Opening of Freeze, 1988. From left to right: Ian Davenport, Damien Hirst, Angela Bulloch, Fiona Rae, Stephen Park, Anya Gallaccio, Sarah Lucas and Gary Hume. Photograph taken by Abigail Lane.
Research Review

June - August 2016

Starting general research on the Young British Artists: origin, artists involved, key works, exhibitions, reception, controversy, British culture in the 80’s and 90’s and ideas surrounding contemporary art.

12th August - Exhibition visit: Conceptual Art in Britain 1964 - 1979

Key/main sources looked at:

Perry, Grayson. *Playing to the Gallery*, 2016
Young British Artists, Tate Resources

September 2016

Continuing collecting and responding to a range of sources. Refining proposal and the potential aims/arguments to explore. In particular, looking at the impact that the yBa has had on British art.

28th - Dissertation meeting - Introduction to the module. Research portfolio outlined and explained.

30th - Proposal due

Key/main sources looked at:

Stallabrass, Julian. *High Art Lite*, 2006
October 2016

Further research for the overall understanding of the Young British Artists and the wider context surrounding the group. Primarily looking into Freeze and Sensation: the artists involved (focusing on the artists who featured in both exhibitions); the response to the exhibitions and the aftermath for the group and as individuals. Beginning to compile bibliography entries and drafting the dissertation outline.

12th - Group tutorial - Discussions on the structure of the year and looking at previous Research Portfolios.

15th - Museum visit - Tracey Emin and William Blake in Focus at Tate Liverpool. Also viewed permanent Tate collection which contains works by yBa artists' Gillian Wearing and Rachel Whiteread.


19th - Writing Workshop - Focus on efficient time management and the components of academic and critical writings. How to structure writing and the principles of style. Referencing A Short Guide to Writing.

20th - Individual tutorial - Research to do: Case studies of Freeze and Sensation. Finding scholarly sources, exhibition catalogues etc that critically engage with yBa.

21st - Email sent to Stephen Park by Gemma - Potential to speak about Freeze (1988) and Park’s involved with the exhibition; how it came about; how it was received; his experiences of the exhibition etc.

Issues accessing the original Freeze exhibition catalogue - not accessible through Plymouth inter-library loans.

Key/main sources looked at:

Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection, 1998
Shone, Richard. “Freeze and its Aftermath”; In Blast to Freeze, 2002
"Questionnaire on "The Contemporary" October 130, 2009
Taking more in depth notes on a number of sources and gaining a clear focus on the most valuable sources to my research. Exploring the idea of manifesto in art. The majority of my research this month has also been looking into the many sources that offer different ideas of the avant-garde (listed in bibliography), in an attempt to understand how the term *avant-garde* can be defined.

3rd - Individual tutorial - Refining my thesis question - defining the avant-garde and exploring its persistence; the institutionalisation of the yBa and how to conceptualise the yBa’s as avant-garde. Using *Avant Garde in Exhibition* by Bruce Atschuler, following its strategy and applying it to *Freeze* and *Sensation*.

7th - Museum visits
- *Abstract Expressionism* at the Royal Academy. Looking at the contemporary museum/gallery displays (White Cube) and the way works are hung, labelling etc.
- Tate Modern - Looking at the way the works in each room are set out within the space, in particular the way the range of new medias and installations are shown.

23rd - Individual tutorial - Picking sources that I will use for the essay and re working the structure of the dissertation outline. Further refining the questions that will underpin my thesis, using Atschuler’s introduction.

Key/main sources looked at:

O’Neill, Paul. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, 2012

Continue reading:
*High Art Lite* - Stallabrass
*Questionnaire on “The Contemporary”*
*Young British Artists : The Saatchi decade*, 1998
December 2016

Main focus on creating a first draft of the essay; summarising the sources and how they inform my ideas. Looking at other summaries / reviews on the sources. First draft lacking structure so continuing to rework it and picking out the most notable concepts within each source. Also looking into more sources and further writing up the bibliography using *A Short Guide to Writing*.

14th - Individual tutorial - Outlining in further detail all of the different requirements for the Research Portfolio - gaining a clear idea on what I need to focus on, especially how to structure the essay.

- Lecture by Sam Smiles - RLB 304 - on the *Late Turner @ Tate Britain and beyond* and the exhibitions’ curatorial aims. Can draw from Smiles’ experiences about the key ideas in the changing contemporary role of the curator and the role of the audience within big museum shows.

Key sources:

Kate Oakley, “From Bohemia to Britart – art students over 50 years”, Cultural Trends, Issue 4, 2009
Valerie Reardon, “British Art in the Twenty-first century™”, in Companion to Modern British Culture, Michael Higgins et al. 2010

January 2017: Deadline, 12th @ 12PM

Further editing and finalising each part of the research portfolio. Filling out the feedback form.

*Still attempting to access the original Freeze catalogue; awaiting outcome for a further request from inter-library loans. Also trying to access the Platonic Topic essay by Ian Jeffrey separately (essay is within the catalogue). Information on the catalogue such as publication, ISBN, etc is limited and so far my requests have been rejected/British library unable to fulfil it.*
Outline of Dissertation

“The story of the avant-garde is that of mutual support among a community and reception of art by a public, all participants enmeshed in systems of personal and economic relations”.

Bruce Altshuler, Avant-Garde in Exhibition

My thesis will consider Bruce Altshuler’s proposition in relation to the Young British Artists’ in exhibition. How did the reception of their work in Freeze (1988) and Sensation (1997) contribute to their making and breaking as an Avant-Garde?

Introduction

—Establish main notions/controversies surrounding the Young British Artists: origin, key artists and works, exhibitions and the wider British culture of the 80’s and 90’s.

—Look into how the group began to be recognised as a collective. Map a brief timeline of the group; key pivotal moments as Freeze and Sensation.

