

MIDVILLE

A MYTHICAL ART SCHOOL

Steve Hawley and Steve Dutton

based on the book Art Students Observed
with additional interviews by Steve Hawley

Copyright Steve Hawley and
Steve Dutton

stevrehawley1@outlook.com

EXT. DAY

It is the late 1960s, an art school, somewhere in the Midlands of the British Isles, a brutalist concrete building. The camera takes us smoothly inside where...

we glide slowly through a series of empty and desolate art studios. And as we do we hear a series of voices...

JOE

In the introductory speech given by the foundation course staff, Keith Armitage asked the new comers, ..."who wants to do Fine Art." I put my hand up. He said something to the effect that it was a mugs game and do something that could earn you a living

DAVE

My parents didn't want me to go, they wanted me to go to university to get a degree in a proper subject you know what I mean.

LIZ

I had to fight to get to Art School. My parents were very reticent about it they wanted me to go to university to do English or something. I had to really fight to get there and so having got there it seemed like a fight all the way through

ARTHUR

I didn't take much notice to be frank of most of what the staff were saying. I sort of in a rather arrogant way thought They're not that bright anyway. why should I be listening?

BRIAN

They were strange times in Midville. We were all in a little play almost, like a theatre group working, and we were being moved in a particular direction. Directed I suppose. And it was all new to us, we all had our own ideas and trying to fit them into this conceptual art idea was actually not the most straightforward of things.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "MIDVILLE"

SUPER: "1967"

NARRATOR

From 1967-70 two sociologists studied the socialisation of art students at a Midlands art school, and published the results in the book *Art Students Observed*. The same students remembered their experience over fifty years later.

In a document dated October 1968 on 'The Re-Organization of Art and Design Education' the then Principal of Midville College wrote:

I believe that one cannot teach art and that neither art institutions nor educational structures should be organized for the rare, highly gifted individual.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "The PRE-DIPLOMA COURSE"

NARRATOR

The function of a foundation course is to bridge the transition from the largely fine art based idea of art experience in Secondary Education and the concepts of diplomas in art and design.

ARTHUR

The pre dip course was on a different floor to the fine art course. The building in Gosport Street, I always thought it looked like a cigarette packet made out of concrete

NARRATOR

The tutor in charge was *Mottram*, the students were given the traditional art school 'prop' of a naked girl as a model, but she was not there for them to draw in the traditional way. The technique they were to use was one of 'mark-making'.

September 25th. Boys and girls separate naturally. The tutor tells them to make as many marks as possible with brush and

black paint, starting from the least obvious way of using the brush-end. The tutor asks that intellect should not take over too soon as happens in modern fashionable painting which he deplores as dull because over-intellectualized.

NARRATOR 2

September 26th. The tutor wants the students to produce marks or symbols which are real in themselves, and do not stand for something else. Marks must not be decorative or designed. Students who commented on their work by describing the feeling the work evoked in them were told that the current trend in art was to be extremely suspicious of such statements, owing to the bad influence the romantic tradition has had in English art.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "ANDREA"

NARRATOR

Her lack of ideas and opinions. They said that she had not been able to explain herself or why she was doing weaving. She had no enthusiasm, excitement, sense of involvement. One tutor said

TUTOR

She closed her mind and contributed nothing. If she couldn't make the tutors interested in her at the next tutorial, she ought to be thrown out - she was just wasting the tutors' time.

NARRATOR

In face of these criticisms, Andrea was defensive and angry. Gillian, who had 'always wanted to do art' but in the event was one of ten students who left the course. In a 'mass tutorial' in the first term, Schofield criticized the work of one group of students as being theatrical, and particularly Gillian's work as being '*emotional and masturbatory*' Gillian said

GILLIAN

She saw no point in tutors being so rude to the students. She hadn't got upset, only angry, when Schofield had been rude about her work. Her work hadn't developed. It used to be very emotional - now she was scared of emotion and found there was nothing she could do.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TEXT WITH MUSIC

SUPER: "Staff crit with Robert

Robert had been struck by the absurdity of clothes-shop window displays, and it was this absurdity that he was trying to express in his work.

A tutor said that

Robert seemed to have chosen the wrong medium, he had been talking about something literary, not visual.

Robert didn't agree, and a tutor said

this was because he had too big an ego - there was nothing visual in his project. The sort of judgment he was making about the absurdity of the shop window had nothing to do with the concerns of the artist, it was silly and (as another tutor had said) amateur theatricals at its worst.

Robert asked

what he should be concerned with.

Schofield said

this was up to Robert to find out.

Robert said

his model of a hat-shop window expressed what he felt about the hat-shop.

Mottram said

his job was not to express, and

Schofield said

it was the work's job to do this. The artist's job was to inquire into form.

Mottram called Robert's work

the result of a third form secondary school attitude.

Robert asked whether

tutors just wanted him to go and make an exact representation of a shop window.

The tutors said

it was not up to them to tell him what to do. He had completely misunderstood everything said to him and was too egotistical to understand it.

Robert said

he didn't see how this came into it.

A tutor said

it was because there were four tutors there trying to put him on the right track.

Robert said

there were four tutors trying to pull him down, they were only offering destructive criticism, and he was having to justify his work.

Mottram

asked whether he expected tutors to construct something for him - it was not their idea of teaching to tell him what to do.

Robert got annoyed."

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "THE DIPLOMA INTERVIEW"

INT. CLOSE UPS OF AN ART STUDIO

NARRATOR

(From the prospectus). Dip AD fine art (Painting). The course is designed to produce professional painters and printmakers of high-calibre who may also teach. At the interview the candidate is invited to discuss his work, interests, background and aspirations.

ARTHUR

My interview was at two o'clock so I turned up at two and Kerr meets me at the door. I have a bundle of paintings most of which I have no real interest in whatever, in fact I sort

of produced a ridiculous number in about in a week and a half in order to get in. and there's a panel of about eight people. Gibson I think was there

LIZ

I had done art foundation, loved it. worked extremely hard. I think there were about four or five people in the room. I think they were just deliberately trying to rile me. They talked about one or two things and then they just said well quite frankly we don't like anything that you've brought in. and I said if I knew how to do it I wouldn't be applying here. And I thought that's it I've blown it.

BERT

I was interviewed by Stone who came down to Colchester School of Art looking for recruits. and he just said to me, I was about to apply to St Martin's, and he promised all kind of things, it's this wonderful new opportunity and these wonderful new technical departments. It wasn't an interview, he persuaded me to go. I thought well at least I'm certain I can go there, I might not get into St Martin's.

BRIAN

They were just in the process of building the new site. it was immaculate, and I do remember a lady who said you're not allowed to put anything on the walls, you can't put anything on the floor. I thought well that's not going to go off.

ALICE

We applied there being told that this was a laissez-faire College and if you had a kind of line or direction of thought already then this was for you. in the first week Kerr took us all into his room, one by one, and sort of depressed us all because he's got quite a depressive personality. He said to me of course no one else wants you, because there were a lot of tutors at the interview, no one else wanted you but I voted for you. He never liked my work so I thought this is really bad.

JOE

Kerr was an outsider. He was a helpful teacher whose European attitude did not fit easily into the British system. He was a gentle and understanding man and a painter who was underestimated.

EMMA

The first one was Maidstone, I didn't get in there, I remember not being particularly enamoured with the way the interview went. There were more comments about one's appearance than one's portfolio.

JOE

I remember a lively interview, with several members of staff in a small office, where I told Stone to fuck off for criticising the woodworking skill of my piece de resistance. I was interested in illusion and suffering. I was the only Manchester student to be accepted on to the fine art course.

EMMA

I think they'd all just come back from the pub so it was quite jolly you know, and it was not at all formal. My portfolio did not seem a high priority

ARTHUR

So Kerr was very much as I was walking out the door, we're looking forward to seeing you.

DAVE

I remember Kerr was pointing out the drawings of chickens that I had in my drawing books. And asking about those, so he was on the ball. Kerr always gave off a kind of hunted feel. I suppose he did seem to look for similarly hunted students.

BBLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "THE SUMMER PROJECT"

JOE

The first year at Midville was confusing because we were so monitored and guided by determined people with opposed artistic ideologies and strategies. Some of the staff were adversarial and so was I. On the first day I came into the main studio and Coutts with an afro haircut, was talking to a bunch of 2nd. year students about his recent trip to the USA and his meetings with fellow conceptualists and minimalists. As we were being shown around earlier I heard Gibson talking loudly, and with authority, to another group of students outside the building. I thought it was an interesting start.

LIZ

We'd been given a summer project, and it was a bizarre summer project. And one of the questions, it always stuck in my mind, was a rose is a rose is a rose. What on earth are you supposed to do with that?.

ALICE

Before we got there we were sent some work to do. A rose as a piece of engineering. A landscape as a man-made instead of God. I thought I can't do this and I didn't do anything which was a bad start.

LIZ

The first day that we arrived, we were told that we'd all been chosen because we were particular individuals and it was a particularly important year. That was why they wanted a wide range of people there

NARRATOR

From the observer's notebooks: October 12th, 1967. Gibson and Watson went to talk to Emma. She had apparently burst into tears when First Year students had put up their holiday work and hers was criticized.

BRIAN

I can remember the tutorial because everybody was in the tutorials. Everybody got a going over. all morning or afternoon, or sometimes all day. I seem to remember feeling a little bit sorry for her. they all laid in. I remember Gibson saying it was fucking shit. It's not exactly what I would have expected really, and I remember her crying over it.

EMMA

My first week at Midville: I remember doing the college holiday work, sitting in my parent's greenhouse, sketching in a whimsical style..... On day one we were asked to pin up the work, then we were given individual critiques in front of the whole group. But I remember, yes, I was very upset about it.. I don't remember it as a good experience with the line -up of male tutors, some with abrasive language, it did not go down well.

BRIAN

Yeah they were pretty brutal. and some of them were from the

old school if you like, and some of them were from the new school. And you 'd quite often find that the staff were fighting each other to support the person. That wasn't just me; everyone was getting that. yes it was bipartisan really. The befores and the afters, and the students were the durings

EMMA

I just remember Arthur came out quite well from that first critique. I think he got quite complimented on his approach. As I remember it was slightly more academic ,analytical approach and a lot of written material. Whereas my work and others was following a fairly traditional literal interpretation of the project brief, perhaps too decorative for the conceptual gang.

LIZ

I remember it was really really hostile. Work was ripped off the wall, and there was what the hell do you f-ing think that is? it was just totally totally full on aggressive. and I think the only one they liked was Brian, because he came with blind them with science type electronics. And I thought my god what's that all about. it was really unsettling.

JOE

As for the harsh judgements, I reciprocated with my own rhetoric. Their comments were reasonable compared to the hostile rhetoric that was currency between my mates back home on Merseyside

LIZ

This was the first week, first few days. I know now from teaching that you try and break down people's preconceptions but this was like everything you brought is rubbish, don't think you can get away with producing that sort of rubbish here. And it knocked me sideways,

EMMA

I have a vague recollection of us all building our 'studio cubicles' within the large studio, with sheets of board on easels, and rather retreating into them., I remember low-level narrow windows rather than large windows with views across the city.

DAVE

I went down to the sculpture studio which was in the

basement, and the painting and all that stuff took place on the on the top floor. When I got in the basement it was like sort of whole different atmosphere. people doing things including yourself. Not mindless or anything but people seem to be more purposeful.

BERT

We were on the top floor of the building, the windows were high up on the wall, you couldn't see out, and there was no natural light. And this was the painting studio.

