Contextual Studies

Year 2

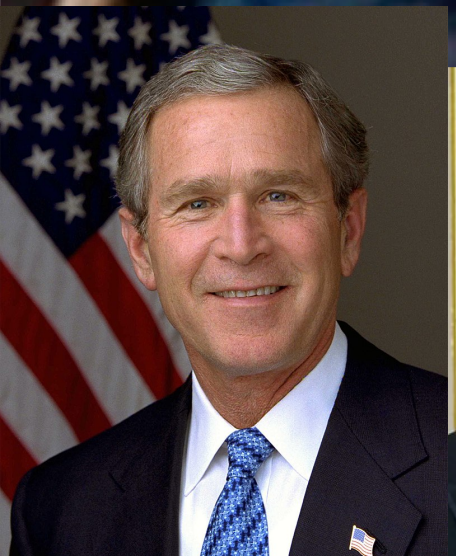
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CURATORIAL ACTIVISM

RESIST

CHALLENGE

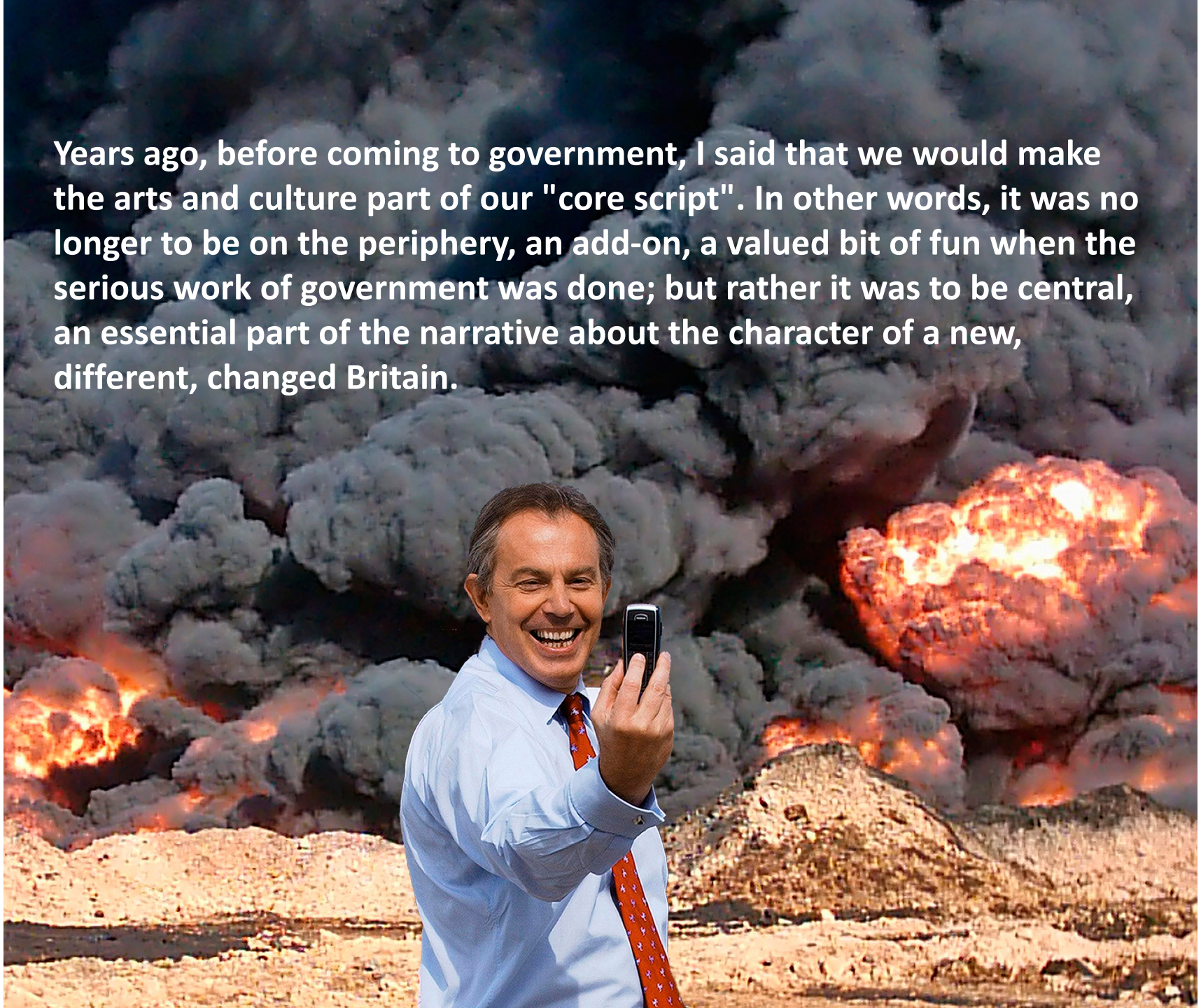
CONFRONT










Years ago, before coming to government, I said that we would make the arts and culture part of our "core script". In other words, it was no longer to be on the periphery, an add-on, a valued bit of fun when the serious work of government was done; but rather it was to be central, an essential part of the narrative about the character of a new, different, changed Britain.

When people **on low incomes** can visit museums free of charge, and see great works of art, they take something of the inspiration with them. A nation that cares about art will not just be a better nation. In the early 21st Century it will be a more successful one.

And a more **cohesive one**. **Because art**, more than any programmes of government, worthy and necessary though those are, **can make people consider, see things differently, understand where the other comes from**.

Tony Blair, 2007

Cultural Democracy / Democratising Culture

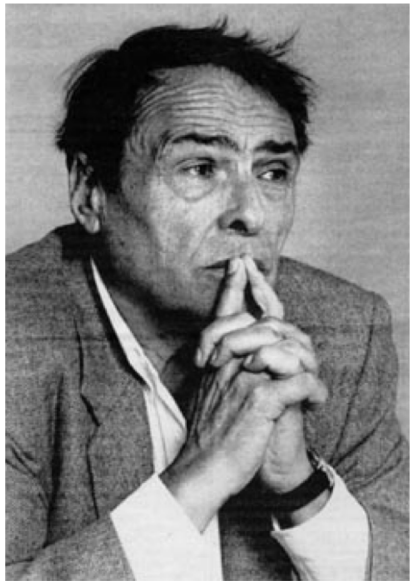
Democratising culture = public accessibility of culture

- Price
- Location
- Education

Cultural Democracy = the desire for every culture to be respected equally without hierarchy

The Responsive Museum, eds Lang, Reeve & Woollard

Cultural Capital



Pierre Bourdieu

Like Marx, Bourdieu argued that **capital** formed the foundation of social life **and dictated one's position within the social order**. For Bourdieu and Marx both, the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life.

However, Bourdieu extended Marx's idea of capital beyond the economic and into the **more symbolic realm of culture.**

Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, etc. that one acquires through being part of a particular social class.

