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### Art Since 1945

*Word and Image, Brian, Patrick, and Art Writing*

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# Art Since 1945

Word and Image, Brian,  
Patrick, and Art Writing



Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes

Brian O'Doherty's *Name Change* of 1972 raises many questions and opens up topics for investigation.<sup>1</sup> One direct implication of Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland's double persona and dual output is the unusual relationship between word and image in his/their oeuvres. There are aspects of this I wish to explore. Word and image appear here—as elsewhere—not as binary opposites, neatly ascribable to one or the other persona, but as realms that constantly overlap in art (as well as other areas of our lives) and whose ever-changing relationship is re-negotiated in artists' and writers' works, as well as recipients' experiences.

Few problems arise when considering Brian O'Doherty as a novelist. He shows himself to be visually alert, even interested in ekphrastic aspects of the novelist's craft, but he does not seem to cross over into visual poetics or typographical experiments. As an art critic, O'Doherty uses illustrations, but remains within the realm of conventions. But here already, his insights are often predicated upon the fact that he is an artist who has perceived critically the visual practices of his generation and contributed centrally to them. This does



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

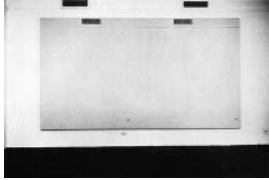
## Inside the White Cube

The Ideology  
of the Gallery Space

by Brian O'Doherty

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

See also in this publication Thomas McEvilley, pp. 27–52.



William Anastasi, *Westwall*, *Dwan Main Gallery*, 1966, photo-screenprint on canvas, exhibition view *Six Sites*, Virginia Dwan Gallery, New York, 1967.

See also in this publication Patricia Falguières, pp. 127–153.



3 Brian O'Doherty, *The Rake's Progress*, 1970, aluminium on wood, 183 × 21.5 × 10 cm, Collection Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

See also in this publication Brenda Moore-McCann, pp. 249–267.

4 As a European and multi-disciplinary practitioner, his experience of modernism was more differentiated, not to say troubled (in Ireland) and immediately political, rather than hegemonic. An example of the US American reception of such thinking in art (criticism), Carola Giedion-Welcker's *Modern Sculpture* by Rosalind Krauss (in O'Doherty's circle), can be found in: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, 'Carola Giedion-Welcker: Misrepresented Collaborator of Modernists', ed. Karen E. Brown, *Women's Contributions to Visual Culture, 1918–1939* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 89–100.

not overtly show in his criticism or publications such as *Inside the White Cube* from the late 1970s, although William Anastasi's work for Dwan Gallery, 1967, takes on a prominent position, even seems to have prompted the investigation—and faintly echoes black marks on a white page.<sup>2</sup> The critical project most likely departed from the visual realm.

Patrick Ireland's visual work, whether in the realm of sculpture, painting or installation, is more clearly crossing word and image boundaries—if only at second glance: Brian O'Doherty's *Rake's Progress* (created in 1970, before the name change) appears in the first instance as a minimalist work that is engaged with the viewer and his or her surroundings, i.e. the gallery space.<sup>3</sup> It thus pre-empts a number of concerns later raised in the medium of writing: *Inside the White Cube*. The sculpture's title of *Rake's Progress* will first alert a viewer to further layers of meaning. It reveals a 'literary' stance, even—in this case—an art-historical one in its clear reference to Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*. The 'literary' aspect is at once a pun and thus commensurate with conceptual art's preferences—and also refers to Ogham writing, i.e. the artist's Irish identity, historical interest and insistence that there is historical (if not art-historical) precedent for visual formulations of the then current, typographical and/or rule-governed kind. Brian O'Doherty's interests at the time were not mathematical, however, but always considered the words' dual purpose of meaning and just being (words/letters on a page: referent). They combined both the aesthetically minimal and conceptually meaningful. That sounds like a contradiction in terms of the art-historical models that were dominant at the time, namely High Modernism (*à la* Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried), wishing to banish content and concentrate on an artwork's form. Artists were rebelling against this narrowness in the 1960s. Brian O'Doherty was one of them.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of conceptual art (rather than in the High Modernist one), word and image cross-overs were legion: they became a determining factor. Artists in the 1960s and 1970s (and by extension up to the present day) have found many new and hybrid formations in both visual and word-based practices. One of these realms of cross-over is the artist's book. It had had a presence throughout the twentieth century and has even been called 'the quintessential twentieth-century artform', but it changed.<sup>5</sup> It became aligned with committed art as a cheap and easily distributed medium—a utopian stance that sought to leave behind precious and laboriously made objects.<sup>6</sup> Brian O'Doherty's/Patrick Ireland's contribution to this genre is my main focus here.

