

John Dummett – Remember we are all here

Over 10 years John Dummett's practice has marked out a trajectory from relational aesthetics to decoration. It would seem an unlikely route to move from the cutting edge of contemporary arts practice to flower arranging, but on close examination, this development in his practice marks out a critical approach that questions the erosion of civil liberties and democratic debate in the early 21st century.

From the late 1990's, beginning with 'uncommon ground' (Bestwood Country Park, Nottingham 1997), his practice behaved as a public forum, in which the public realm, in all its different and diverse manifestations, could be questioned and brought into debate. This intrinsically public process involved group discussions and the collaborative writing of texts. These texts were partly summaries of the discussions, but more importantly, they were a distillation of the thoughts and arguments of many people. This 'solidification' of discussion into short phrases or even single words, became the central focus of later works. Whilst these projects apparently still addressed the public realm and still provided space for discussions, the actual critical focus was the ossification of debate into a ritualised and ornamental procedure.

Lookout (Articule, Montreal, 2003), ostensibly provides a space for collective discussion and writing. The work is a simple metal frame, measuring 3m x 3m x 2m high; each side of this frame has a sheet of clear plastic covered in writing made from coloured vinyl tape. The text consists of short phrases and single words, including; liberty, popular, populist, public etc., all key words in debates about the public realm and its political dimension. Yet in *Lookout*, there is no cohesive or reasoned argument, only a loose set of words that can be read in any order, so does *Lookout* behave as a context from which to watch for signs of debate, or political engagement? If so, then the work sits on an imagined border zone between a memory of engagement and its hoped for reappearance in the future.

This liminal space between memory and future action is the context for Dummett's current projects, it presents a weed choked and abandoned place, that quietly waits for meaning and significance to re-emerge.

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