

WORK

But I am with Ruskin in thinking that a picture is not by its very nature ideology's mute servant, and has at its disposal kinds of intensity and disclosure, kinds of persuasiveness and simplicity, that makes most feats of language by comparison seem abstract, or anxiously assertive, or a mixture of both. Of course I step back from Ruskin's endearing wild claims for painting's total superiority. But at certain moments and on certain subjects – this is the book's essential proposal – painting's muteness gives it a peculiar advantage over the spoken or written word. (1)

It was, in fact, because it was obvious that the principle of national self-determination would create this kind of problem that many people had doubted during the 1914-18 war whether a world of nation-states was such a desirable outcome. Yet for the British and the French, whose global empires were now bigger than ever before, such a territorial settlement in central and eastern Europe suited their imperial interests. It created a tier of states which would act as a buffer against both Germany and Russia, allowing them to govern their far-flung colonies whilst simultaneously dominating the continent. (2)

We've got our country back! (3)

I MUTENESS

In the mid-eighties I titled two exhibitions of my work *Mute 1* and *Mute 2*. These titles were not arrived at in a haphazardly or serendipity way. The question not only 'what is muteness?' but 'can muteness (whatever it might be?) be articulated?' was high at that time on my working agenda. Can muteness be transmitted from one person (say, a person in front of, say, a painting) to another person? – is this a question that makes any sense? Perhaps such a question seems to be puzzling because it is not at all clear whether the 'muteness' that the question resides in is in the viewer or the object, or in both? Thus a major problem for me with any such assertion such as the claim Ruskin makes for painting (see Clark above) can be outlined in the following way. If there is such a thing as a purely visual sensation, can this be in any way transmitted to another person (let us call this person a viewer) purely visually? Insofar as I was capable of it, I laboured through a sustained chain of thought in the process of arriving at the title *Mute*. It was a topic with which I had been preoccupied for a long time. That labour turned and rested upon considerations of what the claim to articulate the meaning of a mute object (in this context an art object) might amount to – if anything. There is a number of my works from the period 1987 to 1993 that are titled *Mute (1, 2, 3 etc.)* or otherwise have *Mute* as part of their title, for example *Hardboard Mute Twins*, *Light Yellow Enola Gay Axe-Head Mute 2*, *Enola Gay Mute*. (4) One consideration is the possibility, or perhaps probability, of the type of spectator or audience who or which argues that any meaning to be derived from art objects is a matter of only purely visual sensation, and further, more fundamentally, a spectator or audience who believes that such a purely visual sensation is transmissible to another person through ONLY visual means. To posit such a person may appear outlandish, but over the sixty ears of my practice assuredly I have heard such a claim made not infrequently, in most cases implicitly, but in some cases explicitly.

Admittedly, in the passage cited above, Clark appears to set limits on the 'muteness' he writes of and champions, "but at certain moments and on certain subjects..." But the claim for the advantage of a muteness over the spoken or written word that Clark argues for in the above passage seems to me to be a paradoxical and enigmatic one, in this respect it is an arresting one. For me it is arresting since the implication of Clark's assertion seems to at least suggest that some kind of articulation of something (is it a language?) takes place. Remember, according to Clark, 'has at its disposal (would not we need to know more exactly what 'disposal' means, or entails, here?) a persuasiveness and simplicity that make most feats

of language abstract ...etc.’, Doesn’t this suggest that there is something other than language being articulated here, and that this ‘non-language’ is persuasive and simple? Consider the claim Clark lays out, “... a picture is not by its very nature ideology’s mute servant and has at its disposal kinds of intensity and disclosure, kinds of persuasiveness and simplicity that makes most feats of language by comparison seem abstract, or anxiously assertive, or a mixture of both.” One of the first questions I directed at the passage that Clark cited from Ruskin as an opening to Clark’s book, was by applying it in respect of what Ruskin might mean by the phrase ‘forced into’, this action anchored in the more expansive Ruskinian claim “...and of the enormously quantity of intellect which might be forced into the picture – and read there – compared with what might be expressed in words.” What kind of reading is involved in the act of ‘read there’? What is this force? Is it a kind of reading that needs no access to words? If it has no access to words, or perhaps better, requires no words, then what kind of reading could this be? Clark in a characteristic cautious but determined approach, states, “Of course I step back from Ruskin’s endearing wild claims for painting’s total superiority.” The pronouncement is paradoxical, and it does have its difficulties, not least in the sense that Clark himself, one of the most critically powerful and insightful of current art historians, can articulate and is a prominent art history producer of sentences that load up with sapience and discernment the images he chooses to examine and interrogate, through the words he uses. It is obvious to the point of perhaps hardly being worth mentioning, that to anyone who is illiterate, then books, printed or digital, Clark’s or anyone else’s, are a bit more difficult to consult. The books would have to be read out loud or otherwise aurally recorded to deliver access to such a recipient. But if there is an articulation of, say, an alleged ‘visual language’ that does not require words, then it hardly seems to matter at all whether or not the given viewing subject is illiterate.

