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Art and Conversation: Disturbance in Public Space

DPhil in Fine Art

ABSTRACT

Arthur C. Danto introduced the term “disturbation” in 1985 to denote artworks that confront audiences with the materials of reality in order to produce reactions that are continuous with those of real life. Danto argued that disturbational art dissolve the distance between representation and reality opened up by Platonic metaphysics and by the insertion of theatrical distance, returning art to its mimetic and magical phase.

The thesis uses Danto’s conceptual framework to develop a critical account of artworks that use politics as the medium for their disturbational content by creating relationships with audiences that provoke the re-realization of attitudes, experiences and identities that have been suppressed. In *Shibboleth* (2007) by Doris Salcedo, disturbance takes the form of the ‘political uncanny’ and in the case of *Domestic Tension* (2007) by Wafaa Bilal, it takes the form of the ‘political abject’.

The thesis argues that *Shibboleth* confronted audiences with “the return of the repressed” through a disturbational process of interaction with the space of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern. Departing from existing readings of Salcedo’s work, the thesis proposes that the installation provoked the experience of the political uncanny by physically enacting suppressed historical, economic and political divisions constructed upon a friend/enemy form of relationship.

Likewise, the thesis argues that the use of virtual electronic media in the process of participation in *Domestic Tension* radically altered the structure of collaborative activities by its production of the abject through the detachment conferred by distance and anonymity. The degree of self-censorship and accountability that exists in face to face interactions was nullified by the process of remote participation which encouraged deindividuation and anti-social or dehumanizing behavior. The tendency towards dehumanization becomes intensified when the artwork’s content is political, thereby provoking hostile and distancing effects refracted by contemporary geopolitics.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CONCEPT OF DISTURBATION

Introduction: Disturbation as Art into Life.ⁱ

Arthur C. Danto proposed the concept of disturbance in 1984 during a symposium organized by the avant-garde gallery The Kitchen in New York to deliberate upon the nonstandard genres of art as exemplified by opera, video and performance art.ⁱⁱ Danto used the structure of performance art to propose that the art forms that he designated as disturbational aimed to relate to audiences through immediate contact in a way that reflected a return to the mimetic and magical phases of art in ancient Greece before art was separated from imitation by Platonic metaphysics, and theatrical distance separated art from religion.¹ Disturbation is derived from co-joining the characteristics of disturbance and masturbation since as Danto argues, the art forms of disturbance seek to “produce an existential spasm through the introduction of images into life.”² The term is also meant to suggest a high degree of disturbance because as a consequence of their improvisational and shabby execution, the art forms of disturbance carry a certain threat, promise a certain danger and are even capable of compromising reality in a way that the more established arts and their derivatives have lost the power to achieve. Danto indicates that an art

ⁱ Danto indicates that the essay “Art and Disturbation” was first published in *Formations* (winter 1985). It has since been published as a chapter in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986). Phrases that will be used interchangeably: disturbational art, art of disturbance and disturbatory art.

ⁱⁱ The Kitchen was founded as an artists’ collective in 1971 and has been a powerful force in shaping the cultural landscape of America having been among the very first institutions to embrace the then new genres of video and performance art and new visionary work within the fields of dance, music, literature, and film. In its early period The Kitchen helped launch the careers of many artists who became to define American avant-garde such as Vito Acconci, Constance de Jong, Kiki Smith, Lucinda Childs and Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass and Meredith Monk. See: <http://www.thekitchen.org/page/24/1>

work should be considered disturbational if it removes the insulating boundary between art and life in a manner that releases disturbing realities that makes us react to them as we would in real life. This differentiates disturbational works from artworks that are merely representations of disturbing things and responded to as such.³ In order to release disturbing realities, disturbational artworks use materials of reality such as obscenity, mutilation, the body (and body materials such as blood), real danger, actual pain and sometimes even incorporate the possibility of death as a component of their production.

Danto indicates that the intentions and materials of production of disturbational artworks make their spaces unstable and uncertain, and thereby contain or promise a degree of risk for both the artist and the audience. For this reason, the experience of disturbational art incorporates for artist and audiences the uncertainty of not knowing what will happen to either one, because the artworks incorporate the boundaries of danger as part of its substance, using both the artist and the audience as its process.⁴ The intrinsic intention of disturbational art is captured by Vito Acconci who stated that his artistic aim is to “set up a space that involves the audience so that they become a part of what the artist is doing.”⁵ In his 1972 performance *Seedbed* at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York, Acconci lay hidden under an artificial floor in the gallery space masturbating and fantasizing about the people up above, with his fantasies and sexual noises being amplified in the gallery space. *Seedbed* deliberately transgressed the line between private and public, audience and performer.

Danto argues that while *Seedbed* disturbed in the direction of content through obscene utterances that proved to be uncomfortable material for audiences, Chris Burden’s 1972 performance *Deadman* disturbed towards life or actual danger because Burden risked being killed. In *Deadman*, Burden was enclosed in a sack and placed on a California highway with the

possibility of getting hurt or killed and yet he accepted that possibility as part of the work and intended it to be responded to as such. Danto states that the possibility of death in the process of *Deadman* did not violate its boundaries because such an outcome is internal to the function of the artwork.⁶ For this reason, Danto argues that disturbational artworks raise existential questions that go against the normal order of how we relate to art because the nature of interaction that is produced by these artworks is very different to anything the philosophy of art has defined as the possibility of art, or even as internal to something being a work of art.⁷ In April 1975 Burden performed *Doomed* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. He set a wall clock on 12 midnight and lay down on the floor under a leaning sheet of glass, and remained immobile as viewers came and left.⁸ During the slightly over forty-five hours of the performance, he soiled himself and when a young museum employee named Dennis O'Shea took it upon himself to place a container of water within his reach, Burden got up and smashed the clock with a hammer and left. Peter Schjeldahl writes that Burden never again undertook a public action where he imperiled himself after *Doomed*.⁹ *Doomed* unmasked the absurdity of the conventions of art where, by assuming the role of viewers, we are both blocked and immunized from ethical responsibility.¹⁰ Ingrid Schaffner writes that from 1971 to 1982 Burden made works that put himself and sometimes his audiences in danger: he had himself locked up in a school locker for five straight days in *Locker Piece* (1971), he had a friend shoot him in the arm at close range with a .22 rifle in *Shoot* (1971); while near an airport he fired a pistol at a 747 Boeing flying overhead in *747* (1973), he dragged himself fifty feet over broken glass on Los Angeles Main Street in *Through the Night Softly* (1973) and in *Kunst Kick* (1974) he was kicked down a flight of stairs at the Basel Art Fair.¹¹ Schjeldahl has described *Shoot* as one of a number of repellent pieces of the early 1970s that created a double bind for viewers between whether they

should deploy the citizen injunction to intervene in crises or observe the institutional taboo against touching the art works.¹²

The conceptual Framework of Disturbation

Danto describes disturbance as a paradox within the development of art. This is because it contains the conceptual sophistication that marks modern art as a movement, but aims to return to the original beginnings of art, whereas Modernism responded to the crisis in representation after the breakdown of the Renaissance paradigm within a Hegelian framework of progression. Danto argues that the conceptual framework of disturbance works in tension with, and is antithetical to the Hegelian construction of the history of art in which art attains self-consciousness by discovering its ultimate nature and becoming philosophy. He describes disturbational artworks as appearing like shantytowns at the edges of what has long been considered to be the limits of art and attempting to drive those limits back so as to take over the edge of art by reproducing the real.¹³ Danto describes disturbational art forms as drawing their urgency from non-aesthetic issues external to the philosophy of art – by attempting to produce real effects and responses from art – and therefore as being in conflict with the traditional aesthetic definition of art. For this reason he turns to the mimetic or imitation theory of Platonic metaphysics and the magic phase of art as theorized by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to construct a conceptual context for disturbance. Danto argues that Platonic metaphysics defined art by creating a boundary between reality and imitation from the exclusion of the dramatization or reproduction of obscenities on stage. The birth of Greek tragedy on the other hand inserted theatrical distance between actor and audience and thus enabled the ancient Greeks to celebrate the Dionysian rites as art rather than as religion.

Plato considered mimetic representation “dangerous” because dramatic dialogue represents by presentation: the words spoken by an actor are real words and stage dialogue a real conversation.¹⁴ This motivated Plato to exclude the imitation of obscenities from dramatic representation because of the consequences of putting real words that were not good words in the mouth of an actor. Danto believes that this action enabled Plato to enact the first philosophical disenfranchisement of art by an institutional process that reduced art to something that exists for gratification.ⁱⁱⁱ Danto uses the framework of imitation theory to argue that *Deadman* by Burden and *Seedbed* by Acconci become disturbational because they completely dissolve the Platonic line between reality and imitation just as happens with images that instantly become examples of what they represent, or obscenities that become disturbing because of the reality they release.¹⁵ In contrast, even though the artist Jasper Johns exploits a class of images that instantly become examples of what they represent – so that between them the line between reality and representation is dissolved – his artwork merely uses the mechanism of disturbance as high art. This is because you cannot represent the reality of a flag, target or numeral without reproducing it and therefore Johns work does not provoke the kind of disturbance that Plato was anxious to exclude from dramatic representation.¹⁶ Johns’s mimesis does not produce the kind of disturbance that Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* provoked at its premier in Paris in 1896, when the first line of the play exploded into reality when voiced by an actor who stood before the audience and said *merdre* (which actually sounded like *merde*).¹⁷ Anthony Julius argues that *Ubu Roi* is a transgressive artwork that directs its violence at the audience by being indifferent to taboos and boundaries of taste.¹⁸ The taboo breaking art intends to extend the challenge to the audience by

ⁱⁱⁱ Danto writes that from behind the shield of poetry, Aristophanes moralized, agitated, wounded and maligned Socrates in *The Clouds* using language that was magnificent, moving and dangerous. Plato scandalized by Aristophanes’s treatment of Socrates, started to dismantle the conventions of theater and reconstituted them as a metaphysics of art. This had the effect of making art ineffectual because as long as something was accepted as art, danger was removed. See Danto: “Dangerous Art” *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 184-189

using the meanest and most despised substances, thereby turning the hierarchy of culture upside down by raising the base over the spiritual. It mocks, teases and retrieves the faecal from the realm of the forbidden in order to make it a subject of art.¹⁹



Figure 1: *Flag* (1954-55) by Jasper Johns. Medium: Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, 42 inches x 61 inches.

Figure 2: *Merda d'artista* (1961) by Piero Manzoni. Materials: Tin can, Printed Paper and Excrement. Dimensions: 1.9 inches x 2.6 inches x 2.6 inches. Weight: 0.1 kg

Danto uses Nietzsche's theory that Greek classical tragedy evolved out of Dionysian rituals through the insertion of theatrical distance between celebrants and vision (thus separating image from reality) to speculate upon the magic theory for art.²⁰ Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the ecstasy of the Dionysian state destroyed the usual barriers and limits of existence and for as long as it lasted, contained a lethargic element in which all personal experiences from the past were submerged. But as soon as daily realities re-entered consciousness, it was experienced with a sense of revulsion and a will negating mood.²¹ The insertion of theatrical distance redirected the repulsive thoughts into harmless representation by transforming the medium of representation of the rituals from a magical mode of appearance into a mere stand-in symbol. This enabled the ancient Greeks to begin re-enacting the rituals at the level of art rather than religion by having the god represented by an actor while the celebrants

evolved into audiences. Danto speculates that the insertion of theatrical distance separated representation from appearance, and the distance between reality and art began to take shape with the concept of art replacing the concept of magic. Representation began to be defined through meaning (words, signs and symbols) rather than in the magical sense. The framework of the magical theory enables Danto to draw a parallel between the disturbational strategies of contemporary artworks and the dark, celebratory and orgiastic events of the Dionysian rituals that allowed for everything in the hope that the god would make an appearance and magically bond with the celebrants at the climactic moment.²² He argues that the contemporary disturbational performance artist aspires to reproduce this Dionysian form of relationship with her audience in a transformation that reconnects art with life.^{iv}

Although distinct in development, the imitation theory and the magic theory seem to converge on the tension produced between theatrical distance on one hand and the separation of representation from reality on the other.^v This tension continued to be felt throughout the tumultuous history of the representation of images in Western civilization. For example Danto argues that the merging of likeness and magic in images (according to which the subject represented was thought to actually enter into its representation) informed the interdiction against

^{iv} James George Frazer writes that the god Dionysus or Bacchus is best known as a personification of the vine and the exhilaration produced by the juice of grape. "His ecstatic worship marked by wild dances, thrilling music and tipsy excess may have originated from the rude tribes of Thrace who were notoriously addicted to drunkenness." Cretans celebrated a biennial festival at which passion of Dionysus was represented in full detail. His worshippers tore a bull to pieces with their teeth and roamed the woods while shouting wildly. See: James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), 396-98

^v Jacques Rancière argues that the entire Platonic polemic against the simulacra of paintings, poems and the stage concerned the ethical regime of images, that is, the use images are put to and the effects they produce. Thus the true arts dealt with the imitation of a model with precise ends or purposes, such as providing spectators with a certain kind of education that fits in with the distribution of the city's community. A second regime – the poetic or representation regime – defined the conditions according to which imitations can be recognized as exclusively belonging to an art and assessed within this framework as good or bad, adequate or inadequate, the representable and the un-representable. See: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Gabriel Rockhill, Trans. (London, Continuum, 2004), 20-22

graven images in Byzantine and Dutch iconoclasm, the fascination with the death mask and the powers ascribed to various statues of the Virgin.²³ In *The Power of Images* David Freedberg raises a similar point. He argues that the history of images is marked by fear and suppression out of the belief that images can produce emotions that result in idol worship or erotic arousal.²⁴ The dominant Platonic argument held that once captured by an image, we would be unable to resist the desires of our emotions because the eyes are the pathways to our other senses.²⁵ Platonic and Neo-Platonic thinking favored the intellect over the senses and denigrated materiality; images, if they must exist, should be able to lift us from the material to the higher plane of the spiritual. According to Freedberg, the prohibition of images either through censorship or suppression has as its basis, the assumption that representation becomes ugly and vulgar when it produces natural and realistic responses from viewers. When an object is capable of arousing emotions through touch, it distracts from, and corrupts the purity of the realm of the intellect and the spirit which represents the higher sides of our beings. The enlivening of the body becomes a danger and a threat because we may not be strong enough to control our impulses. Freedberg indicates that the story of Ovid's Pygmalion illustrate two of the deepest fears that converge in the mistrust of the senses; the fear of the real body and the fear of making an image come alive. When we look at an image with a gaze that enlivens, our responses would be identical to the response that would arise with ordinary human beings.²⁶ Art is supposed to represent the ideal or the beautiful and should not enliven the body or threaten to be real. When art threatens to be real, it produces the fear of fusion where that which should be absent or unknown is made present.^{vi}

^{vi} See also "Communion with the Image," in *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* by Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser (London, Reaktion Books Ltd, 2013), 160-189



Figure 3: Marina Abramovic: *The Artist is Present* (March/May 2010). Museum of Modern Art, New York

Danto suggests a similar parallel in the disturbance that disturbational representation is capable of provoking by reproducing reality. “There exists within disturbance the impulse to engage the irrational or subconscious in our psyche and release a disturbance that comes from the feeling that a part of us is being beckoned to a state before civilization. We do not know what we are capable of, or how we might respond to the feelings provoked by disturbance.”²⁷ The theories of response outlined by Danto and Freedberg converge on the history of suppression of the impulses provoked by representation. Danto theorizes on the effects of Platonic metaphysics to exclude the reproduction of obscenity and on the insertion of theatrical distance by the birth of tragedy to suppress the base and vulgar irrationalities of the Dionysian state. Freedberg on the other hand suggests that by favoring the intellect over the senses and the beautiful and ideal over the ugly and vulgar, Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas suppressed images that threatened to arouse emotions, enliven the body or appeal to the lower side of human beings. Freedberg argues that we should begin to see images or representation as more continuous with what we refer to as reality so that we can reintegrate representation into our experience of reality. “The time has come to acknowledge the possibility that our responses to images may be of the same order as

our responses to reality.”²⁸ Danto on the other hand seems to seek a theoretical framework for analyzing non standard art forms of the 1960s and 1970s and proceeds to use it to as a critical form of analysis for performance art and other postmodernist artworks as political reactions to the history of art and the concept of the masterpiece.

The Transformation of Disturbance into a Critical Analysis of Artworks

From 1989 Danto began using disturbance as a concept for critical analysis of artworks. This began with the essay “Art: Robert Colescott; Russell Connor” in *The Nation* of 22nd May 1989,²⁹ and a subsequent essay in *Modern Painters* of Summer 1989 titled “Bad Aesthetic Times in the USA?” in which he argued that disturbance emerged from feminist politics within the postmodern rejection of the concept of the masterpiece and the aesthetics that drives it.³⁰ Danto revisits the concept of disturbance again in 2006 with his analysis of Fernando Botero’s series of drawings and paintings based on the Abu Ghraib prison tortures in *The Nation* of 27 November 2006.³¹ Then again in 2010 he contributed an essay titled “Danger and disturbance: the Art of Marina Abramovic” for the catalogue of Marina Abramovic’s show *The Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.³²

In his essay “Art: Robert Colescott; Russell Connor” in the *Nation*, Danto contextualizes disturbance as an attack on the idea of the masterpiece. He argues that the idea of the masterpiece came under two forms of attack in the beginning of the 1960s. The first attack was mounted by artists who felt that art had entered a period in which the rules and practices that had made the ideals of the masterpiece no longer defined how art was to be made, but they did so without questioning the history of Western art. The second attack came by way of politics and was led by a generation of artists who felt they had been disenfranchised by the institutions of art

and the attitudes embodied by the masterpiece as they signified exclusion, elitism and symbol of oppression.³³ The members of this group comprised of feminist artists and minority groups. Danto argues that while the artists of the first attack incorporated the masterpiece as the subject of their art in appropriations that questioned their uniqueness or aura,^{vii} the members of the second group protested the very idea of the masterpiece. They believed that the consciousness of the artworld was defined through the masterpiece and this made it impossible for art coming from groups that were disenfranchised through gender or race to find a voice in the artworld: the hold of the masterpiece upon the artworld had to be dismantled if art coming from different groups had to find its audience and a voice of its own.³⁴ One way to achieve this was to find alternative spaces to display an alternative art informed by the rejection of the institutions of the artworld and the aesthetics represented by its masterpieces.^{viii} This alternative art adopted an abrasive visual language and ephemeral materials in order to offend (and possibly transform) the consciousness of viewers formed from the values conveyed by the masterpiece. Danto describes this art as disturbance, and it was meant to be hostile to good taste, bruise sensibilities and upset the values that were regarded as oppressive. This perspective constitutes his analysis of the paintings of Robert Colescott which he describes as disturbatory because they appropriate masterpieces and substitute black for white faces and figures, in paintings that anybody familiar with art would recognize.³⁵ Colescott puts blacks into art history by repainting the history of art

^{vii} Roy Lichtenstein's replacement of brush strokes with comic book coloration and Andy Warhol reproduced the *Mona Lisa* by stenciling on canvas

^{viii} Schjeldahl writes that performances by Burden were usually performed for small audiences: "These events became word-of-mouth sensations on a radically minded grapevine in art schools, new contemporary museums and grant-funded alternative spaces that were emerging as academies of the far out."

with blacks instead of whites and giving the paintings new titles in the dialect of Uncle Remus such as *Eat Dem Taters* for Vincent Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*.^{ix}

In "Bad Aesthetic Times in the USA?" published in *Modern Painters* Danto makes a return to the idea of the masterpiece, this time contextualizing it within the social and cultural politics of the 1960s and 1970s that associated the masterpiece with privilege and elitism. This was effectively a political move that sought to connect the concept of the masterpiece to the traditions of great art which was viewed as exclusionary, ideological, exploitative and artistically disenfranchising to women and non-whites.³⁶ Danto consequently argues that the emergence of feminist theories in the 1970s and 1980s had the inadvertent consequence of propelling forward an aesthetic drive in art by its rejection of the aesthetics of the masterpiece: Feminism released subversive forces that tested the museum, the language of art criticism and even reshaped the nature of the philosophy of art. Feminist disturbational artworks made use of disturbing content while demanding to engage with audiences by being everything that the masterpiece was not: aggressive, confrontational, flagrant; shocking, daring and extreme.³⁷ "It is an art that borrows from the primitive relationship with the theater audience in order to sneer at the masterpiece and its traditional aesthetic values, so that a new non-exploitative history of art can be realized from an art that serves immediate human ends rather than something that ends up on the museum walls."³⁸ The disturbational female artist is engaging with certain artistic strategies and gestures that, like a priestess or sorceress aspiring to a powerful relationship with her audience, repudiates the institutionalized aesthetics of Western culture by seeking to draw energy from an alternative one.³⁹ Thomas McEvilley, meanwhile writes that while the 'old art' history had operated with a clear set of taboos, the new spirit of post-modernism enabled the previous tabooed materials to

^{ix} Uncle Remus is a fictional character of African-American folktales. His stories are captured in the dialect of "plantation Negroes" by Joel Chandler Harris.

rise to the surface and stake their claim in the newly cleared field.⁴⁰ A new art history came to the surface with a multiplicity of directions, each of which representing a previously forbidden avenue of investigation. Art turned around and adopted a critical stance towards society and politics, and suddenly became antagonistic to its prior function as a form of expression that aimed for transcendence in the world outside of art.⁴¹



Left, **Figure 4:** *LesDemoiselles D'Alabama* (1985) by Robert Colescott. Medium: Acrylic on Canvas. Measurements: 96 inches by 92 inches

Right, **Figure 5:** Triptych; *Abu Ghraib No. 43* (2005) by Fernando Botero. Medium: Oil on Canvas. Measurements: 153 ¾ inches by 34 ¾ inches

In 2006 when Botero exhibited his series of drawings and paintings on the Abu Ghraib prison tortures at the Marlborough Gallery in New York, Danto's analysis described the body of work as masterpieces of disturbatory art. "Like Baroque paintings they generate an illusion that has more to do with the feelings that had earlier in the history of images fomented the fear of idolatry, than with pictorial perception."⁴² Botero has managed to capture the power of images for the service of a higher ideal and produced images of clarity, simplicity and realism that serve as an emotional stimulus to arouse sympathetic identification.^x

^x Monique Roelofs in "Theorizing the Aesthetic Homeland" disagrees with Danto's analysis of Botero's pictures by arguing that he has imported racialized, aesthetically nationalistic elements into his interpretation. He omits

His images of torture are masterpieces of what I have called disturbatory art; art whose point and purpose is to make vivid and objective our most frightening subjective thoughts. Botero's astonishing images establish a visceral sense of identification with the victims and compel us to internalize and make the suffering our own. They make us realize that even though we knew that the prisoners at Abu Ghraib were suffering, we did not feel that suffering as ours....⁴³

His rendition of the images evokes Baroque prisons, like that of the painting *Roman Charity*, where a visiting daughter breast-feeds her chained father in the gloomy light of his cell. And although he has painted the prisoners in his much-maligned mannerist signature style, it intensifies our engagement with the images.⁴⁴

Eleanor Heartney writes that the Iraq war has been haunted by the specter of the Crusades – defined as the archetypical clash of Islam and Christian cultures – and there is something strangely appropriate that Botero deliberately invokes traditional Christian iconography in his Abu Ghraib pictures: “His bound and hooded figures assume poses that brings to mind, medieval and Renaissance paintings of Christ and the trials and torture of saints.”⁴⁵ Jason Edward Kaufman indicates that Botero's pictures have been met by a chilly reception in the US, and few museums were willing to even show them or even accept them as a gift from Botero.⁴⁶

Botero's critical body policies by shielding the work against the visual critique that it directs upon the system of justice and punishment as instituted by the United States in Iraq. See: “Theorizing the Aesthetic Homeland,” *Constructing the Nation*, Mariana Ortega and Linda Martin Alcoff Ed. (New York, State University of New York, 2009) 201-202. David Buuck in *Artweek* argues that appropriating the Abu Ghraib images into a Western art historical tradition of Christian allegory and representations of sanctified suffering tends to universalize the historical particularities of the contemporary modes of torture and image-making. The suggestion that such narratives and canonical forms of painting are the best avenues for engaging the images strips them (and their victims) of their much more dynamic, contradictory, and global contexts. By fitting the Abu Ghraib images into the Western art tradition, Botero has run the risk of domesticating the power of the original photographs by placing them within a discursive regime that Western audiences safely understand and are not challenged by. See: David Buuck, “View Point,” *Artweek*, Vol. 38, Issue 4; May 2007, 5

In “Danger and Disturbation” Danto argues that the attempts to dissolve the barrier between art and life in the 1960s became energized by the social and cultural upheavals, the anti-Vietnam war protests and feminist theories within Post-modernism.⁴⁷ The challenge to overcome the barrier between art and life that had preoccupied the avant-garde artists of the 1960s remained, but its nature changed towards the end of the 1960s when it became increasingly disturbational from absorbing the hostile spirit of the protests against the Vietnam War and the ongoing social and cultural revolutions. Performance art became the preferred art form of experimentation and expression (energized by Postmodernism and its connection to feminism) for female artists who wanted to use their bodies as a medium to express the issues of their concerns.⁴⁸ Danto indicates that performance art in the 1970s brought the reality of extreme experiences and sacrifices through danger and pain – unlike any other art before – for both artists and audiences, as a way to overcome the barrier between art and life.⁴⁹ Abramovic’s life as an artist has been strongly influenced by, and intrinsically linked to the history of performance art as it began in the late 1960s down to our present day.⁵⁰ Danto writes that the word “presence” as used in the title of Abramovic’s show, belongs to the discourse of icons predicated on the mysterious presence of saints in the image.^{xi} “The question of an artist’s presence in a performance resonates in a sense with the metaphysics of art because as a rule, artists are not present in the works they make, yet performance art uses the body of the artist as its medium to produce immediacy and unpredictability.”⁵¹

