

Introduction

by Michael Baldwin and Thomas Dreher

Blurting in A & L is a printed booklet whose content is a dictionary with blurts or »annotations«. The annotations were written by american members of Art & Language Ian Burn, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, Joseph Kosuth, Andrew Menard, Mel Ramsden and Terry Smith between january and july 1973. Michael Corris and Mel Ramsden chose terms as headlines for the annotations. The first letters of the headlines were used for an alphabetical ordering. In this order the annotations were numbered. References to other annotations were notated under each annotation with the intent to provoke a cross-reading or browsing: An arrow means a »conjunction« in a restricted sense (»implication«), and an »&« means a »concatenation«, a »conjunction« in a wider sense. After each headline follows an annotation, under the annotation follows a rubric with arrow-cross-references and under this rubric follows a chapter with »&«-cross-references. The points of reference were indexed via naming the numbers and headlines.

"Blurting in A & L" develops initiatives which began with the indexing project. This first saw public exhibition at Documenta 5 in 1972. The project continued in Art & Language in both the U.K. and the U.S.A. The notions of »blurting« and »concatenation« became part of its structural currency. »Blurting In A & L« is therefore a continuation of that project which saw its fullest and most complete expression in »Index 002 Bxal« (1973, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven). This is not to say, however, that the project ended with »Index 002 Bxal«. It continued in various forms, and with various logical transformations, until 1976 (see f.e. "Dialectical Materialism", 1974-76). It goes on in other ways in the current Art & Language practice (s. Kunstforum Bd.155/2001, S.131-135).

»Blurting in A & L« presents the discourse and the dialogue practice of Art & Language. The discourse investigates functions of the art-world (f.e. annotations 39,49,194), but doesn't explore the function of art works within the context of art (compare annotations 252-258). Proposals for wider frameworks were tested within the discourse of Art & Language. The resulting conceptions constitute a provisional program of Art & Language, whose consequences were exemplified in the context of art. These epistemological frameworks were used for a critique of the conditions of the art-world in a way which is as urgent today as it was in 1973. That's the reason for the decision of the direction of ZKM to install an online-version. The members of Art & Language intend to abandon the separation of competences between artists, critics and observers, and to transform the art-world into a system of communication between contributors with equal capabilities of reflection (annotation 55). The presentational forms conventionalized within the systems of art and art exhibitions, and the ways of coding art itself were antithetical to a conception of art practice as discourse-oriented.

Art & Language designs what is, in its time, a new pluralistic framework and tests the possibilities of embedding it into a world which may or may not be the art world. For the members of Art & Language, these experiments with a conception which exposes the context conditions of one's own practice, amounted to a call for a change in and of those conditions which were already institutionalised. The presentation of the own reflections about the context within the context reflected changes of the theory into a »theoretical practice« (Louis Althusser): The form of presentation creates conditions of reception for possible readers. With the model for forms of reflection these conditions were introduced into the discourse of art. The model constitutes not only a text, but a situation for readers as well as specific relations between the text and the reading-situation.

The explanation of forms of presentation became necessary for the members of Art & Language, because they developed the target in internal discussions, to find non-hierarchical

forms of presentation with which to activate readers outside the group. The members of Art & Language developed their methodological basics within a process of »conversational exchanges« (annotation 78) and they wanted to provoke readers to proceed with this process. So the form of presentation of »Blurting In« sustains a reading habit, which creates a dialogical interrelation between parts of the text/annotations as »surface-structures« (annotation 338) and »set[s] of contexts« (annotations 10,103,236,275), which offer parts of the text. The dialogical intratextual character of the reading process should motivate further dialogues within contexts outside the group. The feedback between group-internal and group-external dialogues was the ideal case for Art & Language. In the seventies the members of Art & Language were only able to anticipate this ideal with their development of systems of indices, but they couldn't concretize the feedback with external readers in a satisfying way. By organizing the circulation of Blurts in two stages: (1), to a fragment of the whole group who would work on the material as it passed between them, (2), subsequent to certain other members, not included in the first circulation. The material was then recirculated to all participants in stages (1) and (2) for further treatment. They received very limited feedback from external readers except in certain special cases. These were associated with a system which captured the formal or informal notations of the interlocutors of internal readers. The desire of Art & Language to carry the internal discourse to as many external readers as possible and to integrate the feedback, engenders the **online version** of »Blurting in A & L«. The original producers/receivers, interested former members of Art & Language who were not directly concerned with »Blurting in A & L«, and users who were neither of these, can communicate with each other in **english and german** (see «[questions](#)»).

