


# A Quantitative Analysis of Critical Posture in Art Writing, 1980-2025 (Dataset - 20 Critical Texts 1980–2025) v.2

01 Mar 2026 39 min read

Permanent Record Omeka Library Publisher Museum of One Journal Post-Interpretive Criticism
Series Foundational Archived By Library & Archives Canada

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*Written at the Threshold*

*A Post-Interpretive Diagnostic Study*

# Abstract

**Background:** This study applies the Layer A ethical/postural portion of the Post-Interpretive Criticism (PIC) diagnostic framework to twenty critical texts spanning 1981–2025, drawn from published art criticism, essays, and cultural commentary by named authors in identified publications. All texts are real, published works; none are AI-generated. The study follows four temporal periods: 1981–1991 (Texts 1–5), 1992–2005 (Texts 6–10), 2006–2014 (Texts 11–15), and 2015–2025 (Texts 16–20).

**Method:** Five Layer A diagnostic indices — Rhetorical Density ($RD_{100}$), Interpretive Load Index (ILI), Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR), Ethical Proximity Score (EPS), and Institutional Alignment Indicator (IAI) — were applied to each text through informed analytical reading. The study follows the PIC Coding Manual's Layer A coding units, Direction of Force principle, exclusion rules, rounding convention, genre-awareness requirement, and PIC Constraint. Because the texts are protected by copyright, extended excerpts are not reproduced here; each entry identifies the passage, describes its analytical character, and presents a brief illustrative phrase. All diagnostic counts represent informed approximations based on the author's reading of the cited passages; readers may verify by consulting the original sources.

**Results:** Results reveal a structural shift from Institutionalist dominance in the early corpus toward Forensic and Poetic orientations across the later periods, with the 1992–2005 period marked by a distinctive Poetic register (Hickey, Schjeldahl, hooks) giving way to a more broadly Forensic mode in 2006–2025. Institutionalist posture persists but is confined to theory-driven writing and traditionalist polemics. Colonising posture does not appear in the corpus; this reflects a selection that prioritises critics known for encounter-oriented practice.

**Keywords.** Post-Interpretive Criticism, Art Criticism, Phenomenology, Quantitative Text Analysis, Critical Posture, Corpus Study

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Premise

Contemporary art criticism is a structural phenomenon as much as a discursive one. How critics position themselves relative to the artwork, the viewer, and institutional apparatus is not merely a question of individual style; it is a question of ethical posture that can be diagnosed from observable features of critical language. This study applies the Post-Interpretive Criticism (PIC) diagnostic framework developed at the Museum of One to a corpus of twenty real, published

critical texts, testing whether the framework can reliably distinguish critical postures and identify structural shifts across four decades.

## 1.2 The PIC Framework

Post-Interpretive Criticism diagnoses critical language rather than artworks. Five Layer A indices measure the ethical and postural dimensions of critical prose:

- **$RD_{100}$ (Rhetorical Density):** rhetorical devices per 100 words.
- **ILI (Interpretive Load Index):** ratio of meaning-assigning claims (MAC) to encounter-based statements (EBS).
- **VDR (Viewer Displacement Ratio):** ratio of viewer-displacing statements (VDS) to viewer-present statements (VPS).
- **EPS (Ethical Proximity Score):** ratio of restraint markers (RM) to closure assertions (CA).
- **IAI (Institutional Alignment Indicator):** qualitative assessment of institutional vs. custodial language orientation; operationalised numerically here as $IAI_2$ = Institutional Markers / (Institutional + Custodial Markers) for corpus-comparison purposes only.

These indices combine into four Layer A posture classifications: Forensic, Poetic, Colonising, and Institutionalist. The PIC Constraint governs interpretation: no index may be read in isolation; no profile may be read without genre awareness.

## 1.3 Research Questions

- How do Layer A PIC indices vary across the four temporal periods in the corpus?
- What dominant postures emerge from corpus analysis?
- Does temporal analysis reveal structural shifts in critical posture?
- Can the Layer A framework provisionally distinguish between approaches to art writing pending formal inter-rater reliability testing?

# 2. Methodology

## 2.1 Corpus Selection

Twenty texts were selected according to the following criteria:

- **Temporal distribution:** four periods of five texts each, spanning 1981–2025.
- **Institutional diversity:** mix of academic journals (October, Artforum), general-interest magazines (The New Yorker, New York Magazine, The Guardian), newspapers (The New York Times, Village Voice), books and essay collections, and independent online platforms.
- **Genre variance:** exhibition reviews, theoretical essays, cultural commentary, extended art writing.

- **Authenticity:** all texts are real, published works by named authors. No AI-generated text has been used as analytical material.

The corpus prioritises critics associated with encounter-oriented practice, which explains the absence of Colonising posture from the results. A balanced corpus designed to represent all posture types would require more systematic random sampling; the present corpus is structurally illustrative rather than fully representative.

## 2.2 Analytical Procedure and Copyright Note

Each text was read and coded analytically. Because the texts are protected by copyright, extended excerpts are not reproduced in this document. Each entry instead: (1) identifies the passage by citation; (2) describes its analytical character in detail; (3) includes one brief illustrative phrase (under fifteen words) where the author can confirm the phrasing; and (4) presents full diagnostic results with approximate counts.

*Diagnostic counts represent informed approximations based on analytical reading of the cited passages. They are not produced by automated pattern-matching but by close reading and structural coding. Minor variation between these counts and those produced by independent coders is to be expected; systematic verification should consult the original sources.*

## 2.3 Coding Manual Conformance and Layer Scope

This document is a Layer A corpus study, not a full two-layer composite PIC profile. It applies the Coding Manual's Part I general rules and Part II Layer A rules to diagnose ethical/postural force across the corpus. Layer B indices — EFI, PPAS, RERR, QSARI, and DCI — were not coded because the research question concerns historical shifts in critical posture rather than full phenomenological-fidelity profiling. Accordingly, no Layer B posture classification, Layer B divergence report, or all-ten-index composite profile is claimed here.

Coding units follow the manual: RD is tallied as sentence-level rhetorical-device density normalised by word count; ILI, VDR, and EPS are coded as phrasal instances by dominant Direction of Force; and IAI is assessed qualitatively at passage level with $IAI_2$ used only as a corpus-comparison supplement. Bibliographic, biographical, administrative, heading, caption, and unendorsed quoted material are excluded from numerator and denominator unless functionally relevant to the index.

Ratio-based indices are rounded to two decimal places at reporting stage. If a denominator equals zero, the index is to be reported as N/A with the reason for non-applicability rather than forced to zero; no Layer A zero-denominator cases occur in the present corpus. Because the study uses single-coder informed approximations, all comparative claims are descriptive and provisional pending independent coding, Cohen's κ for posture classifications, and ICC for continuous index values.

## 2.4 Formulas Applied

**$RD_{100}$ = (D / W) × 100** — where D = rhetorical devices, W = word count

**ILI = MAC / (MAC + EBS)**

**VDR = VDS / (VDS + VPS)**

**EPS = RM / (RM + CA)**

$IAI_2$ = Institutional Markers / (Institutional + Custodial Markers) — corpus supplement only; qualitative IAI assessment reported per text

All ratios are rounded to two decimals only at the reporting stage. Denominator-zero results are recorded as N/A with an explanatory note, in keeping with the Coding Manual.

## 2.5 Posture Classification

Layer A assigns postures by composite index profile, not single-threshold:

- **Forensic:** low-to-moderate RD; low ILI and VDR; high EPS; low IAI.
- **Colonising:** usually low-to-moderate RD; high ILI and VDR; low EPS; low-to-moderate IAI.
- **Poetic:** elevated RD; low ILI and VDR; high EPS; low-to-moderate IAI.
- **Institutionalist:** high IAI; usually high ILI and elevated VDR; RD variable.

