

# I Object

## Preface

I have a hunch that single object sculpture may have a new place in art production.

Three years ago I began making such work based on human form developing to human geometric form. The chosen form was simply a conceptual tool to initiate movement from a state of existence where making art was absent to a state of existence where art making was present. This 'work', these 'sculptures' or 'formes' or 'objects' arose from contemplative intuition, a manipulation of inert material, a will working in awareness of the absurd and in isolation, a recall without referencing art making of the past, in privacy. A non-gestural aesthetic becoming in a language of three dimensional forms inhabiting space individually, together and alongside other things. I have wondered what they are. Plaster and bronze, something or nothing, a multiplicity of things. One could be used as a murder weapon, small enough to be held in one hand, heavy enough to strike a fatal blow to the head. Or as a door stop, a book end, a paper-weight. So it IS potentially an object, a sculpture, a murder weapon, a door stop, a book end. But what is it really? And more importantly is it art?

Does evaluating this hunch involve a review of modernism without parody? Would looking more closely or differently at postmodern art and new modernism put it to the test? Should I just have the blind faith to follow my instinct? Is there any relation to Object Orientated Ontology within Speculative Realism? My art school practice is necessarily experimenting away from these works, however my research question recalls them.

**To what extent can the journey of the disappearance and reappearance of the single object sculpture be traced?**

## Structure

My field of investigation will consider art historical debates and positions that have been associated with the dematerialisation of the art object and the impact of installation art in maintaining this condition during the last four decades.

My reason for the investigation is to evaluate and contextualise my practice and thoughts on the nature of art through engagement with postmodern developments in sculpture and how these works relate back to modernism. The research is intended to inform how or why it may be appropriate to re-materialise the art object. The fragmented style of writing and structure deliberately aims to evoke a sense of an installation in text.

The presentation is in three parts;

- i) the 'Tracings' that locate and analyse findings from reading and other experience in direct response to the research question
- ii) the 'Interludes' that allow a more lucid and poetic rendering of the thoughts and musings that the research question stimulates
- iii) the 'Artworks' that describe personal practice evolving as the research question is asked in the studio

My intended method of investigation involves the use of exhibition catalogues; art periodicals and reviews; modern and postmodern theory, criticism and art history; philosophical text; internet resources; contemporary curatorial practice materials; symposiums; lectures; recording lectures; visiting exhibitions of art; filming my responses to exhibitions of art; experimental studio practice.

## Key Artists and Art Movements researched :

Marcel Duchamp (France), Martin Creed (UK), Don Judd (USA), Robert Morris (USA), Alan Kaprow, (USA), Daniel Buren (France), Yayoi Kasuma (Japan), Thomas Hirschorn (Switzerland), Louise de Bourgeois (France/USA), Bruce Nauman (USA).  
Minimalism, Modernism and Installation art.

## Others

Kurt Schwitters (Germany), Ilya Kabakov (Russia), Dan Graham (USA), Olafur Eliasson (Denmark), Felix Gonzalez-Torres (Cuba), Jake and Dinos Chapman (UK), Jenny Holzer (USA), Anthony Caro (UK), Vanessa Beecroft (Italy), James Turrell (USA), Christine Hill (USA), Frank Stella (USA), Zang Enli (China), Rikrit Tiravanija (Buenos Aires/Thailand/USA) Ad Reinhardt (USA), Vito Acconci (USA), Charlotte Posenenske (Germany), Mike Nelson (UK).

## Interlude 1

At home above my worktable I have an image on my wall of a Cycladic figurine which someone other than the maker has called “Standing Female Idol”. It has been classified as Early Cycladic II, Middle Spedos variety, is made of marble, H21.6cms and is dated 2700-2400/2300 BC.

Next to the worktable is a 1920’s Chinese cabinet in red lacquer. On the cabinet sit a variety of objects; books, a lamp, a vase, an ammonite fossil, a set of Russian dolls painted with Orthodox Icons and some sculptures I have made, in plaster and in bronze.

The tulips in the vase on the kitchen table are drying and wilting, their colour fades, the petals will soon fall.

## Artworks One

Interlude 1 offers my research question illustratively as written description of actual of objects personal, historical and autobiographical, owned through purchase as functional and/or aesthetic or made as art/to signify art objects, arranged in a domestic situation. Photography could archive this collection of objects as an art installation, or a memory of a time and place, or of single objects as autonomous artworks. Alternatively the photographs could replace the artworks and objects as artwork.

## Tracing I : Saint Duchamp the Champ

I reluctantly but necessarily join the myriad host of writers who pay homage to Marcel Duchamp’s over referenced but inexhaustibly genius and profound moment of destruction of the aesthetically autonomous constructed object by artist as a work of art in “Fountain” of 1917, and the birth of the first acknowledged readymade.<sup>1</sup> As Duchamp performed midwifery to mother art, scales fell from eyes and panic, followed by waves of adoration down the ages has led to beatification, St. Marcel. A notable disappearance, conceptually of one kind of object of art for another, but physically still an object and still a sculpture by virtue of its art gallery context.

