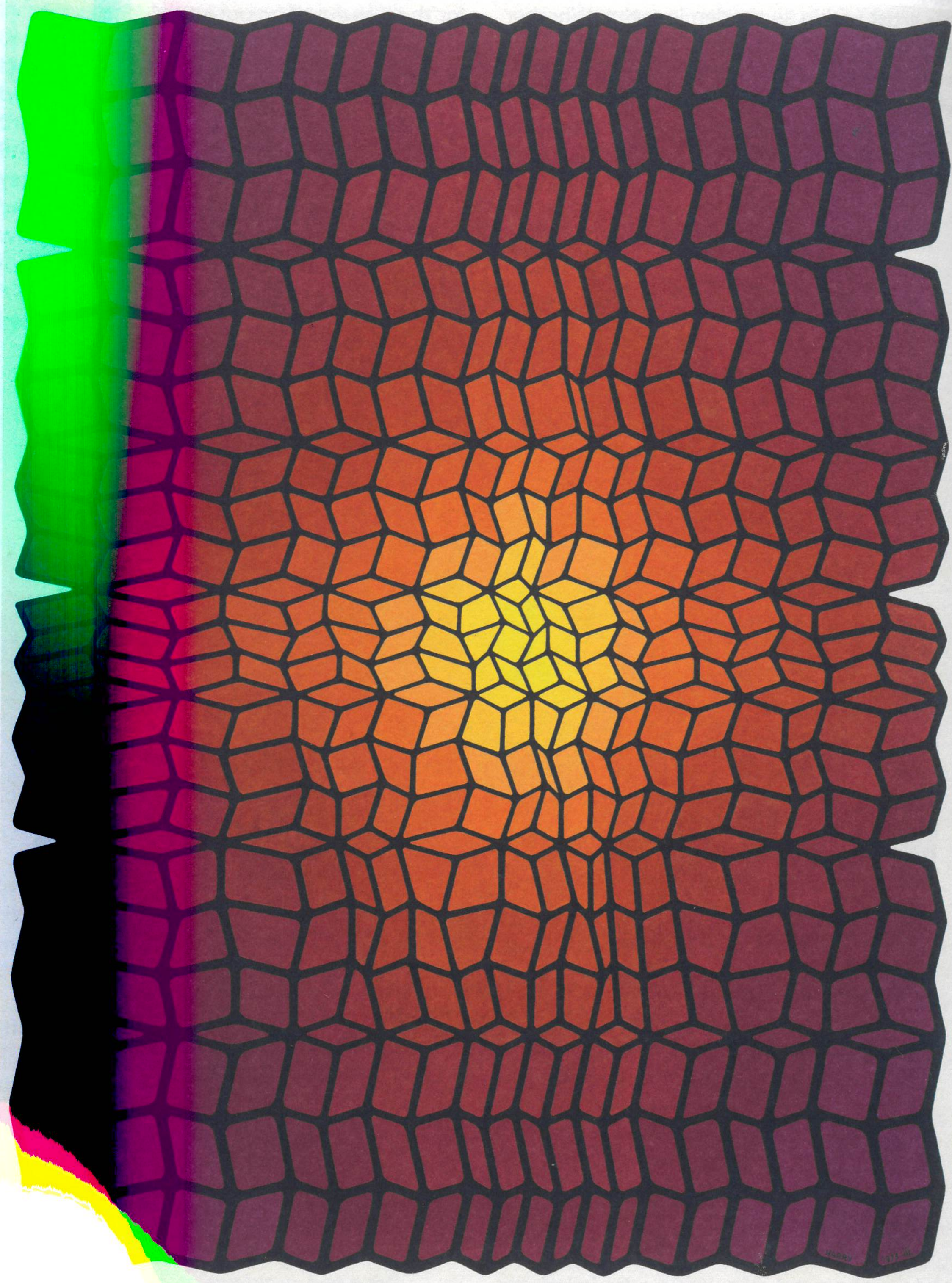


IX

FROM 'CRIT' TO 'LECTURE-PERFORMANCE'

In the post-war period, artists not only gained prominence and became public figures at a younger age, they also increasingly engaged in the public discussion of their work. This chapter explores this development, which can be at least partially situated within the art school, where a new figure of the artist was promoted, as a thinker, as an intellectual and as someone in charge of the conceptual grounding of his or her work. Research for Tate's Art School Educated project found that over a short period of time, artists had to start performing a particular role as 'the artist', that is, as a confident, assertive and self-defined individual, a type modelled on certain prominent American artists of the day. There was also a simultaneous and growing interest in the performing arts, which fostered an acute awareness of and exceptional emphasis on formats of teaching delivery and on instigation of hybrid forms that bridged lecturing and performance. The Sculpture Department at St Martin's School of Art in the early 1960s was at the heart of these developments and was where discursive pedagogies and practices – particularly the formats of group criticism and the lecture-performance – blossomed and became influential models.[1]

THE RISE OF THE 'CRIT'

In Britain, the proliferation of verbal exchanges and written assignments within the art school is conventionally and appropriately discussed in terms of the academicisation of tertiary level fine art education. Following the implementation of the Coldstream Report (1960), art history and complementary studies were introduced into the curriculum in order to grant academic credibility to studio practice, providing a level of education intended to be equivalent with honours degrees in the university sector. At the same time, the renewed perception of the artist as a thinker rather than a mere maker, and the parallel development of discursive pedagogies, is also associated with the opening-up of the art school to the development of modern art and, in particular, the shift from figuration to abstraction. The image of the artist was now seen as akin to that of a scientist, working on the establishment of a universal artistic vocabulary. To confirm this new image of the artist, the art schools had to devise new ways of teaching their students, in particular, new critical formats that could be used on the actual work that the art students produced.

