

Website Postings

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Introduction

The materials posted here accompany the essays published in NOIT—4. Together they form a collection of writings about John Latham's art and ideas from my perspective as his son and as a philosophy professor. They fall into three groups. First there are the interactions, consisting of correspondence and early pieces I wrote for him. Next there are contributions made for exhibitions, all composed after his death on January 1, 2006. These are overviews that serve as standalone pieces that do not presuppose any previous acquaintance with John's work. Finally there are what I am calling "Short essays". These currently consist of three short pieces that I cut out of NOIT—4 to present as appendices. Unlike those NOIT—4 essays that are now set in stone, I intend these essays to be revisable, and I may add some new ones here in the future.

I shall now offer brief descriptions of each of the writings, mostly taken from the introduction to NOIT—4.

“A Discussion of Latham’s Concepts of Time-Base and Insistance” is a piece I wrote as a student in 1980. (It amuses me now to see that it is written in a style influenced by the kind of philosophy of language that was popular at the time where I was studying.) It provides a detailed analysis of John’s views as expressed in his (1975) *Time Base and Determination in Events*. The few places where I no longer agree with the substance of what I say in it are pointed out in “Reflections”. This piece is also of interest for its early role in my interaction with John’s ideas, as explained in “Memoir”. A short response by John is given in one of the letters.

“Some Theoretical/Practical Points for Consideration” is another early commentary written around 1990. It is typed up from a two-sided handwritten page.

“Letters” contains typed up selections from hand-written letters and postcards I sent John over the course of two decades. I was surprised and pleased to find them in the John Latham Archive of documents in his possession at the time of his death. There are also some drafts of letters he sent me.

“Email Correspondence” (2003-05) is unedited except for the removal of practical and personal discussions. Some of the messages are carefully composed, others fired off without further ado. This correspondence relates mostly to John’s ideas and presents an unfiltered view of our different approaches to understanding and communication. The various versions of John’s Flat Time Hypothesis discussed at the end of the correspondence are added there.

“John Latham’s Universe” is a DVD made the day before the event *Reconsidering John Latham*, a one-day symposium held at Tate Britain in 2006 as part of his exhibition John Latham in focus. It was recorded when I was jet-lagged and still in a state of shock from John’s death six weeks earlier. Initially John was to give a talk in the exhibition space introducing his ideas by way of his work, however it was decided that a pre-recorded talk from me would start the day’s programme instead. John had planned to discuss the works in an order that would present his worldview in a natural conceptual progression. I didn’t see how to do this myself, so decided instead to present my understanding of his ideas by way of a chronological discussion of the works. The talk covers the same ground as “Quantum of Mark” but does so through impromptu commentary on the individual works exhibited. It was recorded by Laure Provost who did an excellent job with a hand-held camera without any rehearsal or discussion of what was to happen.

There are moments when the camera was not pointing where I would have liked, but I didn’t want to interrupt the flow to direct her. One instance is during the discussion of *Time-Base Roller*, when it would have been good to have an image of the entire Roller at the moment at which it winds back to the beginning of time. A second is when I say that *Table with the Law* contains a rare case of John’s art representing appearances. And when I ended the talk with *They’re Learning Fast* I would have liked the camera to have been directed at the fish instead of at me. We remedied that to some extent by repeating some footage of the fish and having my final words appear as a voiceover. A small audience of friends and family is doing its best to stay out of the image.

“Quantum of Mark and Least Event” was written in 2006 for *John Latham: Time-Base and the Universe*, the catalogue to the shows at the John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, and the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York. It is an overview of the relation between John’s art and ideas and discusses a few central works rather than attempting to cover what was shown at that exhibition. It is a slightly revised version of the essay printed in the catalogue. I’d sent a draft around to people for comments and had made a few revisions in light of their feedback. Unfortunately it was the draft and not the revised version of the essay that got printed.

“John Latham: Spray Paintings”, written for the Lisson Gallery’s 2016 show of the same name, is a brief introduction to the different uses John made of the spray

gun. The version printed here is the intended revised version. What went into print was a copyedited version that didn't contain final corrections.

"The influence of Gregory and Kohsen" goes into some detail in comparing John's ideas with those found in their book *The O-Structure*, and it is best read after the essay "Reflections".

"Ian Munro's Interpretation" is a discussion of the interpretation of John's ideas published by his artist friend and collaborator Ian Munro.

"John A. Walker's Book" offers some brief comments on *John Latham: The incidental person – his art and ideas* (Middlesex University Press, 1994). This book provides some background knowledge of recent art history and the art scene at the time John was active, and gives a helpful and thorough chronological account of the many different facets of John's life and work.

The contents of NOIT—4, described below, consist of three somewhat overlapping essays I began writing in 2014, followed by a transcription of a conversation from 1981.

"Memoir" begins with sporadic childhood memories loosely related to John's art and ideas. At the point at which I become interested in philosophy, it becomes less episodic and changes into a more sustained discussion of my involvement with his ideas. It discusses our different approaches to understanding and communication and the frustrations we begin to experience in failing to get across to each other. Memories of my mother Barbara Steveni and her work, as well as all the other things going on in my life do not figure here, except when relevant to the themes of these essays. As the memoir spans the entire time from my childhood to the end of John's life and beyond, it serves as a framework for all the other writings here and in NOIT—4.