^{xi} Carrie Lambert-Beatty argues that the title the Artist is Present would be wonderful if it weren’t literally true because in a generative view of performance, the relation of performer to viewer is something to be continually manipulated and multiplied, not restricted to the model of co-presence. “I’m pretty willing believe gazing into Abramovic’s eyes is a moving experience - though the cultural forms the scene evokes are either grandiose (the Pope) or absurd (shopping-mall Santa) – but there is always the possibility that what she is doing is a send-up of the art star as saint and celebrity. Abramovic is a brilliant artist, an electrifying performer, and an art-historical legend. Must she be both martyr and superstar as well?” See: Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Against Performance Art: Carrie Lambert-Beatty on the Art of Marina Abramovic,” *Artforum International*, Vol. 48, No. 9; 1 May 2010, 212

In a *New York Times* blog, Danto describes his experience of sitting across from Abramovic in *The Artist is Present*:

Marina leaned her head back at a slight angle and to one side and fixed her eyes on me without it seemed, seeing me. It was as if she had entered another state and I was outside her gaze. She had gone into what she had often spoken of as a performance mode. It was a shamanic trance and her ability to enter such a state is one of her gifts as a performer, and what has enabled her to go through the physical ordeals of some of her famous performances which often contain the added element of physical danger.⁵²



Figure 6: Marina Abramovic: *The Artist is Present* (March/May 2010). Museum of Modern Art, New York

CONTEMPORARY TOP TEN					
		New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) maintained its dominance of contemporary art shows in 2010, organising four of the top eight. The next most visited shows in this category were not in Paris or London, but in Rio de Janeiro, at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, a new venue in the survey (left, Rebecca Horn, <i>Concert for Anarchy</i> , 1990). Although Tate Modern's overall attendance was 2m more than MoMA's, the London museum's most visited show, "Pop Life", ranked only 57th, something its new director, Chris Dercon, will want to rectify. And more people went to see it in Hamburg (2,141 per day) than in London (1,818). ■ J.P.			
7,120	561,471	Marina Abramovic: the Artist is Present	Museum of Modern Art	New York	14 Mar-31 May
6,859	535,000	29th Bienal de São Paulo	Pavilhão Cicillio Matarazzo	São Paulo	19 Sep-12 Dec
6,802	477,106	Regina Silveira: Shadow Line	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio	12 Oct 09-3 Jan
6,716	313,756	Rebecca Horn	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio	21 May-18 Jul
5,910	492,196	William Kentridge: Five Themes	Museum of Modern Art	New York	24 Feb-17 May
5,585	58,242	13th Japan Media Arts Festival	National Art Center Tokyo	Tokyo	3-14 Feb
5,200	810,511	Tim Burton	Museum of Modern Art	New York	22 Nov 09-26 Apr
4,873	384,269	Gabriel Orozco	Museum of Modern Art	New York	13 Dec 09-1 Mar
4,479	149,717	Monumenta: Christian Boltanski	Grand Palais Nave	Paris	13 Jan-21 Feb
4,433	531,994	The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial	Queensland Art Gallery	Brisbane	5 Dec 09-5 Apr

Figure 7: List of top 10 contemporary art shows of 2010

THE TOP 30 EXHIBITIONS

Daily	Total	Exhibition	Venue	City	Dates
12,116	292,526	Hasegawa Tohaku	Tokyo National Museum	Tokyo	23 Feb-22 Mar
10,757	777,551	Post-Impressionism: from the Musée d'Orsay	National Art Center Tokyo	Tokyo	26 May-16 Aug
9,290	2,926,232	Designing the Lincoln Memorial	National Gallery of Art	Washington	12 Feb 09-4 Apr
9,098	244,347	Hasegawa Tohaku	Kyoto National Museum	Kyoto	10 Apr-9 May
8,436	595,346	Van Gogh: the Adventure of Becoming an Artist	National Art Center Tokyo	Tokyo	1 Oct-20 Dec
8,073	749,638	The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture	Museum of Modern Art	New York	1 Aug-1 Nov
7,873	755,850	Harmony and Integrity: Yongzheng Emperor	National Palace Museum	Taipei	7 Oct 09-10 Jan
7,380	703,256	Picasso in the Metropolitan Museum of Art	Metropolitan Museum of Art	New York	27 Apr-15 Aug
7,120	561,471	Marina Abramovic: the Artist is Present	Museum of Modern Art	New York	14 Mar-31 May
7,011	644,975	Falnama: the Book of Omens	Freer and Sackler Galleries	Washington	24 Oct 09-24 Jan
6,971	602,524	Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913-17	Museum of Modern Art	New York	15 Jul-11 Oct

Figure 8: Partial list of 30 most visited exhibitions in 2010. Source: *The Art Newspaper* No.223, April 2011

According to *The Art Newspaper*, Abramovic's *The Artist is Present* was the most visited contemporary art show in the year 2010, and the ninth most visited of exhibitions of any kind in 2010.⁵³ The exhibition attracted 561,471 visitors over its duration (March 14 – May 31, 2010) with an average daily attendance of 7,120 people per day. In an essay published in *Artforum* in May 2010 in reaction to *The Artist is Present* and other “live art events” taking place in New York during the same period, Caroline A. Jones argues that the attempts to institutionalize performance art reveals that the public are the raw material of event-based art, and whether this is driven by the “information economy” and the “experience economy” is immaterial because, these “economies” do not determine the outcomes of every encounter.⁵⁴ She indicates that the late 1960s represents the moment in which agency and participation began to look incendiary but it is also the epoch in which such strategies entered the safe house of the aesthetic, posing alternative possibilities for experience that remain provocative. Contemporary appeals to the aesthetic of experience will always need to be leveraged by participants' own demands to experiment, for they are responsible for the decisions on whether to participate and the politics that they make out of experiencing art.⁵⁵ Likewise Frazer Ward writes in a 2001 retrospective view of Burden's *Shoot* that the performance's nagging empiricism revealed the public to be a

grey zone defined by the suspension of judgment and choice, through questions such as, what should I do in this situation?⁵⁶ The hermeneutics of Danto's concept of disturbance within the context of *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* suggests that art can still be considered as dangerous when it adopts strategies that reveal the repressed as experiences, ideas or politics from the processes of interacting with it.^{xii} The circumstances under which contemporary disturbational artworks can be classified as dangerous, either because of the politics they are propositioning or the attitudes and experiences that they provoke in viewers, is an area that may need exploration. Such an exploration can investigate whether disturbance can be used as an aesthetic and political concept for artworks that aim to relate to their audiences by dissolving distance in order to produce effects that are real.

The need for a New Critical Application of the Concept of Disturbation

The only piece of secondary literature that has attempted to use disturbance as a critical concept of analysis is David Henley's "Art of Disturbation: Provocation and Censorship in Art Education."⁵⁷ Henley argues that the right to create an artwork and the privilege to show it should be part of the experience of art, but one that understands that the artist's freedom of expression is limited to the right to create only; and once an artwork enters the public domain community values rather than artistic freedom should prevail. "Artists using disturbational content or material should realize that resistance and possible rejection may be the price to pay for working on the edge of artistic extremism."⁵⁸ For this reason, Henley argues that Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981), Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) and Scott Tyler's *What is the*

^{xii} Jane Forsey analyses this point in depth in "Philosophical Disenfranchisement in Danto's The End of Art," though she does not discuss it within the context of "Art and Disturbation." She focuses instead on the texts that she describes as constituting the most provocative themes in the book *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. The texts are; "The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art" (Chapter One) and "The End of Art" (Chapter Five). See: Jane Forsey, "Philosophical Disenfranchisement in Danto's 'The End of Art,'" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 59, No. 4; Fall 2001, 403-409

proper Way to display a U. S. Flag? (1989) displayed attitudes towards the public that were provocative and justified censorship. That the question of censorship should arise as a political response to disturbational art within liberal democracies suggests that disturbance is able – even momentarily – to provoke the formation of extreme identities that have been suppressed by the ideals of democratic freedom. For example, in 2001 the Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani called for the establishment of a commission to set decency standards for museums that receive public money. This was in reaction to *Yo Mamas Last Supper* (1996) by Renee Cox, then on exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art as part of “Committed to Image: Contemporary Black Photographers” for being disgusting, outrageous and anti-Catholic.⁵⁹



Figure 9: *Yo Mamas Last Supper* (1996) by Renee Cox. Medium: Color Coupler prints mounted on Aluminum. Made up of five panels each measuring 19 7/8 inches x 19 7/8 inches

One reason why the application of the concept of disturbance has been limited may be the lack of any consistent development by Danto himself. This may have been difficult given that in “Art and Disturbation” Danto refers to disturbational art as “pathetic and futile, and something that he does not enjoy.”⁶⁰ The several essays in which he revisits disturbance do not indicate how it developed from being pathetic and futile into a critical term for analyzing the paintings of Colecott and Botero and the performance works of Abramovic. The two essays “Bad Aesthetic Times” and “Danger and Disturbation” only succeed in linking disturbance to the political consciousness of the 1960s and 1970s and the emergence of Postmodernism without providing

any conceptual developments for the term. Moreover within “Bad Aesthetic Times” he does not present disturbance in a good light. Performance art has represented for Danto the ideal art form through which to recognize the possibilities of art to produce reality effects. Performance art had been in existence for almost twenty years when Danto was formulating the concept of disturbance in 1985, having produced such landmarks of disturbational art as Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964) and Marina Abramovic’s *Rhythm 0* (1974). Danto’s argument that disturbance is a product of the politics of the 1960s and 1970s stops short of exploring the capability of disturbational art to produce responses that are in themselves political, hence the need to explore the concept of disturbance beyond his groundwork. This should expand the concept of disturbance as a critical term of analysis for contemporary artworks that manage to provoke effects or responses as in real life, and also be capable of producing effects that are political.

This thesis intends to use the conceptual framework of disturbance as reflected in performance artworks as guidance in the process of analyzing the recent sculptures of Doris Salcedo and the interactive and performance artworks of Wafaa Bilal. It will argue that *Shibboleth* (2007) by Salcedo and *Domestic Tension* (2007) by Bilal are artworks that reflect disturbational strategies that reference performance art through their ability to produce responses from audiences that are continuous with real life. For example, while Salcedo’s *Shibboleth* may function as an institutional critique, its presence at Tate Modern enacted a political action that goes beyond the framework Danto identified as underlying the rejection of the concept of the masterpiece. Likewise Bilal’s *Domestic Tension* (and *Dog or Iraqi*) introduces a framework of disturbance that provokes real political reactions from the medium of virtual interaction in a way unanticipated by Danto in his account of the mediums capable of producing disturbance.

The thesis will seek to develop a link between the fear and suppression of images described by Danto and Freedberg and the ability of some artworks to provoke fear by producing experiences that suggest the return of what has long been repressed (the uncanny) or confrontations with the improper or the unclean that has been expurgated (the abject). Sigmund Freud defines something that has been repressed in the psyche but now makes a return that is frightening as constituting the uncanny,⁶¹ while Julia Kristeva indicates that the act of thrusting aside the improper and the unclean such as an item of food through vomiting, or something that the body extricates itself from such as filth and waste, as the process of abjection.⁶² Understanding how the experience of the uncanny and the process of abjection relate to the process of disturbance can provide possibilities through which to analyze contemporary artworks whose characteristics produce effects that are real. These effects need not be guided by the theories of imitation and magic or the fear of idolatry and sexual arousal from fusion, but arise from events that occur in contemporary reality that destabilize the psyche by producing returns of the repressed or the distanced. The ultimate goal will be to argue that the fear of disturbance in the contemporary period (and the call for its censorship), may lie in its ability to use the security of art to provoke in viewers the attitudes, experiences or identities that in theory appear to have been surmounted by the tenets of liberal democracy.

CHAPTER TWO

DORIS SALCEDO'S *SHIBBOLETH*: A HOLE IN THE WALLS OF MY HOUSE

Introduction

*"You surprise me by coming to me. Even if I invited you, your coming disturbs my world. Indeed your entering into my dwelling place interrupts the coherence of my economy; you disarrange my order in which all things familiar to me have their proper place, function and time. Your emergence makes holes in the walls of my house."*⁶³ Adriaan Theodore Peperzak

In the last two decades (1989 – 2011) Doris Salcedo has become established in the international art scene through numerous art shows and the consequent critical reviews in art journals, newspapers and monographs. The reviews have been in agreement in their analysis that the content of Salcedo's work provides meaning through the juxtaposition of the conceptual languages of the uncanny and the political to articulate violence, loss and other forms of human dispossession. Salcedo's earlier works (1989 – 2002) were grounded in the effects of the political violence in Colombia, but her recent large scale installations – *Neither* (2004), *Abyss* (2005), *Shibboleth* (2007) and *Plegaria Muda* (2011) – have expanded her concerns to issues of violence in various forms as experienced within the global political condition. Salcedo's use of the uncanny in her earlier works that referenced the violence in Colombia has received considerable attention and analysis through: Andreas Huyssen's *Present Pasts; Urban palimpsests and the politics of Memory*; Nancy Princenthal et al in *Doris Salcedo*; Jill Bennett's *Empathic Vision*; Joan Gibbon's *Contemporary Art and Memory*, and Tanya Barson's "Unland: the place of Testimony." The political aspect of Salcedo's work has been extensively theorized by: Mieke Bal's *Of What One Cannot Speak*, Jill Bennett's *Empathic Vision* and Elizabeth Adan's "An

Imperative to interrupt: Radical Aesthetics, Global contexts and Site Specificity in the Recent Works of Doris Salcedo” to name a few —from an expansive list of critical reviews through books and monographs.⁶⁴

This chapter will use these critical reviews of Salcedo’s development of content and practice to advance the argument that there is a clear emergence and development of a new artistic language or concept from her merging of the uncanny (as experience) with the political (as content) and the disturbational (as intent) through conceptual artistic principles to produce what I call the “political uncanny.” The chapter will argue that this concept emerged distinctively from developments in the characteristics of Salcedo’s 2007 site specific installation, *Shibboleth* in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern. The nature of these characteristics is specific to the political context and process of execution of the installation, the disturbational attitude that it has towards audiences and the nature of the experience of the uncanny that is evoked. The experience of the uncanny has become identified as a defining characteristic of Salcedo’s work, but as a characteristic of the audiences’ encounter with her sculptures that dematerialize, disfigure, transform and juxtapose everyday utilitarian objects and materials. Joan Gibbons for example, indicates that Salcedo’s work demands duration and proximity from its viewers through a process that slowly reveals the nature of its materials and become unsettling when its familiar everyday objects suddenly become re-realized as strange or threatening.⁶⁵ This distinction is important because the installation *Shibboleth* departs from this formula of object transformation in the fundamental sense that it generates the experience of the uncanny through the interactive actions of two opposing sculptural concepts with the space of the Turbine Hall in an aesthetics whose paradigmatic politics of “a return of the repressed” become realized by viewers as they get drawn deep into the work. These two sculptural concepts – sculpture by absence or void, and

sculpture by sheer presence – in combination with the installation’s disturbational experience and political content produces the political uncanny.

The political uncanny as used in this context should not be confused with Saul Newman’s “Spectres of the Uncanny.” In *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought* Newman argues that new political identities or systems are always a return of the same old repressed political forms but in a way that is strange and different —or uncanny.⁶⁶ The return of the old repressed political order is a necessary ingredient for constituting new political identities because its dislocating and alienating experience places the individual in an unfamiliar order or situation. When this takes place, and when things appear not quite right, the individual undergoes a traumatic experience which produces a new and radical form of politicization.⁶⁷ In contrast, the this thesis is developing the concept of the political uncanny to define the aesthetic and political language of art forms that aim to provoke the re-realization of suppressed political experiences through disturbance. The disturbational activities and strategies of these artworks aim to politicize their spaces through revelations of the politics and divisions that have lain hidden but come back to life through the interactions of audiences with the work. The artworks aim to implicate the audiences in the politics by erasing the boundaries between imitation and reality and thereby produce disturbances that are responded to as real from the experience of the uncanny.

Using this frame of reference, the chapter will argue that Salcedo has incrementally employed disturbational strategies in her work in actions that have involved the use of reality as actual material, the erasure of the boundary between imitation and reality and even the possibility of

actual danger as integrated components of the work's construction.⁶⁸ It will argue that the installation *Shibboleth* by its actions on the floor of the Turbine Hall as an actual crack and not an imitation, acted out its political content in the space by eliminating the barrier between art and audience. The relationship between the sculptures of Salcedo and their audiences has been extensively explored by Huyssen, Bennett, Princenthal and Bal among others. Bal for example, has described the relationships as collaborations that bear similarity to the pictorial device of "foreshortening." This is because these interventions radically politicize their space by their very reliance on duration as a temporal device.⁶⁹ Salcedo's sculptures and installations distort space and time just like foreshortening in painting does, by seeming to bring the sculptures forward as subject so that they confront the viewer in a performance that binds them to the work. Foreshortened time is distorted and made wider, thicker and condensed, and thus comes forward to touch the viewer so that he experiences the almost palpable pull of time.⁷⁰ Bal argues that the device of delay is embodied in Salcedo's work and the viewer becomes drawn into the work so that the viewer's present time and the past that the work holds meet: "Salcedo makes the visualization of duration the crucial weapon in her art and wages war against violence and its obliteration through anonymity."⁷¹

Investigating how disturbance and the uncanny can work together to politicize space should lead to a conceptual understanding of the content, strategies and intentions of *Shibboleth*. To begin with, the uncanny in so far as it relates to Salcedo's work, has always been contextualized around the violence in Colombia and its effects on the viewer when it is represented by art. The shift in the political burden of Salcedo's work from the context of Colombian to the context of the global as characterized by the intervention in the Turbine Hall, should illustrate a new method of

approach for her. The chapter will argue that the politics of space that *Shibboleth* sought to enact upon Tate Modern reflect the artistic and political languages of art practices of the 1960s and 1970s whose processes acted as art critiques of exhibition spaces as embodied by the gallery and the institution of the museum. Nevertheless, *Shibboleth* has to overcome a different set of questions that arise in the context of what Salcedo intends to achieve with its critical message that is not only directed at Tate Modern, but also at the history of repression and exclusion that she claims is represented by Tate Modern, as a landmark institution of western culture and power. Some of these questions are: Can artworks that carry critical political contents and agendas function effectively without their message being compromised when they are executed within the power structure of the museum? Can they survive the co-opting, commodifying effect of the institution and still remain critical of institutions? What are the power relations when such a project involves a “Third World” artist and a “First World” museum, when the work claims to be a political artwork critical of the museum and the First World? And finally, can *Shibboleth* and its subject of disturbing realities of violence and dispossession survive the aesthetics of the museum?

Building a Case

While the installation *Shibboleth* has been the subject of various critical reviews, aspects from three reviews in particular may be taken to represent the wider debate. These are “Scars and Faultlines: the Art of Doris Salcedo” by Chin-Tao Wu; “An Imperative to Interrupt: Radical Aesthetics, Global Contexts and Site Specificity in the Recent Works of Doris Salcedo” by Elizabeth Adan and “Shaping Politics” by J.J. Charlesworth. Wu in the *New Left Review* (2011) raises several questions that revolve around the effectiveness of art that carries political content

critical of power, and yet is executed inside the institution of museums which exemplify capitalist structures of commerce and power. Wu asks whether *Shibboleth* as a work whose political content seeks to question existing power relations from within the institution of the Western museum can be accommodated by capitalist market interests without its legitimacy being called into question since, as she argues: “When such a work becomes the servant of commercial manipulation or is conceived within the existing structures of a museum, there is risk of the work’s meanings being neutralized.”⁷² Wu concedes that “while Salcedo as a ‘Third World’ artist has produced work that carries with it a critical agenda vis-à-vis the power structures of Western art institutions, her work is also unavoidably implicated in the very structures that she wishes to criticize.” This, Wu argues, has set an unavoidable paradox where, on one hand, Salcedo’s universal visibility in terms of global reach can only be achieved by working and exhibiting with powerful Western galleries and museums – and if such institutions continue to sanction her critique of existing structures – yet, on the other hand, as long as the hierarchy of the contemporary art world remains dominated by Western institutions the status quo will remain unchanged.⁷³

Wu’s article also calls into question the working relationship between Salcedo and Tate Modern arguing that it denied the public their democratic right of access to information as to how *Shibboleth* was executed: “The very process of executing *Shibboleth* was far from being a ‘democratizing and open process’ because it protected the interest of the commercial place at the expense of the public’s need to know.” She continues “the way in which Tate Modern went out of its way to accommodate Salcedo was little short of extraordinary since the project’s actual politics of production, overall cost and technical questions of realization was sealed off from any

public scrutiny.”⁷⁴ While allowing that these conditions were imposed by Salcedo, Wu feels that by giving consent, Tate Modern violated the expectations of the artistic process in which how art is executed becomes integral to its mandate to educate the public. Wu concludes that the museum’s willingness to accommodate the artist to such lengths indicates an “interesting relationship between the self-proclaimed Third World artist and her First World art institution.” Wu feels that the questions that surround this relationship expose the ideological contradiction inherent in Salcedo work as a Third World artist working with First World institutions.

Elizabeth Adan meanwhile argues in *Third Text: Critical Perspective on Art and Culture* that *Shibboleth* evokes the at times deadly forces of oppression and exclusion through its physical use and engagement with its site.⁷⁵ Salcedo targets the institution of Tate Modern as one of the pre-eminent venues for modern and contemporary art in the world today to foreground art institutions as sites of politics and power in an expanded approach to institutional critique.⁷⁶ Adan argues that *Shibboleth* reformulates a critique of art institutions that especially examines the role such institutions play in the larger geopolitical networks of colonialism and post-colonialism, which considerably goes beyond the institutional critiques of the 1960s and 1970s that attacked museums for their framing devices and their inner economic workings.⁷⁷ *Shibboleth* employs an “imperative to interrupt” that exempts no location from being implicated in the forces and effects of political oppression through challenging entrenched dichotomies and suggesting complicity.⁷⁸ The installation also underscores the “contested global existence” of art institutions by signaling that conventional gallery and museum spaces are just as deeply implicated in the forces and effects of globalization as are biennials, related large-scale exhibitions and other projects sited in public contexts. More importantly she argues that

Shibboleth, rather than renouncing its political engagement in order to showcase and affirm its site, challenges the entrenched dichotomies of centre and periphery and of “First” and “Third” worlds that often continue to inform the discourses of globalization.⁷⁹

J. J. Charlesworth writes in *Art Review* that political art was something that could easily be located in some genres – with photography, video and performance art representing the newest and most rebellious of these genres – and that the term political was clearly defined.⁸⁰ This is because, beginning in the 1970s, these genres were the most used in the identity politics of feminism, race and sexuality. He indicates that it is surprising that the old medium of sculpture and its spread into installations has become the medium through which contemporary artists are tackling fundamental political issues such as globalization, economics, democracy and cultural conflicts from right within the mainstream of the artworld.⁸¹ And what is more remarkable is that the artworld and audiences are now responding to artworks with political content such that the unnerving chasm of *Shibboleth* is luring people into the Tate Modern. Charlesworth argues that *Shibboleth* functions through poetic association to connect with the ideas of repression and exclusion. Contemporary political artworks are now infiltrating consciousness through “poetic conceptualism” or “political poetry” rather than through the simple denunciation of the realities they are criticizing.⁸² This enables artworks like *Shibboleth* to be received by the artworld and by art audiences because the political content they carry functions through subterfuge rather than by trying to directly impose a political rhetoric on the viewer.

The Practice of Contemporary Installations and Exhibitions

The three critiques reflect the difficulties faced by contemporary art practices whose materials carry a direct political point of view even if they carry different critical sensibilities. For instance, an examination of the interventions and installations of contemporary artists such as Coco Fusco, Santiago Sierra and Mirosław Balka reveal they are informed by the same sensibilities as Salcedo even though they use different strategies to convey their political content. Fusco's documentary *Operation Atropos* (2006), adopts a strategy that bridges the gap between real and play-acting to explore the role of women in the era of global warfare. Working from the revelations that female members of the U.S. military were involved in the torture of captured enemy combatants, Fusco and her group of women students subjected themselves to sessions of "immersive simulations of POW torture" conducted by retired U.S. Army interrogators in order to experience situations of hostile interrogations and how members of the U.S. military are taught to resist them.⁸³

Sierra's *Polyurethane Sprayed on the Back of Ten Workers* (2004) used ten Iraqi men and women to explore "the remunerated system in which people exchange their time and energy for money within the capitalist framework."⁸⁴ The men and women were paid to climb into chemical resistant suits and spray-painted with liquid polyurethane. Marc Spiegler writes that by creating pieces in which workers from local underclass are paid to do meaningless tasks like sitting inside a cardboard box, Sierra highlights the disjunction between the workers and their toil to expose labor as an imposed condition rather than a choice one makes. Sierra defines his relationship with the production of his art as a game in which his role is to highlight sensitive issues so as to create uncomfortable situations for people who want to have fun in the gallery space.⁸⁵ Richard

Dorment has called Sierra's work shocking, dangerous and morally ambiguous.⁸⁶ Balka's *How It Is* (2009) was the 10th artwork in the Unilever Series of exhibitions at the Tate Modern. It was a giant steel container measuring 30 meters long, 10 meters wide and 13 meters high with a dark interior. Zygmunt Bauman writes that "no one would blame you if you hesitated to enter the darkness were you to find yourself in the Turbine hall alone."⁸⁷ Tate Modern described the installation as "traversing the practices of sculpture and architecture in a strong allusion to the entrance to the Ghetto in Warsaw or the trucks which took Jews away to the camps of Treblinka and Auschwitz."⁸⁸ Visitors venturing into the container's vast dark interior were placing their trust in the institution in a way that replicates the risk immigrants take when they cross borders, thus providing an experience which was both personal and collective.