Jean Baudrillard fits up Duchamp and his fame of the readymade at length in his own fame frame of the simulacrum during an interview with Ruth Schepps in 1996.<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard develops his argument that dialectical progress in art has come to a halt and all that can be done is to look back and ‘rework’ its history in a simulacritic manner, speculating that aesthetics may have a finitude as does the physical universe. He gives credit, or blame, to Duchamp over attempts by abstraction to look beyond representation in search of the reality of the object via the event of the readymade,

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<sup>1</sup> *Fountain* is a 1917 work widely attributed to [Marcel Duchamp](#). The scandalous work was a porcelain [urinal](#), which was signed "R.Mutt" and titled *Fountain*. Submitted for the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917, *Fountain* was rejected by the committee, even though the rules stated that all works would be accepted from artists who paid the fee. *Wikipedia, accessed 12 April 2014*.

<sup>2</sup> “Art between Utopia and Anticipation” in *The Conspiracy of Art, Jean Baudrillard; Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*, edited by Sylvere Lotringer, pp50-60. (New York: Semiotext (e)), 2005

*...where the artistic act is just the transposition of an object into an art object. Art is then only an almost magic operation: the object is transferred in its banality into an aesthetic that turns the entire world into a readymade.*<sup>3</sup>

So we are left at this point with the idea that anything can be art, all it takes is an artist to find it, sign it and stick it into a gallery. Almost a hundred years later we are still playing that game, some of us more than others.

### Tracing II : What's the point of it?

To kick start my research in an energetic way I went to London for a weekend in February to see some contemporary art starting with an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery with this as the title. Titles are important. They should lure one into the gallery, or be a bit scary or make one feel so annoyed that one goes in to see what it is all about. I didn't know what the title of this exhibition was until I got there, all I knew was that it was a retrospective of Martin Creed's work.<sup>4</sup> A show in the main galleries of the Hayward means that the artist is reputable, but not as important as anyone showing there in the gallery's heyday of the 1970's like Morris Louis, Picasso or Renoir. All I really knew of Creed's work at first hand was his winning 2001 Turner Prize entry of making lights go on and off and the singing lift in the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham; as the lift goes up the singing goes up and as it comes down the singing comes down. Some people find this amusing. At first I thought it stupid and banal. On the third or fourth listening I thought maybe there is more to this than I thought, and that I should see more of this artist's work. Seeing the Hayward exhibition I think I was right first time. But some people like it because of the banality and I suppose that must be alright, as long as the art can be explained it is acceptable. I am being ironic in the style of Martin Creed. In the A-Z Martin Creed exhibition companion, C is for conceptual art because some people, Matthew Collings for example,<sup>5</sup> think his work is conceptual, unlike Creed who says,

*I don't believe in conceptual art. I don't know what it is. I can't separate ideas from feelings... Work comes from feelings and goes towards or ends up as feelings. It is a feeling sandwich, with ideas in the middle.*<sup>6</sup>

There were a few single objects on show like a piece of Blu-Tack rolled into a ball and pressed onto a wall and a screwed up piece of paper, but arrangements of objects and things happening featured more highly so this tracing arrives at a disappearance of the single object sculpture on the whole, and the exhibition was probably called an

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.52

<sup>4</sup> Hayward Gallery, *Martin Creed: What's the point of it*, A-Z exhibition companion fold out, (Southbank Centre) 2014. (*I filmed myself talking about the exhibition as research but the image and sound quality was poor, like "BANK". The subtitles helped.*)

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Collings, *Art Crazy Nation the post Blimey! art world*, (London: 21 Publishing Ltd) p 73

<sup>6</sup> Hayward, *Creed* letter C. Martin Creed seems to be confused here about how a sandwich gets its name as usually it is named after what is in the middle, eg bread with jam in the middle is called a jam sandwich, so presumably Martin's sandwich is an ideas sandwich rather than a feelings sandwich, but maybe I am just being too serious or pedantic about semantics. (Or maybe the ideas are subsumed into the feelings).

installation too. The term installation is problematic, it is used almost without thinking nowadays, Claire Bishop says as much in her introduction to a book she wrote on installation,

*... the sheer diversity in terms of appearance, content and scope of the work produced today under this name, and the freedom with which the term is used, almost preclude it from having any meaning. ... it can happily be applied to even a conventional display of paintings on a wall.*<sup>7</sup>

I would argue that this is to ensure that what is shown is really contemporary art, not something old and modernist like a sculpture by Anthony Caro or a painting by Mark Rothko. Being contemporary (meaning now) is very important, and installation is contemporary in a way other things aren't. Maybe installation will be like 'Coronation Street' and 'The Archers' and just go on forever.<sup>8</sup> It certainly is the old new status quo term for serious fun art. Like contradictory language that states everything in one go to make sure it has all been said like Will the intern's "Yeah, no, cool, sure," response to almost every ask in BBC 2's current comedy programme W1A, a piss-take by the BBC about the BBC. The furniture is horrendous.

