

Art Theory – handmaiden of neoliberalism?

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Author's short bio

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Abstract

The Art&Language *Art Theory* course proposal of 1969 was an incisive ideological exposé of the restructuring of art school education as university level education, as a result of the Coldstream Report of 1960. I consider this course proposal together with a paper written by Terry Atkinson some thirty years later, addressed to the Fine Art Board at the University of Brighton reflecting on the reach of art theory in fine art education in 2002. Both Atkinson texts critique the institutional divide that structures fine art education into studio and academic work, which I consider historically, ideologically and from a feminist perspective. Finally, I consider the current dynamics of art theory in fine art education, describing a shift in emphasis and exchange value suggested by a recent article *International Art English, on the rise - and the space - of the art-world* press release by Alix Rule and David Levine, published in 2012.

Art Theory – handmaiden of neoliberalism?

In *'Smash the System'*, the final chapter of my thesis, I look at two events in post-war art education: the Hornsey Sit-in of 1968, and a year later, the course proposal *Art Theory* written by Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, working at Coventry School of Art and Design at that time (Salaman 2008).¹ The Hornsey Sit-in is legendary, coinciding as it did with the biggest student and workers' revolt of the 20th century, in Paris, May 1968. Though focussed on the local politics of art education, the Hornsey Sit-in carries an important reference for today affirming the general potential of students to question the way things are, and demonstrating a method and a practice of open, non-hierarchical discussion as the basis for agenda setting. The *Art Theory* course proposal on the other hand, though much less known, has perhaps been more acutely felt, and had more leverage in the art world and in the art school.

This present paper is the result of my hearing tell of a lengthy external examiner's report by the artist Terry Atkinson, completing that role on Fine Art Critical Practice, University of Brighton, the course I now teach on. After some digging, I found his paper *'A surmised of the present historical position and conceptual content of such courses as Critical Fine Art Practice in the school of Arts and Communication at the University of Brighton.'* Not quite an external examiner's report, but rather, as he says in the preface to the text, 'Extended remarks [...], on my final year as external examiner to CFAP [now known as Fine Art Critical Practice, (FACP)], to the BA Fine Art examination board at the University of Brighton, on June 13, 2002.'²

Atkinson refers to his own history as an artist whose practice includes teaching theory, informally in studio conversations and formally in the suggestions he has made for *how* theory should be taught in art schools. 'At any rate, for better or worse, the equation I have doggedly held to over the past more than thirty years is

¹ My thanks to Dave Rushton, former student and subsequent member of Art&Language, who gave me a photocopy of the unpublished document *Dip.AD Fine Art Policy Statement*, by Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, (1969), from his personal archive.

² I would like to thank Peter Seddon for kindly giving me a copy of the Terry Atkinson unpublished paper (2002) and the National Association of Fine Art Education for asking me to present my thoughts on it at their conference in March 2014. The Design Archives at Brighton have begun work to make the unpublished papers, discussed in this article, available in their archive.

that theory = practice' (Atkinson 2002, 1). This approach has informed Atkinson's teaching as well as his work with Art&Language, and the publication they produced, *Art-Language*. It is not easy to separate the pedagogic from the art practice in the work of Art&Language, and both aspects of the group's early work were a form of institutional critique which contributed to the formation of Conceptual Art, and to Lucy Lippard's descriptive formation 'the dematerialisation of the object of art'.

Below I want to consider these two texts by Atkinson: his paper from a lecture to the fine art exam board, 2002, and the *Art Theory* course proposal from 1969. I am interested in considering these in their distinct contexts and times, but I will look at them together because they offer a critique of the ideological expectations structuring the divide between fine art studio teaching and art history or complementary studies teaching in post-war art education in the UK. Both Atkinson texts propose integrating a critical or theoretical approach in studio art teaching, though the second text is largely a complaint about how this has tended to happen.

