

The Afflicted Image

Contemporary Art and Reification

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

M. FINE ARTS (Visual Art)

(by Research)

NOVEMBER 2013

School of Art

Faculty Of The Victorian College Of The Arts
And The Melbourne Conservatorium Of Music

The University of Melbourne

Produced on archival quality paper

Abstract

In the form of a dissertation paired with an installation comprising paintings, photographs, sculptural and text-based elements, this research channels an investigation into aesthetics through the filter of a specific photograph. This image, circulated within the media and pointing to political injustice, serves as the focal point for discourse surrounding the motivation to a politically driven praxis. Documenting the torture and humiliation of a detainee known as ‘Gilligan’ at the hands of U.S. Army personnel stationed at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, this iconic photograph grew into a personal obsession. Its aesthetic influenced the development of a symbolic lexicon based on hoods and facial concealment. *The Afflicted Image* scrutinises this fascination, its psychological and philosophical implications, away from the relentless coherence of mass media.

The dissertation relates the creation of the image, inserting it into a historical framework of the hood as garment and metaphor, and positioning it as the locus for a “constellation of concepts”. The impact of the image is analysed via trauma, W.J.T. Mitchell’s writings on the lives and desire of pictures and Derrida’s ‘hauntology’, locating facial concealment as a tipping point between control and power versus their lack. Responding to the objectification of the detainee, the research traces a line from Hegel’s concept of *Entäusserung* (‘alienation’), to Lukács and Adorno’s totalisation of reification, into contemporary writings on ethics and aesthetics by Jacques Rancière, Simon Critchley and Boris Groys. It explores disappointment as an inevitable outcome of the current political landscape, raising questions around the position of art within this “disenchantment tale”. Commenting on the work of painter Michäel Borremans and ‘relational’ artist Thomas Hirschhorn, the thesis examines opposing aesthetics that acknowledge this melancholic state.

Expanding the theoretical framework led to new strategies for praxis. Processes of deliberate reification, an awareness of failure’s inevitability, and interaction

with a vocabulary of objects and materials occasioned a shift from an emphasis on painting to an installation-based approach. This facilitated irrational juxtapositions of text, image and object, aiming for poetic reflection from within a reified construct. Insertion of the artist's body into the work and its progressive transformation via photography, collage and painting, initiated a visual dialogue with the image, as the image-body became both subject and object. Informing this new trajectory and facilitating a reconsideration of the crossover between art, politics and ethics, were the practices of Medical Hermeneutics and Lygia Clark, and Jane Bennett's concept of enchantment. The research argues for the value of aesthetic experience in the service of possibility.

Declaration

This is to certify that **Sarah Bunting**

- (i) *the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters,*
- (ii) *due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,*
- (iii) *the thesis is 13,682 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.*

Sarah Bunting
10/11/13

Acknowledgements

I feel very fortunate throughout my candidacy to have had the generous support and advice of my supervisor, Dr Bernhard Sachs, who has guided my progress over the last two years with keen insight and great good humour. I am immensely grateful to Dr Stephen Haley, Raafat Ishak, Dr Kate Daw, Jon Campbell, John Meade, Dr Barbara Bolt, Susan Jacobs, Celeste Chandler and Tony Garifalakis, who encouraged me while sharing their time, insight and wisdom as I moved through the school. I would also like to thank the invaluable technical and library staff at the VCA, and, as part of the school's wider family, Richard Lewer, Kate Tucker and Drew Pettifer.

I have been privileged to work amidst a delightful, intelligent community for the last two years, including, in no particular order: Ben, Danica, Helen, Sharon, Georgie, Ross, Hannah, Mel, Emma, Dianne, Viv, Eric, Ngardarb, Andrew and Adrian. Thanks to my dear friends, especially Anna, Skye, Nicole, Tim, Gráinne and Arlan, my housemates, yoga community and Joel for reminding me of gravity's pull. An ocean of gratitude is owed to Laura Skerlj for coffees, conversations and painting, and to Al Meyer, for being himself.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their love, generosity, jokes, patience and alternative career suggestions:

Debra, Alistair, Richard, Irene, Kate and Alexander, this one's for you.

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ARTstor Collection. Database accessed 05/09/13 ©Artist's Rights Society.

When You Cut Your Finger, Bandage the Knife

Joseph Beuys, 1962, kitchen knife with bandaid

Introduction

Unwrap (I don't want the news)

“The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

–Albert Camus¹

On the 15th of February 2003, I joined an estimated 150,000 (200,000 by the organisers' estimate) people in the streets of Melbourne's Central Business District to protest the likelihood of an unjustified and illegal invasion of Iraq by U.S. and allied forces.² Carrying a hand-made placard decrying then Prime Minister John Howard's support for the invasion, I delighted in the protest's sense of community and carnival, and was stunned by the sheer mass of humanity surrounding me. As the day rolled on, so the protests rolled out across the globe, in London, Rome, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, New York and San Francisco, to name just a few of the larger cities (*Fig.1*). The number of demonstrators worldwide was estimated to be between fifteen and twenty million, never before had so many united in an attempt to “stop a war before it began”.³



Fig.1 Alex Majoli, *Police try to control protestors during the worldwide demonstrations to oppose war with Iraq, 2003.*

1 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and other essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1969; repr., 5th): 91.

2 “Australia launches anti-war protests.” *BBC News*. Accessed 5th September 2013. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2761437.stm/>.

3 RETORT, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London, New York: Verso, 2005), p3.

As energising as it was to participate, I trace the loss of my political innocence to the aftermath of that day. Regardless of public opposition, the invasion of Iraq would proceed, the involvement of the Australian military rubber-stamped by our democratically elected leader and his government. The wishes of U.S. and allied politicians, corporate interests and the military were to be privileged over those of the global citizenry. Radio personality Rush Limbaugh and the Fox News team loudly denigrated Kofi Annan and the United Nations to their U.S. heartland audiences, reducing the Security Council to the status of passive objectors whilst heroic George W. marshalled his 'coalition of the willing.'⁴ Disbelief and anger morphed into disillusionment.

If the events of 2003 ensured the end of my political naïvety, they also heralded the initial stirrings of what would evolve into a politically motivated art practice. Any form of politics able to ignore a demand made by many thousands of its citizens was not one I could support and called for immediate questioning and serious reflection. As the invasion of Iraq and the 'War on Terror' continued apace, fresh horrors were brought to light, and regular incursions into civil rights were made. Clearly, organised protest was not enough. Writing indignant letters and handing out accusatory pamphlets had never been enough. Something was lacking, or had been disabled, in the ordinary political processes, and the response made by left-wing 'progressives' were ineffective. There was a melancholic deficiency at the heart of it all, comparing unfavourably with the gleeful vigour of conservative rhetoric. I had, fortunately as it turns out, fallen victim to what I now term (after Simon Critchley), "political disappointment".

The development of a coherent art practice has hinged on attempts to grapple with and translate this disappointment. A process several years in the making, this realisation encompassed the construction of artworks didactic and poetic,

4 "UN Needs U.S., U.S. Needs UN To Face Challenges – HIV/Aids, Sudan – That Defy National Solutions, Says Deputy Secretary". *United Nations Department of Public Information, News and Media Division*. Accessed 5th September 2013. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/dsgsm287.doc.htm>.

fluid and self-conscious, spanning a variety of disciplines and media (focusing on painting in particular). Eventually the work coalesced around a single iconic image, one that had invaded consciousness on its initial publication in mass media and refused to politely depart, no matter how many attempts were made at appeasing or coming to terms with it. The image had made an ethical demand, via an experience of alienation from prior assumptions, calling for a reassessment of those assumptions. These included the ideas alluded to above, for example, that in a democracy, citizens could influence the decisions of their government via a massive show of opposition, or that compassion and justice would prevail over state interests. It became necessary to wonder just what had given rise to these assumptions.

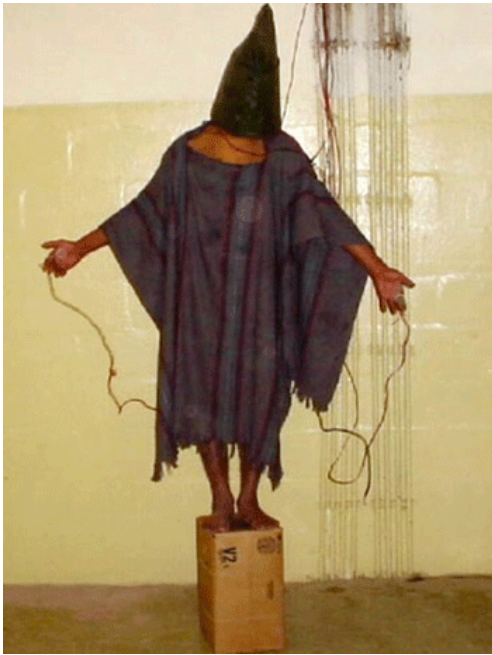


Fig.2 'Gilligan' at Abu Ghraib, 2004



Fig.3 Richard Drew, *Falling Man*, 2001

The specific image referred to records the torture of the prisoner known as ‘Gilligan’, photographed while shrouded in a makeshift hood, electrical wires dangling from his fingertips, at Abu Ghraib Prison, Iraq, 2004 (Fig.2). This image, shot by Staff Sergeant Chip Frederick, was first published in the *New Yorker* in May 2004, and is arguably the most iconic of the some 279 that emerged. ‘Gilligan’ was imprisoned for his alleged role in the murder of two U.S. soldiers. It has been reported that a member of the Criminal Investigation Command (CID), the same agency charged to investigate abuse at Abu Ghraib, ordered military police at the prison to make his life a “living hell.”⁵ The personnel stationed inside Abu Ghraib’s notorious Cellblock 1A proceeded to do just that, attaching electrical wires to ‘Gilligan’s’ fingers, toes and penis, hooding him and forcing him to stand for hours on a cardboard box wearing only a blanket.⁶ This image and its counterpart, the so-called *Falling Man* shot by Associated Press photographer Richard Drew (Fig.3), bookend the events set in motion by 9/11.⁷ The space between the unidentified falling man and the unidentified prisoner is one haunted by the spectre of democracy.