Creed just has a simple idea and does it. Much of his work is like a handmade readymade. By this I mean his work has the appearance of new, everyday objects even if he has had them constructed or handmade. His work is so clean. Even his attempts at being shocking or dirty, like the films of people being sick or shitting or the big scale penis erection,<sup>9</sup> or work pretending to be dangerous like the massive rotating MOTHERS sign written in dressing room mirror lights blocking the entrance<sup>10</sup>, have a squeaky clean feel to them. He makes really safe,<sup>11</sup> middle class art that his mother should be proud of. He was even putting on a Mothers Day event and something specially for the children. It's lovely. Interestingly I went to Tate Britain after the Hayward and his lights were still going on and off.

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<sup>7</sup> Claire Bishop, *Installation Art A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p.6. *Note: I observed this first hand, (on the same day that I went to the Hayward), at Hauser & Worth where Zang Eli's paintings were described as an installation. My talk about this installation is also on film.*

<sup>8</sup> Coronation Street is a British television soap opera that was first broadcast on Granada Television on 9 December 1960, and The Archers is a radio 4 soap opera that has been broadcast daily since 29 May – 2 June 1950 (pilot), 1 January 1951 – present: *dates internet accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2014*

<sup>9</sup> I asked two guys looking at this alongside me what they thought it was about and one of them replied, "Making me feel inadequate." We bumped into each other elsewhere and had a bit of a laugh about the art. Perhaps that was the point of it.

<sup>10</sup> A section of the stair rail on the ramp leading to the next level had been removed (sawn off) to accommodate this piece. I was shocked that this iconic 1970's building had been vandalised in this way.

<sup>11</sup> The Hayward has really good insurance cover to protect it the gallery from liable claims of damages caused by the art.

## Interlude 2 : The object phantomised

Constant reading of and around the object is creating phantoms of the mind: solid, floating, fluent, fluid, inaccessible, especially on waking from sleep, the slow entry into one world of consciousness from another. I wake and collide with objects, simulacra and ethereal. Grey and darker grey. White.

The physicality of the world is overpowering, it is a weight, we deal with it, beginning with our own bodies, are they light or heavy, are we feeling well, aches and pains, an empty healthiness etc., we become drawn to them in a lazy, ignorant, mesmeric way, we become the herd,<sup>12</sup> our eyes glazed over, our contented belief in social, participatory, utilitarian equality. We must rise above them surging with energy and self belief.

The objects made or bought will remain and become if we are not there. The tree falling in the forest metaphor is good. Cliché can be perfect. Does it still fall if we are not there? Yes. No. Cool. Sure. Object Orientated Philosophy poses an interesting quest by speculating on the reality of objects independent of human perception. I like this idea of no policing, no boundaries. Let's speculate realistically. A contradiction. Good, creative. Expressive Geometry. Can geometry be tender?

That mark we make as awakening humans, that personal touch is also an object. That becomes one 'image' object.

And me, I object also.

## Tracing III : Trying to get to grips with a seminal piece of art criticism cited frequently in discussions of the dematerialisation of the art object - Michael Fried's "Object and Objecthood, 1967"<sup>13</sup>: FIRST READ IMPRESSIONS FROM MEMORY, NO LOOKING

*Outcome of re-reading for accuracy of interpretation of Fried's position in italics*

1<sup>st</sup> Fried's term objecthood derives from a commentary on modernist painting (art) in relationship to the absence, or negation of, the essences of art, that being non-art.

*Objecthood is something that should be suspended by modernist painting through the 'pictorial' (discrete to painting) construction of the shape of the canvas, and something that is aspired to by minimalism that regards shape as a given property of all objects, (almost an object in its own right), art objects included. Paintings are paintings first and minimalist artworks are shapes first. The two are clearly in opposition.*

2<sup>nd</sup> This comes from, for Fried, a closer look at the 'ideology' of minimalism, rather specifically in this case through the work and theory of Don Judd and Robert Morris. *This is about right bearing in mind the above and Fried's view that Minimalism (Literalism) claims to succeed in creating a new art from where modernist painting is failing to achieve 'progress' in art. Fried's observations that theatricality is implicit in Minimalism by virtue of the beholders involvement as part of the whole situation pre-*

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<sup>12</sup> The link to Friedrich Nietzsche's writing on Herd Morality is acknowledged but tenuous as my reading and understanding of the same is limited. The often oppressiveness of the physicality of objects, our bodies and body parts included, in an awakening state demands a passive acceptance or an energetic overcoming.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum*, Summer 1967.

*empties the future onslaught of installation art, which postured out the coolness of minimalist iconography while keeping the space for dramas of one kind or another. Also note he believes that "theatre is now the negation of art" <sup>14</sup>*

3<sup>rd</sup> Although coming at minimalism from two different views, Morris as some kind of Gestalt performer and Judd as a form reducer, repeating shapes that become object art rather than art-art, they seem united in the notion that the problems arising in painting as a result of 'time passing' (so history) and 'progress were at the point of collapse (ie exhausted); the pictorial becoming somehow intellectually (and materially) an obsolescence, around concerns with a painting or a sculpture, being reliant on parts (the compositional elements) that somehow articulated a whole. This to be resolved by the creation (or making) of structures without pictorial referencing, but where shape is still important.