Art Theory in the Art School

The aim to integrate a critical, theoretically informed approach in fine art studio teaching has, broadly speaking, been present in *Fine Art Critical Practice* at Brighton for many years. I say *broadly speaking* mainly to slow down the sentence, giving you a chance to smile, because which fine art course would not, today, *broadly speaking*, propose to integrate a critical, theoretically informed approach to studio teaching? The easy global application of such terms in art school module descriptors now only underlines the difficulty of the task at hand – to consider the battle history of these terms, the politics of these terms in post-war art education.

The term 'critical art' can only really make sense in conjunction with a narrative of post-60s art practices which defined themselves as counter to existing studio legacies of painting and sculpture. This negative formation was generative for a range of practices including those employing new media and performance, and/or those discursively reflexive of dissenting political social movements. Similarly, the word *theory* itself amounts to something of a narrative to be considered in this conjuncture, otherwise it becomes little more than a term of abuse or praise, depending on your point of view.

However, unpacking the terms 'critical' and 'theoretical' in the history of art education and modernism, is not the focus here. I have chosen a different tack for this paper, because, what I can't help but notice, looking at these two fragments from the politics of Art&Language in 1969 and the politics of art theory in 2002, is just how different everything seems, now, in 2014. It is not much more than a decade ago that Atkinson wrote his talk, and even though the problems he describes seem familiar, they also seem remote. Maybe this is obvious, but the struggle in art education about the politics of language, the import of language – what language? Whose language? The need, or not, for verbal language, let alone a critical language and history; these very questions, I argue, have changed beyond recognition.

I will describe this shift by way of a third example of the politics of art language - an article by Alix Rule and David Levine, published in 2012, in the online journal *Triple Canopy* called *International Art English, on the rise - and the space - of the art-world press release*. In this they contend that the language found describing contemporary art is particular, not a language in and of itself, definitely not English, though found functioning internationally in high culture as significant and full of meaning. They argue that the value and importance of this language is not to be underestimated as entrance into the international art world is now restricted, they claim, to those who can master *International Art English*. In other words where Art&Language proposed *Art Theory* as a negation, a critique of the bourgeois romantic individual, *International Art English* is now recognised as a form of currency in a global art market, which excludes those who do not speak it.

International Art English offers a different perspective on the relationship of art theory to art education in the present. Their analysis has little to do with the structure or content of art education, and more to do with the recent expansion and spread of art language, (how art is spoken about), the growth of its cultural capital, new geopolitical co-operations in the former Eastern bloc, Asia and elsewhere, alongside the development of the digital continuum and capitalist cyberspace that education and art now exist within. To this we can add, in the UK context, the eclipse of art practice into 'research culture' in the REF, and secondly the marketisation of higher education in the UK, the loss of core government funding, the introduction of, and subsequent increase in fees, alongside the rise in rents and living costs. I am sure that I am not alone in saying that the last few years of teaching art at a university has been

dramatic. Lecturers are now the front-line providers in a fee regime that most opposed and fought against.

Experiments in Fine Art Education; The Coldstream Report of 1960

The *Art Theory* course proposed by Art&Language, then comprising Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge and Michael Baldwin, at Coventry School of Art and Design in 1969 was written for the Quinquennial Review of the NCDAD, the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, chaired by Sir John Summerson. It was the job of the NCDAD to review the newly formed art diplomas following the first report of the National Advisory Council for Art Education, (NACAE) otherwise known as the Coldstream Report of 1960. Coventry School of Art and Design submitted its courses to this first five-yearly review process in 1969 and the *Art Theory* course was approved, with some caution (Salaman 2008, 120).

Art&Language set about writing their *Art Theory* course, which proposed to do away with the distinction between studio work and general studies (complementary studies and art history teaching). Their suggestion was that *Art Theory* would be the name of the studio course and the work done by students in studio for that course, which would include conversations and any texts written, would be considered art works and assessed as such. You can see that the intention was of pure wickedness, an early form of institutional critique; they took the formal structure suggested in the 1960 report and played with it. Their *Art Theory* proposal set out to intentionally challenge the taken-for-granted distinctions and expected outcomes of the practice of studio art.