According to Critchley, ethical experience begins only after the moral self experiences a demand to which approval is given *because* it is demanded. In other words, the self experiencing the demand “affirms that demand” (for example, ‘love thy neighbour’) and finds it to be good, with demand and approval arising together.⁸ Preferably, this experience leads to moral action of some description. In this instance, ethical experience was tied to a traumatic affect (discussed further in Section 1) arising from viewing the image in question, an image that pointed to political injustice. While certain writers, journalists and artists made work based on the publication of this image (for

5 “The Abu Ghraib Files: Chapter 4, Electrical Wires.” Mark Benjamin, Michael Scherer. *Salon.com*. Published 2006. http://www.salon.com/2006/03/14/chapter_4/.

6 Ibid.

7 Jennifer Pollard, “Seen, seared and sealed: Trauma and the visual representation of September 11,” *Health, Risk and Society* 13, no. 1 (2011): 98.

8 Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London, New York: Verso, 2007): 17.

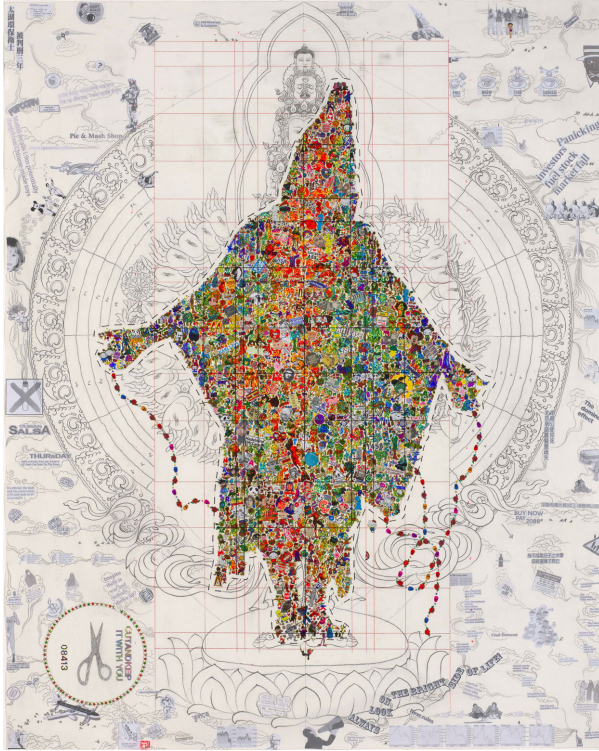


Fig.4 Gonkar Gyatso, *Angel*, 2007

example Errol Morris' 2008 documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* and Tibetan artist Gonkar Gyatso's 2007 work *Angel* (Fig 4)), for the most part its impact was short-lived, as other news items took its place. Ethical demand compelled a different response, involving the isolation of this image in order to reflect on its deeper implications through theory and praxis.

This reflection opened the door to noticing the problem of reification, which in turn became the theoretical lens focusing the research. Although the term is employed in the fields of Computer Science and Human-Computer Interaction (describing the translation of an abstract idea relating to a computer program into a specific data model or object within a programming language – “thingifying” the abstract), here it is used in the Marxist sense, as translated from the German *Verdinglichung*: “making into a thing”, “objectification” or, less commonly, “concretisation”. (For clarification, it should be noted that ‘thingness’ refers to the “quality or state of objective existence or reality”,

‘concreteness’ to a specific instance of a thing, or that which actually exists in the world, perceptible via the senses.) Reification asserts that the functions of capitalism commodify all social relations, transforming them into products by assigning a monetary exchange value (‘re’, an ablative for ‘res’, Latin for ‘thing’, and ‘fy’ from ‘-facere’, ‘do, make’). These products become independent of their producers, regulating human life, while humans in turn are objectified, behaving in ways dictated by the ‘thing-world’.⁹ Brian O’Connor neatly describes this process as “reducing potentially transformative possibilities of experience to control, self-regulation and self-delimitation.”¹⁰

Originating with Marx, attention was drawn to the concept by György Lukács in “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”, a chapter from his 1923 text *History and Class Consciousness*, where he perceives its totalisation as a problem specific to the age of modern capitalism.¹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer in turn seized on the idea in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, noting that “public life has reached a state in which thought is being turned inescapably into a commodity and language into celebration of the commodity”, a statement that reflects the contemporary preoccupation with online social networks.¹² Although, as Axel Honneth observes, reification lost its urgency as a diagnosis in the postwar climate, recently it has regained traction as an explanation for certain tendencies noted by scholars within the fields of ethics and moral philosophy. As examples, Honneth offers up economic alienation, the expanding reach of the sex industry and use of online dating services, where a form of self-reification is required.¹³

9 “Reification,” Ed. Tom Bottomore et al, in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). Accessed 30th September 2013. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/petrovic/1965/reification.htm>.

10 Brian O’Connor, *Adorno*. (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 16.

11 György Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1967). Accessed 30th September 2013. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm>.

12 Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), xiv.

13 Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18-19, 82-84.

Linked to reification, present within the research and key to understanding the impact of the Abu Ghraib image is Hegel's *Entäusserung* (intertwined with *Entfremdung*). *Entäusserung*, introduced in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is usually translated as alienation, but may also mean 'renunciation', 'parting with', 'relinquishment', 'externalisation', 'divestiture' or 'surrender'. This term refers to the creation of an object external to consciousness, via which consciousness comes to understand itself. In contrast, *Entfremdung* translates as estrangement, and, as Gavin Rae describes, refers to "a process or state where consciousness is separated from, at least, one of the aspects that are required for consciousness to fully understand itself."¹⁴ This differs with the externalisation peculiar to *Entäusserung*, which (unlike *Entfremdung*) may be used in reference to property. The research project is suffused with an experience of alienation and the subsequent processing of this experience via the construction of art works – objects external to consciousness.

To expose the motivations behind this project, Section One, *Reveal (we've lost control again)*, begins by uncovering the personal fascination with such images – starting with the tortured prisoner, but fanning out to encompass all imagery involving hooding and similar concealment of the face. In this section, the history of the image's creation is detailed, while trauma, the desire of images and Derrida's 'hauntology' are contemplated in an attempt to process its allure.

Section Two, *Conceal (under picture book smiles)*, details a selection of historical references to the hood that connect with its appearance as symbol or metaphor in the work. The origin of the hood as garment, its relationship to European religious ritual, American race-relations and its contemporary status as BDSM fetish object and contested signifier of Islamic oppression are reflected upon. This brief history is linked to a perception of the hood as a pivot, alternating between power and powerlessness dependent on its use and function.

¹⁴ Gavin Rae, "Hegel, Alienation and the Phenomenological Development of Consciousness," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012): 31.

The third section, *Protect (brave men run into captivity)*, briefly discusses the concept of the sublime, referencing Kant, Adorno and Groys, as a link to the theory of reification. Here the art of Belgian painter Michäel Borremans, whose work embodies this process and has been a major influence both during and prior to the period of the research, is discussed.

In Section Four, *Disappoint (now I'm ready to close my mind)*, Critchley's notion of political disappointment is related to the general state of melancholy perceptible in contemporary politics, both locally and globally. In a discussion of art's ability to question this state, an engagement with the writings of Jacques Rancière and the politically focused practice of Thomas Hirschhorn is undertaken, in a comment on the ethics and efficacy of his particular brand of relational art.

The final section, *Fail (it feels blind)*, analyses the practical component of the research. With a focus on the symbols, mediums and materials involved and their connections to the theoretical framework drawn upon in developing the end result, the changes in methodology wrought during the progress of the project are discussed. Interspersed throughout are images highlighting the processes undertaken to reach this point and generate the final work. The praxis also raises questions pertaining to the resulting aesthetic.

Somewhat against tradition, rather than neatly weaving together the threads articulated in previous chapters, the conclusion *Wrap (repeating useless gestures)*, shifts into a new space. A link between the theories discussed in earlier chapters and the outcome for praxis is articulated via the writings of Jane Bennett, Medical Hermeneutics' installations and selected aspects of the practice of Lygia Clark. Given its particular focus, the research's intention is to continue posing questions, rather than tilt at definitive answers.

Each section has as its heading a verb strongly tied to the content, linked with a line from a punk or post-punk song, some of which may be recognisable to the

casual reader. The DIY, anarchist methodology of the punk movement and many of the bands either directly responsible for or descended from its ethos, have continually provided fresh motivation and deserve recognition here. The title of the thesis owes its genesis to RETORT's (Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts) text *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, who in turn owe theirs to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Book 1*. This fragment of Milton's poem, read in a particular light, struck me as an appropriately poetic reflection on the research undertaken:

“And reassembling our afflicted Powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our enemy, our own loss how repair,
How overcome this dire Calamity,
What reinforcement we may gain from Hope,
If not what resolution from despare.”¹⁵

15 RETORT, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, vii.

Section One

Reveal (we've lost control again)

“1. Hooding, used to prevent people from seeing and to disorient [prisoners], and also to prevent them from breathing freely. One or sometimes two bags, sometimes with an elastic blindfold over the eyes which, when slipped down, further impeded proper breathing. Hooding was sometimes used in conjunction with beatings thus increasing anxiety as to when blows would come. The practice of hooding also allowed the interrogators to remain anonymous and thus to act with impunity. Hooding could last for periods from a few hours to up to two to four consecutive days.”¹⁶

—*International Committee of the Red Cross*

We read it as a figure, via the bare fact of hands, feet, and a portion of exposed skin around the upper chest. We see it in the fragile outstretching of arms, the slight lift of the heel as one foot touches the other; the listing of what must surely be a head to one side. Yet it is also a thing. Draped in dark fabric, posed atop a packing box functioning as plinth, electrical leads trailing away from its fingers toward an invisible power source. And that face, or rather, its absence, a black cone scarcely moulded to features we seek out in vain. What should be clearly human instead oscillates between subject and object, unable to solidify into either.

This is the image W.J.T. Mitchell has dubbed our “contemporary icon of facingness”, the photo of a prisoner taken while under interrogation and torture at Abu Ghraib in Baghdad, 2004.¹⁷ ‘Facingness’ here refers to an inbuilt theatricality or staging for the camera, as detailed by art historian Michael Fried, with the beholder often cast as an ‘alien influence’ or ‘theatricalising force’.¹⁸ In an article titled “Exposure: The Woman Behind the Camera at Abu Ghraib”, *New Yorker* journalists Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris describe a

16 Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 25-6.