*That's right. Morris was into dance and performance around and inside his work until one of his columns fell over with him inside it, Ouch. 'subsequently the boxes became figure equivalents, objects that are like a person, rather than containing one.' <sup>15</sup> So much for suffering for one's art Rob.*

4<sup>th</sup> Judd says that although the minimalist objects appear like sculpture, their dealings are more closely akin to painting and the problems of painting.

*True. Fried quotes and paraphrases Judd's 'case against painting' around the issues of relational composition of parts and pictorial illusion, continuing to be difficult even in the most abstract paintings. Judd believed in the idea of a definite whole without any parts if possible. I think this may have caused problems for the development of sculpture in its own right at the time and since, the issues around painting taking up the space (literally and aesthetically) that had previously been the domain of sculpture. Significant reappearance of the single object sculpture but as a development of painting.*

5<sup>th</sup> Fried says that a key element in the new turn toward minimalism is the theatrical element in that the 'artwork' requires the 'beholder' to be present for the work to function as art.

*As above in 2<sup>nd</sup>.*

6<sup>th</sup> The repetitive nature of minimalist work suggests the infinite. This is in opposition ideologically and materially to the modernist sculptures of Anthony Caro and David Smith where the parts or objects that make up the whole are individual but make up the whole sculpture by the way they are related, contextualised, working in space, more so with each other.

*True. Fried discusses the values of Caro's sculpture at some length as successfully developing the artform in new ways while retaining autonomy and therefore, for Fried, authenticity. He is also upheld as having antiliteralist and antitheatrical sensibility. Note that this repetition is more important for Judd than Morris.*

7<sup>th</sup> The minimalist repetitions get in the way of, almost, the beholder. This requires the beholder to remain psychologically (and physically) outside the work as they negotiate the space around it without becoming drawn into it, or more exactly into its content, as one could into a modernist abstract expressionist painting, that presumes autonomous aestheticism as a painting first.

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<sup>14</sup> Morris is theatrical, Judd is not. In the essay footnotes Fried acknowledges his use of common ground between the two and the absence of their differences in his argument.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p128

*This is there.*

8<sup>th</sup> Frank Stella's paintings were dealing with shape, to take painting to the next level without giving up on it being faced with the problem about painting becoming an object, before it was a painting, perceptually that is, or maybe even actually.

*Yes, this was claimed as the aim of the shaped paintings.*

9<sup>th</sup> The theatrical element in literalist theory was bad theatre for Fried.

*That's what he thought, practice rather than theory though.*

10<sup>th</sup> Fried uses the term objecthood to mean non-art. He got this idea of non-art from Greenberg.

*He didn't exactly get the idea from Greenberg but used the term in a similar way to Greenberg's phrase 'the condition of non-art' that he associated minimalism with as being the nearest thing to it, non-art, but not quite there.*

The single object sculpture disappearing with the advent of minimalism and theatricality, but sometimes being confused with a new development in sculpture that was really a new turn in the development of painting by negating painting and making objects focused on shape before form in a way that could only be done in three dimensions. An earthquake across the landscape of historic artistic sensibility as Fried trembles.

### Interlude 3 – Factory Art Production

Marfa.<sup>16</sup> We are all amazed at the sheer size, commitment and production of the art objects at Marfa known as an art factory. Andy Warhol is well known for his art factory too. Rothko crossed the street when he saw Andy Warhol. Later he committed suicide. FACTORY ART and some years down the line IKEA.<sup>17</sup>

Factory artists: Andy Warhol, Don Judd, Damien Hurst, Tracy Emin et al. (and before these Auguste Rodin with his women slaves also lovers, mistresses). Barbara Hepworth didn't go this far, she had her assistants and foundries, but her concerns with the larger works for public placement that the 'hand of the artist' should somewhere be present, she didn't let go.<sup>18</sup> Good for Barbara.

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<sup>16</sup> "The installation and context for the art being done now is poor and unsuitable. The correction is a permanent installation of a good portion of the work of each of the best artists... The main reason for this is to be able to live with the work and think about it, and also to see the work placed as it should be." Don Judd 1970 – The Judd Foundation in Marfa, Texas is the result. Is near El Paso where Bill shot Beatrix Kiddo and her friends in Tarantino's great film 'Kill Bill'.

<sup>17</sup> I went to see the Paul Klee at Tate Modern after I had written this and while walking into the gallery showing some Art Povera work a young woman entered at the same time, stopped, looked around the gallery for a few seconds and said to her friend with confident surprise, "It's Ikea!" Her friend asked, "Which bit?" and she replied, "All of it!"