Links:

[Feature of the Project »Blurting in A & L online«](#)

[Dreher, Thomas: Art & Language & Hypertext: Blurting, Mapping and Browsing \(presentation of "Blurting in A & L online", ZKM, Karlsruhe, 7.7.2002\)](#)

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II.3 Index Systems

The eight file cabinets of »Index 01« (1972) present something like a compendium of the work of Art & Language. They were shown at documenta 5 in Kassel for the first time.⁴⁷ The metal cabinets with six drawers each contain index cards with texts written by members of Art & Language that were published in »Art-Language«, »Analytical Art«, art magazines, and catalogs. Manuscripts are also included.

For »Index 01«, all the texts were divided into text sections and each section was assigned index numbers. On the narrow side of the drawers, which also form the outer front side of the file cabinets, the index numbers are printed. These numbers are also printed on the texts of the index cards in the drawers. Group-internal and external readers have marked the relations between indices with the three evaluations »+«, »-«, and »T«. These stand for »compatible«, »incompatible«, and »not comparable« or »transformational«. These evaluations are found on photostats on the walls. Next to each index (in the first column) one finds the evaluations (in the third column) of different readers, who are assigned numbers (in the second column). A »key« provides information on the evaluation system. It is located in the uppermost drawer of each file cabinet.

The linkage between two indices or constituents that are both evaluated with »+« also receives the evaluation of »+«. If the two indices that are to be linked are evaluated with »+« and »-«, then the linkage receives the evaluation »-«. The connection of indices that received an evaluation of »T« with indices that were not evaluated with »T« (i.e., with »+« or »-«) receives the evaluation that is not »T«. This last point was, however, the subject of controversy among members of Art & Language.⁴⁸

Visitors can relate the text fragments or passages in the drawers and their evaluations on the walls to one another. »Index 01« creates relations between the texts of the group and provokes readers to evaluate these relations in the way suggested in the »key«, in the same way that the model readers did for the notations in the photostats or to produce alternatives to these. In principle, all readers were invited to find ways to discover pathways through the material in the filing cabinets with reference to the limits set by the wall display. Relationships can be established between different model reader evaluations and between one's own evaluations and model reader evaluations.

In »Index 02«, which was shown a short time later in »The New [British] Art« group exhibition at the London Hayward Gallery for the first time,⁴⁹ the presentation system of »Index 01« was systematized. The wall display system is based on six matrix sheets that list the evaluations of six readers. The indices of all compatible sections are listed under »(+)<«, the indices of all incompatible sections are listed under »(-)<«, and the indices of all sections that cannot be compared are listed under »(T)«. The six matrix sheets are reproduced often enough for there to be sheets so that each index that is contained in one of the »(+)<« index card groups can appear as a heading over the matrix sheets. In the »(+)<« group, the index that appears in the heading is erased with white-out.

The evaluations of »Index 02« adhere to formal-logic criteria of symmetry and transitivity:

Symmetry: If n is compatible with $n + 1$, then $n + 1$ is also compatible with n .

Transitivity (example): If n and $n + 1$ are compatible and $n + 1$ and $n + 2$ are incompatible, then $n + 2$ is also incompatible with n .⁵⁰

Relations between evaluations of relations on the six matrix sheets become interesting in »Index 02«: Comparisons between evaluations made by different readers allow for conclusions to be drawn concerning evaluations that are not compatible with one another. In this way, each following reader can check if his evaluations are compatible with the model reader evaluations or not.⁵¹