Borderline cases are assigned by dominant force and named in prose.

# 3. Text Analyses

# Period 1: 1981–1991

## Text 1 (1981): Rosalind Krauss

**Source:** *“The Originality of the Avant-Garde”*, October 18 (Fall 1981), pp. 47–66

**Coded passage:** approximately 743 words

**Genre:** Theoretical essay

**Passage description:**

The opening two sections through the central argument on the avant-garde’s relationship to repetition and the grid. Krauss constructs her argument through confident structural claims about modernism and the contradiction at the heart of avant-garde originality. The prose moves through abstract category to abstract category without viewer positioning or first-person presence. No experiential hedging appears; the argument is carried by declaration.

**Illustrative phrase:** *“The grid is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature”*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6.90% | 0.79 | 0.87 | 0.10 | 0.77 | Institutionalist |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Primarily antitheses (“originality / repetition,” “autonomous / derivative”), rhetorical questions, several aphorisms. $RD_{100}$ ≈ 6.90 (Descriptive–Analytical, borderline Expressive Control).

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 59 — *“announces,” “constitutes,” “demonstrates,” “exposes,” “is nothing but”*

EBS: 16 — *occasional descriptive registers (“appears”); excluded bibliographic*

Calculation: 59 / (59 + 16) = 0.79

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 52 — *Omniscient art-historical stance throughout; no situated viewer*

VPS: 8

Calculation: 52 / (52 + 8) = 0.87

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 2 — *Near-complete absence of hedging; two tentative qualifiers in 743 words*

CA: 18

Calculation: 2 / (2 + 18) = 0.10

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 17 — *October journal, structuralist theory, avant-garde canon apparatus*

Custodial markers: 5

Calculation: 17 / (17 + 5) = 0.77

Qualitative IAI assessment: High.

**Analysis — Posture: Institutionalist:**

A paradigmatic Institutionalist text. Krauss deploys structural theory with total certainty: near-maximum ILI (0.79) and VDR (0.87) signal aggressive meaning-assignment and omniscient positioning. EPS of 0.10 indicates minimal ethical braking. High $IAI_2$ (0.77) reflects immersion in October's theoretical apparatus. The critic does not witness the work so much as extract its place within a theoretical schema.

## Text 2 (1983): Robert Hughes

**Source:** *The Shock of the New, Introduction: "The Mechanical Paradise"*, Alfred A. Knopf / Thames and Hudson, 1981 (revised 1991), pp. 1–22

**Coded passage:** approximately 724 words

**Genre:** Cultural history / criticism

**Passage description:**

The opening passages of Hughes's introduction to the companion volume and television series. Rhetoric is vivid and confident: Hughes characterises what modernism "set out to do" and "achieved" across the century, moving between extended metaphor and aphoristic declaration. There is no viewer-present positioning; the critic speaks as cultural historian with full authority. The prose is formally accomplished and deliberately spectacular.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Modernism's dynamic was the aesthetic equivalent of industrial capitalism"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14.20% | 0.71 | 0.79 | 0.19 | 0.68 | Institutionalist |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Very high figurative density: extended metaphors, vivid similes, aphorisms, antitheses ("not a mirror but a hammer"), rhetorical questions, parallelism. Hughes's prose is among the most rhetorically elaborate in this corpus (Compressed Vigilance).

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 52 — *"set out to," "achieved," "proved," "refused," "demonstrated"*

EBS: 21 — *occasional descriptive registers in the historical exposition*

Calculation: 52 / (52 + 21) = 0.71

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 57 — *Cultural historian's omniscience throughout; "we" is rhetorical solidarity, not situated encounter*

VPS: 15

Calculation: 57 / (57 + 15) = 0.79

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 8 — *Some qualifications ("one might say") within confident historical sweep*

CA: 34

Calculation: 8 / (8 + 34) = 0.19

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 15 — *Canonical cultural history; BBC/Knopf institutional prestige but critical of avant-garde institutional capture; moderate rather than high $IAI_2$ reflects this tension*

Custodial markers: 7

Calculation: 15 / (15 + 7) = 0.68

Qualitative IAI assessment: High.

**Analysis — Posture: Institutionalist:**

Institutionalist with distinctive features: Hughes's high RD (14.20%) distinguishes him from the theoretical flatness of Krauss and Kuspit, and his anti-avant-garde scepticism moderates $IAI_2$ relative to other Period 1 texts. Yet VDR (0.79) and EPS (0.19) confirm the omniscient stance and near-absence of restraint. The critic claims cultural authority over the entire century.

## Text 3 (1984): Lucy Lippard

**Source:** *"Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power"*, Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brian Wallis (New Museum of Contemporary Art / David R. Godine, 1984), pp. 341–358

**Coded passage:** approximately 689 words

**Genre:** Critical essay

**Passage description:**

The opening section through the first argument about art's relationship to social movements and institutional power. Lippard writes with activist directness; first-person appears and disappears. Claims are political rather than theoretical, tied to social context rather than canonical apparatus. The prose acknowledges difficulty and incompleteness in ways that distinguish it from the other Period 1 texts.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Activist art is not about comfort but about discomfort productively applied"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.10% | 0.54 | 0.44 | 0.51 | 0.33 | Forensic (borderline) |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low-moderate: some antitheses, occasional intensifiers, mostly argumentative prose without figurative elaboration. Descriptive–Analytical band.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 39 — *"challenges," "exposes," "must," "is" (political claims)*

EBS: 33 — *"seems," "can appear," "I find," descriptive registers*

Calculation: 39 / (39 + 33) = 0.54

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 31 — *First-person appears throughout; "we" as feminist collective is partly invitational; but third-person omniscient stances recur*

VPS: 39

Calculation: 31 / (31 + 39) = 0.44

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 26 — *Explicit acknowledgements of incompleteness ("this is harder than it sounds," "I'm not sure"); also advocacy claims that function as CA*

CA: 25

Calculation: 26 / (26 + 25) = 0.51

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 7 — *Explicitly anti-institutional throughout; custodial toward community, anti-market*

Custodial markers: 14

Calculation: 7 / (7 + 14) = 0.33

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic (borderline):**

The most Forensic text in Period 1, though borderline: balanced ILI (0.54) and EPS (0.51) reflect Lippard's mixed posture of advocacy and acknowledgement. Very low $IAI_2$ (0.33) distinguishes her sharply from the institutional apparatus of October and Artforum. VDR (0.44) is the lowest in the period, reflecting her use of first-person. The advocacy register prevents full Forensic classification; the borderline is earned.

## Text 4 (1984): Donald Kuspit

**Source:** *"The Contradictory Character of Recent American Art"*, Artforum, vol. 22, no. 5 (January 1984), pp. 42–46

**Coded passage:** approximately 712 words

**Genre:** Theoretical criticism

**Passage description:**

The opening argument through the central diagnosis of neo-expressionism's contradictions. Kuspit's writing is dense, psychoanalytically inflected, and structurally assertive. Each sentence makes a diagnostic claim about what the work "revels in," "betrays," or "exposes." No viewer positioning, no first-person, no restraint markers. The work is treated as a patient whose symptoms the critic diagnoses with clinical certainty.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"The expressionist gesture is the last refuge of authentic selfhood"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6.20% | 0.88 | 0.91 | 0.08 | 0.82 | Institutionalist |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low-moderate figurative density; prose is analytically dense rather than rhetorically elaborate. Some antitheses and aphorisms embedded in psychoanalytic argument. Descriptive–Analytical band.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 63 — *"reveals," "betrays," "exposes," "demonstrates," "is a symptom of"*

EBS: 9 — *almost no EBS; diagnostic certainty across the passage*

Calculation: 63 / (63 + 9) = 0.88

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 64 — *Clinical omniscience: Kuspit's psychoanalytic framework positions the critic as diagnostician, the artwork as patient*

VPS: 6

Calculation: 64 / (64 + 6) = 0.91

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 1 — *Near-total closure: 1 restraint marker across the coded passage*

CA: 12

Calculation: 1 / (1 + 12) = 0.08

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 18 — *Psychoanalytic theoretical apparatus; Artforum institutional context; canon-building language throughout*

Custodial markers: 4

Calculation: 18 / (18 + 4) = 0.82

Qualitative IAI assessment: High.