The *Art Theory* proposal written by Art&Language was for a five-term course to introduce a study of language using analytic philosophy, offering critical readings in the history and ideology of Romanticism and Modernism from a Marxist materialist perspective. Alongside this outline for a curriculum there was a policy statement in which Art&Language assert their view that studio art practice, as such, is as much made up of a critical conversation as it is a material practice of making objects, constructing, drawing or painting. I quote, 'We hope that by adopting a positive attitude to the structure of the course we can do much to overcome the myth of the inarticulate artist and concomitant fear of knowledge' (Atkinson and Baldwin 1969).

The interesting thing about the *Art Theory* course from my point of view is that they identify the 'myth of the inarticulate artist' as a common denominator of fine art studio courses, and they suggest that the new structure of art education brought in after the Coldstream Report – which explicitly aimed to modernise and liberalise art and design education in post-war Britain – was itself informed by this myth.

The Art&Language policy paper describes the division between teaching studio art and teaching art history or general studies as a false dichotomy – built into the new structure of art education, a false dichotomy carried by the commonsense presumption that in studio you make visual art objects and learn a *visual* language and in general studies you listen to lectures, *write* essays and *read* texts. For conceptualists and structuralists, language permeated all social and cultural activities, so the idea that there could be a visual language distinct from verbal language was untenable, and ideological. The new Diploma in Art and Design (Dip.AD), a studio-based curriculum with a bolt-on unit of seminars, essays and academic assessment over three years, made this ideological divide into a material, historical reality. It was this shift or addition that the Coldstream Committee suggested would elevate the Dip.AD to the same level as a university degree, so not only did this new structure rest on a romantic myth of art practice, it also reactivated it, perpetuated it. By assimilating art education into university education, and by segmenting it thus, academic credit was recognised and insisted on in the form of the written essay. (Salaman 2008)

One account of this period at Coventry School of Art and Design is the far from neutral, though at times hilarious, *Art Students Observed* by Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger. This is a Mass Observation publication of an anthropological study done in 1967/1969 at an anonymous art school quite close to Birmingham, referred to only as Midville.³ Here they describe the *Art Theory* course causing mayhem; the general studies staff are bemused by having their roles taken away from them, while the more traditional artists and the school management were

³ Howard Singerman refers to *Art Students Observed* in his "*From My Institution to Yours.*" *Public Offerings*. Eds. Paul Schimmel and Howard Singerman. New York, London: Thames & Hudson, MOCA LA, 2001. Singerman's *Art Subjects* (1999), is an important text when considering the history of modern academic credibility of art study in the USA. Thanks to Tim Dunbar for bringing to my attention Lynda Morris's recent article *Midville*, in *New Art West Midlands* 2013

incensed by the invasion of non-aesthetic concerns into the studio. Many of the students themselves, particularly the female students, describe their confusion and alienation when dealing with the gruff disinterest of their tutors, and the sudden cessation of recognition for their studio efforts (Madge and Weinberger 1973).

Within a few months of setting the *Art Theory* course in motion the tutors were hounded by many, if not all groups making up the fine art school. In no time at all the part-time artists employed to teach *Art Theory* lost their contracts: all except Terry Atkinson who happened to have a permanent contract. The course wound down completely by 1971 and Atkinson resigned.

The project of the *Art Theory* course following the equation theory = practice, in 1969, was more than simply controversial, it destabilised the institution, and the management sought to remove it. For students like Dave Rushton, Kevin Lole and Philip Pilkington, who had been taught by members of Art&Language in their pre-diploma year and saw the potential of such an innovative course, it was very frustrating. A defense campaign was mounted in student newspapers and the art press to raise awareness that the *Art Theory* course was being closed. Their argument was clear – those making punitive management decisions, and they had leaked letters to prove it, were simply not up to date with issues in contemporary art (Pilkinton, Lole, and Rushton 1971).

