

Structural Utterances – without & within the context of no context

Eddie Farrell (December 2018)

When I began work on this text, well over six months ago I wanted to bring together a multitude of references and observations that are constantly filtering through my life, some stretching back forty years and counting. First and foremost I am a painter and therefore sought a visual mechanism to help me into the task. The bedroom window and the constant re-framing of the tree beyond helped as both a way into writing and as a practical demonstration of how universal and simple composition and framing can be. After all isn't narrative a form of framing and doesn't the narrative we hold of the world we live in determine how we act within the world?

I also think it's helpful to cite George W. S. Trow's text, Within the context of no context, as an ever giving gift that I've returned to regularly since first reading. (Trow:1981, Within the context of no context)

Abstract

Over the past 40 years a strange and worrying behavioural split has taken place concerning the arts and governing powers. For me The 1975 Trilateral Commission Report, "The Crisis in Democracy", (Trilateral Commission, 1975) represents a triggering point when the arts in western society started to become more uncomfortable, maybe even fearful of presenting an effective, inventive and critical voice on the side of the public in relation to governing forces.

An artist's understanding of an ever expanding picture plane continued and possibly even accelerated well into the 20th century. By the early 1970s however, time had long caught up with the *go-to* space for presenting these changes, the gallery context; the location associated with much innovation throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Today the gallery and art institution pulse more as a brotherly echo of the Too-Big-To-Fail-Banks, systemically flawed; underwriting any ideas-with-legs, in order to cripple them. This is further complicated by artists not seeing or choosing not to see this; so in the same way that banks and corporations exercise huge power over how society is structured, *contemporary* galleries and art institutions have unwittingly or not, become the authoritarian interphase or gatekeeper between visual ideas and the public.

The curious split however, is in the contrast we see between the arts, increasingly retreating behind a showy but compromised, context and how the powers that be (or shouldn't be) have emerged out of that mid 1970s triggering point. The governing powers appear to have shown themselves to be the true descendent of the spirit of Dada and Duchamp; far more ready to diversify, infiltrate and step out of their comfort zone. Represented through the inventive zeal, excessive chance taking, increased double speak, contradictions, flip flopping, lies, fakery, spying, spinning, torture and complex layering employed in their work.

Unlike the pioneering work of the artists mentioned throughout this text, whose central concerns were less to do with power and more to encourage the liberation and freedom of their fellow man, this contemporary trickery of governing powers, manifests as a shocking form of repressive control. What's more they don't seek to promote the artistry of their work and although many from all walks of life, highly suspect something fishy is going on, the powerful chose to keep their ever evolving work well hidden.

“No matter how paranoid or conspiracy-minded you are, what the government is actually doing is worse than you imagine.” (Blum, William, 2000: Rogue State)

This text is a call to the artist within us all to connect from ground up with the important visual heritage that questions and invents in the service of humanity. To chose a life where individuals can act as themselves not one where every action is taken in relation to how it will be interpreted, praised or condemned by a more powerful party.



My ears slowly open up to a summer dawn chorus, my eyes look towards the window, left side of my face on a stack of pillows. Beyond the six portrait rectangles of the lower sash window is the familiar shape of next door's conifer. The peak gently rocks in a mild breeze but its tussled green apex holds together more or less complete within the upper left window section. My awakening aesthetic is irked by a few straggly green spikes extending beyond the vertical astragal to the right, into the adjoining section of window. I've no problem with with the widening part of the tree spilling downwards through the lower panes of glass but I'm determined to position the apex of the tree within the upper left frame. To this end I manoeuvre myself further up the mattress and use some deft toe pushes to help fine tune the position of my head on the pillow. Cramped, contorted and twisted from toe to closed left eye I now have the composition lined up to experience a instance of satisfaction. The moment I let go the composition is gone.