The associations of *How It Is*, the moral ambiguity in Sierra's *Polyurethane Sprayed on the Back of 10 Workers* and the borderline of play-real situation of Fusco's *Operation Atropos* seem to confirm Charlesworth's argument that recent political artworks convey content through associations and ambiguities rather than a direct attack on the realities they target. On the other hand there is a critical failure when we ascribe this formulation to *Shibboleth* since it fundamentally undermines the installation's function by limiting the artwork's sensibilities to perceptual qualities (as a crack with various associations) and overlooks its conceptual language. This is because the installation's power emanates from how its conceptual framing of content and action is constructed to impact upon Tate Modern as signifier or symbol of the cultural, political and institutional power of Britain and the West; therefore a suitable site to confront or resurrect uncomfortable repressed historical burdens. As Bal argues, Salcedo executed *Shibboleth* in a manner that overrides attempts to hide behind metaphor, figurativeness or

symbolism. This view becomes significant in light of several events that have occurred in Britain recently: the riots that engulfed north London and other English cities in August 2011; the “discovery” of secret colonial papers that were thought destroyed or reclassified pertaining to the Malayan Emergency, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya and the evacuations of the Chagos Islands,⁸⁹ and even Jeremy Paxman’s *Empire* series that aired on the *BBC* in 2012 (27 February 2012- 26 March 2012). These events encapsulate the various ways in which repressed or buried material makes their return. The examples cited above would require their own individual treatment, but the importance of their context shall become apparent when we examine how the aesthetic of *Shibboleth* and its disturbational strategies transformed the empty space of the Turbine Hall. The empty space saw the distance between audience and art disappear as the installation’s provocative and disturbing political material produced reactions that were continuous with the real world outside.

In this regard, Salcedo’s *Shibboleth* and Sierra’s *Banner Suspended In Front of a Cove* (2001) for example,^{xiii} share a strategy that uses disturbance to politicize space and geography so as to implicate their audiences. But the two artists use the aspect of duration to convey impact of their political material in fundamentally different ways. While the impact of Sierra’s banner is immediate and its provocative attitude dependant on how long it is allowed to exist, *Shibboleth*’s effect is both immediate and delayed through its dual existence in an active state as an installation (crack on the floor), and in a dormant state (as a filled concrete scar or mark on the floor) that still continues to operate through the malignant force of physical presence. The force

^{xiii} Marc Spiegler, “When Human Beings are Canvas,” 96. Spiegler writes that in August 2001, Sierra posted a huge banner on a beach in Mallorca that read “*Inländer Raus*” (“Natives, go away”), targeting the tension on the resort island between the Spanish residents and the Teutonic tourists. The town council immediately ordered the banner torn down, then had it re-hung, and finally the banner mysteriously disappeared.

of this presence becomes apparent in the duration it asks of the viewer to engage with its physical presence, and the activity of its aesthetic process that contains active and incongruous movements. We can therefore recognize the difficulty that *Shibboleth's* forceful and sophisticated manipulation of artistic language imposes on attempts to define its active or passive action. The chief weakness or challenge to Charlesworth's argument is that it overlooks the installation's ability to inextricably combine audience reactions to architecture and sculpture by provoking the experience of the uncanny from a process that denies spectatorship.



Figure 10 and **Figure 11**: *Workers Who Cannot be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (2000) and *Banner Suspended over a Cove* (2001) by Santiago Sierra. Extreme right, **Figure 12**: *Shibboleth* (2007) by Doris Salcedo

Critics are increasingly describing museums as becoming cafes with art on the side, tourist attractions, licensing brands, department stores and food courts on one hand, and on the other as civic centers, town squares, and catalysts of urban renewal; showcases for contemporary architecture and even places that emphasize the visitor at the expense of the visited.⁹⁰ The Unilever sponsored series of exhibitions at Tate Modern – *Shibboleth* included – have been described as spectacle and theater, or as promoting the spectacle. Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel write that while the artwork evoked emotions and ideas beyond its representation as a

chasm, the way visitors interacted with the work —as with most of the installations in the Unilever sponsored Series of exhibitions at Tate Modern —became part of the spectacle.⁹¹ The spectacle unfolds through children jumping across the chasm of *Shibboleth* or gingerly lowering their hands down its depth. This critique, in which large art installations with active audience participation are viewed as spectacle, becomes complicated by the fact that as artists increasingly redefine their approach to the art space – and the meaning of their works by incorporating audience participation – contemporary art venues have also become supportive of projects that challenge their spaces and audiences. This is driven by the need for more audiences. Tom Lubbock argues that in the last 15 years, contemporary art has become famous not for being either bizarre or ridiculous, but for being famous. “Exhibitions in the context of the Turbine Hall have become famous because its ‘outdoor-indoor feeling’ draw in audiences with the expectation of entertainment. Meanwhile the atmosphere of the Turbine hall has made art lose its inhibitions about size and the outside world, which has resulted in producing the ‘indoor art spectacular’ as a new genre of art.”⁹² Lubbock believes Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project* (2003) “scaled up expectations in an unsurpassable standard of theatricality where audiences basked and had picnics on the gallery floor, and gazed up at the installation’s mirrors and great solar disc of sodium light up above for hours as if it were a real sun.”⁹³

Critiques of *The Weather Project* downplay the fact that by deliberately exposing its apparatuses to audiences, the installation was displaying the conditions of its phenomena as smoke and mirrors; the quintessential definition of spectacle. As Susan May who was the curator of the project pointed out: “the clear evidence of pumps, piping and lamps purposely draw attention so that viewers are conscious of the fact that what they perceive is a constructed staging behind the

representation.”⁹⁴ By making us conscious of the construction so that we perceive the staging behind the representation, he makes us conscious of the act of perception, of being caught in the moment of awareness.⁹⁵ Eliasson is using the Turbine Hall space to deliberately reproduce simulacra in effects and meanings in an indoor setting that mimic for viewers their exterior outdoor relations to weather conditions. Ole W. Fischer argues that by taking on an everyday subject such as the weather, Eliasson has managed to question the construction and mediation of perceptions in a manner that transforms the museum space into a body-friendly environment for non-museum activities that range from transcendental perception, talking, having lunch or just lying down on the floor.⁹⁶ Fischer’s point captures the challenges that face site-specific art projects that take on the Turbine Hall. Adrian Searle points out that artists taking on the space of the Turbine Hall and its Unilever sponsored projects face enormous and daunting challenges due to the enormity of the space and its huge audiences, the projects that have preceded them and the urge to test the limits of the building and the forbearance of the institution.⁹⁷

Tate Modern is one of the leading cultural institutions both in Britain and in the world. In April 2011 *The Art Newspaper* reported that Tate Modern was the 4th most visited museum in the world in 2010 having attracted a total of 5,061,172 visitors.⁹⁸ *The Economist* of March 2012 indicated that the museum was the 3rd most visited attraction in Britain in 2011.⁹⁹ Hence Salcedo’s ability to execute a confrontational installation in an institution of such global prominence calls for the need to analyze the artwork in terms of its efficacy as well as the institutional and political critique levied by Wu in regards to the relationship between Salcedo and a First World institution that she intends through her work to hold to account for the imbalances of power in the global context. Wu provides a paradox through which to examine

whether the gravity of Salcedo's artistic concerns, a definitive feature of her artworks and career, can get compromised or diminished when they get to be executed in the context of Tate Modern. That is: do issues such as the weight of the violence in Colombia, contemporary geopolitical marginalization and exclusion and the burdens of political history become compromised by the effects of the spectacle in a venue such as Tate Modern? Or could the execution and the political process of engagement that emerged from interaction with *Shibboleth* in the space of the Turbine Hall be an indication that Salcedo has developed an artistic language capable of manipulating politics, strategy and site beyond her familiar language of the uncanny that has been tied to her earlier works about the violence in Colombia? And finally does the artistic language of *Shibboleth* – that relies on absence as opposed to sculpture by sheer presence – impact the content of the artwork, its relationships with audiences and the politics that emerges from that, in a manner that is specific to its location?

In order to answer these questions effectively, we have to examine the intricate process of violence as it unfolded in Colombia and how Salcedo used its structure to develop the language of the uncanny in her sculptures as a strategy to capture and transmit the complex effects of the violence by involving the viewer through their experiences. Salcedo has always tried to provide these experiences through the immediacy of using the real materials of the violence and transforming everyday utility objects, such as tables and cupboards, in ways that invoke or suggest the processes of violence.

The Human Case of Colombia

Human Rights Watch states in *War without Quarter: Colombia and Humanitarian Law* that “violations of international humanitarian law (the laws of war) are not abstract concepts in

Colombia but the grim material of everyday life. War bursts into the daily activities of a farm, a village, a public bus, or a school and sometimes armed men carefully choose their victims from lists. Other times, they simply kill those nearby, to spread fear. Indeed, a willingness to commit atrocities is among the most striking features of Colombia's war."¹⁰⁰ Atrocities in Colombia are committed by the Colombian army, the national police force, special vigilante and private security services (CONVIVIR); paramilitaries allied to the United Self-Defense Group of Colombia (AUC) and Colombia's three largest guerrilla groups: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (UC-ELN) and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL). The report concludes that all groups in Colombia committed atrocities against civilians and unarmed combatants. The Colombian army was implicated in torture, threats and killing of non-combatants. The national police are reported to capture suspects and execute them, while the paramilitaries and guerilla groups select and kill their victims, engage in torture, mutilation of corpses, death threats, forced displacement and hostage-taking. They also attack non-military targets like ambulances and hospitals, civilian homes and public buses.¹⁰¹ Amnesty International also indicates in a September 2005 report that all parties to Colombia's 40-year-old armed conflict have committed serious human rights abuses and shown a blatant disregard for international humanitarian law with killings, disappearances, forced displacement and torture being routine.¹⁰² The 40-year-old conflict in Colombia had seen more than 70,000 people killed in the last 20 years alone and between 3 and 4 million forcibly displaced from their homes.¹⁰³



Figure 13: The military storming of the Palace of Justice in Bogota - Colombia in 1985

The first time Salcedo addressed the violence in her work from within Colombia was with the site specific installation *Noviembre 6 y 7* in Bogota in 2002. *Noviembre 6 y 7* was staged as on the 17th anniversary of the events of 1985 when leftist rebels of the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* seized the Supreme Court in Bogota, thus precipitating a siege and the eventual storming of the building by the Colombian army. More than 100 people were reportedly killed including eleven of twenty Supreme Court Justices and all the members of M-19, while eleven civilians remained unaccounted for.¹⁰⁴ Salcedo's installation began at exactly 11:35 am when a chair was lowered over the façade of the Palace of Justice building to coincide with the time the first victim of the siege was killed. Another 279 wooden chairs followed at different speeds and intervals to equal the duration of the siege.¹⁰⁵ Stella Baracklianou writes that by staging such a politically charged act in the original place of the event, Salcedo ran the risk of opening up the wound of the original memory.¹⁰⁶ Adan indicates that the installation reproduced the duration of the original by being able to recall the hour and minute in which the siege was said to have commenced as well as its overall duration.¹⁰⁷ By providing no advance publicity, press releases or any other communications that might have prepared the population of Bogotá for the advent of this project,

Salcedo conjured up something of the shock and disorder of the original event. Bal believes that by putting the specific date on the event, Salcedo gave it a name and broke the anonymity to which the army had condemned the siege thereafter.¹⁰⁸ Without naming the victims whose plight triggered the work, Salcedo had succeeded in wrenching them out of anonymity. Salcedo produced other *Novembre* installations but this time outside Colombia with *Tenebrae: Noviembre 7, 1985* at the Camden Arts Centre in London in 2001 and later at Documenta XI in Kassel in 2002.¹⁰⁹ According to Bal, the Documenta XI work was a high water mark in Salcedo's oeuvre as it represented a new departure in use of materials. Even though it was still inspired by furniture, it was made entirely out of stainless steel and lead rather than from assembled wooden furniture as in previous works.¹¹⁰

The Uncanny in Salcedo's Early Works

In a conversation with Carlos Basualdo, Salcedo argues that reality is diachronic in spite of the fact that everything happens at the same time and therefore reality cannot be viewed on a single level because it always occurs on multiple levels. Her work is not simply a mixture but a cruel juxtaposition of things striving violently to manifest themselves simultaneously. The uncanny images in her work are a result of the mixture of materials that come from opposite realities.¹¹¹ Freud argues in *The Uncanny* that if affect arising from an emotional impulse is converted into fear by being repressed, then within the things that we consider frightening there has to be a specific experience that illustrates something that has been repressed and now returns.¹¹² This constitutes the uncanny as something long familiar to the psyche yet alienated from it through being repressed, which now returns as a frightening experience.¹¹³ Freud indicates that an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we

are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary or when a symbol takes on the full effects and significance of what it symbolizes.¹¹⁴ Amongst the many things that Freud considers as representing the uncanny are the German words *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. The *heimlich* embodies the feeling of belonging to the house or homeliness and transmits the sensation of being friendly and familiar. It arouses a sense of security and restfulness as equal to being within the safe confines of a house; tame, intimate, friendly and unthreatening.¹¹⁵ The *heimlich* can also denote that which is concealed or kept from sight.¹¹⁶ The *unheimlich* represents what is weird or arousing gruesome fear.¹¹⁷

Freud indicates that the *heimlich* can become identical with its opposite *unheimlich* so that it can mean what is familiar and agreeable as well as what is concealed and kept out of sight, thus *heimlich* can denote ambivalence until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*.¹¹⁸ This leads him to deduce that the uncanny is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and long established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. It is something which ought to have been hidden but has come to light.¹¹⁹ There are two sources that trigger the experiences which prompt the uncanny. These are when our infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression and when primitive beliefs which have been overcome seem once more to be confirmed.¹²⁰ The revival of either one of these repressed impulses leads to a collision between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, where the homely and safe clash with what should have remained secret or hidden but has come to light. Nicholas Royle in *The Uncanny* argues that the uncanny signifies the displacement of the sense of homeliness by the exposure of something un-homely at the center of home that constitutes a disturbance so critical to what is taken as proper and familiar, such as the concept of personal or private property, names, places, institutions or events.¹²¹ The state of the

uncanny includes the uncertainties brought by silence, solitude or darkness because it is in a manner tied to the language that defines how we conceive and represent occurrences in our world.¹²² In *The Architectural Uncanny* Anthony Vidler argues that the uncanny can be applied to the physical and conceptual architectural structures of a society such as a house, a city or country that pretends to offer maximum security while opening itself up to the utmost in terror.¹²³ This sense of the uncanny is not an inherent property of these spaces nor is it provoked by any particular spatial conformation, but an aesthetic dimension to representation that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity.

Andreas Huyssen, Jill Bennett, Tanya Barson and Joan Gibbons have used the framework of the uncanny in critical analyses of Salcedo's furniture-inspired sculptures of the period 1989 to 1999 that deal with violence, presence and invisibility, trauma and memory. Huyssen argues that *Unland: The Orphans Tunic* (1997) has a complexity that has as much to do with what is there before the spectator's eye as with what is absent. "That which is *heimlich* and familiar in the everyday piece of furniture becomes *unheimlich*, with its homeliness both preserved and denied in the *unheimlich*."¹²⁴ Bennett similarly indicates that Salcedo's transformations de-familiarize objects through a process that removes them from the realm of the familiar, and makes them appear strange as they slowly confront the viewer with a world made strange by death and the alienating and disorienting experience of loss.¹²⁵ Barson writes that Salcedo's *Unland* series of sculptures (1995 – 1999) play on the familiar made strange through the encounter of opposites in the human and the inhuman and the organic and inorganic in substances.¹²⁶ Salcedo's deliberate juxtapositions that combine materials – metal, wood, concrete, bone; thread, hair and animal membrane – evoke unsettling and unfamiliar experiences designed to disturb by making the familiar strange and unhomely.¹²⁷ Gibbons writes that the frequent inclusion of fragments of

clothing and even bone fragment, adds to the incongruity of the furnishings while serving as reminders that the sculptures are a conduit for remembering the fate of actual people.¹²⁸ The deployment of the sculptures in space makes their disfigured and mutated forms inhabit their surroundings in ways that provide discomfoting experiences for the viewer. Since 2004 Salcedo's work has been marked by a shift that focuses more on the use of space than with added materials. This shift is reflected in *Shibboleth* and through other works such as *Neither* (2004) at the White Cube in London, *Abyss* (2005) at Castello di Rivoli in Turin and *Plegaria Muda* exhibited in 2011 at Lisbon and Malmo.



Left, **Figures 14:** *Unland: Irreversible Witness* (1995-1998) by Doris Salcedo. Exhibited at Alexander & Bonin Gallery (Spring 1998). Medium: wood, cloth, metal and hair. Dimensions: 44 inches x 98 inches x 35 inches. Right, **Figure 15:** *Plegaria Muda* by Doris Salcedo at Moderna Museet (May 21 – September 5, 2011). Medium: wood, mineral compound, cement and grass.

The Context of *Shibboleth*

Shibboleth was described as a negative sculpture that existed through the sheer presence of being a chasm on the floor of the Turbine Hall. In *Inside the White Cube* Brian O'Doherty defines the gallery space as a white pristine container where art is displayed, defined and clarified by the space: the container defines our consciousness before we see the art.¹²⁹ This invests the gallery

space with the same presence possessed by other spaces which function to preserve conventions through a closed system of values, such as the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom or the experimental laboratory. The perceptual fields of force created within this chamber of art are so powerful that once inside, objects become art because powerful ideas about art are focused on them, but once outside these objects can lapse back into secular status: “Inside the space objects become the medium through which ideas are manifested and proffered for discussion, giving the space a sacramental nature inherited from Modernism’s paradigm.”¹³⁰ Bal describes the space of the Turbine Hall as belonging to Modernism, both in its previous functions as a power station and in its current incarnation as a space where art can elevate its monumentality.¹³¹ Salcedo challenges this monumentality and that of the space by leaving it entirely empty and filling it with the scar tissue of the entire world, represented by all its divisions and differences, its histories and repressions.¹³² The negative space she has created remains open and one can enter or leave the space of the Turbine Hall at will. Yet when in the visual space of the work, the earth is torn open as if by an earthquake, and there is no consolation for the destruction of the ground upon which the viewer stands. It addresses the viewer directly and violently by bringing history into the present with renewed force.¹³³ Such an effect has been achieved by the installation’s ability to articulate several critical meeting points in the recent history of art in regards to the installation’s references to the politics and attitudes towards space and location of the artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s.

Shibboleth invariably reflects the conceptual strategies of such projects as Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s *MCA (Chicago) Packaged* (1969), The Rosario Art Group’s “gallery action” in Rosario in 1968 and even the Minimalisms of Carl Andre and Richard Serra of sculpture by sheer presence or weight, and the sculpture by absence or void of Gordon Matta-Clark and Michael

Heizer. The strategies of these various artists in one way or another attempted to critique, redefine or subvert the concept of the “white cube.” *MCA (Chicago) Packaged* attempted to enact a conceptual critique of the museum as container, while the attitude of the “gallery action” with its disturbational orientation towards the exhibition space and its audiences managed to both question authority as well as critique art audiences. Likewise, the incongruence of the two sculptural concepts of sculpture by sheer weight or presence and sculpture by absence contribute to enact force through absence and presence in the space of the Turbine Hall. Claire Bishop writes that on 7th October 1968, Graciela Carnevale and the Rosario Art Group (*Experimental Art Cycle*) executed what they called a “gallery action” by locking up viewers in a gallery space with no art for more than an hour. The work consisted of preparing a totally empty room with blank walls, and completely covering up the wall that had glass windows so that the audience could not communicate with anybody from the outside.¹³⁴ Carnevale then locked in the audience that had come to the opening reception in anticipation of art. After an hour, the trapped visitors removed the posters that covered the glass windows and their realization that this was all a joke turned into frustration. Eventually, someone on the outside smashed the window open and this enabled the trapped audience to escape, yet some of them believed the rescuer had ruined the work and began hitting him on the head with an umbrella. Bishop writes that the Rosario Group presents an important development in the genealogy of participation art because they conceived of the work of art as a situation collapsing the viewer and the performer into a fractured social body.¹³⁵ The provocation of the entity and the unpredictability of its response constitute the work’s artistic and political resonance. Lucy Lippard in *Six Years: The dematerialization of the Art Object* writes of the same gallery action: “The door was hermetically sealed without the

visitors being aware as the piece involved closing all accesses and exits and waiting for the unknown reaction of the visitors.”¹³⁶

The following year in 1969 Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 1969 completely wrapped up the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago in tarpaulin and rope. The two artists indicated that the MCA was perfect for the project “because it looked like a package already.”¹³⁷ In contrast to the Rosario Group, Christo and Jeanne-Claude took all the necessary precautions towards public safety by ensuring that no exits were covered and small openings were cut in the tarpaulin to keep the building's air vents unobstructed. They did not wrap the roof of the museum. Ann C. Chave writes in *Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power* that in one of the first Minimalist group shows *Shape and Structure* at Tibor de Nagy in 1965, Andre submitted a timber piece so massive it almost caused the gallery floor to collapse and had to be removed.¹³⁸ Andre’s stated purpose was “to seize and hold the space of the gallery and not to simply fill it; but seize and hold that space.” Chave also indicates that Serra’s sculptures contain an adversarial attitude towards space and audiences, with his attitude towards audiences reflecting that of bully and victim since the sculptures toy with the boundary between what is risky and what is outright lethal.¹³⁹ Serra’s propped steel pieces in museums are normally roped off because they pose actual danger and sometimes during installation or de-installation, they injure or even kill. On 26 October 2008 at the Castelli Gallery in New York Serra’s sixteen ton sculpture *Reading Cones*, collapsed during de-installation and injured two workers.^{xiv} The sculptures of Andre and Serra claim space by their sheer presence and weight.

^{xiv} Don Terry, “A Sixteen Ton Sculpture Falls, Injuring Two,” *The New York Times*, 27 October 1988, B1. The falling sculpture knocked down two of nine cast-iron structural support columns in the five-story loft building resulting in significant cracking in several walls on the upper floors of the building. New York’s city commissioner said that the

Shibboleth promises danger but not to the magnitude of Serra's, yet contains the attitude of both Serra and Andre's work. In addition it shares with the work of the two Minimalists, the ability to occupy space by sheer presence and promise of uncertainty. Thomas Crow argues that while the Minimalist artists championed the idea that the spectator's experience of sculpture should entail both an awareness of the real time of the encounter and the physical and institutional spaces in which it was installed, duration was not built into their installations.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile *Shibboleth's* radical and political reconfiguration of architecture and space resonates with the duration built upon the experiencing of Matta-Clark's concept of sculpture by absence, even though his guerilla appropriation style of working with abandoned or non-sanctioned buildings resulted in an art that had no relation to traditional exhibition spaces.^{xv} In one of his landmark projects *Splitting* (1974), Matta-Clark and his band of artists propped a building on jacks before slicing a one-inch-wide vertical line at the exact middle of a two storey house, impeccably dividing floors, walls, stairs, railings and landings of the entire body of a building in suburban New Jersey.¹⁴¹ They beveled down the house's wooden foundation from the point of split to the rear at a 5 degree gradient then removed the jacks. This resulted in one half of the house resting at an incline, creating a gap between the two sections that gradually widened in split towards the top of the house. Crow indicates that Matta-Clark's work offered a conception of site specificity that defied the efforts of spectators trying to comprehend the work, since in most cases they could not remember the difference between the projects they had seen and the ones they had heard about.¹⁴² Salcedo has re-appropriated the conceptual approach to space of Matta-Clark and brought it into the

floor had sagged in a number of spots on the first and second floors and a stand pipe was ripped open, sending water pouring over the first floor.

^{xv} Thomas Crow indicates that during the months of July and August 1975, Matta-Clark and his team 'requisitioned' Pier 52, a riverside location at West and Gansenvoort streets in New York and proceeded to cut out sections from walls, roofs and floors without permission from the owners or the City Council of New York. (See: Thomas Crow, "Gordon Matta-Clark," 8)

sanctioned and legitimate space of Tate Modern in order to disorient audiences with the politics of the work. Outside of Matta-Clark's *Splitting*, *Shibboleth* shares its conceptual execution of sculpture by void with *North, East, South, West* (1967/2002) at the Dia:Beacon by Michael Heizer and Urs Fischer's *You* (2007) at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York. Heizer's work, which epitomizes emptiness and monumental simplicity, consists of four negative steel forms recessed in the ground; a cube, a cone, a triangular cavity and an inverted foreshortened cone.¹⁴³ Fischer's *You* was a 38 by 30 by 8 foot crater in the floor of the gallery that, like *Shibboleth*, worked with the concept of the gallery as empty space and sculpture as absence, while leaving its meaning and intentions open to interpretation. And like *Shibboleth*, it had a notice that warned its viewers that "the installation was physically dangerous and involved the risk of serious injury or death."¹⁴⁴



Figures 16: *North, East, South, West* (1967/2002) by Michael Heizer. **Figure 17:** *Shibboleth* by Doris Salcedo.

Figure 18: *Splitting: Four Corners* 322 Humphrey Street, Englewood, New Jersey (1974) by Gordon Matta-Clark

Shibboleth and *Splitting* function as cuts and they perform acts of enquiry in architecture in an aesthetic process that Bal has described as anthropomorphic because built architecture and human life are so intertwined that a cut on the house mimics a cut on human flesh. Achim Borchardt-Hume writes that the idea or act of cutting as performed by *Shibboleth* is usually

motivated in equal measure by anger and the will to harm, or, sometimes used as a mode of doubt and enquiry or to test limits.¹⁴⁵ According to Martin Gayford, architecture affects us so intimately because we live in it and are surrounded by it; this makes any alteration to a built structure strike us like the change of expression in a face.¹⁴⁶ A fissure in the architectural foundations of Tate Modern can appear to threaten the very structure of the mighty building and make viewers to fear that it might widen at any moment with untold consequences.¹⁴⁷ Vicente Todolí, the Director of Tate Modern argues that the actions of *Shibboleth* through its interaction of sculpture, space and architecture may have succeeded in raising questions about the values enshrined on the shaky ideological foundations on which Western notions of modernity are built. “The installation reminds us that the history of colonialism and racism is the Janus-face of the history of Enlightenment and the strife towards a utopian world order: to look towards the future we need to face the past.”¹⁴⁸ Salcedo’s negative sculpture aimed to provoke the experience of the repressed by excavating the divisions implied by the word shibboleth on the floor of a brand name British institution.

