The essay argues that an emergent characteristic in recent art could be termed “Lame Art”. Such art appears purposefully inept, and ‘adolescent’. The essay traces a brief history of conscious ineptitude in modern art from Courbet onwards, but suggests that “Lame Art” is to be distinguished from its forerunners by virtue of its different experience of, and relation to, both temporality and mass culture.
My research consistently addresses a set of interlinked questions. Beneath the superficial dissimilarity of my various outputs, these questions remain constant, persistent, structural.

Each output, however, may issue from a differing of their hierarchical arrangement. The outputs may also appear to differ insofar as – crudely speaking - some attempt to address these questions primarily through form, whereas in others they are engaged with on the level of content.

These questions are presented in outline form below:
Ekphrasis: What is the nature of the relation between visual art and language?

This is a longstanding question within the traditions of western philosophical thought, extending back at least to Horace’s dictum, ut pictura poesis, and continuing through Lessing to more recent thinkers and writers such as Mallarme, Lyotard, and W J T Mitchell. As Mitchell suggests, the territorial border between these two provinces is always under dispute, constantly shifting, historically volatile and, finally, ideological. This, then, begs my next question:

How is the relation between visual art and writing about visual art to be reconfigured under specifically contemporary conditions?

First, I would argue, one must attempt to come to an understanding of the contemporary by means of historical investigation. As a researcher I would consider myself first and foremost an historian, rather than a would-be literary stylist.

This output is to be seen in the context of my other published contributions to academic debates surrounding contemporary art. These include articles for journals and magazines, as well as essays for exhibition catalogues. Such outputs cover a period of approximately 25 years. Recent examples include:


‘The Doctor Will See You Now”, article on work by Christine Borland and Jackie Donachie, Map, Issue 8, Winter 2006. Exploring these artists’ work in the light of Foucault’s Birth of the Clinic.


‘The Archive is not the Story’, An essay on archives, history and memory. Map magazine no. 19, autumn 2009. ISSN 1745-4484.

‘Dee Time’. Essay to accompany Jason Dee exhibition X24. A discussion of the artist’s films in relation to desire and a melancholic vision of history. 2010...

http://issuu.com/horsecrossarts/docs/finalissue111?viewMode=magazine&mode=embed


[Other contributions listed]
When writing addresses itself to an external object such as a work of art, must it necessarily assume a second order status in relation to that external object? In other words, what is the nature of the identity and status of such writing: is it fundamentally supplementary, parergonal, or incidental? A key concept in my methodological approach is provided by Derrida’s reflections on the parergon.
To what extent should writing aspire to transparency, and to what extent should it insist upon its intractable materiality?

Writing is the medium through which much of my research is conducted, and through which it is always expressed. The relation between form and content in such writing about art thus becomes a central issue. It is widely agreed that art in the modern period (i.e. since c.1850) has been characterized by an insistence upon a foregrounding of the means of (re)presentation. The techniques of naturalism and illusionism have been systematically challenged and dismantled in order to better serve the demands of historically changing notions of realism. The writing that has attempted to address this art has, by contrast, remained relatively undisturbed by such innovation. In many instances my writing attempts to assert a quasi-autonomy in relation to its objects of enquiry, whilst situating the reader as a co-producer of meaning, an active mediator between quasi-autonomous ‘texts’.
What is the nature of historical investigation?
Siding with theorists such as Hayden White and Mark Poster (among many others), I would claim that the work of the historian consists of various textual operations: it is inescapably inter-textual (i.e. all historical artefacts may be thought of as texts of one kind or another). Put simply: history is a mode of writing. This claim triggers my next research question:

Does history – as a form of writing – have any special claim upon truth?
How is it to be distinguished from fiction?
In the light of these inevitable questions my research attempts to explore relations between truth and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity, within the written text.
The following examples of some of my earlier work are intended to demonstrate that my current outputs are to be understood in the context of a line of enquiry and a methodological approach that stretches back to the mid-1990s.
The essay comprises short paragraphs interspersed with lines from The Beatles’ *I Am The Walrus*.

Several narrative threads are woven through the paragraphs: a sea journey by a figure named Cristoforo; the imagined thoughts of Trismegistus, an ancient Mage immersed in numerology; a striptease show.

All of the imagery in the essay is inspired by the work of the five artists.

Some of the thematic concerns of the essay are also a response to the nature of the event itself (an exhibition of works by five UK artists held in Columbus, Ohio).
The commission for the Deste Prize essay resulted from an ongoing dialogue with the artist beginning in 2006. The image above typifies the nature of the artist's work during this period. Recurrent themes that emerged within the work and the debate that surrounded it at this time included: the history of modernist art; temporality, ruination and the ideology of progress; the conditions of modernity (including the growth of consumer capitalism, the spectacle and XXX) and their relation to the formation of subjectivity. These are all topics that are addressed in one form or another by the essay.

The essay has a montage structure.

The essay is typographically varied, employing a range of typefaces, font sizes and colours.

The thematic currents flowing through the essay are addressed to questions of folding, cutting and sexuality.

The contents and appearance of the essay were determined by an interpretation of the artist’s work in which imagery of folded fabric and pictorial techniques of ‘slicing’ were foregrounded.