I agree with Clark that Ruskin’s claim for painting’s total superiority is a wild claim, but for me, contra Clark, there is nothing endearing about such a claim. It seems to me Ruskin’s claim is not only absurd but plain wrong. Therefore it is likely to sow confusion, not to mention make mischief. At the very least such claims serve to contribute to the maintenance and confirmation of a shibboleth that I have increasingly come to observe and remain suspicious and skeptical of throughout my entire sixty plus years of association with the art schools and art world (see above the concept of some such as the ‘purely visual’, and more concerning the issue below). In the case of there being some such as a ‘purely visual language’, who or what is the Mute? Is it the object or the observer, or both? In one obvious sense the object is mute, but the muteness Ruskin and Clark seem to be claiming seems also to be the name of some quality that they can at least discern (argue) as being there in the object. But whatever this muteness is, according to Clark, following Ruskin, painting is not ‘ideology’s mute servant.’ Based on what I take to be this confusion I would argue too that Ruskin’s view of painting, in short order soon exposes itself as a condescending one since it seems to me that Ruskin is confusingly exclaiming not only a superiority of the medium (that is, painting over literary items) but a superiority of the judgement of the claimant, in this case what seems to be the perception of some such as an authentic painting expert – something of the order not just that painting is totally superior to all text, but that the likes of Ruskin’s claim is unassailable simply because it is in the nature of painting to be superior. It may remain faint behind Ruskin’s rhetorical ploys but with some hard looking (note this latter verb), that is thinking, ghosting behind the rhetoric can be detected a sentiment not so much that painting can reach the parts that literary art cannot, but that painting can reach the parts only of the authentic connoisseur (expert) of painting art because he does have these parts, and, by contrast, that the authentic connoisseur (expert) of literary art does not have these parts since she/he ONLY has, shall we call them, language sensitive parts and not, shall we

call them, painting sensitive parts. Ruskin presents it as if it is a truism, and if it were true it would obviously be a truism, but without some hard scientific evidence we only have Ruskin's word (note the word 'word' here). Throughout Ruskin's entire book (in this particular case Ruskin's Diaries), he cites no evidence for the claim but merely seems to presume it to be the case. Clark has some hefty accomplices in the matter (competition) of reading and looking, for example, Robert Hewison's giveaway metaphysically mysterious title of his biography of Ruskin, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye*. The 'reading' or 'arguing' eye seems too often to me to be unacceptably divorced from the some such as the reading brain – as if the eye can 'read' independently of the brain. I'm passing for the moment on a number of difficulties raised by the use, and it seems to be a habitual use in the art historical canon, of the verb 'read' when muteness is equated with the notion of the purely visual, of a kind of visual autonomy, not to mention that favourite unexamined anchorage and presumption of Greenberg – visual mastery.

I detect here an enduring doppelganger reappearing from my Art & Language past and increasingly raising its clarifying critique in the matter – what is called the Wittgensteinian Private Language Argument. (4) One way of assessing Clark's claim here perhaps is to suggest that what Clark calls the persuasiveness and disclosures that he alleges reside within painting rather than reside in the, shall we call it, observer, are other than it simply being a matter of, so to speak, finding the right words – there is something over and above words –or should it be under and beneath words? Whilst words might be very important, and this in Clark's case seems to be uncontroversial, there is, shall we call it, a residue of the idea of some such as 'the purely visual' – or more directly referential here – a 'visual language' which presents (transmits) other than in words. The best I can do in the example of Ruskin's assertion, for example, is the underlying presumption that this is not a private set of signs which is particular to the individual named John Ruskin, but it is a publicly accessible set of signs (for Wittgenstein a necessary condition such that the set of signs can be granted the status of a language) which is either acquired as a natural outcome of being a human being, is hardwired into us as a species, or alternatively, although it is hardwired into us, it lays dormant unless nurtured by a given socio-cultural set of conditions. If it is a universal hard-wired physiological condition, and this condition is a virtuous one, that is, is worth having, then we have to presume, I suppose, that vis a vis painting then our untrained literary art expert has the faculty but has had the misfortune to have never had access to the necessary socio-cultural set of conditions that develop and sustain the faculty. If this latter is the case then it seems a necessary condition for developing this hard-wired 'faculty' (or whatever it is alleged to be) is to have the kind of cultural conditioning of which, for example, Ruskin is a product.

If the verb 'read' is to be used in what I hold to be such a wild, metaphorical phantasmagorical way, then I would rather try and avoid using it if possible. The basic question for me is not how do we 'read' artwork? Even if we can make some kind of accommodation to a sense of 'read' which is acceptable, the question seem still to me to reduce to the more fundamental question - how do we think about art works? How and through what medium(s), is the act of thinking about art works actually performed? If we can think without using a language then what are the rules for using this non-language? For there to be public discourse (and I include talking to oneself as an act of public discourse) it seems there must be an agreed system of rules – a grammar. I have heard not infrequently over the sixty years of my practice, quite a few artists, critics, writers on art, et al, claim that looking at art does not require thinking about, ONLY looking. I have heard the claim even that making judgements about art does not require thinking at all but just, again, looking. It is as

