

NEW BAD GOODS



RG: A few years ago, along with a friend who operates as a 'fixer', I began a project to open an art school and artist residency programme in the Suffolk market town of Saxmundham called Fairfield International.

JPW: Why did Fairfield International not happen?

RG: The Conservative local authority were constantly creating obstacles. While we were negotiating these our survey identified an outcrop of Japanese knotweed on the site, which effectively made us uninsurable.

DEAR BOSS: UNUSABLE



Opening with a swelling, violent burst of music, the kind used at the end of films with powerfully emotional climaxes [a large orchestra of strings, woodwinds, brasses, extra double basses &c.], the credits are initially of a modern unserified and plain type, maybe Univers or Verdana [though not Helvetica]: the names in fairly simple well-spaced letters, black against a grey background, or white against a grey background; the names or groups of names are framed with simple lines. These letter forms follow each other at a normal, even rather slow, rhythm whilst the frames slowly fade away. The letter forms are gradually transformed with the embellishment of serifs, at first small and not particularly noticeable then growing to thicker slab serifs consistent with Victorian advertising and wooden typefaces. Finally, in the last credits, the grey background of the text merges imperceptibly merges with the grey of a wall. The last two credits titles, instead of constituting separate shots, are gradually revealed by a lateral movement of the camera which, moving along the painted texture of the wall, continues its slow, regular movement, passes across a section of wall containing the following text applied in vinyl letters [as is current in the Potemkinising of gallery walls] with the kind of death sentences redolent of Lawrence Weiner.

“...criticism is atrophying into mere description. [...] ...”

The pan from left to right slowly reveals the text in segments such as...

critic - ism - is - atrop - hying - into - des- cription.

After ending the pan upon the word ‘-cription’, the camera begins to pull out to revealing the fuller text of;

“criticism here cannot be interventionist, but merely descriptive or retrospectively ‘promotional’. [...] By way of comparison, let us cite the sentences with which physicists communicate their perceptions or record their experiments, or the sentences of lawyers. As every word here has practical consequences, every word is carefully considered. At the root of every word there is a decision! And the reader only gains by making decisions! But these are literatures that are intended to be usable.”

On New Criticism – Bertolt Brecht – 1930

Parallel to the development of the image during the credits, the music has gradually been transformed into a man’s voice – slow, warm, fairly loud but with a certain neutral quality at the same time: a fine theatrical voice, rhythmical but without any particular emotion.

ART WRITER: Hey Dave, are you Derbyshire based?

– As it happens [a slight wavering groan follows this line a la Jimmy Saville, the voiced bilabial implosives are to be articulated in the following lines.] I hail from Keston, Derbyshire (...same Midlands backwater as Mel Ramsden...).

[this line is spoken in an inconsistent accent, swinging between Derbyshire and a more Received Pronunciation] ¹

– Anyways, if you had an issue with my writing, it would’ve been nice if you’d taken the opportunity to reach out to me personally, you know – so we could have touched base...

– via Facebook or something – or you could have just DM’d me, or ask me to go for a pint boss –

and discuss it – and you know, chew the fat on the general state of criticism,

– rather than reproduce my text in its entirety without permission whilst slagging it off. C’mon man, that ain’t fair! Now then

– now then, I guess as a result I’m going to have to respond professionally.²

After centering on the text for a little too long, more than enough to be read comfortably, [as in the contemporary aesthetic of multi-channel unseated videos available in many institutions], the camera continues a slow, straight, uniform movement down the wall. There is no direct sunlight and the electric lights are not on, the pale grey of the wall is seen in a natural mid-afternoon maybe with a twilight top-lit luminescence. The field of the image includes the entire wall, from top to bottom, with a thin strip of the floor or the ceiling, or both. What should be visible is the architectural shadow line between the wall and floor. The shot is not taken from directly opposite the wall, as previously with the image of the wall text, but at a slight angle { 25-30°?} [towards the direction in which the camera advances.]

The wall thus revealed, regularly explored metre by metre, is the same wall as that already glimpsed between the the two last picture-frames of the credits: that is, a surface that is detailed enough to see the texture left by the paint roller marks applied by technicians, the flicks and ridges rather than the less evident strokes a hand brushed finished might effect. The title emerges immediately into view, fully capitalized, white on white, only visible due to the varnished sheen of the letters perceptible due to the slightly oblique angle of the camera shot.