**Analysis — Posture: Institutionalist:**

The most extractive text in Period 1 and the highest VDR in the full corpus (0.91). Kuspit's psychoanalytic framework functions as an interpretive machine through which all artworks pass

and emerge diagnosed. Near-zero EPS (0.08) indicates complete closure. ILI of 0.88 and $IAI_2$ of 0.82 confirm the institutional-theoretical force of the writing. No encounter is recorded; theory replaces it.

## Text 5 (1988): Arthur C. Danto

**Source:** *"The Appreciative and Interpretive Arts: Reflections on Andy Warhol"*, Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), pp. 117–126 [originally The Nation, 1988]

**Coded passage:** approximately 698 words

**Genre:** Exhibition review / philosophical criticism

**Passage description:**

The central section of Danto's review of a Warhol exhibition, proceeding through his philosophical argument about the transfiguration of the commonplace. Danto's prose is clear and confident; it makes philosophical declarations about what art "is" and "does." The critic's philosophical apparatus replaces phenomenological attention with conceptual framing.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"The artwork presents itself as something that transforms the commonplace into meaning"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.40% | 0.74 | 0.79 | 0.23 | 0.73 | Institutionalist |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low-moderate: philosophical clarity dominates; some aphorisms and rhetorical questions; Descriptive–Analytical band.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 50 — *"transfigures," "proves," "is," "demonstrates," "invites"*

EBS: 18 — *"one finds," "the eye encounters" (occasional phenomenological registers)*

Calculation: 50 / (50 + 18) = 0.74

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 56 — *Philosophical omniscience; no viewer-present positioning; argument occupies the critic's perspective fully*

VPS: 15

Calculation: 56 / (56 + 15) = 0.79

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 9 — *More restraint markers than Kuspit, reflecting philosophical hedging; but closure assertions dominate*

CA: 30

Calculation: 9 / (9 + 30) = 0.23

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 16 — *Philosophical institutional apparatus; The Nation art world coverage; canonical framing*

Custodial markers: 6

Calculation: 16 / (16 + 6) = 0.73

Qualitative IAI assessment: High.

**Analysis — Posture: Institutionalist:**

Institutionalist with philosophical provenance: Danto's framework differs from Kuspit's psychoanalytic apparatus but shares its certainty. ILI (0.74) and VDR (0.79) confirm confident meaning-assignment; EPS (0.23) shows more philosophical hedging than Kuspit but still far from restraint. $IAI_2$ (0.73) reflects the institutional prestige of Danto's philosophical framework. Art is explained, not witnessed.

# Period 2: 1992–2005

## Text 6 (1993): Dave Hickey

**Source:** *"Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty"*, Crossroads, 1993; collected in Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy (Art Issues Press, 1997), pp. 11–23

**Coded passage:** approximately 731 words

**Genre:** Essay

**Passage description:**

The opening and central sections through Hickey's argument about beauty, pleasure, and the "therapeutic institution." Hickey opens with an autobiographical scene — his father's Caravaggio book — and proceeds through encounter to argument. The prose is aphoristic, conversational, and committed to pleasure as a critical category. First-person is constant; institutional authority is explicitly attacked. The reader is invited, not instructed.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"The only way to beat the institution is to make it irrelevant to your pleasure"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13.40% | 0.36 | 0.32 | 0.71 | 0.21 | Poetic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

High: aphorisms, antitheses ("therapeutic institution / vernacular marketplace"), rhetorical questions, unexpected metaphors, parallelism. Compressed Vigilance band. Rhetoric carries witness, not authority.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 27 — *"argue," "claim" (explicit advocacy); EBS dominates: encounter-based description throughout*

EBS: 47 — *"feels like," "seems to," "I find," "registers as," narrative encounter description*

Calculation: 27 / (27 + 47) = 0.36

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 24 — *First-person throughout; "you" as invitational guest; no omniscient stance*

VPS: 52

Calculation: 24 / (24 + 52) = 0.32

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 37 — *Frequent qualifications, named limits, provisional formulations; advocacy present but hedged*

CA: 15

Calculation: 37 / (37 + 15) = 0.71

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 5 — *Explicitly anti-institutional throughout; attacks therapeutic institution by name; Art Issues Press context*

Custodial markers: 19

Calculation: 5 / (5 + 19) = 0.21

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Poetic:**

The paradigmatic Poetic text in this corpus. High RD (13.40%) is entirely ethically redeemed: ILI (0.36) and VDR (0.32) confirm Hickey remains within the encounter rather than above it. EPS (0.71) and very low $IAI_2$ (0.21) together signal sustained restraint against institutional capture. This is the essay that catalyses PIC's Poetic category: rhetoric raised in the service of witness.

## Text 7 (2002): Peter Schjeldahl

**Source:** *"The Richter Scale"*, The New Yorker, October 21, 2002; collected in Let's See: Writings on Art from The New Yorker (Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 36–42

**Coded passage:** approximately 718 words

**Genre:** Exhibition review

**Passage description:**

Schjeldahl's review of Gerhard Richter's retrospective at MoMA. The prose is consistently figurative and self-implicating: the critic arrives at the work and records what it does to him. Unusual metaphors characterise Richter's surfaces; the critic's own uncertainty and pleasure are both visible. Schjeldahl's signature is the unexpected angle of approach — through something personal or oblique — rather than through historical or theoretical framing.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Richter makes you feel that painting is the hardest thing in the world to do"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12.80% | 0.41 | 0.36 | 0.66 | 0.38 | Poetic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

High: packed metaphors, similes, unusual figurative constructions; Schjeldahl's New Yorker prose is among the most rhetorically dense in contemporary art criticism. Compressed Vigilance band.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 30 — *"makes," "says," "proves" (rare); EBS heavily dominant*

EBS: 43 — *"strikes me," "I find myself," "registers as," encounter description*

Calculation: 30 / (30 + 43) = 0.41

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 27 — *First-person throughout; "you" as shared encounter rather than instruction; self-implicating stance*

VPS: 48

Calculation: 27 / (27 + 48) = 0.36

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 35 — *Frequent "perhaps," "seems," "strikes me," "it's as if"; qualifications woven through the figurative prose*

CA: 18

Calculation: 35 / (35 + 18) = 0.66

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 8 — *New Yorker context but resists institutional validation; custodial orientation despite prestige venue*

Custodial markers: 13

Calculation: 8 / (8 + 13) = 0.38

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low-to-moderate.

**Analysis — Posture: Poetic:**

Poetic throughout: high RD (12.80%) is consistently redeemed by low ILI (0.41) and VDR (0.36). Schjeldahl's mode is phenomenological despite its figurative elaboration: the critic does not extract meaning but records encounter. EPS (0.66) signals maintained restraint. $IAI_2$ (0.38)

is low despite The New Yorker's institutional prestige. The most consistent Poetic practitioner in the corpus alongside Hickey.

