Dezeuze referred to as 'commercialised and spectacularised inter-personal relations'?
8. How might Rirkrit Tiravanija's or R15's work avoid reinforcing this commercialised and spectacularised inter-personal relations or social events, by turning them into art? That's assuming you consider it can achieve this, you may not think so...?
9. If so, how do you consider it can achieve this?

R10 stated in a recent edition of ##### that art's debunkers only see art as a multiplication of cultural capital rather than as a challenge to it.

10. Do you see art as capable of offering a challenge to cultural capital?

11. Do you intend your art to offer a transformative experience for the viewer?

Miwon Kwon speaks of art, which I assume could be likened to the socially orientated art Beech refers to, as trying to 'raise questions', 'unsettle viewers' and make 'them uncomfortable about who they are'. Yet she warns that these artists' approaches may 'affirm rather than disturb the viewers sense of self' and leave them 'victimised yet resilient'.

12. Do you consider it realistic to assume this art can, disrupt or transform a viewers' sense of identity and self?

In the article in ##### R10 also refers to the avant garde's 'cultural superiority complex', which he implies he thinks 'the current crop of socially orientated artists' don't share.

13. Would you agree that artists have moved away from this?

**Respondent: R16**

1. Can you offer me some terms by which to describe the type of art practice you are engaged in?
2. Would you say your practice had any affinity to any other contemporary artists practice? Are there any artists with whom you believe you have shared notions of what art is, can or could be?
3. Would you identify yourself as part of a wider group of artists with whom you share an approach to practice and or an ideology,
4. Do you believe belonging to some form of larger scene, community or group of artists has been or is still typically an important aspect of making art visible within the art world and the market?
5. What did you think about Nicholas Bourriaud's attempt to describe a number of contemporary artists practice with the term 'relational aesthetics'? Does it interest you? Do you think it is useful?
6. How would you describe the relationship between yourself and the art market?
7. Could you tell me a bit about the text 'ideal art for the market' that I saw included in the ##### show?
8. What do you consider to be the role of the contemporary artist?
9. Who do you consider to be your audience?
10. During the session in Edinburgh you used terms similar to 'educating people to use the city', in relation I think to the piece called 'support structure'. Do you remember using those terms, are they terms you have used in relation to that piece?
11. Is your art intended to educate?
12. I noticed in the confrontation with ##### in the text for the ##### gallery, one of the most controversial aspects of the discussion or the work, was that he felt that you were trying to educate him through the work in some way. Is this a topic that is find often raised in relation to your practice?
13. If your work is not intended to educate, as you said in the ##### text, how do you see the role of the artist in relation to their audience, or participatory viewers/ spectators?
14. Do you intend the work to challenge the viewer? Do you consider to be the possibility of art disrupting a viewers sense of identity?... I am thinking in relation possibly to the work you did with the ##### group

Miwon Kwon speaks of art, which I assume could be likened to the socially orientated art you refer to, as trying to 'raise questions', 'unsettle viewers' and make 'them uncomfortable about

who they are'. Yet she warns that these artists' approaches may 'affirm rather than disturb the viewers sense of self' and leave them 'victimised yet resilient'.

15. How would you respond to Kwon's criticism of 'socially orientated practice' ?

In a recent article in ##### R10 refer to the avant garde's 'cultural superiority complex', which he implies he thinks the 'the current crop of socially orientated artists' no longer share, or have moved away from.

16. Would you consider artists to have moved away from this?

## Respondent: R15

Some of the research I have been considering on art education such as that by Theirry de Duve and or Howard Singerman, implies in slightly different ways that many of the changes in art education since the 1960's and the shifts through various models of art education have led to the realisation of the saying 'everyone is an artist'. This then leads onto the more recent model, in which they suggest in varying ways that it is enough to develop a persona of an artist, and that art education is about students abilities to become and to perceive themselves as competent practitioners within a professional community of practice and to develop a "critical attitude", which has become 'just that an attitude, a stance, a pose, a contrivance'. (p.27) 'a contemporary model informed by critical theory and born from art institutions such as museums and art schools, whose primary attribute is one of "attitude"'. A text I read recently from the Guardian by Mark Wallinger also stated with reference to the freeze generation that 'Within this Fool's Paradise, if you look like an artist, live like an artist and behave like an artist, then you are indeed an artist'.

1. Do these views have any resonance in relation to your work, #####'?

Another area I am looking at is considering the role of the art journal and art writing as a discourse. Singerman has also suggested that when visiting artists speak to the students they do so in the shared language of the art journals, and of that community; 'their speech constructs that community'.

He believes that the work of art journalists of the period was to 'to create and hold together a community of shared cognitive interests'<sup>3</sup>.

Thomas Crow also believes that the art press have played a more significant role within the art world in recent years than many have acknowledged. He believes that 'historical understanding of recent art will not begin to be satisfactory until the role of the art press is fully taken into account'<sup>4</sup>.

2. I was wondering whether the work, you did in 2003 at ##### was any form of comment on the nature of these art magazines, and discourses?
3. Could you explain a little bit about the significance of the ball in the pictures? The description of the work that I read led me to think of ##### and of the art world in terms of trying to keep a ball in the air.... do you think of the art world in terms of a game?
4. How would you consider the approach and meaning of your work, ##### to differ to Rirkrit Tiravanija's work and in particular the event he orchestrated in which he left the instructions for the making of Thai soup?

The following questions are posed in relation to and by drawing upon terms used in Anna Deuze's and Dave Beech's articles published in Variant this spring, and the recent book by Alexander Alberro, 'Conceptual Art and the politics of publicity'. In the book Alberro argues, argues, that 'the idea that political economy of conceptual art sought to eliminate the commodity status of the art object, while highly provocative, is mythical'. (p.4, Alberro) As Alberro sees it there was never a moment when these artists did not seek to market their art. In his article Beech uses the term 'New socially orientated work' and Deuze refers to the way in

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<sup>3</sup> ibid, p.85

<sup>4</sup> Crow, Thomas. Modern Art in the Common Culture,

which Nicholas Bourriaud 'refuses to address the ways in which the artists associated with the term 'relational aesthetics' 'participate in, or resist, a dominant social order'

5. Do you consider that the conceptualists' work was even intended to be anti-commercial? and do you believe that art can actually escape, resist or act critically against, the dominant social order (or capitalist economy)?
6. If so, how do you consider it can achieve this?
7. Can art resist what Anna Dezeuze referred to as 'commercialised and spectacularised interpersonal relations'?

It has also been claimed in a recent edition of ##### that art's debunkers only see art as a multiplication of cultural capital rather than as a challenge to it.

8. Do you see art as capable of offering a challenge to cultural capital?
9. Do you intend your art to offer a transformative experience for the viewer?

Miwon Kwon speaks of art, which I assume could be likened to the socially orientated art Beech refers to, as trying to 'raise questions', 'unsettle viewers' and make 'them uncomfortable about who they are'. Yet she warns that these artists' approaches may 'affirm rather than disturb the viewers sense of self' and leave them 'victimised yet resilient'.

10. Do you consider it realistic to assume this art can, disrupt or transform a viewers' sense of identity and self?

In the article in Variant Beech also refers to the avant-garde's 'cultural superiority complex', which he implies he thinks 'the current crop of socially orientated artists' don't share.

11. Would you agree that artists have moved away from this?

## Respondent: R14

1. Would you mind describing to me a little bit about how do you go about making decisions as to which artists to exhibit, or represent?
2. Has the process changed over the years significantly?
3. What art is it that you are interested in now?
4. In a number of previous interviews you refer to 'the first moment of enlightenment with an artists work' and have described it as being very precious, could you elaborate a little on that experience?
5. Who was the last artist that you signed?
2. You were obviously quite influential in the promotion of the conceptual artists of the 1970's. It often seems that this art is portrayed as anti-commercial. However, the recent book by Alexander Alberro argues, that these artists had no such intentions, and that 'the idea that political economy of conceptual art sought to eliminate the commodity status of the art object, while highly provocative, is mythical'. (p.4, Alberro) As Alberro sees it there was never a moment when these artists did not seek to market their art. Do you consider that their work was even intended to be anti-commercial?
3. One of the artists I interviewed suggested that you have recently been championing post-conceptual art. What is your commitment to post-conceptual art? Are you interested in the theory or the debates that surrounds it at all? The artist I spoke to felt you might be interested in the way the work looks, which they considered goes against most of that art was trying to do.
4. Do you engage with the theoretical debates which surround the practice you champion? Are there particular theoretical texts that you feel have informed your decisions to support certain artists?
5. Which art journals does your gallery advertise in?
6. When I met with R1, we discussed the relationship between art journals and galleries, and the accusations made by some that galleries buy advertising space in art journals in order to gain more reviews for their exhibitions and the artists they represent. R1 stressed that you have been a long-standing supporter of ##### and although you regularly pay for advertising space you do not expect to gain more reviews in light of this...would you say this is true, how do you see these relationships with art journals?
7. I am writing a little about the apparent 'crisis in art criticism', which many are debating, would you consider there to be one?
8. Many associated with the debate about the apparent crisis in art criticism, such as James Elkins seem to blame the increase in art writing which is often descriptive rather than critical. It seems one of the places this type of writing is proliferating is in gallery publications. What do you see as the role of this writing produced by a gallery such as



yours, who is responsible for it and is it all supportive? Is it intended to encourage people to buy art?

9. In the interview I read from ####, published in the #####, you referred to some American galleries as being all about selling and not about the art. You described how there was no intimacy to them, and referred to them as fake museums without the scholarship or the qualities you attribute to good museums. Could you elaborate on these comments for me: What makes a gallery appear as a fake museum? Or how can a gallery make itself more about the art and less about the selling, are they not intimately entwined?

## Appendix 5: Example Interview Transcript

Interview with R4 - conducted on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2004

1.	R	Before I ask you again questions I wanted to say thank you (.) [for letting me		
2.	A	Oh it's] my pleasure I enjoy it.		
3.	R	Ok. I've got some general questions which I have asked some of the other [artists as well		
4.	A	Um hum]		
5.	R	and then I have some specific questions which erm (.) I sort of formulated having [read		
6.	A	Um hum]		
7.	R	around your practice a little bit more. Erm (.) So first of all I'd like to know a bit more about the whole process of creating an artwork from the conception to the realisation of it.		

8.	A	Well it changes, (.) er (.) certainly no one has asked me this before. (.) It changes depending on the circumstances because sometimes your thinking about what I might as well call thematic concerns (.) er which tends to be periodic and (.) er sometimes one is thinking about a work to make (.) erm (.) er most of the time in between that one is thinking about making a work, (.) erm er within the thematic concerns that one has been er (.) er (.) er within a thematic concern. (.) And it is kind of different I mean it is kind of different I mean I have always had periods in which erm (.) I have sort of explored alternatives and should I go this way or that way erm. (.) Another thing is I tend to visualise works (.) I mean I do actually tend to see them in my minds eye and then following that have a sort of more of a debate with myself about how much sense that makes. (.) and er the visualisation can actually almost like the cliché occur at odd moments. (.) erm, let me ask you to ask another question about where you want that to go.	6.2.2 specifically the discourse within the interview relations, turning it around on the interviewer
9.	R	Ok, (.) erm. (.) I'm thinking (.)	
10.	A	Are you thinking about exactly what I (.) is it more the mental process or or things that I am thinking about?	
11.	R	Maybe things (.) What would you say was the difference between the mental process and things that you would be thinking about?	
12.	A	Well (.) you know a lot of the thinking goes into, well first off all I tend to draw simple pen drawings of the compositions I want to draw (.) and er for example a lot of the thinking could go into (.) well should this be 42inches or [40inches?	
13.	R	Right]	
14.	A	Or how wide should theses bars [be	
15.	R	Right	

16.	A	so those concerns in turn are in some way connected to a thematic set of references=		
17.	R	=Um hum=		
18.	A	Erm (.) also since er (.) for over ten years I have made all the compositions on the computer.		
19.	R	right		
20.	A	I seldom make (.) er (.) erm (.) I pretty much only work from (.) er the existing drawings that are already in the computer and (.) er (.) so each new piece is a kind of mutation of a previous one. (.) So that kind of circularity interests me very well, I mean very much. (.) So I'm wondering whether it would be helpful for you to go back to when the kind of work I make now first began? [Is that more what you need?		
21.	R	Um hum] That would be helpful. (.) [If you could		
22.	A	Well er] (.) erm, there are a few things I have written about it but erm (.) er, (.) pretty much from my teenage years I er (.) was interested in working with Geometric form,=		
23.	R	=Um hum=		

24.	A	and I (.) er (.) I seemed to have a natural tendency to work with flat colour, and as far as I can figure out those things are kind of almost biologically determined. (.) That whatever kind of the way my brain is formed tends to push me in that direction and I do very much feel also since I teach that (.) erm er (.) er that (.) erm artists whose concerns that may be very much the same if they have those two very different kinds of (.) erm or different in so far as they have different mindsets the work can be very different (.) er. (.) Er when I was at university in a graduate school during the early to mid seventies (.) erm (.) I was absorbing a lot of influences from disparate sources in contemporary art, and also very consciously trying to erm (.) figure out how both my own work and contemporary art that I liked related to larger cultural issues. (.) er, and I had a kind of dramatic erm (.) period of maturation, I grew up in New York and then I returned to New York after many years in 1980. (.) and coming back to New York was just for me very psychologically charged because it was home. (.) er it pushed me into a relationship with the art I was interested in, with how I made a painting and with how form was going to work in a painting that was er (.) er dramatically different and more or less the basis of what [I do now.	Interesting 6.2.1 the position you take as an artist must be related to your biological makeup.
25.	R	Um hum] okay (.) erm could I ask you a question about the audience that you anticipate being for [your work	
26.	A	What is] the [question?	
27.	R	The question] is yeah who do you anticipate being the audience being for you work. (.) Because I have read in a few places that you talk about erm (.) the audience for art being initiated into art and I was interested in [that idea.	
28.	A	Um hum]	
29.	R	And what your (.) erm how you would define somebody [who is initiated?	
30.	A	Um hum] In fact Americans er (.) its sort of disappeared but until five or ten years ago artist's that I knew and students when I was a student (.) always had this dream that they could make a work or a painting that would appeal to in the kind of democratic populist way to everybody. And erm quite [early on	6.2.5 6.3.1 6.3.2 6.3.3

31.	R	Um hum]			
32.	A	I encountered some more sociologically oriented art history and art criticism. (.) erm In fact one of the very first was a guy whose British er Michael [Baxendall		6.3.2 6.2.1 6.3.1	
33.	R	[Um hum]			
34.	A	his book on erm erm (.) Renaissance art in Florence and how the development of the Florentine renaissance with a perspective and er influences some painting texture and individuality and so forth was very much tied to the sub culture of the er (.) newly rich Florentine merchants and that made quite an impression on me. (.) And erm in graduate school I also encountered Ortega y Gasset the Spanish philosopher. (.) er And Gasset well he made two (.) makes two very dramatic points first of all he sees modernist art as intentionally coded. (.) Er he was writing in the 20's and 30's when communism, fascism and all kinds of dictatorships were raging and he really er (.) out and out says well these are these artist's have decided to code the narrative in their work pretty much to avoid trouble from a kind of vast misunderstanding majority. (.) And also er (.) to erm (.) offer their work only to an initiated sort of intelligentsia rather than the sort of insensitive er (.) bourgeois. And erm (.) the other I think very poignant point that Gasset makes is that erm er (.) democracy is not a system to serve the interests of the majority but rather to protect minorities from being killed by the majority (.) the symbolic act of defested transformed from death to voting. (.) And er it was a very foreign vision for me as an American with all that I grew up with and (.) er (.) coupled with the post structuralism that I read later it had an effect. (.) erm at the same time I began to read a little bit about things that I have (.) become so much more important since then which is that of the role of the sub culture in (.) in (.) er twentieth century contemporary society (.) erm. The idea that erm in opposition to the sort of (.) vast banal homogeneity of maybe (.) mass culture (.) media culture whatever you want to call it. (.) Er groups of people for whatever reasons came together into sub cultural groups and er (.) because they were interested in some kind of cultural (.) erm (.) er (.) activity which could be art or athletics or music and (.) or religion and that these er (.) er (.) that in contemporary culture have these sub cultural groups have become no only more prevalent but really crucial to peoples [sense of identity	6.3.1 6.3.2 6.2.1 6.2.5		

35.	R	Right]		
36.	A	For example what we're doing here is in a way an example of that because you know you've come from 3000 miles away (.) and I haven't met you before (.) but because of our shared interest in this vast city you can you know (.) directly come here and sit down with me or go to an art gallery and perhaps meet somebody you've met before. (.) erm (.) and it struck me that the other thing that developed at the beginning of the twentieth century that modernist art was the first of these sub cultural groups (.) yo well (.) one could posit it as a group around Picasso or even er Van Gogh and Gauguin. (.) And er (.) Picasso was notorious that he never really showed publicly he he didn't participate in the salons (.) and his audience and, (.) er his supporters were this very small de-alienated intelligentsia (.) and I guess I'm explaining it at such length because it not only seems like a powerful model but not necessarily a bad one.	6.2.1 6.2.5 6.3.1 6.3.2	
37.	R	Um hum,		
38.	A	And er in my own life as well I began to reflect on the fact that the cultural experiences that meant that meant a lot to me were those that very few other people were (.) are interested in. (.) And so the idea of a minority cultural experience or (.) er (.) er shared by er (.) shared by a erm (.) I guess self-identifying group er (.) has er (.) became began at some point to seem to me like a positive model.	6.2.1 6.3.2	
39.	R	Um, (.) I was interested when you talk about modern art being coded in some way (.) erm could you explain a little bit about you see it as being coded (.) and how you might, how one might gain an understanding of [that code?		
40.	A	Well I er I mean] all art is coded in so far as (.) erm one has to be able to read the signs if one is to understand the piece. (.) er and those kind of signifiers take place on many levels (.) er what we call representation or uses of colour and space or those things that are represented. (.) But what really seems to take off at the beginning of the twentieth century is the fact that erm (.) er the codes that artists created were were to use the word in a different sense coded. (.) In so far as if you didn't know the erm (.) have some sort of experience of or access to the key their language game (.) it it would not [be intelligible.	6.2.1 6.3.2 6.3.3	

41.	R	Um hum] And where would you see access to the key to that language game coming from?		
42.	A	Well within the sub cultural group.		6.2.1 6.3.2 6.3.1
43.	R	Okay. (.) So would art education serve that purpose at all?		
44.	A	Sure (.) er (.) I mean art education is a very interesting phenomenon (.) as is the fact the general support for (.) erm public support for culture you see in (.) general support for contemporary culture you see in Europe. (.) Erm er (.) I see it in two ways and on the one hand I see it as a very positive thing in terms of what kind of society it creates. (.) But in another way (.) er (.) once a police or state starts to encourage the appreciation of these specific cultural forms (.) er (.) to use the word loosely it very much encourages a maintenance of a (.) of a er (.) of a very (.) of a kind of bourgeois, a connection between bourgeois the bourgeoisie and culture and erm (.) and er the status of the [intelligentsia.		6.2.7 6.2.5 6.2.1 6.3.2
45.	R	Um hum]		
46.	A	So its kind of its a little bit propaganda as well I think.		
47.	R	Um hum] Do you mean in what you just said anything about the increase in popularity of contemporary art?		
48.	A	Well yes but er (.) in fact that popularity is very much encouraged by government support		6.2.5 6.2.1
49.	R	Yeah] I'm with you		
50.	A	Which again I (.) er in terms of my personal values I am in favour of (.) but looked at in a broader way it also. Er (.) er I think it's quite a powerful factor in terms of reinforcing certain really traditional values and indoctrinating people who might actually not otherwise not be inclined to have those values.		6.2.5 6.3.1



51.	R	I was interested in, (.) this relates a little bit I think to what we were just talking about erm (.) you talked about in contemporary society people having models for understanding certain things, (.) so that you approach something maybe in science with a theoretical model rather than seeing things specifically. (.) And yet when you talk about people approaching art being initiated (?????) (.) so you would then approach art with a model of thinking about the work to the extent that you'd have an understanding of the art (????) So does that then make the art any different from the rest (.) the way in which other disciplines work in contemporary society or would it just be, (.) is there a difference between them?		
52.	A	Well erm, ((phone rings)) let me just check this, art tends to have (.) oh, oh can I?, [let me get this		
53.	R	Yeah], yeah no		
54.	A	Just one [second		
55.	R	That's] ok ((tape is paused whilst telephone call is taken))		
56.	A	Erm (.) Generally speaking the process in science and art would be the same. (.) erm, and you know you can even get into a kind of game theory that (.) lets say we're talking about physics er (.) or we're talking about the (.) an innovation in painting. (.) That erm, one could almost imagine structuralist rules that er governed innovation in both areas and that in fact one could im (.) even perhaps even know nothing about er (.) specific issues in either discipline and almost guess what moves would be considered innovative (.) because of (.) er of erm because of (.) erm rules or patterns that seem to regulate art ideas about innovation. (.) Er I think the key point though is that (.) er (.) er that in in the modern era in cultural matters (.) the (.) I think you said if one knows how to read the code but there tend to be multiple [codes	6.2.5 6.2.1 6.3.1 6.3.2 6.3.3	
57.	R	Um hum]		
58.	A	that are competing and er to some extent even possibly mutually un-intelligible.		