The Politics of *Shibboleth*

The Oxford English Dictionary defines shibboleth as the Hebrew test-word used by Jephthah to distinguish the fleeing Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the ‘sh’, from his own men, the Gileadites (Judges Xii. 4–6).¹⁴⁹

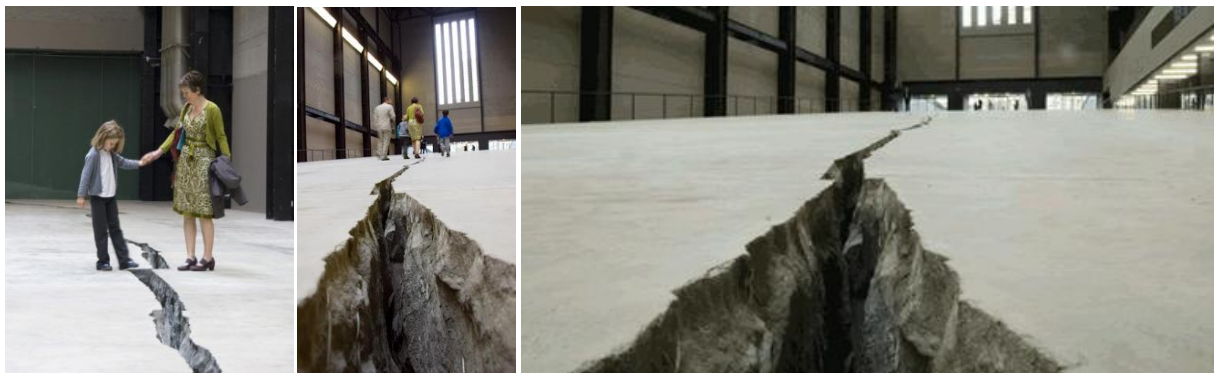
Shibboleth, n.: (1) a word or sound which a person is unable to pronounce correctly, or a word used as a test for detecting foreigners or persons from another district by their pronunciation. (2) A peculiarity of pronunciation or accent indicative of a person's origin; a custom, habit, mode of dress, or the like, which distinguishes a particular class or set of persons. (3) A catchword or

formula adopted by a party or sect, by which their adherents or followers may be discerned, or those not their followers may be excluded. (4) A moral formula held tenaciously and unreflectingly, esp. a prohibitive one; a taboo. Salcedo in “Proposal for a Project for the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, 2007” writes:

“the piece I propose to inscribe in the Turbine Hall is an attempt to orient this modernist space towards the unbridgeable gap that separates humanity from infra-humanity.” “*Shibboleth* is a negative space that addresses the w(hole) [sic] in history that marks the bottomless difference that separates whites from non-whites. The w(hole) in history that I’m referring to is the history of racism, which runs parallel to the history of modernity and its untold dark side.”¹⁵⁰

The installation *Shibboleth* was a relatively deep chasm running 167 meters across the length of the concrete floor of the Turbine Hall. It began as a hairline crack at the entrance to the hall that widened to almost 0.6 meters at the other end of the completely emptied hall. Ivonne Pini writes that the installation did not occupy space but broke it, penetrated, and invaded an otherwise empty gallery with a gap that questioned architecture’s aspiration to monumentality and permanence as expressions of power.¹⁵¹ Bal notes that the art work performed an anti-architecture gesture by boldly destroying the literal architectural foundation of the floor on which it stands with a violent inscription that created a negative space as enormous as the hall itself and opened up an abyss of unlimited meaning.¹⁵² *Shibboleth* is a truly startling work because it has produced so many different responses, all of which convey a sense of being unsettled.¹⁵³ Borchardt-Hume argues that by choosing to go underground, which is the direction of the abject, rather than to reach up into the heights of the Turbine Hall, Salcedo has challenged the claims to

beauty and truth that reside in the art on view in the upper floors of the museum and instead claims territory for those people excluded from these claims. “The mapping of subterranean space as the psycho-spatial terrain of those suppressed and exploited by the forces of so-called progress has haunted the imagination of those beneficiaries of their exploitation from the onset of modernity.”¹⁵⁴ *Shibboleth*’s deep chasm as it runs the length of the Turbine Hall acts as a reminder that the privilege of those born on the right side of it inherently relies on the very same privileges denied others. *Shibboleth* similarly suggests the divide in the urban and urbane space of its location since Tate modern cuts between the financial side of London and the south part that has traditionally been home to the immigrant communities whose contribution to the city’s past is unrecognized.¹⁵⁵ Eyal Weizman indicates that when seismic or man-made cracks cut large cross-sections through architectural, archeological and geological strata they reveal surfaces as large volumes, and the layers that have lain hidden and buried within the depths of materials and the ground, are thrust to view.¹⁵⁶ Morgan Falconer writes in *Artnews* that *Shibboleth* was three feet deep at its widest point and three visitors had fallen into the installation during the first week of opening.¹⁵⁷



Figures 19, 20 and 21: *Shibboleth* by Doris Salcedo

Tate Modern's head of safety had informed staff members prior to the opening of *Shibboleth* that there were obvious primary risks such as tripping over the sculpture that would be associated with presence of the crack on the floor of the Turbine Hall. Those oblivious of its presence faced the potential of significant leg injuries, even though the artistic nature of the sculpture did not demand physical protective measures that would be associated with cracks of a similar nature elsewhere. Tate Modern was prepared to consider such measures as staffing, signage and lighting, or even controlling the number of people admitted into the space of the sculpture. Other actions under contemplation included; erecting barriers, placing demarcation lines or using Perspex to bridge over certain sections.¹⁵⁸

Daily newspapers in London wrote about *Shibboleth* in a language that unwittingly expressed its effects as a work that promised real danger and also capable of revealing the darkest fears of its audiences. Edwin Heathcote wrote in the *Financial Times* that *Shibboleth* qualifies as the darkest and most disturbing of the works so far commissioned for the Turbine Hall and one so open to interpretation that ignorance of the artist's original concept need not be a hindrance.¹⁵⁹ Alice O'Keefe in *The New Statesman* writes that a gaping fissure is an uneasy presence that creates a sense of instability and impermanence, particularly when executed on such a large scale down the middle of the Turbine Hall, a space that is as close to hallowed as you can get in 21st-century London.¹⁶⁰ Rachel Campbell-Johnston of *The Times* of London indicates that while *Shibboleth* benignly starts off as a crack that is capable of trapping a shoe heel at one end, it widens into a chasm that can swallow a child at its other end.¹⁶¹ Tom Lubbock reports in *The Independent* that "Salcedo has emptied out the Turbine Hall entirely to exhibit nothing; except a deep earthquake crack that literally cut into the concrete floor beneath."¹⁶² *The Times* reported that fifteen people

“were hurt” viewing the artwork in the first four weeks of its opening.¹⁶³ *The New York Times* also reported that one individual caught her foot in the crack and tripped.¹⁶⁴

Paul Lehane, a safety officer argues that *Shibboleth* breached statutory requirements and Tate Modern should have implemented further measures to prevent people from being exposed to the dangers posed by the sculpture. In the professional journal, *Journal of Environmental Health Research (JEHR)* he writes that regardless of what *Shibboleth* represented artistically it was in reality a huge crack in the floor, and the arts are not exempted from health and safety regulations: “Although it is the crack that is being exhibited, the room itself is a work place for those employed by Tate Modern.”¹⁶⁵ This establishes that there is work activity being carried out at Tate Modern and the Turbine Hall should be subject to article 12(1) of Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations of the UK Government (1992) which lays down the specific requirements for floors.¹⁶⁶ It states that the floor should be of such construction that it is suitable for the purpose for which it is used and must be of suitable construction, be free from holes or slopes and not be uneven or slippery so as to be a risk to health or safety (Regulations 12 sections (1) and (2)). In addition, section (3) requires that floors should so far as is reasonably practicable, be kept free from obstructions, articles or substances which may cause a person to fall. Lehane argues that the presence of the crack on the floor breached regulation 12(1) and (2) of the Workplace Regulations and Sections (2) and (3) of the health and Safety at work Act of 1974. In addition since members of the public were injured visiting *Shibboleth*, Tate Modern could have faced litigation for failings under the Occupiers Liability Acts or at Common Law.¹⁶⁷

Disturbation and the Uncanny

The issues outlined above illustrate the problems that *Shibboleth* posed for Tate Modern as an institution by challenging the requirements of the Health and Safety Regulations of the UK. Likewise the analysis of *Shibboleth* provided by Bal, Borchardt-Hume and Weizman point to the ability of the installation to provoke an unsettling re-realization of past experiences as well as being a confrontation with distanced disturbing political realities. The re-realization of these experiences point to the uncanny; this together with the presence of real physical danger indicate that *Shibboleth* disturbed by turning the space of the Turbine Hall into a political space. Salcedo managed to use the license provided by Tate Modern to execute an artwork that interfered with the space of the Turbine Hall by being real and by providing the experience of the uncanny as a specifically political disturbance.^{xvi} Noam Chomsky has argued that privilege yields opportunity, and opportunity confers responsibilities.¹⁶⁸ In “Politics of Installation” Boris Groys theorizes that the nature of the installation practice provides the artist with the perfect laboratory to reveal or explore the ambiguity that lies at the core of the Western idea of freedom because it enables her to take charge and decide on what to include and what to leave out from the space.¹⁶⁹ In the installation practice the artist through the symbolic privatization of the public space of the exhibition, installs anything that circulates in our civilization – objects, texts, films etc – in one place and designs it according to her sovereign will without having to publicly justify the choice of its materials or organization.¹⁷⁰ In a very explicit way, the aesthetic responsibility that the practice confers upon the artist allows her to take charge of the design of the space and enforce a

^{xvi} Bal argues that Salcedo’s work is not about resentment and resistance, but rather interferences which produce startling experiences from the interaction between the work and the viewer. This enables the agencies of the political to take place. See Bal, *Of what One Cannot Speak*, 251

new kind of order and control that allows art to show or make visible the realities that are generally overlooked or restricted in the standard exhibition.

The space becomes a symbolic private property of the artist; its visitor leaves the public territory of democratic legitimacy and enters a space of sovereign authoritarian control, where the artist relies on the art institution to police and maintain order among its entrants.¹⁷¹ Groys argues that the installation space is where we are immediately confronted with the ambiguous nature of the contemporary idea of freedom – that functions in democracies with respect to the tension between sovereign and institutional freedom – for the space unmasks the hidden sovereign dimension of the contemporary order that politics for the most part tries to conceal.¹⁷² In addition, the artistic installation empowers the artist to take public responsibility and act in the name of a group, community or society and even democratize its space by opening it up to visitors so that they transform it into a platform for public discussion and democratic practice, communication, networking and education. In this sense the artist gives the community a space in which to constitute itself, and even defines the rules to which they must submit even if she decides to be an outsider to the space. This self-exclusion empowers the artist as the outsider who can be powerful through freedom from society's control and therefore is not restricted from performing sovereign actions by any public discussion or need for public justification.¹⁷³ The arguments advanced by Groys go some way in providing an answer to the critiques levied at *Shibboleth* by Wu's article.

One of the issues raised by Wu concerned the secrecy involved in the execution process of *Shibboleth*. "The actual politics of the production of *Shibboleth* have been sealed off from public scrutiny in the same manner as the Turbine Hall was screened off for six weeks while the project

was being carried out.”¹⁷⁴ Wu translates this to mean that the process of executing *Shibboleth* displayed a relationship between Salcedo and Tate Modern that denied the public an open and democratizing access to information, while protecting the interest of the commercial place. She concedes that although Salcedo had – in the typical manner of all her public installations – provided an explanatory statement of exactly what she had in mind at the start of the project, in effect, this allowed Salcedo to control the direction of critical discourse right from the beginning. On the contrary, we can argue using Groys’s context of the installation, that Salcedo designed the space within a political critique that made Tate Modern the medium through which to confront the face of power and the forces of exclusion, oppression and privilege. The presence of a 167 foot crack on the floor of Tate Modern upset viewers who felt it violated the floor of a major British institution. The artwork equally triggered hostile reactions from viewers who tripped over its void, either from being oblivious to its presence or from their attempts at interacting with it. It is reasonable to argue that Salcedo intended interactions with the violence implicit in *Shibboleth*’s void to be a process capable of triggering histories and experiences that had been repressed, thus allowing them to emerge as real and frightening.

Shibboleth reveals the affinity between the disturbational and the uncanny, particularly through their convergence to generate through the materials of reality experiences that are both disturbing and political. The sculpture’s physical presence as a void impacted how members of the public interacted with the space of the Turbine Hall by confronting them with the urge to explore its depths always aware of the possibilities of inflicting injuries. In the course of these explorations, viewers could not escape their buried anxieties. Meanwhile the mode of erasure of *Shibboleth* at the end of the exhibition ensured that the sculpture continues to be a presence on the floor of Tate Modern through a permanent scar or wound that serves as marker of buried experiences or

reminder of the violation it enacted on the site. As Bal writes, Salcedo has buried shoes and filled furniture with concrete in earlier work, but with *Shibboleth* she has managed to almost make an entire work disappear under concrete. Yet the color of concrete ensures that a trace of what lies underneath cannot be erased, but continues to exist as a remnant of life.¹⁷⁵ In “Failing Better: Salcedo’s Trajectory” Rod Mengham argues that modern festivals – just like the Dionysian festivals of ancient Athens – provide a means for art to question the presiding values of any given ideological formation. “The work of Salcedo agitates the relationship between art and history, and between art and pretext to occupy a temporality that does not end with exit from the gallery or with the dismantling of the installation, but which brings to the surface a process of psychological resistance that is deeply embedded in the social consciousness.”¹⁷⁶

Shibboleth signified a move from Salcedo’s early sculptures that provoked the experience of the uncanny from the juxtaposition of real materials such as cloth, hair and bone with furniture. It confronts its audiences as a negative sculpture that violently zigzags across the floor – an actual void intent on using a disturbational process of interaction to provoke the realization of repressed experiences. The dramatic interaction with the installation is unlike that demanded by any of Salcedo’s other installations such as *Neither*, *Abyss* and *Plegaria Muda*. In this sense Salcedo has succeeded in producing a work that exemplifies her long time stated aim of confronting violence through the process of interacting with art. In a 1998 interview with Charles Merewether, Salcedo had stated that:

Violence is present in the whole world and in all of us. As a result I’m interested in questioning the elements of violence endemic to human nature, since cruelty, indolence and hatred towards others are universal. I look for the possibility of making the connection between the one particular and harsh event that takes place

in Colombia and the equally cruel and harsh everyday life that takes place elsewhere. Perhaps in other places it occurs in a more hidden and subtle way, yet one that is no less painful or unjust. For example when we are sophisticated and cruel, one way to spill blood is to make the other person blush.¹⁷⁷

The disturbational and uncanny process of *Shibboleth* allowed Salcedo to produce a permanent blush on the floor of Tate Modern by making audiences relate to art and its experiences as real. The political uncanny as enacted by *Shibboleth* on Tate Modern exemplifies the statement: “You surprise me by coming to me. Even if I invited you, your coming disturbs my world. Indeed your entering into my dwelling place interrupts the coherence of my economy; you disarrange my order in which all things familiar to me have their proper place, function and time.”

CHAPTER THREE

WAFAA BILAL IN FACING THE ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT

Introduction

*The chief hazard of action is that it has effects that are uncontrollable, unstoppable, and unpredictable. The chief frustration of actions is that it cannot be named or compassed in words as they are unfolding; they can be named and understood only when they have ended – often a long time after they have ended.*¹⁷⁸ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl

In May 2007 Wafaa Bilal came to the world's attention through a month-long art project titled *Domestic Tension* at the Flatfile Galleries in Chicago. For 31 days as Bilal lived in a makeshift space within the gallery going about his daily life, audiences from around the world would monitor his actions 24 hours a day through a webcam and also shoot at him with a custom-made robotic paintball gun over the internet. At the end of the project, 65,000 shots had been fired by participants from 136 countries. He made friends on the project's chat-room but also encountered insulting commentary. Bilal writes that he exited the gallery a forever changed man —altered by the physical, emotional, artistic and social intensity of an encounter that seemed to have lasted far longer than one month. "My body felt permanently impacted and aged as if by years rather than weeks of stress, but the project also seemed to have removed from my shoulders the huge weight of survivor's guilt at being able to live in the comfort zone of America, while my family and many others lived under fire in the war zone of Iraq."¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile the anxieties, fears and sleep problems and the post-traumatic stress syndromes – caused by his experiences of the First Gulf War in Iraq and life in refugee camps in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia – from which he had largely recovered, resurfaced during *Domestic Tension* and stayed long after.

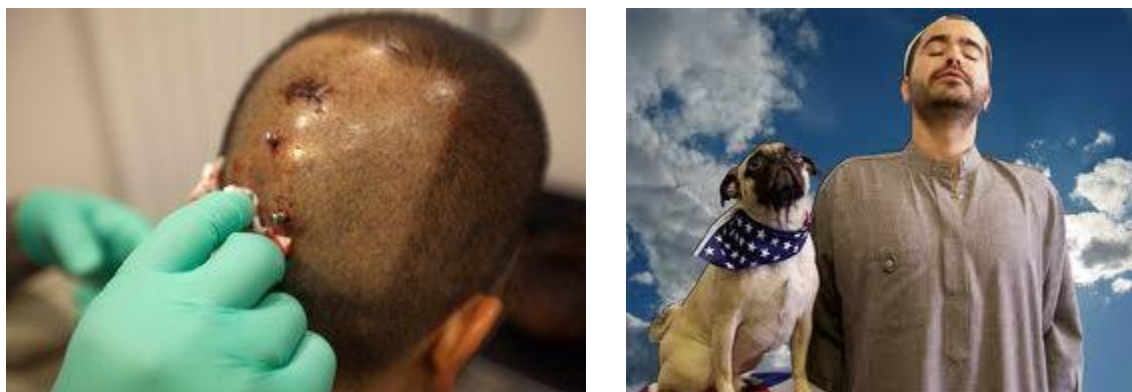
The following year, in 2008, Bilal was invited as a visiting professor by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in the town of Troy in upstate New York, to be part of a dialogue program titled “Art and Islam: Electronic Representations and Local Communities.” He was to install an art project titled *Night of Bush Capturing: A Virtual Jihadi* and also deliver lectures to students. The project *Virtual Jihadi* was shut down on 5 March, 2008 right before its opening after the institution’s Republican Club complained that it was terrorist art and accused Rensselaer’s art department of being a safe haven for terrorists.¹⁸⁰ Bilal has provided the following information as background to *Virtual Jihadi*. “Not long after the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 a video game producer Jesse Petrilla – founder of United American Committee, an organization fighting the threat of ‘Islamofascism’ – released a video game titled *Quest for Saddam* in which players were invited to shoot Iraqi soldiers and gradually work their way through palaces and deserts until they ultimately assassinate Saddam Hussein.”¹⁸¹ The games drew from jingoistic anti-Arab stereotypes, and alongside, there was a website known as “Jihad Chat” which carried anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant discussions and media alerts. Gregory Sholette writes that *Quest for Saddam* had been successfully marketed in 2003 American television stations such as Fox, CNN and MSNBC as American troops hunted down the real Saddam.¹⁸² Al Qaeda hacked the game and produced its own version which they named *The Night of Bush Capturing* in which players fight American soldiers and upon attaining the highest level get a chance to shoot at a rendered image of President George W. Bush. The Al Qaeda version also became available over the internet, accentuated by Arabic music on a home page featuring visages of Arab religious leaders and militants. Bilal hacked the Al Qaeda version of the game and produced *Virtual Jihadi* where he inserted himself wearing medieval warrior attire, as the lead character playing a suicide bomber out to avenge the death of his brother by killing President Bush.

RPI administrators interrupted Bilal during one of his seminars to question him about his art and expressed concerns about his safety on campus. They also informed him that the Secret Service, the FBI and Department of Homeland Security would be attending his lecture and exhibition opening of *Virtual Jihadi*. In an ironic twist, the exhibition was put off limits to viewers and even to students and faculty of RPI's art department for the reason that "it contained work by a terrorist organization."¹⁸³ The Sanctuary for Independent Media, a not-for-profit center located in downtown Troy that offered to host *Virtual Jihadi* in its gallery after the suspension of *Virtual Jihadi* by RPI, was soon closed down by the city of Troy authorities for outstanding fire code violations after a local Republican Party official called for a public protest against the center.¹⁸⁴ Sholette writes that the actions of the officials at RPI and the City of Troy amounted to censorship when viewed in the context of the shrinking public sphere in the United States that has seen an increase in the number of stories of students and artists being visited by security agents since 11 September 2011.¹⁸⁵ Bilal insists that *Virtual Jihadi* addresses the way in which Americans have become desensitized to the violence of war, and that it should be seen as a fictional platform that uses a videogame format to create an alternative narrative whose motive is to highlight the vulnerabilities of Iraqi civilians, the travesties of the war and its reliance and propagation of racist generalizations and profiling. Games such as *Quest for Saddam* traffic in hateful stereotypes of Arab culture and *Virtual Jihadi* intended to highlight how Iraqis are made vulnerable to recruitment by violent groups such as Al Qaeda.¹⁸⁶

Bilal's next project was *Dog or Iraqi* in which he set up a website www.dogoriraqi.com. The website explained that Bilal had been recruited by a company called "Torture Choice" for the purpose of trying out new forms of torture, and in particular the technique of "waterboarding."¹⁸⁷ The website called on participants to cast their vote for whom between Bilal and a

dog was to be water-boarded. The site featured the image of Bilal wearing traditional Arab clothing known as a “dishdasha” with the image of a dog wearing an American flag around his neck. Bilal indicates that the website registered angry comments from animal lovers furious at the suggestion of water-boarding a dog, with the Humane Society threatening legal action. Bilal engaged these concerns with a sense of humor that underscored the serious political and artistic context of *Dog or Iraqi*. To the concerns that as a human being he was involved in the project through his own free will while the dog lacked choice, Bilal responded that the project was being conducted in the name of national security and the dog might have valuable information, arguing that the exercise should not be considered as torture given that the United States government did not consider water-boarding as a form of torture. 4000 votes were cast and Bilal was chosen over the dog for water-boarding, with 10 votes separating the two. Bilal reports that due to legality issues, the water-boarding took place in a private studio in Troy as a private affair attended by a few local artists and two “interrogators.” Bilal was water-boarded for only seven seconds in which he thought he was dying and he kept coughing violently for the rest of that night.¹⁸⁸

Bilal followed *Dog or Iraqi* with a project called *And Counting* in 2010. In a performance lasting 24 hours, he used his body to inscribe the number of Iraqi and American casualties in the War on Iraq. A borderless map of Iraq made of 105, 000 dots – representing each Iraqi and American casualty near the cities where they had fallen – was tattooed on his back, as people from all walks of life read off the names of the dead. 5000 dots done in red permanent ink marked the American casualties, while 100, 000 dots done in green ultra-violet ink (invisible unless viewed under black light) marked the Iraqi casualties. Bilal used the ultra-violet ink to represent the Iraqi casualties so as to underscore the apparent invisible manner in which they were being treated.¹⁸⁹



Right, **Figures 22:** Procedure detail of *3rd I*, and Left, **Figure 23:** *Dog or Iraqi*

In yet another endurance performance, in November 2010 Bilal underwent an operation to surgically implant a camera to the back of his head for a project titled *3rd I*.¹⁹⁰ At a body-modification clinic in Los Angeles, three titanium plates were inserted under his scalp in order to support a custom-built camera.¹⁹¹ A portable notebook computer was connected to the camera to enable the transmission of images and activities captured by Bilal as he went about his daily life for what he expected to be a one year project. The camera went live on 14th December 2010 at the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha by capturing a still image every minute which was immediately uploaded – with its GPS location – to the website [http://3rd I.me](http://3rdI.me). By having the camera on his head, Bilal wanted to make people aware of how much everyday life was under surveillance.¹⁹² Ashley Rawlings writes that *3rd I* resonated with most people in the broader Middle East region for they take it as a given that they are always under watch by their own governments, as well as, having to endure surveillance by the United States.¹⁹³ Bilal contextualizes *3rd I* in the same way as with his previous projects: to address the post 9/11 climate of paranoia, racial profiling and wartime dehumanization of the other. The camera ultimately made it impossible for Bilal to sleep on his back, with the area of skin around the pins

becoming infected as they could not fully heal. In 2011 Bilal's body rejected the camera and it had to be removed.¹⁹⁴

The performances by Bilal in some sense constitute an autobiography of his experiences in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and in America. He was born and grew up in the Shia holy city of Kufa in southwestern Iraq and his childhood coincided with Saddam's rise to power. The Shias constitute a majority in Iraq and always tend to be impoverished, dispossessed and discriminated against.¹⁹⁵ Bilal attributes his taste for provocative art to the Shia tradition of imagery with its scenes of the Battle of Karbala and other historic moments. In September 1980 Iraq went to war with Iran and as the war dragged on and began claiming many lives the Iraqi army began recruiting high school students. Bilal volunteered in order to escape from his father and was sent to an outpost near the Saudi border to guard buried oil pipelines. Two years after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran invaded Kuwait on August 2nd 1990 when Bilal was about to begin his fifth and final year of college. He refused to volunteer for the war effort and left the college ahead of an expulsion list which had the names of students who had refused to volunteer. On January 19, 1991 the United States began bombing Iraq in Operation Desert Storm and on February 27, 1991 Kuwait was liberated. Soon after this defeat, uprisings began in the southern parts of Iraq and in the Kurd-inhabited north against the regime of Saddam. The rebellions were dealt with ruthlessly with Saddam bombing the Shia city of Karbala, Najaf and Bilal's hometown of Kufa. Bilal fled Iraq and lived in refugee camps in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for two years before he was eventually resettled in the United States. Bilal has detailed his experiences of growing up in Iraq, life in refugee camps and resettlement in America in a book he co-authored with Kari Lydersen in 2008 entitled *Shoot an Iraqi: Life, Art and Resistance under the Gun*.

