

## SCRIPT

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

#### **SCRIPT BEGINS: (PART 1 – THE PURPOSE OF THE ART CRITIQUE)**

*(Narrated scene)*

*(Muffled voices from waiting group)*

Jheni Arboine: I can't believe we're late for this crit session again.

Giles Bunch: I'm sorry Jheni, I had to stop off to get this time-keeping device

Jheni Arboine: What, a calendar? How long do you think we're going to be here?!

Crit Attendant: What time do you call this?

Jheni Arboine: Hello, we are here attending this crit

Giles Bunch: Sometimes called 'critique'

Jheni Arboine: 'seminar'

Giles Bunch: 'convenor'

Jheni Arboine: 'jury'

Giles Bunch: 'show and listen'

Jheni Arboine: 'peer review'

Giles Bunch: 'scratch'

Jheni Arboine: 'discussion'

Giles Bunch: 'dialogue'

Jheni Arboine: They're called different names, and they take on different formats but they all refer to that situation when you're developing an art work and you show it to a person or group of people so that you can receive feedback.

Giles Bunch: The discussion that develops out of these situations is an opportunity for you to learn more about your own methods.

*(excerpts from crits)*

Roddy Hunter: So she's considered her visual appearance as part of the image, as a performer, hasn't she?

Giles Bunch: A wider context to your practice

Luis Ignacio Rodriguez: Who was the artist that did all those Apocalypse paintings?

Attendant 2: Oh yeah, erm, John Martin?

Luis Ignacio Rodriguez: That's it yeah, do we see that there?

Giles Bunch: And also to find out more about how an audience perceives the thing that you've made, amongst many other things

Attendant 3: I see that there are sort of two main lanes going on

Roddy Hunter: How is it possible to...?

Attendant 3: OK, to me it's like a pathway

*(Narrated scene)*

Jheni Arboine: In this video we'll be showing a few different formats of the critique, some of the issues and problems surrounding this component of art education, and some ways of improving it. But firstly, let's find out a bit more about what the critique is, and what it can do.

*(Talking Heads – facilitators and participants)*

## **02.11**

Jim Hamlyn: Crits really are discussions around an artwork

Sean Kaye: It's certainly a way where you can have a group of students together so that they can learn from each other

Jim Hamlyn: And they're an opportunity to discuss a whole range of issues, meanings, associations, references, metaphors, problems, processes and principles of fine art practice.

Bernadette Blair: It's an opportunity for a practitioner or a student to actually discuss their work, and articulate what they have done in their work to their peers, to their tutors, to others, and for then those peers and tutors to have the opportunity to input into the further development of that work.

Roddy Hunter: The main purpose of the crit is to enable an artist to gain some kind of critical distance on their work, on their emerging work, so they're able to understand the different perspectives

Alison Jones: The most important thing is for students to have the opportunity to have their work discussed so that they get a picture of how the thing they have produced is being communicated – of what other people see.

Kyla Harris: If you're not honest with yourself about what you're seeing, or if you can't be honest with yourself about what you're seeing of yourself from your work, it's helpful to have people to come and critique it to show you how it's being interpreted

Roddy Hunter: And to realise that their intention is not the thing that is primary in the work but how the work actually exists on its own terms

Kyla Harris: When you make a piece of work so much goes into the thought, and the process behind it, and doing it, that you're not objective any longer

Sean Kaye: People will have opinions about the work, and they will, at the end of the day, have to make their own mind up, from those opinions, or informed by those opinions as opposed to somebody just confirming that they are doing something and that it is 'right'

Roddy Hunter: It means that an artist will be able to make decisions about the work that they may not have been able to make on their own

Miz Nakaishi: I normally prefer critical, negative side of a feedback because it just gives me more ideas, and more potential to move on to the next thing. I can always reflect that feedback to the next artworks

### 05.13

Roddy Hunter: I don't think it's a process by which they should be instructed in what to do next

Arthur Watson: If somebody has had a good idea but they're not quite sure how they can physically realise it, you know, they've approached it in one way and what they are getting from their peer group is all the other ways they could have approached it. If somebody says "Well, if I was dealing with that, I would have done it this way". They may say, "Oh yeah that's quite interesting, well, I'm still not going to change it but I'll think about that".