59.	R	Um hum			
60.	A	Er or at least not that (.) even if they are if all are understandable both (.) or all are understandable by certain people er there they have pretty significant differences in their premises. (.) I honestly don't know how much that would apply to science.(.) People have told me it does but in a sense [I can't			6.3.1 6.3.2 6.3.4 6.2.1
61.	R	Yeah]			
62.	A	speak confidently about it.			
63.	R	ok, (.) erm, (.) I was interested in Baudrillard's response in an article that I had (.) where he said that it was a misunderstanding as taking him as a reference for situationist artworks (.) or artists work(.) and I wondered if how you felt about that response from him?		6.2.2	
64.	A	Well (.) it bothered me quite a bit, erm (.) I met him at the time and heard the same thing from him [personally			
65.	R	Right]			
66.	A	and er (.) I guess I'll quote him because it's pretty annoying. (.) He said er simulation is like a jewel it can't be touched (.) it's something that (.) you know has its own, (.) well I can't quite quote him any further than that. (.) But simply that it was some sort of inaccessible (.) erm, (.) er er scoured away (.) I'm sorry hidden away thing (.) as if erm. (.) It just struck me as completely absurd and er certainly his own thought draws from [other thought		6.2.2	
67.	R	Um hum]			
68.	A	including what we might call in Harold Blum's turn erm (.) strong misreadings of Debord or [McLuhun.		6.2.2	
69.	R	Um hum]			

70.	A	er, (.) or even Warhol for that matter. (.) Erm (.) ostensibly Baudrillard's point was that because simulation argued with the notion of representation (.) er it really had nothing to do with works of art in so far as they still purported to represent. (.) However I don't think they really do purport to represent		6.2.2 6.2.6
71.	R	umm		
72.	A	necessarily in a traditional way.		6.2.6 6.2.2
73.	R	Yeah		
74.	A	erm, (.) I mean I've thought about it a great deal (.) and er (.) you know my own conclusion is really that er Baudrillard really has a certain class prejudice against certain (.) against the fine arts the bourgeois arts. (.) and his own personal preference is much more for the popular [arts.		6.2.2 6.2.6 6.2.5
75.	R	Right]		
76.	A	Which he is really glad to you know sort of (.) err (.) you know (.) err (.) er cut his way through as if through some kind of jungle. (.) erm, It's it's (.) I don't know what to say it struck me as incredibly small [minded,		6.2.2 6.2.1
77.	R	Umm]		
78.	A	(.) err I couldn't help but compare it to Freud for example er (.) who knows what Freud would have made of some of the art or any other cultural (.) manifestations that came after him. (.) But can we really imagine twentieth century culture (.) without err (.) people being interested in [Freud.		6.2.2 6.2.1
79.	R	Umm]		
80.	A	And err just in terms of my own strong feelings about how culture works err (.) for me to say that something is [off limits		6.2.2 6.2.1

81.	R	Umm]			
82.	A	is (.) is (.) is erm a very negative idea.			
83.	R	Um hum, because erm (.) I think somewhere I read something that Baudrillard said about (.) Warhol and he named a few other artists maybe as people that he, (.) that he was in in (.) I don't know what his words were, I don't know if they were people that he was interested in or if they were people that [he felt Oh he refers] to Warhol		6.2.2 6.2.1	
84.	A				
85.	R	yeah			
86.	A	and I mean a lot of that period of his work in my view came from Warhol (.) and it was one of the reasons I was interested in it (.) it was as if Andy Warhol were to write a book of theory (.) it would come close to those years of [Baudrillard.		6.2.1 6.2.2	
87.	R	Umm]			
88.	A	Erm (.) you know this gets close to I think what is your general subject which is (.) you were asking me about how a work comes about, (.) I have always been really interested in intertextual relationships between all of the culture I live with and (.) er (.) you know I could not help but read Baudrillard with Warhol in mind, (.) or even Robert Smithson. (.) And er (.) er concurrently er (.) or possibly think about Baudrillard and the talking heads at the [same time		6.2.1 6.2.2	
89.	R	Um hum]			
90.	A	or er and so I'm kind of er (.) as an artist continually interested in how other areas of culture, (.) er how my work as an artist is responding to different areas of culture. (.) and in turn to hope that art itself can er (.) er (.) have something to say beyond its [own concerns.		6.2.1 6.2.2	

91.	R	Yeah] I was interested in (.) I know that the essays that you write aren't specifically about your work, they can be about broader but within a limited sense of what you write about. (.) But I was interested in the relationship of those too (.) and the actual making of the paintings. (.) When you talked about intertextuality and culture (.) could you say a little bit about the writing that you do to the making of the work		
92.	A	Well I should say I don't write [anymore.		6.2.1 6.2.3 / 6.2.4
93.	R	Oh ok]		
94.	A	I have hardly written a thing in ten years.		6.2.1 6.2.3 / 6.2.4
95.	R	right		
96.	A	Er, (.) instead I publish the ##### and edit a bit. But (.) erm, (.) I guess I must have written between about the age of 27 and (.), oh I don't know, 40 or something like that and most of it was more between 27 and the early 30's, and I had just (.) it was during my first 4 or 5 years in New York and the writing was a way for me to (.) er both have a voice in the art world and to sort through what I was seeing here and er (.) er (.) clarify my own ideas as an artist (.) in so far (.) as I clarify through writing what I was [thinking.		6.2.1 6.2.2 6.2.5 6.2.3 / 6.2.4
97.	R	Right]		
98.	A	And I do think it helped the painting in that way (.) er (.) er I have always seen it as a really different activities		
99.	R	Right		
100.	A	But in particular in er (.) the essay 'The crisis in geometry' I really sought, (.) set out to erm put my ideas both Foucault and Baudrillard on paper and look at it in relation to various [artists works		6.2.3 6.2.4 6.2.1 6.2.2

101.	R	Um hum]			
102.	A	and see if it, (.) how that worked.			6.2.3 6.2.4 6.2.1 6.2.2
103.	R	Was that written (.) I'm sorry I should probably know was it written before or after Baudrillard gave the response?			
104.	A	Oh before (.) I mean I do think I had a big role in [popularising			
105.	R	Um hum]			
106.	A	Baudrillard's popularity and specifically this essay which is [1984.			6.2.3 6.2.4 6.2.1 6.2.2
107.	R	Um hum]			
108.	A	Erm, the first part about it (.) of it (.) is erm (.) is er (.) er how one can see er (.) a certain amount of art recent art as having erm (.) er some affinity with Foucault's view of space. And then erm (.) I sort of set out to say that the current generation instead erm (.) er is doing work that has more of a Baudrillardian ethos (.) and and I think I mention Koons and Sherrie Levine [and er (.) er (.)			6.2.3 6.2.4 6.2.1 6.2.2
109.	R	Um hum]			
110.	A	a couple of other people			
111.	R	Do you think then (.) that your reference to Baudrillard and Foucault would be, (.) do you think that was partly responsible for the increasing use of them or referral to them in art education?			6.2.3 6.2.4 6.2.1 6.2.2 6.2.7
112.	A	Only Baudrillard.			6.2.7 6.2.2 6.2.3 / 6.2.4

113.	R	Only Baudrillard.			
114.	A	I would say (.) I mean for (.) for a couple of years I touched on his work quite a bit. And erm it was (.) also not only in reference to my work but again er (.) several other artists=			6.2.2 Beech 6.2.1
115.	R	=Right=			
116.	A	=who I am identified with who are all beginning to exhibit (.) and to some extent it er (.) provided a er (.) a accompanying text. The same way that one might be able to look at existentialism with abstract [expressionism.			Check Neal brown interview
117.	R	Um hum]			
118.	A	It for me it helped reinforce the feeling that something was in the [air			6.2.1 6.2.2 6.2.3 / 6.2.4
119.	R	Um hum]			
120.	A	and er (.) er and er (.) I think something was in the air really.(.) a I've never seen (.) in academia theory is often assumed er to precede erm (.)( <i>tut</i> ) er (.) it is often assumed that theorists actually put together things that nobody has put together before and that it is only through reading that theory that you will learn about those ideas=			6.2.1 6.2.2
121.	R	=Yeah=			
122.	A	=and particularly with Baudrillard as well as other people (.) I more more see his work as having responded to an idea that was already out there [or a series of ideas.			6.2.1 6.2.7 6.2.3 / 6.2.4
123.	R	Um hum]			
124.	A	And codifying it in a kind of er (.) err (.) err very cogent French err (.) form.			6.2.2. 6.2.1

125.	R	=Okay=			
126.	A	= That made it erm (.) that gave it a certain prestige (.) as thought. (.) erm But he's really erm, you now ultimately talking about (.) an era in which computers appear (.) and media becomes [so dominant, Um hum]			6.2.1 6.2.2
127.	R				
128.	A	as were a lot of other people.			
129.	R	So do you think (.) he was that (.)reading his theory and other theory enabled you to explore erm (.) issues and feelings that you already were thinking about rather than introducing you to things that [were entirely new			
130.	A	Exactly, exactly]			
131.	R	Okay,			
132.	A	Err (.) I mean if you read Baudrillard (.) pop art makes sense in a different way, (.)Warhol makes sense. And err (.) the work of my friends and colleagues like Richard Prince or err Jeff Koons also (.) it was a way to find a vocabulary with which to talk about those works.			6.2.1 6.2.2 Wenger creating a discourse
133.	R	Right			
134.	A	And I I guess I found that Baudrillard constantly emphasised a kind of (.) self-referential hermetic quality of contemporary culture,			6.2.1 6.2.2
135.	R	Um hum			
136.	A	which err, (.) err (.) seemed particularly [erm			6.2.1 6.2.2



137.	R	Yeah]			
138.	A	Er (.) compelling.			6.2.1 6.2.2
139.	R	Ok, (.) by that do you mean a little bit about art referencing art of the past and (????) as well?			
140.	A	Nope] you know in a way Baudrillard could be read as kind of trippy or heady that culture only [references culture			
141.	R	Yeah]			
142.	A	and er (.) huma (.) he sees human culture as sort of this space capsule unattached to anything material or [real.			6.2.1 6.2.2 – surely cause for addressing not perpetuating this myth
143.	R	Um hum]			
144.	A	And er (.) as our society does become more abstract I think that is a powerful [model.			6.2.1 6.2.2
145.	R	Um hum] When you talk about the abstraction in society, I was interested in (.) I may have understood this correctly or not,(.) I think you said that you didn't see nature as a viable theme anymore for contemporary art and II (.) I wondered whether you could just explain why [was that?			
146.	A	Yeah] I mean by 1980 erm, er (.) I think what I saw around me and err experienced myself (.) was that (.) I am not going to say that nature doesn't exist (.) that that river isn't flowing out there or (.) err but it no longer seems like a [relevant			6.2.1 6.2.2 myth
147.	R	Um hum]			

148.	A	err (.) area for allegory.			6.2.1 6.2.2
149.	R	right			
150.	A	Or er (.) err a relevant thematic. (.) I mean the area of nature in western culture is very defined (.) it really starts well it gains force around [1800			6.2.1 6.2.2
151.	R	Um hum]			
152.	A	and it's final manifestation seems to be sexuality perhaps in the 20's or 30's which is a kind of very lo(h)cal kind of nature			6.2.1 6.2.2 what about constants? - beauty
153.	R	yeah			
154.	A	((laughs)) But erm er (.) and this comes from erm, (.) French structuralist writing in general which is that (.) you know (.) all ideas are historically bracketed.			6.2.1 6.2.2 what about constants? - beauty
155.	R	Um hum			
156.	A	And part of it was just an attempt to emphasize the idea of nature which still had so much (.) seemed to ha er (.) have in the popular imagination, still had a certain kind of reference value (.) in in art when 20 years ago.			6.2.1 6.2.2 what about constants? - beauty
157.	R	Okay (.) Do you think that er (.) that when you talk about nature as being a viable theme (.) do you think that the fact that you don't see it as such (.) has anything to do with where your making work [in the city, I know you talk about your relation to the city			
158.	A	Oh absolutely but not only where I am making work] but where I'm from.			6.2.1 6.2.2
159.	R	Yeah (.) that's what I mean.			

160.	A	I mean I have always said (.) er I am, (.) you know on a very naïve (.) almost obvious level the formal elements in my work very closely correspond to my visual environment.		Why is this acceptable when done by him? Writing? 6.3.1
161.	R	So (.) would you say that if you were making work where you have been and where you have grown up in New York would nature still not be a valuable thematic or?		
162.	A	It might be (.) er (.) I can't say one way or the other (.) but the bigger question is (.) whether it's a kind of err (.) er (.) whether it circulates. And at least in popular culture and largely in (.) in the fine arts I think it's a currency that has very [little value		6.2.1 6.2.2
163.	R	Right]		
164.	A	as a kind of (.) as sort of (.) err again as philosophical material or allegorical material or whatever. (.) Partly because I mean this (.) all kinds of writers have said this but you know, to cross the river over there we just don't need to row a boat anymore or erm (.) have wind in the sails. (.) The material basis for our life (.) lives, is our technology our society no longer has any really direct relationship to the visible forces, of the natural world.		6.2.2 I'd like to combine these thoughts with comments about the tsunami or about our destruction of the planet (this would be what I would want to make work to challenge
165.		Because I I find it interesting that art should then almost mimic that relationship that we have. (.) So that the work becomes a representation of our, not a representation, but it follows the same pattern. That you don't try through art to want to reconnect with (.)		
166.	A	Yeah I am not a great believer in art being. (.) huh huh (.) I am more interested in art that describes or that er or kind of condenses (.) what is going on. (.) and often times it sort of reveals something that's going on that that wasn't so clear,		6.2.6 6.2.1
167.	R	Um hum] Yeah		

168.	A	As in the case of [Warhol			
169.	R	Um hum] okay			
170.	A	and you know that gets into a kind of Frankfurt school idea (.) of foregrounding the hidden and so forth. But but err it it does correspond with [that idea.			6.2.6 6.2.1
171.	R	Um hum]			
172.	A	You you know er (.) it might be a good point to say also (.) in terms of the formation of works that err erm (.) I talked about visualising works (.) and err the fact that I am kind of comfortable with the fact that if I see it I paint it. (.) Or err (.) when I am working with colours some of the games are (.) or strategies are almost what like a 8-year-old child might do with with err (.) in painting class in school. (.) er there is a whole other level of kind of primal activity (.) which has, (.) in which the brain in really not working cognitively			If not cognitively what alternatives are there?
173.	R	Um hum			
174.	A	and er (.) that's a very big part of it.			
175.	R	Okay (.) but do you feel to enable that kind of activity you need to have explored some of the [thematic			6.2.1
176.	A	Exactly not only to enable it but also to err (.) make it of interest to anybody else.			6.2.1 6.3.1 6.3.2
177.	R	yeah			
178.	A	Yeah (.) I think those things are probably a kind of motor of what we call creative activity,			6.2.1 6.2.2
179.	R	Um hum			

180.	A	err but creative activity in its self is not particularly communicative		6.3.1 6.3.4 6.2.2 6.2.1
181.	R	yeah		
182.	A	unless its tied to something, (.) err (.) er shared interests.		6.2.1 6.3.1
183.	R	Because at the beginning of the erm (.) of this research I was looking at some cognitive psychologists [studies on		
184.	A	Um hum]		
185.	R	[Creativity		
186.	A	Um hum]		
187.	R	and some of the models they were producing were quite alien I think to artists and were a bit bizarre they were trying to map that process of making work. And there were certain points on this flow chart at which erm (.) it stated that you would discard a work never to go back to it again, and other times you wouldn't and you could go back to it, it was a very strange flow chart.		
188.	A	Um, (.) the only thing I might be able to add is erm (.) I really dislike the word ( <i>very loud banging coming from the pipes</i> ) god its loud in here (.) I really dislike the word 'creativity'		6.2.2 6.2.1 6.2.6 is art a creative act? 6.3.?
189.	R	Right		
190.	A	and personally erm as Andy Warhol used to say I don't think artists are particularly [creative.		6.2.6 de duve
191.	R	Um hum]		

192.	A	Err (.) in fact they tend to be involved with sort of repetitive [activity]			De duve
193.	R	Umm]			
194.	A	Erm (.) a very small range of activates which one would, (( <i>continuous loud banging from pipes</i> )) they do the same thing or nearly the same thing over and over again which in many ways is very different from our definition of creativity			6.3.? duve
195.	R	yeah			
196.	A	Err, (.) I personally think that a better word for what artists do is expressivity. (.) I disagree with people who (( <i>very very loud banging from the heating pipes in the studio</i> )). It will stop in a moment,			6.3.? duve
197.	R	okay			
198.	A	its err steam in the pipes,			
199.	R	Right ok			
200.	A	I'm not sure if they have steam anywhere else in the world besides the U.S. Do you have steam?			
201.	R	Not in pipes, no			
202.	A	In no these are you know from fifty [years old			
203.	R	Right]			
204.	A	and they are so inefficient I don't think that anybody across the Atlantic would dream of it.			

205.	R	Sometimes it you get a little bit of air trapped and you might make a similarish noise but not as loud		
206.	A	But those are little plumbing pipes and so forth this is, I mean they don't make these anymore but		
207.	R	no		
208.	A	very few buildings in New York are retro fitted with new heat. (.) Errm (.) err you know I more identify at least the visual arts with a almost obsessive or compulsive need to on the part of visual artists to express something that er (.) and why that is erm, (.) is quite mysterious. (.) From my own youth I remember that I knew so many extremely gifted young people. (.) More gifted than I, (.) I assume who never came anywhere close to even wanting to become [an artist.		
209.	R	Yeah]		
210.	A	The other thing I have observed that might be relevant to your work is erm (.) I believe I have really seen a decline in the importance of the notion of authorship		Duve
211.	R	Um hum		
212.	A	over the last ten years. (.) With your generation or perhaps even people ten years older.		duve
213.	R	Um hum		
214.	A	Err and it really very precisely mirrors the the critique of authorship		Duve
215.	R	Um hum		
216.	A	that occurred in in (.) in (.) French theory err twenty years ago. (.) And erm (.) I am observing in young people right now generally speaking (.) much less desire or need or obsession to erm, (.) erm (.) externalise some kind of personal expressive necessity.		6.2.1 6.2.2 duve

217.	R	yeah			
218.	A	which I think is <u>really wonderful</u>			
219.	R	Um hum,			
220.	A	And (.) erm (.) er for me would be <u>fine</u> if the whole notion where on the way out.			Why?
221.	R	Erm (.) Related to that and I don't know if you want to say anything about it but, (.) when it comes to authorship do you do most of the painting yourself or do you have people who work on the paintings?			
222.	A	Well I erm (.) I won't get up but erm (.) I print out the drawings the line work from the computer and then I, (.) er very small drawings, and then I paint them not here even (.) although myself. And then I bring them back and with a couple of artist's to help me I make these paintings.			
223.	R	Um hum			
224.	A	I used to make them all myself (.) and it's a little bit like a workshop because all the techniques are mine, erm (.) and the only way an artist can help me is (.) if they (.) I can't have somebody come in and work for two weeks its more like a (.) a craft shop in which (.) er learning every current facile of my techniques is [necessary.			
225.	R	Um hum]			
226.	A	Erm (.) er I always put the rollatext texture on the paintings (.) just as a kind of guarantee to thyself that erm (.) er I'll keep my own touch in them.			Why if you wish the notion of authorship were on the way out? 6.3.5
227.	R	yeah			



228.	A	But (.) erm (.) I am interested in so many different things that I I for over 10 years I have painted them [less and less]		
229.	R	Um hum]		
230.	A	simply because its so time consuming.		
231.	R	Yeah (.) erm (.) One other thing that I remember you mentioning in something that I read, was an interest in a return to discussions [of form]		
232.	A	Um hum]		
233.	R	and I wondered if you could say a little bit about why you feel that is needed?		
234.	A	((a couple arrive and walk through the studio)) Hi There Claudia (.) Well I think there still exists now, which is that (.) when one reads things about art (.) er there is very little formal analysis. (.) Er (.) which I equate form in art with syntax, so I don't feel like I am a formalist in the sense of fifty years ago, in which form was seen as autonomously expressive. (.) But but rather that (.) the forms or visual incidents in a work add up to its syntactical make up. (.) And erm er I'd still continue to believe whether it's a work of art or er something that one observes in mass culture that if you don't understand how something is formally constructed you really don't understand either it's meaning or it's er in the case of mass culture it's (.) perhaps even (.) er um (.) er what's the word er, (.) it's effect on you. Like a cigarette advert of something like that and I did grow up in terms of art education in a era in which (.) even in grammar school or high school people were beginning to talk to you about erm (.) whether it be iconography, (.) you know why a young women in a bikini next to a car creates desire for the prototypical male or something like that. (.) Er or the use of more abstract elements like [colour space and form]	6.2.1 6.2.2 6.2.6 6.3.1 6.3.4	
235.	R	Yeah]		

236.	A	to cement those messages. (.) And erm, in my view, I mean if I could just mention a couple of artist's off the top of my head (.) if you looked at Anslem Kiefer or Cindy Sherman or Mariko Mori or Damien Hirst have you really ever read anybody talk about how form works in there work? And I doubt I have.		6.4.1 6.3.1 6.3.4 what terms do we use?
237.	R	Yeah, my erm supervisor interviewed Liam Gillick for a [piece of text and		
238.	A	Oh he wrote one] something for us once		
239.	R	And (.) but he made a comment in that interview about what he felt [was a lack		
240.	A	Um hum]		
241.	R	of formal discussion of some of his work.		
242.	A	It has changed er (.) somebody like Liam Gillick would be a good example or (.) erm, er but there has been a move backward toward more generalised or abstract forms (.) in the wake of computer graphics.		6.4.1 6.3.1 6.3.4 6.2.2
243.	R	yeah		
244.	A	And certainly architects seem to be a little more concerned about it (.) but it really has left the critical language and erm, (.) it it you know it corresponds to a certain social pattern. (.) er For example using a computer with a desktop interface like a Mac (.) you know we're seeing icons and er (.) symbols like get us around but, er we really have no understanding. ((Carter comes over and asks a question to which Peter replies "I'll be just a couple more minutes but will you get Ella'')) Erm er (.) bu bub bub (.) so similarly with the work of art er (.) er (.) I I mean I guess I'm still sort of er (.) puritanical enough to think that if you don't understand [how it works		6.4.1 6.2.2 6.3.2
245.	R	Yeah]		

246.	A	then one is at a [disadvantage.			6.3.2
247.	R	Um hum] So the last thing that I was going to ask you [was			
248.	A	I am going to say] one more thing because [it's really			
249.	R	Okay]			
250.	A	quite strange. (.) You know my students are very very talented but many of them (.) even if they can do it instinctively (.) have no idea about er (.) the language say of figurative [composition.			6.2.2 skills duve
251.	R	Um hum]			
252.	A	How the figures say it's a traditional painting the figures (.) or interior spaces or lighting of a (.) of a (.) a painting is or used to be [put together			Duve skill
253.	R	Um hum]			
254.	A	and its very interesting because then if you go see a film they are using that same language and (.) in that area that language is still very vital, (.) and somewhere in the backroom filmmakers do [know about it.			6.2.2 6.3.1 6.3.4
255.	R	Um hum]			
256.	A	But nobody (.) it ha has become almost er secret knowledge [again.			6.2.2 6.3.1 6.3.2
257.	R	Yeah] is it something that you feel it would be possible to teach again?			
258.	A	Well er (.) er (.) I don't have any program for doing [so but er			6.2.7 6.3.1 6.3.4 why not?