Books—or something departing from the convention of the book—was nothing strange for the highly acclaimed art critic Brian O'Doherty, who had written for the *New York Times* and had edited a double issue of an art journal, *Aspen* in 1967.<sup>7</sup> In it, he collected and edited texts (e.g. by Samuel Beckett and Roland Barthes), records, film reels, etc., and found the box the most convenient form in which to preserve, present and send the result to subscribers. This has endured as one of the most important art publications of the time. Following this very successful venture, Brian O'Doherty was invited in the same year, 1967, to write a book for Praeger publishers: a volume on visual art since 1945. For this endeavour he appeared to be the perfect collaborator: deeply knowledgeable about the subject, a highly esteemed critic and author with expertise not only in writing but editing, and also someone, who, as an artist, was part of what needed to be investigated. In addition, he needed money and soon received an advance.

The further particulars of what eventually became an artwork, *Art Since 1945*, rather than a published book, are

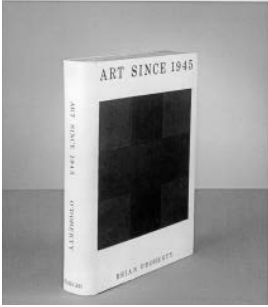
5 Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 2004), p. 1.

6 John Heartfield had taken the lead in the 1930s in distributing his politically engaged photo-montages in the *Workers' Illustrated Newspaper*, as well as on book covers, merging 'high and low' and word and image—and giving rise to Walter Benjamin's well-known endorsement of the reproducible at the expense of the aura of the original. 'Artists' books have existed since early in the century but as a named phenomenon they surfaced with conceptual art in the sixties, part of a broad, if naïve, quasi-political resistance to the extreme commodification of artworks and artists.' Lucy R. Lippard, 'Conspicuous Consumption: New Artist's Books', *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, Peregrine Books; Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), pp. 49–57, here p. 50.



7 Brian O'Doherty, ed., *Aspen 5+6* (Fall/Winter 1967), mixed media, 20 x 20 cm.

8 See: Irving Sandler, 'Book: Art Since 1945', *Patrick Ireland: Gestures Instead of an Autobiography, April 24 Through June 5, 1994*, *The Butler Institute of American Art*, ed. Hal Foster et al. (Youngstown, OH: The Butler Institute of American Art, 1994), pp. 35–37. The documentation part of the work includes a 'dream' that could have originated in Ernst Kris' and Otto Kurz' collection of stereotypes of artists' lives under the heading of 'quasi-divine intervention'. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Die Legende vom Künstler: Ein geschichtlicher Versuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995, 1st ed. 1934).



9 Patrick Ireland, *Book: Art Since 1945*, 1975, acrylic and pressed type on carved wood, text on card, 27 × 21 × 5 cm.

10 Quoted from the documentation/contract pertaining to this work.

given in the documentation supplied with the sculpture.<sup>8/9</sup>

Despite a 90-page manuscript, the endeavour of writing this book eventually appeared as 'bullshit'<sup>10</sup>—with the inference that authorial distance jarred too much with the day-to-day practical engagement of the artist, who by then also worked for the National Endowment. Do we have to take this as something of an internal, externalized, breakdown of communication between image and word? One should not generalize too much: Brian O'Doherty began to write and he completed a book in the reasonable time frame: he wrote in 1970—for publication 1973—*American Masters: The Voice and the Myth*, a Ridge Press book, published by Random House. He did formulate his thoughts on relevant artists for the Praeger book, but appears to have veered off into another trajectory: as quite often happens with research projects, the favourite bits expand, leaving no opening for equal and impartial treatment of all relevant examples. As a non-American, he also felt keenly that the world to be encompassed by *Art Since 1945* was larger than artists in or from the US: a daunting task. Art-historical prose also seems to have been an issue, one that O'Doherty could subvert or circumvent by making the fact that he wished to adopt artists' voices—and thus remain in his, an artist's voice—an advantage.

In the following, I will focus on this book-cum-sculpture that is obviously not the art-historical survey that it claims to be. I will explore some avenues that pleat together and thus eventually form the argument that *Art Since 1945* nevertheless represents a particular, contemporary, possibly especially an Irish and a still valid art history: one that formulates the problem of writing on art, which has since—in his work as well as in that of others—found new and fruitful directions in art writing; not least owing to Brian O'Doherty's work.

In order to create the work, a pattern was repeated that

had been developed in the *Name Change* performance: the calling of an ‘art witness’ and a lawyer to document and vouch for a change of status from a written book to a work of art, whereby the signed document becomes part of the work. In the case of *Art Since 1945*, created in 1975, this meant that—since the advance had been spent and reimbursement was not an option—a block of wood, crafted by a woodworker in the shape of a book, with ‘cover design’ by Patrick Ireland, was submitted to Praeger publishers. Patrick Ireland was now the responsible party, rather than O’Doherty, from whom the book had been commissioned. Ireland signed the accompanying text and thus, interestingly, performed a quasi-literary task.

