Exhibitions

THE COCKSURE, THE CRITIC & THE PEDANT

We take 'critical' at its rudiment: firstly, to consist of any attempt to identify what art is and secondly to distinguish between good and bad examples of it. That is, anything that substantiates any statement that forms a distinction between good and poor work that carries a criteria of validation.

From reading the review in Art Monthly No. 418 there are something like 4 lines of the total 99 of this text that could potentially be consumed as critical. The majority of the text's content consists of descriptive writing characterised by sentences such as Taking as its title the five words occurring most frequently in English-language pop lyrics over the past decade; and lines that might be described as reflective, or exerting an opinion, writing such as Transparency and publicity usher into view the obfuscations organising totalitarianism, then and now. These are distinct from the wholly descriptive sections but do not constitute anything that could sensibly be taken as critical and appear primarily only to function to fill the required word count or bolster the author's academic career aspirations with some kind of illusory capital and engagement.

The following one and a half lines could be taken as critical:

The exhibition's gambit is played out most brilliantly through its form: collaboration.

Some aspect of the exhibition is declared to be brilliant. The criteria given for justification of the distinction of brilliance is that collaboration in the production of artworks is brilliant: collaboration produces brilliant art; the exhibition is collaborative; therefore the exhibition is brilliant.

Again, possibly critical:

This is why the generational story would never have worked. It rides too close to technological determinism, to the claim that technologies drive history.

Taking 'worked' to mean a good example of art, implying that one that doesn't 'work' is a poor or poorer one, the text affirms that the exhibition, or at least one aspect of it is good. It then tries to formulate a criteria of judgement in order to validate the assertion that this part of the exhibition is good: the actual work discussed is good because it doesn't present a generational story, that would apparently ride too close to technological determinism. One specific criteria offered for asserting that a work is good is that it doesn't ride too close to technological determinism, and it follows that any work that does is all the poorer for it: work that rides too close to technological determinism is bad; this work doesn't ride too close to technological determinism, and therefore this work is good.

Art and the system it reproduces, including texts written in response to its objects such as the one in question, function in such a way that may be reducible to a minimal limiting criterion: the communication of meaning. This is all, at root, what it is capable of doing. Fundamentally, it is all it is. What meaning is communicated is of minor significance. Whatever constitutes the meaning of individual works of art and their attendant supplicatory texts is inconsequential; their meaning simply corresponding with the distinction within the system.

Plainly there is no suggestion that this text should be critical, as with the works it attends to, but then one wonders what the fuck is the purpose of the text? Although it does perhaps explain why the text is heavily weighted as description. Is it, like the work it describes, merely another example of art reproducing itself internally within the boundaries of its own system? If the text is in no way critical it cannot expect to exert itself from beyond the boundaries of the system. Therefore the text is equivalent, ultimately the same object as the work it describes...

Therefore, we shall make a clean distinction and state that this review is functionally shit. The text fails to formulate a criteria for what constitutes art, or what constitutes good or better or worse or poor art, or any justification as to why. Not even a 'tentative resolution' is attempted. 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 have been productive, because an attemp at tentative resolutions would itself constitute a criterion for a judgement of quality, even if the question of defining a notion of art is ignored beyond the the assumption that something is art. This bathetic last paragraph will need work in the future.

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