DEAR BOSS

The corridor/gallery may include columns and pilasters intersected with bordered sheet panelling. The entire setting is empty. Only occasionally, perhaps, the pearly gray cast shadow of a person may be appreciated, the soft cast shadows of clouds passing. If a straight trajectory of this length is impossible, it can be replaced by a labyrinthine series of corridors and salons, giving the same impression of a slow, continuous, virtually unending passage.

The offscreen text continues, without interruption but now a woman or man’s voice, with a South Yorkshire accent. It swings between a more “expressive” tone and a delivery consistent with how someone might speak when confronted with a camera. Akin to how people used to have a “telephone manner”.³

JCHP : Everything that is directed loosely towards the reviewers’ texts in relation to ours in relation to the content of the posters we’re currently engaged in producing,[breathe]... is generally directed at the entire output of current art; its practices consisting of written responses or practices focused primarily on making art objects. The pointlessness of the exhibition review has become well established, as is the pointlessness of the exhibition. Their persistence works as a regular, pernicious confirmation. Your text just constitutes one more example of this. And so probably doesn’t warrant us or anyone specifically taking issue with it. The output of current art is presumably also pointless, other than for the function of supplying the exhibition and the exhibition review with content. From our experience of producing art, talking about examples of it proves entirely useless. It would be quite a quick and straightforward job to rephrase the content of our texts in response to the exhibition reviewers’ texts, to redirect it at examples of our own work, written or visual without altering the overall meaning and intended purpose of the text. The job would be straightforward but useless in terms of developing the practice. There is no real difference between the reviewers’ texts and any example of our work, for instance the posters that carry a jpg reproduction of a review. They are essentially one of the same, united in their shared lack of having the possibility of a critical purpose. We’re as much highlighting this problem as trying to change the situation, conceding that to actively alter the situation is beyond our means. The difference is that the reviewers’ texts do not acknowledge that this constitutes the conditions of artistic production.

The images that accompany this part of the text do not correspond exactly with the elements of the setting to which it refers. But the photography must have a constant character which is maintained, moreover, during the entire film: a distinct and brilliant image, even in the darker sections, giving everything a kind of varnished quality.

At the end of the gallery/corridor/gallery there is a door, or even a series of doors{ to be detailed as as Neoclassical/Nash/Regency/Early Georgian as possible} that the camera passes through with the same continuous movement maintained since the the end of the title sequence. Here too the neoclassical ornamentation is just visible behind the poorly screened, chopped edged, cosmetic minimalism of faced stud walls and overtly modern shadow-lined cladding. Glimpses of columns, porticoes and masked capitals can be discerned between and above the contemporary clad overlays.



JCHP: We repeatedly find ourselves wondering if it possible to be critical in any useful way within the context of the conditions of the production of current art? Every example of artistic output written or otherwise seems to function as an open discussion liberally dotted with bits of reference. What our own text achieves is functioning as an example of criticising something for not being critical. Whatever way you look at it, it is difficult not to see this situation as bathetic and unproductive. But in contradistinction to the reviewers’ text our text benefits in terms of having a purpose and a built in justification: it doesn’t offer any productive solutions for how to go about being critical, because it does not know how. This acknowledgement of not knowing renders our text to some extent purposeful in that it consists of an attempt to deal with a set of problems in its attempt to work out some form of critical framework. This attempt seems to us to be the least artists should do. Current artistic production has pushed a process into a goal. The aim of any process is not the perpetuation of that process but the completion thereof. Art is a process, albeit one that for some reason tends towards incomprehensibility, lack of clarity etc. Art might manifest itself as incomprehensible but still it is only a process. The process should work to a completion, not to some stultified horror of intensification, internal complexity and extremity wherein the thing itself as a process ultimately perishes. Perhaps we should not encroach on the critic or creative art writers’ territory. Perhaps we should dutifully produce our gridded up pencil drawings and await subserviently for them to be reviewed by the professional exhibition reviewer. (In the absence though of doing an exhibition this seems unlikely.) Perhaps also, as artists, we should not attempt to criticise the ‘professional’ reviewers’ self-aggrandizing creations. Interpreting our texts as unprofessional written attacks or just “slagging offs” just reveals the egoism and entirely unifying nature of the artwork which seems committed to merely making its output smell like knowledge.

