

## The destruction of art

*Solvent form* examines art and destruction—through objects that have been destroyed (lost in fires, floods, vandalism, or, similarly, those that actively court or represent this destruction, such as Christian Marclay’s *Guitar Drag* or Chris Burden’s *Samson*), but also as an undoing process within art that the object challenges through form itself. In this manner, events such as the Momart warehouse fire in 2004 (in which large holdings of Young British Artists (YBA) and significant collections of art were destroyed en masse through arson), as well as the events surrounding art thief Stéphane Breitwieser (whose mother destroyed the art he had stolen upon his arrest—putting it down a garbage disposal or dumping it in a nearby canal) are critical events in this book, as they reveal something about art itself. Likewise, it is through these moments of destruction that we might distinguish a solvency within art and discover an operation in which something is made visible at a time when art’s metaphorical undoing emerges as oddly literal. Against this overlay, a tendency is mapped whereby individuals attempt to conceptually gather these destroyed or lost objects, to somehow recoup them in their absence. This might be observed through recent projects, such as Jonathan Jones’s *Museum of Lost Art*, the Tate Modern’s *Gallery of Lost Art*, or Henri Lefebvre’s text *The Missing Pieces*; along with exhibitions that position art as destruction, such as *Damage Control* at the Hirschhorn Museum or *Under Destruction* by the Swiss Institute in New York. In this sense, destroyed art emerges as a sort of ruin or oddity in which one might wander in the present; however, it might also point to the object as something fatal rather than simply a collection of or an attempt to revive the lost for posthumous consideration. From this vantage, *Solvent form* investigates work by artists such as Jean Tinguely and Gustav Metzger, while expanding to art in a more general sense through considering works by artists such as Agnes Martin, Rachel

Whiteread, Thomas Hirschhorn, Jeremy Blake, Louise Bourgeois, Urs Fischer, Pavel Büchler, and Tracey Emin (again within the context of the Momart fire). In *Solvent form*, perhaps, there is an absurdity in grouping art together merely because it has been destroyed—but it reveals a resonance. In this sense, the book is neither an art historical document nor even a proposal for bringing together remnants of memory and remainders into some sort of exhibition. Instead, its aim is to investigate what it means when art is destroyed.

Others have similarly considered destruction or undoing as a kind of trick within the inception of a work of art. In an essay on *The Brothers Karamazov*, Jean Genet proposed that every act “means one thing *and* its opposite.” The act for Genet implies both the thing but also its opposite, so that creation in form similarly implies a destruction, as he warns: “everyone expects a miracle, and the opposite occurs.”<sup>1</sup> From this, he concludes:

Having read [*The Brothers Karamazov*] in this way it now seems to me that any novel, poem, painting, or musical composition that does not de-destroy itself—by which I mean, that is not constructed as a blood sport with its own head on the chopping block—is a fraud.<sup>2</sup>

While this is the sort of proclamation that gets the blood racing, there is also something more nuanced in our understanding of art that Genet is missing. Art, in its inception, implies its own undoing with the cutting of its own head; and this apart and aside from its impulse or intention—conscious or not—through its construction, as Genet stated, separately from its author or artist. What I’m suggesting here is not simply a trick or booby-trap that an artist might build into the works, but instead an energetic revelation of what is at risk or has already disappeared in the endeavor. With this, any art form that is not in a sense undoing or cultivating a destruction of sorts, in Genet’s words reveals a *fraud* (also an undoing)—and that is what we see here. For example, it might appear a fatal trick when one looks to an artist such as Michael Landy and his *Art Bin*, in which he asked artists to discard works they were dissatisfied with in a massive bin. Or similarly Jack Kerouac’s attempts to construct *On the Road* as one long scroll of paper fed through his typewriter so that he could frenetically type it in a stream of consciousness, exactly as it happened and without pause. Kerouac’s scroll became a nightmare for his publisher, and it was ultimately revised and written again so that there remains no definitive condition.

In *Solvent form*, the intent is not to get caught up in how a specific artist (or, as Genet suggests, novelist, poet, painter, or composer) might choose to construct art to mimic this destruction or contrive it as a booby-trap—as this emphasis tends to cast *destruction* more as a parlor trick (the work of a didactic clock builder)—or as a clever device a writer or artist constructs and employs. The more accurate observation is that like the shipwreck, which is implied with the creation of the ship, there is a similar destruction implied in the art object itself.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, Landy's *Art Bin* doesn't offer this destruction, but a sleight of hand where the work demonstrates the performative action of absorbing the failure and destruction of others into a redemptive act—masking destruction and instead replacing it with compensation. As with the story of Kerouac's scroll, we are not concerned with the machinations of how an artist attempts to craft a destruction (creating a bin for others to cast their failures into) or the expectations of a publisher, as perhaps the most salient detail of the Kerouac story is that the final section of the scroll was destroyed—apparently eaten by a dog named Potchky.<sup>4</sup> These are the primary destructions somehow implied in the work of art.

In this manner, this book introduces ideas from Bataille and Paul Virilio (the shipwreck that resides within the ship's invention) and their conceptions of the *negative miracle* and *reverse miracle*, which are correlated to understand a method in which absence makes something visible while simultaneously revealing an impulse within art. *Solvent form* aims to determine what may be perceived through the destruction of art, how we understand it, and, further, how these destructions might be linked to some general failure in art that allows us to see through instances when art appears to trip on a rug.<sup>5</sup> Expanding upon this, the text takes cues from literary and varied sources, such as Perec's *Life a User's Manual*—in which the character Bartlebooth spends twenty years painting seascapes of various ports only to spend the next twenty attempting to erase them. Similarly, McCarthy's *Remainder*, in which an unnamed protagonist re-enacts obsessive scenarios following an accident; Mann's *The Magic Mountain* as an act of withdrawal from the daily flow and decay of the world; or the amassed warehouses of *Citizen Kane*. These chartings explore art and its destruction through accounts in the media and newspapers, interviews, and cinematic examples. Amid this accumulation, they weave a narrative of art through events that intermingle with Jean Baudrillard's ideas on disappearance, Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the image (or *imago* as votive that keeps present the past, yet also burns), and Giorgio Agamben's notion of art as an attempt to make the

moment appear permeable. With this, as Bataille proposes, art emerges from a shipwreck with the moment in which assumptions, expectations, or what appears fixed are ultimately undone. Likewise, these destructions are considered through narratives such as Sarah Winchester obsessively building the Winchester Mansion in San Jose, California, as an attempted *house that never ceased*. Alongside these attempts to construct an undoing, and amid a volatile remainder in art, these events provide a metaphoric consideration of real and emblematic events in the world that underscore ideas of destruction and solvency in art. Through this, our understanding of art emerges not as a timeless and fixed entity, but as one that both burns and is burning—putting forth and pulling down; an art that is perpetually shipwrecked, undone, and given form through this moment inhabited.

With these incidents, the destruction of art absorbs, catching us unaware, yet amassing again in newspapers and online, accumulating in books, or gathering as an impetus for exhibitions—capturing popular imagination and calling a bluff, so that it might appear as if destruction *itself* is having a moment (or perhaps always is). But what is it that may be perceived through the destruction of art? In conversation, Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer suggested that art had perhaps reached a point where it was not up to the challenge before it, such that art expanded and sped up, becoming more persuasive, cumbersome, and sprawling as compensation and with this, as Virilio observes, “They have masked the failure or the accident with commercial success,” and in the process made a thing of it.<sup>6</sup> Lotringer continues: “There were all sorts of attempts to maintain the impact of the visual arts in a world that was rapidly changing. So I wonder whether this failure and condemnation ...”<sup>7</sup>

But then Virilio interjects:

Failure is not a condemnation! It’s not the same thing. Failure is failure. Failure is an accident: art has tripped on the rug. In any case you should not forget my logic of failure, my logic of the *accident*. In my view, the accident is positive. Why? Because it reveals something important that we would not otherwise be able to perceive.<sup>8</sup>

It is from this perspective of art “tripping on a rug” that we might perceive something more of art through its destruction. Likewise, it is through these destructions that we may distinguish a solvency within art and catch an operation in which something is made visible through these moments when theory emerges and appears oddly literal. In one sense, events like these present an art engaged in an escape from the *thing*

before us—an undertaking—as artist Pavel Büchler observes of Stéphane Mallarmé and his notion that “the poem is the object escaping,” likewise proposing that the work of art is, “the ‘object escaping’ everything that ‘has a place’...”<sup>9</sup> Eavesdropping, but somehow perversely accurate, like Jean Baudrillard decreeing “Art does not die because there is no more art, it dies because there is too much.” Therefore, among the extension of *too much*, a text might take cues from Georges Bataille in the manner he suggests: “I wanted to present the development of my thought, disclosing in the course of time, little by little, unexpected relations, rather than offer a drily theoretical statement of those relations or of the method I followed.”<sup>10</sup> Beginning here it is hoped that through a similar strategy an understanding of the destruction of art might emerge, and that these investigations might likewise appear, little by little, as a series of bombs in the shape of a book for understanding something of destruction in art.