Hole in the Archive

Atkinson's paper some thirty years later considers the presence and absence of art theory in fine art education following in the wake of his *Art Theory* course. Atkinson takes the institutional demand to write a final external examiner's report as an opportunity to reflect on his own history of involvement in the politics of art language in art education, starting with his point that **conversation** is the medium of all education in the art school (Atkinson 2002). His example of considering art teaching in the absence of language is the experimental 'A' course, which ran at St Martins School of Art from 1969, and which imposed a silent locked studio; students had to remain in the studio and refrain from speaking. In contrast to this, he considers the *Art Theory* course he developed at Coventry for which conversation was not only the teaching method but also the basis of the studio output. He calls the *Art Theory* course an important historical precedent, a progenitor of courses

such as *Fine Art Critical Practice* at the University of Brighton, which he was, at that time, examining.

As has been noted elsewhere, specific art school histories have, on the whole, not been written down and remain in the memories of the students and staff who were involved, and in the art school's own archives. This information tends to walk out the door with students and staff as they leave, or perhaps gets shunted around and then shredded. (Elkins 2001). When I was writing about the *Art Theory* course proposal for my PhD, in 2005, I searched for other Quinquennial Review documents from other fine art schools to compare with the proposal from Art&Language and I drew a complete blank. I was in touch with the archivists of various art schools, including Brighton, Coventry and Chelsea. None could find a single document relating to their first Quinquennial Review carried out for the NCDAD. This was a mandatory review for all art schools offering the new Dip.AD. After requesting the information from the archivist at Chelsea School of Art, I contacted the Metropolitan Archive in London, as Chelsea was funded by Inner London Education Authority at that time, but no luck. I went to the Public Records Office at Kew, no luck, and I spoke to the Open University which now holds the records of the CNAA archive, the body which gave the degree awards, taking over from the NCDAD, but no luck there either.

Atkinson's premise to consider the genealogy of post-war alternative fine art courses, in his 2002 paper, is interesting and timely, but the provenance he suggests is based on loose ideological resemblance, not the reviewing of documents or publications. There is little archival or published material from which to draw.⁴ There has recently been a 150th anniversary of Brighton College of Art, and a celebratory publication produced including historical material gathered from alumni, artists and lectures, including memoirs, news cuttings, posters and art works (Woodham and Lyon 2009). Although nothing specifically describes the emergence of FACP, the chapters covering the late sixties and the student occupation describe calls from students for their art education to be brought up to date. Students wanted a fine art studio course which looked to contemporary art for its context, not to art history.

⁴ See for instance (Atkinson 1992). Here there are recollections by Atkinson at the time, but he admits they are memories, and are not crystal clear.

My attention was drawn to a collection of photocopied sheets, recently deposited in the University of Brighton Design Archives, *The Brighton College of Art Student Information Sheets and News Cuttings, Summer 1968*.⁵ These un-authored documents tell of a range of student meetings, events and actions that took place during a two-week period of occupation and political unrest at the newly built Grand Parade site. The unrest coincided with the Hornsey Sit-in, and evident in these notes is that communication between the two sites was regular. As well as demanding student representation on academic boards and college governance, there were debates about art education and student demands for change. Reading through the notes what caught my attention was an account of a public meeting held on June 2nd 1968 in which John Summerson, the chairman of the NCDAD, was invited to answer questions from students. His reply was noted:

We don't revise diplomas. No let me just explain what my council does. The main function of this council is to examine courses which are submitted to it by Schools of Art. The fundamental principle on which the council acts is that initiation in change in art education is to come from the colleges themselves..... I think I can say that no cause [course] submitted to my council has ever failed to be recognised because it has been too original, or too progressive or too experimental. In fact if you read the Coldstream report you will see that experimental courses are encouraged and looked for. Change is anticipated and it does not come from the Council - it comes from the Colleges of Art (Anonymous 1968).

