



BY THE BORDER COUNTRY OF CRITICAL WRITING  
WATCHING THE DOGGERS WATCH THE DOGGING  
IN AN ENGLISH GLADED LAY-BY

We're unsure if the review reproduced above either constitutes an example of criticism or if it was even ever intended to be critical. However, we'll make the assumption, due to its present location within the magazine and the magazines braying mission statement of employing 'independent critics', that in some way or other it will be at least read as intending to function critically: if not directly or explicitly then in wanting to attempt to engage and contribute towards what might be called an 'ongoing conversation' in and around contemporary arthood. On that basis it is a poor attempt: a poorer attempt than any other that attempts to draw a distinction between itself and the exhibition.

The text is, somewhat problematically written back to front. The only bit bordering on criticism comes in the penultimate paragraph (the last one having been reserved for the inevitable lame 'wrap up'), but only after the vast majority of the word count has been subsumed in an insidious over-professionalised and offensively grotesque academic failure to do anything but describe stuff.

The part that constitutes criticism consists of stating: "Seers is deeply reverent towards the subject and experience of schizophrenia [...] But I couldn't shake the feeling that the title work prioritised an artistic fascination with the metaphorical potential of [...] psychosis, rather than engaging some of the broader [...] problems it provoked, for example in the material configuration of the work itself: slick animations and hyper-fetishised robotics. Principally, what was needed was a fuller acknowledgement of its own complicity within the ubiquitous distribution of images that cultivates schizoid subjects."

The logical progression of this glob of criticism comes down to the realisation that no correlation between the output of arthood and the external environment, that might contain things like issues relating to the 'subject and experience of schizophrenia' is possible within the current conditions of artistic production. Starting from a twofold point of view that there are no unique artistic values that transcend the art system's boundaries, no transcendental quality no matter how heavily it implies meaning while refraining from committing the substance of what is meant; and that criticality in art engages at no significant point with any substantive wider social content: from this position how does one go about maintaining an art practice that wants to function critically in such conditions? But this logical descent in holding artistic practice generally to task is evaded, presumably in favour of the illogical ascent towards career aspirations, of academic point scoring or some kind of accumulation of symbolic capital or kudos generated from regularly having one's words published. Criticism has ended up as nothing more substantial than a handful of individuals commenting and sanctioning each other's output, it has been subsumed into the practices' of arthood as a public relations exercise or insider-job of self-aggrandisement, a necessity in any significant institutional enterprise.

Why couldn't the text begin with the critical statement, maybe after a paragraph of description of the exhibition minus the florid obfuscation that bulks out the current text, and then commit the remaining word count to attempting to explain why the exhibition is or isn't much cop? It seems critical writing consists in devising as many clever arsed ways as possible to substitute actually criticising anything until the very last moment, enacting a literary rhythm method.... What purpose does the text fulfil in working up to an climax like critical point, only a handful of words before the word count finally shoots its load? If there was ever an argument for premature ejaculation then it would be in its application to this exhibition review. If it committed the majority of its word count to its post critical blushes and stuttering apologies it may get somewhere to being critically useful.

Therefore, we shall make a clean distinction and state that this review is as functionally feckless as it is operationally hubristic. The text fails to contribute to the formulation of a criteria for what constitutes art, or what constitutes good or better or worse or poor art and any justification as to why. In the absence of any



attempt in this direction all that remains is the reproduction of existing relations of production. The text just functions as a second (third, fourth?) order set of references in the form of a consecutive text. It represents nothing but an attribute of the exhibition it congruously describes. The text's status becomes that of an installation shot of the exhibition or a press release. In this situation all the text can attain is to unfold or disclose meaning that is subjective or internal to the system that it contributes to the accumulation or reproduction of. It cannot constitute criticism by producing judgements or evaluations, followed by attempts to substantiate with normative explanations. Not even a 'tentative resolution' is attempted. Why can't texts such as this declare a judgement and attempt to substantiate the judgement with statements of explanation or clarification? What exactly is at risk? If we take it that for the text to be operationally critical it must distinguish itself from its object; this can only be done by being critical, which can only be done by being distinct. In the apathetic state of arthood an attempt, at the very least, may prove productive. Because an attempt at a tentative resolution would itself constitute a criterion for a judgement of quality, even if the question of defining a notion of art is ignored beyond the assumption that something just is art.

The 'material configurations' of the exhibition that the text refers to merely constitute stylistic examples of an endless infinitely conceivable quantity that allows the work of art to do nothing but operate avantgardistically, which means nothing in the current conditions of artistic production. That the contemporary work of art retains a mystically abstruse and ineffable, and an apparently inherent cutting-edge quality, says no more than, that the designation of being art is justification enough for the validation of itself as art: the fallacy of projecting the effect and making it a quality of its cause recurring. So-called expert or specialised intervention (the conspicuous distinction between initiate and ignorant in art) only diminishes the potential of criticism. Presumably only the most self-aware practice-based research degree student has to come to terms with looking themselves in the mirror. Criticism in the entirely honorific sense of what is hubristically termed 'critical art practice' regularly operates as being part of the problem of art and not part of a provisional solution to the problem of how to go about maintaining an art practice within the context of current conditions of production. Here criticism has become almost entirely eradicated, or at least considered internally, by arthood's operators as misjudgement or ignorance in achieving the requisite level of understanding. In actual fact this form of criticism currently only contributes to the understanding that no such problem exists, and perpetuates the notion that art contains an inherent property of goodness or meaningfulness and therefore all attempts at criticism or value judgements are defunct in its superior presence.

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VIEW BAD GOODS



# NEW BAD GOODS

we look more to the next inspiring monks of the Middle Ages, who would carry knowledge from one monastery to the next monastery