*Art Since 1945* is a sculpture, a conceptual one, produced by a woodworker and painted by Patrick Ireland. It is also an artist’s book—even the quintessential artist’s book. In order to explain why, let me quote definitions by Clive Phillpot of this genre that resides at the centre of word and image studies. Phillpot offers convenient distinctions between several terms:

[the] ARTIST’S BOOK [is a] Book of which an artist is the author. BOOK ART [is] Art which employs the book form. [A] BOOKWORK [is an] Artwork dependent upon the structure of a book [and the] BOOK OBJECT [is an] Art object which alludes to the form of a book.<sup>11</sup>

While ‘book object’ probably comes closest, all of these terms are applicable—something that cannot be said about too many other artworks.

The work clearly takes a critical stance in relation to the superficiality of narratives, paired with economic exploitation of artists and writers by art publishers. While Brian O’Doherty had the chance of having his thoughts and ideas

11 Clive Phillpot, ‘Books Bookworks Book Objects Artists’ Books’, *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), pp. 77–79.

12 Here, the idea is paramount and the carving e.g. can be done by somebody else.

13 Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2003).

14 Lucy R. Lippard, 'The Artist's Book Goes Public', in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, Peregrine Books; Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), pp. 45–48, here p. 45. She also formulates: 'At the moment, the artist's book is defined (and confined) by an art context, where it still has a purpose to serve. ... The only danger is that ... the artist's book will fall back into its *éditions de luxe* of coffee table originals', p. 47, and: 'I'd like to see artist's books enconced in supermarkets ... and, not incidentally, to see artists able to profit economically from broad communication rather than from lack of it', p. 48.

15 Joan Lyons, 'Introduction', in *ibid.*, pp. 7–26, here p. 7: 'artists' books began to proliferate in the sixties and early seventies in the prevailing climate of social and political activism ... artists were finding that books could be artworks in and of themselves ... Many saw the book as a means for reaching a wider audience beyond the confines of the art world; others anticipated the appropriation of images and/or techniques of mass media for political or aesthetic reasons'. Richard Kostelanetz, 'Book Art', in *ibid.*, pp. 27–30, here p. 27: 'The principal difference between the book hack and the book artist is that the former succumbs to the conventions of the medium, while the latter envisions what else 'the book' might become.'

about art distributed very widely, indeed, it is Patrick Ireland who uses the unique, precious (i.e. auratic) original to unmask exploitation in the realm of art publishing. In conjunction, O'Doherty/Ireland takes up a knowledgeable position in relation to conceptual art<sup>12</sup> and the politics of publicity, which Alexander Alberro has scrutinized succinctly.<sup>13</sup> O'Doherty/Ireland substitutes the commodity status of the idea (as transported in writing and thus preferred by conceptual artists) with the deceptively 'older' form of an artist's output, the commodified sculpture in the museum, pitting one institution against the other at the very moment in time when conceptual artists were beginning to be commercially successful. Lucy R. Lippard was to formulate that: 'The artist's adaption of the book format for works of art constitutes a criticism of criticism as well as of art-as-big-business. [She goes on stating that] Its history, however, lies in the realm of literature and *éditions de luxe*.'<sup>14</sup> This particular artists' book thus already critiques the critique of the precious, auratic artwork. It highlights also the stark differences between the artist's book, including the one that valorizes the artist's voice, and its commercial cousin.<sup>15</sup> While sharing the medium, the supposedly ideal distributor of artistic critique, the commercial 'art book' publisher is revealed as being interested in nothing but the coffee table variety, as well as governed by tight and exploitative economics, similar to those ruling the gallery sector. The critique that *Art Since 1945* conveys by means of the documentation is one that writing and marketing the book (undoubtedly with a different cover) could not have carried.

In this instance, the gallery sector was allowed to win—however temporarily: The publisher wanted nothing to do with that object which he could not open or read, whereas the Hirshhorn Museum (Joe Hirshhorn) was willing to pay for the total cost of the work, including the woodworker's fee,

O'Doherty's advance from the publisher and any related cost. With his apparently higher regard for art's critical potential (rather than profit alone), and his advanced connoisseurial abilities, the collector was able to recognize the artwork that the publisher had failed to see. At a time when institutional critique had yet to be designated and formulated by 1980s artists, Patrick Ireland was already a step ahead of his alter ego Brian O'Doherty and took a stance typical of new institutionalism, even as he was just about to write *Inside the White Cube*.

The work's import, however, does not, of course, lie in at once praising potentially difficult content and connoisseurship. There is almost a chiasmus at play, certainly a complicating of common assumptions about the relationship between artist, writer, collector and art publisher that is noteworthy. Does this allowing and highlighting of such complications amount to a more eloquent statement than an apparently mute book? On the way towards attempting an answer, it may also be interesting to explore briefly in relation to just two twenty-first-century artworks whether or how O'Doherty/Ireland has generated a legacy, a discourse about the central themes in this work.