—Overview of Atschuler’s concept within Avant-Garde in Exhibition, briefly discuss his conclusion and methods and lead into how this begins to relate to how I can look at Freeze and Sensation.
—Propose: Can the yBa be considered as an avant-garde movement? (relate back to the thesis question)

**Key sources to inform my ideas — (these are the sources I feel are most relevant and can refer back to when beginning the initial stages of my writing)**

Harris, Jonathan. *Art History: The Key Concepts*, 2006: 36-37
Muir, Gregory. *Lucky Kunst: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art*, 2009
Pooke, Grant. *Contemporary British Art: An Introduction*, 2010
Smith, Chris. *Creative Britain*, 1998

**Chapter 1**

— How is the term avant-garde defined (and how can artists, movements and exhibitions be defined through the term?) Offer my own opinion whilst bringing together the many sources that investigate the avant-garde.

— Avant-Garde in relation to the yBa; is it a useful term to employ?

— Further introduce the premise of viewing the yBa as an avant-garde movement (Typically the definition of the avant-garde is confined to the Late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century but I propose to use it within a more recent context)
—Discuss the shift within art (change in museum display, techniques, art market, audiences etc) and how the yBa were working within these changes.

—Lead into the question: what impact did the Young British Artists have on British art from 1988?

**Key sources:**


O’Neill, Paul. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, 2012


Stallabrass, Julian. *High Art Lit: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art*, 2006


**Chapter 2 : Case study: Freeze (1988)**

—Cultural, political and social context surrounding the exhibition, ie looking into London subculture at the time and the origin of the group, starting at Goldsmiths.

—Artists and works involved in the exhibition (discussing the openness towards materials, processes of the artists, shared themes and the start of the entrepreneurial attitude for the artists)
—Reactions to the exhibition and the aftermath. **What did the impact of Freeze mean for the group?**

—Explore how the exhibition marked the start of the group beginning to challenge the notion of what defines art and how this was received by the media, critics, artists, collectors, art market and the public.

**Key sources:**


Fullerton, Elizabeth. *Artrage! : the story of the BritArt revolution*, 2016: Chapter 1


Oakley, Kate. “From Bohemia to Britart – art students over 50 years”, 2009: 281-294

Reardon, Valerie. “British Art in the Twenty- First Century”, 189-207


**Chapter 3: Case Study: Sensation (1997)**

—Similar structure to the Case Study of Freeze: social and political context surrounding the exhibition, collective approaches and intentions, artists involved (look at artists that exhibited in both) and the responses; publicly and critically.

—**What changed in the decade between the exhibitions?**

—Shift in curatorial roles, museum displays, audiences etc (further expand on Chapter 1)
—Discuss the institutionalisation, clarification and the ‘brand’ of the yBa
—The change and growth of the art market (changing relationship between public
taste and market price)
—The role of art collectors and the impact this had on the yBa; in particular the
involvement of Charles Saatchi
—Impact (and controversy) of Turner Prize, Biennales etc and how the artists were
established through other means past the exhibitions.

—Role of the media and the artist personae/celebrity culture

—The aftermath of Sensation; did the success of Sensation, nationally and globally, mark
the change in attitudes towards the artists? And how did this effect their stance as avant-
garde?

Key sources:

Kangsan, Lee “Prize & price: The Turner Prize as a valuation device in the contemporary
art market", Art at the Crossroads, Volume 43 (April 2014): 149-171
Legge, Elizabeth. "Reinventing Derivation: Roles, Stereotypes, and "Young British Art"
Molyneux, John. “STATE OF THE ART: A review of the 'Sensation' exhibition at the Royal
Academy of Arts", Issue 79 of International Social, 1998: 1-10
Young British Artists : The Saatchi decade, 1998
Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection, 1998
Conclusion

Speculate the question: Did the yBa revitalise the British art scene or just encourage a hostility towards conceptual and contemporary art?

—The change in British art and the public scepticism towards the Young British Artists and contemporary art as a whole

—The impact of the yBa today; their legacy. Has any other group of British Artists had such a profound and shocking impact on British art?

—Summarise: Can the group really be considered as an avant-garde? (And if so, referring back to the thesis concept, how did the reception - and controversy - of Freeze and Sensation contribute to their making and breaking as an avant-garde?)

Key sources:

Kuspit, Donald. Avant-Garde and Audience, 1982: 170-177
Perry, Grayson. Playing to the Gallery, 2016
Steinberg, Leo. Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art, 1972
Bibliography

Books


Atschuler's introduction gives a short analogy of the avant-garde and the several influencing factors. Leads me to question whether the idea of avant-garde can still be applied to a contemporary movement. My thesis has become centred around this source.


Key guide that I have continually referred back to throughout the whole research process. Clarified any uncertainties about referencing, how to structure/format bibliography etc.


Looks at the question of the modern Avant-Garde in Britain mainly through the magazines, *Rhythm* and *Blue Review*. Although not all of the book is relevant (as more of a focus on literature), Binckes raises some interesting concepts of how the avant-garde is constructed; and examines the idea of manifestos in avant-garde.


Focuses on five prominent members of the yBa: Gallaccio, Hirst, Hume, Landy, and Lucas.
Mixture of sources, interviews and observations on the rise of the group, how they helped shaped the art scene, the change in art market and their future as individual artists. Provides a good basis to thinking about artists’ responses, works, exhibitions both during and after the yBa prominence.


Clearly set out book that provides a history to “how modern art, is and has been whatever the avant grade has made or has said it is”. Begins to explore the leading question that relates directly to the my own ideas; is there still an avant-garde?


Lays out the premise of the labelling the avant-garde as problematic and how the term has evolved as practices get more diverse. Can pick out several ideas that can build up more of an idea of the concepts of the avant-garde. Avant-garde seeks to “enmesh the practice of radical art in wider projects to transform the modern world” (pg.3)


Book covers (and goes someway to answering) a wide range of questions when thinking about the yBa. From the origin of the yBa to the legacy, Fullerton objectively maps out the height of success, controversy and failures of the group. Notable quotes from the artists themselves (drawn from numerous interviews with artists, directors and critics). Particularly take Chapter 1 and Chapter 4; looks into *Freeze* and *Sensation* and the pivotal role of the exhibitions within the yBa’s activity.

Extracted Harris’ definition of the Avant-Garde (Avant-Gardism and Avant-Gardist) and the general ideologies, history and context behind the idea. States how the term recently has become to mean “virtually the same as contemporary art” which provides a useful catalyst to how I come to understand the avant-garde in relation to the yBa and contemporary art.