well to interdict here with the question that looking may be a necessary condition of drawing out meaning from works, but is it a sufficient condition? At bottom Ruskinian arguments seem to champion looking AS a form of reading/speaking, but at the same time to discount any necessary relation between what are taken to be conventional forms of reading/speaking AND looking. A brutish way of posing the Ruskinian issue perhaps is ‘just look, do not think!’ As if you could! Or to pose the characteristic Wittgensteinian Private Language question, how do we know we are just looking when we have no conception of what the word ‘looking’ means since we do not need to have any access to words? Just in the case of stating some such as ‘we are looking but not thinking’ the person stating the statement is thinking, and the proof seems to be in the exclamation of the grammatical sentence “We are looking but not thinking.’ Since it seems the person is articulating the matter in words the issue that emerges at this point is one that rests on the question of whether there is a necessary relation between thinking and language. This applies regardless of whether the person is talking to her self or himself (the English language still seems to require a more discerning gender perspicacity in the matter of transgender cases), whether it is soliloquy or public verbal exchange. Thus it is worth perhaps taking a closer look at Wittgenstein’s observations in respect of the matter of whether or not there can be such a thing as a Private Language. Both Ruskin and Clark are using a set of publicly agreed rules, English grammar. Ruskin makes a major mistake in holding out the comparison - recall here Ruskin’s assertion an “enormously greater quality of intellect which might be forced into a picture – and read there – COMPARED with what might be expressed in words”, how is the comparison made? Clark in the passage I cite from his book near enough inherits the mistake. For example, what Ruskin reads into (or is it draws out of?) – is ‘drawing out’ equal to reading or judging? Presumably it will, of necessity, be transmitted through a system of publicly agreed rules. Ruskin, after all, is writing a diary in which his signs conform to the rules of a public language - yet again, English grammar. Even the most straightforward of road signs, say the British sign comprising the circle with an angular bar running from one part of the circumference of the circle to another we interpret as the meaning of some such word as stop or halt. The Americans use the word yield as the equivalent to the British words give way. For the visual sign to work we must understand the process that gives it meaning, say, stop – that is English grammar. And we understand the word stop because it is fixed within a system of publicly agreed rules - once again, English grammar. Yield has no one word response – it means give way to the person coming from the left But the matter can perhaps be further qualified, by stating that Wittgenstein in inquiring into whether or not a private language is possible, also activates a discussion about the relationship between public language and private sensations. Equally obvious in brute materialist terms, is the fact that paintings (works) do not speak, hear or read. It seems then that when Clark argues the claim ‘that at certain moments and on certain subjects painting’s muteness gives it a peculiar advantage over the spoken or written word’ seems to be implying that this muteness offers up opportunities and searches to the producers of spoken or written word concerning the objects under discussion about the challenges of drawing out meaning from the given mute objects in question, but through a medium which offers a ‘peculiar advantage over the spoken or written words’ – the best I can do is of the order of the following, articulated of course through the medium of the written word ‘is this peculiar advantage articulated in the form of spoken or written words (which, at the very least seems, to hover on the edge of contradiction) or articulated in an as yet unnamed other medium of expression, and then what could ‘articulate’ mean here? What occurred to me straightway is the question, what are these certain moments and certain subjects? I am presuming, with a strong suspicion I may be wrong, that the subjects of the chapters in *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come* are to be counted as examples of these certain subjects. As for ‘the certain moments’, I’ll pass on this matter for

the present, and offer a wink at the spectre of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

II SUBJECTS

Introduction.

What follows is a list of various series of works I have made during the sixty years of practice. It is a far from comprehensive, many other series, groups of, and individual works made as the output of the practice accumulated, have been omitted. Nevertheless my hope is that this truncated list will offer some insights into the direction, patterns, impulse and momentum of the work. Whether or not the work has the acumen I have hoped for and aimed at achieving is quite another matter.

During the period I was nominated for the Turner Prize in late 1985 a BBC newscaster characterized my work under the rubric of 'political art' and, following this logic, I was characterized as a 'political artist'. I could not but wryly and ironically inwardly chuckle to myself, since this remark suggested that there existed such characters as non-political artists, or even apolitical artists. Underlying this characterization and generating my ironic response, was, in respect of art practice, an acknowledgement that there is a fairly widespread belief in the art world in a more fundamentally loaded distinction – that between some such as an ideological artist and a non-ideological artist. Such a distinction has for a long time seemed to me to be unwarranted, since it simply and conveniently overlooks what I take to be an obvious point, that the claim itself to be non-ideological is always, at foundation, an ideological claim. Such a claim to transcend ideology is always underwritten and maintained by an ideology and has the promotion of that ideology's interest as its goal.. This underwriting is often implicit and unstated, and in many cases unrecognized. A particularly clear example of this claim that art, often framed through the posture of the visual transcending the text or spoken word, is Sir Anthony Caro's eulogy to John Hoyland's painting published in the Guardian a few years ago after the occasion of Hoyland's death. (5) In, say, 1985 I had viewed this claim to transcend ideology with increasing puzzlement since 1958 in the very earliest months of my entry into art schools and with outright suspicion by 1967 when I became reasonably cognizant with Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument. (6) Thus, obviously, I do not wish to deny I am a political artist, but the usefulness of the way the category is used I hold to be, at best a truism, but more importantly, a main instrument in the maintenance and ongoing pursuit of an illusion which has served to sustain the still equally unrecognized ideology of the 'non-ideological.' The level at which this widely used distinction between the ideological and the non-ideological is deployed in the art world is presently at such a vertiginous depth of being so unacknowledged and undisclosed as to now endorse it as an unconscious reflex. In summary, then the fact that I am a political artist singles me out from no other artist. This too is why I think Ruskin's claim above for painting's (or, equally, substitute art work's) total superiority is not just wild but eerily misguided and misleading. The notion of a picture being or not being 'ideology's mute servant' (shall we call it a dialectic?) seems to me, contra Ruskin, to ratify the artwork's dependent exchange and relation with verbal exchange in general and, in this case, text/title in particular.

There have been a number of recurrent and intermittently interlocked subjects which have continued to prevail throughout the now sixty plus years of my practice. As, I guess obviously, to which the previous section testifies, a prominent preoccupation has been trying