Contracts were one way in which artists, already in the late 1960s, were critiquing and simultaneously adhering to the conventions of the art market. Maria Eichhorn's contribution to *Documenta II*, 2002, was to establish a company with all the necessary documentation, notaries' signatures, etc. This *Public Limited Company* is contractually bound not to make any profit. Today, contracts are still exposing and *performing* the nature of relationships within the art world—and outside. *Name Change* and *Art Since 1945* are among Patrick Ireland's works that pre-empt these current concerns, but also stretch to questions of identity in a way that continues to be

16 Rosetta Brooks in *Richard Prince*, ed. Rosetta Brooks, Jeff Rian, Luc Sante (New York: Phaidon, 2003), p. 33.

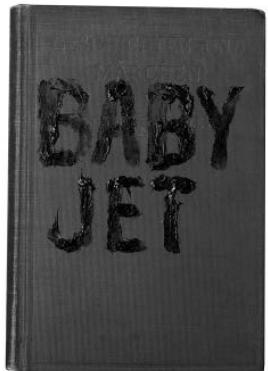
17 Richard Prince, *American Prayer* (Paris: BnF, 2011). See also <[www.richardprince.com](http://www.richardprince.com)> on books and his library.



18 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Natural Grace*, 1985, C-print, 30 × 24 cm.



19 Richard Prince, *It's a Free Concert*, 2014, installation view, Kunsthhaus Bregenz (AT).



20 Ed Ruscha, *Baby Jet*, 2010, acrylic on book cover, 18.7 × 13 × 2 cm.



Peter Zumthor, Kunsthhaus Bregenz, built between 1990 and 1997, Bregenz (AT).

unique and relevant. A contract interferes directly in relationships, in life. It is that performative quality of language that O'Doherty privileges. This quality is apparently also to be located in a work in which a block of wood poses as a book, but that has a contract to go with it. The work acts.

If Maria Eichhorn takes up contract and critical concerns found in *Art Since 1945*, Richard Prince reacts to the book. His work has long operated between the realms of art and advertising, contaminating, like Patrick Ireland/Brian O'Doherty, the 'separation between consumer commodity and the artist's appropriation of it'<sup>16</sup> and has in recent years focused extensively on the book (both as medium of his work and its subject).<sup>17</sup> His foray into sculpture has also circled around the book, more precisely rare editions of classic novels (such as *Lolita*). These real books (not Patrick Ireland's wood, or resin sculptures like the replicas of every-day items that Fischli & Weiss have produced) are often exhibited on sculptural pedestals.<sup>18</sup> In 2014, however, his Bregenz retrospective included a large, wall-mounted object in turquoise that took the shape of an open but blank book and was entitled *Ulysses*.<sup>19</sup> I see it as a witty comment on Ed Ruscha's book-works, presented two years earlier in the very same space, the epitome of the refined gallery space: Peter Zumthor's Kunsthhaus Bregenz building.<sup>20</sup>

The readers' responses to different cover designs make viewers reflect on the marketing strategies behind book covers, as well as the narratives that exhibitions write in white cubes featuring blank (although not always white) books in various materials, but always in large dimensions. Historical aspects and value are also alluded to in the dated appearance of book (cover) designs. In a text accompanying his book sculptures, Prince (in some ways paradoxically) reveals himself to be a book collector, a connoisseur of the highest order,

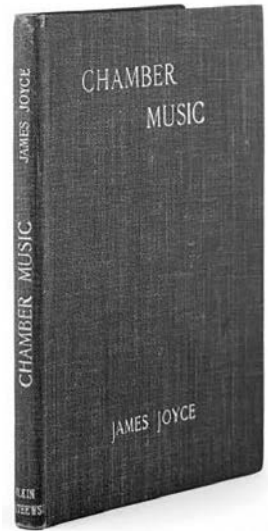
fantasizing (or fictionalizing)<sup>21</sup> about the most coveted of books:

I want the best copy. The only copy. The most expensive copy. I want James Joyce's *Chamber Music*. I want the 1907 version, the variant, the first variant, the only with the lighter green binding, the taller, thin size, laid endpapers as opposed to wove, ...<sup>22</sup> I want mine to be one of the advance review copies ... . I want the tipped in letter to be dated May 3, 1907. I want this date because I know that the British Museum's copy (destroyed in World War II) was received on May 8, ... . I want the earliest copy on record. I want the copy that is rarer than anyone had previously dreamed of. I want the copy of dreams.<sup>23</sup>

This is the *editions de luxe* history of the artist's book of which Lippard wrote taken to extremes—and quite surprisingly repeated today in a contemporary art context. The auratic, original nature of *Art Since 1945* references and subverts this precious history knowingly, possibly aided by the fact that the artist/writer Ireland/O'Doherty is of course familiar with all the mechanisms governing the marketing and reception of possibly the greatest and most expensive of books: Irish manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells*.<sup>24</sup> *Art Since 1945* is a history. But is it a mute history, or even a dead one?

