

ART AND DESTRUCTION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The chapters in this collection derive from the conference session “Art and Destruction” at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference 2012, hosted by the Open University, UK. This was convened by the editor of this volume, Jennifer Walden. An earlier version of Helen E.Scott’s paper was published as, Scott, Helen E. 2009. Crime or creation? Iconoclasm in the name of art. *St Andrews Journal of Art History and Museum Studies* 13: 25-34.

INTRODUCTION: ART AND DESTRUCTION

The connection between art and destruction has occurred in various ways throughout art's history. Most familiarly art is the focus of destruction by acts of iconoclasm insofar as art is the vehicle for religious imagery. As familiar is the destruction of art by oppressive regimes concerned with the aesthetic and intellectual freedom certain works may continue to symbolise. Alternatively of course, destruction may take place via interventions by art's public fighting a political or personal cause or, for the sake of the dismantling of 'the old order' symbolic works or edifices may be destroyed by revolutionary groups. There is also a more intimate history of unexplained defacing or acts of destroying of art works, whether in museums or public places, often referred to as 'art vandalism'. As pertinent are art actions and art movements whose *raison d'être* is 'destruction'. This has taken various forms from large themed and ambitious auto destructive art movements to intricate counterpoints to the making of art, which involve the literal breaking with the tradition by breaking the made object. Modernity itself has been characterised as the 'destruction' of tradition. Thus far *historically* art and destruction, as well as creation, have never been far away from each other. On a more philosophical basis the thinker Walter Benjamin argued for the 'destruction' of reified experience to provide the conditions of possibility for new relation to the world. Art and history play a complex part in this, in Benjamin's thinking.¹ Similarly Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy's radicalise Heidegger's 'Destruktion' as a dismantling of traditional philosophical thinking, to become for Derrida and Nancy a 'deconstructive' ethics and justice as the conditions of the 'openness' of our being with others in the world. Arguably art stands as the mode in which this 'de (con) structive turn' remarks itself.²

The essays collected here respond variously to the themes outlined above. Originating as a call for interest in the theme it is intriguing to note the extent to which this call drew responses steeped in the contemporary or modern, as if destruction has become a certain kind of modern phenomenon in our consciousness. It is the case that most fertile sources for art and destruction collected here came from critical engagement with or reflective description of the work of contemporary artists, intervening with the 'conventions' and structures of art making or its institutional sites and places; a sign of a times perhaps, when contemporary art might 'eat

itself' in its desires to take itself to places and elicit intellectual and affective responses to the particularities of a cultural climate, increasingly global, of various and insidious forms of destructive experience.

It is also evident that 'destruction' has particular relevance and resonance in relation to objects always felt to be as precarious as they are precious, in terms of highly prized or less highly prized but as certainly emotionally invested as ceramic objects of either use or ornament. This leads to experience taking on a further dimension where it is the case that a number of artists' inscribe the experience of the audience into the 'destructive' character of the work, either as physical participants or as 'witnesses' to acts of destruction 'before their eyes' or before their bodies. This brings those issues of 'participation' and whether it is willing or not into this area of activity,

'Willing' turns to 'wilful' when it comes to examples of modern and contemporary acts of physical intervention by the public in relation to artworks and iconoclasm in gallery and museum spaces. The 'contemporary' element in these acts of 'violation' appears to be identification with the artist and/or the work to the extent that the iconoclast feels obligated to intervene. This is an interesting take on the notion of art and the 'experiencing public' in that the turn to 'experience' might be reaping an unintended consequence.

As engaging and forceful is the reference to film as a medium of and for 'destruction' and the impact that can have on our understanding and experience of the cinematic and filmic and the part it can play in our very sense of 'obliteration'.

Two essays refer to art's response to destruction in terms of destruction on a mass scale through war. One response draws upon a powerful and at times both comedic and tragic surrealist commentary on the damaged cityscapes of England. The other engages more philosophically in a set of questions about art's place in 'remembering' mass destruction and the struggle to elicit a 'just' and 'justified' response.

Overall, bringing together art and destruction raises some important questions for art and its place in historical and contemporary cultural shaping of life. Insofar as acts of destruction of artworks both shock but at the same time might 'liberate' one calls to mind Walter Benjamin's understanding of technological forces which can destroy the 'aura' of works; the aura that traps perception of those works in the powerful accretions of inhibiting tradition.³ One can call to mind something of the effect of the 'ruin' and 'ruination' that Benjamin wanted us to see differently, as opening up and illuminating perceptions to histories and configurations of experience and potential futures, previously hidden in

the sediment of tradition. It is the case that Benjamin was commenting upon technological developments of reproducibility as stripping away aura or as critical interventions as the 'mortification' of works liberating their ephemeral beauty into 'truth' content, rather than the physical destruction of art, but something of the experience of art's physical destruction might indeed resonate. That said of course we at the same time might heed Benjamin's warning, expressed here by Graham MacPhee:

If Benjamin looked to the ruin of beauty in technological modernity, what he terms 'the decay of aura', in order to illuminate different possibilities of knowledge, he also recognised that technologically penetrated experience involves a tendency to aestheticise ruin. In *One Way Street* he observes wryly that as we longingly look up through the broken architecture of a ruined castle our 'gaze meets passing clouds' re-inscribing the fixed spatio-temporal organisation which Benjamin characterised as auratic...the transient spectacle offered by the ruin may itself coalesce and limit futurity, so that destruction paradoxically 'reaffirms the eternity of these ruins'.⁴

About this collection

¹Laura Gray examines how the ontologically unstable nature of the contemporary clay vessel is supported by the strong presence of destruction in vessel-based contemporary ceramics practice. Not only connecting with the twentieth century history of iconoclastic sculpture, the shared language of iconoclasm appears to allow the development of a relationship between ceramics and sculpture that cuts both ways. While artists working with clay can be seen to be making use of both the visual language and at times the ideology of iconoclasm by invoking – although inviting and to an extent controlling – acts of violence and destruction directed towards their work, sculptors have also shown a desire to bring together ceramics and the language of destruction. Ai Weiwei, Jeppe Hein and Richard Wentworth have all united ceramic pots and plates with destruction (understood as occurring in a number of guises). Though not a rejection of the vessel form itself, which is so often reconstructed and resurrected after its destruction, much of this destructive practice involves the museum as a site of iconoclasm, and even as an active participant in the destruction of work. Lütticken has stated that, 'While it is often remarked that iconoclasm generates new images, this says nothing about

their nature and quality’ (Lütticken, *Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle* 2009). The essay addresses this gap in the understanding of iconoclasm, as it relates to work in the medium of clay, by examining the product of the iconoclastic act as well as the significance of the moment of destruction.

This theme is taken up again from a different stance by Miranda Stearn. Her interest is in part in those artists who make destruction part of their material practice but also the artist who turns from a material to a conceptual positioning of destruction in the guise of the ‘anti-curator’. ‘Over several months, I have been exploring the museum stores and collecting my own little cabinet of curiosities. Each day over the next forty days I will choose an object from my collection and offer it up in a spirit of sacrifice. The object will be announced through a variety of media, including this blog. I will then destroy it. This destruction will inevitably take place unless someone cares for the object [...] In the absence of some positive appreciation of the object – a poem, a video, a child’s drawing, a scientific assessment, etc., etc. – I will assume that it is of no value to anyone and should no longer take up space in the archive’ (Blog post by Ansuman Biswas, 29 June 2009). As Stearn suggests, inviting an artist to make a selection from a permanent collection is a long established model for museum-commissioned artist interventions, with examples emerging in the 1970s with projects such as Andy Warhol’s *Raid the Icebox* (1969-70) and Anthony Caro’s inauguration of the *Artist Eye* series at London’s National Gallery (1977), continuing in various incarnations to the present day with Grayson Perry’s *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (2011). In 2009, artist Ansuman Biswas took this provocative intervention in stored collections to a new level during his *Manchester Hermit* project while in residence at Manchester Museum. Biswas’s residency lasted a symbolic 40 days and 40 nights, 27 June – 5 August 2009. Categorising Biswas’s project as an example of artist-as-curator initiatives can seem problematic. The role he assumed throughout the project, during which he threatened to destroy one object from the museum’s stored collections each day throughout his forty day retreat, could be seen instead as that of anti-curator. Her essay examines the tensions that arise when the invited artist introduces destruction, rather than preservation, into the museum.

Taking a stronger narrative line Imogen Racz explores the history and exhibiting of a particular work by Cornelia Parker, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. The essay focuses on Cornelia Parker’s *Thirty Pieces of Silver* within the context of her broader interest in destruction initiating new life. It considers how the memory and sentiment put onto particular objects in the home have been transformed through abandonment, ritualised destruction and

then exhibition in the gallery. The home is developed over time through the accretion of memories, rituals, effort and care. Possessions play their part in personal narratives, and although mass produced, silver objects occupy a special place through being celebratory, repeatedly polished and displayed. This sentimental link had already been destroyed in the act of betrayal in sending the objects to garage sales. Parker took photographs of these objects, giving them a fictitious life, before directing a steam roller over the laid out objects. This ritualised 'death' through using the heavy, male, amateur, hobbyist tool, was way beyond the necessary. Just as their formation had been through industrial might, the objects' deformation was achieved through a documented performance of mass destruction. These pools of hanging silver are now part of the Tate's collection, perfectly preserved in their artistic optimal state. The playful ritualised death of each object has ironically meant that their new function is still associated with display, memory and ritual, but rather than being personal and identity forming, they now reach out to a broader scaffolding of cultural memory. Joanna Sperryn-Jones takes some of the breaking encountered earlier in this collection in a very specific direction in terms of investigating the relationship between her 'breaking art' with her 'breaking of writing'. As Sperryn-Jones narrates, her embarkation on Ph D research brings her up against what she experiences as the futility of using writing as a means to translate visual thinking and the negative effect of this type of writing on the artwork. She therefore turns things around so that, rather than analysing the thinking within the artwork she has attempted to reflect the approach of the artwork in writing. As the work's content is breaking so too is this directly reflected in the form of the writing. To make the writing she has literally physically cut up previous versions, added new additions on post-it notes and completely rearranged it, before then rewriting. Sperryn-Jones reminds us that there is also a strong theme of breaking on a philosophical level. This revolves around Barthes pleasure of the text as the seam between two registers of discourse, Benjamin's allegory as a process of shattering old relationships to make possibilities for new juxtapositions and Frey's 'fragmentary' as constituting a different order to that based on the whole. Through these she proposes a space for making art that reflects the elements of risk, uncertainty and paradox.

So far in this collection destruction has been linked to the agency of the artist. Some of the strongest associations of art and destruction however come from acts of iconoclasm from the agency of others outside of the work. Helen E Scott takes up this issue. There are various circumstances in which museums can become the scenes of iconoclastic acts. A political agitator may slash a famous painting to draw attention to

their cause, while a bored child may scribble graffiti on a sculpture if they are not engaged by displays. Gallery exhibits are inherently vulnerable when placed within public reach. Sometimes even artists pose a threat. In 1974 a young artist entered MOMA in New York and spray-painted “KILL LIES ALL” onto Picasso’s *Guernica*. Tony Shafrazi was not jealous of Picasso’s success, nor did he reject the significance of his work. Instead, Shafrazi claimed that his behaviour was prompted by a desire to revive and celebrate *Guernica*. Believing that he was forging a creative dialogue with Picasso, Shafrazi did not see himself as damaging the painting, but enhancing it. He insisted that he was contributing to Picasso’s legacy, and that his gesture was artistic in itself. This episode ignited what has since become an ongoing problem in the museum sector. Every so often an individual will attack a work on display and assert that this constitutes a piece of conceptual or performance art. The phenomenon has blurred the boundaries between criminality and creativity, and proved difficult for galleries to suppress. This essay investigates acts of ‘artistic’ iconoclasm, tracing the roots of the problem before examining some case studies. Assaults on works by Duchamp, Malevich and Hirst are considered. The essay highlights the difficulties that museums face in responding to incidents, and concludes with some recommendations.

Olga Moskatova considers destruction from the point of view of cameraless film. The transition from analog to digital technology has provoked a discourse of analog obsolescence and ‘death of cinema’. Often, the obsolescence debate results in a theoretical and practical re-evaluation of indexicality and of traces. Contemporary experimental films take a great interest in the material and technical conditions of celluloid film. In key experimental work the aim has been to treat and destroy the film strip by means of camera less, direct techniques like painting, scratching, chemicals, bacteria, heat, blanking or weather. This aggressive treatment raises the question of material durability, analog referentiality, limits of reproducibility, strategies of ‘reauratization’ and ‘death of cinema’. These wider cultural and theoretical implications of technological change provide the basis for the examination of aesthetic strategies of destruction in camera less experimental film. The basic approach aims to differentiate the notion and thereby the aesthetic practice of ‘destruction’. The essay suggests three nuances of destruction: destruction, ‘destructuring’ and des-obstruction. The terms are developed in reference to Vilém Flusser and Jacques Derrida. The terms highlight different interest in material damaging and in representation of the body. All strategies deal with fugacity, death, recollection, decay and aging, at narrative and formal

levels, but accentuate them almost antithetically. These three approaches establish different relations between order and dysfunction as well as between dysfunction (Störung) and destruction (Zerstörung). For this reason they each show a different understanding of images and work either in an affirmative/nostalgic, iconoclastic or constructive way. The argument is supported by referring to three exemplary camera less films (Johannes Hammel, *Die Liebenden*, 2007; Carl E. Brown, *Memory Fade*, 2009; Jürgen Reble, *Zillertal*, 1991).

The collection then moves to considerations of representations that are about destruction rather than materially making by acts destruction. In the first of these Lynn Hilditch makes the case that Lee Miller's photographs of the London Blitz, including the twenty-two published in Ernestine Carter's *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (1941) effectively demonstrate what Susan Sontag described as "a beauty in ruins". As a former student and muse of Man Ray during the 1930s and a close associate of the Surrealists in Paris, Miller was able to utilize her knowledge of Surrealism, and other art forms, to create an aestheticized reportage of a broken city ravished by war. In Miller's case, her war photographs may be deemed aesthetically significant by considering her Surrealist background and by analyzing her images within the context of André Breton's theory of "convulsive beauty"—his idea that a scene of destruction can be represented or analyzed as something beautiful by convulsing, or transforming, it into its apparent opposite. Miller's war photographs, therefore, not only depict the chaos and destruction of Britain during the Blitz, they also reveal Surrealism's love for quirky or evocative juxtapositions while creating an artistic visual representation of a temporary surreal world of fallen statues and broken typewriters. As Leo Mellor writes about these dualities, "The paradox of Miller's wartime reportage was announced in the title of her book of documentary photographs, *Grim Glory*; that is to say, the coexistence of darkening mortality and ideal exaltation, like a Baroque conceit". The aesthetic and the documenting of war's destruction arise again in Jennifer Walden's questioning piece. Some 50 years ago the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* caused a scandal for its audacity in apparently comparing the enormity of the atrocity of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima with the personal tragic love story of a French woman. This scandal was augmented by the opening sequence of the film which appeared to make a direct comparison between the ecstasy of love and the extreme devastation of this act of war, by inscribing the effects of each upon two embracing bodies. Different readings of the film have negotiated that apparent intensification upon the body, as a means to critique the 'norms' of representation of and response

to mass destruction that still marks our response to disaster and mass conflict post 'Hiroshima'. We still seem to be struggling with how to 'frame' destruction, insisting on a representation 'proper' to it, even as we know it is a 'ruinous' project. Such interpretation takes on new applicability in the wake of recent 'disavowals' of the death of some and barriers, as Judith Butler has it, "against which we struggle when we try to find out about the losses that we are asked not to mourn" (Butler (2004) *Precarious Life*, Verso p.46)). Such barriers, the very 'frames' we seem insistent upon may be resisted by way of alternative mediations of injustice written more profoundly and perhaps provocatively 'in the ruins' and "starkly upon the body and its abjection" (Butler (2009) *Frames of War*, Verso p.130 and passim). This essay engages with readings of the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, by way of the critical positions towards notions of war, justice, community, and remembrance that the work of Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and Gilles Deleuze provide. This is to consider what a 'just' mourning of, and remembering of the injustices of past and present, and a true sense of a "justice-to-come" might be in terms of a visual cultural response to destruction. It is perhaps somewhere between an overarching impersonal notion of the abject and an over-wrought personalisation, a denial of identity and an excessive inscription of identity, that an 'other' justice emerges, to give to the remembering of destruction.

NOTES

¹ Benjamin W, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Benjamin, *Illuminations* trans Harry Zohn London 1970

² See Derrida, J., 'Perhaps or Maybe' and 'On Responsibility' in Dronsfield J. and Midgely N., eds *Responsibilities of Deconstruction* PLI Warwick Journal of Philosophy Vol 6 1997 and Nancy J-L 'Of Being Singular Plural' in Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* trans Richardson, R and O'Byrne A. E California, Stanford University Press 2000

³ Benjamin 'The Work of Art...' op.cit

⁴ MacPhee, G "Beautiful Knowledge, or Reproducing the University Again? Walter Benjamin and the Institution of Knowledge" in *Culture Machine* Volume 2 (2000) www.culturemachine.net

CHAPTER ONE

‘NO CONSTRUCTION WITHOUT DESTRUCTION’: CERAMICS, SCULPTURE AND ICONOCLASM

Laura Gray

‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’
- T.S. Elliot, *The Wasteland*

This chapter uses destruction within artistic practice as a framework for thinking about and investigating the relationship between ceramics and sculpture. The question motivating this chapter is: In what ways is the notion of iconoclasm shared by ceramics and sculpture? Or put another way, how can the destruction of art provide a point at which the relationship between ceramics and sculpture is both negotiated and revealed?

In this chapter I will argue that destruction is important as a meeting point between ceramics and sculpture. A significant number of sculptors and artists working with clay are using the act of destruction as artistic gesture, which includes destruction as a performative strategy. I will suggest that the importance of this meeting point is in part because the shared concern with the artistic exploration of the potential of destruction occurs in the same time period (the late 1990s through to the present day), and in part because the use of destruction as an artistic strategy appears to dissolve boundaries between the two disciplines. In this chapter I will show that ceramics is not using a form or method of working current among sculptors some fifty or sixty years ago, as is the case with ceramics’ appropriation of Minimalism during the 1990s. Furthermore, sculptors have appropriated ceramics as a material that not only lends itself to the act of destruction in a physical sense, but they are also using it as a material that has metaphorical importance to the act of destruction beyond its own subject boundaries.

The main body of the chapter positions the act of destruction in two ways, as a creative act that in the first instance unites ceramics and sculpture through the formal gesture of destruction, destruction as a

creative act, as an act that has been aestheticised. I will argue that there is a shared formal language, a shared style, which reveals a relationship between ceramics and sculpture. I will also argue that destruction is an intellectual act that is concerned with critique (of the canon of art, of the boundaries of art, of cultural values) and that there is a shared intellectual agenda at work across ceramics and sculpture. In both cases destruction is also viewed as a catalyst for change in the semiotic status of an object.

Fragmentation, Breaking and the Meanings of Iconoclasm

In Egyptian mythology, when Osiris was torn limb from limb his wife Isis collected and buried his fragmented body to ensure his revival in the afterlife. Eros (life) and Thanatos (death) – figures present in Greek mythology and later used by Freud to illustrate his drive theory - embody the duality of existence. This notion is also found in Christianity, expressed in the idea that in the midst of life we are in death. The disruptive aspect of death has its expression in the destruction of art, which can in certain circumstances, also be a form of creative process.

The motif of the dying god-king who makes way for the younger man in order for his kingdom to thrive, the hero of tragedy who has to perish in order to triumph are illustrations of this idea, creation in the wake of destruction, cited by Anton Ehrenzweig in *The Hidden Order of Art* (1967). In iconoclasm – the destruction of an artwork to make way for the new (regime, political thought, religious order, movement in art) - we see an expression of the cycles observed in nature, the coming of the seasons, day coming after night. Considered in this way, the destruction of artwork becomes part of the natural order of life, and an expression of the human condition that we can expect to find expressed across media and disciplines. There is of course another valid position, which is that in most instances destruction of the material or meaning of an artwork is not a creative act. It is appropriate to acknowledge that the view of destruction as creative that is out forward in this chapter is most often associated with avant garde art movements. In art, the Futurists perhaps best embody the notion of the creative aspect of destruction with their views on the purifying role of war and call for the destruction of museums.

The term ‘iconoclasm’ historically refers to religious image breaking. However, contemporary art historical usage of the term has broadened to cover destruction wider than that of sacred objects. Stacy Boldrick and Richard Clay, editors of *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms* (2007), draw attention to the use of the term iconoclasm by different scholars in the introduction to their book,

‘Simon Baker notes that Dario Gamboni’s term “metaphorical iconoclasm” can be used “to describe something that stands for iconoclasm, taking the place of a physical attack”. On the other hand, in their essay, Reinders and Rambelli use the word “iconoclasm” to refer to damage to an object’s “materiality or to its meaning”’

Citing the example of the destruction of religious objects Reinders and Rambelli suggest that such damage can ‘cause transformations of the semiotic status of those objects. Operating on the materiality – on the body – of a sacred object affects and modifies its symbolic status – its meanings and functions in its cultural contexts’¹. This understanding of iconoclasm can be transferred to art objects, a shift from the sacred to the secular. Gamboni observes that ‘The *Trésor de la langue française* specifies that the tradition opposed by an ‘iconoclast’ may be literary, artistic, political or of yet another kind’². The scholarly usage of the term ‘iconoclasm’, as demonstrated by Boldrick and Clay, can now be taken to refer to damage to the meaning of the work as much as the material, a situation that serves to immediately reposition the museum and art gallery, previously understood as institutions of care and preservation, as major sites of iconoclasm.

Destruction as Formal Gesture

We move now to the formal relationship between ceramics and sculpture to consider how this relationship is both negotiated and revealed by the artistic gesture of destruction. While showing how destruction provides a meeting point between ceramics and sculpture, I will argue that there is a shared formal language, a shared style, which reveals a relationship between ceramics and sculpture. This attention to formal concerns is intended to draw on this idea of an initial level of interpretation that first examines what can be seen.

Formal Concerns; Breaking and Making

Making something new from fragmentary remains is central to many of the myths we have woven to explain life and the world. Stories of resurrection from death – Osiris being made whole to participate in the afterlife, Persephone and Odysseus visiting the underworld and returning to life, the resurrection of Christ - form part of our collective unconscious.

Destruction as a necessary act taking place before the coming of a new world or new order is also present in art where one style is broken apart and abandoned, facilitating the development of another. But total obliteration of the artwork is not the only option available to those artists who wish to use the formal language of destruction and iconoclasm in their work. Instead, disfigured or repaired vessels can be made to bear witness to what is perhaps the most violent or eventful episode in their history.

During the early to mid-1990s, Richard Wentworth made a number of sculptures in which repaired plates were positioned in conjunction with unlikely objects. In *Brac* (1996) the surface of a grand piano is covered with broken plates, dishes and jugs (the usual car boot sale or charity shop bric-a-brac) that have been repaired with epoxy resin. *Match* (1995) sees a ping-pong table, complete with net, also covered with repaired plates. And in *Rims, Lips, Feet* (1996) plates and dishes, again repaired with epoxy resin are spread over the surface of a large rectangular sheet of glass that is positioned on top of a ceramics cabinet. Wentworth's sculptures do not offer easy meanings. Simon Groom (2005) has suggested that the 'juxtaposition of objects' used by Wentworth have much in common with the comparisons of a metaphysical poem,

'The initial smile of recognition in the conceit of a pairing, however, is often swiftly followed by a nervous laugh, as joy in the unlikely coupling collapses under a further torrent of questions: What are these things doing together? What is its status now as an object? What does it mean?'³.

Wentworth's excursion into the language offered by the use of repaired plates, bowls and dishes is redolent of the georgic transformation of the mundane into the sublime, a transformation at the very core of what it means to make art.



Fig. 2-1 Richard Wentworth,
Horizon at 15 Metres (2002)

The aesthetic of the repaired object present in Wentworth's work has a related but more flamboyant outlet in the work of Bouke de Vries. In de Vries' 'Exploded Artworks' series, the moment of the break is emphasized rather than concealed. It is the primary visual focus of the work. In fact, there is a neat dichotomy at the heart of Bouke de Vries' practice. He is an artist who works with broken ceramics, and he is also a ceramics conservator with clients that include museums, auction houses, antiques dealers, the National Trust and Grayson Perry.

To make his work de Vries' reclaims 'broken ceramic objects after their accidental trauma'⁴. Instead of repairing them, as would be his job as a conservator, charged with concealing any traces of this trauma, he heightens the sense of their deconstruction by suspending the broken pieces on Perspex armatures, holding the fragments at the moment of explosion. Not always knowing how the objects he uses came to be broken; de Vries offers a fictionalized, heightened and dramatic view of the moment of destruction. While not remaking objects in the way that Wentworth does when he glues plates back together with epoxy resin, de Vries does reunite fragments of ceramics. De Vries makes a cohesive single work out of an object whose relationship with its constituent parts was previously in a state of disarray. In the work of de Vries and Wentworth the hand of the iconoclast is anonymous. The focus is not on the artist as iconoclast. Instead, the artist's role is that of an alchemist, transmutating base materials to make a precious object. Of course, the alchemical quest had a spiritual as well as scientific nature. Understood in such a way the transformation of materials is presented as metaphor for personal transmutation and purification.

Bouke de Vries' *Teapot* (2009) is an eighteenth century Chinese armorial porcelain teapot frozen at the moment of explosion. The spout has detached from the rest of the pot, which in turn is now made up of many fragments preserved at a moment of high drama. A puddle of tea and some damp tea leaves spill out from the pot onto a glass plinth. The moment of explosion, it is suggested, has occurred when the teapot was in use, recalling the exploding Worcester teapots when the company couldn't get the recipe for their porcelain quite right.



Fig. 2-2 Bouke de Vries, *Teapot* (2009).



Fig.2-3 Richard Wentworth, *Brac* (1996).

In both of the works above the almost visceral pleasure of broken ceramics has been heightened rather than tempered by the remaking of new works from the fragmented ruins of plates, jugs and teapots. Wentworth’s plates are resolutely mundane, and yet their clearly defined repairs call to mind the visible repairs made to classical sculpture. The juxtaposition of these plates to other objects – a piano, a ping-pong table – brings together two types of familiar object to make something unfamiliar and mysterious, and it is this mystery, as well as that gives *Brac* and *Match* a formal resonance that marks them out as sculpture. Michael Bracewell (2005) suggests that,

‘When you look at the art of Richard Wentworth, you see materials and objects which appear domestic, industrial or discarded, their function skewed or broken... Their banality becomes transfigured... You are looking at what appears to be some collaboration between sculpture at its most refined and the seductive environmental doodling described by found objects’⁵.

With the repaired ceramic works it seems as if Wentworth, as a sculptor, cannot help but bring the broken objects back together, restoring the unity of the three-dimensional object. The repaired plates, if not for their curious positioning in relation to other objects, could theoretically return to function. However, there is also a sense of the repairs as part of a process of liberation rather than annihilation that sees the plates released from their functional duties. Bouke de Vries more resolutely denies the object the possibility of functioning again. Or one could say instead that he effects a change on the semiotic status of the teapot from historical but still functional domestic ware, to work of art. A transformation from thing to object that sees the teapot no longer able to pour efficiently, but instead able to engage the interest of the viewer on an entirely different level. In de Vries’ work though the destruction has not been undone or repaired in the manner of Wentworth, rather, it has been prevented from progressing further. The moment of total destruction of the teapot, the shattering of the pieces as they make contact with the floor has not yet been reached and will never be. Nonetheless, the process of breaking and remaking is central to both the process of making the work and its composition.

Formal Concerns: The Use of Plates and Domestic Ware

The formal language of domestic ware continues to have a central place in contemporary ceramics practice. What is more, the meeting

between sculpture and ceramics that is facilitated by a joint engagement in processes and acts associated with destruction in many instances uses ordinary plates, cups, teapots, that are churned out of ceramics factories in Stoke and China.

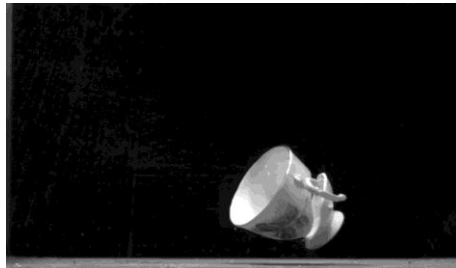
Breaking domestic ceramics has a personal emotional aspect. Those objects that we use or see daily, that make up the day-to-day material world in which we live, become precious objects in a manner that is unrelated to material worth. The moment of the break of such an object is a painful one: the break of a favourite mug perhaps, or the break of a bowl from a grandparent's dinner service given as a wedding gift. It is this moment that both ceramicist David Cushway and artist Runa Islam have sought to extend in their films. Both artists, in this instance distinguished by discipline not medium, have filmed the slow motion destruction of domestic ceramics. In both films we see a prolonged moment of graceful destruction as the slow motion films makes the moment of destruction a hyper-realistic one in which the splintering of every object can be carefully observed and absorbed.