to figure out the status of and how to use the relation between language and image. But conforming to the more established category of history work (history painting) aspects and events of WW1 and WW2 for starters have enjoyed (if this is quite the right verb to deploy in this context) a recurring prominent place in the attention I have accorded to choice of subjects. Thus war itself has been a pronounced subject persisting and emerging regularly throughout the years of my practice. Many of the works I made as a student at the Slade School in the first two or three years of the 1960s often related to events in WW1. Between these years in the early sixties and the works I started to produce from 1974 my practice was singularly focused on contribution I attempted to make in co-founding two groups *Fine Artz* 1963-66 (co-founded with John Bowstead, Roger Jeffs and Bernard Jennings whilst we were all students at the Slade in 1963) and *Art & Language* 1968-73 (co-founded with David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin and Harold Hurrell). The works I made after leaving *Art & Language* in 1974 became, by 1976, again chiefly concerned with figures of and events in WW1. The exhibition of my work at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1983 was almost entirely made up of *WW1 Works* and *Trotsky Postcards*. Nevertheless as a subject for the works I have made since the mid-sixties the relation between language and image is perhaps the first and foremost overriding one. This concern with the relation between image and language seems to me to be a direct inheritance from my time in *Art & Language*. However, at this juncture in these remarks, it is as well to note that there are works reproduced in this publication from the period of the early sixties that pre-date the emergence of this more explicit concern with the relation between language and image - a bunch of works from 1962, that I made during the second of the four years I attended the Slade School in London (7). The titles, both in brevity and sentiment, of these works conform to an understated but wide ranging convention in the art world for titling at that time - shall we say, short and often not so snappy! The convention persists still today. Nonetheless despite this early puzzlement and notwithstanding my growing suspicions by 1962 concerning claims about the concept of some such as 'the purely visual/visual language,' my view then of the relation of the image to title/text conformed to what seemed to be the convention for titling at the time. In short, my inquiries, such as they were at that time in 1962, did not question this convention for titling works.

Throughout the subjects I have used in my practice, across all of them, interlocking and assimilation has occurred. This has produced hybrids. For example, *Grease Works* have been assimilated into *Enola Gay Works* and/or vice versa, the *Goya Works* are replete with *WW2* references. My hope is that I can leave the images/titles-texts to speak for themselves. With, perhaps obviously in respect of the substance of the remarks in section I above, no apologies for using the verb to speak in the phrase 'to speak for themselves.'

A. *WW1 Works* 1976-80

WW1 was an event in which I first became interested as a child through conversations I overheard in the family domain. I was raised in a very close and wide-ranging family framework, both on my mother's and my father's sides - grandparents and their various cousins, parents and their various cousins, my own aunts, uncles and cousins, et al - their conversations frequently constituted a numerous range of filters, memorizations, recollections and references to WW1. A number of my grandparents' relations had seen active service in WW1. Some parts of these conversations I remember clearly from the immediate post WW2 years. In addition nearly every village, town, city throughout Western Europe possessed a WW1 monument, often acting as a kind of civil public focus.

B (a) *Medianik Drawings* (b) *Beirut, Beirut that coddlin' town Drawings*
(c) *Falklands Drawings*; all 1980-83

(a) The *Medianik Drawings* were an attempt to mark out the increasing role of media specialists, not least news presenters, acting as instruments both scribing history and revising history, not to mention exorcising it - newscasters as, literally, speak-easy representations of power relations.

(b) The *Beirut, Beirut that coddlin' town Drawings* were made as a response to the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatila camps in Lebanon in 1982 by Christian militia overviewed and permitted (some would say, organized) by the Israel Defence Force. As a matter of course the drawings were, and I guess still are, characterized in some quarters as anti-semitic drawings. I was reminded of these disturbing accusations in 2017, when I was asked by a friend puzzled by why I had not applied to join the British Labour Party since the election of Jeremy Corbin. I replied that quite aside from the fact that maybe the Labour Party would not have me (at that time I had heard they had just rejected an application by Ken Loach), I considered that entrance to the Labour Party in its present form is like signing a gagging order not to criticize Israeli Government policies.

(c) *Falklands Drawings*

Commentaries attempting to comment on the Falklands War as a confirmation of the Thatcher administration's mobilization to elide the difference between nationalism and patriotism, not to mention whether or not there is a whiff of contradiction in installing the more local nationally applied concept of a property owning democracy (selling off council houses) under an unregulated capitalism. The Grenfell Tower event in 1917 stood out as a retrospective confirmation of the early eighties sentiments that prompted my production of these drawings.

C *The Trotsky Postcards* 1980-83

These works (painting and drawings) were subjectively formed around a time-travelling, historically reconstructed Trotsky figure. The six postcards were sent from this Trotsky figure to various political figures: Churchill, Nixon, Svetlana Stalin and Malcolm Muggeridge, John Locke, Stalin, himself, Ian Paisley. The *Stalin* postcard, for example, is replete with direct WW2 references. These were the first works in which titles were expanded into texts and diagrammatic statements.

The Blue Skies Paintings 1981

These works centred upon and attempted, through a circuitous set of references, to suggest the imperial aspirations and role of Pax Americana Capitalism in what was then, in the early eighties, called the Pacific Rim and, link it, through the events of US business culture incursions and sports and geographical reference, to the role of the drive for fabulous wealth accumulation as a decisive ideological component of the 'American Dream' – in other words, a world increasingly subjugated to a preponderance of American power. Incidentally it is perhaps worth noting here with a view to projecting *The Blue Skies Paintings* forward into a

series of works I am currently (2019) working upon, the ongoing *American Civil War Works*, that an early adoption of the concept of the Pax Americana surfaced in the American Civil War.

The Happysnaps/Historysnaps Paintings 1983-84

The main figures depicted in these paintings are our two daughters Ruby and Amber textually lodged against a Cold War horizon. In 1983 the long-wearing performance of the Cold War stretched a long way behind our two daughters (like their then entire young lives and more than 25 years before the birth of our eldest!) In 1983 Ruby was eight and Amber was five. WW1 and WW2 references are prominent throughout the series.

For example:

The full title of *Historysnap 1*

Ruby, after having been assured that she, like Dorothy, was on the Yellow Brick Road of a happy Disneyland childhood, finds out early that it is really the road from Passchendaele to Hiroshima.

The full title of *Happysnap 6*

After having seen Manet's strong work, Ruby and Amber wonder which bunkers are earmarked for his pictures – they ponder as to whether in the cities where the Manets are, only the neutron bomb will be used.