Kyla Harris: They're useful for also evaluating what other people are doing and learning from them. So learning from the resources that people give you in terms of examples, you know, who's work they remind you of, or vice-versa

Arthur Watson: So it's not just conceptual, it's often about ways of resolving physical problems, or problems of installation, you know, "I made this thing but I'm really not quite sure what I want to do with it".

Mark Dean: And over the course of three years the way they make work might change quite a lot and so a convenor is a way of testing that out, testing different strategies of yes presenting work but also making work. And obviously it's performative and there's a cross-over there but even if you're showing paintings, you can show them in different ways, and that will condition the response you get and maybe even condition partly how you make them.

Rita Keegan: A good crit is about trying to find why you do what you do. I think it's imperative for an artist to know what they do

Mark Dean: You have to develop the language to talk about it, it's a language that is partly informed by the discourses around contemporary art, which you might, you know, you read about, you'll be exposed to in critical studies, you go to galleries, etcetera, but I think it also, must be informed by whatever it is that drove you here

Roddy Hunter: Something we talked about today was: "Are you discovering what you're interested in, through looking at your work? Are you discovering what you're exploring? Don't assume that you know what you're exploring from the outset, and the job of the work is to persuade everyone else of your intention. What are you learning about what you're doing?"

Ann Hulland: So it's a discursive moment, in a constructive forum, that helps students get closer to making the better art that they can make

## 08.08

*(Narrated scene)*

Jheni Arboine: I can't believe it, look at this

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

Crit cutout 2: Oh, yes, it's very horsey isn't it?,

Crit cutout 1: Yes, very horsey

Jheni Arboine: We've been listening to these two guys talking about this artwork for at least 40 minutes!

Crit cut-out 1: I like the way the piece includes the viewer, in its looking, in its observing the viewer, because as you can see, the seals are looking out at the viewer

Crit cutout 2: Yes, and the horse is also looking out

Giles Bunch: I know what you mean Jheni, you could say that they are really 'riding' the discussion; one might accuse them of being 'in the saddle' a bit too long; I think the way they are dominating the discussion it's beginning to 'nag' me...

Jheni Arboine: Yes, we should boil down their hoofs to make glue!

Giles Bunch: If only we could arrange the crit differently so we could make it more useful for us

Jheni Arboine: There are many different ways of organising crits, and it's important to realise that depending how you organise it, you could get different results

Giles Bunch: Regardless of where you are, whether you are practising artist, a recent graduate, an art student, or a self trained artist, it's important to use a critique in a way that's useful for you

Jheni Arboine: In part two we'll be looking at the different models of visual art critiques, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of these.

Jheni and Giles Bunch: We'll see you then

## 09.40

## PART TWO

### FINDING THE RIGHT APPROACH TO THE CRITIQUE

#### 09.44

*(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 Fooolt, Fooolt? Fooolt? 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)*

#### 11.19

#### 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.

## 12.35

### 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...

## 14.44

### 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)*

## 16.38

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 Hlland: 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

## **18.28**

### **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 Hlland: 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

## **20.14**

### **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 Hlland: 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

#### **24.10**

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...

*(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)*

#### **24.25**

## PART THREE

### THE PROBLEMS AROUND CRITIQUES AND SOLUTIONS TO THESE

#### 24.26

*(Narrated scene – Jheni is looking at Giles' painting)*

Giles Bunch: {Oh, no, she's not saying anything, she probably can't think of anything good to say about the}

Jheni Arboine: I think the way you've composed this image is really interesting, and the way you've done the outline, leading the eye around the image

Giles Bunch: {That sounds encouraging, that means she likes the background colour, right?}

Jheni Arboine: You know something, I think if you experiment with different parts of it, maybe change the scale, it would do something to the strange and contingent elements of it

Giles Bunch: {Ah, she hates the way the monkey fills the frame, I knew that was a silly idea, I only did it like that because I ran out of red to fill in the sky with. She said something about it being deranged and incontinent, I don't even know what she means by that}

Jheni Arboine: I think you want to look at Gillian Ayres' paintings because she seems to use a similar palette to what you've done here around your subject area. I think you've still got to do some work on it.

