

OUTPUT

Title

Courbet's Crime

Submission No.

4

Authors/Creators

John Calcutt

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.



David Shrigley

CONTEXT

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:

CONTEXT

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 Mallarmé, 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:

"Think In Print. Edinburgh Printmakers: 1987-2007". Essay on the development of local printmaking in *Edinburgh Printmakers. 40 Years of Original Prints*. Edinburgh Printmakers. ISBN 978-0-9541530-1-4.

"Screening Off: Kenny Hunter's 'Untitled - Girl With Rucksack' in Rhona Warwick (ed), *Arcade. Artists and Place-Making*, Black Dog, November 2006. An essay considering new strategies for public sculpture in an age when film and television reconfigure our understanding of the public realm.

"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*.

SUBJECT: IMAGE. (NOTES)', for *The Drouth*, special issue on The Image, Issue 20, Summer 2006, pp. 37-40. ISSN 1474 6190. An essay exploring the contemporary condition of the image.

"Could We? I Am Asking". Article on Kate Davis and gendered identity, *Map*, Issue 10, Summer 2007, pp. 40-45.

"Waiting For Godow". Essay on Oliver Godow, photography and the question of reality, *Map*, Issue 12, Winter 2007/08, pp. 42-4

'The Archive is not the Story', An essay on archives, history and memory. *Map* magazine no. 19, autumn 2009. ISSN 1745-448

'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>

Essay for *After 'Growth and Form'*, Sam Ainsley and Roger Wilson exhibition, Glasgow Print Studio, May 2011. ISBN 978-0-9569054-0-6. An essay exploring these artists' paintings in terms of their differing relation to the 'sign' and the 'mark'.

CONTEXT

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.

CONTEXT

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'.

CONTEXT

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.

CONTEXT

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.

CONTEXT

Catalogue essay for *Full Fathom Five*, exhibition in Ohio State University by members of GSA SoFA staff, 1996.

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).

Mister city p'liceman sitting pretty little p'licemen in a row

Hot gets hotter as the now unfastened waistcoat slips from glistening shoulders, along down-covered arms and onto soft Atrixo™ fingers, which then drop it limp to the floor. Passion executes a double-take, however, with the simultaneous revelation of a streak of scarlet sculpted Lurex™ hell bent on holding the breasts in place and barely under cover. Embraceable You.

See how they fly like Lucy in the sky, see how they run.

I'm crying

More interesting, possibly, to think of five as a kind of sign or omen. Perhaps Trismegistus found in the sign of five the number of religion, it being the number of God united to that of woman. With religion comes faith, and faith does not consist of the affirmation of this sign or that, but of a genuine and constant aspiration towards the truths which are veiled by all symbolisms. Eliphas nodded in silent assent.

Yellow matter custard, dripping from a dead dog's eye.

Supple undulations of pelvis and thighs accompany the removal of cut-down Levis™, which inch their way down LadyShaved™ legs to the ground where they remain, as meaningless as least season's model. Heartbeats quicken, chests tighten, pupils dilate. It's Witchcraft.

Crabalocker fishwife.

Pornographic priestess

The virus, she said, would affect brain patterns and bodily functions in ways that we could scarcely imagine. We might age overnight, for example; or wake up one morning rejuvenated. Our sexual organs might mutate in such ways as to render obsolete our cherished discrimination between male and female. We might find ourselves unaccountably attracted to trees, or to certain insects. According to her magazine we might end up having no control over our bodily temperature (recent scientific research, she said, suggested that those rare cases of spontaneous human combustion already provided evidence of the existence of the virus).

CONTEXT

Catalogue essay for *Alison Watt: Fold. New Paintings 1996-97*. Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh, 1997.

