

The THIS and THAT works.

Indexicals have sustained and continue to sustain a long term and detailed inquiry within the philosophy of language. Prominent amongst the routine list of indexicals are such words as 'this', 'that', 'here', 'it', 'now', 'then'. I have used inscriptions of 'this', 'that', 'here' and 'now' particularly on works (let us call them paintings) in the early nineties. I first became interested in indexicals in the mid-sixties during a protracted attempt to consider a number of philosophical issues as central to my art practice at that time. My first memory of indexicals registering as a possible resource for art practice inquiry was an encounter with aspects of Bertrand Russell's philosophical work, in particular what Russell called '*egocentric particulars*'. I was then involved in a whole set of inquiries as a member of the group that came to be called *Art & Language*, and especially in the joint inquiries I ventured into with Michael Baldwin at that time in the mid and late sixties. I enjoyed and was intrigued by these joint studies and projects. For better or worse, some of the outcomes of that work at that time in the last half of the sixties/early years of the seventies, have now become historically housed under the rubric of 'Conceptual Art'. Ah well! To continue.

The foregoing remarks are an attempt to concisely cover the early provenance of the THIS and THAT works. In respect of further exposition and explication of these works I intend here to emphasise what I choose to call here the visual characteristics of the work. Such terms as 'the visual' and 'the visual language', that are widely used in in day to day discourse in the art world, are terms that ignore what I take to be the intriguing complexities that emerge from a thorough inquiry into the character and role of the visual in art practice and particularly the role of language in that practice..

I take here an example from these works –

THAT pencil and acrylic on board 31.8 x 31.5 cms 1996

The word THAT is inscribed in pencil on an acrylic painted board.

Questions, which I choose to leave as moot or open.

To what does the word THAT refer?

Is it to the (existential) object comprising both the acrylic painted board and inscription in pencil on the acrylic surface of the board of the word THAT?

Suppose THAT refers only to the pencil inscription THAT and not to the acrylic painted board?

In the vast philosophical literature concerning indexicals the event of using an indexical is most frequently referred to as an utterance. In a sense since THAT is an inscription (piece of writing, if you like) it is not an utterance, or at least bypasses the event of an utterance, it does not use audible voice. In being silent I have viewed the inscription as, in some sense, an open motif. However, to the contrary, as soon as it is read I guess it forms an utterance since as a person reads the word (in this case the word THAT) then the person, in a pretty obvious sense, says (that is speaks) the word THAT to him or herself. But this still leaves open the matter of what the word THAT refers to. The indexical works attempt to postulate the relation between the visual and

language and between looking and reading. A further question, perhaps provocative, is the relation between aesthetics and language

In respect of the latter, does a spectator or audience treat THAT as a word (conforming to the rules of English grammar), that is read it, OR simply as the marks T,H,A,T, the shapes T,H,A,T, as dumb (pleasing or otherwise) shapes (marks), that is, not read but only look at the marks? In the latter case (let us call it mute looking), the marks T,H,A,T, are a continuation of the acrylic painted surface. For any competent user of the English language it seems it might be hard to look at the marks T,HA,T, and not read it as the word THAT.

In philosophy such reading (as distinct from looking) comports in many categories and subject topics, not least Meaning and Reference. For example in the series Oxford Readings in Philosophy, the book Meaning and Reference edited by A W Moore, 1993.

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