The pedagogic mode known as 'group criticism' – in Britain, often shortened to the 'crit' – had its origins in the teaching undertaken in the traditional art academy where there was a long history of intellectual debates among teachers and pupils. Nonetheless, the 'crit', as a format, started to acquire a new and distinctive function when the teaching of art moved from figuration to abstraction. At this historical moment, something was lost which for centuries had acted as the barometer of artistic competence in the academy and had been pivotal in the assessment and discussion of drawing, painting or sculpture, namely, the execution of such works in terms of likeness and of the rendering of the human figure. From the Bauhaus itself to the Bauhaus-derived Basic Design courses taught in a number of British art schools and in university fine art programmes in the 1950s, the teaching of abstract basic forms involved the adoption of the group 'crit' format as key to the discussion and the establishment of new criteria, which could be adopted by teachers and students to guide art-making (fig.9.1).

← Fig.9.1 Session of group criticism, Scarborough Summer School, 1956. Collection of the National Arts Education Archive at Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Across Britain, it was during the 1960s and 1970s that group criticism acquired a more prominent pedagogical role. Stephen Chaplin, as archivist of the Slade School of Art, describes how in the mid 1960s teaching changed from the traditional easel-visit to the 'crit' format that became standard practice in the 1970s, where staff and a group of students would discuss a work by one of their number.[2] For Chaplin, such a move indicated a clear shift in the relationship between the verbal and the visual, playing a major role in the progressive turn of higher art education towards discursive pedagogical formats and practices. As part of this history, it was in the Sculpture Department of St Martin's School of Art, at the beginning of the 1960s, that the 'crit' turned into one of the most distinctive, notorious and influential teaching formats in British art schools, the pattern at St Martin's becoming a model for many other institutions. In fact, group criticism did not just constitute one pedagogical model among others: it became the main occasion for the exchange of ideas on art-making and a forum that acted as a rite of passage for students to be publicly recognised as fully-formed artists.

FRANK MARTIN AND ANTHONY CARO

The 'crit' was just one innovation at St Martin's during the 1960s, when the school became internationally renowned for hosting one of the most innovative Sculpture Departments in the world. Yet, until the mid 1950s, the school had only had a small Modelling Department. Change came about when Frank Martin (1914–2004) was employed as Head of Sculpture in 1952. One of the first part-time tutors Martin employed was Anthony Caro (1924–2013) and the major breakthrough that the department made in its teaching centred on the transition from figuration to abstraction. Although by the late 1950s many established British sculptors were working in abstract modes of expression, the art school curriculum – apart from the teaching imparted through the Basic Design courses – had remained unchallenged by such exterior developments. Beyond those Basic Design courses, it was in the so-called 'Advanced

Course' at St Martin's that, prior to the implementation of the Coldstream Report, the teaching of non-figurative sculpture was conceived and practiced (fig.9.2).

↓ Fig.9.2 Frank Martin (middle-right) teaching in the Sculpture Department at St Martin's School of Art, mid 1950s. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

The history of the successful 'Caro school' is relatively well-known.[3] It was for students on the vocational Advanced Course, freed from the need to develop the official curriculum of the NDD and freed from the need to follow pedagogical models rooted in figuration, that the teaching of sculpture underwent important transformations. Early in 1960, after Caro's return from his mythologised trip to New York, Martin and Caro cleared one of the two available sculpture studios of any (and everything) figurative.[4] As the course was delivered, it was the tutors and students working together who proposed and implemented numerous changes to the pre-existing curriculum – aspects and initiatives such as discarding the pedestal in favour of the ground; discarding casting and modelling in favour of welding and assembling; moving from soft and natural to strong and artificial colours; and from the use of metal, wood and clay to the adoption of new materials, including plain board, plank, rod, scrap metal and fibreglass. The cohesive group of students trained under Caro between the late 1950s and the early 1960s is often referred to as the 'New Generation' sculptors, a name that originated in the 1965 exhibition *The New Generation*, organised at the Whitechapel Gallery by its director Bryan Robertson. Out of the nine young sculptors, whose work was presented in that exhibition, six had studied and then went on to teach in the St Martin's Sculpture Department: they were David Annesley (b.1936), Michael Bolus (1934–2013), Phillip King (b.1934), Tim Scott (b.1937), William Tucker (b.1935) and Isaac Witkin (1936–2006).

↓ Fig.9.3 Left to right: Lord Snowdon, Frank Martin, Bryan Robertson and Phillip King. Robertson visited the Sculpture Department of St Martin's School of Art with Lord Snowdon, c.1965, prior to the publication of *Private View* (1965). Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

While, from 1964, sculpture students at St Martin's could enrol on the DipAD, an Advanced Course at postgraduate level continued to exist well into the 1970s.[5] If the history of the course taught by Caro has been the object of a number of publications and exhibitions, what has never been discussed in any depth is the major role that group criticism played in the shaping of such a cohesive and influential group of artists. For both Advanced and diploma students, group criticism constituted one of the most important and distinctive aspects of their learning.

