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'Script'

Ambiguity: editorial © Phil Sawdon

... ok ready when you are

Drawn for Hector Affection and Admiration

Phil Sawdon: 5five 2006

... No language we've got flags of our own¹

...oblique conversation and a dialogue with ambiguity (herself)²

... ambiguity is the principal source of the inexhaustible richness of art. If we do not quickly tire of a picture or a piece of music, it is because we do not always see exactly the same pattern of coloured patches or hear the same pattern of tonal pitches. Instead we pick up or resonate each time to somewhat different relations within the pattern ... The picture or music, however aesthetically pleasing in its own right, is only interpretable as an abstract pattern of patches in space or pitches in time; the picture or music is also interpretable as, say, the play of moonlight and of violins overlapping waters on the shore of some distant summer's day.³

Aaaaaaggggrrrrrhhhhhh decisions or questions eh? matrices and/or narratives scanning and/or spanning oblique conversations and a dialogue with ambiguity (herself) and how we do not (cannot?) say 'the table is under the book' or 'the tree is under the monkey' and how all these things are determined by prepositions⁴

Avis Newman (AN): I think the paper is an undifferentiated space in that it references the primitive undifferentiated space of the infantile body that has to be claimed as the self

¹ Secret Machines, *Nowhere Again*, Warner Bros, 2004

² Jane Tormey, email correspondence Loughborough University, 2006

³ Roger Shephard, in *Drawing: A Contemporary Approach*, Teel Sale and Claudia Betti, Thomson Wadsorth, USA 2004 p 73

⁴ Jane Tormey, email correspondence Loughborough University, 2006

Catherine de Zegher (CdZ): Is the undifferentiated space language, that Other, everything that is outside of us? It is, I think, the entity of possibility.

AN: Yes, and I think the fascination and the fear of the white page is the site in which one enacts differentiation as soon as a mark or sign is made. It changes the non-ness and establishes a place of action. As soon as that act occurs the paper becomes something.⁵

... distill the essence of 'Ambiguity' - uncertainty of meaning⁶

To draw is never a transcription of thought (in the sense of writing) but rather a formulation or elaboration of the thought itself at the very moment it translates itself into an image.⁷

The 'Atheism' of Ambiguity: an ambiguous slice of editorial practice ∞

A fictional and illustrated, editorial conversation between Ambiguity (herself) and Kiki (a frog) where some of the content is a development of a dialogue originally between Jonathon Miller and Richard Dawkins broadcast during *The Final Hour*, BBC Two Monday 14 November 7pm - 8pm as part of Jonathon Miller's *Brief History of Disbelief*, BBC Two, Monday 31 October - Monday 14 November 2005.

Prologue

Aristotle said the sun goes round the earth. Wrong, wrong. But in his day you didn't have to prove a theory. Nowadays if you say, "I think soot is the elixir of life if mixed with water!" Well then prove it. "I will prove it with string and iodine and a note from my mother." But in Aristotle's time you could say the sun went round the earth and people said well done that's a theory, fantastic, and just a few photos all right?⁸

Kiki (Ki): I'm very interested in 'critical moments' within a practitioner's creative process ...

⁵ Avis Newman/Catherine de Zegher 'Conversation', *The Stage of Drawing; Gesture and Act, Selected from the Tate Collection,* Tate Publishing and the Drawing Centre, New York 2003 – 2004, p. 237

⁶ Susan Kemenyffy, email correspondence, Loughborough University, 2006

⁷ Jean Fisher (written with Stella Santacatterina), 'On Drawing', *The Stage of Drawing; Gesture and Act, Selected from the Tate Collection,* Tate Publishing and the Drawing Centre, New York 2003 – 2004, p. 222

⁸ Eddie Izzard, *Dress to Kill*, Video, Ella Communications Ltd.1998

Ambiguity (Am): Yes and there are a number of interpretations perhaps other meanings

Ki: Such as ... what makes us doubtful at a critical moment?

Am: I think it is an argument away from and with drawing(s) as 'designed'. If we appreciate the complexity of practice, and in this instance I am talking about drawing, and we don't understand the Hectorian explanation for it then we tend to do the rather naive thing of assuming that if something (an outcome?) looks as though it's designed, it probably is designed, and we don't wake up to an alternative explanation. Intention and purpose are too literal. Without the Hectorian explanation, design is a very bad explanation for the complexity of practice (drawing).

Ki: Why?

Am: Because for one thing it has regression built into it. You have to explain 'The Designer'. This is why Hectorism and Hectorian evolution are such a 'simple' explanation of the complexity of drawing practice.

Ki: Perhaps I should explain that Hectorism for me is a theory of epistemological and personal reflexivity developed by René Hector and others, stating that all forms of creative practice arise and develop through the critical selection of small, innate variations that increase the practitioner's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce (personal reflexivity) memories of a creative process. Ambiguity herself may have a different summary version.

OK, so please can we go back to that period when you, as Ambiguity, first started to have doubts ... perhaps because there were so many theories and interpretations ... to when you first read Hector.

What form did your relatively un-doubting reflexivity take?

Am: I was 'devout'. I used to meditate or do I mean mediate? But it just didn't hang together. It didn't make any sense. I... I could follow an argument that said my practice is such a beautiful place it needs a designer, but that wasn't what it was about at all. It was all about originality and things which I could see weren't really coherent.