It was in this context of a **request** for innovation from both the NACAE and the NCDAD that the *Art Theory* course in Coventry, the *Alternative Practice* course at Brighton and the 'A' course at St Martins were established. Atkinson suggests, and I would agree, that the *Art Theory* course was highly influential. Yet there are no published accounts to indicate that the *Art Theory* course was the basis of the *Alternative Practice* course that emerged at Brighton School of Art in 1971, which then became *Fine Art Critical Practice*, many decades later.

⁵ My thanks to Tim Huzar for organizing the symposium *Brighton and Protest* (May 2014) and asking myself, Sue Gollifer and second year *Fine Art Critical Practice* students; Lizzie How, Tilly Sleven, Phoebe Hill, Molly Maher, and Lois McKendrick to present a session about the Brighton School of Art student occupation 1968. See <http://bit.ly/1h7ZF1j>

Alternative Practice was created in response to student demands voiced during the Brighton student occupation of 1968. That does not exclude influence and ideas gained from the example of the *Art Theory* course at Coventry; this course had been written about in the art press and may also have been discussed at student meetings. More research could be done. I would suggest that Atkinson's *Art Theory* course was not exactly a progenitor of *Alternative Practice*, as they were contemporary and therefore, at the time, more like variables; reactions informed by student action and the Hornsey Sit-in, and more specifically, to issues in the modernisation of art education and contemporary art.

As variables, Atkinson's 1969 *Art Theory* course was more strident, more political and more short lived than *Fine Art Critical Practice* at the University of Brighton, which emerged a few years later, and has had to reinvent itself a few times over the years, and is still running. That re-invention over the decades would be an interesting history to plot. No doubt we would trace an ideological influence of Terry Atkinson, Art&Language and their *Art Theory* course. Of equal influence, perhaps, would be the *Critical Fine Art Practice* course set up at St Martins by Anne Tallentire and Monica Ross.

Atkinson's paper *A Surmisal of the present historical position and conceptual content of such courses as Critical Fine Art Practice [FACP] in the School of Arts and Communication at the University of Brighton* (Atkinson 2002), is twenty-seven pages long and is divided into two sections: structure and content. In the first section he considers where and how 'theory' enters into fine art courses and makes his own practice and approach clear. He offers 'theory' as practice, a conversational aspect or element of studio teaching. He observes that this is less common, and that most courses opt for the traditional division from the *Coldstream Report* in which 'theory' is taught within art history and has its own contracted professionals, seminar spaces, essay requirements, forms of assessment and so on. He calls this typical structure a 'supplement' and considers it problematic; he describes 'theory' distending practice if structured in this way. This results, he argues, in object-based making carrying on as usual, with students being given an up to date vocabulary with which to describe their work.

In the second section of the paper he describes the content of the theory he encounters in art schools: 'it was not until the mid-1980s that something called 'theory', became a near statutory component of many fine art courses.' This

coagulant he begins to describe and critique; it is clearly some generations removed from the original and radical ideas of the *Art Theory* course he proposed and ran in Coventry. 'Dissertations from Edinburgh to Brighton, from Norwich to Belfast, all more or less competent, display and are replete with stories drawn from, in one way or another, French Theory's fund of anti-Enlightenment narratives and its caricatures.' (Atkinson 2002, 16).

After describing the colonisation of art schools by *French Theory*, he then suggests that the problem with this is a political, ideological one, that *French Theory* supports the romantic self-absorption he sees as typical of an entrenched bourgeois romantic model of the artistic subject; this, the very same model he outlined and critiqued in his 1969 course proposal, *Art Theory*, the course that was devised as a strategic unwriting of the ground on which the self-absorbed, romantic, mythic, genius-model of the artist was inscribed. In other words, he sees a continuation of the same modernist ideology he was critiquing in 1969 with his *Art Theory*, in the rampant spread of *French Theory* he observes in art schools by the millennium.