Caro has referred to the continuous discussions that took place among and between tutors and students as crucial in the questioning of conventional assumptions about what sculpture was and how it should be made.[6] As the life room emptied, the sculpture studio filled with discussion, which in turn developed into a distinctive pedagogical format. The studio became a site of conversation and experimentation rather than a place where tutors would teach specific skills and guide students towards traditional subject-matter. Everyone who taught on the Advanced Course valued the role played by the dynamics that existed between individuals, all of which were fostered by the open studio, which they considered to be 'vital for the maximum inter-personal contact'.[7] In this respect, the redefining of sculpture at St Martin's was a group activity, collectively shaped through the teaching and through talking. Caro would go to see the work of his students and they would visit him in his studio, both parties commenting on each other's new work. Caro has explained this as a strong osmotic relationship: 'we were our audience and our critics.[8]

Unsurprisingly, sculptors from St Martin's, while exploring new territories which had yet to receive critical plaudits, were in need of each other's responses and support. Moreover, a shared moment of appraisal, in front of the physical work, was needed because it had become common, among tutors and students, to work directly on the final object.[9]

↳ Fig.9.4 Courtyard of the Charing Cross building, St Martin's School of Art, used by sculpture students to assemble and display their work, c.1965. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

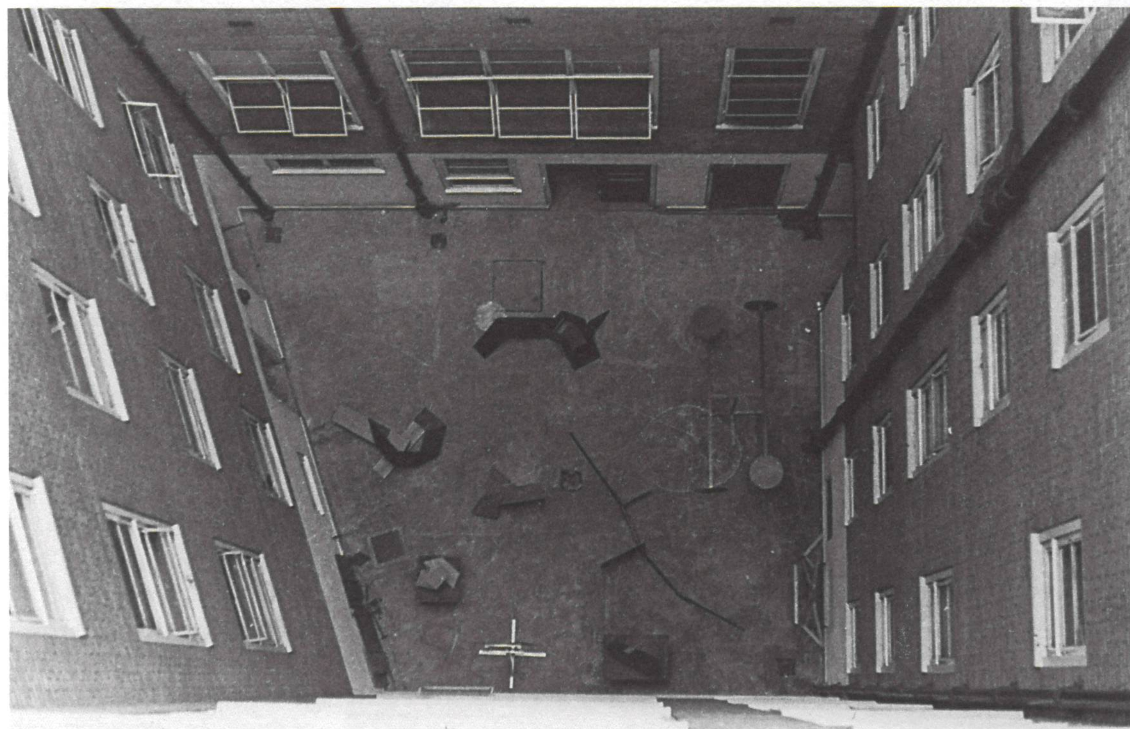
In the making of sculpture, the new techniques of welding and cutting steel dispensed with the processes of sketching, the making of *maquettes* and of scaling-up. The finishing of the sculpted object was effectively the first, dramatic moment when an artist could seek and receive feedback on his or her new work.

Alongside informal discussions, a more clearly formalised type of group discussion was to be conducted by Caro's fellow tutors: this was, the studio 'crit'.[10] It involved the assessment of students' work through

discussions between the student and a number of tutors in front of the work and in the presence of the students' peers. Students were asked to clear an area of the studio in which to set the work up and allow its examination by tutors and fellow students. On these occasions, students were 'asked to comment at length and in depth on the work presented'.[11] All students were requested to attend and participate in the discussions arising from individual 'crits' other than their own since it was felt 'that these discussions often bring up points important in a general as well as individual way'.[12]

It is here argued that the implementation of this new teaching format constituted the necessary outcome of and response to unprecedented shifts in the way that students' work was being produced and assessed. The process of making had undergone a rapid transformation. The abandonment of the long-lasting traditions of life drawing, painting and modelling as processes that were central to the students' education left a void in terms of the criteria for discussing and judging artistic production. How was a student's work now to be discussed and assessed? On the basis of what criteria, if not historically shaped ones? The answer was for artists – both tutors and students, as equals in a project to devise new principles in the making of art – collectively to establish such new criteria through group discussion.