The book is a result of an 8 episode BBC Series, wrote and narrated by Hughes. Chapter 8 (Ep 8 - The Future That Was) proposes several ideas surrounding the collapse of the avant-garde and the debate of modernism culture during the 1970’s and 80’s. Questions of popular culture and avant-garde— “avant-gardist played out through the face-off between “mainstream” and media-derived art” (pg.365)


Introduces Sensation by discussing how Damien Hirst epitomises the values of the yBa and the mass media attention that followed. Kent, through essays, discusses each artist involved in the show individually, conscience of not imposing ‘artificial groupings’ (but suggests how the artists could be grouped despite the broad range of the work).


Muir’s journalistic insight is extremely valuable as provides a structure of investigating the
story of the yBa. From the starting point of Goldsmiths and *Freeze* to the era of Cool Britannia and *Sensation*, Muir’s writing is easy to follow and although opinionated, the book allows me to gain a wide knowledge of the many components of the yBa.


Looks at the avant-garde within contemporary culture. Offers another understanding of the avant-garde by challenging it with theories of the postmodern. Chapters 1, (*Theories of the Avant-Garde*), and Chapter 7, (*Simulation, Parody and History*) are most valuable in defining avant-garde and modernism and the constructs within both ideas.


(*Essays first appeared in 1976*). Highlights the new dynamics of gallery interiors and the white cube space; minimalist, spacious interiors and the “domination of pure forms” (pg. 11). Reveals assumptions on which the modern commercial and museum gallery is based. Key as creates the context in which the yBa were exhibiting their work and the changed role of the spectator.


Throughout the whole book there are important observation and critiques of the curatorial developments which will allow me to deconstruct the exhibitions *Freeze* and *Sensation*. O’Neill states how the “group exhibition has become the dominant mode of curating the contemporary” (pg.1). Allows me to gain an understanding of the exhibition as a medium
for artists, and how the evolution of the avant-garde exhibition marked the developing ideas surrounding art.


Gives many different ways in which the avant-garde can be defined. Rather that a continuous process, analysis of its critical writing suggests a series of discontinuous and historically determined avant-garde movements. Highlighting the definition of avant-garde within Chapter 7; “avant-garde is a concrete cultural phenomenon…” (141)


Looks at the art world tense relationship with popularity and the dynamics between artists, museums, dealers, collectors, critics and the public. Begins to answer questions of what counts as art, what is quality and how we might judge it. Apply many of Perry’s ideas when considering questions around the yBa and the wider skepticism of contemporary art. “Is art still capable of shocking us or have we seen it all before?”


Pollock’s theory on the avant-garde revolves around three main concepts; reference, deference and difference. I can use this process (as discussed in the state of the question essay) and use the factors surrounding avant-garde practices that Pollock’s discusses, when forming the proposition of the yBa as avant-garde.

Covers the dynamic changes within the last couple of decades in Britain. Chapter 1 points out several components that are influencing today’s art world; contemporary art market, celebrity, British art awards, fairs and biennales. Continued emphasis on the role of yBa within British art and culture; ‘Cool Britannia’. Offers further reading that can expand my research.


Focuses on the regeneration of British culture through developments within creativity, institutional ideas between high-low art, and the introduction of events such as the lottery and turner prize. Places the governments role in supporting creativity within four key themes; access, excellence, education and economic value. Places the yBa within a wider context of creativity and change.


Significant source that forms an account of the yBa during the 1990’s and discusses the groups legacy and the public attitudes towards ‘high’ art. Provides information on both *Freeze* and *Sensation*, highlighting the impact of Saatchi, the artist as celebrity and the scepticism by the public, displayed by the art world as “wilful ignorance”. Will continually refer back to Stallabrass’ research when I begin to write my thesis.


Useful guide to looking at the shift of art from late 19th century to today. Particular noted
how modernism is described “as an exemplary avant-garde that is at the forefront of change and experimentation” (pg.200). Can continuously refer back to this book as a central focus of my research develops further.


Weightman reflects of the general nature of the avant-garde and modernism, drawing on different critics, approaches and influences. Introductory ideas surrounding the phenomenon of the avant-garde offers an analysis of the complex changes in aesthetic and context.


Creates a vast range of images, artist biographies and newspaper clippings that all contributed to yBa phenomenon. 6 interviews with most prominent members of Sensation-Hirst, Hume, Lucas, Patterson, Saville and Whiteread. Presents their own perspectives about how British art developed, with many references to Freeze, Sensation, the tension between media and the public. The book contains important points of reference (especially the many newspaper clippings) and the design (by Jonathon Barnbrook) is bold, bright and chaotic. Although hard to read and follow the text, I feel the design is fitting for the radical nature of yBa.

Critical of Muir’s writing and the many brash cliche’s in his accounts of the book. I have found Muir’s insights extremely useful to the overall story of the yBa, and disagree with Colling’s criticism that the book doesn’t necessarily add anything to the “existing mythology” surrounding the yBa.


Gill’s review is underlined by the point that the book heavily focuses on the yBa’s “bad behaviour” than the actual work. Although I agree with this criticism to some extent, the group was equally defined by what the artists did away from their work so perhaps Fullerton is justified in her approach to the yBa.

Haber, John, review of *Feminist Gambits*, by Griselda Pollock, Haber’s Art Reviews, [http://www.haberarts.com/gpollock.htm](http://www.haberarts.com/gpollock.htm), (Fall 1995)

Breaks up many of Pollock’s most influential ideas, focusing on her explanation of the limitations of modernism. Can pick out Haber’s analysis of the formula of reference, deference and difference. Equally found the review difficult to grasp.

Acknowledges Aschuler’s book as an “essential grounding for any curator”, but is critical of the lack of women figures featured in the accounts. Schlatter writes mainly on Altschuler’s breakdown of the “When Attitudes Become Form” but still provides a useful summary (rather than review) of the book.


Provides a short but really useful breakdown of Atschuler’s main concepts. Supported the conclusions that I had made on the text, and allowed me to think about the key points to include in my summary.


