

**Brecht, George. (1961) *TWO EXERCISES*. Arr. Speck, David W. for Terminal in C. (2010). London: David W. Speck.**

[A first draft of this text was read out by David W. Speck at BOOK LIVE! on 9th June 2012. The book containing the score was read out loud with each page simultaneously projected onto the screen. The title of this text was then projected onto the screen while this text was read.]

This book contains the score for a performance art work which is realised upon execution by a computer. The computer performs the score itself using the person at a computer terminal composed of a display screen and keyboard to perform the exercises contained within the score. Although the process is observable there is no provision for an audience. The art status of the performance is in question as although the computer is performing the instructions of an artist, in this case George Brecht, it is incapable of creating art itself. The result of executing the score is no different if initiated by an artist or a non-artist. It could also be argued that the art status of the work was lost during the translation from the English language to the C language yet that translation was performed faithfully by another artist so by that logic this arrangement has more art value than the original score.

The arrangement has been publicly performed twice. It was first presented then performed by a MacBook with Orlando Harrison as the other at Poltroon (a literary saloon) in October 2010 and then at bookartbookshop by a Digital HiNote Ultra 2000 in March 2012 where it was also interpreted and performed by Orlando Harrison with Sandra Harrison and others. In book form it was launched at the Small Publishers Fair in October 2011 and was exhibited, one page per day, in the window of bookartbookshop over two weeks in March / April 2012. It has been acquired by the Poetry Store which is one of the Small Press Collections at UCL and by the National Art Library at the V&A.

There are many things I could talk about regarding the score but for BOOK LIVE! I will concentrate on why this is a book.

Its success is largely down to its form. Had I presented the arrangement as a downloadable file or paper printout from a computer it would not have caused such interest. The fact that it was printed using movable type and hand bound by Alexandra Czinczel in a limited edition allowed it to be taken sufficiently seriously for it to be picked up and its content to be read. If it were a computer printed hot glue (or perfect) bound book it would probably be ignored as just another computer book. In addition the book form improves the legibility of the score. At first glance the C language appears unintelligible. Yet when it is divided up into small parts and viewed one page at a time most people can understand it with only a little effort. The typographic design of the book further enhances its readability. The C language is punctuation heavy so using a lighter weight type for the punctuation sets it back from the text allowing even the casual reader to concentrate on the recognisable words and not be distracted by the semantics of the language.

It is no longer sufficient for an artist to create an aesthetically pleasing object if they want to disseminate their work to a wide audience and be invited to speak at conferences. For the work to be accepted as a possible art object I also needed to place it in the right context. To describe this context I need to explain my understanding (as an artist) of the development of what I see as the prevalent theories of art in use today. In the interest of brevity I'll make many generalisations and sweeping statements. Please bear with me.

During the 1960s and 70s the idea that an art work's status as art was recognised and validated by a critic's evaluation of its aesthetic value and competence of execution was challenged and eventually overturned by two theories of art.

The first was what I will refer to as the intentional theory of art which proposed that a work was art because the artist intended it to be so. This intention could be implicitly acknowledged as the reason for an art work's existence or explicitly declared by the artist.

The art works that were often used to illustrate this theory were Duchamp's readymades, *Bottle Rack* and *Fountain* which had remained almost forgotten for 50 years. It was Duchamp's apparent intentional declaration of these objects as art that made them so.

The removal of the need for a critic's validation undermined the critic's role in interpreting and explaining art work which allowed the artist to directly communicate the ideas and processes involved in creating art. Some artists took this a step further and presented the ideas or processes in place of the work.

At the same time Duchamp's readymades were being used as proof of another theory of art, the institutional theory. This held that the placement of the objects in an art context, i.e. in an exhibition in a gallery or museum, gave them art status. I would suggest that this theory has been combined with the intentional theory to form the main theory of art in use today.

Both theories are of equal value and appear to be complementary. There is, however, one important difference which is that while the intentional theory puts the artist in charge of the production and dissemination of art works, the institutional theory puts the institution, personified by the curator, in charge.

This power imbalance between the two theories has resulted in the institutional theory becoming dominant. Despite a brief moment in the late 1960s where the artist, at least in New York, was in charge of the production and dissemination of art work, the void left by the decline of the critic was soon filled by the curator, whose role, thanks to the institutional theory, has expanded over the last 50 years to include not only the roles of collector, interpreter and explainer but also that of patron and instigator. As this has seemingly resulted in more opportunities (shows, funding) the rise of the apparently benign, non-judgemental, curator has been largely unchallenged and mainly welcomed by artists who are the ones who have, in my opinion, benefited the least from this development.

Although the institutional theory has gained importance it still requires the intentional theory albeit in reduced form. A work requires both artistic intent and institutional acceptance to acquire full status as art. The curator is incapable of subjective critical judgement so the decision as to what is art has remained the artist's responsibility. The intentional theory has been reduced to merely confirming the initial art status of a work i.e. the artist presented this as art therefore it is art.

This may seem to have made the production of art work easier for the artist and the selection easier for the curator but it has posed a new problem. How does the curator know that the person submitting and declaring their work as art is an artist?

Whereas a critic would have pointed out the competence of the artist, possibly in the case of an Abstract Expressionist by simply declaring them so and justifying this by pointing out earlier figurative works, a curator can do no such thing. Subjective judgements are hard to justify within an institution. So instead the artist is judged on their professionalism, first by their attendance at art school followed by their exhibition and acquisition records. This record, the artist's CV, can be evaluated not only by the artist's achievements but also on the status of the institutions who educated the artist, exhibited the work, etc. The artist's CV is therefore more a record of institutional acknowledgement of an artist's professional status. It states that the artist is qualified to declare work as art. The higher the status of the artist the more outlandish the claims they can make as to the art status of their work. A newly graduated artist is usually limited to widely accepted forms of art whereas an established artist is able to claim almost anything as art.

Therefore in order for a work to be fully accorded art status it needs to be produced by an institutionally approved artist in a form appropriate to the artist's status and accepted as art by a recognised institution.

So the other reason for presenting the score as a book was that in order for it to be disseminated widely it needed to be in an institutionally acceptable art form. The art work itself is not fully observable so, for example, a video recording a performance of it would not have worked as my reputation as an artist is not strong enough for such a work to be accepted as art. The work needed to be contained in an object which could be accorded art status irrespective of its content, in this case an Artist's Book. That, along with my identification as an artist allows it to be accepted as an art work.

David W. Speck, 2012.