### **In which art is destroyed by floods, fires, looting, and catastrophes; a museum is created to take its place**

In 2003, critic Jonathan Jones wrote an article about a location he had begun to conceive to house sundry art objects that had been lost and destroyed over the centuries. Setting a stage for destroyed and lost art—in this case work destroyed in floods, fires, looting, and catastrophes—the impulse perhaps being that if we gather them, even in a news story, these unlikely objects might help us understand loss and see what has become invisible, as well as something necessary about art itself. Jones begins his portrayal of the site by evoking a setting and contriving the Museum of Lost Art into existence:

The Museum of Lost Art is a low glass building set in parkland, a place you drive past on the motorway, barely registering it. Approach across the rape fields and what at first had seemed to be a greenhouse turns out to contain not tomatoes but paintings. Hanging low in pale daylight are vanished masterpieces by Rembrandt, Cézanne, Manet, Braque and Vermeer.<sup>11</sup>

Imagined, it is a site conjured from fancy by Jones for the purposes of his article. Perhaps not invisible cities, in the Calvino sense, but conceivably suburbs that are nearly visible from his front porch.<sup>12</sup> With this news story, Jones begins to assemble the scene for uncovering, attempting to see something that might be revealed through gathering and examining the absence of destroyed or lost objects that continue to exert their absence

as a means to envision lost art. Evoked is Richard Brautigan's conception of a library for unpublished books, which "came into being because of an overwhelming need and desire for such a place," or Julian Barnes's invocation of a net, and thus his conception of biography as a "collection of holes tied together with string."<sup>13</sup> The Museum of Lost Art is depicted as nondescript in its outward appearance, barely registering: the type of place one passes on the way to somewhere else.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this museum is a nonplace in the most literal sense, as the Museum of Lost Art, by definition, cannot really exist. Yet, in effect, as an operation, it hews a destination of indistinctness from what is no longer, allowing it to gather like a Chinese ghost story through laying out a bowl of clear water for thirsty ghosts to congregate around. The motif of collecting together art that has been destroyed keeps popping up (this accruing tendency of stories of art and destruction in the form of exhibitions, newspaper coverage, books, and popular media, to attempt to have something to show from what is absent), an attempted respite from disappearance through accumulating what is lost, and that is why Jones's writings in the popular media are such a good place to start. With a museum of lost art, one attempts to create a space for the consideration, ordering, and envisioning of destroyed and lost masterpieces; to find its place and recoup a loss, which in its own right is worth consideration. Jones observes:

Everything in the Museum of Lost Art is invaluable and everything is illegal. There are even masterpieces the world believes to have been lost in floods and fires. As you wander through, paintings take on the appeal of something wrong and sinful. It is my favourite museum.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps *impossibility* grants the works their charm, linking the museum's fascination with something illicit and forbidden, proscribed literally through their destruction and absence. Also like another project—this one by poet Henri Lefebvre—*The Missing Pieces*: a text comprised entirely of citations for works that no longer exist or cannot be accessed.<sup>16</sup> Through it, each entry strings together as a list chronicling a partial catalog of absence, separated by the ellipsis of a dot (•) and rendered as poetry: "*Tilted Arc*, a monumental, site-specific work by sculptor Richard Serra; commissioned in 1981 by the US Government for the Federal Plaza in New York, it was dismantled in 1989 by its commissioner."<sup>17</sup>

Likewise "*On the Road*: the final seven meters of Jack Kerouac's original typescript were eaten by a dog."<sup>18</sup> Additionally,

Until 1977, New York artist Jenny Holzer paints on canvas in the style of Mark Rothko; nothing remains of this period; a text by Jenny Holzer, created for the 1982 Documenta exhibition at Kassel and painted on the facade of a building, is erased in May 2002 when the new owner of the building decides to have the facade restored; he did not know it was a work of art.<sup>19</sup>

Or further: “Forty-two works by Vermeer have come down to us, the others are missing; there isn’t a single line written in his own hand or one self-portrait;”<sup>20</sup> alongside “The Regional Center for Contemporary Art in Corte, Corsica, burns down; a hundred works of art go up in smoke, including those by Dan Graham, Carl André, Sophie Calle, and Annette Messager.”<sup>21</sup>

With each entry inscribed as text in a series, Lefebvre gathers as an object a compendium of absence, drawing material from biographies, autobiographies, and newspapers, as well as statements from painters and writers.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Jones, with his Museum of Lost Art, extols a catalog of artists and lost works for consideration: Apelles, gone; Duchamp, thrown out after the exhibition; Van Gogh and Rembrandt, gone astray; Michelangelo, lost; da Vinci had a terminal damp problem; Vermeer, also lost; Cimabue, floods and earthquake. With each name recited for inclusion into his museum, these objects are transformed by a rationale tainted with the logic of accident into something *other* and altogether more captivating as an art ideal amid the act of disappearance. Intangible by design, Jones laments of the museum, “Its very principle of selection prevents us from offering physical access to the works on show,” yet observes the following:

There are benefits, however, as well as frustrations. There are no queues. The actual works remain, by definition, out of reach, and only their reproduced image – which might be an old, faded, black-and-white photograph, or a copy done by another artist, perhaps merely on the basis of a written description – circulate.<sup>23</sup>

There is something appealing about a museum (or book) whose sole contents are works that no longer exist. However, as Robert Smithson cautions, “Museums are tombs, and it looks like everything is turning into a museum.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, perhaps with this it is only fitting that we ought now to have a museum for the viewing of destroyed art. Within it, destruction mocks while proving, as Jones observes, a means for circulation—the works on display are out of reach and inaccessible. Instead, the viewer is

invited to walk through and ponder what is more akin to implied ruins left behind in the work's absence, the holes somehow still inexplicably tied together with string. Here, access is mediated through the circulation of faded photographs, imitations, and descriptions formed from bits of rumor and ether gathered into virtual reliquaries of art—museums of lost art amid the world we inhabit. Yet what emerges is perhaps an absurdist menagerie of sorts, owing its logic to a nearness to Borges's encyclopedia. Jones notes of the grouping the following:

The principle of selection may seem perverse, like Jorge Luis Borges's description of "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" in which animals are divided into such categories as "frenzied" and "innumerable."<sup>25</sup>

Yet, through this profusion of absent objects, something might be revealed, as if the very act of gathering exposes roughly an origin in the objects, with destruction as its commonality. With *Stolen, Looted, Lost and Burned*, Jones begins telling particular stories of works, the details and incidentals that caused pieces such as those of da Vinci, Duchamp, Michelangelo, and Van Gogh to become eligible for inclusion in his museum. Jones observes: "Yet when you put them together, patterns emerge." As if the key to understanding lost objects is through their disappearance, and through gathering them we might understand something of art and also its destruction through its unlikeliness. Jones continues:

There is something unlikely about the artists brought together in this exhibition, or at least about the idea that they have something in common and something to say to each other simply because they all fit the class of "works of art that have been lost."<sup>26</sup>

However, perhaps this unlikeliness is instead crucial to understanding the negative or reverse miracle to which they point in Bataille's and even Virilio's terms.<sup>27</sup> In the third volume of the *Accursed Share*, Bataille recounts a story of his cousin, thought lost in a shipwreck, as a means for examining a paradox of happy tears and what he terms the negative miracle. The story involves a cousin by marriage who was an officer in the British Navy and served on board a ship called the *Hood* that sank during the Second World War, with nearly every person onboard dying. Assumed lost, the cousin was reported as dead to his mother, yet later was discovered to have been assigned to a separate mission on a smaller boat just hours before the *Hood* sank. Of the unfolding of events, Bataille explains,