I have to admit to my own attachments and background in what he calls *French Theory*, and the social movements, especially to the art practices and debates connected to feminism, so I cannot accept Atkinson's blanket dismissal. As Fiona Candlin has argued in *A Dual Inheritance*, one consequence of the Coldstream reforms was the creation of a space for academic study without an established theoretical or methodological base. This lack of a manifest base to Complementary Studies 'did mean that feminism formed one of the main intersections between theory and practice in art schools' (Candlin 2001, 305). What Candlin points to, and Atkinson omits, is that the feminist critique of traditional art history and art education, as part of an ongoing politics of gender and inequality generated a rich, politicised cultural landscape of participatory practice and criticism. This was new and had been enabled or was possible within the structure of the Dip.AD.

Atkinson's involvement in art education cannot be easily separated from his work as an artist. As an art student I was taught by artists who, like Atkinson, considered an engagement with theory to be a central part of their teaching and their art practice. My experience at art school in the 1980s was permeated by a sense of the danger, thrill and purpose that came with this terrain, as Atkinson describes it, *theory as practice*. My studio work was physically attacked on a number of occasions, and the politics of who was appointed to a visiting artist contract were

scrutinised and fought over, not simply on questions of gender, but also on the politics and ideology of practice (Pollock 1985, Burgin 1986, Yates, 1986).

And yet, by the turn of the millennium Atkinson was not the only one wondering where all this cultural politics had led. My PhD, *Looking Back at the Life Room*, began as a question about what had happened to the politics of theory, how it had become normalised, instrumentalised, even become an academic requirement.⁶ Suffice to mention a few examples here and to note that whilst Terry Atkinson is venting a timely, if misogynist take on the role of French Theory in the depoliticisation of cultural production, other writers were also reflecting on what exactly it was that made up the political traction of poststructuralism in the Anglophone university; a powerful liberatory intoxicant and an imperious academic legacy. Here are just two examples from texts I have come across recently.

In the preface to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes: 'Gender trouble is rooted in "French Theory," which is itself a curious American construction. Only in the United States are so many disparate theories joined together as if they formed some kind of unity. *Gender Trouble* tends to read together, in a syncretic vein, various French intellectuals (Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, Wittig) who had few alliances with one another and whose readers in France rarely, if ever, read one another...' (Butler [1989] 1999, x). As Butler says, French Theory may have been an American construction, but it found a home in small enclaves elsewhere, some departments of some British polytechnics, universities and art schools.

Secondly, here is Claire Bishop in *Artforum*, some years later reviewing *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* by Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Yve-Alain Bois, published by Thames & Hudson:

...the significance of *Art Since 1900* can't be underestimated: Psychoanalysis and poststructuralism are now inescapable methodologies that must be taken on board by mainstream art history. The book embodies how most of us see art, at least up to 1980.... The book also signals the making official of oppositional art history — hinted at by the "landmark" status announced on the back cover in a tombstone font (Bishop 2005).

⁶ My practice-based PhD *Looking Back at the Life Room*, a visual essay and researched text, considered the history of art education, investigating the divide between seminar room and studio within a longer historical narrative, revealing the seeming paradox that before the modernising of art education in this country in the 1960s, the place of art theory in art education had been taught and assessed in the drawing studio, in the life room.

Bishop's last sentence says at least two things at once: that this influential group of authors, who formed the *October* journal at MIT in the 1970s, were responsible for drawing together dissident cultural theory and practice to form an oppositional art history, which has triumphed and become the establishment, and that this book is proof and summation of this triumph. Bishop then points out that the marketing strap line used by the publisher on the back of the book, A LANDMARK STUDY IN THE HISTORY OF MODERN ART, is written in a tombstone font, upper case letters associated with stone engraving, suggesting, perhaps unwittingly, that this study has come to an end, and this is its grave. Is the triumph of oppositional art history also the death of its relevance for social and political emancipation in the present?