But Bourdieu also points out that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality.

Certain forms of cultural capital are valued over others, and can help or hinder one’s social mobility just as much as income or wealth.

Cultural Capital comes in three forms:

Embodied – eg accent/dialect

Objectified – expensive car/big house

Institutionalized – credentials/qualification eg degrees or titles that symbolize cultural competence and authority.

Habitus

refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences.

In the right situations, our habitus allows us to successfully navigate social environments.

Habitus also extends to our “taste” for cultural objects such as art, food, and clothing.

aesthetic sensibilities are shaped

by

the culturally ingrained habitus

Habitus = so ingrained people often mistook feelings as natural instead of culturally developed.

This often leads to justifying social inequality, because it is (mistakenly) believed that some people are naturally disposed to the finer things in life while others are not.



Dr Hartwig Fisher



Tristram Hunt



Alex Farquharson



Frances Morris



Ralph Rugoff



This book ultimately asks:
how can we get people in the art world to think about

gender, race, and sexuality,

to understand that these are persistent concerns that require action?

how can we all contribute to ensuring that the art world becomes more inclusive?

In the West, greatness has been defined since antiquity as white, Western, privileged and, above all, male.

Linda Nochlin

Despite decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the art world continues to exclude "Other" artists – those who are women, of colour, and LGBTQ.

Some stats

- In 2013 less than a third of artists represented in US commercial galleries were women.

- Yet between **65% - 80%** of US art students and around **70%** MFA students are women.

