

OUTPUT

An essay, in the form of a fiction, which explores the themes of modernity, temporality, subjectivity and spectacle. The essay was commissioned by Rallou Panagiotou, one of the Deste Prize finalists, to accompany her work in the Deste Prize publication, 2009.

Title
His Loss

Submission No.
1

Authors/Creators
John Calcutt

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.

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

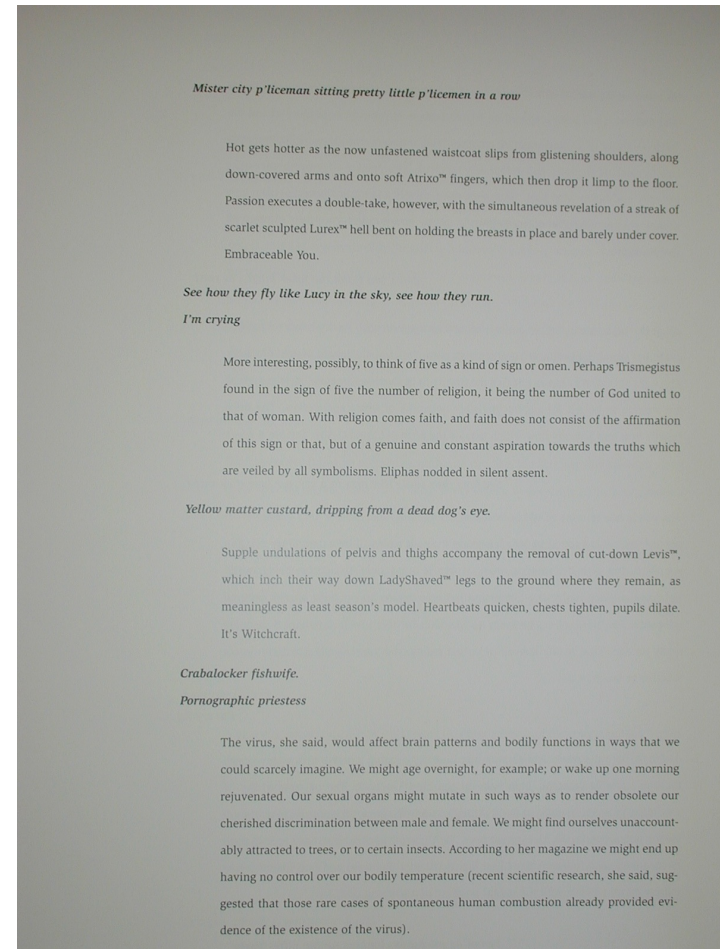
Catalogue essay for *Full Fathom Five*, exhibition in Ohio State University by members of GSA SoFA staff, 1996.

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).