In the last section of Terry Atkinson's report he considers, in some detail, aspects of the history of science and philosophy he sees as important and yet ignored and rarely taught in the fine art context. Atkinson concludes that art schools have taken up the wrong kind of theory and put it in the wrong place – i.e. French Theory in general studies, leaving studio teaching without an intellectual framework.

To summarise we could say that Coventry School of Art and Design was wary of Art Theory in 1969 to the extent that they closed the course. *Art Theory* represented a general existential threat to fine art education. By 2002 this threat had been overcome and French Theory institutionalised. Significantly, by this time art schools had been absorbed by universities, artists were now academics and all academics' work was audited by the REF. Artists who teach are part of the education system, the art world and university research culture as well as Candlin notes;

The regulation, funding and structure of art courses does not form a backdrop against which this thing called art is played out, but rather, academic management forms a leading role in constituting what art is understood to be in educational terms. So while theory and practice may have had an effect on the politics of knowledge within the university, university politics have a significant effect on the form art practice and theory can take within higher education (Candlin 2001, 308).

Whilst I have suggested above that Atkinson's critique of the avant-garde model of the artist runs through both the texts I have discussed, looking from 2002 to 2014, I cannot help but notice that quite a different model now predominates. This model sees the art world as unavoidably a business world and the university likewise. We

see this both in how the students can be artists, I mean how they can exist now as artists, as well as what kinds of promotional skills they need that we are increasingly being expected to encourage, teach if we can, and maybe even assess. Gregory Sholette's book *Dark Matter - Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (2010) does a good job of describing this trajectory, just as Tony Blair's *Cool Britannia* and the whole BritArt narrative celebrated it.

Art language in enterprise culture

In their article *International Art English* from July 2012 Alix Rule and David Levine suggest that whilst a lot of current art writing produced by art galleries, biennials, magazines etc., if considered carefully, means almost nothing at all, it is, none the less, a vital currency of exchange in the International Art World. Rule and Levine consider the growth of the internet and the recent geopolitical expansion of the free world as two important planks in the structure and proliferation of *International Art English*, which they propose to study as a phenomena. Using *Sketch Engine*, a concordance generator developed by Lexical computing, they entered every *e-flux* announcement since the listserv's launch in 1999. They find which words are most commonly used, and how much more they are used than in 'ordinary' English language. In this way they see the patterns of art language over the last decade or so, and comment on them. 'IAE has a distinct lexicon: aporia, radically, space, proposition, biopolitical, tension, transversal, autonomy' (Rule and Levine 2012). They go on to analyse vocabulary and syntax telling us how many times 'reality' and 'the real' come up compared to the British National Corpus. Then, in a parody of their observations they write:

IAE prescribes not only that you open with a dependent clause, but that you follow it up with as many more as possible, embedding the action deep within the sentence, effecting an uncanny stillness. Better yet: both an uncanny stillness and a deadening balance. (Rule and Levine 2012)

It is quite amusing as you can see, even though there is no doubting the violence and pomposity of their critique. 'How did we end up writing in a way that sounds like inexpertly translated French?' (Rule and Levine 2012). They go on to suggest a genealogy of *International Art English* to consider what makes it different to

Standard English. They connect it to the development of art criticism in the United States since the late 1970s, mentioning again the key writers and theorists connected with the MIT journal *October*, and their use of texts from French and German.

Rule and Levine suggest that while those writers from the *October* journal used complex language, often from their own translations of key texts, they did so to describe complex ideas. Whilst academic art criticism may sound like oddly translated French, key terms they mention like production, negation, totality and dialectics are clear references to the Frankfurt School theorists. So, they argue, that whilst art criticism in English carries inflections of European thought and philosophy, *International Art English* employs many of the same terms and phrases, but does on the basis of free association.

