

Extracts from Allen Fisher
Key specialist terms for Modernist Painting
1950-1970 in Britain and America

The following notes are supplemented with an 'Extract from the Introduction' to my book *Imperfect Fit: Aesthetic function, facture and reception*.¹

abstract, abstraction

The Tate's view is that 'Abstract art is art which is not representational, it could be based on a subject or may have no source at all in the external world.' As the term implies, to abstract is to separate or remove, and an abstraction is the result of being abstracted, but this would be an over-implied view. As J.H. Prynne notes, abstraction can function 'not as that which is abstracted from something else but as autonomous at levels of second-order meaning and interpretation', see the quotation from J.H. Prynne under **poetics**.²

aesthetics

In this course the term refers to the basis for artistic practice. All human activity (and the activity of other aspects of nature) have aesthetic components. Art has by definition aesthetics as its dominant component. Aesthetics may be summarised as a pattern of connectedness (see below). Aesthetics may be divided into three different attentions, all or some of which may be present: these attentions may be summarised as to teach, to move to delight. See Allen Fisher. 'Extract from Introduction'.³

autonomy

In art practice, a painting has autonomy if it does not rely on external factors to be effective as a painting. In fact most paintings are enhanced by both their extrinsic and intrinsic context. See also quotation from J.H. Prynne under **poetics**.

collage

It useful to understand collage in artistic practice as being about displacement, the feature of one reality or spacetime put against another. Its best and early discussion takes place in a text written by Max Ernst. In the larger public use, collage is gluing together different components and this is clearly applicable to many painting practices. See Allen Fisher. 'Extract from Introduction'.⁴

¹ Allen Fisher. *Imperfect Fit: Aesthetic function, facture and reception*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016. The 'Extract from the Introduction' has been provided on my *edublogs* site.

² See also Anna Moszynska. *Abstract Art*, London, 1990.

³ Fisher, op. cit. 1.

⁴ Fisher, op. cit. 1.

conceptual

Conceptual refers to forethought. Conceptual art relies on the thought behind the work, rather than its materiality. There have been several useful books on the subject. See also quotation from J.H. Prynne under **poetics** and Allen Fisher. 'Extract from Introduction'.⁵

conceptual art

Marcel Duchamp paved the way for 'Conceptual art' in that he factured work that was 'in the service of the mind', as opposed to a purely 'retinal' art, intended only to please the eye. There have been many books on the subject.⁶

Expressionist

The idea that what the visual object conveys is more than perception, but includes the inner feelings of the artist.⁷

extrinsic and intrinsic artistic content

The intrinsic content of the painting proposes to give meaning to the work without reference to its context. The extrinsic meaning relies on the input from the work's context. Both factors feature as part of the understanding of work on this course.

facture, factured

The term *facture* has been used to replace such words as 'make' or 'create', which often imply completions or finished products. Artistic production involves both facture and reception. This idea derives both from many artists' ideas of process in their art and their meanings, but also from the contemporary discussion which wishes to include the viewer in the production process of the art. See Allen Fisher. 'Extract from Introduction'.⁸

figurative

In painting this refers to the explicit use of human figure, or landscapes or items in the world such as might be found in a Still Life.

form

An object with three dimensions often represented in two dimensions (that is as shapes) in painting.

⁵ Fisher, op. cit. 1.

⁶ See Ursula Meyer. *Conceptual Art, New York, 1972*; Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, London, 1998; Charles Harrison. *Conceptual Art and Painting. Further Essays on Art & Language*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001; Paul Wood. *Movement in Modern Art. Conceptual Art*, London, 2002.

⁷ See August Wiedmann. *Romantic Roots in Modern Art*, Old Woking: Surrey, 1979.

⁸ Fisher, op. cit. 1.

mark facture

The line or stroke made by the artist's pencil, pen, brush or palette knife.⁹

Modernist

The term refers to the specific intention to facture innovative work in distinction from conventional open traditional work. Its beginnings are always in contest, some would begin with Modernism in Jacques-Louis David classicism in the eighteenth century, others would begin with Gustave Courbet's 'Realism'. Just as feasible would be to begin with the work of Eduard Manet. Modernists usually have a project, a particular attention to changing the norms.

'... the practice of art is necessarily conducted within the context of some tradition of art and with regard to other works of art. ...the value of modernism is established in practice as a kind of intentional difference with respect to other current forms and styles and practices. In many cases a modern work will invite comparison with some similar but more conservative manner of treating of a given subject, as if it is precisely through what is not shared – through the remainder that is left when all common features have been excluded – that the real meaning is to be found.' Charles Harrison. *Movements in Modern Art. Modernism*, Tate Publishing, 1997.¹⁰

patterns of connectedness

The term derives from Gregory Bateson and provides a summary for consciousness and aesthetics and thus their reciprocal interaction. The use of the phrase will prevail during the course and as a consequence become more evident. See Allen Fisher. 'Extract from Introduction'.¹¹

picture plane

The two-dimension area of the canvas, paper or flat surface onto which the painting is factured.

poetics

It seems inadequate to simply say 'having the character of poetry', because, of course, it begs the question, then what is poetry? The term refers to the capacity for the retinal image, the picture, to make meaningful connections to literature or ideas in literature and thought that enlarge the understanding or meaning of the visual picture plane.

'... it is possible to consider the most ambitious forms of poetical invention to be those that enter into their own conceptual domain so completely as to transform this into its own free 'naturalism',

⁹ See Allen Fisher, 'THE CROWD: momentum, energy and the work of Cy Twombly' <http://www.e-space.mmu.ac.uk/e-space/bitstream/2173/9747/5/Fisher%20-%20The%20Crowd.pdf.txt?sequence=5>

¹⁰ Charles Harrison. *Movements in Modern Art. Modernism*, Tate Publishing, 1997, p. 14. Harrison illustrates his statement with *The Bathers*, 1884, by William-Adolphe Bouguereau and *The Three Bathers*, 1879-82, by Paul Cézanne.

¹¹ Fisher, op. cit. 1.

where all is conceptualised and therefore nothing is, a 'possible world', where abstraction functions not as that which is abstracted from something else but as autonomous at levels of second-order meaning and interpretation; this meta-discourse practice is fully supported by the language medium because natural language itself is generically conceptualised in relation to 'what there is', whether 'real' or not, elastic in upward dimensionality, almost indefinitely so; and this is especially true of poetic discourse constructions. ...' J.H. Prynne, 2014.¹²

¹² J.H. Prynne, 2014. *Concepts and Conception in Poetry*, Cambridge, 2014, p. 15.