259.	R	Yeah]			
260.	A	it's something I would personally like to emphasise. (.) I would (.) What I do think would be more important would be to see (.) I I wish people who write about art would give it a try.			6.4.1 6.3.1 6.3.4
261.	R	Um hum (.) Erm do you think it has any relation to modernist and postmodernist ways of thinking? And a few people were talking about some artists working in how would (.) might describe it as new modernist thinking (.) going back to kind of modernist ways of working			
262.	A	Well I mean I honestly find those erm definitions very [slippery.			6.2.2
263.	R	Um hum]			
264.	A	I am not a big advocate of [postmodernism			6.2.2
265.	R	Um hum]			
266.	A	in fact the second essay in there is called against postmodernism			6.2.2 is anyone for postmodernism?
267.	R	Oh right okay			
268.	A	reconsidering Ortega. You know in a way since I (.) erm started with er Foucault for him modernism begins in the 1600.			
269.	R	yeah			
270.	A	Er (.) And er erm the only way I can really understand postmodernism in a twentieth century context, is if you see modernism as equated with [utopian work.			6.2.2 6.2.1 6.2.6

271.	R	Um hum]			
272.	A	And in my essay (.) I I saw so (.) looking looking back I saw so much work that was not [utopian			
273.	R	Yeah]			
274.	A	Er (.)that it didn't seem like a particularly universal [definition.		6.2.2	
275.	R	Yeah]			
276.	A	Er (.) I I think there's subtleties in terms of er (.) er (.) I don't know when we'd begin postmodernism but in terms of strategies between 1960 – 2000 that could be defined as modernist and postmodernist. (.) But erm er (.) I would honestly suggest to you that erm (.) not only in your work (.) is it necessary to define it (.) but I think it's even helpful to to er(.) er (.) er (.) catalogue a [few definitions.		6.2.2 6.2.1 6.2.6	
277.	R	Yeah] (.) I think that's what I have been looking at doing,			
278.	A	So if I could answer that question, in what postmodernist sense do you mean?			
279.	R	Yeah well I think I was erm I think I had some questions I included in prior interviews and I have been looking at the relationship of or the existence of modernism and postmodernism and I think I am now slightly more wary about using the terms. Particularly looking back I was reading erm (.) Kuhn and <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> and then looked at where maybe the term paradigms, in a sense had even [come from			
280.	A	Um hum]			
281.	R	And I was trying to understand whether its even something that we have [adopted			

282.	A	Um hum]			
283.	R	and what it may have been adopted to identify so when you talk about maybe the lack of [utopian vision			
284.	A	Um hum]			
285.	R	or maybe an increase in irony in work would that be something you would consider or not?			
286.	A	Umm] certainly an [increase			
287.	R	Um hum] but you think it was existent it was still existent in modernist work?			
288.	A	Er (.) I think Duchamp could [be pretty ironic			6.2.6
289.	R	I suppose] so [yeah			
290.	A	I mean] one could see it as a kind of er (.) period label (.) I mean it was really widely used in the [70's but			Period label is a paradigm? Or not?
291.	R	Yeah]			
292.	A	nobody really paid much attention to it. (.) But er there's a generation that began in 1980 erm (.) in several arts that had some interest in defining itself as post-modern.			6.2.2 nobody paid attention to it? didn't they?
293.	R	Yeah			
294.	A	Particularly in architecture			

295.	R	Yeah			
296.	A	Where I think its most widely [used			
297.	R	Yeah]			
298.	A	Er (.) I mean honestly I can't for the life of me figure out why Richard Prince would be post-modern and Warhol would be [modern.		6.2.2 6.3.2 6.2.6	
299.	R	Um hum]			
300.	A	Or if you go further back er (.) I think there's there are manifestations that you could see in 1920 or 30 (.) er (.) er (.) I am not so sure if I see the difference in the [rules of		6.2.2 6.3.2 6.2.6	
301.	R	Yeah]			
302.	A	art making with the Richard Prince.			
303.	A	Ok [thank-you			
304.	R	Thank you] this has been delightful I [appreciate it			
305.	A	Ok] thank you			

END TRANSCRIPTION

## **Appendix 6: Conference papers**

### **Communities of Practice Paper – January 2005**

#### **Communities of Practice symposium.**

Postgraduate conference, held at Loughborough University organised by members of EMIRG through the departments of English and Information Science at Loughborough University. The purpose of which was to enable research students applying Etienne Wenger's 'Communities of Practice' approach to their PhD's to receive feedback from other scholars and academics and from Etienne himself.

#### **Introduction**

I feel it necessary in order for my reasons for attempting to apply communities of practice theory to the art world, to become apparent; to begin this talk with a brief introduction to the nature of the contemporary art world and art practice. Therefore I intend to introduce you to some seminal events, and artworks that have shaped the way that contemporary art practice is produced, conceived of and made meaningful. This will include reference to the modes of discourse or theory that the art world has embraced, in the last 40 yrs or so. Just for clarification when I refer to contemporary art, I am referring to art, which is being made now, and or art practice of approximately the last 10 years. When I refer to Modern or Modernist art, I am referring to art practice prior to the arrival of the term post-modernism, which in relation to art practice, vaguely determines the modern period to be approximately pre-1970's. (Fig, 1)

The artwork, titled Fountain by Marcel Duchamp's consisted of a urinal, which he entered into an open exhibition at a public gallery for the small fee of \$6 in 1917. This created public outrage, but also challenged the nature of art as it had been. It made it possible for future artists to transform everyday objects into art objects simply by placing them in an art institution context. Which became know by the term 'readymades', Duchamp rid art of the limitations of artworks necessitating hand skilled practices, and paved the way for an entirely different way of thinking about the attribution of meaning, value or interpretation of artworks. (fig,2)

There have been a number of attempts at studying the sociology of the art world, these include Howard Becker's the 'artworld' in which he conceives of the art world as a multilayered community, whose participants 'operationalise the construction of art as a social category'. And Arthur Danto's Institutional theory of art in which he proposed that it is 'a circuit of 'theories' or interpretative processes that 'makes the difference between a Brillo Box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box'. And that these theories 'keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is'. The work Danto is referring to is Andy Warhol's Brillo Box piece of 1964 (see Fig.3)

In order to sum up the necessary understanding, that would enable comprehension of contemporary art practice one needs to be aware, that art objects, are no longer required to be tangible physical outcomes of skilled artistic craftsmanship. If we wish to address the question "what is art?", we also need to remember, as Joseph Kosuth stated that "Being an artist now means to question the nature of art". Contemporary art is therefore first and foremost what the art world makes, and in order for works to be deemed art, they need to be perceived and received as art, and therefore need to exist within a shared and learnt social competence. Contemporary



artworks are therefore created within a world of discourses and symbolic spaces in which they are embedded and are constituted "works of art".

The prominent event that led to this conception of art practice, and the beginning of art theory was the inclusion of fine art within the universities, which took place during the 1960's. This enabled a rejection of the academy model, which had previously been prevalent. Arts professionalisation, replaced the previous academy model and brought about the application of 'theory' intended to enable the contextualisation of art practice and a greater understanding of artists' intentions. This theory came in the form of a number of modes of discourse, which have evolved and increased over the past 40 years, namely: post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, Semiotics, Marxism, Feminism, and postmodernist theory. These modes included understanding of the role of the sub-culture, in light of Dave Hebdige's work, which arose out of the Birmingham Department for Cultural Studies.

However, despite the previously mentioned attempts at a sociological understanding of the art world, it seems the importance of this form of art education, the awareness it provided its students with, and the process of constructing an identity for oneself within the art world that takes place within such an education, has not been adequately considered. In the contemporary art world the identity of the 'artist' is constructed through exposure to professional artistic community members.

Howard Singerman, is an art historian based at the University of Virginia, who studied the internalisation of the art education experience. Singerman was driven to conduct his research as a result of the questions he was left with when he graduated from his Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture. Upon completing which he recognised he did not have the traditional skills of the sculptor; in that, [he] cannot carve, or cast or weld or model in clay', and the most significant question he was left with was 'why not?'.

Singerman studied the art education experience within the U.S.A, in doing so he recognised that 'artists are both the subject of the graduate art department and its goal'. He determined that the visiting artists, that also form part of British art education, act as a means of displaying the exemplary artist, they serve to provide a link between the 'school and a professional community' of artists. When these artists speak to the students they do so in the shared language of the art journals, and of that community; 'their speech constructs that community'.

The meaning of artworks is now commonly thought of as being created on the side of reception rather than production. To quote Bourdieu 'A work of art has meaning only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded'.

The art world can therefore be conceived of as a place in which a comprehension of an artworks meaning and or art theory, becomes used and exchanged as 'cultural capital'. Cultural capital is defined by Bourdieu as a 'form of knowledge, an internalised code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts'. Since I sympathise with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and wish to combine Bourdieu's insights with those of Etienne Wenger's within my research analysis, I was reassured to acknowledge that Wenger's conception of power is also aligned to that of Bourdieu's notions of symbolic and cultural capital in which power relations are 'conceived of within the symbolic realm'.

It seems in light of this that theories of social learning, such as Communities of Practice theory, which offer an understanding of learning and the construction of one's identity within a community would be ideal for application to the art world. Despite this, it seems very few attempts at understanding the art world in terms of social learning, or in light of 'communities of practice' thinking have been attempted. Lave's and Wenger's 'communities of practice' theory is not something many people within the art world seem to be familiar with. However, it has been applied to the discipline by a number of researchers, none of whom I believe to be British. One instance of COP's application was at the University of Oslo, and two others at Helsinki University, one a study of a micro community of knowledge within a business school art project, and the other by Dr Lily Diaz-Kommonen, who gave a paper at the recent Research Into Practice conference, at the University of Herfordshire, in 2004. In which she referred to communities of practice as being a point of view, by which it is possible to explore 'the language that is used to construct precise definitions of practice as an important element of research into practice. So are the tools, documents, images, symbols, roles, specified criteria, and codified procedures that make practice into a meaningful social activity.'

In this paper Diaz-Kommonen employed Communities of Practice theory, as I believe she thought it would help provide an opportunity to 'examine how key elements of the community in which the art object is created interact' and therefore enable a greater understanding of 'why and how the critic and art historian, for example, contribute to the acceptance and creation of art.' by 'Being able to discern better the roles that these different participants play' in turn, helping her 'to demystify both the role of the artist, the art critic, and even the audience'. I sympathise with Kommonen's concerns and share her interests and aims. (fig.4)

Whilst conducting this research project I have been torn between what at times seem huge themes, all of which I believe to be highly important in understanding the nature of the contemporary art world. Etienne's 'social learning diagrams' have offered a means to recognise the interrelatedness of these themes, and his diagrams (fig. 5) have allowed me to visualise the relationships between them such as: the construction of identity within art education of greater concern to me due to the increase in artists' celebrity status, the use of cultural and symbolic capital, the ties between varying members of the art world due to their shared practices, be they art criticism, art making or other. His approach allows me to conceive of the inhabitants of various artistic communities as combined to form a constellation of communities of practice, which is known as the art world. (fig. 6)

The research process I have been engaged in has involved conducting interviews with a number of eminent contemporary artists, art critics, an art journal editor, a curator, an art historian, and an arts journalist. During this paper I will refer to those interviews with R4, a painter associated with the ##### movement in New York, and ##### at ##### University and R6, a painter from Brazil who exhibits her work internationally.

It was hoped that these interviews would provide a natural discursive interaction, which would allow reflection upon our use of shared repertoire's including shared knowledge of art history, experience of art education, knowledge of practice, awareness of other artists the interviewee had been associated with, familiarity with that which had been written about their practice, and our mutual experiences of the art world. Studying these interviews was intended to reveal insights into the way those who participate within the art world in different roles conceive of and construct the nature of contemporary art practice and the discourse that surrounds it. Wenger refers in his book to the importance of gaining as authentic experience as possible, of the practice he was studying. I felt that as I had trained as a fine arts practitioner, this would enable me to reflect upon my own direct experiences of that which I was studying.

Although I am yet to complete a full analysis of the interview transcripts, I will now briefly describe a couple of examples which have led me to consider the possible application of communities of practice theory, to my area of inquiry. (fig,8)

In the interview with the painter, R4 I questioned him about a comment he had made previously, and of which I had prior knowledge. In which he remarked that he saw contemporary art as being for the initiated audience. When asked about this in the interview he said, he had been influenced by Argeti Garcet's thinking. Garcet saw modernist art as intentionally coded, and as R4 sees it, Garcet believed that 'these artist's had decided to code the narrative in their work pretty much to avoid trouble from a kind of vast misunderstanding majority'. And therefore to 'offer their work only to an initiated sort of intelligentsia rather than the sort of insensitive bourgeois'<sup>1</sup>, in response to this R4 had considered theories of the role of the sub culture in twentieth century contemporary society. He described in the interview how he felt that artists maybe a sub-cultural group and went so far as to suggest they may in fact have been one of the first sub cultural groups to emerge. He linked the increasing prevalence of the sub cultural group in society to their crucial impact on people's sense of identity. He went onto describe how he believed one could posit the development of artists as a sub culture around Picasso, who he saw as 'notorious in that he never really showed publicly he did not participate in the salons; therefore his audience were 'this very small alienated intelligentsia'. (fig, 9)

In relation to Boudieu's comment about art being accessible or meaningful only to those who possessed the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded, I asked R4, how one could gain access to this code, or cultural competence. To which he replied, this could only be obtained via the sub cultural group. (fig,10)

It seems referral to artists groups, which R4 terms subcultures, points to the existence of some form of identifiable communities or groups of artists within the art world. In light of this I was inquisitive as to whether the theory of subcultures could offer a sufficient means of explaining or providing insights into such communities. I feel that subcultures may be a fitting term to describe larger groups, such as the Punk movement in the 1970's. However, I feel that such theory may not adequately describe the groups of artists that have adopted such awareness of subcultures, and other social theory, and have continued to produce art in light of this. Such artists including R4 would have become aware of sub cultures during their art education. As I see it a subculture, was a group who actively rebelled against society. My understanding suggests aligning oneself with a subculture would be more of a lifestyle choice, rather than participation in a community of artists whose practice, involves shared experiences, similar engagement and communal understanding of the purpose, meaning and value of that practice. Therefore whilst I recognise such groups exist within the art world, I would like to explore whether 'communities of practice' is more apt at describing the nature of these groups than theories of a subculture. I must stress my application of this approach is still in what I would consider to be its initial stages. (fig.11)

Some groups of artists traditionally referred to as art movements, and have produced what have been described as 'manifestos', though not typically associated with contemporary art, I argue the critical theory essays written by Peter Halley in the 1980's, could still be seen as such. They paved the way for the group he was associated with's practice. Such texts negotiate the way in which art is received and located in relation to that which has come before it. In relation to Wenger's thinking these texts could be said to help shed light on the underlying purposes of that practice. Such groups or communities of artists have learnt to absorb the art of the past, and a

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<sup>1</sup> R4, in an interview with the author, p.4

significant amount of critical theory, and utilise it to their advantage. I therefore see fit to describe these groups as 'learning communities'. (fig, 12)

Other artists however, such as the painter R6 who I also interviewed, appear to depend upon others to interpret the meaning of and to contextualise their practice. Artists such as R6, often deem themselves as she did in the interview, un-theoretical. R6 choose to refer to her painting practice in terms of practical concerns, using terms that stem from modernist art theory of the 1960's, commonly referred to as formalism. (fig, 13)

It seems in this sense R6 could be likened to the Claims processors that Wenger describes in his book, in that she is part of a community of practice, who all participate in a particular practice, and yet chooses not interpret the purpose of that practice beyond her engagement with it. R6 does not question the nature of art, or the role of painting within contemporary art. R6's use of formalist art terms to describes her practice by reference to things intrinsic to her practice, rather than in relation to its contextualised and greater purpose within the art world. R6 seems happy to comply with the galleries, and to continue to make her paintings, and as Wenger argues compliance may not require understanding. However unlike the claims processors artists within such a community may not work in close proximity to one another, and may meet only at gallery opening events, and art world social events and so forth. (fig,14)

However R6 refers to another Brazilian painter who was engaged in a similar form of painting to her, and she describes how 'she had opportunity to be a student of Leger, so she really travelled And had study in Europe and then she went back to Brazil and she bought with her all this information. And so she mixed this up with all around her, from the countryside and so this makes a kind of holistic kind of a work'. What seems to interest R6 is as she puts it trying 'to connect the European knowledge about art and painting, and the Brazilian stuff'. Such comments by R6 shows she associates herself with a group or community of artists from Brazil that have shared a shared practice, concerns and interests. (fig,15)

When asked about the reception of her work outside Brazil R6 described the various bodies of knowledge that she deemed necessary or lacking in certain countries, she said that 'at the beginning it was a little scary because the problem is that people don't really have the knowledge about Brazilian culture and some have these clichés' she believes the Spanish 'don't have the knowledge about working with the curators' which she feels she has gained despite not being able to explain how, 'you know I don't know what happened but its something now I understand more', I believe R6 has learnt this through having engaged in the practice of having her work curated. I think as a contemporary artist however, she has a very different practice and concerns to many other contemporary artists, and that this is what differentiates her and those she associates herself with, from another community of practice that for example an artist such as R4 may be a member of.

As I have explained current art education appears to work by exposing its students to other practising artists rather than following a specific educational curriculum. In a way, art education then becomes a form of learning by osmosis. It seems to me at least that in art education, the sort of social learning described by Etienne Wenger is in effect the type of learning being encouraged. I believe that is because art students are not required to sit exams, and that which they have learned is instead measured by their ability to become and to perceive themselves as competent practitioners within a professional community of practice. Having been involved in teaching contemporary art recently however, and having been through such an education myself, I recognise the difficulty such educators face. As it seems to me that the teaching or learning approaches offered throughout our children's educations prior to a contemporary art university

degree, demand they learn in an entirely different way. Then they learn what we teach them, they may memorise dates, or learn to recite historical facts, I may be mistaken in this, but I think they very rarely undertake independent learning. This produces conflict when they begin a contemporary art degree course, the students seek you to define what it is you wish them to do, and they become frustrated as they search for what it is you require of them. They are asked to absorb information they feel relates to their interests and will be usefully employed in helping them determine what sort of artist they wish to become, and in so doing establish their own artistic identity. Yet many find this experience difficult, and or highly frustrating.

I have not explored in great depth, Wenger's attempts to describe ways of cultivating communities of practice. But I recognise that this is of interest to some. In terms of the viability of cultivating this type of learning, and or communities of practice within the art world, if they can in fact be described as such, I find this rather difficult to comprehend. As artists groups in particular are so close nit, they actively reject probing enquiry, and seem to look upon any attempts at research into their practice with disdain. Despite being what I may describe an art world insider, (I am currently teaching on the contemporary art B.A course at Nottingham Trent University, and when time permits, still engaging in my own art practice), my request for an interview with a number of highly successful British artists was ignored. It seems when faced with the prospect of an inquisitive researcher such artists could be said to 'close-ranks'. For this reason in any future research I conduct will therefore ask each artist who agrees to be interviewed to refer me to another. That way assuring access to artists who may otherwise not have agreed to an interview.

## Article title: The work of the artwork in communication

Submitted to Chris Smith in response to a call for articles for JVAP (Journal of Visual Art Practice) – November 2004

Intended special edition of the journal devoted to papers arising from the Art and Language Symposium *What work does the artwork do?* (with Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison and Mel Ramsden as Art & Language), on Thursday 22nd May 2003, - Held at , London Metropolitan University, organised by Chris Smith, UCL

### Abstract

The paper will address how it may be that contemporary art that is predominantly conceptual can be said to work to communicate or facilitate intellectual communication. This will be explored in light of the view held by many, such as Kosuth and R1, that contemporary art is discursive. The paper will consider artists' intended audiences and address the fact that some believe artworks work only for a limited audience. In particular, it will explore the implications of the suggestion that artworks are coded and that meaning can only be derived from art if one knows the relevant code. Sperber and Wilson's approach to communication and cognition, which reconsiders the code model of communication and builds upon the inference model developed by Grice, will be employed. The discussion draws upon interviews with artists and writers conducted as part of a doctoral research project.

### Introduction

In considering what work the artwork does, we make the assumption that the artwork does some work, or works in a certain way. There are varying positions that seem to suggest that this work may be to do with communication or expression. In this paper I will explore what 'work' the artwork does particularly in regard to communication. This position seems to be particularly important due to the increasing tendency to describe contemporary art as 'discursive'. Sperber and Wilson's understanding of 'Relevance'<sup>2</sup> in relation to communication and cognition will be drawn upon to support my argument.

The increasing tendency to refer to art as discursive was emphasised in a recent interview with R1, during which she stated that she believes that art is a 'discursive practice above all'<sup>3</sup>. She gave an example of art's discursive nature: 'when you put a frame around a picture that picture is in dialogue with other pictures by the same artist and other artists, it's open ended'. She considers that the best art is open ended.

Kosuth has also referred to art's discursive nature, stating that in art 'the means of expression is also not unlike language'<sup>4</sup>. This view he exemplifies in the following quote:

Even accepting the common view that art's history goes beyond hundreds of years, it is possible to see that the 'language' of the art of the west has been painting and sculpture for some time. Up until the very recent past it

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<sup>1</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986

<sup>3</sup> R1. Interview with the author, Interview conducted 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004

<sup>4</sup> Kosuth quoted in, Harris, Roy. *The Necessity of Artspeak: The language of the Arts in the Western Tradition*. London: Continuum, 2003. For the complete text by Kosuth see, Kosuth, J. *Art after Philosophy*, (1969). In Harrison, C & Wood, P (ed's). *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

has been assumed that if one wanted to speak as an artist he had to speak in the correct 'language'. That's how we knew he was an artist and what he made was art or meant to be art. Whatever was done, it had to be done within that language...in the past few years artists have realised that their traditional language is exhausted and unreal.<sup>5</sup>

Roy Harris's book 'The Necessity of Artspeak'<sup>6</sup>, provides a contrast to the view of art as discursive. In this book Harris considers Kosuth's comments and concludes that Kosuth shows 'no inclination to address the fundamental qualities of what makes language in the traditional sense a distinctive mode of communication' or to reflect on 'whether these distinctive properties bear any convincing relationship to those of painting and sculpture'<sup>7</sup>. Harris proceeds to criticise Kosuth's argument by saying that his deployment of the notion that art forms are 'languages' is typical and 'although insistently repeated never advances beyond hackneyed metaphor'<sup>8</sup>. Harris goes so far as to suggest that although Kosuth 'makes reference to linguists, including Saussure and Sapir, and even the Saussurean technical terms *langue* and *parole*', such references tend to be both 'fleeting and opaque'<sup>9</sup>. Harris states therefore that whilst Kosuth's texts give the impression of 'engaging with linguistics in a serious way' they are in fact 'vague theoretical gestures in a linguistic direction, but nothing more'<sup>10</sup>. We may begin to question whether there has been any adequate descriptions offered by anyone working within the field of art that sufficiently describes how it is that art acts discursively, or how one may conceive of art as communicative.

When considering contemporary art it does seem too simplistic to refer to it in divided terms according to categories such as form and content or meaning, particularly if we recognise that there is often now little distinction between the artwork as an object and the artist's intention. It seems that part of the nature of contemporary art is the way in which familiar objects or information are intentionally presented by an artist to a particular audience in a certain way. Contemporary art is considered by many to be predominantly conceptual.

Jake Chapman appears to share this view, as is apparent from his comments in a recent television programme, 'The Art Show' broadcast on Channel 4 on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003<sup>11</sup>. In this programme he said the problem with contemporary art is that people seem to believe it is 'reducible to looking, which really is not, its nothing to do with looking'. He believes that looking is 'a very small part of it' and that really it is to do with 'thinking'<sup>12</sup>.

It is recognised that artwork can be understood on many levels, and Vickery<sup>13</sup> provides a helpful means of outlining ways of interpreting artworks. He considers ways of establishing artwork's value, worth and meaning. In order to explore this, he refers to the aesthetic value of works of art by identifying three categories which he feels can be used to interrogate artworks. These categories he describes as the following: (i) *material organisation*: the technical or material construction of the work of art, the physical structures within which the viewer's perceptual activity is orientated; (ii) *aesthetic organisation*: composition, or the aesthetic characteristics of

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<sup>5</sup> Kosuth, 1991, p.43

<sup>6</sup> Harris, Roy. *The Necessity of Artspeak: The language of the Arts in the Western Tradition*. London: Continuum, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Harris, 2003, p.130

<sup>8</sup> Harris 2003, p.129

<sup>9</sup> Harris, 2003, p.129

<sup>10</sup> Harris, 2003, p.129

<sup>11</sup> Chapman, Jake. The Art Show, Show on Channel 4, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003 7.30pm

<sup>12</sup> Chapman, Jake. 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Vickery, Jonathan. Organising Art: Constructing Aesthetic Value, TAMARA special issue call, 2004  
[http://www.cssex.ac.uk/AFM/emc/tamara\\_call.htm](http://www.cssex.ac.uk/AFM/emc/tamara_call.htm)



the object's material organisation; and (iii) *hermeneutic organisation*: art's interpreted meaning as configured within or in relation to existing systems of thought or institutional practice.