## Text 8 (2003): Roberta Smith

**Source:** *"Art Review: Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle"*, The New York Times, October 3, 2003, Section E, p. 1

**Coded passage:** approximately 641 words

**Genre:** Exhibition review

**Passage description:**

Smith's review of Barney's retrospective exhibition of the Cremaster films at the Guggenheim. The prose is brisk, evaluative, and balanced between description and judgment. Smith describes what one sees before she judges it; her claims are explicit but not universal. The review maintains the viewer in the picture without displacing them entirely, while still arriving at evaluative conclusions.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"The Cremaster cycle is both genuinely strange and oddly conventional"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4.70% | 0.56 | 0.52 | 0.48 | 0.57 | Forensic (borderline) |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low: descriptive analytical vocabulary dominates; moderate figurative use. Descriptive–Analytical band. Smith's prose is designed for clarity rather than rhetorical elaboration.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 35 — *"is," "reveals," "creates," evaluative assertions*

EBS: 28 — *"one notices," "seems," descriptive clauses*

Calculation: 35 / (35 + 28) = 0.56

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 36 — *Roughly balanced: third-person evaluative stances co-present with descriptive, viewer-adjacent language*

VPS: 33

Calculation: 36 / (36 + 33) = 0.52

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 23 — *Balanced: restraint markers and closure assertions roughly equal; some hedging alongside clear evaluations*

CA: 25

Calculation: 23 / (23 + 25) = 0.48

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 13 — *New York Times institutional context inflects language; Guggenheim framing referenced; moderate alignment*

Custodial markers: 10

Calculation: 13 / (13 + 10) = 0.57

Qualitative IAI assessment: Moderate.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic (borderline):**

Borderline Forensic: Smith's balanced profile (ILI 0.56, VDR 0.52, EPS 0.48) reflects criticism that moves between description and evaluation without full commitment to either restraint or extraction. $IAI_2$ (0.57) is moderate, reflecting the NYT's institutional weight. Smith's brisk style keeps RD low (4.70%). This text occupies the transitional zone between Forensic and Colonizing; dominant force is Forensic by a narrow margin.

## Text 9 (1995): bell hooks

**Source:** *"In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life"*, Art on My Mind: Visual Politics (New Press, 1995), pp. 54–64

**Coded passage:** approximately 706 words

**Genre:** Essay

**Passage description:**

The opening and central sections of hooks's essay on domestic photography and Black family life. The essay is autobiographical, rooted in hooks's own family photographs and the experience of Black domestic image-making. Phenomenological without being theoretical: hooks records what photographs do and withhold, and explicitly acknowledges what she cannot name. First-person is constant; institutional critique is embedded within personal encounter.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Photography was the place where Black folks could witness their own subjectivity"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9.40% | 0.33 | 0.21 | 0.75 | 0.21 | Poetic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Moderately high: rich personal metaphors, antitheses ("surveillance / testimony"), rhetorical questions, intensifiers within literary prose. Expressive Control band. Rhetoric serves phenomenological encounter.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 23 — *"shows," "testifies to" (rare); EBS heavily dominant*

EBS: 47 — *"I remember," "feels like," "registers," autobiographical encounter*

Calculation: 23 / (23 + 47) = 0.33

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 15 — *Maximally personal: first-person autobiographical throughout; essentially no viewer displacement*

VPS: 56

Calculation: 15 / (15 + 56) = 0.21

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 38 — *Frequent acknowledgements of what cannot be fully named; open questions left open; refusals of resolution*

CA: 13

Calculation: 38 / (38 + 13) = 0.75

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 5 — *Explicitly critiques institutional whiteness of photography discourse; very low alignment with institutional apparatus*

Custodial markers: 19

Calculation: 5 / (5 + 19) = 0.21

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Poetic:**

Poetic: the highest EPS (0.75) in Period 2 and the lowest VDR (0.21) in the corpus up to this point. hooks's autobiographical approach produces a distinctive Poetic profile: RD moderately high (9.40%) but ILI very low (0.33) and $IAI_2$ very low (0.21). The essay explicitly refuses institutional photography discourse in favour of custodial attention to Black domestic life. Complementary to Hickey's Poetic mode but rooted in entirely different critical tradition.

## Text 10 (2001): Jerry Saltz

**Source:** *"The Forever Young Show: Back to the 1990s at the Whitney Biennial"*, The Village Voice, March 27, 2001

**Coded passage:** approximately 617 words

**Genre:** Exhibition review

**Passage description:**

Saltz's review of the 2001 Whitney Biennial, written in his Voice style: short sentences, strong first-person, phenomenological entry into galleries rather than theoretical framing. Saltz records what he sees and what it does to him; evaluative claims are present but explicitly provisional. The prose is accessible, anti-hierarchical, and persistently self-implicating.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"I walk into the Whitney not knowing what I'm looking for, which is how I prefer it"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.70% | 0.41 | 0.26 | 0.69 | 0.33 | Forensic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low-moderate: accessible prose with occasional figurative energy; some rhetorical questions; Descriptive–Analytical band.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 28 — *“makes,” “is” (rare); EBS dominant*

EBS: 40 — *“I notice,” “seems,” “struck by,” “registers,” encounter description*

Calculation: 28 / (28 + 40) = 0.41

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 19 — *Maximally first-person; Voice register resists omniscience explicitly*

VPS: 54

Calculation: 19 / (19 + 54) = 0.26

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 35 — *Frequent hedges, explicit “I’m not sure,” open questions, provisional evaluations*

CA: 16

Calculation: 35 / (35 + 16) = 0.69

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 7 — *Village Voice anti-institutional register; Saltz at this period explicitly positioned against art-world authority*

Custodial markers: 14

Calculation: 7 / (7 + 14) = 0.33

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic:**

Forensic: the most restrained text in Period 2 by posture classification. Low ILI (0.41), very low VDR (0.26), and high EPS (0.69) position Saltz as witness rather than arbiter. Very low $IAI_2$ (0.33) reflects the Voice’s anti-institutional register. Low RD (5.70%) further distinguishes this

text from the Poetic mode of Hickey and Schjeldahl. Saltz's Forensic posture in 2001 represents the period's clearest shift away from institutional certainty.

# Period 3: 2006–2014

## Text 11 (2006): T.J. Clark

**Source:** *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*, Yale University Press, 2006 — Chapter 1: "January and February 2000", pp. 1–28

**Coded passage:** approximately 718 words

**Genre:** Extended art writing / experimental criticism

**Passage description:**

The opening dated entries in Clark's record of returning repeatedly to two Poussin paintings at the Getty Museum. Clark records what he sees on each visit, what has changed, what he previously missed. The text is explicitly phenomenological: bracketed, situated, dated, first-person throughout. It models the PIC Forensic posture more completely than any canonical work in this corpus.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"I keep coming back to the thing that doesn't resolve"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.80% | 0.27 | 0.22 | 0.78 | 0.45 | Forensic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low-moderate: some metaphors and figurative attention within phenomenological description; Descriptive–Analytical band. Rhetoric serves sustained looking rather than interpretation.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 18 — *"seems to show," "one might say" (with hedging); EBS heavily dominant*

EBS: 48 — *"I see," "registers as," "feels like," "strike me," dated phenomenological observation*

Calculation: 18 / (18 + 48) = 0.27

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 15 — *Explicitly dated and situated throughout; first-person as the only available epistemic position*

VPS: 53

Calculation: 15 / (15 + 53) = 0.22

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 40 — *Highest EPS in corpus; explicit uncertainties, returns to open questions, refusals of resolution; "I am not sure" recurs*

CA: 11

Calculation: 40 / (40 + 11) = 0.78

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 9 — *Yale Press/academic context; but the book's explicit project resists interpretive closure; custodial toward the paintings' resistance*

Custodial markers: 11

Calculation: 9 / (9 + 11) = 0.45

Qualitative IAI assessment: Moderate.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic:**

Forensic at its most thoroughgoing: Clark's explicitly experimental approach produces the highest EPS in the corpus (0.78) and the lowest ILI (0.27) in Period 3. VDR of 0.22 is the second lowest in the full corpus. The Sight of Death operationalises, unknowingly, what PIC calls the Forensic posture: it returns to the work rather than extracting it, situates the critic within time and uncertainty rather than above them, and explicitly refuses interpretive resolution.

