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Publication date
2017
Document Version
Final published version
Published in
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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Lerm-Hayes, C.-M. (2017). Introduction, or the Crossdresser's Secret. In C.-M. Lerm Hayes (Ed.), *Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland: Word, Image and Institutional Critique* (pp. 9-25). (Vis-á-vis). Valiz.

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Introduction, or the Crossdresser's Secret

Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes

Titles of (academic) texts on Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland abound with formulations such as 'beyond category', 'between categories', 'interdisciplinary', 'inside and outside' et cetera—and with justification: he is a novel-writing installation artist, a leading art administrator as TV personality, an art critic/painter, a medical doctor-cum-editor, a university professor and curator, an art historian's husband, friend of many artists, Irishman, Italophile, psychologist, reader, activist, emigrant. In the title of his latest novel, *The Crossdresser's Secret* (2014), he has provided material for a further—and arguably more fitting—tongue-in-cheek (self-)description: he is a cross-dresser with a secret.[1] The crossing of genres, media, professions and continents also includes genders, as he has given himself, among his numerous pseudonyms the alias Mary Josephson. This volume cannot, unfortunately, reveal secrets, such as how he has managed to be and remain so remarkably productive and still make all with whom he comes into contact feel special, no matter how small their contribution to something that concerns him. Rather, this book makes the case for a renewed and different under-

1 Brian O'Doherty, *The Crossdresser's Secret* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), book cover.

Brian O'Doherty, *The Crossdresser's Secret* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).

Book cover *The Crossdresser's Secret* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).

standing of O'Doherty/Ireland's work through the diversity of his approaches or 'personae'. At a moment when more visual artists write than ever before (both fiction and critical/theoretical texts), when institutionally and socio-politically critical insights are motivating artists to undertake organizing activities and take up leadership positions—and when this is all now considered to be part of an ever broader understanding of the art 'ecosystem'—Brian O'Doherty's actions, art and writings are able to establish him as a forerunner of much of what seems relevant today.

This introductory text aims to fulfil the task of introducing the contributions, particularly highlighting cross-references between them. It also responds to *The Crossdresser's Secret* as a tool to account for (some of) the intellectual and artistic/writerly border-crossings that are at stake in his work. These mixed activities of both theoretical writing and artistic practice can be found as the enabling moment in Brian O'Doherty's inauguration of institutional critique and novel modes of art writing. In addition to the usual task of an introduction, I will consider two recent works (both in Ireland) as pursuing a 'cross-dressing' artistic strategy, which is counter-intuitive, but makes for particularly poignant artistic/ethical/political gestures, owing to their supposed unsuitability. This introduction will thus close with the proposal that through his multi-faceted oeuvre, Brian O'Doherty provides an analysis of art's role and value for human beings. He has socially (scientifically and artistically) constructed this problem and tackles it in single-minded but necessarily diverse—and hopefully efficacious—ways: a truly remarkable life's work.

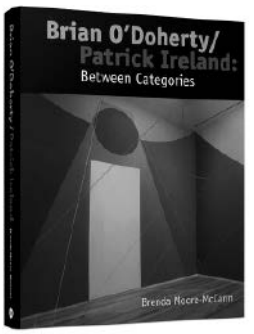
I will not chart and contextualize the main stages in O'Doherty/Ireland's life and work. It is an immense privilege to defer this task to Thomas McEvilley. He introduces his friend in a warm and simultaneously incisive manner,

selecting works for close attention that he had experienced and with which his own interests resonate. An element can be found here that pervades this collection: Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland's life and work are so diverse that responses will vary—paired with a decisive but indescribable capacity to connect with each careful viewer/reader, possibly owing to his overarching attention to the fine balance between perception and cognition, as Thomas McEvilley identifies it: 'This seemingly paradoxical position does not seem negative so much as an affirmation of a paradox, a state of being comfortable with a paradox—a dance in the excluded middle.' It will be moving for many to hear McEvilley's distinctive voice in these quite informal but erudite remarks from beyond the grave.