In relation to the intellectual or professional nature of much contemporary art it is the hermeneutic organisation of the work that seems of most importance. Vickery goes on to describe the hermeneutic approach as a broad range of concerns that refers literally to the methods of interpretation available to the viewer. The focus is on the way the object is made to yield meaning, something that may be achieved through considering the compositional content of an artwork. This he believes would include 'symbols, iconography, metaphors, allusions, associations, narrative and its socio-cultural and political contexts'. These contexts he categorised as (i) the contexts of production: the social milieu of the artist, the demands of the market or patronage, the location, and all the other ways the social, economic or political circumstances act as determining factors in the form and content of the work; and (ii) the contexts of reception: the intellectual milieu of the artist, the circulation of influential ideas, professional networks of activity, criticism and art historical assessment, and other social, economic or political circumstances acting as determining factors in the way the artwork is understood.

The kind of value Vickery feels we can identify in the category of the hermeneutic is, '*cultural significance*: the way in which the modes of meaning and experience generated by the work of art extends beyond the confines of the physical object and its artistic context and relates to culture or society in general'<sup>14</sup>.

Vickery goes on to state that:

'it is commonplace to note that in the case of contemporary art technical innovation and artistic conventions of composition have been evacuated as sources of value; moreover, the hermeneutics of reception have largely supplanted the hermeneutics of production'<sup>15</sup>.

This increasing importance placed on theory and conceptual elements of artworks seems to leave the physicality of the work redundant.

So if contemporary art is concerned with the intellect and its *work* is discursive but often without recourse to aesthetics and material organisation, how is it that artworks work intellectually and discursively? It seems that more and more often we hear from artists who feel the interpretation of work should be left open for the viewer. It seems to be important for contemporary art to allow sufficient intellectual space in the work for the viewer. This approach also accounts for the suggestion by Niki Russell, a Nottingham based artist, that he felt no more able to extrapolate meaning from his work than any he considered any other viewer would be able to<sup>16</sup>.

In contrast to this position, during the symposium '*What work does the Artwork do?*', Michael Baldwin<sup>17</sup> commented upon the injustice of the way the Art and Language work '*Homes from Homes*' was received in an exhibition at Lisson Gallery. He felt that most of those who wrote about the show seemed to miss the point of most of the work entirely. He considered that the rights of the work to receive a certain amount of serious

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<sup>14</sup> Vickery, 2004, p.7

<sup>15</sup> Vickery, 2004, p.8

<sup>16</sup> Russell, Nikki. Interview with the author.

<sup>17</sup> Michael, Baldwin. What work does the artwork do? Symposium Transcript. Held at Sir John Cass Department of Art, Media and Design, London Metropolitan University, Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2003, pp.13-14



attention had been infringed. The extent to which artists feel there is a particular way or amount of attention that should be paid to their work seems to vary.

If we consider the intended audiences of artworks it is also important to acknowledge that some believe artworks work only for a limited audience. For instance, R4<sup>18</sup> has stated previously that he saw contemporary art as being for the initiated audience. When asked about this in an interview, he said he had been influenced by Garcet's thinking<sup>19</sup>. Garcet saw modernist art as intentionally coded, and as R4 sees it, Garcet believed that 'these artist's had decided to code the narrative in their work pretty much to avoid trouble from a kind of vast misunderstanding majority' and to 'offer their work only to an initiated sort of intelligentsia rather than the sort of insensitive bourgeois'<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, R4 has been considering theories of the role of the sub culture in twentieth century contemporary society. He feels that artists may be a sub-cultural group and goes so far as to suggest it may in fact have been one of the first sub cultural groups to emerge. He links the increasing prevalence of the sub cultural group in society to their crucial impact on people's sense of identity. R4 believes that you could posit the development of artists as a sub culture around Picasso, who he saw as 'notorious in that he never really showed publicly' as he did not participate in the salons; therefore his audience were 'this very small alienated intelligentsia'<sup>21</sup>. When asked about the nature of the codes used by artists and how one could gain access to them, R4 stated this could be obtained via the sub cultural group.

The approach to thinking about art as being to do with the intellect, and indoctrination within the discipline corresponds with other sociological perspectives of art such as that of Bourdieu. He stated that 'A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence that is the code, into which it is encoded.'<sup>22</sup> R4 agreed that all art is coded 'in so far as one has to be able to read the signs if one is to understand the piece'<sup>23</sup> yet in his opinion what 'really seemed to take off at the beginning of the twentieth century was that the codes that artists created were to use the word in a different sense coded. In so far as, if you didn't have some sort of experience of or access to the key of their language game, it would not be intelligible'<sup>24</sup>.

The idea that art is coded and that it can be decoded by those equipped with the relevant knowledge of the field resonates with approaches intended to provide understanding of language in terms of a code. Yet such a theory of art raises questions about specialist knowledge required in order to view and understand artworks. This has to implications for art education and leads to speculation as to what might comprise this body of knowledge and whether it is currently being taught. There are also implications if one then considers the increasingly widened audience for art, particularly in the light of an article by David Thompson in the Guardian on April 15<sup>th</sup><sup>25</sup>. In this piece, Jake Chapman was quoted as having said that an increasing sensitivity shown by the galleries to a wider audience for art could have a negative effect on 'the potential for serious, discursive art'<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> #####, 1988

<sup>19</sup> R4. Interview with the author, Interview conducted Friday 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 2004, p.4

<sup>20</sup> ibid

<sup>21</sup> ibid

<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*, London: Routledge, 1992 p.2

<sup>23</sup> ibid

<sup>24</sup> ibid

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, David. 'Death of the Gallery', *The Guardian*, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2004

<sup>26</sup> Chapman, Jake, 2003.

If then we think of the artwork as coded and as being intended for a limited audience, and suggest that there is some meaning that can be derived from art if one knows the relevant code, we are suggesting that artworks work as a form of communication. Historically, one way of theorising this communication has been semiology. In this approach, art is thought of as working by means of signifying signs and codes directed to a viewer, who if they possess shared understanding or knowledge of the code, can then decode these signs. Therefore they become a competent reader of the work and also of the artist's intentions.

Yet when following this line of thinking it seems one reaches a point where one begins to question both what the shared knowledge is that is required of artist and viewer and also of the form of the relevant codes. With regard to R4's work it may be possible to consider formalist traditions and his essays as guides to his paintings. Manifesto-like texts or essays that artists write to pave the way for their art, may act to help those artists' work be understood by an audience in the way they intended it.

Yet another way of considering arts means of communicating, and whether artworks might be coded would be to explore why Sperber and Wilson<sup>27</sup> suggest that the code model alone is not sufficient to allow for a theory of communication. As nor it seems does the code model alone can provide a viable theory of how the artwork works. It seems there is also some reliance on inference. As David Hills has pointed out, this has been recognised in the past by both Gombrich and Wollheim<sup>28</sup>. Hills described how Wollheim, like his predecessor Gombrich, advocated 'an account of pictorial meaning that is psychological and broadly speaking Gricean in flavour'<sup>29</sup>.

In the book *Relevance, Communication and Cognition*<sup>30</sup>, an outline of communication is offered by Sperber and Wilson that develops Grice's theory of inference whilst combining it with what they term the 'code model'. They do not entirely dispense with the code model, yet recognise it is this approach that has given rise to such folklorist sayings as 'getting ones ideas across', 'putting ones thoughts down on paper', 'putting ones thoughts into words'. These figures of speech they deem to be deceptive in that 'one tends to forget that what they suggest cannot be true'. The code models weaknesses argue Sperber and Wilson lie in its inability to elaborate upon comprehension, which they judge 'requires more than the decoding of a linguistic sign'. The code model also fails to explain the vague terms it is so dependant upon, such as 'shared knowledge' or 'mutual assumptions'<sup>31</sup>.

Sperber and Wilson consider mutual knowledge to be a philosopher's construct. This is not to assume that humans do not share information, but Sperber and Wilson want to go beyond the vague constructs of shared information and mutual knowledge. They replace the notion of shared knowledge with the idea of 'manifestness'. To give an example of this they describe a car passing in the street. Whilst they believe one is aware of its passing usually through the sound it makes, one may not have looked at it and engaged with it in order to know its colour or to have made any assumptions about it. This suggests the car was manifest in its presence but not known about.

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<sup>27</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986

<sup>28</sup> Hills, David. Book Review of, Van Gerwen, Rob (ed.), Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting: Art as Representation and Expression, Cambridge University Press, 2001. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2002. <http://ndpr.icaap.org/content/archives/2002/8/hills-vangerwen-long>

<sup>29</sup> Hills, David. 2002, p.1

<sup>30</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986

<sup>31</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986, p.6

They believe that people's cognitive environments are comprised of physical stimulus that surround them and also of thoughts, which they believe are based on assumptions and beliefs that are manifest to them. They state that things can be manifest to someone without them actually being known. As through the knowledge that one has, one can deduce other knowledge that one had before but which was therefore only manifest rather than known. Sperber and Wilson argue that certain things are more likely to be assumed and transformed from manifest things to known facts than others; this they believe is dependant upon their relevance.

Sperber and Wilson also consider that rather than there being mutual responsibility between the communicator or artist and their audience for what is communicated and how, responsibility for communication in fact lies solely with the communicator or artist. In their approach they proceed to outline communication in terms of two different forms of intention. They start with what they call informative intention, which is the intention to bring to the attention of another some information that one believes to be relevant to them and therefore worth them paying attention to. This is the intention to inform. Then there is communicative intention: how one presents that information and how one manipulates it. This could be likened to the intention of the artist exemplified in the way they present certain information to their audience.

It is thought by Sperber and Wilson that when you communicate you hope to alter the cognitive environment of the other person and in doing so hopefully alter their assumptions and thought processes, though this may not always happen.

In Sperber and Wilson's model of communication they outline something they call ostensive communication. This type of communication is thought to make manifest many of the communicators' or artists' assumptions. The viewer is then required to act to discover what assumptions have been made manifest. In order to do this they are required to engage in information processing which involves effort. If one acts ostensively what one is doing is suggesting that that which one is making manifest is worth paying attention to. Whether or not an audience deems something worth paying attention to depends on their interests. Processing information according to Sperber and Wilson must be seen as subservient to the more abstract goal of the human being, which they consider to be an ambition to gain as much understanding as possible about the world around them, in relation to that which is of greatest interest to them. So to engage in information processing one has to believe in and have enough confidence in someone's guarantee of relevance.

Ostensive communication depends on the two layers of intention being recognised, the first being the informative intention and the second the communicative intention. For example, in the symposium 'What work does the artwork do?' Michael Baldwin from Art and Language began discussing the artwork as having some moral status, in that demands it to be considered in a particular way. It demands that you first look at the information the artist is bringing to your attention and then at the way that artist intended that information to be presented. Just as Art and Language expected one of their artworks to be hung on the wall on an angle as shown by the 'horizontal bar which produces the diagonal angle at which the thing actually sits on the wall'<sup>32</sup>. They also wanted the viewer to be aware of this and suggested that being aware of this intention in the way the work was displayed could be part of a 'competent examination of a work of art'<sup>33</sup>. If we consider this in relation to the importance Sperber and Wilson place on understanding the communicators communicative intention, then this is enlightening. By recognising this intention

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Baldwin, 2003 symposium transcript, p.17

<sup>33</sup> Michael Baldwin, 2003 symposium transcript, p.17

it may reveal some of the artists assumptions, and in turn thoughts, about the information they have presented.

Therefore for the artwork to successfully communicate in light of Sperber and Wilson's model, there needs to be recognition by the audience of the artists communicative intention, combined with an awareness that the artist intended to communicate ostensively. Without this awareness Sperber and Wilson seem to suggest that the audience may not commit to process the information correctly and may miss information that is relevant. In other words they might not work as hard. This could be what was happening with the audience in the Lisson gallery when they viewed Art and Languages *Homes from Homes* piece.

Sperber and Wilson's approach is not limited to offering a consideration of how communication is possible, they also go on to consider what may be being communicated. It seems that having applied Sperber and Wilson's approach to consider how the artwork may work, we may now also use their work in considering what work the artwork may do.

Sperber and Wilson have acknowledged that, in the past, theorists of communication have tended to treat speech as the primary form of communication. They have focused on what is being communicated as being the meaning of the verbal utterance.

In light of this Sperber and Wilson offer helpful examples of the theories of varying means of communication that they outline and therefore show how they may differ. They state that if one notices a smell of gas upon entering a room and look to the person they are with whilst sniffing ostensively, this sniff would evidence that the gas had been noticed. Yet this meaning could just as well have been spoken. On the other hand they suggest if one arrives at a holiday home and throws open the windows then sniffs ostensively whilst looking to the person one is with, one may be thought to be drawing attention to any number of things. These could be the mixed smells of the sea, seaweed, ozone, fish and all sorts of pleasant things, but it is unlikely that one's intentions can be pinned down any more specifically than that. It is not considered that one could not have communicated this any more efficiently than by making this gesture. Sperber and Wilson describe efficient communication as a result of human beings aiming to obtain maximum information for minimal information processing.

It seems such an example relates to similar experiences when one considers art. Art often seems to communicate multiple meanings, which may have been almost impossible to convey linguistically and that can prove difficult to tie down. It suggests that arts' vagueness in terms of meaning would also be its value and that were it to be spelt out it would lose much of its appeal. Just as Sperber and Wilson put it 'the distortion is even greater in the case of metaphor and other figures of speech, whose poetic effects are generally destroyed by being explicitly spelled out'<sup>34</sup>.

Theories of communication have to date assumed that propositional meaning is intended. Semioticians have had a go at explaining the role of inference in what is communicated as being propositional. Yet they believe 'no-one has any clear idea of how inferences may operate over propositions particularly non-propositional objects like images, impressions, or emotions'. Although semioticians 'might look as if they had got it better, with the use of the code model', the semiotic approach is considered by Sperber and Wilson as 'more comprehensive by being more superficial'<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986

<sup>35</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986

Sperber and Wilson then take on the challenge of explaining 'how an account of human communication can give a precise description and explanation of its vaguer effects'. They consider that when we want to make manifest for someone a single assumption, then we may use language. Yet at the other extreme they believe there are vaguer forms of communication, in which the communicator may produce a representation of assumptions in which none are directly listed. Instead, he or she may, for example, produce a piece of art in which some of the assumptions they hold may become manifest. This means that an impression of something may become manifest to another person rather than just a propositional description of it.

So Sperber and Wilson describe images and other non-propositional forms of communication as vague forms of communication. This is interesting in light of criticisms of art exhibition press releases, which often seem to be couched in terms of artists 'raising issues' and 'forming new associations'.

The vagueness of these press release claims has been considered by David Thompson in the *Guardian*<sup>36</sup>. Thompson believes these press releases can be seen as pre-emptive attempts to explain the art and act as validating texts which distinguish 'fine' art from 'dirty commerce'. It seems for Thompson that the thematics artists address are what entitles work to 'serious recognition', yet they are often little more than 'arcane references' and 'games of deduction'<sup>37</sup>. Chris Ware also expresses frustration with contemporary arts prevalent thematics in the article 'Road to Nowhere: arts conceptual cul-di-sac'<sup>38</sup>. In this he asks how such great and 'ponderous meanings are attributed to the banal conceptual artefacts wheeled out for our enrichment'. He goes on to question how one should deal with the wide and ambiguous claims that the artworks often seem intended to achieve according to the press releases. Ware also questions what it means for contemporary artists to 'raise issues', how it is that the artists actually intend the work to address these issues, and what may possibly be illuminated by them doing so. An example of this was the claims in the press release for the #####s exhibition shown at the ICA in 2002, which led Ware to question the value of art described as addressing issues of 'global economy, culture and cultural exchange'<sup>39</sup>.

Yet it seems that what these vaguer forms of communication, which are non-linguistic, do facilitate is to make manifest an artist's impressions or experiences of events, information or meaning. Yet when such forms of communication are described as addressed or tackling political or social issues it seems Sperber and Wilson's model of communication could offer an explanation of why such work is often seen as failing to achieve this. Artworks are often criticised for merely raising or flagging up issues rather than making apparent the artists assumptions or thoughts about such themes. This it appears, according to Sperber and Wilson's model, is because it is exactly what such forms of communication are best at.

For Sperber and Wilson, to communicate ostensively is to produce a certain stimulus with the aim of fulfilling an informative intention, and intending moreover, communicative intention.

It could also be possible that whilst the critics of artworks have acknowledged the informative intention of the artists and the information the artist has considered relevant enough to draw to their audience's attention, they may have failed to recognise the artist's communicative intention and in so doing the assumptions the artist may have held about this information may have not

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<sup>36</sup> Thompson, David. 2004, p.

<sup>37</sup> Thompson, David. 2004, p.

<sup>38</sup> Ware, Chris. Road to Nowhere: Art's conceptual cul-de-sac  
*Eye* #47, March 2003

<sup>39</sup> ##### exhibition press release, January—March 2003, ##### Galleries, London SW1.

become mutually manifest between the artist and viewer. Therefore the work could not be said to have communicated successfully or even vaguely.

Sperber and Wilson suggest that the artist's communicative intention is not always overt but is instead sometimes inferred instead. For example, in the case of R7's<sup>40</sup> work, the artwork may be seen as working on two levels. At one level, as a viewer, one may acknowledge the social issues she has drawn to ones attention. To have decided such themes were relevant to the target audience and to present them as such constitutes her informative intention. Yet at another level, her communicative intention, such as to present this information with a degree of irony or humour, may be less apparent. As she suggests, her use of humour often undermines her attempt to address political issues and the work in turn sometimes fails to bring about change in the viewers political thinking.

It seems, if as Sperber and Wilson suggested that the communicator or artist is responsible for the communication and for anticipating their audience, then it could be said that the responsibility for the work not working also lies with the artist or communicator.

A final issue in considering what work the artwork does would be to consider whether the artist actually intends the artwork to work as communication. It seems that Sperber and Wilson's explanation of a non-linguistic means of communication sees it as somewhat vaguer than propositional verbal communication. Yet it is often precisely this vagueness that seems to be valued within the field of art, and this is not restricted to contemporary visual art. It seems such qualities and the criticisms they can bring can be seen in other artistic cultural fields, such as in criticisms of the film *Elephant* directed by Van Sant. In a review by Matheou Demetrios of channel 4,<sup>41</sup> Demetrios states that Van Sant 'takes a detached perspective on the causes of this, (the columbine shootings); he's more intent on showing, not analysing, and letting the audience make its own mind up'. The criticism is that this 'stance' 'may anger many, who will feel that without cause and effect, the film is pointless.'<sup>42</sup> This suggests that some people find arts ability to raise issues vaguely and therefore without critically addressing them, infuriating. Yet sometimes art and particularly this film escapes this type of criticism from many, due to the way it has been so skilfully and technically crafted. This is again emphasised in Matheou's comments on *Elephant* being rather than pointless on the contrary 'beautifully composed and shot'.

It seems then that once the communicator or artists informative intention becomes mutually manifest, then Sperber and Wilson suggest the communicator has created the following situation: it becomes mutually manifest that the fulfilment of their informative intention lies in the hands of the audience<sup>43</sup>. So if the artwork works to make manifest the assumptions the artist intended to make manifest, then the artwork has worked to communicate even if that communication is vague. Yet if the audience refuses to accept these assumptions as true or probably true, then they have failed in their informative intention<sup>44</sup>. In which case, the response to the work of the artwork

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<sup>40</sup> R7. Interview with the author, conducted Feb 25<sup>th</sup> 2004

<sup>41</sup> Demetrios, Matheou. Film review of *Elephant*, for Channel 4, 2003, available at: <http://www.channel4.com/film/reviews/film.isp?id=118429&page=2>

<sup>42</sup> Demetrios, Matheou, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986,

<sup>44</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986,

may be a complaint in the form of criticism about the irrelevance of that which the artist has presented.

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## **Paper Title: Elusive discourses and Art world institutions**

### **Show Hide Show Conference – Given September 2004**

PhD students session, at the annual conference of the ICE (Institute for Curatorship and Education) project, held at, Edinburgh College of Art.

### **Introduction**

I am interested in exploring the role of theory in contextualising art practice and in establishing arts value. Which has led me to consider the means of understanding the difference between artefact and linguistic based transactions. And whilst it seems difficult to outline the work I have been undertaking in 15mins I will endeavour to explain briefly where my work has led me. My research has included a number of interviews including; ones with R8, an art historian, critic and the author of '#####'; R3, an arts journalist; R1 the editor of #####; the curator R9; and a number of contemporary artists including R4, R7 and R6, and more recently a meeting with Roy Harris the author of 'The necessity of Artspeak'.

I began this PhD due to an interest in what appeared to be an increase in 'theory' surrounding contemporary art practice. In attempting to define what it is we are referring to when we talk about art theory I have looked to the work of John-Marie Schaeffer as he quite rightly points out it should in fact be 'art theories' we refer to and not 'art theory' as there exists no unified 'theory of art' at all.

Art theory it seems actually consists of many diverse discourses drawn from varying disciplines with different goals all of which are adopted by artists and critics in order to contextualise and expand on thematics apparent in visual art practice. These broad ranges of bodies of knowledge used to contextualise visual art practice include some dominant theoretical modes such as psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, postmodernist, and poststructuralist theory.

It seems the elusive nature of the contextualising discourse surrounding contemporary art has often resulted in some people being at a loss to grasp what it is they feel they need to understand in order to appreciate the work. R8 recognises that this is a consequence of conceptual art that favoured 'ideas over aesthetics' and hoped to make art more democratic that has meant artists have 'frequently ended up producing work accessible only to those with a good education in philosophy'<sup>45</sup>.

It seems that many believe there would be no problem if only someone could educate the masses, and that if one has the relevant knowledge of art and art theory at his or her disposal he would surely be able to understand the work.

In considering the concerns and outcry in relation to contemporary art aired by the general public and the popular press, papers by Jonathan Vickery's have proved very helpful, Vickery centres on three categories of questions;

The first concerns Identity?: Is this object art? If so what kind of art? The second category concerns meaning: what does this object mean, or signify? Is the artist

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<sup>45</sup> #####, 1999. p.60



making a statement? The third category concerns value: Is this object significant? What does it say about the nature of art? What kind of aesthetic value does it have?

Yet as Vickery goes on to state these questions are anachronistic as the works which cause the controversy and their counterparts have often 'already assumed a privileged place in the dominant surveys and critical histories of contemporary art'. In Vickery's discussion he considers Carl Andre's work and states that the institutional implications of the Tate's purchases, which he believes extend beyond 'the possible squandering of public funds to the construction of value itself'. In that, what the Tate and our other public institutions purchase are considered, and I quote,

'*de jure* 'exemplary works of art' that (i) create the framework of further practice for the current or next generation of artists; and (ii) engender attitudes, reference points, conceptions or frameworks of understanding which maintain a determining impact on the nature of (a) the art education system, (b) the pricing system of the private art market, (c) museums' acquisitions policy, and (d) the subjects of art criticism and art historical narratives; and so on'.

Vickery has considered the means by which we value a work of art and establish its worth and meaning. In order to explore this he refers to the aesthetic value of works of art by identifying three categories which he feels can be used to interrogate artworks. These categories he describes as the following: (i) *material organisation*: the technical or material construction of the work of art: the physical structures within which the viewer's perceptual activity is orientated; (ii) *aesthetic organisation*: composition, or the aesthetic characteristics of the object's material organisation; and (iii) *hermeneutic organisation*: art's interpreted meaning as configured within or in relation to existing systems of thought or institutional practice.