Irish Works 1983-86

The most numerous series of works of my entire practice. This event, the Anglo-Irish confrontation, has a very long history, and to a Brit of my generation it was an ongoing local horizon in contrast to, say, the more inter-continental dimensions of the Cold War. However, like the Cold War, the Troubles seemed in the mid eighties, when the *Irish Works* were made, a vanishing horizon, as the PIRA and the British Army engaged in what seemed an uncontrollable chain of violent events. The old dispute now threatens a new additional context for the *Irish Works*, as it proves to be the bone that the old imperial dog refuses to let go of. Not least as the matter of the Irish land border provided and hauled the *Irish Works* into another kind of focus, this time at the very centre of the piss and wind of the current Brexit concert as it continues to display itself as a specious and disturbingly self-preoccupied manifestation of right wing English nationalism.

The Stonetouchers. 1984-85

This series of paintings also has our two daughters as the central figures, this time setting them into the locale of the WW1 cemeteries in northern France. This series too embraces a diagrammatic expansion of title and text attempting to intercalate the works into a historical calendar projecting both backwards and forwards in time. This series of paintings, although the settings were WW1 graveyards, were elicited by an event happening at the time, filtered out by a curiosity that both our daughters raised there and then on the occasion of the first graveyard we visited in a chain of such visits. By coincidence this first graveyard was a South African graveyard. Our daughters were puzzled because a prime political event of that time 1984, was the issue of apartheid. They were a bit perplexed that white South Africans (since most of the names on the gravestones indicated white soldiers and not Africans) were allies of Britain and France during WW1

The Goya Works 1986

Most of the works in this series use text as title rather than a title. Many of these titles are relatively long ones. *The Goya Works* are comprised of two series, all, more or less, near enough in respect of the materials used in making them, can just about be classed as paintings. The two series are as follows.

SERIES 1 LETTERS FROM THE REPUBLIC

Series I is made in a non-figurative mode, a non-figurative mode of representation if you like. And therein lies a possible historical paradox, since non-figuration and non-representation are frequently used interchangeably as if they refer to the same mode of practice. Along with a series of works that masqueraded under the title of *Non-figurative Irish Works* (1984-86) this was my first sustained practical inquiry tarrying on the border between alleged figurative and alleged non-figurative work. The emergent renewal of old considerations of and thoughts about muteness had a lot of heft in the endeavour of making Series 1. Is the idea of non-figurative work that it 'speaks for itself as painting' – a kind of painting for painting's sake? The mute object need not state anything, that is, requires no words. That, in fact, it is better without words, somehow just the visual sensation is the complete event? The long titles-texts are explicit devices to interrogate and reject this view of non-figuration, not least because non-figuration by the time these works were made had been integrated into art discussion (let us say that Kandinsky made the first non-figurative work in the early part of the twentieth century) to the extent that the mode was so familiar as to have become figurative – thus the art public now has series of figurative references of 'non-figuration'. The dedications (for example in nos 6 and 7) are attempts to fan out the works' references into another set of historical/geographical tracks.

SERIES 2 LETTERS FROM THE ARTIST

Series 2 carries many more figurative references, and like the *Happysnaps/History snaps* and *The Stonetouchers* works, the main protagonists depicted are our two daughters Ruby and Amber. In this series the setting is the carefully preserved Natzwiller-Struthof concentration camp high up the Vosges mountains in Eastern France – one of the few, if not the only, Nazi extermination camp(s) in France. Thus the references to WW2 are obvious. The camp is preserved in pretty well fully equipped form, or at least it was in 1986, with all the characteristic instruments of an extermination camp, ovens, gibbet, etc. I attempted a lot of play in the titles listing the materials from which the pictures were variously made attempting to face off European WW2 historical references with the incursion of modernist theory and practice into twentieth century art practice (for example, Robert Morris' characterization in the sixties that current practice was complex and expanded) not least in my own practice. I was trying to figure out possible options for the historical repositioning of the relation between figuration and non-figuration. Considerations of interpretation of the alleged 'mute object' were a significant input into the making of both Series 1 and 2. These works prefigured the emerging preoccupation with the concept of the contradiction of the speaking/writing mute which underwrote both *The Mute Works* and the exhibitions titled *Mute 1* and *Mute 2*. The prominence of the extermination camp as a motif in Series 2 perhaps hints at my emerging search for other historical ghosts of extermination programmes in my lifetime – for example, the idea of the motif of the Enola Gay B29 standing in symbolically for the B29 itself as an instrument whereby entire city populations could be exterminated.

In all three of the above series of works, *Happysnaps/Historysnaps*, *The Stonetouchers* and *The Goya Works*, I attempted to insert the arena of the domestic, through the logo of our two daughters, into the historical events enacted in the public and civic domains of both authoritarian and liberal twentieth century governments – both again, ordained and realized in

events during my lifetime.

The Enola Gay Works

The *Enola Gay* paintings/constructions partially emerged from a concern with the genre (if that is what it is?) of the monochrome. I perceived the monochrome as a kind of historically-remaindered genre. A popular view (fierce devotees of the monochrome would say a philistine view) being that the monochrome is not so much art-like as like art not worthy of the name. More technically, the view internal to the art world, remaindered insofar the monochrome is often projected by its champions as concerned with pure painting, the wafting rhetoric imbedded in such phrases as an emblematic all-over field of colour. It is also positioned, at the same time, through its very plainness, at the juncture where the painting project is pulled into the orbit of concerns about the three-dimensionality of the painted objects, its edge for instance (see, for example, Robert Morris, *Notes on Sculpture IV*, Art Forum, 1967). In being positioned at this juncture the monochrome seems to be astride the legacies of modernism, which has undermined one-time alleged certainties of the earlier part of the modernist project (for example, the essentialist theories of painting/sculpture of Greenberg and Fried earlier in the sixties). In the current climate of exchange, painting, like any other practice, has many foci, and does not have a stable generic centre. Insofar as the *Enola Gay* works can be called paintings the above claims and arguments are presupposed in the moves of which they are comprised.