The scholarly Reception of *Domestic Tension*

Since 2007, Bilal's body of work has received worldwide attention through numerous newspaper articles and magazine reviews,^{xvii} but up to this moment only two scholarly articles have attempted to theorize and formulate the political agency of his projects. These two analyses have concentrated their focus on the social and political impetus of *Domestic Tension*. Carol Becker in "Walking, Standing and Sitting like a Duck" argues that *Domestic Tension* is a performance that exhibits both spiritual and political aspirations.¹⁹⁶ In confining himself to the gallery space for one month, Bilal's action can be compared to that of monks and ascetics who spent their lives cloistered in one place in the pursuit of a spiritual path. The individual struggles of the monks, renunciates and ascetics were undertaken in the hope of achieving higher levels of consciousness in order to find God in isolation because they saw themselves as sinners and poor weak men. The people from adjacent communities saw these monks as trees purifying the atmosphere by their presence, while their refusal to work at any task other than that of achieving a type of spiritual elevation generated both adoration and disgust. Becker writes that some saw the monks as representing an ideal of purity in their attempts to make themselves "Other" to this world while others viewed their refusal to work yet begging for food an indication of laziness.¹⁹⁷ The meaning in the actions of those who choose to live an un-earthly life on earth by performing the public act of private contemplation comes from their dedication to the task of turning the inside out, so that the circle of the ordinary can be broken to let the extra-ordinary in.¹⁹⁸ Bilal's artistic gesture is a microcosm of the larger effect of what occurs when individuals make large or small

^{xvii} For a few examples, see: Kari Lydersen, "Antiwar Paintball in a New Medium: Paintball-on-web; Iraqi Dodges Projectiles at Chicago Gallery to Illustrate His People's Plight," *The Washington Post*, 29 May 2007, A 02; Sam Hudzik, "Iraqi Artist Makes a Point with Virtual Paintballs," *NPR: All Things Considered (Chicago Public Radio)*, 1 June 2007; Bobbie Johnson, "U S Campaigners File Lawsuit Over George Bush Assassination Game," *Guardian.com*, 12 June 2009; Erica Orden, "Sir, There is a Camera in Your Head," *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 November 2010, A 23; Ashley Rawlings, "Wafaa Bilal: Remote Repercussions," *AsiaArt Pacific Magazine*, No. 72, March/April, 2011, 84-95

gestures as acts of public or personal protests within the public arena to breach continuity so as to expose the pressure that lies hidden beneath the status quo. Becker believes these gestures by individuals generate a collective excitement that encourages people to feel that the world could be renewed and reinvented, and allows them to be part of its transformation.

Within the utilitarian and market driven society of America, art that is spontaneous and risky is unexpected and potentially transgressive when placed in the public arena as an organic response to particular historical, political or environmental conditions. “Even a complete rarity is artwork that attempts to transform the solitary gesture of spiritual or political regeneration into a public performance.”¹⁹⁹ By sitting in front of the paintball gun and making himself a target to a world anxious to detach from its own violence, Bilal has put his body on the line to remind us that those who live in the comfort zone do not understand the combat zone.²⁰⁰ In the tradition of the free speech and civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s and the student movement of the Vietnam War years, Bilal has made us aware of how a simple act of sitting can become a gesture of provocation.^{xviii} As Becker notes, the occurrence of such gestures illustrate the importance of Hannah Arendt’s belief that power can be expressed through actions that bring actors together — whether as individuals or the collective— or when individual action and collective action work together as a common force to challenge the status quo.²⁰¹ Becker continues that “these actions make us wonder why people do not congregate more often to change existing conditions or assert more lone manifestations of social action.”²⁰²

^{xviii} On 1st February 1960 four students from the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College – Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Billy Smith and Clarence Henderson – walked into a local Woolworth’s store in downtown Greensboro purchased toothpaste and other small items and then sat down at the “Whites only” lunch counter and demanded equal service with white persons. When told that the store did not serve Negroes, the four students refused to leave and sat at the lunch counter until closing time. The next day, they returned to the store accompanied by fifteen other students. Their actions sparked the student phase of the civil rights revolution and within two months the sit-in movement had spread to fifty-four cities in nine states. See: William Henry Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981), 71

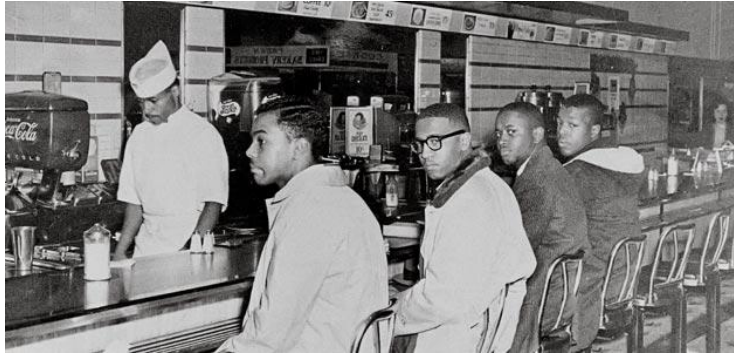


Figure 24: Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-in on 1st February 1960, Greensboro, North Carolina

Individuals and groups rose to stand by Bilal against the actions of the participants who fired the paint pellets incessantly or kept him up all night and the bloggers who would hurl racist epithets and recriminations at him. The Virtual Human Shield group succeeded in jamming the site for seven days so as to keep away the hackers who were trying to fire the gun continuously; there were individuals who brought in food and supplies for Bilal or volunteered their time for the project, and even the gallery owner offered her space to be trashed. But Becker stresses that even though *Domestic Tension* was a collaborative project, it was Bilal alone who positioned himself in the line of fire while the world fought over him. “He sat as the target and endured the sounds of the paintball gun, the lack of sleep, a situation of no escape and a relapse of his post-traumatic stress syndrome.” It is astonishing to realize that a simple gesture of sitting can replicate the conditions of war in a gallery space and in the process manage to engage larger questions of society.²⁰³

Alan Ingram in “Experimental Geopolitics: Wafaa Bilal’s *Domestic Tension*” considers *Domestic Tension* to be a critically constructive experiment that offers the field of geopolitics an example of how new creative approaches can be used to create transformative and alternative modes of geopolitical intervention.²⁰⁴ He argues that *Domestic Tension* is an artistic intervention

that illustrates how an experimental tactic that borrows from the blurring of art and life, and the ambiguity between art and politics, can open up geopolitics for reflexive interrogation and creative refashioning through its creation of a space that allowed for moments of peace.²⁰⁵

Domestic Tension recreated, modified, translated, mobilized and even inverted a number of dynamics that operate in geopolitics today to produce the unanticipated outcome of self-organizing protective networks or communities in a way that can be informative to other projects seeking an alternative geopolitics.²⁰⁶ Ingram argues that the project showed that it is possible to alter the balance of forces that operate within geopolitics today by illustrating that weapons can be rendered less deadly, and that the communication and representation of experiences can be made more open and equitable. *Domestic Tension* was able to illustrate how power acts across geopolitical space through its assemblage of a variety of elements that were allowed to play dynamically while being modulated in the course of the experiment to produce diverse effects.

Ingram argues that contemporary geopolitical power operates through the assemblage of high technologies for acts of surveillance and global strike capabilities. It also defines proximity and distance through the production and assemblage of force across and within space, according to politico-economic interests.²⁰⁷ While *Domestic Tension* replicates the way geopolitical power operates across topology, what is important is its production of diverse practices of critique and solidarity through those people who emerged to combat the violence it elicited. This is because even though some participants derived geopolitical pleasure from exercising orientalist violence against Bilal, other alternative and spontaneous groups of participants formed to provide “alternative securities that offered a pacific geopolitics of urgent, non-violent response.”²⁰⁸ Ingram indicates that the actions of this group of participants out-weigh that of participants who derived the geopolitical pleasure of casting him as a racialized and sexualized other, or those

who dismissed the project as a fake and constructed art project that presented no actual danger to Bilal. The pacific community provided Bilal with the opportunity to be part of the community, enabling the project to highlight a network of connections that had emerged during its existence which differed from orthodox geopolitics. Ingram concludes that *Domestic Tension* inverted the hierarchy of geopolitics – which is normally concerned with big pictures and big actors – by bringing focus to the small things of everyday life that enabled the emergence of a more pacific geopolitics, as defined by spontaneous community reactions towards emergent hostile environments.²⁰⁹

Proposing a New Political and Aesthetic Analysis of *Domestic Tension*

The conceptual aesthetic that Becker constructs through “Walking, Standing and Sitting like a Duck” places emphasis on simple and ephemeral socio-spiritual activities that, when used as artistic process of individual sacrifice, become political and transformative. This is reflected through her argument that it requires courage for Ernesto Pujol (walking), Kim Sooja (standing) and Bilal (sitting) to perform their gestures that engage larger questions of life, and in the process awaken consciousness. Pujol’s began his series of walks in the summer of 2005 with *Walk and Mourning Circle* as a solitary performance at the American Civil War Cemetery of Magnolia in Charleston, South Carolina. He dressed in a monk’s habit as a gesture to comfort the buried dead and mourn the loss of life through war, describing his performance as a return to the language of the body by way of landscape in order to explore its relationship to illness, politics and religion. As he walked in the cemetery, he thought of the letters of Walt Whitman who had nursed wounded soldiers during the civil war.²¹⁰ In *A Needle Woman* (2000) Sooja stands in the middle of chaotic urban settings in Sibuya, Shanghai and Delhi oblivious of the crowds milling around her: “she finds her place as the Needle Woman stitching things together and patching them up

and by just standing there voiding herself, the world opens up transparent and you suddenly see yourself.”²¹¹

Becker argues that these three performances transform the act of a solitary gesture into a public performance and a spiritual regeneration, conferring upon them a political potency for their unexpected and therefore dangerous ability to intervene into daily life and be a force of transformation. Ingram’s socio-political analysis on the other hand uses the framework of relational aesthetics – and its belief in spontaneity and emergent social relations – to prescribe an alternative model of geopolitical intervention in which communities can quickly self-organize and apply non-violent responses to threatening securities. His analysis prioritizes the ability of the techno-social structure of *Domestic Tension* as a means to an end, that is, capable of producing an empathizing community and therefore a model for geopolitical possibilities.

This chapter will propose a different reading of *Domestic Tension* that argues that its use of virtual electronic media introduced into participation the psychological influence of anonymity and distancing, through effects whose structures are more complicated than the pacific geopolitics model suggested by Ingram. It argues that the artwork is a model of the contradictions that exist in the social and political context of participation and contemporary geopolitics and calls for a reading that echoes Clare Bishop’s antagonism or aggression model, in which she argues for a more critical interpretation of collaborative practices that takes into account the contradictions in the structure of their aesthetic experience and the conditions of their reception.²¹² She argues that, rather than the prevalent approach that elevates the artwork’s fusion with social praxis or ability to achieve truthfulness or concrete positive ends, a reading of the artwork’s aesthetic contents and structures can invite us to confront darker, more complicated

considerations of our predicament.²¹³ Bishop uses this approach in her analysis of Oscar Masotta's *Para inducer al espíritu de la imagen* or *To Induce the Spirit of the Image* (1966),²¹⁴ and Santiago Sierra's *Workers Who Cannot be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (2000).²¹⁵ She argues that these artworks exemplify the complicated fusion of the social and the aesthetic because the tensions the works create in our experience by their aggressive address to the viewer and the quality of audience relations they produce, acknowledge the tensions of trying to reconcile art to society. The projects of Sierra embed themselves into social and political issues such as immigration, minimum wage and homelessness in order to highlight the divisions enforced by their contexts.²¹⁶ Meanwhile Bishop quotes Masotta as stating that his artistic experiment was "not to serve as an ideal social model but as a lens through which to engage more directly with the contradictions of the existing tumultuous social and political context of the Argentina of 1966."²¹⁷ Masotta paid twenty elderly middleclass men and women 600 pesos each to stand against a white wall under the glare of white light and be subjected to the gaze of the audience. According to Bishop, this kind of staging turns its aggression towards participants by emphasizing – instead of collapsing – the economic and psychological distance between viewer and performer. Masotta describes his actions as a form of "social sadism made explicit."

The points raised by Bishop highlight the social, ethical and political implications of the way distance and division are reflected in participatory or collaborative works. However her analysis does not explore the possibility of a correlation between the production of distance and division (or antagonism) and the behavioral or psychological processes that influence or produce this division. Bishop has constantly reiterated that it is difficult to quantify the process of collaborative works outside the actualized realities or quality of audience relations that they

produce.²¹⁸ This chapter will propose a new aesthetic approach that utilizes critical studies on the effects of disguise or distancing in participation to draw a correlation between the production of antagonism (and its aspects of division and separation), the distancing action of anonymity and the distancing movement of abjection. The chapter will argue that the distancing effect of virtual or remote participation in *Domestic Tension* and *Dog or Iraqi* altered the aesthetics and structures of participation as compared to those that involve face to face interactions. Additionally, it will argue that the distancing action of anonymity and the distancing movement of abjection produced by *Domestic Tension* (and *Dog or Iraqi*) have opened up a new critical area of study beyond the conceptual framework that defined the body art performances of Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovic and other body artist of the 1960s and 1970s. It is for this reason that it becomes important to outline briefly the quality of the relationships produced by the aesthetic structures of the performances of Ono and Abramovic so that we can contrast the effects of face to face interactions on the behavior of participants against those where participants are assured of anonymity.

When we view Bilal's work in the context of Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964) and Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1974) it is evident that all three works are instances where the artists are using their bodies as vulnerable ritual sacrificial materials offered to, and conferring responsibility on participants with unpredictable consequences. Jieun Rhee has written that when *Cut Piece* was first performed on 20th July 1964 at Yamaichi Hall in Kyoto, Ono had conceived it as about the power of giving. Rhee quotes Ono as recalling that when she knelt down on the stage and audience members were invited to come and cut off her clothes one piece at a time, it was very difficult for people to come up: there would be long silences before you hear the sound of scissors cutting.²¹⁹ Kevin Concannon commissioned a translation from Japanese to English of an

interview published in 1974 by the Japanese magazine *Bungei Shunju* that has Ono recalling that the audience was quiet and still, and holding their breath.²²⁰ “I was staring into space while I was doing it and felt kind of like I was praying; I also felt that I was willingly sacrificing myself.” Danto describes *Cut Piece* as a very violent and disturbing performance which unveils a very disturbing side of our nature as human beings: that we can gleefully participate in an artwork that makes us cut the garments off a woman until she remains helpless and bare.²²¹

Abramovic’s *Rhythm 0* (1974) was first performed at the Galleria Studio Morra in Naples where she offered herself to the audience to perform whatever they desired on her body.²²² Her instructions as conferred to the audience in written form read: “There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired. I’m the object. During this period I take full responsibility” and among the list of objects were a gun, a bullet, whip, matches; needle, saw, scalpel and hammer; box of razor blades, apple, metal spear, soap; lipstick, bell, comb and chains.²²³ At the end of the six hour performance Abramovic had been cut and crowned with thorns, painted, cleaned and had her clothes sliced off, and had the gun pressed against her head.²²⁴ Sue Scott writes that in the early stages of the performance, members of the audience were passive and calm but became more aggressive as it progressed, while Abramovic remained detached and unresponsive. When the performance ended she approached the audience and tried to engage them, many of them quickly dispersed.²²⁵ Thomas McEvilley’s account of the performance indicates that the audience comprised a random crowd brought in from the streets and people from the world of art: “as the time passed the randomly selected audience, many of them not accustomed to performance art, grew more and more aggressive so that in the end the artworld constituency rebelled against the outsiders and the event was declared over.”²²⁶



Left, **Figure 25:** *Cut Piece* performance by Yoko Ono on 26 July 1964 at Yamaichi concert hall, Kyoto, Japan. Center, **Figure 26:** *Rhythm 0* performed by Marina Abramovic in 1974 at Galleria Studio Morra in Naples, Italy. Right, **Figure 27:** *Admission Badges* by Robert Martinez at the Whitney Biennial of 1993

What these accounts illustrate is the degree of control or self-censorship that exists in the processes of face to face encounters. They indicate a hesitation or uncertainty in audiences to engage in antisocial behavior, and also the protective mechanisms that police face to face encounters by virtue of their institutional structure and its mechanisms of intercession or promotion of self-organizing groups. The accounts of the quick dispersal of the audience when Abramovic approached them and the long silences or gaps during Ono's performance go a long way in supporting the assertion that perpetrators of demeaning acts are never comfortable when compelled to face and acknowledge the humanity of the victim, even if in the words of McEvelley, a performance like *Rhythm 0* is a form of self-sacrifice in which the artist is both the sacrificer and the sacrificed.²²⁷ In a paradoxical sense, Bilal's performance encourages us to think of the consequences of recreating *Cut Piece* or *Rhythm 0* in a format that confers anonymity and lack of accountability on participants through the structure of remote participation. The political concept of *Domestic Tension* and *Dog or Iraqi* reproduced and constructed Bilal as the other in an antagonistic and polarizing atmosphere that is similar to *Admission Badges* (1993) submitted by Daniel Martinez for the 1993 Whitney Biennial. Arthur

Danto writes that visitors to the show were polarized from the front desk where they were issued with Martinez's flat metal badges which bore all or part of the provocative slogan; "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white."²²⁸ He continues that the Biennial also contained a videotape that played continuously over and over showing the beating of Rodney King by members of the Los Angeles Police Department. Martinez's badges aimed to expose rejection and distancing by reversing the polarities of the racial Other against its construction by the history of race in America. Bilal's projects on the other hand polarize by exposing how the Other is constructed through the ability and willingness of Americans (those who participated) to shoot at or water-board the Iraqi-American.

Bilal states that the interactive and participatory process of *Domestic Tension* should function as an aesthetic and political platform for drawing attention to the sense of detachment the nature of modern technological warfare provides for soldiers – sitting in comfortable safety in front of a computer console in the U. S. – who drop bombs in places halfway across the world with no physical or psychological connections to their targets.²²⁹ *Domestic Tension* provided participants with the same sense of detachment when they logged in on their computers from halfway across the world in order to shoot at Bilal without facing the inhibitions written into the face to face interactions of the performances of Ono and Abramovic. Phillip G. Zimbardo argues in *The Lucifer Effect* that conditions that provide disguise and anonymity to individuals have a drastic effect on their behavioral or psychological state of mind because it makes it easier for them to engage in destructive behavior.²³⁰ Experiments show that disguising the external appearance of individuals has the effect of deindividuating them thereby transforming the individual's Apollonian principles of rationality, order and coherence into the Dionysian principles of chaos, disorganization and irrationality. Tendencies towards anti-social behavior intensify when

situations or agencies such as war sanctions an individual to engage in violent actions against others. W. J. T. Mitchell argues in *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* that the War on Terror and Terrorism has produced an vast amount of electronic images of war together with an intense war of images whose primary purpose has been to shock, demoralize and traumatize by constructing and projecting the outcomes in images of fearful futures.²³¹

The Role of Disguise and Anonymity in the Process of Dehumanization

In August 1971, Zimbardo set up a mock prison environment in the basement of Stanford University to investigate the social dynamics that operate in the psychology of imprisonment.²³² He chose student volunteers and randomly assigned them the roles of “guards” and “prisoners.” The guards were outfitted with military-style uniforms, clubs and reflective sunglasses to disguise their eyes. The experiment began by “arrests” of the prisoners who were then blindfolded and escorted down to a little jail where the guards ordered them to strip naked, stand with their legs apart and hold their arms outstretched against the wall. Each prisoner was given a uniform with numbers on front and back for identification and women’s nylon stockings for head covering, as a method of erasing the markers of individuality and to promote greater anonymity among them. Zimbardo and his team noted that both groups of volunteers began exhibiting behavioral changes within a few days. The guards began issuing commands and deindividualizing the prisoners through insults, increased aggression and threats, demeaning and degrading the prisoners and using instruments on them. Zimbardo and his team suspended the experiment after six days because it had become too real. Appearing before a Sub-committee on prison reform in October 1971, Zimbardo stated:

“At the end of only six days we had to close down our mock prison because what we saw was frightening. It was no longer apparent to us or most of the subjects

where they ended and their roles began. The majority had indeed become ‘prisoners’ or ‘guards,’ no longer able to clearly differentiate between role playing and self. In less than a week, the experience of prison undid (temporarily) a lifetime of learning; human values were suspended, self concepts were challenged and the ugliest most base, pathological side of human nature surfaced. We were horrified because we saw the “guards” treating the “prisoners” as if they were despicable and taking pleasure in human cruelty. The prisoners became servile, dehumanized robots who thought only of escape, of their individual survival, and of their mounting hatred of the guards. By the end of the week the experiment had become a reality.”^{xix}

Zimbardo argues that the “Stanford Prison Experiment” showed that anything or any situation that makes people feel anonymous or deindividuated as though no one knows who they are or cares to know – or any act that provides disguise such as a mask, the reflective sunglasses of prison guards and uniforms – will reduce their sense of personal accountability thereby creating conditions for perverse action.²³³ Deindividuation reduces personal accountability and self-monitoring, while dehumanization will take away the humanity of potential victims and render them as nothing.²³⁴ Dehumanization typically facilitates abusive and destructive actions against those so objectified and the Stanford Prison Experiment created an ecology of dehumanization just like real prisons do. The psychological process of dehumanization occurs when the “others” are thought not to possess the same feelings, thoughts, values and purposes in life that we do: any human qualities that these others share with us are diminished or erased from our awareness and relationships become defined by “I” and “it.” Hence by identifying certain individuals or groups as being outside the sphere of humanity, dehumanizing agents suspend the morality that

^{xix}Zimbardo appearing in hearings before Subcommittee No. 3 of the Committee on the Judiciary - House of Representatives, 92nd Congress; First session on Corrections Part II; Prisons, Prison reform and Prisoner’s rights/California 25th October 1971, Serial No. 15

typically governs reasoned actions towards others. Zimbardo states that dehumanization is a central process in prejudice, racism and discrimination because it stigmatizes others and accords them a spoilt identity through labels such as insects, cockroaches, gooks, hajjis and towel heads—the enemy. The enemy becomes a visual image of the outsider or “dangerous them” and an abstracted conception of the abject: a dehumanized animal, scary and faceless; godless and a criminal and murderer who is different and undesirable. Stereotyped and dehumanized conceptions of the other are created through dramatic visual images on television, posters, magazine covers, movies and the internet.²³⁵

W. J. T. Mitchell theorizes in *Cloning Terror: The War of Images. 9/11 to the Present* that the electronic images that have emerged in the context of the War on Terror and Terrorism are images that are meant to appall and demoralize by replicating themselves endlessly and infecting the collective imagery of global populations.²³⁶ The present moment has produced, in equal measures, vast quantities of images and a war of images that project the real-world stakes in radical and different images of possible futures. According to Mitchell the war of images began with the spectacular destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and the 2003 launching of the iconic counterattack invasion of Iraq with its televised “shock and awe” bombing of Baghdad and the destruction of Saddam Hussein’s monuments. There was a deliberate effort to link the spectacular wound of 9/11 to Saddam Hussein and declare Iraq as the front in the War on Terror, and to produce a composite image of the enemy as a figure of ‘Islamofascism’ which could freely confuse Osama with Saddam and vice versa.²³⁷ Mitchell argues that the post September 11 era has produced the radical innovation of the War on Terror and Terrorism and an image war on both sides exhibiting the maxim of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, soon escalating into a head for a head as symbolic decapitation became

overtaken by the staging of real beheading on international television.”²³⁸ Mitchell also argues that the images of Saddam Hussein produced by the Americans after his capture on 15 December 2003 were images whose strategy was to humiliate the once powerful tyrant by parading him for the cameras in a scene of abjection and humiliation.²³⁹



Figure 28: Intelligence Agency of United States, *Iraq War Playing Cards* (2003), Photo by David Welch

Mitchell writes that up to the spring of 2004 the war of images was running in favor of the United States because until then, the inconvenient images of Iraqi civilian casualties were successfully censored; the army had made it clear that the only bodies to be counted – and that mattered – were of American troops.²⁴⁰ But in May 2004 images of bodies began to proliferate in the mass media through a new kind of photo opportunity: atrocity photographs and videos of the beheading of American hostages and dismemberment of American contractors (and the public display of their mutilated bodies) as well as images of flag-draped coffins of American soldiers and the torture photographs from Abu Ghraib prisoners. The first two images were deliberately staged by the enemy and were immediately censored and denounced as barbaric and savage spectacles, while the last two were produced by Americans themselves. Earlier on March 31 2004, the bodies of four American contractors who ambushed and killed outside the city of Fallujah were set on fire and horribly mutilated. The remains of two of them were then strung up

as trophies from a bridge over River Euphrates as television cameras captured rejoicing spectators carrying signs declaring Fallujah to be a graveyard for Americans. Mitchell writes that these were images iconizing the abject human body, deliberately staged to infuriate the eyes of the enemy. The acts of desecration performed on the dead bodies turned the images into images of trauma, with the sole purpose of traumatizing the American viewer by overwhelming their defenses. Not surprisingly, the Fallujah actions were met by reprisals in the form of collective punishment as the United States army conducted a siege and destruction of the city in the fall of 2004.²⁴¹

Susan Sontag writes that for a long time censorship of images of war has always been a major component in reportage of wars. The terms for allowing the use of cameras for non-military purposes at the front have become much stricter as war has become an activity prosecuted with increasingly exact technological devices for tracking the enemy.²⁴² Governments in the current era prefer to wage war by distance through bombing targets chosen on the basis of instantly relayed information and visualizing technology from continents away, while television serves up the war as images. Sontag indicates that there has always been a powerful interdiction in America against showing the naked face of its dead, even though the shocking photographs of dead Union and Confederate soldiers – lying dead on the grounds of Gettysburg and Antietam – with their agonized faces turned to the viewer had been shown in October 1862 at a Manhattan gallery.²⁴³ American soldiers fallen on the battleground were not shown again in a major publication until the taboo-shattering pictures of three dead American soldiers killed on the beach during a landing in New Guinea, were published by *Life* magazine in September 1943.²⁴⁴ By the time of landing in France in June 1944 photographs of anonymous American casualties had appeared in a number of newsmagazines, but always prone or shrouded, or with their faces

turned away. Sontag argues that such dignity has not been accorded to others and the more remote or exotic the place, the more likelihood of a full frontal view of their dead and dying. “The other, even when not an enemy is regarded as someone to be seen and not someone like us who also sees, unlike the considerations that deter such display of our own victims of violence.”²⁴⁵

Both Mitchell and Sontag centralize the image of the corpse as a display of abjection. They stress that the process of defiling or disrespecting the dead constitutes a definite attitude towards how we define and then distance the Other, since how we treat the dead is illustrative of how we demonstrate not only our humanity, but also acknowledge the Other’s humanity. How we treat the dead body defines the fragile point that prevents us from straying onto the territory of being animal. Kristeva argues that the corpse represents the abject, for together with refuse, corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.²⁴⁶ Just as dung or waste signifies the other side of the border of self-definition, the corpse is the most sickening of wastes because it designates the border that encroaches upon everything: the border which becomes the abject.²⁴⁷ The corpse or cadaver upsets more violently anybody who comes across it through fragile or fallacious chance. When the corpse is encountered outside the framework of spirituality or science, it becomes the utmost abjection for it signifies death infecting life, or the border of my condition as a living being. One is forced to recoil from that border for it represents the abject. Abjection confronts us with the fragile state where man strays on the territory of the animal; it is the repugnance that protects me by keeping me away from a state of defilement. What disturbs identity, systems and order causes abjection.²⁴⁸ It is something rejected from which one does not part, or from which one has no protection as from an object. As an imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us in order to engulf us.