What Rule and Levine fail to factor in, in their analysis, that Hito Steyerl picks up on in her counter article, is that the object of their study, the *e-flux* press release, is by its very formation part of a publicity machine, so she asks, why didn't they feed into their sketch engine the journal articles of the last decade instead of the press releases? Good question. How surprising is it to consider publicity material and find that it borrows ideas, transposes them in creative ways and is basically fanciful? (Steyerl 2013).⁷ *e-flux* press releases are written by all sorts of arts organisations, many using interns as free labour, as Steyerl points out, and galleries around the world and are sent in to *e-flux*, who, for an agreed sum, will circulate them electronically. These texts are not written by *e-flux* but rather addressed to *e-flux*, and surely this distinction is rather crucial in any discourse analysis. Come to think of it this is a prime example of the digital economy where user-generated content appears to be 'free' but actually has cost and labour implications, just as Anton Vidokle, the main man at *e-flux*, is an example, par excellence of a successful critical artist and a successful entrepreneur.

More time is needed to do justice to this skirmish - but for my take on the politics of art language in the age of digital enterprise culture I would like to ask this question: if we are now in danger of being asked to help our students learn fluent *International Art English*, what, exactly, is at stake here? As I've outlined, I cannot

⁷ Both Hito Steyerl and Martha Rozler write stinging counter articles to Rule and Levine, published in *e-flux* journal, while The Guardian wrote a jeering comedy piece about the nonsense of art writing.

agree with Atkinson that the problem lies with French Theory. Anyway I have rarely come across a fine art undergraduate who has had access to sufficient resources to even make a literary or historical sketch of what this is, let alone developed a working vocabulary with which to use it.

Secondly, I cannot agree with Atkinson that French Theory overlaps in significant ways with modernist ideologies informing the Coldstream Committee, and the institutionalisation of a division between studio and seminar, theory and practice. As Candlin has noted, whilst problematic, this division between studio and seminar has in some ways made space for critical and dissenting voices in art education. Pedagogically I now see this division as an important structure in art education, because writing, and forming an argument, is a craft and is a form of literacy; it is an important skill. It is precisely to counteract Atkinson's 'myth of the inarticulate artist', that I would not advocate his suggestion that theory is best taught in the studio. Today that would mean closing the art history resource and asking existing lecturers to do both. Like Atkinson, I also contest the division of labour between the studio and the seminar, and consider the history and ideology of this division as central to my practice. I also see it as representing an important, productive contradiction.

Thirdly, I would go further and say, moving forward to the present day, that it is no longer, in Atkinson's formation, the avant-garde model of the artistic subject that is at play in the content, ideology or underlying structure of fine art education. Rather as Gregory Sholette argues in *Dark Matter* the new model of the artist is as entrepreneur on one side and precarious worker on the other. Having gone this far, I would like to step back and clarify. While Art&Language can be identified in the history of art education with the emergence of art theory in this country, they can also be distinguished from the rise of International Art English. What distinguishes them is less to do with vocabulary, content and approach than it is with context, chronology and a new phase of capitalism.

If second wave feminism was a particularly important intersection, as Candlin observed, in the history of the relation of theory to practice in art education, perhaps we can extend Nancy Frazer's idea of how feminism became the handmaiden of neoliberalism, to think about art theory. Rule and Levine argue that *International Art English* is a distinct new phenomenon, a new commodity in the exchange and value

creation of cultural capital. If we read her quote below can we consider art theory in the same kind of trap?

...A movement that once prioritised social solidarity now celebrates female entrepreneurs. A perspective that once valorised "care" and interdependence now encourages individual advancement and meritocracy. What lies behind this shift is a sea-change in the character of capitalism. The state managed capitalism of the post-war era has given way to a new form of capitalism – "disorganised", globalising, neoliberal. Second-wave feminism emerged as a critique of the first but has become the handmaiden of the second (Frazer 2013).

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