

In form express and admirable (in a sense lying, in a sense not)

THE YARDARM^I

Amongst the thronging visitors to the 1857 Paris Salon, a sculpture silently screams for attention. Those sitting around its base, their eyes focussed on the floor-to-ceiling exhibition of paintings and perhaps the crowds themselves, pay it no heed. Drawn by the caricaturist, painter and sculptor Honoré Daumier for publication in the satirical daily newspaper Le Charivari, the work speaks to the dreams of objects, and to the nightmares of the sculptor. II

02:00

"My mother was a royal virgin," Peterson said, "and my father was a shower of gold. My childhood was pastoral and energetic and rich in experiences which developed my character. As a young man I was noble in reason, infinite in faculty, in form express and admirable, and in apprehension..." Peterson went on and on and although he was, in a sense, lying, in a sense he was not.^{III}

Peterson, Barthelme's struggling sculptor (for exposure, for rent, for psychological stability), coerced to appear on an absurd TV gameshow by financial and mental duress, seizes his moment in the limelight. You don't need to wait for the questions if the answers are apparent, it seems, and the disgorging that ensues lays bare a plethora of formative influences. The clause 'in form express and admirable' from which this exhibition takes its title is itself a quotation of a linguistically disputed section of Hamlet's 'What a piece of work man is!' monologue, the Dane's preoccupation with the 'quintessence of dust' an aptly sculptural concern.^{IV}

os:00 Can a pumpkin festival then perform as a useful metaphor for the materialisation of ideas? If sculptures are the embodiment of thought, what is to be gained by this act of translation? What does this expressive language have that is intrinsic only to itself? How are these ideas offered up? How are they to be assessed, weighed? How easily may one ignore the truck and the harness, the pallet that it rests upon? Is it desirable to do so? Is 'desire' applicable? Is it acceptable? How democratic is this performance? How easily will it be manipulated? Is this good?

From this vast circulation in the world, in the field of the original thought matter, he or she may have an idea; a set of abstract norms and rules that you can carry around in your head. A mind stretched by an idea, or the flesh of your mind stretched by an idea...^{VI}

o4:00 For a short period, principally the latter half of the 1960s, Claes Oldenburg produced a series of rapid sketches that took the form of proposals for colossal monuments, reading like ideas sketched down on whatever lay to hand on a night of fitful sleep, hotel notepaper doodling or long-haul sketches. Specifically situated geographically, it became commonplace for an artist growing in reputation that when he travelled his hosts would request local iterations.

The proposals are characterized by their whimsy, satire of monumental pomposity and keen sense of the absurd, qualities largely lost in the transition from proposal to the civic-scale material realizations that followed. What is the cause of this translation error? Perhaps it is the loss of the tangible precarity exhibited by earlier fabrications, for the Ray Gun Manufacturing Company 'happenings' for example, that had coherently translated to these dashed-off works of absurdist grandeur? VII The imprint of bureaucracy weighs heavy on a practice that makes no generative play of the restrictions that a commissioning process inevitably imposes – unlike, say, Chris Burden's ludicrously complex, and transparent, systems for the realization of a throwaway gesture. VIII

Oldenburg's monuments are far more challenging as sculptures on the page, their civic (and civil) manifestations perversely reducing their ambition and expressive force. Is the success of these proposals therefore due to their lack, and therefore absolute (through non-fabrication) embrace, of compromise?^{IX}

The Golem, hubris personified, is brought down by the loss of his name. Accordingly it is the one thing that John Proctor^X will not surrender. In the age of McCarthyism, the guarding of names is key. For Marcel Duchamp, nomination became the tool. Performing an inversion, Robert Morris removed aesthetic content. It For Cratylus there was instead the denunciation of all words – for him speech was too shifting, meaning too precarious. The reasonable, consistent recourse was gesture, the movement of a finger.

Clay, the red earth, works fast under the hand. Plaster casts seriality. Monumental heads emerge from the disordered, or resolutely ordered, state of dumb matter, indicative of man's desire to find his representation in everything.