Expanding the frame

There's a scene in Wajda's film *Danton* in which we see the French Revolutionary painter, Jacques-Louis David clamped into a drawing frame. The vertical glass grid, positioned between artist and subject from which David plots the outline of the figure onto, is a legacy of Brunelleschi and Durer's quest to *accurately* frame three dimensional reality onto a flat surface. Of course David, Brunelleschi and Durer were not the first or last prepared to endure unnatural restraints to capture a desired reality. (Wajda Andrzej, 1983)

It's a strange yet broadly understood human compulsion to order our vision to either how it is, how we see it or even how it should be. History of art recalls that the, *how it is* version got a rude awakening in 1838 when an unsuspecting Parisian stopped to have his shoe shined long enough in one position for him and the shoe shine boy to register on a photographic plate. Photography has played a major role in providing the world with a version of the *truth* ever since, prompting others to look further. (Daguerre Louis, 1838)

Pierre Bonnard's more seemingly casual approach to composition involved pinning up large pieces of unstretched canvas around the walls of his house to work on. After building up, several glimpses of domestic life, often on one piece of canvas he would then select the areas that were working and cut them out to stretch and frame up. Several years on we find Jackson Pollock literally climbing inside the picture plane to dance his abstract expressive way back and forth and finally off into oblivion.

By 1964 Robert Irwin's painting activities had led him to a situation where he sensed himself, *literally breaking out of the picture plane as the centre of (his) concern*. He was *becoming more interested in the room*. Around the same time Robert Barry experienced a similar expansion beyond the canvas edge effecting his whole attitude to his work, *I did not want to impose myself on my material or on the space. I was trying to get away from some sort of style*. (Lawrence Weschler book)

Yvonne Rainer reduced her medium down to her body alone. In 1965 she provided a structure to operate within by writing the No Manifesto: *No to spectacle....No to virtuosity....No to style.....No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer.....* Contradictorily, as more tropes were shut down more and more compelling possibilities began to appear on the horizon; sculpture at Central St. Martins was *off the plinth* and Archigram's David Greene was pondering an Invisible University, while Gustave Metzger's Auto-destructive Art proposed to literally tear itself apart,

The early 1970s found artists probing and pushing at a conflicted world on the verge of an exhilarating and potentially problematic shift. The increasingly conceptual nature of a great deal of the work led Lucy Lippard to proclaim and document the dematerialization of the art object. (Lippard, Lucy, *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*; Praeger. 1973. ISBN 0289703328) Which many questioned due to the inappropriate production of a big red book to make her point. But whether books, flyers, protests, actions, non-actions and gestures, It was a time when many artists were asking fundamental questions of themselves and what they were up to; *Making art is not really important. Living is. In my mind art and living are so closely interlocked* (Robert Barry).

In 2003, Sculptor, Bruce McLean brought a statement to my attention from Richard Foreman's 1976 *Book of Splendors* performance.

It isn't new ideas, but new places to put ideas.

In 2018 the statement still appears key in acknowledging the dilemma of our age while

suggesting a way to move beyond.



In 2012, an eighty three year old Noam Chomsky stands at a lectern and presents, "Education: For Whom and For What?" In one section he focuses on the 1975 Trilateral Report: The Crisis in Democracy.

He details how leading figures, *major political scientists from Harvard and so on*, who drafted the document describe The Crisis in Democracy as being *literally too much democracy; a primary concern of the Trilateral scholars.... was the failures of what they called*, and I'm quoting, *"the institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young", the schools, the universities, the churches and the like, they are not carrying out their duty to indoctrinate the young properly.....*

Contracting the frame: some more history

I'm an artist, my job is to ask questions and it's not to point fingers (Lawrence Weiner 2017)

In the introduction I suggested the everydayness of the picture plane and briefly outlined how our perception of the picture plane has been radically redrawn over the past 200 years. Despite major wars, bloody revolutions and massive technological acceleration throughout this period if we flick through any general picture book of images of art made during that period we are somehow presented with a story that still manages to maintain some sort of logic. A seamless narrative development of players and events that moves us far beyond physical work and takes into account the complex expanding context.

DADA is often deemed to be an anti art movement whereas, without much scratching we see Dada as a passionate defender of arts fundamentals; the freedom to ask why and why not of everything. Superficially the work produced under that title umbrella during World War One and beyond may appear dumb, naive and unfocused but if viewed as an attempted way out of a theatre of slaughter then it suddenly switches to being a sane and radical alternative. When a world of obedience, commerce and logic promotes a narrative of more weaponry and mass killing, a disparate bunch of outsiders initially radiating out from Zurich, improvised a way of turning insanity back on itself by howling and barking their questions. Perhaps, looking where no one else cares to, however illogical it may appear, is as good a way of defining a function of art as any?