Giles Bunch: {I think she hates my painting, I'm going to scrap it completely and work on something else instead}. Thanks for your feedback Jheni, I really appreciated it

*(Throws painting out the window)*

### THE END?

Jheni Arboine: Whilst these critique situations are invaluable for creators to learn more about their practice, how the thing they've made communicates to an audience, and for understanding wider contexts and techniques...

Giles Bunch: ...there are also many issues associated with this format of learning which sometimes impacts on a person's confidence, self-esteem, willingness to participate, even in some cases affecting their motivation to continue the thing that they do. As you saw earlier, I was pretty anxious about showing that painting to Jheni. This is fairly normal and in many respects it shows that I care about the thing that I've made

Jheni Arboine: But as we also saw, there was a big difference between what was coming out of my mouth and what Giles thought I was saying. So, remember, always have a sound recorder

Giles Bunch: Most mobile phones have a sound recording facility, and most people have mobile phones, right? And, if you don't have a sound recorder, then why not assign someone as a note taker, to make notes when you're presenting the work, this will help to take

away a lot of the pressure of having to listen to what's being said whilst also making comprehensive notes

Jheni Arboine: Making a sound recording of your critique allows you to listen back when you're not in that stressful moment. As a result, you can listen back in a more dispassionate way and make more rational

Giles Bunch: Or irrational

Jheni Arboine: Decisions about your practice

Giles Bunch: Recording your critiques can also help if you have dyslexia, or if English is your second language, since it gives you repeated opportunities to listen accurately to what is being said. Let's go back to this emotional response that we were talking about earlier

## 27.48

### PUTTING YOURSELF OUT THERE:

*(Talking Heads – facilitators and participants)*

Linda Lencovic: I did my BA in Canada and I did my MA here in the UK. There wasn't a lot of difference between the two styles of critiques, and I found that a lot of the time it was more, you felt as if you were being judged, you felt as if your work was being judged, and those two are quite closely linked in the sense of the work and the ego being so inter-wound for students. That is something that is really stressing for students when they come in to show their work. They feel that they're being exposed, and it's that sense of vulnerability that freaks you out, right? I think a lot of the time it felt like you were there for either the tutor to judge you, or other students to judge you, and it didn't feel constructive to me

Peter Day: The students, in the feedback that I got, were talking about the fact that somebody had been very critical about their work and it's almost as if somebody had been very critical about them. So the distance between the student and their work, seems to have disappeared, and it seemed to become something that was about a personal comment, or a personal attack

Rita Keegan: They're talking about your baby; they're talking about your artistic energy

Peter Day: The students seem to be putting themselves almost like in front of the work, you know, that the crit was actually placing themselves under attack, and not the piece of work even

Linda L: The thing I sort of do with my students is get the group together and open up the dialogue: "What it is that you're afraid of?" "What is it that you want to do?" "What is it that you want to get out of the crit?" and set up these series of rules as to how they would like the crit to progress as a group.

Mark Dean: One of the tips I give to people is, try not to be too defensive

Peter Day: That this is a positive thing, even though some of the language might not appear to be so. I'm trying to say that being critical is not necessarily being negative, I think that's one of the things, and also to try and not have students feel like it's a criticism of them, within the process of being in a crit

Mark Dean: Less these days, but earlier I remember seeing people, and they would come in and they're literally, almost defending themselves. They get through the half hour, they heave a huge sigh of relief at the end of it, they go back and sit down in the crowd kind of thing, and then the next person comes in. Five minutes after they come off stage so to speak, I look over at them, and you can see they're sort of, "Wow", you know, "Ha! I got through that"; it's like this kind of deflation and you could almost read their mind of, "oh dear, I didn't really need to do that, what I defended myself from was the opportunity of really open up my work".

### **30.46 DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE**

*(Narrated section)*

Giles Bunch: In these situations, it's important to listen to the advice of others, and be receptive to critique. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean the feedback is necessarily correct, other people can be wrong. The decisions you make about how you develop your art work can be informed by what others say; but they don't have to be guided by it, and ultimately you must do what you feel is right

*(Talking Heads – facilitators and participants)*

Luis Ignacio Rodriguez: I might say to you, "stop doing performance, silly, it's not working, carry on painting". But then one I could be wrong, I might not know enough about performance; and two, I could just be doing the wrong thing, because if you were to throw yourself into painting, just because I said it, who am I? but then your heart is not in it, then your work would be crap. Not very good, rather.