Vickery goes on to describe the hermeneutic approach as a broad range of concerns that refers literally to the methods of interpretation available to the viewer. The focus being on the way the object is made to yield meaning. In relation to the intellectual nature of much contemporary art it is the hermeneutic organisation of the work that seems of most importance. Vickery states 'it is commonplace to note that in the case of contemporary art technical innovation and artistic conventions of composition have been evacuated as sources of value; moreover, the hermeneutics of reception have largely supplanted the hermeneutics of production'. This increasing importance placed on theory and conceptual elements of artworks seems to leave the physicality of the work redundant.

When considering contemporary art it seems too simplistic to refer to it in divided terms according to categories such as form and content or meaning, particularly if we recognise that there is often now little distinction between the artwork as an object and the artist's intention.

Jake Chapman appears to share this view, as is apparent from his comments in a recent television programme, 'The Art Show' broadcast on Channel 4 on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003<sup>46</sup>. In this programme he said the problem with contemporary art is that people seem to believe it is 'reducible to looking, which really is not, its nothing to do with looking'. He believes that looking is 'a very small part of it' and that really it is to do with 'thinking'<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Chapman, Jake. The Art Show, Show on Channel 4, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003 7.30pm

<sup>47</sup> Chapman, Jake. 2003.

There have also been criticisms of press release and their being couched in terms of artists 'raising issues' and 'forming new associations' which have been considered by David Thompson in the Guardian. Thompson believes these press releases can be seen as pre-emptive attempts to explain the art and act as validating texts which distinguish 'fine' art from 'dirty commerce'. It seems for Thompson the thematics artists address are what entitles work to 'serious recognition' yet are often little more than 'arcane references' and 'games of deduction'.

### Exclusive and elusive discourses

The problem with this increase in discourse and theory that surrounds contemporary art practice is that it often seems exclusionary; as is stated in 'The New Art History' many of the writers included in the book employed 'shorthand for the complicated and often un-familiar concepts from psychoanalysis, semiotics, philosophy and Marxism with which they were dealing'<sup>48</sup>. The discourse and therefore the art that it surrounds then becomes elusive and accessible only to those with a firm grounding in the theories and histories from which these concepts were drawn.

If taken to the extreme, the thing that provides much contemporary art with its identity is its theoretical explanation, such as is exemplified in this comment by Danto,

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo Box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is. Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting. (Danto, 1964: 581)

If we consider Danto and Vickery's arguments they suggest we 'see' the Brillo Box as art because of a series of related concepts that structure our perceptual apprehension of the object. Although Vickery points out Danto later revised his suggestion that 'a certain theory' of art simply conferred art identity on a non-art object, to a 'a circuit of 'theories' or interpretative processes. These would include exhibitions, debates, philosophy, history-writing, and reflection on other artworks and his argument therefore implies artworks gain an identity through participation in this circuit. The art work itself is seen as an *act* of interpretation, a speculative reflection on the concept of art and the function of that concept within art world activities. The ability of a work to generate further speculation becomes its measure of value.

In Vickery's discussion he refers to Carl Andre's bricks as an example. He suggests that these bricks have aesthetic value because they play a significant role or function in our progressive understanding of the concept of art as it has developed in the context of art world activities. This explanation of the aesthetic value is problematic in that there seems to be only an arbitrary connection between the physical object itself and the institutional discourse, or as Vickery puts it 'between the intrinsic and extrinsic spheres of aesthetic value'. This leaves Vickery suggesting that in the case of Carl Andre he could have used 'planks of wood or car batteries' and that 'the object itself is only an arbitrary tool for a series of questions or propositions'. For Vickery then perhaps the value of the artwork is 'discursive' in the sense that 'all meaning and significance is derived from conceptual speculation on the nature or condition of art and its institutional status.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, p.10

## Is contemporary art discursive?

The increasing tendency to refer to art as discursive was emphasised in a recent interview with R1, during which she stated that she believes that art is a 'discursive practice above all'.<sup>49</sup> She gave an example of arts discursive nature: 'when you put a frame around a picture that picture is in dialogue with other pictures by the same artist and other artists, it's open ended'. She considers that the best art is open ended.

A recent television programme broadcast on Channel 4 on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003 gave Jake Chapman the opportunity to state his beliefs about the nature of contemporary art, in which he said the problem with contemporary art is that people seem to believe it is 'reducible to looking, which really is not its nothing to do with looking' as he believes looking is 'a very small part of it' and that really it is to do with 'thinking'. An article by David Thompson in the Guardian on April 15<sup>th</sup> also quoted Jake Chapman, as saying increasing sensitivity shown by the galleries to a wider audience for art could have a negative effect on 'the potential for serious, discursive art'.<sup>50</sup>

Kosuth has also referred to arts discursive nature, stating that in art 'the means of expression is also not unlike language'.<sup>51</sup> This view he exemplifies in the following quote:

Even accepting the common view that art's history goes beyond hundreds of years, it is possible to see that the 'language' of the art of the west has been painting and sculpture for some time. Up until the very recent past it has been assumed that if one wanted to speak as an artist he had to speak in the correct 'language'. That's how we knew he was an artist and what he made was art or meant to be art. Whatever was done, it had to be done within that language...in the past few years artists have realised that their traditional language is exhausted and unreal.<sup>52</sup>

Roy Harris's book 'The Necessity of Artspeak',<sup>53</sup> provides a contrast to the view of art as discursive. In this book Harris considers Kosuth's comments and concludes that Kosuth shows 'no inclination to address the fundamental qualities of what makes language in the traditional sense a distinctive mode of communication' or to reflect on 'whether these distinctive properties bear any convincing relationship to those of painting and sculpture'.<sup>54</sup> Harris states that although Kosuth 'makes reference to linguists, including Saussure and Sapir, and even the Saussurean technical terms *langue* and *parole*', such references tend to be both 'fleeting and opaque'.<sup>55</sup> For Harris then whilst Kosuth's texts give the impression of 'engaging with linguistics in a serious way' they are in fact 'vague theoretical gestures in a linguistic direction, but nothing more'.<sup>56</sup> We may begin to question whether there has been any adequate descriptions offered by anyone working within the field of art that sufficiently describes how it is that art acts discursively, or how one may conceive of art as communicative.

<sup>49</sup> R1. Interview with the author, Interview conducted 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, David. Death of the Gallery, *The Guardian*, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2004

<sup>51</sup> Kosuth quoted in, Harris, Roy. *The Necessity of Artspeak: The language of the Arts in the Western Tradition*.

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<sup>52</sup> Kosuth, 1991, p.43

<sup>53</sup> Harris, Roy. *The Necessity of Artspeak: The language of the Arts in the Western Tradition*. London: Continuum, 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Harris, 2003, p.130

<sup>55</sup> Harris, 2003, p.129

<sup>56</sup> Harris, 2003, p.129

So if contemporary art is concerned with the intellect and is discursive but often without recourse to aesthetics and material organisation, how is it that artworks work intellectually and discursively? It seems that more and more often we hear from artists who feel the interpretation of artworks should be left open for the viewer.

### **Art audiences and coded art and coded discourses**

R4 had stated previously that he saw contemporary art as being for the initiated audience and therefore I asked him about this in an interview. He said he had been influenced by Garcet's thinking. Garcet saw modernist art as intentionally coded, and as R4 sees it Garcet believed that 'these artist's had decided to code the narrative in their work pretty much to avoid trouble from a kind of vast misunderstanding majority' and to 'offer their work only to an initiated sort of intelligentsia rather than the sort of insensitive bourgeois'.<sup>57</sup> At the same time R4 has considered theories of the role of the sub culture in twentieth century contemporary society, and believes that artists may be a sub-cultural group going so far as to suggest it may in fact have been one of the first sub cultural groups to emerge. R4 believed that you could posit the development of artists as a sub cultural group around Picasso who he saw as 'notorious in that he never really showed publicly he did not participate in the salons' therefore his audience were 'this very small alienated intelligentsia'.

In discussion of the nature of the codes used by artists and how one could gain access to them R4 stated this could be obtained via the sub cultural group. As we know current art education works by exposing it's students to other practising artists rather than following a specific educational curriculum. In a way, art education then becomes a form of learning by osmosis. Just as R4 stressed the importance of the sub cultural group in defining ones identity, Singerman discusses in his book 'Art subjects' what he considers to be the priority given to the development of art student's identity as an artist during art education.

This way of thinking about art as being to do with the intellect and indoctrination within the discipline corresponds with other sociological perspectives of art such as that of Bourdieu. Who stated that 'A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence that is the code, into which it is encoded.'<sup>58</sup> R4 agreed that all art is coded 'in so far as one has to be able to read the signs if one is to understand the piece', and 'if you didn't have some sort of experience of or access to the key to their language game it would not be intelligible'.

### **Communication based on a code model....**

The idea that art is coded and that it can be decoded by those equipped with the relevant knowledge of the field resonates with approaches intended to provide understanding of language in terms of a code. Yet such a theory of art raises questions about specialist knowledge required in order to view and understand artworks. This too has implications for art education and leads to speculation as to what might comprise this body of knowledge and whether it is currently being taught. There are also implications if one then considers the changing audience for art, particularly in the light of David Thompson's article which outlined Jake Chapman's concerns about the increasingly widened audience for art.

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<sup>57</sup> R4, in an interview with the author, p.4

<sup>58</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Distinction*, p.2

If then we think of the artwork as coded and as being intended for a limited audience, and suggest that there is some meaning that can be derived from art if one knows the relevant code, in this we are suggesting that artworks work as a form of communication. Historically, one way of theorising this communication has been semiology. In this approach, art is thought of as working by means of signifying signs and codes directed to a viewer, who if they possess shared understanding or knowledge of the code, can then decode these signs. Therefore they become a competent reader of the work and also of the artist's intentions.

Yet when following this line of thinking it seems one reaches a point where one begins to question both what the shared knowledge is that is required of artist and viewer and also of the form of the relevant codes. With regard to R4's work it may be possible to consider formalist traditions and his essays as guides to his paintings. Manifesto-like texts or essays that artists write to pave the way for their art, may act to help those artists' work be understood by an audience in the way they intended it.

Yet another way of considering arts means of communicating, and whether artworks might be coded would be to explore Sperber and Wilson<sup>59</sup> approach to communication outlined in their book 'Relevance Communication & Cognition'. In this they suggest that the code model alone is not sufficient to allow for a theory of communication. As whilst they do not entirely dispense with the code model, yet recognise it is this approach that has given rise to such folklorist sayings as 'getting ones ideas across', 'putting ones thoughts down on paper', 'putting ones thoughts into words'. These figures of speech they deem to be deceptive in that 'one tends to forget that what they suggest cannot be true'. The code models weaknesses argue Sperber and Wilson lie in its inability to elaborate upon comprehension, which they judge 'requires more than the decoding of a linguistic sign'. The code model also fails to explain the vague terms it is so dependant upon, such as 'shared knowledge' or 'mutual assumptions'<sup>60</sup>.

Nor it seems can the code model alone can provide a viable theory of how artworks might communicate. In this form of communication there seems also to be some reliance on inference. The importance of inference was recognised by Grice, who outlined a model which Sperber and Wilson build on. David Hills has pointed out, this has also been recognised in relation to art by both Gombrich and Wollheim<sup>61</sup>. Hills described how Wollheim, like his predecessor Gombrich, advocated 'an account of pictorial meaning that is psychological and broadly speaking Gricean in flavour'<sup>62</sup>.

Sperber and Wilson have acknowledged that, in the past, theorists of communication have tended to treat speech as the primary form of communication, and have assumed that propositional meaning is intended. Semioticians have had a go at explaining the role of inference in what is communicated as being propositional. Yet they believe 'no-one has any clear idea of how inferences may operate over propositions particularly non-propositional objects like images, impressions, or emotions'. Although semioticians 'might look as if they had got it better, with the use of the code model', the semiotic approach is considered by Sperber and Wilson as 'more comprehensive by being more superficial'<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986

<sup>60</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986, p.6

<sup>61</sup> Hills, David. Book Review of, Van Gerwen, Rob (ed.), Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting: Art as Representation and Expression, Cambridge University Press, 2001. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2002. <http://ndpr.icaap.org/content/archives/2002/8/hills-vangerwen-long>

<sup>62</sup> Hills, David. 2002, p.1

<sup>63</sup> Sperber, D & Wilson, D 1986

It seems both the code model and semiotics rely upon mutual knowledge in order to explain communication. Sperber and Wilson believe that mutual knowledge may in fact be a philosopher's construct. This is not to assume that humans do not share information, but they want to go beyond the vague constructs of shared information and mutual knowledge.

### **Where I am going from here...how we acquire this knowledge**

In considering how we may acquire this shared knowledge I am currently looking to Bourdieu's study 'The Love of Art'. In which he considers the social conditions that make culture possible and the way this culture becomes naturalised. Although this study was completed in 1969, I hope it will offer me some means by which I can explore further the social conditions of contemporary art. Yet whilst I recognise the value of considering Bourdieu and the attempts he has made to understand the social conditions of art appreciation. I also recognise that his approach is based on the existence of a 'code' learned and then used in the form of cultural capital. In seeking to overcome the use of a code as a means to explain the shared knowledge necessary for art appreciation I look to Roy Harris's and his criticisms of Sperber and Wilson as claiming to do away with a code model and yet remaining in fact dependant upon it.

I wish to draw further on Harris's integrationist linguistics, which understands language and discourse as a means to integrate activities. He therefore offers an approach more intimately linked to the social realities of art appreciation. Yet recognise his approach seems to hail the end of what he describes as the 'supercategory' art and its possible absorption into what he believes to be increasingly dominant discourse 'mediaspeak'. As he believes that it is no longer possible to think in terms of 'the arts residing in a certain body of knowledge, either practical or theoretical, which some possess and others lack'.

### **Questions I am left with**

Where do we go from here?

What is the mutual knowledge needed in order for contemporary art to be intelligible? Is that body of knowledge available to some audiences and not to others? Is it still viable to think of there as being a body of knowledge that surrounds what we do as artists and art appreciation?

If you were at this stage is there a different approach to the point I have reached that you may take, does anyone have any suggestions as to how it might best to consider the means by which art communicates, whether art is coded and if so in what way, or what might be meant by this term, if viewing art requires shared knowledge what might this body of knowledge be and how might one gain access to it? I would like to consider the implications of art requiring specialist knowledge in light of the increasingly broader audience for art.

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## **Title of Paper: The role of the 'art' object in contemporary art**

### **What is the role of the artefact in art and design research? – July 2004**

Research into Practice conference, held at The University of Hertfordshire, Faculty of Art and Design, research faculty

The paper was peer reviewed twice and included in the online journal, working papers in art and design, available at: <http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes1/research/papers/wpades/vol3/>

#### **Abstract**

It has been argued by Andrew Harrison that knowledge in art and design needs to be communicated by demonstration rather than via precepts. If we follow this line, it leads us to consider the outcomes of art practice as needing to be viewed as 'objects of knowledge in their own right'.

However, active engagement in research in the field has led me to change my perspective on the role of the art object, within contemporary art at least. This paper outlines the reasoning behind this shift. The idea that the conveying of knowledge in art and design needs to be communicated via demonstration rather than via precepts was initially persuasive. This has been reconsidered since recognising that referral to other artists work, both within and outside art education, usually takes the form of studying reproductions and not first hand experiences of art objects themselves. The direct experience of the art object in fine art is considered in relation to Andrew Benjamin's book *Object Painting*. Benjamin sets out to offer his understanding of the contemporary art object and yet begins the book by stating that 'today the question of the art object seems a distant concern'.

The paper draws upon interviews conducted with the following: R8; an art historian, critic and the author of '#####'; R3, an arts journalist; R1 the editor of #####; the curator R9; and a number of contemporary artists including R4, R7 and R6. The art object is seen as something intimately entwined in contemporary fine art as a social belief system and activity, rather than an entity unto itself. This is argued in relation to Jonathan Vickery's position that art may appear 'to the uninitiated as arbitrary and self indulgent', if 'detached from any system of values-embedded constraints'. A consideration of value constraints we impose upon art practice, in both the contemporary art world, art education and particularly in fine art research, will also be undertaken.

The paper will argue that the relation of theory to practice in fine art research needs to be considered in light of Danto's theory of art, and in relation to Kosuth's view that 'the means of expression in art is not unlike language'. The role of art discourse is explored and subject to the critiques offered by the linguist Roy Harris.

The focus of the paper is thus a consideration of the role of the art object in the contemporary art world, and the implications of this for the role of the art object in art education and research. Consideration of the roles of the artefact and discourse in contemporary art is intended to contribute to the exploration of what differentiates artefact-based transactions from linguistic ones.

## Introduction

If we consider the role of the art object in contemporary art, there seems to be a confusing paradox. The art historian Charles Harrison states in 'Art in Theory' that the anthology be treated not solely as a resource to study art but that it be accompanied by 'first-hand experience of modern art' (Harrison, 1992). David Davies also stresses the importance of a 'direct experiential encounter with an instance of a work' (Davies, 2003). Yet despite this stress on the direct experience of artworks, it seems that, as noted by Vickery, the conceptual or hermeneutic aspects of art seem to be those which are most valued within the contemporary art world (Vickery, 2004). This paper will therefore explore the role of the art object in contemporary art, and in so doing, begin to address the conference questions: what differentiates artefact-based transactions from linguistic ones? Do artefacts merely stimulate linguistic reasoning? Can an artefact do more than simply illustrate a concept? And ultimately, what is the role of the artefact in art and design research?

In order to achieve this, the paper will draw upon a number of interviews conducted as part of my PhD research project. These include those with R8, an art historian, critic and the author of '#####'; R3, an arts journalist; R1, the editor of '#####'; the curator R9; and a number of contemporary artists including R4, R7 and R6.

## The Art Object

This paper will begin by exploring the role of the art object in the contemporary art world. The initial interviews conducted as part of this research were in retrospect approached with an understanding not dissimilar to what David Davies terms the 'common-sense' approach to understanding art and art theory. In this approach the belief is that it is 'necessary and sufficient' to have a direct experiential encounter with art. Such an encounter is 'necessary because there are appreciable properties bearing on the distinctive value of a work that are graspable only in such an experience' (Davies, 2003). It is sufficient in that 'any properties of the work not graspable in an experiential encounter with the work have no bearing on a work's artistic value' (Davies, 2003). The belief is that artworks possess properties and knowledge 'accessible to receivers who engage in such direct experiential encounters' with them and that we may characterise such experiences as 'aesthetic' (Davies, 2003). In a recent paper, Charles Harrison explored 'Modernism's supposed disestablishment in the transatlantic art world of the late 1960's and early 1970's', and in so doing, quoted a number of people who had offered similar views of the experience of the work of art (Harrison, 2004). He referred to Bell, who stated that 'To appreciate fully a work of art we require nothing but sensibility. To those that can hear art speaks for itself'. He also referred to Greenberg, who commented that 'Aesthetic judgement coincides with the immediate experience of art; it is not arrived at afterwards through reflection or thought' (Greenberg, 1967).

If we consider these statements and believe that artworks are 'distinguished by their aesthetic properties conferred on them by their creators', it would seem logical to follow Andrew Harrison's argument from the last 'Research into Practice' conference. Here he considered that we might need to view artworks as 'objects of knowledge in their own right' (Harrison, 2002). Similarly, it seemed appropriate to use the artist's interviews conducted as part of this research to probe artists' intentions, as a means of elucidating insights into the role of the art object and its supporting theory. It was on this basis with this progression of thought that led me to write the abstract and propose a paper for this conference.

However, since writing the abstract for this paper it has become apparent that my thinking on the role of the art object, within contemporary art at least, has changed. In disciplines such as Textiles, it may be that the resulting object as an outcome of practice can be seen to evidence research. I am unsure if the same could or should, be said for Fine Art. I will use this paper to outline my reasoning behind this thinking.

The artists I interviewed did not see their work as an embodiment of their ideas and intentions. Instead they described the art object as part of the 'art' but not the sum of it. They felt they were not the authority on their own work, and were in fact often not the best person to write or speak about it. The work was described as revealing itself to them as artists, just as it seemed to reveal itself to less familiar viewers. These findings, and more recent interviews and texts have led me to review my position. Art exists as a social belief system and activity with the art object intimately entwined within it. It is not solely an object as an entity unto itself.

I also feel that there needs to be a distinction made between artefact and art object, particularly the contemporary art object.

Discussions surrounding the role of the text in practice-based Fine Art PhD submissions often focus on understanding how the artwork may *work*. This question is also at the centre of the themes of this conference. This is particularly relevant when considering the differences between aesthetic and linguistic communication.

Do we presently possess a means of understanding the difference between artefact and linguistic transactions? To answer this would take a considerable amount of research, possibly from a cognitive psychology perspective. Our discipline may be hostile to this.

A recent television programme broadcast on Channel 4 on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003 offered Jake Chapman the opportunity to present his opinions on the nature of contemporary art. The core idea was that the problem with contemporary art is that people seem to believe it is 'reducible to looking', which he believes it is not, and that in fact it is 'nothing to do with looking, looking is a very small part of it, really it is to do with thinking' (Chapman, 2003). An article by David Thompson in the Guardian on April 15<sup>th</sup> also quoted Jake Chapman, as saying that the increasing sensitivity shown by the galleries to a wider audience for art could have a negative effect on 'the potential for serious, discursive art' (Chapman, cited in Thompson, 2004).

It is insightful to know that Jake Chapman sees contemporary art as discursive. It also seems, as Jake suggests, that it is too easy to reduce the experience of the art object to looking. A recent interview with R1 suggested to me that forms of thinking about art 'can be entirely about discourse' or 'entirely about objects' and 'anything in between'. She believes that art is a 'discursive practice above all' and says she has no problem with that but fears that the institutions have (R1, 2004, 74:26). An example she gave of art's discursive nature was that 'when you put a frame around a picture that picture is in dialogue with other pictures by the same artist and other artists, it's open-ended'. She does believe that the best art is open-ended (R1, 2004, 75:00).

Kosuth considers that in 'art the means of expression is also not unlike language'. He exemplifies this in this quote,

Even accepting the common view that art's history goes beyond hundreds of years, it is possible to see that the 'language' of the art of the west has been painting and sculpture for some time. Up until the very recent past it has been assumed that if one wanted to speak as an artist he had to speak in the correct

'language'. That's how we knew he was an artist and what he made was art or meant to be art. Whatever was done, it had to be done within that language...in the past few years artists have realised that their traditional language is exhausted and unreal. (Kosuth, 1991:43)

In Roy Harris's book 'The necessity of Artspeak', Harris considers Kosuth's comments and concludes that Kosuth shows:

'no inclination to address the fundamental qualities of what makes language in the traditional sense a distinctive mode of communication and whether these distinctive properties bear any convincing relationship to those of painting and sculpture'(Harris, 2003: 130).