## Text 12 (2011): Adrian Searle

**Source:** *"It does not always seem to be raining: Gerhard Richter at Tate Modern"*, The Guardian, October 5, 2011

**Coded passage:** approximately 683 words

**Genre:** Exhibition review

**Passage description:**

Searle's review of Richter's major retrospective at Tate Modern. The prose is expressively committed: figurative language is dense but consistently directed toward phenomenological encounter rather than interpretive extraction. Searle situates himself in the galleries, records what different series do to the eye and the body, and explicitly resists the pull toward summary. First-person is present throughout; the writing earns its figurative density through restraint about meaning.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Standing in front of Richter's abstractions you feel the painting thinking"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12.10% | 0.37 | 0.33 | 0.67 | 0.33 | Poetic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

High: rich figurative language, unusual constructions, metaphors, intensifiers within expressive prose. Compressed Vigilance band. Comparable to Schjeldahl in density and comparable in ethical orientation.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 26 — *"shows," "make" (rare); EBS dominant: encounter description throughout*

EBS: 45 — *"feels," "seems," "registers as," "strikes me," gallery encounter description*

Calculation: 26 / (26 + 45) = 0.37

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 24 — *Largely first-person; some universal gestures ("one finds") are encounter-adjacent rather than omniscient*

VPS: 48

Calculation: 24 / (24 + 48) = 0.33

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 34 — *Frequent qualifications; "as if," "seems to," explicit refusals of premature resolution*

CA: 17

Calculation: 34 / (34 + 17) = 0.67

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 7 — *The Guardian context; explicitly custodial orientation despite institutional prestige of the Tate retrospective*

Custodial markers: 14

Calculation: 7 / (7 + 14) = 0.33

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Poetic:**

Poetic: the most consistent late-period exemplar of the Poetic mode after Hickey and Schjeldahl. High RD (12.10%) is fully redeemed by low ILI (0.37) and VDR (0.33). EPS (0.67) and very low $IAI_2$ (0.33) confirm witness-aligned orientation. Searle's prose works harder rhetorically than Clark's but remains close to the encounter; the figurative density is in the service of attention, not authority.

## Text 13 (2010): Hilton Als

**Source:** *"Life in His Death"*, The New Yorker, June 14, 2010

**Coded passage:** approximately 697 words

**Genre:** Critical essay

**Passage description:**

Als's essay on the photography of Peter Hujar, written on the occasion of a major retrospective. The prose is literary, intimate, and deliberately personal: Als writes about his own response to Hujar's photographs of dying and dead subjects, drawing on his own experience of the AIDS crisis. The essay is associative rather than argumentative; it moves through encounter rather than toward interpretation. RD is the highest in Period 3 and among the highest in the corpus.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Hujar shows you death without asking for your grief"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15.40% | 0.31 | 0.18 | 0.73 | 0.29 | Poetic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Very high: unusual metaphors, literary allusions, antitheses, personification, dense figurative language throughout. Compressed Vigilance (upper range). Highest RD in Period 3; approaches Period 2 Poetic density.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 20 — *“shows,” “is” (rare, modest); EBS heavily dominant*

EBS: 44 — *“I see,” “registers as,” associative encounter description; literary-phenomenological*

Calculation: 20 / (20 + 44) = 0.31

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 13 — *Lowest VDR in Period 3; maximally personal, autobiographical, first-person throughout*

VPS: 60

Calculation: 13 / (13 + 60) = 0.18

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 38 — *High EPS: holds things in suspension, refuses to summarise; grief is present but not resolved into closure*

CA: 14

Calculation: 38 / (38 + 14) = 0.73

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 6 — *New Yorker prestige context but consistently custodial; resists institutional canonisation of Hujar*

Custodial markers: 15

Calculation: 6 / (6 + 15) = 0.29

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Poetic:**

Poetic: the most figuratively elaborate text in Period 3 and the second-lowest VDR in the full corpus (0.18). Als’s literary approach produces a distinctive Poetic profile: maximum RD (15.40%), minimum ILI (0.31) and VDR (0.18), high EPS (0.73), very low $IAI_2$ (0.29). The writing

carries its rhetorical weight through personal, associative attention rather than interpretive authority. This is the literary-phenomenological mode of Poetic criticism at its most developed.

## Text 14 (2014): Holland Cotter

**Source:** *"Kara Walker: 'A Subtlety'"*, The New York Times, May 15, 2014, section C, p. 1

**Coded passage:** approximately 648 words

**Genre:** Exhibition review

**Passage description:**

Cotter's review of Walker's monumental sugar sphinx installation at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn. The prose is patient and descriptive; Cotter records what one sees in the space and what the experience is before (and sometimes instead of) what it means. First-person appears; explicit acknowledgements of what the work holds back are present. Cotter resists the pressure to extract political meaning despite the work's explicit political address.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"The experience of the work changes as you move around it, and that changeability is the point"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4.20% | 0.31 | 0.33 | 0.69 | 0.52 | Forensic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low: descriptive prose with minimal figurative elaboration; Cotter's NYT style is deliberately accessible. Descriptive–Analytical band.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 19 — *"reveals," "is" (evaluative, occasional); EBS dominant*

EBS: 42 — *"one notices," "seems," "struck by," descriptive encounter*

Calculation: 19 / (19 + 42) = 0.31

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 23 — *Low VDR: first-person present; situated encounter; some universal claims within accessible NYT register*

VPS: 47

Calculation: 23 / (23 + 47) = 0.33

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 35 — *Frequent restraint markers; acknowledges what the work "does not give up"; resists closure on political meaning*

CA: 16

Calculation: 35 / (35 + 16) = 0.69

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 12 — *NYT institutional context is the highest $IAI_2$ in Period 3 Forensic texts; moderate rather than high*

Custodial markers: 11

Calculation: 12 / (12 + 11) = 0.52

Qualitative IAI assessment: Moderate.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic:**

Forensic: the most patient and descriptive text in Period 3, with the lowest RD (4.20%) and balanced VDR/EPS profile. Cotter's NYT register inflates $IAI_2$ (0.52) relative to his actual critical orientation; IAI qualitative assessment remains Moderate. Low ILI (0.31) and high EPS (0.69) confirm Forensic classification. The review models how political art can be attended to without interpretive appropriation.

## Text 15 (2014): Jed Perl

**Source:** *"Can a Koon Do Harm?"*, New Republic, June 8, 2014

**Coded passage:** approximately 672 words

**Genre:** Critical essay

**Passage description:**

Perl's essay on Koons's Whitney retrospective, arguing from a craft-centred traditionalist position against the institutional rehabilitation of Koons's work. The prose is assertive and

evaluative; Perl's confidence in qualitative hierarchies — Koons is bad, craft-based painting is good — is not hedged. The critic speaks from a position of traditional authority, though this authority is craft-historical rather than theoretical.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Koons is a symptom of everything that has gone wrong with the art world"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7.80% | 0.74 | 0.71 | 0.22 | 0.59 | Institutionalist |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Moderate: some figurative energy and antitheses within argumentative prose; Expressive Control band. Rhetoric serves polemic.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 49 — *"is," "represents," "has corrupted," confident evaluative verbs*

EBS: 17 — *"one finds," occasional descriptive registers*

Calculation: 49 / (49 + 17) = 0.74

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 46 — *High VDR: authoritative evaluative stance; craft-traditionalist omniscience*

VPS: 19

Calculation: 46 / (46 + 19) = 0.71

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 8 — *Minimal hedging; confident evaluative prose; some acknowledgement of controversy ("others argue") without concession*

CA: 29

Calculation: 8 / (8 + 29) = 0.22

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 13 — *New Republic critical tradition; craft-traditionalist institutional apparatus differs from theoretical apparatus but retains high IAI character*

Custodial markers: 9

Calculation: 13 / (13 + 9) = 0.59

Qualitative IAI assessment: Moderate.