Lucy Lippard gave O'Doherty the decisive idea of what to put on the cover. She spoke about a book she had written about Ad Reinhardt, but could not get published. She commented how she had been told that nobody would be interested in buying a volume with one of Reinhardt's 'black paintings' on the cover.<sup>25</sup> Ireland thus added the self-painted cover image of a Reinhardt painting, long before

21 The notions expressed seem to express quite genuinely the 'high' art infatuations of an artist, who is usually associated with subject matter pertaining to America's popular culture: 'I've read *Chamber Music*. I've tried to read *Ulysses* about hundred times. It's hard. It's the kind of book written for a desert island.' Richard Prince in correspondence with the author, 5 January 2007. The research he has undertaken into *Chamber Music* already seems to have taken up time only afforded by a desert island.



22 James Joyce, *Chamber Music*, 1907.

23 Richard Prince in 1988: *Richard Prince* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992), pp. 138–139.



Photo portrait of James Joyce in Richard Prince's library. Source: <[www.richardprince.com/collection/#/detail/185/](http://www.richardprince.com/collection/#/detail/185/)>.

24 Brian O'Doherty continues to lament that a first edition copy of *Finnegans Wake* was stolen from him once at a party.

25 See the documentation/contract that is part of the work.

26 Hans Belting stated at the Patrick Ireland Symposium, Trinity College Dublin, 22 April 2006, that the manuscript for *Art Since 1945* may have developed into the *Inside the White Cube* essays. This corroborates the current argument.



27 On Kawara's 13th Street Studio, 1966, New York.

appropriation art became an -ism in the history of art since 1945. This cover is another element that adds to the critical stance with regard to the art publishing industry and its mechanisms. However, it again means more: in fact, I would like to argue that, together with the work's phenomenological appearance and material, it spells as much an alternative history of art since 1945. This art history is a visual, rather than a written one, without, however, being any less researched or unambiguous a text. This may even be signalled by the cover, as Reinhardt was himself author of scathing criticisms of the art market and current art histories in his 'art cartoons' from the 1950s.

The wooden volume is not a white cube, but has a simple, (one would be tempted to say neutral) book-shape that approximates a trapeze: it references Minimalism's whiteness, conveying messages that O'Doherty was to formulate later about supposedly neutral gallery spaces. The abandoned manuscript of the written version of *Art Since 1945* has reportedly found its way into passages of O'Doherty's later, celebrated book *Inside the White Cube*.<sup>26</sup> Books are carriers of photographic images in 'museums without walls' (a term coined by André Malraux for the art-historical photo book that is substitute for an exhibition). And books also have more than casual contact with the other spaces for artistic display, for storing history and memory: museums. This is a connection that O'Doherty has most prominently established in *Aspen 5+6*, 1967.

History is included not only in the letters that are painted onto the wooden, box-like sculpture that succeeds *Aspen: 'Art Since 1945'*. Time and its passing are also present in conceptual art, e.g. in On Kawara's similarly painstakingly painted letters and numbers on his *Date Paintings* (since 1966).<sup>27</sup> History is also embedded in the material of *Art Since*

1945: wood. The year rings (which we know to be present) are the means by which this work could also be dated, however roughly. In our imagination they can become lines on the pages that bear what we, as viewers, now need to add ourselves. It is among other things an organic, a multiple art history that we are called to envisage and write in our minds—in keeping with the fact that ‘The Death of the Author’, Roland Barthes’ canonical essay, was first published by Brian O’Doherty.

Beside the formal openness that invites the viewers’ participation, further heightened meanings, multiple histories and deaths can be discerned: the Ad Reinhardt painting is composed of nine differently blackened fields, forming a black cross on black. Also, when first encountering the work one may merely see a black square. It and the year 1945 combine to allow allusions of death to surface. For Brian O’Doherty, this topic does arise, but mainly with reference to Joe Hirshhorn, who had repeatedly demanded the documentation to go alongside the work. O’Doherty had—once again concerning this work—procrastinated, somehow superstitiously thinking that this may have a bad result. It did: the collector died a week after receiving the documentation that completed the work in his collection. Perhaps the victory of the collector over the publisher was not to be too sweet and fast.

Death is also connoted by the juxtaposition of 1945 (the end of World War II) and a black ‘hole’ in the book that takes on the shape of Malevich’s *Black Square* painting, which carried spiritual meaning for this artist, who had stipulated that it should be mounted over his deathbed, on the front of the hearse, and then on top of his grave. Malevich’s connoted presence, together with a notional referencing of Duchamp’s readymade in the book that is nevertheless painstakingly crafted, could amount to a criticism: i.e. that the most

28 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Commitment' (1962), <<http://ada.evergreen.edu/~arunc/texts/frankfurt/commitment/commitment.pdf>>.