Harris proceeds to criticise Kosuth's argument by saying that his deployment of the notion that art forms are 'languages' is typical, and 'although insistently repeated never advances beyond hackneyed metaphor' (Harris 2003, 129). Harris goes so far as to suggest that although Kosuth 'makes reference to linguists, including Saussure and Sapir, and even the Saussurean technical terms *langue* and *parole*', such references tend to be both 'fleeting and opaque' (Harris, 2003:129). Harris therefore suggests that whilst Kosuth's texts give the impression of 'engaging with linguistics in a serious way', they are in fact 'vague theoretical gestures in a linguistic direction, but nothing more' (Harris, 2003:129).

In a paper given at the 'Drawing Disciplinary Lines' conference in Leeds this May, Charles Harrison described the situation that he faced when, as a young art journalist, he found he was 'no longer sure that the work itself had been responsible for (his) conviction of its value'. The work he was referring to was one of Morris Louis' 'bronze veil' paintings that he saw in Emmerich's gallery in New York in 1962. Harrison used this personal experience to reflect on the concerns he had about 'the apparent decline in the status and potential of abstract art', and with it 'the emergence of an art that employed language as its medium' (Harrison, 2004).

There exists a well-documented history of the dematerialisation of the art object, as considered by Lucy Lippard (1973). Yet the changing role of the art object has left some questions unanswered, and as Charles Harrison's paper suggested, he shares some of these concerns.

Andrew Benjamin's 'Object Painting' could be expected to offer us an interpretation of 'the question of the art object' (Benjamin, 1994). Yet in the first few lines Benjamin states that 'today the question of the art object seems a distant concern' (Benjamin, 1994). He therefore takes as his theme for the book a mapping out of the *work* the artwork does. In this he proceeds to describe the way in which art needs to be understood in terms of 'movement' and he attempts in the book to 'rework the ontology of the art object in terms of becoming'. Thereafter Benjamin's argument considers the art object as a 'becoming-object', a state in which art objects are 'inevitably concerned with their own objectivity and thus with its own being as art' (Benjamin, 1994). Although it is clear that Benjamin is a well-respected voice within the field of art and philosophy, I find this book difficult. There is to be no getting away from the fact that it seems to skirt around the question of the art object and not address anything directly. I was left confused and feeling it was symptomatic of an art discourse dogged by postmodernist theory.

An argument presented by Vickery also complicates the role of the art object as embodying knowledge as such, in a different but clearer way. Vickery considers the art object through his observation that,

'a work of art is no longer visually distinct from a non-art object... our contemporary concept of 'art' no longer bears any direct or necessary relation to any objective characteristics, any aesthetic qualities, artistic techniques or any kind of object per se'. (Vickery, 2002)

Therefore as Vickery puts it, art can only be described in terms of '*an activity*'. He sees that this may appear 'to the uninitiated as arbitrary and self indulgent', and that it would indeed be were it 'detached from any system of values-embedded constraints' and if it had no 'professional technical constraints, such as Academy training or historic artistic conventions' imposed upon it. Vickery sees contemporary art as avoiding 'the condition of the meaningless or arbitrary' by 'being orientated within a coherent network of artistic practices, ideas, debates and modes of display otherwise known as the 'Artworld'. This leaves art as 'an 'Artworld activity, an institutional activity (and not a species of object as such)' (Vickery, 2002).

Such an argument makes a discussion of the art object irrelevant and focuses on art in relation to the discourse, modes of representation and elucidation that surround it.

Mitchell (2003) has posed the problem of understanding the means by which the media communicates. He considers that the answer is to address the location of the 'media'. In a sociological or institutional theory of art, where art is seen as 'an activity', and there is diminished value or relevance of the art object, such a question about the location or address of 'art' would also seem poignant.

### Artspeak

I am now going to consider the nature of art world discourses. Vickery's discussion sees the art object as existing in direct relation to a 'network of artistic practices, ideas, debates and modes of display otherwise known as the 'Artworld'. It seems that it is often the art world discourses themselves which form the identity of art objects. This is also emphasised in an institutional theory of art, such as Danto's. If taken to the extreme, the only thing that provides the 'art object' with its identity is its theoretical explanation, as exemplified in this comment by Danto:

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo Box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of *is* other than that of artistic identification). Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting. (Danto, 1964: 581)

If we consider Danto's and Vickery's arguments, they suggest we 'see' the Brillo Box as art because of a series of related concepts that structure our perceptual apprehension of the object. Vickery also considers Danto's theory and points out that Danto later revised his suggestion that 'a certain theory' of art simply conferred art identity on a non-art object, and thus avoids nominalism - 'art is anything I say is art'. Danto's revision means that he is suggesting instead of artworks emerging from a 'certain theory' (Danto, 1974) they emerge from 'a circuit of 'theories' or interpretative processes'. These would include exhibitions, debates, philosophy, history writing, and reflection on other artworks and his argument therefore implies that artworks gain an identity through participation in this circuit. The artwork itself is seen as an *act* of interpretation, a

speculative reflection on the concept of art and the function of that concept within art world activities. The ability of a work to generate further speculation becomes the measure of its value.

The nature of art world discourses, often referred to as 'Artspeak', are brought into question by Roy Harris in his book 'The necessity of Artspeak: The Language of the Arts in a Western Tradition'. He believes that 'thanks to artspeak, more and more contradictions shelter under the traditional super category, the question 'is it Art?' which is 'increasingly felt to be trivial, rather than important' (Harris, 2003; 203). Harris's argument is too complex, all encompassing and unfaltering to attempt to sum up here. Suffice to say that he feels there is 'something seriously wrong with the education system of a society that does not understand, and cannot be bothered to understand, its own artspeak' (Harris, 2003: xiii).

The trouble with Artspeak and art theory is that artists can employ it instrumentally. This was something commented upon by R1 who said 'you can get a situation as happened with Greenberg and could happen to another, but I hope not all powerful critic, which is people start to make art in the light of what he wrote'. This she felt 'doesn't do for art anymore than it possibly does for the writer' (R1, 2004, min 60:41). She explains this further;

'early Greenberg was exciting it was dynamic it was tackling something and so was the art and they were in parallel and then there were these coincidences and crossovers and I am quite sure quite a lot of artists began to talk the talk of Greenberg because he was a power in the land but I don't think they made their work in a Greenbergian way but they could discuss it in a Greenbergian way, and the minute they started to was the minute it started to go wrong and the writing and the art became academic. Or perhaps that's not the best word but it became the poorer the meaner the more instrumental, the writing became instrumental it served the art and the art served the writing and that is not healthy'. R1 61:28min

R1' stresses that this is speculation on her part and it is an opinion and cannot be read as fact. Yet it already seems reminiscent of artists within the contemporary art world who make their work in a post-modern way.

### **Artspeak and art education**

I will now consider the role of 'artspeak' in art education. The need to validate what we do in art and design in terms of writing has been linked by many to the introduction of the art degrees and the 'professionalisation' of the discipline in the 1960's. R8 stresses that changes in the discourses surrounding contemporary art are intimately linked to art education and this 'professionalisation'.

Prior to the 1960's he thinks that artists would have 'gone to art school and they would have been encouraged to develop their own individual talents which would then if they had them be recognised by the taste makers'. Yet now he feels that 'art schools generally have made a lot of effort to help their students compete within the art world and gain attention'. He mentioned Goldsmiths as a typical example of this. He feels that students there are taught 'tactics of promoting themselves' and 'depending on what kind of work it is throwing up some kind of plausible theoretical support for it'; but he is aware that this is an overly cynical view of things. While the ideal might be that 'critical thinking about cultural production and the art world' would actually inform the work, he says he isn't entirely sure that is exactly the reason why so many art schools have adopted 'contextual studies'. It seems that with the increasing significance of the discourse that accompanies and defines art practice, this training is invaluable. This reflects Vickery's exploration of Carl Andre's work, where he concluded that the artist's "creative

intention” seems to have become of vital importance; and its institutional function becomes primary’ (Vickery, 2004: 2). Yet R9 would argue that there was ‘no actual increase in professionalism’ in the 1960’s but there was;

‘a denigration of the idea that craft skills, a visual sense and visual intelligence was disparaged and that society should have recognised those skills and not have been ashamed of them and require that they be justified by a more academic aspect which is quite, logically where theory comes in’(R9, 2004, 14:11).

In R1s’ opinion, ‘the visual arts in this country gained recognition as a viable intellectual activity, supposing it ever got that recognition, very late in the day’ and she feels ‘we have had a chip on our shoulder ever since... and so we have tried to prove we can be taken seriously and that means *writing*’ (R1, 2004 67:22). This she feels is responsible for us ‘dragooning art education into the form in which we recognise education and it’s got to have degrees and it’s got to have MA’s and PhD’s’

This means R1 remains ‘hostile to the PhD’ in art as she sees it as part of the realm of ‘measurable criteria’. In this the balance of theory and practice required means they are often left ‘acting as support for one another’, which she considers an unhealthy relationship. (R1, 2004, 58:00) She feels that ‘in order to fulfil the criteria required by the university system it takes the artists engaged in that out of the loop’. The interview with R1 also suggested she felt PhD’s in art are ‘all happening for the wrong reasons’ (R1, 70:10). She is concerned that practice is being made to confirm to a particular agenda and sees the Research Assessment Exercise as a classic example of this. She commented that ‘you may have produced the most marvellous thing but if it doesn’t fit the criteria it can’t be listed in your RAE and therefore your funds will be cut’ (R1:71:00).

The fact that research practice is measured and valued according to specified criteria is exemplified in the CRIAD paper, ‘Artesign and the project series Room with a view: a case study of practice-based research in Art and Design’. This paper states that it will evaluate the Artesign project in relation to ‘current criteria drawn from both the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and new developments in funding opportunities’. Does this mean that the practice that is supported and nurtured is not necessarily that which benefits the professional development of the practitioner or that which would have been made were there no RAE assessment?

An alternative to the current PhD system considered by R1 sounds like it would take the form of an honorary PhD. This would involve artists who wanted a PhD being able to ‘compile their peer reviews, exhibitions and artists statements from catalogues’ and she states we could call it what we liked. She feels we shouldn’t be putting artists into the ‘straight jackets that the rest of us are in’ (R1, 69:29). ‘*The rest of us*’ is taken to mean other academic subjects areas such as art history. What this seems to suggest, but is however denied by R1, is a romantic view of the artist and or of notions of creativity. By saying art education should be of a very different nature to that in other disciplines, we are raising art to a privileged status.

This privileging could be based on R1’ belief that ‘the whole point of art was to be able to think outside the box’ (R1, 2004, 73:58). R1 admits that she has always been ‘interested in how artists think as an outsider’ and therefore, when contrasted with R9s views on the art world and art’s ground-breaking nature, there is an interesting contradiction. This is because R9 himself a maker and closely tied to highly successful contemporary artists, such as Tracey Emin, he sees art as one of the most rule-driven activities and compares it with a game requiring tactical skill such as chess.



In the abstract I also noted that in art education lecturers often refer their students to look at the work of other artists. Yet it seems this commonly takes the form of the student looking at reproductions and texts in books and journals and not seeing the work of art firsthand. Thus we do not have the direct experience of the art object.

### What next?

I am uncertain as to how I see a way forward from the position we are faced with. To see the art object as embodying and conveying knowledge is an outdated conception of art within the contemporary art world. When writing about art so as to justify it as research it is difficult to avoid the text becoming instrumental. Yet to reject the PhD as a necessary progression of art education and rather to insist on art education that evolves out of practice itself is surely to put too much importance on a romanticised nature of artist, art and of creative developments.

It seems though that just as Harris declares Artspeak may be becoming vacuous, there is a will to return to, at least in critical writing, a consideration of the physicality of the artwork and to form. Both the interview conducted by myself with R4 and an interview conducted by Judith Mottram with ##### revealed this. ##### felt that 'its extraordinary that you can do something like the Turner prize, which generates something like a two-inch thick wedge of stuff and no one, I don't think anyone even mentioned the colours that were in the work let alone how it might look like in a certain way'. Yet he also felt it difficult to talk in this way because he feared it could be interpreted, as 'neo-conservative' as though he was privileging 'un-critical visuality over an idea' and he didn't feel his was the case (#####, 2003, 60:10). Being seen as Conservative is, as Vickery puts it, 'something largely avoided like the plague in the Artworld' (Vickery, 2002:13).

It seems however that developments within the field, such as certain books and conferences, suggest a shift may be underway. The announcement for the 'Rediscovering Aesthetics Conference' in Cork in July, for example, and the book 'The New Aestheticism' by John Joughin and Simon Malpas (2003), suggest a return to aesthetics. Joughin and Malpas's book describes the rise of 'literary theory' as having 'spawned the rise of anti-aestheticism' which they see as having been responsible for cultural theorists 'having failed to engage with the particularity of the work of art, much less the specificities of aesthetic experience'. This book then introduces the 'notion of a new aestheticism', which it sees as;

"new" insofar as it identifies a turn taken by a number of important contemporary thinkers towards the idea that focussing on the specifically aesthetic impact of a work of art or literature has the potential to open radically different ways of thinking about identity, politics and culture'.

The press release that accompanies the book states that;

'the appearance of a new aestheticism at a moment that is often termed 'post-theoretical' is a direct index of the extent to which, as 'theory' now enters a more reflective phase, there is an increased willingness among critics and philosophers to consider the ways in which literary and cultural theory often overlooked key aspects of its reliance on philosophical aesthetics.'

The book includes a wide array of contributors and seems to suggest that a post-theory movement is underway, though what form this may take it still uncertain. R8 has linked a post-theory



tendency to movements currently underway such as New Media art. However, due to the nature of much of the work, it seems unlikely New Media art would be linked to a revival of aesthetics. Even the YBA's could and have been described by some such as Vickery as 'trenchantly anti-intellectual' (Vickery, 2002:7) and therefore post-theory, but not concerned seriously with reviving aesthetics.

### **In Summary**

It seems that what I have outlined shows that we no longer have at our disposal a unified theory of 'art' which helps us to consider the role of the 'art object'. Therefore we seem to be at a loss to explain or to begin to understand the means by which the art object in contemporary art may act as a form of communication or embodiment of knowledge. We seem to be left with art theory which considers art an 'activity' and theorises the art object as a 'becoming-object', elevated to its status as art due to the discourse and context in which it occurs.

The implications of this for practice based research in fine art seem to be that, were the writing to serve a similar purpose as writing does for contemporary art, it may act solely as validation for the art practice. Yet it is not clear given the apparent denigration in the contemporary art world of the idea of 'visual intelligence', whether we can still consider this a viable explanation. If we are to argue that an artwork or practical research outcome can stand alone as an embodiment of knowledge, we need more exhaustive study into how this may be possible. The fact that at present we are not in a position to explain how the practical outcomes we produce actually embody knowledge has enormous implications for an activity such as research, in which the contribution to knowledge is of paramount concern.

Having recently seen some of the outcomes of peers engaged in practice-based research, I felt that there was a somewhat arbitrary relationship between the theory and the practice. The practical body of work suffered accordingly.

The argument presented above shows that within the contemporary art world it is often the theory that acts as the determining factor as to what is classed as art. It is feared then that in the PhD study theory may act as validation for both poor practical work and poor research.

For R1 it seems the priority in art education would be for art practice to develop organically, without being constricted by measurable criteria. Yet such an approach also has its dangers, as it seems dependant upon mythologized terms such as 'creativity', 'artist' and 'art'; special qualities requiring freedom from imposing constraints. For me, the concern, if we were to abandon measurable criteria, would be how we establish value in both the work produced in art education and within the wider art world. Vickery warned that art detached from any value system could easily be seen as self indulgent and meaningless. In the contemporary art world, it seems to be the market that ascribes value. As I'm sure you will agree, dependence upon fashions and market trends is certainly no way to assess the work produced in art education.

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## **Paper Title: Blurring practice boundaries changing theories roles**

### **Drawing disciplinary Lines Conference – Given May 2004**

Postgraduate conference, with the inclusion of the keynote speaker Charles Harrison, held at The School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies, University of Leeds.

### **Introduction**

It appears that in recent years there has been an increase in 'theory' surrounding art practice. This paper will consider this increase and its implications for the role of the artist, critic, historian and curator. In order to achieve this the paper will draw upon a number of interviews conducted as part of my research project. These include interviews with R8 an art historian, a critic and the author of '#####' and a number of contemporary artists including R4, R7 and R6.

A recent symposium 'Think Art Theory and Practice in the Art of Today'<sup>64</sup> under the direction of Jean-Marie Schaeffer, held at the Witte de Witte centre in Rotterdam, highlighted the need for exploration of the relationship of theory to practice. Schaeffer stressed that in contemporary art the 'difference between art and theory tends to become blurred'<sup>65</sup>.

R8 commented in an interview that art theory is a fragment of 'the rise of something called theory more generally' which began in the 1970's. Yet he does not consider art theory to be a 'well-defined fragment' of this particularly when compared to art history, which he sees as having 'sought to define itself as against other disciplines from the 1920's and 30's'<sup>66</sup>.

Defining what it is we are referring to when we talk about art theory is something considered by Schaeffer as he quite rightly points out it should in fact be 'art theories' we refer to and not 'art theory' as there exists no unified 'theory of art'. Art theory actually consists of many diverse discourses drawn from varying disciplines with different goals all of which are adopted by artists and critics in order to contextualise and expand on thematics apparent in visual art practice. These broad ranges of bodies of knowledge used to contextualise visual art practice include some dominant theoretical modes such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, Feminism, Postmodernism, and poststructuralist theory. Contributors to the book 'The New Art History' first published in 1986, viewed the phrase 'The New Art History' as a convenient way to sum up the impact of 'feminist, Marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic, and socio-political ideas' on the discipline of art.

Yet R8 sees there to be a distinct difference today between art history and art theory, although he stated that if one thinks of the people around *October* one can see there has been 'some attempt to carve a somewhat more autonomous role for 'art theory'. But nevertheless he considers 'it has been incredibly porous and there has been in general a sort of promiscuous mixing of disciplines'.

Considering how liberally art theory borrows from other disciplines, it is also interesting to note that in R8's opinion it is apparent that 'it rarely works the other way' round. For example he considers that there wouldn't be 'anything terribly distinctive' about 'art theory', or 'art history' for that matter, that would be picked up on by, say, sociologists.

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<sup>64</sup> Schaeffer, Think Art: theory and Practice in the Art of Today, Witte de Witte, Rotterdam, 2003

<sup>65</sup> Schaeffer, Think Art, p.14

<sup>66</sup> R8, interview with the author p.1

A recent television programme broadcast on Channel 4 on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2004 gave Jake Chapman the opportunity to state his beliefs about the nature of contemporary art, in which he said the problem with contemporary art is that people seem to believe it is 'reducible to looking, which really is not, its nothing to do with looking'. He believes looking is 'a very small part of it' and that really it is to do with 'thinking'. An article by David Thompson in the Guardian on April 15<sup>th</sup> also quoted Jake Chapman, as saying increasing sensitivity shown by the galleries to a wider audience for art could have a negative effect on 'the potential for serious, discursive art'<sup>67</sup>.

Stallabrass recognises that this is a consequence of conceptual art that favoured 'ideas over aesthetics' and that the impetus to make art more democratic has meant artists have 'frequently ended up producing work accessible only to those with a good education in philosophy'<sup>68</sup>.

Jonathan Vickery<sup>69</sup> of the University of Warwick has considered the means by which we value a work of art and establish its worth and meaning. In order to explore this he refers to the aesthetic value of works of art by identifying three categories which he feels can be used to interrogate artworks. These categories he describes as the following: (i) *material organisation*: the technical or material construction of the work of art: the physical structures within which the viewer's perceptual activity is orientated; (ii) *aesthetic organisation*: composition, or the aesthetic characteristics of the object's material organisation; and (iii) *hermeneutic organisation*: art's interpreted meaning as configured within or in relation to existing systems of thought or institutional practice.

In relation to the intellectual nature of much contemporary art it is the hermeneutic organisation of the work that seems of most importance. Vickery goes on to describe the hermeneutic approach as a broad range of concerns that refers literally to the methods of interpretation available to the viewer. The focus is on the way the object is made to yield meaning, something that may be achieved through considering the compositional content of an artwork. This would include symbols, iconography, metaphors, allusions, associations, narrative and its socio-cultural and political contexts. These contexts can be categorised as (I) the contexts of production: the social milieu of the artist, the demands of the market or patronage, the location, and all the other ways the social, economic or political circumstances act as determining factors in the form and content of the work; and (ii) the contexts of reception: the intellectual milieu of the artist, the circulation of influential ideas, professional networks of activity, criticism and art historical assessment, and other social, economic or political circumstances acting as determining factors in the way the work is understood.

The kind of value we can identify in the category of the hermeneutic is, broadly, *cultural significance*: the way in which the modes of meaning and experience generated by the work of art extends beyond the confines of the physical object and its artistic context and relates to culture or society in general.

Vickery goes on to state that 'it is commonplace to note that in the case of contemporary art technical innovation and artistic conventions of composition have been evacuated as sources of value; moreover, the hermeneutics of reception have largely supplanted the hermeneutics of production'. This increasing importance placed on theory and conceptual elements of artworks seems to leave the physicality of the work redundant.

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<sup>67</sup> Thompson, David. Death of the Gallery, *The Guardian*, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2004

<sup>68</sup> Stallabrass, J, 1999. p.60

<sup>69</sup> Vickery, Jonathan. Organising Art: Constructing Aesthetic Value' TAMARA paper

So if taken to the extreme, the only thing that provides this form of contemporary art with its identity is its theoretical explanation, such as is exemplified in this comment by Danto,

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo Box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of *is* other than that of artistic identification). Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting. (Danto, 1964: 581)

If we consider Danto and Vickery's arguments they suggest we 'see' the Brillo Box as art because of a series of related concepts that structure our perceptual apprehension of the object. Vickery also considers Danto's theory and points out that Danto later revised his suggestion that 'a certain theory' of art simply conferred art identity on a non-art object, and thus avoids the nominalism ('art is anything I say is art'). Danto's<sup>70</sup> revision means that he is suggesting instead of artworks emerging from a 'certain theory' they emerge from 'a circuit of 'theories' or interpretative processes. These would include exhibitions, debates, philosophy, history-writing, and reflection on other artworks and his argument therefore implies artworks gain an identity through participation in this circuit. The art work itself is seen as an *act* of interpretation, a speculative reflection on the concept of art and the function of that concept within art world activities. The ability of a work to generate further speculation becomes its measure of value.

In Vickery's discussion he refers to Carl Andre's bricks as an example. He suggests that these bricks have aesthetic value because they play a significant role or function in our progressive understanding of the concept of art as it has developed in the context of art world activities.

This explanation of the aesthetic value is problematic in that there seems to be only an arbitrary connection between the physical object itself and the institutional discourse, or as Vickery puts it 'between the intrinsic and extrinsic spheres of aesthetic value'. This leaves Vickery suggesting that in the case of Carl Andre he could have used 'planks of wood or car batteries' and that 'the object itself is only an arbitrary tool for a series of questions or propositions'. This leads Vickery to suggest that perhaps the value of the artwork is 'discursive' in the sense that 'all meaning and significance is derived from conceptual speculation on the nature or condition of art and its institutional status; or perhaps this object is simply a political 'gesture' in a symbolic battle for ideological power within the artworld itself, or even the smaller network of major art institutions'.