EMMA

Letter home in second week: Hall of Residence, Midville (posted 1st October 1967). Have settled in now and finding college not as bad as it seemed when I first arrived. We do not have to keep to such a strict timetable as at Loughborough and one is expected to work on one's own. The tutors occasionally talk to us when they feel like it! But although their attitude takes some getting used to, I think it is a good thing as it makes one more independent.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE TEXT. (WITH MUSIC)

SUPER: "If you have any difficulty in comprehending this brief you will consult a dictionary and translate English into which ever modification you speak."

TYPESCRIPT INSTRUCTIONS BY COUTTS FOR A

DRAWING PROJECT FOR FIRST YEAR FINE ART

STUDENTS, NOVEMBER 22-24, 1967

1. Draw with as much precision as you can muster (there is no let-out here, you are all capable of far more precise observation than you realize), one balloon and one relating section of streamer.

2. Any marks made by you on the paper will be made with the aid of ONLY an HB pencil.

3. Your attempts will consider intensely the topography of which ever area you choose (i.e. balloon - section of streamer).

5. Should any balloon burst or streamer fall down you will

not replace the balloon or 're-hang' the streamer. Your drawings will indicate such an occurrence. Such an occurrence will probably constitute an 'architectural' climax

7. You will consider line and tone.

8. You will NOT consider colour.

9. You may photograph 'your' section providing it will help in your understanding of the phenomena. (You should consult Mr Jackson to obtain the necessary photographic equipment.)

10. For the purposes of this project you WILL forget the following value concepts so precious to many of the areas of modern and contemporary art.

A. INVENTIVENESS B. ORIGINALITY

C. CREATIVITY

11. If any of you are sufficiently conscientious to think about this project in your coffee-breaks, lunch times, evenings and other sundry times when you are not observing these phenomena you should think about the following processes and factors.

A. DUPLICATION B. COPYING

C. REPETITION D. TRANSCRIPTION

E. MINUSCULE AND MICROSCOPIC VARIATION

F. MINDLESSNESS

G. RECHAUFFE

12. You will work on this project regardless of whether or not you see yourself as possessing a romantic, baroque, classical, mannerist, conceptual or any other arbitrarily categorised artistic temperament. 13. If you have any difficulty in comprehending this brief you will consult a dictionary and translate English into which ever modification you speak.

14. A platitude, under the circumstances, courtesy St Thomas Aquinas. 'That which makes two pieces of flint two pieces and not one is not the fact that they are both flint, for in this respect they do not differ ''

ARTHUR

Coutt's drawing project. it was a setup of balloons

BERT

We were given a project to...; this is me having having studied painting at Colchester School of Art where we had tutors like Francis Bacon and others. We were given a project to draw a balloon which was inflated and positioned in front of a piece of a graph paper. And that was our project for the first month. I think that's when Dave started bringing the chickens in to the studio which got a little bit weird.

ALICE

These people were drawing balloons. And over the week the balloons collapsed, so you couldn't do it anyway. I was glad I didn't do the project because what a waste of time was that.

DAVE

I seem to remember that they let me off that if I carried on with the egg. It's not beyond the bounds of possibility that the balloon and streamers thing came from the egg, in that they saw me get my hands on the egg, and they said alright you've got to measure this without touching it.

JOE

There were more than the balloons and streamers. Chris Dawson laid out a grid on the floor and attached string from the corners to the ceiling and a model would walk around for short intervals and stop. It was an incoherent criticism of life drawing.

ARTHUR

Now Coutts's course, the drawing project was a non-static setup, because the balloons waved etc. etc. and then they went down, and what do you do; how do you draw that. And a lot of that problematisation of representational drawing was very much I think that was there then.

DAVE

There weren't many sort of inter group relationships I think, the blokes used to usually inhabit one big house. Bert Arthur, plus various other people from other years. would be in some noisy house. And the women seemed to stick

together in another house in another part of town.

ALICE

We got a house together we girls - five of us, for the second two years. and I think we were close. Because they had the idea that girls should be in lodgings for the first year. we couldn't look after ourselves. The boys could. So we were up in arms particularly Pam who was a wonderful mouthpiece. She had all the confidence;

EMMA

Letter home. November 12th 1967 the girl I was sharing a room with downstairs has been suspended from the college for the rest of the term as she brought a man into her bedroom in the Hostel. You can imagine what the warden's reaction was, so naturally the Principal took action.

LIZ

They had such strict rules you know about when we had to come in, and they locked the door and all the rest of it. I shared room, a tiny room with somebody, which I didn't like.

ARTHUR

Pam, Alice, Jackie, and Liz were really like a sort of group. They lived together. I remember in the first term Emma and Alice writing a parody of some of the teaching, in the style of a restoration comedy. it was really funny. I think that they all got somewhat pushed under by the general atmosphere of the place. Dave and I and Brian found a place and we lived there for the rest of that year. And then in the second year I found a flat in Midville which was in a tower block unfurnished, which was just amazing at the time, and then a number of the people from the course ended up sharing with me at various stages in the proceedings; Brian did and Bert did and Joe did.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "City of Midville College of Art

Diploma in art and design

The program time allocation per week for studio activities will be 24-hours. Studios and staff will be available in excess of this as necessary. the studios will be available, by arrangement, over the weekends on the vacations.

Block drawing course. what matters here is the students own experience and his rejection of facile answers. Experience of the drawing course has shown that if this course continues for too long the freshness of vision can deteriorate into mannerist cliches and predetermined and products; therefore at this point we intend to introduce projects directed towards the extension of the individual student"

ALICE

The allocation of time were going to be; Drawing seven hours a week, Sculpture five hours, Graphics five hours. Well we definitely did photography which I enjoyed. We had that, and we were left for hours in the third year, totally ignored.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "TORPOR"

REG

PAINTING - suspended for two weeks.

A GROUP PROJECT - to take place over the next fortnight. ORIGINALLY: The group was to be split into 3 sub-groups of 6 each. Three themes were presented - FOOD: MASKS AND DISGUISES: METAMORPHOSES OF THE HUMAN BODY. Presumably, however, variations on the above themes, or new ideas would have been accepted. A physical end-product was implied, though not stipulated.

EVENTUALLY: The set themes were withdrawn. 'Complete freedom' of choice of subject or line of investigation was given. The only specification made was that each member of the group must fully document their activity and report to an information centre, which will be set up, throughout the fortnight:

NARRATOR

Only about a third of the group were at all enthusiastic about the project, and as many were actively against taking part. In fact, about a third of the group did not contribute regularly to the [information] board. However the very freedom of the situation made it impossible for anyone to opt out.

REG

The project itself was a failure. I. Why project?

Work had stopped. The dreaded 'apathy', 'torpor' etc. had set in. Therefore something had to be done. The assumption seemed to be that activity is in itself a desirable end that forced activity banishes 'torpor' - that if we set to with sufficient energy to making plastic sausages or playing about with coloured lights, then the habit of working thus introduced will, by its own momentum, continue when we resume painting. Presumably, once we have reached this painting-by-reflex-action state, the project is deemed a success and the staff can go back to sleep.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "December 7th, 1967. In the course of a discussion between Coutts and a group of students,

Bert said *art could stand for itself without any written statements.*

Coutts disagreed, saying *that it is the articulation of the problem, not the object standing there in its mystical silence, which is important; and artists were increasingly taking to writing.*

He agreed with Bert when he said that verbal communication was becoming more important than visual.

Bert distinguished between symbols and signs.

Coutts said that pictorial language cannot be articulated without verbalization; the verbal area is essential, while not necessarily the most important.

Bert said therefore there is no point in having the object.

Coutts said his own work tended this way although he did not feel confident enough to dispense with the object. But his work was tending towards 'theoretical art'. In kinetic art the end product had always been visual display; artists have not had the courage to work away from concrete objects. He is concerned with theoretical entities."

NARRATOR

In 1968-69, the tutor in charge of the Second Year Fine Art students was Gibson. His demands on the students were high, Coutts, another influential tutor, was well known outside the college. We have reports by Gibson on all fourteen students. it is Coutts who uses the word 'interesting' and

Gibson who uses the word 'mediocre'.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "ARTHUR"

NARRATOR

Tutors' reports, 1968-69:

Arthur is an intelligent and literate student. He spends most of his time on written research and the application of verbal language systems to art. It is too early to say whether his researches are stringent enough to be worthwhile, or whether they are more than a defensive ploy by someone with Sixth Form academic attitudes and to whom art is an embarrassment. Maybe Arthur is too soft for the art game. To his credit he works seriously on his theory. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

A lot of his work is about the fact that he is on a course where object-making is required of him - that is - he has made objects which 'express' the fact that certain conditions are placed upon him. I think he is inclined to overestimate the importance of certain ideas he is involved with. An interesting student. (Coutts)

ARTHUR

I'd gone to a public school that I really didn't like and that I had learnt to be an outsider in those sort of circumstances, and how to deal with an institution. It was a public school set up to be the place to take you to Sandhurst so I became adept to do things which were against the system without getting caught by the system as it were. I didn't feel any threat from the criticism at all.

NARRATOR

From the observer's notebooks:

October 5th, 1967. Arthur produced a large flat brightly coloured crude painting yesterday, firmly closed the lid of his paints and spent today writing and talking philosophy, as on all the other days. Watson says he didn't want him on the course, didn't like his work and doesn't think he is interested in working (correct so far).

NARRATOR 2

October 23rd, 1967. In the seminar, Arthur questioned the fact that they were required to be creative 8 hours of the day in the studio. Art for him is one method of understanding, he wants to be free to draw on many others - lectures, books, etc. It was too narrow to rely only on one's own creativity. The others disagreed and said he should be at university.

January 11th, 1968. Arthur is reading a book on the science of signs and symbols. He is now sharing a flat with Dave. He said they both agreed that in order to operate in college they needed a cover story for whatever they were doing. Arthur said that truthfully it was not always possible to justify or provide explanation for what one is doing.

NARRATOR

February 22nd, 1968. I helped Arthur fill in his black tomato shapes (on black background). I asked if he minded, he said no, he had not looked forward to painting them in. I asked why he hadn't applied to a university rather than an art college; he said it was because he wanted the freedom offered in a college of art - time and freedom to read and discuss ideas.

BERT

Even in Rauschenberg there was something to do with the romantic side to it, there was something to do with the poetic, something to do with the music. Conceptual art at that time, in my view was completely dry. Without humour that one could see. So my inclination was to withdraw from it.

LIZ

Oh well there was a definite split, you were either in one camp or the other. People who wanted to paint or make things, were in a way fighting a battle of remaining to do that. It was a them or us situation I think. It was sort of the implication that if you were producing visual work you weren't thinking. not by everybody, but there was that sort of feeling.

NARRATOR 2

March 4th, 1968. Arthur said that the Fine Art Department was the least important department in the college, in so far as Fine Art was not for anything.

March 7th, 1968. Arthur reading a book on Wittgenstein's Tractatus, an Introduction to Cybernetics, and a book on College Physics.

ARTHUR

I did investigate the possibility of actually doing that, and I decided that in fact philosophy courses were actually far too rigid, that I couldn't have explored the things I was interested in exploring

NARRATOR

April 4th, 1968. Assessment of students by group of six tutors. Arthur produced a box with a light bulb mounted on it. He says he is asking questions, not answering them, at the moment. His idea was that definitions of what is an art-object change so quickly that he wanted something that could either be placed in a gallery and called an art-object, or used functionally as a light if it became obsolete as an art-object. Watson said he finds his work unsophisticated and banal. Stone said he is making all the right noises. Assessment: D.

NARRATOR 2

November 28th, 1968. Arthur gave a highly abstract talk about his work. He read a paper in three parts, written by him, Dyer, Coutts and Brian. Dyer's statement started: 'According to Arthur B-, when a visitor V observes another visitor V* observing a notice N, the conditions are fulfilled by which his (Arthur's) contribution to this exhibition exists.' Arthur said that the reason he writes is because he finds painting vague and an easy way out of situations. He wanted to try to remove the vagueness out of statements which bothered him;

BERT

I think the four of us were on the same planet at that time, but we were the only four that were. Either we were on the wrong planet or it was everybody else. I remember there was a typesetting room and we spent quite a lot of time in there, formulating ideas and sort of concepts.