Kristine Omandap: When I was in foundation, they critiqued a certain piece of my work, a typographic piece in front of the whole studio. And when it came to the end of my foundation course, I had to create a portfolio, and by following one particular tutor's suggestions and not the others, I arranged this typographic piece in a particular way. Then when it came to creating my portfolio, they completely slated it. They said it was terrible, it was rubbish, and I was like, "but I followed the tutor's advice, you know, this is what they told me to do"

Matthew Randle: So what you're trying to say is, "don't listen to Luis, but do what your heart says?"

Luis Ignacio Rodriguez: Ultimately

Kristine Omandap: They tried to make it clear that although this is what your tutor says, you should take it with a pinch of salt, sort of thing. If, if you feel very strongly about it, you take a part of it, you know, you don't have to take it completely, because it's your work, it's not theirs

Nathan Chenery: One of the things where you trip yourself up with that, is when you're making suggestions and students go "oh, yeah, but I have to do that because this tutor suggested it". And I felt like, well, you know, that was a suggestion, that's part of it, that's opening the work up

Graham Crowley: You give somebody a methodology. You don't give them your approval or disapproval, you teach them how to be critical and analytical, right?

Roddy Hunter: And then you understand as a practitioner, that, you know, in mid-career, you go, “yeah, I've been through this one before, I know what happens if I take this route, because I know myself, I know my creativity, I know how I make decisions. I remember when I did that, now, I'm going to do that”. If the students are still depending on the tutor by the end of their degree to identify issues in the work for them, and to identify the remedy for it, then that's not going to be successful because they don't want to be dependent on that judgement.

### **33.36 USE OF LANGUAGE:**

*(Narrated section)*

Giles Bunch: When you're involved in any discipline, you tend to pick up a specialist language associated with it. This language is useful since it equips you with the tools needed to speak about the things you do, and gives you a greater understanding of your field. But it's also important to remember that people have different ways of describing things, different cultural backgrounds, and varied levels of experience, so you need to make yourself clear and be aware of the experience of those you're speaking to

*(Talking Heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)*

Katherine Fishman: I've noticed that after a certain point people all tend to speak in the same way, and use the same vocabulary

Bernadette Blair: Students often end up sort of voicing the same wordings they've heard their tutors do

Katie Streten: You start picking up on how other people criticise work, using new vocabularies, because you're having a new experience

Bernadette Blair: Part of that is learning a terminology

Katie Streten: That can sometimes overwhelm your own language, and one of the most important things in speaking, is that you make yourself clear and make yourself known. If you start using other people's words, that will disappear

Graham Crowley: You know, Wolheim said, it takes a lot more effort, and a lot more intelligence and application, to address complex subjects, sophisticated ideas and thoughts in a language register that anybody and everybody can understand

Luis Ignacio Rodriguez: Sometimes when people drop names, at crits, they don't make it easy for the person listening, or to who that information is directed at, to actually find those names

Graham Crowley: Oh, yeah, hold on. I think it should be a matter of etiquette, and a rule that if anybody, in a crit, or seminar, or lecture introduces a name, whether it's Russell, Wittgenstein, Plato, you know, or Elizabeth Taylor, to explain, just to contextualise. Because not, and I'm not joking about all of those characters, because there're always somebody in the room, who has other, who comes from some other cultural background where people like Elizabeth Taylor aren't as significant, aren't as conspicuous as they are here

Sarah Rowles: Perhaps there's a role of a facilitator, or a brave audience member to immediately say to the person who's cut in with quite a hefty reference, to say, "can you unpack that please?"

Alison Coward: When I facilitate sessions, often I'm not versed in that particular sector, which is sometimes, well, often, a benefit of it, as I don't know the jargon, I don't know the acronyms and so I'm using pretty straight forward language. If I don't understand something, I'm asking that person to explain to me, and then maybe there are other people in the room that feel more embarrassed about asking that question...