“But some days after, my mother received a letter from him relating the circumstances in which he had, ‘by a miracle,’ escaped death.”<sup>28</sup>

Not particularly acquainted with the cousin at the time, Bataille did not consider the events especially affecting, but remembers, “I had the opportunity to tell the story to friends, and every time I did so, to my great surprise tears came to my eyes.”<sup>29</sup> Bataille thought these tears puzzling, explaining that he had not felt exceptionally attached to the events, and wondering of this unlikely response. “Everyone knows that one weeps for joy. But I did not feel any joy.”<sup>30</sup> It became interrelated with an idea of the miracle or, if not the miracle, then the cut and deliverance of the unexpected event, which could not hope to be repeated. He clarifies, “This *miraculous* quality is conveyed rather exactly by the expression: *impossible and yet there it is*”<sup>31</sup> which he likewise links to the allure of art in general.<sup>32</sup> It is this unanticipated or unlikely response “where one would least expect it” that reveals what he terms a negative or reverse miracle, and which is perhaps also what Jones encounters and attempts to gather with these lost works of art. Bataille observes, “what was it if not, in negative form, the unanticipated, the miracle that takes one’s breath away? *Impossible, yet there it is*.”<sup>33</sup> Yet the negative miracle of the destruction of art perhaps simultaneously implies the positive miracle that art in its own way posits—suggesting that in the midst of destruction and shipwrecks, there is the capacity to find something (perhaps not a conveniently lost cousin spirited back for the third act, but something capable of taking our breath away all the same). Bataille proposes that through loss “we discover the negative analogue of the miracle, something we find all the harder to believe”<sup>34</sup>—as if it had not been struck down, and was also right here before us (or, conversely, right here yet nowhere to be seen).

### **Wherein absence takes our breath away; a masterpiece as disruption**

From this vantage of contemplating the unlikeliness of the lost works of art, Jones introduces the notion of the masterpiece as it becomes entangled in the object’s propensity to be absent or lost. Seeing the masterpiece through a capacity to become unbound, a work striving to go beyond our ability to create it, likewise houses this unanticipated quality. Of what in Bataille’s terms is an ability to take our breath away, perhaps only half facetiously Jones proposes of the masterpiece: “The very idea of a masterpiece is mystical, extreme, redemptive. It is the idea of a work of art so great that it rivals the creativity of the gods themselves, gives birth

to a new nature, transcends the limitations of the human.”<sup>35</sup> For Jones, the masterpiece exceeds us in its unlikely ability to launch new natures. Bataille sees this in terms of genius, or an ability to call forth the unanticipated that marks in these instances the difference between genius and talent. He notes: “This is why the measure of art is genius, while talent relates to the rational, explicable means, whose result never has anything unanticipated about it.”<sup>36</sup>

For Jones, the notion of the masterpiece is also closely linked to loss and disappearance—that this loss might best exemplify what is at the heart of the masterpiece. He observes the following of destroyed art:

And no work of art fits that description so well as the one we can't see, the one that exists only as a myth, a rumour. Even the greatest existing work of art can leave you cold if you see it on a bad day. But that fabled lost masterpiece never disappoints. It is perfect. It is completed and transfigured by your own imagination. And imagination never has to subject its splendours to critical scrutiny.<sup>37</sup>

In these terms, the masterpiece is the object detached from scrutiny—inscrutable, the type of thing one might say of a Mona Lisa. For Jones, the masterpiece could be that which possesses an ability to untether itself, to undo what links the work to the mundane and expectations, which allows an object to exist as myth or rumor transfigured and somehow apart. Cautious not to advocate for the destruction of art itself, Jones warns:

This does not mean that we should shrug off theft or vandalism, or anything that destroys art. But art does not die so much as multiply its power when it disappears. What was stunning to look at is, in its absence, tantalising to think about.<sup>38</sup>

Bataille echoes this caution when he also perhaps gets too close to advocating the destruction of art,<sup>39</sup> saying “This does not in any way involve an intention to eliminate what remains: Who would think of getting rid of the work of art or of poetry?”<sup>40</sup>

This impulse to destroy might be read merely as a problem of iconoclasm, which Dario Gamboni sees in terms of revolution or a political act.<sup>41</sup> For example, as in 2011 when Susan Burns walked into the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC and tried to rip Paul Gauguin’s painting *Two Tahitian Women* from the wall before beating it with her fist, later saying, “I feel that Gauguin is evil. He has nudity and is bad for the

children. He has two women in the painting and it's very homosexual. I was trying to remove it. I think it should be burned."<sup>42</sup> Gamboni defines *iconoclasm* as the "destruction of, and opposition to, any images or works of art and, metaphorically, the 'attacking' or overthrow of venerated institutions and cherished beliefs . . ."<sup>43</sup> Such that in the destruction of art, one might find a challenge to the work's legitimacy or right to exist through a clearing away—or the very act of *getting rid of the work of art* through *thefts* and *vandalism*. It is in these terms that Gamboni surveys works of art destroyed since the French Revolution, focusing on notions of vandalism and iconoclasm, while locating impulses of the avant-garde. However, this is to overlook what, for Jones and Bataille, remains. For, conceivably, it is for them something of this destruction that grants poetry and works of art their ability to persist. Therefore, far from advocating for the destruction of art, what appears central for Jones, in particular, is a desire to gather this fleeting aspect of the lost art object; and, perhaps, this is where we might first look,<sup>44</sup> assembling with it that which does not die with its disappearance but instead appears multiplied and amplified. Recalling, as Jones observed and Gamboni might agree, that *what was stunning to look at is, in its absence, tantalizing to think about*.

And perhaps that is the allure of lost art. Through it, a sort of ruin emerges in which we can wander in the present, in light of the work's absence and loss, a story that is never completely fixed in our understanding. And yet isn't this also in part the fascination of art itself? Art has a capacity to forestall through a ship's wreckage, to catch our breath, revealing this interplay between what is lost yet still there—shipwrecked, yet still docked. Conceivably, this grants the masterpiece its allure, this ability to be lost that Jones notes, but also this ability to be beyond our grasp. In conjuring a Museum of Lost Art, one attempts to locate a site where we might better understand destruction in art, as well as something of art itself—in a sense to make what is lost and invisible tangible; as if every word spoken in New York each day were rendered as a snowflake, freezing us in.<sup>45</sup> Jones observes: "We want what we can't have. We need to see what is invisible. This gives lost art a compelling power, and it makes artists create the new by trying to reconstruct what has been lost. In the story of art, the end is the beginning."<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, if, as Jones suggests, in art the end is the beginning, then indeed it is with the end that we must start if we want to understand art and what its destruction might tell us. Yet it might also be useful to look at this notion of a remainder, or what remains and continues in some form, exerting this fascination—that which Bataille associates with the allure of

art and poetry and yet which is entwined with the means of the negative miracle; with its ability to persist, which is likewise a disruption.