The informal discussions that started to take place were soon formalised into the weekly group 'crits' or 'forums', which became a distinctive feature of the teaching of the Sculpture Department. In this process, around half a dozen finished works were displayed in the main hall of the college building and much of the work presented was rejected by the other participants. Yet, it was precisely the artists' need to face such disparagement and to defend their work that was considered essential for them to 'forge and sharpen their views'.[13] For Frank Martin, who was in overall charge, the forums were opportunities for students 'to gain confidence, to see themselves as sculptors, to be able to stand by and take responsibility for their work in the face of the devastating criticism of their peers'.[14] In attendance were sculpture tutors and students as well as their peers from other departments and external visitors, such as artists or members of staff from other schools or critics and gallery owners from London, as well as foreign visitors.[15]



On the basis of the classification of the art school's pedagogical models established by academic and critic Thierry de Duve (b.1944), teaching at St Martin's was a direct outcome of the Bauhaus model.[16] The aim of the school was not to train apprentices in a single *metier* but to encourage an understanding of the arts according to the specificity of the medium, while fostering invention. Within this pedagogic framework, students' work was judged in relation to the formal aspects of the work immanent to the medium.[17]

↓ Fig.9.5 'Important Photos – Studio action all year', St Martin's School of Art, c.1966. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

In the establishment of an abstract sculptural idiom, a predominant role was played by better insights in London about American abstract painting and direct contact with American artists and critics, who supported abstraction.[18] Howard Singerman argues that in the USA the 'group critique class' first emerged in the 1950s, when painters needed to develop a teaching format that would allow them to get to grips with abstract form and the possible kinds of content it could carry.[19] He argues that as art was becoming increasingly abstract, it expressed more demands on the linguistic abilities of the critic and of the artist discussing his or her work, in the need to make language serve the experience of art. In the Sculpture Department at St Martin's, the demand on artists' linguistic abilities may have been even greater because they needed to do more than bridge the gap between the description and analysis of abstract forms and their possible content or the experience they solicited. Since abstract expressionism was a cultural import, a wider gap had to be bridged before there could be a breakthrough into a new and exciting way of making.

Group criticism was also a useful format in the articulation and adoption of a new way of making art, as the result of a rational and concept-driven process. The curator Lynne Cooke has argued that from the example of abstract expressionism 'the [New Generation] sculptors acquired a proclivity for questioning and examining the very nature of their activity which instilled a conceptual or at least theoretical basis to their understanding'.[20] For Cooke, Tucker's 'keen concern with theoretical issues was very influential within this St Martin's nexus and contributed significantly to the intellectual or conceptual basis underlying their approach'.[21] Tucker himself has otherwise spoken of the importance of the moment of conception, in a way reminiscent of the precepts of conceptual art: 'Sculpture could be made from anything, about anything. Permanence consisted in the strength of the idea, not in the material.'[22]

Nevertheless, the work made by 'New Generation' artists was not 'conceptual' in the sense in which the word would be used in relation to the international movement later known as conceptual art. The conceptual presentation of the work was not to be the result of prolonged reflections on the assumptions regulating art-making and on the language shaping its supporting discourse. Rather, what students were to be judged on was referred to as their *intention*. In the forums

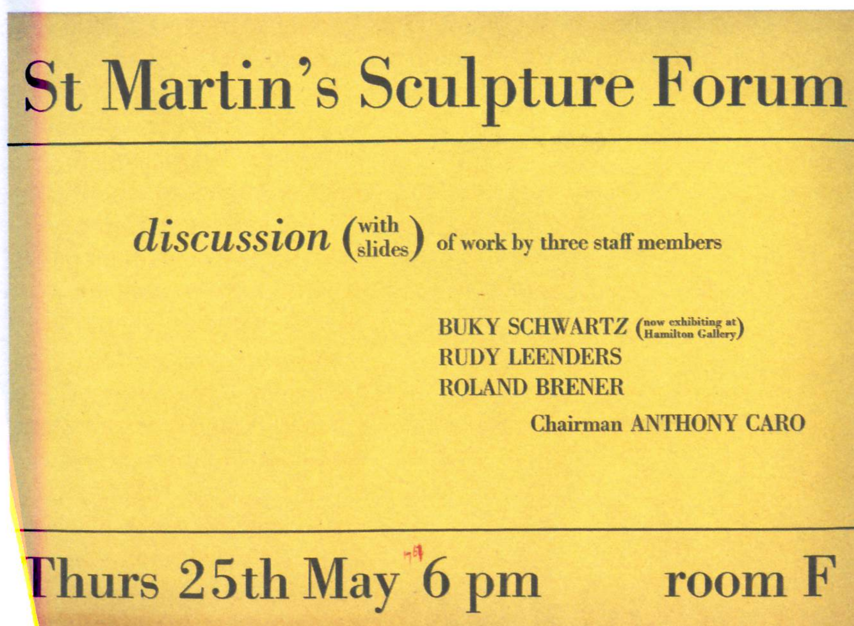
as well as in the studio 'crits', students were 'asked to outline the main intention' of their work.[23] As Caro declared after his 1959 visit to the States: 'There's a tremendous freedom in knowing that your only limitations in sculpture or painting are whether it carries its intentions or not, not whether it's "Art".'[24] For Tucker, the process of making might completely change the aspect of the finished work, but not the original intention: 'In making the image you realize the intention more clearly.'[25] The artist's intention might have not been a fully-formulated theoretical argument supporting the making of the work of art but it was certainly a step in that direction, towards the envisioning of art-making as a concept-based activity.

If the major objective of group criticism was to set new criteria guiding and justifying art-making – constructing a dialogical framework for the making of the work – the 'crit' was inevitably to end up functioning as a regulating apparatus. Despite the initial experimental nature and inquisitive character of the teaching, increasingly tight parameters were to be established for the evaluation of the aesthetic success of the students' work. What was to guide the establishment of these parameters? What were the pre-established trajectories that students were to follow in the articulation of their intention? The major influence was played by the criteria already shaped in the writing of the American critic Clement Greenberg.