This review contains many comments on Stallbrass’ ideas that I hadn't initially considered, ie the links with Stallbrass’ and Berger’s Ways of Seeing. Also compares High Art Lite and Matthew Collings’ This is Modern Art, noting that although they state similar ideas, “Collings seems to like the art and the artists, for the same reasons that Stallabrass detests them”. Warner’s summary enhances not only my understanding of Stallbrass’ ideas but my understanding of the yBa as a whole.
Edited collections

Ashbury’s ideas support many other writings on the avant-garde but the text is particular useful as draws attention to the role of the media (“media is really a disguised blessing”) and the balance for an artist to remain avant-garde and independent of public acceptance/rejection.

Discusses the different structures within art education, and how cultural changes are reflected through the art schools of the twentieth century. Highlights Goldsmiths and the main attitudes, concerns and style of the yBa era, focusing on the *Public Offerings* exhibition in 1988.

Outlines three terms for basic ways in thinking about Modern art from 1850 - present. Formalism, Avant-Garde and Contextualism. Everett provides a lengthy definition of the concept of avant-garde, a concept that will directly inform my understanding. Key sources in creating a clear link between the avant-garde, popular culture and the nature of social changes.

Offers a definition of what a post-modern avant-garde could mean, moving away from the traditional associations with causality and progress. Can use Everett’s ideas to support and apply it to the how the avant-garde can be applied to the yBa.


Key formalist ideas within the 20th century on the changing notion of what defines accepted art. Draws comparison between avant-garde and kitsch. Greenberg’s essay is crucial in giving another idea of how the avant-garde can be defined and how it has changed due aspects such as widening markets, changing audiences and the constant link between higher and dominant culture.


Collection of several essays by different artists, curators and critics, critically investigating the constantly changing discourse of exhibitions. The book as a whole notes the vital role that exhibitions play within an artist becoming recognised and also the wider impact on culture that exhibitions have. Several discussions of larger exhibitions; factors raised relate directly to the features of Freeze and Sensation.
Investigates the relationship between audience and the avant-garde and how the line between the two isn't so straightforward. Significant as the reception of Freeze and Sensation is one of the most important factors so through Kuspit's analysis can begin to decipher the relationship between the two exhibitions, the audience and the avant-garde.

Highlights the power of media in forming public opinion, and the critics constant battle against this. Although a lot of the text isn’t relevant, it still provides ideas that are important to consider when thinking about the relationship between the reactions to exhibitions, both publicly and critically.

Provides a timeline of the yBa, starting with Freeze and ending with Sensation (the last yBa show to gain widespread media attention”, pg.205) States how the term yBa “relies on notion of a coherent and critical avant-garde” (pg.192) and discusses the loose grouping of the yBa and the collapse of the boundary between high and popular art. I found this source particularly relevant as it has supported and further enhanced the other research I have done.

Places London as the capital of contemporary art and the Freeze exhibition as the origin of this, which supports the other research I have been doing for the case study on Freeze. Discusses shared themes of the yBa and a brief timeline on the influential artworks from Freeze to Sensation.


Amongst the several short reviews, there are several vital concepts within Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public (1962). Steinberg proposes the public as a role played by people and the plight, the shock of discomfort when challenged with radical new styles. I can use these ideas to comment on the relationship between the public, their reactions, and how this was impacted by a “rapid domestication of the outrageous”(5). Apply some of these ideas in particular to the reactions and controversy surrounding Sensation.

Exhibition catalogues (and the featured essays)


Introduces the many influences and shared themes of Sensation, but importantly notes that the show is only “one mans view of how art has changed” (34). Individually discusses
some of the artists and artworks and is ultimately supportive in the shows strength in influences the next phases of British art.


Asks the question: “what is so new about the art in Sensation?” (pg 10). Offers many answers to this and supports the radical nature of the exhibition. Can use many of Rosenthal’s reflections on the impact, scale and context of the exhibition within my own case study.


Exhibition catalog providing direct accounts and critical context for the show. Maps the various factors, artists, documents all the artworks and responses involved. Key essays that analyse the new phase of British art, placing Sensation as the radical spectacle of this change.


Notes the changes within the latest phases of British art and the core ideas surrounding Freeze, the yBa and the growth of the group (and the artists as individuals). Almost creates a chronological account of the first few years of the yBa but also focuses on further shows and publications that stemmed from Freeze.
Exhibition reviews

Applauds the strength of the exhibition and positively acknowledges the ambition of the artists. Heavily mentions the role of Hirst (too much in my opinion) but does provide a context surrounding the exhibition and how the exhibition was received and publicised in Britain and the US.

Proposes a strong critique of the exhibition and its catalog, Sensation: Young British Artists from Saatchi Collection (and in turn Rosenthal and Saatchi). Highlights the influence of Saatchi and states him as an “exhibition maker, like Rosenthal, rather than a collector”. Critical of the several essays within the catalog whilst also touching on what distinguishes the work of the artists from their British predecessors.

Deals with the controversies of the exhibition, focusing on Marcus Harvey’s Myra. Molyneux is notably critical of the offensive nature of the Chapman brothers work and the exhibition catalogues failure to acknowledge these controversies. Praises Hirst and Whiteread, and discusses their concepts, processes and originality in length. Touches on
the other artists only briefly but does strongly support the mark the exhibition has left on our culture.


Highly critical of the mass culture and entertainment that surrounds the yBa and labels some of its work as “parasitical”. Questions the intentions of the group and its relationship to the public. Offers a balance to my research as doesn't view the group and its success in a completely favourable light, arguing against the changes in market that the yBa thrived upon.


Records the many controversies surrounding the _Sensation_ exhibition, and the media and public outrage. A cynical perspective on the exhibition, the review is critical of some of the work that overshadows some of what Plagen believes to be the more successful pieces (highlights Whiteread and Saville). I can take some of Plagen’s criticism and acknowledge it within the case study of _Sensation._

Exhibition visits

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**Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2016**

Bluecoat, Liverpool - 9 July – 16 October 2016

New Contemporaries has become a platform for emerging talent from the UK art schools.
yBa artists such as Hirst, Lane and Whiteread have all been involved in past exhibitions. Artists exhibited responded to variety of today's social, cultural and environmental changes through a range of medias. Shows the future trends in contemporary art; allows me compare today's work to that of the yBa.

**Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979**

**Tate Britain - 12 April – 29 August 2016**

An exhibition showing the state of artists breaking away from traditional boundaries of art. Concepts within the yBa echoes and was clearly influenced by the ideas these earlier conceptual artists had. Opening up the question of ‘Can an idea be art?’. Works by Hirst and Michael Craig Martin (key figures within the yBa movement)

**Tracey Emin and William Blake in Focus**

**Tate Liverpool - 16 September 2016 – 3 September 2017**

Comparison of Emin and Blake's work, highlighting shared themes. Central focus on Emin’s *My Bed*, 1998 and the capacity the work had to provoke conversation made it a starting point for a project the Tate Liverpool Community collective - audio of discussions such as framing *My Bed* as artistic provocation.

Newspaper articles

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**Berens, Jessica. “Freeze: 20 years on”, Art, The Observer, 1 June 2008**

Quotes several artists on their experience of *Freeze*. Article contains short extracts about the 16 artists involved and what they are doing today which although isn't in depth, provides starting point to expand my research about individual artists further.

Lengthy discussion of the reception of British art in the decade of yBa dominance and how the yBa is retrospectively viewed today. The notable changes to views towards the group, Fox states is the aftermath of a “throbbing cultural hangover”. Begins to tackle the complications of changes with class, gender, art market and popular culture (and notes the magazines —Frieze— role and record of the changing culture).

Fullerton, Elizabeth. “Sex, psychos and sharks: did Britart change the world?”, Art and Design, Culture, The Guardian, 16 April 2016

Retrospective on the phenomenon of the yBa. Similar ideas to her book, in that the yBa are still prominent today with many of the artists still in major exhibitions and producing successful and profitable works. Leaves me to question whether any other group has impacted the British art scene the way that the yBa did.

Jones, Jonathan. “Here’s to the YBAs, and the best 25 years in British Art History”, Art and Design, Culture, The Guardian, 30 April 2013

Like most of the articles on the yBa, Hirst dominates the discussion on Freeze (however, Jones does mark Hirst as a “national shame” and questions his true talent). He also asks the question of how many British artists since 1988 have created “enduring masterpieces”. Opinions switches between positive and negative ideas on the aftermath of Freeze.

Lewis, Ben. “Charles Saatchi: the man who reinvented art”, Art and Culture, The Observer, 10 July 2011

Discusses Saatchi’s role and achievements within the art world, referencing The History of
the Saatchi Gallery and perhaps rightly labelling him the “puppet master of contemporary artists”. Offers an opinion of the controversy of Saatchi’s power and notes the exhibitions that changed British art’s culture, both to a national and international audience.


Like many other sources, highlights Freeze as the founding moment of the YBA, primarily noting Hirst’s involvement. Extract from David Mabb, who has a critical view of the immediate involvement of the collectors and the way Goldsmiths is now trying to distance itself from the “commodity production” idea of art. Introduces the artist collective, Lucky PDF and the general indifference to the Freeze generation in parts of the contemporary art world.

MacCarthy, Fiona. “Why the pre-Raphaelites were the YBAs of their day”, Art and Design, Culture, The Guardian, 31 August 2012

Draws parallels between 1850’s PRBs and 1990’s yBa and the shock values and radical nature of the works involved. Points out the Tate’s role within success of exhibitions and there are some aspects of the “Victorian Avant-Garde” exhibition relates to the ideas within Freeze and Sensation.


Critical of Artrage! by Elizabeth Fullerton. Strong undertone of irritation towards the ‘arrogance’ of the yBa and although I don’t agree with all of Meade’s points, he does raise interesting concerns over the many cliches that arise when discussing the yBa. He also
notes the delusion that every generation believes “that it is starting from zero”, brings into question how truly radical the yBa was.

**Sharp, Rob. “Jay Jopling: Big space, big art, big ego”, Art and Culture, Independent, 11 October 2011**

Briefly examines the persona and influence of Jay Jopling and the White cube gallery empire. Discusses his involvement with the rising yBa artists in 1980 and suggests how he became a “cultural ambassador” for the generation of artists. Also looks into his reputation and how he continues to be a huge figure within contemporary art.

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**Journals**


Explores the valuation of young British contemporary artists in correlation to the emergence of the Turner Prize. Starts to break down the different processes of valuation within the art markets. Also looks at factors involved within the Turner Prize, specifically the “three innovative validation mechanisms: brokerage, deliberation, and institutional labelling”.


Raises several key aspects; the enhancing stereotypes of avant-gardism, British class and
identity, role of the institutions, and the relationship between marketed works of art and the social disruption raised by the publicity. Also gives another aspect to look into - the relationship to US art and the response to Sensation in NY.

**Oakley, Kate.** "From Bohemia to Britart – art students over 50 years", Cultural Trends, Vol 18, Issue 4 (2009): 281-294

Focus on how artists work informs the “labour practices of arts school graduates” and how these graduates contribute to the wider economy. Contains many theories, research methods and the concepts of the link to art with money, and the artist as worker. Made me aware of many research projects that I can use to critically support ideas, especially concerning the role of the art school.


Places the yBa in the context of British culture and looks at the influence the group had in “redefining the art market’s London axis” (pg.4). Questions the “Biennalisation” of contemporary art. Compares *Freeze* to *The Other Story*, both showing different sides of the art world and appealing to different audiences and collectors. Looks at the redefining of sculpture in relation to the yBa which is lacking in many other sources.


Raises the question of placing contemporary art as a field within art history. Brings attention to the growing concepts of the contemporary and the transformations within galleries, museums and the interplay between artists. Gives a strong understanding of the wider
controversies surrounding contemporary art which I believe is forming the controversies that are at the central focus of the yBa.


Reflection on the strange conjunction between the fact that “contemporary art has become an institutional object in its own right” (pg.1) Overriding issues of placing contemporary art as a discipline with art history; questions of institutionalisation, globalisation, temporality and causality. Many of the writers offer different critical views; some in support of this growing generation of art history and the possibilities it is creating, others critical of its teaching as a field. Each writing has made me question how contemporary art is placed in history and in the present. Has made me consider the potential problems in exploring contemporary art when it is in an ever-changing state.