**An unknown protagonist remakes an absence when an object falls from the sky: the crack in David Simpson's wall, spiral jetties, or what Bartlebooth knew (a puzzle)**

In Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder*, an unnamed protagonist attempts to recreate and execute a series of obsessive scenarios in real life after a catastrophic accident that leaves him cut off from his experiences and memories. Through it, absence grows and exerts influence; a disruption, it becomes an active participant as a phantom limb of the present through what is lost or destroyed, emerging and supplanting as unexplained compulsions. In the wake of a vaguely specified accident—"something falling from the sky, technology, parts, bits"<sup>47</sup>—the narrator begins spending his vast settlement money in obsessively concentric reenactments and rehearsals of unrecalled scenarios and oblique constructions, in an attempt to reconcile and give form to what remains and is absent after the shipwreck, so to speak, and through which he is ultimately undone. Piecing events together, he recalls:

I don't even remember the event. It's a blank: a white slate, a black hole. I have vague images, half impression: of being, or having been—or, more precisely, being *about* to be—hit; blue light; railings; light of other colours; being held above some kind of tray or bed.<sup>48</sup>

Not precisely a recollection but a half-remembered something, the trace that exerts its weight through loss, like Jones's lost art; a change of pressure as "a train enters a tunnel and your ears go funny."<sup>49</sup> The incident troubles as an absence to be filled, from which everything must be reconstructed, surmised, enticingly approximate and unrecalled, like lost art, "shooting an arrow and painting a target around it," experiencing the gap as something misplaced behind a line drawn. It becomes inscribed through what remains as absence, this invisible force giving form and carrying forward a loss—fleet ships just beyond the horizon. Supplanting in its stead an attempt to recapture and give form to something that was lost, including experience and impressions: "Who's to say my traumatized mind didn't just make them up, or pull them out from somewhere else, some other slot, and stick them there to plug the gap—the crater—that the accident had blown?"<sup>50</sup>

After being awarded an “unprecedented sum” as compensation for the accident,<sup>51</sup> the main character experiences a prompting at a housewarming party held by an acquaintance, David Simpson, triggered by a small crack in the wall. Recalling:

It happened like this. I was standing in the bathroom with the door locked behind me. I'd used the toilet and was washing my hands in the sink, looking away from the mirror above it—because I don't like mirrors generally—at this crack that ran down the wall. David Simpson, or perhaps the last owner, had stripped the walls, so there was only plaster on them, plus some daubs of different types of paint where David had been experimenting to see how the room would look in various colours. I was standing by the sink looking at this crack in the plaster when I had a sudden sense of *déjà vu*.<sup>52</sup>

And with this crack an absence intrudes like the shipwreck, as some other that resembles but is just out of reach, and yet insistent: “I'd been in a space like this before, a place just like this, looking at the crack, a crack that had jutted and meandered in the same way as the one beside the mirror.”<sup>53</sup> Impossible and yet there it is; and “There'd been that same crack, and a bathtub also, and a window directly above the taps just like there was in this room—only the window had been slightly bigger and the taps older, different.”<sup>54</sup> From this crack the narrator traces elaborate scenarios outward: views through a similar window of a red roof across the courtyard on which black cats laze and accidentally slip off from time to time; someone in a flat below who cooks liver—the smell, spit, sizzle it makes, the air heavy with it; a person below in the courtyard who tinkers with a motorbike in his spare time; a faceless porter, sometimes in the hall or behind a door; two floors below someone playing piano.<sup>55</sup> The sound:

I remembered how it had sounded, its rhythms. Sometimes he'd paused, whenever he'd hit a wrong note or lost his place. He'd paused and started the passage again, running through it slowly, slowing right down as he approached the bit he'd got wrong. Then he'd played it several times correctly, running through it again, speeding it up again till he was able to play it back at speed without fluffing it up. I remembered all this clearly—crystal clear, as clear as in a vision.<sup>56</sup>

Yet these images cannot be placed, not his flat during a stay in Paris or London, nor childhood, possibly not even *his* experience, but instead an unplaceable surplus matter, compulsion, acquired from some other slot to fill a gap, the unlikely force fueled by absence. “And yet it was growing,

minute by minute as I stood there in the bathroom, this remembered building, spreading outwards from the crack.”<sup>57</sup> A phantom present, not of size, but of scale; emerging like another crack, opening like a Grand Canyon, another room—this game of resemblances. A crack, as Smithson determines elsewhere, that appears to mumble in unison with this crack experienced in a wall at a party and the premonition of a crack and an apartment building in which to house it that must be recreated like Jones’s museum or Brautigan’s library. Smithson observes:

Size determines an object, but scale determines art. A crack in the wall if viewed in terms of scale, not size, could be called the Grand Canyon. A room could be made to take on the immensity of the solar system. Scale depends on one’s capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception. When one refuses to release scale from size, one is left with an object or language that *appears* to be certain. For me scale operates by uncertainty.<sup>58</sup>

And this is the scale of uncertainty, with art, which emerges from absence and likewise fascinates through disappearance, giving force to remainder. And with it, *Remainder*’s unnamed protagonist, like Jones’s museum, reenacts something lost, expanding in scale, shifting beyond the crack and encompassing every minute detail imaginable and reenacting from this initial impulse and half-impression, while eclipsing it both in scale and ambition through the compulsion to create it exactly and experience it as tangible. This is the scale from which remainder grows:

We hired an architect. We hired an interior designer. We hired a landscape gardener for the courtyard. We hired contractors, who hired builders, electricians and plumbers. There were site managers and sub-site managers, delivery coordinators and coordination supervisors. We took on performers, props and wardrobe people, hair and make-up artists. We hired security guards. We fired the interior designer and hired another one.<sup>59</sup>

Further, this undertaking reconstructs an apartment building populated with reenactors repeating, slowing down, rewinding, playing out some unrealized impulse written broadly, more elaborately, forensics as an art form and drawn from remainder.<sup>60</sup> And in the process, expanding into other scenes (reenactments of a trip to a petrol station, a crime scene involving a shooting in Brixton, a plane flying in the figure eight—infinity). Every detail captured and looped, elaborated, in the hopes of discerning vague authenticity through this act of repeating; however, still

never quite adding up, and instead displaced forward through a surplus being given form, compulsive, a desire to see the entire world reenacted. In this sense, remainder yields as the gathering absence wielded in the present, the unlikely gravitational implied from what is not here or can no longer be directly accessed that gives it form. In an attempt to build a site to house loss, systems producing systems, it multiplies its taut force through disappearance: this engine of negative miracles steering influence through an absence that accrues and gives art and poetry its form.

In this sense, remainder appears a puzzle to be pieced together. Yet remainder is not a puzzle to be solved but rather a piece that is left over or absent that pushes and is unaccountable. In Georges Perec's novel, *Life a User's Manual*, another character sets out on an obsessive regimen of fixing events from fragments. Constructed as a puzzle, Perec employs the device of the knight's tour around the chessboard, and he uses this sequence to ambulate through the rooms of an apartment building in which the novel takes place.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Perec's description of his character Bartlebooth<sup>62</sup> might remind us of McCarthy's unnamed protagonist:

Let us imagine a man whose wealth is equalled only by his indifference to what wealth generally brings, a man of exceptional arrogance who wishes to fix, to describe, and to exhaust not the whole world—merely to state such an ambition is enough to invalidate it—but a constituted fragment of the world: in the face of the inextricable incoherence of things, he will set out to execute a (necessarily limited) programme right the way through, in all its irreducible, intact entirety.<sup>63</sup>

Like the impulse to recreate and reenact an apartment building from a half-remembered crack in a wall at a party, Bartlebooth sets out to squander his considerable wealth on “an arbitrarily constrained programme with no purpose outside its own completion”<sup>64</sup> and in the face of “the incoherence of things.”<sup>65</sup> Yet perhaps it is precisely through this desire “to fix, to describe, and to exhaust”<sup>66</sup> an entire world through his reenactments, as endeavors expand, that McCarthy's nameless character strives to “invalidate”<sup>67</sup> remainder through his efforts. It is these compulsions, given form, which likewise carry these stories onward. Describing Bartlebooth's peculiar actions:

For twenty years, from 1935 to 1955, he would travel the world, painting, at a rate of one watercolour each fortnight, five hundred seascapes of identical

format (royal, 65cm x 50cm) depicting seaports. When each view was done, he would dispatch it to a specialist craftsman (Gaspard Winckler), who would glue it to a thin wooden backing board and cut it into a jigsaw puzzle of seven hundred and fifty pieces.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, through these proposed actions, in their own right reenactments, Bartlebooth sought an expression from which no trace of the operation would ultimately remain. To be successful, the methodology would in effect undo itself. As his scenarios continue:

For twenty years, from 1955–1975, Bartlebooth, on his return to France, would reassemble the jigsaw puzzles in order, at a rate, once again, of one puzzle a fortnight. As each puzzle was finished, the seascape would be “retex-turised” so that it could be removed from its backing, returned to the place where it had been painted—twenty years before—and dipped in a detergent solution whence would emerge a clean and unmarked sheet of Whatman paper.<sup>69</sup>

Through his lifework, Bartlebooth attempts similarly an enactment as he travels to each location and executes a single painting. For twenty years he paints the series of sites he visits (seaports) and then has them disassembled into puzzles that he is to spend the next twenty years putting back together, only to have them removed from the puzzle backing and dipped in a solution and returned as blank to the places where they were painted. With the initial ten years under the tutelage of Valène, it takes the entire planned endeavor to fifty years, coincidentally the number that Marcel Duchamp attributes to the age at which a work of art dies.<sup>70</sup> Yet through these enactments and reenactments, one operation attempts to undo the other; for perhaps this is the action of remainder—to somehow cancel and carry forward or remove this burden. However, both Bartlebooth and McCarthy’s character attempt (perhaps like Jones’s museum for lost art) to reconcile and abide with what remains, although in this each character is ultimately thwarted (or perhaps resolved) in their attempts. In *Life a User’s Manual*, the bulk of the novel is finally revealed to be the contents of the apartment building—its stories remaining and frozen in time moments after Bartlebooth’s death on June 23, 1975. Likewise, we are left with *Remainder*’s character as he escalates in one last reenactment of a plane flying in a figure eight forever, against the remonstrations of the Civil Aviation Authority threatening to shoot it down.