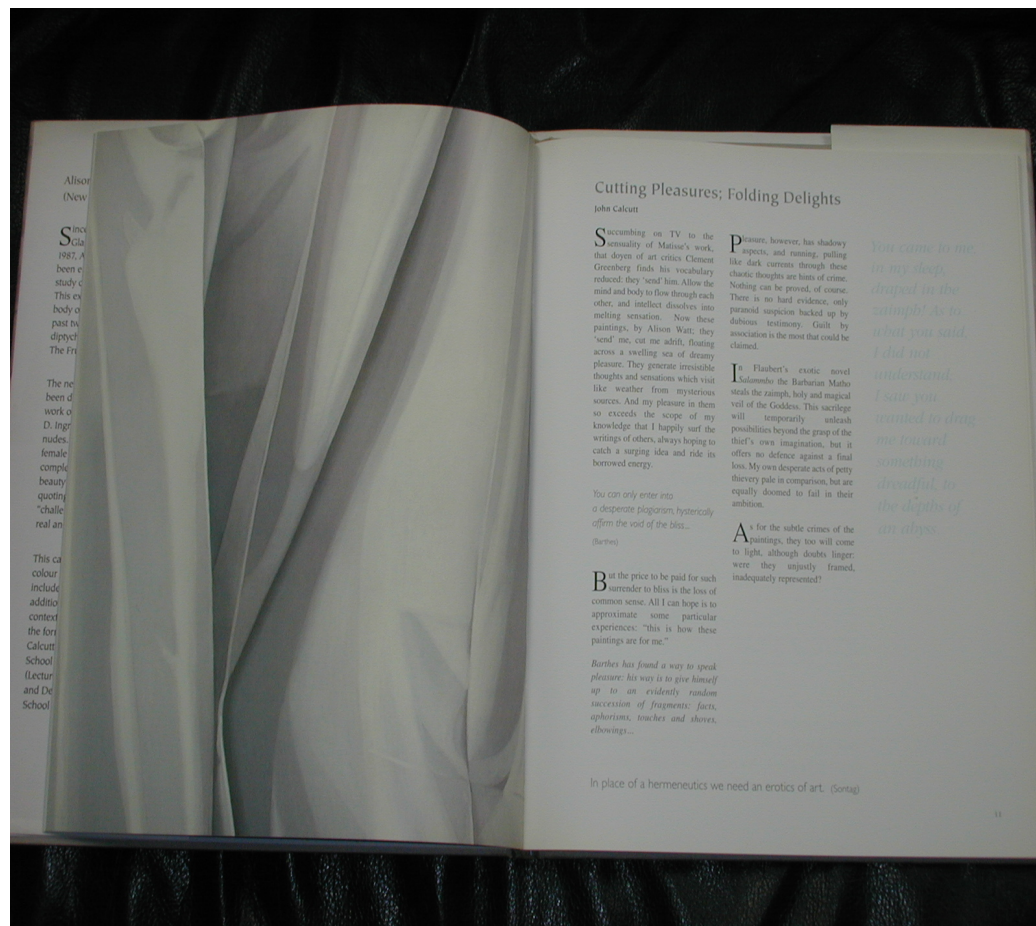
The essay has a montage structure.

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).



CONTEXT

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.

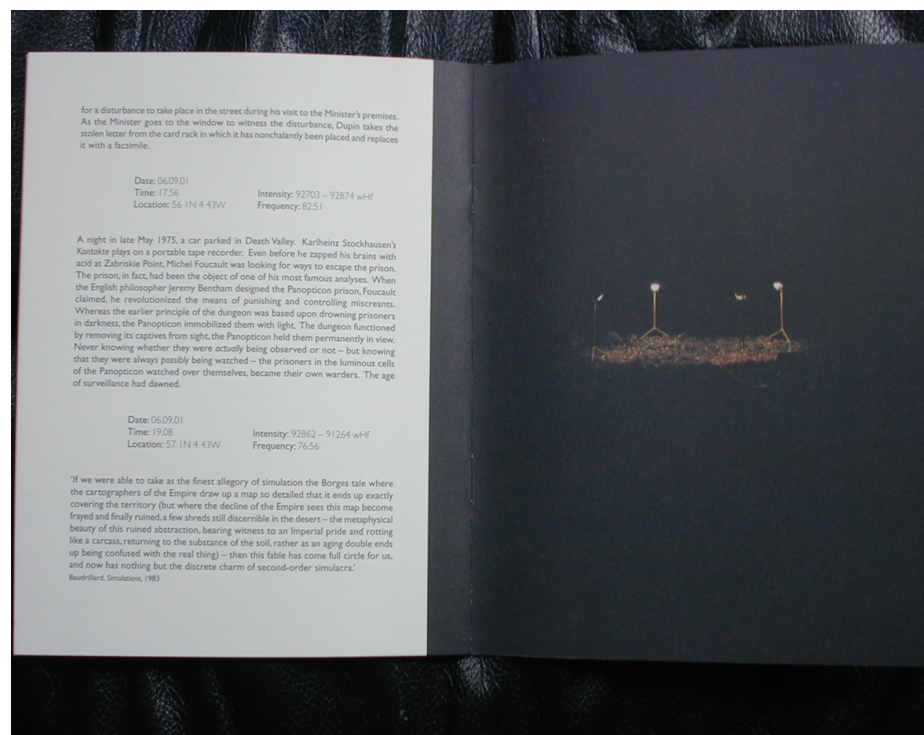
Each paragraph addresses a different idea.