<sup>18</sup> Sophie Bowness, editor, *Barbara Hepworth the Plasters The Gift to Wakefield* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2011) p 77-86 'Single Form' for the United Nations

#### Interlude 4

I am thinking about Martin Creed {I cannot think about this name without a presence of John Creed, my brother John's friend who we called Soda John because he was the son of Vi and Stan Creed who ran the oil shop, our name for the hardware store, along the parade of shops where my father ran the shoe repairers and fancy goods shop on Harold Hill, his first. And I have an inkling that an artist called Creed had a studio just along the way from my mothers flat, years and years on, near Red Lion Square WC2... was it the same one? } but not in parody) about my own sculpture as my mark - this is different to degree than 'my shit' because I am using my hands and cognition not solely the physiological function of the body in its biological continuation. (I have seen shit smeared all over the walls of a prison cell, don't forget, and spent time with the person who did it, whom I remember well, how she looked, the smell, and had feelings for. This does make a different meaning of such works in the art world, trying to 'get back' to primordial states).<sup>19</sup> Both are ridding of waste perhaps, the waste of thinking, the waste of memory, the waste of eating, ingesting, excreting.

#### Artworks Two

As an older woman I could make installations of my life experiences to work them out on the lines of Louise Bourgeois. I have thought about it but for me life is life and art is art so I guess I am in agreement with Ad Reinhardt who I have heard said 'art is art and everything else is everything else'. Outside human made art is nature made art, volcanoes, storms, sunsets etc., which is awesome and mysterious, in a very different way to installations trying to re-create them like Olafur Eliason's work 'The Weather Project'.<sup>20</sup> It was strange seeing people lying underneath it pretending to sunbathe. It is interesting that most major artists now live in cities so art tends to have an urban, unnatural, consumerist feel. Art in imitation of nature even more so.

#### Interlude 5

It is not time yet to do great works, for these will occur unwittingly through toil. It is the time for contemplation and daily execution of the same. It is the time also to endure and make worthy the ruptures that study evokes. There are many paths to follow and choices to be made. It is the time to raise up consciousness through works and referencing from whence the thoughts of the same works may have come. It is the time to be adventurous in small ways and also by large gestures. It is the time to be open and on guard, to listen and to speak, embracing the needs of the self and of others. Anger has passed away but for the while even as the injustice and corruption of the world continues. Quiet resides in the place where discontent has raged.

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<sup>19</sup> The work of Ana Mendieta, for example *'Untitled (Body Tracks), 1974*. I saw this alongside the earth body works and the Silueta in the Hayward exhibition 'Traces' in 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Olafur Eliason, *The Weather Project*, Tate Modern, London Oct 2003-March 2004.

Tracing IV : Harman at the ICA on Objects and the Arts<sup>21</sup> or ‘Non Relational Aesthetics’<sup>22</sup>

The director of the ICA introduced Graham Harman with reference to his text “The Third Table”<sup>23</sup> written for the catalogue of Documenta 13 and with these words,

*We really wanted to organise this talk at the ICA now because we seem to be entering an extremely significant moment in which Graham’s philosophies increasingly seem to be entering into artistic debate and consideration.*<sup>24</sup>

With typical breakneck speed delivery Graham Harman, fresh flown in from Cairo via Turkey,<sup>25</sup> launched into the lecture with his raising of ‘The Third Table’ that for him is the reality that cannot be directly accessed, positioned between the ‘Two Tables’ of Arthur Eddington.<sup>26</sup> The indirect access to the real, says Harman, is a key principal of Object Orientated Philosophy as it resides within the broader field of Speculative Realism, the movement that he is associated with.<sup>27</sup> He suggests that the arts are in a prime position to make an alliance with philosophy, almost in opposition to science, with regard to a similar experience of this indirect access to the real,

*Aesthetics is always aware of the difficulty of contact with the real*<sup>28</sup>

Harman remains on safe, reasonable, familiar ground by speaking of aesthetics in a general sense, presumably as a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of art, beauty and taste. I say presumably as he does not elaborate or discuss any specific aesthetics, the principles of cubist aesthetics or modernist abstract sculpture as arbitrary examples, that could be mapped onto his object orientated philosophy.<sup>29</sup> There is an absence of discussion of the nature or essence of ‘actual’ objects of art with respect to their being objects; Harman may be echoing the flatness of ontology upheld within Speculative Realism from a position that all objects, artworks included, are equal in their limited or indirect access to each other and require a mediator as posited in the notion of

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<sup>21</sup> Graham Harman Lecture: *Objects and the Arts*, ICA London, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2014; which I attended and make reference to here via my notes and a recording made in situ.

<sup>22</sup> The title of the lecture was given as *Objects and the Arts* but Harman said it could also have been called Non Relational Aesthetics, I think he is referring to Nicolas Bourriaud’s theories on relational aesthetics.

<sup>23</sup> Graham Harman, *The Third Table/Der dritte Tisch*, 100 thoughts - No 085, (Documenta 13, 2012)

<sup>24</sup> Gregor Muir, appointed Executive Director of the ICA in 2011.