The *Enola Gay* paintings/constructions also emerged, linked to the issues outlined above, through a concern to point out that a border in which figuration and non-figuration are relatively easy to distinguish one from the other, is a far from straightforward task. In the following sense. The interface between figuration and non-figuration, such as it is, seems to be characterized by incidents that fall between levels of representation, that is, they are an attempt to locate and catch incidents that fall between levels of representation. Thus the moves across and into the problematic figuration/non-figuration border were generated by something like the following set of thoughts. Any object/image with which we become sufficiently familiar we come to remember as a figure - we hold in our memory a figure of this object/image. Anything we remember visually, we remember as, so to write, a visual figure. Thus in respect of non-figuration eventually we have a series of figures of non-figuration. The concern with the relation figuration/non-figuration also manifest itself in the *Goya Works* 1985-87 (first shown in the exhibitions *Brit Art* at Air Gallery and Gimpel Fils Gallery, London, 1987). A further suggestion hovering within this notion is that a figurative representation of non-representation is not absurd. In the case of intending to make a non-figurative painting as being manifest in some produced object (a non-figurative work claimed to be produced by accident, as with any work produced by accident, is another case), then it is assumed that in order to produce such a painting, the producer will have to have some fairly clear idea of what a non-figurative work is like - will have to have in mind a figure of non-figuration. The producer needs this figure as the intention to guide his/her production. Presumably an art work produced entirely by accident will be an event in which the producer has no intention whatsoever to produce an art work- Pollock's works, for example, clearly to do not conform to this kind of production event. Because it is bereft of gestural marks, perhaps nothing in the range of art objects is more easily memorized than the monochrome. In this sense the monochrome is one of the most simple and, in this sense, draconian figures of non-figuration

In respect of the untidiness of the relation figuration/non-figuration, the monochromatic ground of the great majority of the *Enola Gay* works was never conceived as purifyingly

reductive. The adoption of a monochromatic ground was, on the contrary, a device that attempted to inscribe the untidiness and volatile historicism required to make any kind of accurate mapping of the relation figuration/non-figuration and its role within the legacy of modernism. In 1991 I wrote the following of the state then of the *Enola Gay* work. “In the present state of the work, the using of the Enola Gay motif is a bit like using a franking machine, a bit like using a postmark. It has come to identify the works not only formally, but if and when the image of the plane becomes known as the image of the plane it is an image of, the particular B29 that delivered Little Boy to Hiroshima, then the idea is that the historical drama of the event depicted is stamped upon the surface of the work; albeit through a fairly anonymous and innocuous formal motif upon the monochromatic surface of the work. The motif is anonymous and innocuous in the sense that the image of the plane itself is neither distinguishable from many other B29s (formally at least at the range of the specific image used in the *Enola Gay* works it could be any old B29 – in fact, the Enola Gay did have to have significant modifications made inside the bomb bay area of the plane in order to accommodate Little Boy) nor is the image dramatically or expressionistically rendered.” It was in this sense a remaindering out of the monochrome genre as a kind of carrier of blatant pictorial historiography.

In adopting the genre of the monochrome during 1989-92 I attempted to make it serve as a reminder that the claims concerning the genre are both prone to suppressing and sublimating its historically contingent character. It has been claimed that the monochrome is non-ideological, but the claim itself, like all claims to transcend ideology, is an ideological claim, is a claim made on behalf of some one or another ideology. The monochrome, like all genre, does have an historically contingent character. My choice to deploy the monochromatic ground in the *Enola Gay* works was an attempt to state that the monochrome is part of the grubby world of ideology. The monochrome is one of the most transparently, perhaps brutally, materialist expressions within the modernist project; it is an object holding a relentlessly uniform all-over field of colour. Whilst it is this lack of gestural mark-making which seems to furnish the toe-hold for the claims to transcendence made on behalf of the monochrome (claims for some kind of ‘pure painting’, of ‘the essence of painting’), there is also a whiff of paradox attached to such an essentialist claim .

It is not so much that the interpretation of the monochrome suffers from slipshod reading, although, no doubt, there is plenty of this, it is not these kinds of mistakes in which I am interested. Rather, it is more those errors which I take to be structural to the genre; specifically those yearnings for and fantasies of transcendental being in the reading of the monochrome which, widely read as transcendental and essentialist, inversely, offered me an opportunity to use the genre for purposes of carrying the filthiest and grubbiest of historical iconography (the image of the Enola Gay). The historical bottom line is that the event of dropping Little Boy did kill more or less 80,000 people at one stroke, and in the longer run killed and poisoned many thousands of others. The idea of transplanting the image of the Enola Gay on to an emblem, the monochrome, many claims (since these are claims concerning the artistic subject) about which assert it to have a self-confirming access to truth. Any claim embracing the yearning that the artist via her/his art work has a self-confirming access to truth, that the genre of the monochrome is in this sense transcendent, sooner or later runs directly up against the limits of what we can do with language. But they are pretty extensive and expansive limits.

The Grease Works

The analogy which I elected to use in conceiving of the *Grease Works* was the hardware/software distinction of computer science. [8] I wished to make a series of works which had a software component such that the works would continue to produce themselves (or at least aspects of themselves) after they had left my (the artist's) relations of production. An early group of *Grease Works* was the Warhol Chair works, where the hardboard/paint/trough construction is treated as the hardware tableau upon which the software programme (grease) is implemented and runs. Grease, being the relatively volatile material it is, continues to shift and seep according to such factors as variation in temperature, how vigorously the works may be moved one site to another, etc. Accordingly I conceived of the use of grease as the deployment of a continuing to run software programme.