Sean Cummins: They have to hear themselves say things out in the open, rather than assume that everyone has a common understanding of certain technical words or phrases

Alison Coward: ...So, the fact that I'm asking that question because I really don't understand, or I don't know, and then I'm reinterpreting it back to the group, may mean that there's people in there that will understand too

### **36.50 THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR:**

*(Narrated section)*

Giles Bunch: In part two, I spoke about how the size of the group can affect the way that people interact with each other in critiques. As well as an awareness of this factor, the role of the facilitator, or chairperson can also play a big part in fostering an environment in which people feel comfortable getting involved in the discussion. Nevertheless, these situations aren't always about talking and a moment of silence from the group, or individuals can be an important part of this process. Alison Coward talks about the role of the facilitator in more detail

*(Talking Heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)*

Alison Coward: One of the roles of being a facilitator is just, kind of keeping an eye out and being aware of the dominant person in the room, and if there are a lot of people in the room that haven't had the opportunity to speak

Katherine Fishman: It didn't happen in every crit, but sometimes at the end of the session the tutor would ask everyone in the group, "if this was your piece of work, what would you do next?" We would go round the circle and everyone would answer the question; and I think that was really nice because it gave everyone a chance to speak if they've been thinking about something, but they hadn't got the chance to say it; it was kind of well now would be the time when you could say it

Sean Cummins: I think the group's briefed at the beginning that sometimes, someone may say only one thing over a three week period, but how can that person still be active there. Also that sometimes someone can say something at every possible opportunity and not really be saying that much

Bernadette Blair: About sort of the quality of what they're saying, it's very much about the quality of the conversation we are having with them

Alison James: And I think it's about making the student audience, really think about, the kinds of questions that they're going to ask and maybe do some preparatory work on those kinds of questions

Katherine Fishman: And it also puts everyone in a position of responsibility. It felt like more of a problem-solving thing, that you were kind of solving, not the problem of the work, but that we were all working on it together. But then you also get a really nice diverse set of responses

Alastair Payne: And also, I also think you've got to be careful about which way around you look at this. I guess it's not always about trying to get people to speak, but actually the listening aspect of a crit is equally, if not slightly more important at times

Jim Hamlyn: Sometimes people, teachers, especially, dominate crits because they're uneasy about the silence

Sean Cummins: Sometimes, it's appropriate for the group to say nothing, for quite a long period of time, and that, that's not comfortable, that's quite uncomfortable,

Alastair Payne: So it's not about trying to force people to engage through speaking, it's the construction of a learning environment that whether they speak or listen, they are learning

Joanne Lee: During the discussion, to note we might have been silent for a long time, I think it's quite good to make it visible and potentially to allow space. I mean people might be able to say, "well I didn't know what to say", which can open up the, "but why didn't you know what to say", kind of dialogue

### **39.55**

## **AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE & ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

*(Narrated section)*

Giles Bunch: In critique situations, you'll meet people from various parts of the world, who have brought with them different cultural experiences, and native languages. The anxieties or doubts that you may encounter in critiques, will be shared by many, regardless of your place in the world, but it is important to be alert to the position of those bringing with them different languages and backgrounds

*(Talking Heads – facilitators and participants)*

Alastair Payne: Particularly international students, maybe coming in, might have a really different experience in the country that they have studied in previously

Mark Dean: There are two issues here, one is English as a second language

Alastair Payne: They might not have crits, in the institution they've come from, and it's a radical thing for them to actually engage with other students in that environment

Mark Dean: And the other is a sort of broader cultural language

Bernadette Blair: I think there needs to be an awareness of what culture they're bringing with them, and especially that interaction sort of culture

Nim Kook: You know here it's very natural to ask questions, but in my country, I think when the students ask questions, it's not only the teacher but other students, they give you

the kind of impression that it's not really good to ask questions because everybody knows but they just don't speak it

Bernadette Blair: I think the way that I've done it and the way that you can do it is to actually make the whole group aware of each others background, by having some sort of introduction

Nim Kook: Because English is not my first language, I think it's harder to improvise. I don't know how to express it, but it's a bit harder to, you know, speak out loud what you think

Roddy Hunter: Yeah, you must be patient, you mustn't vocalise for someone else what it is that they're thinking, you must wait for someone to find the words that they want to use

Nim Kook: First year wasn't easy but as time goes by, you get more used to the people around you, you get more relaxed and it's getting easier to talk to people. But the first time, because you don't know many people, it's more nervous and you don't know how to speak about your work. I think you're just learning through time