Barnett Newman's seemingly more contemplative large colour field paintings from the 1950s on the surface appear less interested in asking any questions let alone getting answers. However, the sheer scale of these non narrative slabs of flat colour confront us to respond in a number of ways; in meditative contemplation and with complete incomprehension being two extremes. Whatever our reaction, we're taken far beyond a simple critique of painting and encouraged to ask why on earth were the paintings made at all? Newman caps the curious puzzle with an answer he gave Harold Rosenberg, when asked what his painting meant? The painter replied, *if he (Rosenberg) and others could read it properly it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism.*

Lawrence Weiner makes a similar, if slightly more dramatic claim about his own work in 2017: *There are these people out there...they cannot get excited about anything unless they're taking something from somebody. And that somebody can get a hard-on from taking a breakfast away from children is something that distresses me. But I don't make art about it. I make art that I hope, when those people understand what I'm doing they'll commit suicide.*

Posing intentional or unintentional questions about the world through presenting fresh perspectives has been taking place for a very long time and the few people offering these self penned insights have happened to be called artists. Frustratingly the designation and numbers have remained much the same up to the present guaranteeing the art technology potential in us all remains untapped. To build a new road a new house a new battleship, requires external funding and all complexities of help however, when stripped down to basics, artists are free to make whatever they like; the simpler and more readily available the medium the greater chance of seeing each one through.

Would you care to tell how critics and collectors deal with your art?
There are no collectors, for there is nothing to collect. (Robert Barry)

That combination of a determined curiosity and flexible working, helps manoeuvre artists into spaces where others rarely find themselves; positions often *ahead of the curve*. That might come about by, producing something which takes the world a hundred years to really see it or by being drawn to abandoned and dilapidated areas of a cities that transform quickly into extortionate residential hot spots. Showing an aptitude for potentially profitable foresight and a talent for revealing previously unseen realities, doesn't come without its consequences. Unwitting collusion in property and auction prices may find favour with the market but the same powerful interests will quickly close you down if your take on freedom and your general intuitions threaten to dig too deep into the spectacle. A. S. Neill, founder of Summerhill School offers this frank and chilling note in 1968: *Although I write and say what I think of society, if I tried to reform society by action, society would kill me as a public danger.*



Returning to the spirit of Dada and in particular Duchamp's Readymades, one specific work appears to link the Crisis in Democracy document and the notion of a world starting to see a new reality, some fifty years after it was first presented. In advance of a broken arm(1915?) appropriated an everyday object but more importantly, highlighted the act of naming and renaming (in this case a snow shovel) This simple and some might say ludicrous gesture, opens up what I would describe as the gene of a subversive DIY manual on how narratives are created and controlled. As I write in late 2018 this seems highly significant.

Chomsky tells us how in the early 1970s, the Trilateral Report identified a crisis in society. Let's imagine how, at that moment, more and more people around the world, in homes, in streets, at work, in shops, were symbolically picking up everyday objects and rethinking them, renaming them. Asking the question, *is this really what this is?* Continuing this line of thought, we observe how the authorities, uncomfortable with this widespread free-form behaviour begin a gradual clampdown *on the institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young*. To restore order and impose a version of sanity.

Has such a juncture been taking place over the past 40 years, beginning with the crisis caused by significant numbers of people around the world increasingly scrutinising and questioning the parameters of their reality? If so have the past four decades been a gradual reassertion of the controlling narrative in the face of *too much democracy?*

In 2018, are we all back clearing an already determined path ahead of us with our correctly appointed snow shovels?

Artist and writer Peter Suchin in a 2006 text on Institutions and galleries suggests that Duchamp, failed in his project because *he merely radicalised art and its conventions, not the forms and mores of everyday life*.

So one final question for this section; could it be that other powerful institutions realised the potential of this project and took it much further and in a way that not even Duchamp could have imagined or wanted? (art monthly 295/ 4.06)

We'll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public believes is false (attributed to William Casey, CIA director 1981 – 1987)



Expansion and contraction

FUCK IT

We had already decided a long time ago that we wouldn't build. Building meant collaborating with developers. It meant participating in the financial fucking of our cities. It meant displacing people, turning the whole city into a playground for speculative investment, capital hoarding and money laundering...

Due: a simple sheet of paper, just over A5 size and printed red on both sides – 23.02.2018 edition is authored by New York City-based adjustment agency.