29 Buzz Spector, *33 Art Histories (spine)*, 2003.

30 Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). This book was published first in German in 1995 as the revision of a book on the 'end of art history' from a decade previously.

31 In 1975, *The New Art History* was certainly still some way in the future.

important art historical points of reference for 1975 art happen to be pre-1945 ones. This criticism is, however, somewhat modified, when the viewer recognizes the Ad Reinhardt-appropriation—and considers the appearance of the book itself. Its minimalist allegiances and its wooden centre combine to point towards minimalist boxes from Tony Smith to Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt. *Art Since 1945* adds to these positions, reflecting e.g. John Cage's 4'33", 1952, or Samuel Beckett's work and expressing (in not expressing) the conviction that the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust could not be represented. Negative representation, through silence and reduction, is then the most appropriate, the most respectful response, one could say, outlining Theodor Adorno's analysis.<sup>28</sup>

Which art history (or histories) does *Art Since 1945* then advance? Some other books and book works may assist in answering this question: Buzz Spector's *33 Art Histories*, a photo diptych of piled-up books, seen from the top, 2003, seems to make the point about the great number of art-historical textbooks that may almost be arbitrarily exchanged, piled up, opened or closed.<sup>29</sup> James Elkins' book *Stories of Art* from 2002 may have provided inspiration to Spector—and *Art Since 1945* appears more original than a written text, despite the author's erudition. Similarly, in *The End of Art History*,<sup>30</sup> Hans Belting's argument about art having outmanoeuvred art history may have also been present before its time as a notion in the creation of *Art Since 1945* as a visual artwork, rather than a text. Art History as an authoritative, chronologically ordered narrative is dead, and we could say that his book is its coffin.<sup>31</sup>

Brian O'Doherty asserts that his intention was not to turn away from writing about art in general, although he does not see himself as an art historian, specializing only on his

own generation, as he says<sup>32</sup> (a choice that is a matter of definitions in and of our field). I will return to this conundrum in closing and suggest that Brian O'Doherty has a place in new and vibrant forms of art writing.

In 1965, O'Doherty had planned to create a hollowed-out book with enclosed recording: a whispering art history.<sup>33</sup> The technology was not invented at the time and once tapes were available, he did not return to his earlier idea, since, one can presume, this would have reinforced the art historical master narrative that was so effectively subverted by developments to which O'Doherty centrally contributed in the following years (particularly the *Aspen* box with Barthes' essay about the death—or substitution—of the author by the creative viewer or reader).

I would like to consider the possibility that by the time, not of signing the book deal in 1967, or publishing *American Masters* in 1974, but of producing *Art Since 1945* in 1975, discontent with traditional art history informed Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland, when creating this work as a sculpture, and that a need for a gesture of silence among art historians was also felt (as had been explored before them by composers such as Cage and painters such as Robert Ryman), particularly when the year 1945 was to stand on its cover.<sup>34</sup> Art History as an originally German discipline had in the 1970s just begun to consider its own implications in the Third Reich. The Ulmer Verein that led this self-investigation constituted itself in 1968.

When considering this potential motif for silence it is understandable that O'Doherty does not go as far towards libro-clasm as John Latham did, who digested parts of a central High Modernist text and burned encyclopaedias.<sup>35</sup> A discontent, however, is not an alternative creation of a text, which, notwithstanding its refusal to be a written text and

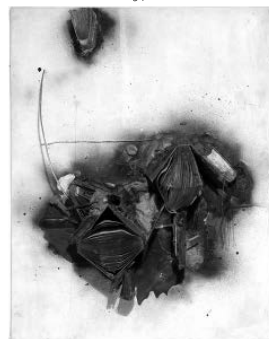
32 Interview with the author 2006.

33 Brian O'Doherty in conversation with the author, April 2006. It is possible that Robert Morris' *Box With the Sound of Its Own Making*, 1961, may have seemed too close: in the current context that work becomes its own (art) history.



34 Robert Ryman, *Untitled*, 1965, oil on linen, 28.4 × 28.2 cm.

35 *Still and Chew*, 1965, where his target was Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture*, and *Tower Ceremony*, 1966.



John Latham, *Belief System*, 1959, books, plaster, metal, light bulb and paint on canvas.



John Latham, *Still and Chew: Art and Culture*, 1966–69, leather case containing book, letters, photostats, and labelled vials filled with soot and burned paper, 7.9 × 28.2 × 25.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



John Latham, *Skooob Tower Ceremony*, 1964–68.

36 Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992).

37 Correspondence with the author, 2 February 2003.

38 *Ibid.*, 10 June 2003.

39 The awareness of the fact that the white cube is not neutral may have been better possible for the Irish emigrant to see than for anyone else in 1950s New York, because white walls meant other things, namely poverty, in Ireland.