17 W.J.T. Mitchell, “The Future of the Image: Rancière’s Road Not Taken.” *Culture, Theory and Critique*, no. 50 (2009): 139.

18 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1980), 153.

Velazquez-esque tableau involving two photographers.¹⁹ Staff Sergeant Chip Frederick, who attached electrical wires to the prisoner's fingers and asked him to spread his arms, took the first two photos. The third, taken by Specialist Sabrina Harman from further back, shows Frederick off to the side, looking at the images on his camera's LCD screen. Unwittingly or no, these amateur photographers shaped the iconic nature of the image; comparison with Christ's crucifixion and certain art historical references (for example Goya's series on the Spanish Inquisition, *Fig.5*) are inevitable.



Fig.5 Francisco Goya, *Caprichos No. 23: Aquellos Polbos*, 1797-99

Yet in contrast to the photographs documenting 9/11, or the ‘shock and awe’ tactics utilised while invading Iraq, the images from Abu Ghraib are not about creating spectacle. There was no plan to create digital idols that would occupy the world’s media for the days, weeks and years following their capture. Their release acted as an infection, bursting unwanted from beneath the skin of righteous U.S. and Allied imperialism, revealing a “naked, vulnerable, desiring body that is habitually covered by the system of social conventions.”²⁰ The images’ existence pierced the veil separating both ‘sides’ of the so-called War on Terror, exposing the compulsion behind the calls for imposition of democracy on the Iraqi peoples. Allen Feldman states that, “What eludes everyday sensory perception becomes socially available to experience in the prosthetics of media pictures and

19 “Exposure: The Woman Behind the Camera at Abu Ghraib,” Philip Gourevitch, Errol Morris. *The New Yorker*. Published March 4th, 2008. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/03/24/080324fa_fact_gourevitch

20 Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. 2008), 121.

reports.”²¹ Together with *Falling Man*, the photographs from Abu Ghraib dragged the question of the image back into the light. As critic Boris Groys notes, images of terrorism, violence and injustice complicate critiques of representation and the truth of the photographic or moving image.²²

What, precisely, is the charisma exerted by these images, that embed themselves into and catalyse praxis? Sitting safely inside a studio, inside the privilege of being white and Australian, makes the experience of finding one’s self in similar circumstances unlikely. And yet...they shook the foundations of a comfortable world view and lead to a questioning of the social basis that allowed for (and even encouraged) their existence. The etymology of the word ‘terror’ (from the Latin verbs *terreo* and *tremo*) drew Adriano Cavarero to describe it as “characterised by the physical experience of fear as manifested in a trembling body.”²³ So, terror shakes the body like an earthquake, perhaps even the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, deemed by Adorno to have influenced the first writings on the sublime (more on which later). It is interesting to consider the phrase ‘War on Terror’ with respect to this characterization.

When one has experienced terror, the resulting emotional or physical shock is often described as trauma. According to Roger Luckhurst, trauma is “that which cannot be processed by the psyche yet lodges within the self as a foreign body, dictating its processes and behaviours in opaque and alarming ways.”²⁴ This lodgment creates an amnesiac ‘gap’ within the subject, literally a wound exposing inside to outside, causing confusion between subject and object – as with the image of the detainee. It is arguable that the apparatus made visible by such images has the ability to inflict this type of injury, to generate a traumatic affect.

21 Allen Feldman, “On the Actuarial Gaze: From 9/11 to Abu Ghraib.” *Cultural Studies* 2, no. 19 (2005): 205.

22 Boris Groys, “The Fate of Art in the Age of Terror.” *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy*, Karlsruhe/Cambridge (Mass.)/London (2005): 970-977.

23 Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 4.

24 Roger Luckhurst, “Traumaculture,” *New Formations* Autumn, no. 50 (2003): 28.

This corresponds with Susan Sontag's "irrevocable wounding" when viewing photographs from Belsen, or Barthes' likening of the photographic punctum to a "piercing arrow".²⁵ And the possibilities for dealing collectively with these wounds are lessening. Sociologist Charles Turner suggests there has been a "rejection of the claims of collective belonging and obligation which a state or political community might make on individuals", "throwing individuals increasingly back upon themselves, and [making] all of us more sensitive to catastrophes of every sort."²⁶ This statement resonates with the notion of political disappointment, expanded upon below.

Of the images of torture at Abu Ghraib, Sontag has said: "The photographs are us. That is, they are representative of distinctive policies and of the fundamental corruptions of any foreign occupation..."²⁷ *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, Stephen Eisenman's 2007 text, explores how the iconic nature of the image may result from its close visual relationship to repeated motifs existing throughout Western art history – in effect, the image itself is colonised. In line with this attitude, as Brian Johnsrud points out, what is often overlooked in discussions of the U.S.'s reactions to Abu Ghraib are the detainees themselves. The U.S. has largely retained control over the images. As yet, there has been no independent Iraqi investigation, nor have we heard the detainees' stories. Confusion obscures the identity of the prisoner in that most infamous photograph, as more than one detainee received the same treatment. The body under the hood instead acts as a focus for ideological viewpoints: either a bio-political threat in need of containment, or the extreme endgame of an unjustified war.

This ideological objectification is intrinsic to the image's traumatic affect. Captivation by the image, at least in part, revolves around a desire to recapitulate that unknowingness, the forced sense of an objectified *Other*, that could also be *I*,

25 Luckhurst, "Traumaculture", 41.

26 Ibid, 38.

27 Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *New York Times Magazine* (May 2004), <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

representative of the repetition Freud associated with response to trauma.²⁸ This pull to identify is heightened by the ‘non-place’ of the prison interior, which, like the airport or chain store, is rarely specific to a particular location. The possibility of finding one’s self inside cannot be ignored.

Or, perhaps identification is caught up in the desire of the images themselves? The ability of an image to inflict this wound, this infection travelling via the host of mass media, chimes with W.J.T. Mitchell’s writings in *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. Mitchell attributes a vitalism to our dialogue with and about pictures, one that grants them leave from the walls of galleries or the pages of newspapers, questioning their intentions *as if* they were alive. He takes his cue from the “double-consciousness” evident in the language surrounding images, which conveys a mixture of magical and logical attitudes.²⁹ Regardless of whether people truly *believe* images are alive, they often act and speak as if they do. This attribution of desire (which is really a projection on) to an image seems especially pertinent to the digital, circulated at a speed and in a fashion closer to a virus than an “object to be saved.”³⁰ These particular images evoke a need to be, in my phraseology, ‘pulled out of speed’, to be slowed down, examined, considered and reconsidered, away from the overwhelming momentum of mass media. They should be allowed to ‘haunt’ us, to tell us what they need, and only by paying attention will we divine what they want us to know.

“To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept”, wrote Jacques Derrida, referring to his theory of ‘hauntology’, developed primarily in response to the fall of Communism around the globe.³¹ Central to this concept is the indefinable figure

28 Brian Johnsrud, “Putting the pieces together again: digital photography and the compulsion to order violence at Abu Ghraib,” *Visual Studies* 26, no. 2 (2011): 155.

29 W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005): 7.

30 Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others.”

31 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 161.

of the spectre. Unable to be fully present, the spectre can only be associated with what no longer exists, or with what is yet to be...hence the pessimistic connection of this ghostly presence with democracy. The technologies of reproduction employed by mass media “collapse both time and space”, allowing an image to remain with us long after the moment of its capture.³² The photograph of the hooded prisoner from Abu Ghraib acts as a spectral presence, never fully present but always hovering, a signifier of what has been and what may be again. This spectre haunts the space left by the traumatic wound, able to call attention to the void, but not to fill it.

Treating the subject within the image as an object for aesthetic contemplation directly reflects Adorno’s construction of society as a totalisation of reification, as carried by the figure and the symbolic nature of the hood. To paraphrase Frederic Jameson, the anxiety experienced when confronting the non-human is “comfortably replaced” by possessing and turning it into private property.³³ In line with the photographers at Abu Ghraib, this project deliberately seeks to transform and re-transform what was seen into yet another image.

32 Mark Fisher, “What is Hauntology?” *Film Quarterly* 1, No. 66 (2012): 19.

33 Frederic Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” *Social Text* 1, Winter (1979): 131.

Section Two

Conceal (under picture book smiles)

The physical and symbolic qualities of the garment known as the hood (and the act of ‘hooding’, as it is called) have acted as a catalyst for this project. Beyond its appearance in the Abu Ghraib image, the hood has a compelling history worth exploring, from the defining feature of a fairy-tale character, to its use in religious and pagan rituals, or as a contemporary fetish object within BDSM (Bondage & Discipline/Sadism & Masochism). It has the characteristic of partially or completely concealing the head (and sometimes upper body) of its wearer from the gaze, obfuscating the direction of the wearer’s eyes, hiding their facial features and expression. If the hood has eyeholes, the hooded have some control over their surroundings, and its donning acts as disguise or protection. If not, the hooded will experience sensory deprivation, which may include muffled hearing. Hence the hood contains the potential to shift power and control from the viewer to the viewed, and vice versa, via the fact of whether wearers can see, or have themselves chosen to don the garment. This shift is immediately apparent when considering the difference between the tortured prisoner and a costumed member of the Ku Klux Klan.

The word ‘hood’ originates from the Old English *hod*, translated as ‘covering’ or ‘hat’, related to the German *hut* and Dutch *hoed*. The hood as costume has its genesis in ancient Rome, where part of a cloak was drawn up to veil during the act of sacrifice.³⁴ The hood became a separate item of clothing during the middle ages, often complete with a fabric tail known as a *liripipe*.³⁵ The garment (in reality a hessian bag) seen in the photographs from Abu Ghraib relates visually to pointed hats and head-coverings, immediately calling to mind those worn by the Klan in order to conceal their identity and strike fear into victims.

Speculation surrounding the origin of the Klan costume suggests D.W. Griffith’s

34 Jennifer Heath, ed. *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2008), 104.

35 Francis M. Kelly, “Concerning Hoods,” in *Mediaeval Costume and Life* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd, 1931), 89-92.