It is high time for an at once varied and comprehensive anthology about Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland.[2] The intention for it is to contain a number of approaches, also in order to complement the first monograph by Brenda Moore-McCann (one of the authors here), where a unified perspective and luxuriously illustrated design led to essential fact being established and key themes introduced in rich and pleasing ways.[3] The current book is a cross-Atlantic endeavour with its roots—as they should be—in Ireland, in a conference that took place at Trinity College Dublin (Triarc).[4] Further additions include the essay on O'Doherty's *White Cube* book by Patricia Falguières, which accompanied the French translation and is here for the first time available in English, Barbara Novak's evocative reading of a Rope Drawing by her husband (previously only published in German) and Lucy Cotter's article, which deserves to reach those interested in her primary subject, Brian O'Doherty's *Aspen*.[5]

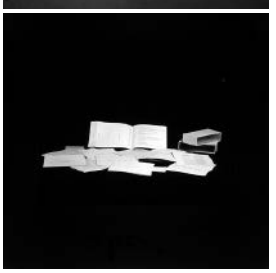
Thomas McEvilley's and Hans Belting's personally inflected responses can be considered as part of the tendency

2 This is to continue work published *In Place of an Autobiography*, Brenda Moore-McCann's monograph and the *Recorder* issue: *The Recorder: The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 22, no. 1 (Fall 2009).



3 Brenda Moore-McCann, *Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland: Between Categories* (Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2009), book cover.

4 I thank Yvonne Scott and the authors for their patience, for making the transition from Yvonne Scott as editor to me, as well as for updating and expanding on their papers.



5 Brian O'Doherty, ed., *Aspen* 5+6 (contents) (Fall/Winter 1967), mixed media, 20 × 20 cm. Photograph commissioned and arranged by Mary-Ruth Walsh; photo: Fionn McCann.

to wear one's learning lightly and humbly, which O'Doherty effects, as well as a reflection of the fact that it was in his generation that the personal became the political. Many of the essays rely on the authors' privileged access to the creator of the works they are investigating and underline their thoughts with quotations from correspondence. Independent minds are, however, *sine qua non* for the former art critic, who has himself had convictions strong enough to quit a job (or jobs) for them. It was always the view of the TV man and funding official O'Doherty that one should not pretend to possess privileged access to artworks. In this sense, this collection may function as a test case in how we can (still) speak about art. When the stringency and inevitability of transitions between the mode of academic or critical writing and the artistic and poetical voice are being valued in the subject, an anthology on him can hardly avoid following his example.[6]

Indeed, this collection thematizes O'Doherty's pioneering role in what is now the artistic research debate. Lucy Cotter proposes *Aspen* 5+6 as a model for a space between the gallery and the publication, between practice and interpretation.

O'Doherty/Ireland's entire oeuvre constitutes an outmanoeuvring of neat categories, which in turn may be the reason why academics have had difficulty canonizing/institutionalizing him. While artistic research always already institutionalizes practice and knowledge/values, O'Doherty's important role in the National Endowment for the Arts (first part-time in Visual Arts and later as the director of the Media Arts Program) is yet another complication of the picture. Whitney Rugg is the first to devote her attention to this crucial aspect for an assessment of his achievement. How did he manage to motivate the funding by the US government—the ultimate institution—of institutionally critical work? How did he

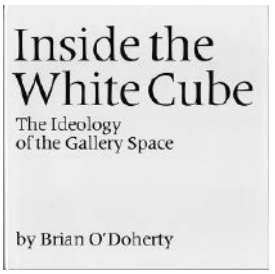
6 Working (far too intermittently) on Brian O'Doherty and the contributions to this volume has enriched my view of the way in which art and art history are fruitfully trading places. See: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do With Art (History)?* (Inaugural Lecture 537) (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers/Amsterdam University Press, 2015), <www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF_Oratie_Lerm_WEB.pdf> (accessed September 2015).

combine the roles of peer, funder and canonizer? His efforts to develop and democratize processes and categories and, as Rugg puts it here, the 'avoidance of the argument based on privileged understanding' made him tread a fine line between supporting government policy or rhetoric for free expression and provoking the discontinuation of funding, indeed the existence of the NEA itself. O'Doherty's role in enabling so much by now canonical contemporary art in expanding the NEA and finally in its demise is charted here for the first time, revealing a courage to parallel that of the *Name Change*.[7]

