

**Olga Koumoundouros: Hey Todd, here's a question for you. Why Oldenburg? Especially, where do you see it in the work outside of the "Parity" piece?**

Todd Bourret: I began to think of Oldenburg in relation to you mainly in his earlier work. Specifically in *The Store*, 1961 and the objects made for it. They were these sloppy, drippy, fucked-up versions of "regular" things, everyday things. And, with all the weird hand-ness of the objects, they resisted being seen as (more successfully than Rauchenberg or Johns) expressionist. So I think that relates to your work.

Also, there is this performative element to these sculptures. They're not made by Oldenburg the "artist". Rather they are products of Oldenburg performing the role of the "Store-keep". This, I think, relates to some of your work, in which the object on display (although not always the direct result of a performance) is often made by you in the guise of survivalist or paranoid, etc.

I had actually thought that you were moving away from this way of working. The work in Padasena & the first Aachen show didn't seem to be results of you taking on a persona of any sort. In fact they were really earnest. On the other hand, the piece that was in *Thing: New Sculpture From L.A.* is very performative, as are the shooting pieces at Adamski (though to me the shooting pieces aren't as theatrical).

I also noticed that there are more direct references to 60's/70's art popping up in your recent work. Why the decision to invoke Acconci in your Terror piece, or Oldenburg in your Parity piece?

**OK: Your comment about Oldenburg's "weird hand-ness that resists being seen as expressionist" is so right. I agree with Judd's writing that the expressive nature of Oldenburg's sculptures is his experience of that object. It is NOT a typical anthropomorphism, but one so blatant and exaggerated that it becomes an investigation of his experience or feeling about that object. It also is representational and the objects represented are found everywhere in the everyday. The banal and the emotional content is in contrast to its ubiquitous distribution. I like that tension. I think that's where that work sings. Judd has problems with the hybridity that is in typical anthropomorphism ... You know, a little geometry or structure, a little figuration. I don't have such a problem with that idea of the hybrid. I guess I've gone there in my some of my work. So that is opposed to Oldenburg.**

**And I see what you are saying about "weird hand-ness escaping expressionism" in my work. The ideas I want to convey have a strong**

basis in language, and largely remain at the forefront. That keeps it out of expressionism. Plus, I want to allow my idiosyncratic process to be known. Inserting the somatic where we don't expect it, yet not making it figurative (like Oldenburg) speaks about the feeling, the experience, the human within the idea of that object. It is not about a hand recording a solipsistic moment but humanness within that specific idea.

That weirdness is also my way of solving problems in contrast to a standardized or industrial way of solving a problem. Pop references may exist in some of the work, but unlike Warhol, I am not a machine, nor do I want to be. I fear if I were to become one I would feel alienated from my work. Alienated like a factory worker or perhaps like an industrialist using my creative energies to create Taylorist or Fordist processes in my production.

And then there is the material language that I pile on to all that...

As for why Oldenburg In "0's vs. 1's: Parity"? I wanted to reference his forms; his expressing his thoughts about an object; in this case a word. (I wanted) to bring humanity to the idea of parity; (to show) that the concept is within us. I also liked the soft, comfy, smooshy, bubbly suggestion to that word. Is it a concept with levity? Is it a Bubblicious concept?

But it is also unwieldy, awkward to institute. Encased in Kevlar, there is a suggestion of fear of getting shot at. So what does it mean if the word is body-like and then shot at? I made it reference sixties idealism and ask, "What does it mean if it is a down-to-earth, casual, sloppy bean bag chair?"

In "Monument to a town Meeting: after Acconci" it was more straightforward. I literally took the title of his piece *Monument to a Town Meeting*, and then thanked him for it as my title. It was his piece where he had a boardroom table with chairs around it fill a room and continue right out the window of the gallery. It was an upper floor of a building so there is great documentation of it inside and outside. Outside it looks like the plank off a big pirate ship. Walking the plank. I loved that piece. But the sentiment of honoring (while) warning of a dying democratic process (with a small "d"), its his idea that I referenced. There was no formal relationship.

TB: Well, to follow up on the way your work looks (I like the term "scrappy" -- do you object to that?), there was a point when I felt the tenuous, incongruous, rickety-looking way some of your sculptures are assembled was distracting to the viewer; that if they were a bit more refined, your ideas

would come across more clearly. I don't feel that way now. I like that they make me uncomfortable. You make these really jarring formal decisions that always seem to be worked out logically conceptually or metaphorically. There are, though, different degrees of "finished-ness" or elegance to your work. For example, both of your solo shows at Adamski featured very restrained, handsome installations in the front gallery, which is kind of the "public face" of the gallery; and much more raw and violent work in the back gallery, which is not immediately accessible. This method of installation almost anthropomorphizes or psychologizes the space. Is that intentional?