CONTEXT

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

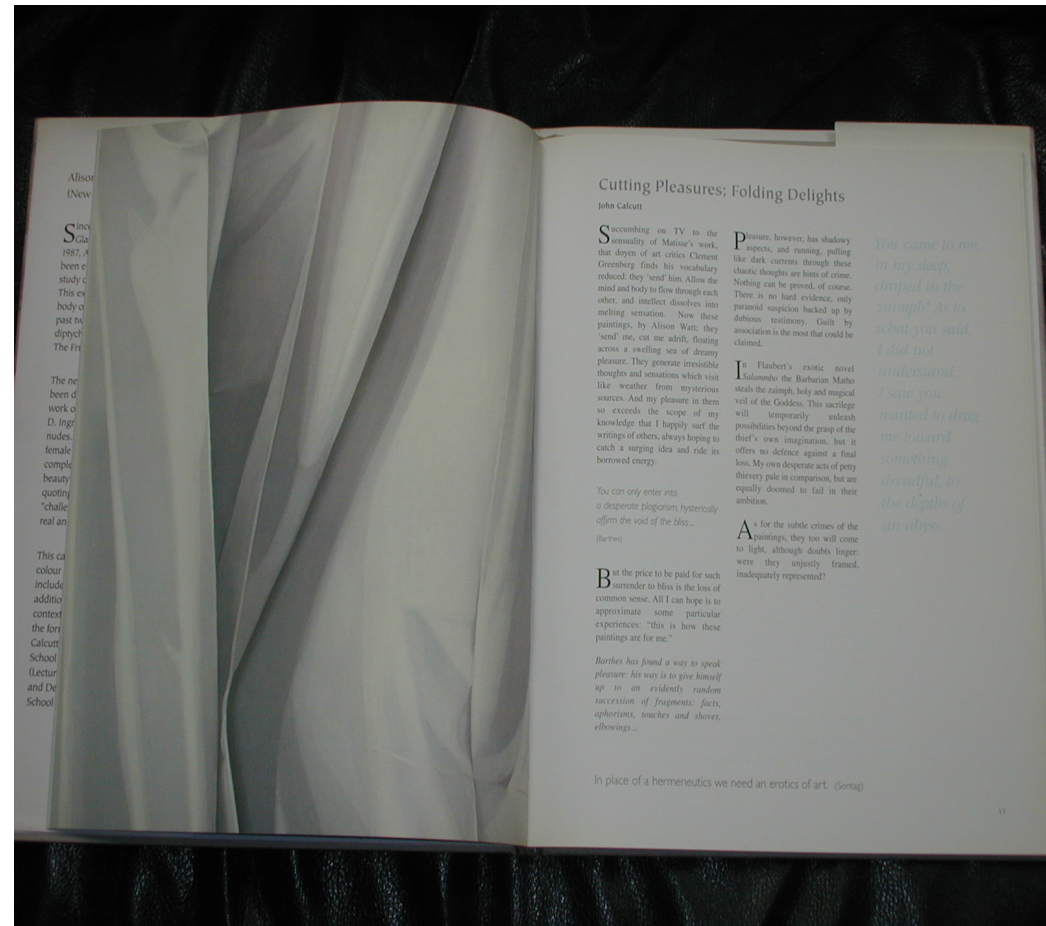
The essay has a montage structure.

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.

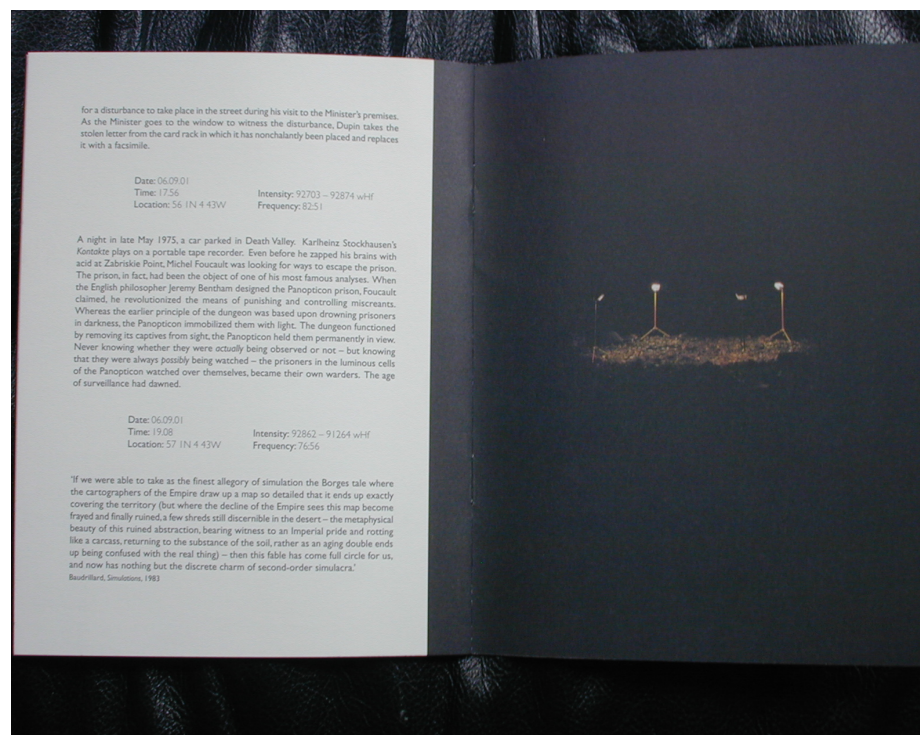
Each paragraph addresses a different idea.

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.