- os:00 Holes get prodded into things they are not; cut open a Swiss cheese and air is replaced by air. Minds turn to food. The stomach reasserts itself. How far have we travelled from the days of reading through viscera? Thoughts get sifted. Stones are removed from heads XII, voluntarily, their delivery never simple but the gesture one of clarity. Is production therapeutic? XIII
- Forgery looks to outsource such problems by adopting a pre-existing methodology. It skips the supposedly evolutionary stage from mimicry to inspired production, resolutely creatively retrograde. But the challenge is one both of skill (craft) and projection (development of adopted style into new forms, occasionally directed by provenancial loopholes). There is intellectual and archival labour in the coherent, subtle construction of narrative, by necessity one backed by technical aptitude. Even denial

may be factored as provenance. XIV A rare process whereby damage or removal, echoing an original lack (perceived or otherwise) completes the generative process, XV closes an ellipse. What status the object once the illusion is compromised? Will narrative again step into the breach?

The relationship between tools and their users is reciprocal. The form of the experiment constructs its results. The curve of a road defines behaviour. The history of the loom is analogous to the evolution of mechanised warfare. The industrialisation of agriculture began with Cain and Abel: the verisimilitude between the jawbone of an ass XVII and the conventional plough was an irony not lost. Manufacture, the asserted human command of materials, is more of a two-way street, the boundaries more porous, than we would care to acknowledge.

What is the nature of its responsibility to those drawn into its mechanics? An action is not performed without the action simultaneously performing the actor. XVIII We know this from Brecht of course. But the infrastructure is also performed. Sets are built, 'non-professionals' form both the background, the ecosystem of the production, and the audience. Again the tools are constructed and construct. This complex system commands multiple layers of replication, evidenced by the fetish-objects of production to the desire for re-fabrication, from props ('film property') to entire subjectivities. XIX



Image from You and Me, 1938, dir. Fritz Lang XX

In the social security office there are 3-kilo bags of potatoes strapped to the underside of the waiting-room chairs. It is hoped they will grow, a latterly-visible jungle under the chair. They hark back to the 'potato money' of German history. Is it about social policy? Is it a provocation? 'We couldn't accept to have potatoes thrown at them', says the welfare manager of the claimants. The work goes into books instead, a proposition. A backing away from the job in-hand. Who is an acceptable audience? Whose role is it to defend an art project (commissioner? artist? dealer...?) Where does the buck stop?

Paris, May, 1968. Students climb onto civic sculptures, their new flags in hand. Monuments to victory are reclaimed as the focus for revolutionary spectacle and at the same time are reinvigorated as memorials to loss. The images of their seizure proliferate through likeminded outlets in different territories, the symbolism clear to all. They become, momentarily, propositions again. The continuing contention of some, and the loci for protest of others, suggest that monumental sculpture may still be productive (and malleable) social actants. XXI

How do we learn about matter? How are limitations introduced, understood, exploited? What response to this process is expected? What are the limits of instruction? To what extent should a student body be regarded as an experimental resource within the study of complex group behaviour? Is a pedagogic duty of care beholden to engineer environments of cynicism and disinterest?

You receive an unsigned letter from the Group A Staff, St. Martins School of Art, 1972. It's been like this for weeks. This one, rather than idiosyncratic reference material, or a demand to absent oneself, say, requests that you bring a ball of string to the park near the Serpentine Gallery at a specific time and date, but offers no further instruction.

It's 1851. The same park. Gentlemen in top hats, couples in their finery, strolling past tables of rocks, browsing the mineral wealth of invited nations in a giant, temporary glass palace, itself once a sketch on some station blotting paper—the resolution of a competition that nobody won. Outside the samples are larger, the exhibition here one of both material and processing capability. The temporary steam plant is audible. In a little over five months, all this will be gone. XXII

of Hockney-esque clarity, attention equal to rocks and Vans alike. Part homage to sun-bleached Hockney, part rehabilitation of John William Inchbold, the drawings of Flemming George here study out the ground beneath his feet. Both vividly contemporary and wildly anachronistic, a precise philosophical untamping of Long's grass, out in the long grass, an exercise in formal precision. Our imperative engagement with matter begins where our feet touch the ground. XXIII

An architect builds pavilions in the flat lands of Suffolk, retooling Neutra for the English landscape. A small but radical body of work. Space, clearly delineated for the passage of light. An architect's house built on the beach so that one could see the daily seasons approach. He would come to build machines to map the atmospheric interactions of mist and light as the magic hour approached. A painting machine, an animated watercolour wash with whirring automation. XXIV

The plants are watered. XXV Clothes are folded and stacked. Materials are observed as to how they conduct themselves with the simplest of human intervention, for the purpose of clarity. There is rigour to these juxtapositions, the gestures and titles – piles, heaps, bundles – indexically linking object and process. XXVI