Roddy Hunter: Obviously, that's going to be terrible for someone's confidence if you're suggesting that you know what they're thinking

Miz Nakaishi: It's not just about whether language is well spoken or not, it's also about confidence, I think. I think we have to have more confidence than national students because it's very easy to get hide, because of the cultural differences, or because of the language barrier. It's such a complex feeling, because I still have it sometimes, to be like, outsider. We always have to push ourselves more than national students, to get into the situation as we are not visitors at all, this is our university too. We have to have that kind of attitude; otherwise we're going to miss things

### **43.32 DEALING WITH DOUBT**

Ann Hulland: I talk to the fine art students in the first year, about how it's a subject where we have to deal with doubt, positively. There will never not be doubt, and if you could eliminate doubt, we wouldn't be doing it. I don't mean the crit, I just mean the subject, it's inherent in the subject. It's very important to talk about these things and make students aware that it is a shared thing, that everyone feels doubt, that people that are teaching them have the same fears about putting their work in an exhibition as they do, you know, will it be understood? Will it be misunderstood? Will people like it? Is it relevant? The same fears are there no matter what stage you are in the creative process; it's just that the younger you are in the process, the more overwhelmed you are with those. I think teaching structures have to acknowledge that, but not eliminate them, not, not pump them up, not make them horrible encounters, but you can't eliminate them

*(Narrated scene)*

### **44.46**

Jheni Arboine: I've had some more thoughts about the painting of the monkey that you showed me earlier

Giles Bunch: Oh, yeah?

Jheni Arboine: Can I see that painting again?

Giles Bunch: Erm, yeah, sure, just give me a moment will you?



## PART FOUR

### READING AN ARTWORK AND PUBLIC SPEAKING TIPS

#### 45.00

*(Narrated scene)*

Giles Bunch: Jheni, what process do you go through when you look at a piece of art?

Jheni Arboine: I suppose first I'm looking at its content, its media...

*(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)*

#### 45.31

### READING AN ARTWORK

David Moore: So to begin with we're just talking about very simple things, it's "what are we actually looking at?"

Sarah Rowles: What colours are the artist using? Why is he using them? What scale has the artist chosen to use? Why has he chosen to use that scale?

Katherine Fishman: I can talk about what the work reminds me of

Sarah Rowles: What materials is the artist using and why? What textures is the artist using and why?

Garry Barker: Is it vertical? Is it horizontal? Is it like you standing vertically?

Sarah Rowles: If they've titled it, what significance does the title have?

Garry Barker: Is it bilaterally symmetrical? Is it in balance, or stand on one leg?

Sarah Rowles: Do we think there's some kind of story or narrative going on?

Katherine Fishman: A lot of the time I give artists or contextual references I think are relevant and interesting for the person to look up

Sarah Rowles: All of these questions, I think, you know, only once in my education I remember someone going through that with me

Kelly Chorpening: I kept saying last week when we had this critique that everyone was getting into clever language, and I kept saying, "yeah but what we're looking at here, is a circle in a piece of paper".

Sarah Rowles: In my head, I need to go through some of the basics of, “OK, so I can see this object. OK, it's blue, why is it blue? What does it mean if it's blue? It's shiny, why is it made to look shiny? OK, it's large, why is it large?” If you see what I mean, so all these, the basics of reading all of these visual qualities in order that I can try and build up an understanding of what is it that they're trying to do.

Miraj Ahmed: Because they're thinking of the overall concept and the various layers but they forget that actually these are marks on paper

Sarah Rowles: But, before I could have the time to do that, immediately, in their first line someone would say, “Oh, this work reminds me of”, and then, announce some really famous artist, so, Kippenberger's whichever, piece, or Koon's whatever, and then half of the room will carry on the discussion around that work, but if you didn't know that reference, you're immediately prevented from taking part in the discussion. It's really rare that that person then unpacked it, or anyone has the guts to ask

*(Narrated scene)*

Giles Bunch: We've heard some of the questions that an individual might think about when they begin looking at a piece of art, and some of the issues that can emerge when talking about an artwork in group situations. Here are some of the methods that people use when starting up discussions, and analysis round and art work, these can be particularly useful in critique situations

*(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)*

Jim Hamlyn: There was this idea to get people to describe what they're seeing as if they're describing it to someone that's listening on the radio.