Broadcasted programmes / online videos


Conversation between Gompertz and Micheal Craig-Martin. Discusses the dynamics of Goldsmiths during the 1980’s and highlights the “detrimental change” in art schools from the early 1990’s with the university structures compromising the environment that helped create the yBa. Craig-Martin on Sensation; “Successful proof that was goldsmiths was doing was the right thing”.


Discusses the traditional values associated with the Royal Academy and contains interviews with many of the yBa artists and critics spreading over the build up to the Sensation show. Looks into the decision to show the yBa within the Academy; because of “the subculture of the group and the common spirit, to that extent, they are a genuine academy”

Omnibus, “Freeze, but Is It Art?”, Directed by Mark James, Produced by Andrea Cornes, Season 28, Episode 1, Produced by the BBC, 22th February 1994

First major television documentary on Damien Hirst and his YBA contemporaries. Contains behind the scenes footage of Freeze; valuable to see first responses and interviews from the artists, teachers and critics at the time. Ian Jeffrey: “When you look through the history of art, those who have success belong to a group of mutually supportive artists”.


Explores how the yBa “changed the face of art”. Several interviews with the yBa including Sam Taylor-Wood and also Jeremy Deller, who is very critical of the yBa. Kemp pushes his own views on the prominence of the yBa which isn't perhaps as well supported, rather influenced by his own personal experiences/interest with art.


Ann Gallagher, Director of Collections at Tate Britain speaks about Lucas representing Britain at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Also makes a notable comment that although she is
very well known and successful, Lucas is rarely in the tabloids - marks a distinction between the artists of the yBa, despite being grouped together under the term.

This is Modern Art, Presented by Matthew Collings, Channel 4, Broadcast 1994.

6 episode brash documentary that explores the controversies surrounding art today. Specifically Episode 2 ‘Shock! Horror!’ “Why do we want to be shocked?”. In regards to the yBa, Colling’s states it as a “brand new staging of shocks that were passed back between artists in media”. Although I don’t agree with all of Collings’ comments (such as that the “art the yBa's created had less meaning”), he does raise questions that provoke thought, and shows many different art works that were pushing the boundaries of what art can be.

What Do Artists Do All Day, BBC Four, 2013

Series which conducts interviews with a number of British artists. Episodes with Micheal Craig-Martin (Ep 13), Tracey Emin (Ep 18), Michael Landy (Ep 16) and the Chapman brothers (Ep 17) relevant to seeing how the artists themselves work, their concepts and the comparison of the work they are making now to when at the height of the yBa phenomenon. This direct insight is important to understand some of their intentions without input from critics, journalists and the public.
Websites


Provides further information through various texts, images and videos on the life and works of Hirst to date. Notable extract on the exhibition *Freeze* and Hirst's curatorial role, and the impact this had.


As I found Greenberg’s text difficult to breakdown, useful summary to refer back to when trying to really grasp the ideas of avant-garde and kitsch, high and low culture and the paradoxes of the avant-garde.


New contemporaries provides a platform for leading British artist emerging straight from national art schools. Website shows artists, selectors, exhibitions and publications of every year of the New Contemporaries from 1989-2016. Many of the yBa artists featured.


Shows the past, current and upcoming exhibitions, displaying the vast number of artists that Saatchi now represents. Contains visual documentation of the Sensation exhibition, showing visitors reacting to the works.

Collection of over 100 visual images that records the works and installation of the Sensation exhibition at Brooklyn Museum. See how the works relate to each other within the space; compare this to how the exhibition was shown at the Royal Academy.


Conversation with Michael Craig-Martin, discussing the definitive exhibition of British conceptual art, The New Art, 1972. Also discusses his influence on the yBa at Goldsmiths college, describing Freeze as a “combination of youthful bravado, innocence, fortunate timing, good luck, and, of course, good work”. Use Craig-Martin’s reactions to help support my conclusion of the impact of Freeze.


Brief synopsis of the group, placing Freeze and Sensation of the two most “shocking exhibits of the late twentieth century”. Maps out key ideas and then provides further sources (books, articles, videos) to gaining a more in depth knowledge of the yBa.


Briefly discusses many ideas on the yBa including definition/membership, characteristics
of the group style, exhibitions, Charles Saatchi, Turner Prize winners and shows the most ‘famous’ artworks by the yBa. Good base to gain an overall understanding of the groups impact on British art.

Young British Artists, Tate, (http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/y/young-british-artists, first accessed 20/06/2016 - continued

Gives an overview of the origin and main elements of the group, in particular focusing on their “openess to material, processes, shock tactic and entrepreneurial attitude”. Gives attention to the ‘brand’ of the yBa and highlights certain artists and shows, in particular Freeze and Damien Hirst. Links to further essays, videos and recordings discussing wider context surrounding the yBa.
“State of the question” Essay

“The story of the avant-garde is that of mutual support among a community and reception of art by a public, all participants enmeshed in systems of personal and economic relations”

Bruce Altshuler, Avant-Garde in Exhibition

My thesis will consider Bruce Altshuler’s proposition in relation to the Young British Artists’ in exhibition. How did the reception of their work in Freeze (1988) and Sensation (1997) contribute to their making and breaking as an Avant-Garde?

Over the last few months, I have been forming an extensive base of research exploring the Young British Artists (yBa). Through focusing on the origin of the group; the individual artists; artworks and the social, political and cultural contexts surrounding the yBa, my research has become centred around two key exhibitions, Freeze (1988) and Sensation (1997). Freeze is considered as the starting point that staged the artists as a collective group and Sensation as the epitome of both the height of success and controversy for the yBa. By looking at the radical shared themes and aspects involved within the exhibitions, I have begun to explore the dynamic changing network between artist, curator, dealer, critic and the public. These exhibitions stand as the key moments within the decade of yBa dominance, defining the yBa as a group and ultimately as avant-garde.