18:00 A lemon in a dish, Kettle's Yard. Used by Jim Ede to teach composition. It is composition. It is the

infrastructure. The lemon is the invigilator's acceded responsibility. It must be waxed, so the pewter won't tarnish. It must be typically proportioned—pointed ends, not too round. A greenish hew, not a warm yellow. It will demand trips to multiple vendors to find the right one. In winter you get 10-14 days, in summer a week at most. The air conditioning dries it out. It is a persistent fluid agreement, a received oral history. The lemon is a museum. It takes time. XXVII

19:00 Strolling through the National Theatre foyer you wonder to yourself—what's the difference between a modernist ashtray and a Donald Judd? For the sculptor that designed them, what is this shift of registers that commands the separation of disciplines? What role does an exhibition perform that re-conflates these two concerns? If the concrete benches in the Hayward Gallery are by Julian Opie, is there a consideration any more of placing 'Julian Opie' in every Hayward show? I feel no disincentive on each visit to seeking out the polished patina of their raw concrete, a modernism humanized by physical interaction with their gentle undulations in the shadows of exhibition spaces.

The lights go on, the lights go off, they dim and flare, the floods, profiles, fresnels and PARcans perform together. A narrative is in play. XXVIII A spotlight aspires to 'open white'. The apparatus establishes an empty stage for the performance of light. The cues are intricately constructed representations and enactions of themselves. The 'writing' of this script demands a mastery of a discipline but a re-appropriation of its conventional use to its own ends. Must light always have an object to be seen? What space does light, both particle and wave, command?

21:00 A cast shadow is a volume of space but also a performative obliteration, a redaction. XXIX

The Shadow knows...XXX

The impossible object proposes an appeal that fluctuates perpetually between the scientific and the poetic. Wrested between idea and physical reality, anchored by plausibility, it stalks the imagination as Melville's Confidence Man does the timber decks of the Mississippi paddle steamer where trust (and souls) are to be won. The allure of these substantiations lies in the illusion of tangibility. The initiation of a confidence trick relies on trust given, not sought. This is the moral contract that leaves you susceptible to the game in play.

In what way do we experience recollections of materiality? Do images help us? What if they are reactions to recollections, or matter experienced vicariously through relation? How does the flat documentation of a sculpture perform? What is this elimination of doubt, the concreteness of encounter that may outlive the material reality of a given work? Is this the moment where a designed object most perfectly realises its producer's intentions or its receiver's? Is abstraction dishonest? How may an object thus disintegrated become an active site of performance and production? XXXXI

How many works do I know only this way...and how do the words 'non extant' affect my understanding of an object beyond photography's partial encapsulation of death?

Night 'closes in'. We are back to thinking about air. Sculpting with moving emptiness like the *Cloud Sculptors of Coral-D* (J.G. Ballard, 1967). God abors a vacuum, apparently. Must art and science be divided to solve the plenist debate? We cannot remove the witness though, and a book may be a series of sculptural installations in volume and pressure and form. Without the need for material translation. The importance of the thought experiment cannot be overstated. XXXIII Lie down, mull it over. XXXIII