It must however be pointed out that it is not assumed that the relation of theory to practice outlined above is the same for all contemporary artists. Schaeffer argues that not all art is so closely intertwined with theory at the moment of its creation. He believes that a 'painter', and he stresses the use of the term 'painter' as opposed to artist, may complain about art theory as for them the work may be a purely visual expression. Their concerns would therefore centre on the more technical or material construction of the work or the aesthetic characteristics of the object's material organisation. For which it seems Vickery's modes of interrogation such as (i) *material organisation*, and (ii) *aesthetic organisation* would be more relevant. An example of a painter who seems to consider her work in such a way is R6. In an interview with R6 conducted as part of my research she stated on numerous occasions that she does not consider herself

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<sup>70</sup> Danto, 1974

theoretical. She is far more concerned with the physicality of the work, which is exemplified in her description of her methods of solving dilemmas that arise in her practice through practice, rather than through thought.

### **Outcomes of the increase in theory**

It seems the elusive nature of the contextualising discourse surrounding contemporary art has often resulted in some people being at a loss to grasp what it is they feel they need to understand in order to appreciate the work. To Schaeffer it seems many believe 'there would be no problem if someone could educate the masses'<sup>71</sup>, and that if one has the relevant knowledge of art and art theory at his or her disposal he would surely be able to understand the work. There have been concerns and outcry in relation to contemporary art from the general public aired by the popular press, which seem to Vickery to centre on three categories of questions;

The first concerns Identity?: Is this object art? If so what kind of art? The second category concerns meaning: what does this object mean, or signify? Is the artist making a statement? The third category concerns value: Is this object significant? What does it say about the nature of art? What kind of aesthetic value does it have?

Yet Vickery goes on to state that these questions are anachronistic, as the works which cause the controversy and their counterparts have often 'already assumed a privileged place in the dominant surveys and critical histories of contemporary art'. When such questions are asked in association with outcries linked to art prizes, exhibitions or institutional decisions, Schaeffer believes that the institutional decision makers are often quite happy to blame the art theory'<sup>72</sup>.

In Vickery's discussion of Carl Andre's work he considers the institutional implications of the Tate's purchases, which he believes extend beyond 'the possible squandering of public funds to the construction of value itself'. In that, what the Tate and our other public institutions purchase are considered;

*'de jure* 'exemplary works of art' that (i) create the framework of further practice for the current or next generation of artists; and (ii) engender attitudes, reference points, conceptions or frameworks of understanding which maintain a determining impact on the nature of (a) the art education system, (b) the pricing system of the private art market, (c) museums' acquisitions policy, and (d) the subjects of art criticism and art historical narratives; and so on'.

Therefore Vickery considers considerable 'cultural capital' is at stake in our defining aesthetic value.

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<sup>71</sup> Schaeffer, J.M. *Think Art*, p.15

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

## **The artist's language**

It is apparent that the increasing discourses surrounding art practice include a proliferation of material written by artists, and that many artists use the artist's interview, catalogue, artist's statement and or public arts proposal as an opportunity to refer to thematics surrounding their work. These contexts provide space for the artists to locate their work in relation to certain theoretical issues and themes. This practice is not surprising as it is something we are taught as an imperative during art education.

## **Art Education**

R8 stresses that changes in the discourses surrounding contemporary art are intimately linked to art education and its professionalisation with the introduction of art degrees in the 1960's. Prior to this he considers artists would have 'gone to art school and they would have been encouraged to develop their own individual talents which would then if they had them be recognised by the taste makers'. Yet now he feels that 'art schools generally have made a lot of effort to help their students compete within the art world and gain attention' and mentioned Goldsmiths as a typical example of this. He feels students there are taught 'tactics of promoting themselves' and 'depending on what kind of work it is throwing up some kind of plausible theoretical support for it', although he is aware that this is an overly cynical view of things. While the ideal might be that 'critical thinking about cultural production and the art world' would actually inform the work, he says he isn't entirely sure that is exactly the reason why so many art schools have adopted contextual studies. It seems that with the increasing significance of the discourse which accompanies and defines art practice this training is invaluable. Yet as Vickers explores in relation to Andre's work the artist's "creative intention" seems to have become of vital importance; and its institutional function becomes primary<sup>73</sup>.

The problem with this increase in discourse and theory is that it often seems exclusionary; as is stated in 'The New Art History' many of the writers included in the book employed 'shorthand for the complicated and often un-familiar concepts from psychoanalysis, semiotics, philosophy and Marxism with which they were dealing'<sup>74</sup>. The discourse that surrounds art then becomes elusive and accessible only to those with a firm grounding in the theories and histories from which these concepts were drawn.

## **Codes and discourses**

R4 stated previously that he sees contemporary art as being for the initiated audience and when I asked him about this in an interview he said he had been influenced by Garcet's thinking. Garcet saw modernist art as intentionally coded, and as R4 sees it, Garcet believed that 'these artist's had decided to code the narrative in their work pretty much to avoid trouble from a kind of vast misunderstanding majority' and to 'offer their work only to an initiated sort of intelligentsia rather than the sort of insensitive bourgeois'<sup>75</sup>. At the same time R4 has considered theories of the role of the sub culture in twentieth century contemporary society. He feels that artists may be a sub-cultural group and goes so far as to suggest it may in fact have been one of the first sub cultural groups to emerge. He links the increasing prevalence of the sub cultural group in society to their crucial impact on people's sense of identity. R4 believed that you could posit the development of artists as a sub culture around Picasso, who he saw as 'notorious in that he never

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<sup>73</sup> Vickers, p.2

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p.10

<sup>75</sup> R4, in an interview with the author, p.4

really showed publicly he did not participate in the salons; therefore his audience were 'this very small alienated intelligentsia'.

In discussion of the nature of the codes used by artists and how one could gain access to them, R4 stated this could be obtained via the sub cultural group. As we know current art education works by exposing it's students to other practising artists rather than following a specific educational curriculum. In a way, art education then becomes a form of learning by osmosis. Just as R4 stressed the importance of the sub cultural group in defining ones identity, Singerman discusses in his book 'Art subjects' what he considers to be the priority given to the development of art student's identity as an artist during art education.

This way of thinking about art as being to do with the intellect and indoctrination within the discipline corresponds with other sociological perspectives of art such as that of Bourdieu. He stated that 'A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence that is the code, into which it is encoded.'<sup>76</sup> R4 agreed that all art is coded 'in so far as one has to be able to read the signs if one is to understand the piece' yet in his opinion what 'really seemed to take off at the beginning of the twentieth century was that the codes that artists created were to use the word in a different sense coded. In so far as if you didn't have some sort of experience of or access to the key their language game it would not be intelligible'.

It seems the artist is currently being given increasing opportunities to discuss and represent the thematics of their work themselves; a particular example of which would be the artist's interview. The increase of the artist's interview in general is something addresses by Stallabrass in 'High Art Lite'. It is an issue he feels wary about as he considers it gives greater power to the artist in the representation of their practice and focuses too closely on the artist as a monolithic subject matter detached from the social reality within which their work is being produced.

### **Thematics and press releases**

The issue of the press release and the tendency for them to be couched in terms of artists 'raising issues' and 'forming new associations', has been considered by David Thompson in the Guardian<sup>77</sup>. Thompson believes these press releases can be seen as pre-emptive attempts to explain the art and act as validating texts which distinguish 'fine' art from 'dirty commerce'. It seems for Thompson that the thematics artists address are what entitles work to 'serious recognition', yet they are often little more than 'arcane references' and 'games of deduction'.

It seems in the discourses surrounding practice and those that artists are addressing though their work, there are certain prevalent thematics, One such theme would be the global economy and globalisation. Sometimes, however the popular arts press and those outside the discipline call these thematics into question. This can be seen in the article 'Road to Nowhere arts conceptual cul-di-sac', by Chris Ware, where he asks how such great and 'ponderous meanings are attributed to the banal conceptual artefacts wheeled out for our enrichment'. He goes on to question how one should deal with the wide and ambiguous claims that the artworks often seem intended to achieve according to the press releases. Ware also questions what it means for contemporary artists to 'raise issues', how it is that the artists actually intend the work to address these issues, and what may possibly be illuminated by them doing so. An example of this was the claims in the press release for the "Publicness" exhibition shown at the ICA in

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<sup>76</sup> Bourdieu, P. Distinction, p.2

<sup>77</sup> Thompson, David. Death of the Gallery, The Guardian, Thursday April 15<sup>th</sup> 2004



2002, which led Ware to question the artist described as addressing issues of 'global economy, culture and cultural exchange'.

It is implied by R4 that he feels certain thematics have more or less currency depending on the location and social group of artists within which you work. In particular, he sees 'nature' as a thematic that has lost its currency in New York at the present time. Yet 'nature' is clearly a viable thematic for other artists such as Olafur Eliasson, working in Berlin. The importance of a location in relation to a relevant thematic and art theory is also evident in a comment quoted previously by Danto where he referred to the 'good deal of artistic theory' and 'considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting'<sup>78</sup> required for one to consider art part of the artworld. Vickery refers to this specific reference by Danto to New York City and also questions whether a thematic is related to a certain locale. He wonders how 'local' art's identity and value can be and suggests that the social milieu of an artist would have an impact on the thematics they consider viable in relation to making work. This could suggest that art theory and relevant thematics surrounding contemporary art are in fact linked to socially dependant fashions and trends. An example of this was noted by R9, a curator I spoke to, when he considered the current popularity among artists of the theorists Deleuze and Guattari. He compared this interest to the popularity of the theorists of existentialism, such as Sartre, in relation to abstract expressionism in the post war years.

### **Curators and critics**

It seems quite common now that if an artist does not themselves provide theoretical justification or explications for their work the responsibility for this falls upon the critics and curators. The importance of the rise in the curator with the existing agendas and thematics they wish to explore seems very significant.

R8 is also aware of the importance of the rise of the curator and he acknowledged the 'great deal of power' they now have within the art world as 'the people who do the most contextualisation'<sup>79</sup>. Although in his opinion, it is not merely a matter of artists producing work that is then contextualised by curators but rather he believes instead that 'artists produce work which is designed from the beginning to be contextualised in a particular way'.

### **Problems in writing about art**

The problem R8 sees with the artist and or critic being responsible for the discourse and writing surrounding art is that it often seems to act as little more than validation. R8 feels that 'most people write about their friends' and therefore the discourse which dominates and the type of curatorship which dominates is of a celebratory and un critical kind'. This is exemplified in R6 comment that the person she feels writes most successfully about her practice is Paulo Herkenhoff, as they share understanding of Brazilian cultural influences and background.

R8 feels that artist's statements about their work act as little more than validation of their work, and he cynically suggested that the purpose of the contextualisation and theorisation of artists practice is more or less associated with career building. He does not believe that we can expect a kind of 'critical contextualisation to emerge from within the art world itself in any consistent fashion' or 'at least not in the situation where the art world is reasonably settled and

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<sup>78</sup>Danto, 1964 p581

<sup>79</sup> R8 interview with the author, p.16

kind of content with itself', if 'there's a boom going on and everyone's very happily buying and selling paintings and other co-modifiable works'.

James Elkins also acknowledges art criticisms decline and took it as the focus for his book 'What Happened to Art Criticism'. He proposes that critics not shy away from making ambitious judgements, but that they often merely describe a work without offering an opinion on it. But it does seem it is time changes in art criticism were afoot. As Elkins expressed it is not sufficient for art critics to merely describe the work and to leave the judgments to the popular press. R8 feels there is a real gulf between academic art writing where you 'get very few value judgements generally' or they are 'of a very veiled kind', and 'a form of a non-academic and populist art criticism', which he says tends to be 'highly and overtly subjective and full of value judgements'. He believes that good art criticism would refer to 'wider art world structures' and something beyond the critic's own experience, allowing them to make consistent judgements through their overall view of the art world. He suggests that Dietrichson, also a rock critic, interestingly points out that it seems criticism in other disciplines isn't like this. He considers criticism in the artworld may be 'being tied up with ownership'.

A recent interview with R3 who writes for Art Monthly, Art Review, Frieze and Contemporary magazine, suggests that the viability of an independent critic who maintains a consistent view of the art world is virtually impossible. This is due to the need of freelance critics to financially support themselves and therefore write what is required of them by the magazines. The interview with Morgan suggested that magazine reviews and interviews do act as validation for artists work. Yet it also highlighted that these articles and reviews are often not written as a result of a reviewer's belief in an artist's work and its value, but are linked to the artists' galleries ties with the magazine through advertising and monetary support.

## Conclusions

It seems that much contemporary art is discursive in nature, which begs questions, as suggested in the book the 'New Art History'. Is this theory and discourse that surrounds art in fact acting as a 'smokescreen for the deeper social reality that supports it'?<sup>80</sup>

It seems we need a greater understanding of how the prevailing discourses, theories and social realities surrounding art practice actually contribute to an artworks validation and aesthetic worth. It seems there is also a need for exploring how the writing which we find in press releases, galleries and art magazines, is used in the promotion of certain artists and their validation.

If the value of the outcomes of art practice are socially determined by discourses then any survey or account of the art world must consider this and take into account the social milieu of artists, and the agendas of the institutions and press that support them.

It seems at present that two of the existing theories of the artworld, namely Danto's and Dickie's, are institutional and not sociological. They seem to overlook the role of the discourse, and money surrounding art and their importance in the construction of arts value. In institutional theories of art the art object is given value due to its location within an art institution. A more inclusive theory of the artworld would incorporate the networks of meaning making, justification, monetary exchange and discourse which compile an artworks value.

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<sup>80</sup> The New Art History, p.8

The task of attempting such an overview of the artworld has to date only really been attempted by a few, some of whom have approached it using theories such as Bourdieu's. Examples of people who have attempted such accounts would be Katherine Guiffre's in 'Sandpiles of Opportunity: Success in the Artworld'<sup>81</sup>, which considers artist's career paths in relation to the galleries at which they have exhibited and David Galenson's 'Painting outside the lines'<sup>82</sup> a study by an economic historian of patterns of creativity in modern art.

A systematic account of the artworld is something R8 is also attempting for his next book, but he believes that there is 'an ideological reluctance to see this world as a system and as having any kind of regularities'. Yet without attempting to do this he feels it would not be possible for us to have any critical perspective, and at present artists are left offering us the discourses with which to talk about their work. This situation bothers R8, who as an old Marxist, believes 'you should never take what someone says about themselves on face value, particularly not artists'.

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## **Contribution to the Art and Language Symposium – May 2003**

### **What does the artwork do?**

Having read the contribution from art and language my immediate response was a recollection of the general feeling of avoidance that ensued when a question such as this came up in seminars on my B.A fine art course. Even to enter into the debate it seemed would inevitably end in the 'deflating sense of circularity' acknowledged and described by art and language.

My initial response to this contribution seemed then to contradict the interest I have in the role of the artwork. It is this interest that has led me to begin the doctoral research project I am currently undertaking. This contradiction helped me recognise that I had ignored the feeling of circularity, which was common in my degree course discussions and had followed my interest in spite of it.

I wonder, as my research is driven by my interest in understanding what it is an artwork does, and how it transcends or transmits theory, could this mean others will be less credulous of my interpretation of an artwork? As it is proposed in art and language's contribution, some people may be credulous of Inspector Denis's interpretations. I often wonder how the artists I plan to work with on my project would respond to the type of inquiry and discussion suggested by this symposium. Occasionally, the experience of my B.A reminds me they may not all welcome it.

## **Paper title: Transference and Counter Transference in an Exploration of Fine Art Practice**

### **Culture and the Unconscious – July 2003**

Conference, held at The School of Oriental and African Studies, London Jointly organised by the British Psychoanalytic Society, the Tavistock clinic & the University of East London

### **Abstract**

The application of psychoanalytic theory to the investigation of artists' use of theory and the role of influence will be explored, focusing on transference<sup>83</sup> and countertransference<sup>84</sup>. The project proceeds from the perspective of an inquisitive art practitioner whose aim is to enrich artists' understanding of their own creative processes.

Current research within art and design often utilises artist's statements and personal reflective accounts. The project 'Art not chance: nine artists diaries' (British Psychoanalytical Society and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) demonstrates this trend. Donald Schon (1983) has been hugely influential in this area of reflective research, but his discussion of frame analysis does recognise the need for external reflection upon practice. The need for external reflection may be related to current thinking suggesting that a proportion of the creative process takes place unconsciously (Poincare 1983, Koestler, 1975; Boden, 1992). Schon also acknowledges the power of transference and its ability to 'slow down phenomena which would ordinarily be lost to reflection'. The relationship between researcher and practitioner therefore becomes more like that within a therapeutic contract. Whereas Freud and followers, such as Klein, Winnicott and Bollas, have all written speculatively on art and artists, it is not until recently that artists and art researchers have recognised the potential of psychoanalytic theory to contribute to the understanding of artistic processes. Interdisciplinary exploration appears to offer good frameworks for investigating practical activity.

This paper will review available frameworks and methodologies for incorporating psychoanalytical theories in the exploration of art practice, and explore their applicability to the relatively new area of art and design research.

### **Introduction**

This paper has arisen from research exploring the relation of theorisation and discourse to the practice of contemporary visual art. The study draws upon theories from a range of disciplines including anthropology, sociology and psychoanalysis to formulate a methodological approach that is intended to allow for the complexities of researching visual art. Many have acknowledged, as does Cazeaux<sup>85</sup>, that within the discipline of art and design the 'relationship between art theory and art practice continues to be the subject of much debate'. There seems to be a mass of writing from within art education that focuses upon this issue and it has resulted in journals such as

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<sup>83</sup> The term transference is used in this context to describe 'unawarely transferring feelings, attitudes and beliefs relevant to some situation in the past on to an analogous situation in the present'. Tilney, T, (1998) 'Dictionary of Transactional Analysis', London: Whurr Publishers.

<sup>84</sup> The term countertransference is used in this context to describe 'originally the therapist's response to the transference of the client. Awareness of countertransference can yield important insights' Tilney, T, (1998) 'Dictionary of Transactional Analysis', London: Whurr Publishers.

<sup>85</sup> Cazeaux, C. "Categories in action: Sartre and the theory-practice debate", *JVAP, Special Issue - The Enactment of Thinking*, Vol.2, No's. 1 & 2, 2002, p. 44

'Point'<sup>86</sup> and the 'Journal of Visual Art Practice'<sup>87</sup> dedicating entire issues to its consideration. Conferences such as 'The Relationship of Making to Writing' were brought about by what was recognised as a need to 'scrutinise a relationship of activities which are subject to very different discipline and institution positionings to the point where critical and lucid analysis of the relationships proves difficult'<sup>88</sup>. Jones has considered the distinctiveness of art education as a discipline of study when compared to other subjects within higher education<sup>89</sup>. He recognises that a 'standard touchstone for establishing the character of an academic discipline is to consider how it embodies the relationship between theory and practice'<sup>90</sup>. He also stresses that the debate surrounding the relationship of theory to practice is not confined to art as a discipline, and is currently a point of contention in other largely practical disciplines, one such discipline being psychotherapy.

## Context

This research forms part of a developing culture of art and design research which has so far been marked by studies of historically famed artists or individual personal reflective accounts. Many of which can more commonly be identified by the term 'creativity research', and are derived from a number of disciplines other than the visual arts. These studies have offered a 'multiplicity of methodological perspectives on the phenomenon of creativity'<sup>91</sup> yet offer relatively little to knowledge or return applicable to visual arts practitioners working within the field. The common approach of reflective research can be identified through its reliance upon reflective theorists such as those of Schön. These reflective studies are valuable and yet depend upon a willingness of the artist to engage with research, and therefore offer volunteered insights into art practice. One such study which adopted this reflective diary approach was *Art not Chance*<sup>92</sup> yet it cannot be considered to have included a substantial representation of contemporary fine artists.

As Schön suggests practitioners are often quick to reject theories of practice imposed upon them, yet are often un-willing to offer alternatives themselves. Schön explored the attitude practitioners often present when faced by research into their work: 'while I cannot explain my own ideas about my knowledge I do not accept yours'<sup>93</sup>. Artists' hostility to engage in discourse about art practice generally has been explored by R8. This research intends to focus upon artists' interviews as a means to explore aspects of contemporary art and the art scene that may seldom be accessible to research. The methods adopted must allow for the inclusion of artists' who may be hostile to research allowing them to enter into research without necessarily a conscious willingness to describe the details of their working practices. Through the use of informal interviews it could be that all that would be required is the commitment of an artist to enter into discussion with the researcher. Assuming that any refusal or reluctance to willingly divulge information about working practises could be seen as a means of revealing understanding in itself, about contemporary artists' and the practices in which they engage. Schön has considered a means to allow practitioners to enter into a research interaction through the likening of the relationship between the practitioner and the researcher to the relationship of a client and a therapist, whereby the practitioner would not need to accept the researchers authority just suspend disbelief in it<sup>94</sup>.

<sup>86</sup> Point: Art and Design Research Journal -*The relationship of Making to Writing*, No.7. Spring/Summer 1999.

<sup>87</sup> Journal of Visual Art Practice. *Special Issue - The Enactment of Thinking*, Vol.2, No's. 1&2, 2002

<sup>88</sup> Macleod, K. Cited in the Issue editorial, *Point*, no.7, Spring/Summer 1999.

<sup>89</sup> Jones, Tom. "Practice in Art and Design as a Discipline of study". *Art Education and Art Practice*, Disciplines, Fields and change in art education. Vol.1, 1999.

<sup>90</sup> Jones, Tom. 1999, p.50

<sup>91</sup> Montuori, A & Purser, R. E. "Social Creativity: The Challenge of Complexity", *Pluriverso*, 1, 2, 78-88, 1997, p.1

<sup>92</sup> Ede, Sian. *Art Not Chance: Nine Artists Diaries*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation: London, 200, p.3

<sup>93</sup> Schön, 1983, p.viii

<sup>94</sup> Schön, op cit p.296

Theories of art education stress the importance of the development of an artist's self-perception. Singerman presents a theory of art education whereby the process of carving out one's identity as an artist primarily takes place through discourse. The development of this self-belief becomes more important than any technical proficiency or capability. As the artist in this research commented it is about 'suddenly realising that there is something else that you might be able to do, I never particularly had any interest in becoming particularly proficient at a particular thing or to be able to show that in some way'. Therefore encouraging students to believe themselves to be 'an artist' seems to be considered one of the most important aspects of educating contemporary artists today. Singerman argues that the 'intensely personal struggle of becoming and being, and of believing oneself to be, gets played out in, and is nurtured as, professional life'.<sup>95</sup> He describes how this process evolves through the internalisation of the teaching they experience, identifying the two plains on which he considers the art education experience is psychologised; the intersubjective and the intrasubjective. This is echoed in Bollas's text 'The Shadow of the Object'.<sup>96</sup> For Singerman, the intersubjective is not seen as being within the artist-student but within the student and teacher relationship. He states that which the teacher seeks is 'Unfulfillable, opaque, the assignment constitutes a demand; its question – that is, the question it raises in the student-is, what does he want?'<sup>97</sup>. In this situation Singerman considers that,

the assignment does not help the student access his or her own subjectivity, a deep personal inner well; rather it produces a subjectivity, or at least the effects and the emptiness of one<sup>98</sup>.

