





Two text+work seminars delivered through a partnership with ArtSway on the occasion of  
New Forest Pavilion at the 52nd International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia.

## WORD MATTERS

'Spinning a Line'

12 June, 2007

David Bate, Stephanie James, Lee Trimming, and Laura McLean-Ferris

Chaired by Jim Hunter

'Crafting a Visual Language'

26 June, 2007

Stephanie James and Professor Simon Olding

Chaired by Jim Hunter

Instigated by Jim Hunter and Stephanie James  
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Published by text+work, The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

Supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

text+work

The Gallery

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

Wallisdown

Poole

Dorset

BH12 SHH

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Edited by Josepha Sanna, text+work, and Oliver Shamlou, Shrug Magazine

Designed by David Roberts, Shrug Magazine

Produced by text+work, The Gallery, The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

Printed by FWB Printing, Wincanton

[www.fwbprinting.co.uk](http://www.fwbprinting.co.uk)

This publication and its accompanying audio CD reflect the views of the speakers and not necessarily those of the publisher or of its editors

A catalogue record of this publication

is available from the British Library

ISBN: 9788-0-901196-23-1

## WORD MATTERS



THE *WORD MATTERS* SEMINARS, 'Spinning a Line' and 'Crafting a Visual Language', sought to explore current levels of dissemination of writing and practice, and the contribution of the individual to writing on art.

The guest speakers—which included artists, writers, curators, and academics; both working within and supporting the arts and the education sector—took an exceptionally engaged and inquisitive audience on a journey into the meeting of the written word and art, travelling through its many contemporary forms and functions.

Reaching no definitive conclusions, *Word Matters* is a discussion, an exploration, into text as label and as access; text as catalogue and as critique; as interpretation and as an accompaniment; text as description and as narrative; and text as gossip and performance. It is a debate about the limitations and the possibilities of words, and an observation of the contemporary art world and its ongoing conversations.

The *Word Matters* seminars were held in June and hosted at *New Forest Pavilion*, Palazzo Zenobio in Venice during the 52nd International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia. The project was supported and enabled by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and marked the first time *text+work* reached such a global audience. *Word Matters* celebrates the beginning of a developing partnership between ArtSway and the Arts Institute at Bournemouth's *text+work* programme, from which we hope to develop further dialogue and debate surrounding the intertwinement of text and work.



# SEMINAR ONE

12 June, 2007

David Bate, Stephanie James, Lee Trimming, and Laura McLean-Ferris

Chaired by Jim Hunter



## SPINNING A LINE

[*Time Flag*]

JIM HUNTER: *Buonasera*, good evening, thank you for coming; pleased you could make it and be with us. First of all, I'll introduce those of us who are sat here: the panel. On my far right, Stephanie James. Steph is an artist, a curator, and she's head of the MA programme at The Arts Institute at Bournemouth. Next to me is David Bate: artist, Reader in Photography at The University of Westminster, and writer. On my left, Lee Trimming. Lee is a writer, an artist, and a lecturer. And on my left, Laura McLean-Ferris, who is Press Officer at ArtSway and also a writer. A few words about the format of the seminar—oh, I didn't introduce myself. I'm Jim Hunter, Director of the School of Art at The Arts Institute at Bournemouth, and I'll be explaining that a lot of the instigation of this seminar comes from our programme of *text+work*, which Steph and I have worked on as the gallery committee, and I'll have a few words to say about that. But the format of this event: I'll make a few remarks about *text+work*, about the relationship between text and visual practice, and then I'll invite the panel to explain why they're here, their contributions and thoughts on this relationship, and then hopefully we can open it up to discussion amongst ourselves [i.e., the present audience].

The idea for the programme of *text+work* grew out of consideration for the function of the Arts Institute's gallery space. What was the purpose of our exhibition programme? Who is our audience and how do we reach that audience? And of course, as an education institute, we have an internal

audience: the staff, the students—who are members of the Arts Institute—and we've always acknowledged that a primary function of a gallery in that setting is to bring exemplars of contemporary practice into that community. But of course, we also acknowledge that there's a wider, external audience and we have a duty to engage with that wider audience. But we recognise that *that* audience is probably unlikely to come through the doors to see the exhibitions in person. We agreed that the purpose of our exhibition programme would be that of promoting and supporting critical discourse around contemporary practice, and this led to the acceptance that our audience must be one that comprises those who are familiar with and versed in critical debate and argument. In other words, we sought to engage with our peers; with artists and writers, critics and educators. The concept is one of mutual engagement: equals meeting in the sharing of views and thoughts around contemporary practice. OK, so this may seem like a conversation between like-minded people, a debate for those 'in the loop' and 'in the know'. But I would contend that it is nevertheless an egalitarian engagement. The concept of *text+work* events and publications is that it does not privilege any particular discipline or critical position; it's simply open to those who seek to engage in critical exhibition and writing on equal terms; it privileges an equal relationship between writer and artist.

We send out the published texts, free, to a mailing list of some 2,000-plus individuals and we make the texts available on the website—this now gets to the interesting bit. So the majority of the audience for our exhibitions never see the actual works, but read the critical text without visiting the exhibition. Latterly, we've included some illustrations within the texts, and despite being an artist who values the visual image above all, it was me as chair of the gallery group who resisted—and I still resist, actually—the move from our original intention to rigorously keep separate the offer of text from any accompanying images. Why? Well, I'm wary of that relationship that arises—in fact that is inherent—in the juxtaposition of text and image. One or other inevitably becomes an adjunct: the text explains the image or the image explains the text. What I've always sought in the concept of *text+work* is an equal relation between the writing and the making. That the written and visual are an acted activity, and are valid in their shared and different ways. They're interrelated, complementary, but separately sustainable in

their contribution to a shared debate and understanding. But of course this is in regard to a particular circumstance that I've described about our gallery, our publications. Of course, the relationship of text to artistic practice is not always based on a reciprocal relationship or partnership; there are many and various positions in this relationship: one or other seeking to dominate, to lead, to structure responses, to embellish, or to be embellished; to explain or be validated by, either by intention or by default.

Well, enough of my initial thoughts. As I promised we come to the panel members to open up this complex set of relationships and explore the idea that words matter. And I was going to come to Steph first because we were talking as we came up the steps just outside. One of the things which interests Steph is: well yes, but an object itself has a language, there is a language of the object. Steph, do you want to pick up on that point?

STEPHANIE JAMES: I was interested in what you were saying, actually, about critical text, because I'm interested in a text which isn't necessarily critical, and perhaps we could explore what that means later on. I'm always pushing *text+work* to think of text as a kind of narrative or an equivalent to the object. The object as a painting, a video, a photograph—a work of art in whatever form that is. I'm interested in what we discuss on the MA: what you're doing when you're presenting work, or you're writing about it, could be performative, which means that you would take your audience to the same place rather than describing it or being critical, in fact Lee was saying yesterday, which I thought was very interesting, that there isn't enough *critical* text at the moment—that's another area that we could talk about perhaps—but I'm interested in an equivalent experience. So it could be a narrative, it could be a poem, it could be a song, and in fact the Sophie Calle [who represents the *French Pavilion* at the 52nd Venice Biennale] today was showing me the reverse, and how many interpretations you can have of an object, which is essentially a text, and it's more than a text because it's an experience, isn't it? I mean, I don't know if you want to pick up on that. But my interest—I suppose—is how an object tells you how to look at it.

I prefer to go to see the work. I don't want anyone to tell me about it, I don't want to read about it, I don't want to engage in the press on this—in fact it's been very interesting this week because the press have been here and

their engagement is very cool, and when the public came in on the first public day they were hot. Can I say that? They had lots of views about the work and they experienced it and they were very interesting, it sort of reinforced my sense of—or maybe I'm looking for it—that in fact an object has got a set of codes in front of it, it's got what it's made out of, what it's referring to, the processes that have been used to create it; and so you can, in a sense, textually analyse an object, because in fact it's a reflexive thing. I've just been reading about Joseph Kosuth who's interested in the reflexive object that actually asks you questions because you're viewing it, so in a way you've got to kind of say, well it says to you, 'What am I?' and you start to engage with it. And then I'm quite interested in how perhaps the viewer would allow themselves to engage after they've got the where it sits and how text can perhaps help that. Can I shut up now?

JH: Yeah, yeah. David, do you want to perhaps pick up on that one?

DAVID BATE: I'm just going to say something really, not particularly to pick up on that. I make work, photographic work, where I use captions, text, sentences, writing. And I also write. So I think there are two senses of text there, for me: one is the way that it's actually linked by the maker of the work, and secondly, by someone who writes about the work who doesn't know anything about it, perhaps. There's a third sense of text, which has maybe fallen out of date, which came from post-structuralism, which is that a text was a 'tissue of quotations'<sup>1</sup>. So that any work—be it a visual image, or a novel, or whatever—would already be quoting other things, so a text meant textuality: relationships to other things. And Sophie Calle's work in the *French Pavilion* is a very good example because it starts with a letter. She then uses that letter to make the work, by asking other people to contribute, and then people are going to write about that; so there's this amazing sort of circularity. For me, one of the key things about text is that—and it's written in my head ever since I read it—is a remark by Roland Barthes, and it's repeated by many other people since, which is that writing polices images<sup>2</sup>. And part of me knows that that's true, but part of me wants to resist that, and I think there are two aspects to this: one is that ever since the 20th century, our attitude towards art is completely different from all the societies before that. If you think about

Christian art—as I have been, since we’re in Venice—the text upon which all Christian art referred to was the Bible. There was no way out of that—unless you were a heretic and you would be burnt. So no matter how far you think about Bellini and his relationship to his mother, when you’re looking at the Madonna and Child painting, at the end of the day, the meaning of that painting always comes back to the Christian narratives, The Story. Ever since the 20th century, that—or maybe we could argue about where that starts, it’s just convenient to say the 20th century—that has been kind of smashed, so the end of the grand narratives; there are now lots of smaller stories, which makes it more difficult to know what a work, an image work, is referring to. What is its underlying narrative picture? And in a sense, I can see a conflict here: critics who want to give a viewer who is not going to see the work a way into it—and give them some material to work with—risk the danger of closing that work, of making it like Christian art where everything goes back to the same story in the end. And on the other hand, what I’m always excited about—and I try in the use of text in my own work, in a way, to contradict Barthes—is to use text—writing, I mean—to open a work, and there’s a very old essay by Umberto Eco who argues, in the late ’70s, for the open work<sup>3</sup>. The idea that writing should be a bit like a piece of frayed cloth, so it should not close things, congeal it, it should heat it up and let things move around—I’m mixing my metaphors. And I think in a way, in modern art you can see both of these tendencies, you can see art which is quite clearly intended to be open, and you can see art—which tends to be moral—but which actually closes the issue for the viewer; and I can see the same dichotomy in artists’ attitudes to writing about their own work.

[15:09]

JH: OK David, thank you very much. Lee do you want to pick up?

LEE TRIMING: Yeah, well I’m going to start with a brief introduction as you suggested. One of the things you said was: ‘Why are we here?’ And the reason why I’m here is—I’ve been told—is that I, a month or two ago, let slip an idle comment: that the best writing that I had done, when I was producing essays for artists, was on occasions when I hadn’t seen the work, and that I wanted

to do more writing for artists where I hadn't seen and knew very little, not knew very little about the work, but had no direct visual experience of the work that was being produced—which possibly sounds a little perverse, so I should maybe contextualise that a little bit. I had done an essay for an artist whose work I was familiar with, but for the exhibition she was putting on she was making a lot of the work in situ—I wasn't going to be able to access the work by the time it was completed—so I had to produce a text before the show was on while she was still actually producing the work. So we sat down and discussed the kind of things that she was interested in, things that she was thinking about—the production of this work—and we agreed that I would produce a text which dealt with issues based on our conversations, but out of necessity would make no reference to the work she actually produced. And as a writer, I found that a really exhilarating and much freer experience, than writing what in essence ends up often being a review of the work. And I found that it kind of opened up a lot of things, it meant that I wasn't—I've been writing on contemporary art probably since about the year 2000, and that's often in the form of reviews—and I'm getting increasingly uncomfortable with telling people what the work does, what it is, and even though it's always been at the forefront of my mind while I'm writing that—it's as if every sentence I write is inaudibly prefaced with: 'In my opinion.' You know text, they become very sort of solid ...

I suppose to pick up on what you mentioned about Barthes and policing the text, and also possibly Steph what you said about reflexivity, I am reluctant to drop the names of philosophers because I don't read very much philosophy and I don't know much about it, but I have become quite interested in Gilles Deleuze recently, particularly in a kind of very, very fundamental idea of Deleuze's where he's interested in doing away with the idea of anything being a fixed or solid permanent state. Doing away with this idea in favour of a constant state of becoming, where things are in a constantly changing and developing state<sup>4</sup>. Jim asked me before we came up here, 'Are you ready?', and I said, 'I'm not ready because I'm becoming'. This is an interesting problem for me in terms of thinking [about] how you can produce a piece of writing around work, which addresses the problem of wanting to keep things as fluid as possible, without kind of interrupting or freezing into what I think is a very sort of false state of certainty. What's happening with

your encounter with the work by using a medium which is actually as static and self-contained as a piece of text?

JH: Laura do you want to pick up on the point from working in a gallery, the different uses that you have for text and the need to provide text, is there a need?