David Cushway's film *Fragments* (2008) recalls the 'visual, emotional, and physical poetics' of Runa Islam's film *Be The First To see What You see As You see It* (2004)⁶. Islam's film allows the viewer to contemplate the measured decent of fragile cups, dishes and saucers towards the floor and probable obliteration. In one moment of Islam's film a woman toys with the lid of a coffee pot, flicking and tipping the lid testing its capacity for movement. In Cushway's film there is no narrative element, and no sign of the hand of the iconoclast. Cushway made his films in collaboration with the University of Wales Engineering Department, experimenting with capturing the moment when a vessel makes contact with a concrete surface. Using the department's high-speed cameras which capture images at 3000 frames per second, Cushway filmed the breaking of ordinary domestic ceramic objects 'which could then be slowed down and edited to run backwards, so that the objects break and then reform themselves'⁷. For Cushway, the importance of this use of technology was that allowed the viewer to witness an ordinary occurrence in an extraordinary way. The high-speed camera allows Cushway to document the moment of destruction, slowing down to minutes an event that we would usually experience only in a split second. The sickening inevitability of the impending moment of destruction is in transformed into an extended moment of anticipation as the viewer expectantly waits for the visceral moment of the meeting of teapot and hard surface.



Fig. 2-4 David Cushway, still from *Fragments* (2008) Fig. 2-5 Runa Islam, still from *Be The First To see What You see As You see It* (2004).

Both Cushway and Islam are interested in manipulating the moment of destruction. Writing about *Be The First To see What You see As You see It* Janet Owen describes, ‘Inside the space of a luminous screen, some objects are broken and then are seen whole again. Others, offering a climax cut short by the next frame, are arrested in the moment before impact’⁸.



However, undermining the moment of destruction can pose difficulties. The very reconstruction of the teapot in *Fragments*, caused by Cushway looping the film so that the teapot or cup reform, is the moment that the film falters and fails to convince. The emotional effect of seeing broken china is undermined as, like Nahum Tate’s rewriting Shakespeare’s plays to giving them happy endings, the teapot comes back together. The moment of climax, the emotion of the break, is momentary as the teapot is resurrected before our very eyes.

The shared formal language of domestic ware seen in the work of Runa Islam and David Cushway demonstrates the extension of the range of operation that mass-produced common objects can have in the hands of an artist. However, while artists continue to work with industrially produced domestic ware, this relationship is not without its difficulties if one considers this use as taking place in conjunction with acts of destruction. These ordinary objects are subjected to artist-sanctioned destruction in the

work of Cushway and Islam. The aesthetic effect created by the use of run-of-the-mill ceramics is simultaneously familiar and uncanny. The destruction of the familiar is emotional, and within that moment of destruction are painful evocations of death, loss and change.

Formal Concerns: The Shared Use of Medium

This section focuses on material as a shared formal element and considers how this element contributes to the overall impression made by the work. Certain materials carry certain connotations. The durability of sculptures in bronze and marble suggest that the ideas these sculptures represent - memory, tradition, political ideology – are equally durable. The destruction of sculptures (political or religious for instance) made in such durable materials is a powerful gesture. Ceramic on the other hand is inherently fragile and easily broken without force. One could draw the conclusion that breaking something that is easily broken is not a powerful act, but the use of ceramic by artists who use the gesture of destruction suggests otherwise. This section will examine the ways in which ceramic as a material is approached in destructive practice.

Clare Twomey's 2010 work *Is It Madness. Is it Beauty* was the result of a collaboration with choreographer Siobhan Davies. The starting point for the partnership was Davies' interest in choreography and dance as a creative act that can be a trigger for other creative acts. A dance piece by Davies called *The Score*, in which four dancers move in a circle around a fixed point, became the starting point for an ensemble of works by nine artists known under the collective title of *ROTOR*.



Fig. 2-6 Siobhan Davies, *The Score*
(2010).

The dance was filmed from above, and the patterns and repetitions in the movements of the dancers ‘triggered new work which responded not only to the images from the dance but also to the energies, counterpoints or character developed by the dancers actions’⁹. Twomey described *Is It Madness. Is it Beauty* as ‘a performative piece that other people will perform but I’m kind of authoring’¹⁰. In this sense, the work is not such a departure for Twomey as the performative element might initially indicate. The authoring of work that others perform is a fitting description of Twomey’s *Trophy* (2006), an event that filled the cast courts at the V&A with four thousand birds made of Wedgwood blue jasper clay.



Fig. 2-7 Clare Twomey, *Trophy* (2006). Photo credit: Dan Prince.

The covetable birds (each marked with the back-stamps of Wedgwood, the Victoria & Albert Museum and Twomey) sitting amongst the classical sculptures created a three-dimensional landscape to walk within, the pleasure of doing so heightened by the freedom for visitors to select and take home their favourite birds. Over the course of a day the installation disappeared from sight. Though the work was dismantled and effectively destroyed, equally, the work only became complete with the participation of the public in the removal of the birds.

The ephemerality of *Trophy*, as well as the co-opting of the visitor as performer, was a feature of what is perhaps Twomey's earliest important work, *Consciousness/Conscience* (realized at the World Ceramic Biennial in Korea in 2001 and again realized for the exhibitions *Approaching Content* in 2003 and *A Secret History of Clay* in 2004). In this work, the visitor walks across, and therefore crushes, hollow bone china tiles laid as if they were floor tiles. In this way, the presence of ceramic, destruction and performance in *Is It Madness. Is it Beauty* is prefigured in Twomey's earlier work. In *Trophy*, Twomey plays on the desirability of porcelain as a material that is elevated in status through back-stamps and their institutional and historical associations. In *Consciousness/Conscience* the relationship with material is decidedly more corporeal in that the initial reaction to the work as a participant is of relates to the effect of the weight of the body on china and how it feels to crush the tiles. An intellectual

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response is secondary to the experience of the materiality of the work. In this work the relationship between material and viewer is in the first instance destructive and exploratory, followed by the intellectual considerations of conscience and consciousness suggested by the title of the piece. The primary focus of the work is the materiality of china, and what happens to hollow tiles when they come into contact with the pressure of the foot. This is the starting point for the work, and for its interpretations. In this way material is the element that contributes most to the overall impression made by the work.

Is It Madness. Is it Beauty is a work that, at the time of writing, has been realised at three locations, the Siobhan Davies dance studio in London, the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester and at the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh. In each location, a number of grey trestle-type tables are laid end to end. The surface of the tables is covered with neatly arranged, identical, unfired clay vessels.



Fig. 2-8 Clare Twomey, *Is It Madness. Is it Beauty* (2010).

Behind the tables more vessels are neatly stacked, waiting. What the visitor will see depends on the moment at which the piece is encountered. Perhaps nothing is happening and only a chair and mop and bucket hint at the possibility of performance. Though a closer look reveals that some of the pots on the tables are collapsing in on themselves, and there is a slow drip drip drip of water from the table to the floor. Perhaps you catch the performance at a different stage: a woman carefully pouring water from a jug into the vessels on the table; or the same woman walking round the tables and rhythmically mopping the floor.

These are some of the quiet moments that form *Is It Madness. Is it Beauty*, a work of near silent destruction in which water gradually breaks down the unfired vessels uniformly arranged on the tables. As with *Trophy* and *Consciousness/Conscience* Twomey endorses the destruction of her work, instructs other to carry it out, but does not perform the destruction herself. The artist is absent from the moment of iconoclasm, but her endorsement removes the guilt from the pleasure of crushing a tile underfoot, or stealing something from a public museum for one's personal enjoyment at home.



Fig. 2-9 Clare Twomey, *Is It Madness. Is it Beauty* (2010)



Fig. 2-10 Clare Twomey, *Is It Madness. Is it Beauty* (2010)

This work is the only instance in this chapter where an artist is using unfired clay as their material. Using unfired clay rather than ceramic means that the gesture of destruction must be recalibrated to take into account the material properties of leather hard clay. Not brittle, clay in this state cannot be smashed (in the manner of Runa Islam or David Cushway), nor crushed (in the manner of *Consciousness/Conscience*). The method of destruction responds to material. By pouring water into the vessels a process of erosion is set in motion. This process happens slowly. There is no need to slow down real time as Cushway and Islam have done, or freeze time like de Vries.

Yarisal and Kublitz's *Anger Release Machine* (2006) harnesses the destruction of ceramics as a moment of release and catharsis for the destroyer. Keeping the destruction at one step removed through the mechanized operation of a vending machine, the act of obliteration is

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commoditized and available without the guilt, loss, and consequences that an iconoclast might otherwise experience. *Anger Release Machine* takes the form of a vending machine that dispenses ceramic and glass vessels, but instead of delivering them safely to the purchaser to be used, the vessels are released to smash in the bottom of the machine in order to deliver a moment of stress release through vessel-breaking.



Fig. 2-11 Yarisal and Kublitz, *Anger Release Machine*
(2006).

Anger Release Machine places the destruction of ceramics at centre of the work, encouraging associations such as the commoditization of iconoclasm, mass production, disposability and the lack of status of ceramics, as well as the negation of the visceral, physical aspect of iconoclasm. This is iconoclasm that is not performed by the artists, but is clearly sanctioned by them, for the payment of a small fee. *Anger Release Machine* also shows us destruction without construction, in which in the moment of the smash is the final moment, nothing further is available to the viewer apart from repetition of the experience with a different object. The act of destruction is not recorded, and no image is created. Even the residue of the broken plates and bowls remains behind the glass of the vending machine. The separation of viewer/iconoclast from the object, a feature of *Anger Release Machine*, emphasizes the poignancy and immediacy of the destruction of ceramics in the work of Ai Weiwei and Clare Twomey. The total obliteration of the physical vessel in their work

leaves a powerful residue that is not only linked to the value of the vessels, as Twomey's work demonstrates. In *Anger Release Machine* ceramic seems only to be employed for its ability to shatter. Ceramic objects sit alongside glass ones in the vending machine. Neither material is valued for more than this ability to break when it hits the bottom of the machine.

The visual effect of the use of clay and ceramic in works that also involve destruction can be dramatic or quiet: a sharp, sudden break, or slow and silent erosion. There is destruction that is over in an instant and destruction that is gradual and can hardly be noticed. The use of material is an element that contributes to the overall impression made by an artwork, and it is the use of ceramic or clay in the hands of the artist that is the starting point for the interpretation of these works. The treatment of material offers a way into the work, a first step in drawing out potential meanings. Material, in this case clay and ceramic, is also an important component of the imagery of the work, as well as component of its construction. The aesthetic differences in the treatment of ceramics and clay, while they vary artist by artist, do not ultimately seem to be delineated by the status of the artist (artist in clay, or sculptor). While some differences are apparent, as has been suggested in the examples above, these aesthetic differences in the treatment of material are not such that it possible to identify two different styles of working with ceramics and destruction, one belonging to sculptors and the other to artists working in clay (who work with the material as a matter of course). Instead, the treatment of material reveals a point in which there is convergence between ceramics and sculpture to the point where the boundaries are not only unidentifiable, but also irrelevant to the interpretation of the individual work. In terms of style, the work of Twomey, Cushway and Yarisal and Kublitz for example, illustrates a style – the unification of ceramics and the artistic gesture of destruction - that crosses disciplinary boundaries without regard for established categories of art.

Destruction as Meaning in Ceramics and Sculpture

The formal qualities of the works discussed above provide a foundation upon which to develop the notion of destruction as an intellectual concept in ceramics and sculpture. This second part of the chapter will now consider how the act of destruction comes to mean something. This section positions destruction in art as an act of institutional and cultural critique (with particular reference to the boundaries of art). Here, in a development of the formal analysis that took place in the earlier part of this chapter, the act of destruction is understood

as a sign that stands for something else. Alex Potts (2003) provides a framework for this approach when he writes that semiotic theory,

‘...has perhaps been most effective in giving a new twist to the formal analysis of visual style that has traditionally been such a central preoccupation of art history as a disciplines. If we envisage a work of art as a sign or a combination of signs, our understanding of its form no longer operates on a purely visual level, but also concerns the articulation of meaning’¹¹.

The ability of art to convey meaning, to point to meaning outside itself, meaning that can be decoded by the viewer, is what Potts is referring to here, and which will be the concern of this next section.

Destruction as Meaning: The Museum as a Site of Destruction

It is inevitable that an object entering a museum will no longer function in the way it was originally intended. Objects take on new functions and meanings when they enter collections and to be a curator is to be implicated in the reframing of the object. Some artists, conscious of the power of the curator to influence the meaning and function of a work, have been highly critical of museums and galleries, while at the same time taking advantage of the ambitious projects that such institutions can help them realize. The willingness to be critiqued from within, to collaborate with artists who are openly hostile to the museum as a concept, is a legacy of the self-reflexive ‘New Museology’ in which institutional insight and openness to self-critique is considered important. This tension or dissonance between the artist and the institution offers a starting point for the exploration of works that use the museum or gallery as the site of destruction.

This chapter demonstrates that this tension can be fruitful, not least because the act of destruction gives rise to a new work. For instance, despite Linda Sormin’s suggestion that there was an overall vision of the installation for her work *Rift* (2009) that the gallery thwarted, her installation was completed successfully. Taking a slightly different approach to institutional critique, Clare Twomey’s work *Trophy* (2006) can be interpreted as positioning the visitor as a collector/thief/destroyer, and in this role the visitor reflects the institutional behaviour of the Victoria & Albert Museum during its 150 years.

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exploration to what would usually be the clear open spaces of mimma’s galleries. Sormin has also become known for putting ‘the bearing capacity of ceramics to the test in thin and frail constructions’¹².



Fig. 2-13 Linda Sormin, *Rift* (2009).

In *Rift*, the capacity of ceramics was not only tested in the use of the material, but it was also subject to attack. The iconoclastic element of *Rift* took place on the opening night of the exhibition, when curator James Beighton was charged with taking a hammer to one of these ceramic constructions. Asked to crawl through a raised Perspex tunnel first, wearing safety goggles, Beighton chipped away at the ceramic structure, knocking shards and chunks of debris into a tall Perspex cylinder below.



Fig. 2-14 Still from the film made on opening night of *Rift* showing James Beighton destroying the work, 2009



Fig. 2-15 Linda Sormin, *Rift*

This event was filmed, and the film of the destruction of part of the installation was projected on the wall of the gallery that housed *Rift* for the duration of the exhibition. Curator James Beighton found the destructive aspect of the installation key, and spoke of *Rift* as,

‘...troubling in that particular space, that’s troubling to the whole institution, institutional priorities, ideas of collecting, the priority of a museum to care for an object. Linda’s piece *Rift* was a performative work and had the curator smashing pots over the course of the exhibition. So she’s squarely tackling that nonsensical idea of a museum holding onto works for posterity. So yes the spaces can make the work look beautiful but it’s not a one sided relationship and artists are very often battling against that’¹³.

For Beighton, the element of destruction is not a direct comment on the curator. Instead, Beighton sees his role in the process of destruction in *Rift* as a conduit for an assault by Sormin on the inherently unsustainable model of collecting that museums follow.

While institutional critique is the focus of the piece, Sormin also situated the installation within the context of the natural destruction brought about by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and on the destruction wreaked on Middlesbrough in the wake of post-industrial decline. And while Beighton’s role on the opening night of the exhibition formed the central act of iconoclasm in *Rift*, there was also a quiet form of destruction taking place through the course of the exhibition. Sormin used wind and water to erode the ceramic forms that she had constructed herself and brought into the gallery. Sormin’s desire that the curator of the institution

(rather than the exhibitions co-curator and artist Twomey) should perform a destructive act in public view on the opening night of the exhibition can be seen as a desire to disrupt the balance of power between artist and curator. Sormin is openly critical of a relationship in which the balance of power can often be unequal, with the curator directing collecting, inclusion in exhibitions, acting as a gatekeeper to funds, influencing the reputation of artists and having a role in how a work is realized. In this instance, the artist exercises her power to the full, making the suit-clad Beighton crawl through a Perspex tube, raised above the gallery in full view of onlookers. In short, she makes an exhibition of the curator. In doing so, Sormin reveals what she sees as the true nature of the curator and the destructive power of the role.

A second work that brings ceramics, destruction and the museum or gallery into contact with one another is Clare Twomey’s work *Consciousness/Conscience* (2001). This work (first shown at the first Korean Biennial in 2001) does not strictly qualify for an investigation centered on understanding vessel forms in relation to sculpture. However, the strong relationship that *Consciousness/Conscience* demonstrates between ceramics, sculpture and iconoclasm, as well as the importance of the piece in terms of developments in contemporary ceramics practice and Twomey’s own body of work, would make its exclusion from this chapter a notable oversight. The 2001 realization of *Consciousness/Conscience* consisted of seven thousand hollow ceramic tiles laid as a tiled floor. The viewer was invited to cross the floor, but in doing so would participate in the destruction of the tiles.



Fig. 2-16 Clare Twomey, *Consciousness/Conscience* (2001).

The very title of the work implies a thought process, a consciousness or awareness of the destruction that one is deciding whether or not to cause, and the effect on the conscience of the viewer turned destroyer. The conscience suggested by the title indicates the inner sense of right and wrong, while the word consciousness points to the state of being aware of one's own existence that is perhaps heightened during the destruction of the work. Yet this is no senseless destruction, instead the work seems more redolent of a sense of individual human enquiry as the foot and weight of the body is shifted onto the delicate china tile. The effect of so many feet ground the tiles to dust, a material subsequently used by Twomey, which is possessed of strong associations with ephemerality, memory and loss.

Edmund de Waal writes that, 'Twomey made every step of a viewer break her artwork: the consciousness of moving in the space was made contingent on destruction'¹⁴. De Waal relates *Consciousness/Conscience* to the work of British sculptors Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy, both of whom have 'used unfired clay to make installations within museums'¹⁵. De Waal argues that temporality is an essential idea for these installations, 'the relocating of the viewer in the present by disturbing the museum environment... This is something that has been explored by ceramicists who make vessels, just as much as by more overtly "conceptual" sculptors'¹⁶.

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When artist Jeppe Hein has turned to the language of destruction in his sculpture, the gallery has been part of, or party to, that destruction. An instruction familiar to museum and gallery goers, *Please do not touch the Artwork*, like *360° Presence*, used motion sensors and the presence of the visitor. *Please do not touch the Artwork* is a single plate mounted on the wall, with a line on the floor to indicate that the visitor should not move too close to the object. When a visitor moves too close and crosses the line, a sensor causes the plate to be released from the wall, surrendering it to the effects of gravity. The shattered plate is left on the floor of the gallery until the next day, when it is replaced with a new one.



Fig. 2-17 Jeppe Hein, *Please do not touch the Artwork* (2003).

The ambiguity of this work, the duping of the visitor, and the powerful emotion elicited by the destruction of objects in a public gallery meant that the presence of this work in *A Secret History of Clay* was not without controversy. The layout of the exhibition meant that Hein's work was being reached after the visitor had first passed through a space populated by ceramics by Gauguin, Miro and Picasso, followed by huge lump of oil clay that could be touched and manipulated by the visitor (Nubuo Sekine's *Phase of Nothingness – Oil Clay*, 1969) and Chen Zhen's *Purification Room 1995*, a room that can only be looked at, not entered. The apparent simplicity of such an object after so many challenging and unusual works would surely invite the viewer to lean in for a closer look, and in

attempting to fathom why an ordinary looking plate should be included in the exhibition, the unfortunate visitor becomes the perpetrator who has caused a most unlucky accident. Amy Dickson related how,

‘One of our visitors did get very upset that it fell off the wall because in that context it was such a powerful experience. So after that we had to put a warning onto the wall, saying, “Warning: this plate may fall without warning”. So suddenly this work that was about the unexpected, in order to manage our visitor expectation we had to have this warning. Again, in terms of it challenging an institution to do a show like that it was an archetypal example, although I think that it detracted from the work to have that warning, but there was also an element of humour in the way that it was worded, pointing to the ludicrousness of having to have such a warning’¹⁷.

The response of this one particular audience member to this piece indicates the power that the language of object-breaking has, and which is emphasized by the context of the gallery. It is the element of the unexpected, combined with the environment in which the work is situated, that makes Hein’s work so powerful in this instance. The viewer who has the misfortune to activate the motion sensor is an unwitting iconoclast, forced into the role by the artist and his work. Kirsty Bell, writing about the destructive tendencies of *360° Presence* interprets these tendencies as, ‘more accidental than malevolent’¹⁸. For Bell, Hein’s work plays with,

‘the unspoken boundaries that dictate the proper distance between artwork and audience and challenging the quick run-in, run-out approach of many a gallery-goer...jolting the spectator out of complacent assumptions by enabling the art object to answer back, so to speak, or even to initiate the conversation’¹⁹.

In these works by Hein, Sorimin and Twomey destruction is used variously as institutional critique, and as an example of the effect of the institution upon the artwork. *Consciousness/Conscience* makes the visitor acutely aware of their movement in the gallery, the irreversible imprint of their foot on a tile, in the same way that this work makes us aware of the imprint of the gallery on the work. For the gallery visitor *Consciousness/Conscience* makes what would usually be a casual drift from work to work instead a deliberate placement of foot on tile that makes the act of walking simultaneously a collaborative element in the work, while also destroying it. In the destructive element of *Rift* nothing mediates between the artists intention and the audience: Sorimin’s approach is direct, uncoded and literal. While Beighton may maintain that

Sormin’s critique is directed at the unsustainability of collecting in museums generally and in a disruption of the simplicity of the white cube galleries at mima, it is undeniable that the artist has transformed him into an archetype of a curator whose destructive tendencies towards artist and artwork are exposed for all to see.

Conclusion

Iconoclastic artworks can operate on metaphorical as well as literal level, using destruction specifically to critique and comment upon cultural boundaries particularly as they relate to the status of clay and the boundaries between art and craft, the role of the curator and the extent of institutional influence upon the creation of an artwork. This intellectual convergence between ceramics and sculpture, as they come together in the moment of destruction, is underpinned by a significant formal relationship between ceramics and sculpture that likewise centers on destruction. Ultimately, this chapter has argued that the act of iconoclasm creates a moment at which the relationship between ceramics and sculpture can be both negotiated and revealed and that by examining the iconoclastic act as a moment of creation as well as destruction provides a framework through which we can simultaneously consider ceramics and sculpture. The works used to illustrate this chapter demonstrate the unstable nature of the clay vessel in the hands of both sculptors, and artists who work exclusively in clay. The literal instability of the object – brittle ceramic so easily smashed – provides access to ideas of the metaphorical instability that relates to the shifting status of the contemporary clay vessel and the treatment of boundaries between art forms. What we are seeing in iconoclasm as artistic gesture as it relates to ceramics is the provision of the conditions of possibility for works in clay to have new relation to the (art)world. Ceramics has engaged with art’s historical and contemporary encounter with destruction as well as more philosophical explorations of the meaning and possibilities of destruction. André Breton’s theory of “convulsive beauty”—his idea that a scene of destruction can be represented or analyzed as something beautiful by convulsing, or transforming has its expression in the work of Clare Twomey, Bouke de Vries and Linda Sormin.

The aesthetic strategies of destruction used by these artists and others are closely linked to materiality of clay. Ceramic objects lend themselves to being broken. Breaking is a part of the risk of the making process for ceramics, where success is contingent on various processes that move

beyond the control of the artist. The artistic gesture of iconoclasm deals with death, recollection, decay and aging at narrative and formal levels, and accentuates them through the reality of the broken object lying on the gallery floor. These broken clay vessels suggest a psychological break with boundaries through the destruction of the physical object. But, as the reconstruction of the broken vessel suggests, there is a desire to construct something new. New meanings and new categories of art are suggested through the act of iconoclasm done and then undone. When this destruction takes place in the museum, artists can be considered to be engaging with an idea outlined by Linda Sandino (2004), a 'culturally sanctioned re-definition' of objects 'in which trash becomes durable and in some cases 'endurable' as a museum object, challenging the museological code of permanence'²⁰.

The presence of destruction and broken objects in the museum questions the 'presumed timeless significance and value of the museum collection'²¹. Not only a threat to the boundaries of what should and should not be in a museum, the shared use of the language of destruction is a threat to the disciplinary boundaries between sculpture and ceramics. In these works that see the meaning of the work residing in the visibility of action (and as found in the work of Richard Long for instance) we are reminded that sculptors do not only create three-dimensional objects, they also create a space or a moment to be experienced. This serves to remind that it is not only the vessel that is physically and metaphorically unstable: in *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* Krauss calls sculpture a category in danger of collapse²². This collapse is reflected in the interest in iconoclasm and destruction exhibited by the sculptors referenced in this chapter which can also be interpreted as relating to the human desire for 'omnipotence and immortality', desires ultimately 'thwarted by the limitations of reality'²³. As such, the destruction of artwork becomes part of the natural order of life and an expression of the human condition that is expressed across media and disciplines.

NOTES

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² D. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm & Vandalism since the French Revolution*, London, Reaktion Books, 1997, p.255.

³ S. Groom, ‘In Media Res’, in M. Bracewell, R. Malbert and S. Groom, *Richard Wentworth*, London, Tate Publishing, 2005, p.74.

⁴ M. Chapman in B. de Vries and M. Champman, *Pieces*, London, Bouke Art Ltd, 2010, unpaginated.

⁵ M. Bracewell, ‘“So Much Depends”: An Introduction to the Art of Richard Wentworth’, in M. Bracewell, R. Malbert and S. Groom, *Richard Wentworth*, London, Tate Publishing, 2005, p.6.

⁶ J. Owen, ‘About the exhibition’,

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⁷ D. Cushway, website address DETAIL (accessed 21.07.2011).

⁸ J. Owen, ‘About the exhibition’,

http://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/detail/exhibition_id/70 (accessed 21.06.2011).

⁹ <http://www.siobhandavies.com/dance/dance-works/rotor/rotor-about.html> (accessed 17.06.2011)

¹⁰ Author’s interview with Clare Twomey, 2010.

¹¹ A. Potts, ‘Sign’, in R. Nelson and R. Shiff, editors, *Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003, p.21.

¹² Anonymously authored text, in Damsbo, M., Twomey, C., de Waal, E., *The Magic of Clay: Ceramics in Contemporary Art*, Denmark, GL Holtegaard, 2011, p.150.

¹³ Interview with James Beighton, 2010.

¹⁴ E. de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2003, p.187.

¹⁵ E. de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2003, p.187.

¹⁶ E. de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2003, p.188.

¹⁷ A. Dickson, interview, 2010.

¹⁸ K. Bell, ‘Jeppe Hein’, *Frieze*, 2004, Issue 81, p.89.

¹⁹ K. Bell, ‘Jeppe Hein’, *Frieze*, 2004, Issue 81, p.91.

²⁰ L. Sandino, ‘Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Transient Materiality in Contemporary Cultural Artifacts’, *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 17 no. 3, 2004, p. 284.

²¹ L. Sandino, ‘Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Transient Materiality in Contemporary Cultural Artifacts’, p. 289.

²² R. Krauss, ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, p.335.

²³ A. Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, London, Phoenix Press, 2000 (first published 1967), p.175.

CHAPTER TWO

ART AND DESTRUCTION: THE ARTIST AS ANTI-CURATOR IN THE MUSEUM

Miranda Stearn

This essay is primarily about literal, physical destruction. Not deconstruction or *destruktion* with a K, but about artists physically breaking stuff in museums. The former may come into it a little, but it is primarily about the latter and the emotional, affective, sometimes even visceral response that the idea of destruction elicits in the museum context. These thoughts come out of a wider piece of research into contemporary artist commissions and interventions in museums and historic art collections, and the impact that such invited projects have upon how visitors experience these collections and institutions. Interventions which introduce destruction into the museum are a small subset, and this essay offers not a comprehensive survey but a selection of examples through which to explore the implications of invited destruction in the museum.

Museums do not tend to be comfortable with destruction. People who work in museums are not comfortable with destruction, and the public do not like the idea much either. Generally when we witness destruction taking place in museums, something has gone seriously awry. Someone has neglected their duty. The values of civilized society seem at stake. It is this which makes news footage of museum looting in times of civil unrest and revolution seem particularly powerful, functioning almost metonymically for the breakdown of civilized society as a whole into anarchy.