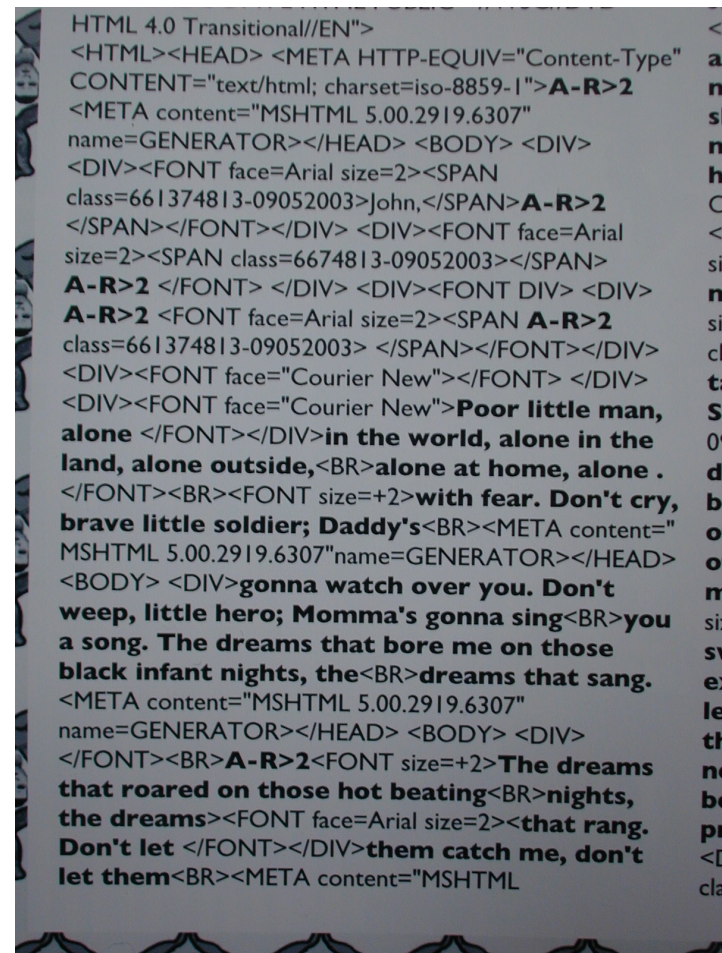
CONTEXT

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*)
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.

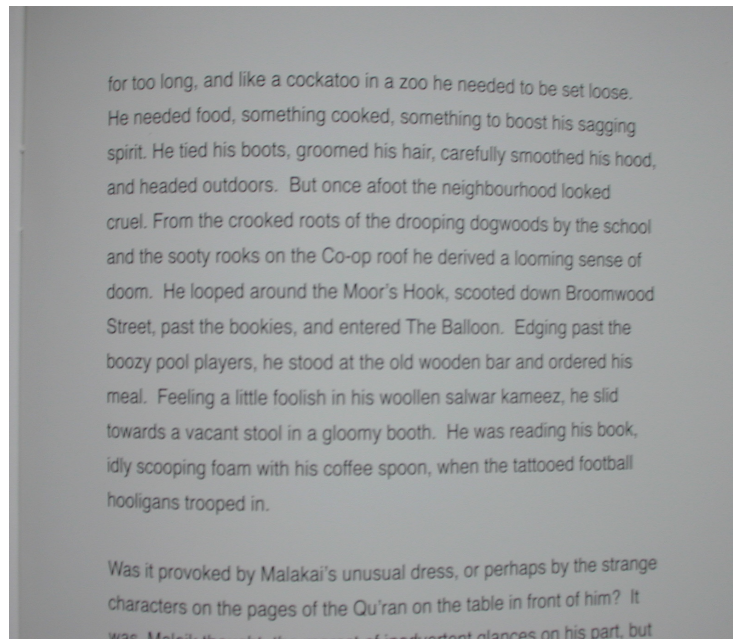


CONTEXT

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) 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

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 similarities are:

Duncan McLaren (especially those art reviews collected in *Personal Delivery*)

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

Neil Mulholland

Fiona Jardine.

CONTEXT



Rallou Panagiotou. Installation, Tramway, 2008

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 and the spectacle) and their relation to the formation of subjectivity. These are all topics that are addressed in one form or another by the essay.

CONTEXT

The challenge facing anyone in their attempt to write about specific works of art is to see those works of art in a manner that allows the writer to write about them in a way that does not entirely betray or misrepresent them. It would be nice to think that the work of art could simply present itself to the writer in its entirety, and that the task of the writer would then be to 'capture' its self-evident plenitude, as if photographing it in words. Unfortunately, the exercise is more complicated than this. The writer arrives laden with baggage; a stock of expectations, preconceptions, prejudices, desires, ideas, concepts, theories, knowledge of other works of art, and so on. A process of negotiation thus begins.