LAURA MCLEAN-FERRIS: Yes I think there is a need and there are lots of questions that I want to ask the panel but ... and some interesting points have already come up, but I want to carry on the format of just quickly explaining to you who I am and why I'm here. I don't know how many of you have managed to see the exhibition while you've been at the Biennale tonight, *New Forest Pavilion* for which *text+work* produced a catalogue with the artists. I work at ArtSway, which is a gallery in the New Forest. We run a residency programme and all of the artists in *New Forest Pavilion* exhibition, apart from one, have come to stay at ArtSway in the New Forest on residency and produced work. The gallery is in a very rural area, it's in a tiny village, so a large part of the reason why I'm here and interested in speaking with the panel this evening is that I provide the gallery text and things [i.e., exhibition panels and hand-outs], and I suppose the questions I really want to raise are about education and providing people with a way into the work that we show at the gallery. So when we do have exhibitions, because we are in this tiny rural village, if we don't provide anything for people—we're a publicly funded gallery—we don't seem friendly, we want as many people to enjoy the exhibitions as possible, we don't want to discourage people from having the best experience they can of the art but at the same time there are all these fears, which everyone has already mentioned, about closing off possibilities in the way that you experience the work. So as a writer as well, who has written reviews and things like that and also someone who works with the artists on press releases and things, these are two very different experiences: writing text which the artists kind of have a say in, is a really different experience to writing a review because often the artist will come back and say to you, 'I'm not happy with what you've said about my work and ... these are the things I'd like to be said, I'm not happy with that interpretation', and so they want to maintain a level of control about what a gallery says about their work. As a

reviewer you're slightly freer, I think, you don't have to check with the artist. Obviously at the Biennale there are hundreds and hundreds of reviews all over the world now that won't have been OK'd by the artists. So I'm coming to things from those two perspectives, and also academically my interest is in systems of understanding, like language or text, and how they can either harm or help something.

In terms of *text+work*, I'm quite interested in the texts that audiences bring when they go to see an exhibition without even realising. I mean, a lot of you will have studied art or art history and you'll be bringing these set art-historical texts—whether they be Gombrich, or John Berger, or Deleuze, or whoever it is—you're bringing text and education and references with you, and how do you encourage people who don't come from that background, who haven't studied art history, to either go and read those texts or to experience the work in a different way? But as I'm the last person to introduce myself I thought I might ask the panel: it's interesting that quite a lot of you have brought up Sophie Calle—I don't know how many of you have seen the exhibition and I'm a bit conscious of trying to explain it because that seems to be against everything we've spoken about—there's a lot of interpretation over, as Steph said, one particular text or experience—107 different interpretations—and I just wondered what you all thought about how successful those interpretations are of that experience, of that text, whether you actually do get to something through all the other interpretations that are there, or whether you really end up with a blockage, a no way sign, something that can't actually be interpreted? Steph particularly, you've mentioned to me another piece of work that's in the Biennale that represents that kind of blockage, that kind of stop, in terms of interpretation. So, I will hand over.

SJ: Well actually both Lee and I like an artist's work, what's her name?

LT AND SJ [*IN UNISON*]: Tatiana Trouvé.

SJ: Tatiana Trouvé. Yeah. And I liked it, I don't know why he liked it, but there's a certain ... you think you know what you're looking at. So you go into this object or this installation and there are a set of things that you can kind of catalogue, in your own mind, and every little trail that I went down sort of

petered out, and it was a wonderful sort of returning again to what you were looking at, trying to work out from the materials and the form and the—it was enjoyable. So you're experiencing it rather than attaching a set of references or other meanings or other roads that you could follow, so in fact bringing all your thoughts with you—probably I want to say something about Deleuze again, this is going to be a Deleuze and Guattari evening, I can see this—how do you say their names? I only ever read them—but they came up with this notion, they used the rhizome as a metaphor for talking about when things are progressing and new experiences happen when you put things together. So it's a bit like a ginger root or a galangal that moves along under the ground and it shoots up and it shoots down and the whole thing becomes longer and larger and it takes on a lot of indeterminate—which is what all objects are—growth; rather than a tree, which stands up vertically and has a kind of hierarchy and a status. So that was the only thing I could bring to it, it was me and the work and some other space happened, which I think is the rhizome space. Can I say that, does that make sense? Good. We got a few nods. Do you want to talk about that?

[28:45]

LT: About the same piece of work?

SJ: Yeah.

LT: Well, I think my enjoyment of it was slightly different to yours. It does confound, it does kind of like what you mentioned, this idea of a tissue of quotations, and it does make this kind of huge tissue of quotations to all sorts of previous art-historical things, and there's something quite cinematic about certain takes on it. It nods towards a really oblique narrativity that it then never really does anything with, which I quite like. And the way that it sort of deliberately confounds every construction that it sets up. But my predominant enjoyment of it really was because it was such a ... it seemed to me a very complex and subtle exploration of various kinds of issues within sculptural language and the draftsmanly and pictorial nature of the experience of a sculpture. And how that kind of fits within an architectural context and the

use of—I mean, mirrors are very modish at the moment within sculpture—but I thought that the use of mirrors and kind of fake space within it were nice as well, particularly where the mirror is actually set up within a space, which is then closed off with glass within part of the architecture. And then there are these other objects which kind of sit ... you're never quite sure whether it's an installation or whether it's three sculptures which happen to sit very close together. So there's a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity formally in the way that everything is set up. While I was doing this kind of head-above-water thing, every now and then I'd pop up and kind of like 'Oh I'll try and hunt down some kind of narrative thing in here'—that didn't last for very long. Predominantly, it's just this incredibly formal, sexy ... I like work that makes my brain switch off and just turn into a white-noise machine .... [When] The language centre of my brain is possibly less engaged than other centres of my brain.

SJ: I thought: 'Is there anything I can get if I go and read the little panel and it said "Untitled"?' and I thought, 'yes, OK, that's right somehow: "Untitled"'. And it didn't then give you, there wasn't any ... if it had said: 'Zoo', then I would have started looking at it in a different way because I did think 'Zoo' when I was there, you know: monkey cage or looking in, little door, I don't know—good piece of work.

JH: We haven't touched on the theme of titles yet, which we did yesterday evening. From what I can remember about yesterday evening we did talk about titles. And I'm always interested in how much titles do open up a piece of work for you, or how much they might actually just be a red herring or a cul-de-sac, and whether sometimes the artist does that deliberately. But David, you've got some thoughts about how artists use titles.

DB: Yeah, well I guess they use titles like everybody else does, in some ways, which is, you know, my usual example: if you walk into a McDonald's, you see a lovely big picture, and if you actually want one you have to ask them for it, so you have to know whether it's a Big Mac, or whatever it is, and then you get it, and you know what it is because you've got language, you've got a name. And then the experience of the image may not be the same as the experience of eating it, but the text is a crucial link between those things. So it's crucial in

getting by; I mean, anthropologists say that writing is the technology of the intellect, so if you give up language, culturally, you give up power—it's no coincidence that all the cultures that have the power are the ones that have a written tradition as opposed to those who have oral traditions. I think that at some point it's socially absolutely crucial. But there's also a point in the 20th century when avant-garde artists began to realise that this was a convention of the art institution that you could play with. So the most famous one, probably, is the urinal by Marcel Duchamp that was put in a gallery. It wasn't called a 'urinal' and it wasn't by Marcel Duchamp, it was by Richard Mutt and it was called a 'fountain'. So the object was a piece of art made by an artist who did not exist. So he is the first one, in a way, to really start that tradition of using language in a way to completely undermine the object, and I think we could probably say—I was thinking about this today looking around the gallery, how much text there was used by artists in the works and around it—that, in the West, the use of language in the work, or very powerfully to go with the work, has been predominantly the tradition of the avant-garde art, rather than Modernism. They seem to have accelerated it, and I was thinking of Francis Picabia's drawing of a spark plug, which he then calls *Portrait of an American Girl in the Nude*, and it's completely sort of absurd, yet you start along a train of thought—the spark—between these two things, and in a way that's a very open work because you have the possibility to reject it as absurd or somehow play in the space between those things. I don't know if that is Deleuzian or if it fits the Deleuzian model, but it certainly fits a long tradition of thinking in Western culture, before Deleuze, of opposing monological discourse. Russian formalists had this idea of dialogic discourse, in the theatre Brecht had the idea of dialectics and distanciation and lots of traditions for setting up conflicts to give audiences space to think about the relations between things, rather than that relation closing it. But I'll come back to that issue of closure and openness.

SJ: Can I just pick up on a point you made earlier which might have something to do with what you've said now? You were talking about the images in the churches and the Catholic saints, etcetera, etcetera, which obviously were a form of language, and when I lived in Rome for two years—you know it was quite clear to me that people still use those images to look at and to pray

next to and to get closer to God—there was a lot of discussion about their understanding of Protestantism, because we prefer a blank wall to get closer to God and they prefer a lot of images, and it made me think about the way in which, say, hierarchies develop in terms of text and image and white cube and museum, and there's this wonderful sort of binary system.

DB: So, Protestants run the art galleries? No, Catholics run the art galleries?

SJ: Actually I think it was just what they talked about quite a lot. There's this sort of empty space and you intellectually project yourself into that space in order to get closer to God, that's what they presume we do—I don't know whether we do this, I don't have any particular faith at all, but, I don't know.

DB: It's also the thing with the Biennale, isn't it? I was reading Robert Storr's little introduction where he says, '... we're undoing binary oppositions'<sup>5</sup>, and of course the title *Think with the Senses*, and what's the other one?

REST OF THE PANEL [IN UNISON]: *Feel with the Mind*.

[37:25]

DB: Yeah, it's a typical inversion of the usual, you know: feelings go with looking and outside of language, and thinking goes with the intellect, which is not to do with images.

SJ: Yes he's trying to reverse it, isn't he? And I think it's a very sentimental title—can I say that about Robert Storr? Yes I can—he talked the other day at a breakfast seminar about putting on this work for 'The General Public' ['Venice Agendas V', organised by Wimbledon College of Art] but a particular kind of general public that go to the Venice Biennale, which is an interesting one; you know, who are they? You guys. Maybe we should ask them what they think.

JH: I did promise that we wouldn't just keep it a conversation between ourselves, but an open conversation. Does anyone want to come in, either with a

comment or a question, at that point?

AUDIENCE QUESTION: I have a question. This is for Lee—sorry. You were discussing writing about art and not wanting to kind of nail the reader into a specific understanding of what’s happening, and kind of wanting to maintain that fluidity of a constant sense of becoming. And I was wondering—I think that that’s an excellent, excellent question to ask yourself as a writer: ‘What sort of strategies can you at least play with to try to do that?’

LT: At the moment because it’s a relatively sort of—probably only in the last six months has it come up as an issue that I’m really ... it was something that was kind of like hovering at the peripheries of what I was doing, I was talking about it but not really addressing it. I was kind of addressing it in this vague, floaty way of ‘Oh I’ll just be poetic and subjective and that’s enough’, and it isn’t. I suppose I’m thinking about watching yourself—at the moment it’s like I’m trying to police myself in terms of; When am I trying to construct an argument to argue for a particular reading? When am I making a definitive statement? When am I saying, ‘This work does X, this work addresses Y; what are the concerns of this?’ All these kinds of statements, which kind of like lead you to a dead end and actually make a definitive statement like that. That’s what’s started to really hack me off. And I suppose at the moment I’m trying to talk, or I’m trying to find ways of talking, *around* the work rather than *about* the work.

I do think that, you know, I make a dismissive comment about subjectivity but I do really believe that it’s important to hold that at the front of your mind in terms of ... I was thinking about this earlier today actually and thinking about who it is that you’re actually writing about, and if you’re writing about an artist who already has a large audience and is extensively written about, it’s a really, really different kind of responsibility that you have than if you’re writing about somebody who is a relative newcomer and has much less published critical discourse around them. The writing has less weight for someone who’s more established, particularly in terms of the internet and the press, and if I write something for *Flash Art*, for example, and somebody hasn’t been written about in the press at that level before, my article is going to be the one that gets quoted, so it has a particular kind of weight. But if

I'm writing about Felix Gonzales-Torres it's just not going to have [as much weight], and it's a drop in an ocean. The other way that you can look at that is that if I'm writing about Felix Gonzales-Torres there's already this massive kind of text that exists around the work that I can fuck with, and I can make my writing about picking that apart or deliberately avoiding things that have been talked about, deliberately looking for a gap that hasn't been plugged or looking for a space in the armour where the crowbar hasn't yet been applied. So I think it's that kind of strategic 'How do I come at this?' is part of that, so I suppose that as a writer thinking more questioningly about the approach but always in terms of the application of myself as an interpreting subject who is talking about the encounter with the work rather than a definition of the work. I mean, I'm realising more and more and more I never write about the work. I never, ever write about the work. I write about my encounter, and that's really, really different, and the more I write the more I realise the significance of that, of that difference. I don't know if that answers your question.

AUDIENCE COMMENT: Yeah pretty much. One further thought: Do you think just posing questions and finding ways to pose questions to your audience is a way of perhaps keeping it open, as opposed to—I mean, it seems like the definitive statements that you were talking about before kind of like close it off, whereas certain types of questions perhaps might be ways of ...

