

Greasing.

- 1) Grease the axle.
- 2) Grease the Henry Moore Medallion for proper art behavior.
- 3) Grease seriousness.
- 4) Grease the European Treasure House.
- 5) Grease The Wall.
- 6) Grease The Diamond.
- 7) Grease the Brit.
- 8) Grease Rock n' roll.
- 9) Grease consciousness.
- 10) Grease minimalism.
- 11) Grease God (in John Milton's vision heaven was landscaped—perhaps by God himself! It is rumoured God is still a he!)
- 12) Grease language (in John Milton's vision God spoke—from whom did God learn the language?)
- 13) Grease the autonomous surface.
- 14) Grease the materials of art.
- 15) Grease the practice.

Using grease.

- 1) The material of the avant-garde greasers.
- 2) Grease—the new material.
- 3) Grease as a repository of the potentially oppositional. Chortle! (Be serious now! Grease is entering the portals of serious art histories of the social referent.)
- 4) Grease as a disaffirming material—will it ever dry? I don't know, but I can find out. From Castrol for example. Castrol the art object consultants.
- 5) Grease is the perfect material for a successful art career.
- 6) Grease, the perfect material for the civilization of senior common room culture.
- 7) Grease is the perfect material for making copies.

Paragraphs on grease.

- 1) It is asserted by the wise guys of art criticism that representation (or is it figuration?) leads to conservatism of practice. This is true enough. But what are we to make of the figurative state of abstraction? Hoorah for our serious art historians of the social referents of autonomous surface, of conceptual audacity (swoon), of technical daring (double-swoon).
- 2) Grease is the perfect material for contemporary art practice. And how is this, we ask ourselves? Because grease is a perfect resume of the shift towards consumption as its own justification! Really!
- 3) Grease is the perfect material of socialist realism. Because of its working class associations. The local car mechanic. (but how about Formula 1, Silverstone, etc.? Within the next decade we will see the Leningrad Glasnost Grand Prix!) Please don't try to be ironic, rather try and make a noble stereotype out of the material of the car mechanic.
- 4) The attack on complacent dichotomies is complacent. Fake the attack! Grease it! Then make a double-fake! A double-fake! What's a double-fake?

Uses for grease.

- 1) Grease for the career.
- 2) Grease for the opportunity.
- 3) Grease for the the going-on.
- 4) Grease for Dion diMucci.
- 5) Grease for the remembrance of the Great war—to keep the history slipping.
- 6) Grease for lessening the leaven of irony.
- 7) Grease for the sake of grease sales organizations.
- 8) Grease for democracy.
- 9) Grease for Tom Paulin's Permafrost breakfast.
- 10) Grease for the Revolution (being serious, but don't let them know you're being serious—the real test will come soon enough—and in an October not in an art practice. Grease to distinguish work from wishful thinking.)

Terry Atkinson, *Mute*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Galleri Prag, 1988, p. 22.

Work

Terry Atkinson

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

I MUTENESS

In the mid-eighties I titled two exhibitions of my work Mute I 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 Tiins, Light Yellow Enola Gay Axe-Head Mute 2, Enola Gay Mute. 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 years 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 enormous 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 reading 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 our 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 nor require words, then it hardly seems to matter at all whether or not the given viewing subject is illiterate.

I agree with Clark that Ruskins 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 sceptical 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 nor 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 or 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, nor 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 cry and avoid using it if possible. The basic question for me is nor 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 con-

dition of drawing out meaning from works, but is it a sufficient condition? At best, 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 bur not chinking.' 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 chinking 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 ir 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 our 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 master for the present, and offer a wink at the spectre of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Endnotes

- 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: Europes Twentieth Century*, Penguin Books, London, 1998, p. 42.

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