

Kate Long
Contributions to a space -
Part Two

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Bus Projects is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria. Bus Projects' 2017-19 Program is supported by the City of Yarra.

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How Context Became Content or: The Wall's Revenge

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 18.01.17—11.02.17

The Modernists were determined to defend the art object from the seductive lures of the big bad world, shuddering at the thought of the defilement of their precious progeny. *I have assumed as axiomatic that creation, the work of art, is autonomous.*¹ They tenderly shielded its eyes, whispered honeyed words into its ear and told it that it would all be OK.

As a gesture of their unwavering ardour, they constructed a protective enclosure around the art object. *The outside world must not come in [...].*² Its walls, painted white (the most dispassionate of colours) were sturdy and secure and free of adornment. Its edges were sealed and impenetrable. It had something of the holy about it. *[...] a non-place, a neutral space.*³ They called it the white cube.

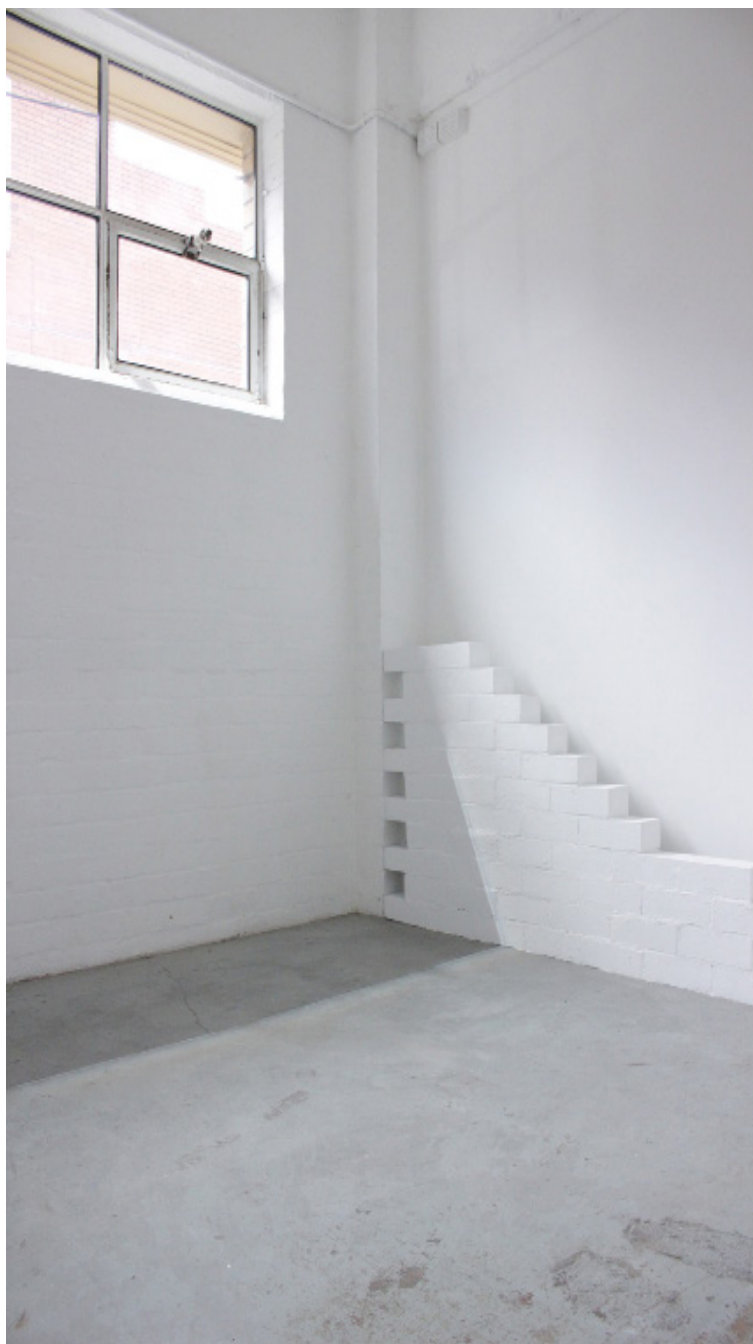
Moored in this hallowed chamber, the art object was, thereupon, consecrated. Inordinately coddled by the Modernists, it was unsurprising that it turned out to be an *enfant terrible*. Delusions of grandeur and vain pretensions soon distracted it. *[A]n ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by [...] mere choice [...]*.⁴ Delusion increased to dissociation; time became progressively unintelligible within the empty cavern. *[A]n illusion of eternal presence [...]*.⁵ Then, the wall itself vied for attention.

At first, it was only a minor irritation. The wall would bump, jolt and scrape against the art object's frame, meekly asserting its presence. Nothing to fret about. But it wasn't long before a tug of war ensued. The wall's resentment grew, it refused to simply exist at the service of the art object. *The white wall's apparent neutrality is an illusion.*⁶ It began to infringe on the art object's resolute solidity, its mastery over the white cube. *The edge in modern painting is charged with neurosis; it meets a world that no longer confirms it but which is hostile or at best indifferent.*⁷ The wall tried to invent ways to individuate itself, to mark itself out as discrete. That scheme quickly failed.

Vexed and brimming with outrage, the wall was at its last tether. The germ of a brilliant scheme, however, was burgeoning in some remote corner of its mind. *If I cannot overcome the art object, I will become it, realised the wall.* Rather cleverly, it resolved to meld and mingle with the art object. *[It] created a continuity with no singular point of perceptual objectification.*⁸ The wall went about its task so artfully that eventually its limits and those of art object were indistinguishable. A little grudge had brought about the dematerialisation of the art object. *The wall, the context of the art, had become rich in a content it subtly donated to the art.*⁹ Such was the wall's revenge.

Stephanie Berlangieri

1. T. S. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," *Criterion* 2, no. 5 (October 1923): 38.
2. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: Lapis Press, 1986), 15.
3. Maria A. Slowinska, *Art/Commerce: The Convergence of Art and Marketing in Contemporary Culture*, (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014), 44.
4. Thomas Deane Tucker, *Derridada: Duchamp as Readymade Deconstruction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 45.
5. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 79.
7. Andrew Graham-Dixon, "Revealing neurosis of art at the edge," *Independent*, 5 April, 1999. Accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/revealing-neurosis-of-art-at-the-edge-1085294.html>.
8. *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher* p. 38
9. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 29.





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