GREENBERG

Not only was Greenberg's writing recognised as the most assertive and persuasive US criticism, he also played an important role by supporting and giving greater visibility to the St Martin's department.[26] The criteria for the evaluation of art that were starting to be identified through tutor-student group discussion were inevitably influenced by his contribution. The critic Andrew Brighton, who studied painting at St Martin's and used to attend the sculptor's forums in the mid 1960s, remembers a new vocabulary penetrating the art school's discourse through those sessions.[27] He remembers people suddenly using words hitherto unknown such as 'Rothko' and 'modernism' and reading Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture* (1961) and Michael Fried's articles in *Artforum*.

By the mid 1960s, by which time American critical references and vocabulary had acquired a discriminating role, the initial phase of open discussion regarding what constituted art was at least partially over. Greenbergian criticism guided the making of art towards a progressive focus on the self-sufficient and the reflexive conditions of the medium and towards a reduction of all the formal aspects, which were not essential to the medium itself. This was reflected in the broadening limitations self-imposed by numerous students on their own work, while the criteria establishing the parameters of good sculpture, as rehearsed in the 'crits', seemingly became self-evident. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) is an important reference point when discussing the role played by group criticism in this developing process. Lyotard writes about the legitimation of knowledge through performance within learning institutions. He states that disciplines 'owe their status to the existence of a language whose rules of functioning cannot themselves be demonstrated but are the object of a consensus among experts'.[28] The subscription to these rules is requested, and their implementation is guaranteed by their assimilation and dispersion in a multiplicity of occurrences.



At St Martin's, group criticism ended up acquiring a normative role in legitimising the dominant ways of making. What is more, ingrained rules for art-making were not only related to a specific critical discourse and its vocabulary, but were cemented by a particular performance. The 'crit' constituted a rite of passage by which a practising artist was recognised as such by means of a double act of presentation. On the one hand there was the display of the work of art itself, on the other the discussion of the artist's work in a public arena, in front of a group of peers and respected practising artists. The status of artist was coming to be acquired not so much through public applause but through the endurance of the experience of public discussion.

← Fig.9.6 This poster, advertising a forum in 1967, shows the format of group criticisms. They were structured around the physical presentation of sculpture but could also involve the projection of slides of previous work. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

The ritualistic and performative aspect of the 'crits' did not escape the observation of some of the most critical students. Commenting on the 'crits', Bruce McLean (b.1944), a student in the St Martin's Sculpture Department 1963–6) famously stated: 'Twelve adult men with pipes would walk for hours around sculpture and mumble'.[29] As observed by critic Mel Gooding, McLean's observation was a reaction to his realisation: 'that sculpture itself might be secondary to something else, might be simply the focus for the real object of the exercise – pose.'[30] Sculpture provided the occasion for the staging of a routine with relatively fixed formats of discussion and styles of presentation.

→ Fig.9.7 Anthony Caro smoking a pipe in the company of other tutors from the Sculpture Department, St Martin's School of Art, c.1963. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

Such an interpretation suggests that Frank Martin's and Anthony Caro's insistence on organising the forums as staged tournaments for the training of young artists, each needing to stand up for their ideas in front of their peers, may have sowed the seeds amongst the students of a particular interest in posture and the staging of performances and actions. Moreover, McLean's statement points towards the particular nature of the social performance defining the St Martin's forums, in which artists – nearly exclusively men – played the dominant role of the confident and self-centred 'macho' creator, an image which had been promoted and popularised by the first generation of artists of the New York School.

While students training at St Martin's under 'New Generation' tutors felt the generational need to contest the standing and achievements of their predecessors, broader change was undermining the seemingly untouchable authority of 'high modernism'. Already at the beginning of the 1960s, Greenbergian criticism was entering a crisis related to the rigidity of its own parameters and a younger generation of students, who enrolled at St Martin's in the early to mid 1960s, started to challenge the power of this regularly performed knowledge. Lyotard has stated that 'there are two different kinds of "progress" in knowledge: one corresponds to a new move (a new argument) within the established rules; the

TUESDAY EVENING PROJECTS 1966

An extension to the current individual student project by asserting physical organisation in other ways than those employed in the actual making of the sculpture. An attempt was made by each student to make use of the ideas and aims of his particular work in a physical demonstration - by the use of his or her limbs in any way possible with, or without, other props. It was not to be a 'drama' or ballet and the one or two that verged on this were patently less successful. The extraordinary thing was that in fact the most banal series of movements when put to use in this way could take on a particularly poignant and dramatic form. It was also extraordinarily revealing method of showing up differences in personality and aims however similar particular pieces of sculpture may have seemed.

Make a sculpture expressing a given physical emotion: i.e. 'Having a hot bath'. The object of this exercise was to permit the maximum freedom of use of materials and technique (no essential permanence or stability) within the short time span allocated which necessitates speedy decisions and consequent activity. This necessity, the necessity to make very quick decisions, seems to have been the main stumbling block to the success of most of the efforts, and a good deal of time was spent attempting to describe and elaborate upon this. A certain resentment was felt at the sheer pressure in which the work was attempted.

It is felt necessary that, as an extension to the considered work of projects taking place during the day, periods during which the student can become entirely absorbed in the processes and attitudes developed from a single limited notion, and equally, as an extension to the 'formal' information gathering of lectures and seminars, that an evening period could be devoted to attempts to in any way possible to break away from the habits of routine. Projects, group actions, discussions, any physical means will be used to attempt to open up the habitual assumptions developed during other work periods.