LT: Questions are really leading as well though, and questions are really directing, and it can be quite a sly way of corralling someone into a particular kind of position. It can deflate something that you would like to get out of the way. I sound as if I'm stepping into a place where I'm saying, 'I have no agenda', and of course I have an enormous agenda that I want to apply vigorously to everything, otherwise I wouldn't bother picking up a pen in the first place. But, I suppose what I'm trying to do is—it's really interesting, I read Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation* this morning, again, and she kind of is ... I had a point as to why I remembered that and then it's sort of popped its head up and now it's sunk away from me.

DB: *Against Interpretation*<sup>6</sup>.

LT: Yeah. It was at that point that it left me. Damn you Susan Sontag!

AQ: As you've got the microphone can I ask you something?

LT: Please, God yeah, throw me a plank of wood.

AQ: Do you see your criticism as a work of art when you set out to write your criticism?

LT: Yes. Yes, but.

AQ: Are you writing about you?

LT: Always. You can't not. But I would qualify that because I get really angry with the argument that ... there's the, you know, it became very sort of *de rigueur* in the mid-to-late nineties to talk about: 'Oh, well the curator's an artist too', or: 'Oh the critic is an artist too', and this kind of morphed into a position where a lot of writers seemed to be taking the position that the work had no content until it was supplied, that the critic actually kind of crafted the meaning of the work; it kind of over-egged the pudding of the importance of that writing, and it's really actually toxic in terms of the stuff that we're talking about because it's like 'Well we're going to tell you what to fucking think about it'. And I think to say—when you're writing about art that the product is a work of art—to say, 'Yes' ... kind of caps that off, and I don't agree with that at all; but what I do think that I'm doing is ... I'm writing a fiction based upon my encounter with an object, which is what I say when I say that I'm not writing about the thing. The thing, I do believe, is an ineffable object in itself that operates in ways that we don't understand and which probably cannot be translated into language. So I'm not going to try to do that, what I'm going to do is ... it's kind of like the process of abstraction, it's like if you have—I use this analogy quite a lot—if you have a dream, and then you wake up and your recollection of the experience is incomplete and vague, and then you try and tell somebody about the dream—you cannot do it. What you're doing is: you've had the dream which is an experience which is no longer available to you, and then you have the memory of that experience, and then you translate

that to somebody in text; so you have the original object, then you have a secondary object, and then your explanation is this third thing that you're making. And when I'm writing about an exhibition or a piece of work, it's that third thing that I'm making. And that's a contrivance, and I'm fine with that.

AC: But it's text and that's what you're alerted to: your interpretation of the text, you're using text and you're a writer, so there's a form of art there.

SJ: It's like a portable memory, isn't it, in a way? Because you go and see the work and, I don't know, we just sort of talked about this—Jo [i.e., Josepha Sanna] and I—what does the text do? I'm thinking about ArtSway, you [addresses Laura McLean-Ferris] make a catalogue for each of those artist residencies, don't you, and actually you see the work a bit like *text+work* and then what have you got? You've got your memory, like your dream: it fades, it moves away, but you've always got this portable kind of—umm, what is it?—pointer, to what you saw, in the worst possible way. Or whatever.

LT: It's always a perversion, but that's what I like about it.

SJ: But this is why I'm interested in the equivalent to it. I mean, your piece of writing about the shopping centre, I really like that piece because I'm going with you through that space and I'm seeing with you and I'm also—talking to you David, it's bit strange pointing—and your sort of embarrassed thoughts are there and you're with them, and I think that's quite an interesting way of writing.

JH: Do you want to ask a question?

LM-F: Can I ask something?

JH: OK Laura, and then we'll come to the lady in the audience.

LM-F: I'd just—while we're on it, sorry—I'd just like to pick up on a couple of points that Lee has made before we lose them, and but I also want to ask the audience as well about your opinions on this kind of thing, because Steph

you made reference to Lee saying that there is a lack of critical writing, and I just thought that that might be an interesting thing to discuss. You seem to make a division between your experience and interpretative writing, basically, and art criticism. I mean, art criticism—from what I can see—has kind of dropped a few places on the rungs of value and importance, and how influential it really seems to be in the art world at the moment, and I've got a couple of ideas about why that might be. I think it's interesting as well that we were just talking about catalogues because catalogues and the production of catalogues—particularly now with the production of catalogues by every commercial gallery as well as every public space—means that a lot of the same writers that were the art critics at some point are now writers for hire, but also because there are so many magazines and so many newspapers and online blogs and so many people writing. The kind of top critics and how important that really is seems to be not so important anymore, so there does seem to be this lack of criticism basically, a lack of critical writing. You go back and what you have are interpretations and often things that seem like catalogue text, and then you have, you know, in the academic world, as you referred to [i.e., as Lee Trimming referred to], you've got criticism which is actually criticising the previous criticism as opposed to actually talking about the works. So I just thought that I'd raise that as an idea about the lack of criticism and critical writing, and see what the audience and you think.

[52:37]

LT: There're two things that I'd like to say about that before, but you're not forgotten: when I said critical writing I did mean in that kind of like small 'c' way of writing, which goes out of its way to kind of decimate a piece of work because you hate it so much ... one of the things that was written down in the proposal for things to talk about that we could possibly address here was: 'How work'—it was all very dutiful in terms of like— 'how can work serve? How can we make writing that doesn't kind of like get in the way? How can we make writing that doesn't destroy the piece of work?', and as soon as I started reading that I thought, 'Ooh that would be a really interesting project: to write something that really ... could you actually destroy a piece of work with a piece of writing?' And I quite fancy the idea of trying that.

AQ: Does it then—that piece of writing that you’re doing—then become the work of art itself? As a vampire.

LT: I think it would be an interesting thing to do. That’s the best answer I have for that. So I’m interested in hearing—there are lots of reasons for that because if you’re writing criticism for a magazine you’re only going to get to do one piece of writing and if they say to you: ‘Do you want to write about an exhibition?’ are you going to pick something that you hate and don’t want to give any exposure to? Or, are you going to do something that you really, really love and would like to talk about?—maybe there should be a publication which is solely people writing about things that they think are really shit and should absolutely be attacked. I think that would be a wonderful thing to read actually, because if it’s done with intelligence, why is that not interesting?

AC: You were the one talking about responsibility.

LT: Yeah, but I was talking about the responsibility that I feel towards a particular piece of art. If you throw it open to the wider thing and the responsibility that I feel to culture in general, is it important that there’s a dissenting voice? Absolutely. And I think that it’s actually really irresponsible to only produce things which are in praise of, because it then just turns into a community of mutual backslapping, which is horrific, and everything becomes meaningless. So yeah, I think that kind of—we need more venom.

SJ: Has anybody read Luce Irigaray’s *The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*? You knew I was going to say that. It’s an attack, but it’s so fluid and beautiful, it’s a romantic, kind of lovesick sort of a poem. But in it the content is just so acute; I think it’s a great piece of writing on Nietzsche.

DB: I think in a way art critics are generally lazy, that’s the problem. I’ll give you an example: I had a show outside of London—I won’t say where—and I opened *The Guardian* one weekend to find that it was in the ‘Pick of the Week’ show to go and see, and it had a long review in *The Guardian*, in the *Weekend* [supplementary magazine], and when I spoke to the gallerists they

told me that no one had been; that they'd actually read my press release and because it was well written they could crib from that and write. So it's completely lazy, basically. Now Lee's obviously an exception to this, who wants people to either trash work or to actually do something with it, like think about it, which is great. I mean, if you go back to the first art critic—one of the most famous early critics—Denis Diderot in the 1700s—OK, I'm going to drop out the Renaissance—he would rush around the salon shows in Paris, he'd go round, write all of his notes, and the next day they would be churning out his reviews; and those texts now are still amazing because they are treatises about art. They're full of morality, they're full of hypotheses about what sort of art should be made in painting and its relationship to the theatre and so on; wonderful richness to it, because he was an intellect. And I guess the question is: Does a critic—any more, in our age of web-blog democracy—actually have any kind of privileged relationship to the work than anybody else? Art critics have been saying 'There's a crisis in criticism' for about thirty years—I think I remember reading that in *Art Monthly* in the early '80s. Is there a role for critics in a way other than legitimating artists? Everybody knows, if you want to get an artist legitimated you get a famous writer—Umberto Eco, or Madonna, or anybody—who can write a text about that artist and they will legitimate them, so it has a really valuable function. There's another function, which is educational, where presumably people are trained to open up to a wider audience: people who are unfamiliar with the stuff. But in a sense the sort of issue seems to be that people are lazy. Perhaps I can ask you, Lee, whether you think the critic does have a privileged relation to a work any more than anybody else. I mean, why should we be sitting here?

SJ: Should we do swapsies? Do you know—just bringing up your point here and taking it a little bit further—Gavin Butt? He has just launched a new book called *Between You and Me*, which is about gossip, which I suppose in a sense is text<sup>8</sup>. The gossip that surrounded Andy Warhol and the building of his reputation, and he [i.e., Gavin Butt] was talking the other morning about gossip in a positive sense, without its sort of insidious nature. But us talking about art as well, one-to-one, and how interesting that is, because OK you might have your critique, and you might have your catalogues, and you might have your gallery text, but we talk, don't we. One-to-one, in front of a body,

to a body, to one another, and I think that that's perhaps where we could go forward: gossip, in the best possible sense. Anecdote, hearsay. And you're describing, like the dream, something you've seen to somebody, you're going to give them your particularity and they're going to know you because you're a particular person that they think of in a certain kind of way, so it's going to be Stephanie-ified, or Lee-ified, or whatever; this object's going to have an approach, from that describer. And then often I'll go to see something that somebody's told me to go and see because I trust them. And so in a way, gossip can be a very interesting form of text. Of text or communication of some kind.

DB: Before I—let me just make my own position clear—because I write reviews and things, and I write about things because I think it's important to write about them, because I think *that* work should get reviewed, so I have a position; or because it's asking a question that I don't quite understand and want to think about, and writing is an excellent way to think about a problem, like a dream or something. So in a way, for me, and it's a luxury of being an academic, I can slide away from it, I don't depend on writing, so I don't have to become a hack. But I write about things that I think are analysing me, and I think instead of me as a critic analysing a work of art, I'm interested in works that seem to be analysing me; so that's a good reason to write about them.

LT: I like that; I'm stealing that, that's brilliant.

SJ: Does anybody have any observations? Does anybody want to make a comment?

AC: Just one comment about writing in an academic situation is that—it's different from country to country—that the weight of writing in academia is weighted more, or is seen by general funding bodies, as often more valuable than the actual creation of works. So that's interesting I guess in this context, that relationship of text to work.

JH: The lady in the middle, who's waited very patiently.

AQ: I was just thinking, David, about your talk on Jeff Wall's *Milk*, a few months ago. I left the auditorium feeling like that, per se, was a work of art, in a sense. And I wondered, you all brought up this idea of the small 'c' and the big 'C'. Now I'm thinking about the word 'interpretation' and the word 'gossip', so the big 'I', the small 'i'; the big 'G', the little 'g'; what is your reading of *Milk*? How does it function? Because it takes us from milk, which is what Jeff Wall tells us it is, but then through your parallel, or your incredibly amazing undoing of it, it takes us to beer, but no that's not enough, and then it takes us to the viscosity of paint. So I'm left having looked at a Jeff Wall's portrait of a man with milk who's now got paint. That disrupts me, in a sense. That knowledge, which is incredibly amazing, also does something. It works on the work itself.

SJ: I like disrupt. I think it should disrupt. Don't you? Good writing about art *should* disrupt.

[GENERAL MURMURS OF ASSENT FROM THE AUDIENCE AND PANEL]

DB: I do. I talked recently—somewhere else in England—and a student told someone else that it had ruined the picture for them; they couldn't look at it anymore. So it had disrupted their sense of it. I guess that's a good example of, you know, it's like *that* work has been analysing me ever since I saw it, because the first time I saw it—sorry everyone's at a huge disadvantage, it's a Jeff Wall painting, a photograph, I did a 5,000-word essay on one picture in a lecture ...

AQ [CONTINUED]: Which your students assigned you, right?

DB: ... yes. It was a bet that you couldn't write about one picture for 3,000 words, so it's 5,000 words actually. So they had to do their 3,000 word essay on one picture. I won. In a way, it was like having a dream image, which was like bothering me, and maybe you find this: you go around the Biennale, there'll be a few images that stick in your head, and they're the images that mean something to you at a level that maybe you don't quite understand. And so for me, that would be a good reason to write about it. Now if someone pays

you to write about it and publishes it in a magazine, fantastic, because then other people get to read that and ... whatever.

AQ[CONTINUED]: Would that function as a criticism, as an interpretation, or as a bridge between the two, or neither? You know, that parallel, you're working on the work, in that case, that narrative of your reading of the work, what exactly was that? Besides just a test from your students.

DB: I think, you know, you need to make your own reading of the photograph.

[1:05:00]

LT: Regarding what you were saying earlier, I said I had two things to say and I only said one of them, and this actually picks up on it perfectly. I think it's that kind of idea of interpretation, I was saying that I was quoting from *Against Interpretation* and then you were saying it was an interpretative reading, which is kind of true and it is in terms of how you think about what the word 'interpretation' means. And I—also to go back to your question about critics and privileged positions—I don't, umm ... if somebody calls me a 'critic' I get quite cross, because I don't like to think of myself as a critic because I think that what critics are trying to do is to place, to define, to peg out certain kinds of things, to clarify; and I'm not so interested in that.