Since I was assuming, for this project at least, that the given model of the artistic subject (learned and inculcated, let us say, in art school) as running (implemented) in the body of the artist (a truism in one strong sense), then, accordingly, the works of the late eighties and those made throughout the nineties, can be viewed as an attempt to increasingly focus upon making works which model, in one way or another, the artistic subject her or himself. It is clearer now (2002) that the *Grease Works* (the first two small *Grease Works* were made toward the end of 1986) were a sustained attempt to make works, a component (grease) of which was a kind of automata. Grease as a kind of continuous ongoing -past-the-hand-of-the-artist moving agent of the relations of production of these works. With more than ten years of hindsight this now seems obvious. In the later eighties and early nineties other series of works also preoccupied me alongside and sometimes interleaved with the *Grease Works*. These were the series (i) *Mayor of Leipzig/Jacques Louis David Works*, (ii) *Mute Works* and (iii) *Enola Gay Works*. All four series of works had a number of works which crossed into one or another, or a number of, the other series. In short, the boundaries between the series of works are porous. The software programmes (either grease, or in the work of the nineties, automated projected image technology and/or conventional computer software programmes) are cross series, and are often intra-series.

The grease was the initial software programme. The second programme introduced was automated projected image technology, projected on to the hardware (tableaux surfaces of various kind - hardboard, polystyrene, canvas, etc.). Some later *Grease Works* use both kinds of software (grease and automated projected image technology). Mainly these works have remained in the form of the initial drawings. [9] Throughout the nineties the largest body of work was constituted of these kinds of materiel. The first work of the nineties that realized the work past the drawing stage is *Work by a Split-Brain Artist*, shown at the IMMA Glen Dimplex Prize exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 1994. This particular realization is a variation on an initial plan that remains in the form of a series of plans/drawings and notes, which was a characteristic initial way of working with this body of work. And many of these plans/drawings remain in this form, although should a suitable future opportunity arise I would be happy to realize them. Some of the later works (from around 1995) would, ideally, incorporate a software that continuously develops itself

Thus these software entrants (implemented by whatever technology) are attempts to model an artistic agent, an artistic subject. Thus I guess these works may be seen as representations of representers (artists). So, in one way at least, I viewed these works as agents/subjects rather than as objects, keeping in mind the limitations and problems outlined earlier in these remarks. Throughout the nineties and early 2000s I maintained a strong preoccupation with

such areas as genetic algorithms, automata theory, which I thought, at that time, would entail more direct involvement in computer science/artificial intelligence/cognitive science areas than hitherto. An interest in cognitive science remains as a possible resource for future work. I remain intrigued with studying some areas of mathematics, although not necessarily as direct feeds into my practice. Such study, as I have found to my cost, can be very time consuming.

Some points of continuity seem to stay with the practice. A characteristic twinning of painting/software text remains and has been steadfast in the work since 1996. This kind of twinning seems to act as a kind of bridge, in the sense that it is securely tied into a traditional technology (painting), the ontology of which safeguardedly chaperones the work as art. The idea of making work that might both hang in and out of art has interested me a long time. It seems a kind of space where some productive questions concerning the status of art practice might be raised.

Be this as it may, qua painting and drawing, it seems that both slide-projection software and computer software offer some purchase upon the notion of a work-agent which reflects and comments upon itself, including the history of any given genre, technology, set of cognitive resources, etc. These reflexive and iterative possibilities have stayed as preoccupations of my practice. Not the least of the historical aspects which the work may continue to reflect upon, is the status and condition of the avant-garde model of the artistic subject (AGMOAS). The *Grease Works* did mark something of a step along the way of this still current ongoing concern in my practice. Text works have become passé in the steady inversion and deflation of avant-garde-ism in its long trek through the twentieth century. But software technology does seem to me to furnish some engaging possibilities for the use of text, both within and without a given tableau/work. (11)

A second and entangled concern in *The Grease Works* was the idea of linking the fact that the grease is a relatively unstable material (it's material constitution being such that it lies somewhere between liquid and solid) to the post-WW2 historical event of observing the slippage of the seeming 1945 secure British identity into something more volatile emerging during the sixties, seventies and eighties. Quite aside from the ongoing war with PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army) 1969 to the late nineties, the emergence of the SNP (Scottish National Party) has also rendered uneasy and less secure some of the comfortable suppositions concerning British identity characteristic of post-WW2 Westminster administrations. I chose what I see as a particularly loaded symbol of these suppositions, the flag of British and Union identity – the Union Jack, as the motif through which to attempt to realize and represent this idea. Thus two or three of these *Grease Flags* have been made. They vary in size, but the drawings I made of them in 1991 envisaged a substantial number of them as thirty feet in their longest dimensions and two or three that have been made have been this kind of scale. They are comprised of wooden troughs in which rests the grease, and, up to the present, they have been laid on the floor. A second possibility is to position them on a wall, where the event of gravity will act in a different way upon the material qualities of the grease. A second set is made of polystyrene troughs, again filled with grease. The idea being that the grease might eventually, if not completely, destroy the polystyrene hardware, perhaps rendering the motif of the flag more or less unrecognizable. The *Grease Flags*, hopefully displaying the central preoccupation with the brittleness of British identity that drove the selection of the flag motif, proffer their metaphorical load trying as attempting to suggest the possibility of the dissolution of a purblind nationalism (not just English nationalism in particular but the general problem of the difference between nationalism and patriotism).

Iraq Works 2003

Enough said!