Make a pyramid.
Groups of 3 or 4. Potentially imaginative concept of scale-grandeur-structure-mass-density-struggle to erect etc:

Five minute crash individual writing on specified subject. i.e. Cubism, Discussion following individual reading of results.

Quentionnaire
Individual responses for discussion.

Make a sculpture which responds directly to your feelings concerning another selected work of one of the other students.

Make a colour.

Make a gate.

other, to the invention of new rules, in other words, a change to a new game'.[31] If we accept Lyotard's guidance on this principle, we can say that students in the St Martin's Sculpture Department, such as Bruce McLean and Gilbert & George (b.1943 and 1942, in the department respectively 1967–9 and 1965–9), invented a new game by conceiving of hybrid forms of performance and criticism.

In these ways, group criticism contributed to the conceptual and discursive turns in tertiary level art education, in two senses. First, because the artwork could no longer exist independently from its framing discourse, and second because artists were now required to engage in the production or repetition of that same discourse. The next step was for discourse about art to start playing a direct role in the work itself. This gave birth to artworks that took criticism as their starting point while giving that criticism an aesthetic twist. Such artworks expressed critical stances referring to, further articulating, contesting, mocking or making parodies of the criteria that dominated the art production around them. Having given prominence to group discussion as a mode of pedagogy, the Sculpture Department of St Martin's played a central role in the shift by which art discourse started being absorbed into the artwork itself. A younger generation of artists, who studied in a department that was increasingly defined in terms of theoretical studies and group discussion, started conceiving installations and staging performances, which embodied and articulated a counter-discourse to that which dominated the rest of the School.[32] They rejected the notions of art as medium-specific, abstract, formal phenomenon that related only to what was made by individuals; and embraced collaborative practices, a growing concern for the physical experience of the work and the principle that artworks are sites for the establishment of exchanges and interactions between artists and public.

One important and distinctive format adopted by some of these students was that of the lecture-performance. This perfectly embodied the marriage between formats borrowed from the performing arts with a concept-driven and performance-based type of work, casting the artist as a *sui generis* researcher, engaged in the articulation of knowledge but doing so in his or her own terms and combining the oral delivery of art criticism with formats borrowed from the performing arts. In Britain, the development of the lecture-performance happened early and was influential. Although, since the beginning of the twentieth-century, the historical avant-garde had engaged with a variety of live activities that crossed theatre, musical performance and dance, these had only marginally influenced the development of performance-based work within the visual arts. Moreover, the early inclination of St Martin's students towards the performative can predominantly be attributed to specific teaching methodologies developed in the Sculpture Department. If the posing of artists and critics in the forums contributed to the students' interest in performance-based activities, an even more direct source of inspiration came from the teaching of experimental classes and project-based activities.

EXPERIMENTAL CLASSES

In the early to mid 1960s, for the weekly evening classes in the St Martin's Advanced Course, a number of physical activities were conceived as 'situational' projects. For one of those, each student was asked to 'make use of the ideas and aims of his particular work in a physical demonstration by the use of his or her limbs in any way possible with, or without, other props'.[33]

← Fig.9.8 'Tuesday Evening Projects', St Martin's School of Art, 1966. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

↳ Fig.9.9 Detail of above

The description of a 'Tuesday Evening Project' from the year 1966 reads: 'the most banal series of movements when put to use in this way could take on a particularly poignant and dramatic form'.[34] One of the projects devised by Tucker for his second-year students, titled

'Make a sculpture using people as elements', comprised two stages: a warming-up period defined as 'a sculptural P.E. [Physical Education] session' and the making of different structures or arrangements on the part of each student, involving as many of their fellow students as was desired.[35] These activities continued into the late 1960s for students enrolled in the DipAD. For example, for the project 'Body Space', devised by Gareth Evans (b.1934), second-year students had to prepare a programme of movement for the other students: 'a kind of human mobile or ballet'.[36]

Physical activities were considered important as a way of breaking with the routine of studio practice and the traditional formats of lectures and seminars, which tended to foster habitual assumptions and procedures. Such a view of the creative function of physical activities reflected positions developed at the Bauhaus, where experimentation and cooperation were conditions often solicited through physical and staged activities.[37] And yet, the practices they fostered certainly exceeded the tutors' expectations. For American performance artist and tutor Charles R. Garoian (b.1943), a pedagogy founded on performance art represents 'a process through which spectators/students learn to challenge the ideologies of institutionalised learning (schooled culture) in order to facilitate political agency and to develop critical citizenship'.[38]

Engaging in performance-based activities in the learning environment invites students to find their own voice rather than take on the normative behavioural pattern inscribed in ongoing academic practices.[39] If the 'crits' seemed to prescribe criteria for judgement, the organisation of performance-based activities played a central role in fostering individual agency through physical play.

→ Figs.9.10 and 9.11 (overleaf) 'Making sculpture from "themselves"', St Martin's School of Art, c.1966. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

Bruce McLean and Gilbert & George are among the first artists who started to challenge and subvert established ways of making and discussing art by playing with the format of the lecture. They were sensitive to the rhetorical as well as to the choreographed qualities, settings and *décors* of their interventions. They often decided to stage their lecture-performances in lecture theatres, making use of the furniture, decorative elements and technologies typical of an academic setting, such as blackboards and slide projectors.