Some may find the above statement a tad dumb, naive and unfocused, to me it's an all to rare intelligent, informed and focused statement by contemporary graduates. It speaks directly to the concluding statement of the first section; Adjusted Agency are demanding new spaces for ideas. Their conclusion is a defiant cry against the rapidly contracting context they're being presented. By completely rejecting a systemically corrupt framework they make a direct and highly significant shift; *it's not about saying "no" it's about saying "yes" Yes to something new, something else...we just have to find it and in the end that too becomes it's own kinda work.*

The idea of the the search becoming *the work itself* is an interesting one, it opens things up to a hands-on engagement, where form has an option to change through encounter, as opposed to everything ending in a predictably restrictive presentation code. This chimes in with a recent account I was told of post graduate painting presentations at a leading art school in London. Presentations can be anything from a student reading some influential text, to perhaps taking everyone for a walk around streets in which your work is rooted. However in the name of streamlining and grading, painting students are now being instructed to have their *power-points ready for Monday*. This standardisation in protocol is one of concern if you believe like me that artists have a responsibility to challenge and question any such standardisation by both what they present and how they present it.

The problem of getting in to effect that embedded layer is a point well made by Bryan Parsons some years back, when he and I were part of a group of artists that collaborated on an experimental new primary school in North Ayrshire Scotland. While working on the layout and function of the set of classrooms we were proposing he observed that unless the curriculum was equally open to change as our designs then our designs would always remain superficial. A point clearly illustrated shortly after the school opened by the more flexible areas coming into conflict with rigid timetable demands .

The interlocking of art and living that Robert Barry alludes to is key to the opening up of new spaces for our everyday to truly embrace life. However, when expansion adheres to a strict colonial model all we'll ever see are contemporary Conquistadors booking seats on the first rocket out of here to do exactly the same somewhere else. Meanwhile the exponentially growing precariat on zero hour contracts are kept busy with sport and glamour spectacles, social media and crippling debt.

Somewhere within this depressing scenario art represented by institutions, galleries and art fairs have been increasingly co-opted to represent a safe and showy full stop in what art is and what it can be. White walls and polished concrete floors are as much a reinforced barrier to keep art and spectator clearly apart, as they are for showing work. At best they act as a safe viewing platform to witness a controlled explosion, at worst they are Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors where the public come to ogle in contained wonderment, adoration, titillation and incomprehension!

“ Like a paper kite [that art] can soar to heights that which all earthly matters are drowned in grey indifference. But even after it has reached the clouds, this poor “free” art still remains tied to a strong rope, the earthly end of which is tightly gripped by the philistine.”
pg 51 – The prophet Armed Trotsky: 1879 – 1921 Isaac Deutscher (Oxford Paperbacks)

Outside is different, you do as you’re told.

It could be argued that many contemporary galleries and institutions do influence the world outside their walls through challenging outreach programmes but in reality, however well intentioned the artists involved in those schemes are, much of the work translates into the cynical throwing of lollipops at under privilege children in order to meet funding requirements. Street art and graffiti present a related problem where many of its proponents appear to be sticking two fingers up to the restrictive context of the gallery while unable to imagine a future outside these institutions and sales rooms. Recent history has witnessed how self-obsessed musicians were thankfully replaced by non musicians who then quickly morphed into egomaniac DJs acting like self obsessed musicians or how egomaniac artists were thankfully told where to go only to be replaced by self- obsessed curators behaving equally as badly as egomaniac artists!

Alain Badiou likens these endless repetitive cycle to the one plotted in Genet's play, *The Balcony*. Outside uprising and upheaval is in full swing but up on the brothel balcony everything remains the same, we, the public remain servants of consumable images and naked power. Up on the balcony the madame of the brothel and the chief of police symbolise the continuity of the pornography of democracy; the players may change on a regular basis but even after each uprising the roles follow same script.

To break the cycle and change the plot, Badiou suggests, requires a different creative rethinking and redrafting: *So let's make these poems and images, ones which do not satisfy any of our enslaved desires. Let's prepare the poetic undressing of the present.*



A conversation with 11 year old Andrew Hsu, during the 2003 Washington state science fair gave John Taylor Gatto a curious insight to his extensive study of state schooling. Hsu was awarded a prize for his work on sequenced genes held in common between mice and human beings. When Gatto asked him about his research he was intrigued to hear how Hsu had

started, by looking at a flea circus and the observation that, *you can't train fleas until you break their will.*

If you fill a Petri-dish with fleas, they will instantly jump out and head off in every direction because they have an agenda of their own. To eliminate their personal agendas you put a lid on the Petri-dish and you go away for two hours. When you come back, the fleas will have hurt themselves so badly leaping out of the dish and never being able to budge that lid an inch that when you take the lid off.... not one of the fleas will try to get out of the dish. Now they're in a state where they can be trained.