A final exchange between protagonist and a panicked pilot:



“Where do you want to go?”

“Go?” I said. “Nowhere. Just keep doing this.”

“Doing what? He asked.

“Turning back, then turning out. Then turning back again. The way we’re doing it right now.”<sup>71</sup>

This is the motion of attempting to reconcile remainder, where through it, turning back, then turning out, then turning back again—as Jacques Roubaud observes of Perec’s writings—“life appears as a puzzle endlessly destroying its own solutions.”<sup>72</sup> And yet, to briefly jump register (as that is what remainder does), is to inhabit a world hewn and populated (haunted) by these remainders that never quite cancel out nor add up, “a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus” carrying over that prevents these things from being fixed.<sup>73</sup> Characters are immersed in an impossibility of logic, a buffer spitting out contents and mingling with the daily, as an action that Perec might rejoin from again another source:

At the end of the journey, when time and space no longer quite obey the normal rules, where Edgar Poe answers Dracula and Captain Nemo responds to Bluebeard, what remains in all its violence and emotion is the story of a love so strong that it turned to crime, to suicide and maybe madness, before being turned into a film.<sup>74</sup>

This is the obsession of remainders, where what is not here presents as more captivating and magnified than what is. Remainder offers accursed shares, tangible as this force, a surplus or “excess energy, translated into the effervescence of life” that must be squandered or else destroyed (or likewise destroys).<sup>75</sup> However, through it, what emerges is “a kind of bold reversal that substitutes a dynamism,” and this is its fascination.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, it is not a puzzle, for this would be to misunderstand its significance. You cannot put a remainder together—it asserts its influence through its irreconcilability—but instead, in what carries forward and undoes this system we attempt to overlay and make sense of what is absent. We become obsessed, as a nameless protagonist attempting to recapture something lost, playing at a game; and as Simon Critchley warns regarding McCarthy’s *Remainder*, herein lays a trap in which contemporary art may be ensnared, where artists reenact and only remake the works of previous artists from a time before, and art is lost in recreating, verbatim, the form that is not there.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps this is also the space that the destroyed art object attempts to again occupy, and this is likewise its disruption.

### A gap and a portrait: the house that Whiteread built and Gale's complaint

The subject of destroyed and lost art is a theme Jones returns to repeatedly in his writing. In *Lost Art Comes Back To Haunt Us*, he laments, "The art that exists is a tiny fraction of the art that is lost. Vanished works outnumber the surviving masterpieces in museums, just as the dead outnumber the living."<sup>78</sup> However, with this Jones shifts focus onto the ability of destroyed and lost art to leave scars, noting artists such as Klimt, who had their reputations scarred by the loss of important works at the end of the Second World War, or the gap left by a portrait that Lucian Freud painted of his friend Francis Bacon that was stolen from Berlin. Loss affects how we see what remains, or as Jones observes, "Lost art exerts a fascination all of its own. Like ghostly mutterings in galleries, the images of vanished works linger behind the surviving corpus of art."<sup>79</sup>

From here, Jones begins to emphasize a more complicated rapport that art develops in relation to disappearance, remarking, "In the 20th century, art's relationship with disappearance got stranger than ever."<sup>80</sup> Introducing the example of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Jones notes the general ability of some works to sink gradually into their environment. With *Spiral Jetty*, perhaps it is the site chosen in part that accounts for disappearance, hewn as it was from the instability of its location. Smithson describes the work as follows:

About one mile north of the oil seeps I selected my site. Irregular beds of limestone dip gently eastwards, massive deposits of black basalt are broken over the peninsula, giving the region a shattered appearance ... This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty.<sup>81</sup>

As a *space for possibility*, *Spiral Jetty* invites the unanticipated—material and site conspiring toward ponderous disappearance. Jones remarks on the immense earthwork's gradual sinking over time, only to unexpectedly reemerge more recently as the lake receded, before asserting "For me, the most moving lost masterpiece of the last couple of decades is Rachel Whiteread's *House*: a work that was not specifically intended to disappear although it had no permission to permanently exist, either."<sup>82</sup>

Whiteread's demolished *House* consisted of an inverse casting of a Victorian terrace house that in effect turned the original habitation inside out in its appearance, making a concrete object of the negative space within

the structure. Jones observed of the object: “Whiteread cast the interior of an entire house that was due to be demolished: the resulting grey spectre of a London home stood isolated in a park and radiated negative ions of surreal beauty.”<sup>83</sup> The critic Andrew Graham-Dixon described the piece as a “monument made out of void space, a thing constructed out of the absence of things.”<sup>84</sup> Searching for a suitable house earmarked for demolition—in this case to make way for regeneration in the form of a park—Whiteread partnered with the organization Artangel to produce the work. Located at 193 Grove Road in East London, the house was one of a few remaining after the rest of the terrace had been vacated and destroyed as part of the razing process (Figure 1.1). The *Sunday Times*



1.1 Rachel Whiteread, *House*.

said that Whiteread's *House* proved a poignant "monument to the house that refused to become a park."<sup>85</sup> Moreover, "As such, it is a monument to a certain kind of East End stubbornness that withstood wars, bombs, hunger, riots and assorted ethnic invasions but not the building boom of the 1980s."<sup>86</sup>

Using the original house as a mold, and retaining traces from bay windows and stairs, a mixture of liquid concrete was poured into the prepared structure, at which point the masonry of the terrace house was demolished, revealing the cast of the interior space. Graham-Dixon said, "The result could be described as the opposite of a house, since what it consists of is a cast of the spaces once contained by one."<sup>87</sup>

Within this space, the work of art attempts to make tangible what disappears, gathering it together as a site for accretion in a manner comparable to Jones's own efforts at accumulation with a museum of lost art. As Jones observed of *House*, "Lives and memories, the history of a city were held in this powerful monument."<sup>88</sup> However, conceivably there is something of the *negative analogue of the miracle* as well, that which Graham-Dixon describes in his praise as the opposite of a house (or perhaps something hinted at in the words of Susan Burns concerning Gauguin's *Two Tahitian Women*); a capsized aspect implied in a work's construction as remainder. For Sid Gale, the elderly dockworker who had made his life in the terrace home that ultimately became Whiteread's *House*, something is lost in making the monument, and his response in many ways reads as a transposition of Jones's concerns. Seeing his home of fifty years being turned inside out, Gale lamented in the press, "I thought they were going to build a model of my house, not do this to it. All you can see is the lovely woodwork and mouldings the other way round. I had a lovely front room. I spent my life in it."<sup>89</sup>

Gale's response offers a glimpse of the loss of art that cuts both ways. Like Bataille's cousin aboard a ship, the East London house had escaped death, but in unanticipated form—gone is the *lovely front room* where Gale spent his life, save woodwork and moldings, ultimately destroyed into art and rendered in concrete slab. Yet, simultaneously, something thought lost is miraculously found rescued: a cousin vanished at sea is discovered to have been sent on another mission, this time as the concrete structure of Whiteread's *House*. Impossible, and yet there it is; crashing into the comforting experience of a lived home. For Gale, the creation of Whiteread's *House* is a shipwreck of the house he knew, where he is left stranded without the homely trappings of his lovely front room and life. The launch of Whiteread's vessel with its poignant and monumental

capacities is also the shipwreck of Gale, revealed the other way round, *impossible, yet there it is*, if not for this representation.