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.

The essay derives some of its ideas from Heidegger, Lacan, Foucault and Plato.



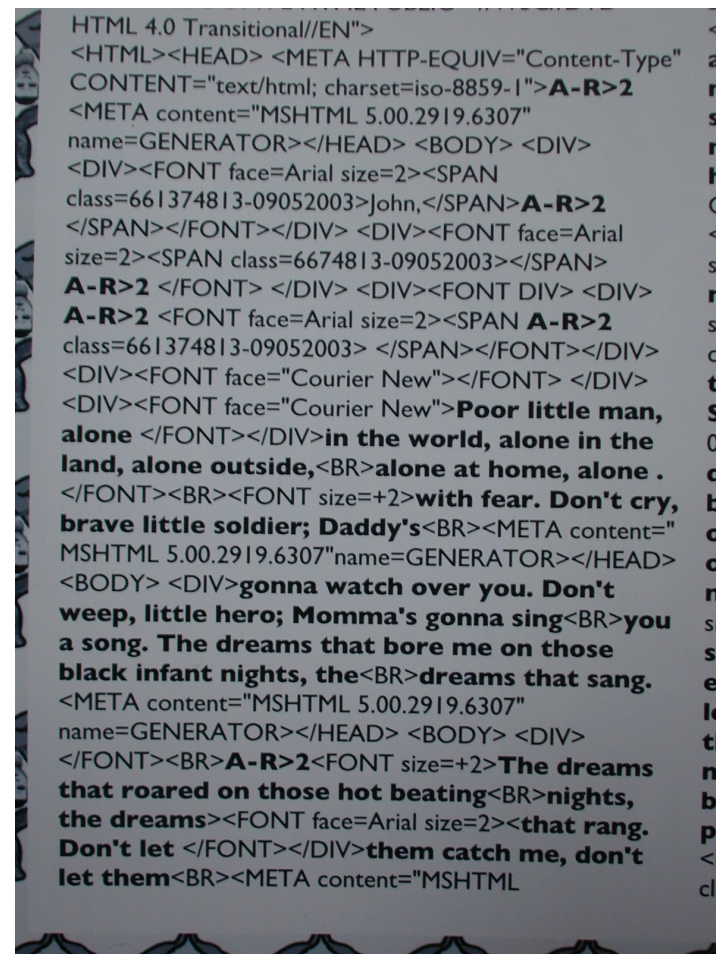
CONTEXT

Excerpt *Where Are You? Story of the Eye*
(A monograph on Portuguese video artist
Antonio Rego. Written 2003, published
2011.

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
the printed word in order to create an emotive effect.



CONTEXT

Essay in *You Do Voodoo*. Group exhibition catalogue, 2007.

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.

for too long, and like a cockatoo in a zoo he needed to be set loose. He needed food, something cooked, something to boost his sagging spirit. He tied his boots, groomed his hair, carefully smoothed his hood, and headed outdoors. But once afoot the neighbourhood looked cruel. From the crooked roots of the drooping dogwoods by the school and the sooty rooks on the Co-op roof he derived a looming sense of doom. He looped around the Moor's Hook, scooted down Broomwood Street, past the bookies, and entered The Balloon. Edging past the boozy pool players, he stood at the old wooden bar and ordered his meal. Feeling a little foolish in his woollen salwar kameez, he slid towards a vacant stool in a gloomy booth. He was reading his book, idly scooping foam with his coffee spoon, when the tattooed football hooligans trooped in.

Was it provoked by Malakai's unusual dress, or perhaps by the strange characters on the pages of the Qu'ran on the table in front of him? It was, Malik thought, the merest of inadvertent glances on his part, but

*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

Essay on the work of Nicolas Party, *Map No. 25*, Summer 2011.

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.



CONTEXT

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 impossible object: towards a sociology of the sublime”.
Dick Hebdige, *New Formations*, 1 (1987) pp. 47-76.

Blasted Allegories. Brian Wallis (ed). MIT Press, 1989

Silence Please. Stories after the works of Juan Munoz.
Louise Neri (ed). Scalo, 1996.

La Belle Captive, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Rene Magritte.
University of California Press, 1996.

CONTEXT

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 Bankowsky 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.



Tal R

CONTEXT

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 Lane 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.



Paper Rad

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