<sup>25</sup> G. Harman is Associate Provost for Research Administration and Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the American University in Cairo: course ‘Philosophical Thinking’, [://www.aucegypt.edu/fac/grahamharman](http://www.aucegypt.edu/fac/grahamharman), accessed 16.03.14

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*, (New York: MacMillan, 1929). The two tables of Eddington are the table of everyday life and the table of physics.

<sup>27</sup> Speculative realism is a movement in contemporary [philosophy](#) which defines itself loosely in its stance of [metaphysical realism](#) against the dominant forms of [post-Kantian philosophy](#) or what it terms *correlationism*.<sup>[1]</sup> Speculative realism takes its name from a conference held at [Goldsmiths College, University of London](#) in April 2007. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculative\\_realism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculative_realism) accessed 13.04.14

<sup>28</sup> Ibid Harman Lecture

<sup>29</sup> Robert Jackson attempts this in: *The Anxiousness of Objects and Artworks*, Michael Fried, *Object Orientated Ontology and Aesthetic Absorption*, Speculations II ([www.speculationsjournal.org](http://www.speculationsjournal.org)), 2011.

‘vicarious causation’<sup>30</sup> which in this case is aesthetics. The artist, informed by theory, deals with the material world by adding to it, and creates the real, metaphysically, by this adding.

Perhaps the arrogance (pretension – the risk of the artwork or idea falling flat), and the foolishness (absurdity – the artwork is not materially needed like a chair), of the artist can make a ‘real’ alliance with the philosophy of Speculative Realism, neither having, what Harman terms ‘the professional pressure’ of explaining objects as the scientist has. The practice of ‘artistic adding’ by aesthetics seems to have some affinity with Harman’s dismissal of reductionist philosophy in its various guises,<sup>31</sup> that attempts to understand the object through elimination of it, by two routes he terms under-mining and over-mining; the former being reducing the reality of the object to its physical constituent parts, eg atoms, and the latter being reducing the reality of the object to its being a product of cultural networks and social structures. To paraphrase Harman this is ‘getting rid of objects’ through reductionist explanation. Harman mindfully ‘references back’ to modernist theory via a mention of Clement Greenberg; Speculative Realism being accused of regression rather than progression from the positions of Continental Philosophy.

The single object re-appearing as a tentative suggestion of an alliance between art and philosophy. Although Harman has much to say of other philosophers and their attempts at quantifying objects or the real, (in fact he appears to build his own thoughts on criticisms of ‘his favourites’), he seems to avoid making any ‘direct’ claims of his own, discoursing in an inaccessible style comparable his philosophy. I think he is interested in the ideas he proposes but in a creative way as he insists upon philosophy being a love of knowledge rather than knowledge itself. So a doing thing rather than an arriving thing, more like artists than scientists, or maybe somewhere in the middle like Harman’s table.

### Tracing V – Everything looks like installation now<sup>32</sup>

Afterthought during a quiet, early morning coffee in a desolate Strada, Birmingham Mailbox: Not just contemporary gallery art, but young, cool, urban life too looks like installation, the installation of an airport lounge, a stage set to come onto and leave, homogenised bars and restaurants, somewhere to wait until the next thing happens, the next journey out, the next business meeting or time with friends, to sit and drink and chat, to text, phone and surf, a recognisable and safe place to hang, predictable sterility, comfort, standards, known expenditure. The emphatic, frenzied daytime streets of non-gendered suits walking to work becoming adult playgrounds by night, when vomiting

<sup>30</sup> 'Vicarious' means that objects confront one another only by proxy, through sensual profiles found only on the interior of some other entity. 'Asymmetrical' means that the initial confrontation always unfolds between a real object and a sensual one. And 'buffered' means that [real objects] do not fuse into [sensual objects], nor [sensual objects] into their sensual neighbors, since all are held at bay through unknown firewalls sustaining the privacy of each. from the asymmetrical and buffered inner life of an object, vicarious connections arise occasionally...giving birth to new objects with their own interior spaces.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object-oriented\\_ontology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object-oriented_ontology), accessed 20.03.14

<sup>31</sup> Harman takes this back to Pre Socratic philosophy circa 600 BC

<sup>32</sup> The Now Show, *Radio 4 Comedy programme; a send up of the 1990's lounge sound band Coldplay by singing in their style a song entitled "Everything sounds like Coldplay now"* circa 2012.

into handbags is controlled like the traffic by community police and suspect behaviours devoured by CCTV are squeezed and pushed against a wall for questioning with real guns. Mundane life as drama. Phenomenological perception where life has come so close to art it has become the art. The single object sculpture transformed into the desired and obtained mobile phone, handbag, ipad, hair cut, suit, jeans, coffee, shoes, shirt but most of all the phone. We don't really need art to make us think anymore, we just want more visual stimulation sensation.