Constructing the Political Abject

The effect of distancing involved in abjection as discussed by Kristeva joins the frameworks of anonymity, deindividuation and dehumanization provided by Zimbardo, and the use of images to traumatize the other from a distance in Mitchell's formulation, to provide the structure that identifies and defines the political Other in contemporary conflicts. This chapter will define the aesthetic and political structure of the process of defining the political Other in the geopolitical context (of participation) through the distancing elements of anonymity and deindividuation, dehumanization and the abject as the *political abject*. The political abject is produced through the use of distancing technology in the structure of geopolitics to objectify the other in order to be able to dehumanize and dominate them. The term geopolitics is used in this context as developed by geographers to mean the way power is projected or reproduced across physical geography, and to capture the divide that Bilal describes as existing between living in the comfort zone and living in the conflict zone. The concept of the political abject *is therefore an abject that is enacted through political structures as opposed to the artifice of abjection produced by body materials* as theorized by Hal Foster in reference to particular artworks produced in the 1980s and 1990s that he defines as abject art.²⁴⁹

The political abject has been produced in the structures of *Domestic Tension* and *Dog or Iraqi* by the effects of anonymity which enabled participants to dehumanize and dominate over Bilal by identifying and defining him as the enemy to be rejected, refused or thrust aside through taunts and insults, or choosing him over the dog for water-boarding. He became abject. We can argue that these performances reproduced the same sense of power relations that are used by political, cultural and social entities such as governments and other groupings to construct the identity of the political Other or enemy Other. For example in the War on Terror and Terrorism, the CIA

refers to successful drone strikes against human enemy targets as bugsplats.²⁵⁰ This characterization of the enemy other as a bugsplat resonates with Georges Bataille's formulation of the *informe*. Whatever the *informe* designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed like a spider or earthworm: "The *informe* is what must be crushed (or spat out) because it has no rights in any sense, because it does not make sense, and because that in itself is unbearable to reason."²⁵¹ The *informe* is the unassimilable waste of heterology. Bataille defines heterology as the science of what is entirely other, rejected.²⁵² Rosalind Krauss has argued that the point being raised by Bataille is that if the lowest parts of society have become untouchable (abject) through wretchedness, the very summit of that same society is also separated as untouchable and sovereign because it makes the rules and is therefore outside those rules.²⁵³

Bilal writes that in early 2007 he had seen a TV interview of a young female American soldier whose job was to direct bombs remotely on Iraqi targets from a computer console in Colorado. The young lady expressed no doubts or remorse for her actions because she had trust in the orders and information delivered from her superiors.^{xx} "It occurred to me that my brother Haji's death had been orchestrated by someone just like this sitting comfortably in a chair in front of a computer, pressing buttons from thousands of miles away completely oblivious to the terror and destruction those actions were having half way across the world." Jack M Beard has written in *The American Journal of International Law* that the extra-human capabilities of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles to linger over targets for long periods of time, performing dull or dangerous mission under any conditions, provide their human operators with a virtual working environment by creating virtual distance between humans and the battlefield.²⁵⁴ Bilal describes *Domestic*

^{xx} See also: "Art of War: Film Looks at Lives of Drone Operators" where Mark Brown writes on *5,000 Feet is the Best*, a film by Israeli-born artist Fast on show at the Imperial War Museum in London from 29 July 2013. "It is a lot like playing a video game," a former Predator drone operator says while admitting that his bombs kill real people. (Mark Brown, "Art of War: Film Looks at Lives of Drone Operators," *The Guardian*, 29 July 2013, 11)

Tension as telepresence art that integrates the internet and robotics to allow remote viewer participation in interactive art projects.²⁵⁵ Telepresence art is made possible by the use of a hardware interface known as an EZIO board that allows software to communicate with external devices such as robotics to a computer. Bilal explains that this form of remote technology was developed by the military but has become available to consumers. Bilal and his team of collaborators developed *Domestic Tension* to run on open-source technology in order to replicate its shared spirit and the objective of collectively and conceptually creating and sharing free software. This was also intended to enable *Domestic Tension* to replicate elements of unpredictability and chaos that characterize the kinds of interactions that exists in the cyber-games culture. This connects Bilal's aspirations to theoretical formulation of telematic art as developed by Roy Ascott in the *Telematic Embrace*. Ascott argues that telematic art connects the artist, the artifact and the spectator through the creation of behavioral patterns that enable the establishment of feedback loops in the production, consumption and meaning of art. The ambiguity, instability, uncertainty and room for change that is encouraged by the structures of telematic media can draw the spectator into active participation and creation by providing the opportunity to be involved at all levels in the physical, emotional and conceptual experience of creative behavior.²⁵⁶

This concept of telematic participation or interaction constructs an aesthetics whose creative and pacific geopolitical aspirations share with Ingram the conclusion that collaborative activities create spontaneous support mechanisms, or the open-ended processes that are privileged by relational aesthetics where human interactions provide meaning through potentially emancipatory activities. Bishop believes that a critique that privileges process over the meanings produced does not do justice to performance art.²⁵⁷ The products of participation whether

presented in the form of the mediating object, concept, image or story is the vital link between the artist and a secondary audience (all the people who didn't participate) and constitutes the concrete record required to guide our analysis of the politics of spectatorship as exhibited by the performance.²⁵⁸ This means that it is necessary to analyze *Domestic Tension* not only in the context of socio-spiritual aesthetics of Becker and the pacific socio-geopolitical framework of Ingram, but also in the context of its psycho-political framework which enabled its remote form of participation to reproduce a *hostile geopolitics*. The psychological and political impact of the hostile geopolitics is captured in the accounts of the physical state of the gallery space after the performance, the records of the chat-room logs that Bilal has provided, as well as the effects of the project on Bilal's wellbeing. For example, Bilal reports that by day 16 of the project, the floor of the gallery space was riddled with lesions where the yellow paint had eaten away the white flooring paint. This damage, together with the increasingly violent and threatening tone of the comments from participants, prompted the gallery assistant to want the project stopped.²⁵⁹ Becker who visited Bilal during this period writes:

“Bilal's installation room once a clean white-cube gallery, was now covered in sticky, slippery yellow paint whose fish-oil smell was everywhere. It was impossible to breathe, sleep, eat or write in this space and most disturbing of all was the sound of the gun, out of which flew paintballs with such velocity that at one point they cracked the protective Plexiglas shield behind which Bilal occasionally retreated to compose his thoughts. The gun poked its head up out of its armature and roved the room continuously, commanded by impatient gamers at the other end of the internet.”²⁶⁰

Bilal writes that the website interface of his project was grainy and without sound as an intentional decision to heighten the sense of remoteness and detachment that he wanted to explore. People who visited the website first and then came to the gallery space were often

shocked to hear how loud the gun actually was. Its continuous sound prevented Bilal from sleep, ultimately triggering the anxieties of life under Saddam and the times spent in refugee camps in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that had lain buried. Three weeks into the project, he developed insomnia, nightmares and paranoia; shortness of breath, chest and abdominal pains and exhaustion, as well as strange freckles on his skin from the fish oil.²⁶¹ The transcripts from the chat-room log show that as an Iraqi and Muslim, Bilal became the target of religious and ethnic jokes and became the face of Saddam, Bin Laden, hijackers of 9/11 and prisoners at Guantanamo.

Did you enjoy it when the bombs fell on Baghdad?

We need a Bin Laden cut out to aim at

Fuckin Iraqis

Water-board him, make him talk

There he is, shoot him!²⁶²

.....

Shoot him again for Jesus

Send him to Guantanamo

Stone this infidel

Can you jump around a little?

Lyndie England where are you

I want to blast him again

Where's that fag Iraqi?

Where's the towel head?²⁶³



Figure 29: *Domestic Tension* (2007)

The physical state of the gallery space, the tone and language of the chat-room and the physical impact of the project on Bilal's body and mental state illustrate how the techno-geopolitical structure and the psycho-physical process of the hostile geopolitics produced through *Domestic Tension* a political form of abjection. The techno-geopolitical process allowed an anonymous structure of participation that enabled individuals from 136 countries to fire a total of 65,000 shots at Bilal from the comfort of their computer consoles during both day and night for the duration of the project. This produced two psycho-physical structures. The first is manifested by the material abject produced in the gallery space in the form of slippery yellow paint and its sickening smell of fish oil which made his body itch constantly. The second structure of the psycho-physical (virtual) is represented by the relationship of prisoner and jailer that developed between Bilal and participants who tried to humiliate him through insults and even commanded him to get in the line of fire. These participants would get upset when he did not respond to their taunting and they would react through wild, continuous firing of the gun and post insults on the chat-room. Zimbardo has pointed out that anything or any situation that makes people feel anonymous, or in which no one knows who they are, will reduce their sense of personal

accountability and create conditions for perverse action. The techno-geopolitical structure of participation reduced the personal accountability of participants and enabled them to involve in anti-social behavior.

Conclusion

Becker and Ingram showed the potential of art to individuate the artist and help in transforming the consciousness of participants by a show of solidarity with the artist. This chapter has developed the concept of the political abject to argue that the structure of *Domestic Tension*, like The Stanford Prison Experiment, has created an ecology of dehumanization homologous to that of contemporary geopolitics. *Domestic Tension* has achieved this by using the aesthetic and political structure of art to produce the distancing movement of abjection through the psychological process of deindividuation. By shifting the focus onto participants, the chapter has outlined how anonymity affects the process of interaction and eventually the final product of a collaborative project. It has used a behavioral framework to argue that virtual participation produced physical and psychological distancing that deindividuated participants and allowed them to express their disgust and rejection of Bilal. The feelings of disgust and rejection produced in the participatory context of *Domestic Tension* (and *Dog or Iraqi*) meet the threshold of the defining characteristics of the abject. Kristeva has indicated that disgust is a rejecting or distancing movement that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage and filth. *Domestic Tension* has illustrated that physical and psychological abjection can be produced through the structure of virtual participation. This was materialized through the accumulation of the material abject of sticky, slippery yellow and smell of fish oil as well as the contents of the chat-room log in comments such as “replace the gun with a knife so we can behead him.” The physical and psychological structure of these materials reproduce resentment and disgust through

a response to art similar to the one Danto describes as resulting from Martinez's *Admission Badges* at the Whitney Biennial of 1993. Danto identifies the feeling of disgust with the specific primary feeling of anything unusual in the appearance, odor or nature of our food; anything that automatically provokes nausea and gagging, or the impulse to close our mouths or noses or induce a change in our facial expression.²⁶⁴

Danto proceeds to argue that the effect of the materials used in art to elicit or represent disgust must remain disgusting and resist normalization or acculturation if the art is to achieve its affective purpose. "What we find disgusting with the art should be the same as what we are disgusted with in reality so that when the disgusting is represented, its representation is as disgusting as what is represented."²⁶⁵ He continues that artists have historically incorporated the properties of degradation, repulsion and horror as the abject and the disgusting in art so as to produce art that strikes at human consciousness. Danto points out that Baroque artists depicted a crucified Christ of blood and torn flesh in order to inscribe pain and agony in the consciousness of believers.²⁶⁶ When Danto indicates that the materials of disgust should produce the same effects in art as in life, he is describing the characteristics of disturbational artworks which he defined as disturbing towards life by releasing a reality that is in itself so disturbing it erases the barrier between representation and reality in a way that the mere representation of disturbing things do not achieve. *Domestic Tension* becomes disturbational because of the realities it released, and its effect on Bilal and on the viewer. The lack of sleep, the exhaustion and sense of rejection; the skin infection and the post-traumatic stress disorder that it triggered are real mental and physical consequences that cannot be considered representations. Likewise it also has real psychological impacts on the viewer who has to witness the ability of the virtual process to materialize dehumanization. While it provided participants with a virtual environment to remain

anonymous and distance themselves from Bilal and inflict pain, *Domestic Tension* succeeded in producing disturbational results.

Mexican performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena who partnered Coco Fusco in 1992 to perform *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit* (also known as *The Couple in the Cage*) has written that:

“For politicized border artists experimenting with the tenuous and ever fluctuating frontiers between art and life, there is always a ‘real’ danger present, especially when the work of art or performance occurs in spaces that are unprotected by cultural institutions. It is one thing to carry out iconoclastic actions in a theatre or museum before a public that is predisposed to tolerate radical behavior, and quite another to bring the work into the street and introduce it into the mined terrain of unpredictable social and political forces. In the street, the risks are far greater. Some of these are obvious, like confronting the intolerance of the police or army, or of extremist religious groups. Others are more random, like a surprise encounter with some psychopath who could suddenly cross one's path. We performance artists are well aware of these risks, but every now and then we don't accurately gauge the temperature of the context or the symbolic weight of our actions. At such times, the devil appears before us.”²⁶⁷



Figure 30: *Two undiscovered Amerindians Visit* (1992-1994) by Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco.

Gomez-Pena wrote this as a result of an acid attack in 1994. Gomez-Pena and Fusco were performing a version of the *Couple in the Cage* at one of the most visited street intersections in Buenos Aires. The motive of the attack remains unknown though there are speculations that it was a reprisal from someone who misinterpreted the performance as a direct comment on the Argentine military culture. Since *Domestic Tension* and *Dog or Iraqi* were deliberately located within the divisive and emotive context of the Global War on Terror and Terrorism, it can be argued that they were bound to produce hostile results that reflect this division. Mitchell has shown that the War on Terror produced traumatizing images that were meant to polarize, therefore a collaborative project borrowing from its structure and involving global participation, was likely to reproduce similar emotive responses. The ability of Bilal to reproduce in *Domestic Tension* (and *Dog or Iraqi*) the emotive atmosphere of the war in an aesthetic of dehumanization from his body and virtual mediation, is a conceptual leap from the tradition of the body art of Ono and Abramovic, the participatory practices of Masotta and Sierra where the artist hires other people to perform the work and the collaborative practices that fuse art with pedagogy.

Bishop has defined the practice of hiring non-professionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing on behalf of the artist, and from his instructions, as delegated performance.²⁶⁸ She describes the projects of Sierra, Maurizio Cattelan and Tania Bruguera as emblematic of delegated performances in which the artist hires people to perform their own situation or socio-economic category rather than using his/her own body as material to engage with the ethics and aesthetics of contemporary labor.²⁶⁹ For example in *Southern Suppliers FC* (1991), Cattelan assembled a football team from North African immigrants living in Italy to play local football matches. These players wore jerseys that bore across their fronts the brand name of their fictional sponsor, RAUSS which is the German word

for “get out.” Tania Bruguera’s performance *Tatlin’s Whisper #5* (2008) in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern involved two policemen on horseback demonstrating crowd control techniques on the audience. Bishop argues that while these examples of delegated performance emphasize the phenomenological immediacy of the live body and specific socio-economic identities in a way that mirrors the body art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, they do not contain the physical and psychologically transgressive character of using one’s own body as medium and material of work.²⁷⁰

This account of the conceptual developments that have occurred in collaborative artworks such as in the body artworks of Ono and Abramovic, the delegated performances of Sierra and Cattelan and the pedagogic performances of Bruguera should illustrate that *Domestic Tension* (and *Dog or Iraqi*) has demonstrated an expansion in the conceptual structure of collaboration by introducing the psychological implications of virtual mediation into live body performances. Bilal’s work contains the physical and psychological transgression of earlier body works, but in a political and aesthetic framework that indicates that distance intensifies the psychological character of participation by producing anonymity, and that this encourages the construction of the other through dehumanizing identities and the distancing movement of abjection. Such an outcome has not been evident in performances that delegate to other performers or pedagogic situations, both of which require face to face interactions. The concept of the political abject defines the political, psychological and aesthetic structure that is constructed by the technologies of distancing in participation in art, just as it defines the socio-political structure of the geopolitics of power and domination. Through this aesthetic structure *Domestic Tension* has also demonstrated that disturbational effects can be materialized from virtual mediation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICAL CONCEPT OF DISTURBATION

Overview

The thesis has attempted to trace the concept of disturbance from Danto's first use of the term in "Art and Disturbance" in 1985 to his subsequent application of the concept in the critical analysis of artworks. This has seen its application shift from a description of artworks that blurred the boundary between representation and reality (in particular performance art) to a conceptual form of analysis that he applies to paintings and performances — a shift that emerges through his analysis of Botero's paintings and Abramovic's performance *The Artist is Present*. This thesis suggests that the aesthetic and political framework of disturbance should be expanded far beyond the original framework of Danto, so that it can be applied to the conceptual strategies and processes and functions of political artworks such as *Shibboleth* by Doris Salcedo and *Domestic Tension* by Wafaa Bilal. It argues that the confrontations that emerge through the disturbational processes and the strategies of the two artworks produced the political uncanny with *Shibboleth*, and the political abject in *Domestic Tension*. The two concepts seek to link the uncanny and the abject to the production of disturbance in contemporary political artworks whose processes expose the repressed or produce reality. This crucial development has been left unexplored by Danto, even though in *The Abuse of Beauty* he connects the use of materials that elicit disgust or produce the abject in the work of contemporary artists to their desire to directly address viewers by making the human body the site of suffering and object for political outrage.²⁷¹

The neologism of disturbance emerged as a play of words seeking to explain the nature of the relationships and responses that non-standard genres in art in the 1960s and 1970s demanded of viewers. Danto argued that these new art practices upset long held standards of how we relate to art in fundamental ways because they not only produced a radical change in our relationships with art, but also monumentally affects how we conceive of the relationship between art and reality. Danto indicates that the practice of performance art, for instance, aims to relate with audiences in a Dionysian relationship by dissolving the barrier between reality and art in a way that threatens the philosophical definition of art. As Jonathan Gilmore writes in a new Foreword to *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, by re-establishing contact between art and reality these new art-forms are challenging two paradigms inherited from the philosophy of art. The first holds that art is dangerous and should be subject to censorship and control, while the second holds the view that art is ineffectual because it is removed from everyday reality and therefore cannot effect change in the real world.²⁷² Gilmore explains that the two positions may appear contradictory until we realize that Danto is indicating that the position that art is ineffectual and removed from everyday reality is in fact a philosophical countermeasure to the idea that art is dangerous.²⁷³

Danto argues that disturbational artworks are capable of producing in viewers, responses that can be considered as dangerous because they use as materials of art, substances that undergo no transformation when turned into art – they have as art, whatever aesthetic qualities they have in life – and hence viewers respond to the art as they would to its materials in the real world.²⁷⁴ Danto argues that *Seven Easy Pieces – Lips of Thomas* which Abramovic first performed at the Galerie Krinzinger in Innsbruck in 1975 evoked the feeling of pain and suffering with as much intensity as that of Baroque artists whose vivid depiction of agony and horror was meant to enlist

compassion in the Christian viewer. He indicates that *Lips of Thomas* was painful to perform and to witness because for two hours Abramovic performed self flagellation and went through extreme cold and bleeding.²⁷⁵ Danto reasons that *Lips of Thomas* crossed a border that most art does not and the responses it aimed for fall outside of traditional aesthetic categories of response. Danto similarly argues that Colescott's paintings that appropriate classic Western masterpieces to depict black figures using white culture's cartoons of black physiognomy become shocking and disturbational in our era because they make us feel that great art is being desecrated to some racist end, until we discover that Colescott is black and has deliberately set his paintings to disturb our sensibilities.²⁷⁶ Colescott is taking liberties and making wonderful jokes at the expense of pure art, while politically raising the question of who is represented and who is missing from masterpieces.²⁷⁷ Colescott's painting *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an America Text Book* (1975) uses one of America's most recognizable masterpieces — Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) – in order to modify American text book history. The prominent standing figure of the first president of the United States, George Washington at the prow of the boat is replaced by that of African-American scientist and inventor George Washington Carver. The other figures in Leutze's painting are replaced by a banjo player, a man in a white chef's uniform, Aunt Jemima, a barefoot man reeling in a catfish and a man drinking home-made liquor from a jug. Danto describes *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an America Text Book* as immediately disturbational and political, because Colescott has not merely defaced one of America's most famous paintings by re-facing it with black faces, he has done it by using the most degrading and discomfoting images of black caricature in America in a way that is as offensive as the verbal use of a racial epithet. Danto points out that the paintings of Colescott

antagonize their viewers by provoking them to rethink the practice of art and its history of racial representation in America.



Figure 31: Opening of The Metropolitan's Museum of Art's New American Wing Galleries for Paintings, Sculpture and Decorative Arts in 2012 with in the background, the best known work in all of American art - *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) by Emmanuel Gottlieb Leutze.

Figure 32: *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook (1975)* by Robert Colescott

In a 1999 interview with Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Colescott indicates:

Ever since I started doing the appropriations, there has been criticism. I thought everybody would get it. I started doing that in 1975 when I painted *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware* which is a much more complicated painting than a lot of people think; a lot more than a one liner. I have gone all over the country talking and showing slides of these paintings and exhibiting them in museums and in African-American venues, and taken questions about my work. A lot of people have heard me speak and I'm really surprised that it is not a dead issue since people are digging it up and having the same arguments. I have been talking about this stuff for twenty years and the debate still continues. We've already come to understand that it is about white perceptions of black people. The imagery may not be pretty, may even be stupid, but we did not make up these images so why should we take the heat? It is the satire that kills the serpent.²⁷⁸

Politics as a Medium of Disturbation

The confrontation between Colescott's *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Text book* and its viewers provides a starting point for examining how disturbance uses the medium of politics in order to provoke audiences with disturbing content, and how the structure of the confrontations can sometimes progress into the political. This line of enquiry will suggest that encounters between audiences and disturbational artworks can remain at the level of tension, unease and antagonism, or can gain intensity as to produce or provoke the formation of friend or enemy identities. For example, from the transcript of Colescott's interview it is evident that the encounters between audiences and Colescott's paintings still create divisions that are reflected not through antagonisms, but through hostilities that approach extreme identities defined by the friend/enemy structure. Equally, Danto has described the 1993 Whitney Biennial as provoking hostilities by the vehemently political artworks that were on display. The Biennial was deeply reviled by audiences even if it forced them to measure the art on display against what they believed they knew about American realities.²⁷⁹ The hostility arose in large part because in its attempt to transform society, the Biennial had the immediate impact of transforming the museum from an institution that was viewed as a sanctuary for beauty and a place dedicated to knowledge, into a place where audiences engaged the problems of the world. The Biennial also put visitors on the spot at the entrance in providing them with Martinez's confrontational *Admission Badges* (which contained the words; I Can't Imagine Ever Wanting to be White) to attach to their coat lapels. Acceptance of the badges amounted to a tacit agreement that the audiences were willing to be implicated in the issues of race in America. Audiences do not expect this kind of encounter with art in museums, nor is it what they want the experience of the museum or of art to be.²⁸⁰ Danto argues

that the Biennial seemed to be demanding that audiences not only look at what artists were trying to do – by making art that was engaged in opposing the injustices of race, class and gender in America – it was asking that they also engage with the problem and help in changing the world. The presence of the Rodney King tape at the Biennial was also contested on the grounds that it was not art, even if it was generally felt that it had already become part of American self-consciousness.

The kind of hostilities that are provoked by the disturbational attitudes of *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Text book* and *Admission Badges* become political by producing identification that reflects the structure of friend or enemy. Similarly the installation *Shibboleth* by Salcedo and the interactive project *Domestic Tension* by Bilal have both illustrated that their structures can reproduce political identities that reflect the friend/enemy framework. The political structure of the friend/enemy division has been theorized by Carl Schmitt who argues in *The Concept of the Political* that it symbolizes the utmost degree of intensity in a union or separation, or an association or dissociation.²⁸¹ The political division of friend/enemy exists theoretically and practically, independent of the moral distinction of good and evil, the aesthetic distinctions of beautiful and ugly or the economic distinctions of profitable or unprofitable, and does not need to draw upon any of these distinctions for its existence. That is, the political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly or even appear as an economic rival, since, the political is independent of these distinctions and expresses itself independently for it is not derived from these distinctions. Nonetheless, the political enemy is the other and a stranger, and it is sufficient for his character that he is, because he is something different and alien so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are likely.²⁸² Schmitt specifies that only the actual participants in the conflict can correctly recognize or

understand the nature of the conflict and be in a position to judge whether their opponent intends to threaten or negate their way of life, so that they can position themselves to repel or fight the enemy in order to safeguard their group's survival. The political can draw upon the other distinctions for support purposes such as from the emotional pool to treat the enemy as evil and ugly, even if it recognizes that the morally evil, aesthetically ugly or economically damaging is not necessarily the enemy. Likewise the morally good, aesthetically beautiful and economically profitable need not become the friend because the political is able to distinguish and comprehend the enemy/friend antithesis independently of other antitheses.