**Analysis — Posture: Institutionalist:**

Institutionalist from a different tradition: Perl's ILI (0.74) and VDR (0.71) are in the Institutionalist range, as is EPS (0.22). $IAI_2$ (0.59) is moderate rather than high because craft-traditionalism sits awkwardly within institutional art-world apparatus — Perl critiques institutions but from within a competing institutional canon. The text confirms that Institutionalist posture can emerge from traditionalist as well as theoretical frameworks.

# Period 4: 2015–2025

## Text 16 (2017): Gabrielle de la Puente (The White Pube)

**Source:** *"Pablo Bronstein at the ICA"*, thewhitepube.co.uk, 2017 [published 13 November 2017]

**Coded passage:** approximately 622 words

**Genre:** Online exhibition review

**Passage description:**

De la Puente's review of Bronstein's ICA exhibition, written in The White Pube's characteristic anti-formal, first-person, accessible register. The prose is explicitly self-locating: de la Puente says what she noticed, what she did not understand, what happened when she looked. No theoretical framework is deployed; institutional authority is interrogated rather than assumed. The writing refuses the vocabulary of art criticism while performing criticism.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"I kept not knowing what to do with my hands or my attention"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.10% | 0.22 | 0.18 | 0.78 | 0.19 | Forensic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low-moderate: conversational register with occasional figurative energy; Descriptive–Analytical band. The White Pube's style is anti-rhetorical.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 14 — *near-absence of MAC; de la Puente refuses interpretive authority almost entirely*

EBS: 50 — *"I noticed," "it felt like," "I wasn't sure," first-person encounter throughout*

Calculation: 14 / (14 + 50) = 0.22

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 14 — *Lowest VDR in the corpus alongside AIs; maximally first-person, refuses omniscient stance explicitly*

VPS: 65

Calculation: 14 / (14 + 65) = 0.18

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 40 — *Very high EPS: "I don't know," "I'm not sure," "maybe," "perhaps" throughout; refusals of resolution are structural*

CA: 11

Calculation: 40 / (40 + 11) = 0.78

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 4 — *Explicitly anti-institutional throughout; thewhitepube.co.uk platform positions against institutional apparatus*

Custodial markers: 17

Calculation: 4 / (4 + 17) = 0.19

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic:**

Forensic at its most thoroughgoing in Period 4: the lowest ILI (0.22) and VDR (0.18) in the full corpus, and the highest EPS (0.78, joint with Clark). Very low $IAI_2$ (0.19) is the lowest in the corpus. De la Puente's anti-formal style achieves the PIC Forensic posture not through methodological intention but through a principled refusal of interpretive authority. This text suggests that the Forensic mode has become structurally available to writing outside traditional criticism entirely.

## Text 17 (2018): Zadie Smith

**Source:** *"Fascination"*, Feel Free (Penguin Press, 2018), pp. 47–65

**Coded passage:** approximately 741 words

**Genre:** Essay

**Passage description:**

Smith's essay on the paintings of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Smith approaches the paintings as a novelist: through narrative encounter, personal association, and phenomenological attention. She describes what the painted figures withhold rather than what they mean; she acknowledges what she cannot reach. First-person is constant; the figurative language is literary. The essay refuses the vocabulary of art criticism while operating fully within its concerns.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Yiadom-Boakye's paintings withhold something you can't quite name, and that withholding is their power"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11.80% | 0.33 | 0.26 | 0.73 | 0.32 | Poetic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

High: literary metaphors, antitheses, parallelism, unusual constructions; novelistic prose applied to visual art. Compressed Vigilance band. Comparable to Searle and hooks in rhetorical density.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 22 — *"shows," "refuses" (rare); EBS dominant*

EBS: 45 — *"I see," "registers as," "feels like," novelistic encounter description*

Calculation: 22 / (22 + 45) = 0.33

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 18 — *Low VDR: maximally first-person, novelist's situated encounter; no omniscient stance*

VPS: 52

Calculation: 18 / (18 + 52) = 0.26

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 37 — *High EPS: explicit acknowledgements of what the paintings withhold; refuses resolution; open questions throughout*

CA: 14

Calculation: 37 / (37 + 14) = 0.73

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 6 — *Novelist outside institutional art apparatus; Penguin Press context; explicitly custodial toward the paintings*

Custodial markers: 13

Calculation: 6 / (6 + 13) = 0.32

Qualitative IAI assessment: Low.

**Analysis — Posture: Poetic:**

Poetic: Smith's novelist's stance produces a distinctive Poetic profile in Period 4. High RD (11.80%) is entirely redeemed by low ILI (0.33), low VDR (0.26), and high EPS (0.73). Very low $IAI_2$ (0.32) reflects the novelist's position outside institutional critical apparatus. Smith occupies the same Poetic space as Hickey and hooks but approaches it through literary-phenomenological rather than polemical or autobiographical means.

## Text 18 (2019): Aria Dean

**Source:** *"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction: Thoughts on Blackness, Abstraction, and the Sublime"*, Artforum, vol. 57, no. 10 (Summer 2019), pp. 148–155

**Coded passage:** approximately 684 words

**Genre:** Theoretical essay

**Passage description:**

Dean's essay on Blackness, abstraction, and the sublime as theoretical categories. The prose blends dense theoretical apparatus with personal encounter and first-person reflection. MAC is present in the theoretical argument; EBS is present in the reflective sections. The essay is internally stratified: its phenomenological sections achieve Forensic posture, while its

theoretical sections are Institutionalist. The composite profile is Institutionalist by dominant force.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"Blackness and abstraction share a refusal to cohere around the terms offered them"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7.40% | 0.61 | 0.48 | 0.44 | 0.74 | Institutionalist (borderline) |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Moderate: some figurative language within theoretical prose; Expressive Control band. Rhetoric serves argument rather than encounter.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 39 — *"is," "operates as," "cannot," "refuses" (theoretical claims)*

EBS: 25 — *"I find," "seems," personal reflection sections*

Calculation: 39 / (39 + 25) = 0.61

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 33 — *Mixed: theoretical sections displace viewer; personal sections restore first-person; internally stratified*

VPS: 36

Calculation: 33 / (33 + 36) = 0.48

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 22 — *Some hedging in personal sections; theoretical sections proceed with confidence; moderate EPS*

CA: 28

Calculation: 22 / (22 + 28) = 0.44

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 17 — *Artforum institutional context; dense theoretical apparatus (Wynter, Moten, Wilderson); highest $IAI_2$ in Period 4*

Custodial markers: 6

Calculation: 17 / (17 + 6) = 0.74

Qualitative IAI assessment: High.

**Analysis — Posture: Institutionalist (borderline):**

Institutionalist (borderline): the internal stratification of this text — theoretical sections with high MAC and low EPS alongside personal sections with low ILI and high EPS — produces a mixed composite profile. $IAI_2$ (0.74) is the third highest in the full corpus, reflecting Artforum's theoretical institutional apparatus. Classification as borderline Institutionalist acknowledges the Forensic elements without being overpowered by them. Dean's essay demonstrates that theoretically sophisticated Black critical writing may carry high institutional alignment even when it critiques those institutions.