"Story of the RIO" (Reflective Intuitive Organism) is a significantly revised version of the essay first published in the wonderfully Johnesque catalogue for the 2017 Serpentine show *A World View: John Latham*. It is an account of one of John's most striking works, both for its appearance and for its relation to his worldview. The essay looks at other works of his which explore the same themes, and notes how John took three brothers from Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* as emblematic of one of these themes. It discusses why the work came to be made, and the new materials John used in its creation. It discusses how the work does not have a single canonical form and has been exhibited in different configuration. It points out a mystery about the title and offers an explanation. It examines why John initially presented the work as being about the role of art in society, and how he saw this as implemented by the Artist Placement Group.

In "Reflections" I offer my interpretation and evaluation of John's ideas, revealing the differences in our views of the world and approaches to understanding. I begin by looking at his classification of the various media used in art and communication. I discuss what he thinks they can and cannot do, and focus on his critique of language. I address his time-based understanding of the universe, our place in it, and what people are referring to when talking of God. I discuss his attitude to contemporary physics, the special role he saw for intuition in the creativity of artists and for finding out about the world, and speculate about his reactions to the way his worldview was received. Finally I briefly look at what he took to be the practical applications of adopting his worldview. Throughout I point to ways in which these ideas can be discerned in his art.

"Conversation" is transcribed from a cassette tape recording made in 1981 of John discussing his art along with some reflections on other artists, primarily Francis Bacon, but also Walter Sickert, Paul Cezanne, El Greco, and Graham Sutherland. I came across the recording shortly after John's death and found it comforting to hear his voice. It contains plenty of detail which has not been heard before about how John constructed his early work and first film, and the transi-

tion he made from oil painting to spray painting to assemblage and film. I found it very useful in preparing my Tate Gallery talk in 2006.

This is not quite everything I've written or recorded about John's work. There is my first essay, which is lost, and a video interview made in 2004, both discussed in "Memoir". There is also a spoken commentary on John's first film that can be found in the DVD *John Latham Films 1960–1971*.

Writings of John's discussed in these postings or in NOIT—4:

Time Base and Determination in Events (Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, 1975)
Time Base and Determination in Events (Tate Gallery, London, 1976)
Event Structure: approach to a basic contradiction (Syntax, Calgary, 1981)
Report of a Surveyor (Hansjorg Mayer, 1984)

Artworks of John's mentioned in these postings or in NOIT—4:

<i>Praying Figure</i> (1953)	<i>One Second Drawings</i> (1967–70)
<i>Formition</i> (1954)	<i>Four NOITs</i> (1970)
<i>Man caught up with a Yellow Object</i> (1955)	<i>Least Event as a Habit</i> (1970)
<i>Figures</i> (1956)	<i>NOIT for the Under Six</i> (1970)
<i>Plot</i> (1957)	<i>Erth</i> (1971)
<i>Untitled</i> (1957)	<i>Time-Base Roller</i> (1972)
<i>Fragment on Asbestos</i> (1958)	<i>Whatareyoulookingat?</i> (1974)
<i>Burial of Count Orgaz</i> (1958)	<i>Niddrie Woman</i> (1976)
<i>Shem</i> (1958)	<i>Organism Somewhere</i> (1980)
<i>Shaun</i> (1958)	<i>Government of the First and Thirteenth Chair</i> (1978)
<i>Untitled</i> (1958)	<i>Precursor to Story of the RIO</i> (1982)
<i>Untitled</i> (1958)	<i>Story of the RIO</i> (1983)
<i>Noa's</i> (1959)	<i>Time-base Roller with Graphic Store</i> (1987)
<i>Antecedent of the Film Star</i> (1959)	<i>Table with the Law</i> (1988)
<i>Belief System (1)</i> (1959)	<i>They're Learning Fast</i> (1988)
<i>Belief System (3)</i> (1959)	<i>N-U Niddrie Heart</i> (1991)
<i>Observer I–V</i> (1958–60)	<i>God is Great (#2)</i> (1991)
<i>Dante and Beatrice</i> (1959)	<i>Long Painting</i> (1992)
<i>Wave Function</i> (1959)	<i>Cluster of Eleven</i> (1992)
<i>Unclassified Material</i> (1960)	<i>Basic T Diagram</i> (1992)
<i>Skoob Box</i> (1960)	<i>Flat Time House 'Face'</i> (2003)
<i>Film Star</i> (1960)	<i>Proto Universe</i> (2003)
<i>Unedited Material from the Star</i> (1960)	<i>Book Relief Triad</i> (2003)
<i>Full Stop</i> (1961)	<i>God is Great (#4)</i> (2004)
<i>Talk Mr Bard</i> (1961)	<i>IO I IO</i> (2005)
<i>Speak</i> (1962)	<i>Two-sided Painting</i> (2005)
<i>Thinking-it-Out-and-Putting-it-Down-Machine</i> (1962)	
<i>Conquest of Space</i> (1962)	For further background readers can consult:
<i>Quantum Chronodynamics</i> (1963)	lissongallery.com/artists/john-latham/
<i>Painting out of a Book</i> (1964)	tate.org.uk/art/artists/john-latham-1470
<i>Untitled Roller Painting</i> (1965)	flattimeho.org.uk/
<i>Review of a Dictionary Series</i> (1966–73)	ligatus.org.uk/jla/
<i>Skoob Tower Ceremonies</i> (1966)	tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup/
<i>Encyclopedias over London</i> (1967)	ravenrow.org/exhibition/artist_placement_group/
<i>Even Tstructu Re Board</i> (1967)	