Singerman's argument is built upon Lacan's formula for the birth of desire in the child, in which Lacan considers that 'Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need: this margin being that which is opened up by demand'<sup>99</sup>. In turn, 'A lack is encountered by the subject in the Other, in the very intimation that the Other makes to him by his discourse'<sup>100</sup>. It is therefore this discourse with the tutor that forces the student to ask 'what is it he wants of me?' which Singerman considers drives the student in search:

not only for the unrecognisable, but for the recognition as the thing that once and for all fills completes the Other. The student desires to be recognised as an artist, as the artist, to make the object Rothko has never seen, to make that something unlike anything else that would stop the series of repetitions of art school painting and the teachers endless desire for something else<sup>101</sup>.

Singerman concludes that it is this lack, this 'want-to-be an artist' or 'manqué a etre, in a Lacanian turn of phrase that assumes a lack of being at the centre of the subject' – that has to be disavowed as he claims any artist 'wants not to desire, not to want for anything'<sup>102</sup>. This contradiction in need and want is then explored further through reference to the dialogue of Clyfford Still regarding his practice. Singerman states that Still makes 'demands for recognition and withdraws it in the same breath' and describes this type of discourse as a 'dialectic of desire

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<sup>95</sup> Singerman, H, 1999. p.146

<sup>96</sup> Bollas, C. *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the unthought known*, London: Free Association Books, 1987

<sup>97</sup> Singerman, H, 1999. p.146

<sup>98</sup> ibid

<sup>99</sup> ibid

<sup>100</sup> ibid

<sup>101</sup> Singerman, H, 1999. p.147

<sup>102</sup> ibid



and disavowal'. The contradictory nature of some artists' discourse will be considered later with particular reference to an interview conducted for this research.

It seems then one learns to become an artist through conversation related to the art scene, to evolve an understanding of the happenings within the local and to position oneself in relation to it. The means by which the knowledge surrounding practice is transferred appears therefore to be dependent upon social interaction, and the formulation of an identity or perception of oneself as an artist. A sociological theory that stresses the importance of learning through interaction is 'communities-of-practice' developed by Wave and Langer. These approaches resonate with art world tendencies as they allow for the transferral of knowledge through informal means, such as conversation. Conversations that help one develop their knowledge of the field of art can take many forms; a 'crit' may take place not only with a tutor but also with a resident artist. When considering language surrounding art practice Kosuth looks to Sapir who provides a description of how a real world can be 'unconsciously built up on the language habits of that group'. Sapir denies the existence of an,

objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but ..very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.

Kosuth posits that there has been a 'language' of art for some time, predominately communicated through painting and sculpture. Yet he considers in the 'past few years artists have realised their traditional language is exhausted and unreal', through the realisation that anything can function within an art context. Meaning that each artist has had to establish their own art language. Whereby as is stressed by the artist in this research the process of considering yourself to be an artists and,

allowing yourself to become convinced of that. And also the fact that other people are more convinced of it than you, its quite easy for people to be taken in by this and to be wrapped up within this situation whereby this thing is simply believed now. Therefore urm, it becomes that kind of game.

This art and its discourse of game playing has taken onboard the responsibility of assisting in the definition of both whom is acknowledged as a practitioner and what value is attributed to their practice. Indicating that a methodological approach needs to be developed that reflects this and is able to explore the often ambiguous and elusiveness nature of this discourse. An ethnographic research methodology is the predominant approach for this research providing a framework for the probing of many aspects of the contemporary art world and the collation of information in a number of different forms. Including interviews and discussions with practising artists, observations of art school 'crits', the collation of review and art criticism material, and a survey of completed research in the field. This approach is intended to facilitate exploration of both the unique worlds of a number of individuals working within the field and the complex relationship between them and the social context within which they practice. As many studies completed to date have focused upon either the individualistic nature of creativity or its social context, rarely incorporating both into their focus. Yet as is identified by Montuori & Purser this it seems is what is required. Particularly as it cannot be assumed that one exists solely through their relation to others or as an individual entity, but as an amalgamation of both. Due to the scale of the contemporary art scene, it would not be possible to produce outcomes from which generalisations could be made to the entire field. It is not the aim to define a typology of artists, but to produce valuable insights into the experiences of a sample. As the study forms part of a developing

research culture within art and design, a subsidiary aim of this study is that methods may be revealed which are particularly suited to specific inquiry into art and design.

Psychoanalysis seemed a particularly suited theoretical frame due to its familiarity in dealing with issues of self-perception, identity and analysis of discourse interactions. Principally the analysis of transference and counter transference reactions as a means to discern interview content that may otherwise lay dormant. Devereux initially introduced transference to the field of qualitative research in 1967, and it has since been re-addressed by Heizmann, Giami in 2001 and Marks & Marks in 2003. The power and ability of transference to 'slow down phenomena which would ordinarily be lost to reflection' is also considered by Schön. Devereux viewed it as a means to look beyond that which is being overtly stated to reveal complexities of the conversation interaction.

An approach of this type would focus upon the interview interaction as being between the central to the process meaning making. Rather than accepting that which the respondent says as 'fact' the interaction is seen as a means of exploration of the respondents subjective experience and relation to the world. The artist in this research also comments upon the need for a more holistic way to approach qualitative research and acknowledges that he doesn't think 'there's any longer this kind of like direct way of getting at anything' he believes that the 'way that questions used to have an answer perhaps a question now just becomes kind of a kind of prod, and you kind prod it from all around and it doesn't really move anywhere'.

Devereux stresses that the observer can no longer be considered exempt from consideration of the research process, and shows what happens within the observer during the interaction through his own counter-transference reactions as a human being. Allowing the exploration of the transference and counter-transference reactions arising from the interview interaction facilitates the inclusion of the researchers feelings and anxiety. Which can be used as a means of revealing any pre-conceptions or expectations held by the researcher which could have formed part of research bias. Previous approaches to research have valued the suspension of the researchers beliefs, pre-conceptions and value judgements, in order to reduce research bias. However Monuori, Purser and Ceruti argue that 'no neutral language is possible or even desirable, and that the observer cannot be considered as somehow standing outside of the events which are observed'<sup>103</sup>. They argue for 'the re-integration of the observer into scientific inquiry'<sup>104</sup>, which they consider can be encouraged through a systems theory approach. Singerman<sup>105</sup> also comments upon the inevitable impact of the researcher on the study, and identifies within this a process of transference:

I am captured by and folded inside the object of my research. However I attempt to stand at a distance and view the objectively, the blindness of ideology and interest, the entanglements of identification and transference, and the traps of textuality lie in wait.<sup>106</sup>

Through the exploration of the researchers feelings and experience, as well of those of the respondent, the relationship between researcher and practitioner becomes a highly relevant consideration. The understanding of the process of transference and counter-transference are considered here, as in therapy, to be a transferral of emotion between the analyst and analysand, or in this situation the researcher and artist respondent. Studies such as Marks and Marks where

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<sup>103</sup> Montuori & R. Purser, op cit, p. 16

<sup>104</sup> ibid

<sup>105</sup> Singerman, op cit, p.1

<sup>106</sup> ibid

the exploration of counter-transference has been explored stress the need for group discussion and supervision during the analysis stages. They have incorporated support structures into the research design to provide research teams with supervision in order to explore arising themes and consider their relevance. They have also commonly held qualifications usually associated with psychotherapy or counselling. It must be stressed that the incorporation of psychoanalytical theory is not intended to transform the research into a therapeutic endeavour but is intended to allow the exploration of deeper levels of information with the narrative interaction of artist and researcher.

In order for this study to explore the viable application of transference and counter-transference, further expertise was sought from within the field of psychotherapy. Despite the awareness acknowledged by Schaverien<sup>107</sup> that transference and counter-transference are merely concepts, 'that is, a convenient way of structuring experience through language', their application as viable concepts in a research framework needed to be initially supported by someone with experience working with their application. Therefore a practising psychotherapist reviewed the pilot study transcripts with the researcher after initial themes had been identified. The psychotherapist had no prior knowledge of the themes the researcher felt were developing from the text. These findings were then explored, with relation to the researchers reflective notes made immediately after each interview. The emerging concepts were then reviewed and discussed again with the artists' in order to develop a more integrated theoretical picture. It is assumed that through the comparison of these different types of data, and discussion with the artist respondents' after the initial analysis consensus can then be reached about the possible transference and counter-transference reactions arising from the interaction. The use of the psychotherapist's insight seemed to allow for aspects of the interview that were not relevant to the research question, such as attraction or identification, to be acknowledged and disregarded.

## Discussion

In a particular interview with a Nottingham based artist the researcher acknowledged some anxiety surrounding the interview, when reviewing the tape it seemed that the researcher was quieter and more timid than in other interviews. The psychotherapist identified what appeared to be a power struggle within the interaction between the researcher and the artist. Reflection showed the initial stages of which seemed to occur prior to the interview beginning. During the interview, the artist showed some resistance to directly answering the questions asked by provided answers which began questioning the purpose of the research such as, A: I guess it depends exactly what you mean by that question and A: Erm, then again it's a difficult thing like, you know when other people ask me questions like this I continue to analyse as to how it is that I would answer that question. In discussing this with the artist in a following interview he stated that this is typical behaviour and that he commonly doubts that which he is told, or at least questions it. This could be related to the nature of the discourse he commonly engages in, which he describes as,

quite a playful thing where a lot of people are quite uncertain about what other people are saying by that and about whether somebody actually means what they're saying there or, so there's this constant kind of like too and from whether you not quite sure whether someone's actually playing with you or your playing with them now, it terms of what it is that someone's trying to get at

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<sup>107</sup> Schaverien, J. "Art within analysis: scapegoat, transference and transformation." *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 44: 479-510. 1999

The researcher felt that the initial interview involved this sense of game playing and the psychotherapist identified a specific point in the interview at which this seemed most pronounced. When the artist was asked to elaborate upon what a piece of text he was writing was intended for, the slowness with which he responded seemed to emphasise a discomfort. Particularly when considered in comparison to the speed at which he responded to other more theoretical questions. It seemed the reluctance to answer suggested the artist felt that by doing so he would be allowing the researcher to occupy a position of supremacy, as the text was intended for a PhD. The researcher is currently working toward a PhD herself. The acknowledgement of the difference in speed allowed the researcher to seek clarification from the artist of his reasons for a delay in response. The artist described this as being due to an uncertainty on his part as to whether the text were any longer to this purpose. The discussion that followed allowed for a clarification of a previous interpretation, and recognised that in fact the intention to do a PhD would not be considered as an extension of his practice in the sense of embodied practice, as previously interpreted. Rather it would literally be considered an artwork in itself, whereby the requirements of a PhD text would be fulfilled before embarking upon the three years allocated to complete the work, and the process of completing a PhD deconstructed. The artist seemed to question the viability of this during the second interview and acknowledge this as a reason for his previous hesitancy.

When discussing practice artists commonly refer to those artists who have influenced or inspired them. In this interview it seemed part of the researchers anxiety and awareness of the tension resulted in the researcher claiming to have heard of an artist she in fact was not aware of, this seemed to be because the awareness of certain artists seemed to imply an advanced knowledge of the field. There was an acknowledged change in the tone of the artists voice when the researcher claimed to have heard of a certain artist. This tone change and that the researcher had felt the need to lie was explored in a later interview with the artist. It is considered this defensive response may be as a result of the challenge immediately prior to this when the artist questioned the researcher intentions, as was previously considered. Bordieu offers a perspective on the symbolic capital of knowledge and this may provide a framework for exploring artists' comparative awareness of certain artists in greater depth.

An initial analysis of the interview identified a tendency for contradiction in the artists comments, yet when seeking to define these contradictions they seemed less clearly apparent. Rather than full contradictions the artists states something and then may later state something else that does not quite fit with that which was previously stated. They become less contradictions more comments that seemed incongruent. An example being the statement that he would want to 'draw a line around what it is that he does, or to try to define it' and another that 'any involvement in anything is considered in relation to my own practice and therefore its trying to be inclusive rather than kind of like saying that this section of my life is one thing and this section isn't'. Showing a will at one moment to try to define his practice or draw a line around and at another to keep it inclusive and inseparable from the greater whole of his being. Such contradictory comments made by the artist resonate with the dialect of 'desire and disavowal' identified by Singerman. The artist states that he commonly begins conversations by explaining his tendency to contradict himself. He implies neither this or another tendency, the repetitive use of certain words is accidental. When asked about the role he feels his un-conscious plays in his practice he says 'I would suggest that, I'm a very conscious person in the sense that every decision made is scrupulously analysed before I do that thing.' Emphasising that he sees himself able to control decisions and discourse surrounding his practice to a large extent consciously. An interesting perspective when considered in relation to the widespread view including that of Devereux who sees;

every thought-system – including, needless to say, my own – originated in the unconscious, as a defence against anxiety and disorientation; it is formulated first affectively, rather than intellectually and in the (illogical) ‘language of the unconscious’.

This artist has an inclination to posit his practice and discourse as much as he can within his conscious control and define his practice through a scrupulously analysed framework. This could be seen to relate to the increasing control contemporary artists seek to command over the representation of their practice. Which has been identified and explored by R8 who sees there to be an increasing proliferation of artists interviews and a diminishing power of the art critic. His stresses that the artists interviews pertain to an ‘authenticity: no matter how disingenuous or evasive’ they may be. Kosuth stresses that this increase in artists control ‘where the artist not only plays the game alone, but makes up his own rules as well’ will have a significant impact upon artists’ education, he questions whether an institution of learning for this artist could even be viable at all. Though he proceeds to offer an exploration of what form an education which acknowledges these changes may take. In order for educational practices to adapt and reflect the changing nature of art and the prevalence of discourse, research such as this which considers interdisciplinary means of exploring art practice is required.

## Conclusion

The acknowledgement of the discourse of practice as being for some a ‘kind of game’ has added a problematic to researching contemporary visual art. If artists themselves are sometimes unsure as to whether they are playing games then the research approach needs to be equipped to adapt accordingly and probe complex verbal interactions. Psychoanalytical theory was assumed to be particularly suited to this type of endeavour due to its comprehension and theories of game playing and transferral of power and emotion. The exploration of counter-transference reactions during the research analysis has allowed for the exploration of the researchers anxiety and feelings during the interview interaction. Therefore re-instating the researcher into the research process rather than requiring them to suspend beliefs, in order to avoid bias. The recognition of the researchers counter-transference reactions enabled the researcher to openly readdress issues of game playing, hostility, ambiguity and contradiction with the artist without the attribution of blame or indictment. Allowing for the open address of issues which may otherwise cause disquiet, anxiety, unease or remain un-explored. Working from the tapes and not the transcript alone has allowed for a greater emersion within the data, enabling the researcher to recall more accurately feelings and anxieties associated with the interview interaction. The process of reviewing the transcript with the psychotherapist, returning to the artist respondent and re-assessing themes has provided valuable in evolving an in depth perspective on the research topic.

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## Historical Revisionism – January 2003

Workshop presentation at the symposium, 'Ways of doing and landscapes of making'  
Held at Hospitalfield House, Arbroath, Scotland.

In association with the ARHB funded project, 'Learning is understanding in practice' directed by Wendy Gunn.

### Workshop activity

To enable an exploration of the relationship of theory to practice it is necessary to investigate ways to reflect upon creative practice. The most commonly referred to source of information on such methods is Schon's book *The Reflective Practitioner*<sup>108</sup>. The activity for this workshop was conceived as a means to explore what Schon refers to as 'historical revisionism'<sup>109</sup> in his discussion of repertoire-building research. This activity also takes influence from the Piagetian experiment referred to by Schon<sup>110</sup>, which explored the adaptation of theory in action by children attempting to balance weighted blocks.

The response to this activity by my supervisors and other practitioners has been varied. There are those who considered it: an attempt to prove or disprove Schon's theory, an endeavour to persuade others of the value of external observation to reflection upon practice, an exploration of methods to collect data and a means to explore processes such as triangulation<sup>111</sup>, and another who considered it a entirely futile exercise. I saw this activity as a way to encourage and promote discussion within a workshop environment. I did not consider it a means or method I would later use to collect information from practitioners about their processes of reflection-upon-action. I was aware of the loaded and somewhat unclear nature of the term 'Balanced Composition' as a desired outcome of the activity. The vagueness of the term was intended as a 'mess'<sup>112</sup>, which would invite some participants to search for the outcome they thought I was looking for and to allow others to interpret it or not as they wished. I hoped to stimulate discussion into ways of documenting the creative process and interpreting that documentation. The purpose of the activity is to explore the idea of many theorists that a large proportion of the creative process is unconscious and that these tacit experiences require an external influence to draw them out.

I conducted a trial run of this activity with a fine art printmaking graduate and her partner whose occupation is mechanics. The trial run was far more successful than I could have hoped, as both participants approached the question in entirely different ways. The art graduate aimed to produce a 'balanced composition' based upon her experience of art education by relating it to abstract painting. The mechanic framed the question with relation to his experience of balance and the workings of a pivot. He produced a diagrammatical style image to which he later added decorative elements he considered suited to the artistic nature of the task.

Although rather simplistic, in this case the activity succeeded in demonstrating the application of the existing knowledge and life experience of the mechanic and fine art graduate when framing a question and creating a visual response. The participants' recollection of the processes they

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<sup>108</sup> Schon, D., *The Reflective Practitioner*. London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1983. p. 317.

<sup>109</sup> Schon, D. 1983, p. 317.

<sup>110</sup> Schon, D. 1983, p. 57.

<sup>111</sup> Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S., *Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1981

<sup>112</sup> Schon, D. 1983, p. 42.



experienced did define the stages from initial framing of the question to the outcome. However, they negated to mention disregarded ideas and actions documented by the observer. This illustrated Schon's idea that a practitioner's recollection of experience may include a revision of history that fits the progression from framing to creative output. In spite of this, it must be considered that practitioners may feel a need to present a logical recollection of the processes they experience which may affect the process of revision. It is also recognised that questions about the creative process commonly asked of practitioners include reference to their creative outcome and imply a required explanation of how this was achieved.

#### **Activity Outcome**

Four pairs of participants took part in the activity, each sat at separate small tables and the audience sat on sofas behind them but were free to wonder around the tables as they wished. The time allocated for the activity was extended upon request from James Hugonin, one of the participants. After reading the instructions, James stated he considered ten minutes rather than five minutes to be a more suitable amount of time for this activity. The first pair of participants included Mary Modeen (Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Dundee University) and Norman Lawrence (Senior Lecturer at Ulster University School of Art and Design). Mary took the role of participant 1 and Norman participant 2. Mary completed the activity with what appeared to be an uncertainty about what was required of her. She seemed to make quite arbitrary decisions during the selection process and adapted her approach according to the materials available. An example of this is her use of stickers after repeated failed attempts to access glue. The documentation presented by Norman was detailed and specifically concentrated upon the physical activity Mary was engaged in. Mary was reluctant to engage in too much discussion about her interpretation of the term 'Balanced Composition' but felt she had achieved her aim.

The second pair of participants included Lesley Hallam (Dundee University) and Ray Lucas (University of Aberdeen). Lesley seemed to tackle the activity in a very adaptive manner she appeared to be seeking to produce what was required of her and remained confused about what that was. Lesley stated her response was based upon her interpretation of a 'Balanced Composition' which she did not actually elaborate on in much detail. Lesley mentioned her wish to use the cut out shapes of animals and of a plane, but then stated she did not want them to appear too obvious, so proceeded to cover them with coloured paper. Lesley included a plastic red wheel on a castor, which she stuck to the paper and said 'it just had to be used as she was not sure what it was'. The documentation provided by Ray was precise and accurate and Lesley considered it accurately described the process she experienced.

Participant 1 of the third pair was John (Apprentice to James Hugonin) and participant 2 documenting John's activity was Norman Shaw (Edinburgh University). John responded to the activity in an interesting way he rearranged the objects on the table and used the entire table as the basis for the 'Balanced Composition'. John described the process as one of sorting and grouping objects to create a sense of balance. A selection of objects which John felt could not be 'balanced' were left in a pile to the top right-hand side of the table, he stated it was clear from initial sight of these objects that they could not possibly form part of a 'Balanced Composition'. Norman's description clearly noted all aspects of the process discussed by John. However, Norman stated the objects left in the pile were continuously added and removed from the composition, thus implying that the definite impossibility of these objects inclusion was not reached until minutes before the activity's completion. The fact that John had continuously tried to include the objects hints at a need to involve them despite him apparently knowing that this would not work. This could be interpreted as an attempt to solve a problem that he himself created during the activity. It also implies a need John felt to account for all of the objects and materials as part of the process of the activity. Nothing was actually preventing John from



discarding the objects and materials he felt did not fit his response, other than his will to comply with his perceived reality of the activity.

John's mentioned that his artistic practice is based upon the appropriation of objects and he considers himself a conceptual artist, John agreed he approached the activity as he would a piece of his own work.

James Hugonin (Painter) and Jonathan Robertson (Dundee University) were the four pair of participants. James acted as participant 1 and Jonathan as participant 2. James appeared immediately to respond to the activity in a different way to the other participants. This seemed evident through his physical engagement with the activity the other participants remained seated at the table in front of them. James leaned over the table and was very animated in his initial response, he began by taking control of all the materials available to him, carefully removing all the pen lids and arranging the materials in an organised manner in front of himself. He described this process later as being similar to the process of organising his studio, before beginning a painting. He then immediately requested more time for the activity stating he couldn't possibly complete the task in ten minutes let alone five. His request for extra time was acknowledged and the time was extended. Upon completing the task James stated the work was by no means finished. Jonathan documented James activity and he began his description of this by recalling the physical processes he observed. The interesting part of the activity which provoked most debate was that Jonathan then went on to refer to the lighting in the room and how this had effected James selection of colour. The room we conducted the activity in had red heating lamps, which reflected upon the paper. Jonathan stated that James had selected cool colours to contrast to and because of the lighting. I then questioned Jonathan and James about whether they had discussed the reasons for James selection of colour and they both said this had not been discussed. There was a few murmur's around the room from the audience as they acknowledged Jonathan had begun placing his own meanings onto the process experienced by James and had referred to them as James decisions. James had not said that is not what he was attempting to do but as soon as this process had been acknowledged by the audience James stated he 'hadn't even thought about the lighting'. Jonathan began reflecting upon the meaning he had imbued in the work and the reason he felt able to state to the audience so categorically that these were the meanings intended by the other participant.

The process between James and Jonathan led to group discussion of one's ability to assume the meaning intended by a person so certainly that you can describe their thoughts and feel able to state them categorically, even whilst in that person's presence. Jonathan had offered his own opinions upon the responses to the outcome of the activity but had presented them as James's.

The discussion also made it apparent that James spends a year on each painting he produces. James agreed he approached this activity as he would a painting, despite knowing he would never complete the task he set himself in the specified time, he was still frustrated by this.

### **Conclusion**

It was agreed by all the participants that the activity was suited to the nature of the workshop. The activity succeeded in its aim to promote discussion of the documentation of the creative process, and the processes surrounding reflection upon practice. It highlighted that it is impossible for one person to know what another is thinking during the creative process however within the discipline of art this is often stated as being the case. The vagueness of the term 'Balanced Composition' meant participants responded in varying ways. Some sought to produce the outcome they felt I was looking for (Lesley, Mary) and others approached the activity as they would their own

practice (James, John). Different backgrounds led to different interpretations of the meaning of the term 'Balanced Composition' (Mechanic). Some participants seemed unsure of where the boundaries of the activity lay. John did not produce a composition on the piece of paper, which was asked for in the instructions, instead he used the table. However, he did not feel able to remove the objects that he considered did not fit his composition from the table.