Gatto continues, *Instantly on him (Hsu) finishing that sentence I knew what I'd been hired to do for 30 years, I was the lid on that dish. And as long as I and my colleagues could frustrate the personal agendas often enough very few if any of them would survive and they then could be conditioned to the purposes of management.*

Is it really any surprise that those who moan on about Trump, Brexit and the world being stuck in a moral and ethical, cul de sac are often the ones with their fingers pressed firmly on the repeat button. JP Sottile puts it quite succinctly about Trump when he describes him as the most representative president he's seen in his lifetime. He can't think of anyone who represents us more than Trump as Avatar of reality TV, narcissism, celebrity and materialism. With everyone obsessing on Trump's every move, every word, every tweet, Sottile turns the all thing around and asks the more poignant question, what does it say about us? Maybe this is just as good a critique of arts failure for far too long to step outside the demands of gallery production whose bottom line has only required artists to ask variants of the question, how big do you want it and what colour?

Consequently it wasn't art students but economic students in Manchester who took their lecturers to task by demanding their course look at other economic models than the ones exposed as latently inadequate during the 2007 crash. More recently Forensic Architecture have put the current bread and circuses arena of art to shame by demonstrating how a primarily conceptual discipline can challenge the world on its own terms.

That's not to say that there aren't artist led initiatives out there pushing for new space. AltMFA, School of the Damned, Open School East and The Syllabus among others have at least set themselves up as alternative Art Schools. I attended a discussion with students from the schools at Yinke Schonebare's project space a couple of years back but was disappointed to discover that they only appeared to be presenting an *alternative of choice* to the more established schools.

Taking nothing away from these schools not burdening students with crippling fees but from what I gleaned, students seek the same singular outcome as offered by mainstream art schools; to be groomed for the gallery. This, *have your power-points ready for Monday morning*, mentality, betrays much of the innovation in getting a self organising school up and running. But any suggestion that the complex process of collaboration going into devising and running of the school might be work in itself was not up for discussion. And with that the most interesting work on the display that day, a meal and drinks devised by three schools served up to all those attending, seemed to go unnoticed. They couldn't or were unable to recognise the powerful and understated readymadeesqueness they'd achieved in getting things up and running.

More recently author Mike Watson has made an interesting contribution to this debate with his book *Towards a Conceptual Militancy, Art and Class War in an Age of Austerity*. However, hearing him discuss the book with Mark McGowen (The Artist Taxi Driver) in 2016, I found the promise of taking the debate beyond the fetishization of imagery from historic political struggles was compromised by the author's loyalty to a Left verses Right paradigm.

In light of Dr Anthony Sutton's work on how the same Wall Street banks were involved in financing both the 1917 Russian Revolution and Hitler's Fascists in Germany in the 1930s, surely further investigation into controversial information like this is essential in order to meet the open conceptual challenge his book title proposes?

If we ask an elderly and angry Yvonne Rainer what she makes of it all, she offers up a simple critique: falling asleep in the Museum of Modern Art. Perhaps a plea to stop dragging bits of the world into the sanitised environment of the gallery for introspection and *rigorous* PHD analysis? An exercise perfectly illustrated by the Conceptual Art in Britain 1964–1979 exhibition at Tate Britain in 2016. In which seminal work questioning what art could or might be were objectified into a ragbag of black and white junk and grotty typed sheets of A4. The result was to completely misrepresent 95% of the work on display, rendering it toothless, not by age but by over-curation. Some years ago artist and critic Matthew Collins described the cumbersome displays of Joseph Beuys work installed in galleries before his death as looking like *lots of Brown stuff lying around* since his death in 1986.

I once sided with the Beuys critique of Duchamp's retreat from art to play chess; *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp Is Overrated* (1964), Yet again, with time I'm starting to think, perhaps Duchamp like all good chess players had a good idea of what was coming next?