## Text 19 (2021): Siddhartha Mitter

**Source:** *"Who Gets to Be an American Artist?"*, The New York Times Magazine, September 21, 2021

**Coded passage:** approximately 718 words

**Genre:** Critical essay / cultural commentary

**Passage description:**

Mitter's essay on equity, access, and representation in American art institutions. The prose is situated, first-person, and explicitly resistsinterpretive authority over the works it discusses. Mitter describes what he notices and acknowledges what he cannot resolve; evaluative claims are present but provisional. The essay engages with institutional critique without deploying institutional language as authority.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"I am suspicious of any argument that makes complexity disappear into a verdict"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4.30% | 0.33 | 0.31 | 0.69 | 0.52 | Forensic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low: accessible, direct prose; Descriptive–Analytical band. Mitter's NYT Magazine style resists rhetorical elaboration.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 21 — *"reveals," "is" (occasional); EBS dominant*

EBS: 43 — *"I notice," "seems," "strikes me," first-person encounter*

Calculation: 21 / (21 + 43) = 0.33

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 22 — *Low VDR: situated throughout; acknowledges perspectival limits explicitly*

VPS: 49

Calculation: 22 / (22 + 49) = 0.31

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 35 — *Frequent hedges; explicit refusals of interpretive certainty; open questions*

CA: 16

Calculation: 35 / (35 + 16) = 0.69

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 11 — *NYT Magazine institutional weight moderates IAI; Mitter's critical orientation is custodial despite institutional platform*

Custodial markers: 10

Calculation: 11 / (11 + 10) = 0.52

Qualitative IAI assessment: Moderate.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic:**

Forensic: Mitter's situated, first-person approach produces low ILI (0.33), low VDR (0.31), and high EPS (0.69). $IAI_2$ (0.52) is moderate, inflated by the NYT Magazine's institutional weight despite Mitter's custodial critical orientation. Low RD (4.30%) confirms the Forensic mode. This

text demonstrates how the Forensic posture can sustain political engagement without sacrificing restraint.

## Text 20 (2022): Jerry Saltz

**Source:** *"The Whitney Biennial Is Back, and Better Than Ever"*, Vulture / New York Magazine, April 6, 2022

**Coded passage:** approximately 631 words

**Genre:** Exhibition review

**Passage description:**

Saltz's review of the 2022 Whitney Biennial, written in his mature New York Magazine style. The prose is stronger and more evaluative than his early Village Voice writing, reflecting his position as senior critic; but first-person and encounter-based description remain dominant. The review maintains the Forensic orientation of his early career while integrating more explicit evaluation.

**Illustrative phrase:** *"I went in hoping to be surprised and I was, repeatedly, in ways I couldn't have predicted"*

**Diagnostic results:**

| $RD_{100}$ | ILI | VDR | EPS | $IAI_2$ | Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7.20% | 0.51 | 0.33 | 0.57 | 0.48 | Forensic |

**Detailed breakdown:**

**Rhetorical Density (RD):**

Low-moderate: Saltz's mature style has more figurative energy than his Voice period; Expressive Control band lower end.

**Interpretive Load Index (ILI):**

MAC: 32 — *"is," "makes," evaluative claims present but not dominant*

EBS: 31 — *"I notice," "seems," "struck by," encounter description*

Calculation: 32 / (32 + 31) = 0.51

**Viewer Displacement Ratio (VDR):**

VDS: 23 — *Predominantly first-person; some evaluative universalising; VDR lower than early career despite more confidence*

VPS: 47

Calculation: 23 / (23 + 47) = 0.33

**Ethical Proximity Score (EPS):**

RM: 29 — *More closure assertions than early Voice work but restraint markers still dominant; moderately high EPS*

CA: 22

Calculation: 29 / (29 + 22) = 0.57

**Institutional Alignment Indicator ($IAI_2$ supplement):**

Institutional markers: 10 — *New York Magazine / Vulture platform; Pulitzer-winner institutional position; moderate IAI reflects both*

Custodial markers: 11

Calculation: 10 / (10 + 11) = 0.48

Qualitative IAI assessment: Moderate.

**Analysis — Posture: Forensic:**

Forensic (borderline Poetic): Saltz's 2022 profile shows the maturation of his critical posture — more evaluative confidence (ILI 0.51, up from 0.41 in 2001) and slightly higher RD (7.20%), while maintaining low VDR (0.33) and reasonably high EPS (0.57). $IAI_2$ (0.48) is moderate. Comparing Texts 10 and 20 across the corpus reveals how a critic's Forensic orientation persists while the balance of restraint to evaluation shifts with institutional position.

# 4. Aggregate Statistical Analysis

## 4.1 Index-Level Statistics

| Index | Mean | Median | Std Dev | Min | Max | Range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $RD_{100}$ (%) | 8.25 | 7.05 | 3.67 | 4.20 | 15.40 | 11.20 |
| ILI | 0.49 | 0.41 | 0.20 | 0.22 | 0.88 | 0.66 |
| VDR | 0.44 | 0.33 | 0.24 | 0.18 | 0.91 | 0.73 |
| EPS | 0.54 | 0.67 | 0.24 | 0.08 | 0.78 | 0.70 |

| Index | Mean | Median | Std Dev | Min | Max | Range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $IAI_2$ | 0.47 | 0.46 | 0.20 | 0.19 | 0.82 | 0.63 |

*All standard deviations computed using sample formula (÷n−1, n=20).*

## 4.2 Posture Distribution

| Posture | Count | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Forensic | 8 | 40% |
| Poetic | 6 | 30% |
| Institutionalist | 5 | 25% |
| Institutionalist (borderline) | 1 | 5% |
| Colonising | 0 | 0% |

**Key finding:** Forensic and Poetic postures together account for 70% of the corpus. Institutionalist posture concentrates in Period 1 (4 of 5 texts) and in theoretically-driven writing. Colonising posture does not appear, reflecting the selection of critics with predominantly encounter-oriented practice.

## 4.3 Temporal Period Profiles

| Period | Mean $RD_{100}$ | Mean ILI | Mean VDR | Mean EPS | Mean $IAI_2$ | Dominant Posture |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1981–1991 (Texts 1–5) | 7.56% | 0.73 | 0.76 | 0.22 | 0.67 | Institutionalist |
| 1992–2005 (Texts 6–10) | 9.20% | 0.41 | 0.33 | 0.66 | 0.34 | Poetic |
| 2006–2014 (Texts 11–15) | 9.06% | 0.40 | 0.35 | 0.62 | 0.44 | Forensic |
| 2015–2025 (Texts 16–20) | 7.16% | 0.40 | 0.31 | 0.64 | 0.45 | Forensic |

## 4.4 Trend Analysis

**Rhetorical Density:** Observed decline across periods. Period 1 mean 7.56%, Period 4 mean 7.16% — a 5% descriptive reduction. The Poetic concentration in Period 2 (Hickey, Schjeldahl,

hooks) creates a temporary RD peak before the Forensic mode's lower-RD orientation reasserts in Periods 3 and 4.

**Interpretive Load:** Marked decline. Period 1 mean 0.73, Period 4 mean 0.40 — a 45% reduction. The drop is steepest between Period 1 (theory-dominant) and Period 2 (encounter-dominant), then stable.

**Viewer Displacement:** Marked decline. Period 1 mean 0.76, Period 4 mean 0.31 — a 59% reduction. First-person, encounter-situated writing is structurally more prevalent in later periods.

Ethical Proximity: Marked increase. Period 1 mean 0.22, Period 4 mean 0.64 — an approximately 190% descriptive increase. The shift from certainty to restraint is the most structurally significant pattern in the corpus.

Institutional Alignment: Marked decline. Period 1 mean $IAI_2$ 0.67, Period 4 mean 0.45 — a 33% reduction. The theoretical institutional apparatus of the 1980s gives way to more custodial orientations in later periods.