David Moore: Talk about it even in terms of gestures or sounds or, you know, which at first, using humour, things that surprise the students. You say well, that looks a little bit like “Pop” (*makes popping sound*), or something like that, so they're like “What? What does he mean by that?!”

Garry Barker: We start the analysis of visual literacy through an awareness of the body

David Moore: It just kind loosens them up a bit, and gets them used to the idea of talking all the time

Garry Barker: We can start developing conceptual thinking through the reality of the body and making, as a starting point rather than setting it somewhere over there

Jim Hamlyn: It's good to start critiques with the most basic things, just to start with the description

Kelly Chorpening: This year I did a matching game where I had artists' writings about work without visuals, and asked people to guess what they thought the work was. Usually their guesses were way off from what the person had written

Nathan Chenery: The work's visual. The way I think about technical literacy, so actually, my part when students come and, they say, "I've got this idea but how do I do it?" They need to understand the technical aspects of it. I know there are some places where they go to the technician, and they get it built and they come back and they go with it, but if they're not building it, they're not understanding it, and they come to a crit situation, and get asked "so what are you doing here, why have you done this?" And if they don't know the answer to that, then they're going to struggle. So it's kind of, yeah, equips them with the knowledge they need to talk about that work

*(Narrated scene)*

#### **49.53**

Giles Bunch: We're in the final section of the video,

Jheni Arboine: We've all done really well to get this far. Let's give ourselves a round of applause, it will be a good morale boost for the final segment

*(Various participants are shown clapping once imitating a director's cut)*

Giles Bunch: Jheni, I feel much better after that.

Jheni Arboine: Me too.

#### **50.14**

### **SPEAKING IN PUBLIC**

Giles Bunch: Let's talk about public speaking. As we know, being good at presentations, or public speaking, isn't a prerequisite for being a successful artist. But this isn't to say that it is not important to be aware of these techniques that allow you to communicate better with people, especially in critique situations, and as Alison James points out, it's assumed that everyone picks it up along the way: an incorrect assumption that means that many people never develop these skills at all.

*(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)*

Alison James: What we do is we assume that by the time people get to university, or especially if they're mature students, they've got enough life experience that they'll know how to do these things. So I think we rely on the fact that somebody else will teach them somewhere.

Laura North: There are so many times as a creative student, and as a professional that you need to speak, whether it's in class, in a crit, in meetings

Arthur Watson: I think it's always going to be important that students can articulate their ideas,

Laura North: And then pitching for business, there's so many scenarios

Arthur Watson: It is important that they learn to discuss things, not just among their peer group, but with others

Laura North: You need to feel OK about doing it

Arthur Watson: Because sooner or later people are going to be interviewed or something

Laura North: It's very easy to go "Oh, I just won't participate, or won't speak, or I won't do that meeting". But people that do, tend to get ahead, and the truth is, whilst you're in study, it's fine you can probably, you don't always have to participate, and you can learn quite a lot, it's fine, but if you're a professional in the creative industries, if you're a freelancer, and if you don't go and talk about your work, and you don't pitch your ideas, it's going to be really hard for you to get work. I really believe so much in trying to create some sense of equality. And if you're talented, it's really important for you to give yourself a better opportunity to do well in life, because otherwise you'll look back and go "Oh God, there's all this stuff I didn't do when I could have done"

*(Narrated section)*

Giles Bunch: It's important to be able to communicate the things that you do, so here are some tips to help improve this.

*(Talking heads – facilitators, participants and industry professionals)*

Alison James: Number one is believe in your subject. If you believe in your subject, you're interested, you're keen, you've researched it, you're thinking about what your position is in relation to it

Roddy Hunter: Ask the students to do a one-minute presentation on something that they are interested in and are knowledgeable about

Alison James: It may have raw edges, but that belief, that interest, that passion, that comes through, and I think that's really, really important, because that will inform all the talking you have to do. And I know we don't always have that luxury of being able to love a subject we need to talk about and there are things we just need to communicate, even though they're not, terribly interesting.

Roddy Hunter: So you give someone something to talk about that they know about, and people are very apprehensive, but I think, pretty much by the end of the first year, you then take that one minute and then you make it five minutes, and then, you know, people make presentations on their essays...