In October 1968, McLean returned to St Martin's School of Art to deliver what can only be defined as a lecture-performance. The slides he prepared to show were not of existing works or works in progress.[40] Instead, he shot several rolls of slides showing objects seen in the urban environment, such as brick walls, garden edging, park benches and kerb-stones. McLean explained to the audience that the work consisted in observing those different elements and recognising them as sculpture, or as possible sites for sculpture. Mel Gooding defined this public intervention not just as the lecture of a visiting artist but as 'a proto-performance, an exercise in pose, a lecture-sculpture precisely devised for its context'.[41] The lecture was effectively a staged intervention, playing with conventions in the way artists are expected to make and discuss their work. Through his presentation, McLean deliberately undertook a critique of 'New Generation' tutors' disinterest in the conditions of the viewer's encounter with the sculptural object.

McLean also made a number of lecture-performances in collaboration with fellow students Gilbert & George. In April 1969, they realised *Interview Sculpture*, also referred to as *Sculpture in the 60s*, first presented at the RCA, then at St Martin's and finally at the Hanover Grand under the new title *Impresarios of the Art World*. During the performance, Gilbert & George would enquire about particular pieces of work by established artists, from Henry Moore to Anthony Caro and William Tucker, and McLean would respond by physically mimicking the characteristics of the work in question. While McLean acted out the different works, Gilbert & George sat down on a stage applauding, or took photographs of the 'works' being performed, showing a clear awareness of the role of documentation in the currency of performance art.[42] As the curator Marianne Wagner puts it, 'The incorporation of roles and the critique of these roles frequently run parallel in performance lectures': existing works were deconstructed in order to undermine their presumed value.[43]

Although these works have conventionally been defined simply as performances, they undoubtedly

represented a form of critical presentation and articulation of knowledge, albeit on a satirical and mostly plastic rather than verbal level. These early examples of lecture-performances were certainly characterised by a meagre use of language. Nevertheless, they engaged in the critical debate by subverting the traditional oratory strategies and presentation techniques experienced in lectures and group discussions.

On 26 January 1969, art teachers and educationalists turned up at the Geffrye Museum in East London for the first showing of *Reading from a Stick*. It consisted of a one-hour presentation, including the projection of 160 colour transparencies of cross-sections of Gilbert's resin walking stick, accompanied by a commentary delivered by George. The remarks on the slides, including commentaries such as 'especially pretty' or 'extraordinarily imaginative', seemed to be devoid of any content.[44] This work has hardly been discussed, let alone critically assessed. On the basis of the interpretation foregrounded in this essay, it can be argued that *Reading from a Stick*, with its vacuous comments dissecting an item belonging to the artist, represented a clear parody of the St Martin's sessions of group criticism, in which artists were asked to develop arguments in support of their work. Instead, Gilbert & George, after having turned one of the artist's most important accessories into an object of scrutiny, proceeded to state their refusal to engage critically with it, preferring to indulge in the staging of their own personae as vacuous inhabitants of the everyday.

In May 1969, only a month after staging *Interview Sculpture* at the RCA, Gilbert & George wrote to Frank Martin asking if they might present to the Sculpture Department a lecture titled 'The Meal'.[45]

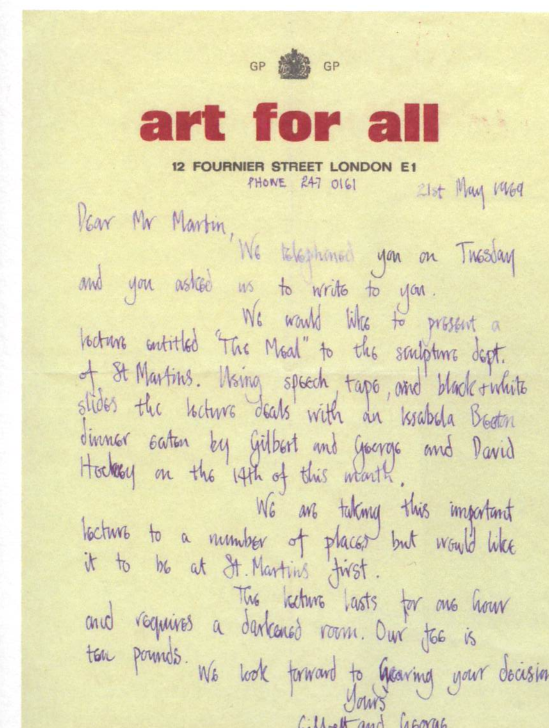
The lecture, which required a darkened room and would last one hour, was set to involve speech, tape and black-and-white slides. It dealt with a recently realised piece titled *The Meal*: a dinner cooked by Doreen Marriott following a menu from Isabelle Beeton, to be eaten by the sculptors Gilbert & George and their guest David Hockney (b.1937)

↓ Fig.9.12 Letter from Gilbert & George, to Frank Martin, 21 May 1969. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

↘ Fig.9.13 Gilbert & George, Letter of invitation to *The Meal*, 14 May 1969. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

↪ Fig.9.14 Gilbert & George, *The Meal*, Ripley, Bromley, 14 May 1969. Tate Archive, Frank Martin collection

Approximately thirty people assisted at the dinner, which took place in the music room of a sumptuous property owned by the Arts Council. For the lecture, a slide show featured an image of one of the two artists holding a copy of *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* which, published in 1861, was a guide to all aspects of running a household in Victorian Britain. The book, which took the form of a repository of much of what had been preserved as proper to traditional British housekeeping and cooking, was an immediate best seller, with millions of copies published. Other images shown in Gilbert & George's lecture included photographs of the set table and of the venue