1915 film *Birth of a Nation* (based on Thomas Dixon Junior's novel *The Clansman* (Fig.6)) as one possible source.³⁶ In 2004 Sontag called attention to the similarity between the Abu Ghraib photographs and lynching images taken from 1880-1930, primarily due to the perpetrators' appearance in the photographs with their victims.³⁷ In this case, however, the prisoners are disguised, while their abusers greet the camera with exposed, smiling visages.

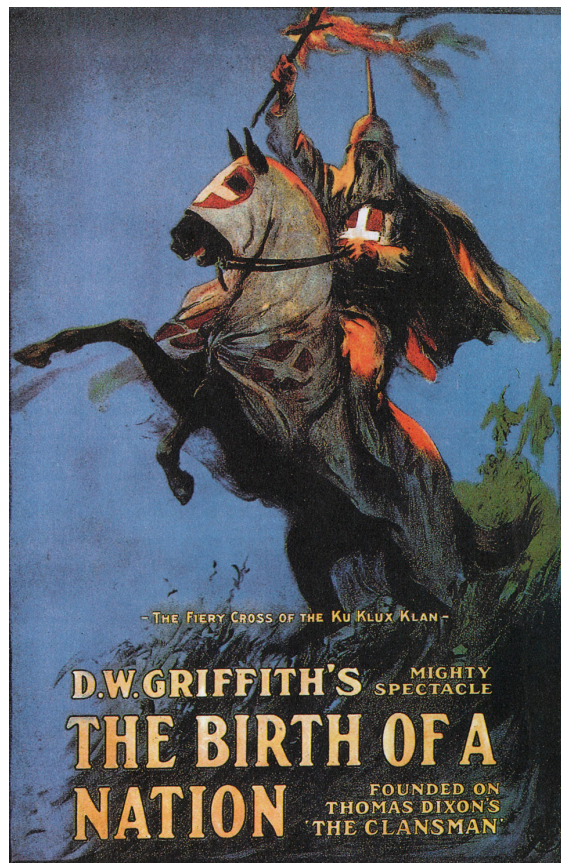


Fig.6 Epoch Film Co, *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915

The Klan hood may also locate its origins in the Spanish *capirote*, originally a cardboard cone with attached head covering, worn by flagellants and those condemned by the Spanish Inquisition. The pointed hat is believed to bring its wearer closer to God, and is worn by the Nazarenos (“penitent ones”) taking

36 “Revered and Reviled: D.W. Griffith’s ‘The Birth of a Nation,’” E.M. Armstrong, *The Moving Arts Film Journal*. Accessed 5th September 2013. <http://www.themovingarts.com/revered-and-reviled-d-w-griffiths-the-birth-of-a-nation/>.

37 Sontag. “Regarding the Torture of Others.”.



Fig.7 Marcelo del Pozo, *Nazzarenos San Esteban*, 2006

part in the Holy Week processions of Seville to this day (*Fig.7*).³⁸ Despite a similarity of appearance and a ritualistic purpose, wearers of the capirote have little in common with the intentions of the KKK. The Abu Ghraib garment, Klan costume and capirote also call to mind the medieval executioner's hood, worn to mark the performer of this unpleasant role, and as a form of protection. Traditionally shunned by society, executioners either operated as travelling journeymen or were obliged to disguise themselves to prevent retribution. Although the 'executioners' at Abu Ghraib remain unmasked, in many of the photos they are fully clothed while the prisoners' bodies are naked and vulnerable, signifying a hierarchy of domination.

As menacing as these costumes can be, a bondage suit (*Fig.8*), used to reduce its wearer to a sexual toy, is arguably even more disturbing. The bondage hood, or 'gimp' mask (from the offensive term used to describe a person with a physical disability), may or may not have eye, nose or mouth holes (or they may be controlled by means of zippers), and the suit



Fig.8 'Sensei George', *Bondage Suit*, 2007

³⁸ "Holy Week in Seville", Antonio M. Rueda. Accessed 23rd August 2013. <http://www.conocersevilla.org/fiestas/semanasanta/holy/index.html>.

often restricts access to the genitals. Occasionally rings or chains form part of the suit, for the purpose of restraint. The infamous image of Pvt. Lynndie England holding a leash attached to a prisoner calls this form of sexual restraint to mind, and as Eisenman notes, resembles artistic works such as Robert Mapplethorpe's 1979 photograph *Dominick and Elliot* (See Fig 4 & 5).



Fig.9 Cpl. Charles Graner, Pvt. Lynndie England with 'Gus' at Abu Ghraib, 2004



Fig.10 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Dominick & Elliot*, 1979

Many of the Abu Ghraib photos hint at eroticism of this nature, if, as Eisenman points out, we ignore the fact that such practices are defined as occurring between consenting adults.³⁹ And yet, even with consent, BDSM is arguably a performance of reification. The image of the mentally unstable prisoner known as 'Shitboy', named after his predilection for smearing himself with excrement (photographed in an ecstatic, crucifixion-like pose), hints at coprophilia, sexual pleasure derived from faeces.⁴⁰ (Fig 11) This prisoner may have internalised the objectification and humiliation deliberately inflicted upon him, or perhaps viewed the faeces as a means of repelling his gaolers.

39 Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*. See especially Chapter 2, "Freudian Slip", 18-41.

40 "Exposure: The Woman Behind the Camera at Abu Ghraib". Gourevitch and Morris. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/03/24/080324fa_fact_gourevitch



Fig.11 Prisoner known as Shitboy at Abu Ghraib, 2003

Referencing the erotic nature of the photographs calls to mind the stereotypical costume of the Witch, an historical and artistic figure bound up with notions of female power and sexuality. While difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the black witch's hat, consensus seems to suggest that peasant women were wearing the pointed hat long after it went out of fashion, and thus it became associated with rural victims of the European witch trials.⁴¹ It is hard not to draw associations between the witch hat and the forced wearing of the capiroto by victims of the Spanish Inquisition, as there are similarities between both "witch hunts". The tale of Little Red Riding Hood also has its origins in folk culture, originally relating to the social initiation of a young woman before Charles Perrault made Christian-oriented revisions in 1697. It was he who added the red hood, or *chaperon*, symbolising sin in the form of female desire (punishable by death in Perrault's version).⁴² The hood's link to the etymology of *chaperone* indicates it was regarded as a form of protection.

On the subject of the feminine, the *hijab*, the head-covering donned by Islamic women as a symbol of modesty and/or morality, has been the recent subject of

41 Lord Raglan, "The Origin of Folk-Culture," *Folklore* 58, no. 2 (1947): 257.

42 Jack Zipes, "A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood's Trials and Tribulations," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 7/8(1983-84): 80.

much heated discussion. Often worn in conjunction with the *niqab*, which covers the face, the hijab is a curious blend of control and protection. This fully-enveloping body covering popularly known as the *burqa* (Fig.12) has received divisive attention in the press and been subject to controversial policies, as well as conversations around female oppression. Thus the veil functions as a metaphor for the ever shifting “threat to national security”... “An Enlightenment inspired panoptical dream of control reproduces itself in the dialectic of the *veiling* and *unveiling* of hazards.”⁴³ (Emphasis mine.)



Fig.12 ‘Rama’, *Burqa*, 2010

Although the face-covering veil is now associated with followers of Islam (and thus Islamic fundamentalism), it also has a long history in the West. Christian women in Europe veiled until the 12th Century, nuns were veiled until the changes wrought by Vatican II, and fashionable women in the 1950s sported veiled hats.⁴⁴ Hence its construction as a political problem is obviously about more than just the garment. As Ayçe Lucie Batur reminds us, “when we consider the various types of headscarves as any other ordinary part of clothing like suits, saris, Jewish skullcaps, or jeans, which may have subtle or explicit regional, cultural,

or religious connotations, it becomes clearer that it is only through a process that clothing begins to signify contested meanings.”⁴⁵ Despite the common perception that women in the Arab world are forced to veil, in fact the opposite is often true,

43 Allen Feldman, “On the Actuarial Gaze: From 9/11 to Abu Ghraib,” *Cultural Studies* 19, no. 2 (2005): 206.

44 Heath, *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*.

45 Ayçe Lucie Batur, “The Mythology of the Veil in Europe: A Brief History of a Debate,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 1 (2012): 157.

and as Mohja Kahf points out, by focusing on clothing choices, deeper questions of oppression brought about by economics, politics and neocolonialism may be ignored.⁴⁶

Removal of clothing as a form of humiliation was frequently forced upon the prisoners at Abu Ghraib. In his photograph 'Gilligan' wears only a blanket, casually thrown around his shoulders as protection against the cold, and was warned "jokingly" that if he fell he would be electrocuted.⁴⁷ Taking photographs of the accused while naked was intended as a form of culturally specific humiliation, a technique sanctioned by Donald Rumsfeld in Guantánamo and Afghanistan.⁴⁸ The use of inherently racist methods of interrogation, and the American-style naming of the prisoners ('Gilligan', 'Shitboy' and 'Iceman') evidence the cultural imperialism and neocolonialist attitudes brought to bear in objectifying the prisoners. In this instance the act of hooding clearly demonstrates power and control over the hooded. All forms of protection have been stripped away by these representatives of democracy under capitalism.

46 Heath, *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. Chapter 1, "From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed", 27-43.

47 "Exposure: The Woman Behind the Camera at Abu Ghraib." Gourevitch and Morris. *The New Yorker*. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/03/24/080324fa_fact_gourevitch.

48 "The Abu Ghraib Files: Chapter 4, Electrical Wires." Benjamin and Scherer. *Salon.com*, http://www.salon.com/2006/03/14/introduction_2/.

Section Three

Protect (brave men run into captivity)

“That the human being is a victim of his situation and is not free is a conviction of mine.”

–Michael Borremans⁴⁹

The symbolism of the hood encompasses, as noted above, other physical forms of shrouding or obscuration, and lack of transparency surrounding information, its gathering and dissemination. The work of activists who resist control of information by the state, for example Julian Assange’s *Wikileaks* project and Edward Snowden’s exposure of the NSA (National Security Agency). The covert hacker network known as Anonymous, the members of the Chaos Computer Club (CCC), Europe’s largest association of hackers. Black Sites, Darknets, Black Jails and Ghost Detainees, the shadowy side of Suaraz-Villa’s ‘technocapitalism’. Black Ops, the Black Ships used as floating prisons by the Obama administration, black as a reference to the hidden and illegal.⁵⁰ That which is covered and dark, yet lit faintly by the cold grey light of ambivalence, echoes within the work.