*House* gained wide acclaim, winning Whiteread the Turner Prize in the process, yet also notoriety for the local community and the council's reaction. Intended to remain for only eleven weeks, the project gained support as people campaigned for it to either be extended or made permanent. Nevertheless, it was amid this backdrop that the local council-chair opted to have the structure pulled down.<sup>90</sup> *House* arrived on October 25, 1993 and was demolished eleven weeks later on January 11, 1994—experiencing a shipwreck of its own, as what housed all these tensions was similarly destroyed. Of this, Jones observes:

The demolition of *House* by a hostile local council who refused to accept its artistic and cultural importance seems, now, tragic. It did away at a stroke with the most serious and worthwhile work of the “Young British Art” generation.<sup>91</sup>

Yet, conceivably, it is precisely this demise (which further fixes *House* to Jones's idea of the destroyed masterpiece) that endures and grows: a capacity to exist *only as a myth, a rumor* through which it circulates. With the abrupt cut of its destruction, it is rescued—never submitting to the rounding of edges through time, or withdrawal into the mundane, a concrete slab amid a city of concrete slabs. A shame, Whiteread observed, that *House* “didn't have the chance to become invisible, the way architecture becomes invisible.”<sup>92</sup> For in withstanding it might have disappeared into its role as monumental (which likewise fascinates, as we see with the persistence of *Spiral Jetty*). Yet of its continued allure, Whiteread noted, “but I also know that part of it is undoubtedly to do with the way it was destroyed.”<sup>93</sup> In remaining it made visible the loss of Gale's house (along with a more general loss), and, in its destruction, it likewise revealed something unanticipated *where one would least expect it* through absence. It is with our need to see what is absent<sup>94</sup> that *House* grants a means for viewing what becomes invisible, which for Jones also gives lost art its compelling power and fascination.<sup>95</sup>

However, perhaps it is through this destruction that *House* went from simply “a worthwhile work of the “Young British Art” generation,” as Jones says, to “the most moving lost masterpiece” that he mourns.<sup>96</sup> Yet, when viewed from history, a lovely trick of symmetry also emerges, where the intangibles of a life experienced disappear into the art object only to be destroyed and rendered indistinct again. Through this role the art object itself appears stranded between two intangibles: a fleeting pivot, fervently

grinding and ground from both directions—the monument of a demolished house that is likewise destroyed.

### Conjuring a gallery of lost art; an unknown masterpiece

When Jones next returns to the theme of destroyed and lost art, it is to announce the opening of the virtual exhibition, *Gallery of Lost Art*,<sup>97</sup> through the Tate the following day. If it was a museum that Jones sought to gather and give form to with his musings on lost art in the *Guardian*, then, in the process, what appears to have been conjured forth is a gallery of lost art (now within the auspices of a museum). Having first shifted location from a *nowhere* to the rape fields along a highway in Jones's imagination, lost art here takes up residence in a warehouse under the backing of the Tate—not bad for less than ten years. In *Now You See Them: The Eternal Allure Of Lost Art*,<sup>98</sup> Jones approaches again this now familiar theme in art—the fascination of the destroyed and lost—wryly observing that the perfect condition for art may be that of lost as “it becomes indestructible by being destroyed.”<sup>99</sup>

Jones ambles the reader through works on display at the Tate's project, including the likes of a portrait by Graham Sutherland destroyed by Winston Churchill's widow (unflattering), the case of Bas Jan Ader's *In Search of the Miraculous* (death), and Tracey Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (fire), while also unfolding a narrative of modern art's rebellion against its status as timeless objects and its eventual dematerialization through the course of the twentieth century. Jones opens with the example of *Erased de Kooning Drawing*,<sup>100</sup> in which a young Robert Rauschenberg approached Willem de Kooning—a younger artist approaching an established artist in the full reaches of his influence—asking for a drawing from the senior for him to erase, or as Jones observes, so he “could rub it out.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, the work of Rauschenberg comprised of making de Kooning's piece undone, through the effort of revealing the blank page, but also something else.

Illustrating this, Jones likewise looks to Picasso's fascination with Balzac's story *The Unknown Masterpiece* (Le Chef-d'oeuvre Inconnu).<sup>102</sup> Characterizing it, Jones recounts how an artist spends his life trying to paint the perfect woman, which renders ultimately a blankness visible.<sup>103</sup> Similar to Rauschenberg and de Kooning, the story begins with a younger artist (Poussin) approaching an artist also at the full reaches of his influence (Porbus); however, in Balzac's story, they are joined by the master artist Frenhofer, who, in studio, makes the whole encounter possible.

Looking at the painting by Porbus on display, Frenhofer observes, "It is all there, and yet it is not there. What is lacking? A nothing, but that nothing is everything."<sup>104</sup> With minor adjustments and setting the scene, Frenhofer isolates "that indescribable something"<sup>105</sup> in Porbus's work through which the portrait of Saint Mary and the Shipman<sup>106</sup> emerges with a flourish of the nothing that is everything, just so. [And ... might a shipman not likewise resemble a dockworker, and draw the mind back to Whiteread's *dockworker*, Sid Gale, and a shipwreck between the two where something unexpected is revealed.] Frenhofer declares it is the labor of the artist to bring the nothing and everything together, saying: "Neither painter nor poet nor sculptor may separate the effect from the cause, which are inevitably contained the one in the other."<sup>107</sup> This is the "innermost secret" of form, which he pursues here as "the mystery of form" that must be made clear, seeking an intimacy that "would shatter external form."<sup>108</sup> Thus, it is a destruction that must be revealed as the mystery of form, where cause and effect are contained one in the other without separation, save the art object. Here Frenhofer appraises Porbus's attempts with, "Because you have made something more like a woman than a house, you think that you have set your fingers on the goal."<sup>109</sup> [Yet ... elsewhere it is precisely this interplay between woman and house made manifest—or a distinction between shipman/dockworker and Whiteread's home—that in its intimacy places a finger to this revelation]. In Frenhofer's words, it is the call of the artist not to copy, but to be a poet, saying, "Otherwise a sculptor might make a plaster cast of a living woman and save himself all further trouble."<sup>110</sup>

[Nevertheless, this would be to overlook *that nothing that is also everything*, implied in Whiteread's plaster cast of a living house that, instead of simply revealing its copy, strikes it inverted as poetry]. Moreover, it is precisely this distinction, this ability to lay a plaster cast of a house, that made visible the absence—not of a woman—but the disappearance and obscuring of Gale and his life, and a city, and revealed an inversion of the copy as poetry. What Rauschenberg saw with his erasing of de Kooning was not a protest against abstract expressionism, as commonly held; when asked in an interview he replies simply, "It's poetry."<sup>111</sup>

Later, we return to Frenhofer's studio as he prepares to reveal his masterpiece of ten years. Aspiring toward "leaving no trace of the passage of the brush,"<sup>112</sup> Frenhofer is driven in his pursuit of the perfect representation, prompting him to determine:

it needs faith, faith in art, and you must live for long with your work to produce such a creation. What toil some of those shadows have cost me. Look! There is a faint shadow there upon the cheek beneath the eyes—if you saw that on a human face, it would seem to you that you could never render it with paint. Do you think that that effect has not cost unheard of toil?<sup>113</sup>

We might now briefly turn to Giorgio Agamben's reading of this story in his *The Man without Content*, where he observes "But in this quest for absolute meaning, Frenhofer has succeeded only in obscuring his idea and erasing from the canvas any human form, disfiguring" it into what is described as a sort of shapeless fog.<sup>114</sup> Frenhofer is lost in the chase of his unknowable masterpiece, but Agamben observes: "On the canvas there is only a confused mass of colors contained inside a jumble of indecipherable lines. All meaning has been dissolved, all content has vanished, except the tip of a foot that stands out from the rest of the canvas." Seeing in the nothing depicted a "gradual destruction" on canvas, "emerging from the ashes of a ruined town"<sup>115</sup> ultimately spurs Porbus and Poussin in their reappraisal of the work:

"There," Porbus continued, as he touched the canvas, "lies the utmost limit of our art on earth."