Destruction is, one might suggest, the ultimate museum taboo. Museums can cope with sex and death and politics, but not destruction. And that means, like any taboo worth its salt, the idea of destruction in the museum is massively potent. Artists know this, of course.

There is a long tradition of what we might call “museum-baiting” by artists, from the museum destruction fantasies of the Futurists to the provocative happenings of Fluxus artists during the 1966 *Destruction in Art* Symposium. Jean Tinguely described his 1960 *Homage to New York*, an auto-destructive sculpture which (almost) battered itself into oblivion in the Museum of Modern Art, as “the opposite of the cathedrals, the

opposite of the skyscrapers around us, the opposite of the museum idea.”¹ By showing the piece, the museum participated in an act of self-sabotage, knowing that the impossibility of fulfilling its usual duty to preserve the work for the public was integral to the nature of that work. In contrast, Ben Vautier’s *Total Art Matchbox* from *Flux Year Box 2* (c. 1968), preserved and presented in a glass case at MOMA last year,² feels almost pathetic, the very act of preserving the artwork so at odds with the text emblazoned on it:

“TOTAL ART MATCH-BOX. USE THESE MATCHES TO DESTROY
ALL ART – MUSEUMS ART LIBRARY’S – READY – MADES POP –
ART AND AS I BEN SIGNED EVERYTHING WORK OF ART –
BURN – ANYTHING – KEEP LAST MATCH FOR THIS MATCH-”

These are uncompromising works, and one feels only the museum or the artwork can fulfil its function, one necessarily thwarting the other. At the same time of course these art works could not function without the museum to spar with as worthy adversary, and the taboo of destruction in the museum to pique our interest.

That artists should find the (literally) iconoclastic potential of destruction in the museum exciting and

productive, and seek to channel its potency to their own ends, probably should not surprise us. That museums might also be tempted down this path is more unexpected. We expect to find destructive artists and museums at loggerheads, not in collaboration. Because museums just do not do destruction.

But what happens when they do? What happens when a museum invites or commissions an artist to intervene, and that intervention takes a destructive form? This paper will examine instances of museum commissioned interventions which actively engage with the idea of physical destruction, looking at how museums as well as artists have begun to explore and exploit the taboo of destruction to their own ends.

In 2001, The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) invited an intervention which used simulated rather than actual destruction to activate these associations. *Give & Take*, collaboration between the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Serpentine Gallery, saw fifteen contemporary artists stage temporary interventions in the V&A.³ Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska created *Use Value*, a sound installation primarily for the ceramics galleries, but which could also be heard in the main museum atrium directly below. The sound piece used audio recordings including the sounds of visitors eating in the museum restaurant and the noise of washing up, to create a soundscape which evoked ceramics in use

in daily life, bringing to mind the original “use value” of the ceramic objects – a use value now eliminated or overwritten by their status as precious objects for aesthetic contemplation to be displayed safely out of reach behind glass in the museum display cases. These sounds of everyday use were punctuated by something more alarming, however; at regular intervals, the crashing sound of something being dropped and broken. Neil Cummings describes the impact:

“What you hear in the lobby downstairs is ambient café noise, which slowly increases in volume until you become conscious of it. Then, once every ten minutes, it is punctuated by the sound of a terrible crash and followed by a careful silence. We did extensive testing to find that the ten-minute loop is enough time so that not everyone hears it. So, a visitor can’t expect it; it’s too long a wait. And it’s even more theatrical in the lobby than upstairs when that crash goes off; it changes the whole atmosphere of the museum...[Kaplan] Everybody stops dead in their tracks. There is a moment of total silence each time... [Cummings] And it’s very tense – this is a museum where, of course, the biggest fear is breakage of any kind.”⁴

Cummings and Lewandowska had partly selected the ceramics galleries, situated off the beaten track on level 6 of the museum and rather under-visited, as the setting for their installation precisely because they were interested in bringing visitors up to this lesser known and at the time appealing un-reconstructed part of the collection. One assumes this chimed well with the museum too – this was before the major re-display of the ceramics galleries, which interestingly has made use of a commission by another contemporary practitioner, *Signs and Wonders* (2009) by Edmund de Waal, to draw visitors up to the top floor.

This adds an extra frisson to the alarm induced by the apparently destructive crash as heard by visitors in the lobby – their alarm was provoked by the implied destruction of collection objects which the majority would never have bothered to climb the stairs to visit, and it was only really at the moment of their simulated destruction that these pieces became interesting to, and valued by, the majority of visitors.

Cummings and Lewandoska did not actually destroy anything apart from peace of mind, although their simulated destruction allows us to begin to explore the uncomfortable potency of the idea of destruction in the museum, and the very bodily, almost visceral response it elicits – stopping us ‘dead in our tracks’ as interviewer Janet Kaplan put it.

An interesting current counterpart to this is Ai Weiwei's *Dropping a Han-Dynasty Urn* (1995), displayed at the V&A as part of a temporary exhibition in the revamped top floor ceramics galleries entitled 'Dropping the Urn: Ceramic Works, 5000 BCE – 2010 CE'.⁵ Interestingly, the catalogue essay accompanying this display describes the impact of Ai's work in very similar terms to those applied to *Use Value*, even bringing into play the idea of the sound of shattering despite the fact that the piece consists of still photos and is therefore technically silent – the sound of breaking in this case is all imagined or remembered:

“the sense of something irreplaceable at stake in each example is matched by the paradoxical way this reverence is reawakened by the sound of its own disintegration, whether we actually hear it or not.”⁶

The challenge of Ai's work rests in the fact that it involves the actual destruction of authentic historic objects; he does not just threaten to break the urn but drops it in front of us on camera, and we must watch powerless as the antique object shatters into tiny pieces. Elsewhere he grinds a Neolithic urn into powder to be displayed in a glass jar (*Dust to Dust* 2009) or dips seven-thousand-year-old vases in bright industrial paint (*Coloured Vases* 2006-8). These are complex works and deep engagement with them is beyond the scope of this essay; rather I will consider the specifics of presenting these works in a museum setting.

Experiencing Ai's work anywhere is uncomfortable and exhilarating, but especially so in a museum context. Here, in a space dedicated to preservation and veneration of cultural artifacts, we are presented with evidence of the destruction of similar artifacts. More than evidence in fact: something which comes closer to celebration or at least approbation of the artist's actions.

The re-presentation of Ai's *Dropping a Han-Dynasty Urn* and associated ceramic works at the V&A has the potential to prompt various chains of association. On one level, it can operate very much in the same way as Cummings and Lewandowska's simulated destruction, using the shock of witnessing historic artifacts being destroyed to activate our sense of the value we place on the still surviving objects elsewhere in the museum – objects we might not have known we cared about until confronted with the possibility of their destruction. Alternatively or perhaps in parallel, we might be prompted to think a bit more deeply about why it is that we do place such special value on the objects, which it should matter to us if they were to be destroyed. And then there's something else – as we ask ourselves how it could be that this could

happen, that Ai could be allowed to destroy these objects, the explanation leads us to another realization that works in the museum's favour. The V&A may have risked appearing to condone Ai's destruction of cultural artifacts, but they stopped short of inviting him to destroy the objects in their care. That would have been even more unthinkable. Ai was able to drop the 2000 year old urn because, one assumes, it was his. He had bought it and therefore it was no longer legally, technically part of some shared cultural inheritance the way museum objects are, but rather his property to dispose of as he wished: to destroy. That could not happen to the objects kept in trust for the public by the V&A. By bringing traces of overt destruction into the museum space, the museum reawakens not only the value we place on the objects in the museum but also our awareness of the museum's unique role in preserving them. It presents us with the possibility of the alternative.

Finally, let us turn to a project in which the museum in question apparently did do the unthinkable – offer up the objects in its collection to an artist, for potential destruction.

In 2009, artist Ansuman Biswas turned the relatively well-worn model of the artist-as-curator invited to select from the museum's stored collection on its head through his *Manchester Hermit* project while in residence at Manchester Museum.⁷ The artist himself provides a to-the-point summary of his intervention on the project blog:

“Over several months I have been exploring the museum stores and collecting my own little cabinet of curiosities. Each day over the next forty days I will choose an object from my collection and offer it up in a spirit of sacrifice. The object will be announced through a variety of media, including this blog. I will then destroy it. This destruction will inevitably take place unless someone cares for the object [...] In the absence of some positive appreciation of the object – a poem, a video, a child's drawing, a scientific assessment, etc., etc. – I will assume that it is of no value to anyone and should no longer take up space in the archive.”⁸

The project resonates with examples of stored collection projects such as Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox* (1969) and its successors, in that through his intervention Biswas was selecting, and bringing into the public realm objects from the museum's store which were usually considered, for whatever reason, beneath the notice of general visitors and therefore not displayed and rendered inaccessible. Nevertheless the role he assumed, threatening to destroy one object from the museum's stored collections each day throughout a forty day retreat, could perhaps be better described as that of anti-curator rather than curator.

The project caused a predictable if minor ruckus in the museum community, with the Museums Association's Ethics Committee meeting to discuss the issues at stake.⁹ It also created a stir in the press, although the tone was generally intrigued and incredulous rather than shocked outrage.

Even the title of the blogpost quoted above, "You don't know what you've got til its gone", signaled from the outset that Biswas's project was not about destruction of cultural artifacts in itself but about using the threat of destruction to prompt reflection and meditation about what, as a society, we value and make an effort to preserve, and why. On the one hand this was about raising public awareness of the stored collections of the Manchester Museum and flushing out the value people placed in these collections when faced with the threat of their destruction, precipitating a public cherishing of these long neglected objects. On the other, it sought to raise questions about preservation and destruction in a wider sense, particularly in relation to environmental stewardship. The expressions of dismay at the threat of destroying these rarely-looked at objects were held up in implied contrast to the arguably more serious losses we seem willing to let happen in our society.

By giving anyone the power to "save" an object – only one expression of value was needed to protect each item – Biswas rejected the hierarchy of expert opinion in the museum, creating a sense of interactive democracy in which the audience were encouraged to take an active role. This was curatorship and museum disposals for the web 2.0 generation, perhaps even the *X-factor* generation.¹⁰ In fact, the Museums Association were quick to realise the synergy between the project and their own aspirations to encourage museums to this more courageously and creatively about disposals, and to encourage more sophisticated public understanding around disposals by engaging visitors more fully in the process.¹¹ By entering into dialogue with the audience and endowing them with a sense of agency, Biswas disrupted traditional hierarchies not to replace them with the privileged insight of the artist as in many previous artist-as-curator projects, but to give value to the opinions and actions of the public at large.

With power comes responsibility, and Biswas's intervention gave the wider audience not only power over the selected objects but responsibility for their fate. This notion of being able to make a choice to either intervene or to sit back and do nothing carried powerful resonances in relation to the effort, or otherwise, that we as a society are willing to make to preserve what we claim to value.

The *Manchester Hermit* project used the threat of destroying objects

from a museum's stored collection to bring to public attention both individual stored collection objects and also the processes by which objects are collected, stored, displayed or not displayed in museums. It also, and this was at the heart of the project, used the museum and the way we preserve, categorise and place value upon its collection as a microcosm to encourage us to think about our actions, behaviours and values in the wider world, resulting in a destructive intervention that was not exclusively, or primarily, about the museum and the collection objects.

"By my action I hope to sensitize us to the sorrow of loss. My aim is to engage emotionally with the fact of the massive loss of memes, genes and habitats which we ourselves are precipitating on a planetary scale."¹²

"Sensitizing us to the sorrow of loss" and "engaging emotionally" seems to be something destructive, or apparently destructive, artist interventions in museums are exceptionally well placed to do, whether those losses be cultural or natural – a result of the continuing emotive punch of breaking the taboo.

NOTES

¹ Extract from an unpublished interview with Tinguely conducted by Calvin Tomkins for a 1962 article for *The New Yorker* (courtesy Calvin Tomkins Papers, II.A.5. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York), reproduced in Michael Landy and Jean Tinguely, 'Homage to Destruction', *Tate Etc.*, Issue 17, Autumn 2009

² *Thing/Thought: Fluxus Editions 1962-1978*, MOMA New York, 21 September 2011 – 16 January 2012

³ *Give & Take*, Serpentine Gallery, London, and Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 30 January – 1 April 2001

⁴ Neil Cummings interviewed by Janet A. Kaplan, 'Give & Take Conversations', *Art Journal*, Summer 2002, p. 75

⁵ *Dropping the Urn: Ceramic Works, 5000 BCE – 2010 CE*, Victoria and Albert Museum London, 15 October 2011 – 18 March 2012

⁶ Gregg Moore and Richard Torchia, 'Doing ceramics', *Ai Weiwei: Dropping the Urn; Ceramic Works, 5000 BCE – 2010 CE*, Arcadia University Art Gallery, Pennsylvania, 2010, p. 13

⁷ Biswas's residency lasted a symbolic 40 days and 40 nights, 27 June – 5 August 2009.

⁸ Blog post by Ansuman Biswas, 29 June 2009 (<http://manchesterhermit.wordpress.com/2009/06/29/you-dont-know-what-youve-got-til-its-gone/>), accessed 14 June 2012

⁹ The exchange between Nick Merriman and the MA on this subject provides a valuable insight into thinking around the subject. In an extract from a briefing note to the MA Ethics Committee, Merriman explains: ‘So, we are currently exploring with Ansuman ways in which we might be able to stimulate this debate about retention, disposal, and extinction, without behaving recklessly or unethically. Options currently include:

Only putting forward for destruction objects that the Museum already wishes to dispose of (including casts and unaccessioned items)

Not destroying objects but instead putting any objects not ‘saved’ forward for disposal by transfer to other institutions

Putting forward a selection of items that we already wish to dispose of, together with objects of great significance, on the basis that they will certainly be ‘saved’ by the public.

Ultimately the project is not an exercise in promoting destruction, but is aimed at making explicit the appreciation of stored collections (i.e. those out of the public gaze). One of the concerns in fact is that after, say, ten times when an object is ‘saved’, the exercise might lose its sense of drama. Nevertheless, we have to act as if objects or specimens might be destroyed and be prepared to destroy (or otherwise dispose of) them if no-one makes a case for their retention. Indeed, we feel we should as museum professionals have the courage to argue that if no-one in the world makes a case for the retention of an object, then perhaps it should not be retained,’ (Nick Merriman, *The Manchester Hermit Project – briefing for the MA Ethics Committee*, 23 April 2009). The MA response was guardedly enthusiastic, beginning: ‘Thank you for inviting the committee to comment on the Manchester Hermit Project at the Manchester Museum. Members were extremely interested in and excited by the uniqueness of the project. We would specifically like to commend you for your transparent approach that is truly in the spirit of the MA’s new ethical guidance and toolkit on disposal.’ (Response from Rebecca Jacobs, Museum development Officer, ethics and Professional Development, Museums Association, undated).

¹⁰ The project relied on the immediacy and interactivity provided by current internet technology, which allowed Biswas to communicate his intentions and audiences to express their opinions to him despite his ‘seclusion’ in his hermitage in the museum tower. As well as drawing on the interactive ‘curate your own exhibition’ and ‘write your own label’ activities featured on various museum and gallery websites, the project relied upon public familiarity with the form of the blog. It also seems reasonable to detect links between the project concept with the current global popularity of television formats which involve the public in voting to either ‘save’ or ‘evict’ contestants –formats such as *X-factor* (ITV, 2004-), *Britain’s Got Talent* (ITV, 2007-), *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC, 2004-) or *Big Brother* (Endemol, 2000-10) which have become international brands.

¹¹ Nick Merriman, Director of Manchester Museum and instigator of the project, recalls that the MA were quick to see the links to their own Effective Collections project and in fact suggested that, had the timescales been different, the Hermit

project might have been eligible for funding under this scheme (interview with Nick Merriman, Manchester, 13 March 2012). *Effective Collections*, running from 2006-12, is described by the MA as follows: 'Effective Collections has been the cornerstone of the MA's work on collections since late in 2006. Supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, it is a programme of policy work and grant-giving to help museums make better use of stored collections, principally through increased numbers of loans and a more proactive approach to disposal. In just five years, the MA has sought to change the culture of museums.' (*Effective Collections Achievements and Legacy* final report, Museums Association, April 2012, p. 5

¹² Ansuman Biswas, blog introduction, 2009, (<http://manchesterhermit.wordpress.com/about/>), accessed 14 June 2012.

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CHAPTER THREE

CORNELIA PARKER'S THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER FOR ART AND DESTRUCTION

Imogen Racz

Cornelia Parker's installation *Thirty Pieces of Silver* was made as a result of a commission by the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham in 1988.¹ It was her first solo exhibition and was also the first work in her practice where an act of destruction was the pivotal point between an original existence of an object or group of objects, with their associated functions, meanings and contexts, and their translation into works of art to be displayed in a gallery. Since then Parker has become well known for the variety, and - it has to be said - frequently absurd means that she has employed in her acts of destruction, that include exploding, burning, shooting, melting and dissolving. In this case she had a steamroller flatten about a thousand pieces of domestic silver that had been laid out on a country road in Hertfordshire. While focusing on *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, this chapter will also consider the destructive act in some of her other works, and how this process creates a platform for considering the layered, complex and symbolic relationship that we have with everyday things.

Original exhibition and relation to other works

The original exhibition of *Thirty Pieces of Silver* opened to the public in November 1988. It consisted of thirty circular pools - or large coins - of flattened, domestic, silver objects hanging in a five by six formation from a grid fixed to the ceiling, a large photograph of a steamroller lumbering towards the carpet of objects and twelve pairs of photographs, with the first of each showing the objects in pristine condition, being cherished and having a function within the home, but the second after their destruction, discarded and overlooked. The title, like many others applied to her works suggests a conceptual perspective, and in this case links to the Biblical betrayal that is at the heart of Christian beliefs. However, the association of this story to an installation of flattened, small, shiny and industrially produced objects contradicts the

enormity of the consequences of Judas' weakness and greed. She was to play with these contradictions in other works, like *Rorschach*, *Endless Column III*, which is a horizontal column of fourteen flattened, domestic, silver objects each of which would have been a gleaming presence in their original lives, but in their art context the title refers to the neutral, dark ink blot from which one can divine and project images and meanings.²

The use of titles to suggest a conceptual angle, together with the wit, transformation and arrangement of found, everyday objects into works suggesting other meanings and associations, links Parker's installations to the earlier generation of New British Sculptors. Tony Cragg incorporated everyday materials, including industrially produced plastic debris in his works from the late 1970s that, like Parker, he ordered into formal arrangements where each element kept its identity within the whole. *New Stones*, *Newton's Tones* of 1978 for instance, humorously references Land Art in the plastic fragments arranged across the gallery floor within a rectangular shape in a manner similar to Parker's arrangement of silver on the road waiting to be crushed. Rather than using materials with romantic associations, Cragg's colourful fragments reflect the overlooked debris of consumer society.³ Richard Wentworth has also incorporated rearranged and reconfigured found domestic objects since the late 1970s. Like Parker, there is a humour that runs through his works, not only in the way that the quirky is referenced, but also through the juxtaposition of things that suggest linguistic games or meanings beyond themselves.⁴ In the work of all three artists the sculptures refer to and explore the bonds between humans and their possessions.

However, unlike Cragg and Wentworth, destruction and transformation are the pivotal and defining points in much of Parker's work. This was particularly in evidence in the artist's book that she published in 1993 called *Lost Volume: A Catalogue of Disasters*, with photographs by Edward Woodman.⁵ In this, particular objects, including a medal, a box camera and a silver cup had apparently been squashed between the pages, leaving their impressions on the covering paper.

In 1998 the Serpentine Gallery in London held a large retrospective of her work that included a collaboration with Tilda Swinton for *The Maybe* as well as many individual works and installations. These included suspended works like *Thirty Pieces of Silver* and *Matter and What it Means*, represented and altered objects like *Avoided Object* of 1995, tarnishes and drawings including ones taken from a communion lamp in 1998 and from Charles Dickens' knife, and photograms of feathers taken from clothing and pillows of famous people. If one groups these works, a rough taxonomy could be a) destructive forces brought to bear on common

objects, b) things destroyed by famous/unexpected objects, c) borrowed fame appropriated either through traces taken from objects or through scrutinising actual objects owned or used by someone famous, and lastly d) appropriation of fragments that have touched/supported famous things.⁶ All of these imply a narrative, where the previous life of each object still speaks in its transformed state. What is also revealed is the subjective meanings that all humans project onto their personal things, and how objects can 'stand in' for, or retain an apparent resonance of a person even after they have gone.⁷ When combined with their titles, the elements in Parker's installations invite one to reconsider an apparently 'natural' system of values.

Parker has discussed how she likes to look at the world sideways. One of her favourite paintings is Holbein's *Ambassadors*, where the skull has to be viewed from an angle to see it in its true, symbolic perspective.⁸ Certainly if one looks at the diverse ways of destroying things to create new meanings, both in *Thirty Pieces of Silver* and other works like *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, (1991), or indeed *Shared Fate* (1998) the unique perspective of the sideways glance are there. *Cold Dark Matter* was made from a garden shed filled with things that she had collected. The army was then brought in to explode it, after which the charred fragments were collected and suspended in a formal arrangement around a light in the Chisenhale Gallery in London, so that the shadows played on the walls. *Shared Fate* was a collection of objects that had been cut by the guillotine blade that beheaded Marie Antoinette, arranged like documentary evidence of their destruction.

Photographs housed at the Serpentine archive show her in the workshop at Madame Tussauds in London, working the chosen objects up and down against the steady blade.⁹ Other photographs depict her working on other projects for the Serpentine exhibition. She is shown at the Tower of London, cutting into a pillow with a sword outside on the roof surrounded by castellation, discussing ideas with the Keeper of Ravens and working with others in the store of antiquities on armour.¹⁰ These processes were important in leading to the final installations, where objects have been acted upon after discussions with others from different areas of specialisation, each of whom brought their everyday professional activities and understandings to the works.¹¹

Thirty Pieces of Silver and the meaning of things

The budget that Parker was given to make *Thirty Pieces of Silver* was small, so that the silverware that she collected from auctions and garage

sales were inexpensive.¹² However, unlike earlier collectors, like Louis Molay-Bacon or the Goncourt brothers from the nineteenth century, her collection of objects scavenged from the urban sphere was not a protest against the forces of modernity, or a recuperation of particular aesthetic values or aristocratic civilisation. Rather than preserving them in their original state, Parker wanted to inflict a ‘cartoon’ death where characters like Tom and Jerry are flattened by unlikely means and then spring back to life, or the orchestrated dramas in Charlie Chaplin films.¹³ Like them, the objects were not meant to cease to exist. The man who operated the steamroller was an extra from Carry On films who enjoyed the task so much he went back and forth over the silver four times.¹⁴ Because the objects had been so cheaply made, with some having been cast, they reacted in different ways. Some were reduced to powder where as others like the cutlery remained fairly three dimensional.¹⁵

The catalogue for the Ikon exhibition showed four of the series of paired photographs of the objects before and after their destruction, and the centre page spread was given to two large photographs of the steamroller flattening the silver. After being shown at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, the exhibition moved first to Manchester and then to the Aspex Gallery in Portsmouth in May of 1989. The publicity for this was a sheet folded into three with the paired before and after photographs, and two cards one with a steamroller part way down the line of silver, and the other with the installation shot.¹⁶ The three-part narrative, with the destructive act as emotional peak was even more obvious in the publicity for *Cold Dark Matter, An Exploded View*, which showed the narrative on one card, with three images one above the other. First the shed was shown in the gallery, then mid-explosion outside, and then the final installation of charred fragments back in Chisenhale gallery.¹⁷ The photographs in both the catalogue and the publicity for the exhibitions document specific moments of the process. We do not see the intervening stages, do not experience the performative crushing or exploding, and there is a notable absence of people, but these documents have become iconic images that frame the works as a whole.

Like the works of many of Parker’s peers, such as Rachel Whiteread, or artists from the 1970s who made work outside institutional spaces like Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Smithson or Richard Long, the photographic documentation of *Thirty Pieces of Silver* is intrinsic to the work. It forms part of the documentary evidence of its making and is integral with its interpretation.¹⁸ In the case of Rachel Whiteread’s *House* of 1993, all that now exists is photographic documentation and the interpretive criticism. In *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, unlike many of Parker’s later works, the

photographs provide a narrative. However, this is not like the arrested narratives of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as in some of the paintings by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, where the story is depicted at the defining psychological point after which there is no going back but the future is also not certain. It is also unlike the final destruction of *House*, in that the flattening of the silver is not the final scene. The resolution to the narrative is in the installation, which she has described as a residue of the process.¹⁹

The twelve pairs of photographs that showed the objects first in the home and then after their destruction provide punctuation points to the story but also subvert expected narratives in a capitalist society, where there is normally improvement through effort or purchase.²⁰ Whereas the objects in the first images have been obviously arranged to look cared-for in the home, there is an almost theatrical quality to the nonchalance in which those that have been flattened have been abandoned by an outside door, thrust childlike up the side of a downpipe or left in a grass-clipping hod.

In the first of the photographic images, the objects are shown in suitable surroundings that reflect their status in the home. Each shines though constant care, and is positioned and used in the way that ensures positive reciprocity between object, function and owner. Tom Leddy has argued that from early childhood our first aesthetic experience is about cleanliness and tidiness.²¹ We absorb this, and strive through polishing, dusting and other caressing movements to keep our special things at a constant optimum state, and to arrange them in ways that suit our notions of taste and order, and that add to the narratives that we build around ourselves. Silver naturally tarnishes, but in our efforts to keep nature at bay and suggest the home as a civilized place this, along with all traces of inappropriate dirt, is repeatedly removed.²² Each object, set in its place alongside others, plays its part in creating the mesh of meaning for the owner that he or she develops over time in the making of the home. This is our part of the world that, as Bachelard – a philosopher that Parker admires – Husserl and Merleau-Ponty have argued, is carried around within us, and is understood through bodily interaction, memories and imagination.²³

Parker has said that silver is a commemorative material and that these objects represent landmarks in people's lives.²⁴ Silver cutlery is for best, so is kept in a box – provided by the manufacturer – to be brought out for special meals, where they can add to the ritual. In her photographs they are shown on a well-polished table and ready to be arranged for a special meal. Silver cups that have been won celebrate achievements, and in

Parker's photographs they are shown high up on a shelf, grouped together to reinforce the prowess that has led to their gain, and where they can be referred to in conversation. A wire fruit bowl sits by itself on a sideboard containing an abundance of fresh fruit, and a small silver vase contains beautiful, carefully chosen flowers. Norman Bryson has discussed that in pre-industrial still life paintings, these objects containing assortments of fruits and hot-house flowers would have been a display of prodigality and waste. However, in a society where industrialisation and rapid, reliable transport have made what had been expensive items cheap, these displays of surplus wealth are no longer confined to the very rich, but retain both class and associative overtones of 'making special'.²⁵

There is an aspirational aspect to silver plate, as played to on the websites for Sheffield Plate, which discuss its Royal warrants, its history linked with Queen Victoria and its use on the Titanic.²⁶ When transferred into the home, this bourgeois respectability was designed to be reflected onto the owner, with all the oppressive desire recounted by Alan Bennett in his monologue 'An Ideal Home', where his childhood recollections of working class life in Leeds in the 1940s were articulated. Parker has discussed how she wanted to squash bourgeois pretensions out of the objects.

Silver plate has the appearance of silver, but is in fact a thin layer of silver coating a nickel alloy. To make the objects there is a necessary violence tempered with sufficient delicacy so that they could be made with minimal material.²⁷ The drop forging, spinning and stamping would have been hot, noisy and unrelenting. These were not unique items made by a skilled individual over many days, but industrially produced in their thousands, after which they were chosen, bought, given or won, and then absorbed into an individual's narrative.

However, the things in *Thirty Pieces of Silver* had been discarded. They no longer played their part within a constructed personal narrative that reflected back onto the owner. Parker had been incorporating everyday things since 1984, which was in part triggered by having her studio in her home in Leytonstone, where she worked with things to hand.²⁸ But she also retained childhood memories of the religious relics that had surrounded her family. Although different, our relation to special things does give them an aura of ritual and projected values that are constantly reinforced through touch, sight and communication.