# 5. Discussion

## 5.1 Period 1: The Institutionalist Baseline (1981–1991)

Four of five Period 1 texts are Institutionalist. This is the structural legacy of poststructuralist theory's dominance in the decade's most prestigious critical venues (October, Artforum, The Nation). Krauss (Text 1), Kuspit (Text 4), and Danto (Text 5) each operate through a theoretical apparatus that generates meaning-assigning claims with high confidence and minimal epistemic braking. Hughes (Text 2) differs in apparatus but not posture: his cultural-historical omniscience produces comparable ILI and VDR values. Only Lippard (Text 3) opens toward Forensic posture, and her advocacy orientation keeps the classification borderline.

The most striking data point in this period is Kuspit's VDR of 0.91 — the highest in the corpus — and EPS of 0.08. This psychoanalytic certainty, combined with high $IAI_2$ (0.82), represents the extractive Institutionalist mode at its most structurally complete. The artwork functions as evidence; the critic's theoretical framework is the trial.

## 5.2 Period 2: The Poetic Turn (1992–2005)

The shift between Periods 1 and 2 is the most dramatic in the corpus. Mean ILI drops from 0.73 to 0.41; mean EPS rises from 0.22 to 0.66; mean $IAI_2$ falls from 0.67 to 0.34. Three of five Period 2 texts are Poetic (Hickey, Schjeldahl, hooks). This is the era of what might be called the "vernacular beauty" turn: Hickey's anti-institutional polemics, Schjeldahl's phenomenological figurative style, and hooks's autobiographical approach together establish the Poetic mode as the alternative to institutional theory.

The shared features of this Poetic cluster are revealing: all three are high-RD (13.40%, 12.80%, 9.40%) with low ILI and VDR, indicating that rhetorical density in the service of encounter is the Period 2 signature. This differs structurally from Hughes's high RD in Period 1, where density served omniscient cultural authority. Saltz (Text 10) is Forensic rather than Poetic — the Voice register's anti-rhetorical stance keeps his RD below the Poetic threshold — but his low ILI, VDR, and $IAI_2$ align with the period's broader shift away from extraction.

## 5.3 Period 3: Forensic Consolidation (2006–2014)

Period 3 shows the consolidation of witness-aligned criticism in both Poetic and Forensic modes. Clark's The Sight of Death (Text 11) is the most explicitly methodological Forensic text in the corpus: its dated, first-person, return-to-the-paintings structure operationalises PIC's Forensic category without awareness of the framework. EPS of 0.78 and ILI of 0.27 are the strongest Forensic signals in the period.

Als (Text 13) demonstrates that very high RD (15.40%) can co-exist with Poetic restraint when the figurative pressure is directed toward personal encounter rather than institutional authority. Perl (Text 15) is the period's outlier: his craft-traditionalist Institutionalist posture is structurally indistinguishable from the theoretical Institutionalism of Period 1 despite its different ideological provenance. Institutionalist posture, the data suggests, is a structural condition of critical language as much as an ideological one.

## 5.4 Period 4: Forensic Expansion (2015–2025)

Period 4 shows the broadest Forensic presence in the corpus. Three of five texts are Forensic; one is Poetic; one is Institutionalist (borderline). The White Pube (Text 16) achieves the lowest ILI (0.22), VDR (0.18), and $IAI_2$ (0.19) in the full corpus, demonstrating that the Forensic posture has become available to writing outside traditional critical institutions entirely. De la Puente's refusal of interpretive authority is structural rather than tactical.

Comparing Saltz's Texts 10 (2001) and 20 (2022) reveals a telling shift: his mature posture is slightly more evaluative (ILI 0.41 to 0.51) and slightly higher in RD (5.70% to 7.20%), reflecting his Pulitzer-winner institutional position. The Forensic orientation persists but the balance between restraint and evaluation has shifted with institutional authority. This suggests that critical posture responds not only to temporal period but to the critic's own institutional standing.

Dean's Artforum essay (Text 18) remains the period's Institutionalist case, with the highest $IAI_2$ (0.74) in Period 4 and a moderate ILI (0.61) reflecting the theoretical apparatus of Artforum's Black critical writing. The essay demonstrates that institutional alignment can coexist with genuine critical sophistication; $IAI_2$ is a structural measure, not a quality judgment.

## 5.5 Genre Effects

Genre appears as a structural constraint on posture. Theory-driven essays (Krauss, Kuspit, Danto, Dean) consistently register high ILI and $IAI_2$ regardless of period, suggesting that the argumentative requirements of the theoretical essay structurally resist Forensic or Poetic classification. Exhibition reviews show the greatest variability: from Kuspit's extractive certainty (Text 4) to Searle's Poetic attention (Text 12) to de la Puente's radical Forensic refusal (Text 16). Extended art writing (Clark, Text 11) and essay collections (hooks, Text 9; Smith, Text 17) show the strongest tendency toward Poetic and Forensic postures, possibly because the essay form's length removes pressure toward interpretive summary.

## 5.6 Methodological Notes

This study differs from a fully mechanised corpus analysis in that diagnostic counts are based on informed analytical reading rather than automated pattern-matching. This introduces the limitation of reader-dependent coding while avoiding the limitation of contextually blind pattern detection. Because formal reliability statistics were not computed for the present single-coder pilot, all comparative claims should be read as descriptive and provisional. A future study using independent coders and formal inter-rater reliability testing (Cohen's κ for posture classification; ICC for index values) would allow the present approximations to be validated or revised. The provisional targets remain $\kappa \geq 0.80$ and ICC ≥ 0.85 as specified in the PIC Coding Manual.

# 6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the Layer A PIC diagnostic framework can provisionally distinguish between critical postures in a real corpus of published art writing. Five Layer A diagnostic indices, applied to twenty texts spanning four decades, reveal structural shifts that qualitative criticism has noted but struggled to measure: the decline of institutional certainty, the rise of phenomenological restraint, and the emergence of multiple critical modes across institutional platforms.

The temporal analysis supports the following descriptive findings:

- $RD_{100}$ declined 5% from Period 1 to Period 4, with a Poetic-driven peak in Period 2.
- ILI declined 45% from Period 1 to Period 4: meaning is now asserted less aggressively.
- VDR declined 59% from Period 1 to Period 4: the critic's situated presence is more visible.
- EPS increased approximately 190% from Period 1 to Period 4: restraint is now a structural feature rather than an exception.
- $IAI_2$ declined 33% from Period 1 to Period 4: the theoretical institutional apparatus of the 1980s has partially given way.

These are descriptive changes in a structured corpus, not formal significance tests. They support the broader PIC argument: critical language is a structural condition, not merely a

stylistic choice. How critics write about art shapes what artworks become in discourse; the distance between critic, artwork, and viewer can be operationalised, tracked, and compared.

The framework does not prescribe a correct critical mode. Forensic posture is not superior to Poetic; both are ethically proximate, differing in rhetorical intensity rather than ethical orientation. Institutionalist posture can coexist with critical sophistication, as Dean's essay demonstrates. What the framework makes visible is that these are choices — structural, ethical, and political — embedded in every critical sentence, available for diagnosis and reflection.

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ISBN Prefix: 978-1-0698203 · ISSN: 2819-7232 · Registered Publisher: Library & Archives Canada
Contact: research@museumofone.art
Journal: *The Journal of Post-Interpretive Criticism*
**Library:** *Museum of One Archival Library*
Vol. I (978-1-0698203-0-3) · Vol. II (978-1-0698203-1-0) · Canada, 2025
OCLC Numbers: Museum of One (1412305300) · The Journal of Post-Interpretive Criticism (1412468296)

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