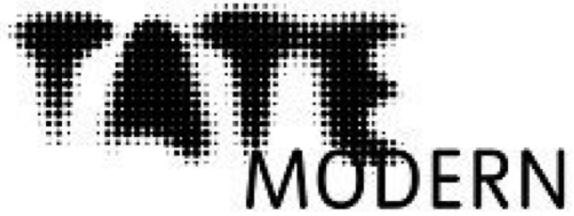
RESIST: masculinism and sexism

Definition:

Advocacy of the rights of men; adherence to or promotion of opinions, values, etc., regarded as typical of men; (more generally) anti-feminism, **machismo.**

In 2013 the ELF (East London Fawcett) examined the artists represented at 134 London galleries and less than 1/3 were women.

At the re-opening of the Tate Modern in 2016, of 300 artists represented in the re-hang of the permanent collection, less than 1/3 were women, fewer still non-white.





Pussy Galore –
"an international feminist art collective — artists, curators, critics, collectors, educators, and writers — dedicated to eradicating sexism in the art world via a series of insurrectionist tactics —

be it artwork, actions/performances, exhibitions, purchases, articles, classes, books, and so forth,"



Guerilla Girls
(1989)

Strategies of Resistance

Revisionism

- The most frequently cited counter-hegemonic strategy addressing exclusion in the canon is a “revisionist” one, whereby individuals are reclaimed from history and the canon itself is re-written, the principal aim being to include those who had hitherto been refused, forgotten or hidden.
- A revisionist approach… rediscovers what the canon conceals and supresses.

benefits of a revisionist strategy.

- They address critical exclusions
- Provide a deeper, more contextual understanding of key issues by creating space within white male institutions and mainstream discourses that help audiences understand visual culture from a wholly different perspective.
- Broader, more comprehensive view of art history

Action/Abstraction



Willem de Kooning, Gotham News, 1955, oil on canvas. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo: Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1955, K1955.6. Copyright 2008 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York.

The Jewish Museum, New York
2008

Revised the narrative of Abstract Impressionism to include **Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Bontecou, Joan Mitchell, Ann Truitt, Lee Krasner** and **Norman Lewis** – 5 women and an artist of colour who had previously been excluded from the "canon".

Area Studies

- While revisionism involves an integrative approach “area studies” produces new canons and supplements the traditional discourse by focusing on work that is based on either racial, geographical, gendered or sexual orientation. Eg Women Artists, African American Art, LGBTQ art, Middle Eastern Art etc
- These exhibitions are viewed as entirely separate to the canon – this is why many postcolonial and feminist theorists have argued against them, claiming that they are ghettoizing, segregating and culturally/or biologically essentialist insofar as they isolate artists on the basis of gender, nationality and sexuality – any difference

Benefits of area studies

- About global perspectives – about thinking outside of the comfort of the locality.
- Specialist frameworks to present artworks often seen for the first time.
- They function as curatorial correctives.

Key concept is ‘visibility’ – crucial in terms of prominence in the art marketplace and in art history.
More visibility means they are taught in schools, colleges, and universities – women only exhibitions have had a transformative impact on the art world.



curator Clare Barlow explained: “We (were) absolutely not presenting it as a closed canon. It (was) the start of a conversation.”



'Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent' features the work of more than 85 artists from 25 countries on the African continent and the Diaspora. Considered to be the largest exhibition of contemporary African art ever seen in Europe, it includes painting, sculpture, installation, video, drawing, photography and design.

Relational Approach

- A relational approach to curating presents art as if it were a polysemic site of contradictory positions and contested practices.
- This focus goes beyond a mere description of discrete regions and cultures, it transcends the “additive” approach, collapses the destructive centre-periphery binary, and is essentially postmodern in nature: it is textual, dialogic and “**writerly**”

*polysemic - Having a number of meanings, interpretations or understandings.

Barthes “ a writerly text is characterised by heterogeneity and incoherence” It is “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”

In a “writerly” exhibition then, the reader or viewer, can be seen as an **active participant** in the construction, or “writing” of meaning with respect to the works on view.

documenta11
8 June – 15 September 2002
Platform 5: Exhibition

Artistic Director
Okwui Enwezor

Venues
Museum Fridericianum, documenta-Halle, Kulturbahnhof / Balikino, Binding-Brauerei, Orangerie, Karlsaue, Kasseler Innenstadt / Nordstadt

Artists
117

Visitors
650.924

Budget
18.075.420 Euro

Website
documenta11.de



Curators who adopt a relational approach highlight cultural differences by presenting a collection of voices that " tell alternate stories of difference, culture, power and agency."
Okwui Enwezor

“The one duty we owe to history is to re-write it”

Oscar Wilde

“Not until the white people, who now hold the power in the art world, scrutinize their own motives and attitudes toward people of colour, will it be possible to *unlearn racism*.”