"Beyond that point it loses itself in the skies" said Poussin.<sup>116</sup>

Both responses resonate of Jones's words regarding masterpiece,<sup>117</sup> yet it is of the artwork's final revelation that Jones observes "When he unveils it, there is nothing to see. His efforts at perfection have cancelled out the image as thoroughly as Rauschenberg erased de Kooning's drawing. Indeed, the parallels between the two are striking."<sup>118</sup>

Yet, for Agamben, it becomes a tale of the erasing of form as a conflict amid an inexpressible content. He says of Frenhofer's results, "In order to leave the evanescent world of forms, he has no other means than form itself, and the more he wants to erase it, the more he has to concentrate on it to render it permeable to the inexpressible content he wants to express."<sup>119</sup>

However, with cause and effect "inevitably contained the one in the other,"<sup>120</sup> it also becomes a merging, form and content (yet also rhetoric versus meaning for Agamben), which reveals the mystery of form and renders it *permeable* as an innermost secret of form (and a shattering of external form). Yet, with absence, stories inevitably bleed, one into the other, cause and effect, and old master Frenhofer—having spent a lifetime painting his blank canvas—can only respond with:



Nothing! nothing! After ten years of work ...<sup>121</sup>

Shattered, he sits down and weeps.

And Agamben proposes:

So long as no other eye contemplated his masterpiece, he did not doubt his success for one moment; but one look at the canvas through the eyes of his two spectators is enough for him to appropriate Porbus's and Poussin's opinion.<sup>122</sup>

The shattering is exposed when cause and effect are revealed as mingled through Frenhofer's shift from the *cause* of the work to the *effect* he produced before the two witnesses through this intermingling, one contained in the other; as Agamben observes, in "this transition, the integrity of his work dissolves."<sup>123</sup> Thus, we wonder where we are left if not in the lovely front room with its woodwork and moldings. The fascination that draws Picasso to a fictional story of *The Unknown Masterpiece* also inspired him to make work motivated by it, and led Jones to conclude, "For him, that blank canvas was a modern masterpiece—the ultimate example of lost art."<sup>124</sup>

### A fictional museum becomes a gallery

The Tate's *Gallery of Lost Art*<sup>125</sup> billed itself as "an immersive online exhibition" and as an opportunity to explore "the stories behind the loss of works of art."<sup>126</sup> The project was positioned as a placeholder, marking what has become disappeared and existing as an online exhibition for one year. Commencing at the beginning of July 2012, the exhibition was symbolically removed after one year, likewise a gesture toward understanding loss and absence.<sup>127</sup> The gathering together of an assortment of audio files, photographs, video, announcement cards, newspaper clippings, essays, and accounts of the work forms the shape of this exhibition. The absent works become replaced by their surrounding stories and narrative, commenting obliquely on how art history is constructed and how loss shapes this larger narrative.

Curator Jennifer Mundy suggests of the project the following:

Art history tends to be the history of what has survived. But loss has shaped our sense of art's history in ways that we are often not aware of. Museums normally tell stories through the objects they have in their collections. But this exhibition focuses on significant works that cannot be seen.<sup>128</sup>

In this sense, the exhibition attempts to resolve a problem of representing what has become lost and destroyed. The *Gallery of Lost Art* presented a series of tableaux within “an immersive website in the form of a vast warehouse, where visitors can explore the evidence laid out for them.”<sup>129</sup> Depicted are clustered chairs, text written on the floor, stray wooden pallets, virtual people (sitting, standing, looking, and frozen), and scattered tables with images, media, and transcripts.

The space is divided into sections from above, with scenes collected around words stenciled on an image of grey floor. Alongside the word *Unrealised*: an image of a blond veneer table beneath depictions of books opened and laying spine down, photographs, invitation cards, a stack of letters, a binder with interviews, newspaper clippings, and a reading lamp—here laid out, evidencing Bas Jan Ader’s disappearance in a capsized boat in *In Search of the Miraculous*. Through these scenarios, the viewer clicks and scrolls over elements to launch photos, open texts, hear voiceovers, or access the thematic essays assembled around works.

Elsewhere in the virtual warehouse are depictions of case studies and documentation for lost works, some of which we have encountered previously. Bordering the word *Ephemeral* is an image of a white foldout table with materials documenting Eva Hesse’s *Sans III*—a work that deteriorated because of the instability of latex used.<sup>130</sup> Near the lettering *Transient*, an outline of Rachel Whiteread’s piece *House* is marked off in tape against the floor like a body at a crime scene, alongside an image of a table supporting snapshots and files.<sup>131</sup> The atmosphere throughout is a mix of crime scene investigation and interactive catalog, presenting themes intended to classify the demise of the works included. With *Erased* is predictably Rauschenberg’s *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, whereas Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* urinal is filed under *Discarded*, Richard Serra’s famously dismantled *Tilted Arc* with *Rejected*, and Lucian Freud’s portrait *Francis Bacon* marked *Stolen*, along with his wanted-style reward poster, *Missing*; Frida Kahlo’s *The Wounded Table* is set with *Destroyed*, as is Alexander Calder’s *Bent Propeller*, which was lost in the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York.<sup>132</sup> Next to *Attacked* is Egon Schiele’s *Self-Seer*, and also, adjacent to the stenciled outline of the word *Destroyed*, is Tracey Emin’s tent *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With*, a piece lost in the Momart warehouse fire that will be discussed in more detail later.<sup>133</sup>

Bordering *Stolen* is a text in which Mundy references an intriguing turn of phrase—“a serious crime against the heritage of humanity”<sup>134</sup>—taken from the Deputy Culture Secretary for the City of Paris. In its

offhand nature, it implies that through robbing our collective inheritance, these crimes might in their own way constitute a crime against humanity. While alluding to something of the loss experienced, the phrase refers to a theft of five paintings of Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, and Fernand Léger on May 20, 2010 from the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.<sup>135</sup> Caught on CCTV footage, Mundy describes events as a man entered the museum:

Masked and wearing black, he cut through a padlock securing a grille and smashed a window to enter the museum in the early hours of the morning. He selected the five works, which were in different galleries, and made his getaway in no more than fifteen minutes.<sup>136</sup>

In attempting to come to terms with the legacy of lost works (if only in a Sherlock Holmes capacity) it becomes our job as viewer and participator to put these objects back together, to accumulate what might be left behind as remains from the perpetrator, victim, chronicler, or witness of the crime; sifting through effects. In a sense “to bring back to life the artworks that no longer exist” as clues and trace evidence scrutinized from “fire, war, attacks and neglect,” as an “invitation” to examine what no longer exists.<sup>137</sup> Yet how do we understand the active element, the destruction or theft that delivers, or likewise what this theft comes to mean in the popular mind? Mundy observes: “The loss in these cases is shared and public, and interest may be piqued by the enormous value of the artworks and by details of exactly how they were taken—particularly if there are echoes of well-known films.”<sup>138</sup> Yet the theft or incident becomes an agent in revealing a strategy for which the object appears to choreograph a rehearsal to spectacularly undo itself before an audience; like Balzac’s masterpiece, striving to render its cause and effect indistinguishable.

### **A thief steals the Mona Lisa and something commences**

Through framing the lost works as a crime scene to be gathered in and exhumed, there is also an assumption that these objects form a “heritage of humanity” and that loss and destruction constitute a theft of what ought to be present. In these matters, however, it may be more accurate to propose something of a Jean Baudrillard *fatal strategy*, in which “the object is considered more cunning, cynical, talented than the subject, for which it lies in wait.”<sup>139</sup> Through loss, what might present is a challenge of the object toward our understanding, where the reversibility of loss,

like Bataille's negative miracle, "is not a matter of chance, but would rather be a kind of perfectly inverted and simultaneous determination, or perverse counter determination," in the words of Baudrillard.<sup>140</sup> These capacities to reveal where we might least expect to find are impossible, and yet there it is. In *Stealing the Mona Lisa*,<sup>141</sup> Darian Leader contends that it is in instances such as theft and loss that the absent art objects allow us to see, as if they are otherwise obscuring through their very existence. With the *Mona Lisa* and its theft, Leader sees this demonstrated in the unlikely reactions to loss, where "Crowds gathered at the Louvre to gaze at the empty space where the picture had once hung,"<sup>142</sup> observing in the lost object an ability to draw in through a fascination of absence—in spite of there being no object to view—as in the way that Picasso was fascinated with Balzac's *Unknown Masterpiece* as Jones likewise observes.