DB: But you're publishing in a magazine, you are a critic in a position of power.

LT: In that sense yeah. But it's a word I have a problematic relationship with, I suppose is what I'm saying. It's kind of this difference when I'm talking about, 'What am I making the writing for?' I was thinking about what direction it moves in, and you can think of interpretation in terms of the direction of it being kind of like trying to move inwards to the work—we talked about this the other night, well, we didn't talk about it, I mouthed off about it. If what you're doing through writing is kind of like trying to crack the work open, to kind of take it apart and find out how it works, that implies to me the idea that the work is kind of finite, contained, comprehensible, that it's effable instead

of ineffable. So the direction of that interpretative writing is this kind of like inward, limited, focussed, I suppose dialectical in a way, in that you're sort of trying to move forward through various positions in order to come up with the definitive article, which I think is bullshit. What I'm interested in is writing in that other direction, where you take the object as the centre from which you build a piece of writing. So the work is like a springboard or a ground, and that's almost one of the reasons why I'm interested in it not even appearing within the writing.

LM-F: I think I've got a fairly good illustration of that and I hope that it's one that lots of you might be familiar with, because it is something that is difficult to describe with words. There's a piece by Mike Kelley called *Craft Morphology Flow Chart*, which kind of illustrates almost what we're talking about, in a way. There is a room of craft objects, which are stuffed animals and they're all handmade. They've all been divided into categories and you're not told what those categories are, so they might be things with three eyes, or they might be red toys, and there're some of these funny stuffed animals on their own on a table, and they've all been measured and plotted on graphs in terms of how big or small they are, and these charts are presented with the categories around them around the room. And I think in a way, the whole point about that work is the fact that in trying to break it down, it's like a scientist has found these things and has tried to take them apart to see how they work and analyse them almost mathematically, which I think is kind of like the writing you're talking about. But that whole system completely misses the point of why those stuffed toys exist, because that's something that is slightly ineffable because it's about the relationship between people and children and wool and sheep. And so I just wanted to use that as an illustration in terms of writing, which is breaking something down and missing it basically, like missing the description of a dream. So I just thought that I'd use that as an explanation.

AQ: I was interested in your views [i.e., Stephanie James's views]. We kind of touched upon it earlier, when you were talking about work and text being a narrative and then it went on as text being separate to work, so art criticism, or whatever words you were using. I'm interested in where the text *is* the work, so—I come from a performance background—so my work becomes the text,

and that act of performative writing is actually cancelling out the work. So at some point it gets completely moved over to just text, so there is no original thing left other than a dream, a memory. And I was just wondering about your views on that.

SJ: And gossip?

AC: And gossip.

SJ: And gossip actually, because if it isn't there again and it isn't documented, it becomes what—I think is interesting—is us carrying the work on. Anyone got any thoughts on what Matt [a previous audience interlocutor] said?

LT: It's a nice way of projecting spaces into things, maybe; just in terms of writing. There's a lot of guff taught, not that it's worthless guff, but a lot of guff gets taught at art school about representation, and we always think about 'The Image', and I don't know if the arguments around representation are as often applied to writing, but it's exactly the same. A word is a representation of a thing that's not present. So all of those kinds of things that sit for painting and photography sit for writing as well. And it was interesting, just picking up specifically on what you said [i.e., what the previous audience interlocutor said]: 'The object is cancelled out and no longer present, and what's left is the text but the text is referring back', then, you know, I'm interested in ambiguity, I'm interested in absence, I'm interested in confusion. So if the incorporation or use of text is something which allows me an experience of confusion or ambiguity around something, then fantastic. I mean, it's interesting because in my work when I was a student and subsequently as well, the idea of the relationship between image and text is something that I had very much kind of wrestled with, and I was really interested in Cy Twombly, I'd become very interested in Ed Ruscha, and that kind of balancing act between text and image where text becomes image, or text overrides image, or text throttles image, or kind of ... that again can be a space for something uncomfortable and uncertain, and I really enjoy that.

AC: Allan Kaprow was really interested in the idea of rumour in terms of

documentation for performance, and he discusses a preference for rumour to simulate performance better than documentation.

LT: There are certain pieces of work that I've only been told about that I love. There's a Mike Kelley piece that I've only ever had described to me, and I love it and I don't want to see it because I know it'll just be a letdown. It exists for me as an anecdote.

SJ: Actually it can be a letdown. I want to go back to a really early point that you made [i.e., David Bate made] that alarmed me. I had a short intake of breath, David, which was 'writing polices art', what do you mean by that?

LT: What did Roland Barthes mean by that?

SJ: OK, what did Roland Barthes mean by that? What can we say about that now?

DB: Well, we never see images without writing, and that writing, on the whole, polices images, I mean ...

SJ: Corrals them, keeps them, moralises them? Is it moralising?

DB: ... polices them. If you look at images in a newspaper, if you cut them out and put them on a wall and looked at them, wrote down your own analysis, and then looked at what the headlines were, you'd find that the headlines tell you what the pictures mean. Most of our culture is spent ... language tells you what to think about a picture. They explain the image. Even art galleries do that. I mean, quite rightly, I want a label at some point to know who made that work. There's nothing wrong with that.

AQ: But if it polices can it also parasite?

DB: Can it parasite? I guess so. I mean, you can have a picture of a hat or you can have a 'hat', as a word, and they're interchangeable, but they're clearly not the same. Now a picture of a hat is still dependent on the linguistic term 'hat',

unless you have another language, in which case it's a '*chapeau*', or whatever. So there's always this relationship, and you can't get away from it, and I don't see why anyone would really want to. But, as I said, I resist that, and there is a tradition in avant-garde art which has been about resisting it, from Dada to Conceptual Art. To answer your question, I mean, you know, Dada and Conceptual Art, it hasn't stopped people writing about them even though they're very often purely textual works, like a sentence, for example, which doesn't even exist except as a ....

LM-F: But in a gallery context. If you're exhibiting, or you're trying to exhibit someone else's work—I'll use two examples which are really close by to us: the Callum Morton piece, which is just outside the building—I mean for me, I find it really interesting and almost, I don't want to say essential, but I think it's very interesting for everyone to know that it's a replica of his family home scaled down to three-quarters and that his father was a Brutalist architect in Australia, who designed the house ... I find it very necessary—that piece of information. In terms of *New Forest Pavilion*—the exhibition that we've just put up here—one of Simon Faithfull's films is called *Orbital*, which is concentric circles of film—the centre one being a film filmed going round the Circle Line, the next ring is filmed going round the North and South Circular, and the third ring is the M25—and it's for an international audience, of course it's not essential, but I think that you kind of want people to know that, and how do you do that without kind of being disruptive?

DB: I don't think it's an either or.

SJ: Why do you have to know it?

LM-F: You don't have to, but ....

LT: Is it the artist's decision that they want you to know that? That's my question.

SJ: See, what I like is the rumour, the gossip. Now I know that because you told me, and that's actually how I learn about a lot of work, it's because we're

talking about it. Anybody else got anything to say, any burning issue about text? About writing?

AQ: So when we're talking about rumours regarding work, then how would an art critic write about those rumours, or is that not valid?

LT: Oh I do it all the time, but I just preface it.

DB: What you make them up?

LT: No, I just preface: 'I've heard that'. I mean, I love anecdote, I love rumour, I love fantasy and fantasy that's been generated around certain kinds of things. I've just—this is a bit of a lame example—I've just written something where I kind of refer to this story about the Victorians covering up their piano legs with sueded fabric because they were considered too sexy, and that's actually bollocks, that didn't happen, there's this kind of convoluted thing of like ... everyone thinks it did happen, it's a really popular fallacy. But this is the thing I love about it, it's so *in* the culture, it's become this incredibly foggy ground, but, you know, I read something and I've chosen to believe it, which presented a lot of evidence which swung me over to actually believe that this isn't true, it's a popular fallacy and here are the examples historically from documents saying: 'This is how the rumour actually began'. And I presented it within the text and I presented it as a fallacy and then talked about it as a fallacy. So yeah, I love to bring that sense of uncertainty, this might relate to a question that you [a previous audience interlocutor]—I don't know whether it does or not, but it kind of sprang into my mind—you were talking about how can you make work accessible to people who don't come from a background where they have a kind of vast amount of art-historical knowledge? I love to pull in rumour, gossip, pop-cultural reference, partially because I like the formal contrast of it, partially because I like to be entertaining and I think you can do very entertaining things with that, but also that it can provide a set of references that people can access if they don't have the other set of references [the art-historical set]. And one of my favourite things that anybody ever said to me was, I was interviewing a novelist who is very—called Dennis Cooper—who is very involved with contemporary art in Los Angeles, and he

made this really blasé comment about, ‘Well you know that like Donald Judd is really just like ABBA’, I almost didn’t want him to explain it, but I couldn’t resist it—I’m not going to explain it to you—but he had a really plausible explanation for it, it was amazing but it really just kind of like ... that’s just so, I don’t know, there’s something so pleasurable about that little idea, that little game.

[1:21:17]

SJ: What about transubstantiation then?

DB: What about it?

SJ: No I’m just thinking about it. I think it was you, Carla [an audience member], and you’re Portuguese, and you want things to be true, yet the kind of Latin or the Catholicism, you know, this belief in miracles and that when you eat or drink that little round thing and the red wine, you are actually drinking and eating the body of Christ. I find that incredible.

AQ: It’s conceptual, isn’t it?

SJ: It’s conceptual, yeah.

LT: Not if it’s real.

AC: It’s real for some people.

SJ: It could be real, yeah.

AQ: I have a question for Jim. At the very beginning you said that—I’m sorry if I don’t repeat this properly—that *text+work* is aimed at people versed in critical ideas. Versed as in educated, or academically ... ?

JH: Well yes, educated or attuned or ready to [respond to] ... the practice, the debate, or—as Steph started calling it this evening—the gossip. I was—in

leading this and working with colleagues—absolutely clear that we were about talking to like-minded people and I think it's great. It's a great conceit, it's a great arrogance as well, and now what's the point? And this horrified my colleague, the Gallery Officer, who said, 'But we've got a community agenda, Jim', and I said, 'No, no I'm not interested, not in this case, because we're not that sort of function'. Now, Laura [McLean-Ferris] couldn't possibly say that, she wouldn't be allowed to because the funding council people wouldn't let her—but I said, 'Well we're not getting any funds from anyone at this point'. What I want to do is to share ideas and to get ideas back from people, to start, if you like, a conversation going. So it's a great sort of privileged position to start with, saying, 'We're going to decide who our audience is, we're going to decide who we speak to'. And what we did is: both people who said to us, 'Yes, please send us these texts', but also people we just decided *should* have them, so we just sent them out, they didn't have to pay for them. And it's great because people then come back to us and say, 'Ooh I've been getting these, these are really interesting', or: 'I didn't really understand what that last one was about', or: 'Why on earth didn't you write this or the other?' So it was, in a sense, interventionist that we just said, 'Right we're going to do this and we're going to send them out. We've got no other agenda than engaging people in this conversation'. So I was just sort of putting where we were coming from in context and setting up, because I know it's a very privileged position and there are many other purposes that writing around and about art has to function. Such as the explication, such as trying to build new audiences, which is why I'm quite interested in what you have to do, Laura, because you have to try and reach new audiences.

LM-F: Yes, I mean, well it's interesting that we're working together, in a way, and there absolutely is a place for that audience because every piece of writing about *text+work* doesn't need to be accessible to everyone. But at the same time, you know, we are this rural gallery in the middle of the forest and quite aside from that it's ... I think even if it was a public-funded gallery as well, I mean, there is a place for that kind of not-for-the-likes-of-you attitude. Well, there is somewhere, but in terms of my work, and personally as well, I've spoken to a lot of people about their first kind of experiences of going into a gallery and being lit up in some way—whether that was as a child or as a teen-

ager or as an adult—and I would hate to bar that to people, basically, or to say you know, ‘Go off and get a degree in art history and then come back’, because I don’t really think that the place where art is coming from comes from there ... I’m struggling ....

JH: I’ll come back on that. Although our texts started with that stance, I don’t in any way think it’s elitist actually, having said, ‘We could decide who our audience is’, as a starting point. I think what’s interesting and paradoxical is that we’ve probably reached many more people than we would have done otherwise, and also—I would contend, although I’m willing for people to say, ‘No, no, no Jim’—but I think that all of those texts are actually very accessible, that they’re not complex (except in their content) but I think that they’re actually ... because the format means—it’s like I’m writing a review, David, you’ve got a certain amount of words, you’ve got to try and do it—but we’ve been very strict with the format we have, which means the writer and the artist, because they’re working together, have to be very focussed in what they’re doing, and I believe that we’ve had texts that have had a great deal of clarity to them, and therefore are accessible. But I guess I’m also thinking as an artist and again people might say, ‘How can you even say that?’ but I think how often does the artist—whatever they do: performance, installation, painting; I guess performance more so—how often, in the creative act, do you actually have the audience in mind?

SJ: Well we were talking about this last night: Who’s sitting on your shoulder while you’re making a piece of work? Which critics, which family members, which friends, which artist that you really admire but you don’t know? Which artist that you really admire and you do know? How many have you got? Loads of them.

