

SCRIPT

ART CRITS: 20 QUESTIONS – Talking About Talking About: An Introduction to Visual Art Critiques – by Giles Bunch.

PART TWO FINDING THE RIGHT APPROACH TO THE CRITIQUE

(Narrated scene)

Jheni Arboine: Oh my goodness I fell asleep

Giles Bunch: Oh, me too

Crit cutout 1: It's about an interplay between what is a working animal, how do we work animals, what will animals...?

Jheni Arboine: Ugh, these two are still hogging the conversation!

Crit cutout 1: I was more interested in the form, of the horse

Crit cut-out 2: Oh, yes, I know, I know, I think I read that Fou-cault...

Giles Bunch: Fou-cault? Fou-cault? What? Fou-cault, Fou-cault, Oh! He means Foocolt, Foocolt? Foocolt? Making obtuse un-contextualised references, get the fook olt!

Jheni Arboine: Let's move on and look at some of the different formats that visual art critiques take

Giles Bunch: At the beginning of the first video, we listed some of the different names that are given to these situations. There are very good reasons why in some institutions they're not called critiques, let's look at some of these different formats

(Narrated animation)

01.37

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CRIT

You want to develop your artwork, so you show it to some people to find out how an audience perceives it, or what can be done to improve the piece.

Often these situations, happen in art and design courses, and this might be where you first encounter them, but they happen in loads of other places too, and the discussion of the work might take place in a location relevant to the piece you're showing. You can do it in your house, the park, by some water, or by the road. You can put your work up somewhere, disguise yourself, and listen in to the conversation to find out what people really think. You can ask people to write down their thoughts about the work, or get feedback over the Internet. It's up to you.

The size varies, it could be with two, ten, seven, fifty, or twenty-three people, sometimes even more; but the number of people can have an effect on how the group interacts with the artwork, and with each other. If it's a small group, it's easier to get close to the work, and have an

intimate conversation, although you might not have a wide range of voices. With a bigger group, you're more likely to have a wide scope of opinion and experiences when talking about the work, although it might be harder for less confident people to get involved in the discussion. So the way people interact with each other can change as the group size gets bigger.

02.52

CRITS WHERE THE PRESENTER STAYS SILENT

(Narrated crit excerpt)

The format you use could change depending on what you want to learn; as the artist you can remain silent, but listen carefully to what it's being said by the group.

Artist: I'd like a slightly different format from the first two, in that I'd like you to talk about this for ten minutes, without my intervention, without my response, I'll be listening

(Talking Heads – facilitators and participants)

Miz Nakaishi: I think it's role playing being in the museum or gallery because normally the artist is not there and viewers talk about the artwork or about the artist freely. It could be sometimes quite wrong...

Sean Kaye: Sometimes the work is not being read according to their intentions and they have to consider what they might do, you know, to change that work, in order to make it read the way they wanted or intended; or they might think, actually the way it's being read is far more interesting than my initial intentions and how do I develop that work

Sebastian Hau-Walker: I think that by having, in that sense an audience invited to speak at us, it almost saves us from jumping the gun and saying, "Oh, that was work in progress, it didn't go quite to plan", and trying to, what's the word when you're trying to...

Alicia Radage: Validate

Sebastian Hau-Walker: Validate

Alicia Radage: Excuse

Sebastian Hau-Walker: Excuse, kind of excuse, what has just happened, or to try to feed too much to the audience like "It's like this is" or "about this and this". It's more visceral, a more raw kind of response of, well "I didn't like that", or "I didn't have a clue that was going on", or...

Alicia Radage: It's unmediated,

Sebastian Hau-Walker: Yeah

Alicia Radage: That's really important, I think, how people just react without you justifying it, and going, "Oh, but this, but did you know that we were trying to say this", and then they go, "Oh, maybe". That's pointless, because you want them to make that point, and then you go, "Oh, OK that's how people are receiving it" without us filling in those holes, plugging in the holes...

05:02

CRITS WHERE THE PRESENTER GIVES SOME DETAIL ABOUT THE WORK AT THE START:

(Narrated crit excerpt)

Giles Bunch: You can give some details about the work at the beginning, to give it some context. There might be some specific questions you'd like to ask the group, or the place where you're having the critique might not be where you intend for the work to be exhibited.

Artist: The next time I show it, it will be in an exhibition space with other projections and videos going on, and it will be in quite an inconspicuous, low-down space, it will just be there, and you might happen across it

(Talking Heads – facilitators and participants)

Alison Jones: Art develops, it has different needs at different stages of its development, and I think that sometimes a silent convenor is absolutely appropriate; and other times students should actually say something very pointed about what they're doing.

Katherine Fishman: I think when people did show work in progress, it often resulted in confusion, because you weren't allowed to talk about the work, so people often assumed that it was.... I mean, I never showed work in progress, but if someone did, people often assumed that it was something finished. And yet if it wasn't, often the intention of the work wasn't quite clear and it came across as if it didn't really know what it was trying to do, when in fact it was just unfinished.

(Narrated crit excerpt)

Giles Bunch: Or you might want the group to discuss it for the first part of the session, and step in towards the end, to give some extra contextual information about the work. But as I said before, there are so many ways of doing this, and it's up to you how you proceed

There's also the issue of timing. Critiques could last eleven, twenty-three, forty-seven, or a hundred and ninety-eight minutes; there's no formula to this. But the length of time needed depends on what you want to get out of the discussion. For instance, one person might make a very valuable comment in the space of thirty seconds, and this could be all you need; or you might want to go into great depth over the space of six hours, or even: two days!