My research quickly extended to the wider question of how to define the avant-garde, a term that is typically considered as a late 19th century to “mid twentieth century phe-
nomenon”. In its simplest sense, the avant-garde is radical and at the forefront of experimentation and change. Through many different sources I have explored how it can be defined further, looking into its persistence and the changing contexts surrounding the concept. This research has then led to the question, that despite functioning with no direct manifesto in a post-modern era, can the yBa be conceptualised as avant-garde — and more importantly, is it a useful term to employ?

At the forefront of my research I have highlighted four key sources: Avant-Garde in Exhibition, Bruce Atschluer (1994); Avant-Garde Gambits: Gender and the Colour of Art History, Griselda Pollock (1888-1893); Avant-Garde and Kitsch, Clement Greenberg (1939) and Reinventing Derivation: Roles, Stereotypes and Young British Artists by Elisabeth Legge (2000). All of these sources offer several ideas to how the avant-garde can be used to define artists, movements and exhibitions, which I can build on and relate directly back to the yBa.

Bruce Atschuler’s, Avant-Garde in Exhibition (1994) creates a timeline of global avant-garde exhibitions that span from the Fauvist Salon d’Automne (Paris, 1905) to When Attitudes Become Form, Kunsthalle (Bern 1969). Atschuler focuses on how the “exhibitions developed, what they actually presented, and what happened to the participants afterwards”. The book as a whole shows the changing context surrounding exhibitions, pointing out the growing audiences that are readily been challenged by the art world. I aim to use the basis of the ideas mapped out in the introduction, and apply it to the contemporary exhibitions, Freeze and Sensation.


In the introduction, Atschuler highlights the growing interplay between “artists, dealers, collectors, critics and public”\(^3\). The balance of this “mutual support”\(^4\) is hinged on the reactions of audiences towards exhibitions. The responses to both Freeze and Sensation and how this was then portrayed in the media, has been pivotal in contributing to the rise and fall of the groups structure as avant-garde. The change in exposure for the group was highlighted in Sensation, which brought an “end to their positions as outsiders”\(^5\). Despite the controversies, the yBa achieved not only national exposure, but was widely received globally. Atschuler suggests that to maintain its avant-garde status, an artist or group needs to keep “a decent distance from the dominant culture and economic institutions”\(^6\). This distance for the yBa became increasingly smaller when Sensation was shown at the Royal Academy and after the exhibition, there was perhaps no distance at all.

Another important idea that I have taken from Atschuler is that to find the spirit of the avant-garde “…we must look at the many scenes of its introduction, the confluence of artistic practice, aesthetic theorising, promotional kill, business acumen and sheer energy that was the avant-garde exhibition”.\(^7\) To find this spirit within the yBa, I can directly use Avant-Garde in Exhibition whilst considering all of the interweaving aspects of exhibitions. Despite this, the one difficulty I have found is Atschuler’s implication that the avant-garde has already ended. Atschuler states “Today young artists don’t use the term, burdened as it is with such notions as complete originality and faith in artistic progress”\(^8\). This may chal-

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\(^3\) Bruce Atschuler, The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th century, 8

\(^4\) Ibid, 8

\(^5\) Young British Artists: The Saatchi decade (London: Booth-Clibborn Edns, 1998) 6

\(^6\) Bruce Atschuler, The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th century, 9

\(^7\) Ibid, 9

\(^8\) Ibid, 9
lenge the whole notion of considering the avant-garde within the twenty-first century, but I still feel I can take many references from Atschuler to underpin my whole thesis.

Griselda Pollock’s *Avant-Garde Gambits (1888-1893)* offers another process of understanding the avant-garde. Pollock’s theory proposes that for art to be avant-garde, it has to become an interplay between *reference, deference and difference*.

According to Pollock’s ideas, to *reference*, an artist needs to relate to the current context surrounding them. Through all of my research it is clear that no matter how controversial, the artists in *Freeze* and *Sensation* show an awareness to events that were defining and affecting British culture. *Deference* is the consideration of the “definitive statement of shared concerns”\(^9\), acknowledging radical developments and techniques. There are many stylistic comparisons from earlier Minimalism and Conceptualism. Asides to this the majority of the yBa were also all under the same teachings at Goldsmiths which gave them a platform to acknowledge and learn from the latest ideas that were circulating. This acknowledgement is then surpassed by the intent of the yBa to challenge the accepted notions of art. It is this *difference*, and the ambition to move forward from the “current aesthetic and criticism”.\(^10\), that Pollock believes makes a group truly avant-garde.

The combination of these three concepts forms a way of interpreting the avant-garde. Asides to these principles, Pollock also discusses the framework of the avant-garde, which she concludes generates “intense competitiveness, antagonism and ambition under a shared rubric…..Avant-Gardism involves a series of gambits for intervening in the interrelated spaces of representation, publicity, professional competition and critical


\(^10\) *Ibid*, 14
recognition”\textsuperscript{11}. The interplay of all of these factors can be applied to the exact frameworks of the yBa. Through reference, deference and difference I can break down the factors within \textit{Freeze} and \textit{Sensation} and see how they were characteristic of the ambitious nature of the group.

Another important source in the theory of the avant-garde, is Clement Greenberg’s essay from 1939, \textit{Avant-Garde and Kitsch}. For Greenberg, art is distinguished between high and low art, or between avant-garde and kitsch. Avant-garde is radical and consciously seeking to push art and culture further. The challenge on this high level of art was kitsch. Kitsch, which stemmed from the industrial revolution, reflected the every day, the popular and the commercial. It formed a kind of “universal literacy”\textsuperscript{12} and appealed to the masses. Greenberg believed this to be weakening culture and a trigger for the decline of taste.

Greenberg notes that both avant-garde and kitsch are defined by the audiences they were aimed towards. Traditional and accepted conceptions of art were thrown into question, as artists in the twentieth century were “no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works”\textsuperscript{13}. Greenberg further comments on the unsure future of the avant-garde which he believed was caused by elite cultural audiences “shrinking”\textsuperscript{14}. The overwhelming idea of culture within the source, is that avant-garde’s most important function is to “find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture moving”\textsuperscript{15}. Avant-garde progresses, whilst kitsch doesn’t contribute to a develop-

\textsuperscript{11} Griselda Pollock, \textit{Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History}, 12


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid}, 4

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}, 8

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, 5
ment, but rather repeats and reproduces previous concepts. The avant-garde, according to Greenberg, is seen to be resisting this change in culture caused by commodities and the commercial nature of art.