40 Transgressions of boundaries, between word and image and many others, naturally come easier in a small, rural country, where, at the time, division of labour had not progressed greatly and narrow specialization was not the norm. The visual and the literary were thus possible realms of engagement for a medical doctor.

despite the work's intensely practical origins, I argue *Art Since 1945* to be.

Georges Didi-Huberman has in the 1990s proposed a particularly pertinent reading of minimalism<sup>36</sup>—away from High Modernist formalism mentioned earlier, while realizing that there is still the seeing of a formal whatness that needs to be taken into account. It is as valid as the viewer's interpretative seeing and taking-part in being touched. This concerns especially the mentioned minimalist boxes, which never manage to escape entirely the ultimate, heightened meaning: their kinship with coffins. Didi-Huberman mediates the unmediatable by suggesting that these are two valid but oscillating, never coincidental ways of seeing minimalist boxes.

*Art Since 1945* on the one hand lets Brian O'Doherty's conceptual narratives, interpretations and critical commentaries conveniently oscillate with Patrick Ireland's visual creations in the minimal tradition. However, the dual personality also places stress on the distinctions between the two and shows them to coexist in works like *Art Since 1945*. They do share the creative burden. Brian/Patrick, who has signed correspondence as 'Brine/Peatrick'<sup>37</sup> and 'Bri-and-peat-rick',<sup>38</sup> plays tricks with identities.

The contextualizing and interpreting writer was schooled in an Ireland that has often been strong at allowing oscillations, even coincidences between contraries, like Celtic Christianity, figuration and abstraction.<sup>39</sup> This is, moreover, part of the emigrant's remit: to consider the ways of both origin and destination as valid, to pay attention to (in this case) both form and meaning, writing and visual creating.<sup>40</sup> This is where art writing has in recent years departed: the need not to write about art, but with it, creatively, artistically if you will, but very firmly in the context and modes of distribution of the visual art field. Maria Fusco (from Belfast) was the

inaugural course director of the first Art Writing MFA at Goldsmiths College, London, and inaugural writer in residence at the Whitechapel Gallery, also in London. I included her work, as well as, of course, that of Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland, in my curated (meta-)exhibition 'Convergence: Literary Art Exhibitions', Belfast and Limerick, 2011.<sup>41</sup> Taking my cue from the prominence of literature in Irish culture, I presented a history of literary art exhibitions (through catalogues and books), as well as a collection of contemporary artworks that engage in different ways with the literary canon.<sup>42</sup> I highlighted its (their) liberating elements and moved towards a consideration of conceptual writing in current art practice, including the artistic research field.

To follow on from these Ireland-related aspects (since James Joyce was already mentioned by Richard Prince, albeit in a very different context to the subversive one most artists have found exciting,<sup>43</sup> and appeared as precedent for the quoted word-games between Brian and Patrick), I would like to mention that Didi-Huberman introduced his concept of oscillation between form and meaning with a page-long quotation from the 'Proteus' episode of *Ulysses*.<sup>44</sup> Patrick Ireland/Brian O'Doherty, who will, I predict, never cease to be both fascinated and annoyed by Joyce,<sup>45</sup> sculpted with *Art Since 1945* an inclusive, word and image-, form and content-addressing art history. It is one that can only *now*, following e.g. Didi-Huberman's quasi-mediations and other reassessments of the projects of art history, be captured in words. It thus appears as a unique establishing in its day of a dialogue between word and image, rather than the expected diagnosis of a breakdown in communication.

I would like to close by juxtaposing Brian O'Doherty's/Patrick Ireland's identities with what his own reaction was to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: in margins and on the title page, he

41 See <<http://goldenthreadgallery.co.uk/event/convergence-literary-art-exhibitions/>>. Brian O'Doherty spoke among the works, when the exhibition travelled to Limerick City Gallery of Art.



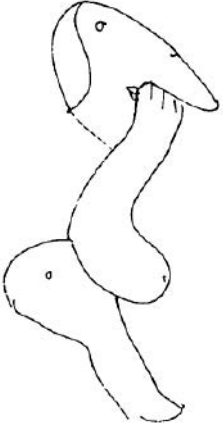
42 Davide Cascio, *Polyhedra (a room in which to read Joyce's Ulysses)*, 2004, cardboard, wood, neon, plastic flowers, 300 × 300 × 300 cm, installation view of 'Convergence: Literary Art Exhibitions', curated by Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast, 2011. Photo: Paul Moore. Collection Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano.

43 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, 'The Joyce Effect: Joyce in the Visual Arts', in *A Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Richard Brown (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, reprinted in paperback 2011), pp. 318–340.

44 I used Didi-Huberman's theories in: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Joyce in Art*, Fritz Senn (foreword), James Elkins (envoy), Eeke Bonk (design), (Dublin: Lilliput 2004).

45 Ibid. Here, Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland is a central figure, serving as my prime example of a particularly valid way for art to react to Joyce: the well-informed, irrelevant way.

