

The 'Un-Authored' Object

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Abstract

This conference is made up of a collection of people who use arranged systems in art pieces. A prominent aspect of systems in art is the creation of products that are separate from the artist's creative decisions. In Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube*, he didn't decide the arrangement of the water droplets as they formed on the acrylic. The responsibility of that was given over to the system and gallery conditions.

The main themes of the paper are separateness and otherness in art. The study will focus on four case studies: 'Slumber' by Janine Antoni, an in gallery performance work; the status given to meteorites in early cultures; Andy Goldsworthy's work; and an example of an 'un-authored object', something awe inspiring formed by chance. Two ideas develop from the analysis of these sources; shared human experience is essential to art; and that chance happenings create an otherness which put all people in the same position of separateness.

Essay

The 'un-authored' object idea; objects formed out of chance and accident, that are then noticed and valued in equivalent ways to the art object is theoretically interesting because it questions the technical relationship between seeing and creating, and more broadly the dynamic of the viewer and the artist. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art' Heidegger defines the creative act as "bringing forth a being such as never was before and will never be again"[1]. The moment of making art manifest and the moment of noticing, are both inside the "bringing forth" creative moment. There are different sorts of creating; realist drawing, imagining etc. which have related sorts of noticing. To draw a realist piece is to notice; and then employ hand eye coordination to translate the observation. In making up stories, the creator can build a fantasy but his only power is to combine[2]. Language in its basic sense is a collection of signs; one sign is put with another to make an interesting connection that is accessed through knowing what the original signs are. Language is learned. The beginning of language must have happened through focusing sensory experience; the creators of language would notice something and wish to indicate it specifically to others. You look at something, then I look at it, then you check with me, that I see what you see and we decide a term to use to refer to it. At the root of our ability to imagine; from where we would invent the signs; is 'constructive' imagining; that is the psychological act of 'reviving' sense experience in our mind. This allows the beginning of our inner conception of the world, our specific

perspective to form. So creating, “bringing forth”, perceiving (sensing, ‘reviving’) and then making; is fundamentally individual because we have each developed a sensory relationship to the world prior to learning any communal linguistic conception of it. Agreeing that we both see the same thing bonds us and inventing a sign for it commits us to our agreement. With a view of society that holds a one to one relationship as the way society bonds, the art object presented in a gallery doesn’t engage the primary social relationship. It is secondary, the viewer perceives the art object, as they would a Natural ‘un-authored’ object, the dynamic part of perception that can bond people is absent from the artist’s manifested perspective placed in a gallery and the viewer’s perceiving of their perspective. Art doesn’t have the luxury that language enjoys of its elements being previously agreed; the sensory aspect of art is utterly subjective. The viewer perceives the object but isn’t given the opportunity to have a balanced relationship with the artist; they are left to project personas.

I will study three cases which elaborate on the artist, viewer dynamic and then show the place of un-authored objects within the discussion. Janine Antoni’s ‘Slumber’ is a work which physically includes her in a practical passive manner. She would sleep in the gallery at night attached to an EKG machine to record her R.E.M. brain activity. During the day she would weave the blanket that she slept under, and with torn pieces of her nightgown she would weave the pattern of her sleeping brain’s activity into her bed cover. The viewer’s experience of her work is entwined with their consciousness of her presence. Martha Buskirk, a writer and curator, has analysed Antoni’s piece in her book ‘The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art’; and puts Antoni forward as someone who unites the viewer, the gallery, and the artist.



[3]

Allan Kaprow in his essays ‘Education of the un-artist I, II, and III’, argued dissolve into the experience of the moment of its creation. She grounds this thinking in the pragmatics of the necessity of telling people about it; interesting culture will out, in one way or another; so the artist may as well shack up with the gallery and approach the viewer in an ordered manner, as Antoni does fascinatingly, using language of institution and tradition to intimate effect. Another artist that Buskirk may have been interested in is Kirsty Stansfield. She made a work, ‘Object Scores’ which invited the viewer to explore

the work. It was an installation which, when the viewer moved around it, or touched the taught guitar wire, made ethereal sounds. It was a piece that took investigating; the viewer's presence completed the art work. When Jacques Rancière discussed the object that is individually interpreted he gave the example of a book. The book is something complete, in *Object Scores*, Stansfield re-defined the art object to require a physical contribution from the viewer. In *Slumber*, Antoni was the one to provide the physical contribution expanding the relationship of individual to object, and making it about reacting to a person and their environment. It's about the place of the person.

The second case is the meteorite's place in early cultures, the majority of the information for this comes from the book *'The Forge and the Crucible'* by Mircea Eliade. The kings of Malaya venerated a sacred block of meteorite iron and some tribes that weren't familiar with smelting took other tribes arrows and worshipped them. Eliade explains this behaviour thus:

"It was not a question of fetishism or of the worship of an object for its own sake, it was not a matter of superstition but a sacred respect for a strange object outside their own familiar world, an object coming from elsewhere and hence a sign or token of the 'beyond', a near image of the transcendental."^[4]