The ‘War on Terror’, the resultant changes to civil rights and new covert tactics, call to mind a concept entwined with aesthetics, hinted at briefly in the first section. Adorno reinvigorated the 18th Century notion of the sublime, that curious admixture of beauty and terror, in his texts *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. His concept takes account of Marx, Lukács and the progression of modern history. For Adorno, the effect of the “natural” sublime as theorised by Burke and Kant was confronted and subsumed by the disaster of Auschwitz... transformed by ‘second nature’, those social relations that appear natural despite their constructedness, which is “concealed from existence.”⁵¹ The possibility of ‘administrative genocide’ demonstrated by Auschwitz and Hiroshima

49 David Coggins, “Michäel Borremans: An Interview,” *Art in America* March(2009): 91.

50 “U.S. accused of holding terror suspects on prison ships,” Duncan Campbell, Richard Norton-Taylor, *The Guardian*. Published 2nd June 2008.

51 Gene Ray, “History, Sublime, Terror: Notes on the Politics of Fear,” *Static*, no. 7, Catastrophe (2008): 2.

transformed all in its wake, generating “the permanent nexus of terror, profit and secrecy that is at the core of the post-1945 national security state.”⁵²

The sublime of ‘first nature’, according to Kant, requires a degree of safety in order for the subject to encounter it. Our contemporary experience – constant, ever-shifting threats, invisible enemies, hidden weapons of mass destruction and remote-controlled drones – allows for no such safety. According to Groys, we are witnessing a return of the ‘political sublime’, a term coined by Edmund Burke as a descriptor for the violence preceding the Enlightenment. Exemplified by public executions and the beheadings of the French revolution, the political sublime was “ugly, repelling, unbearable, terrifying.”⁵³ Videotaped beheadings from Iraq and the leaked footage of a U.S. helicopter gunning down civilians in Afghanistan serve as harsh illustrations of this point. These forms of the sublime are firmly linked to the systemic nature of reification.

The ‘thingness’ of the hood, the dehumanization evident at Abu Ghraib, the aggressive activities of the Bush and Obama administrations and the control and humiliation of BDSM games (or ‘scenes’) all connect with the totalisation of reification. Fittingly, Adorno characterises it as “a deathmask”, emphasising the suitability of facial concealment as symbol.⁵⁴ Yet it is equally interesting to commit an act of reversal and view facial concealment as protection against the process it symbolises.

In a culture where everything is increasingly ‘seen’ and digitally captured – via surveillance, social media and the stripping away of online freedoms – we contribute to this process, monitoring and regulating ourselves, altering our behaviour in response to constant evaluation. The choice to be unseen, anonymous or otherwise absent from ‘social networks’ attracts suspicion,

52 Gene Ray, “HITS: From Trauma and the Sublime to Radical Critique,” *Third Text* 23, no. 2 (2009): 140.

53 Groys, *Art Power*, 126.

54 Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel M. Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 30.

allowable only if required by the state for its own purposes. By not participating in this process of self-regulation, you are refusing to be part of the [con]census... “This [resistance is futile] is indeed the terrifying, sublime, spectacular message continuously repeated by the voice of power as such today. And if you do resist, we can deem you an enemy – and here’s what we do to them...”⁵⁵ It is the work of a Belgian figurative painter that best embodies reification, in part by enacting a quiet analysis of contemporary surveillance.



Fig.13 Michäel Borremans, *The Pupils*, 2001

They sit at an approximately table-sized slice of geometry, bloodlessly slicing off their own fingers. They examine a severed head, white fluid draining from one eyeball to another, in a curiously gruesome exchange. Their skin glistens under the painted light, white as the finest porcelain. They are indifferent to your gaze, absorbed in their own thoughts or processes. They never look back at you (*Fig.13*).

⁵⁵ Ray, “History, Sublime, Terror: Notes on the Politics of Fear”, 13.

Michäel Borremans' figures exist in a non-space, a non-time. Their clothing is oddly nonspecific, their environments composed of loosely painted shapes. Absurd tasks occupy their isolation, doomed to endless re-enactment in the still timelessness of the painting. Borremans has an equivalent fascination with covering the face, employing masks, pigments and plastic to alter surface and mute expression. His models submit to manipulation like the subjects of an experiment, deliberately reified. Jeffrey Grove suggests "the universe of Borremans' drawing is both a secret place for social analysis and a public arena for inserting the self within a critique of social processes."⁵⁶ This crafting of a performative persona for the artist is utilised even more fully within his slow-moving films, such as *The Feeding*, 2006 (Fig 14), in which two men in white coats slowly place their hands between hovering sheets of an uncertain white substance. Grove also states that Borremans' work "defies theorization", but I instead suggest that they are *pre-theoretical*, embodying concepts yet not impervious to analysis.⁵⁷

Borremans' bodies seem subject to forces beyond their control, compelled to perform by an unseen puppeteer, someone or thing that exists beyond the frame. This invisible manipulator, representative of the complex apparatus of capitalism, is ridiculed by the irrationality of the actions performed. The figures are unable to look away from their tasks, or question the means of their control. This absorption calls to mind Slavoj Žižek's comment that the appearance of an eye acts as a patch within a picture, causing a split in the viewer's relationship to an image.⁵⁸ By refusing eye contact with their audience, the paintings break with the genre of portraiture, becoming far more curious and unsettling, what Borremans describes as "a knife in the eye".⁵⁹

56 Michäel Borremans, *Whistling a Happy Tune* (Brussels: Ludion, 2008): 6.

57 Ibid.

58 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, Third ed. (New York, London: Routledge, 2008), 126-27.

59 *Michäel Borremans: A Knife in the Eye*, directed by Guido de Brunn (Antwerp: chromogenic, 2009), online broadcast.



Fig.14 Michäel Borremans, *The Feeding*, 2006

The figures are closer to *types*, exhibiting little individuality or free will. The strong ties to tradition and history in Borremans' painting style, the restricted palette and use of 35mm film in the moving works, serve to underline this disquieting quality. The figures' indifferent faces indicate a resignation to fate, an acceptance that nothing they could do would make a difference. What if, despite all wishes to the contrary, this were the wider case with art? As Rancière has wondered, if anyone knows how to overthrow capitalism, why haven't they already done it?⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Jacques Rancière, "Art of the Possible: Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in Conversation with Jacques Rancière," *Artforum International* 45, no. 7 (2007): 80.

Section Four

Disappoint (now I'm ready to close my mind)

“...[Reality] shows that because of an excessive diet of sleaze, deception, complacency and corruption, liberal democracy is not in the best of health. It shows, in my parlance, massive political disappointment.”⁶¹

—Simon Critchley

According to Simon Critchley, philosophy “begins in disappointment”, as a direct response to a feeling of failure or unfulfilled desire.⁶² Arguably, this is also the point at which a politicised art practice begins. In his text *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, Critchley details two distinct forms of disappointment, the religious and the political. Although each has implications for the other, for the purposes of this project, the focus remains on the political.⁶³ This form of disappointment is rooted in the daily act of living in a violent and unjust world, one that seems highly resistant to change. As evidence, look no further than the recent Australian federal election, which saw a record number of nonvoters and spoiled votes.⁶⁴

In the introduction to *Infinitely Demanding*, Critchley, with reference to Nietzsche, discusses two related forms of reaction to political disappointment: Active and Passive Nihilism. Active Nihilism is the destructive reaction to a perceived breakdown of meaning, and is concerned with an attempt to destroy the existing world in order to make way for the construction of another. The most obvious contemporary manifestation of this impulse is Al-Qaeda, whom Critchley describes as “this covert and utterly postmodern, rhizomatic quasi-corporation outside of any state control.”⁶⁵ Passive Nihilism, by contrast, turns inward, focusing on the self in an attempt to achieve “a mystical stillness, calm

61 Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, 6.

62 Ibid, 1

63 Ibid, 3

64 “Record dud vote tally”, Tim Colebatch, *The Age*. Published September 10, 2013. <http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2013/record-dud-vote-tally-20130910-2ti1g.html>.

65 Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, 5.

contemplation: ‘European Buddhism.’” It is obvious that for Critchley, neither would be an appropriately ethical response to the demand made by the Abu Ghraib images.

An obsession with images from the media archive, the conspiratorial and the hidden, and an interest in reification, could be viewed as a project of mourning, a passively nihilistic indulgence – an example of Benjamin’s “left melancholy” or Rosi Braidotti’s understanding of melancholia as the “dominant mood and ... mode of relation” in the contemporary political landscape.⁶⁶ It is evident that the modern political has a distinctly melancholic disposition – terms such as “non-participatory democracy” and “age of enforced consensus” point to it.⁶⁷ But this fails to explain an enduring obsession with particular symbols and theories, or the response of an artist who continues to make against the pessimist’s logic. Melancholia is characterised by passivity, the inability to act, and yet creation is always an action, a movement and response to events or situations. The history of melancholy is long and complex, and there is not enough space within this essay to sufficiently mine its past. Suffice to say, the connection between artistic and melancholic temperaments is plagued by the incommensurability of the passive creator.

How should an artist experiencing ‘political disappointment’ and the pressure of ethical demand, linked to an awareness of reification, proceed? Should they be restricted to the genre of ‘political art’, often seen as tiresome and overwrought, thrusting feelings of guilt or superiority onto its audience? Should they attempt social engagement, in the form of ‘relational art’, as a matter of course? A comment made by Australian curator Juliana Engberg, in relation to the Berlin Biennale, details problems that may arise when artists takes this path:

66 Rosi Braidotti, “On Putting the Active Back Into Activism,” *New Formations* 3, no. 68 (2009): 42-43.

67 Vered Maimon, “The Third Citizen: On Models of Criticality in Contemporary Art Practice”, *October* Summer, no. 129, (2009): 96.