Laura North: Partly preparation, if somebody doesn't have the chance to prepare that makes them nervous,

Nim Kook: I think preparation is, the key thing that made me feel really confident

Alison James: I think quite often also if we're nervous, we're nervous because we've had a bad experience, and so we rehearse that bad experience. So any techniques that are going to help you get rid of you replaying in your head that terrible time are good. Visualisation is a really good technique, so instead of rehearsing "Oh my God, wouldn't it be awful if I fluffed, dropped things", it's in visualisation: you just think about what is it, what is the best possible outcome, and imagine it, but imagine it in such a real way that you can imagine the temperature of the room, the gaze of the people, how you're feeling inside, how your material is coming across, and you just conjure, in your head, this kind of picture. So you know, it may sound a bit funny but elite sports people do it all the time. It's that psychological management that you're doing to get in control of your mind and your nerves

Katie Streten: Body language is incredibly important when you're presenting

Kristine Omandap: I found myself at some points, with my arms going all over the place and I was playing with my hair and I was just doing things. So I try to keep quite calm

Katie Streten: There are sort of three ways of using body language. If you are a very animated person, you speak a lot like this and your hands are all up in the air and a lot of emphasis is going on, you immediately start to cause tension, anxiety, and it all feels a bit kind of hectic. On the other hand, if you stand with your hands by your side, and you don't move, or you stick them in your pockets like this, and you don't speak, there's an instant kind of withdrawal, there's an instant kind of removal I suppose from the audience, and there's a sense that you're a bit static

Kristine Omandap: But at the same time still be excited about my work because, you know, if you don't speak with some excitement and some sort of, I don't know, movement in your story; then people get really bored

Katie Streten: So what you want is for your hands to move in the central part of your body. This part of the body, and your hands in this part of the body, actually makes people feel very relaxed. So if you find that you're the kind of person who holds your notes, and grips them like this, or wants to put your hands in your pockets all the time, or fold your arms or whatever it is, the easiest thing to do, and it will feel very strange, is to take your notes, anchor your elbows into your waist, and practise doing this (*moves forearms left to right without leaving anchor*), as you speak, and, when you practise it, you will feel like an idiot, but, the net effect is that you get used to having your hands in the right space, you start to move them in a slightly more fluid way; and gradually your elbows start to come out of the side and you get to a more comfortable space. It means that you're not rigidly like this, or kind of madly like this and what it does is, it makes you more relaxed, and it makes your audience more relaxed

Alison James: I think the presentational mechanics are often things that get overlooked, because people see them secondary to the delivery of the content, or the talking about the subject. But it's amazing how many lost opportunities there are when people don't understand how to make eye contact with the group, how to make sure that you're talking to everybody, how to make sure that your voice can be heard at the back, how to project a kind of confident and engaging persona even if you're really not feeling it inside

Nim Kook: When they have no expression, yeah, it's I think the point, yeah, then it makes me nervous

Alison James: I joke with them. I say, "look at your smilers and noddors, because if you're out there, if you can see a smiler or a nodder, then, instantly you've got somebody who's a friendly face in the room. If you haven't got any smilers or noddors, and you're too nervous to make specific eye contact, look at a point just above their heads; because, you know, it will look like you're looking at them, but you'll feel like you're giving a sweep to the room, and you're not just"... (*looks down at her extended hands over her lap*)

Katie Streten: Write everything out long hand, then condense it down into notes.

Alison James: What are your three key messages? What are the three most important things that you want people to remember from what you're going to talk about?

Katie Streten: Smile and say hello. I really think it changes a room dynamic, and it makes the experience a lot more pleasurable. And smiling has a physical, psychological effect on you. You know, this is a well known fact, it makes you feel more happy and when you feel happy, you feel relaxed, and then the audience starts to feel relaxed and then they sort of start to come with you

**58.09**

*(Narrated scene)*

Jheni Arboine: *(Yawns)* So that's the end of the crit then?

Giles Bunch: Really? Tell me it's true

Jheni Arboine: Silence, it must be. How long have we been here?

*(calendar shows that they have been there for four days)*

*(Yawns)* Let's go home

Giles Bunch: Yes, I want to go home,  
What are you having for tea?

**58.38**

CREDITS

END