NARRATOR

March 3rd, 1969. Coutts told Arthur there was no point in his discussing his ideas until he presented him with a written statement.

ARTHUR

Because Gibson was robust it meant you could have a proper argument with him. And feel like there was something there you were arguing with.

EMMA

I can remember students like Arthur doing a lot of written work, I don't think there was anything very visual. I remember Arthur as very independent and self-motivated, quite serious.

ARTHUR

The biggest thing that they found difficult was that they would get heavy criticism, and then they would be looking for what the answer should be. and the answer was, there wasn't one. I thought great, that's what I want to hear, I don't want them to give me an answer.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "December 13th, 1968. Individual sessions with students Gibson selected as needing talking to.

Arthur said he has been trying to discover what he considers to be an art-object or an art-event, and whether it is to do with communication, and if so which is the best form.

Asked whether he was surprised that he was asked to justify his work, he said

No, because he knew that Gibson was uncertain about what he was doing. He felt the reason the tutors wanted to see him was because they did not know what he had been working on.

Coutts and Arthur had a long discussion about meaning, about the placing of his statement in the exhibition, and how meaning would change with context for the viewer.

Gibson asked whether Arthur was working in the right field - it didn't bother him, it was a question, though, of whether he was working or not.

Coutts said that in terms of self-consciousness Arthur was one of the best students.

Gibson said that self-motivation was what one wanted, but he

was worried as a tutor whether Arthur was not cutting out areas which might be valuable to him; was he blinkering himself?

Coutts said that the same criticism might be directed at the painters or object-makers, but, because of the art-college set-up, in fact it isn't.

There followed an argument between Coutts and Gibson.

Arthur said as far as he was concerned his field of inquiry was limitless.

Gibson asked whether he wouldn't get more help from people at a university.

Arthur said he would prefer to stay here, he had thought about it, one is freer here, one is too directed at a university.

Kerr said the trouble with him being here was that there was no one here for him to compare himself with.

Gibson said it would be inflexible not to allow his approach here, but why does he limit himself to verbal form?

Coutts said that he resented the word 'limitation' here: a similar question could be put to painters.

Arthur said he used words because it was the clearest way for him to communicate but agreed that, because few people read what he writes, he is thinking of making objects accompanied by explanations.

Gibson said he couldn't see why he should make objects, but equally he couldn't see why he shouldn't.

Watson agreed with Coutts that no painter would be subjected to this sort of interview, which was due to his and Gibson's innate prejudice against people who write in a college of art.

Arthur agreed that he felt there was a lot of prejudice against his work here, because it took the form of writing.

Gibson said he was glad he had had Arthur in and cleared the air."

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "PAM"

NARRATOR

Tutor's report, 28 June 1969:

Pam is a stubborn person who is capable of resisting advice or tuition but not to her advantage. A neurotic student that adopts defensive attitudes. There has been some slight improvement in the 3rd term but I would describe her work as straightforward, boring, unadventurous, mediocre painting that reflects her straightforward unadventurous attitudes. (Gibson)

LIZ

I thought Pam was interesting rather than mediocre but that might have just been my interpretation. At the time we didn't know that we were interesting or mediocre, we thought we were all in the same boat. There was a feeling that particularly as the course progressed, that the people who were getting a lot of attention from people like Coutts were doing better. and they were thinking in similar ways.

PAM

I used to sit by the fire and draw fairies when I was tired of being a fairy myself because there was no one else to dress up with. Well by the age often I was quite good at fairies and relatives used to say 'aren't you a clever girl you ought to go to Art College', and being an obedient child I believed them. I had this inborn feeling, 'Pam you are a talented artist and when you get to an art school you'll fall into a niche just made for you and all your troubles will be over.'

Well, something went wrong.

Over the year I started about ten different projects and got knocked off all of them, inwardly I lost confidence in myself, I was missing something, I needed something and I didn't know what it was. I couldn't bear my own company and as an alternative floated through parties and dances in an alcoholic haze because I was too frightened of people to face them when I was sober.

One of the most terrible changes I experienced was that my home gave me no comfort. It wasn't a refuge any more, I argued with my parents or sat in morose silence. They said they wished I'd never gone to Art College if it was making me like this and wouldn't I rather leave and get a job. It took me a year, two terms of hell, one when it began to get better

NARRATOR

From the observer's notebooks :

October 5th, 1967. Pam working on two paintings based on holiday work seems a serious and committed painter. The tutor told her to carry on, said she seemed one of the few students who had the right approach.

January 16th, 1968. Pam was criticized by Watson. When asked what he had said, she said she wasn't really sure. Tutors seemed to read all sorts of things into her work which did not seem relevant to her at all, therefore she had decided to be quite self-indulgent.

NARRATOR 2

April 4th, 1968. At the assessment of students, Watson said he found Pam difficult to understand. He had thought she was going to be the best female this year, but she feels that the college is antagonistic to her. The tutors wanted to put her on probation but felt it might put her even more on the defensive. They haven't found anything to get her going - she is reacting neurotically against the things that the college approves of.

BERT

I befriended the small girl who did very flowery pictures, very flowery paintings, and this was considered to be rubbish. To this day I think that women do have a hard time in art, despite Tracey Emin, they do, they're not regarded as real artists.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TEXT

SUPER: "December 5th, 1968. Gibson talked to Pam, asked her why she was working in such a dead-pan naturalistic way. If she wanted to do a perspective drawing she would have to do it much better than she had done.

Pam said

she was just interested in drawing what she saw in front of her, it was a straightforward visual response. She didn't feel she knew enough to attempt anything else.

Gibson pointed out inconsistencies in her work, and when she

said these were done for emotional reasons, he said subjective reality was different to objective reality - she seemed to want the best of both worlds.

Asked if she responded to art, Pam said the table in front of her was as beautiful as any painting.

Gibson said her trouble was that she had no criteria or standards against which to judge things. Her attitude of everything being equally valid was an attitude of mediocrity and a way of playing it cool because her situation and environment demanded a debunking approach to art. In spite of that, there were standards; high art was created through a spirit of high endeavour

He told Pam she lived in a self-enclosed world, that she ought to be more receptive to others and that there were many people who could help her.

Her response was always 'Well, it's only your opinion.'

Pam told me afterwards that it didn't make any difference to her what Gibson said."

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "BRIAN"

NARRATOR

Tutors' reports, 1968-69:

Brian works hard and I believe he is seriously committed to his type of work i.e. electronics. However he is adolescent in many of his attitudes and displays a smugness bordering on

obdurate philistinism when it comes to dealing with areas outside his immediate province. He will have to grow up before he will be able to use his expertise towards art rather than be a small-time boffin. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

Gives the appearance of knowing what he is doing. He may very well know what he is doing.. What I wonder about is his general awareness of how his work relates to 'Art'. I get the impression sometimes that he is inclined to take up an 'avantgarde' posture. In terms of describing what his work is technically, he is very good, but I am not sure how he means it! A little inclined to 'strut'. An interesting student. (Coutts)

BRIAN

I thought when I read those that they got me just about right. They'd obviously got it, but they didn't seem to be able to help me to think about it, I got quite involved with digital art, and some people might say oh it isn't art.

NARRATOR

From the observer's notebooks: October 13th, 1967. Brian laid his radio-lightwave machine out along the studio. Everyone who walked in front of it interrupted transmission. Philip became interested, helped him fiddle about with the equipment. It reminded me of boys playing with electric trains.

BRIAN

I think I was in this rather unfortunate position in many ways, because I already knew my technical stuff, so from the point of view of teaching, I didn't get any at all. I used to go to see people in the physics department and stuff like that to get help if I couldn't make something work,

NARRATOR 2

February 14th, 1968. He has made some electronic equipment which operates so that the wall changes colour as you move towards it. He told me that painting is his hobby - he does it at home! I asked what sort of painting. He said the sort of thing you see in Boots reproductions, mostly meticulous drawings of cars and machinery. A couple of weeks ago he did a drawing of the sun, taken from Hokusai. Watson told him it was rubbish.

BRIAN

I might have done cars, well I did do cars but I never did anything like Hokusai's wave or anything like that. That was probably one of those moments where I was trying to make what I was doing into fine art. But I never painted at home, never.

NARRATOR

February 15th, 1968. Watson, Dyer and Brian had a long discussion about Brian's electronic machine. Watson had got Brian a grant of £17 towards building the machine. Brian had come up against some snags and intended to present his work in the form of a written report. Watson argued that this was not good enough; he would learn something by not only

producing the machine but in assessing the effects of its operation. Dyer said now that Brian had proved that the machine was operational there was no point in actually making it.

BRIAN

I went more into the interactive stuff, that was partly because of the exhibition in Midville museum where the staff put on an exhibition. Dyer and I put together the construction. Coutts came around quite a lot and we talked about the interaction between these objects. it was a huge galvanised water tank, circular like an outside gas cylinder, and . sounds occurred, and as you approached the sound would change and all sorts of stuff. It gave me that lead into interaction with art which is what I still do now.

NARRATOR 2

November 28th, 1968. Brian gave his history of art talk. He said his work was a visual representation of his thoughts on cybernetics. He took the class into the lecture hall, turned off all the lights and played some records. Asked why he had presented the lecture in this form, he said it would have taken him at least three hours to explain his ideas on cybernetics, even supposing the others could understand it. He seems rather arrogant in his assumption that no one can understand what he is concerned with - he takes his ideas very seriously. Abbott (in charge of history of art) took the event seriously at its face value and asked questions about its meaning and purpose which Brian was not prepared to answer.

NARRATOR

February 14th, 1969. Brian told me he had reached a sort of crisis. He hasn't been able to work for the last three weeks and spends his time reading.

BRIAN

But the staff were really supportive and when I said look this isn't me; they said well what is? They did give me a lot of support, I mean well Stone was amazing. And Kerr. He actually found me my first job after.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "TORPOR"

NARRATOR

January 8th, 1969. Gibson set up a week's life drawing situation for most of the Second Year. Boys and girls were separated, the boys being given a female model, the girls a male model, both in the same room. He had decided to set the project firstly, because there is a long humanist tradition based on observation and drawing from the figure; secondly, because he thinks Second Year students are a poor lot, lazy, evading their responsibilities, philistine, infected with pseudo-scientism and in the girls' case with a very weak formal basis for their work. The drawings were mostly quite bad and very conventional art school type life drawings - Quite a few, such as Bert and Joe, obviously felt self-conscious or ridiculous drawing and made rude comments or cartoon-like scribbles on their drawings.

ARTHUR

To prove a point and I think Brian did this with me, we managed to borrow a strobe light from the physics department and take photographs of the model. With it flashing about 8 or 9 times a second. so that you could see in a second exposure just how much the model had moved. Ok let's do some analytic thinking about this.

NARRATOR 2

February 6th, 1969. A group of students including Dave, Rose, Jackie and Emma set up a large collection of miscellaneous objects in the studio - strings suspended from the ceiling with balloons, sticks and their life drawings tied to them, and a lot of objects on the floor. Jackie said it started as a joke but ended by becoming very serious - they spent all evening setting it up. I suggested it was a comment on the life drawing project, but Jackie said not,. It was more to do with the fact that the cleaner is continually clearing up - she thinks they should be allowed to be as messy as they like.

NARRATOR

January 21st, 1969. In the discussion between Gibson, Price and Second Year students about the life-drawing project Joe said Gibson just wants them to work harder. Does he think he will get this when he has been going round insulting them for the last few weeks? He said that Gibson was nothing but a glorified yob himself. Gibson said the problem was always how far one should or needed to push students.