**OK: I love the word scrappy. I use it often when I speak. So no I don't mind at all. Scrappy is pertinent. Even though more recently when I am using fewer found objects and materials than before I still pulled out the most beaten up and chipped, hole ridden 2x4's for the *Truth and Falsehood* piece. I wanted the contrast of the well-worn, functioning wood with a visceral history against the more precious cast bronze. The used wood has the residue of its past uses, locations, and time. I like the scrap materials for that information. It brings the wear and tear of life into the picture. That was the same with the prison toilet I used for the *Spider Hole* piece. I scrubbed the bowl clean, but left the crap marks on the plumbing (in back of the piece). Here there was anthropomorphizing going on, but in the gallery not really.**

**I care a lot about the space I will install in. When I have the ability to, I will take much into consideration. At Adamski, the huge picture window that is on an angle to the street is one factor. The drain in the tiled floor in the back room is another. The gallery used to be an old butcher shop for many years. That's where the bloody stuff took place. When I am thinking about a show in that space, I consider the front space first. I am conscious of that window. In that regard, your comment about the "public face" is correct. That work gets really worked out and arranged in the space in advance. The back room is where I have chosen to explore corollary ideas. So conceptually, if the work is a flow chart, the build up is from the back to the front. It is not that that work is less important; it just is (where) the source material or the tangents (are). Therefore, it is a freer space for me, and in turn, the ideas are looser, and physically the work is less refined.**

TB: Backing up a bit, industrialization and standardization, along with reductive aesthetics, and pop references has, in a way, become a new expressionism. It is kind of the thing to do if you want work to read "smart" or "critical". I couldn't for the life of me imagine a time when a Judd (or an Asher for that matter) could be seen as "anti-art" art. A post-studio approach is so completely expected that when you come across a bronze or plaster

sculpture in a gallery, it looks crazy. Were you thinking of this when you recently started working with these more traditional materials?

On a similar topic, you're looking a bit further back into art history lately. It seems as though you're finding a kinship in the allegorical/metaphorical content of pre-modernist sculpture. Which makes sense because your work has never been a "what you see is what you see" experience. Rather, it depends on a complex, sometimes arcane series of references.

**OK: I understand what you say about industrialization and standardization along with reductive aesthetics or pop references being the new expressionism. It's a way to denote individuality. The reductive aesthetics go hand in hand with DIY popular trends that can be seen in magazines like "Ready-made". There is lots of irony, wit and connoisseurship in that kind of hand made stuff (with) an ironic collision of materials and virtuoso handling. Sometimes the strange material choice means something, and then that really works great. And the pop cultural references in art say "you can place me in this context because my library is about this or my music list is like that." It is all an attempt to individuate within this Wal-Mart/Crate & Barrel time.**

**But behind some of that is still what propelled the Arts and Crafts Movement. I don't know if you remember that conversation I was having with Michael Asher about that movement while we were in school. It was an anti-modernist response 100 yrs ago. What is it now? An anti-corporate response? Can idiosyncrasy really be found in the hand alone? Of course not. Is it a truly a confirmation of our existence? That has problems too.**

**Or is it necessary to use language to articulate something? Once the language is out there it becomes a bit of a commitment even if there are multiple ways to read it. I'm starting to reach a conclusion toward the latter. You saw the Thing show, with its assertion about the artists having in common their return to the hand and do it yourself fabrication strategies. However, the art in the show had nothing in common with one another and so it was difficult for a conversation to occur between the works.**

**This is relevant to your inquiry of my use of bronze and plaster lately. Yes I am deliberately using those materials to refer to the historic (moment?) associated with them. That is also my way to have a kind of collision of material and language and refer to classicism in art or 19th century**

statues and allegorical works as well. I definitely am utilizing the art historical references of those materials and processes and asking what does it mean to use them in this way.

Wow, arcane is troubling. Is that really true? I have always hoped that viewers get something from my works, even if there is some coded stuff. Doesn't every artist desire that? I know that I tend to vacillate between being literal and then abstract. I guess I am still learning to balance content and form, ala Papa Charles Gaines. But that's a toughie, is it not?

Sure, I set up problems to solve for myself and I do so with varying degrees of success. And there is a generous lesson gotten from each and every work I've made and it's that inquiry that keeps me going. In some of my more recent works like *Monument to a Town Meeting, 0's and 1's:Parity, Sagamore, Truth and Falsehood*, people have talked to me about what they understood and they do seem to get information out of it that is interesting to me. The viewer doesn't have to get all the references within the work, just get a hold of at least one of the problems I was pursuing, or better yet get something for themselves. Its not like artwork operates like a puzzle to be solved and that discounts the visual experiences to be had. Sometimes people don't get from the work everything that I put in my written statements either, but at this point my statements are a total undressing. I am not so sure I want to do that anymore, but keep those for me and then speak about the problem I pursued instead. That way people won't compare the "undressings" they read and feel like the work is arcane because they didn't see all that.