Ki: So in a sense, it was more tied to morality - and a sense of 'sinfulness' if you like more than it was to an aesthetic of the creation.

Am: Maybe

Ki: Were you constantly told that you were in the nature of man, an inheritor of something that we might call sin?

Am: I don't remember. I do remember odd little... stupidities such as,

"drawing practice is the result of inspiration". That it is not a result of intention, reflection, analysis or research... that practice is a result of estrangement!

Ki: You became acquainted with the writings of René Hector. Can you give a summary of a version of Hectorian theory?

Am: First I would make a distinction between the fact of evolution and the actual change from practitioner to practitioner over generations that has led to all the practitioners we have today by gradual change such that you wouldn't have noticed it in any particular generation.

That is a matter of fact that can be observed by its aftermath in the form of institutionalised outcomes.

Then ask what the guiding force is for it being like that, Critical Selection. All practitioners contain digitally coded representations of themselves, digitally coded instructions for building themselves and for making more like themselves. The instructions survive or they don't survive depending on how good the practitioners are at surviving and at how good they are at reproducing and therefore passing them on. Therefore the creative domain becomes filled with coded instructions for being successful in building drawing practitioners that survive and reproduce those very same coded instructions.

Ki: But what is the source of these 'originals' that Critical Selection exerts its pressures on?

Am: The originals are artistic variations. They are neither inventive nor ingenious. They are random. Let's focus on Critical Selection as its only Critical Selection that produces practitioners that have the illusion of design. The illusion of design does not come from the novelty; it comes from what happens to the originals as they filtered through.

There are no intermediate stages that are not beneficial. There's no room in Critical Selection for a foresight argument. There's selection pressure all the way through the process.

Ki: So the reflexive process won't tolerate a statement such as "please be patient, it's going to be a drawing, and you just have to believe me".

Am: Perhaps, but probably not.

Ki: So there has to be a series of advantages all the way in the drawing. If you can't think of one then that's not Critical Selection's problem. Critical Selection is a matter of faith.

Over and over again we come across cases where a drawing starts out doing one thing and then gets modified to doing another.

Am: Is there a fatal weakness in an argument, which says, "I cannot understand how that drawing could have happened, so it must have been 'designed'." I think of Hector and Za Za attempting a drawing that explains how to whistle. Suppose that they found it too difficult. Would we have respected them if they'd said something like, "I can't work out how to do this, Za Za. Can you?" "No Hector, I can't. Let's just give up and say The Designer will do it for us."

Ki: So why is the atheism argument important if indeed atheism is what we are arguing?

Am: What if we regard the notion of our supernatural designer as a hypothesis? The moment you talk about a supernatural designer you are advancing a scientific hypothesis, which is either right or wrong. A creative domain that has a supernatural intelligence, a supernatural overmind in it, is a very different kind of reflexive space from a purely scientific point of view than a space which hasn't. It's a difference. There may be minds far superior to ours but they will also have come into existence through a slow, gradual, incremental process. They were not there from the start.

Ki: Is there a way in which it can be proved right or wrong because it belongs to a domain of existence and entities about which that sort of proof, disproof and research are irrelevant. There is something that some call 'the difference of artistic practice' in other words perhaps even a 'leap of faith' which identifies one with a creator.

Am: It may be impossible to demonstrate one way or the other. So there may be no test you could ever do to decide the question. Is it true or isn't it?

Ki: A 'leap of faith' might mean that a practitioner has an internal feeling, a revelation which can't be demonstrated. Is that delusional or ambiguous? The practitioners with the 'internal revelations' presumably consider that practice doesn't literally intervene otherwise they would have to concede that it is a 'scientific' hypothesis. Is the domain in which practice works rather strangely detached from a world domain. Limbo ... and as soon as practice makes any concession in the direction of wonder, awe and mystery then it is itself 'religious'. Is drawing a transcendental, mystical and religious process?

Am: If I am 'religious' for that reason then my reply is, "Well, you're playing with words."

Ki: So should we reserve a different kind of language? A source language, converted into instructions by a compiler, for the nature of the equivalence between the verbal and the visual.

Am: I'm reminded of John Berger stating that 'when words are applied to visual art, both lose precision. Impasse'⁹

Finis

∞

⁹ John Berger, *Berger on Drawing,* Occasional Press 2005, p. 80

Postscript

La Maison de Tutu is a French puppet show from 1965 in which a dog named Hector after attempting to compose some verse decides that the only way to immortalise the sunset before him is to paint it and this is the exchange:

'First I like to sketch it in with a few dabs on the canvas.

How can I paint without a canvas?

This time Mrs. Frog I really feel I'm going to paint a masterpiece.

I don't think this easel is in quite the right place. Please bring it over here ladies.

With painting you've got to find the proper angle. Always try and see and then paint the subject from the most interesting angle.

Get your proportions right. One, two, three times the apple tree.

Oh my hat!

What's the matter with your hat Hector?

It's my old gardening hat.

I can't paint pictures in my gardening hat.

It goes against all the rules of art.

Here we are. Now with this on I really feel like an artist, I can get started.

Oh the sunset has disappeared.

Ah well, a true artist doesn't mind waiting'¹⁰

¹⁰ The further adventures of Hector's House, Video, © 1965 Europe1, Channel 5 Video