LIZ

I remember when we did life drawing with him, and as I say I loved life drawing and I had great respect For Gibson as well, because he was as you know a visual artist. He was always so, "you're at a holiday camp, you don't know how to work", and his favourite word was torpor. You're all suffering from torpor. So I could just imagine him saying mediocre

DAVE

It seemed to me that there was a lot of inertia too. There was a lot of people who were always stuck. They were just lost, you know. didn't know what to do or how to do it or both., It sounds like it's your fault, torpor. and Gibson was a bit like that. It's a snap out of it or something like that.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "January 21st, 1969. Gibson asked if the Second Year students found the task he had set them redundant. There was no response. He said that the figure is a very subtle form and it takes a lot of concentration to work out the principles involved

He had thought of asking students to go back to first principles and draw spheres, cones, etc, but he didn't think any of the students would comply - he had a difficult enough time getting them to draw the model.

Bert asked what is wrong with doing the thing one has an aptitude for? All one needs to do is to understand drawing as a concept, and one doesn't have to do it to understand it. He sees no point in doing life drawing. Gibson seems to imply that life-drawing is the basis for all art activity.

Gibson denied this and also disagreed that through specialization one got a grasp of generalities. He challenged whether Bert in fact did grasp what drawing was about. He was suspicious about his claim to be able to make choices if he was unprepared to go through the rigours of acquiring a skill.

Bert said did he mean that there were certain stages one had to go through, in learning to represent form through drawing, in order to become whatever it was they were becoming?

Gibson said art is a precise endeavour.

Bert said Gibson seemed to be saying that in order to proceed along the road labelled art one must know and understand about all the forms of art in existence.

Gibson said not all, but one must choose on the basis of knowledge."

NARRATOR

City of Midville College of Art; art and design fine art painting) second year course; History of art: 19th century

term 1

1 Baroque; French Rococo.

2. England in the 18th-century - Hogarth; Gainsborough; West.

3 Grand Style - Reynolds; David.

4 Goya.

5 Neoclassical and political sculpture Canova; Flaxman; Thorwaldson.

6 German Mediaevalism (painting circa 1800 -1830 Friedrich; classical landscape.

7 Blake and Mediaevalism

8 Ingres and Gros.

9 Delacroix and Gericault

10 naturalistic landscape - English watercolourists; Constable; Bonnington;; Corot, Barbizon School.

11 Turner

12 Daumier; Millet; social satire.

ARTHUR

We haven't talked about the relationship of liberal studies to fine art and that was a big thing, At Hornsey for example. liberal studies departments hadn't not woken up to the fact that they should be talking about current art practice.

JOE

The art history lecturer, was subjected to our poor student behavior. She had the decency and courage to take us all to Herford and Worcester cathedrals for a day trip. The boys behaved badly

ARTHUR

The liberal studies tutor. She was ex-Courtauld, and very self-unaware. Her chosen subject area was essentially baroque painting and sculpture, If anybody said what about 20th century stuff, well you know. And she had an unfortunate thing where she clearly liked images of horses and saw them as something erotic. And she would talk about plunging horses.

NARRATOR

(Student statement) Since the commencement of the painting course (1968) a complete non-understanding has existed between members of the Liberal Studies staff and Fine Art Painting students. Numerous futile attempts to sort out and change the existing system of teaching' (a system comparable to primary and secondary school systems) have resulted in no basic change. I consider now that the functioning of this department must be completely rethought and if drastic measures are necessary then they must be taken.

NARRATOR 2

Practically no member of the Liberal Studies staff is capable of getting to grips with contemporary work. As we and our work are contemporary, in the basic sense of the word, it is patently ridiculous for them to talk glibly of relating the two departments. Rather than putting us in touch with the past, as the Art History dept purports to be doing, it is actually sealing us off from the past as effectively as if we were denied access by mere lack of information.

ARTHUR

I think one of the reactions was getting in Abbott. That surge of things was interesting and exciting. That description in the book seems to miss out that real excitement of things changing.

NARRATOR

November 13th, 1968. History of art seminar. Bert read a very abstract and philosophical short paper about perceiving

and understanding: empirical knowledge which he calls objective realism and conceptual thought which can only be expressed in words. Language, he says, is inadequate. Logical definitions are misleading. One must get to a state of subjective realism through un-understanding (?).

NARRATOR 2

November 26th, 1968. History of art seminar. Dave gave a talk entitled 'Vagueness'. Dave said he was not going to do anything or prove anything. It was a typically Dave-like lecture in that every statement he made he felt could be qualified or reversed. Brian and Arthur were very scornful of some of his statements. Dave capitulated immediately and roared with laughter at the suggestion that he might be making intellectual statements. There was endless discussion on whether there was such a thing as vagueness, and attempts at definitions, without much participation from Dave.

DAVE

We were always invited to be so specific about everything, you know, so matter of fact and verbally sound on every move we made, so I by bringing in vagueness, was saying well what about if you prefer to be vague? I didn't do the research to do justice to the idea. There was a lot of reading lists going on all the time, and I didn't take any notice. People like Bert and Arthur, those two mainly were incredibly well read

NARRATOR

November 28th, 1968. In the history of art seminar, Emma gave a talk on signs and symbols in relation to language and their connection with sounds and the visual representation objects in language, which is what her work is concerned with. It was a very disconnected talk as she finds it very difficult to put her ideas into verbal terms.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "November 13th, 1968. At the history of art seminar, Joe talked about his work.

He said he had a sensitivity for certain natural phenomena - volcanoes, galaxies, etc - and an ability to present this sensitivity in visual form. He talked a lot about the 'presence' of an object which was more than the sum of its parts.

Questioned about this by Bert, Arthur and Gibson, he said his sculptures needed to be awkward - too large to move on one's own, too small to crawl under, and so on. Awkwardness is what constitutes their presence. He is making pure objects which have a Gestalt of their own - away from European illusionism.

Jean said she thought she was romantic, but Joe's talk about the presence that emanates from a successful work is too much."

ALICE

I liked the history of art department they set fabulous essays. random stuff like the history of education, I don't know who they all were, well one guy fell in love with Joe while I was going out with him, so we had mixed grills all over Worcestershire I was the raspberry well the gooseberry. While he gazed into Joe's lovely blue eyes.

EMMA

I loved researching art history projects, and I think that those tutors who taught like Fawley and there was Abbott as well who taught there, I think they did encourage quite a lot of research. And really nurtured in me a lifelong passion for art history and visiting galleries. I still have the reading list* that Abbott gave us. She had quite a lively approach to art history and she brought famous American artists such as Don Judd to Coventry, quite a coup really. at that time. I remember a more conventional art history lecturer called Abbott who was often teased and given a harder time by a few of the men in our year.

LIZ

I remember David Hockney coming to talk to us, it was the very first lecture that Hockney had given on his work. Looking back we were incredibly privileged weren't we. Carl Andre I remember, I remember the line of bricks that people had made that spelt Carl Andre is giving a lecture and it led the way to the lecture theatre.

JOE

We had lectures from Les Levine amongst many other significant people.

ARTHUR

Two other people that were quite significant that came during the second year, were both Gerald Scarfe and Ralph

Steadman, who were both fantastic.

EMMA

1970 diary Wednesday 28 Jan. David Hockney lecture. Very humorous two hours....Wednesday 25 Feb . Tony Palmer lecture. Good, showed 'All my Loving' excerpts, film on Cream and other pop music films...Good lecturer

DAVE

She got all sorts of American minimalists to Midville. I think Sol LeWitt I think Seth Siegelaub. They didn't go to any London Art schools they just came straight up to Midville. From showing at the Lisson or wherever.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "BERT"

NARRATOR

Tutors' reports, 1968-69:

Bert started off well and gave the impression that he was a serious and intelligent student. However, he seems to have regressed and to adopt childish attitudes. He has become more slovenly in his attitude to work. However, he is intelligent and he might be able to overcome his present attack of frivolity. He can work hard on occasions. So far he is something of a disappointment. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

I find his work difficult to comprehend. I feel in some ways he is paying a kind of lip-service to object-making, and he is not aware of this. He uses quite a lot of written work to 'extend' and 'fill out' his existential objects, this written work seems careless and ill-formed to me. One cannot help thinking that the difficulty of placing this style of working may be acting as a 'smoke-screen' to cover up 'slack' ideas. An interesting student. (Coutts)

BERT

And it seemed fairly obvious, fairly quickly, that if we wanted to do anything creative we have to do it somewhere else. My memories of it are not good, I found a lot of animosity. I found a lot of my fellow students were pissed off.

NARRATOR

February 1st, 1968. Bert is quite happy with the games project. It ties in well with his own work, mathematical permutations of two or three shapes. April 3rd, 1968. In the assessment of students at the end of the spring term, Bert was given a B on his work for the games project - white boxes, large plastic circles with instructions printed on them.

BERT

I've always wanted to be involved with art in one form or another, and despite would it says in the book I've never become dissatisfied with painting as an art form.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "DIANA"

NARRATOR

Tutor's report, 28 June 1969:

Diana is a very neurotic girl, her tenseness is a handicap because it is difficult to have a conversation with her without her getting defensive. Her work is turgid and unresolved but there may be some outcome from her recent puppet project which is fairly ambitious. Unless she resolves her neurosis there is little hope for her career in fine art. There is some evidence of a change of direction in the 3rd term and perhaps this student will improve. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

From the observer's notebooks :

October 5th, 1967. Diana has retired to the other side of the studio where she is less disturbed, with a very large canvas, on which she has started a painting based on her environmental landscape holiday project, She says it is the first time she has worked from photographs. She has been left without tuition so far, which she prefers. A natural painter with a direct intuitive approach.

October 27th, 1967. Watson talked to Diana about her two paintings. He said that the style of painting seemed impressionist and mannered, that she seemed to be bugged by the idea of craftsmanship, too concerned with filling in the

whole area of the canvas in a craftsmanlike manner. Diana denied this, except that she agreed her style might be mannered. She said to me it meant little to her when Watson said he preferred one painting to another; another tutor might come along and say the opposite - it was only his opinion.

NARRATOR

November 15th, 1967. Diana has been given permission to leave the hostel after she produced a doctor's certificate saying it was bad for her health. The others told me she had been having nightmares where she called out 'Let me out, let me out.'

LIZ

I remember that we all thought Diana had done really well to get out of the hostel, and why hadn't we thought of doing that.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "April 3rd, 1968. Group of 7 tutors assessing first year students.

Clark said she started very reluctantly and then worked very hard.

Watson said he wanted to give her a mark of encouragement as she was afraid to come in to college.

Coutts and Clark said they had found her quite aggressive. Gibson said her work is very much related to her previous art school, it consists of old-fashioned landscape paintings.

Watson said she hadn't developed since she came. She had shown herself to be rather non-thinking and hadn't taken any risks.

Clark said she was afraid of the college situation.

Coutts said that if she had a chip on her shoulder, the work didn't back up her independent stand.

Kerr said he found her quite unpretentious and straightforward, a natural painter.

A vote was taken on her assessment, the division being

mainly between Kerr who liked her work and Coutts who hated it. D assessment."

NARRATOR

April 4th, 1968. Diana was in tears. I had told her yesterday that she had got a D, and she seemed unconcerned, but the tension of tutors going around assessing proved too much for her by the end of the second day.

NARRATOR 2

End of summer term 1968, First Year assessments. Tutors

agreed that Diana has improved. Coutts thinks that by the third year she will produce some fairly proficient painting. Assessment C.

November 18th, 1968. Diana came in to college drunk this afternoon. I asked her about it and she said, jokingly, she was always drunk. Bert came up, and she told him she drinks because she is worried. Taken together with Pam's statements about getting drunk, it seems to be the method both choose to cope with doubt and confusion.