“Art has been sidelined for the chimeric hopefulness of engagement and political energy...but these things are lacking...the revolution remains stubbornly quixotic and resistant to gentrification by art. The things that make art essential and potentially useful to the development of ideas, empathy and action are missing from this Biennale. Less didacticism and more humanity engaged through metaphor, narrative, and poësis might have had more impact.”⁶⁸

In contrast to community-minded movements, organisations or individuals, art is clearly not the most suitable tool for initiating social change, although it may participate. It is also troubling to consider collaborative practices, at their best intended to produce “dematerialized, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life” used as a tool of the state to engage and pacify citizens. Claire Bishop, a key academic in the field of relational art, states in reference to the rhetoric of New Labour that the government “[reduced] art to statistical information about target audiences and “performance indicators”, prioritising “social effect over considerations of artistic quality.”⁶⁹

Rancière has critiqued the Situationist International’s project of merging art and life (of which relational art is a direct descendent), as leading to an endless cycle of mourning for the death of art, and Adorno and Horkheimer observed that “[t]he whole world is passing through the filter of the culture industry” in the 1940s.^{70,71} None of this is to suggest that socially engaged art should be dismissed; rather that it is a limiting solution to the problems that arise in the crossover between art, politics and ethics. The focus on ethics at the expense of aesthetics affects art’s ability to disturb or delight.

Both Rancière and Groys believe art retains an importance beyond this perceived cycle of mourning, as a ‘space of possibility’ characterised by humour and play,

68 “Berlin Biennale: At the End of the Day ...So to Speak.” *Australian Centre for Contemporary Art*. Accessed June 4 2012. <http://accaartblog.com/2012/05/07/berlinbiennale-at-the-end-of-the-day-so-to-speak/>.

69 Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,” *Artforum International* 44, no. 6 (2006): 180.

70 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 9.

71 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 99.

and, within the museum, as an alternative means of observing history.⁷² While mourning in a traumatic age may be a vital operation, it is preferable to avoid the obituary column and join these theorists arguing for the necessity of art being granted a level of autonomy, and against the sidelining of aesthetic experience in favour of misguided attempts at activism.

Earlier, ineffectual efforts to re-present media events experienced as traumatic and alienating lead to the writings of Jacques Rancière. His theories provoked a realisation that much of what qualifies as ‘political art’ functions instead as a demonstration of art’s powerlessness. In his influential 2009 text *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière posits that political art often alienates its audience via didactic instruction (“Let me show you what you do not know how to see”) and the conferral of shame or guilt to the viewer. Informed by 18th Century pedagogue Joseph Jacotot, Rancière concludes that artists should instead work from an assumed position of equality with their audience, avoiding the belief that spectatorship is merely passive. Despite reservations regarding his optimistic use of the word ‘equality’, his questioning of whether spectatorship (and thereby ‘the spectacle’) is in fact the problem has been instrumental to the progression of this research.

By creating space for contemplation and reflection, making use of humour and play, art has the opportunity to disrupt what Rancière terms the “distribution of the sensible”. This distribution, controlled by the order of “politics as police”, determines what may be sensibly experienced by deciding “who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.” For Rancière, this demonstrates that aesthetics indeed exists at the heart of politics, which also operates in reverse. He advocates fictionalization, playfulness, a multidisciplinary approach, and the equality of forms inherent in what he terms the *Aesthetic Regime* in order to intervene in this distribution.⁷³ The

72 Boris Groys, “Art at War” in *Art Power*, 120-29.

73 Rancière . *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, 12-13.

Aesthetic Regime asserts the singularity of art, allows for forms old and new to coexist in the cause of disruption and ambivalence, subverting hierarchies and a linear narrative of (art) history. Using these methods, Rancière believes art is able to carve out a space of possibility, in which other ways of being are imagined, even when operating from within an institutional framework.

Groys, in his essay “The Logic of Equal Aesthetic Rights”, argues that while the art system and connected institutions may not possess autonomy, art itself does.⁷⁴ This occurs via the logic of contradiction (thesis negated by antithesis), which abolishes hierarchies of taste, and the acknowledgment of equality between different visual forms and mediums. He states that: “Art and politics are initially connected in one fundamental respect: both are realms in which a struggle for recognition is being waged.”⁷⁵ While his approach differs from Rancière’s, the outcome is markedly similar.

These ideas chime with Critchley’s notion of a politics of resistance, which he believes occurs in the interstitial spaces found *within* the state. Rather than being concerned with a consensus model of democracy or replacing one system with another, he advocates for dissensual meta-politics, organised around differing ethical demands. In his words, “such anarchy is the meta-political disturbance of the anti-political order of the police.”⁷⁶ Critchley’s take is an interesting juxtaposition, arriving as it does from an anarchist rather than Marxist/liberal viewpoint. His ethico-anarchic position suggests a way of actively responding to injustices we are compelled to feel “infinite responsibility” for, by side-stepping the state from within its confines.

These concepts of the Aesthetic Regime, of possibility and resistance (or perhaps more appropriately, *dissensus*) link to Adorno’s aesthetic theory, which critiques

74 Boris Groys, “The Logic of Equal Aesthetic Rights” in *Art Power*, pp13-22.

75 Ibid, p14.

76 Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, 129.

artistic representation designed to politically educate an audience as ‘crude propaganda’.⁷⁷ According to Adorno, an encounter with art should point to the irrationality of reification, inside of which experience has ‘withered’. In his words:

“The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination. They must assimilate themselves to the comportment of domination in order to produce something qualitatively distinct from the world of domination.”⁷⁸

While examining the practice of Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn (who has also worked with photographs from Abu Ghraib), my attention was caught by a graffito within his 2005 installation, *Anschool* (Fig.15). It reads: “I don’t make political art. I work politically. Working politically means working without cynicism, without negativity and without self-satisfaction.”⁷⁹ According to Hirschhorn, making art politically means to decide in favour of something, to create, to love your material and to invent your own guidelines. The artist claims that while one should be involved in and work with ‘the negative’, to *become* negative is something to be avoided.⁸⁰ Such statements, while slogan-like in and of themselves, suggest a resonance with the active positions detailed by Critchley and Rancière. Fittingly, *Anschool* was designed to engage with a critique of pedagogical power structures; whether it did so or not is something only visitors to and participants in the installation can truly answer.

In works such as 2008’s *Ur-Collage* (Fig.16), where fashion images are juxtaposed with photographs of dismembered bodies, Hirschhorn falls prey to the didacticism Rancière criticises in the work of other ‘political’ artists such as Hans Haacke. In his essay “What is Political About Hirschhorn’s Art?” Sebastian Egenhofer suggests that “through the extremism and aggressiveness of their

77 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 243

78 Ibid, 289.

79 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Establishing a Critical Corpus* (Zurich: Swiss Federal Office of Culture, 2011). 306-07.

80 “Doing Art Politically: What Does This Mean?,” Thomas Hirschhorn, *Art and Research* 3, no. 1 (2009/10), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v3n1/fullap01.html>.



Fig.15 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Anschool*, 2005

formal means the artist's installations attempt to retain contact with the political real while increasingly situated within an art-world context", and that *Ur-collage* achieves it "through enfolding horror into a perverted, decorative

form."⁸¹ Aggression, extremism and a situating of decoration as perversion are uncomfortably close to phrases used to describe the actively nihilistic methods of religious fundamentalists, and certainly Hirschhorn's engulfing installations function as attempts to create the world anew.

Hirschhorn's work reiterates in another key the surrealistic simultaneity of attraction and repulsion. His unconventional, often nonsensical attempts to socially engage while retaining authorship, in combination with his anti-authoritarian attitude, are both compelling and troubling. 'Authority' and 'author' share the same Latin root, *auctor*, from *augere*, 'increase, originate, promote', with the addition of the suffix '-ship' used to designate office or status. The moralising overtones and overwhelming, egocentric presence of his installations, which rhetorically embody an ethical position, leave little space for reflection or dialogue not dictated by the earnest will of the artist or the language of the artwork. Hirschhorn attempts humour but painfully fails to include himself in the joke. If society is indeed a totalisation of reification, then it is essential that the artist also be implicated.

⁸¹ Hirschhorn, *Establishing a Critical Corpus*, 121-22.

If reification is totalising, it follows that it is almost impossible to step beyond its confines by means of existing social relationships. As the distinction between high and low, or mass, culture, continues to rapidly unravel, practices equating art/life and art/work may unwittingly contribute to reification, leaving little space beyond its reach. Although the guards at Abu Ghraib were responsible for their crimes against the prisoners (who may also have been responsible for offences committed or planned against other individuals), they were equally unable to



Fig.16 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ur-Collages (detail)*, 2008

escape the expanding reach of the military-industrial complex and its negative social effects.

Rather than appoint blame or attempt to educate on specific issues, it seems more vital at this time to reflect on the whole of the problem, particularly from within its confines. According to Rancière, the artist is a *proletarian*, in the sense that

they exist outside of any caste, in the *inbetween*, and as such embody the space betwixt identities without assuming them. The artist is not the figure in the photograph from Abu Ghraib, but is able to “draw consequences” by identifying with this ‘anybody’, or rather, their image.⁸²

82 Jacques Rancière. “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization.” *October* Summer, no. 61 (1992): 61.

Section Five

Fail (how does it feel? it feels blind)

“We seem to have enormous difficulty in accepting our limitedness, our finiteness, and this failure is a cause of much tragedy.”⁸³

–Simon Critchley

Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil...one more for good measure...touch no evil. While considering obsessions with concealment and protection, as represented by the hood, an unconscious exploration of other senses began. Balloons, partially or completely deflated, masks, gloves, safety goggles, coveralls, paintings of exposed, melting hands and feet have all made an appearance (See *Figs. 17, 18 & 20* for examples). Via acts of anthropomorphism, these objects reference parts of the body and autonomic bodily functions. Living organisms are connected by a need to respire and exist within bodies whose internal structure dictates sensible experience, regardless of outward form or degrees of difference in perception. Reification’s effects are noted at the level of the body, as:

“[t]he more complex and sensitive the social, economic, and scientific mechanism, to the operation of which the system of production has long since attuned the body, the more impoverished are the experiences of which the body is capable.”⁸⁴

And contemporary forms of torture work on all these senses “render[ing] risk perception haptic, tactile, penetrative and transformative” as they seek out the loopholes in international conventions protecting prisoner rights.⁸⁵ In the work, these body parts and functions are



Fig.17 Sarah Bunting, *Safety Goggles*, 2013

83 Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, 1.