Schmitt explains that the enemy is not merely any competitor or just any partner of a conflict in general. An enemy exists potentially when one fighting collective of people confronts another similar collectivity, so that the enemy becomes solely the public enemy because everything that has a relationship to such a collective becomes public by virtue of such a relationship.²⁸³ "The political is the most intense and extreme antagonism and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping."²⁸⁴ Schmitt's concept provides a framework through which to scrutinize the conceptual frameworks of *Shibboleth* and *Domestic Tension*. Do they produce disturbational encounters that reference antagonistic identities that are political in Schmitt's sense? Is there a link between the actions of the political uncanny and the political abject, and the formation of the friend/enemy political identities? And if so, is disturbance then capable of re-realizing the friend/enemy distinction which the emergence of liberal democracy is supposed to have suppressed? Salcedo's proposal to Tate Modern for the project *Shibboleth* was premised on political divisions. She states that the sculpture intends:

To orient the modernist space of Tate Modern towards the unbridgeable gap that separates humanity from infra-humanity through a negative space that will explore the act of exclusion. The negative space or split will serve as the locus of addressing the w (hole) in history that marks the bottomless difference that separates whites from non-whites.”²⁸⁵

Salcedo describes the bottomless difference as the history of racism that runs parallel to the history of modernity and its untold dark side. In this context, *Shibboleth* functions as a mark about absolute indifference that intrudes in and disturbs the space of the Turbine Hall in the same way that the appearance of immigrants disturbs the consensus and homogeneity of European societies.²⁸⁶ The sculpture physically split the floor of the Turbine Hall in half to invoke the biblical Hebrew origin of the word shibboleth, which is constructed upon a friend/enemy form of identification. When we analyze the effect of *Shibboleth* on the floor of a landmark Western institution using this framework, the chasm confronts the viewers with the politically repressed histories of exclusions, racisms and indifference. This confrontation with the uncanny enables the sculpture to enact the friend/enemy split in humanity that Salcedo aims to expose. It is not surprising that *Shibboleth* elicited visceral responses from audiences who did not view it as an artwork but as an offensive crack that ruined the good floor of a landmark British Institution. Those who tripped over the sculpture considered it an offensive intrusion on public space — forgetting that the uncanny trips up experiences.

The conceptual framework of *Domestic Tension* as provided by Bilal indicates that the artwork intended to provoke conversation on the dehumanizing effects of modern technological warfare on the citizens of the United States who go about their daily lives without a care, having been shielded from the actual horrors of America’s campaign in Iraq. Bilal wanted *Domestic Tension*

to reveal the physical and psychological impact of the War on Terror on those living in the war zone of Iraq as compared to the comfort and detachment felt by those living in the comfort zone of the United States. The real effects of this concept emerged in the process of the work where as Becker for example has indicated, for most participants the identity of Bilal as an artist soon became lost even though he had positioned himself in a gallery and saw the entire action as a performance. “It was astounding that the conditions of war could be replicated in a gallery space whose outer spaces housed regular art shows – or were rented out to weddings on weekends – and even that Bilal experienced the effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome as if he had been in an actual war zone.”²⁸⁷ These reality effects of *Domestic Tension* suggests that its structure of participation managed to eliminate aesthetic distance by provoking participants to act in a way that transformed the format of an artwork into the real world stakes of us/them, since for most participants, interaction with the project became real and political and not a performance. We can apply the frame of reference provided by Mitchell and argue that *Domestic Tension* reproduced the real-world stakes in different radical images of fearful futures with Bilal as the composite image of the enemy figure as Islamo-fascism. Zimbardo has also suggested that constructing the concept of the enemy requires the production of a visual image of the outsider or dangerous Other who wants to harm your children and women, and is out to destroy your fundamental values and beliefs.

The definition of the Other as enemy, as provided by Mitchell and Zimbardo, may indicate why the anonymous process of participation in *Domestic Tension* led to the perception that Bilal represented the image of the dangerous other, making the project quickly lose its identity as an artwork and begin enacting the real. The tone of this reality had also been formalized by President George Bush of the United States of America who indicated in November 2001 that

the War on Terror was a war of two extreme identities with no room for neutral space: “Over time it is going to be important for nations to know that they will be held accountable for inactivity; for you are either with us or against us in the fight against terror.”^{xxi} *Domestic Tension* managed to reproduce the framework of us/them as formulated by President Bush through virtual technologies that demonstrated that real hostility and aggression can emerge from the context of disturbance. It also created a situation where imagined friends or enemies can become real.

These underlying factors demonstrate that *Shibboleth* and *Domestic Tension* have used politics as their medium of disturbance in a way that differs from the antagonistic structure of relationships that Bishop has identified in the artworks of Sierra. The concept of antagonism as used by Bishop is derived from that developed by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. In *On the Political* Mouffe modifies Schmitt’s construction of friend/enemy by indicating that his framework of we/they is not compatible with democratic pluralism and therefore unable to provide an adequate structure through which to analyze the antagonistic dimension of the political in the pluralism of a democratic political community.²⁸⁸ She argues that although collective identities create we/they binaries, it does not necessarily mean that identities have to be structured around friend or enemy antagonisms even though the positions of we/they can become antagonistic. And in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Mouffe together with Ernesto Laclau describe the concept of antagonism as a failure of difference or the impossibility of the closure or knitting together of society.²⁸⁹ What we refer to as society is a process and not a fully constituted entity. Mouffe and Laclau believe that the politically solidified groups that Schmitt

^{xxi} CNN website, “Bush Says it is Time for Action,”

<http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/ret.bush.coalition/index.html>. Last accessed 28 May 2013. See also “You are Either with Us or Against Us,” <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/> and “Transcript of President Bush’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress” on 20th September 2001; <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>

identifies as constituting friend/enemy category do not present themselves within the democratic pluralism of liberal democracy because its societies are in flux and differences are defined by antagonism as opposed to a structure of them and us. This absence of a distinctive or definitive friend/enemy demarcation – that reflects instead the inability of the society to fully constitute itself or the contestation of defining boundaries – informs the frame of analysis that Bishop applies to Sierra's artworks in "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." She argues that Sierra's artworks seek to transform relationships by straining boundaries so that viewers' relationship to the work is constituted by the antagonism generated from the unease and discomfort that is created when they are confronted by the artwork and its context.^{xxii}

Bishop suggests that Sierra contextualizes his work around exclusions so as to highlight the divisions that his material forces upon us, without attempting to reconcile the divisions or project them as a separate sphere. Bishop argues that these works become antagonistic because we encounter them as actual (or real) processes of confrontation and tension in their installation spaces.²⁹⁰ For example, in *Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blonde* that Sierra produced for the 2001 Venice Biennale, the real encounters between the work and their viewers make them respond to its content and context with awkwardness and discomfort. This is because the work reflects a more complicated fusion of the social and the aesthetic or a fusion of art and reality that goes beyond activation or literal participation in the work.²⁹¹ Sierra paid illegal street vendors – normally immigrants from Senegal, Bangladesh, China and Southern Italy who make their living on the streets of Venice selling fake designer handbags – to have their hair dyed blonde. Sierra then made his space inside the Biennale available to some of the vendors to display and sell their merchandise just as they normally did on the streets outside. Bishop argues

^{xxii} See: Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, 69-70

that the vendors represent the most excluded social group or class from the Biennale, and their highlighted presence amongst the art audience produced a confrontation that left each group mutually estranged, for it disrupted the tacit non-identification that defines their relationships in the real world.²⁹²

In contrast, we can argue that *Shibboleth* and *Domestic Tension* suggest an antagonistic form of relationship constructed upon the friend/enemy political form of identity theorized by Schmitt, rather than the structure provided by Mouffe and Laclau, which argues that societies are always in flux and cannot be fully constituted by defined extremes. This means that the structures of *Shibboleth* and *Domestic Tension* have shown through their disturbational processes that real and extreme divisions can be produced, even within plural democracy. Groys argues that the practice of installation reveals the act of unconditional, sovereign violence that initially installs any democratic order and that the violent, revolutionary and sovereign act of installing law and order can never be fully erased afterwards —meaning that this initial act of violence can and will always be mobilized again.²⁹³ This is because the space of the installation is the symbolic property of the artist; by entering this space the audience leaves the public territory of democratic legitimacy and enters a space of sovereign authoritarian control with implicit submission to the artist. We can argue that *Shibboleth* enabled Salcedo to take control of the Turbine Hall and execute her sculpture without having to justify its process of execution to the public. The authority to design the installation space and then allow the public to enter into its space enabled Salcedo to work with a major institution and use its structure to perform a social, historical and political critique of the institution, and to transform the space into a public event for enacting political divisions and unveiling repressed histories. *Domestic Tension* on the other hand used

disturbation to reproduce the real effects of geopolitics in a gallery situation by using the process of anonymous participation.

The anonymous process of participation allowed *Domestic Tension* to expose how the virtual space of the internet can mobilize violence, in the absence of the art institution whose role is to impose sovereignty and maintain order amongst those who decide to interact with the installation. This enabled the artwork to produce responses that exhibited a direct friend/enemy confrontation as opposed to the encounters in *Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blonde* which were marked merely by awkwardness and unease. The differences in audience responses between *Domestic Tension* and *Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blonde* suggests that participatory activities whose structures incorporate anonymity can subvert the democratic ideals held by audiences and make them act on their innermost fears and hostilities. The experience of Bilal invokes that of Gomez-Pena who was sprinkled with acid by an anonymous individual who dissolved back into the crowd when Gomez-Pena and Fusco held a performance at a street corner in Buenos Aires. The two experiences illustrate the instabilities that exist for disturbational artworks whose spaces allow viewers to feel anonymous enough to enact their hostilities. Hence it can be argued that the antagonistic framework developed by Bishop is most likely a feature of participatory activities that involve face to face interactions in settings which rely on the institution to enforce democratic order. The chance towards aggressive anti-social behavior increases exponentially when interactions with the artwork occur in spaces that confer anonymity on participants or audiences.

Zimbardo argues that situations that provide anonymity or disguise to individuals are more likely to reduce their sense of personal accountability and create conditions for perverse action or dehumanizing processes where relationships become defined by I and It. The account McEvelley

has provided of Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* indicates that the section of the crowd that was not familiar with performance art grew more aggressive and had to be restrained by the section from the art world who called an end to the performance. Danto argues that disturbational artworks threaten danger because we are not sure what will happen to us and neither does the artist know what will happen to her, because the possibility of irrational or anti-social behavior exists within its structure. *Domestic Tension* has illustrated the possibility of the disturbational process to create the friend/enemy distinction by erasing the line between art and life through a movement of abjection that defined Bilal as the enemy. The emergence of a network of friends who identified with Bilal and offered him protection and support through acts such as turning the gun away from him or providing material and technical support for the project, as argued by Ingram, reinforces the argument for the friend-enemy divide. The "friends" emerged to counter the actions of the enemy group who had hacked into the gun so that it fired continuously, and who constantly insulted Bilal on the chat-room or enacted a relationship of prisoner-jailer.

Disturbation and Political Response

Having suggested the various ways in which disturbance produces hostility and can reproduce the formation of identities through the concept of the political, we can now examine how disturbance produces political responses as an effect. In "Art and Disturbation" Danto argues that disturbational art's ultimate aspiration is to release realities that are so disturbing they completely dissolve the line between imitation and reality, or between art and audience. Danto used Jarry's *Ubu Roi* as an example of how the effects of disturbance produce spontaneous responses from their audiences. When an actor stood up on stage before a Parisian audience and voiced the first word of *Ubu Roi*, the effect of the word exploded into reality dissolving theatrical distance and producing a riot from the audience. We can transplant this frame to the occasions in

contemporary art where disturbational artworks have managed to produce intense passion and anger in public space, initiating contests that have pitted artistic freedom against the prevailing social, cultural and political definitions of art and public space. Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981), David Nelson's painting *Mirth and Girth* (1988) and Scott Tyler's installation *What is the Proper Way to Display a U. S. Flag?* will provide case studies of when the attitude of disturbational art clashed with public sentiment.

In 1981 Richard Serra produced *Tilted Arc* for the Jacob Javits Federal Plaza Building in New York and the public sculpture drew immediate protest from workers and visitors to the Federal building, as well as from politicians. The controversy over *Tilted Arc* managed to split the artworld and Danto joined up with opponents of the sculpture who were calling for its removal from the Federal Plaza. Danto specifically argued that the sculpture did not embody the values of a public artwork or the conditions of the public upon which it was imposed.²⁹⁴ Nelson was an art student of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago when he submitted *Mirth and Girth* for the school's Annual Travel Fellowship competition. His painting provoked black aldermen of the city of Chicago as well as the black community in Chicago because it depicted the late mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington as an overweight transvestite dressed in flimsy women's underwear. Washington was Chicago's first black mayor and had died in 1987 from a heart attack. In 1989 Tyler, another art student of the School of the Art Institute, provoked Veterans of Foreign Wars, Illinois State senators, white Chicago aldermen and civilian flag defenders to protest in the streets of Chicago when he presented *What is the Proper way to Display a U.S. Flag?* for an exhibition organized by the school to showcase works of students of color. The two student artworks brought to the surface the tensions that existed between artistic freedom, institutional sovereignty and autonomy, and public responsibility. Danto argues that an artwork

is considered disturbational if it generates disturbances that are powerful enough to dissolve the barrier between representation and reality by making viewers respond to the disturbance as if it were real. The experience of reality by the work has to come from within the artwork as part of its production, rather than an incident or consequence of interacting with the artwork.

Yet despite the fact that most of Serra's sculptures are made of heavy steel plates precariously balanced and held together by friction – thus holding the promise of danger for those who enter their spaces – Danto indicates that the sculptures are not disturbational. He argues that the possibility of getting hurt by Serra's sculptures is not integral to the process of their experience but rather a case of artworks that are indifferent to what happens to their audiences.²⁹⁵ Yet the hostility and controversy that *Tilted Arc* provoked do indicate that the sculpture was disturbational. Danto has described *Tilted Arc* as a rusted slope of curved steel that stuck out of the Federal Plaza like a sullen blade whose interference with the use of the space of the Federal Plaza aroused hostility from office workers.²⁹⁶ Thomas Crow describes *Tilted Arc* as a gently curving sheet of steel 120 feet long by 12 feet high that slanted slightly inward, with its convex face turned towards the street. It divided the space of the Federal Plaza in half, so that workers and visitors to the courthouse and office buildings contained within the space, found their normal approaches blocked by the sculpture's full length.²⁹⁷ *Tilted Arc* was installed during a right-wing Republican administration and this enabled two conservative bureaucrats who were agitating for its removal – by claiming to speak for ordinary people – to attack the sculpture as the product of an entrenched self-interested minority culture that was brutally indifferent to the needs of the average individual. They argued that only by removing the sculpture could the plaza be restored to its function as a site of shared outdoor relaxation and agreeable pedestrian passage.²⁹⁸

In “*Tilted Arc Controversy: Dangerous Precedent?*” Harriet Senie writes that Serra’s sculptures often prompt experiences of profound and instantaneous visceral unease. The sculptures manage to generate anger in their viewers because Serra makes a familiar space suddenly feel threatening.²⁹⁹ Perpetual tension and implicit instability characterizes most of Serra’s works that are installed in urban spaces.³⁰⁰ Rosalyn Deutsche argues that proponents and opponents of *Tilted Arc* employed the rhetoric of democracy and made public art the site of their struggle to define democracy but neglected the critical issue of defining public space.³⁰¹ A definition of the public space should be modeled on the framework provided by Mouffe and Laclau where the public is a contested formation since an absolute basis of social unity that gives the people an essential identity is not possible. The absence of the formation of absolute identities makes the public space the social realm where the meaning of the people is simultaneously constituted and put at risk.³⁰² Crow indicates that the removal of *Tilted Arc* succeeded in arousing debate concerning the relationship between public symbols and private ambitions, between political freedom, legal obligation and aesthetic choice in the public life of America. These issues would otherwise have remained abstract and idle had the work not existed, or might have been forgotten had it continued to occupy the plaza.³⁰³ In *One Place After Another*, Miwon Kwon defends the relationship of tilted Arc to its site: “Serra imagined the location of *Tilted Arc* as a physical, social and political site and saw the sculpture producing an antagonistic relationship with its site through a proactive interrogation about the socio-political conditions of its location.”³⁰⁴ Instead of enhancing the site of the plaza, the sculpture chose to aggressively cut across the space and divide it so as to literalize the social divisions, exclusions and fragmentations that aesthetically well packaged public spaces always disguise.³⁰⁵ Kwon argues that the aggressive attitude of tilted Arc enabled it to dismantle the illusion that Federal Plaza is a coherent spatial totality.

The events surrounding *Mirth and Girth* and *What is the Proper way to Display a U.S. Flag?* are described by Carol Becker in *Zones of Contention: Essays on Art, Institutions, Gender and Anxiety*.³⁰⁶ The two artworks provoked outrage and polarized the community of Chicago and became the flashpoints of anger and race politics there. A few hours after Nelson's painting went on display at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a group of black Chicago aldermen accompanied by the police and members of the press stormed into the school and forcefully removed it from the wall. The aldermen marched into the president's office and threatened to burn the painting on the spot.³⁰⁷ The police fearful that such an action by the aldermen in front of the press might result in news coverage that would incite riots, "arrested" the painting. Becker reports that the events of *Mirth and Girth* soon escalated into numerous bomb threats and demonstrations. Members of the African-American community gathered outside the school for several days charging that the students were racists while the students in turn called the community protestors fascists. Nelson went into hiding. Alongside the external problems, *Mirth and Girth* had also generated internal tension within the school amongst the student population. Most of the white art students insisted that artists should have the right to display whatever they choose, while most of the minority students (blacks, Latinos and Asians) were torn between their allegiance to the community of artists, the mandate for unconditional freedom of expression and their own connections to their communities. The connections to their communities called on them to be sensitive to race and the need to challenge racist acts whenever they occurred. Becker writes: "For the first time the larger community intruded into the autonomous space of the school and the school administrators realized it could happen again."³⁰⁸

The outrage over *Mirth and Girth* forced the School of the Art Institute to apologize to the public through full page advertisements published in the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

The apology read in part: “All educational institutions encourage students’ freedom of expression. Regrettably in the use of his freedom, this student created a work that had the effect of insulting the memory of an important leader, Mayor Harold Washington.” The advertisement carried the names of Marshall Field the 5th as the president of the board of trustees of the Art Institute of Chicago and Tony Jones as the president of the School of the Art Institute.³⁰⁹



Figures 33: *Mirth and Girth* (1988) by David Nelson. Medium: Acrylic on canvas, size 48 inches by 31 inches.

Figure 34: *What is the Proper Way to Display a U. S. Flag?* (1988) by Scott Tyler. Silver gelatin print, US flag, book, pen, shelf, audience; 80 inches x 28 inches x 60 inches

The following year in 1989, Tyler, a black student who had objected to Nelson’s painting – and had asked that it be removed on the grounds of racism – submitted *What is the Proper Way to Display a U. S. Flag?* that was to cause more divisions in Chicago. Becker writes that the

installation almost brought the school to its knees by causing more division and generating more unrest and division in the community of Chicago than ever before.³¹⁰ *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?* had as its elements, a shelf upon which rested a ledger that invited viewers to respond to the question of the title and an American flag spread out on the gallery floor directly below the shelf. It was almost impossible to write on the ledger without stepping on the flag. The presence of an American flag displayed on the floor – with the possibility of being stepped upon – galvanized thousands of Chicagoans to hold demonstrations against the artwork. Politicians and members of the press elevated the rhetoric and the school became further isolated by the community of Chicago and the Illinois state legislature. Problems erupted again later that academic year when Tyler once more submitted the same installation for the requirements of his degree in the school's Bachelors of Fine Art Degree Show. Three days before the show was due to open, the press alerted the public that the school was preparing to show the flag again, and local radio DJs and talk show hosts encouraged people to hold protests in front of the Art Institute museum. This pressure forced the school to pull Tyler's installation out of the BFA Show. As Groys argues, artistic sovereignty conferred to artists by Western liberal democracy means they have the freedom to make art exclusively according to private imagination. This freedom also means that the artwork can be criticized and rejected once it enters the public space; but it can only be rejected as a whole.³¹¹ Hence Tyler could not be asked to modify his installation or remove the flag as this would compromise the sovereignty of his artistic vision.

In a retrospective of the emotions aroused by the two student works, Becker writes: "the African-American community could not understand why a young art student like Nelson would so irreverently take the image of Harold Washington (an image that they felt belonged to them) and transform it into an image of an overweight transvestite in garter belt, bikini underwear and

stockings.” They were asking: why somebody would do this at a time when they were still mourning the death of the mayor? Equally, when Tyler responded with *What is the Proper Way to Display a U. S. Flag?* the following year to express his view as an African-American man in American culture, the more conservative members of the white community thought: “how dare this angry young man who calls himself a communist use the flag, our flag, to protest this country?” Becker writes that this perception rested on the view is that the flag belonged only to true American patriots who had fought in American wars, or were from families of men who had lost their lives defending the flag. It did not allow for the consideration that Tyler might also be a true American and perhaps a descendant of the many black soldiers who had died defending this country. “His blackness and his Communist/Maoist ideological stance invalidated him to defenders of the flag, alienated them and terrified them.”³¹²

The arguments about disturbance that have been developed in the context of this study have sought to demonstrate how the processes and results of *Shibboleth* and *Domestic Tension*, and numerous other artworks that have been cited, capture the social and political ability of disturbance to transform consciousness or provoke debate. Tyler’s *What is the Proper way to Display a U.S. Flag?* and Nelson’s *Mirth and Girth* have suggested how disturbance can produce the political as a configuration of a we/they from the structures of installation and painting respectively. This study has also suggested that *Domestic Tension*’s provision of the condition of anonymity removed barriers and allowed repressed feelings in participants to surface and produce, within the framework of an artwork, actual effects of geopolitics. Meanwhile the artwork’s process of virtual participation also managed to circumvent the institutional sovereignty outlined by Groys, exposing disturbance and contradictions that are not manifested in other collaborative artworks that aim for the ideals of democratic participation.

The study has also suggested that through *Shibboleth*, Salcedo managed to interrupt the space of the Turbine Hall and produce the concept of the political through the experience of the uncanny. A close analysis of *Shibboleth* and *Domestic Tension* has opened up new possibilities in the concept of disturbance beyond the framework sketched out by Danto. This can serve as a starting point for both artists and scholars who are interested in developing a critical interpretation for artworks whose strategies aim to stimulate socio-political conversations in the public space by producing reality from processes of art. The potential in disturbance and the development of the political uncanny and the political abject should be explored, tested and contested like any provocative idea in art.

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ART AND CONVERSATION: DISTURBATION IN PUBLIC SPACE

PRACTICE

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Ovada Gallery Exhibition.....138

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(Execution Date: June 2012 to March 2013)

APPENDIX..... 165

Description

The practice component of Art and Conversation: Disturbance in Public Space uses sculptural objects made from salvaged materials of everyday use to explore violence and deprivation. The environment of the sculptures becomes a space to confront the reconfigured objects and their layered surfaces as real products of violence and deprivation.

The sculptures are meticulously fabricated to suggest they are functional or contain a history of past function so that viewers relate to them with a mixture of curiosity and unease.

The sculpture *Conversations* exploits the conceptual framework of disturbance by provoking a tactile reaction from viewers in order to function as a talisman of scientific research. This type of relationship will be registered on the surface of the sculpture as it gradually acquires textural effects from repeated touch.



Materials: Reclaimed pine timber, woolen jumper, hook-bolt, coach bolt and nuts, chair arm, cupboard handle and polyurethane glue. Dimensions: 4 inches x 25 inches x 36 inches. Year of execution: 2010



Materials: Reclaimed 2 x 4 pine timber, decomposing wood, wooden chair leg, broomstick, denim jeans, silk stocking, woolen glove, cardigan, angle bar and polyurethane glue. Dimensions: 2 inches x 36 inches x 48 inches. Year of execution: 2010





Materials: Reclaimed 2 x 4 pine timber, reclaimed wooden pallet, scrap wood, cardigan, rusted nails, angle bars and polyurethane glue. Dimensions: 3 inches x 30 inches x 48 inches. Year of execution: 2010



Materials: Reclaimed timber, decomposing wood, corduroy trousers, cotton twine, burnt fabric, rusted steel wheel and glue.

Dimensions: 24 inches x 48 inches x 30 inches. Year of execution: 2010



Materials: reclaimed wooden pallet on fabricated steel base, soap, polyurethane glue, coach bolt, cotton twine and stainless steel cups.