NARRATOR

November 25th, 1968. Talked to Diana who said Gibson had slated her work - two paintings she had done in the first term last year -. and had called them amateurish, art-schoolish, Graham Sutherlandish etc. She said it had upset her a great deal and was the reason she had got drunk.

NARRATOR 2

December 13th, 1968. Individual sessions with students Gibson selected as needing talking to. Gibson said she had to learn to take criticism. Watson said she must understand that criticism is not meant as personal destruction, it is meant as something for her to consider and decide about. Diana said she realized this.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "JEAN"

NARRATOR

Tutor's report, 28 June 1969:

Jean has not got very much talent or depth of character. She

can work hard and has a certain obstinacy, both to her credit. Her work is shallow and her attitude self-indulgent. One more mediocre art student and I should think her chances of not being mediocre slim. (Gibson)

JEAN

The attitude on this course is the idea, the whole idea, and nothing but the idea, 'regardless of visual interpretation. So much so that to one patronizing fellow my work is devoid of 'guts' because I was unwilling to talk about it in the way which is expected.

NARRATOR 2

From the observer's notebooks:

December 13th, 1968. Asked by tutors what she is thinking of doing, Jean said a double coffin thing with herself in one side, a lifesize object.

NARRATOR

October 1968. Bert called a meeting of First and Second Year students. He said that in his first year they didn't get to know the Second Year students until the very end of the year.

He thought experience of how the college works might be useful to First Years. This was not meant in any paternalist spirit, he just wanted to get a dialogue going.

He also raised the question of the Diploma, saying that he personally objected to coming out of college with a painting diploma when it was very unlikely that he would ever do a painting on the course here.

He also deplored the fact that they would be lumped together with engineering students in a polytechnic when they had nothing in common with them beyond the fact that they were all students.

ALICE

I've got a cutting somewhere of art students, sort of drug problems in Midville. It was the 60s; we all smoked. I think the boys did it more but we all did.

BRIAN

Most of us were really a bit more into the alcohol because it's more social we found. Down the pub talking to the

fashion girls and that sort of thing.

BERT

You have to remember that we were taking an awful lot of drugs. A lot of drugs.

JOE

We smoked hashish and occasionally took acid before we went and drank barley wine in the pub with the staff

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "October 2nd, 1968. Kerr asked to see Bert's work.

Bert said Kerr wouldn't be interested as he wouldn't consider it was art.

Kerr said, more to the point was did Bert think it was?

Bert said he wasn't interested in art,

Kerr said that was obvious.

Bert was surprised, saying he had come out top at the assessments last year and had thought the tutors all approved of his work.

Kerr said he didn't.

Bert then said he found the whole art set-up farcical. He had deliberately set out to do something in the games project for which he would get bottom marks; to his surprise he got rated very highly; after this he had lost all respect for the tutors.

Kerr said that art college was the only place where he would be free to operate as he does - what was he at college for? He should be at university reading philosophy or something.

Bert said he hadn't the A-levels - what would Kerr advise him to do?

Kerr said he should make use of his time here by finding out what he was interested in. Had he ever been interested in art?

Bert said it had been knocked out of him at Pre-Dip where

dots and hard edge work had been praised rather than more personal imagery. This was where the break with art had come for him.

Kerr said his motivation could not have been very strong to begin with"

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "THE TYPING POOL"

BERT

The second year one was feeling a bit more confident about being anti-establishment. I and a lot of other people had dived into Dada, As a resort. At least you're producing something. Rather than writing. someone who was at Midville described us as the typing pool. Because the whole thing was to do with words and language.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "FRANCES"

NARRATOR

Tutor's report, 28 June, 1969:

Frances is a capable student who gives the appearance of working seriously. I believe her failing to be a self-satisfied smugness that does not allow her to practice stringent self criticism. If it is possible to have grades of mediocrity, Frances is a slightly better mediocrity but I doubt very much if she has what it takes to be anything better. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

October 5th, 1967. Frances, who is strongly motivated to work out her own ideas, is carrying on with her holiday project based on butterfly wing colouring, which she is analysing on a small scale and building up in interlocking patterns. The tutors approve and she has been told to carry on.

October 16th, 1967. Frances is still producing fragmentary patterns based on butterflies. She has been told her colour is too pretty. When I asked why she hadn't started a painting, she said it was due to failure of imagination (which I interpreted as failure of nerve). Gifted and very quick to sense what the college pressures are, I feel she is biding her time until she can work out an acceptable

response to these pressures and to what she wants to do.

NARRATOR

October 11th, 1968. Frances and Arthur work undisturbed by approval or- disapproval, Arthur upstairs in a room with Brian, mainly reading and writing (physics and philosophy) and Frances on a new painting, related in manner to her butterfly painting last year.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "November 19th, 1968. Kerr asked Frances

why she had abandoned her painting. She said

because criticisms she had got about it only confirmed her own doubts about it"

NARRATOR

I remember about two weeks ago that she had mentioned the same thing to me. Kerr said it was like falling off a horse, important for her self-confidence to finish the painting, but that the reason it is a failure has something to do with the rigid grid framework she imposes on it. Frances said her life was really chaotic, and this is the reason she tries to impose order in her painting. She has always been such a self-confident, self... directed girl in her work and attitudes. It now appears as though some doubts have arisen and some criticism made an impact on her.

NARRATOR 2

Observer's note on Frances: A pretty, very self-possessed girl who very quickly settled in at college. Tutors found her unresponsive and difficult to talk to; she resisted criticism or being directed. She deliberately tried to evade the projects set in her first term and was successful in avoiding Coutts's project by not coming in to the studio or by doing print-making. She told me that she also hoped to get out of the game project but here she was not successful and she produced a game-object (unfinished) which Coutts thought highly of.

NARRATOR

Frances comes in to college regularly and works consistently. She is uninterested in philosophical chat

about art, avoids history of art lectures and discussions, and chose to write a paper rather than give a talk for the history of art seminar. She also did not turn up for the seminar when her paper was to be discussed.

EMMA

Frances, I remember she didn't seem to socialise with us much, a lovely person, focussed on her work, not often at college parties; I think she may be had a life outside College, I was never very close with her,

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "THE HAPPENING"

NARRATOR

In the afternoon there was an outside lecturer on Schwitters. Bert, Dave and George made an attempt at a 'happening' swinging a boot filled with water over the audience and making noises. When this didn't work well (there was no response), Bert went out and barricaded the exit - again a 'non-happening' as everyone went out through the emergency exit. A spontaneous wall newspaper has sprung up on the Fine Art painting floor: some numbered sheets with single words or sentences, started by Bert.

BERT

I think we were plotting, we would probably put on some universal takeover of art schools or something. Anyway he turned up, that was in the lecture theatre. He had a projection with Kurt Schwitters stuff on it, and he was talking away, and we had set up an event which started with the boot. which was thrown by Joe, on a piece of rope, on a pulley in the roof that we had set up earlier, which hit the screen, pee and beer splattered everywhere, and there were lots of dogs barking. and then there was a Mickey Mouse balloon I seem to remember which was held in front of the projector so that it danced

DAVE

Yes I think that was in the kind of cinema, the hall where they showed films and where they had a stage and lectern and all that. Bert was attempting to swing it onto the stage and empty its contents over the speaker. Outrageous. in fact it hit a graphics student called Gill on the back of the head and soaked her. so that was a bit of a dampener.

NARRATOR 2

July 10th, 1969. Bert and Joe were asked to see Stone, Kerr and Gibson. Both were put on probation. Joe was asked to produce some work by the beginning of next term, his grant being withheld until the work was produced. Both boys have taken on full-time jobs for the last three weeks, Joe with a chemist, Bert at a bakery. Joe was apparently very aggressive and abusive at first, then broke down and pleaded to be kept on. Kerr thinks him extremely unstable emotionally and says he has got progressively worse since he came.

BERT

The second year, things were becoming quite difficult for me and quite a lot of others. We moved out to a cottage and we got a dog. So we hardly went into the Art School. For the last part of the third year I don't think I went at all. We took a lot of LSD, and went to a lot of pop concerts

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "JOE"

NARRATOR

Tutors' reports, 1968-69: Joe is erratic in his working procedures and allows the more frivolous and self-indulgent aspects of his personality to obtrude into his work sphere. He works hard in spasms but he has shown little evidence of stamina. There has been little progress so far. However, there is probably some sensibility and intelligence behind his buffoon-like persona. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

His work has largely consisted of a 'portrayal' of a certain style. That style being named 'Minimal'. He has made some very large objects, and the making of these constructions has taken up most of his working time. I would prefer to see a different kind of awareness of contemporary art rather than one that simply associates itself with a certain style. And neither style nor size is an adequate substitute for development of awareness. An industrious student. (Coutts)

JOE

The only thing I remember is being embarrassed by Gibson saying that I had a 'buffoon-like persona'. He was probably correct. I was naive, immature, and, in many ways totally unprepared for the challenges that Midville School of Art

presented to me

NARRATOR

From the observer's notebooks : November 24th, 1967. Joe told me he had lost interest in drawing, painting and sculpture. He was writing an essay on volcanoes, which is what he is now interested in.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "November 28th, 1967. Coutts and Gibson talked to Joe about what he was doing - reading and writing about volcanoes.

Joe said that in the situation Coutts had set up, where he was free to draw what he wanted, his writing was his drawing. This only applied in his situation - in any other situation he would call his drawing writing.

The tutors agreed that this was all right.

Joe asked Coutts what were his criteria for what is a drawing.

Coutts said he would not tell him this.

Gibson also agreed that the whole point was that students had to find their own criteria.

Coutts said that all the work done on the project would be pinned up.

Joe said that most of the work had gone on in his head, and asked whether this was valid.

The tutors said yes"

NARRATOR

March 21st, 1968. Joe showed me his notebook which he said was private - but it "as all right for me to read it as I was not one of the 'enemy', i.e. tutors.

NARRATOR 2

End of summer term 1968, assessment of First Year students. Stone calls Joe the 'joker in the pack'. Coutts likes his work, thinks he will go straight on from here. The tutors

felt that putting him on probation at the end of the Spring Term had helped; he was very mixed up at the time.

JOE

I was insecure and immature. I was also untrusting and patronising to females. I was an impressionable boy out of his depth in a situation that was fluid.

NARRATOR 2

October 11th, 1968. The only student who has changed his style because of the teaching in the college, and who feels through this that he has 'found' himself, is Joe. I call it a style of minimal structures, he denies this and calls it 'maximal'. He has become much more dogmatic and arrogant since he came.

JOE

At the time I was unaware that art was a competitive sport where ideas were currency and deception common place. I was innocent of that kind of cynicism. It was through my association with guys like Ashley and Coutts that I was able to see art as a viable lifestyle.

NARRATOR

October 25th, 1968. Joe called a meeting of all Fine Art students in the Second Year to discuss holding an exhibition at the college in December. Brian and Arthur said they had thought of this earlier; it was a joint decision, together with Bert. Not very many students turned up, probably because it was Friday afternoon, but all there agreed to contribute. Stone has promised them the exhibition hall for two weeks. Bert said they wanted to get as many outside people interested as possible; they will advertise in the paper, through posters, etc. Arthur said it seemed silly to wait to show one's work until the Diploma show. Brian said that the next two years was the time when they would 'make it' - or within the next five years if they got onto a post-graduate course - after that it would be too late. Joe said he had wanted to restrict the exhibition to boys only, but Bert had persuaded him that this would be wrong.

ARTHUR

It was quite a pivotal point. Bert was quite pushy about it, Used to go down to London a lot, so he was one of the people because of the Hornsey thing etc who came back with a lot of, whoa, this is what should be happening.