From destruction to rebirth

Brian Sewell has described the destructive act as pure performance art. He and others have linked it to the work of Richard Long.²⁹ Certainly the neat curved line of small elements, set out in the countryside with trees behind does suggest Long's arrangements of stones, but the ensuing rumbling, noisy, crushing force makes an ironic counterbalance to his light-touch, eco-friendly lines set out in places seemingly devoid of human habitation. The process of destruction for *Thirty Pieces of Silver* was also unlike Parker's later acts of flattening silver, where she wanted the result to be more precise and symmetrical. For these later works, like *Endless Column III* or *Alter Ego, (Tea with Unconscious)* 2012, she worked in a welding factory that had a two hundred and fifty ton press. The original objects had to be of better quality than before so that they would not break through the exerted forces, but this method gave her greater control over the end results. The crushing gave all the objects a shared fate and unifying narrative that released them from their previous binding conventions.³⁰ The destructive acts also create a dialogue between Parker's works in the mind of the viewer, so that *Alter Ego* of 2004, where one flattened silver jug is juxtaposed against one that is pristine looks forward to *Alter Ego, (Tea with Unconscious)* and back to the original destruction performed to create *Thirty Pieces of Silver*.

For the exhibition at the Ikon Gallery in 1988, Parker had thought about continuing with the idea of hanging each item individually from the ceiling, as she had done in her previous works like *Fleeting Monument* of 1986. However, the glass and raked ceiling of the gallery made this impossible, so she made a grid structure from which each pool/coin was hung, allowing three feet between. This meant that the audience could walk through it in a manner similar to the changing perceptual perspectives that one has in the home. Since this installation, both the formation and the gaps between the pools have been altered according to situation, and indeed the effect changes according to light and surrounding architecture. One critic, Sarah Kent, commented on the difference between seeing the work at the Hayward Gallery, where the Brutalist architecture and lack of light made the work seem heavy, and at the Serpentine Gallery in 1998, where it was hung in the light filled West gallery – incidentally in a formation of four by seven plus two.³¹ Tate Britain no longer allows the audience to move within it – children kept becoming caught in the threads - and they hang it with only one foot between each coin.³²

Moving through the installation also allows the audience to experience the changing spatial relations between body and sculptural elements, and

between each pool and the whole. Although the order of the pools changes at each exhibition, the ones with the most interesting objects are distributed evenly.³³ Like the minimalist works of Judd, there is an additional, non-hierarchical aspect to the installation, where the elements are combined so that they make up an overall, geometric shape, suggesting a single thing that is open and extended.³⁴ However Parker, like many British sculptors of her generation, has pushed against the sculptural block. As one meanders between the suspended groups, the air currents make them waft, causing a light metallic tapping as the individual pieces jostle with each other. These tinkling, shining, moving 'lily pads' of things reflect back to the viewer the memories of their previous lives and become a catalyst for stories and personal associations.³⁵

Each deflated object has its place within its pool. There is a plan that is followed at each hang, but although suggesting domestic display, where every object has its place and is kept at its peak, here the arrangements negate the relationship with the real.³⁶ In *Thirty Pieces of Silver* there is a self-conscious, in-between state, where the former lives of the individual objects are legible but the flattening and display strategies reference those in art. In the opening section to the *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard wrote about the power of the imagination, where the function of the real and that of the unreal need to cooperate in order to receive the psychic benefit of poetry. Just as Parker has said that she likes the ideas of the indefinable, of the space between absence and presence, and to glance at the world from different angles, he wrote that poetry takes place on the margins, where it can charm and disturb. The light flickers both off the silver surfaces and the threads, reflecting both the physical fact of being suspended, but also suggesting the idea of being in suspension.³⁷

Over the period of time of an exhibition, the objects gradually tarnish, so that they move from optimum state to one where the surface reflects less well. Parker has discussed this constant change through the action of natural forces as being a metaphor for life.³⁸ But, the Tate cares for and preserves all of their works of art. After each exhibition every element is polished and stored, and at each hang, again there is a last minute polish.³⁹ Parker has commented on the irony that having destroyed the objects, they are now kept in a plastisote lined tray with a red tarnish proof cloth spread over the top, and have teams of people caring for them.⁴⁰

When Parker was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1997, the catalogue discussed the variety of ways that she had used to destroy objects. In explanation, she wrote – 'I am interested with ambivalence, with opposites, with inhaling and exhaling, things falling and things rising, things disintegrating and coming back together again...with killing them

CORNELIA PARKER'S THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER FOR ART AND
DESTRUCTION



Fig 3-1 Cornelia Parker, *30 Pieces of Silver*, 1988-1989. Copyright Tate 2012. Courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

off, as if they were in cartoon comics, and resurrecting them, so that one set of references is negated as a new one takes its place'. She discussed this as a 'repositioning'.⁴¹

Having endured the forces of creation, being cherished by individuals and then crushed, they now remain in a state of collective suspension so that the public can put their own stories and memories onto the *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, while perhaps also considering broader ideas about the cycle of life and death.

NOTES

¹ The exhibition ran from 26 November 1988 to 7 January 1989. I would like to thank the Ikon Gallery for sending me a catalogue.

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCv52LTMFos>.

³ Helmut Friedel, ed., *Anthony Cragg. Material_Object_Form*. (Munich: Cantz Verlag, 1995), p. 60.

⁴ For an interesting discussion about Cornelia Parker's influences, see Jessica Morgan, 'Matter and What It Means', in *Cornelia Parker*, (Boston: ICA, 2000), pp. 11-39, pp. 11-15. For influences also see Lisa Tickner, 'A Strange Alchemy: Cornelia Parker', *Art History*, (26:3, 2003), pp. 364-391.

⁵ Cornelia Parker, *Lost Volume: A Catalogue of Disasters*, photography by Edward Woodman, (London: Book Works, 1993)

⁶ The exhibition ran from 12 May to 14 June, 1998. It was the largest survey exhibition of her work in London to date. See Press Release for the exhibition. I would like to thank the Serpentine Gallery for letting me see their archive for Cornelia Parker, and Clare Colvin for organising all the material for me to view. I made this taxonomy from the exhibition labels.

⁷ For an interesting discussion see Darian Leader, 'The Double Life of Objects', in *Cornelia Parker: Perpetual Canon*, (Stuttgart: Kerber Verlag, 2004), pp. 72-77.

⁸ Stuart Cameron in conversation with Cornelia Parker, in *Cornelia Parker: Avoided Object*, (Cardiff: Chapter, 1996), pp. 55-69, p. 63.

⁹ See photographs housed at Serpentine Archive, Folder: Cornelia Parker, May-June, 1998. Photographs by Gautier Deblonde.

¹⁰ See photographs and contact prints housed at the Serpentine Archive, Folder: Cornelia Parker: May-June 1998.

¹¹ See letters sent from Lisa Corrin, the curator of the Serpentine exhibition to various scientists, keepers, technicians etc. Serpentine Gallery Archive, Correspondence folder related to exhibition 1998.

¹² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcm5e_lv0_8

¹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCv52LTMFos>

¹⁴ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcm5e_lv0_8

¹⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCv52LTMFos>

¹⁶ See National Art Library information File: Cornelia Parker. Photographs by Edward Woodman.

¹⁷ See National Art Library information File: Cornelia Parker. Photographs by Hugo Glendinning.

¹⁸ See Rosalind Krauss, 'Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary', *Artforum*, (November 1971), pp. 68-71 for an interesting discussion of the use of photography as documentary evidence.

¹⁹ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcm5e_lv0_8

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²⁰ For a discussion of this, see Antonia Payne, 'Neither From nor Towards', in *Cornelia Parker, Avoided Object*, (Cardiff: Chapter, 1996), pp. 39-50.

²¹ See Yuriko Saito *Everyday Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 153.

²² Yuriko Saito *Everyday Aesthetics*, pp. 154-155.

²³ See for instance: Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon, 1994), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), and Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., New York: Humanities Press, 1967).

²⁴ Jessica Morgan, 'Matter and What It Means', p. 16.

²⁵ See Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked. Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), pp. 96-98.

²⁶ <http://www.sheffield-cutlery.com/titanic.html>.

²⁷ I would like to thank Helen Makin at Coventry University for explaining the processes to me.

²⁸ Kester Rattenbury, 'Definitely Maybe', *Building Design*, (18 September 1998), n.p. Viewed in Cornelia Parker Press Folder 57, Serpentine Gallery Archive.

²⁹ Brian Sewell, 'Maybe Not the Greatest Show in Town', *Evening Standard*, (May 28, 1998), pp. 28-29. Adrian Searle, 'What the Butler Saw', *The Guardian*, (19 May 1998), n.p. Both viewed in Cornelia Parker Press Folder 57, Serpentine Gallery.

³⁰ Guy Brett, 'The Maybe', in *Cornelia Parker: Avoided Object*, (Cardiff: Chapter, 1996), pp. 11-19, p. 18.

³¹ Sarah Kent, 'Here's the Thing. Cornelia Parker's Objets d'Art', *Time Out*, (20 May, 1998), n.p. viewed in Cornelia Parker Press Folder 57, Serpentine Gallery Archive.

³² Lisa Tickner, 'A Strange Alchemy', p. 372.

³³ I would like to thank Tamar Maor, Sculpture Conservator at Tate Britain for explaining to me the processes of hanging and care of the objects. Email to author 09.03.12.

³⁴ See Donald Judd 'Specific Objects', 1965 in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900-2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 824-828.

³⁵ The link to Monet's paintings has been made by a number of art historians including Lisa Tickner, 'A Strange Alchemy,' p. 371.

³⁶ Email from Tamar Maor to author 09.03.12.

³⁷ Cornelia Parker has discussed this in relation to the instability of meaning in life, see Lisa G. Corrin in discussion with Cornelia Parker, in Lisa G. Corrin, *Cornelia Parker*, (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1998), n.p.

³⁸ Lisa G. Corrin in discussion with Cornelia Parker, in Lisa G. Corrin, *Cornelia Parker*, n.p.

³⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIUefdrGhVs>.

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⁴⁰ Tamar Maor, email to author 09.03.12. Lisa Tickner, 'A Strange Alchemy', p. 375.

⁴¹ *The Turner Prize*, (London: Tate, 1997), n.p.

CHAPTER FOUR

BREAKING AS MAKING: A METHODOLOGY FOR VISUAL WORK REFLECTED IN WRITING

Joanna Sperryn-Jones

Mary Anne Francis suggests; “that an artist’s writing should aspire to the condition of well, yes, art” (2009: 3). As an artist, rather than analysing the thinking within my artwork I attempt to reflect the approach of artwork in writing. ‘Breaking’ is the main theme running through my artwork and writing and in addition both have developed to use breaking as a methodology. Since the methodology and subject are both ‘breaking’ it is difficult to distinguish in writing where one stops and the other starts; both contribute to understanding the experience of the other.

To make writing I literally physically cut up previous versions, add new additions on post-it notes and completely rearrange it, before then rewriting. As this practice has developed I realised there is also a strong theme of breaking on a philosophical level. This revolves around Benjamin’s allegory, Derrida’s break and Frey’s fragmentary as constituting a different order to that based on the whole. Through these philosophies of breaking I will propose a space for making art that reflects the elements of risk, uncertainty and paradox.

Breaking bones

The subject of breaking first arose in my work in September 2005 after I broke my wrist very badly followed shortly after this by breaking my hand and then some ribs in February 2006. In May 2006 I broke my collarbone, followed by breaking it again in both June and August taking until the following Easter 2007 to recover. During this time I was not able to continue with the sculpture I had been making and when I did return to making sculpture I found I could only relate to previous work in my studio by breaking it. Following this my artwork shifted towards a focus on breaking and I felt my experiences of breaking bones influenced this. Finding this shift from making to breaking had occurred for others after injury I began to research experiences of breaking in the body, sculpture

and relationships between the two. I was interested in why being injured creates such an imposing break on your work, be this art or academic.



Figure 4-1: A page from my sketchpad 2006: unfired china twig, Japanese crutched trees, my wrist x-ray, Hiroshima.

In “Broken Arm” Henri Michaux observes,

A while ago, on the very spot where the accident took place, right after the fracture, when I didn’t know yet that my right elbow was broken, the spirit of my body had silently, secretly deserted it (1994: 244).

Oliver Sacks described his broken leg as a “corpse leg” (1990: 88) and that, “...it was, in effect, mortified: it was neutrally, functionally and existentially dead” (1990: 83). In *Fracture: adventures of a broken body* Anne Oakley notes that, “It’s a shocking to experience part of one’s body as lifeless flesh when one ‘knows’ it isn’t” (2007: 32).

Kristeva suggests the abject is caused by what makes our individual subjectivity ambiguous. She suggests,

A decaying body, lifeless... the corpse represents fundamental pollution. A body without soul, a non-body, disquieting matter, it is to be excluded from God’s *territory*... (1982: 109).

The broken limb is perceived as dead although ambiguously still attached to the body. Kristeva states,

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (1982: 4).

Nick Mansfield surmises, “What abjection unleashes, then, is the internal ambiguity and uncertainty that logical systems try to deny or disguise” (2000: 85). I found that my alienation from my broken limbs made me question the boundaries of my body and how I thought about myself in relation to my body.

Mansfield suggests that whereas Freud and Lacan looked to create “stability, order and a fixed and constant identity”, Kristeva’s abjection offered the “ability to theorise subjectivity as incomplete and discontinuous, as a process rather than a fixed structure” (2000: 80). Injury lends a glimpse of the structures that constitute our subjectivity. This indicates a potentially positive and powerful element to physically breaking which I would have preconceived as being predominately about loss.

Breaking writing

One of my supervisors commented on my early writing that any paragraph from any section could easily be placed into another section and that themes reoccurred throughout. Another supervisor suggested I moved away from the computer and worked physically with the text on paper. Once I started cutting, rearranging and adding post-it notes I realised a distinct similarity with the processes I use in my sketchpad. In my sketchpad I collect drawings, photos, material experiments and sketch ideas for new work. I stick these in with masking tape so that I can rearrange them on a daily basis. I bring things together for numerous reasons; it could be disparate things which have a similarity or alternatively elements that feel uncomfortable together.

Once I viewed rearranging the writing as akin to my sketchpad process I ceased to worry about finding a definitive structure and instead perceived the process as playful and under continual review. I started to add new elements on coloured paper or post it notes. The continual restructuring is not arbitrary but is done with a sense of play where different juxtapositions of the content create new tensions to explore. It reflects the



Figure 4-2: My writing April 2010.



Figure 4-3: My writing July 2010.

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Figure 4-4: My writing November 2010.



Figure 4-5: My writing November 2011.



Figure 4-6: The version of the methodology written from the post-it notes.



Figure 4-7: Thesis March 2012.

way I make art. Mary Anne Francis suggests; “that an artist’s writing should aspire to the condition of well, yes, art” (2009: 3).

I initially found it difficult to bring theoretical texts into my writing because it altered the nature of the writing in a way that I felt did not reflect the interaction of theory with my visual work. The theory had a tendency to take over and dominate the structure of the writing. I see theory as containing a stronger striated element¹; there is frequently a far off approach and a fixed element. When I introduced this theory to my writing it altered the approach away from the visual work. When I started to write notes from theoretical texts onto post-it notes and then add them where ever they seemed most relevant I found this broke up the structure of the theory and prevented it from dominating the structure of my writing.

Figures 2-7 show the development of this process over the last two years. It is a process of repeatedly cutting and juxtaposing that at first fragments into chaotic complexity but goes through this to create changing new constellations.

The Cut-up technique

The cut-up technique starts with Dada. The first known use of the cut-up technique in writing is thought to be Tristan Tzara. “At a surrealist rally in the 1920s Tristan Tzara the man from nowhere proposed to create a poem on the spot by pulling words out of a hat” (Burroughs 1962). Gerhard Richter describes Tzara’s method:

Sounds are relatively easy to put together, rhythmically and melodically, in chance combinations; words are more difficult. Words a burden of meaning designed for practical use, and do not readily submit to a process of random arrangement. It was however exactly this that Tzara wanted. He cut newspaper articles into tiny pieces, none of them longer than a word, put the words in a bag, shook them well, and allowed them to flutter onto a table. The arrangement (or lack of it) in which they fell constituted a ‘poem’, a Tzara poem, and was intended to reveal something of the mind and personality of the author (1978: 54).

William Burroughs extensively used the technique in his work and was influenced by Brion Gysin:

¹ See Deleuze & Guattari (2004b, 1980: 544)

In the summer of 1959 Brion Gysin painter and writer cut newspaper articles into sections and rearranged the sections at random. Minutes to Go resulted from this initial cut-up experiment. Minutes to Go contains unedited unchanged cut ups emerging as quite coherent and meaningful prose. The cut-up method brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years. And used by the moving and still camera. In fact all street shots from movie or still cameras are by the unpredictable factors of passersby and juxtaposition cut-ups. And photographers will tell you that often their best shots are accidents . . . writers will tell you the same. The best writing seems to be done almost by accident but writers until the cut-up method was made explicit— all writing is in fact cut ups. I will return to this point—had no way to produce the accident of spontaneity. You cannot will spontaneity. But you can introduce the unpredictable spontaneous factor with a pair of scissors (Burroughs 1962).

Important here is the introduction of chance in the structuring of new writing through breaking to counteract established orders. In my work the continual restructuring is not arbitrary but is done with a sense of play and awareness of infinite possibilities. Burroughs observes that, “words have lost meaning and life through years of repetition” (1962). This sense is also acknowledged in allegory, “Words, devices and narrative worlds fossilise with historical accretions, which allegory chips away...” (Hunter 2010: 266). Whereas the realm of the symbol assumes a unity between form and content, allegory makes us aware of the arbitrariness of this relationship. Lash and Urry note how symbols are built up over time by the ritual repetition of a particular until it becomes a universal and so gains in significance becoming a classifier rather than a classified. Allegory seeks to break this build up (1994: 50).

My post-it note formations at first become increasingly chaotic but through the process of reordering new paths are established creating new coherent narratives. For this reason the process of breaking is not always evident in the final version because it has been an ongoing process of breaking and making. The process of fragmenting and juxtaposing both opens new creative possibilities and a way of representing the fragmentary way in which we process lived experience.

A methodology of breaking

Lash and Urry note Charles Taylor’s two main secular sources of the modern self; one is Enlightenment reason and in reaction to this an aesthetic, romantic and hermeneutic trend. The latter, a rejection of the former, involved, “a search for the ‘original’ ‘uncorrupted’ symbols

before the fall into excess mediation, commodification and the like” (1994: 48). In rejecting the abstract logic and politics of the public sphere (1994: 49), this latter turned to nature and later aesthetics as a moral source outside of the subject but registered “through languages which resonate *within* him or her, the grasping of an order which is inseparably indexed to personal vision” (1994: 52). Lash and Urry, via Taylor, suggest there is an additional aesthetic source of the modern self; allegory.

In *The Arcades Project* Walter Benjamin states,

...allegory has to do, precisely in its destructive furore, with dispelling the illusion that proceeds from all “given order,” whether of art or of life: the illusion of totality or of organic wholeness which transfigures that order and makes it seem enduring. And this is the progressive tendency of allegory. (2002: 331 J57, 3).

Naomi Stead further observes,

For Benjamin, violence and destruction are able to ‘shatter the continuum of history’, leaving in their wake a fresh and demystified field of fragments and detritus. The act of destruction places everything in new juxtapositions, shatters old relationships and opens history up for examination. ...criticism in the name of allegory is a process of conceptually ‘ruining’ the structures of affirmative argument and then of working through the rubble (2003: 10).

Lynette Hunter reflects that allegory insists that “the language human beings employ is limited: it can never fully or exactly describe the actual world” (2010: 266). I think this is the point I reached when I realised that my writing was using a similar process to my sketchpad; I was no longer attempting to find one path through that would describe how things are but instead realised the productivity of play and multiple possibilities. In reflecting on Benjamin, Howard Caygill proposes;

The allegorical method of philosophising pursues a strategy of representation quite different from that of the symbolic: it departs from a crisis of representation, seeking to construct constellations out of the material of the past (2010: 245).



Figure 4-8: A planned section of my thesis on damage. Digital backup December 2010.

Buck-Morss discussing Benjamin states his view that allegorists heaped emblematic images on top of each other with arbitrariness and a lack of coherence that could make nature that previously appeared as an organic whole seem arbitrary, fragmentary and lifeless. In addition, “the coherence of language is similarly ‘shattered’”. Meanings are not only multiple, they are ‘above all’ antithetical” (1991: 173). In digitally backing up from post-it notes I took a series of photos and then reassembled them, thereby creating a second layer of breaking to the image. The result, for me, accentuates the observation of Benjamin that allegorists could make nature that previously appeared as an organic whole seem arbitrary, fragmentary and lifeless. Despite this seemingly

pessimistic outlook Benjamin also recognised the creativity of the process and I think this is evident in the photos of my thesis in process:

Baudelaire regards art's workshop in itself [as a site of confusion,] as the 'apparatus of destruction' which the allegories so often represent. In the notes he left for a preface to a projected third edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, he writes: 'Do we show the public...the mechanism behind our effects? ...Do we display all the rags, the paint, the pulleys, the chains, the alterations, the scribbled over proof sheets – in short, all the horrors that make up the sanctuary of art?' (Benjamin 2002: 330 J56, 4).

Derrida outlines his concept of the 'break' or 'rupture' in, "Structure, sign and play" (2001). He proposes that for most of history there has always been a centre, an organising principle, to the structures of thought. History until the point of rupture has been a series of substitution of one centre for another, be this of God, rationality, the unconscious.

The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance and organise the structure - one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganised structure – but above all to make sure that the organising principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure (2001: 352).

Derrida defines the 'rupture' or 'break' as the point when the "structurality of structure had to begin to be thought" (2001: 353). This critiques the very idea of a structure organised around a central organising principle and creates the question of how to move forward from here. He observes two reactions to this state:

Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean affirmation, that is the joyous *affirmation* of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the noncentre otherwise than a loss of the centre.* And it plays without security (Derrida 2001: 369).

This latter possibility he proposes continues to treat the previous concepts as tools but without attributing any truth value to them. He also observes that, "The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely" (2001: 354). He turns to Levi-Strauss's idea of *bricolage*. The *bricoleur* is someone who

appropriates any tools at hand, and regardless of their previous use tests by trial and error to adapt or discard them. He observes,

In effect, what appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a centre, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia* (2001:361).

Claire Lofting wrote a paper, “Thinking Through Ellipses” (2003) reflecting two different, but related, styles of writing in dyslexic students. In the first the student seems to struggle to get words out,

Sentences are often broken. Words are missing...Phrases and sentences might form intriguing fragments but there are usually gaps between the fragments. This kind of elliptical writing often contains startling phrases and flashes of insight (2003: 1).

By comparison the second,

...writes prolifically. Often the idea, argument or project is presented again and again and again. Each time it is restated from a slightly different point of view and each reiteration might include slightly different material but the writer seems to have tremendous difficulty explaining or developing ideas, sequencing ideas or building an argument.the writer often makes exciting connections between ideas and material drawn from different disciplines (2003: 1).

She notes that,

...both styles of writing are elliptical but in different ways. An ellipsis is both a kind of flattened circle and the omission of parts of a word or sentence (2003: 2).

She goes on to propose that there is thinking contained within these gaps and this can allow leaps to be made across them:

However, in both styles of writing we see leaps and juxtapositions between words and ideas. It is these leaps across gaps, across spaces, across ideas drawn from different disciplines, which can be breathtaking and truly creative. I want to suggest that there *is* a lot of thinking going on in these gaps between words, sentences, fragments, concepts and ideas drawn from different disciplines (2003: 2).

Frequently when I read text I start paying more attention to the patterns the gaps between the words create as they join up vertically running down

the page. When I was younger I used to draw red lines down these gaps, it made the writing more difficult to read but, for me, doing this expressed how I felt about reading the text. Being distracted by the physical gaps between words is a common dyslexic characteristic. Lofting's insight extends this inability to ignore the physical gaps into an inability to ignore gaps on many different planes. As the gaps between ideas and concepts form a dominating element of the structuring a philosophical exploration of the gaps reflects the physical one between words.

In reading feedback from a paper I had written I couldn't face opening the file for hours. It was as if every cell in my body avoided it; I could not face engaging with it, to be in the middle of it, to be caught up in it. Remaining on the outside, skirting round the wall like the palace in Japan I can stroll calmly. I fear entering. I feel it is going to make my head hurt, I fear the stress of piecing it together. I fear the hundred different moves and orders and options my brain will leap through when I read. I can't remember what I wrote but I fear how much I will need to change it. I fear entering into that process of change, of reordering, of restructuring. I fear being lost in it, like being lost in a maze but not, because a maze stands still and you only explore one route through at a time. It's more like a rhizomatic maze, in pieces, with glimpses from above. The experience is not only of the world chaos but as you enter writing you lose the order in your head. Your self enters this state of fragmentation.

Nicholas Burbules describes the aporetic encounter as, "...making one's way through a labyrinth with no clear lines to follow. Uncertainty, difficulty, and discomfort in such an encounter are intrinsic" (2000: 179). There are similarities between his observations on aporia and Lofting's descriptions above. He notes of aporia, "...the etymology: *a-poros* means lacking a *poros*: a path, a passage, a way" (2000: 173). And goes on to state, "...a different kind of aporia is to have lost one's way, to be confused; there are *too many* paths from which to choose" (2000: 179). Burbules suggests it leads to,

A way of thinking, a way of writing, that contains multiple lines of association; that is organized not only linearly, but laterally; that follows, not a single hierarchical outline, but a labyrinth of continually returning, criss-crossing pathways. Each particular step or link within a rhizomatic whole can be conceived as a line between two points, but the *overall* pattern is not linear, because there is no beginning and end, no center and periphery, to be traced (2000: 174).

The rhizomatic structure would provide an explanation of why the second type of dyslexic student that Lofting describes writes in ellipses,

exploring the same argument from different points of view or with slightly different knowledge. I'm not sure that paths are a good analogy. This suggests that you make different paths but implies in imagination a static context and content. The analogy is wrong because it suggests the path is the mobile element when in fact everything is mobile. He goes on to propose,

The picture of rhizomes, webs, and nets *begins* with the significance of the line, the link, as an object of study itself, not merely as a connection between two points. In this inversion, we do not start with the points, and then connect them; we start by thinking about *ways of connecting*, and regard points as the nodes of intersection where lines or links come together (2000: 175).

I wonder if actually it goes further than starting from connections and rather than thinking about connecting just two points is about applying different potential structures. In my dyslexic style of learning I have an immaculate memory for complex structures which I process as whole pictures not sequences. I cannot, however, remember specific details or points of knowledge. I think when different structures are brought together dyslexic learning styles can compare them easily or imagine information reordered into different structures and see the implications. I am acutely aware when I structure a text of the hundreds of possible structures each creating different meaning. This is not paths through fixed information points but is more like a kaleidoscope where the pattern changes each time you twist. The structures are remembered and applied to the information which is imagined in numerous alternative structures.

Having emphasised an obvious bias to the fragmentary in my approach it is important to reinforce that the fragment exists in constant tension with the whole. Sophie Thomas observes that fragments, "...simultaneously raise and resist the possibility of totality and wholeness" (2008: 67). She notes that Camilia Elias's categorical genres of the fragment in a postmodern and post-structural context "seem to mediate actively between the fragment's state or mode as both fragment ('being') and fragmentary ('becoming')" (2008: 70). She suggests "Moreover, the dichotomy between *being* and *becoming* is not meant to be a rigid one but is deployed in order to elaborate a poetics of the fragment that is 'a poetics of intersection *par excellence*'" (2008: 69). This reminds me of Barthes 'pleasure of the text' being the edge between two different orders where, "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so" (1975: 6-7). Frey provides an alternative view of this tension which emphasises this:

In the face of the fragment, which puts wholeness in question, it is neither possible to give up wanting to understand nor certain whether the quest for meaning is meaningful. Here the doubting of meaning accompanies the quest for it (1996, 1989: 28).

Frey suggests that the fragment can only be approached from a discourse that is itself fragmentary. It could follow that the best way to understand the subject of breaking is through a methodology of breaking. Alternatively it could be that I became interested in breaking, not because of my experience of a broken arm, but because this experience shared common elements with the nature of art practice. I may never know which came first.

In her review of Camilia Elias's *The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Genre* Sophie Thomas suggests fragments are the natural setting of the philosophic mind, "They are important tools for thinking, indeed for thinking about thinking, and for representing the way we think about thinking" (2008: 67). She notes that Elias sees fragments not so much as a thing but as a force, it is what it does that is important, and she "is more interested in the place of the fragment in the metatextual discourse in which it so frequently participates" (2008: 68). Elizabeth Price's "sidekick" (2006), taken from her PhD, is a good example of this in practice. Her writing alternates between exploring the experience of making and the experience of writing. Initially writing on making draws you into the process until a reflection on the practice of writing creates uncertainty over the authority or 'truth' of the writing. There is a constant dialogue between text and metatext, between attempting to construct understanding and then revealing its constructedness. This creates uncertainty, making the familiar unfamiliar, and ultimately questions the entire way we construct knowledge. The breaks within Price's PhD writing and what Barthes describes may start from two "antipathetic codes" but the result is a dialogue between two different registers of thinking; the text and metatext or as Barthes suggests "the place where the death of language is glimpsed."