Dimensions: 20 inches x 48 inches x 48 inches. Year of execution: 2010





Materials: reclaimed English oak sleeper, clear pine, glue and steel. Dimensions: 10 inches x 20 inches x 60 inches.
Year of execution: 2010



Materials: Scrap wood, weld mesh, sand, sack, cotton twine, cloth pegs, steel rod and glove. Dimensions: 20 inches x 20 inches x 36 inches. Year of execution: 2011





Materials: Block of reclaimed wood, scrap metal, paper, cloth, polyurethane glue, copper piping and bolts.
Dimensions: 12 inches x 16 inches x 18 inches. Year of execution: 2011



Materials: Block of wood, tree trunk, chest of drawers, sewing machine wheel, steel pipes, cotton twine, rattan fiber and billiard ball. Dimensions: 10 inches x 32 inches x 60 inches. Year of execution: 2011



Materials: Reclaimed tree trunk, piece of flywheel, electric cable, chair seat and conduit pipe

Dimensions: 14 inches x 18 inches x 18 inches. Year of execution; 2011



Materials: Copper pipes, tennis shoe, aluminum radiator foil, canvas, corduroy, and electric cable and plug.
Dimensions: 10 inches x 10 inches x 10 inches. Year of execution: 2011



Materials: Reclaimed wood, canvas fabric, clothing, polyurethane glue, broomstick, chair seat and cotton twine.
Dimensions: 15 inches x 13 inches x 26 inches. Year of execution 2011

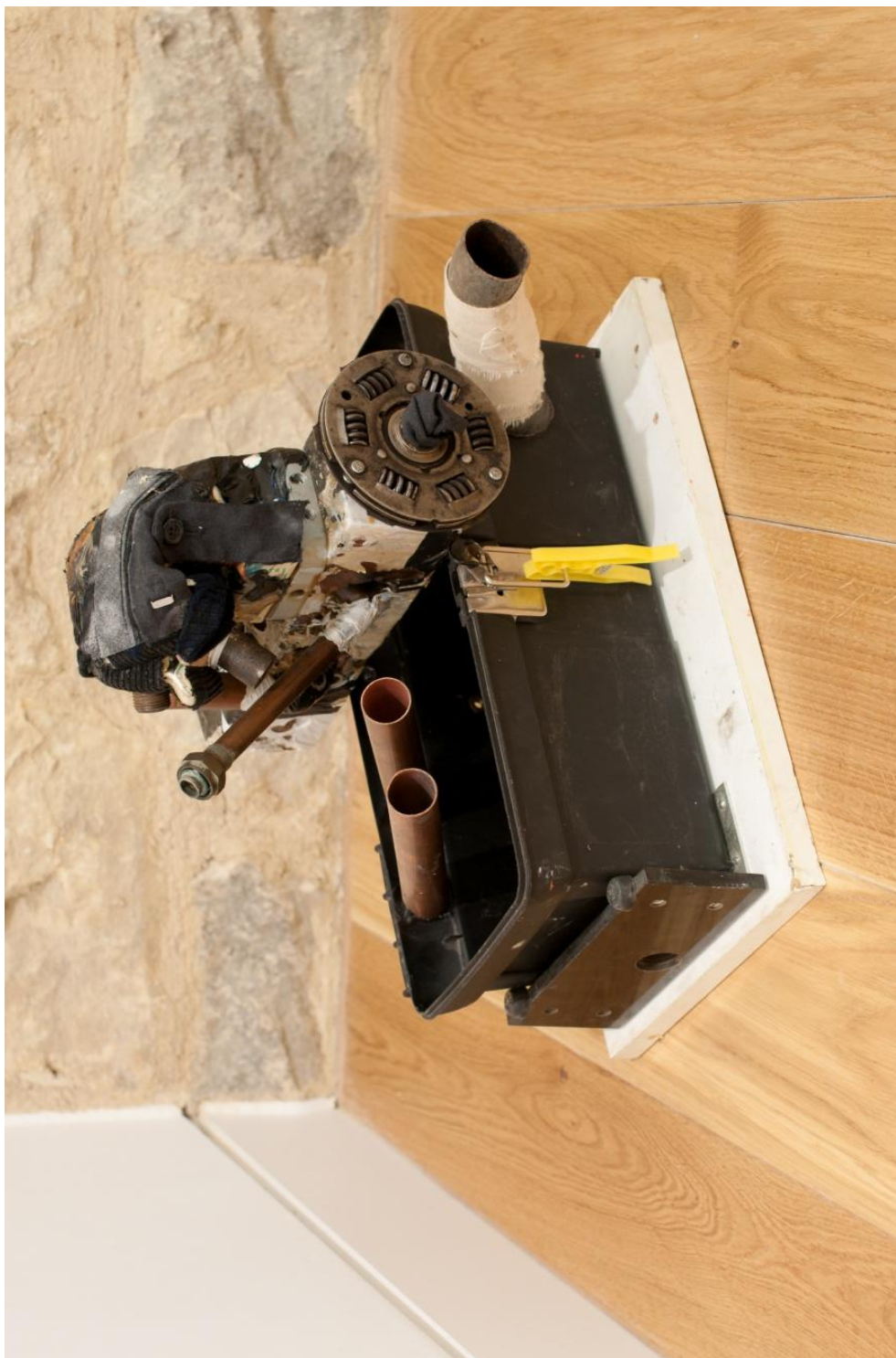


Materials: Reclaimed pallet wood, denim fabric, corduroy, shoe, copper pipes, soap, tap, pliers, sand, kraft paper, baseball cap, polyurethane glue, car exhaust flange and electric motor part. Dimensions: 2 inches x 30 inches x 48 inches. Year of execution: 2010/2011



Materials: Reclaimed wood, car exhaust pipe, billiard ball, copper pipes, drawer holder and scrap metal.

Dimensions: 14 inches x 24 inches x 20 inches. Year of execution: 2011



Materials: Clutch plate, copper pipes, corduroy, and cloth peg, piece of trouser, block of wood, artist paint box, canvas, plastic bags and orange juice carton. Dimensions: 10 inches x 15 inches x 16 inches. Year of execution 2011



Conversations

Materials: Reclaimed English Oak timber, polyurethane glue and (5 inch diameter) hardened steel ball-bearings.

Finish: Clear Danish oil and clear wax. Dimension: 107 inches diameter. The sculpture wall measures 3 inches.

Year of execution: 2012/2013







Two hardened chrome finished steel ball-bearings, each weighing 9 kilograms. They are fastened to the sculpture from the inside with a 16mm bolt and nut attachment.

The bearings were precision drilled and threaded at the University of Oxford Physics department.











APPENDIX:

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDIO AS PLATFORM FOR CONVERSATION

The practice assembled numerous and very often disturbing images from the armed conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo where combatants used “child soldiers”, the effects of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and ordinary images of machinery and equipment (such as sewing machines, data flight recorders) that bear no relationships to the tragic images.

These discordant images function as the backdrop upon which the studio practice contextualizes its conceptual framework as a conversation between ordinary found materials and objects that make up sculptures that in turn become the medium through which to engage viewers in dialogue with the processes of violence and conflict.

The practice transforms discarded materials such as shoes, pieces of clothing, wooden pallets and pieces of scrap metal into sculptures – formed by a process of disfigurement, distortion and rearrangement, and held together by glue, twine and friction – that suggest the condition of fragility and instability. This enables the sculptures to function as objects that bear marks of the fragile and debilitating nature of violence, or to represent the tools used for inflicting terror or even as the remaining traces of tragedy.

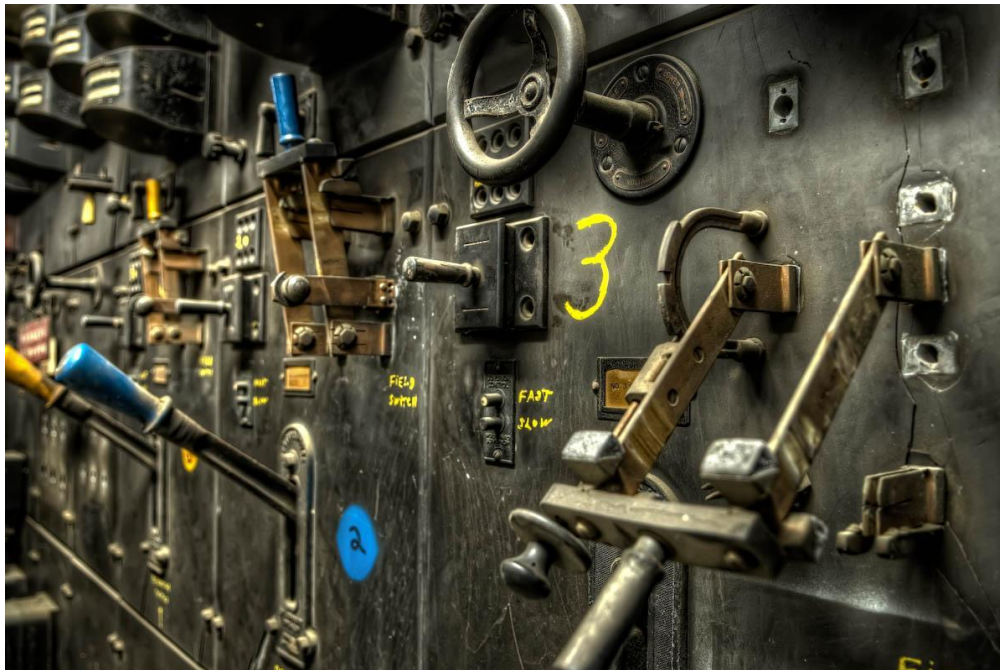
Since the sculptures are held together by twine and friction, they possess the ability to be constantly manipulated or reconstituted into new formations. These sculptures are eventually broken down and recycled back into the environment as a way of contextualizing the organic and cyclic nature of violence and its materials.





















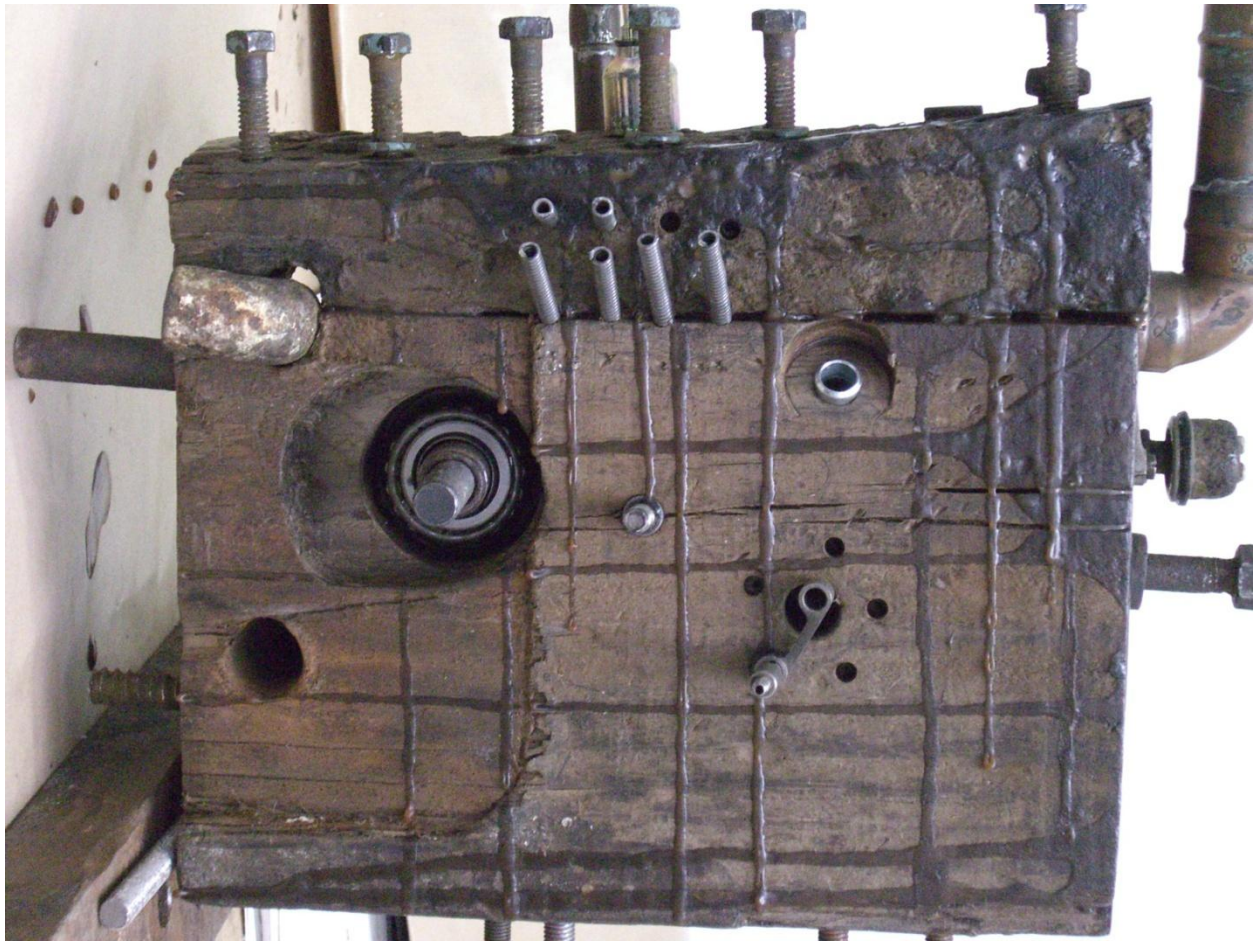


















PROPOSAL FOR THE SCULPTURE FOR OLD ROAD CAMPUS RESEARCH BUILDING (ORCRB) IN HEADINGTON, OXFORD

TEMPORARY WORKING TITLE: “The Bowl”

The sculpture is envisioned as a tilted highly textured giant wooden orb with an approximate diameter of 1 to 1.5 meters with a highly finished shallow bowl at the top. Inside this bowl will be 3 to 4 polished steel spheres.

The wooden orb will be a strenuously hand carved, gouge-marked surface that highly encourages both the physical process of touch and the emotional mental impulse of an organic feel. This tactile and emotional sensibility of the orb with its steel balls should imbue the sculpture with an everyday talismanic quantity of research into cancer and offer a visual concept of the organic and awe. I envision that over time, the impact of these touches by the human hand should add additional surface texture as transferred feelings onto the sculpture.

The giant orb will have as its support a bench for everyday use. This makes the sculpture a functional organ that encourages every day interactive activities and conversation as people sit around and touch it. In this way the sculpture becomes an integral part of the living environment of the front space of the building. The sculpture will be designed to fit into this space with consideration to human traffic and its flow and safety requirements. The design will also incorporate a secondary bench whose design merges together with the main bench.

The benches will have as their tops recycled wood bearing marks of human use, and anchored to the ground with a steel superstructure.

CONCEPT

The concept I’m proposing takes into consideration the fact that the Research Building houses several departments that work on the cutting edge of cancer research. The proposed sculpture hopes to visualize and capture the meeting point between cancer and medical science in an object form that provides for profundity, warmth and contemplation.

This concept aims to give the intricate nature of cancer research and science a conceptual image that contains conversation and presence. The organic relationship between this highly textured and tactile mass of wood and the polished balls nestling in its shallow should reflect the vibrating material nature of cancer and the scientific efforts to combat it.

Though the sculpture employs the traditional carving process with its burden of physical labor, the very delicate nature of the sculpture's organic mortality against the background of a highly sophisticated building as an everyday usage ensemble makes it quite contemporary.

MATERIALS

The materials of the sculpture will consist of wood and steel. The wood will be sourced from re-use and expertly laminated together to provide the working dimensions. This choice of materials though driven purely by the concept, takes into consideration the location, construction cost and the sculpture's maintenance. Though wood behaves in an organic manner when exposed to natural elements, the changes that it incurs over time (mainly cracks and change in color) in this case will be to the conceptual advantage of the message of the sculpture.

This very fact invests the sculpture with the ability to work within its environment without incurring maintenance costs.



23RD MARCH 2012

**AMMENDMENDS TO PUBLIC ART PROJECT PROPOSAL AT OLD ROAD CAMPUS
RESEARCH BUILDING (ORCRB): AMENDMENT TO SCHEDULE 2**

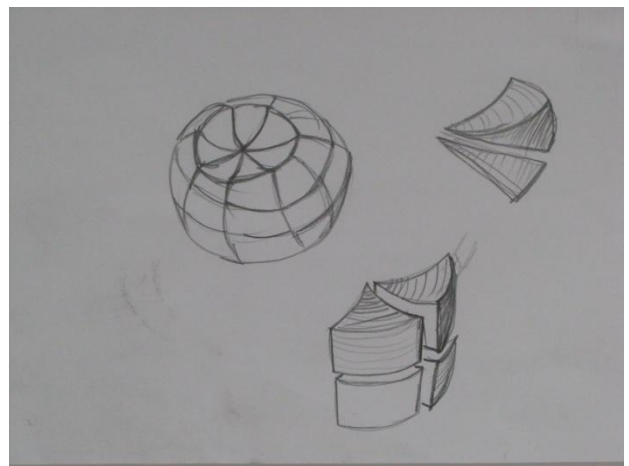
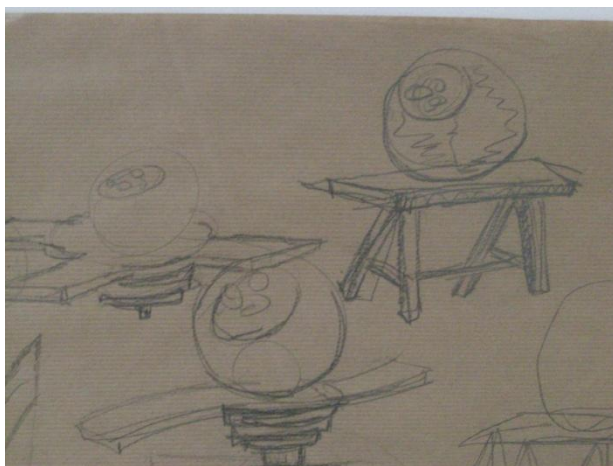
In view of the revised location of the public art project from the exterior of the ORCRB building to the interior of the ORCRB building the project will be modified by following revisions:

1. Size: The project will be scaled down to an approximate of 100cm at its widest dimensions. This scaling down still remains within the scale proposed in the original brief of dimensions 100cm to 150cm.
2. Location: The project is being reconfigured as an interior piece of artwork. It will dispense with the original conception of a bench platform and instead incorporate a safe and secure base or plinth as suitable for the needs of the interior of the building. This new secure base or plinth will not interfere with the floor space of the new location: i.e. it will not require drilling into the floor in any manner. The artwork will be able to occupy its location as a feature of its own design and weight. This feature will take into consideration stability, safety, maintenance and the need to move the work within the interior space as required or specified by ORCRB.

This amendment takes cognizance of and will be executed in compliance with all the requirements as outlined in all the clauses from 1.00 to 5.11 and schedule 1.00

FRANCIS ONYANGO OKETCH

23RD MARCH 2012





The public art project *Conversation*, is made from reclaimed English Oak sleepers. I purchased twenty one sleepers from Reclaimed Limited, a company based in North Chingford, UK. Each sleeper measured 3 inches thick by 9 inches wide and an overall length of 108 inches. These were in turn split in half and milled down to provide the dimensions of 2 inches by 4 inches by length that forms the unit size of each section of *Conversations*.

Monday, June 18, 2012 5:46 PM

From: Reclaimed - Specialists in Reclaimed Timber - info@reclaimed.uk.com

To: onyangooketch@yahoo.com

Hi Oketch

Further to our conversation, here is the required information.

The timbers supplied were reclaimed from a building on London Kingsway.

They were built into the cavity walls in 1907 to act as support, possibly bomb structuring.

We acquired them approximately ten years ago.

There was a mix of English oak, chestnut, Baltic pine and white fir.

Many thanks

Regards Andy

Reclaimed - Specialists in Reclaimed Timber

Tel: 0208 529 8504

www.reclaimed.uk.com

Sewardstone Hall Farm
Sewardstone Road
North Chingford
E4 7RH







Kraft paper templates used in fabricating cross sections of the sphere at decreasing intervals of 2 inches. The master template was sealed inside the sculpture at completion.



Section of the sphere being glued together





Building up the sections of the sphere













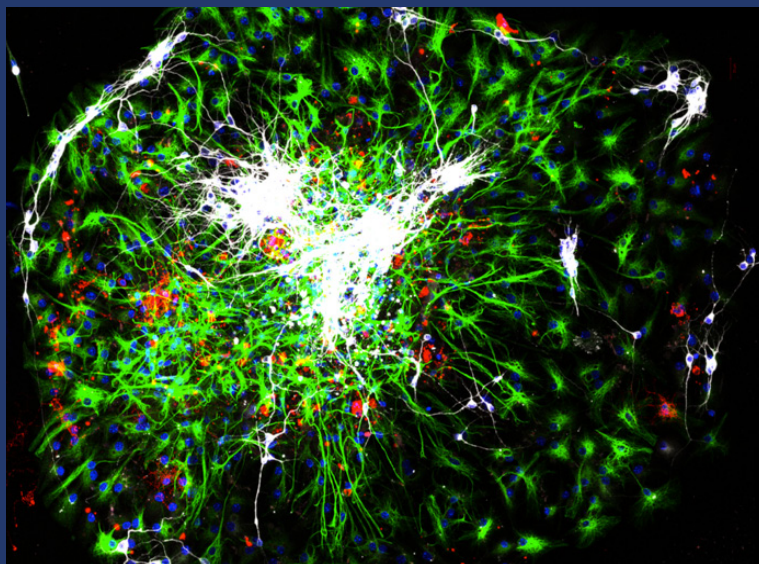


THE CLARENDON CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the Clarendon Scholars' Association

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- 3 Coast-to-Coast
- 4 OxBump
- 5 Literary Doubles
- 6 Conversations



*Image of a postnatal brain stem cell-derived tripotential neurosphere
Image courtesy of Dr Francis Szele.*

Talking Heads

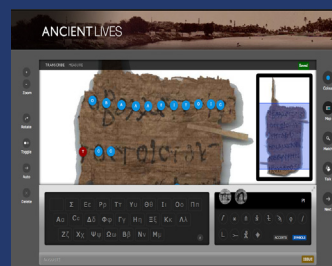
A technologically-inclined interdisciplinary conversation.

It is rare to find an area of our lives that technology does not touch. This year's Talking Heads, which took place on 23 February at the Oxford Internet Institute, celebrated the prominence of technology in society by highlighting innovative scholarship which incorporates notable technological dimensions.

We were very lucky to have an incredibly strong line-up of diverse speakers. Representing natural science was Dr Francis Szele (St Anne's) from the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics. Szele led a discussion around advances in stem cell research in a conversation entitled 'The Hype and Promise of Brain Stem Cells'. Advances in technology has enabled Szele to visualize neurones by labelling them with different fluorescent molecules. This provides Szele and his team with unprecedented resources to begin to understand how neurons interact and migrate to keep us functioning.

From the social sciences we had Daniel Mullins (Linacre), a Clarendon Scholar at the Centre for Anthropology and the Mind. Mullins employs large-scale database sampling techniques, qualitative data analysis software, and digital research methods such as Perl-based web crawlers to study the evolution of political systems. Specifically, he focuses on the role of ritual in the socio-political evolution of complex societies.

Finally, Dr James Brusuelas (Corpus Christi) from the Classics Department discussed the innovative role



Screenshot of the Ancient Lives project in action. Daniel Mullins

crowd-sourcing has played in the Ancient Lives project. The Ancient Lives project (ancientlives.org) placed hundreds of thousands of images of Greek papyri fragments online, many of these remain unstudied due to a lack of workers. The project allows lay users to help transcribe these scripts and so boosts the speed of bringing the classical world to the digital age.

The event was a great success, providing those who attended with an opportunity to note first-hand some of the advances currently being made across a range of disciplines and the role which technology has played in making those advances possible.

—Cohen Simpson

Cohen is a first-year postgraduate student at the Oxford Internet Institute studying Social Science of the Internet. He is especially thankful for the efforts and support of the coordinating team and the Clarendon Scholars' Council in planning this year's Talking Heads.



Special thanks to Ramtin Amin, Susan Barbour, Susan Graham, Claire Higgins, F. Onyango Oketch, Akhila Pydah, Patty Sachamitr and Cohen Simpson for contributing to this term's newsletter.

Conversations

an exhibition by F. Onyango Oketch

On a sunny weekend in November, members of the Clarendon newsletter team visited the exhibition of F. Onyango Oketch, a third year Clarendon scholar in Fine Art (DPhil). In the hands of Oketch, the rooms of the Kendrew Barn & Gallery of St John's college became a sculptural environment where items of everyday use, materials from scrapyards, and even pieces of wood and clothing became an integral platform for conversations that explores violence, deprivation, and forms of human degradation.

Walking around the exhibition, one cannot help being intrigued and puzzled by the items and sculptures on display. Some of the objects forming sculptures are easily recognisable: a cup from someone's kitchen table, an old workbench, a bowl. But others are so reconfigured, distorted and plucked apart that only imagination can determine what you are looking at – is it an old radio, a control box, or perhaps part of a plane engine? Being brought out of their natural setting and placed in the light and spacious surroundings of the Kendrew Gallery, Oketch's works engage the mind and curiosity of the viewer. Here, natural wood, stone, large windows and white walls form an aesthetic backdrop for the sculptural environment that brings new life and meanings to the objects.

Where did the inspiration for this work come from? Oketch explains that he is driven by political activism, human right issues, the art of rhetoric, stories, and experiences. The history and memories of the discarded objects and debris engage the viewer in visualising contemporary tragedies, triggering our minds to contemplate wars, tribulations, losses, traumas, and memories of our own.

The experience of being in the Conversations was truly unique and we congratulate Oketch for this successful event. For more information on upcoming events at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, visit <http://www.ruskin-sch.ox.ac.uk/>.

—Lise Loerup

The next issue of *The Clarendon Chronicle* will be the Trinity Term 2012 edition. Have you attended a conference, completed fieldwork, or travelled to interesting places?

Submit your photos and stories to the newsletter team via clarendonchronicle@gmail.com



Nuffield Department of Medicine

Medical Sciences Division

Conversation piece



The University of Oxford's Old Road Campus Research Building (ORCRB) and the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art came together in "conversation" this month, at the ORCRB's 2013 summer event. The annual champagne and strawberries reception, held on the 6th of June 2013, played host to the unveiling of a unique piece of public art, commissioned by the ORCRB building management committee in 2012.

ORCRB NDM Business manager, Gary Strickland, explained that the piece of art was the result of a lengthy commissioning process, involving students at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art. "Many new research buildings are required to include a percentage of the budget to be spent on a piece of public art – it was great exploring different ways to achieve this for the ORCRB," Gary explains. "One of our board members at the time, the late Sue Holly, came up with the idea of engaging with the University's artistic community, and so the decision was made to run a competition for graduate students at the Ruskin School.



We gave the students a brief, to reflect our science and the translational research we do in this building, and Onyango Oketch was the clear winner."

Onyango Oketch is a Clarendon Scholar, currently completing his fourth year of a DPhil at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, while residing at St John's College. The Sculpture, which is titled *Conversations*, attempts to capture the meeting points between cancer and medical science through a "tactile experience, which inspires warmth and contemplation".



“It was difficult to produce a work of art that was not a direct model of what these researchers are doing, but rather an artistic representation of what the science means, philosophically,” Onyango said. “Working from the brief the research building gave us, I tried to come up with some kind of concept that would reflect not just the science but the people behind it, not just our cells, but us”.

“The organic nature of the wood provides the mood for the piece. It is made of 100-year-old English oak beams, which were reclaimed from a building on Kingsway in London. Once I found the right material, the battle began,” Onyango

continued. “I am happy to be here – every artist looks forward to a situation where their work is seen by the public. I’m glad to see that people are touching it too – the piece encourages touch and interaction.”

Onyango Oketch’s “Conversations” will sit in the window of the ORCRB, where it will be accessible to those working in the building, and the public.

Images supplied by Jonah Rosenberg, DPhil in Classical Archaeology, St John’s College.

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Henry Wellcome Building for Molecular Physiology, Old Road Campus, Headington, Oxford OX3 7BN

<http://www.ndm.ox.ac.uk/conversation-piece>