What's specifically interesting about this sort of object relationship is the place it puts the perceiver in terms of Nature. Looking at the meteorite history, tribes valuing meteorite iron more than gold, building a history of how people have looked at Nature, objects and sanctity; the position of objects in that dynamic. In the tribes they made rituals, they carved the meteorites like stone, the people incorporated them into their culture. It wasn't a straight position of awe. In a lot of the myths the meteorites were sacrifices by God to create people, so the people sacrificed back, it was relational. The sacrifices in Aztec culture are examples of this. This put man in a position of power; the shamans would partake in sorting out Nature. Today the larger meteorites are on exhibition in museums, presented to be observed. This makes them a very different kind of object from those that were made into items of religious significance. Here the object is dead, perhaps it has a nifty piece of museum writing beside it telling its interesting origin and where and how it was found, but it is taken out of a cultural dynamic with Nature and sanctity. Eliade towards the end of the book writes about that shift in the social position of sanctity and its impact on work ethos, in early cultures people ceremonially shot the arrows to worship the Gods, now they are put in museums. What is art's place in contemporary culture? In 1972 Rebecca Horn performed an atheistic ritual; 'pencil mask', she strapped a leather mask to her face which had short pencils attached all around it, she then moved her head back and forth in front of a white wall, making the work about time and her presence. What's different is the purpose and mapping of meaning in Horn's piece. Her person is a generator of meaning, the mask is a generator of meaning; the viewer perceives and makes the meaning. They'd watch the video of her doing it, in the room with all the pencil marks on it. Or now just watch the video. The marks are supposed to be inane, no God to be worshipped by them.

With the Land Art of the seventies to the present, there is an element that can be suggested as being an attempt to connect to a quasi-spiritual relationship with Nature. The philosophy of phenomenology and its presuppositionless stance on our experience; that there is always empirical experience before abstract thought; is relevant to this. A

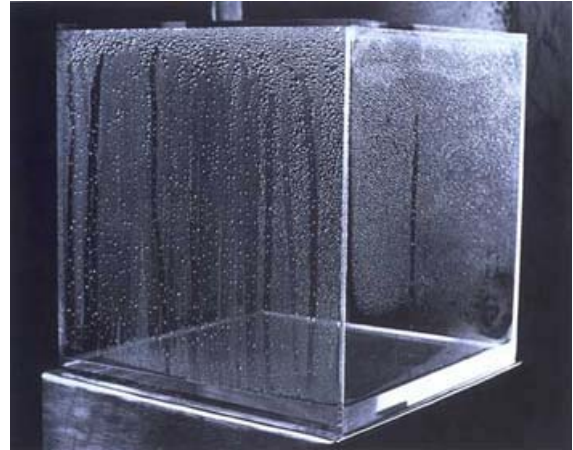
major idea in phenomenology is the essential place of man as part of Nature. From the position of my discussion about perceiving the object; the separation of looking and articulating is key. With the work of Land artists, focussing specifically on Andy Goldsworthy, the trace of creativity left in Nature, attempting to enhance our experience of Nature, it is important to remember the effect of the human ego. The psychology of object relations conceives of our sense of ourselves as relational, rather than Freud's concept of an enclosed personality. The interesting thing about this track of experiential philosophy in terms of art is that the construct of the gallery system is of the individuals experience. Goldsworthy's current exhibition at YSP attempts to colonise the gallery using an overwhelming amount of raw natural materials. He and local helpers covered the walls and ceiling of one of the exhibition spaces with mud and human hair.

The Un-Authored Object

Finally, a piece of wax, which accidentally dripped off a rose coloured church candle onto a plate.



[4]



[5]

This object is 'un-authored'. It was caused by coincidence. It is more than the sum of the intention that was put into it. It's a document of the process of the wax cooling, its proportions resonate with those of clouds; the way the blobs have cooled beside each other is familiar to how organs sit together. Its proportions, form and texture all resonate with the physics of everything which causes other things we are surrounded by to operate in a similar manner. I picked it up and found it valuable. I can drip wax onto plates on purpose but it won't be as interesting, the chance which authored this makes it much more interesting than my contrived attempts could be. Pollock said he entered a Zen like state in creating his paintings. But even with him, there is an intention over it, willing it to be interesting and so it would succeed or fail according to his decisions. This piece is not a success or failure, it's a find. I project value onto it. There are many attempts to bypass this 'desire' aspect of art making. Hans Haacke's 'Condensation Cube' is about minimalism, control and physics but also in viewing the drips of the water on the acrylic there is a sense that no one has desired this particular Natural arrangement, the viewer is having an unadulterated moment with Nature. This can be

seen in Ceal Floyer's work too. In their work they deal with the art gallery as a site, a situation of references and defined social actions, looking. If we think of this 'un-authored object' not in the individualised, structured experience of the gallery but in the everyday space of my living room and ask if the object would be valued so much if one of my flatmates would have picked it up rather than me. I have a desire for visual experiences which are not pre-defined, which we are not encouraged to enjoy, which we choose, through our looking to enjoy. I loved it for its unintended creation. I assign approval to the object and show it to my peers to enjoy. There is no author, so all people have the same separateness from the work, it is an egalitarian experience.

References

- 1 Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art* p.159
- 2 Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author* p.4
- 3 Janine Antoni, *Slumber*, 1994, New York
- 4 Wax, 2007, *Flat of Christine McLoughlin*, Glasgow, UK
- 5 Hans Haacke, *Condensation Cube*, 1963, Museu d'Art Contemporaini, Barcelona, Spain

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Appendix

Tramway, *“Kirsty Stansfield: Object Scores”*, Glasgow, March 2007

Yorkshire Sculpture, *Andy Goldsworthy*, Yorkshire, May 2007
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