III Blurting in A & L

III.1 Origin and Form

Mel Ramsden had worked with Michael Baldwin and Joseph Kosuth on the installation of »Index 01« in Kassel (see Section [II.3](#)). The project »Blurting in A & L« was seen by all the contributors to Art & Language, whether based in New York or in England as a drawing of certain implications from the first two »Index« projects (see Section [II.3](#)). It was significant that for Art & Language, »Index 01« and »Index 02« were seen as conversational engines, referring both to themselves and the world. They were conceived, in other words, as models for reflexive and non-reflexive conversation expansion. »Index 01« and »Index 02« was seen by those who collaborated in its production as a model for "a place to work" – a site of some sort of »production-as-reflection«. The Indexes have been described as "home for homeless art".⁵² One of the implications of the Documenta Index (01) and the Hayward Index (02) was that Art & Language examine the discursive exchanges in which they were involved. For the New York based contributors to Art & Language, the conversational base was going to have to expand. Michael Corris and Terry Smith, an art historian originally from Australia, had already participated in the production of the manuscript for »Version 2« of »Comparative Models« (see Section [II.2](#)). In an article in Artforum in February 1973, Preston Heller and Andrew Menard, who in 1972 had both been students at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn⁵³, defended the basic arguments of Art & Language against Max Kozloff's »The Trouble with Art-as-Idea« (see Section [II.2](#)). In 1973 in »Blurting in A & L«, Corris, Heller, Menard, and Smith appeared as co-authors with Burn and Ramsden.⁵⁴ Joseph Kosuth provided three quotes as annotations within a period of five months.⁵⁵

»Blurting in A & L« was undertaken as a collaboration between contributors based in the USA and those based in England in taking up and expanding the logic of the Indexes. There were two initiatives which attached themselves to the notion of »Blurting«, one in New York that is the subject of the present discussion, the other [Blurting x \(index al\)](#) as »Going-on« in Great Britain. Both were open to commentary and revision from either of the places in which the Art & Language project was located.

The members of A & L_{NY} continued and developed the index systems (see Section [II.3](#)) with a practice rather than a »diagram« using »annotations«. The »annotations« were drawn up between January and July 1973 as comments that were part of a »set of short statements or remarks« (p. 1). Corris and Ramsden assigned »subject-headings« to the 408 »annotations« or »blurts«⁵⁶. These »'user oriented landmarks'« (p. 2) were sorted and numbered in alphabetical order. Thanks to the numbers, »blurts« with identical »landmarks« can be distinguished from one another.

Under each »blurt« references appear to other »blurts« in two groups: The group marked with an arrow refers to »blurts«, the reference of which is labeled an »implication« (see below) and which forms »a strong context« (see pp. 2 and 10) because their connections appear to be conclusive to the evaluating model readers. »Blurts« listed under »&« are only loosely connected to the »landmark« and they can also lead the reader away from the »strong context«. An »annotation« never has a reference in both the arrow and the »&« group. In the introduction, this is presented as a matter of »choice« and not as a »dialectical negation between '&' and '[arrow]'« (see p. 5).

»Comparative Models« (see Section [II.2](#)) present the relationship between Artforum and Art & Language as a dialogue that the reader can continue in the form of a 'dialogue with the presentation of a dialogue'. The index systems of 1972 (see Section [II.3](#)) present the discourse of Art & Language as a 'dialogue' evaluated by model readers. They enable further readers to create relations between model readers and the 'dialogue' between excerpts of the discourse of

Art & Language. »Blurring in A & L« seeks to 'expand' the contents of the filing cabinets into a (partially) self-reflexive discourse that includes, as it were, an informal version of the wall display within itself; it puts the reader in the position of continuing 'the dialogue through the presentation of further dialogue' 57 'against', 'next to', or 'with' the available »pathways«. Compatibility criteria for the relations between relations of »Index 02 (II)« (see Section II.3) are replaced by conditions of semantic implicature for the interpretation of the pathways that have been noted down in the form of arrows and »&« symbols. Transitivity as a reader condition is possible (see p. 3), conditions of symmetry do not apply (see p. 9).58

According to Mel Ramsden, the Indexes and subsequent projects including »Blurring in A & L« played a decisive role in continuing the transformation of the basic elements of the discourse of Art & Language; in 1971, the discourse's basic elements, which had been developed in adherence to analytic philosophy, began to be transformed by several approaches taken from the »Philosophy of Science«. At the same time, several »Philosophy of Science« approaches (Paul Karl Feyerabend, Thomas Samuel Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, and Karl Raimund Popper) offered means of dealing with the Art & Language discourse, which had become confused: ...I do see the handbook as a necessary catalyst...The internal pandemonium/contradictions of the Annotations were one way of ridding ourselves of the objectivist/atomist model of discovery.59