(1) *The Berlin, The Desert and East Prussia Drawings* 2014-2017 (2) *The American Civil War Studies* 2018-19 (ongoing)

The older I get the more the inevitability of continuing wars throughout my lifetime seems omnipresent. As far as I am capable of realizing it, then these two sets of works discharged an idea I have had for many years. Namely, that not just would I like, but that I ought to attempt to make a series of works reporting the fact that the experiences of my generation (I was born 1939) were overseen by a form of political rivalry, the events of which were omnipresent – the Cold War. Thus two colossal civil wars, the American Civil War (1861-65) and the Russian Civil War (1918-21), begot the two superpowers that incubated, conducted and maintained the Cold War and consequently were the primary protagonists of the episode. And this conflict permeated every aspect of the lives of my generation, not least the art world in which my own practice was imbedded from 1958 onwards. The Cold War was fought and marshaled through many proxies and conveyed into every cultural aspect of the so-called West and East. I, like millions and millions of others, lived through the entire event. Below is a truncated personally indexed calendar list of those years.

I was ten when the Truman Doctrine was installed,

I was 11 at the outbreak of the Korean War

I was thirteen when Stalin died

I was fifteen at the time of Dien Bien Phu

I was seventeen when the Suez invasion and the Algerian War signaled the absolute waning of European imperialism's old pretensions and the rising in Hungary threatened the solidarity of the Warsaw Pact

I was the same age when I first heard and embraced a Chuck Berry and a Buddy Holly song

I was eighteen when the Cuban revolution was achieved

I was the same age when I first listened to the pulsing squeak, via Radio Luxembourg, of Sputnik 1's journey round the Earth

I was 21 when Gagarin became the first man in space

I was 22 when the administrations of Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy contrived the Cuban Missile Crisis

I was 25 when LBJ expanded American military intervention in Vietnam

On my 30th birthday I was in New York on Art & Language business when, one day later, Armstrong and Aldrin walked on the moon

A few weeks later, I was on a Greyhound bus journey from Toronto back to New York, the Thruway was blocked by tens of thousands of hippies walking to the event named Woodstock. I had never heard of and had no idea what the event was until I arrived in NYC six hours late and saw the event recorded on TV.

I was 39 when Margaret Thatcher was elected, predictably inaugurating a less civilized social environment and a vengeful and much more callous political culture in the UK, the outcome of which is presently manifesting itself in an envious and vicious right wing English nationalism

I was 40 when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan

I was 50 when the Wall came down

I was 61 when the event of the Twin Towers took place.

... and so on

“War is cruelty. There is no use trying to reform it, the crueller it is the sooner it will be over.”

“My aim is to make Georgia howl.”

William Tecumseh Sherman 1864

In war, where both success and failure are repaid by death, hostile agents who operate in the rear are subject to execution. This is inhuman, but no one ever considered war a school of humanity.

Leon Trotsky 1920

Notes.

(1) T J Clark, *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2018
p. 10

(2) Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, Penguin Books, London, 1998
p. 42

(3) Nigel Farage on the event of the result of the Brexit Referendum

(4) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1968, especially 243-271. See also, Stephen Mulhall, *Wittgenstein's Private Language: Grammar, Nonsense, and Imagination*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2009.

(5) Obituary in the Guardian, 1 August, 2011

(6) A tutor at Barnsley Art School in 1959, George Little, was the first person I recall I heard uttering the claim that a painting should be self-sufficient ('stand on it's own', I recall, was the very phrase). It was I think a fairly widely held view in the art world at that time. I did not disagree with this view at that time, but I did think about it and remained puzzled thinking about it and what it could mean over the next few months, not least because George Little was so insistent in his view. A second input that increased my skeptical view of the claim, was when I saw an interview with Bertrand Russell on TV in the series *Face to Face* in February 1959. Russell's interlocutor was John Freeman. The interview intrigued and influenced me a lot. Although I did not start seriously reading any of Russell's books until October 1960, when I bought his *Mysticism and Logic* in London during my first few weeks at the Slade School, Russell's commentary had given me a lot to think about over the intervening twenty months.

(7) I had no idea these drawings were still extant, until I discovered them when going through my Mother's possessions after her death in 1999. She had apparently saved them, whether inadvertently I do not know, for 36 years.

(8) At the time in 1986, when I first started to ponder the idea, I guess the springboard for it lay way back to nearly twenty years before when I was working closely with Michael Baldwin and we were discussing and inquiring into the role of intentions and intensions, intensionality. By the eighties I had been thinking about the paradox of separating the artist's intentions from the work – paradoxical because the artist would have to have the intention to make a work that was separated from her intentions. This is a kind of cognitive qualification, if not limit, on the idea of a work produced by accident. Many of the approaches to Pollock's drip paintings (if I can be permitted to use the hackneyed term) hover strongly in this kind of area of paradox.

(9) Six of the *Grease Works* were produced at the exhibition of my work at Yale Union in Portland, Oregon in late 2014, all were produced from the 1991 drawings. The six works were made by the carpenter at Yale Union, Brian Thackeray, They are incredibly skillfully made and presented. The event proved that, as a general case, when an artist has works made by someone else he is only as good as his best craftsman.

(10) I attempted to study and understand a lot of material from the Artificial Intelligence area (not very successfully) in the first five or six years of the nineties: Minsky, the Churchlands, Dennett, for example, as well as some of the foundational texts from the likes of Turing and McCarthy. I have though heeded many of the reservations stated by Noam Chomsky concerning a number of the claims coming from the AI constituency.

Many aspects of Chomsky's work have had a foundational and persistent influence upon my work since the late sixties, much in the way Bertrand Russell's work has influenced my view of practice since even earlier.

(11) The notion is one in which I remain interested. I guess the source of it goes back a long way, to at least what has turned out to be a continuous imbedded preoccupation in my practice, starting at the very latest in my participation in Art & Language practice in the sixties. On reassessing the concept of the avant-garde see, Terry Atkinson, *Avant-Garde Model of the Artistic Subject: The AGMOAS is now a Corporate Audit*, edited by Matthew Poole, kynastonmcschine.org.uk, 2017