The essay employed ideas from a range of thinkers, including Derrida, Deleuze, Barthes and Lacan, whilst its typographic format is indebted to the example of Derrida’s Glas (1974).
Views of the West of Scotland.
Essay on the work of Sans Façon, 2001

The essay comprises 9 paragraphs.

Between each paragraph data are interspersed.

Each paragraph addresses a different idea.

The essay, in its totality, addresses questions of visibility, surveillance, illusion, and paranoia.

The work of Sans Façon was a response to the various covert signs of military presence in the area surrounding Cove Park, the location of the artist's residency that gave rise to this project.

The essay is a response to these works by Sans Façon.

Excerpt Where Are You? Story of the Eye

This is a short extract from a full-length (c. 80,000 word) monograph on the artist’s work.

The textual extract here refers to one of the artist’s videos (A-R>2) in which a voice-over, accompanied by relentless drumming, recounts a traumatic childhood memory of violence in war-stricken Angola.

This is an example of an attempt to explore the materiality and visuality of the printed word in order to create an emotive effect.
The commission for the Deste Prize essay resulted from an ongoing dialogue with the artist beginning in 2006. The image above typifies the nature of the artist's work during this period. Recurrent themes that emerged within the work and the debate that surrounded it at this time included: the history of modernist art; temporality, ruination and the ideology of progress; the conditions of modernity (including the growth of consumer capitalism, the spectacle and XXX) and their relation to the formation of subjectivity. These are all topics that are addressed in one form or another by the essay.

The exhibition featured “13 artists whose work involves aspects of magic, ritual and supernature.” The essay appeared as two columns on the page, the right-hand column offering comment upon the left-hand. The commentary (see below right) was supposedly written by Sir David Nixon after Calcutt’s death.

Critical opinion is divided on this section. Some claim that Calcutt’s wordplay is "an annoying mannerism" [Shaw, 1983], or "mere self-indulgence - an unfortunate characteristic of much of his later work " [Crooks, 1996]. Choudhry [1989] is more forgiving, detecting in the obsessive use of words containing "oo" a faint and distant echo of Perec’s "La Disparition" [1969] in which the author dispensed entirely with the letter e. In this insistent use of the "oo" form, McLeod [1996: b] detects Calcutt’s extension by typographic means of the theme of looking, the "oo" form being visually suggestive of a pair of eyes. Thereby, McLeod suggests, the text appears to 'look back at the reader. Developing McLeod’s thesis, Kuehne and Klein [1998] draw upon the work of Octavio Paz and Vilém Flusser to propose a theory of the magical properties of the text-as-image. Although not actually appearing in Calcutt’s brief story, the word Voodoo is, they argue, "the absent presence that lies at its heart and secretly animates all those other instances of the "oo" formation that are included." [78]. From Fujii’s study [2001] of his surviving notes it appears that Calcutt was keen to include reference to Douglas Adams’ Hoolooovoo at some point in his story. The Hoolooovoo, as conceived by Adams in The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, is a superintelligent shade of the colour blue, a fact that would have allowed Calcutt to augment this chromatic sub-theme in his text. Furthermore, its inclusion would have satisfied the various demands: for the "oo" typographic structure, for lexicographical obscurity, and for appropriate assonantal value. Modern readers should perhaps be relieved that Calcutt abandoned this ill-conceived attempt.
CONTEXT


A collaboration in which the artists designed the magazine pages in response to the text.

Another attempt to explore relations between image and text, but adopting a different strategy insofar as:

i. This is a collaboration with the artist in which the artist has “the last word”.

ii. Writing is not used to approximate the image, but is ‘overwritten’ by it.

iii. Image and text are simultaneously present. Looking and reading are brought into a closer relationship.
Among the contemporary writers on art with whom my work (as exemplified by Outputs 1, 2 and 3) may share certain coincidental similarities are:

Duncan McLaren (especially those art reviews collected in *Personal Delivery*, Quartet Books, 1998.)

Maria Fusco (and the writers associated with
The Happy Hypocrite)

Neil Mulholland

Fiona Jardine

Specific models, however, were provided by the following:


The editors of Montreal-based journal *Etc. Revue d’Art Contemporain* commissioned this essay after having read some of my other published works. The challenge was to define and characterize Lame Art, an as yet historically unexamined phenomenon in modern and contemporary art. ‘Slacker’ was already established as an art world term by the early 1990s (notably by Jack Bankowsy in *Artforum*, 1991), but my essay attempted to address a slightly different cultural phenomenon, and to add an art historical dimension to the analysis. In terms of the research questions that underpin all of my outputs (see commentary for Output 1) I here prioritize those that seek to approach and interrogate the contemporary. In contrast to my other outputs, this essay appears to emphasize content over form or style.
The procedure was conventional: review the available literature (which, in this instance, was limited); research the field of contemporary practice to identify artists whose work might contribute to a loose definition of Lame Art; conduct art historical research to find relevant precedents; conduct wider research from which to construct historical, social and cultural contexts for the analysis. Given the intellectual context in which the essay was to be published (an article-based, bi-lingual journal with international circulation), it was decided to adopt a conventionally academic approach in its execution.
Etc is a Montreal-based bilingual publication with international distribution:

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