The theme of institutional critique within the institution (of the art world) continues in three assessments of *Inside the White Cube*.[8] It is only now that a reductive anti-gallery reading has lost its purchase, as new/experimental institutionalism and radical autonomy/radical history are being debated. Returning to O'Doherty's seminal series of essays is particularly fruitful, again revealing foresightedness and differentiation of categories and orthodoxies. Anne-Marie Bonnet contextualizes *Inside the White Cube* (ITWC) in broader historical and art market contexts. Hans Belting, as Thomas McEvilley before him, initially takes the opportunity to approach the subject of the impersonal white cube personally. Both Bonnet and Belting focus on the paradoxical success or importance of the largely unread texts. Belting unearths two categories, the spectator and the eye, where O'Doherty/Ireland's interest in art perception transcends both art history and art criticism.

In speaking of ITWC as a great unread text, Belting asks for exactly what, indeed, follows in this collection: Patricia Falguières' careful contextualization and interpretation of this suite of essays in relation to the precise cultural and critical moment and location of publication. Falguières is also particularly well placed to undertake such a position. O'Doherty

7 Patrick Ireland, *Name Change*, 1972, performance, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington.



8 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), book cover.

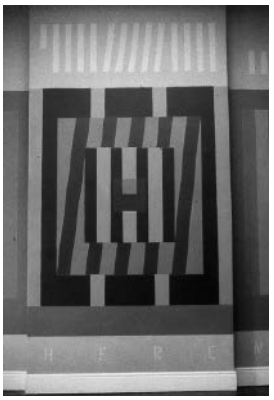
had brought French theory (and European artistic positions) to prominence in US discourse through commissioning 'The Death of the Author' from Roland Barthes. Falguières thus sites O'Doherty's Atlantic-crossing efforts by reading him 'back': from the European/French vantage point, albeit today in an academic context in which English (and American art) are hegemonic. The extent to which O'Doherty set the agenda in the debates around the white cube and institutional critique and how that is reflected in his artistic practice, as well as in current discourse is investigated very differently by both Patricia Falguières and Anne-Marie Bonnet. The latter author takes a broad view at the dynamics of the art market in relation to the white cube, its changes and O'Doherty/Ireland within these shifts, suggesting a new conception of heterotopia of the art space. Falguières' approach is minute and exact in tracing the debates to which O'Doherty contributed. Her essay elucidates and astutely contextualizes the complexities of O'Doherty's position. She suggests that his artwork provides a key to encompassing inherent contradictions: it was O'Doherty/Ireland's unique status as artist, writer and funder of his peer group that enabled him to close the door on modernism and inaugurate the study of the art exhibition, as well as institutional critique. Tensions implicit in the subject matter enable Falguières to make cross-references to the NEA directorship, to *Aspen* and to the early work on perception, which will be Walsh's subjects. Falguières' essay closes in suggesting that ITWC's analysis and its attempt at localizing the creative act were demanded by the future artistic practice.

Christina Kennedy, curator of O'Doherty/Ireland's Dublin retrospective in 2006, considers the artworks in light of architecture: Borromini's work, to be more precise. There, his art-historical impetus and occupation with space continue to evolve. From the Rope Drawings to drawing as an

overarching phenomenon in O'Doherty/Ireland's work, Ingmar Lähnemann departs from Robert Rauschenberg's assessment that the artist was always a 'line man'. Having considered aspects of his 'artistic research', editorial/curatorial and especially writing practices already, *graphein* (Greek) as both writing and drawing does bind his work to an extra-ordinary degree. Lähnemann also develops drawing in the practice as an institutionally critical element, thus linking his text with the concerns of previous essays (Cotter, Rugg, Falguières, Scott—and looking ahead to Alberro). He appraises O'Doherty/Ireland's drawing in ways that echo the remark Belting had made about the artist/writer's strange exclusion from surveys of both theoretical and artists' writing anthologies: O'Doherty/Ireland is also, similarly astonishingly, missing from drawing surveys.