MIKE COOTER, 2013

ENDNOTES

- 1. The yardarm designates the piece of timber on a boat, typically the horizontal spar running perpendicular to the mast for the hanging of square sails, the sun's relationship to which regulates the social acceptability of a variety of daily actions, most commonly the taking of a meal or alcoholic drink.
- II. This publication, and the exhibition to which it relates, present a subjective overview of the potential forms and working methodologies that speculatively demarcate the boundaries of what might be considered a 'sculptural practice'. Intentionally, these iterations also map a web of intertwined reference points accreted through the daily practice of considering objects in the context of art, presenting an inevitably partial cartography of a thought process.
- III. A Shower of Gold, Donald Barthelme, 1964 (published in the UK by Penguin Books in Sixty Stories, 1993).
- IV. 'Quintessence', whilst being the classical fifth element in ancient Greek science, may also describe a theoretical form of dark energy, or the most pure or concentrated form of a specific essence. The dust that drifts through the fetid atmosphere of Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1941) giving definition to the bold Expressionist lighting by John F. Seitz, production designed by Hal Pereira, was composed of ground aluminium particles blown into the air prior to shooting.
- v. The two events featured in Gert Verhoeven's *The Blob* are the World Pumpkin Confederation Contest (Buffalo, NY) and the Gourd Olympics (Port Elgin, Ontario). A sequel to this work, *Bustutai*, was filmed in Japan in 2003.
- VI. Excerpted voice-over from The Blob, video, 21mins, Gert Verhoeven, 2001.
- VII. "Giant Fagends to be scattered like columns of ancient temples in a park in London...", Writing on the Side, 1956-69, Claes Oldenburg, Museum of Modern Art New York, 2013. See also Darkman, dir. Sam Raimi, Universal Pictures, 1990, an essay in creative anxiety and sculptural precarity.
- VIII. I am thinking particularly of When Robots Rule: The Two-Minute Airplane Factory, installed at the Tate Gallery in 1999.
- IX. "Two little ones would move much, much faster than a single huge big one... That place where it saws," Jean-Claude said, "is not very difficult. I can put my two hands around it." He made a circle with his two hands to demonstrate. "Invariably when I look at the piece I see two pieces. Are you absolutely sure you didn't conceive of it wrongly in the first instance?" "Absolutely," Peterson said. Not a single piece of his was on view, and his liver expanded in rage and hatred. "You have a very romantic impulse," Jean-Claude said. "I admire, dimly, the posture. You read too much in the history of art. It estranges you from those possibilities for authentic selfhood that inhere in the present century." "I know," Peterson said, "Could you let me have twenty until the first?" (Barthelme, ibid.)
- x. The Crucible, Arthur Miller, 1953.
- XI. Document, Robert Morris, 1963.
- XII See *The Extraction of the Stone of Madness*, c.1494, Hieronymous Bosch, and Michel Foucault writing on the same in *History of Madness*, 1961. From Barthelme: "'Yesterday," Petersen said to the television audience, "in the typewriter in front of the Olivetti showroom on Fifth Avenue, I found a recipe for Ten Ingredient Soup that included a stone from a toad's head..." (ibid.)
- XIII. Produced on April 29th, 1971, one of '6 letter/actions in support of the "May Days" demonstration in Washington, D.C. which for the first time included passive resistance on a large scale designed to bring the war machine to a halt',

the letter addressed to Melvin Laird, (US) Secretary of Defence from the Guerrilla Art Action Group (and signed Jon Hendricks/Jean Toche) reads:

Guerrilla Art Action, to be performed every day, from May 1 through May 6, 1971, by Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defence:

QUOTATIONS FROM THE WASHINGTON MEAT MARKET:

BRAINS:	79¢ per pound.
TONGUES:	
BLOOD:	. Y . Y
HEADS:	1 0

CAN YOU DO BETTER?

From The Guerrillla Art Action Group - 1969—76 A Selection, Printed Matter Inc., NY, 1978.

- XIV. See The autobiography of Howard Hughes by Clifford Irving, 1971.
- XV. See also Copy Right, Superflex, 2006.
- XVI. See also Leviathan and the Air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life, Steven Shapin & Simon Schaffer, Princeton University Press, 1985/2011 and We Have Never Been Modern, Bruno Latour, Harvard University Press, 1993 (English translation).
- XVII. A neat narrative embellishment.
- xVIII. See also *See Saw*, performed by Simone Forti (with Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer), Reuben Gallery, December 16-18, 1960.
- XIX. Film screening as part of the exhibition programme *The Last Movie*, Dennis Hopper, 1971 courtesy the Hopper Art Trust.
- xx. In this sequence from Lang's flawed but fascinating attempt at a lehrstück, made rather tempestuously with regular Brecht collaborator Kurt Weill, the socially-minded owner of the department store in which the film is set explains to his wife the rehabilitative value of staffing his enterprise entirely with parolees and ex-prisoners. The gestural echo of the Socialist sculpture visible behind has some prior form in Lang's oeuvre. See, for instance, his interpolation of Walter Gropius' Monument to the March Dead (1920) in Metropolia (1927).
- XXI. Personal utility is not to be overlooked either of course. 'Once there I swear I'm going to go in for some monstrous debauches, to restore my morale. I'm longing for them. Perhaps by sticking something up my ass I can give my brain a good fucking. I hesitate between the column in the Place Vendôme and the obelisk [in the Place de la Concorde].' Letter to Ernest Feydeau, Gustave Flaubert, Dec 12th, 1857. Taken from The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1857-1880, Faber and Faber, 1984, Francis Steegmuller trans.
- XXII. A related work: A Stone from Metternich's House in Bohemia, Jimmie Durham, 1998.
 A related building: The Serpentine Restaurant, Patrick Gwynne, 1964-1990.
- XXIII. Audio: Charles Bukowski reading When All the Animals Lay (sic) Down, orig. 1970, on King of Poets, United States of Distribution Ltd, 1997. "I'm getting it," said Gus..."
- XXIV. I have come to understand the myriad workings of the confidence game of matte painted architecture through the classical canon over time, but this was my indelible introduction: I. M. Pei's inverted concrete pyramid for Dallas City Hall