84 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 28.

85 Feldman, “On the Actuarial Gaze: From 9/11 to Abu Ghraib”, 209.

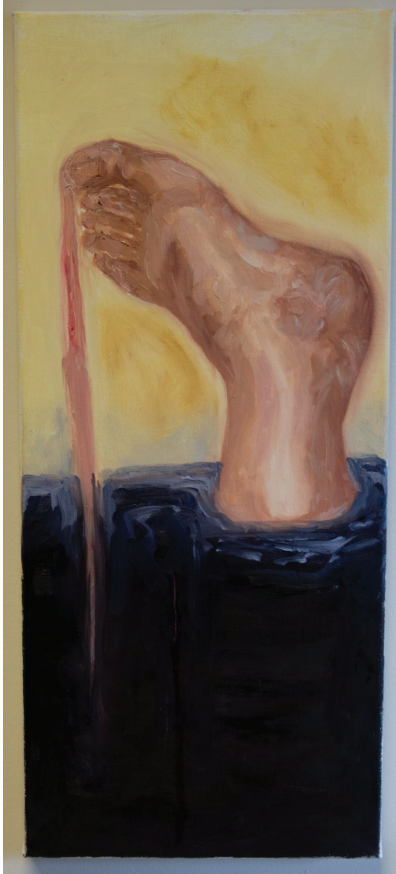


Fig.18 Sarah Bunting,
Best Foot Forward, 2012



Fig.19 Sarah Bunting, *Respirator*, 2013

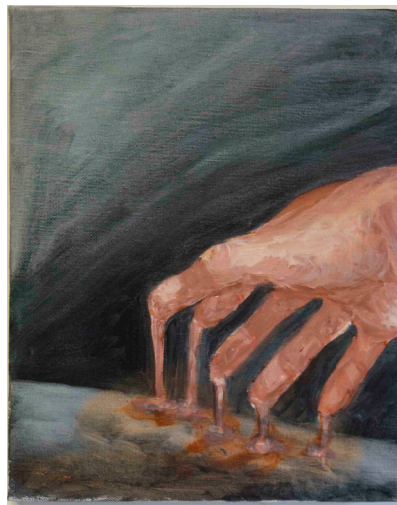


Fig.20 Sarah Bunting, *Sleight of Hand*, 2013

objectified twice or thrice over, be they goggles acting as both sculpture and image, or the mask that hangs on the wall and appears inside a painting. This treatment expresses obsessiveness, not just with the objects, but with an exploration of the image and the ways in which its repetition affects perception and emotion.

Repeatedly appearing as both subjects and objects, the hazard suit and respirator conceal, yet also protect against a toxic environment (*Figs.19 & 21*). The respirator allows life-giving oxygen to reach the wearer while reducing the inhalation of dangerous chemicals. Together, they conceal facial features and result in clumsy cyborgs, but are a requirement for dealing safely with a variety of dangers. Without them, the body underneath is vulnerable, yet the need to wear them



Fig.21 Sarah Bunting, *Compliance (detail)*, 2013

directly expresses this vulnerability. The appearance of protective wear – the hood and mask could also been seen in this light – in the work exists as a metaphor for the ‘bubble’ of art floating precariously through an otherwise pernicious social space, referencing environmental degradation and natural disasters. Acts of concealment erect a safety zone of anonymity, something difficult to find while under constant scrutiny. Inside these garments, is it possible for communication to occur? The gaze is obscured from view, pushing the observer into a state of unknowingness. Masculine

or feminine? Human or robot? Beauty or horror? Subject or object? The problem stays unsolved, the ground refusing to settle. Viewing the body as a strange unknown ultimately changed the direction of the praxis.

The project began with a focus on painting as sole outcome, a medium that called for constant questioning and reassessment in terms of its fit with the theoretical framework. In the first year, between thirty and forty oil paintings were generated in an attempt at honing technique and method. But the paintings became cluttered and overly programmatic (see *Fig.22* for an example) and the use of colour fought against the subject matter. Melancholy saturated the work, but this direction of research, although interesting, was not commensurate with the politicised focus of the practice. The energy and freshness in the mark-making was lost, as inexperience fumbled toward knowledge.



Fig.22 Sarah Bunting, *Od/dity/yssey*, 2013

Smaller paintings of isolated objects felt stronger, but alone failed to have impact (Fig. 23 & 24) and were tethered to re-presentation of their photographic origins. While testing the paintings by varying their relationship to each other, they hung on one wall of the studio, source material and objects of interest occupying others, including a vintage East German gas mask (Fig.25), disposable protective coverall and antique abacus. Less purposefully displayed were collected postcards, and handwritten notes containing sections of texts copied from articles or books. A gold-coated log, a man huddling under a ceiling draped with light bulbs, a positive slogan and a longer piece quoting James Joyce, repeating the suffix 'fall' exactly nine times.



Fig.23 Sarah Bunting, *The Monument*, 2013



Fig.24 Sarah Bunting, *Respite*, 2013

This collection resonated in a way that the paintings alone did not. It seemed to manifest what the painted space had fallen short of creating, a confluence of uncanny objects from various times and places, gathered and wilting under the force of a toxic environment or system. The addition of short texts resurrected the black humour

missing from the earlier paintings and enhanced the oddness of the objects and images. In light of this new understanding, a shift toward constructing an installation involving multiple mediums was warranted.

Contemplating facial concealment, protective wear and their symbolism, led to a process of attempting to transform the artist's body into an object/image. Earlier oil on paper experiments attempted this, but with a psychological/melancholic focus rather than an awareness of deliberate reification (Figs.26 & 27). The source material was undeveloped and the paintings lacked confidence, yet there were elements that fed later efforts. At this stage, the medium of photography was subordinate to the painting and not considered in its own right. As reification and a relationship to the Abu Ghraib media image asserted primacy, it became important to create photographic sources that could stand alone as separate works.



Fig.25 Sarah Bunting, *DDR Gas Mask*, 2013



Fig.26 Sarah Bunting, *Grasping*, 2012

A series of in-studio photo-shoots were undertaken, using the artist's body in conjunction with various synthetic props, some of which had made an appearance in earlier paintings or photographs. Referencing Borremans, the face and parts of the body were concealed by safety goggles, gloves, the gas mask, respirator, and glossy black fabric. Silver Mylar emergency blankets,

representative of protection, were also used, attractive thanks to the reflective surface's ability to repel the gaze. The setting for these images was deliberately basic, using only what was available in the studio – walls, floor, stretched canvas, a trolley, fluorescent lighting – and while exposure and contrast were adjusted in post-production, the body and surrounds were not retouched. Without assistance, the images were taken using a timer, allowing for unpredictable results and interesting errors.



Fig.27 Sarah Bunting, *Two-faced*, 2012

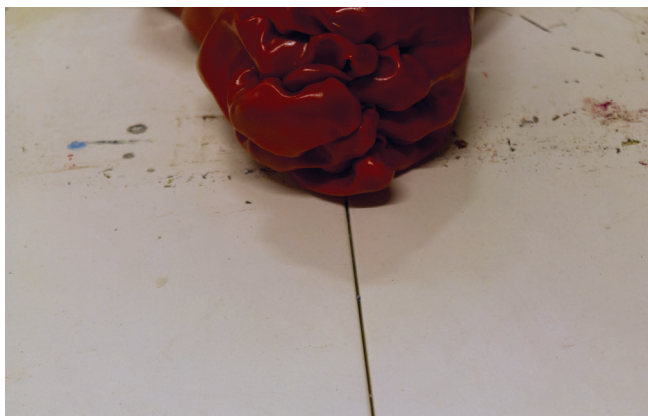


Fig.28 Sarah Bunting, *Safe Hands 2*, 2013



Fig.29 Sarah Bunting, *Emergency Body 1*, 2013



Fig.30 Sarah Bunting, *Emergency Body 2*, 2013



Fig.31 Sarah Bunting, *Hidden Body 4*, 2013



Fig.32 Sarah Bunting, *Body/Thing 1*, 2013

Unintentionally, certain of these photographs called to mind the eroticism of the Abu Ghraib images, some drawing close to the oscillation between subject and object as desired (*Figs.28* through *31*). In a continuation of the process, digital collages (*Figs.32 & 33*) were created from a selection of the photographs, morphing the organic and inorganic into a complex blend of the two. These functioned both as stand-alone works and as references for new paintings. Simple moving-image pieces were generated in conjunction with the photographs, as an expansion of



Fig.33 Sarah Bunting, *Body/Thing 2*, 2013

the reference to mass media and to the vocabulary of the project. The paintings regained freshness as part of an installation and continuation of this working method. The new methodology fed back into the content of the paintings in unexpected ways, altering the approach taken to make them. Emphasising the use of different mediums in subsequent iterations, with the requirement of changing the image each time, helped free the paintings from the confines of representation.

To introduce further elements of irrationality to the project, a return was made to the creation of text-based works. While pieces made prior to this project had been hand-painted, in this instance other methods were explored as experiments in undermining the rational. Pigments able to be destroyed or damaged in some fashion, so as to render the text less legible (*Fig. 34 & 35*), fragmented lettering and digital applications were utilised in an effort to render visible the deficient nature of propaganda across the political spectrum. The texts were applied to various surfaces, drawing on the aesthetics of protest, bureaucracy, cryptography and graphic design.



Fig.34 Sarah Bunting, *Locate your oracles (detail)*, 2013.

Beyond the framework of the research, what these elements had in common was a state of ‘unnaturalness’ and failure to resist subjection to this state. Whether the failure of direct action, as detailed in the introduction, the failure of capitalism or the failure to oppose it, the failure of painting or the failure of art as a whole, this idea pervaded the entire project, including the overall aesthetic. By fragmenting, drooping, hanging, lying, deflating, concealing, decaying, darkening or sinking, the works embodied futility. Yet there was a positive, darkly humorous side to



Fig. 35 Sarah Bunting, *I am appropriating*, 2013

this failure, resulting in production rather than destruction or dematerialisation. This posed another question: can making art, in the form of objects, comment on reification with any success?