GP GP

art for all

12 FOURNIER STREET LONDON E1
PHONE 247 0161

21st May 1969

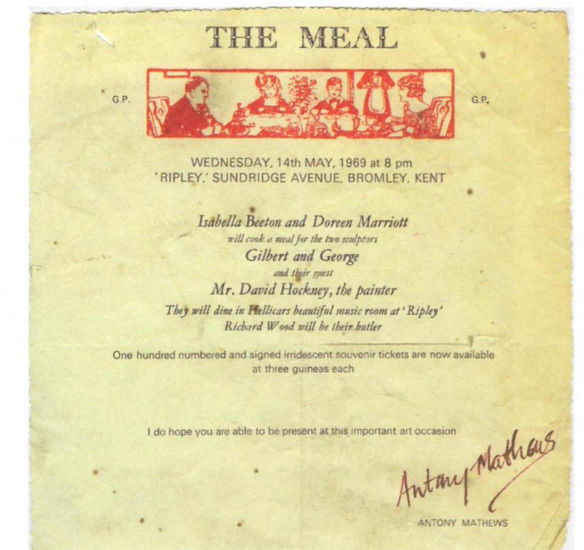
Dear Mr Martin,
We telephoned you on Tuesday and you asked us to write to you.
We would like to present a lecture entitled "The Meal" to the sculpture dept. of St Martins. Using speech, tape, and black+white slides the lecture deals with an Isabella Beeton dinner eaten by Gilbert and George and David Hockney on the 14th of this month.
We are taking this important lecture to a number of places but would like it to be at St. Martins first.
The lecture lasts for one hour and requires a darkened room. Our fee is ten pounds.
We look forward to hearing your decision.
Yours
Gilbert and George

where – with formats borrowed from the performing arts – *The Meal* took place, as well as images and fragments of recipes from *Mrs Beeton's Book*.

The artists undoubtedly staged *The Meal* as part of project to construct their artistic *personae*. Presenting such a lecture to members of the art world, accustomed as they were to debates focused on art criticism rather than about household management, must have constituted a clear act of satirical provocation, interrogating the image and role of the artist as someone belonging to a world – the art world – defined by a different vocabulary and with separate preoccupations from those of everyday life. Furthermore, although the idea of giving a lecture on a previously realised work has since become a conventional activity, it was not common in the late 1960s. *The Meal* is one of the earliest examples of artists developing a lecture-performance out of a previous work, as the extension as well as the formal presentation of that work.

CONCLUSION

Within the history of performance art, the development of performance-based work as the embodiment of a discourse or critical position has hardly been researched. It sits between two trajectories: the one concerned



THE MEAL

G.P. G.P.

WEDNESDAY, 14th MAY, 1969 at 8 pm
'RIPLEY,' SUNDRIDGE AVENUE, BROMLEY, KENT

Isabella Beeton and Doreen Marriott
will cook a meal for the two sculptors
Gilbert and George
and their guest
Mr. David Hockney, the painter
They will dine in Phillicars beautiful music room at 'Ripley'
Richard Wood will be their butler

One hundred numbered and signed iridescent souvenir tickets are now available at three guineas each

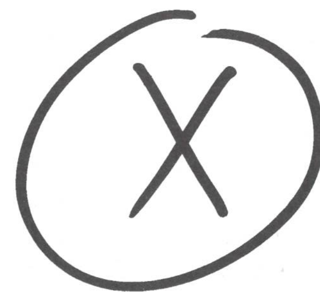
I do hope you are able to be present at this important art occasion

Antony Mathews
ANTONY MATHEWS

with the body and physical enactment as part of the tradition of theatre and dance; and the one relating to the performance of knowledge through lectures, public discussions and the presentations of papers or audio-visual material. Its development cannot be subsumed in either of the two most influential accounts of the history of performance art: an analysis of performance in relation to the physical embodiment of space in theatre and dance, as championed by RoseLee Goldberg; or as an extension of the painting and sculptural object into the fourth dimension.[46] Neither of these two prominent narratives account for what was specific in the performance-based work developed by students at St Martin's School of Art: the articulation of a critical position through the work. This essay has argued that, at least in Britain, the format thrived among former art students, who had been influenced by what they learned in a reformed type of art school curriculum, within which artists had to engage equally with the making of objects as with the articulation, discussion and public presentation of the critical issues surrounding the making of their work.

As forms of articulation and distribution of knowledge, the formats of group criticism and of the lecture-performance offer a strong contrast. On one side, the 'crit' fostered the collective discussion of ideas, the agreement on shared criteria of assessment, the assimilation of a prominent critical discourse and the posturing of the artist as an assertive and self-defined individual. On the other side, former students staging lecture-performances challenged and rejected the criteria dominating the 'crits' as much as the notions that an artist needs to take on macho postures and that knowledge is imposed from above and shaped through collective reiteration. And yet, these two apparently contrasting positions are ultimately part of the same historical narrative. Their establishment is equally rooted in developments that redefined the art school in the post war, initiating process- and concept-driven ways of making and developing a model in which the artist – as a thinker and intellectual – is in charge of the elaboration and public articulation of knowledge.

If in the present-day art university, an institution increasingly defined in terms of research, the pedagogical format of group criticism remains a prominent and regulating format, it is also the case that artists continue to stage lecture-performances which, then as now, tend to solicit more idiosyncratic, poetic and often more humorous approaches to the making of art, subverting institutionalised forms of articulation and the presentation of knowledge.



CONCLUSION