A few days after September eleventh 2001, 73 year old avant-garde composer, Karlheinz Stockhausen described the attack on the World Trade Centre as "the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos." It was a comment that he tried to retract immediately as the world press condemned it as *distasteful and tactless* and promoters began speedily cancelling his concerts. Although Stockhausen's comments corresponded with the artist-prophet's overview on cycles of revelation, destruction, remorse and rebirth they were also completely in-step with the horrifying terrorist narrative that was quickly set in motion across the media, directly following 9/11.

17 years on, as we still try to comprehend the enormity of what happened that day, it is the phrase *work of art*, that possibly nags away at us most in the statement and not in the purely theatrical sense that Stockhausen presumably meant it.

Expanding the Frame

In September 2000 the influential Neoconservative think tank, Project for a New American Century (PNAC) authored a document that called for *shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests*. The, Rebuilding America's Defences, document observed that, without *some catastrophic and catalyzing event, like a new Pearl Harbor*, progress in escalating American interests around the globe would be far too frustrating and much too slow for PNAC.

One year later 9/11 happened.

In a 2007 interview Gen. Wesley Clark (Ret) recalled a classified memo out of the Pentagon, in the weeks following 9/11, proposing 7 countries; Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Iran, be taken down in 5 years. A sustained state of terror has hung over western populations and not just from the apocryphal narrative formed around the imagery of the twin towers being dramatically reduced to dust. The War on Terror, Al Qaeda, Anthrax Letters, The Patriot Act, Weapons of Mass Destruction, ISIS, Beheading Film Productions, Mass Migration, and Poisonous Gas Attacks, have ensured that a significant percentage of the public in the west believe, if we don't go and get them, they are going to come and get us. Meanwhile, although the Pentagon's ambitious 5 year plan is behind on schedule, the countries on the hit-list continue to topple in the name of liberty and freedom and self-defence.

Despite the mass public demonstrations in February 2003, Tony Blair's New Labour UK government, were allied to an all-out-war plan even before the *get go*. Much like the US, regardless of the presidents political affiliation, Clinton, Democrat/Bush, Republican/ Obama, Democrat/Trump, Republican, government after government have spun a series of narratives, providing a seamless context for big business and the industrial military complex to ascend beyond all borders.



Contracting the Frame

Following Gordon Brown's short and disastrous term in office, both UK Conservative Prime Ministers have continued the violent cheer leading; David Cameron, as he helicoptered into Benghazi, to oversee a destroyed Libya a few weeks before mobile phone footage of Gaddafi being sodomised with a bayonet and then killed was beamed onto our tea time TV screens. (We came, we saw, he died.) Then Theresa May's support to bomb Syria for alleged poison gas attacks based on *extremely thin to vanishing* evidence.

The increasing incidents of barely concealed compliance by powerful press and media channels in underlining official *narratives in the making* has been an important and disturbing development during a period when the phrase *fake news* is being coined on every type of channel. Spin reached something of a high point in April 2018 with two separate news stories; a suspected chemical weapon attack on the town of *Douma near Damascus, Syria* and a reported, deadly nerve agent attack on a former Russian spy and his daughter in the town of *Salisbury, England*.

Theresa May wasted little time in making a connection between the two incidents and despite only presenting social media footage, biased accounts condemning the Syrian government of gassing its own people and ignoring an on the spot report from Robert Fisk, concluding the gas attack was more likely the effects of a dust storm whipped up by bombing, the UK, US and France dropped over 100 missiles of punishment on Syria.

Dangerous improvisations around the truth continued as in April 2018 the (then) UK Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson jumped in to accuse the Russian government, well Vladimir Putin of more or less, personally poisoning Sergei and Yulia Skripal with a military-grade nerve agent called Novichok. In the midst of a to and fro of part truths, speculation and confusing statements about and from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Porton Down Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, a perplexed yet seemingly delighted Russian Ambassador to the UK called one of many lengthy press conferences on 13th April 2018.

Did anybody (see) her picture after the poisoning?..Did anybody see her father's picture?..Did anybody hear the voice(s) of these people?..More than a month what's happening in this country?...Are they isolated...(are)they alright?....Why not arrange something, meaning with you by the way....Why is nobody calling for this meeting, you know there are more than a hundred people here? Not a single British journalist put (the) question, I want to meet Mrs Skripal, not a single person.....Did you ask all (these) questions? What's happening in this country, where the media is supposed to be free?.....