Breaking in art

For me, Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* 1960 (Goldberg 2004: 33) embodies the mind set to approach art making. Thomas Mc Evilly

suggests that in the “Leap” Klein “sought (among other things) to escape from all closed categories” (2005: 55). He notes that in Zen meditation

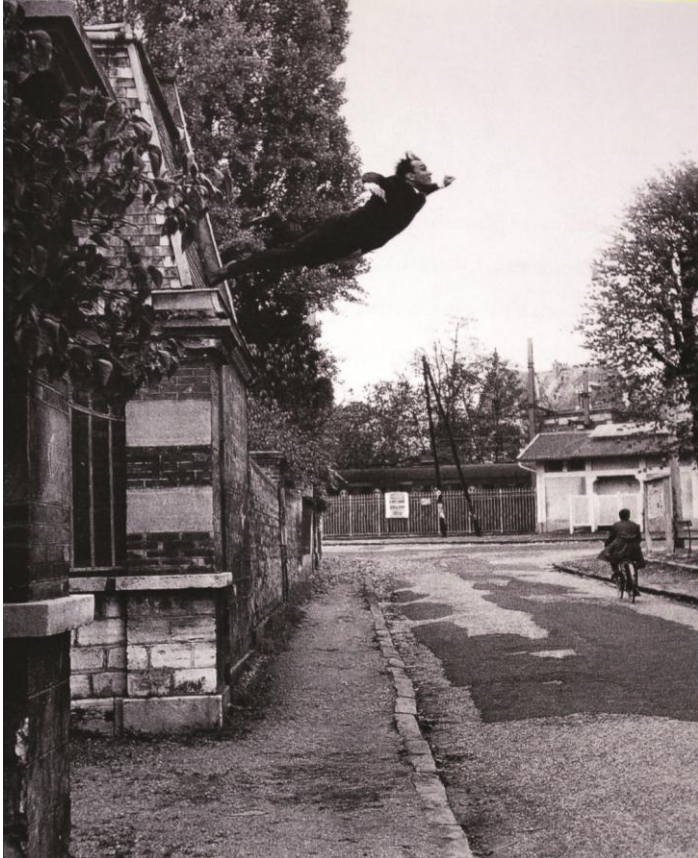


Figure 4-9: Yves Klein Leap into the Void, 5, Rue Gentil-Bernard, Fontenay-aux-Roses, Octobre 1960. © Yves Klein, ADAGP, Paris; Photo: Shunk-Kender © Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

‘The Leap into the Void’ represents the moment of going beyond all codes and interpretations, into the void where, as the Buddhist Prajnaparamita texts say “one stands firmly because one stands upon nothing” (2005: 57). Mc Evilly suggests that Klein attempts to move beyond current structures of thought by allowing cultural codes to annihilate each other through their semantic and ethical contradictions (2005: 57). Here he breaks away from security and moves beyond expectation to embrace the risk of uncertainty.

I did not intentionally bring a gendered element into my work; it appeared in the differing reactions to my work from men and women. *breaking* and *fragility* both raised issues on gender. Both installations create fragile spaces from bone china cast twigs and involve the participation of the viewer to activate the work. *fragility* creates fragile, precarious walls from the china twigs and involves manoeuvring through these tight passageways without breaking them. *Breaking* invites people to walk across a floor covered deep in china twigs. Underlying these installations is that one requires an active, assertive, destructive approach to the space and the other instils a passive, restrictive response. From the initial conception of *breaking* there was a definite split between women's and men's reaction to their expected participation in the work. Men almost universally relished the idea of destroying my china twigs whereas women were far more reserved and often horrified by the idea. *Fragility* inspired the reverse attitudes.

Afterwards many of the women who participated in *breaking* said to me how much the actual experience of walking on the twigs had made them question their previous expectations of the experience of breaking. They now viewed a powerful and positive element to it that they had previously not thought of. The act of walking on the china transformed women's perception of the breaking from being only about damage to realising the empowerment in the act. I was taken by surprise myself by this feeling when I first stepped onto them. In *The Creative Feminine and her Discontents* Juliet Miller proposes,

The acceptance and understanding of the positive aspects of aggression can bring about a change in a woman's self-experiencing, for by doing so she steps into uncharted territory (2008: 139).

This point of realisation involves not only becoming aware of the power in breaking but also challenges self-perception in previously having not acknowledged aggressive or destructive impulses. The awareness of the experience of power in breaking, and of the destructive forces within the self further encourages more acts of breaking. Gustav Metzger proposes,

Auto-destructive art seeks to be an instrument for transforming peoples' thought and feelings, not only about art, but wants to use art to change people's relations to themselves and society (1996: 27).



Figure 4-10: A still from my participative installation *breaking* 2007.

Before walking on the china twigs I already had some intuition that the experience of breaking contained some positive elements, even when this was breaking my bones, yet I was still surprised by the feelings of power. Further to this I had not previously thought how my attitude to breaking might be a gendered construct. It has had a similar affect on others and for me the state of uncertainty produced is the most positive aspect of breaking because in addition to risk there is temporary freedom from existing orders and the potential for change.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ICONOCLASM AS ART: CREATIVE GESTURES AND CRIMINAL ACTS INSIDE MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Helen E. Scott

There are various circumstances in which museums and galleries can become the scenes of iconoclastic acts.¹ A political agitator may slash a famous painting to draw greater attention to their cause, while a religious follower may wreck an installation that they deem to be blasphemous in an attempt to reverse the perceived offence. A bored child may scribble graffiti on an artwork if they are not sufficiently engaged by museum displays, while a pensioner may harm an avant-garde piece that they do not consider to merit inclusion alongside more traditional work. When art is placed on show in a gallery, it becomes inherently vulnerable to damage at the hands of the viewing public. Its ease of access makes it a potential target for groups and individuals from across society, spurred on by a diverse range of motivations and rationales. Sometimes even artists pose a threat.

On 28th February 1974 a young artist entered the Museum of Modern Art in New York, approached Picasso's 1937 oil painting *Guernica*, and spray-painted the words "KILL LIES ALL" across the bottom half of the canvas (Gamboni 2002, 124-125; Grogan 1984, 115; Kaufman 1974; Merryman and Elsen 2002, 569-571) (Fig.1). Although the specific meaning of this enigmatic message has always been unclear, its author, Tony Shafrazi, was determined to clarify the intention behind it. He had not marked the iconic painting with red spray paint because he was jealous of Picasso's global success, nor was he protesting from a conservative standpoint that *Guernica*, with its abstracted forms and austere palette, was unworthy of its critical praise. Shafrazi was not even demonstrating a

¹ An earlier version of this paper was published as: Scott, Helen E. 2009. Crime or creation?: Iconoclasm in the name of art. *St Andrews Journal of Art History and Museum Studies* 13: 25-34.

rejection of the artistic accomplishments of his predecessors. Instead, the artist said that he wanted “to bring the art absolutely up to date, to retrieve it from art history and give it life” (Gamboni 2002, 124). Shafrazi claimed that he was making the ‘hackneyed’ image relevant again, obliging people to look at it afresh. The original significance of the work was not in question, but Shafrazi felt that its impact and meaning had become muted over the years. Notions of revival and celebration were guiding principles for him. Believing that he was forging a creative dialogue with Picasso, Shafrazi did not consider himself to be damaging the painting, but enhancing it; his ‘*Guernica* action’, as he called it, was an innovative contribution to Picasso’s legacy. Essentially, Shafrazi’s gesture was a work of art in its own right.

This episode ignited what has since become an ongoing problem in the museum sector. Every so often an individual will attack a work on display and insist that this action constitutes a piece of conceptual or performance art. The phenomenon has blurred the boundaries between criminality and creativity, and proved remarkably difficult for museums and galleries to suppress. This paper investigates such acts of ‘artistic’ iconoclasm, tracing the roots of the problem before examining some key case studies. Assaults on works by Marcel Duchamp, Kasimir Malevich, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, the Chapman Brothers, Cy Twombly and Mark Rothko will be analysed. The difficulties that museums face in responding to incidents will be highlighted, and the paper will conclude with a set of recommendations.

The affinity between artistic creation and artistic destruction is an age-old romantic notion. As Brian Dillon says, the idea that “there is something subconscious and inspired at work is the cultural trope that links artist and iconoclast in a strange doubling” (Dillon 2004). Although this popular concept is vague, it is not without some substance. In their ‘Aesthetic Theory of Vandalism’ the psychologists Vernon Allen and David Greenberger state that the variables which make artistic creation a pleasurable experience are the same as those responsible for the enjoyment derived from destructive behaviour (Allen and Greenberger 1978, 309-321). These variables include the levels of complexity, novelty, patterning and intensity associated with the activity, as well as anticipation of the transformative process. The ‘Aesthetic Theory of Vandalism’ proposes that if someone deliberately damages an object, and it breaks in an interesting, tangible manner, with the end result conforming to aesthetically pleasing notions of physical arrangement, that person will feel a strong sense of satisfaction. In this regard, destructive and creative sensibilities not only overlap, but blur together. If Allen and Greenberger

are correct, it would be only natural for someone engaged in one pursuit to be attracted towards the other.

This idea appears to be supported by various aspects of the theory and practice that have shaped the development of modern art. Since the nineteenth century there have been avant-garde movements committed to renouncing the efforts of forebears in a resolute and even vitriolic way. In terms of context, this provides the initial foundations for acts of iconoclasm undertaken in the name of art.

David's pupils were among the first to talk about rejecting the art of the past through destruction. Maurice Quay allegedly called for the Louvre to be burned down on the grounds that museums corrupt artistic taste (Gombrich 1971, 38; Levitine 1978, 62). A century later, similarly rebellious sentiments were echoed by the Italian Futurists. "Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!", urged Filippo Marinetti in 1909, "Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded! ... Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!" (Marinetti 1909, 23). The Futurists believed that a prerequisite to artistic progression was the destruction of the past and its attributes: libraries, opera houses, theatres, and museums. In their vehement bid to revolutionise the cultural landscape, they did not wish to be influenced or compromised by the achievements of their predecessors, and they advocated that superseding artists should likewise cast Futurism aside. Kazimir Malevich responded appropriately in his 1915 manifesto, entitled 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The new painterly realism'. Proclaiming the birth of Suprematist art, Malevich announced: "We have abandoned futurism, and we, bravest of the brave, *have spat on the altar of its art*" (Malevich 1915, 124). In subsequent years, proponents of other avant-garde movements also turned hostile rhetoric towards their artistic forefathers – groups to adopt this stance included the Russian Constructivists and the Dadaists. However, the destruction of which they spoke remained metaphorical (Gamboni 1997, 258-259; Gamboni 2002, 108; Kastner 1997, 155).

In 1919 Marcel Duchamp took this oedipal conflict one step further when he created *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Fig.2). This work consists of a postcard image of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, to which Duchamp added a moustache and beard, and inscribed his new title. Duchamp returned to this concept of the doctored masterpiece at various points throughout his career, producing several versions of the work in different sizes. His preoccupation with the moustached *Mona Lisa* demonstrates his irreverent rejection of his forebears; yet this work also indicates something else. Although *L.H.O.O.Q.* was made by defacing a mass-produced reproduction

of Leonardo's work and not the real painting, it makes the implicit suggestion that mutilating an actual artwork could be a valid form of artistic expression.

Robert Rauschenberg finally broke the taboo of ruining an original artwork for his own creative purposes in 1953. To produce *Erased de Kooning Drawing, 1953*, Rauschenberg spent four weeks methodically erasing an image by Willem de Kooning, which he then framed and exhibited in New York (Fig.3). Years later, during an interview in May 1976, Rauschenberg spoke of the rationale behind his actions. He explained that while he had admired de Kooning, he felt compelled to "purge" himself of his artistic teaching, and *Erased de Kooning Drawing* was a physical manifestation of this endeavour (Gamboni 1997, 268). Rauschenberg's subversive act inevitably sparked controversy. As with most modern episodes of 'artistic' iconoclasm, he perceived that he was working collaboratively with the original artist. Crucially, though, Rauschenberg had acted with de Kooning's permission; he had been gifted a drawing for this very function.

Rauschenberg's experiment encouraged other artists to explore the creative potential of destruction, either disfiguring artworks that they owned or else mutilating their own artistic efforts. For instance, the Situationist Asger Jorn followed Rauschenberg's lead when he exhibited his series of 'modifications' in Paris in 1959. These works were kitsch paintings that Jorn had purchased in flea markets and over-painted with primitivist figures and abstract forms (Foster et al. 2004, 395-397; Shield 1998, xviii, 155). On the other hand, Lucio Fontana applied destructive practices to his own work. During the 1950s, he produced artworks with slits cut into the canvases, which he called *Tagli*, or Incisions (Gamboni 1997, 266). In another interpretation of the balance between creation and destruction, the sculptor Jean Tinguely constructed machines that were designed to auto-destruct in kinetic art 'happenings'. His best-known creation was *Homage to New York*, which exploded in flames on 17th March 1960 in a staged performance in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Foster et al. 2004, 382; Gamboni 1997, 273; Gamboni 2002, 114).

Neither the metaphorical iconoclasm of the early twentieth century, nor the radical but legally sanctioned activities of later artists provide direct precursors to modern incidents of 'artistically' motivated damage in museums and galleries. However, these developments established the origins of the problem. They opened the door to the possibility of harming the work of great artists and creating new art from the experience.

The other main contextual root of this phenomenon is the avant-garde trend away from conventional modes of artistic expression. Early experiments with found objects and conceptual installations were important markers in this progression. Yet, arguably, it was the birth of performance art that ultimately enabled artists to escape the fixed traditions of painting and sculpture (Brooks 2001). To quote RosaLee Goldberg, performance art is “a permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms, and determined to take their art directly to the public” (Goldberg 1995, 10). With such a “boundless manifesto”, the growth of performance challenged the formal frontiers of art, so that the physical realisation of an idea or human bodily gestures could be considered as artworks in their own right. Essentially, action could be art. Although performance was not fully recognised as an art form until the 1970s, aspects of theatricality featured in avant-garde circles throughout the twentieth century, from Zurich Dada to Andy Warhol’s Factory scene.

Considering the topic at hand, the anarchist qualities of performance art are also worth noting. Early performances of the Italian Futurists often resulted in violence and arrests, with Marinetti frequently the instigator of rioting among viewers and performers (Tisdall and Bozzolla 1977, 91-93). In later years, performance itself would incorporate destructive elements. In February 1960 Jim Dine performed *The Smiling Workman* at the Judson Memorial Church in New York. This piece involved the artist drinking from paint jars as he worked upon a large canvas. The performance culminated in Dine finally destroyed his painting by leaping through it (Goldberg 1995, 131). The French-born artist Arman provides another example. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he carried out a series of destructive ‘happenings’, where he would wreck items of furniture, musical instruments and domestic commodities through acts of cutting, compressing, smashing or burning. As Dario Gamboni points out, Arman did not damage actual works of art in his performances (Gamboni 1997, 266). However, his 1975 ‘happening’ *Conscious Vandalism*, which was staged at the John Gibson Gallery in New York, came very close to this, as the artist laid waste to the furnishings of a domestic interior armed with a club and an axe. Among the items destroyed in this piece was a framed reproduction of Dalí’s painting *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubus)*, which received a very deliberate and direct axe blow (Dillon 2004; Gamboni 1997, 266).

Clearly, this act was not equivalent to the defacement of Picasso’s *Guernica* by Tony Shafrazi at the Museum of Modern Art. Yet, with performance becoming established as a genuine artistic vehicle, the

progression from this type of art to the unauthorised ‘artistic’ destruction of gallery exhibits was, perhaps, inevitable.

The evolution of these contextual threads places cultural institutions in a serious quandary. On one hand, it seems hypocritical for museums to reject the legitimacy of iconoclastic gestures that are the progeny of theories and formal experiments celebrated as milestones in the history of modern art. Yet, on the other hand, if museums recognise such assaults as innovative art, they undermine their custodial responsibilities and risk the future safety of collections. This dilemma has grave consequences, as the outcome of the attack on *Guernica* illustrates. Immediately after carrying out his act, Shafrazi was restrained by guards. He neither attempted to escape or deny his actions; allegedly, upon apprehension he shouted “Call the curator, I’m an artist!” (Kaufman 1974). However, despite his clear guilt and willingness to confess to the crime, the Museum of Modern Art did not pursue a conviction for criminal mischief. Shafrazi faced no fine or prison sentence for his behaviour. Presumably, museum officials wished to avoid creating even more negative publicity. It is equally conceivable, though, that this non-committal stance derived from a sense of paralysis brought on by the ambiguity of the situation. With the Museum caught between the conflicted roles of avant-garde champion and cultural guardian, staff simply sought to put the affair behind them as quickly and discreetly as possible.

Following Shafrazi’s 1974 attack there was a lull in high profile incidents of this nature. The problem re-emerged two decades later, in 1993. On 24th August an artist named Pierre Pinoncelli marred the opening of a new art gallery in Nîmes, in Southern France, by targeting a version of Duchamp’s *Fountain* that had been lent by the Centre Georges Pompidou (Fig.4). Evading security guards, Pinoncelli poured liquid over the artwork and hit it with a hammer. He proclaimed his act to be a “urinal-happening” (Gamboni 1997, 279-282; Jones 1999).

In some respects, this assault could have been anticipated. Pinoncelli was well-known for his outrageous brand of performance art. In 1969, for instance, he had attacked the French Culture Minister with a paint-filled water-pistol (Dillon 2004). *Fountain* was also a particularly apt focus for an ‘artistic’ attack. Duchamp advocated that any object could be a work of art, subject to the choice of the artist; he took ordinary mass-produced items and de-contextualised them to create ‘readymades’. *Fountain* was the most infamous illustration of this theory – a porcelain urinal conceived for exhibition in 1917 (Camfield 1989; d’Harnoncourt and McShine 1973, 132). Pinoncelli was aware of the artwork’s subversive context. Yet he felt that *Fountain* had since become an enshrined icon of art history, and so

sought to liberate and reinvigorate it with a gesture emphasising its original function and physicality. Splashing the urinal with liquid and striking it with a hammer served this purpose. It can even be argued that Pinoncelli's conduct related to Duchamp's concept of the 'reciprocal readymade', where a commodity elevated to the status of art at the artist's discretion may be demoted once again to its original function (Gamboni 2002, 110). As such, *Fountain* was an obvious target. It was not only a historically significant piece, but one that appeared to invite further 'artistic' interventions.

Pinoncelli claimed that Duchamp would have understood and appreciated his gesture. A week after the attack he faxed news of his 'happening' to various art world personalities, intent on mustering their support. His argument did win a few people over. The artist Benjamin Vautier was so convinced by the artistic authenticity of the act that he wrote to the magazine *Art Press* insisting that the editors acknowledge it as a genuine work of art (Gamboni 1997, 280). The authorities were less convinced; Pinoncelli was punished with a one month suspended sentence and a hefty fine. However, despite this reprimand, he continued to assert his artistic rationale. Indeed, Pinoncelli felt his actions sufficiently justified that he repeated them over a decade later on 4th January 2006, when he struck the same version of *Fountain* with a hammer while it was on display in Paris (Chrisafis 2006; Lichfield 2006; Riding 2006; Anonymous 2007a). Again, he characterised his attack as an artistic tribute to Duchamp, stating that he was rescuing the work from "the institution" (Lichfield 2006). This time, *Fountain* was damaged to such an extent that it became too fragile to be loaned out to other galleries (Chrisafis 2006).

The repeated targeting of *Fountain* demonstrated the strength of Pinoncelli's personal convictions, but it did little to indicate that 'artistic' iconoclasm was a significant wider problem. On the whole, the Frenchman was regarded as a lone eccentric obsessed with attention-seeking; few took his artistic assertions seriously (Gamboni 1997, 280-282). The art world was, however, forced to take greater notice in 1997, when damage befell a painting by Malevich at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

On 4th January the Russian performance artist Alexander Brener used green spray paint to mark a large dollar symbol across Malevich's *Suprematism 1920-1927 (White Cross on Grey)* (Fig.5). Having surrendered himself to security guards, he explained that the gesture was a performance protesting against "corruption and commercialism in the art world" (Esman 1997; Kastner 1997, 154-156; Sokolov 1997, 86-87; Anonymous 2005). The dollar symbol was intended to appear as if nailed to Malevich's cross, drawing attention to the disproportionate emphasis on

money in the art establishment. The pale canvas was severely disfigured by the spray paint. Unlike Picasso's *Guernica*, its surface was not protected by a layer of thick varnish, and the staining proved to be permanent. Yet Brener maintained that his action was not one of violence. "What I did WAS NOT against the painting," he explained in court, "I view my act as a dialogue with Malewicz [sic]" (Anonymous 2005).

Although Brener was jailed for his behaviour, the art world was divided by the episode. Some genuinely believed his claims that he had been engaging in a creative exchange with Malevich, and striving for greater democracy in art. Giancarlo Politi, the editor of *Flash Art*, described Brener's performance as representing "mouth to mouth resuscitation" on the "dead" picture (Politi 1997, 88). Rather than being a crime, he felt the incident was a "particularly ambitious work of art" that enhanced the Suprematist image by endowing it with another layer of meaning (Kastner 1997, 156). During the trial, even the Stedelijk's Keeper of Collections, Geurt Imanse, was forced to admit that the attack could be interpreted as artistic, though he added that "art should not overstep certain limits" (Sokolov 1997, 86).

Others questioned the extent of Brener's expressive originality. The director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Glenn D. Lowry, repudiated his 'artistic' justifications because his 'art' was entirely reliant on Malevich's accomplishments (Lowry 1997, 59). Without *White Cross on Grey* acting as a foil, Brener's efforts were meaningless; he was more a parasite than an artist.

Dario Gamboni highlights the inherent contradictions of this motive further. Performance artists may declare that their interventions liberate masterpieces, but attempting to forge a creative dialogue with a deceased artist necessarily means that the performer's interpretation is imposed upon the original artwork without the original artist's involvement or consent, which is hardly an act of liberation (Gamboni 2005, 170). As a group of artists pointed out in 1974, after the disfigurement of *Guernica*, "No one has the right to unilaterally and arrogantly 'join' another artist's work" (Kozloff et al. 1974, 8).

Iconoclasts who cite artistic justifications are not always motivated solely by aesthetic concerns; they may also be guided on a more personal level by the allure of public attention. This factor has been mentioned briefly in relation to Pierre Pinoncelli, but it is worth considering in greater depth.

A pertinent case study is provided by an incident that occurred in 1994 at the Serpentine Gallery in London. On 9th May Damien Hirst's *Away From the Flock*, a vitrine holding a lamb suspended in formaldehyde, was

damaged by a man who opened the lid while no one was looking, and poured black ink into the tank (Gmelin 1994; Hirst 1997, 294-297; Kastner 1997, 154) (Fig.6). Mark Bridger claimed to be on the same creative wavelength as Hirst, and said that he had acted to augment the installation. "I was providing an interesting addendum", he later explained in court, "In terms of conceptual art, the sheep had already made its statement. Art is there for creation of awareness and I added to whatever it was meant to say" (Gmelin 1994). Describing himself as an artist, Bridger said he was surprised that Hirst had not approved of his intervention.

Before being apprehended, Bridger had replaced the exhibit's label with one reading: "Mark Bridger, *Black Sheep*, May 1, 1994" (Kastner 1997, 154). This final flourish reinforced the idea that he had devised a new piece of conceptual art. But it also introduced a tongue-in-cheek aspect to the episode. In parodying this gallery convention, Bridger may have been alluding to the perceived ridiculousness of contemporary art. His act could have been a publicity stunt that was assured an audience by the interest that the exhibition had already generated. Indeed, some 48,000 people visited the Serpentine Gallery while *Away From the Flock* was on display there (Beckett 1995). Observers in the media certainly suspected that Bridger's gesture was a stunt. Reporting on the trial, a journalist from the *Guardian* commented that the defendant had "brought cheer to Middle England", and was "poised to become a folk hero of the shires" (Anonymous 1994). Bridger denied that he had acted to draw public attention to himself. However, since he was not a well-established artist, unlike Brener or even Pinoncelli, the artistic integrity of his act is difficult to gauge.

In a strange turn of events, Hirst later went some way towards validating the artistic credentials of Bridger's conduct. In 1997 he produced an artist's book that featured a novelty image of *Away From the Flock* that could be manipulated with a movable tab. When the reader pulled the tab, the image of the lamb was obscured, as if ink was filling the tank (Hirst 1997, 295). Bridger may have interfered with the installation without permission, and been found guilty of criminal damage, but it appears that Hirst was not completely opposed to the idea of *Black Sheep* as a piece of art.

Tracey Emin felt no such ambivalence when her installation *My Bed* was wrecked at the Tate in 1999 (Fig.7). This time there were two culprits, a Chinese duo of performance artists named Yuan Cai and Jian Jun Xi Ianjun. On 23rd October, an otherwise ordinary day at the Gallery was interrupted when the two men stripped off their shirts and leaped onto Emin's Turner Prize nominated exhibit, where they staged an impromptu

pillow fight, scattering elements of the installation across the room. They called the performance *Two Naked Men Jump Into Tracey's Bed* (Wallace 1999; Walsh 2000; Anonymous 1999).

Justification for the act again drew on the idea of augmenting the original artwork. They insisted that, while Emin's piece had been "strong", they had wanted "to push her work to further limits, make it more sensational, interesting and significant" (Anonymous 1999). They also cited the influence of Duchamp. Describing their effort as a continuation of his legacy, they explained that just as he had turned found objects into art, so they wished to transform *My Bed* back into its constituent found object parts. Six months later, on 21st May 2000, they followed this aspiration to its logical conclusion, when they actually managed to urinate on the Tate's version of Duchamp's *Fountain* in another unauthorised performance (Dillon 2004; Shinn 2003).

Emin, however, dismissed their justifications and denied resolutely that the wreckage of *My Bed* had been artistic. Instead, she accused the assailants of "gimmicky" publicity-seeking (Walsh 2000). She chastised the Tate for not pressing charges, and voiced her objections to the press: "It was upsetting and disturbing – a criminal offence [...] I wouldn't go round to someone's house, smash up a coffee table and call that art" (Walsh 2000). Emin believed unequivocally that a crime had been committed. Nevertheless, others were less sure. After the initial apprehension of the attackers, the Tate chose to take the matter no further, but merely went about restoring the installation. Moreover, some members of the public were entirely bemused by the episode. While Cai and Xi bounced on the bed, a few oblivious bystanders responded with polite applause, assuming that the performance was sanctioned by the gallery. Without interpretation, the distinction between creation and destruction all but vanished.

In 2002 Bruno Latour coined the term 'iconoclash', meaning a scenario where "one does not know, one hesitates, one is troubled by an action for which there is no way to know, without further inquiry, whether it is destructive or constructive" (Latour 2002, 14). The phrase suitably encapsulates the events surrounding the display of the Chapman Brothers' installation *Insult to Injury*, probably the most absurd demonstration to date of the ambiguity of 'artistic' iconoclasm.

In 2003 Jake and Dinos Chapman provoked outrage when they doctored a set of Francisco Goya's etchings *The Disasters of War* (Cork 2003; Gibbons 2003; Jones 2003; Shinn 2003). The result, which they entitled *Insult to Injury*, was a sequence of eighty original etchings of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain overlaid with contemporary watercolour and

gouache additions: clown faces, puppy heads, and other grotesques (Fig.8). Although the Chapmans saw the work as a tribute to Goya, it prompted widespread accusations of cultural destruction. Legally, the artists were beyond reproach because the etchings belonged to them. Modifying them may have been ethically dubious, but defacing their own property was technically within their rights. The episode whipped up a storm of publicity, with critics questioning the entitlement of private ownership and the acceptable parameters of art. So when *Insult to Injury* itself became the victim of an attack staged as performance art, the irony was lost on very few.