JH: And if you’d targeted your audience when you were making art, you’d be bamboozled.

SJ: It’d be nice to get rid of them all. See what happened to the work.

AC: I just thought it was a very interesting partnership because ArtSway has a

definitive preoccupation with educating their audience and the Arts Institute, because they're an education institution, already have that privilege, as you called it; that's something else altogether.

JH: But at least I'm honest about it and aware of it, and you can't do everything for everyone, and so we thought: 'What can we do with the resource we've got?' and then let it work itself out from there, and let's—this is irrelevant for people who don't know it—but let's face it, our immediate community, that is the people who live about and around us, are largely not interested, white suburban middle class. So we wanted to reach farther than that, well actually we sought to engage and reach and talk to, really, people who were interested in the arts, so we took that as our starting premise. But it is reaching out, it's working.

DB: And I don't think your project, or the sort of use of educational language that you're talking about, are the culprits of policing works. I'm thinking of, for example, these *appareil* [*auditif*] things that you pick up, a sound guide to a major-museum exhibition where you go and stand in front of painting number one, number 15, number 16; you see all those people going around and they're great ways to get people through museums in a certain amount of time, actually I think that's their main function.

AC: They almost do it without thinking.

DB: Yes, exactly. And maybe photograph the image. So there's no space for interaction with your friends—if you've got any—or anyone else who's looking at the same painting. Gossip, dialogue, storytelling, encounters that happen, and it's kind of a shame if the art gallery becomes closed in its use of language. I don't mind artists closing their works, like Chérie Samba, if you want to make work about Africa for a Western audience I think you're probably going to have to use text to make it clear exactly what some of the issues are, you know, you put some in paintings and they're beautiful, it's not an antithesis to the image, it's part of the image. But it's that kind of policing institutionally, which kind of closes the work. These are great works of art and, you know, when you've seen 15 that's OK; I'm parodying but ...

LT: Or the press release, that's one of my current bug bears. I get so many of them through and I'm so sick of them and I just ... I can't quite not read them.

DB: Because you're in Venice.

LT: Well that's part of it, but no. I go down to pick up my post before I have my breakfast and there'll be something through from X or Y gallery, just like, 'We are proud to announce that our new exhibition, by such-and-such, *which* addresses *and* is about ... the work is fascinating in terms of its appropriation of ...' Arghh! I mean, for starters it's like the bit on the back of the book that tells you the crucial plot twist that the author saw fit to leave until page 300, before you've even read the first page. Oh God they drive me insane. And the other thing is that they all say the same thing, they're all so stultifyingly boring they make me not want to go to exhibitions. I just think they're hateful.

JH: It's quarter to nine-ish, so we don't want to hold people away from their dinners, but let's finish off with some more comments from you [the audience].

AQ: I've got a sort of fairly playful question: I always find that an extremely mysterious relationship between text and work. Whether it's sort of text on work, or whether it's the artist's text within the work, or whether it's sort of the text is the work itself, or whether it's the text that actually comes out of the work itself, which perhaps doesn't even refer to the work. And I think that it's that area that I sort of ended up with a big question with, because in each case I've listened to, the question seems to be: What is the value, the possible relationship between text and art? And rumour, which is generated about art, but to me that always implies that there is a place for it to go, it can return to the art. Where I think I get stuck a little bit, is with something Lee said right at the beginning: you talked about writing on art when you haven't had an actual experience with it, and to a certain extent when the text, which *text+work* produces, goes right out into the ether without any images. If there were the images to return to I can understand that, but can you say something about

the value of that? I think I understand in your case, I know why the gentleman here mentioned that you'd then consider it a work of art because it's giving you something: the value of that is a great value, you've created a piece of work. But where would *text+work* stand there, if it hadn't got the images to return to? What is the value of that critical discourse without the reference to what has given it its origination?

[1:34:10]

SJ: Can you answer this one honestly?

JH: Well yes, because I've lost the argument on this one.

SJ: You have.

JH: And I guess, because it has a value in the sense that it would lead the person reading it to think, to conjecture, to try and understand what it is, it might also bring them to look at the work and look at it in its own right. Whereas when you ... I'm just very wary of, you know, it's like all the things that Lee says he gets through the press release, and all those catalogues one gets and looks at, and there's an image and then the writing seems to police it, explain it, put it in [context], and you always feel that actually it's not an equal relationship. The other thing which always bothers me is that the images are never good enough. You can never—unless you spent an absolute fortune—you couldn't print a good enough image. It would always be inferior to the real thing.

SJ: It doesn't do anything about the experience of looking at the image. There's no scale there, there's no relation of going round it or through it. I think images are problematic actually, in catalogues.

AQ: When you said it opens it up, I wanted to know what you meant by 'it' and what it opens up. Does it open up critical discourses, you know: particular ways of thinking that would show people who aren't part of this elitist art discourse you're chatting about? How is it that people think about art? And

therefore it's a bit of an abstraction.

SJ: This is why the text, I'm always pushing for them to be very different, so that in fact it could be a story. We have had some good texts, which have been narrative, storytelling, and don't ever talk about the work.

AC: That's really interesting. I would have put that in the performative category rather than criticism, because then criticism—and by this I mean in its most general sense where it opens up the piece of work, that's what criticism should do, for me anyway—but if it's actually creating a further piece of work, we're talking about it having instigated a ...

SJ: I read from the top of my first card—my prompt card; this was one of my MA student's great ideas—it says: 'Where does the artwork begin and end?' And in fact it's the unanswerable question because as soon as you have finished it, but it's in the gallery, it starts a new life again, doesn't it? Because it doesn't belong to you anymore, and it goes on with whatever gossip people want to take with it for a very long time.

AQ: So David, as a critic, what do you think of that? Where do you stand?

DB: I mean, the argument's interesting because it does incite you to see the work, assuming the text does something. And it's not that, I would like to see an image.

AQ [CONTINUED]: And my question really—well that's nice—my question was actually, following on from what Steph said, the piece of writing that you then make about the work, do you see it as this, in a performative way? Or, you know, as Lee's explained, sometimes you can produce work without a visual referent.

DB: I thought that the whole programme was, in a way, like using allegory, where the visual work is its own thing and someone is—to use an old-fashioned word—'inspired' by that to do something, which is what Sophie Calle's done in her work. And in fact her work is the inspiration everybody

else got from reading her letter, which is a wonderful idea, in a way. And that's what I think it does, so the text becomes its own thing. Now if that makes you want to see the work, that's great. If it doesn't, then it has its own value. Well, I think that's OK but maybe it's an institutional anxiety about the normalcy of that relation. I think it is quite an unusual project because usually if there was a catalogue the writer would probably get left out, or shoved to the back, or whatever.

JH: And of course it's served us well in the first number we did because people did say, 'Oh this is unusual' and of course it had a very set format, and I don't just mean in terms of design, but in terms of the concept of it, and because it didn't come with glossy images and people did come back to us and say, 'What's this then?'

DB: It creates a kind of enigma.

JH: Yeah, this was quite a deliberate intent on our part.

DB: Are you disagreeing?

SJ: No, no I was just thinking about Sophie Calle and one of the ... one of the bits that I liked the most, and I'm suddenly a bit cross with myself because it's the one where the translator has interpreted it from French into English and her footnotes—the list of footnotes—it's really intriguing because there's a whole process going on there where it's interpretation from one language—it doesn't matter what that is—into another—and it doesn't matter what that is either—but it's the given constructs from each of those that are trying to meet each other.

AC: Lost in translation.

SJ: Well I don't know, I thought it was really interesting that point. And that, to me, is the pivot from which then you kind of go out to see the rest of it. I think it's fantastic that.

AQ: Is there a kind of scrutiny? Because I write in Portuguese and I translate into English. I have this—I scrutinise things—and if a sentence could mean several things I have to know about these and then decide which one is more appropriate, and I get all these different ... was there any element of that?

SJ: Yeah I think it's worth going and having a look at it and reading it, because she is really investigating the ways in which language is used, and she explains why she's used a certain phrase and why she's used punctuation in certain areas to control the meaning of it, and so I started to think, 'Well, who does this actually belong to now?' In fact in the end, I started to question the authenticity of the e-mail in the first place, which is an interesting place to get to because it's ... somebody came by and said to me, somebody last week—an artist friend of mine—and said, 'It's a PhD that show'. And I thought, 'Yeah, perhaps it is, there is a hell of a lot of research and investigation and it looks like one, too'.

[1:41:27]

AC: It's aimed at a certain professional class of ladies ... there's one caption, with the English translation, and a group of people rushed up behind me to watch it, it was quite crude: this English lady was being filmed with her cat, and the cat was licking its arse. And at that point, ten to 15 people walked away; that took away from the whole point of the piece, I thought.

SJ: Actually it was licking its balls.

JH: We should wind it up now. Laura is there anything that you would like to say? Or Lee?

LM-F: I'll just say the words that are in my head actually, just the fact that, you know, I think that *text+work* as a project is most valuable where the two things have that slight distance, that is like the plug and the beautiful woman, and the space in between those things rather than being prescriptive.

JH: Where things become different from their original intention, and that's

what makes the partnership really good.

LM-F: Yeah.

LT: The question I'm going away with now, based on what you've just been talking about, is this idea of translation, because it's always the translation from French to English which highlights that kind of dilemma and the translation of the visual into the textual, and I think what I might be trying to do, or the question that I'm asking myself now, is: 'Oh is this one of the problems that you're trying to sidestep?' that I want to sidestep the whole business of translation and do something else, with writing in response to work rather than trying to translate it.

LM-F: Is it loss or gain? The translation.

LT: Yeah, and I just kind of want to maybe step out of that dynamic and do something else. Good luck.

JH: Good luck. David, anything?

SJ: I want to change the name of *text+work* to 'stuff + nonsense'.

JH: No. Any further comments that anyone would like to make? Comments rather than questions, otherwise—it'd be great—we'll be here till midnight, but any comments?

AC: 'Ego versus ego', I think.

JH: Ego versus ego? As a suggestion, hmm.

SJ: It's the 'versus' that's interesting. It's the '+' between the 'text' and the 'work'.

JH: Thank you for coming and thank you for being such a participative, not so much audience but group. It's been a really interesting evening, I've

enjoyed it, it's been very good. I did jot down a few things as we went through, but I knew before we started this that it would be impossible to summarise, and I wouldn't even attempt to because the whole reason we are all interested in this is that of the sort of multiplicity and the diversity of the possibilities and the potentials in that relationship of text to work. Thank you all. Thank you Steph, thank you David, thank you Lee, thank you Laura.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> From Roland Barthes, 1977. *Image-Music-Text*, 'The Death of the Author', edit and translation by Stephen Heath, New York: Hill and Wan.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 'The Photographic Message'.

<sup>3</sup> See Umberto Eco, 1982. *Thinking Photography*, 'Critique of the Image', edited by Victor Burgin, London: Macmillan.

<sup>4</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, 1997. *Essays Critical and Clinical*, translation by Michael A. Greco, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>5</sup> David Bate is paraphrasing Robert Storr, 2007. *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense*, Venice: Marsilio Editori.

<sup>6</sup> Read Susan Sontag, 1967. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 'Against Interpretation', New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<sup>7</sup> Luce Irigaray, 1991. *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, translation by Gillian. C. Gill, New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>8</sup> See Gavin Butt, 2005. *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963*, Durham: Duke University Press.



## SEMINAR TWO

26 June, 2007

Stephanie James and Professor Simon Olding

Chaired by Jim Hunter



## CRAFTING A VISUAL LANGUAGE

[*Time Flag*]

JIM HUNTER: Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to our second seminar of *text+work*. It is my pleasure to introduce you to our panel for this seminar, which is entitled 'Word Matters: Crafting a Visual Language'. On my left, Professor Simon Olding. Simon is a curator and writer on contemporary craft and art, and Professor of Crafts Study at the University College of the Creative Arts. On my right is Stephanie James: artist, curator, and writer, and Course Leader of the Master's programme at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth. And myself, I'm Jim Hunter. I'm a painter, a writer, and I'm Director of the School of Art at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth.

In the first seminar, 'Spinning a Line', we discussed how text is used in a museum and gallery context, how objects possess or refer to a language—whether writing polices images. Also, we talked about audiences and how or if the audience is a consideration, and we talked of the function of gossip within art discourse, and the possibility that one function of text may be to disrupt our relationship with the object. This evening Simon wishes to talk about writing on contemporary craft practice, current levels of dissemination of writing and practice, and the contribution of the individual, or the poet, to writing on art. Simon may also raise a question about audiences, and this is something we may wish to return to when we have a more open forum. Steph, I believe, is going to talk on trusting your eye: how text may provide an experience analogous to that of viewing the artwork, and share with us her thoughts arising from a consideration of the work of Tatiana Trouvé, in the

Arsenale. After Steph, I will offer my responses on experiencing Bill Viola's contribution to the Biennale. Following our three presentations I hope that we may enjoy a more open conversation between the panel and yourselves as the audience. So firstly, Simon.