Jasper Johns, *The Critic Sees*, 1961.

CONTEXT

In the case of this output, the work of art that the writing had as its object was not yet in existence. It was impossible, therefore, to produce a text in response to an initial inspection of a particular object. Ideas, or themes, thus replaced material artefacts as the point of departure. I had known the artist's work for about two years before she commissioned me to write the essay, and thus had a fairly good idea about the interests that informed her practice. In order to buttress this knowledge I also asked her to supply me with a list of key words and phrases that she felt would encapsulate her interests. The list included the following: the notion of the modern; the autonomy of modernism; modernism as memory, fragments and ruins; the objectification of the self.



Rallou Panagiotou: Deste Prize installation, Cycladic Museum, Athens. 2009.

This is the work that the essay ostensibly refers to. The work was being produced at the same time as the essay, and was thus not available for viewing prior to commencement of the writing.

CONTEXT

Previous and ongoing research allowed me to identify certain relevant writers (e.g. Walter Benjamin, Rosalind Krauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty) who could provide substance to my thoughts about the historical and philosophical aspects of many of these themes. I made the strategic decision, however, to prioritize the theme of the self – the objectification of the self, the fragmentation of the self – and to address all other themes through a lens of intense subjectivity. Embattled subjectivity therefore was approached not so much as a topic to be ‘examined’ within the text, but more as an experience provided by the text. Perry Anderson’s distinction between modernization (as historical process), modernity (as subjective experience of the processes of modernization) and modernity (the artistic responses arising in response to the experiences of modernity) thus provided another pivotal component within the essay’s conceptual framework

CONTEXT

A methodological snapshot.

Three sources were thereby combined in certain passages of the text: my own disorienting experience of (what was at the time) the newly reconstructed Potsdamer Platz in Berlin; my 'rationalization' of this experience by means of equating it with Frederic Jameson's discussions of the function and effects of glass in postmodern architecture; the literary effects of mental confusion and disconnectedness produced by Malcolm Bradbury in *Under The Volcano*. Such 'fusions' typify the methodological approach adopted throughout much of the essay: a combination of subjective experience, objective research, and attempts at a 'literary' style. The intention is to produce a text whose various levels of reference conspire to generate an effect adequate to the complexities of the art that it is married to, and to the complexities of the reader's experience of those aspects of the world that motivate both text and work of art.

DISSEMINATION

Excerpts from the DESTE Foundation website: <http://deste.gr/deste-prize/>

The DESTE Prize was established in 1999 as part of the DESTE Foundation's policy of supporting and promoting contemporary art in Greece. Awarded biannually to a young Greek artist, the Prize aims to identify and showcase the work of an emerging generation of contemporary Greek artists who are actively redefining the parameters of cultural production and contributing to new issues in the artistic discourse.

Since 2009, the DESTE Foundation has been collaborating with the Museum of Cycladic Art where an annual exhibition of artworks by those shortlisted for the DESTE Prize is hosted.

This collaboration between the two art institutions has become an integral part of the Museum's Young Views program, which aims to develop artistic discussion with younger generations, inform the general public about contemporary art, and establish the necessary environment for the fruitful exchange of ideas.

SELECTION PROCEDURE

The artist's shortlisted for the DESTE Prize are nominated by a six-member Selection Committee, which consists of Greek curators, art critics, collectors, and artists. Each member of the Selection Committee is invited to nominate up to six artists and is asked to submit complete portfolios of the candidates; the choice of artistic genre is open.

A Greek/English catalogue featuring the work of the six nominated artists and supplemented with essays is published by the DESTE Foundation to accompany each DESTE Prize exhibition.

An international Jury of six members selects the winner of the DESTE Prize, following Interviews with each shortlisted artist. The Jury comprises distinguished, international museum directors, curators, and art critics together with Dakis Joannou, president of the DESTE Foundation. The winner of the DESTE Prize is awarded the amount of 10.000 Euros.

Publication available at:

<http://deste.gr/publications/#search=KEYWORD%2C+ARTIST%2C+TITLE&year=&lang=en&paged=6>