EMMA

Extract from diary 3rd of November 1968. College is very busy; a lot of work to get finished by the end of November. Time is short; panic stations. We're having an exhibition of our work in in college and various other people of importance could come and see it.

NARRATOR

November 18th, 1968. Joe called a meeting to clarify problems connected with the Second Year Exhibition. Brian and Arthur to design and print the posters. Brian said to me he is getting fed up with it; it is the first and last exhibition he will have.

ARTHUR

There was a space which could be a gallery, which at that time was at the back of the lecture Hall. To say we really mean this.

NARRATOR 2

November 28th, 1968. A discussion about why Arthur wanted to present his statement typed out under perspex in the Second Year Exhibition: would it or would it not then become an art object? Abbott and Fawley felt it was incongruous to 'design' the way the statement looked. Arthur felt this was far too romantic an outlook. He said that explanations were better made in verbal than in visual terms.

ARTHUR

It was like why have you put it behind perspex? And actually it was to do with the fact that the wall was in fact covered with hessian, so how do you actually fit bits of paper to hessian..

NARRATOR

Coutts and Arthur had a long discussion about meaning, about the placing of his statement in the exhibition, and how meaning would change with context for the viewer.

NARRATOR 2

December 2nd, 1968. Very few people came to the opening of the Second Year Exhibition, and hardly any outsiders. The students were in a rather subdued mood. They seem to have had rather inflated expectations, and a great deal of

insecurity or unsureness came to the surface through their having willingly presented their work for public inspection. Nearly all asked me rather timidly what I thought of the show - none of them has ever asked me what I think of their work in the studios. Joe got upset because people leant on and put drinks on his sculpture; he says he realises now that he made it the wrong size.

BRIAN

It wasn't very well attended. There was no, I mean we had secretaries come from the school office. And they asked you about what you were doing because they had no idea either. and you'd explain and people would walk around. But it never seemed to be a show.

NARRATOR

December 2nd, 1968. At the Second Year Exhibition, Bert kidded Dave about the pretentiousness of the projected sizes of the structures to be made from his models, as given in the catalogue. Dave refuted any 'arty' intention, saying that the dimensions he had given were simply those of a 'real' chicken coop. December 2nd, 1968. Emma was upset because several people had asked her for the meaning of her work which she thought was self-evident and self-explanatory, as her work is not about herself but about the work she is investigating.

NARRATOR 2

December 5th, 1968. I asked Gibson what he thought of the Second Year show. He said he found the paintings execrable, and a lot of the other things boring and pretentious. The only piece of work he liked was Dave's - something about the material used, the relationship of people to the defined space, and so on. I said that Dave would probably not agree with Gibson's assessment of the work. Gibson said that it was probably the unconscious ideas that were being expressed which he was responding to - it took years of experience to be aware of them, or rather to lower the threshold of consciousness.

DAVE

Yeah Gibson has always liked my work I don't know why, they were not as attention-grabbing as some other bigger things, there might have been in that show. I mean Joe was making quite big cubic sculptures, at that time. Big cubic blocks of cardboard and stuff, painted over.

NARRATOR

November 22nd, 1968. Talked a long time to Jean. Arthur had given me a card for the Second Year Exhibition where students described the sort of work they were entering. Jean just wanted to put 'prints' as her description. Bert wouldn't let her, insisted that she put something which would intrigue and interest other people more - so she put 'depths in dispute'. She has apparently had some sort of nervous breakdown.

ALICE

I was pretty pleased with my work, I worked for hours on these fibre glass blocks with Muybridge pictures sealed inside. Incidentally nobody told me I should be wearing a mask while I was sanding these things. But Kerr saw the show and he said he thought it was very..., I think he said he thought it was shallow, but he also said the smaller pieces are the most pretentious. Mine was the smallest. Another vote down.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "JACKIE"

NARRATOR

Tutor's report 28 June, 1969: Jackie is a nice girl, a serious girl even. Her work is diabolical and I tentatively suggest that it is bad because it is Art-therapy only. The distancing process needed to discipline the therapy side of art does not seem to exist in Jackie's work. Perhaps if her emotional and physical life resolves itself she can be more in control of her work. If it ever transcends the state of being 'twee' I will be surprised. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

From the observer's notebooks: October 23rd, 1967. In the sculpture studios, Jackie is the only one of the First Year group present. She is making an 'environmental box' which she has painted red. When I asked what is to go inside it, she said she was. Aim is to see what her own reaction to a red environment would be. The problem is that if it is four sided, it would be dark inside and she wouldn't see the red colour!

NARRATOR

December 5th, 1968. Gibson talked to Jackie about her work. He said it was not the sort of work he responded to, but

taking his bias into account, he found the work sugary and vulgar. He recommended that she look at the work of Altdorfer and Japanese sixteenth-century artists. She had to decide whether she was doing figurative work or not, her birdlike forms were simply vague and decorative. Jackie said she was interested in colour and the application of paint. Gibson said these were two different objectives and she would have to decide between them. He suggested that she was probably a rather soft-minded person, her work was soft-minded too. He recommended that she become more analytical, do some analytical drawings and become more aware of formal problems.

EMMA

Jackie went on to do an MA in painting at Birmingham afterwards, I've got a lot of correspondence from her and we holidayed together during two summers. Jackie was very much a painter. she got on very well with Kerr, and I think that Liz did as well because Liz was a painter. for the painters it was very tough as they were challenged by other tutors.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "December 13th, 1968. Individual sessions with students Gibson selected as needing talking to. Among these was Joe.

Asked to explain his lack of work, he said he had done a lot; he had built his arch, done some printing and writing and organized the exhibition.

He agreed he had not been working at full stretch and could have worked much harder. He felt he had worked harder than some of the other people who have not been asked to come for interview today.

Stone said that had nothing to do with it, they were concerned with him on his own.

Asked why he thought he was called up for interview, Joe said it was because of his behaviour.

Gibson said the reason he was called up was because he was lazy and his thinking was slovenly.

He was asked to come back with work or ideas on the first day of next term.

He said he wanted a holiday and felt run down.

Gibson said everyone felt like that, and this is the time one should get down to work.

Coutts said the pressures were also social- if these things stop one working one will never do any work.

Gibson said that Joe only works when he is enthusiastic and then stops for long periods of time.

The tutors felt he was soft and more insecure than one would suppose; his attitude to work was immature"

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "LIZ"

NARRATOR

Tutor's report, 28 June 1969: Liz is a stolid, puddingy student of consistent attitudes and a plodding work-style. Mediocre certainly, and there will have to be radical changes in her life-style etc, before she is capable of transcending the banality of her present work. Perhaps she has the stamina to carry her through, but I doubt that she has sufficient imagination. (Gibson)

LIZ

Some of the comments that were made about the girls, about me in particular, you would never ever make a comment about a student like that now. it was incredibly sexist. Stolid puddingy student, needs a complete change of lifestyle, what are they basing those sorts of comments on?

NARRATOR 2

From the observer's notebooks:

September 28th, 1967. Students developing holiday project set in whichever direction they wish. Liz had left some offal in the studio overnight which Bert and Arthur had arranged into a still life with some tubing, flowers, etc. October 5th, 1967. Liz did a rather crude patterned painting based on the offal drawing. Watson told her to get some more offal and develop her drawings more searchingly. Watson calls her a 'doer'.

LIZ

I think we could either develop that work and there was no way I was going to develop it after the crit, Watson gave us

a list of words and said choose a word. I chose the word slimy. that's summed up how I felt about the time I think.

NARRATOR

October 10th, 1967. Liz squared up her drawing of offal in a distorted (non-parallel) manner, so that it became elongated in some places, congested in others. Artificial means to produce tension and emphasis, she said this was her own idea.

NARRATOR 2

December 5th, 1967. Liz reading book on behaviourism and conditioned reflexes in room where the model was walking repeatedly around in a prearranged grid pattern, while the students sitting around her concerned themselves with timing various intervals connected with her movements.

LIZ

We hadn't been given any clear instructions about why the model was going around, and measuring her footprints and all that, and I actually loved life drawing, and we were being prevented from doing any drawing. I got to know the model quite well, because I felt a sympathy for her, because she was walking round and round, it was absolutely driving her mad.

NARRATOR

Watson talking to Liz about the notes she was taking from the book said 'I am turning into a teacher of English'. He said the purpose was to force her to use and extend her thought processes, he was not concerned in this brief with her aesthetic sensibilities - it was not to do with art but with science.

LIZ

It was very interesting considering some of the things that were going on in the group. There were people who were into Mathematics and Philosophy, so that to say that I'm turning into an English teacher was a little bit it strange actually.

NARRATOR 2

March 7th, 1968. Liz and Jackie do not think going to art college is an escape. Liz says art is necessary for society, she cannot think of a society without any art. Both said it is far more difficult than having an office job; they find it cuts them off from others, Liz said that the art world

was very competitive; she thought that some competition was a good thing,

NARRATOR

July 18th 1968. Liz was one of five students asked to see Stone, the head of the department. She has found this year very difficult but good because she has had to think more deeply about her work. She felt she had not had enough tuition, especially technical help. She had been left alone a lot on PreDip, her ideas there were her own - they had been crushed here.

LIZ

I spoke to people like Dave I suppose occasionally, I was quite interested in the way he was trying to pull the wool over everybody's eyes His work was quite brilliant I think really he was so about what he was really about, he wasn't making it up he really was into chickens and bits of wood and stuff.

NARRATOR 2

Stone thinks she is working and thinking much better than she was when she came; she has had a good year in relation to herself. Liz asked on what basis assessments were made, and was told they were made relative to the group. Gibson said it was not a question of marking her down because she was intuitive rather than analytical, it was just that some students had sorted themselves out quicker than others. The tutors agreed she had come on very well.

LIZ

I like to being challenged if it is positive criticism. Coutts walked into my area, and he looked around, and he said I can't relate to any of this. So I'm not going to come and talk to you anymore. It's just handicraft. and then he walked out and I never saw him again. At the time I felt shock, and I also felt some anger, and I also felt relief.

JOE

We talk ourselves into what we are, so I guess at Midville I was in the Romantic process of talking myself into being a 'great' artist - carrying the values of the handmade object. Coutts was all about the opposite. Although I disagreed with his idea of dismissing the handmade, I respected his analytical thinking and his critique of the economy of the art game.

DAVE

Coutts, he didn't like to get too close. I think I convinced him that I was not on his wavelength, I was not on his rota of students. he just wanted to find out what I was doing. Then suggest a few words that I could look up. And then move on. 'Report to me later when you've read the book'.

NARRATOR 2

October 11th, 1968. Liz still working on drawings based on her battered baby in a pram. She told Abbott that many of the students in her year group had had their self-confidence demolished in the first week of the course in the criticism of their pre-course holiday work, and hadn't recovered from it since. It is true that she, Jackie, Pam and Diana feel that their work is not approved of and are on the defensive. In this category I would also put Philip, Harold and Giles.

NARRATOR

October 15th, 1968. Liz working on drawings of dolls. She says the advice she has had from Price and Gibson has been much more sympathetic than what she got last year.

December 5th, 1968. Gibson talked to Liz, said her paintings were badly done, that she had probably not found the best technique for what she wanted to do. He thought she oughtn't to paint yet. He disliked the expressionist distortions in her work and said her paintings suffered from lack of organization.

LIZ

I think there was a difference between the boys and the girls, I think the boys felt they were it, and that was that. Feminism wasn't really around at that time so that you did feel sort of second-rate citizens.

JOE

Liz is correct, most of the guys were assholes when it came to women.

ALICE

And I think the thing was girls were then much more then now socialised to have less confidence, and to try to please, and I think I was very much in that category. I was easily wiped out. I felt a bit left out because I think the main guys were the main guys who did it. and then when the book

came out I thought, ooh I'm not in it.