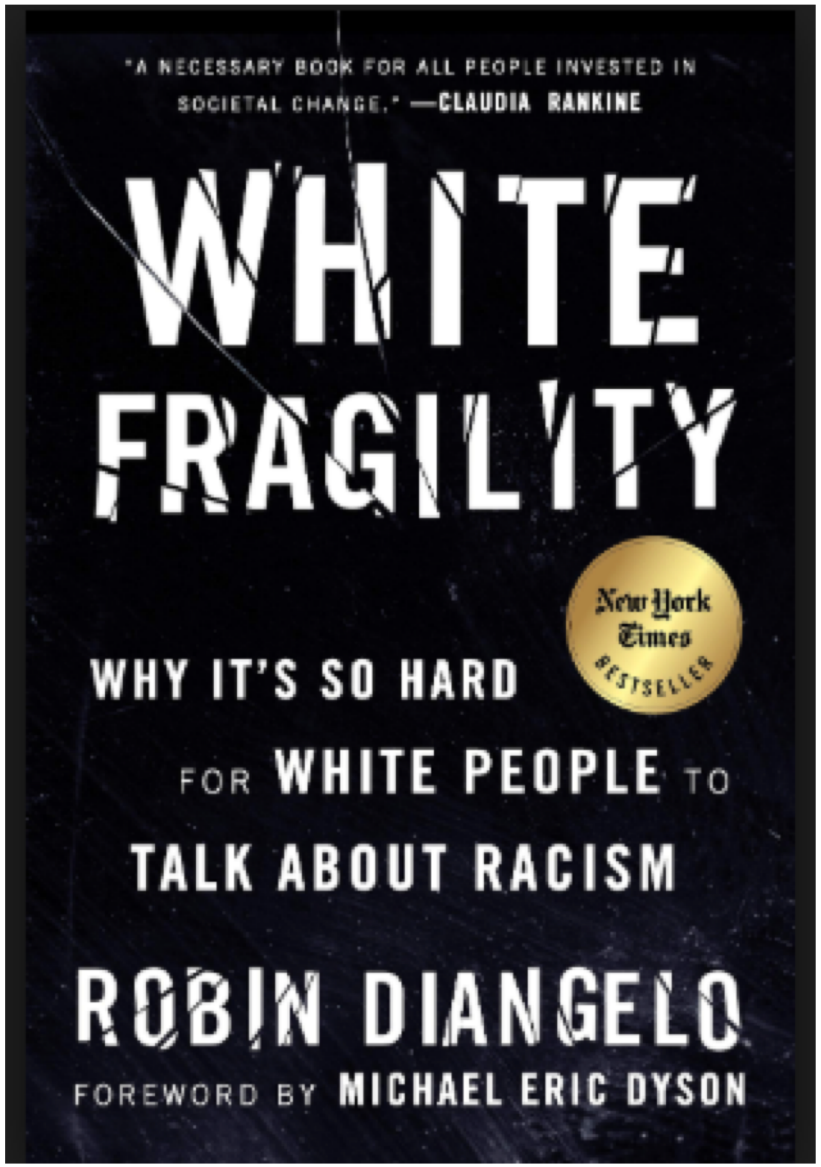
Maurice Berger

Confront

- Confronting our own privilege and prejudice
- Tackling White Privilege and Western Centrism
- “(The art world) is one of the last bastions of white supremacy-by-exclusion” Judith Wilson



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzLT54QjclA



- https://www.channel4.com/news/rapper-and-author-akala-no-correlation-between-tougher-sentences-and-reduction-in-crime



Challenge

Don’t just sit and wait for change to come…

- Be proactive
- Call out institutions, critics, curators, collectors and gallerists for their sexist and racist practices.

Book references

The Responsive Museum, Eds Caroline Lang, John Reeve, Vickly Woollard (2017 edition)

Pascalian Meditations, Pierre Bourdieu (1997)

White Fragility, Robin DiAngelo (2018)

Curatorial Activism, Maura Reilly (2018)