Several authors differentiate and expand categories in the oeuvre (architecture, drawing, editorial/curatorial work, institutional employment/critique). Barbara Novak focuses on the experience of the Rope Drawings and the role of the viewers in navigating them. In the process, the academic employs a language that addresses sensual experience (see Walsh's essay) and play in a way that is usually reserved for artists' texts, such as her husband's writings. In the context of expansion, the focus turns to (the Irish) landscape, or the organic element in the artist's work. Yvonne Scott adds barren, i.e. critically reflected and lived landscapes, rather than mythologized ones, to the 'Baroque minimalism' that Kennedy encountered. Such seeming paradoxes are to be found in O'Doherty's (early) painting, his novel writing, as well as artworks using maps (or Ireland) and turf briquettes. Their smell Scott relates to the senses and specifically to the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, with whom O'Doherty has a special affinity, as Mary-Ruth Walsh continues to inform us

9 The main marker of this change of thinking is probably the *Autonomy Project*, initiated by the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2011.



10 Patrick Ireland, *One, Here, Now: The Ogham Cycle*, 1996, wall paintings, water-based house paint, variable dimensions.

in her essay on some early artworks in relation to the senses. The works she studies establish sensory perception—and particularly sensory deprivation—as menacing political tools—at the very time when dematerialization was usually connoted and valued differently.

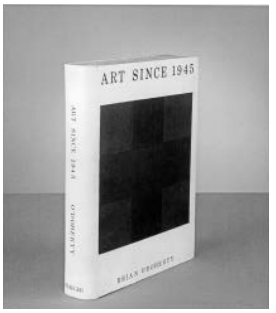
Alexander Alberro had, of course, in Walsh's argument been quoted on the preparatory moments of conceptual art, the use of text, language and dematerialization. O'Doherty managed to speak—if not inaugurate and simultaneously already critique—the conceptual language by using its means for drawing attention to the body and its senses. Alberro develops a similar antinomy concerning O'Doherty/Ireland's art—and all worthwhile contemporary art's autonomous and simultaneously heteronomous character. His focus is the 'difficult dialectic of an autonomous art with a social dimension'. O'Doherty/Ireland's practices could never be dissociated from either the one or the other, however, it is only now, in the wake of Rancière's rediscovery of Schiller's focus on the senses and aesthetic education as a political (post-traumatic) means that we are able to acknowledge the necessity of such a productive contradiction to exist.[9] O'Doherty/Ireland emerges as an artist whom we can newly appreciate today—and only with and through a range of historical and theoretical perspectives, to which it is the intention here to contribute. Alberro's subject is a cycle of Ogham-based wall paintings by Patrick Ireland, as Ogham is used for the 'dismantling of conventions of hierarchical composition and of reading structures'.[10] Language, particularly in its codified, aesthetically and physically present form is the shared concern of the last three essays in this collection.

Brenda Moore-McCann delves further into word and image relations in Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland's practices, agreeing with Lucy Cotter that *Aspen* 5+6 constitutes

its editor's manifesto for a new attitude towards art. Moore-McCann's notion of language as a virus in the wake of Burroughs (in *Aspen*) and O'Doherty also chimes with Alberro's assessment that in the *Ogham Cycle* he discussed, the Celtic lingual construction (Ogham is an early Medieval form of writing made up of lines) had (re)asserted its presence in the here and now of the previously colonial seat of power and status of its site of exhibition (above the harbour of Cork, once Queenstown). Here Ogham is invoked as a bridge between word and image, language and silence, past and presence. This owes both to its persuasive visuality and cryptic unreadability today, despite its simplicity. Ogham addresses the senses in specific and rich ways (serially), despite also occupying or conjuring silence.

My own essay maintains links with Cotter's in that it analyses how (conventional) art history has failed, as perceptible in Patrick Ireland's *Art Since 1945*, a sculpture from 1975.[11] It constitutes artistic research, as *Aspen* does. Nevertheless, I argue, it is also still a (more current) form of art history, which we would now call art writing. As such, it points (for me) to James Joyce—as other work did for Christina Kennedy when considering O'Doherty and Borromini—and confirms the need to progress a research project on Joyce's effect for art history.[12]

How direct historical links to Joyce and others are for O'Doherty (we in the twenty-first century can only laboriously trace them), is illustrated when realizing that the young emigrant did not only 'immortalize' Duchamp, but was also a protégé of Thomas McGreevey's—just as Samuel Beckett was in Paris some decades earlier, while the latter worked as Joyce's secretary.[13] O'Doherty emerged from an Irish (i.e. a de-colonializing and as yet un-professionalized or actively de-professionalizing) context in which a writer became



11 Brian O'Doherty, *Book: Art Since 1945*, 1975, acrylic and pressed type on carved wood, text on card, 27 × 21 × 5 cm.

12 I announce it in: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, 'The Joyce Effect: Joyce in the Visual Arts', in *A Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Richard Brown (Malden, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 318–340, reprinted in paperback 2011. Brian O'Doherty will play an important role in it.