A recall of my conception of small scale sculpted formes, a withdrawn world in your hand, made in the B1 cave in the sky in 2011, calling back the Aegean islands, the Cycladic figurines, desire for meaning, presence, possession, continuity, permanence. Anthropological autonomy in single object sculpture reappearing.

Whilst agreeing about the changing role of the viewer as a key element in the developmental purpose of installation art in their books on the subject Mark Rosenthal<sup>33</sup> and Claire Bishop<sup>34</sup> unfold this view under different headings. Rosenthal proposes a taxonomy of four artistic approaches with an emphasis on materials and presentation, whilst Bishop presents four modalities of experience with emphasis on the perception of the viewer. In both cases the disintegration of the autonomous art object is intentional, it being replaced by a varying of modes of juxtaposing objects, colours, sounds, movements and performances requiring the presence of the viewer to activate or realise the work. Hence a paradigm shift occurs as the 'progress' of art is cited away from Fried's 'presentness'<sup>35</sup> of autonomous artworks that invite the detached 'beholder' to experience the sublime through looking, toward a literal experience for the 'viewer' as they enter a 'situation' that demands their embodied participation. This activated spectatorship and the art that presupposes it is what Fried deemed as theatrical, or 'bad theatre' in his essay 'Art and Objecthood', whereas proponents of installation would endorse it as engaging more fully than autonomous art with life and therefore with reality. This is a limited view in my opinion that has continued to form the basis of an unsound case for the supremacy of installation art over autonomous art per se, or as Bishop states before re-examining this premise in her conclusion,

*Insisting on the viewer's first hand presence in the work, installation art has come to justify its claims to political and philosophical significance on the basis of two arguments: **activated spectatorship** and the ideas of the **dispersed or de-centred subject**. This argument supports a consensus widely held among academics, curators, critics and practitioners of contemporary art that the decentering of normative (ie modern) subjectivity is today a **fait accompli**.*<sup>36</sup>

Should there be an *accomplished fact* arrived at in contemporary art? Should art not be going further that the status quo, attempting to at least? One could argue that from aesthetically and politically ideological beginnings installation art has developed over time into an inflated, sensationalist, capitalist, outdated, conformist, institutionalised

<sup>33</sup> Mark Rosenthal, *Understanding Installation Art From Duchamp to Holzer* (Munich: Prestel, 2003)

<sup>34</sup> Bishop, *Installation Art*

<sup>35</sup> Fried, *Art and Objecthood*

<sup>36</sup> Bishop, *Installation Art*, p 128

social network. A little extreme perhaps, however with this thought in mind I would like to take a waltz around a few installations and associated trappings in an attempt to elucidate this idea.

The art gallery, private and public, as institution has its own reality that has survived the attempts by artists through the decades to subvert its position of power and undermine its authority as a privileged venue for art often with installation art.

Alan Kaprow leaves an authentic legacy of 1960's political installation in opposition to the economic alliance between formalism (abstract expressionist painting) and commercial galleries. His environments and happenings in downtown New York loft spaces filled with detritus, cast off materials and word hanging<sup>37</sup> invited the viewer to be organically involved and were in stark contrast to the smart uptown galleries showing high market value abstract expressionist paintings.

They are equally in contrast to more recent works of installation claiming to continue to stand on a political, if quasi, platform behind a rhetoric of democracy, such as Thomas Hirschorn's 'Bataille Monument', an installation at Kassell for Documenta 12 in 2002. The siting of the installation in a working class suburb plays more with the titillation possibilities of an art going public finding themselves amidst the lower classes mixed with art than any subversion of the privileged gallery system. On the contrary this work also serves as a good example of artist compliance with the system via involvement in a high profile, lucrative art event. The rise in recent years of the popularity and sheer size of blockbuster biennales and art fairs totally suited to the format of installation art that can be designed to fill any given space demonstrates a symbiotic relationship of success, fame and fortune.

Daniel Buren's politically motivated work had attempted to directly challenge the context of the gallery space since the 1960's, which maybe alerting in its concept and visually impressive, but his posturing with stripes painted on banners hung out of gallery windows<sup>38</sup> and painted on the edges of grandiose gallery steps<sup>39</sup> have ultimately failed to make any *actual* difference to what takes place in the long term in galleries. In the last show I saw of his at the Lisson Gallery he had abandoned his democratic iconography of stripes for colourful constructions in various materials including Perspex that had a very constructed, formalist feel. His success as an artist within the gallery system is surely a case of biting the hand that feeds.