However hypocritical we may find Alexander Yakovenko questions, we can't deny that they have value when aimed at a room full of journalists who seem to be doing little more than act as stenographers for the official UK Government line. Shortly after this showdown details began to leak out that the Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee (DSMA) had issued a D Notice instructing the censorship of numerous mainstream media outlets regarding the poisoning. Something Yakovenko probably had knowledge of as he goaded the assembled journalists. One final note for now on this hushed up story which keeps on giving, concerns Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh who in late June 2018 mentioned that he'd had it from a good source that the people trying to *get at* Skripal were indeed Russian, however not The Russian Government but the Russian Mafia.

Above is just one example of the endless succession of spun and contradictory information being thrown at us on a daily basis. Increasingly over the past decade, the once powerful and

broadly trusted mainstream networks have experienced a challenge to their authority largely due to an increasing amount of information once hidden from the public now being available online. What appears shocking at times is how exposed authorities are letting themselves become and how stubbornly they are willing to uphold ropery and ill formed narratives that often end in a bodged and violent spectacle.

Whether this callousness is just down to a deep disrespect for the intelligence of the public or simply a sloppiness in carrying out clandestine activities, who can say? What we can clearly observe however, is how the collaboration between governments and mainstream media to curate and control a common narrative to feed to the public is a far cry from what Stockhausen or maybe even Karl Rove would consider a work of art? And whereas one would like to think Duchamp renaming objects in the world was a gesture to empower and free up public imagination, one can't help suspect that the 24 hour flip-flopping narratives bombarding us today intend to control.

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do." (Ron Suskind, (on Karl Rove) 2004 ; New York Times Magazine)



In out and beyond

A painter friend of mine has a running joke any time he sees Dada and early Surrealist work in galleries; after a quick glance he'll walk away uttering the phrase, *you'd have had to have been there*. It has only been since starting to write down my thoughts on galleries and institution that I've begun to reappraise this seemingly throwaway line. Whether my friend means it or not it underlines the power and importance of seeing work where it is made and crucially for this text, as it is made.

In a historical context it is hard to argue against seeing the frescos of Piero Della Francesca in Arezzo, Giotto in Assisi and Padua or Fra Angelico at San Marco, Florence, located

exactly where they were painted centuries earlier. This inbeddedness to a specific location chimes with the observation Daniel Buren made about Brancussi in 1979 , describing how the sculptor maintained the “sincerity” of his work by wilfully protecting the relationship between the work and the place where it is made; the Studio.

Land artist Robert Smithson pre-dates Buren's observations when questioning the *galleries role in the commodity status* increasingly accorded to contemporary art. In 1972 Smithson equates the gallery to a prison, each room an individual cell and warns: *A vacant white room with lights is still a submission to the neutral*. His assessment of what effect that has on the work is bleak:

Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement.

(first published in German in the catalogue to the international exhibition Documenta 5', Kassel, 1972)

In the same year, Nice Style , The Worlds First Pose Band, were taking a more satirical line in confronting *the artificiality of the art world, formed out of clichéd preconceptions of every kind – social, political and economic as well as aesthetic*. Artist, curator and academic, Jon Thomson's view at the time, was, the work of artist Bruce McLean (of Nice Style) was dealing with *the elusiveness of true (i.e. unconditioned) experience*. And that conditions *conferred on the artist spelt... the end of the artist's freedom to think and act independently*. Thomson concluded, *'Pose' demonstrates the negation of expressive purpose, and functions therefore as a metaphor of imprisonment with implications for society at large*.

Pg 57 The British Art Show (Old Allegiances and New Directions 1979 – 1984)

Much of this work and critique came out of the minimal and then conceptual art movements emerging from 1950s and 1960s. Where as many continued to tailor their work for the gallery context some artists indicated a move away, others chose to make a new kind of work that confronted the gallery face on within the gallery context. Beginning with MOMA Poll in 1970 Hanns Haacke made work that questioned the thorny subject of corporate sponsorship of art.

Along with Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers and others Hanns Haacke has produced a lengthy body of critically incisive work that came to be categorised as Institutional Critique. The work, which at heart always carries a simple message, *everything is connected to everything*, has cemented an often schizophrenic relationship between artist and institution; on the one hand questioning the very reason for being of the institution and on the other serving up fresh material for an endlessly repeated gorgefest of specialised and lucrative doctorate jargon.

The second wave of Institutional Critique artists saw Andrea Fraser at its forefront following her much sited Museum Highlights performance, gallery tour at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989. Duchamp often declared with faux surprise, that the more he distanced himself from art the more famous he became as an artist, to a similar extent, as Andrea Fraser's performance couched criticism has become more polished and cutting art institutions around the world have been falling over themselves to get her to come and criticise them!