13 Patrick Ireland, *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp: Lead 1, Slow Heartbeat*, 1966, wood, glass, liquitex, motor, 43 × 43 × 20 cm.

director of the National Gallery and another (Beckett) crossed the divide between writing and visual art in many ways. The familiarity and comfort that disciplinary boundaries breed appeared as something that had to be unsettled deliberately. When O'Doherty wrote *ITWC* as an artist, this consciously precarious position could not but contribute to the content: an inaugural moment of institutional critique. His background thus provides a new genealogy for institutional critique, as we now know it. In the process, art writing as a hybrid activity by artists and historians/theoreticians/critics is revealed always to have been an ethical, a political practice.[14]

What does this history then mean for the business of editing such a volume? The already mentioned diversity of contributions becomes all the more necessary: this volume has had to grow slowly and allow uncertainties, tentative and personal notes. I thank Yvonne Scott, Trinity College Dublin, for offering me a treasure trove of essays, some funding, and a free hand to add and group as I saw fit. This could have been achieved (or failed) differently, too, of course: all the categories invented have to be eschewed, too, to do the subject justice. There is also the more fundamental difficulty: that any such project would contradict some of O'Doherty's anti-authorial tenets—as they do mine. Patrick Ireland's response to O'Doherty's inability to produce a conventional/canonical art history of *Art Since 1945* quite easily became the focus for my own contribution. Thankfully, he has contradicted himself, too. Katherine Waugh formulated this particular conundrum in relation to *Aspen*:

> How can one gather together an extraordinary collection of artists, writers and filmmakers, and perform this curatorial and editorial task whilst passionately upholding the

14 I need to acknowledge my debt to Brian O'Doherty and the pleasure that it gave me to follow his critical legacy when for myself attempting to position current art history: *Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do With Art (History)?* (Inaugural Lecture 537) (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers/Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

absolute dissolution of any concept of authorship or a controlling subject?[15]

I consider it a risk inherent in this kind of project—and a shame at the same time—that Waugh and Mary-Ruth Walsh (here present with a more academic contribution) in the end did not prepare for this book an echo (however deficient) of their collaborative and artistic (visual, in the future possibly even filmic) presentation at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, February 2013. They took on the multiple personae and used artistic/associative formats that are exactly O'Doherty/Ireland's responses, too. Such a presentation would have been inserted after Lucy Cotter's motivation of artistic research through O'Doherty/Ireland—as the necessary example and loosening of the format—and before Whitney Rugg's investigation of O'Doherty's leading role in the National Endowment, i.e. his choice for nearly two decades to work on the institutional 'inside', changing perceptions of and familiarity with contemporary art, and thus, as I believe (following eleven academic years' work in Belfast), epistemological beliefs.

If the institutional player O'Doherty had persevered for longer, would the US Culture Wars of the 1990s have affected the (art) world to the extent that it did? Humans all have their limitations, despite the appearance for decades that such matters are far from Brian O'Doherty. He has risen more than once: typhoid in his youth, and witnessing/organizing Patrick Ireland's 'funeral'.[16] He survived both. Declan Long, in his doctoral dissertation, chose the metaphor/concept of spectrality[17] to describe the haunting quality of much art in and on Northern Ireland. He maintains that Brian O'Doherty buried Patrick Ireland too early, that there cannot as yet be closure. Of course, it is up to interpretation when

15 Katherine Waugh, *Unfolding Aspen* 5+6, 2013, unpublished manuscript/film script.

16 Brian O'Doherty, *The Burial of Patrick Ireland*, Wake, 2008, Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Mourning card for Patrick Ireland.

17 Declan Long, *Ghost-Haunted Land: Contemporary Art and Post-Troubles Northern Ireland*, unpublished doctoral thesis (Dublin: NCAD, 2012).

18 Brian O'Doherty, *Teanga—Aisling an Phobail*, 2011.

19 Saint Brigid's cross.

20 See: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, index 'Conceptual Art', in *Joyce in Art: Visual Art Inspired by James Joyce* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004).