III.2 »A Learning Context«: »Proceedings«

In »Blurring in A & L«, the following approaches recur as theory-constituting elements that already appeared in the »annotations« of the »Comparative Models« and in the manuscript »A Dithering Device«, which contains »Version 2« (see Section II.2):

- The theory of »**theory-ladenness** of experience« (see annotations 3, 195)60 is once again used as an approach for the criticism of »experience« in Clement Greenberg's and Max Kozloff's art criticism (see annotations 123, 127, 130).
- Imre Lakatos' discussion of Karl Popper's »methodical **falsificationism**« (see Section II.1)61 (see p. 9, annotations 131, 132, 190)62 once again provides an important element of the argumentation.
- The differentiation between an art that is tied to an art-theoretical paradigm and an art that reflects theoretical **alternatives** (see Section II.1)63 (see annotations 1, 2, 3, 131, 216, 246)64 once again serves to characterize the difference between Art & Language's and current art practice.
- Imre Lakatos' term of »**heuristics**« and his term of a »**model**« 65 recur (see annotations 135-139, 190, 191, 253, 261, 373).66
- **Pragmatics** are once again - and, this time, in greater detail - picked out as a central theme in a way that makes clear that more than simply an expansion of the questions of syntax and semantics is at issue; the problem is posed that the Philosophy of Language (including the approaches of Art & Language) needs to de- and reconstructed via Pragmatics (see Section III.4) (see annotations 80, 95, 96, 102, 107, 276, 277, 337).67
- Edmund Husserl's term »**Lebenswelt**«68 is used in further theoretical connections as a designation for a social practice that is based upon intersubjectivity (see annotations 45, 58, 60, 217, 218, 250, 263).69
- The dialogue between equal partners who present argument and suggest alternatives is once again described as a **learning environment** and a **learning process**70 (see annotations 9, 28, 84, 108, 110, 117, 196, 205-216, 272, 377).71

Precursors for the following theory-constituting elements of the »annotations« in »Blurring in A & L« are not (also) found in »Comparative Models«, but (only) in other works by members of Art & Language:

- **The stimulus-oriented reference theory** of Willard van Orman Quine recurs with an explicit reference to his term »stimulus meaning« (see Section [III.3](#)) (see annotations [176](#), [196](#), [327](#), [355](#), [357](#), [361](#)).[72](#)
- **The Philosophy of Ordinary Language** recurs, above all, in references to statements made in Ludwig Wittgenstein's »language games« and in questions about the attainment of »certainty« [73](#) (see annotations [83](#), [88](#), [90](#), [103](#), [198](#), [203](#), [204](#)).[74](#)
- Chaim Perelman's **New Rhetoric** (see Section [III.4](#)) is again presented as an approach that identifies pragmatics and dialogue in argumentation[75](#) as an independent problem area next to semantics and syntax (see pp. [10](#), [15](#)).[76](#)
- The term »**blik**« for non-rationalizable statements was already adopted by Richard Mervyn Hare's appendix to Anthony G. N. Flew's »Theology and Falsification«[77](#) (see annotation [74](#), [75](#)).[78](#)

New and explosive theory-constituting elements for the »going-on« of the Art & Language discourse are:

- Reflections on »**annotating**« (see annotations [17](#), [18](#), [19](#)), »**blurring**« (see annotations [76-80](#))[79](#), and »**information retrieval systems**« (see annotations [179-186](#));
- The »conversational **implicature**« of H. Paul Grice in the critical reception of L. Jonathan Cohen[80](#) (see pp. [2](#), [6](#), [15](#); annotation [391](#), cf. annotation [76](#))[81](#);
- The problem of the »**concatenation**« (i.e., linking) of »blurts« (see pp. [2](#), [6](#), [8](#), [13](#), annotation [117](#)) in relation to questions concerning »proceeding«, »going-on« (see pp. [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), annotations [292](#), [293](#), [294](#))[82](#);
- The term »**problematics**«, used for the first time in specific reference to Louis Althusser[83](#) (see annotation [282](#)).