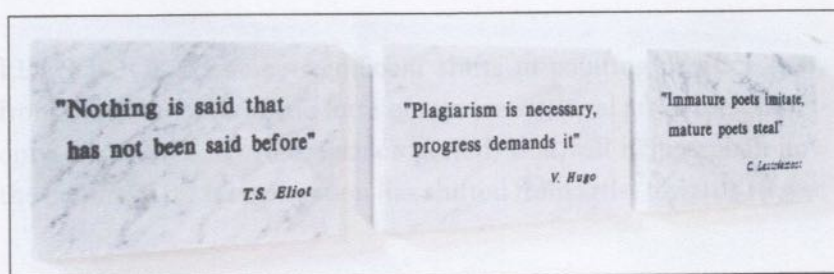


Or they may hint at meaning through a title or artist's statement. Equally, the viewer can read the opinions of others, such as critics, but ultimately it is their own interpretation that matters. This places the onus on viewers to make a greater effort to sharpen their critical awareness understand works of art and and get the most out of their experience.

The Italian artist Paolo Cirio plays on Barthes' theory by using a mock website to randomly align quotations with the wrong authors and continually reorder them. His intention is to liberate us from the fixation with authorship, stating, "This explores plagiarism and issues of authorship in the era of the creative economy, with its attendant profusion of artistic creations and their remixes."⁹



Paolo Cirio, People Quote People – The Death of the Author 2.0, 2007, engraved white marble, each 30 x 19 x 4 cm

In summary, it is very important to engage with art and form our own opinions. In the following chapter I will expand on this by examining some features of contemporary painting.

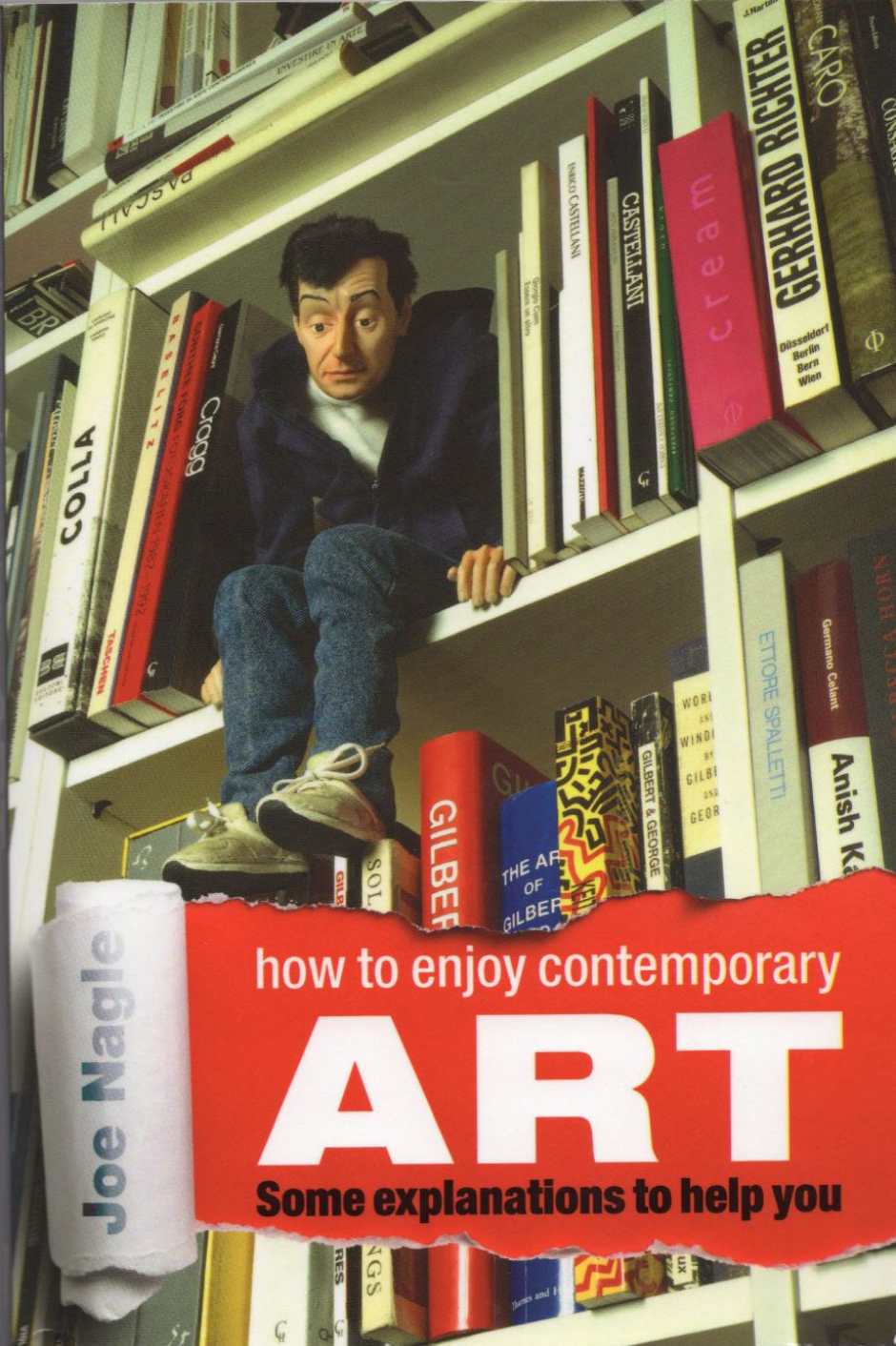
For example, gender, race, beliefs and other factors all influence what the author has to say. Barthes contends that

a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.¹⁸

Therefore, the best person to arbitrate on a text is the reader and not the author. For example, when we read a book, how do we know what the author means or intended to mean? Since we don't usually know the author personally, we cannot ask. Hence, a text is not a collection of words with clearly identifiable meanings but a conglomeration of influences from different sources, which are open to many possible interpretations. Contemporary theorists argue that any piece of writing is, in fact, a complex web of cultural and other meanings formed into a text. For Barthes, this means that the author's intentions in creating a text are largely irrelevant for its meaning or interpretation.

Thus, we can say that a book is divided into two parts – the act of writing and the act of reading – and there is seldom any communication between them unless one happens to discuss the text with the author. Indeed, how many authors can remember after their book is written exactly what they meant by each word and sentence? From this we can see that literature is an inter-textual phenomenon, that is, texts only have meaning in relation to other texts and not in relation to the author. Therefore, any meaning is made by the reader and not by the author, and they will interpret any given text in the light of their own experiences. Although it is going too far to suggest that the author's view doesn't matter, Barthes is simply asking us to reconsider the importance we place on authorship by shifting the emphasis more from author to reader.

Barthes' writings on authorship can be similarly applied to the visual arts. Artists may attempt to encourage the viewer to supply their own meaning through tactics such as multi-layering and ambiguity.



Joe Nagle

how to enjoy contemporary

ART

Some explanations to help you

How to Enjoy Contemporary Art
Some explanations to help you

The author's rights are fully asserted. The right of Joe Nagle to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

A CIP Catalogue of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-9927495-0-7

Cover image courtesy of Maurizio Cattelan

Copyright © 2013 by Joe Nagle

Published by Elgan Publishing Limited

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Nor be circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Cover designed and typeset in 11pt Fairfield by
www.chandlerbookdesign.co.uk

Printed by
Lightning Source