SIMON OLDING: Thank you Jim. Well as Jim has alluded, I want to say just a few words about writing on modern and contemporary craft, using the title of this seminar, 'Crafting a Visual Language', as a prompt. I refer to craft as a subspecies, if you like, of the visual arts, and I want to use one or two particular examples of text to illustrate this presentation. Perhaps by way of a personal context, I should say that in my own writing, whether I am asked to write by a potter or a painter, a sculptor or a weaver, I don't make any particular distinction in relation to that definition of craft or art; although I do take approaches to bear in relation to gathering technical understandings of process of methods. I regard these enquiries from artists, or in fact whatever descriptive noun the individual 'artist' asks for, and in the case of three recent essays that was: 'potter', 'ceramicist', and 'I-don't-mind-what-word-you-use-as-long-as-I-see-your-draft-essay-first'.

In 1979, the writer John Houston was commissioned by the Crafts Council to produce a short essay for an exhibition catalogue published on the occasion of Alison Britton's first solo exhibition. Writing on contemporary craft in the late 1970s was a relatively rare and still un-cherished outpost of critical writing on the visual arts. There was no robust or flexible infrastructure to support it; extremely limited national press coverage; patchy connections of interested individuals looking for the speculative opportunity to write; or the occasional exhibition essay. The Crafts Advisory Committee endeavoured to change this by gathering together a small network of craft commentators and applying funds to critical writing through high-quality exhibition catalogues and essays, as well as through the support of *Crafts Magazine*, first published in 1973, and still, to this day, the only specialist/generalist subject journal for the field.

Houston's memorable essay 'Waiting for Alison' was described by the craft historian Tanya Harrod as a '... poetic, adoring evocation of the small world of art-school-trained makers, in the late 1970s and a meditation

on Britton and her work ... an extraordinary piece of prose which went far beyond the usual catalogue essay in intensity and eccentricity. It was also accessible in a way that most fine art writing about avant-garde figures of the 1970s was not<sup>1</sup>. If we jump from 1979 to the present day, what might we say about craft/art writing that is still relevant? Have these richly desired attributes of text, accessibility, intensity, eccentricity survived? Are they still important?

I would say that in my field there have been important advances in dissemination, volume, and image manipulation to contend that the art/craft writer today is in a more privileged and information-rich position. The self-confidence, one might even say the arrogance, of some museum-based text and its decreasing emphasis on overt scholarship has played a part in this. You can hardly move for art words and art text in the places where you might expect to see it: the museum, the museum bookshop, the specialist journal, and the Sunday newspaper. But I should add that if I turned that phrase specifically into the subspecies of contemporary writing about craft, then you would have to look much harder to find text.

The role of the internet has transformed the size, scope, and 24-hour ready availability of critical art writing at every level: from personal blogs to institutional blogs, from substantive university digitisation catalogues, collections, and essays, through to the use of the organisational website as a means of illustrated publication. There are active debates and dynamic arguments about art writing and the content of art undreamt of in 1979. What is more, artists are also prime movers in adding to critical writing through their own websites or through their own mediation of external essays.

Specialist writing is also being promoted at fever pitch by the universities in the UK hungry for research credibility, to poach staff in advance of the research assessment exercise and rateable writing outputs. This industry of art writing has recently received the ultimate academic honour of a dedicated Chair. Goldsmith's College at the University of London has, within the past month, advertised for the new post of 'Professor of Art Writing', calling for '... experience and understanding of the histories of writing produced by artists within the broad field of art production, curation, and reception'. In the field of craft writing specifically, a new *Journal of Modern Craft* is about to

be published, laying out a new theory and critical platform for the subject, giving it a new status and language. A new American history of contemporary modern craft is about to be published, and Glenn Adamson has written a new book, *Thinking Through Craft*<sup>2</sup>, on craft history and theory. *Crafts Magazine* itself has survived calls for its demise, and occupies a place somewhere between a lifestyle magazine, a broadsheet newspaper, an airline in-flight magazine, and a place for the maker's voice. The internet is full of mediated and unmediated new content, greatly and purposively enhanced by digital imagery. It's never been easier to look at virtual art or representations of the real object.

None of this, however, has, I think, stopped the individual's direct need to see the work directly. What has changed, I think, is the shift that has enabled the artist's voice to be heard, unmediated and clear. In my field, there is a strong body of artists who will describe themselves as 'artists and writers', in ceramics, notably: Alison Britton, Emmanuel Cooper, and Edmund de Waal, who have all forged dual careers as makers and writers about making. Eccentric or individualistic approaches to writing, such as John Houston's 1979 text, are valuable simply because they may choose to ignore the conventions of text.

I want to end my remarks by asking this question: When we write, do we know who we are writing for? Critical text and art/craft writing often exists for a minority. Its minority value is not, perhaps, in question. But if minority value excludes audiences or acts against the interests of audiences when it should be there to serve them, we can see that text, especially text written in or for the public domain, can put us off from what we have come to see. There are dangers in the educated text of the museum. Perhaps there's a responsibility for curators and writers as well as artists: to talk together to ensure that 'multiple voices of text' enrich the visual content wherever possible; to give artists space and resources to write; to encourage the discovery of new forms of disseminating content to celebrate the place of the specialist journal, book, essay, or text label; and to add new means of the distribution of the word to enrich what is after all the primary experience of seeing and reflection.

JH: Thank you Simon. Steph do you want to pick up at this point and share your thoughts? Tatiana Trouvé and other things.

STEPHANIE JAMES: Yeah. OK. I was going to read but everyone else has read something so I'm going to try not to do that, I'm just going to use my memory. I've been engaged with looking at and teaching art for far too many years, I'm not going to tell you how many, but I have found the way in which I want to look at it: the best way to look at it is never to read about it first, always to go and see it. So I try very, very hard not to read reviews, I don't want to see any panel texts, and this goes for museums as well—the big museums, the kind that lead you into how you should think. So I want to trust my eyes, I know that my eyes are educated eyes, I've been looking at art for a long time, I've been discussing art and teaching art for a long time, but it's like going on holiday with a camera and you photograph everything you see in the museum but you don't actually look at it. You've framed it through your camera and you go home and you think, 'Well what was that about?', and you've just got this series of images and they don't really connect to your experience. So I have banned myself from doing that, and also from reading text, because it takes you into a frame of mind that somebody else has put you in. Perhaps I would like to talk about the art with somebody who's seen it before I go and see it, and that's quite good because ... we talked last time about gossip and how you can learn about work through what people say about it.

I wanted to sort of look at how I experienced a piece of work by Tatiana Trouvé, and I don't know anything about this artist but as I was wandering through the Arsenale, and I'm sure you've been there, at the Venice Biennale, in the Arsenale there is part of Robert Storr's curated exhibition, and you can buy the catalogues for it, and this is all part of it. Anyway, I'm wandering through this very, very long building—it used to be a rope factory, it's a bit like a train depot because it's long and thin, and the artists kind of display in a long and thin winding way—I'm walking through and I'm always looking for something like a hook, to grab me, to say: 'Ah that's interesting, I'll just go and have a look at it'. So I'm waiting for this to happen to me, I'm walking past a lot of art and it doesn't do it, and eventually I see this small door in the wall and I think, 'Ah, a small door', and I think *Alice in Wonderland*, I think of my son, Felix—who is in another country and I miss him—so I

go towards this small door and I realise it's part of a big installation, it's glass fronted, and I'm looking into this glass space at some objects that are trapped behind this glass and I start to think about zoo. Am I waiting here for feeding time, you know, who lives in this space? Is it an animal? Is it a child? I can see a small bed frame that could be like a trampoline, maybe it's a bed frame—it's been manipulated, because it's weird shaped and I think, 'Child: a child lives here'—and I look around at all of the objects and I see these metal rods that have been covered in leather and they've been woven with the leather to look like reinforced metal. I think, 'Reinforced metal, bed frame' ... and then I see these stainless-steel balls hanging from this frame and I think, 'They're odd, a cluster of jewel-like balls', and I realise they're bells—maybe they're sleigh bells, and I go back to my animal. Perhaps this is a stable. Perhaps a pony lives here with a child. Then I think about my son again, I think about *Alice in Wonderland*, and I turn around and I see a whole pile of these bells hanging on leather straps over a small pony shape. I think, 'I'm on the right track here: it's a pony, it's a child-pony'. No it's not, it's maybe just one of those forms from gym class that you jump over when you're learning to—what's it called, the vault?

JH: Vaulting.

SJ: Vaulting. That's what it is, it's a vault. But it's definitely a little pony as well because it's kind of got a saddle on it. Maybe it is a saddle, maybe it isn't a saddle. And I start to think it's sad. I get this overwhelmingly sort of sad feeling about the work because it doesn't allow me in. It's another world, you know, and I realise how sad the work is and I suddenly look through the space again and I see a mirror, and there I am, reflected back to myself in this mirror, and there I am looking very sad, and then I'm convinced that the work has led me to that situation, because it's not answering any questions that I have. Yet there are little indications that maybe I do know something about it and maybe I don't. It's familiar to me yet it's a stranger ... [i.e.,] the work. And then I think, 'I like this work'. I'm trying to corral everything I know about it. I like the word 'corral' because there's pony, stable, child, and I like this idea that I'm going to corral together all of the signifiers that don't signify anything because I can't get to the end of every thread that I follow. And I realise that

the work is taking me to a state of mind where I am so dependent on answers, and it won't give me any, that I'm now rationalizing and I'm thinking, 'No, why do you always want answers?', and I start to have this little argument with myself across this mirrored space and I think: 'This is good work'. This is good work because it hasn't shown me anything, particularly. It hasn't allowed me an end point, if you like. A full stop. What it's done is opened things up. So then I went over to the little sign on the wall and it said 'Untitled', so there wasn't even a way in through the title. So then all I had was me and this very well-crafted work, and I started to look at the way it was made: it was made beautifully. And that was another whole part of it, the crafting of the work. And I started thinking about museums and collections and looking behind glass at objects when they're trapped behind glass, and this zoo-like thing then became a very important aspect of it—zoo, museum, glass case. And then I came away thinking, 'Right, I'm going to read about the work'. And Robert Storr asked all of the artists to send a piece of writing to him. He didn't want anything that they'd written, he wanted something that gave insight to the audience, and so this is the only insight I have into this artist. Maybe you know more about her, but I don't know anything about her apart from what I've seen and what I'm going to read to you. This piece of writing is by Fernando Pessoa and it's from *The Book of Disquiet*. I think it's an excerpt from 'The Serpent's Tale':

Their inability to say what they see or think is a cause of suffering to most people. They say there is nothing more difficult than to define a spiral in words; it's necessary, they say, to describe it in the air, with one's illiterate hands, using gestures, spiralling slowly upwards, to show how that abstract form, peculiar to coiled springs and certain staircases, appears to the eye. But, as long as we remember that to speak means to renew language, we should have no difficulty whatsoever in describing a spiral: it is a circle that rises upwards but never closes upon itself. I know perfectly well that most people would not dare to define it thus, because they imagine that to define something one should say what other people want, and not what one needs to say in order to produce a definition. I would go further: a spiral is a virtual circle which repeats itself as it rises but never reaches fulfilment. But, no, that's still abstract. If I make it concrete all will become clear: a spiral is a snake, which is not a snake, coiled vertically around nothing.<sup>4</sup>

JH: Thanks Steph. Let me turn to my pages, because I am going to read this out and it's important that I read it out. That was great Steph: extemporising on your thoughts, but you'll see the connection here about why I wish to read this out and what it means. And I want to share with you some thoughts that I had arising from my experience this week of one of the exhibitions at the Biennale: in the *Chiesa di San Gallo* in Bill Viola's *Ocean Without a Shore*. This is one of the most arresting and engaging works that I have experienced for some time, and it provides a focus for my thoughts on 'Crafting a Visual Language'.

I believe that Bill Viola describes himself as a painter, or at least talks of sharing the concerns of painting—concern for light, shadow, colour, and visual meaning. If not using the form of painting, he shares in the history of painting the concern for the human condition—the transcendental and the sublime—and he shares the craft of painting, crafting a visual language in his choice of medium and technology. This is art. That is: a crafting of visual expression that is thoughtful, deliberate, and refined. Not immaculate or facile, but considered in that every mark or nuance is used to maximum effect in creating or constructing a reality that enables us to reflect upon our *own* experience of our *own* reality. The construct is simple: three video projections with people filmed, individually, as they come from the shadow and walk slowly through a curtain of water, coming out into the focus and colour, standing, before turning and returning through the curtain of water. Some put their hands out in supplication, adoration, or as an instinctive, protective or defensive gesture; some bow their heads, some raise their hands to their heads. All are ordinary people, old and young, man and woman. I do not know of Bill Viola's directions to them. They are not actors. I imagine that he asked them to remain as impassive as possible: to not act. And through an absolute control or absence of drama, he gives us the most profound expression of humanity. We imagine or feel their hesitation, or flinching, as they approach the water, breaking into the deluge. They are, variously: submissive, resilient, defiant, regretful, sorrowful, or hopeful. They, of course, speak to us through their simple actions and the simple construct of the work, of other

languages, and the language of religion—of baptism, immersion, of birth, life, and death. That they are so apparently ordinary people is important: they are us, connecting with us on the experience of life and the sublime. The projections are on-screen, set on the three altars of the *Chiesa*; they are works of reverence and worship, and in keeping with the history and language of religious art. Bill Viola is crafting a visual language in his art in a way that is not always evident in the multiplicity of current video works. His work shows us that such a visual language can be crafted, and that, most powerfully, this draws upon the history of art's visual language and our own need to have a language that speaks to us directly on the profundities of our existence.