'British military presence' has ceased. Of course, the 'troubles' will not have disappeared from peoples' minds so quickly. The psychologist in O'Doherty knows this only too well. As a social constructionist, however, he weighed up whether to seize the opportunity of both, O'Doherty and Ireland, to be alive to perform a gesture of peace that could become a self-fulfilling prophecy in a messy world. An 'outsider' like an emigrant (and the present author, as well as possibly the Dublin-resident Long) will, however, easily and inevitably make 'mistakes' when one's actions presuppose a very personal judgment as to the pace at which a population's peace process (not necessarily a government's) has taken place or can occur.

I had suggested to Brian O'Doherty to let Patrick Ireland's interment take place in Belfast. Instead, one of his stone labyrinths is installed on the Falls Road (the 'Catholic' part of Belfast).[18] Looking in one direction from the work, one inevitably has press footage of a massacre at a funeral in mind; looking the other way, it is canonical footage of armoured cars and machine guns around street corners. The minimalist aesthetics of the three-dimensional stone 'labyrinth' may follow the Saint Brigid's cross, or echo Ogham script.[19] There may be Irish allusions, or, even more interestingly, an insistence of the 'international' language of minimalism/conceptualism, which (partly through O'Doherty) has Irish roots. I had suggested something similar about the origins of the conceptualist attitude in the minds of Joyce-trained (*Finnegans-Wake*-reading) artists, such as Joseph Kosuth, Richard Hamilton, John Cage, but also, of course, Brian O'Doherty.[20] What is striking about the Falls Road sculpture is that it is—unapologetically—art. One sees very little in that part of the world that is not neo-expressionist in nature, or a meaningless stainless-steel squiggle as an excuse

for art, a little bit of icing on the powder keg, and thus serving more to keep affect in the well-worn paths of the Troubles than take a different direction.[21] This work does take a different direction. It is for youths to hang out, climb, smoke and chat (yes, to litter, too)—and it is 'high' art that seeks to bestow value. It reminds me of the Max Bill sculpture on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse (possibly an intentional allusion, as it is the way marker between the Joyce Foundation and the Joyce pub in that city and also a meeting place/bench).[22] While O'Doherty and Ireland 'performed' peace in Dublin's Irish Museum of Modern Art, this quiet work does not claim to do anything but be there—in an environment that has not seen much 'disinterested beauty'. That is why it may just change peoples' thinking here and there, one by one.

I so far seem to have failed to address *The Crossdresser's Secret*, but is it possible that the efficacy of these two gestures by O'Doherty/Ireland may well consist in having chosen the supposedly 'wrong' dress, i.e. the unusual, counterintuitive artistic approach in each case? O'Doherty's strategies cross-pollinate and cross-dress: deliberately, intelligently and with long-lasting, caring effect.

To give this mixing of artistic strategies a framework, I wish to turn to *The Crossdresser's Secret*, to the 2014 book itself. The Chevalier d'Eon, whose biography *The Crossdresser's Secret* constitutes, is a writer (in several registers) and aesthete, a diplomat with some gift for military success, as well as courtly intrigue. (S)he is somebody whose at times strategically employed, changing or uncertain gender and fall from grace have occupied the media. The senses (especially hearing but also sight) betray him/her regularly, but are, failing fortunes considered, what remains. The title pages of the different parts of the book each show a different 'mirror' shape in grey scale. On the cover is one in gold. The

21 For an attempt to chart the (im)possibilities of (political) art in Northern Ireland see: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, 'Sandra Johnston: Doubt, Gesture, Love and the Paradoxes of (Political) Art in Northern Ireland'; Sandra Johnston, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation of Doubt, Risk and Testimony Through Performance Art Processes in Relation to Systems of Legal Justice* (European Studies in Culture and Policy) (Berlin etc.: LIT, 2014), pp. 3–42.