The word ‘failure’ descends from the Latin *fallere*, ‘deceive’, and its antonym ‘success’, from *succedere*, ‘to come after’. Combining the two proposes that success is only possible *after* or *because of* failure, and that failure itself may not be what it seems. To paraphrase Adorno’s beloved Samuel Beckett, to fail better, and fail joyfully, is an (irrationally) appropriate response to what an unnatural notion of ‘success’ has wrought. As Jane Bennett affirms, “sense becomes nonsense and then a new sense of things.”⁸⁶ To fail deliberately points to the absurdity of adhering to the rational within a reified society.

⁸⁶ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 6.

Conclusion

Wrap (repeating useless gestures)

“Verily, I may have done this and that for sufferers; but always I seemed to have done better when I learned to feel better joys.”⁸⁷

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Experiments with deliberate reification, amidst awareness of its ultimate futility, expanded into a viable working method, leading to significant advances in the research. Informing the new methodology were the installations of ‘Moscow Conceptualists’ Medical Hermeneutics, certain aspects of the practice of Lygia Clark, and Bennett’s text *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics*. This text suggested a link between alienation and art making, colouring in gaps left blank by Critchley et al. The aforementioned artists are introduced in the conclusion as they point the way forward for the future of this project beyond what has been documented here.

Medical Hermeneutics (also known as Inspection Medical Hermeneutics), a group formed in Moscow in 1987, consisted of three artists, Sergei Anufriev, Yuri Leiderman, and Pavel Pepperstein. According to Pepperstein, the group produced “a thick mumble, white noise and other incomprehensible, unclear things” via installations and performances that focused on language, meaning and the opening up of the Soviet Union to the West (‘Glasnost’).⁸⁸ A reproduction of their 1991 installation *Amber Room* (referring to Tsarina Catherine II’s supposed hiding place from enemies (Fig.36)) at London’s Raven Row, was described by reviewer Martin Herbert as “dissension narrated through symbolic poetics.”⁸⁹ The smiling faces drawn on apples and oranges refer to Kolobok, a character from Russian folklore known for constantly running away, a nod to the avoidance of

87 Quoted in Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, Princeton, NJ/Oxfordshire, UK: Princeton University Press, 2001, 12-13.

88 “Inspection Medical Hermeneutics”, Pavel Pepperstein, *Raven Row*. Published 17th December 2009. <http://www.ravenrow.org/texts/19/>.

89 Martin Herbert. “Reviews: UK: A History of Irritated Material.” *Art Review*, May (2010): 116.



Fig.36 Inspection Medical
Hermeneutics, *Amber Room*, 1991.

interpretation.⁹⁰ The playful irrationality and pseudo-scientific nature of the group's installations hint at potential scenario- or event-based outcomes for the work.

Medical Hermeneutics' often incomprehensible works, embodied by randomly chosen objects signifying private desires, "demonstrate the collapse of all explanation, all interpretation, all justification".⁹¹ This collapsing and blurring of the personal with the ideological chimes with the performance of failure, and

reflects the transformation of the Abu Ghraib image into a departure point for the creation of work. The "aestheticisation of

art theory" within their practice illustrates a loss of faith in its explanatory power, foregrounding the situation of art under the Communist regime (and in general). This aestheticisation and resultant multiplicity of interpretations suggests a possible set of responses to the contemporary situation.

Aspects of the practice of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark inspired a consideration of the change in methodology in yet another light. Beyond a resonance with the materiality of her work utilising fabric, masks and hoods, Clark's interest in the "participant-beholder's" bodily interaction with her objects parallels concerns of this praxis, as does her conception of the artwork as a living thing.⁹² *The I and You: Clothes-Body-Clothes-Series* and *Sensory Masks* (Fig. 38 & 39) of 1967 employed

90 "Inspection Medical Hermeneutics", Pavel Pepperstein, <http://www.ravenrow.org/texts/19/>.

91 Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press), 61.

92 Susan Best, *Visualizing Feeling: Affect and the Feminine Avant-Garde*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 9, 52-55.

different materials, sensory deprivation, aromatic smells and sounds in order to generate ‘first experiences’ for those drawn to participate in their creation, which could only occur when the objects were activated. Hence “the body of the participant becomes the site of...aesthetic investigation.”⁹³ The repression, altering or heightening of sensations resisted alienation by pulling attention back to an experience of the body.



Fig.37 Lygia Clark, *The I and You: Clothes-Body-Clothes-Series*, 1967

In donning various objects and materials, the sensory experience is changed, symbolically connecting with what is pointed to by the Abu Ghraib photograph. Yet in a break with Clark, the artist is the spectator-come-participant, in a co-creative dialogue with the image. Although the awareness desired is one of the collective body under reification, rather than as a site of private experience, this is always present, in conversation with the image and other objects. This connects with Mitchell’s ideas regarding the desires of images, and the ways in which they seek to transfix and spread, processes Mitchell genders as explicitly feminine.⁹⁴ Clark’s oeuvre provides a strong example of work that treads the fine line between the political and the aesthetic, resonating with the words of Adorno:

“If it is essential to artworks that they be things, it is no less essential that they negate their own status as things, and thus art turns against art. The totally objectivated artwork would congeal into a mere thing, whereas if it altogether evaded objectivation it would regress to an impotently powerless subjective impulse and flounder in the world.”⁹⁵

93 Butler, *Visualizing Feeling: Affect and the Feminine Avant-Garde*, 47.

94 Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, 35-36.

95 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 175.



Fig.38 Lygia Clark, *Sensory Masks*, 1967.

Although this conclusion implies future directions, there is a circularity to the overall argument, beginning and ending with a response to alienation. In the introduction, it was noted that a sense of alienation from prior assumptions drew

attention to the totalisation of reification. This same sense also resulted in the motivation toward a politicised art practice. Central to understanding this response is Bennett's concept of enchantment, and a re-vision of *Entäusserung* that comes closer to 'relinquishment' or 'surrender'.

In articulating the idea of 'ethical demand', Critchley notes the potential for this demand to go unheeded. He observes that sublimation via tragedy may be occasioned by the infinite nature of such demands, and suggests humour as a way of bearing up under their weight. Although an important connection is drawn between ridicule and self-knowledge, there is no convincing discussion of what might energise the shift from demand into action.

Bennett suggests that the missing ingredient in such "disenchantment tales" is joy, elicited by those moments of transfiguration that occur *within the confines* of everyday life [emphasis mine].⁹⁶ This perception obviously parallels Critchley's call for an interstitial meta-politics. Joy relates to the drive to make, touched on in *Section Three*, not as a manic opposition to melancholy, but as reflection of a deep attachment to the world. Underlying the traumatic affect of the Abu Ghraib image is the sense that opening up to a new understanding of the world does not necessarily void it of enchantment...why practice, otherwise? By, in effect,

96 Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, 12.

‘crossing’ with the image (a term Bennett employs in place of hybridisation, for its more positive connotations), an opening up to the wider world of matter and agency occurs.⁹⁷ As they dissolve and transform into something new, imagined hierarchies between subject, object and image are flattened and reconsidered. Rather than being thought as traumatic, repetition may signify something else, an intensive Deleuzian spiralling giving birth to enchanted new forms... “From the twists and swerves of spiral repetitions are born new molecules and new viruses, but also new images, new identities, and new social movements.”⁹⁸

Art will not solve problems of political injustice, or reverse the torture of the detainee. It may point to the spectres in the void, but is not equipped for performing exorcisms. Yet, acceptance of this, and opening up to possibility via practice and aesthetic experience, may shift perception, moving alienation and frozen apathy toward generosity and action:

“[...] the essence of a dream is the very fact that its essence is not fixed, it has no definite form and it is not institutionalised. For it is only longings, desires and indefinable wishes that can be genuinely collective.”⁹⁹

97 Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, 31.

98 Ibid, 39-40.

99 Boris Groys, *Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*, 2.

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Appendix

Exhibition Documentation: List of Images (CD located inside back cover)

All work © Sarah Bunting 2013, photography by Danica Chappell.

- 01.** Installation view
Oil on canvas and linen
Dimensions variable
- 02.** *Inflation I*
Oil on canvas
25 × 20cm
- 03.** *Inflation II*
Oil on canvas
25 × 20cm
- 04.** *Respite*
Oil on linen
30 × 20cm
- 05.** Installation view
Giclée prints on archival paper
Dimensions variable
- 06.** *Safe Hands II*
Giclée print on archival paper & Artmount
10 × 6in
- 07.** *Safe Hands I*
Giclée print on archival paper & Artmount
12 × 8in
- 08.** *Applause*
Oil on board
60 × 55cm
- 09.** *Sleight of Hand*
Oil on linen
20 × 30cm
- 10.** *DDR Gas Mask*
Found object
- 11.** Installation view
Giclée prints on archival paper
Each framed

12. *Body/Thing I*

Digital collage

11 × 22in

13. *Body/Thing II*

Digital collage

11 × 22in

14. *Thing/Body I*

Oil on linen

0.9 × 1.2m

15. *Thing/Body II*

Oil on linen

0.9 × 1.2m

16. *DDR Gas Mask*

Giclée print on archival paper, Artmount

12 × 18in

17. Installation view (*scale & lighting*)

Dimensions variable

18. Installation view

Giclée prints on archival paper, straight pins

Each 4 × 6in (printed area)

19. *Emergency Body*

Giclée print on archival paper

4 × 6in

20. *Hidden Body*

Giclée print on archival paper

4 × 6in

21. *The Monument*

Oil on linen

60 × 59cm

21. Installation view

Giclée prints on archival paper, oil on linen

Dimensions variable

23. *In Safe Hands* (installation view)

Digital video on LCD screen, enamel spraypaint on plaster and cardboard

Dimensions variable

24. Installation view

Dimensions variable

25. Installation view

Dimensions variable

26. *Last Night I Had a Dream that Something Happened* (Installation view)

Satin, UV-activated synthetic polymer paint, blacklights, cardboard, plaster,
enamel spraypaint and found objects

Dimensions variable

27. Installation view

Dimensions variable

28. Installation view

Dimensions variable

29. Installation view

Dimensions variable