So, I've read that out. I wrote those words directly after my experience of Bill Viola's work, coming out from the *Chiesa* into the sunlight of the square and sitting down with a coffee and writing straight into my sketchbook in pencil. The words I have read out are unmediated and an immediate account of my thoughts on my experience of the work. And I did not look at or read the pamphlet available at the exhibition until the next day. I then found that the pamphlet's text validates much of my own reading of the work. That Viola embraces technology to convey fundamental human states, and that, quoting, 'Overall, Viola thus manipulates precise objective means to explore meta-physical subjectivity', as David Anfam, the curator, writes<sup>5</sup>. So I pondered, 'Could I have written my words if I had, instead, sat down with my coffee and first read David Anfam's words? Would my thoughts have been prescribed by his?' Of course, in my writing I would have had to refer to Anfam's words as I have now just done—those are the conventions of writing—but the subsequent reading of the pamphlet brought further meaning to my experience of the work. It gave me references to other cultures and their beliefs on the presence of the dead in our lives. The text helped me to connect with other, non-Western cultures and the 12th-century Sufi mystic Ibn al'Arabi. The poem offered in the text by the Senegalese poet Birago Diop brought another resonance to my experience and subsequent thoughts. So this led to further thinking around the relation of writing to art practice, of text offered to us as part of the experience of art, or text that seeks to disseminate a view or interpretation of that art. In our first seminar the panel had commented on how much critical writing on contemporary art was no longer critical. That is, that it did not offer the reader a critical judgement, a qualitative assessment of

good, bad, relevant, irrelevant, or whatever. Rather it turns to description, or interpretation, or narrative.

Elsewhere in the Biennale, I visited a national pavilion and found myself in a building with walls and ceilings decorated with Mannerist paintings of the cycle of purgatory from the 17th century<sup>6</sup>. Installed in this space were four canvases by a South-American painter in which he sought to look at an abstract language for painting by revisiting the visual codes or devices of Cubism; the postmodern exploration of the manner of art surrounded by the late-1600s Mannerist legacy. In the accompanying leaflet, the curator writes of the wish to provide ‘... an anachronic framework’ and the attempt ‘... to establish an indifferent coexistence, knowing that, without our help, the layers of history implicit in each groups of works will act and interact’<sup>7</sup>. ‘Surely’, I thought, ‘this is why, in this diverse and pluralistic world, the writing about and around the art is so important. Not to make value judgements or to police our responses but to help us in making the connections, seeing the references, and from that, making further connections and making sense for ourselves’.

So, we’ve made our three presentations—applause later, when you’ve contributed; the applause will be for all of us—we would like to open it up—I’ve written down questions while I’ve been listening to my colleagues—but I’d far rather that we could open it up—not questions perhaps, comments, contributions, thoughts.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** What do you see as the main objective of your role as you write on art? And your service and contribution to the public, who may have problems or difficulties understanding at the level that you are understanding art.

**JH:** I do have an answer to that. I’m not going to pass over, but I wondered, Simon, would you like to come in?

**SO:** For me, that’s a really crucial point because my day job, so to speak, in terms of writing, is to create or construct a narrative that will carry some meaning to an audience or audiences who I will never meet. My approach, and it is just a personal response, is to try to undertake that writing, first to be factually correct, second to be explicit, but third to try to find ways of

incorporating the words and thoughts of the maker on whom I am writing, in such a way that they are comfortable with what I've said. And I haven't, I have to say, always found that easy or straightforward, particularly when I've been in situations where a maker has been uncomfortable with a view that I've expressed. And in those situations I've found that sometimes you have to go through quite a painful negotiation, because there must be writing value on both sides. But I'd rather, and again this is just a personal response, feel that there was something in what I'd said that carried their *imprimatural* approval. But I can entirely understand that that is just one way of approaching it and it will stop a confrontational, or aggressive, or arrogant writing. But that's just a personal judgement. But I do try to think about an audience beyond the words, so to speak.

SJ: I really wish that people—it doesn't matter how much they know about art and I know that I said before that I'm coming at it from an educated viewpoint ... I suppose my eight-year-old son is also educated now because he's my son, but at the same time he's very good at responding and talking about work—I really want people to say: 'What am I looking at? What's in front of me? What do I think about it? And what little clues can I put together?' Unfortunately, or fortunately, artists are always referring to other artists and I think what Jim was talking about was that Bill Viola was referring to Catholicism, painting, the history of painting, the purpose of painting in religion, and it was a language in its own right. And I think we have lost the knack, there is a kind of lost experience. Let's just look at it and then read about it later, and to trust our own views, because when I had my experience with Tatiana Trouvé, and then I read what she had put in [to the book, *Pages in the Wind. A Reader*<sup>3</sup>], I put those two bodies of knowledge together and I've got this really open-ended relationship with the work now. What I haven't done is read a critique of it or read a theoretical perspective on it. How do you relate to work? How do you see it?

AQ: I find that, having visited a number of American museums and seeing their attitudes towards the public, it is not one of: 'We know it all, you don't have to worry about it we'll show you, it doesn't matter to us if you understand anything or not'—understanding not just in the head but emotionally.

Now, they don't have that attitude. They try to explain to the public that: 'This is what it could mean' or: 'This is what the artist had in mind'. But in a multicultural world we don't understand the symbols anymore. We don't understand the languages, the pictorial language of our own culture anymore. Try to go with a person from another culture, like I did. I went with a Chinese gentleman who had just come from China, which is a closed culture, we went to a museum and he said, 'Who is this man who is always on the cross? Why is he so important?' Try to explain. And he didn't understand what the saints did, or particularly the Evangelists, or whatever. That was meaningful before in art, namely: the spiritual space that we occupied through religion or whatever. How do we access that world, now that it is a secular world? And yet, our subconscious still supplies us with a lot of material to work with, with these symbols, however inconvenient they may be. So what is it that you do to clarify that? And I believe—I'm sorry to say—that very few people do a good job.

[26:56]

SJ: I have in amongst my papers some excerpts from the British Museum's guidelines [Victoria and Albert Museum] for museums in Britain to write texts for the artefacts that they have in their institutions<sup>8</sup>. And it's not just the text, not the panel text, it's leaflets, it's PR, it's all kinds of promotional things, and it's about 96 pages. It's very thorough on the words you can and can't use, and it talks a lot about being clear, providing the context, developing a house style, never using words like 'East' and 'West', which really don't mean ... or it can be political to use those terms, or it could be about hierarchy and status and power, and it's really interesting. And also how to use humour without overdoing it, they're very, very prescribed in the way in which museum panels are developed for public use, and the reading age is about 12, which I find fascinating. And in a way, in one way, it's a sterilisation. What I want to see on the panel text when you go up to it, it says: 'Think about it for yourself. Just trust it.'

AQ: Just that if you think for yourself: 'Trust it' ... well, I was interested in your preliminary remarks that you went through and: nothing. You just

went through [i.e., through the Arsénale] and nothing spoke to you, and you were looking for something that would [grab you] and there you planted yourself and obviously had a long interaction with a particular work of art, and you shared it with us. A lot of experiences which automatically point right back to the indeterminacy of the work ... yet you don't talk about the illumination of a lot of other works, but that's implied. You also focussed on one and gave that a lot of attention. And I'm just wondering about the entire significance ... because it used to be, and now I come back to what you were saying [i.e., what the previous audience interlocutor was saying], is that the literal metaphysical context was really quite clear, and then it was finding a means of difference—a bit of coloration, a bit of facial expression, whatever it is—that people could follow. Now, all of these anchor points are left out, they are no longer available to us. Instead we focus on a few things and we put tremendous effort into the potential of art, which really, originally, was meant to be a whole lot simpler, you know, by eliminating the context and so on, we were supposed to have the immediate experience, but exactly the opposite is happening: we keep talking and talking and talking, and I've even read text that says: 'Modern art without language does not exist.' You have to explain, you have to have some kind of interpretation for these works to have any significance. So I wonder where that's going and whether this is just an intermediate stage where we're still looking for significance at a time when we're no longer supposed to?

SJ: Yeah I think there is a disjuncture. I think there's a disjuncture and we may not be talking about what's happening at the right time that it's happening; we're either following it or in front of it, I feel that all the time. For example, I'm interested in art language, and Joseph Kosuth and that group of people that were clear that an art object had its own language, and that it was in front of you and it told you how to read it. It became like a being, embodied with language of its own, and that you connected to one of its ... you know: 'How To' ... you'd ask it a question and it would answer it, or it would tell you what it was made out of and what era it was from and whether it was made by a female or a male; it would give you a lot of information and what it was referring to without having to read it. So they were talking about that primacy, the primary source being the object itself rather than the secondary source, which

is possibly the language that's written and developed through a very different kind of way of thinking, I don't know. I think it's a very good point though, I think it's a disjuncture.

AQ: I have a very simple question. Why do we have to explain everything? For what? Why do we have to explain art? For what? Did we ever explain the Old Masters? What is the difference that we have to explain contemporary art?

JH: Well perhaps we don't have to explain it and it perhaps comes back to the first question.

AQ [CONTINUED]: I work in an auction house, I'm a broker, and people want us to have an explanation. I don't think there is an explanation for it, because it takes so much away from our souls. Everything has to be pointed out.

JH: But there's nothing more—if you're a practitioner, if you're an artist—there is nothing more dispiriting when you're showing your work—and this is the climax of months or years of endeavour and you've made these pieces, whatever it is; paintings, sculpture, installation—and you're stood there with a glass of wine and people come in and engage and share in this, and then somebody will say: 'Explain it to me'. Well, I spent three years doing this. *Explain it to me*. And of course it needs to be looked at and one hopes it will explain itself. Not immediately, and of course it's part of our modern culture where we want things to be immediate, but in the history of paintings they never were immediate. You'd have to look at them again and again and they'd slowly, slowly reveal their meaning. The other thing is we probably fondly think that—as we look at the Titians and Tintoretts in Venice—that 'Everyone who went in those churches understood the paintings.' I'm not sure they did, but eventually perhaps people did know the stories, learnt the symbols, and learnt to read at least the narrative in the painting. The trouble is we don't have those narratives in the artwork anymore, and it comes back to the first question, whereby perhaps one of the functions of the writing or the need to explain is: to be given some way of making comparisons, that, I'm looking forward to my dinner tonight and I will know whether it's good or

not because of all the other dinners I've eaten, and of course you judge things by—and you know more about art—by referring to your earlier experiences of it, which is always why it's very frustrating when people say: 'Explain it to me'. Where are you starting from with that question? What are the comparisons you already have for me to begin talking to you about it? And I think that's part of the function of what writing on art is though. It's to help people make comparisons and to open up ... oh alright then: the menu. To open up what you can refer to.

AQ: Just in what you were explaining: in being able to explain or trying to have explanations for a painting. I find that—a lot of times when I go to view any artwork—that, as Steph said about trying to look at it before, I look at whatever, the title or information on what the piece is, and I also find that many times, coming back and then looking at the piece, it's not the feeling that I got, or the title that I got from it. So how, as a writer, do you go about explaining something in trying to give a universal meaning to it, so that maybe one person who goes and views it doesn't feel, 'Oh maybe I looked at it wrong and I have to go and look at it again'.

JH: And perhaps it's an ultimately futile endeavour to try—in two paragraphs on a card, on a wall—to sum up something that has that amount of complexity, and to the diversity of people who will be looking at it.

SJ: But I don't think it's wrong. Whatever you see in the painting is right, and then whatever is written is another experience. If those two things don't match then I think: 'It's interesting that they don't match, but neither of them is wrong'. I think you should trust the fact that what you've experienced is what you've been given and what you've taken to it.

SO: I think that's true. Many times you write a museum label and in the writing of the label you want to be seen to be neutral, you don't want the author's voice to be heard. But actually, perhaps we should be doing it in a different way and make it explicit that the author's voice and the author's name is prescribed on the label, because it is *but a view*, it might set up a particular set of contexts. And I think that perhaps there is a role for that more kind of

personal writing. I think we don't use the words of artists themselves enough in those descriptive texts, partly because it is the job, so to speak, of the museum curator to come to the view to write the label that is the carefully honed assimilation of knowledge and presented in this neutral way, when in fact it's entirely un-neutral, it's always personal, and it's good because of that, I think.

AUDIENCE COMMENT: In my travel guide to Venice it says: 'You see what you know', and I think it's also true for art. We may understand it in the head—emotionally, spiritually, whatever—but I think a certain precondition has to be there in order to see a picture, and whether it's subjective or objective is another matter ... Terrible writing exists on art, and that puts people off. How do you communicate what is essential? Because a label that gives to me: 'This painting is one-by-one-fifty metres'—where does it take you? But this is what you get in many museums—and maybe the painter, perhaps even the country where he worked or lived. You say, 'Oh, what's this? How does that fit in?' And knowing that it's one-by-one-fifty is not that essential. And I think well-written catalogues and well-written labels or an introduction to, let's say, artists' exhibitions, are usually good if the curator thinks a little bit and doesn't just hang it up like laundry, which also sometimes happens, and then you know, 'Aha this is what it's all about', and then you go in and you fully enjoy it.