On 30th May 2003 Jake Chapman gave a lecture at Modern Art Oxford, the venue for their exhibition 'The Rape of Creativity'. While speaking, he was ambushed by an audience member who threw red paint at him and the etchings (Fleming 2003; Payne 2003, Shinn 2003). The assailant, Aaron Barschak, asserted that his actions had artistic merit. After the offence, he told police that he had been "collaborating" with the Chapmans, and that he intended to submit photographs of the incident to the Turner Prize competition. Barschak had a reputation for instigating high-profile publicity stunts, and presumably for this reason his explanations were dismissed in court. Found guilty of criminal damage, he was given a jail term of 28 days, a sentence intended as a deterrent to any future offences. The judge agreed with the prosecution that the attack was not artistic. He flatly rejected pleas to the contrary, concluding: "This was not the creation of a work of art but the creation of a complete mess" (Payne 2003). He did not comment on the artistic validity of the Chapmans' own decision to rework Goya's etchings.

Whether or not Barschak's gesture constituted art is a troublesome question, and one which is, perhaps, ultimately irresolvable. The important point to consider in any of the aforementioned case studies is that the perpetrators, even if they were behaving with a sense of irony or acting as a publicity stunt, always felt justified in claiming their intentions to be artistic. Their confidence suggests that they were aware of the ambiguity of their actions and the paralysing dilemma that they would impose on the targeted galleries.

Acts of iconoclasm in museums are not an everyday occurrence, yet the general problem is more prevalent than many people realise. A survey of 250 museums and galleries conducted in 2007 found that between 1997 and 2006 over 40% of UK museums had experienced attacks on artworks within their premises (Scott 2010, 14). The proportion of these episodes carried out for 'artistic' reasons is hard to gauge. All too often targeted institutions and the media make hasty conclusions about motives,

assuming that most perpetrators are mentally ill. A case in point occurred in 2007, when a woman damaged a painting by Cy Twombly at a gallery in Avignon by kissing the white canvas and smearing it with lipstick (Allen 2007; Bell 2007; Anonymous 2007b; Anonymous 2007c). Initial reports focused on the woman's assertions that she had acted out of love for the painting, particularly her claim that she now found it "even more beautiful" (Anonymous 2007d). The insinuation was that she was delusional and unbalanced. Yet prior to appearing in court some months later, the woman made a public statement where she took full responsibility for her actions, explaining that she had been responding to the painting on an artistic level (Bell 2007). It had been a performance inspired by "the power of art" she said; a gesture following in a long line of art interventions. Such misinterpretation means that, if anything, the scale of the phenomenon is underestimated.

One certainty is that incidents of this nature will continue to take place so long as museums fail to address the issue. On 7th October 2012 the problem raised its head again, when an artist scrawled black ink across Mark Rothko's painting *Black on Maroon* while it was on display at Tate Modern (Johnson 2012; Quinn 2012; Singh 2012; Anonymous 2012a; Anonymous 2012b) (Fig.9). This case bore a strong resemblance to Shafrazi's 1974 attack on Picasso's *Guernica*. Again, the perpetrator, a Polish-born artist named Włodzimierz Umaniec (also known as Vladimir Umanets), defaced the artwork by writing a message directly onto the canvas, in this instance the words: "Vladimir Umanets, A Potential Piece of Yellowism". The intentions behind the act were also comparable. In an interview with the BBC, Umaniec explained that the graffiti was a creative gesture following the principles of 'Yellowism', an artistic movement that he and a colleague had founded in 2010 (Anonymous 2012c). It is not clear from Umaniec's somewhat rambling statements whether he considered the attack on the painting to be an actual performance-based piece of Yellowist art, or if he was simply trying to draw wider attention to his Yellowist manifesto. Either way, like Shafrazi, he spoke in terms of his admiration for the original painting and his aspiration to breathe new life into it. As he remarked: "I would like to show such a wonderful piece in the context of Yellowism" (Anonymous 2012c).

Interestingly, on this occasion, the Tate responded with a striking degree of resolve. The gallery decided to press charges, and Umaniec (who had fled immediately after the incident) was arrested a few days later on suspicion of causing criminal damage. The artist's initial stance was one of defiance, denying that he was a vandal and claiming that he had in fact increased the value of the painting (Marsden 2012). Yet, when he

appeared in court for a second time on 16th October he entered a guilty plea (Anonymous 2012d). This must have been a relief to the Tate. In the days and weeks following the incident, the gallery had maintained its position, asserting that the police were investigating and that a criminal prosecution would be sought. This time, there was little sense of paralysis. The response was clear and determined, quite possibly as a conscious effort to deny the assailant his artistic credibility and thereby reduce the risk of further attacks. Indeed, once Umaniec had pleaded guilty to criminal damage, and the ambiguity of his behaviour had been negated, the episode swiftly disappeared from the news. The gallery's handling of this case showed a marked improvement. It may not be a coincidence that at the time of the damage, the Tate was actually planning an exhibition on the theme of iconoclasm, and had been studying assaults on art in museums.

As this example indicates, to tackle 'artistic' iconoclasm effectively, and curb its perpetuation, museums and galleries need to confront the problem head-on. It is no use hoping that the phenomenon will somehow vanish of its own accord. A number of practical recommendations can be made to this end.

Currently, research into iconoclasm in cultural institutions remains relatively unusual, and studies that concentrate specifically on 'artistically' motivated damage are scarcer still. This means that galleries' responses are often handicapped by a lack of knowledge. It is crucial, therefore, that the museum sector takes the initiative by encouraging individual institutions to keep thorough records of attacks and to share information and advice amongst themselves. Raising internal awareness of trends, potential risks, and appropriate response strategies should be a priority. With a more comprehensive understanding of the problem, galleries will be better placed to pinpoint situations where the threat of attack is at its highest. With this step in place, security enhancement can then be focused, so as not to waste valuable resources (Scott 2009, 175-225).

But perhaps the key factor to address is the sense of ambiguity which museums too often allow to permeate episodes of 'artistic' iconoclasm. Ultimately, the sector needs to consolidate and clarify its position on this type of attack, so that a consistent message may be delivered to potential perpetrators. This was presumably something that the Tate recognised when they considered how best to deal with the defacement of Rothko's *Black on Maroon*. Galleries that grudgingly accept attackers' 'artistic' justifications, or even those that simply resist making a judgement on them, essentially serve to validate these acts and in doing so embolden other would-be assailants. In these situations, the safety of collections

ought to be the guiding principle above all else. Whatever the motivational premise, an assault on an exhibit always undermines the fundamental duty of a museum to preserve cultural artefacts for the benefit of future generations. Artistic collaboration, modification, and even destruction, all warrant recognition for their roles in the development of avant-garde art, but interference undertaken without the owner or guardian's consent is irrefutably a criminal act.

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Figure 7 Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998, Installation, Saatchi Collection.

Figure 8 Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Insult to Injury (One of 80 reworked etchings)*, 2003, Etching and Mixed Media.

Figure 9 Mark Rothko, Black on Maroon, 1958, Oil on Canvas, Tate Modern.

CHAPTER SIX
UNSTABLE MATTER DESTRUCTION,
DESTRUCTURING, DE-OBSTRUCTION IN
CAMERA-LESS FILM

Olga Moskatova

‘Death of Cinema’

Dysfunctions are supposed to disturb and destructions are supposed to violate intactness and to make something more or less dysfunctional. But what exactly disturbs the destroyer? This will be the essential question of this essay—and I want to approach and discuss this question by talking about three different kinds of destruction in cameraless films. Cameraless film production is a widespread method in the history of experimental and avant-garde film and harkens back to the twenties. The films are produced without shooting but rather by means of direct manipulation of film strip. In the last 10-15 years, these techniques became very popular. Contemporary experimental filmmakers re-enact old and develop new direct techniques. They treat and damage the film strip by means of painting or scratching it; by chemicals, bacteria, heat, blanking or weather. This revival of direct manipulation expresses an increasing interest in the material and technical conditions of celluloid film—especially in its ability for indexical inscriptions and thus for establishing a causal relation to the profilmic space. This suggests the idea that the anew¹ foregrounding of celluloid film’s materiality negotiates the technological change from analog to digital and functions as a counterbalance to the digital technology or, to be more precise, to the “digital utopia”². The latter is associated with immateriality, infinite manipulability, transcoding, ubiquity and arbitrary referentiality. Different aspects can sustain this consideration. First, the material film strip is the primary subject matter of cameraless film practice. It functions not only as the space for indexical inscriptions but also as a finite material object which can limit the reproduction as well as it has its own aesthetics potentiality (for example to generate rather than represent colours or structures). At the same time, the object status allows a tactile and intimate approach. Often, the films

emphasize other characteristics of analog apparatus and presentation like cutting blade, light of projection, flicker, frames or hand cranking.

The direct manipulation of film strip implies a singular or an original space of marking turning the filmstrip into a canvas and relating to models of production like painting, hand writing or drawing. The results of inscriptions can be reproduced but not repeated—especially when the production involves contingent and uncontrollable reactions and unstable processes and even can make the projection of this original film strip impossible. Thus, the difference between the original medium where the processes take place and further reproductions becomes relevant. This tendency of re-auratization³ by means of production often corresponds to the idea of last or single copy which is displayed in the films. Material durability and aesthetic potential of the film strip; the more and more auratic film event in the darkness of movie theatre; the indexical relation to the recorded past; nostalgia for cinematic history and the possible end of celluloid film can be identified as some essential topics of contemporary cameraless film. Last but not least, the cameraless techniques focus on low-tech and supposedly obsolete practices and undercuts current technological possibilities deliberately. Briefly, they can be analyzed in terms of divergent aspects which can function as a counterbalance to the “digital utopia”⁴ and invest in the technological and aesthetic history and future of analog film.

Certainly, it was repeatedly argued that the films broach the issue of technological change alongside the theoretical discourse – in fact not only in the context of experimental film or his cameraless sub-category.⁵ Notably, but not surprisingly, the discourse on the possible obsolescence of analog film is dominated by the metaphor ‘death of cinema’. Numerous papers, journals and books focus on and are headed by this metaphor⁶ recalling the rivalry of television and film which was also discussed through similar terms.⁷ And of course, this narrative can be easily observed in the films too. In this regard, the metaphor delineates a scenario of threat and implies a technological substitution and thus a more or less linear temporal model of development towards a constant improvement leaving the ‘obsolete’ medium behind.

This ongoing investment in analog ‘obsolescence’ provides the basis for the following examination of destruction in cameraless films. In doing so, the argument will concentrate on one concrete form of ‘death of cinema’ as we know it—the material instability and finiteness of the celluloid film. Unlike digital image making, the “irreversible loss of structure”⁸ is inherent in the analog medium itself and constitutes its entropic nature. Light, chemicals, climatic conditions of storage, frequent

projections or copying influence the lifespan of a filmstrip and leave traces of aging, erosion and chemical decay. They undermine the assurance of capturing and preserving the absent past in a long lasting, because reproducible image. While filmmakers like Peter Delpeut, Bill Morrison or Yervant Gianikian & Angela Ricci Lucchi are known to collect such decayed archive material, I would like to focus on intentionally damaged films. Today, many filmmakers use the photochemical auto-destructivity of celluloid film and accelerate the inherent decay on purpose. In doing so, they suggest a self-reflexive approach to technological ‘obsolescence’ and the possible vanishing of analog film. Decay in film – both found as well as intentionally caused—seems to participate in the melancholic discourse on the ‘death of cinema’. Decayed films contrast the indexical relationship to the past with their own fugacity and finite material durability. The filmmaker Luis Recoder offers one of the most explicit parallelisation of these both kinds of finiteness tracing the ‘death of cinema’ back to the strategies of structural film of the 70s:

The destruction of the celluloid material of film signals the ‘death of cinema’. If such is the case, it is from the perspective – the optic if you wish – of the celluloid material itself that the question of death in cinema gets developed. The ‘death of cinema’ is the death of film - *not* the absolute and final death of cinema but the death of cinema as a cinema based on the material make-up of cellulose acetate film. For cinema is alive and well. Film, on the other hand is on its way out. [...] The destruction of celluloid as the spectacle *par excellence* of the death of cinema.⁹

Although, it is not possible to ascribe the interest in material instability solely to the technological transformations, it is also not possible to ignore this context and the symptomatic dimension of this increasing interest. Nevertheless, while it is easy to link the aesthetics of decay and destruction to the ‘death of cinema’, this metaphor lacks a complex concept of media change and bases upon a “narrowly technical idea of media”¹⁰. Moreover, it is worthwhile to examine the intentionality of deliberately caused damages and, with it, the possible difference between auto-destructivity and destruction. The intentionality implies some additional consequences as the purposeful caused aging and erosion must be regarded as destruction and thus goes along with moments of aggression and even iconoclasm. This raises the question if intentional damages can be subordinated under the melancholic discourse of the ‘death of cinema’ at all, as it is proposed by Luis Recoder. Acts of destruction seem not to treat the material instability as something threatening. They seem to condemn rather than to mourn. After all, the

aesthetic and conceptual impact of destruction is at least questionable. With this in mind, I would like to argue that the intentional damaging implies very different logics which relate to the technological changes in their own ways. The differences of these logics are directly connected to the question raised at the beginning. What exactly disturbs the destroyer? I propose to distinguish three different nuances of destruction to answer this question. They are destruction, destructuring and des-obstruction. The terms will be explicated in the course of the argumentation. All three are ways of damaging as well as strategies of temporalization. However, while they use similar cameraless techniques, their formal results, context and overall concept present significant differences. In each case, the major difference is the particular way of relating order to dysfunction and dysfunction to destruction. All three strategies deal with fugacity, death, recollection, decay and aging at narrative and formal levels, but accentuate them almost antithetically and have different understandings of images.

Concepts of Destruction

The terms destruction and des-obstruction are developed in reference to Vilém Flusser, while the third nuance is an addition to Flusser's concept which will be outlined with reference to Jacques Derrida later. In his text *Gesten der Zerstörung*¹¹ (according to the following argument, it is translated as *Gestures of Des-obstruction*) Vilém Flusser proposes to deduct destruction from des-obstruction (destruction \neq des-obstruction).¹² The distinction bases upon an understanding of gestures as symbolic acts. Gestures articulate particular reference to the world and depend on legibility and interpretation. Gestures of destruction or des-obstruction require voluntariness or alternatives and preclude necessity or constraint. Thus, their legibility derives from reason and motifs rather than from causality or results.¹³ At the same time, Flusser correlates both terms to a given order and points out destruction and des-obstruction as acts of negation which target different subject matter. While des-obstruction is actually a medical word, it tries to profit from the quite common use of the German as well as Latin expressions for what appears to be the same act in German. In German you can use *Zerstörung* and *Destruction* synonymously and translate both as destruction (destruction \Rightarrow *Zerstörung* & *Destruction*). But Flusser suggests that they are actually different and renames *Zerstörung* des-obstruction (*Zerstörung* = des-obstruction \neq *Destruction*). So, what we can call destruction in the broader sense in English is named des-obstruction by Flusser, but we can retain the German word *Zerstörung* to prevent confusions and to translate

Destruktion as destruction. This distinction is hardly a simple play on words but rather an opportunity to interlace both terms with concepts of function and work:

“Destruction” means rather decomposition and deformation than “Zerstörung”. And “Zerstörung” means rather “des-obstruction” than “destruction”. Because “Zerstörung” negates something annoying/dysfunctions [Stören] and “destruction” negates something arranged [Stellen].¹⁴

In this short quotation Flusser displays and uses two interesting linguistic correlations. At first, he correlates *Zerstörung* and dysfunction which is evident in German [Zerstörung—Störung]. Secondly, the verb ‘to arrange’ [stellen] alludes to the verb ‘fabricate’ [herstellen]. With these linguistic shifts in mind, we can understand the impact of the distinction between destruction and *Zerstörung*, respectively des-obstruction. The distinction highlights their different relation to order. Flusser understands fabrication as an act aimed against the entropic nature of the world. Men build order by means of work, production and rules and thus try to minimize contingency. So, destruction causes decomposition and dissolution because of the knowledge that order is unlikely.¹⁵ In Flusser’s terms, destruction is revolutionary but not constructive or productive.¹⁶ It induces entropy and makes room for something new without actually filling it with something new. In contrast, des-obstruction aims not against structures or something fabricated but rather against something annoying. And it is not a coincidence that the German *Störung* also means dysfunction or bug and thus all kinds of technical failure. The semantic ambivalence expresses a re-evaluation of order and the pre-existing state. Insofar as des-obstruction negates something annoying it actually posits the order as annoying dysfunction. This shift leaves the conception of order as something positive and sustainable behind. In a way, des-obstruction is actually de-bugging. But like destruction, des-obstruction also lacks the idea of an alternative. It remains within the pre-existing order to which it relates negatively.

I suggest a third term, destructuring, to add the possibility of constructive ways of damaging to Flusser’s considerations. So, all three terms express a disagreement about the pre-existing state. But destructuring refers to a process in which the negating moments turn out to be only transitional phases on the way to a new or alternative order. Destructuring creates by means of destruction, starting off with decomposition and passing on to rearrangement. The constructive dimension characterizes destructuring as a practice of delay, while

destruction and des-obstruction are more linear and target-oriented. Aesthetically speaking, destruction and des-obstruction abolish rather than alter the visual or narrative order. Although it is not Flusser's point, I incline to radicalize both terms for the purpose of film analysis and to understand them as opposites. Three concrete film examples might deepen these considerations. It is worth pointing out that the following films use found footage material to treat and damage it with direct techniques. The direct manipulations are secondary gestures and thus relate the found material as the pre-existing state.

Analog Nostalgia

I would like to start with the film *Abendmahl* (2005) by an Austrian filmmaker Johannes Hammel. The film collects heterogeneous fragments of found home movies and shows everyday private activities. Images of holidays, walks or dinners alternate with images of illness, death and the Last Supper. The film material was chemically treated and artificially aged so that it bears traces of decay. These traces of decay have a temporary nature and seem to anticipate the entire erasure of representation. The temporal interplay of persistence and disappearance broaches the issue of fugacity of the image as well as of its content. Thus, the motifs as well as the decay deal with mortality, farewell and oblivion. The decay affects the mimetic visual order and displays time as a linear process of slow passing directed toward definite death. The chemical loss of structure encroaches upon the represented bodies and draws a parallel between human aging and the erosion of celluloid. While the decay is inseparable from the subject-matter of finiteness and memory, the analog image itself participates in this discourse through indexical relation to the captured past. It was André Bazin who established the connection between photographic image and relic in his well-known text "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1945)¹⁷. He called the psychological need for defence against the passage of time and for preservation "the mummy complex"¹⁸. Analog image-making turns out to be "a practice of embalming the dead"¹⁹. This relation to time and death becomes most apparent in films that deal with their own lifespan and temporality. But at the same time, the finitude of the material film strip impedes the overcoming of death by image. The loss of structure proves to be a threat and becomes the object of nostalgia and yearning for intactness. This nostalgia is often the nostalgia for the own cinematic history and past. The film *Abendmahl* cites this history by manifold means. Freeze frames, for example, not only arrest the narrative flow but also illustrate the

discontinuous projection which often occurred in early film because of the low frame rate. The sound cites the noise of manually operated projection and supports the reference to old apparatus. At the same time, the decayed and burnt images cite the risk of the old nitrate-base prints catching fire in the projector. The demonstration of wear, decay and destruction of the images highlights not only the concrete material condition of media but also the singularity of each film copy. *Abendmahl* displays the idea of the last single film copy and contrasts the immateriality of screen image with the material instability of a single film strip.

The nostalgic emphasis on analog film technology goes along with its re-auratization insofar it puts forward the unique inscription, physical immediacy and the idea of the original bearing reproducible but not repeatable marks. Nevertheless, the interest in indexicality participates not so much in the old discourses on realistic representation; rather, it symptomatically emphasises the index as medium specificity of analog film.²⁰ The represented death doubles the possible death and disappearance of analog celluloid film. This is a very important topic in lots of contemporary, purposefully destructed films (for example by Phil Solomon or Louise Bourque). Corpses, cadavers and spectres are reflexive figures which draw parallels between filmic embalming and 'dying' film. The emphasis on indexicality turns out to be a doubly intertwined mourning.

Destruction as an aesthetic strategy aims at creating entropy. However, this intentionality notwithstanding, this strategy is not so much about actual damaging and destroying but rather about the simulation of accidents. After all, decay, decomposition, wear, freeze frames and discontinuous projection cite technical and material dysfunctions. They make the transparent medium apparent. But, this reflexivity is something that destructed films have in common with films which can be analysed in terms of des-obstruction and destructuring. The important point is that the cited dysfunctions have to be understood as imperfections. They have to disturb and provoke the desire to fix and to re-establish the intactness and frictionless functioning. Otherwise they are not dysfunctions. And this is exactly the nostalgic and melancholic manner in *Abendmahl* that expresses the required negative approach. On the contrary, the des-obstruction reverses the relation of the found intact material and its secondary treatment by positioning order as something annoying, as something that has to be eliminated – just like it is usually supposed to be in the case of dysfunctions. Order and disorder, function and dysfunction appear not as fixed attributes of objects but rather as results of motivated attributions. They are observer-dependent categories. So, the elements which can

become annoying can be a continuous montage or projection, the imaginary or mimetic filmic order as well as imaginary wholeness of the subject. In the film discussed next, the relation of found and secondary treatment shifts from the idea of preservation and embalming to the ironic auto-sabotage and to the aesthetics of ugliness. Des-obstruction aims at a lowering and devaluation of found material.

Des-obstruction as De-bugging

I would like to discuss the second strategy using the example of the film *Zillertal* (1997) by German filmmaker Jürgen Reble. The film uses an old film trailer that was hanging on a tree for several years and thus deteriorated through rain, sun and wind. The chemical reactions aggressively affect the representative elements of the original film. The colours grew faint and melted into unformed, yellowish-brown blots. The speed is slowed down to 16 frames per second and so to a succession of freeze frames. This maximizes the visibility of the damage with the ruination being most notable in the disastrous effects it has on faces and naked bodies. For instance, a close-up of a man's face has obtained blue contours and bloated facial features. Another face flattens. Only a man's eyes staring directly into the camera are visible through the brown-greenish, chemical blurring while his nose and mouth are disfigured. The "uncanny"²¹ effect of his look results from the lively brilliance contrasting with the rotten face, but also from the associations with reptilian, scabby skin indicating a transformation into an animal. But also the naked bodies of lovers and of women participating in a beauty contest are strongly affected. The vertical chemical rain scars their skin, forces their flesh open and makes them go blue in the face. The fragile analog film strip is seen as analogous to the vulnerable human body which is represented as a cadaver. The frayed contour plays a decisive role in this context. It suspends the distinction between intact visual space and damaged surface, between figure and ground. The bodies are presented as organic unformed material. Their physical wholeness is disfigured. The brown-yellowish and bluish colours evoke natural process of decomposition and appeal to the sense of smell. Smell is an intimate sense seemingly incorporating the perceived object. And as Aurel Kolnai remarks, it is the primary origin of disgust.²² While the fragmentation of the body through montage and field size is usually compensated by narrative²³, the wholeness of a chemically destroyed body cannot be re-established. The frayed contour threatens the physical delimitation and the imaginary stability. The classical fragmented body is displaced in favour of a deliquescent body. The frayed contour is a

mark of disintegration and distinguishes the dead from the living body insofar its function is to delimit the shape and to secure the inner structure of an organism.²⁴ The frayed contour not only violates the intactness but also the representational conventions of an ideal of beauty. The ideal beautiful body is based upon the exclusion and thus refusal of every sign of unformed, unfinished, proliferating—in short of a grotesque state which is associated with death, illness and aging.²⁵ The frayed contour potentially provokes disgust.²⁶ Destabilization of ideals of beauty, imaginary wholeness and aesthetics of disgust are strategies which are inconsistent with the melancholic yearning for intactness and regeneration. In fact, youth, beauty or stable identity as well as stable visual order are targets of the attacks. The erotic images are damaged and de-sublimated. The voyeuristic forms of looking and the successful suturing of the beholder into them are frustrated insofar as the reverse angles give way to ruined, cadaverous bodies. The final caption “soon in your theatre” reminds us of the advertising function of the trailer that is supposed to summarize the highlights of the story and to attract an audience to the movie. Deceleration, rot and anti-narratives divert the trailer from its intended use and present an experimental horror movie in which undead bodies are making love. Unlike in *Abendmahl*, the image is not the subject-matter of a longing reanimation of disappearance but rather its intactness is an imaginary and annoying order. The des-obstruction negates the primacy of iconicity positioning it rather than decay as an error. The des-obstruction obliterates the representation in favour of unformed materiality. The film *Zillertal* stands in the iconoclastic tradition of avant-garde film which aims “not against the image as such but rather against the idea of cinematic image as realistic representation”²⁷. This vanguard approach highlights the artificiality of the image. *Zillertal* doesn’t aestheticize the loss of structure. Rather, the aggressive treatment operates to lower and to degrade the image—an operation which Georges Bataille and later Rosalind Krauss named the “informe” or “formless”²⁸. The degradation aims at annihilation of economic value and at interruption of reproduction and consumerism—even if art only can simulate the annihilation of value while creating it at the same time.

Abendmahl and *Zillertal* are two filmic examples for different aesthetic strategies of destruction in the broader sense. In *Abendmahl* destruction is a means of a melancholic self-reflection, while in *Zillertal* des-obstruction subverts the “reality effect”²⁹. The first draws a parallel between represented death and ‘death of cinema’ in order to affirm the compensatory function of the “mummy complex”. In the second film, death doubles absence as absence and embraces rather than denies

mortality and material instability. Thus, the material instability can be understood as threatening as well as enabling. It has the potential to change or to disclose meaning. Notably, this is the impact of the third strategy I like to discuss consulting the film *Memory Fade* by Canadian filmmaker Carl E. Brown.

Interlacing

In Browns film *Memory Fade*, ruination of images works as a reorganization of the found material. While *Abendmahl* broaches the issue of irreversible disappearance and oblivion, *Memory Fade* counteracts it. The film collects visual as well as audio fragments of mediated historical events and disasters. Two events are foregrounded, 9/11 and the Hindenburg disaster that happened in 1937 at Lakehurst. The key images of both disasters are amended by images of explosions, people, salvage work, streets and others. Although the very heterogeneous images don't originate exclusively from the visual repertoire of both events, they nonetheless fit into their destructive imagery. Meanwhile, the material destructuring increases their violent content. There are three main operations of destructuring in this film: collage and heavy fragmentation of original material, interior repetition of film images and chemically and optically caused de-realizations.

The three operations alienate the original images and hinder their immediate identification and semantic stability. The images refer to each other through repetitions instead of offering an overall story line. The ruination aims at deferral of meaning and expose how much underlying information are contained in the found images. The repetition plays an important role in the process of destructuring. It might illustrate its very functioning. The collage and the internal repetitions are iterative operations. And in terms of Jacques Derrida, the iterability³⁰ is the process of destructuring par excellence. Iterability is the capacity of a sign to be repeatable in different contexts and thus to break with any context. It guarantees the legibility of a sign as well as it alters its meaning. Iterability produces difference through repetition.³¹ A semantic unity has to be de-contextualized and installed onto a new context. In this process the relation to the former context persists in the new context but only through deferral, transcription and reshaping. Iterability is composition and decomposition at the same time.

In *Memory Fade*, the heavy iterative fragmentation is supported by optical and chemical treatment of found images. In doing so, the ruination of media images fulfils an almost analytical function. Dual projection,

varied compositions, cross dissolves and others relate the historical images in a synchronous, non-linear way. The rearrangement of fragments establishes new semantic and temporal interrelations and hints at a historical comparison of 9/11 and the Hindenburg crash.

Although, both disasters are historically and symbolically very different events, they have one thing in common. Both are significant and well known media events³² and media icons³³ which found their way into collective memory and enabled a global participation in actuality. Their common status as media events is exactly what is at stake in the film. The press and academic examination of imagery of 9/11 didn't compare the two.³⁴ The discourse focussed not so much on media historic analysis but rather on iconographic and symbolic parallels to, for example, Caspar David Friedrich's *Eismeer* (1823), to Joe Rosenthal's photo *Flag raising on Iwo Jima* (1945, AP) or to Pearl Harbour.³⁵ The fragmentation levels the chronology in favour of temporal discontinuity and of multiple linking. Both events represent actual historical events as well as more general technical and political destructivity. Thus, they create the context for other images of historical disasters and acts of violence. The ruination dismantles the habitual perceptual forms as well as narrative, mythical and symbolic integrations of images. These are quintessential for their status and presentation as media events.³⁶ Media events are highly codified and symbolically charged representations which follow specific, ritualized dramaturgies and offer explanatory and satisfying framework.³⁷ Thus, the dismantling of habituality through discontinuity, de-realization, multiple linking etc. impedes the easy reintegration of images into the everyday life.