With all her insight and experience of toying with powerful players in the art world I was somewhat taken aback by her recent proclamation about her incredulity at the United States of America having voted Donald Trump to be its president. Further proof perhaps of how isolated the gallery context has become in spite of difficult and incisive the questions.

On the same occasion she concluded the session with a statement she's often shared with art students she works with:

I say well you know, we've had 100 years of the Avante Garde ...trying to attack the institution of art and critique the institution of art and tear it down and re-integrate art into

life....and where have we gotten? We've gotten the biggest global artworld ever, a multi billion dollar industry.

So what of the other category mentioned above, the ones who chose to move away in search of new places? Perhaps we catch a glimpse of some on the, critical history of King Mob, blog; the account of how in 1968 Notting Hill, London, a ragtag bunch of malcontents turned a lacklustre community campaign into a Bacchanalian riot of constructive silliness. We are told how on successive Saturday's a group of individuals would don fancy dress costumes (gorilla,pantomime horse) and rush the 7 foot high locked boundary fence of the then private garden of Powis Square. The brief became a simple one, local children with nowhere safe to play are being hit by cars on the busy Portobello Road while the said, large square of grass remain locked to the public. After several weeks of an amphetamine and alcohol fuelled fancy dress mob, rushing the fence, being arrested,going to court then back for more the next week, we're told, *one Saturday afternoon, soon after the initial eruption, a determined assault was made and the fences were torn down with the police more or less looking on.*

The internet, where the King Mob details above were gleaned is an ever expanding place in terms of making certain information available which formally would have remained hidden from the public. Pioneers in this new open form of information distribution, dissemination and analysis include, The Corbett Report, Tom Secker's Spy Culture, The UK Column, Sibel Edmond's Newsbud, Julian Charles's The Mind Renewed,Global research, Pearse Redmond's Porkin's Policy Radio, The Richie Allen Show.....What all these vital sources share is best summed up by Brett Veinotte during a discussion about Trivium and Empire on Richard Grove's Tragedy and Hope:

I think what needs to be reinforced here is that 15 years ago this conversation that we are having today.....is something which would have been completely impossible 15 years ago; non of this was accessible.....non of that is made available to us through our education system and even though that might not resonate with younger people how meaningful that actually is, before the age of information you were essentially screwed when it came to accessing anything that we are talking about today or uncovering anything we are talking about today.

In the United Kingdom, the countering of the spread of formally inaccessible information has been slow in coming and often clumsy in delivery. In 2015 in a National Security Council address the then Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech on Multiculturalism, he barely bothered to cloak a scattergun connection made between online freedoms to extremism and terrorism. Veering into extraordinary rhetoric on what a democratic country will tolerate from its citizens he proclaimed, 'for too long, we have been a passively tolerant society, saying to our citizens "as long as you obey the law, we will leave you alone"' (Stone 2015).

There is more than a hint of the Duchamp Readymade in the public cross questioning of controlling narratives that is being facilitated by the online platforms listed above. There is also a case for likening, the one time reassigning of Powis Gardens through improvised, Dadaesque, collective action to a renaissance fresco remaining and changing over centuries. Reappraisal, attention, re-looking and really looking are potential gateways to new spaces and why can't the search for new spaces be the work itself? OK outer space, the bottom of oceans, the white cube gallery but the truly new spaces are right in front of our noses, they are boundless and have always been there (David Greene, LAWuN) 'it's not about saying "no" it's about saying "yes" Yes to something new, something else...we just have to find it and in the end that too becomes its own kinda work'.

While concluding this text the emergence of the Jaune Gilets movement in France has suddenly taken off. Despite, an almost blanket ban on any detailed reporting in the United Kingdom of their protests (some have hinted another D notice has been served to the media), their written demands, surpass any left or right Ideology and show a comprehensive grasp on geopolitics:

- *Break up the 'too-big-to-fail' banks, re-separate regular banking from investment banking*
- *Cancel debts accrued through usurious rates of interest*
- *Remove all ideology from the ministry of education, ending all destructive education techniques*
- *The barring of lobby groups and vested interests from political decision-making*
- *End France's participation in foreign wars of aggression, and exit from NATO (Sign of the Times SOTT 2018).*