The anti-form dispersal of objects in a space is said to eliminate 'single point perspective' associated with autonomous art since the Renaissance and symbolising male hierarchical power; consequently a relationship has been taken to exist between the fragmented, multi-viewpoint reception of installation art and a left field emancipation that actually arose as a genuine product of the climate of 1960's liberal ethics, feminism and political protest. However, installation art continues to thrive in today's global economy as the customs and wealth of western capitalism spreads eastward. If anything the increasing number of art galleries built in cities like Shanghai and Beijing to house such large scale works are becoming a symbol of cultural and economic progress for the emerging economies of Asia.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Allan Kaprow, *An Apple Shrine*, Judson Gallery, New York, Nov-Dec 1961 and *Words*, Smolin Gallery, New York, Sept 1962.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Buren, *Within and beyond the Frame*, John Webber Gallery, New York, Oct 1973

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Buren, *Up and Down, In and Out, Step by Step A Sculpture*, Art Institute Chicago, 1977

Similarly large installation has become necessary to fill the massive spaces created by new build galleries like Bilbao or the conversion of old buildings like Tate Modern starting during the 1990's. Such projects have contributed to the prestige and cultural acumen of cities, increasing tourism and revenue, one might say they are regarded more highly than the art inside, a reversal of modernist work and its exhibition. Big and impressive, sensation dominating, instant knowledge via a set of earphones and therefore accessible to more people, for many installation art has become part of life.

Individual installations by their ephemeral nature cannot be bought and sold in the same way as individual, portable art so have been upheld as being in opposition to the capitalist, economic structures around ownership, collectability, investment and profit supported by the private gallery system. However, I would argue that the documentation of work has indirectly become the artwork as 'valued residue object' of installation works demonstrated by the large volume of gallery archive and art books available. The increasing number of installation commissions, including those for the large scale Biennale venues across the globe, suggest that the artist has replaced the artwork as commodity. The artist has become the object and is bought in trust of their work and value, before the work has been materialised. Is this not reminiscent of the same male dominated value system in operation around art production during the Renaissance with families such as the Medicis having the power hold on culture?

Complex issues seem to have arisen around the roles of artist and curator in the context of installation art inviting a range of readings over responsibility and authorship. In the early days of conception the artists complete contextual control of the installation would have carried significant weight as this was deemed, with the viewers presence, the whole work. In dematerialisation work the distribution of the art is the 'act' of the artwork, and he/she/they playing this out themselves. In this sense the curators role is marginalised, both as conservator and exhibition manager. Perhaps this accounts for the apparent trend of artist curators, but the debate continues.

In making these observations I am not intending to give a negative view of all post 1960's installation art, or indeed installation art in general but I am trying to challenge it as the definitive form of art for our time and the foreseeable future. I acknowledge the absence of works not relevant in this regard but worthy of further study and research in their own right and for other purposes, some of these are listed in the section on structure.

### Artworks Three – Bruce and Me

Bruce Nauman works with the de-centring theme but brings back emotion into the artistic frame. He uses his own body as a tool of art execution, the performance is the art, the experience, the residue of little or no interest. That's why he films and photographs it. I have been recommended to look at the way Bruce Nauman works on several occasions, in view of the large, choreographed drawings I have made so I have tried to overcome my previous disinterest in his work, although there were some mirrors set up at the corners of constructed corridors at an ICA exhibition I found interesting.

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<sup>40</sup> Rachel Marsden, *The Temporary*, Article Gallery, BIAD, Birmingham. A talk on contemporary curation in China, April, 2014.

Until recently the work I make using my body as a tool has been focused on the formal residue, the resultant drawing. However, current work in drawing and in sculpture is tending toward a hybrid of both and my planned piece of work will explore the experience of performance as a conscious act.

### Conclusion

In writing this essay I seem to have dug many holes, some of which I have fallen into, feeling like Alice when she is none too sure of where her moving body is taking her confused and intrigued mind.

In execution of the essay there has been a constant battle ensuing between a hypnotic, intuitive attraction toward creative writing and an analytical desire to arrive at and record complete answers which of course is impossible. Not surprisingly I experience a similar duality in my practice.

I cannot deny that my original hunch and question about single object sculpture has unwittingly turned into a pretext for beginning to resolve some issues over the debates and positioning around the nature of art in the late 1960's and early 70's that have hung over me since I completed my Fine Art BA in 1976, an after the flood feeling in the wake of the excitement of the dematerialisation of the art object under investigation here. Interestingly my final studio work then was emphatically situated within the fragmented installation arena that I have touselled with again here, critically this time thanks to the research demands. I am discovering now what I had suspected to be true then that conviction requires contextualising by theory if art practice is to develop with understanding, authenticity and purpose.

So what next as an interplay with the research? A studio and gallery hybrid installation in the form of an 8 foot high cuboid made from Celotex loft insulation (an unprivileged material used in the building trade like the minimalists used in the 1960's but in this case feminist as it is so light I can handle it myself and it has got pink writing on the exterior), for the purpose of entering inside to perform a felt pen drawing responding to the context at the time with intuitive logic, probably.

Strangely I did get a sense of something I could recognise recently looking at the video of Bruce Nauman side-stepping round his square to the metronome beat in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The next day I saw Barack Obama land on the Museumplein while on my way to the Van Gogh Museum. He had just arrived for the Nuclear Summit in Rotterdam and stopped off at the Rijksmuseum to see 'The Night Watch' by Rembrandt. The Van Gogh Museum was closed for security reasons but I bet Michelle was in there looking at 'The Potato Eaters.'

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