(Shot off narrated scene/calendar)

07.02

Here are some of the ways that people organise critiques in art schools, across the different year groups, and beyond.

FIRST YEAR CRITS

(Talking Heads – facilitators and participants)

David Moore: We do a different range of crits, from first years through to final year, which change kind of emphasis, year on year

Sean Cummins: There's a kind of *Show and Tell*, which the first years do when they're just trying to describe and practise what it's like to be in a seminar situation

Garry Barker: The very first crit would be led by the staff, the idea being that these are typically the sort of questions that we might be asking. We also introduce the crit in terms of a series of ethics

David Moore: We know that they're not used to speaking, we know that they've not really had enough time to complete some things, and so we start off from the point of view of actually just talking about "You didn't have time to finish this, what might you want to do?" They're projecting further ahead in time than the object that's in front of them so they don't feel that kind of pressure for this thing to succeed; we're only talking about its potential

Ann Hulland: In the first year of a BA, it's very much about learning the language, of talking about work and moving away from the "I like it", "I don't like it", "I can't say anything", "I'm too shy", you know, all those sort of quite understandable first year issues

David Moore: We can start by introducing the kind of language of form and all sorts of possibilities and then introduce larger concepts to do with contemporary art, as we talk about where this might be or what it might look like in a different situation

08.45 SECOND YEAR CRITS

Sean Cummins: There's a *Show and Context* where students will present context to their practice side-by-side with their own work and then receive feedback from other members of their tutor group, which is normally around twelve students.

Ann Hulland: Second year, the four presenters put up their work as if they were attempting an exhibition together in a gallery. In the evening, they open that presentation up as an exhibition, we have a private view, and it goes public for one night. The twelve who aren't presenting respond to the work before the presenter says anything, so they read the work, they discuss it as if the artist-presenter wasn't there, and the artist-presenter hears the reactions of an informed group like a critical discussion of the work, and then the artist is invited to join the conversation

10.32 THIRD YEAR CRITS:

Roddy Hunter: When I do a crit I do always start by, let's say the work is in exhibition mode, I say let's look at all the works so then you can make cross-references and we don't have to go from left to right with 10 minutes each; we can make a decision to compare one artist's use of a particular medium with another artist's use of a particular medium if that's where the flow goes. Usually there's a point where it seems natural to go from one artist's work to another artist's work because we've all looked at it together and we're all aware of the work that's coming up

Ann Hulland: By the third year that becomes even more refined, so the students are learning to talk with quite a lot of grounding and depth from critical awareness and contextualisation of their practice, and they're beginning to really tease out that relationship with the audience; however they set it up, it might be a direct relationship, it might be an obfuscating relationship, you know, whatever the practice demands

Roddy Hunter: There is an understanding that the work has to be contextualised outside of the place where it's been made in the studio, and it has to start to enter a situation where it can be viewed. There are all the pragmatic aspects around that, in terms of material implications, technical implications. That's absolutely part and parcel of exhibition design

Joanne Lee: We've had some quite interesting debates about the notion of the *show and listens*, and what the students expected. And some of the questions that came up were around things like, you know, maybe there are issues for us around how durational work, or how work that might be site-specific and outside of the rooms that we do show and listen in, might be affected by the fact that the spaces where we do show and listen in are seminar spaces. I know some students show documentation of the work that they're making, kind of externally, but I think that students are quite alert to that idea of who this thing that they're making is for, where it needs to be, and how it needs to be

Nathan Chenery: So that's where I kind of start getting involved. So they then they have to start thinking about, "how am I going to physically put this work in the space?" And the technical requirements coming through that sort of thing; especially in this final semester leading up to the degree show, having been able to develop their ideas critically and technically, because they both cross over so much. It's kind of handy to have that extra aspect, and also if ideas start coming up it sometimes can be a question of turning around and going, "Oh, can we actually do that, or how might we do that?"

Ann Hulland: So it's enabling students in the build-up to leaving the course, with a degree of knowledgeable self reflection, I hope, for their work to go out into a professional arena; but also for them to be able to begin that lone dialogue with yourself that happens as an artist when you leave art school

Nathan Chenery: So, yeah, it's also, once you move on, once you start, sort of mid-career, you'll be going to venues and you will be talking to technicians when you're setting up exhibitions. So it's good practice to start thinking of how to talk to a technician as opposed to a curator, and various different levels you have to negotiate your artwork on, can come through the crit

13.59

Joanne Lee: Because the expectation all the time is that you're doing it in relation to other people. It seems to us that's largely how the art world functions and particularly in that bit, in terms of emerging artists where there's a sense of them needing to support one another, that community of peers is what will sustain them, particularly through those difficult, you know, first few wilderness years of coming out of college and, "oh, what am I doing?" And "how can I fund this?" And all that kind of thing...

14.27

(Narrated scene)

Giles Bunch: Hey, Jheni, I was wondering, would you be able to take a look at something I've been working on at the moment? I'd really appreciate your feedback, and some of your thoughts on it, and maybe ways that I could develop it further...

Jheni Arboine: Of course you can

Giles Bunch: If you could, erm
(Holds up a painting)

14.59