Moreover, all three forms of deconstructing endorse a reflection on mediatization and shifting representational levels of reality. Real events become representations and finally shift to reflexive examinations through spectral imagery in Brown's film: The repetition of single sequences cyclically alternates the motives of devastation and their resurrection. The objects seem to wait for their renewed annihilation. The repetition is at once temporal and negates time. The ghostly, uncanny dimension turns the objects and subjects into revenants. The collage and the interior repetition of film images do the preliminary work for de-realization by disrupting the narrative flow and by hindering easy recognition. But it is especially the direct photochemical alienation of colours and Sabattier effects which alter the realistic representation. The aesthetics oscillate between disappearance and haunting. The manipulations deprive the images of constative legibility and establish visual ambiguity by transforming the realistic representation into spectral imagery. In Brown's film, spectres are

reflexive figures of mediatization too. They not only literally double the embalming but also suspend the distinction between real and imaginary, real and fictional. They anticipate the deferral of meaning due to passing time. The images express future disappearance and oblivion through their ephemeral, faded and incomplete state fraught with temporal gaps.

The film *Memory Fade* examines the interrelation of images and memory by confronting the function of images to preserve life by representing life³⁸ with the crucial role of iconic images for individual and collective memory. The destructuring of images doesn't expel the past by turning it into fixed documentation but rather uncloses a material filmic and historical interspace. Therein, the different temporal strata coexist and affect each other. Their interrelation thinks historicity as effectual and agile. The present echoes the past as well as the upcoming future. The trace of the past reminds us of the future becoming future *antérieur* and of its upcoming ruination. The corrosive repetition interlaces destruction and rearrangement as well as oblivion and recollection, preservation and annihilation. The image is a technical prosthesis which is already marked by oblivion insofar as it replaces embodied, intuitive and spontaneous memory. The first two films I discussed anticipate the oblivion by employing aesthetics of entropy. But oblivion doesn't oppose memory; rather it is its interior pre-condition intertwining construction and reconstruction.³⁹ Similarly, annihilation and decomposition don't oppose preservation and storage. They share the necessity of repetition and thus its dynamics of deferral. Clearly, repetition and deferral go to the heart of memory like Jacques Derrida repeatedly pointed out in his work on Freud and the repetition compulsion.⁴⁰ Neither storage nor archive or recollection is separable from repetition. The retrieval of a discarded, withdrawn past doesn't take place as identical realization. The preservation of the past, as the Derridean notion of "bio-degradable" as well as of "*anarchivic*" suggests⁴¹, is attended by constant annihilation of identity through destructuring, that is to say, through transcription, reorganization and recycling allowing the past "to pass into the general milieu of culture".⁴² On the other hand, fixation would equal stagnation of temporality. *Memory Fade* embraces the annihilation not as a destructive threat but rather as the destructuring process and the pre-condition of memory. Thus, the film focuses on history as a "constant and irreversible process of becoming illegible".⁴³

In summary, all three strategies deal with the material instability quite differently. The decay is presented as threat, as anarchistic subversion of the "reality effect" and as a dynamic means of reflection. Inasmuch as decay establishes a self-reflexive examination, it can be related to the

discourse on the 'death of cinema'. But it is questionable if this widespread topos is automatically related to technological change. The plurality of these three strategies impedes monocausal film-to-digital-narrative, whether it is discussed as rupture, loss or utopia. The history of avant-garde and experimental film is hallmarked by explicit and implicit announcements of the end. Verbal and material attacks and proclamations of death form a part of the vanguard rhetoric which aims at destroying the old in order to make way for something new. Accordingly, the three nuances of destruction can be understood as different approaches to the relation of the old and the new, correlating both either to order or dysfunction, respectively. This relation can encompass aesthetic traditions as well as it can offer a model for thinking about technological developments. Destruction names a strategy of analog nostalgia that fends off the new. To a certain extent, it turns over the vanguard rhetoric. Destruction, as it was discussed above, does not reject the old but rather turns to the supposedly threatened old. Here the dysfunction disturbs. Desobstruction insists on approved vanguard strategies. Here the order disturbs. Finally, destructuring can show that the new is unthinkable without the old, the order without its alternation. And it is the last strategy which can provide a more complex way of thinking about change by insisting on interrelations, asynchronities and nonlinear negotiations.

NOTES

¹ The examination of filmic materiality has already been an important topic in structural and/or materialist film in the 1960-70s. The term "structural film" was coined by Adams Sitney, while Peter Gidal reformulated Sitney's concept as "materialist film" in order to politicise the materialist film practice and distance the latter from the formalist approach. See Adams P. Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1934-1978* (Oxford [et al.]: Oxford University Press, 1974), 369-446 and Peter Gidal, *Materialist Film* (London/New York: Routledge, 1989).

² Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis [et al.]: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 301-349. "Digital utopia" stresses the difference between actual technological possibilities and the discourse ('utopian' as well as 'anxious') which constructs ideal oppositions to analog characteristics. For another critical analysis of these constructions, see also David N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press,

2007), 110-124. The aim of my following argumentation is not so much to deconstruct these oppositions but rather to focus on different models of transformation, i.e. relations between the old and the new which is displayed by the films I will discuss exemplary.

3 Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1963). I'm well aware that Benjamin's concept of aura is more complex and doesn't base solely on singularity. The subject is broadly discussed elsewhere. For further examination, see among others Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of technology'", *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 179-224; Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura", *Critical Inquiry* 34 (2008): 336-375; Hans Robert Jauss, "Spur und Aura (Bemerkungen zu Walter Benjamins ‚Passagen-Werk‘)", in *Art social und art industriel: Funktionen der Kunst im Zeitalter des Industrialismus*, ed. Helmut Pfeiffer et al. (München: Fink, 1987), 19-38; Karlheinz Stierle, "Aura, Spur, und Benjamins Vergegenwärtigung des 19. Jahrhunderts", in *Art social und art industriel: Funktionen der Kunst im Zeitalter des Industrialismus*, ed. Helmut Pfeiffer et al. (München: Fink, 1987), 39-47; Mika Elo, "Die Wiederkehr der Aura", in *Walter Benjamins Medientheorie*, ed. Christian Schulte (Konstanz: UVK-Verl.-Ges., 2005), 117-135.

4 Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 301-349.

5 For films dealing with technological change, see David N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2007). For experimental films dealing with technological change, see James Leo Cahill, "...and Afterwards? Martin Arnold's Phantom Cinema", *Spectator* 27.3 Supplement (2007): 19-25; Tess Takahashi, "After the Death of Film: Writing the Natural World in the Digital Age", *Visible Language* 42.1 (2008): 44-69; Jonathan Walley, "'Not an Image of the Death of Film': Contemporary Expanded Cinema and Experimental Film", in *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, ed. Alan L. Rees et al. (London: Tate, 2011), 241-251; Kim Knowles, "Analog Obsolescence and the 'Death of Cinema' Debate: The Case of Experimental Film" (paper presented at MIT7 Conference, Boston, May 13-15, 2011).

6 *Ibid.* as well as Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI, 2001).

7 André Bazin, "Will CinemaScope Save the Film Industry?", in *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, ed. and trans. Bert Cardullo et al. (New York/London: Routledge, 1997), 77-92.

8 Wolfgang Hagen, "Die Entropie der Fotografie: Skizzen zu einer Genealogie der digital-elektronischen Bildaufzeichnung", in *Paradigma Fotografie*, ed. Herta Wolf (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 233 (my translation).

9 Luis Recoder, "The Death of Structural Film: Notes Toward a Filmless Cinema", *Spectator* 27.3 Supplement (2007): 26.

10 David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, "Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of Transition", in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn et al. (Cambridge, Mass. [et al.]: MIT Press, 2004), 2.

11 Vilém Flusser, *Gesten: Versuch einer Phänomenologie* (Düsseldorf [et al.]: Bollmann, 1991), 99-107. All following references to Flusser are my translations.

12 *Ibid.*, 100.

13 *Ibid.*, 99.

14 *Ibid.*, 100.

15 *Ibid.*, 105.

16 *Ibid.*, 106.

17 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", in *What is Cinema?*, trans. and selected Hugh Gray (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1967), 9-16.

18 *Ibid.*, 9.

19 *Ibid.*, 9.

20 Indexicality attained an anew centrality within the discourse on technological transformation to digital. It became an important category of medium specificity in theory and practice. For critical remarks, see Mary Ann Doane, "Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity", in *The Meaning of Photography*, ed. Robin Kelsey et al. (New Haven, Conn. [et al.]: Yale University Press, 2008), 3-15.

21 Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche", in *Studienausgabe: Psychologische Schriften*. Vol. IV., ed. Alexander Mitscherlich (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1989), 241-274.

22 Aurel Kolnai, *Ekel, Hochmut, Haß: Zur Phänomenologie feindlicher Gefühle* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2007), 26.

23 Stephan Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 184-185.

24 Claudia Blümle and Armin Schäfer, "Organismus und Kunstwerk: Zur Einführung" in *Struktur, Figur, Kontur: Abstraktion in Kunst und Lebenswissenschaften*, ed. Claudia Blümle et al. (Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007), 17.

25 Winfried Menninghaus, *Ekel: Theorie und Geschichte einer starken Empfindung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 87. Menninghaus' argument refers to Michail Bachtin's analysis of the grotesque state. See Michail Bachtin, *Rabelais und seine Welt: Volkskultur als Gegenkultur*, trans. Gabriele Leupold (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987).

26 Blümle and Schäfer, "Organismus und Kunstwerk", 16.

27 Peter Tscherkassky, "Die Analogien der Avant-garde", in *Found Footage Film*, ed. Cecilia Hausheer et al. (Luzern: Viper/Zyklop, 1992), 26.

28 Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 13.

29 The terms 'reality effect' was an important concept within the debate on cinematographic apparatus led, among others, by Jean-Louis Baudry and Jean-

Louis Comolli. For essential texts, see Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, ed., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London/Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1980); Teresa Kyung Cha, ed., *Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus. Selected Writings* (New York: Tanam Press, 1980); Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). To my knowledge, the term was coined by Roland Barthes and introduced to film theory by Jean-Pierre Oudart, "L'effet de réel", *Cahiers du Cinéma* 228 (1971): 19-26. The discourse on cinematographic apparatus was crucial reference for the debates on political dimension of structuralist/materialist film (see note 1) and thus for evaluation of materiality in avant-garde film. The film *Zillertal* is related to these former debates rather than to a nostalgic approach.

30 Jacques Derrida, "Signatur, Ereignis, Kontext", in *Randgänge der Philosophie*, ed. Peter Engelmann (Wien: Passagen, 1999), 333-339.

31 *Ibid.*, 333.

32 For the general concept of media event, see Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, "Performing Media Events", in *Impacts and Influences: Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Curran James et al. (London/New York: Meuthen, 1987), 174-197. For the analysis of 9/11 as media event, see Reinhold Viehoff and Kathrin Fahlenbrach, "Ikonen der Medienkultur: Über die (verschwindende) Differenz von Authentizität und Inszenierung der Bilder in der Geschichte", in *Bilder des Terrors - Terror der Bilder? Krisenberichterstattung am und nach dem 11. September*, ed. Michael Beuthner et al. (Köln: Halem, 2003), 42-59. For Hindenburg disaster, see Gerhard Paul, "Lakehurst: Die Havarie als Medienereignis und Ikonografie der Katastrophe", in *Bilder die Geschichte schrieben: 1990 bis heute*, ed. Gerhard Paul (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 88-97.

33 For the concept of media icon, see Viehoff and Fahlenbrach, "Ikonen der Medienkultur", 42-59; Kathrin Fahlenbrach and Reinhold Viehoff, "Medienikonen des Krieges: Die symbolische Entthronung Saddams als Versuch strategischer Ikonisierung", in *War Visions: Bildkommunikation und Krieg*, ed. Thomas Knieper et al. (Köln: Halem, 2005), 356-387; Reinhold Viehoff, "Programmierte Bilder: Gedanken zur ritualisierten Zirkelstruktur von Wahrnehmung und Inszenierung durch Bild(schirm)medien", in *Programm und Programmatik: Kultur- und medienwissenschaftliche Analysen*, ed. Ludwig Fischer (Konstanz: UVK-Ver.-Ges., 2005), 113-131.

34 Clément Chéroux, *Diplopie: Bildpolitik des 11. September*, trans. Robert Fajen (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2011), 78.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Dayan and Katz, "Performing Media Events", 174-197.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Bazin, "Ontology", 10.

39 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: Beck, 1999), 29 and 106.

- 40 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); Jaques Derrida, "Biodégradables, Seven Diary Fragments", *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1988-1989), 812-873; Jacques Derrida, *Die Schrift und die Differenz*, trans. Rodolphe Gasché (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), 302-350.
- 41 Derrida, "Biodégradables", 837-838, Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 10.
- 42 Derrida, "Biodégradables", 837-838.
- 43 Aleida Assmann, "Text und Ruine", in *Ruinenbilder*, ed. Aleida Assmann (München: Fink, 2002), 162.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

A SURREAL LANDSCAPE OF DEVASTATION: AN ANALYSIS OF LEE MILLER'S *GRIM GLORY* PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE LONDON BLITZ

Lynn Hilditch

Susan Sontag in her 2004 book *Regarding the Pain of Others* suggests that images of war and destruction can be interpreted as aesthetic objects—that “there is a beauty in ruins”.¹ While a battlefield is usually photographed as a form of document—an historical record of a specific war environment—a landscape of war is still a landscape. A painting depicting war can still be interpreted as a piece of art. Lee Miller’s photographs taken during the latter years of the Second World War effectively express this belief by proving that images of war can be justified as being aesthetic artefacts through the photographer’s creative use of composition and form and by demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of art. In Miller’s case, her war photographs may be deemed aesthetically significant by considering her Surrealist background and by analysing her images within the context of André Breton’s theory of “convulsive beauty”—Breton’s idea that a scene of death and destruction can be represented or analysed as something beautiful by convulsing, or transforming, it into its apparent opposite.

Miller’s photographs of the London Blitz, including the twenty-two published in Ernestine Carter’s 1941 publication *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire*, effectively demonstrate “a beauty in ruins”. As a former student and muse of Man Ray from 1929 to 1932 and a close associate of the Surrealists in Paris, Miller was able to utilize her knowledge of Surrealism, and other art forms, to create an aestheticized reportage of a broken city ravished by war. In this respect, Miller’s war photographs can be interpreted as hybrids of art and war, which, while documenting the chaos and destruction of Britain during the Blitz, also reveal Surrealism’s love for quirky or evocative juxtapositions. Throughout her Blitz photographs, Miller succeeds in creating an aesthetic visual representation of a temporary surreal world of fallen statues and broken typewriters. As Leo Mellor writes about these dualities, “The

paradox of Miller's wartime reportage was announced in the title of her book of documentary photographs, *Grim Glory*; that is to say, the coexistence of darkening mortality and ideal exaltation, like a Baroque conceit".²

Like a Surrealist play on words, the British people had waited months for "the Phoney War", "Bore War", "Funny War" or "Sitzkrieg", as the period from September 1939 to April 1940 became known, to the point that gas masks, black-outs, bomb shelters and evacuations had become part of their new—one might say "surreal"—way of life. The war, therefore, had forced London to assume a strange persona, the British people becoming the living subjects of a George Grosz-style painting. As Carolyn Burke writes:

By October, Londoners were taking the increasingly surreal aspects of the Sitzkrieg in their stride. They covered windows with brown paper strips, installed "Anderson" shelters in the garden, if they had one, and, if not, prepared for the Blitz with the government-issue earplugs. Signs saying TO THE TRENCHES showed the way to dugouts in Hyde Park. By November, when the fog blanketed the city, flashlights were scarce; cigarettes gave a welcome source of light. People collided with one another; pedestrians found their way home by means of white lines on the curbs and gateposts.³

Miller's contemporary at *Vogue* magazine, Cecil Beaton, referred to the chaotic nature of the Blitz as a product of the "laws of blast", and it was the results of these "laws" that Miller chose to capture in the photographs for *Grim Glory*.⁴ To a Surrealist photographer like Miller, capturing the destruction with her Rolleiflex camera was "not so much unfathomable as liberating"; a unique opportunity for an artist to create something aesthetically inspiring out of the devastation.⁵ As Burke adds, "By wrecking some targets and sparing others, the bombs created wonders in the midst of chaos—as if Magritte or Dali had remade the landscape".⁶ For example, in Miller's photographs, a broken window pane takes on the persona of the Gas, Light and Coke company trademark, Mr Therm; a bomb-ravaged building in Knightsbridge is transformed into the Venetian Bridge of Sighs; and in a London park a grounded barrage balloon becomes the giant "egg" of two extremely proud-looking geese. The creative potential of these scenes were endless. British Surrealist Julian Trevelyan noted in his 1957 autobiography *Indigo Days* that it "became absurd to compose Surrealist confections when high explosives could do it much better, and when German soldiers with Tommy-guns descended from the clouds on parachutes dressed as nuns. Life had caught up with

Surrealism or Surrealism with life, and for a giddy moment we in England lived the irrational movement to its death”.⁷

Beneath Miller’s photograph of a bombed Non-conformist chapel taken in Camden Town in 1940, Carter has described in words what Miller has captured in visual form while replicating Trevelyan’s thoughts. She writes:

If all that one saw was unrelieved tragedy, life would be unendurable in these beleaguered cities. Fortunately, the wanton behaviour of explosives and blast occasionally produces effects that are ironical, freakish, beautiful, and sometimes even funny, although the irony is grim and the humour threaded through with pathos.⁸

With an element of dark humour, or *humour noir*, the caption beneath the photograph reads, “1 Non-conformist chapel + 1 bomb = Greek Temple”.⁹ Miller’s reference to classical architecture seems to indicate that war can create time shifts by bringing the past into the future. All that remains of the building are the Ionic pillars standing defiant, reminiscent of those at the ancient Temple of Athena Nike in Athens. In another photograph of the blocked doorway of that same Non-conformist chapel, Miller has used irony and wit to suggest that the human congregation who once occupied the chapel has now been metamorphosed into a “congregation of bricks”, thus indicating that even the House of God was not safe from the destructiveness of war. Here, Miller appears to be making an observation on the sacrilegious nature of war, while at the same time displaying an attitude that is essentially Dadaist in using images to express anger, disillusionment and the irrationality of war. Although Miller was not religious, religious themes are increasingly apparent in Miller’s war photographs. For example, “Hot Line to God”, taken in 1945, provides Miller with an opportunity to convert the crucifixion into a surreal scene by capturing the sculptured image of Christ on the cross immersed beneath a web of telegraph wires brought down by enemy bombing. Carter notes, “Churches may seem to be of dubious military importance, yet they share with hospitals the distinction of being primary objectives”, or in other words, prime targets for enemy fire due to their humanitarian significance. As Susan Sontag observes:

To feel the pulse of Christian iconography in certain wartime or disaster-time photographs is not a sentimental projection. It would be hard not to discern the lineaments of the Pietà in W. Eugene Smith’s picture of a woman in Minamata cradling her deformed, blind and deaf daughter, or the template of the Descent from the Cross in several of Don McCullin’s pictures of dying American soldiers in Vietnam.¹⁰

Miller's photograph of the "Bombed Interior, Cologne Cathedral," published in *Vogue* magazine in April 1945, also comments on the relationship between art, religion and war while using chance form. The dramatic vertical lines of the architectural structure of the internal cathedral walls stand in defiant contrast to the horizontal piles of rubble where the floor used to be, rather like a symbolic spruce forest rising up from a forest floor covered in decomposing vegetation. Although the cathedral suffered fourteen attacks by aerial bombs during the war, it remained standing like a symbol of defiance in a city described in 1945 by architect Rudolf Schwarz as the "world's greatest heap of debris". There also appear to be stark similarities between the rubble on the cathedral floor and the piles of bones Miller would later encounter at Buchenwald and Dachau—both distinct and extreme consequences of the destructive nature of war: architectural destruction caused by allied air strikes, and human destruction, the result of the Nazis' merciless political campaign.

Although *Grim Glory* aimed to depict the destruction caused during the Blitz, it also includes photographs that portray the physical suffering of the British people as a direct result of the bombing. However, within these photographs of devastation there are the characteristic Surrealist elements of irony, pun and *humour noir*. "Indecent Exposure?", for example, was taken from a series of photographs of two naked male mannequins wearing top hats and left standing defiantly like statues at the side of the road. The uplifted arm of the mannequin to the right of the photograph gives the impression that he is shaking an angry fist at the enemy, or perhaps more humorously, giving a sarcastic Nazi salute. The second mannequin, who has no male genitalia, holds a sign that reads, "Look what Adolf has done to me!" Despite the fact that the male mannequins appear to have been "de-gendered" by the war, the pun in the title suggests that the naked mannequins are "indecently exposing" themselves on a public street, in sight of two on-duty police officers standing to the left of the frame. The inclusion of the fully-dressed policemen suggests an example of polarisation, with the men of authority mirroring the "men" of insolence. However, the title could also suggest that Miller, a female photographer, is creating an indecent exposure of the scene via her camera by photographing the two naked "men". The presence of the question mark in the title also provides an element of flexibility in the interpretation of the scene. Are the mannequins indecent? Is the photograph (exposure) therefore indecent? Whatever the interpretation, the photograph shows Miller's use of black humour and a sense of fun, or "comic sublime" as Ian Walker describes her use of amusing juxtapositions.¹¹ Although it is unclear whether it was Miller who manipulated the scene or whether it

was a scene she stumbled upon, in her photograph Miller seems to be commenting on the humour of the British people who, amongst these dark times of the war, appear to have turned one small piece of the destruction into an amusing Surrealist scene.

Miller had used mannequins and sculpted figures in her earlier photographic career after being inspired by the surreal quality of Eugene Atget's Paris street photography—what Walker describes as “an Atgetian aesthetic”.¹² Her photographs reflect the bizarre nature of Surrealism with its “statuary gesturing from shop windows and absurdly lifelike mannequins parading themselves on pavements”. While “Indecent Exposure?” certainly fits into this category, it also complies with Breton's theory of the “marvellous”, two examples of which Breton notes in his first manifesto as being illustrated by “romantic ruins” and the “modern mannequin”. As Hal Foster writes in 2000 book *Compulsive Beauty*:

Both [romantic ruins and the modern mannequin are] prized emblems in Surrealism, the first evocation of the space of the unconscious, the second of its status as both intimate and alien, but what renders them marvellous? Each combined and conflates two opposed terms: in the ruin the natural and the historical, and in the mannequin the human and the nonhuman. In the ruin cultural progress is captured by natural entropy, and in the mannequin the human form is given over to the commodity form—indeed, the mannequin is the very image of capitalist reification.¹³

The “Bombed Nonconformist Chapel” photograph, for example, is a prime example of Breton's “romantic ruins” and the combination and contradiction of “the natural and the historical.” The ruins in the photograph are not so much “natural” as “unnatural”—although they do *resemble* the natural (and historical) ancient ruins created by erosion over time; in other words, they can be interpreted as *forced* ruins shaped by the destructive nature of war. The mannequins in “Indecent Exposure?”, however, are examples of the “modern mannequin”, which appears to imply a relationship between war and business in relation to the mannequin's “commodity form”. Miller also transforms the “nonhuman” into the “human” by providing the mannequins with personality, comparing them to the uniformed policemen, and perhaps *speaking* on behalf of the British people by the inclusion of the sign around the mannequin's neck. Therefore, by using an element of *humour noir*, Miller has created a character in human form to comment upon the absurd nature of the war. In addition, it is perhaps ironic that the male mannequins on the streets of London appear to be replacing the presence of male soldiers in Miller's *Grim Glory* photographs.

While Miller's photographs use random or chance objects—or *objet trouvé*—often placed, arranged or constructed by war, in many respects, Miller also uses her camera in an attempt to preserve a lost or damaged culture through her selection of individual objects that symbolise different aspects of culture. The result is a series of images that stand as visual memorials to the past. "Remington Silent", for example, depicts a mangled typewriter, which, ironically, has been "silenced" by the bombings in London, as so many writers and intellectuals were during the Second World War. Antony Penrose writes, "[Miller's] eye was Surrealist and poetic, seeing in each image a statement that could be interpreted at many levels. Superficially the picture entitled 'Remington Silent' may be of a bashed-up typewriter; subliminally the shattered machine taps out an eloquent essay about the war's assault on culture"—just as Miller did in her wartime photo-essays for *Vogue*.¹⁴

Similarly, *Piano By Broadwood* shows the chance discovery of a musical instrument, a symbol of affluence and high culture, which has been reduced to a piece of debris, another casualty of the Blitz. The piano displays the manufacturer's plate which indicates that it was produced by John Broadwood & Sons, one of the oldest and most prestigious piano companies in the world, making instruments for some of the greatest musicians and composers such as Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Liszt, and for royalty including the future Queen Elizabeth II. The presence of the plate also transforms the object into a commercial artefact that illustrates the diverse relationships between business, technology and war in a similar way to Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades".

Carolyn Burke describes the crushed object as "an eloquent testimony at a time when wailing sirens and droning dive-bombers composed London's nightly music".¹⁵ At the same time as Miller was photographing the piano, her future husband Roland Penrose was engaging in a series of dark paintings depicting the noises of war as musical instruments, such as his inclusion of a violin in *Black Music* which, in turn, is "transformed into a skull-like mask of death with knives emerging from the neck of the instrument".¹⁶ As Penrose writes:

It was the noise of the bombardment at night. It was so overwhelming I felt it was the relentless work of demons, so to make them less terrifying I tried to see them as a group of musicians. They seemed less threatening that way. The art of primitive man always seemed to me to have been doing just that—converting hideous intangible fears into art that might still frighten us, but we can see it and touch it so it becomes more understandable.¹⁷

Perhaps Miller, like Penrose, also saw the artistic significance of a musical instrument, whether captured in a photograph or a painting, as a way of making some sense out of the madness of the conflict.

More poignant perhaps is *Revenge on Culture*, a photograph depicting the statue of a female figure lying amongst the rubble. Miller's interest in and knowledge of classical art and ancient mythology is apparent throughout her photographic work, bringing together the old and the new, the ancient and the modern, the past and the present. The statue, probably a Roman or Greek goddess and once a symbol of great beauty, has been thrown from her pedestal and reduced to another chance object amongst the ruins, like the typewriter and the Broadwood piano. In this respect, the sculpture has become an object which has then been transformed back into a piece of art via Miller's camera, thus symbolising the rebirth of art, and perhaps the emancipation of women who adopted male roles during the war. It is also possible that Miller saw some similarities between herself and the statue—Miller had been cast as a statue brought back to life in Jean Cocteau's 1930 film *Le Sang d'un Poète*, thus creating a direct relationship between photographer and object.

In all three photographs—*Remington Silent*, *Piano By Broadwood* and *Revenge on Culture*—Miller appears to be commenting on the death of culture (writing, music and art) as one of the consequences of war.

So, to conclude: it becomes apparent when looking at photographs depicting the dark, nightmarish landscapes of urban destruction taken during the Blitz, including Miller's *Grim Glory* photographs, that there is a distinct lack of dead bodies on display. As Ian Walker explains, "In the great mass of photography of the Blitz, there are very few pictures of actual bodies, largely because of self-censorship. Rather buildings, statues, objects and mannequins become metaphors for the destruction wrought on real bodies".¹⁸ Miller's photographs of the London Blitz, therefore, demonstrate an ability to transform, or "convulse", the *real*—the horror and devastation, the brutality of war—into the *surreal*, producing sensitive and at times humorous and witty portraits of war. As Nigel Henderson put it: "Surrealism was everywhere in a sense. Houses chopped by bombs while ladies were still sitting on the lavatory, the rest of the house gone but the wallpaper and fires still burning in the grate. Who can hold a candle to that kind of real life Surrealism?"¹⁹ However, Antony Penrose writes that throughout Miller's *Grim Glory* photographs an "...anger burns deep. But there is also a wit, as Lee shouts at the devil, in her photographs of the congregation of bricks tumbling out of the door of the wrecked Non-Conformist Chapel; the mannequins, naked but for their top hats, trying to hail a taxi in an empty street; and the two ineffably proud geese posing in

front of a colossal silver egg, an adopted barrage balloon”.²⁰ This quotation effectively sums up how Miller’s photographs display an element of surprise often incited by a feeling of indignation conjured up by being a willing observer to the horrific consequences of the Second World War, and how she used her Surrealist eye to produce unconventional photographic representations of the destruction of war.

NOTES

¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 67.

² Leo Mellor, “War Journalism in English”, in Marina MacKay, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75.

³ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 201.

⁴ Cecil Beaton, *The Years Between: Diaries 1939-44* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 37.

⁵ Burke, 205.