At the same time, the darkness becomes more intense, though not producing a grey image; on the contrary, there are some extremely clear details [highlights of the obscured details, capitals, door pediments and half-covered edges of moldings] seen against an equally distinct darkness, without it becoming apparent what source of light is responsible for these inconsistent effects.

As the camera moves from the corridor/gallery a woman is stood towards the left [or right] of an open double door, a dense, unmanageable square formed blackness is briefly captured. She nods in a half-hearted, bored acceptance towards the camera. Finally a dark room is seen, really very dark this time, where the light [vague at first, but gradually becoming distinct as the camera draws closer] is emanating from precisely the direction toward which the image is advancing. The room is a kind of lecture theatre/ small cinema/screening room arranged in the customary fashion of raked, banked seating funneled towards a squeezed raised platform and viewing wall/screen. The seats are irregularly occupied, a poor attendance: although an even mixture of sexes. The faces are seen in profile or in three quarters from behind, lit from in front by the reflected light coming from the platformed area. All the bodies are quite motionless, the faces absolutely set, illuminated individually, half the eyes fixed on phone screens. The light grows brighter toward the front rows, but the room retains its character both as a lecture theatre, where the faces are illuminated doubly by the very spectacle they are watching and individually by the blue glow of hand held devices.

JCHP: We are aware that for criticism to function critically and not merely pseudo-critically it needs to be distinguishable from or external to what it criticises. We are also aware that although our text may be entirely inconsequential with regard to the context of the artwork it is nevertheless wholly engaged and produced within that context and is therefore in no meaningful way critical. But we do know that our text is in someway usable, if only for the requirements of maintaining a cooperative

practice that is critical of the conditions that produce it.

The word ‘works’ is prevalent in art. Particularly in its teaching institutions. At a completely practical level the entire artwork is founded on words like ‘works’: “That works” or “Do you think that works? I do/don’t etc”. It is obvious that what works for him might not work for her. Even without establishing exactly what ‘works’ actually means in the context of how it is regularly applied in art education it is easily observed that there is always a potential variance for the word’s intended meaning to mean precisely one thing, while meaning exactly the opposite thing. Irrespective of how the word is intended in art as applied to the judgement of art works, unless it is substantiated by some declarative justification, it is operationally functionless. It doesn’t really mean anything at all. Doesn’t this then mean that the entire edifice of art is based on generally accepted notions that don’t in actuality mean anything? In a situation like this is the choice to either accept this purposeless circle and celebrate art by default; continue to make art as if it were purposeful; as if there is a purpose of the sought associated with Courbet or Orwell; that it has the potential to do something socially useful? Or alternatively try to question its validity with the same intention but minus the celebrative complicity? Is criticism possible? Is it possible to maintain an art practice that functions in some way critically, supposing we establish what that means, in the current conditions of artistic production, distribution etc? The possibility of this is an open problem. We are generally inclined to think that the attempt is more likely to prove productive if the problem is engaged with in a way that is distinct from both nihilism and professionalism.

Having reached the first row of spectators, the camera continues its movement, passing in review, from almost directly in front now, the faces aligned, frozen with attention, and brightly illuminated by the light of the stage and their screens. But the camera’s speed has gradually decreased and the image finally comes to rest on a few motionless heads.

Then the shot cuts abruptly to the stage itself, where a bearded man, dressed in black suit and tie stands, brilliantly back lit from the projected light on the wall behind him, a silhouette/shadow play occupying the whole screen.

The voice over text fades into that of the American accent of the man who is evidently just finishing a lecture. The blank, bright, illuminated stage that back lights the form of the man changes as he clicks to the final image of his lecture/talk. White text on a black background, similar dull modern font in lower case. Thus the theatre darkens considerably, as he utters the words...

If you cannot.jpeg it and you cannot write a wall text for it, then you are encountering important art.

The audience sniggers knowingly...

JEFFREY CHARLES HENRY PEACOCK FEBRUARY 2019



¹ Tosh Lines / Kevin Lloyd/ News reporter/ Terry Lloyd]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYXZOCQ06a4

² The dashes above represents a slight pause, more emphatic than the meaning of the text suggests. Next month we shall offer a more nuanced system of verbal notation.

³ Warnock’s interview technique and pitch side delivery. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vjltStmovU