The paradox that I have always found difficult to understand is how, despite the elite stance of the avant-garde, it is still dependent on its links with dominant culture and the masses. Greenberg perfectly describes this connection as “the umbilical cord of gold”\(^\text{16}\). In response to this I have then began to question in the decade between *Freeze* and *Sensation*, how strong did this ‘umbilical cord’ for the yBa become? The changes between *Freeze* and *Sensation*, such as the institutionalisation and the role of Charles Saatchi, had an enormous impact on the profitable success of some of the artworks of the yBa. Ultimately, the question I have been left with from reading this source is, would Greenberg define the yBa as avant-garde?

Amongst the sources that outline the avant-garde I felt it was vital to discuss a source that directly looks at the yBa. Elisabeth Legge’s *Reinventing Derivation: Roles, Stereotypes and “Young British Art”* is a key contemporary text that explores how the yBa can be defined, how it was received and the factors that have influenced the stereotypes of the group. The stereotypes associated and the shared themes within *Freeze* and *Sensation* are a large part of why the artists are so recognisable as a collective.

Legge approaches the several controversies and objections of the yBa, particularly towards the shock of *Sensation* and both its national and international reception. She highlights the many aggravations that *Sensation* caused. The main objections from the text is that the yBa merely adopts a “media-friendly look of being shocking in the tradition of the

\(^{16}\) Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939), 8
angry young man, the working class hero, and the punk"\textsuperscript{17}. The media exposure has had positive impacts on the yBa but there has always been a negative stigma attached, with questions of the legitimacy and nature of the yBa art. Legge also brings up the question of the avant-garde and whether the yBa was just a “shallow, media driven phenomenon playing into certain stereotypes of Britishness”\textsuperscript{18}. It could be considered that the yBa played on these objections, highlighting the tensions between the artists, art market, publicity and the public.

The sceptical debate on the yBa is further defined through its relationship with the US art world and market. Legge constantly refers back to how the shock of \textit{Sensation} abroad, reflected the status of British artistic culture. Through reading this source, I have realised the importance in thinking about British identity through the yBa’s art, considering aspects such as class and the stereotypes attached to this. These concepts all relate back to whether the yBa enhance “stereotypes of avant-gardism”\textsuperscript{19} or actually just imitates the avant-garde. Although Legge does not directly investigate he yBa as avant-garde, she hints towards other critics post-modern ideas, and brings together strong criticisms of the group that I can use to balance my arguments.

All four of these sources create a strong base to my research. Despite questions of the ‘end’ of the avant-garde, there are many ideas that can be applied to the yBa and what contributes to the success and collapse of the group as a progressional avant-garde movement. The sources are all written in different contexts and it has made me realise how aware I need to be of the context surrounding the yBa and the state of contemporary

\textsuperscript{17} Elisabeth Legge, "Reinventing Derivation: Roles, Stereotypes, and "Young British Art"" \textit{Representations}, no. 71 (2000): 4

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 3

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 4
art. Each source has come to advance my understanding on the different aspects linked to
the avant-garde and allowed me to form my own conclusions, acknowledging ideas and
equally dismissing others. I have found these sources complicated to break down but have
managed to find a number of parallels to the pattern of the avant-garde, with the pattern of
the yBa and the shift from Freeze to Sensation.

Word Count: 1,976

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Throughout this module, the research I have done has allowed me to strongly identify and really understand the key concepts that I will propose in my thesis. Initially, I struggled with the vast amount of research that was available and how to take the most relevant ideas from each source. I was able to start to overcome this from simply re-reading sources, taking more detailed notes, photocopies and direct quotations. I soon started to organise my research better through the documentation I have kept. Creating a rough outline of each section also helped and allowed me to focus on smaller ideas at a time, rather than trying to take in everything at once.

I was also aware that I needed to find more scholarly sources as a large amount of information circulating on the yBa is newspaper articles and headlines. As soon as I started exploring more critically engaged sources, I found my knowledge of the yBa and the con-
text surrounding the artists, became more developed. This in turn led to me discovering a number of writings that explored the wider contexts of contemporary art. I have then been able to map the changes from *Freeze*, *Sensation* and to the state of art and exhibitions today. Although I have found many relevant books, journals etc, the one major disappointment has been not accessing a copy of the *Freeze* exhibition catalogue. I have sent several different requests, the last of which is outstanding, but due to the lack of information surround the publication of the catalogue, the requests have yet to be fulfilled.

The notable turning point for me during this module, was the suggestion by Gemma, of looking at Bruce Atschuler’s *Avant-Garde in Exhibition*. Not only was I able to apply Atschuler’s concepts to my own research on *Freeze* and *Sensation*, but it triggered an on going exploration with the avant-garde. From this, I was able to structure the main thesis title that allowed me to focus my research and bring it all together to start forming questions. I have always found the idea of the avant-garde and what constitutes a movement to be avant-garde really difficult to grasp. However, after my research and through focusing on the four sources in the “state of the question” essay, I now have a stronger understanding of the history and changes of the avant-garde and how the term could be applied to the yBa.

Many of the sources have been complex to understand and at times I have felt overwhelmed and stretched by trying to balance the many aspects of the module. Key to this project has been my tutorials, as each conversation with Gemma has given me the clarity on what I needed to focus on. I now feel at a stage where I can draw from all of my research and begin to push my concepts forward, building my own critical responses.
**Learning Outcomes**

- Demonstrate detailed knowledge of a selected research topic (Knowledge & Understanding)
- Identify, select, and make appropriate use of research materials from a range of source (Cognitive & Intellectual Skills)
- Interpret, analyse, evaluate and synthesise research materials (Cognitive & Intellectual Skills)
- Conduct research activity with a degree of autonomy (Practical Skills)
- Organise, plan and develop an extended argument and take critical responsibility for this argument (Key Transferable Skills)
- Present research findings in appropriate and effective ways (Key Transferable Skills)

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