# FINNEGANS WAKE



46 Brian O'Doherty's drawings in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, undated.

47 <<http://smak.be/en/news/collection-sol-lewitt-cabinet-4-brian-odoherty-06092015>> (accessed September 2015).

invents figures that become letters—or letters that are figures. These humorously occupy the interstices between word and image. The initials ALP, which signal the shifting identity of the female protagonist, Anna Livia Plurabelle, enable many possible versions of her name. This little drawing may be understood as yet another alter ego for O'Doherty/Ireland. In Patrick/Brian's metamorphoses of these forms, he answers the fact that Joyce himself conceived of the identities of the characters in his late book in a visual way: the sigla, which appear turned around in all directions and thus change, but remain the same.<sup>46</sup> How else but visually could one act out the theme of eternal change when it comes to identities? Not surprisingly, Patrick Ireland has drawn the sigla. Apart from the 'X', the only siglum that does not change when turned, is the square: '□'. It is the cipher for 'the book', i.e. every book, *Finnegans Wake* itself and the unwritten history, not just of art, but of the world. It is a black square, circumscribing the white page. Writing, creating images and the identities of Brian O'Doherty and Patrick Ireland become circumscribed, intertwined—pleated—in *Art Since 1945*. It thus emerges not just as the quintessential artist's book, but as an eminently eloquent, while respectfully silent, a current, multiple, inclusive and oscillating, an Irish art history that envisages its own hermeneutics in and as image *and* word.

## Postscript

*Art Since 1945* is regularly exhibited in museum spaces: currently it is on view at the s.m.a.k. in Ghent, Belgium. Brian O'Doherty's authored books are now also—and with certain effects for, or in response to certain changes in art history.<sup>47</sup>

In 2014, just days after receiving Brian O'Doherty's *The Crossdresser's Secret* in the post, I had the opportunity to include it—as an artwork and a book simultaneously—in my curated exhibition, 'Wilde Art',<sup>48</sup> at the Irish Cultural Centre, Paris.<sup>49</sup> The artists' collective 'The Book Lovers' have collected Brian O'Doherty's novels as part of a select, although growing, library of novels written by visual artists. These have now also been exhibited—as visual art—in spaces as central to contemporary visual art's concerns as De Appel in Amsterdam.<sup>50</sup> It is an aspect of the literary and publishing trajectory of art (and poetry) that are art writing (in the broadest sense) and conceptual writing (for more specifically conceptual text-appropriation and publishing projects).<sup>51</sup> Brian O'Doherty, now without his alter ego Patrick Ireland—and fittingly for the creator of *Art Since 1945*, the curator/editor of *Aspen 5+6* and the author of *Inside the White Cube*—finds himself at the centre of visual art's most recent word-and-image-merging currents. The fact that *The Crossdresser's Secret* is published among many of the best artists' and art-theoretical projects of today at Sternberg Press, Berlin, indicates that even a historical novel—if its author is Brian O'Doherty—can be considered as relevant in the context: as visual art practice and novel. This calls for yet new modes of 'writing' art history today. Patrick Ireland, 30 years after 1945 set a process of reconsideration in motion that a further 40 years later looks a little less mute or disciplinarily bound—Patrick Ireland possibly also vanished as the division of tasks between him and Brian O'Doherty became less and less meaningful—but the process is certainly not completed.<sup>52</sup> It is fortuitous that exciting artworks, exhibitions and texts appear along the way—created by practitioners from both sides. Very few creations are poised, however, to achieve the silent poignancy of *Art Since 1945*.

48 15 May–26 June 2014. See <[www.centreculturelirlandais.com/modules/movie/scenes/home/inder.php?fuseAction=archives&FUSEBOX\\_LANG=2#](http://www.centreculturelirlandais.com/modules/movie/scenes/home/inder.php?fuseAction=archives&FUSEBOX_LANG=2#)> (accessed August 2014). Patrick Ireland's *The Critic's Boots* would have fitted Wilde well, even better, but the available time and resources for the exhibition dictated certain decisions about exhibits.



49 Brian O'Doherty in front of the Oscar Wilde's tomb, 1984, Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris.

50 <[www.thebooklovers.info/De-Appel-Arts-Centre-Book-Lovers-4-0](http://www.thebooklovers.info/De-Appel-Arts-Centre-Book-Lovers-4-0)> (accessed August 2014).

51 It may be interesting to note that the IAWIS (International Association of Word and Image Studies) panel at CAA, Chicago, February 2014, concerned itself with 'Conceptual Writing as a Word and Image Continuum' (I chaired it and included Brian O'Doherty in my introductory remarks).

52 In attempting to chart the field of contemporary art history recently, I outlined the trading of places between artists and art historians/writers that in the present example found an exciting early (if not first) instantiation: 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](http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF_Oratie_Lerm_WEB.pdf)> (accessed September 2015).