(1978) and it's re-servicing as the headquarters of Omni Consumer Products in Paul Verhoeven's 1987 film *Robocop*.





- xxv. Juliette Blightman's work I. Southwest pillar and its shadow at the beginning of the novel (2012/13) makes explicit reference to Alain Robbe Grillet's Jealousy (1957), a major work of the nouvelle romain. Blightman's work shares this movement's explicit preoccupation with the objective interrelation of humans with tactile matter through acts of intervention and dislocation. The sculptural potential of minute change or displacement is domestically scaled and formally tangible. The emphasis on texture in The Erasers, or on the movement of the sun around a building in Jealousy, epitomise this concern with the workings of the inanimate.
- xxvi. See Barry Flanagan: Early Works 1965-82, Clarrie Wallis and Andrew Wilson eds, Tate Publishing, 2011.
- XXVII. See also *Untitled* (2007) by Simon Martin a domestically-scaled bronze reproduction of an African figurative sculpture and a fresh, organic lemon.
- XXVIII. Kill the Workers!, Janice Kerbel, Chisenhale Gallery (London), 2011.
- XXIX. It is speculated that this is the 'rat.' (from 'ratures' deletions) in Marcel Broodthaers' La souris écrit rat (à compte d'auteur), 1974 (trans. The Mouse Writes Rat (At the Author's Expense). Michael Compton, The Editions of Marcel Broodthaers, 1991.
- xxx. Tagline from the MBS radio serial *The Shadow*, 1937-54. 'Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men...? The Shadow knows'.
- XXXI. Falke Pisano, Figures of Speech, Falke Pisano and Will Holder eds, Cristoph Keller Editions, 2010.
- XXXII. See particularly, with regards to the subject of this essay, ice-nine in Kurt Vonnegut's Cat's Cradle, 1963.
- xxxIII. See Edison's Restbench and the installation From the Laboratory of Thomas A. Edison, Kirsten Pieroth, Portikus Frankfurt am Main, 2003 (catalogue available).

WITH THANKS

Honoré Daumier

Triste contenance de la Sculpture placée au milieu de la Peinture, 1857

Gert Verhoeven *The Blob.* 2001

Claes Oldenburg
Proposed Colossal Monument: Fagends
in Hyde Park, Version One, 1966

Nick Evans *Untitled (mask)*, 2012

Anonymous psychiatric patient *Untitled (cheese)*, 2007

Shaun Greenhalgh

Barbara Hepworth 'Goose (c.1927)'
forgery, date unknown

Harun Farocki Wie man sieht (As you see), 1986

Dennis Hopper
The Last Movie, 1971

Simone Forti

Documentation of the performance

See-Saw, 1960

Carsten Höller

Documentation related to the unrealised project Kartoffeln (Potatoes), 1996

Robin Fior Black Dwarf, Volume 13, Number 1,1968

Group A Staff, St Martins School of Art Archive material relating to the 'A-Course', 1969-73

Dickinson's Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition Views of the Minerals Court and the Mining Hall, 1851/2 Flemming George
Two sketchbooks, 2012

John Penn Light Machine, c.1971, and documents related to architectural practice

Juliette Blightman

I. Southwest pillar and its shadow at the beginning of the novel, 2012

Barry Flanagan Untitled (Pile), 1976

Bernard Schottlander Two ashtrays designed for the National Theatre, 1970s, and documents related to sculptural practice

Julian Opie

Cast concrete benches for the Hayward

Gallery, c.1993 (tbc)

Janice Kerbel
Cue (no.7), 2012

Marcel Broodthaers La souris écrit rat (à compte d'auteur), 1974

Raimundas Malašauskas Whose face rings the bell (Mininos), 2011

Falke Pisano Chillida (Forms and Feelings), 2006

Michael Asher Documentation of The Appearing/ Disappearing Object, 1969 To the artists for allowing their work to be included.

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