TB: Well I think that the handmade and language are on equal footing in your work, and that's one reason I think I respond to it. I get frustrated when work that is air-tight conceptually is dismissed because there is some level of craft involved, as being "gallery-ready" or "marketable", etc. For this reason, I have a hard time relating to artists more squarely centered in the language camp.

I get equally frustrated when virtuosity rules the roost. I had a discussion/argument about this recently where I took the position against virtuosity. For me, virtuosity (and I might throw in fabricated work here) has this way of both distancing the viewer in a "I am better than you" way (the classic "genius" problem I know --nothing new) while at the same time performing and bending over backwards for the viewer in this desperate "please like me" way. Ineptitude, I think, is exactly the same thing from the other side, so maybe I should be using "virtuosity/ineptitude" instead.

There was this article on Blake Rayne in Artforum a couple of months ago

that talked about his idea of "the Good Enough", and it bowled me over because I've been thinking about my own work (at least how it looks) in precisely these terms for some time. Of course he is also a CalArts-educated painter, so I guess I shouldn't be so surprised. My point is, though, that the "Good Enough" theory takes into account these problems of reception, and could be ascribed to your practice.

Speaking of which (problems of reception, that is), I was trying to provoke you when I used the term "arcane". I think your position is right on the money. I don't think that a viewer needs complete access to every last reference. I guess I brought it up because I didn't have access to the fact that "Parity" was made of Kevlar. I still thought it was a wonderful piece, but my read of it changed considerably when I discovered that the material you were working with was loaded. But I generally don't have a problem with difficult or obscure references, it's more of a problem of (as a viewer) having access to that information.

Maybe we can end discussing the "Terror/ \_error" piece a bit. The work now exists without the "T"? I'm fascinated, one, by this monumental play with language. This makes me think of Acconci again, but earlier Acconci, when he was still a poet. However, in your statement for the piece, I was struck by how much the description recalled Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting*, 1974, where he cut a suburban New Jersey home in two. So your piece works on both of these levels: as linguistic play, and in the idea that through a relatively simple intervention, something pre-existing can be radically transformed.

**OK: I appreciate the Acconci reference with regards to the language. His investigation of the subject in space, body in space is so rich. It was there from the very beginning and keeps evolving with his performances, even within his sculptural work and of course that is a serious concern in his architecture.**

**Well about the Terror/ \_error" piece, that piece doesn't exist anymore. It was completely dismantled. You are right on in mentioning Gordon Matta-Clark's "Splitting" piece. That is exactly what I was referencing - the rupture of a concept. In his, it was the home. Even though he was about structure, which is typically exterior, he so often was dealing with interior space (which should be the domain of architects as well). His work was so psychological. Even though the artifacts from his cuts don't do his work justice when they stand alone, they are shockingly domestic when you see them. Bits of yellowing wallpaper, sheetrock etc... The space was lived in and has the residue of such.**

**I was doing a rupture as well, but of the concept of Terror. So the piece was created with the process of a barn raising... lots of people coming together and helping. It was moved using house-moving technology. We should have filmed it. We jacked it up, stacked wood props on it, made sure it was even, then put dollies galore - anything with wheels on it- (underneath), and then pushed it. The transformation was important too, not just for rupturing the "monolithic" structure of Terror, but also for the depiction of Terror. A seemingly solid, clean form split/schismed apart. I wanted the break up to happen in the process of moving it. The elevation, movement and relocation would produce the inherent weak spots. This is very different than taking a sledgehammer to it from the outside. The destruction came from within the weaknesses of the form itself.**

TB: Lastly, I've been referencing all these Sixties New York guys, but I think your work also is really a part of your environment in Los Angeles, both historically, and in terms of an active community of really interesting artists working with sculpture. I think that the scatological fascinations of Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley are in your work, as are earlier Liz Lerner, Chris Burden, and of course our old teachers up on the hill at CalArts.

**I'm glad you brought up LA. The space and transience is absolutely defining for me. It permits this size of work. The breathing room within the landscape is constantly ruptured. Incongruous or unsuspecting architecture next to one another, the destruction and remaking of identity, etc... And of course the influence of Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley with the scatological. Don't forget Mary Kelly in that. I actually owe my scatological work in form to those guys, but Mary Kelly led me to the analysis of it. I am still at the beginning of this investigation but I have been interested in a female exploration of the scatological. A text by Sandro Firenzi is used by Mary Kelly in her *Post-Partum Document*. It is a Marxist-Freudian take on the currency of coprophilia. How it is the feminine position to be obsessive compulsive cleaners, removers of the scat, and the male position due to envy of birth, to fetishize the things they excrete, that they "make". So through that, it is given currency all the way to referring to money as dirty. The cleaner is a lower power position and the maker of the filth, a higher power position. Although this is operating on gross generalizations, some of which may not be as relevant, I was interested.**