22 Max Bill, *Pavillon-Skulptur*, 1983, granite, Zurich.

conclusion may be drawn that to bring this work about, the writer profited from all of his personae, including the NEA 'diplomat', the artist, (historical novel) writer and (woman) critic, who lived through times of revolution. One may also say that the 'mirrors' encourage us to see current affairs in this historical light. They also promote a more differentiated, a cyclical understanding of history: Duchamp appears *avant la lettre*: allusions to other visual artists and to Joyce are presented.[23] This book acts out what, in art theory, Peter Osborne has achieved: to mediate an understanding of aesthetics and politics as deeply intertwined—and for that idea, relevant as it is today, to have originated in the era of the French Revolution (Jena Romanticism).[24]

Brian O'Doherty's is, we can conclude, a European philosophical position at heart. Friedrich Schiller around the time of the French Revolution developed ideas concerning the importance of sensual/aesthetic education and play, while Bishop Berkley (Mary-Ruth Walsh elucidates this here) was O'Doherty's privileged (earlier, Irish) source from the eighteenth century.[25] These thoughts are also foundations of a constructionist epistemological position, one that does not take the way in which we know for granted, but is aware of the fragility of (sensory) knowledge, of meaning, of life. It is almost as though the medical training and experimental scientific work of his earlier days had enabled O'Doherty to analyse the human need for sensory literacy and the value of art for human beings, which could provide antidotes to both sensory and intellectual deprivation. He proceeded to plough that field. The problem was identified and potential remedies pursued in the most single-minded and at once versatile ways.

When one thus considers social constructionism in e.g. John Hannigan's (environmental) sociology and attempts to

23 Brian O'Doherty, *The Crossdresser's Secret* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014). Duchamp: p. 335, Joyce: pp. 302–303, 393; Marina Abramović and Ulay, p. 19. Actual historical art is mentioned when reference is made to the Royal Academy, London, p. 454. Presenting the Chevalier's 'mad' father's papers is a potent opportunity for foundational/artistic research, particularly pp. 300ff.

24 Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

25 Schiller does not seem to have referred to Berkeley's theories on the senses directly: (ed.) Stephen H. Daniel, *Reexamining Berkeley's Philosophy* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 215.

view this analysis in relation to another fragile environment, that of art, a worthwhile list of necessary tasks for the construction of a problem (i.e. also the basis of its solution) is offered. One requires:

— Scientific authority for and validation of claims
— Existence of 'popularizers' who can bridge [in our case art] and science
— Media attention in which the problem is 'framed' as novel and important
— Dramatization of the problem in symbolic and visual terms
— Economic incentives for taking positive action
— Recruitment of an institutional sponsor who can ensure both legitimacy and continuity.[26]

I would like to suggest that O'Doherty/Ireland's is such a constructionist perspective, and that he arrived at similar analyses early and honed it over the decades. Even more: he has occupied the variety of necessary roles with uncanny precision; and with the energy of someone who sees a problem—the value of art for human beings—in its complex entirety. There are, of course, successes and failures, powerful moments and those when one is reduced to untrustworthy sensory perceptions, when the body is functioning or otherwise. But writing about these (as in *The Crossdresser's Secret*) also has its politics and its moment. Brian O'Doherty's literary achievement is, I would like to argue, now ripe to be considered as both a (visual) art practice and as a position in the world: forging or constructing reality, as much as interpreting it.[27]

Was it the emigrant's experience that brought Brian O'Doherty to such remarkably current insights early? Was it

26 John Hannigan, *Environmental Sociology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 2nd ed., p. 78.

27 In my University of Amsterdam Inaugural Lecture, *Writing Art and Creating Back*, I use Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) to elaborate on this point.

reading Joyce or studying medicine? Whatever it was, it is arguably one of the most precious gifts that our ecologically fragile, 'credit-crunched', ever more image-assaulted and sensorially deprived world can receive. It is almost, though, as if positivism had taken O'Doherty's labour of critique personally, as he belongs precisely to the year-group whose pensions were hardest-hit in 2008. That this is relevant to be mentioned in an anthology on an artist/writer's oeuvre owes to his own work in funding the livelihoods of artists, in making apparent and critiquing institutional conventions, as well as casting a critical eye on the system (of art) and its biases or failures.

It is hoped that this volume will contribute to students, artists and scholars asking new questions about Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland's multi-faceted work, ideally lead to them valuing such a complex position, and possibly making it (undoubtedly in more manageable parts) their own for the future. In the view of the authors assembled here: it is a challenging position, a precarious and at times paradoxical one—and eminently necessary today.