

Reading as a Contemporary Art, ICA Friday Salon July 5 2013

'I never read. I only look at art.' *Andy Warhol*

'There is no contemporary reader.' *Hélène Cixous*

'I write in order to give the contemporary the slip.' *Jacques Derrida*

PART ONE

mirroring the bright flames of the fire, together with the early rays of the sun coming in through the windows.

Charles went upstairs, to see the patient. He found him in his bed, sweating under his blankets, his cotton nightcap thrown off into a far corner. He was a stocky little man of fifty, with fair skin, and blue eyes, bald at the front, and wearing ear-rings. At his side, on a chair, he had a large decanter of brandy, from which he poured himself a drink every so often to keep up his courage; but, as soon as he saw the doctor, his spirits sank, and, instead of cursing as he had for the last twelve hours, he began a feeble groaning.

The fracture was a simple one, with no complications of any kind. Charles could not have hoped for anything easier. Then, remembering the bedside manner of his professors, he comforted the patient with all sorts of little phrases, surgical caresses, like the oil they smear on the scalpel. To make some splints, they went off to get from the cart-shed a bundle of laths. Charles picked one out, cut it into sections, and smoothed it off with a piece of broken glass, while the maid-servant tore up a sheet to make bandages, and Mademoiselle Emma set about making some little pads. Because it took her a long time to find her sewing-box, her father became impatient; she said nothing; but, as she was sewing, she kept pricking her fingers, and then she put them to her lips to suck them.

Charles was surprised at the whiteness of her nails. They were lustrous, tapering, more highly polished than Dieppe ivories, and cut into an almond shape. Yet her hands were not beautiful, not white enough perhaps, and rather bony at the knuckles; they were also too long, with no softening curves. If she were beautiful, it was in her eyes; though they were brown, they seemed to be black because of the lashes, and they met your gaze openly, with an artless candour.

Once the bandaging was done, the doctor was invited by Monsieur Rouault himself, to *have a bite of something* before he left.

Charles went downstairs, into the parlour. Two places, with silver goblets, were set on a little table, at the foot of a big four-poster bed, its cotton canopy printed with pictures of Turks. There was an odour of orris-root and damp sheets, which came from the tall oakwood chest, facing the window. On the floor, in the corners, propped up, there were sacks of wheat. It was the overflow from the granary next door, just up the three stone steps. By way of decoration, hanging from a nail, in the middle of a wall with its green paint all flaking off from the saltpetre,

Contemporary art-writing and creative writing continue to flourish. This afternoon event spotlights reading as itself an art, something to be cultivated, celebrated, enjoyed and thought about. Writers, artists, teachers and academics who work with, and on, reading will talk and present work. What does reading bring to contemporary art? How does it affect the institutions where it takes place? Who am I when I read? Where do I go? What traces does reading leave in me, or in the wider world? Where does reading end?

Reading is an important part of the life of many contemporary artists and writers: it may also be what their work is about. There are traditions, theories and learned practices of reading but it's also a more or less spontaneous, private and unregulated occurrence. And what happens to reading when we are confronted by the unreadable?

1-2.30 'The Rite of Reading.' Forbes Morlock, The Institute for Creative Reading and Syracuse University London. Forbes writes about texts, art and psychoanalysis; he teaches, among other things, a course called 'Reading Pictures: Seeing Stories.'

'Teaching Reading Creative-Critical Writing.' Stephen Benson and Clare Connors convene the new MA in Creative-Critical Writing at The University of East Anglia. They will talk about their experience co-teaching creative-critical writing and about reading such writing with their students.

'Individual Reading Records.' Kate Briggs is a writer and translator; she teaches at the American University of Paris and Paris College of Art.

2.45- 4.15 'Essayism'. Brian Dillon, UK editor of *Cabinet* magazine, and Tutor in Critical Writing at the Royal College of Art, will address the essay as a form that crosses literature, film and contemporary art.

'Shimmy.' Hester Reeve's practice explores art as a species of philosophical agency, invested first and foremost in the task of radical thinking. She chooses to operate in her own mind via 'HRH.the' (a conceptual persona). Public showings of her artwork include former Randolph Street Gallery Chicago, LIVE Biennale Vancouver, The Women's Library Gallery London and Arnolfini Bristol. She is Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University and a member of the Performance Philosophy international research network.

'Action Reading.' Peter Jaeger is a Canadian poet, literary critic and text-based artist now living in the UK. He is an AHRC research fellow for 2012-13, and is working on John Cage's poetics.

4.45-6 Nicholas Royle, writer and critic, Professor of English at the University of Sussex, will read a bit of Elizabeth Bowen alongside some Wallace Stevens.

'The First Reader: a Dictation,' Sarah Wood (event organiser: s.wood@kent.ac.uk) is an editor of *Oxford Literary Review* and *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, also Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Kent.

'Reading *Nana*' by Sharon Kivland, artist and writer, Reader in Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University, and Tutor in Critical Practice, Wimbledon College of Art, UAL. Sharon is a keen reader, thinking about what is put at stake by art, politics, and psychoanalysis.