SO: No, I think that it's a kind of vulnerable game, but we mustn't stop writing even though we write well, we write badly. We don't train museum personnel to write in the UK, there's no course you can go on to learn how to do it, you do it by experience, or selection, or choice—it's kind of hit or miss, actually. But I don't think we should stop writing anymore than we should stop making pots, I think it's a continual voyage of discovery. I think we could do more if we did train and test, actually, and maybe we should start doing that.

AC: I think that all these commentaries, whether it's titles or whatever, are just enriching the context—they are not any kind of definition, there's nothing definitive about any kinds of words that go with the painting—and that has to be understood, it just enriches the context. And in literary theory it's been accepted for a long time that the ultimate meaning or significance, all the different types

of meaning of a work of art, of a literary work of art, surpass the writer's intention, the words of the writer—in a really good work of art—the writer is not fully aware of everything that she has put into that written work, and we assume that it's just a work. That is obviously even truer of a painting, where the words are missing. And so, by definition, you engage in discourse with the painting you saw that other people have enriched the context of ... If I talk with an artist [and relate my interpretation of their work] there's an initial objection, a little like 'Humph, no, no, no', and then they say, 'well, maybe ...'. And that enriches their experience. So I think it's ongoing.

[51:23]

JH: Good. I'll come to this lady here.

AQ: In your research, do you also give room to other disciplines like political scientists, for instance? I had a guided tour in Vienna by a woman who was specialising in Gender Aspects and she showed us—with all the pictures—to what extent attitudes are reflected in the way pictures are presented, and it was really an eye opener. And you could imagine that this aspect could be generalised.

SJ: I think that's really interesting. I'm in the middle of organising an exhibition—in the Russell-Cotes Museum—of contemporary artists. So I'm putting contemporary work in the museum, and I'm inviting school children—aged 15, from Poole High School—to come and do tours for the public, on Saturdays, but they've had no guidance or background on the work. So they are going to say whatever they want, whatever they see, whatever they feel, and they have open license to talk about it in any way they want to. And I noticed that they're doing it at the *documenta* [the major art exhibition held quinquennially in Kassel, Germany], I don't know if any of you are going on to the *documenta*, but they are also doing the same idea with school children who are uninformed about the exhibition, just taking the public through and having a conversation with them about whatever they find.

JH: And of course the children will see things at face value and will immediately

respond, which isn't contradicting what we say; you need to make connections, but also accept things as you see them.

SJ: Yes.

AQ: So far it seems like there are two channels here: one is critical writing, and I think that's what you were talking about, Simon; while the other is the writing that's attached to a work, and I just feel like they're totally different things. That any text panel is for a very broad public, well in fact, that should probably be audience, and in fact critical writing is for an informed audience, usually ... I feel that there are lots of obligations on the part of the writer. And I really end up on the Bill Viola issue, and say, you know, look at his past works. I don't think you can talk about that work without looking at his history. I found it very similar to his other works, and I think that there are issues that really need to be raised if you're addressing it to an art audience as opposed to, you know, putting it in a pamphlet or handbill for people looking round the exhibition here. And I guess I'd address it to Simon: What are the obligations that you'd accept? For example: Do you write about someone whose work you don't like?

SO: No. I mean, that's a very, very shrewd question because the answer is: 'No I haven't'. It's partly because, I'll be completely frank, I broadly write on demand. I don't have a plan for writing over the next five years. There are things that I would love to write and work I'd love to write about, but broadly—I suppose it's no more than unspeakable vanity, and I feel extremely exposed in saying that—if I'm going to write I like there to be an outcome, I like it to be somewhere, wherever that thing might be. And therefore my tendency has been—and I think this is a weakness not a strength, actually—and I feel more comfortable, writing about works of those I'm either familiar with or actually feel comfortable talking about in a positive environment. The difficulties I have had personally have been where I have attempted to take a kind of critical, not an unfriendly or an unpleasant line, because there's something I need to say that has actually rubbed-up hard against an artist, and I've found those

negotiations really rather difficult. But that's just the way I happened to have done things.

SJ: I'm going to pick up on your point about Bill Viola. I don't actually like Bill Viola's work at all.

AC [CONTINUED]: I used to.

SJ: *I used to!*

AC [CONTINUED]: It's when I started seeing more and more of the same thing.

SJ: And hopefully—because Jim you don't like it either—hopefully when I go and see this piece it might actually be the first time it's found a right place for it to work. I don't know. I've seen it in so many different contexts, Bill Viola, it never fits its site, its space, its location—it doesn't work with it. I can't see the significance of it.

JH: I was intrigued by myself on this, because yeah, I'm aware of Bill Viola's work and I've seen it over the years and I've not been particularly interested or moved by it. I've even seen it in a particular installation in Durham Cathedral in the North East of England, which: 'No, no, no, not particularly'. And I didn't go into this expecting to be struck by it, I was walking past on my way to something else and I thought, 'Ah the Bill Viola, I'll go in and see it', and came out an hour-and-a-half later. Now it could be just my frame of mind and because I was thinking around certain issues about how an artist may craft a visual language, I just came out, sat down, and wrote it; straight away. Yes, it could be that if I'd been more aware of all the previous work I'd seen and what I'd read about, and had that in my mind, I might never, if you like, have seen the wood, I'd have been too involved with all the: 'Oh yes, well he's done that before and this before'. But just the experience of that work, that one time, made me come out and say: 'Well what does that mean about my thoughts on this?' And it wasn't particularly meant as a critique of his overall work, it was: How do you respond to one work? And: How do I find in that what the artist is trying to say with a language? There's a whole other talk about critiquing his whole work.

AQ: Well I guess that *that* maybe comes back to the point about the writing. Because it was then sort of a one-rule perspective; but if you're actually taking on the work, is there an obligation to provide a broader context?

JH: Yes.

AQ: But why does he have to change so much? Is it because of the medium? If he was a painter would you expect there to be like ... ?

AC: I get bored of painters who do the same stuff too.

AC: I had a different reaction. When the water was coming out I was like 'Oh, here it is again.'

JH: Here it is again. Yeah.

SJ: I want to say something about craft because we did come here to talk about craft. My education was in Canada, and in Canada there is—you can correct me now, because I don't know if it's changed or not—but there was not a craft–art divide, when I was studying. There didn't seem to be a hierarchy of one over the other, but when I came to the UK it seemed that for some reason artists understood themselves to be of a higher activity—art—and that craft was a lower activity, and I was just wondering how that works in other countries, because it might just be something that goes on in the UK. And what I thought was very interesting about the Venice Biennale was the amount of craft used in it, or how craft can be seen in the context of the Biennale as a political gesture. If you take an artist from a country where high art isn't necessarily what goes on there, that it's more about craft, you could actually curate it in a political way, and I was quite interested in how craft is sometimes used to make a point, or socially and politically set out some sort of value about why we make what we're making. I don't know if you've found that yet, around the show?

AQ: Wasn't that an issue already, in the history of art?

SJ: I remember Rose Gerard or was it Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton?—I can't remember which feminist position—or maybe it was Hilary Robinson. One of those writers and curators actually took a housewife and put her up on this podium and said, 'This is the artist', and we were like 'Gosh' [*accompanied by rapid inhalation to indicate shock*]. And from then on, once you realised that in fact *that* potentially *might* be the artist the whole thing changes, doesn't it? And I think that the craft is being used in a similar kind of way.

SO: One final word. I once commissioned an essay from a very eminent potter to write about the history of a museum collection, in a book of essays, and he completely and utterly ignored the brief, he didn't respond to it at all, which was a great joy and a relief because it was actually a very beautiful essay in which he concluded: '... there's no time left for a craft-art debate because we've been having it far too long', and the less we think about it—I think in the UK it's a particular problem—then the easier it is to just kind of loosen the stays and get on with things really.

JH: Loosen the stays? Is that a concluding statement from you? It was a good one. Steph?

SJ: Look first. Read later.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> From Tanya Harrod, 1999. *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, London: Yale University Press. The text Tanya Harrod is referring to is John Houston, 1979. *The Work of Alison Britton*, 'Waiting for Alison', London: Crafts Council.

<sup>2</sup> Forthcoming from Berg Publishers; available December, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Pages in the Wind. A Reader*, texts chosen by the artists of the 52nd International Art Exhibition, Venezia: Marsilio.

<sup>4</sup> See Fernando Pessoa, 1991. *The Book of Disquiet*, translation by Alfred Mac Adam, New York: Pantheon Books.

<sup>5</sup> David Anfam, 2007. *Ocean Without A Shore*, © Art Ex.

<sup>6</sup> The Exhibition Jim Hunter goes to view elsewhere in the Biennale is Guillermo Kuitca's *Si Yo Fuera el Invierno Mismo [If I Were Winter Itself]* in the *Argentine Pavilion*, 52nd International Art Exhibition, Venice, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> The accompanying catalogue essay is by Inés Katzenstein, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> See *Victoria and Albert Museum British Gallery Text Guidelines*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2003.





## SPEAKERS' NOTES

JIM HUNTER is Director of the School of Art at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth and Chair of the *text+work* Gallery group. He graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1976. Since then he has pursued his practice as a painter and was awarded sabbatical leave by the Institute in 2005. He used this time to produce a substantial body of new work, informed by visits to Italy. His research questions the capacity of watercolour to articulate and carry meaning within the context of contemporary critical discourse. The culmination of his research was *A Short Grand Tour*, exhibited in the Institute's gallery as part of the *text+work* programme, the accompanying text was written by Professor Simon Olding.

LEE TRIMING is an artist and a writer. Since graduating from Goldsmiths College, University of London, his work has been widely exhibited. He has written about the work of Chloe Piene, Lisa Prior, and Craig Fisher, among other accompanying exhibition essays. Since 2000, he has contributed regularly to *Flash Art*.

DAVID BATE completed his PhD at the University of Leeds and is currently Reader in Photography at the University of Westminster, London. His photographic works have been shown widely in contemporary galleries, most recently at the Istanbul Photography Biennale, 2006. His writing has appeared in many journals, including *Afterimage* (US), *Source*, *Creative Camera*, *Portfolio*, and *Third Text*. He is also the author of *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, published by I.B.Tauris, 2004. His current research subjects involve memory, time, and photographic space.

PROFESSOR SIMON OLDING has worked extensively within the art and museum sectors since 1979, with roles ranging from specialist curator—in the decorative arts—to senior management positions, such as Director of Policy and Research for the Heritage Lottery Fund. Currently Director of the Crafts Study Centre—University College for the Creative Arts, Farnham—his research focuses on craft histories, ceramics, and public art. He has written widely on contemporary crafts and is a regular contributor to *Ceramic Review*.

LAURA MCLEAN-FERRIS completed an MA in Literature Culture and Modernity in 2005 at the University of Southampton. She is currently co-curating an exhibition on the theme of domestic glitches in language and systems, and is assistant curator and special projects co-ordinator for Fashion in Film Festival, 2008. As Press and Marketing Officer at ArtSway, she wrote accompanying exhibition texts, press releases, and edited art catalogues—always striving to make contemporary art accessible and inclusive.

STEPHANIE JAMES is an artist and the Arts Institute at Bournemouth's MA Course Leader. Her research focuses on curating and the dynamic between space and the creative process. She recently organised *MEETING PLACE: Contemporary Art and the Museum*, an exhibition of contemporary artists and designers at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth. She was the main instigator of the forgoing AHRC-funded project, enabling the *Word Matters* seminars and the production of the *New Forest Pavilion* catalogue.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people and institutions deserve special thanks: The Arts Institute at Bournemouth's staff and Fine Art students: Emily Bailey, Suzie Edwards, Simón Granell, Tom Hall, Stephanie Hands, Paul Horne, Tom Marsh, Violet McClean, Frances Naylor, Emma Purchase, Shawn Randall, Lisa Richardson, Andy Walders, and Victoria Wareham. From ArtSway: Peter Bonnell, Melinda McCheyne, Laura McLean-Ferris, and Mark Segal.

With additional thanks to the speakers and attending audience, to all the staff at the Palazzo Zenobio, and to Matt Wilding for his technical assistance, among many other uncountable things. Also: The Arts and Humanities Research Council, for making this possible.



# text + work

text+work is the defining concept of the gallery program at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth, with the aim of promoting critical discourse around contemporary practice in an equal relationship between writing and making. text+work events and publications do not privilege any particular discipline, art form, or critical position; it is open to those who seek to engage in exhibition and writing on equal terms, providing a platform for the meeting of the two. There are text+work gallery events, critical texts, shared and networked exhibitions, and a text+work website. The creative practice exhibited within text+work is thus made available to a wide audience, many of whom may never visit the gallery: [www.textandwork.org.uk](http://www.textandwork.org.uk).

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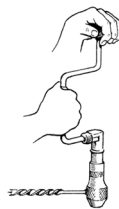
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*New Forest Pavilion* was partnered by the Arts Institute at Bournemouth and SCAN; funded by the Arts Council England, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and Hampshire County Council; and sponsored by Hallett Independent. ArtSway is regularly funded by the Arts Council England, Hampshire County Council, and the New Forest District Council.  
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SHRUG MAGAZINE—responsible for the design and editorial contributions—is a nonprofit literature and visual arts imprint. It features portfolios and conversations by emerging and lesser-known artists; articles of varying length about creative practices and exhibitions; and publishes formal verse that isn't just another declaration of a sunbeam on an unblemished leaf. Care harder.