⁶ Burke, 205.

⁷ Julian Trevelyan, *Indigo Days: Art and Memoirs of Julian Trevelyan* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), 80.

⁸ Ernestine Carter, ed. *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (London: Lund Humphries, 1941), 33.

⁹ Carter, *Grim Glory*, plate 74.

¹⁰ Sontag, 71.

¹¹ Ian Walker, “Lee Miller and Surrealism” (paper presented at The Quintessential Lee Miller Symposium, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, & December 2007).

¹² Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 88.

¹³ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2000), 21.

¹⁴ Antony Penrose quoted in Katherine Slusher, *Lee Miller and Roland Penrose: The Green Memories of Desire* (Munich, Berlin, London and New York: Prestel, 2007), 56.

¹⁵ Burke, 206.

¹⁶ Slusher, 56.

¹⁷ Roland Penrose quoted in Slusher, 57.

¹⁸ Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester Press, 2007), 156.

¹⁹ Dave Hoffman and Shirley Read, “Nigel Henderson”, *Camerawork*, 11 (September 1978), 12.

²⁰ Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 103.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR, REMEMBERING DESTRUCTION: INSCRIPTION ON THE BODY AND THE PROMISE OF JUSTICE

Jennifer Walden

This chapter is a response to the debates and deliberations that have emerged concerning destruction in war and the modes by which this destruction is culturally mediated. Those debates have concerned the power and effect of mediations to shape ethical and ultimately political dispositions towards mass death and violence. The chapter first scopes some of the main tenets of these concerns. Thereafter it explores an historical example of representing mass destruction which sought to eschew the norms which govern the familiar assumed realistic approaches to such representation.

The critical thinker Judith Butler has written:

“Our inability to see what we see is of critical concern. To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter. And if there is a critical role for visual culture during times of war it is precisely to thematize the forcible frame, the one that conducts the dehumanizing norm that restricts what is perceivable and, indeed, what can be. ...this restriction works to undermine both a sensate understanding of war, and the conditions for a sensate opposition to war. This ‘not seeing’ in the midst of seeing...became the visual norm, one conducted by the photographic frame in the scene of torture”.¹

Butler thought has brought to the fore pressing ethical issues concerning modern military conflicts. Her writings raise questions concerning what constitutes war, especially post 9/11 and the part that images and photographic representation of “bodies” in war play in the West’s conceptualisation of “grievability”. She asks what “to grieve” now means in the rush to execute “the war on terror” which itself appears to question which lives are “human” and hence even “grievable” at all.

Referring to Levinas’s meditation on our absolute responsibility for the ‘face’ of the other in all its vulnerability Butler indicates how that

precariousness and vulnerability may be erased by the normative repetitions of its framing, for example via the proliferating of visual representations of the ‘other’ by various means or simply by absence.

“The frame” is one of the key ways in which Butler articulates how we might be denied a structural opening allowing for “grievability” or might in spite of such attempts at “denial”, actually encounter this structure. We are used to photographic images and televisual images of various orders framing and acting as our information about the horrors of war and our “signposts” for reaction. The frame however is always “in play” in its putting into play a dynamic between as Butler suggests, an apprehension of the sort to ‘blind us’ to the recognisability of the life of the other, and the full recognition of the life of the other. The frame can frame in the sense of “setting up” the reception of that which is framed. Knowing this, however, can call into question the frame itself.

“...to call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside... The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, apprehend. Some thing exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality...”²

One of the ways of putting the frame of war photography in question is the very modes of its circulation and the means by which the production and circulation of images can never be entirely securely ‘framed’. Images break from the frame. This has been seen historically and latterly with images, such as those from Abu Ghraib in the war in Iraq, circulating globally via the internet, often produced informally, which can “facilitate a widespread visceral turn against [the] war”³ That said, as Butler is at pains to argue, it is not enough to look for new content or eschew the means of representation and circulation of images in the name of something closer the truth. The very apparatus of circulation is the iterable structure of the frame which also gives rise to the breaking of the frame.

“When those frames that govern the relative and differential recognisability of lives comes apart- as part of the very mechanism of their circulation-it becomes possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally “recognized” as a life.”⁴

It is also the case that what becomes possible to apprehend in the breaking of the frame, is not, cannot be another idealised norm for “humanity”.

“The point is not to substitute one set of idealized norms for understanding the “human” with another, but to grasp those instances in which the norm destroys its instance, when human life...exceeds and resists the norm of the human....Is this not the scene in which life is apprehended that is not yet ordered by the norms of recognition?”⁵

Butler makes the case for a *sense* of vulnerability and precariousness as a political necessity which precisely exceeds or cannot be ‘held’ within our norms of humanity. She argues for grief, vulnerability, *precariousness* as new *political* concepts to mobilise a true ethical relation to the otherness of the other, a profound and perhaps ultimately ungraspable relation, *rather than* a confused narcissistic or universalising sense of the normative ideal of ‘humanity’ or nationhood.

“Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of a political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the ‘we’ is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against [without] denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation...grief displays the thrall in which our relations with others hold us...we are [both] gripped and undone by these relations...”⁶

As Butler suggests this structure of grief is a profound one which is also that of desire-both gripped and undone- and “one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the *prospect* of the touch, by the *memory* of the feel”.⁷ Here this structure, or more exactly I suggest, this ‘de-structure’ is described as something akin to being strewn between prospect and memory, memory and prospect. This is one that is encountered and resonates across other thinkers attempting to come to grips with these extremes of modern experience, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and Gilles Deleuze.

Butler’s grief resonates with Derrida’s temporal structure of the ‘promise’, the structure of the time out of joint, crossing time, as the promise of justice *without end*, found in his *Spectres of Marx*.⁸ The promise as a structure without end is *endlessly* open to the other as an ‘excess’ or a ghost, within any presumed presence. It is endlessly open precisely in resistance to re-instating an identified and idealised ‘norm’ for the humanity of the other. This is not because Derrida does not think of the need for justice for finite groups in the present, but because even as there are finite groups, there is *the infinite within the finite*; those who perish in

the fire, for whom even the ash does not remain; but are yet, a 'not nothing', a community without ends.⁹

Derrida's temporal structure is complemented by what I characterise as the spatial structure as found in Jean-Luc Nancy's conceptualisation of the inoperable community without ends, as our response and responsibility to each other. This is a responsibility premised upon our exposure one to another, *not* in the manner of "communing" but precisely in the manner of difference –touching and not touching- in a bodily sense- bound together but apart- indeed, as with Butler, *gripped and undone*; the body touched and undone by the other and by this "never coming back to itself"-a differential return of another sort.¹⁰

Of pertinence to Butler's concerns for our responsibility being in danger of effacement by the very means of visual representation and 'framing' that at the same time can bring the plight of 'the other' to us, is Gilles Deleuze's "time-image". The "time-image" for Deleuze is in fact as a structure which self-destructs (both grips and undoes' to extend Butler's metaphor again), its function in a representational schema in order to demonstrate its "truth" as a construct of "falsity". Such interpretation of the image opens the reader/viewer to the "power of the false" and thus awareness of that very process of 'imaging' the other that participates in foreclosing upon or potentially opening to the other.

Butler's context for invoking grief and precariousness as politically necessary provocations is the need to re-member the destruction of the other in all its vulnerability and thus the importance of those factors in common with other thinkers I have been tracing here; the structural relation between grief, encountering loss and destruction and desire; the promise of justice for the dead; precariousness as a political concept and the question of representation and visual culture. How might we re-member destruction and at the same time attend to a certain "promise" of recognition and justice for those who have been destroyed?

To explore this question and indeed apply it to a "framing of war" I turn to representation of destruction and disaster historically. This is by way of the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. This was first released in France in 1959, directed by Alain Resnais with a script by Marguerite Duras. I turn to this film to enlighten our thinking of the other and destruction in the contemporary, because I consider that it is a film that inscribes within its "de-structure" those very themes preoccupying our thinkers, as outlined above.

Resnais had been commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture to make a film about the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima by the Americans in 1945. Resnais had previously made a documentary film

about the Nazi Death-Camps (*Night and Fog*, 1955). He gave up on the initial idea of a documentary on Hiroshima, “just another *Night and Fog*” and enlisted the help of Marguerite Duras to make a different type of film. That does not mean to say that elements from *Night and Fog* are not present in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. One of these is Resnais’s interest in how memory and mental images of the camps relate to the actual documented footage, at what point does this documented “past “become the “past” and for whom? The questions of ‘*how you remember?*’ and ‘whose sense of the past is it?’ are central to Resnais.

Hiroshima Mon Amour produced a sort of “false documentary” as Duras termed it.¹¹ From the outset of her synopsis, it is clear that this film is to approach the horror of Hiroshima by way of a calculated subversion of the genre of documentary, which in its reliance upon *the repetition of images* reduces, *by its very amplitude*, the horror to a banality. The point is to have done with the showing or more exactly *re-presenting* of horror by horror; destruction by destruction and instead approach that entire sense of destruction otherwise; indeed by a combination of a certain de-structuring or “ruining” structure to the film-making and a quasi “allegorical” narrative.

The film’s approach to the proposition of ‘*false documentary*’ is to place a love story at the site of Hiroshima twelve years after the bombing, a chance one night affair between a Japanese man and a French woman. This story is itself overwhelmed by the female protagonist’s emerging memory of love, horrific death, punishment and ‘madness’ in her home town of Nevers in France, as this previously *repressed* memory is provoked by the new love affair at the site of Hiroshima’s disaster.

Formally it is a false documentary in that it is a film, which *foregrounds its own apparatus*. It does so through an orchestration of effects. In the opening this is via an elaborate montage of images from newsreels and reconstructions of the aftermath of the bombing intercut with images of two bodies (the chance lovers) in erotic embrace with a voice-over dialogue which, contrary to the norms of documentary, *disputes rather than confirms* the relationship between what is seen and knowledge of the event. The viewer is invited to understand the focus on these bodies and the disturbance of the senses it provokes, as a critique of the usual form of visual representation as a means by which a collective response to mass death is instituted. If the erotic touch upon skin disturbs vision as part of a critique of visual representation’s “dissimulation” of the truth, this is accompanied by an orchestration of other cinematic effects designed to disorient the spectator. The idea of testimony is put into question as the woman’s voice-over declarations of the truth of what she

has seen are denied by the man's voice-over. Thereafter visual themes from this prologue of reconstructions subtly echo and 'replay' in the flashback sequences of the female protagonist's remembered narration of her own experience of love, destruction and grief.

The story that is provoked by the French woman's chance encounter with the Japanese man, at the site of Hiroshima, is of her previous tragic love affair with a German soldier, who is shot dead during the Occupation of Nevers. Her recounting of her madness at his death and subsequent punishment, as her head is shaved for collaborating with the enemy (a *femme tondu*) and she is confined as 'mad' to a cellar, happens in images which, borrow from and repeat those of Hiroshima's aftermath, and is narrated via fragmented 'recall' images, which echo or imitate scenes from the Hiroshima newsreels and Museum. This contributes to the complex 'time' of the film (it is structurally intrinsic that the affair in the present appears equally riven with separation and loss, as the lovers have met in the interrupted time of a chance encounter and have to 'kill time' before her imminent departure) and the difficulties of distinguishing between what is 'real' and what is 'imaginary'. On the one hand, the woman's personal memory appears to be provoked by and continues to be imaged by her through the later images of Hiroshima, on the other hand her memory images serve as a device through which the collective images of Hiroshima are re-thought and given a bodily connection and a 'truth'.

The images of Nevers appear to be both a memory emerging from a deeply interiorised (traumatised) event *and* the interminable exteriorised repetitions of images of death at Hiroshima. And yet it is here that the Japanese man appears to seek a meaning for his memory, somewhere else, in the French woman and her *forging* a link with the experience of Hiroshima. The Japanese man is drawn by the threads of this story into a quasi identification with the dead German lover of the past. Having 'told her story' and in that sense both remembered by bringing to the 'surface' and thereby somehow 'forgotten' her German lover and 'betraying' him, by consigning him to a narrative, the film appears to end with the separation that has been there all along and no closure. She admits to 'beginning to forget' the Japanese man. He is desperate for her to stay, yet treasures a 'memory of forgetting'. In the end,

'...*nothing* happens. Both are reduced to a terrifying mutual impotence...They simply call each other once again. What? Nevers. Hiroshima. For in fact, in each other's eyes, they are no one. They are names of places, names that are not names...' ¹²

The film still generates unease (considerable criticism from the Japanese themselves¹³) because of the apparent analogy it makes between the personal anguished memories of a woman's tragic love affair and subsequent punishment, and the collective commemoration of a nuclear devastation. Can these be commensurable?¹⁴ In Duras's terms the answer may be 'yes' and 'no', in the sense that in both cases the suffering can be deemed to be 'absolute' (and *thereby* incomparable). Yet this personal distress is inextricably bound to the world-historical events of World War Two, "To shave a girl's head because she has loved – really loved – an official enemy of her country, is the ultimate of horror and stupidity".¹⁵

I am interested in what we can glean from this film and how we might connect the approach of this film, its critical impact and what it might be saying to us about the comprehensibility of mass death and the precariousness of 'life', with the critical concerns I have outlined, with how we apprehend the 'grief' 'assigned' to 'bodies' and whose bodies in recent conflicts. What is at stake is precisely how the film is understood as a filmic object that recognises the "crisis of representation" to which it has to respond. How does this film in contrast to 'received conventions of documentary repetition' *inscribe* the horror on a particular 'body' in the interests of, what we might refer to along with Butler as "a political community of a complex order"? Through certain reading we can trace some major elements: This is a piece of '*cinema*'; it is *a fiction*; it tells 'one' story' through another as an *allegory* of sorts; it is prepared to reach out for the ethical promise of recognition for the dead through the structures of 'desire'.

The cultural theorist, Gregg Lambert, reads the film by way of Gilles Deleuze. He traces some key themes from Deleuze on the basis of Deleuze's key philosophical appropriation of Nietzsche's notion of the "true world become fable", using *Hiroshima Mon Amour* as an exemplary 'text'.¹⁶ Deleuze's writing on cinema, in *Cinema Two: The Time Image* is profoundly influenced by Nietzsche's destruction of the pretension of philosophical metaphysics to know the truth.¹⁷ Deleuze sees modern cinema as itself taking up the *problem* of truth, centrally concerned as it is, in its very technique, with 'the world of appearances' and its relation to the 'real world'.¹⁸

What is cinema after all, but a world constructed by pure appearances?
...[inasmuch as] [T]he representation of a truth in itself is revealed as a purely *conventional* means of establishing a relation between terms or elements of a given narration... cinema discovers a new means of producing description that, although it unfolds in the proximity of a 'world' or 'a subject', does not find itself organised or coordinated by the

terms that are located there, as if cinema has found the means of disconnecting itself from the 'true world' and becomes immanent to itself, a world of pure appearances.¹⁹

The point to note from this reading of the 'falsifying' function of cinema is that it undermines and renders ineffective any distinction between 'true' and 'false' in as Lambert points out, a 'moral-juridical' sense. On the contrary, it demonstrates the extent to which that which is deemed 'true' is that which framed and thus we might say has hidden appearances by 'universalizing' the event "and provides them with an alibi".²⁰ In the context of Hiroshima this is a crucial question in terms of the effectiveness of a representation of the event, 'the showing of horror by horror', as the means by which the event can be *known*.

If memory becomes a function of purely cinematic time, it provides the opportunity to 'forge' an articulation of memory that allows for the exploration of those ethical-political questions concerning exactly how, for whom and by whom memory is 'produced' and how we can go beyond or get 'inside' the mere repetition of 'what happened' in the past tense. It is precisely 'her' appropriation of the recollection images of Hiroshima for 'her memory' which is to provide Hiroshima with its connection to '*the living body of the present*'²¹.

Contrary to this [the impasse of the recollection-image] we might see in 'her' story, as well as in his, a certain 'living connection' that is established with the past.; the desire to seek out the memory of Hiroshima where it was – at Nevers – and to establish a living connection that is signalled by the transference of the past of Nevers onto the past of Hiroshima.²²

The erotic becomes a vehicle for transference of memory from its *abstract* to its living dimensions, in order to dialectise the relationship between the two. It is the erotic that establishes the memory '*right where it was*', *where the living dwell*, as opposed to the 'in-itself' of abstract repetition. Eroticised repetition, i.e. transference, will 'heal' the trauma which is occluded by abstract repetition by the process of working through, however 'demonic' or 'painful' these dimensions of the erotic may be. Such an interpretation of the erotic appropriates it in terms of a necessary immanent *embodiment*, of joy, pain, and suffering felt right on the body in order to transcend them, *transformed* in survival.

By passing through all these stages represented by the journey that is enacted from Riva's [the woman's] point of view, Hiroshima is thus transformed from the name of death to the proper name of love that survives the horror of its own past. Thus the story is that of a survivor, one

who survives the end of the world and who must live after Hiroshima. In telling her story she offers a way out of Hiroshima by filling the place with a love that is ‘wonderful’ as Duras writes.²³

These arguments are compelling and go a long way to demonstrating how our sense of grief and the fundamental precariousness of life may be touched precisely by eschewing “horror by horror”. But I would question whether there is a ‘way out’ of Hiroshima by ‘filling the place’ etc. This sense of plenitude and ‘closure’ is not how I read the film’s transformative effects. The promise of justice and recognition seems to me to reside in that which we *cannot* ‘fill’, the *limits* of remembrance, representation, and narration. Otherwise we may be ‘gripped’ by the other but as an idealised norm, which loses the sense of being undone by the other and by this “never coming back to [the] self”, as Nancy would have it.²⁴ To return to Butler’s question, “Is this not the scene in which life is apprehended that is *not yet ordered by the norms of recognition?*” (Emphasis added).²⁵

Thus those thoughts of Derrida, alluded to previously, gain import as the means to think the resistance to an early closure into identification and idealisation of the ‘humanity’ of the other. Kyo Maclear, writing about *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, with reference to Derrida and an allied thinker, Drucilla Cornell, speaks to those important thoughts about the *limits* of memory and the opening for justice that occupy Derrida.

“...all description and narrative constitute [not the plenitude but] the limits of remembrance because [the atomic bomb] experience conjures an excess that cannot be fully incorporated we are pressed to explore the ethical implication of partial memory... ..²⁶

Arguing for a practice of remembering at the limits as *transmemoration*, Maclear states

“Even as we enlist artefacts and images to ‘name’ and ‘picture’ the dead *the limits* bid us keep our minds open to the...sufferings that *cannot be* captured. As Derrida suggests, these excesses, these remains, these “ghosts” call forth infinite responsibility and an aspiration to live more justly.”²⁷

Given that this film provides both an attempt to inscribe suffering on the body as a ‘lived’ relation for the viewer and at the same time enact the limits of vision, we can be acutely aware of the ‘crisis’ of representation whereby we cannot have adequate frames for such traumatic historical events but it is through this very inadequacy, through this gap; through separation, through the astonishment of ‘always unfulfilled desire’ through

as Butler says, *grief as a political community of a complex order*, that the promise of justice remains. Such resistance to complete is not refusal or yet more destruction,

“Needless to spell it out here, therefore, still less to insist on it too heavily: it is not a taste for the void or for destruction that leads anyone to recognize the right of the necessity to “empty out” increasingly and to deconstruct the philosophical response that consists in totalizing in filling in the space of the question or in denying its possibility, in fleeing from the very thing it will have allowed one to glimpse.”²⁸

In the end I suggest, with Maclear, that this cultural mediation of war and destruction, is less a mediation of the bombing of Hiroshima in the denotative, descriptive sense but is a film about the very “production of memory, vision and knowledge...[which] draws back into view the layered process by which memory is constructed”²⁹ and the limitations and complexities of this process including those ambiguities between the real and the imagined, the excessive and non-communicable feelings of loss and desolation and the norms of description which are barriers to memory. This ‘frame of war’ gives us to think, as Maclear says, along with Derrida and his philosophical associate Drucilla Cornell that

“...heeding the call of otherness” cannot be achieved through narcissistic or universalizing modes of identification. Calling attention to the limits of every historical translation, they seek to register yet unspoken claims of otherness which cannot be encompassed by any given narrative, and thus point to the narrative’s contradictions and exclusions...herein defined ethics focuses rather “on the kind of person one must become to develop a non-violating relationship to the Other.”³⁰

Hence there is the need for the constant vigilance towards and openness to the tension between the ‘other’ and the ‘loss’ of the other and no closure. The film ends with this in Duras’s synopsis

...A moan of utter sadness. The light of the city in her eyes...He looks at her, she at him, as she would look at the city, and suddenly, very softly, she calls him. She calls him from afar, lost in wonder. She has succeeded in drowning him in universal oblivion and it is a source of amazement to her...³¹

What *Hiroshima Mon Amour* gives us to see is surely the very problem of ‘seeing’ and the ethical question that problem subtends. It goes some way to raise Butler’s call: “To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we

see is no easy matter. And if there is a critical role for visual culture during times of war it is precisely to thematize the forcible frame”.

Remembering destruction, at the limits

NOTES

¹ Butler, J *Frames of War* (London Verso 2009)

² Butler, J *Frames of War*

³ Butler, J *Frames of War* 11

⁴ Butler, J *Frames of War* 12

⁵ Butler, J *Frames of War* 95

⁶ Butler, J *Precarious Life* (London Verso 2004) 22-24

⁷ Butler, J op.cit 23-4

⁸ Derrida, J *Specters of Marx* trans Peggy Kamuf, (New York, Routledge) 1994

⁹ See Derrida, J *Cinders* trans Ned Lukacher (Lincoln USA and London University of Nebraska Press) 1991

¹⁰ See Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Inoperative Community*. Edited by Connor, P, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1991 and Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Sense of the World*. Translated by Librett, J, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1997.

¹¹ Duras, M., ‘Synopsis’, *Hiroshima Mon Amour Screenplay*, (New York: Grove Press) 1961

¹² *Ibid.*, 13

¹³ See Higgins, L., *New Novel, new wave, new politics*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1996

¹⁴ In their book “*Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais*”, Leo Bersani makes much of the pitting of what amounts to a bourgeois love story against the atrocity of Hiroshima and suggest Resnais’s ‘vision’ was ‘compromised’ by the involvement of Duras, see Bersani, Leo, and Ulysses Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais*, (Cambridge UK), 1994.

¹⁵ Duras, M., ‘Synopsis’, 12 The film, in Duras’ hands, is a positioned ‘anti-war’ text, which refuses to disconnect the atrocity of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima with the atrocious behaviour of some of those in France at the time of the Liberation. The violence, conflict and shame of Liberation is a ‘truer’ picture than the nationalist fervour of celebration with De Gaulle as a national hero which went on to legitimise the government of De Gaulle in 1958 in the wake of the war against Algerian independence.

¹⁶ Lambert, G., ‘How the true world finally became fable’ in *The non-philosophy of Gilles Deleuze* London: Continuum, 2002), 102.

¹⁷ Lambert summarises this thus: “Philosophy and Christianity are exposed by Nietzsche as producing nothing but the history of error, in the guise of truth, by way of the different ways of thinking about the relationship between truth and

appearance, which has been at the core of philosophical and Christian thought from Plato to modernity. Nietzsche himself... represents, under the name of Zarathustra, a final moment, which bears a Janus-face that casts a glance both forward and backward, and encompassing the entire unfolding of ‘truth as a history of error’. The character of Zarathustra represents the twilight of the concept of truth, the death of the truthful man and the collapse of every model of truth (that is, the entry into the long night of insomnia, pessimism and even nihilism); however on the other slope his appearance marks the dawn that breaks into the long night of insomnia and promises the return of good sense and a spirit of happiness and joy” Ibid., 92-93 (an affirmation of appearance no longer shackled by a ‘presumed’ truth) . The ambiguity between these two slopes of ‘passive’ and ‘active’ nihilism, summed up in Nietzsche’s aphorism, that with the vanquishing of ‘the true’ world the world of appearances vanishes as well, marks the very character of a certain cinema and literature in Europe post-WW II, of which *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is a key example.

¹⁸ Deleuze, G., *Cinema Two: The Time Image*. Trans. Tomlinson, H. and Galeta, R., (London: Althone Press, 1989. Resnais features amongst Deleuze’s list of post-World War II filmmakers who represented an entire shift in cinema from the ‘movement image; to the ‘time image’. The crisis in time and history brought about by the horrors of World War II precipitates a crisis in thought reflected in cinema as a critical engagement with time. The recording of the unfolding of “action” governing the ‘movement image’ gives way to the complexities of time and memory, which belie the straightforward notion of the image as reflecting the external world and the subject of consciousness. This puts into question the relationship between seeing and ‘reality’ and truth and fiction. This question becomes central to cinema, along with its preoccupation with the internal relations of time within the cinematic event. This is clearly relevant to *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

¹⁹ Lambert, G., op.cit p. 94. The quotes from Deleuze are from *Cinema Two: The Time Image*, 132-135.

²⁰ Deleuze, G., *Cinema Two: The Time Image*, 146.

²¹ Lambert. Op.cit 100

²² Lambert, G op.cit. 112.

²³ Lambert, G., op.cit 110.

²⁴ Nancy, J-L *The Inoperative Community* op.cit

²⁵ Butler, J *Frames of War* op. cit 95

²⁶ Maclear, K ‘The limits of vision, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and the subversion of representation’ in Douglass A and Vogler, TA eds. *Witness and Memory* the discourse of trauma (London Routledge 2003) p.235

²⁷ Maclear op.cit p. 236

²⁸ Derrida, J ‘No apocalypse, Not now: Full speed ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives’, *diacritics* 14 p. 30 quoted in Maclear op.cit 243

²⁹ Maclear op.cit 244

³⁰ Maclear op.cit 245 Maclear refers here to Drucilla Cornell in Cornell, D *The Philosophy of the Limit*, London and New York Routledge 1992 p 13

³¹ Duras, M., 'Synopsis' p 83

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Resnais, A *Hiroshima Mon Amour* 1959 France/Japan

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Helen E. Scott completed her Ph.D. at the University of St Andrews in 2009. Her main area of research concerns incidents of iconoclasm perpetrated by members of the public in Western museums and art galleries. In particular, her work focuses on how museums respond to this phenomenon, and the ways in which response strategies influence iconoclastic crime. Her doctoral research was awarded funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and resulted in the thesis ‘Confronting Nightmares: Responding to Iconoclasm in Western Museums and Art Galleries’. She continues to present her research at academic conferences in the UK and USA, and has published articles on the subject in various books and journals. Outside of her research, Helen is employed as Manager of the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust, an organisation that safeguards and promotes the artistic legacy of the 20th century abstract painter Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. She also works as an art historical editor, both freelance and for the *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*.

Joanna Sperryn-Jones is an artist and manages the Sculpture Department for City Lit, London. She has completed a PhD in sculpture at Norwich University College of the Arts and University of the Arts London. Through processes of making and breaking in sculpture and writing, she explores experiences and perceptions of breaking. Her doctoral thesis simultaneously explores and draws parallels between personal experiences in life, such as breaking bones, with those of making/breaking sculpture, using Derrida's concept of the break and breaking as a methodology.

Miranda Stearn is a final year PhD candidate at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Her research focuses on museum-commissioned artist interventions, looking at how and why museums and galleries bring in contemporary artists as interpreters of their collections. Underlying her project is an aspiration to investigate and understand the widespread prevalence of these types of projects in the UK museums sector in recent years and to examine how practice in this area has evolved and developed over the past three decades, and the implications for museums, collections, artists and audiences. When she is not on sabbatical, she is an arts and heritage professional with six year's experience working in the UK sector, equally at home in the spheres of museums, galleries and public sector arts, and currently Arts and Heritage Development Co-ordinator for London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

Dr Jennifer Walden is Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries at the University of Portsmouth, UK. She lectures in the history of art and visual culture and fine art practice, has led a Master's course in art and design practice and supervises practice and theory research in art and design school environments. She has written on modern and contemporary interventions in the history of art as a discipline, contemporary interpretations of history and memory as applied to art practice and questions concerning aesthetics and politics. Publications include, 'Concepts of art history in a changing world'. In H. Frendo (Ed.), *The European mind, narrative and identity (Proceedings of the X World Congress, International Society for the Study of European Ideas, University of Malta 24th to 26th July 2006)* (pp. 53-59). Malta: University of Malta Press. 2010; 'It's extraordinary how beautiful your skin is.' In D. Meyer-Dinkgräfe (Ed.), *The future of beauty in theatre, literature and the arts* (pp. 123-145). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2006 Jenny convened the conference session "Art and Destruction" at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference 2012, hosted by the Open University, UK, from which most of the essays collected here derive.