BRIAN

I don't think there was much interplay (between the boys and the girls). They didn't come to the pub you see. I mean we had most of our lectures in the pub. I can remember someone else who was making some quite interesting things with plaster. But they didn't fit in with the staff and she was being bullied actually and they gave her some really bad criticism about it. I remember lace and things being draped in plaster and creating shapes. it was completely off the wall as far as the course was concerned.

JOE

The male/female relationship between staff and students was of the period. Female students had affairs with male staff and were often selected at interview for their looks.

ARTHUR

It was an interesting year group in that it was somewhat imbalanced. it was 50/50 male female but there were only one or two strong women in the group and there were four or five of the guys who were pushy in all sorts of ways.

EMMA

Margaret was the only female member of staff, an easy person to have a dialogue with, she always spoke to me about my work; female members of the fine art staff were rare then, I only remember her. Of the fine art staff, the rest were all male tutors. As a tutor she was open to having a dialogue with someone else working on different themes, her own particular field of work was quite different, she could still engage with one.

NARRATOR

January 19th, 1969. Students met together in the common room to discuss a liberal studies project that they are to work on together as a group and present in a couple of weeks, to include something to do with numbers. As usual the boys ran the show. Of the girls only Emma, Jackie, Rose and Diana turned up, and Diana walked out after five minutes. Joe said it had to be a group effort at all levels, otherwise people feel they are being bossed about - obviously referring back to the exhibition last term. He said to the girls rather condescendingly: 'Now come on girls, what ideas have you got to contribute ?'

NARRATOR 2

March 14th, 1969. The Second Year group are busy with organizing their happening, based on numbers, for liberal studies this week - the performance is next week. I met Bert who hasn't been around for ages; he said he works at home now, he doesn't like working in college. Joe has also disappeared for a long time now.

NARRATOR

March 20th, 1969. Performance of Second Year 'number' happening. The main event was a long choreographed series of figures moving in worked-out sequence on to different squares on the floor, worked out by Bert. Quite well presented but very boring. The Principal was dissatisfied with it, as the first of the 'symposia' worked out by the liberal studies department in their new syllabus, and told the tutor in charge so, publicly.

JOE

We were dressed up and moved about on chess board in some kind of pattern. It went wrong half way through when some of the performers forgot what to do..

BERT

It wasn't actually based on numbers it was based on War and Peace. it involved several of the students, they had to be hermaphrodites, they had to wear skin-tight bodysuits, and the girls had to have no tits pretty much. Like a game of chess, like in Lewis Carroll, people moved about on the chessboard and enacted things that happened in relation to the key. Battle, victory, loss, death. Apparently in the book it's said to be very boring but what was extraordinary was that all the third year students stayed to the very very end,

NARRATOR

July 2nd, 1969. I sat with Dave, Bert and Pam, who said they were anxious to know if they were going to have assessments this term, and what the plans for them for next year were. They have still not realized that at no point have there been 'plans' for them - everything has functioned on an ad hoc day to-day basis.

ARTHUR

I think a lot of the course was organised around, the course is getting a bit too chaotic let's think what project we can

think up, let's do it next week, let's do it on Monday. a sudden rush and Gibson would say let's do a life drawing course, and that would be it, let's do it.

JOE

Some of the students were unable to deal with the laissez-faire method of education. Which is what Coutts described the method as to me. However, it belies what happened. The staff were really trying to herd cats while asking them to be squirrels.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "EMMA"

NARRATOR

Tutors' reports, 1968-69: Emma is one of the more bright students. However she is constantly beset by doubts that effectively stop her from committing herself to her work with sufficient ardour. Her tentativeness is her problem. I rate her somewhat better than average, but I don't think she has enough drive to significantly improve as yet. Maybe she will have more confidence next year. Still a good student. (Gibson)

NARRATOR 2

She has developed what might be termed a 'personal' content rather than a personal style. Whereas I would say in Joe's case the style is the content, here the style is simply arrived at through the involvement with the content. Both methods are as valid as each other. Her work is well made. Again I think this has been used as a means of justifying it - such justifications do her a disservice - criteria suited to judging the work of a skilled artisan are fine but there is the question of 'what the fine artist means?' to be accounted for here. An interesting and good student. (Coutts)

EMMA

We were suddenly on our own and maybe they were trying to encourage us to be calmer; to pursue research on our own. I think there's a lot in that really in the way I work now although I work in a completely different way; being in a solitary studio doesn't bother me. They were probably trying to harden us up a bit really.

NARRATOR

She wants to relate words to symbols. Asked whether she would use symbols out of the book or her own, she said she wanted to find her own. Gibson approved, and said this was a good idea and that he thought this way in his own work, but that it was important to start from personal meanings or symbols. Watson said she must soon start to get something down on paper.

EMMA

I think we were encouraged to read and research our creative ideas, to study writers, poets, musicians, philosophers as well as visual artists. Certainly my three diaries have notes on books to read and buying books on Chinese pictograms, books on Concrete Poetry .

NARRATOR

November 24th, 1967. Emma says she is feeling very confused. She has been trying to write down her ideas and sort them out. She did not do this before as her Pre-Dip course required only straightforward representations.

EMMA

I think I was someone who wasn't always super confident about things, that lack of confidence and uncertainty would have come across in the book. I found a reference in my notes to giving a talk in art history about Lichtenstein, now I'm used to giving talks and lectures, but at that time I just hated speaking in front of the group. I had a shyness and it was not an experience I particularly enjoyed.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "April 4th, 1968. Tutors assessing First Year students at the end of the Spring term. Emma has been experimenting with known symbols (the Western alphabet) and superimposing others on them.

Asked what the purpose or end-product will be, she says she isn't sure. She is interested in visual perception and has been reading about semantics. She found this necessary before she can make a decision about what to do.

Asked if it worries her that there is no concretization of her ideas, she said that it has but that it is unavoidable.

Watson said he liked her approach.

Gibson said the end result will not depend on what she has read but on her personal presentation of the relationship between sound and letter forms.

Coutts said that she is on difficult ground, that she has an intellectual problem.

The tutors said that she had taken on a huge problem and had been in a situation of doubt and confusion.

Gibson said that this is a good sign.

Watson said he would have to catch up with a lot of reading to be able to help her.

The tutors agreed that her problems were concerned with decision making. She was given a B assessment"

EMMA

Coutts was always quite pleasant to me, but I didn't really go for the way in which he taught, although he was always interested in my work. He was fairly positive I found, I haven't really got any unpleasant experiences of him, apart from that first critique when he was quite harsh. Stone I always thought was a bit of a joke;

ARTHUR

He objected to all the bureaucracy where Midville College of Art was becoming Midville Polytechnic and he had a brother that worked in a company that made rubber stamps, and every bit of paperwork that came from the Polytechnic, and there was a lot, he used to stamp with stamp and send it back. And the stamp simply read "bollocks".

NARRATOR

October 15th, 1968. Emma said that Gibson and Price had talked to her about her work. Gibson had asked her to be more intuitive, but she says she can't and that this is not the way she works. She can only put something down if she is sure of what it is and the reasons for it. She doesn't like being in the second year. She is not interested in coming to conclusions but in pursuing her ideas.

EMMA

There was a note in a diary about a fracas in a staff

meeting, there were times when there were arguments between Kerr and the conceptual people, like Coutts. Dyer. I'm sure there were various upsets. I think Kerr was given quite a hard time sometimes, he seemed like he was a lone support for the painters

EMMA (CONT'D)

Extract from diary Tuesday Jan 6th 1970 : ...awful meeting in the afternoon, all of the staff were going at one another, complete confusion. I am rendered speechless by this.

NARRATOR

(Prospectus) Department of fine art

The policy of the department is to present students with diverse opportunities to carry out investigations into their particular field of enquiry. at all times the onus is on the students to develop sufficiently and to work with those tutors who are in sympathy with their work.

JOE

One on one was common. Each staff member selling his, or, her art ideology to us with intensity. The students who could not compete with the staff went under. Many hid themselves in hard to access cubicles they constructed.

NARRATOR 2

(Prospectus) The department has an excellent record of postgraduate Awards gained in the major colleges in London and in the provinces.

ALICE

I didn't know that the Men in Black Suits were coming. Ashley and Coutts, they wore black suits and strode about. and they never spoke to us but I think Ashley did once come and grill me in the studio probably in my second year I think. And asked lots and lots of questions and somehow I told him more than I wanted to, and all the Catholic education and so on came out. He finished up saying you should have probably been a nun, and strode off.

BRIAN

No I didn't fit straight in. One or two people did, and I think they were the people who knew what they were doing. There was a period of time I remember when you could go into

the studio and there was no-one there. When you're on a conceptual art course you always have the excuse that you could say I was off thinking down the pub. it was that period in history really. Tutorials in the pub..

REG

'There is not enough communication or exchange of ideas with staff.' I didn't see people that often. I came from a foundation course where the timetable was really full to this huge blank of studio time. People just used to sort of drop-in. 'I haven't really had any tuition. I would like more contact with tutors. I would like more help in directing myself.'

EMMA

At Midville we were also fortunate in being exposed to inspiring lectures. I came across lecture notes for 'Type in Art, Type as Art', I think the Graphics tutor gave that ; he was very helpful with print work for me too, a lovely man,

BRIAN

I don't remember there being much teaching to be honest. at all. There were tutorials with individual staff and I remember there being sessions at the end of the semester, and we had to put up stuff of what we had done.

REG

'I was left on my own too much at the beginning, I'm used to it now. But I'm not able to communicate with the tutors and this worries me a bit. I would prefer the tuition to be more organized. '

BRIAN

I mean I had Dyer as my personal tutor, I was lucky he always came in, he always saw me every week, we went over things, we went over new ideas and went to the pub and had a couple of pints. Perfect, absolutely how it should be.

REG

There is no discussion or relationship between staff and students. Students are forced to be free. The tuition is lousy - tutors are more concerned with themselves than with students.'

BERT

Gibson was, I don't know what he was but he seemed to be round about our age group, and he was totally off the wall. very amusing, and fun, and he liked to drink beer. And he liked girls. But he was an interesting guy to talk to. The art history tutor was fantastic, she was really alive she was, she brought things out I think in all of us. which had probably made us want to be at art school in the first place.

REG

'Something about the college drains confidence. I have never found it difficult to be articulate before. Individual development is encouraged in theory, but in practice I don't feel free.' I understand that the idea of leaving students alone is to make it more like the outside world. This suits me but I think it is bad for many students who haven't done a thing.'

ALICE

Basically my view of them was always jaded because I've always been quite cynical but I thought they like you (a) if you're attractive or (b) if your work is anything like theirs or could be.

BLACK SCREEN

SCROLLING TITLE

SUPER: "City of Midville College of art and design

*To all third-year students fine art and all fine art staff
18th July 1969*

Dear 3rd year fine artists

Topic art history / complementary studies 1969 / 1970

In the first term you will be asked to write along research paper on a topic of your own choice within the realm of "art history". This paper need not be thought of as a "thesis" with fantastic bindings, etc; but it should be "good" in terms of depth of research, thought and analyses. It should also be comprehensible

By the end of the first week you should be prepared to give your tutors a written outline (in duplicate) of your topic, with as much of a bibliography as you can manage. Obviously fruitful thinking during this summer is of value.

Fondly yours,

The General - Liberal - Complementary - Art-Historical staff"

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "DAVE"

NARRATOR

Tutor's report, 1969: Dave is an intelligent student with an interesting mind which is sometimes hidden by a deliberate act of inarticulate yobbishness. This I think is due to his shyness. He works hard and his ideas are interesting in their display of surrealist humour. His attitudes are consistent and his technical expertise is outstanding. One of the best students of the year group. (Gibson)

ARTHUR

Dave was an interesting character. Quite a reserved character. Liked irony is I suppose is the best way of describing it.

BRIAN

Dave was different -he wasn't eccentric at all, anyone could be forgiven for thinking that, having chickens in an art studio. but I could see where he was coming from. I had Dyer, he had Gibson you know.

EMMA

I've got fond memories of Dave, more independent, being a little bit older than us. He was interesting and explored highly original concepts in his sculpture. I can remember when they arrived, an eccentric act for someone to bring a coop of chickens into the studio. He was quiet, reflective person but with a sense of humour,

DAVE

I used to do a lot of drawing. Rustic stuff you know, I mean I grew up in the country. What I drew was what was around me really. Tractors, you know what I mean. I suppose the kind of things I started to make when I was a kid were chicken runs, and bale huts for chickens, and rabbit hutches and stuff. I used to make kind of little chicken cities out of corrugated iron and slatted structures, straw and stuff. Before we even had any chickens. It does look like in my memory that I was making a kind of installationy kind of

thing you know.

NARRATOR

September 29th, 1967. There is one complete eccentric on the course, who has no interest in art but is obsessed with chickens. In his corner he has skilfully built a chicken run in the first few days, and marked the floor off in squares which are numbered and lettered. Today he has gone to collect his six chickens. He asked the tutor whether there would be a night watchman available to look after them, but was told no. He intends to plot down their movements on a graph, taking readings every 30 seconds. When asked whether his chicken run had anything to do with art, he said no. He thought the graphs might perhaps be used as a pictorial image, but had not really considered this and only said it because I inquired. Tutors and students regard him with amused tolerance.

NARRATOR 2

October 5th, 1967. He is getting disheartened by the frivolous attitude displayed by staff and students to his ideas, and thinks perhaps he made a mistake in bringing the chickens to college

October 10th, 1967. Dave is dismantling his chicken coop. He said the chickens didn't like the artificial environment of the college, so he has taken them to his digs.

NARRATOR

October 13th, 1967. Watson talked to Dave who has been working out his graphs based on recordings of the movements of the chickens. He found it impossible to get Dave to acknowledge that he might do anything apart from charting chickens, such as using the graphs as a base from which to make some aesthetic development. As Dave says, he is just interested in 'chickeny' things. A true nut.

NARRATOR 2

October 26th, 1967. Dave has been waiting for Dyer, as he wants to ask him about his chicken charts. Dyer is the electronics expert who encouraged and helped Brian. Dave wanted to know how to assemble his charts so as to indicate movement, direction and time. Dyer suggested using a cine-camera. Dave prefers the idea of flashing lights to indicate time and movement, but he hasn't the knowledge required for this. So he went back to his corner, saying that he must think of a new way to solve his problem.

NARRATOR

November 6th, 1967. Seven students are drawing from the model, the others had been told to bring objects to draw. Watson told Dave that he must not bring anything to do with chickens: Dave produced a carton of eggs!

DAVE

Yes well that was a touch of up yours. I was being an annoying brat wasn't I.

NARRATOR 2

At the end of the day all he had produced were some tiny figures on graph paper. He said he had been working hard taking measurements, or readings as he put it, of the egg, its height, width, etc. November 15th, 1967. Dave continues solidly to take readings from his egg. November 24th, 1967. Dave has stopped working from his egg as he says it is cracking, so he is stopping that piece of work. He is reading a book on animal behaviour.

NARRATOR

February 29th, 1968. Watson talking to Dave about his projected idea of building a chicken coop containing chickens and observers, where the observers are not sure what their role is, or who is observing whom. He asked Dave what it was about. Dave offered the idea of wit and social comment. This was all he was prepared to offer, and a sort of bargaining process went on between Watson and him.

DAVE

I found that if you convince people you are not on their side then they would let you alone. do you know what I mean. so that if you could actually convince the expressionist wing of the course that you weren't really with them, they'd leave you for the other team to deal with. And if you convinced the conceptualists that you weren't really with them, then they wouldn't really bother you that much.

NARRATOR

April 4th, 1968. Tutors assessing First Year students at the end of the Spring term. Dave has made colour transparencies of the charts in order to blow them up to the original 8-foot size. The tutors were impressed with his disciplined, well worked out idea. Dave was given a B assessment. Later he was incredulous when I told him he had been given a B. He

laughed like anything and said his 'conning' had paid off. This only convinced him more to keep the paintings he does at home separate from the college. I asked why, and he said because he would not be able to justify them

DAVE

Yes I've still got the set of transparencies I made with that thing because I was going to project them back on the floor and see the difference. Really it should have been filmed but by doing it this way you've got a kind of key in terms of what had moved in relation to what.

NARRATOR 2

December 2nd, 1968. At the Second Year Exhibition, Bert kidded Dave about the pretentiousness of the projected sizes of the structures to be made from his models, as given in the catalogue. Dave refuted any 'arty' intention, saying that the dimensions he had given were simply those of a 'real' chicken coop.

DAVE

The people who had gone over to the linguist side, they had a hell of a reading list. and a lot of long words to master. And employ with confidence you know. Similarly I didn't really see the chickens as a vehicle for expressionism in any way. It could be in an illustrative way I suppose. chickens fighting. I didn't really know what I was doing but I was quite convinced it wasn't either of those two

BRIAN

Dave, he started making small things that were interactive. We did an exhibition and he and I got places in the ICA. And he made a small interactive thing and I made a great big thing a huge pinball table and you had people on this end and people on that - switches and everything went off; it was quite good.

NARRATOR

In May, 1969, took place the first Review by the National Council for Diploma in Art and Design of the Midville Diploma courses.. In the months immediately preceding the Review, plans for a radical reconstruction of the Fine Art course as a whole were put forward by Coutts and Gibson, their formulation being largely the work of Ashley . The Coutts-Gibson proposals became the 'DAD Fine Art Policy Statement'.

NARRATOR 2

The submission on History of Art and Complementary Studies was completely re-drafted to bring it into line with the proposed new policy, which involved a merging of the two areas, Fine Art and General Studies. In the resulting combined syllabus, students were to concentrate for the first five terms of the course on an analysis of language, with a gradual movement towards studio work. The importance of language and verbalization was thus to be so heavily emphasized as to overshadow, and virtually exclude, at least during the first half of the course, the traditional activities of painting and sculpture.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "National Council for diplomas in art and design

Quinquennial review of DAD courses

Midville College of art and design

The proposals for the integration of art history and complementary studies with studio work were discussed and although it was felt that in principle this might be advantageous, nevertheless it was felt that insufficient thought had as yet, being given to the proposals.

Fine art. full-time staff are almost all young with a keen outlook and enthusiasm. The head of Painting is steady, sensible and provides a sobering influence in the department. Sculpture staff are adequate but another full-time lecturer will be required as the course progresses

The board were presented with two vital proposals for changes to take place in 1969 / 70 which will have considerable effect on the courses. The first is the merging of the fine art and general studies (i.e. history of art and complementary studies)"

NARRATOR

The second change is that up till now the course has been characterized by a "laissez-faire" approach. this is considered unsatisfactory and in its place there is to be close student direction for the first 5 terms after which there will be gradual movement towards practical studio work. Only in the last year will the student be free to work with "autonomy". In effect, there will be five terms occupied largely with enquiry and research

NARRATOR 2

Members of the visiting board found it difficult to assess the likely outcome of these changes. Part of the policy statement presented was so turgidly expressed as to be almost incomprehensible and in this form appeared very pretentious. However, after discussion, it was apparent that there is much sincere and anxious thought behind it, and that the phraseology, although unfortunate, is probably the result of haste.

JOE

The conflict between abstraction and figuration, conceptualism/minimalism and traditional practice, sculpture and performance, industrial techniques and hand made was acted out by the staff. It was a time when I felt I was part of the sharp end of Music and Art.

NARRATOR

The idea of the integration is both bold and most interesting. Reservations arise from a feeling that it might easily become over analytical and damp the spark of creating invention. However the new principal is a man of mature judgement, aware of the situation, and he will no doubt be able to exercise critical control.

NARRATOR 2

The specialist members of the board considered an opportunity should be given to allow the college to proceed with their proposals and consequently would wish to recommend that approval of the course should be continued for a further five years.

ALICE

We never did any drawing at Midville that was organised, except for once we had the Quinquennial Review Gibson took us for the day to clear the whole Studio and he set up a massive stage and placed, it might have been a model, dressed as Britannia with everything perfect as Britannia on the Penny in those days, and easels all the way around, and we would draw the model, but when the music and I think it was Rule Britannia, when it stopped you had to draw on the drawing in front of us and you had to take it very seriously. And the Quinquennial reviewers thought it was fabulous. Obviously when they left the room we all creased up laughing.

NARRATOR

(Prospectus) Year three course. The year will be spent on projects and schemes of work to be initiated by students themselves in consultation with members of the staff.

ARTHUR

At the end there was a lot of fuss about who was going to get what, and was I going to get failed etc. Coutts said, it was a bit stupid in the exam board, because I was arguing for you to get first and they were arguing for you to fail, so we agreed on a 2;1.

ALICE

Dave got a first. Emma I don't know if she got a first or 2:1. A lot of us just got a pass, and I got pass, I've had nightmares for years that I've been back to try and do it better. And couldn't paint and couldn't do anything sort of thing. it was quite traumatic at the time, because I think I felt I was kind of worth a bit more but was probably wrong,

BRIAN

Dyer was very helpful I think. Stone. He gave up his office for me to have my final show. that was something wasn't it. Because I needed somewhere to work because I needed electricity

NARRATOR

Dave was the only student in his year to be awarded a First-class Diploma. He was also the only student in his year to get a post-graduate place. In his final year, 1969-70, he appeared to be working very hard and was one of the few students who was usually in the sculpture studios whenever the observer called round. Asked if he was still producing his 'own' work at home, he said no, the discrepancies between college and private work hardly existed any more.

ALICE

I've got over that now, and recovered from Midville, it took me years to get over that. What they did. I think I was a rigorous student. I did read a lot and I worked to, I worked till nine at night and made stuff. I think my show had a huge amount of work in it, but I believe I nearly failed, because we all had very low marks, it's not like everyone gets two ones, these days.

LIZ

It was a toughening up process I think. I think the final year was quite difficult, I won't say traumatic, challenging was possibly a different word to describe it. I wasn't very happy with my degree show and I think if there had been a bit of nurturing and direct encouragement early on that the form of that exhibition would have been totally different. I made this grotesque Alice in Wonderland doll which I put in a picture frame.

JOE

The three years at Midville was a steep learning curve with many painful experiences that ultimately inured me to class intimidation and sharpened my intellect.

LIZ

I think Midville was a huge toughening up process something that you survived. I think Midville was something that was very difficult. I don't think it should have been as difficult as it was. I often think if I had gone to somewhere like Chelsea I'd be painting

ARTHUR

The rigorousness came from Gibson's view of things. Not text based, but rigorousness would fit with Gibson very strongly. A very strong sense of no, it's got to stand up to everything. You had a situation where Stone was the head of department, he was not going to write a course document even if somebody held six shotguns to his head

DAVE

I know that they were all sorts of very miserable times at Midville. probably for most people. but it worked out alright in the end if you know what I mean. if you get those crits where everyone's hammering down on you, they could be quite brutal. I suppose when I was eventually teaching in art schools I tried to be quite the opposite really.

JOE

Without a completely life changing event like the one I experienced on the Fine Art course I had the very real possibility of living my life in the clutches of bosses like my parents had. To me the behavior of us all - students and staff - on close review seemed to be a dramatic enactment of characters caught up in an epic struggle.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "Like Stephen King setting a horror novel in art school"

(and spoken simultaneously)

JOE

Like Stephen King setting a horror novel in art school.

END TITLES