Leader recounts how the art thief Vincenzo Peruggia walked out of the Louvre with the *Mona Lisa* tucked beneath his smock on August 21, 1911. Knowing the Louvre was closed on Mondays, Peruggia apparently hid in the museum the night before and exited the next morning, dressed in a worker's smock, and hopped on the bus and returned home.<sup>143</sup> Once there he kept the painting in his boarding house in Paris, in a recessed panel in a trunk built to house it, for over two years.<sup>144</sup> Peruggia claimed that it was something about her eyes that first attracted him to the painting. The initial theft was not noticed for twenty-four hours; when the museum reopened, it was flooded with crowds who queued, as Leader observes, simply to stare at the empty space where the *Mona Lisa* had hung. Much of Leader's account centers on speculations of the painting in its absence, and its unfolding in the media. Yet, ultimately, Leader suggests that the incident changed something about how we see art. "The fact that a painting wasn't there had made people look at things in a different way. Everything that was once invisible became the object of a look, a fact that makes the theft of the *Mona Lisa* a work of art in itself."<sup>145</sup> Seeing in this incident many of the preoccupations of Modernism, absence, and what lies beyond the spectacle, Leader considers: "Was the theft of the *Mona Lisa*, then, the perfect crime of the Modernist era? A painting is stolen, and thousands converge on a museum to see an empty space."<sup>146</sup> Further, if the theft of the *Mona Lisa* points to an absence on display, then the more recent example of Stéphane Breitwieser likewise links it to destruction.

**After another thief is caught, his mother flushes the remains down a garbage disposal; the marvellous thing people talked about—improvisations in reverse**

Beginning in 1995 and running up until his arrest in 2001 in Lucerne, Switzerland, art thief Stéphane Breitwieser went on a spree of art thefts across Europe. The man who the *Guardian* referred to as “arguably the world’s most consistently successful art thief”<sup>147</sup> had been walking into museums and collections across Europe and in the process had amassed a collection of old master paintings and objects, including works by Boucher, Breughel, Cranach, Teniers, and Watteau.<sup>148</sup> With art hauls initially estimated at well over a billion euros, his eventual arrest sparked considerable sensation in newspapers and the media as details emerged.<sup>149</sup> Reacting in the press, a relative of Breitwieser summarized his unlikely success and ability to accomplish something on such a large scale without raising suspicions with, “Who would have thought it? Stéphane is not particularly charismatic or funny. He is shy, introverted, small and fragile.”<sup>150</sup>

However, it was precisely this shy and perhaps uncharismatic man who was responsible for some of the most extensive thefts in art. Living in France near the Swiss border, Breitwieser worked as a waiter in restaurants, and in favoring out-of-the-way locations for his thefts, he appears to have selected them for their sometimes-lax security. After initially scouting sites, he often simply walked out with the works under his coat. Of his ability to elude detection, Alexandra Smith from the Art Loss Register said: “A lot of people expect works of art to be well protected with alarms and clamps, but he clearly worked out that most are not, so he took what he wanted.”<sup>151</sup> Consistently “dressed smartly in a suit and overcoat,”<sup>152</sup> Breitwieser appears to have taken a mostly opportunistic approach to art theft and to have just blended in as he went about his business. One prosecutor remarked, “I am amazed at the disconcerting ease and different ways by which he stole from dozens of museums.”<sup>153</sup>

Upon his arrest, accounts of his unlikely methods began to catch the attention of the public in the press. Smith of the Art Loss Register remarked that a pattern had emerged with one or two objects disappearing from various museums, “But we thought it was the work of a gang. What happened here was simply unimaginable.”<sup>154</sup> Describing an instance when Breitwieser found himself alone with girlfriend Anne-Catherine Kleinklauss in a castle in Gruyères, Switzerland, the *Guardian* recounts how he was entranced by a small painting of a woman by Christian

Wilhelm Dietrich—by her beauty and her eyes in particular [and again a painting’s eyes]. The reporter muses how another “art lover might have lingered awhile and then turned from the room with a sigh,”<sup>155</sup> however, “Instead, with his girlfriend keeping watch, Breitwieser worked out the nails holding the canvas in its frame, slipped the painting under his jacket and left the castle.”<sup>156</sup>

Through sometimes contradictory reports, what begins to emerge in these accounts is a portrait of an art thief who was both unlikely and yet particular (almost quirky) in his approach. In articles originating from the French media, it was alleged that he simply cut the canvases from their frames, but what surfaces in the telling is perhaps an image of a more refined and complicated art thief. Philip Delves Broughton’s description appears almost chiding in its recount in the *Telegraph*:

He would never cut paintings and drawings out of their frames, as the French police claimed, but carefully undid the frames and removed the entire works. Often, the couple would hit two or three museums in a weekend.<sup>157</sup>

This almost sounds like a genteel theft with its careful undoings, certainly efficient if two to three were common in a weekend—an afternoon excursion. Articles appear deliberate in their characterization of the thefts of Breitwieser, describing what he did as perhaps different or set apart in his eccentric pursuit. Often portrayed as an art lover in these accounts, Delves Broughton even proposes that “he loved art so much it turned him into a thief,”<sup>158</sup> as if revealing consequences of the dark side of art appreciation and viewing as ultimately theft [and again, *a story of a love so strong that it turned to crime, to suicide and maybe madness, before being turned into a film*].<sup>159,160</sup> Most reports fixate on the details of how he accumulated the works for his own personal enjoyment and not for resale, noting: “Apart from the scale of the Frenchman’s ambition and success as a thief, what distinguishes [Breitwieser] from other, common or garden art robbers is his motive: not lucre, but a genuine love of art and antiques.”<sup>161</sup>

Of the accumulation of works and the manner in which they were displayed, Sergeant von der Mühl offers: “He would rotate his paintings on the walls of his bedroom. There wasn’t enough room for all of them at once. All his objects would be arranged around the room.”<sup>162</sup>

Peculiar details of his conscientious mode of operation began to surface in the telling, such as how he always stole the display cards and then destroyed them. Swiss police sergeant Alexandre von der Mühl noted: “He always took the descriptive sign from whatever he stole, memorised

it, destroyed it and then did more research. He knew by heart the dimensions and condition of everything he stole and knew their prices.”<sup>163</sup>

It is peculiar that Breitwieser took the accompanying information cards along with the art, first internalizing their contents before destroying them. Yet in the art object’s destruction it is precisely this sort of constituent support (textual, price, history, and characteristics) that replaces the absent object—and it is curious to think of how this behavior anticipates as inverted that which Jones and Mundy attempt to reconstitute from what might only remain as an announcement card—to put back together the lost work through a card that remains.

Yet, on November 19, 2001 Stéphane Breitwieser was arrested in Lucerne, Switzerland, after returning to a museum where he had stolen an antique bugle only days before. Recognized by a security guard, he was detained on the spot, but his girlfriend managed to escape and alert his mother, Marielle Schwengel, to his arrest. Schwengel, eager to avoid capture and afraid of losing her Swiss work permit, began destroying all of the art her son had stolen,<sup>164</sup> allegedly cutting “the paintings into small pieces and [shoving] them down her sink disposal unit with the potato peelings” and dumping what would not fit into a nearby canal or mixed it in with her rubbish in the dustbin for collection.<sup>165</sup> Upon his arrest, Breitwieser confessed to all the thefts, giving police a detailed list of everything stolen and where from, telling them that it was all stored at his mother’s house, where he lived. Yet, when the Swiss authorities finally obtained an international search warrant to examine the home in France, everything had been destroyed.<sup>166</sup>

In this instance theft ultimately led to the object’s destruction; however, seen in reverse, Breitwieser, through accumulation and circumstance, delivers the objects rendered destroyed and superfluous as items for contemplation for the likes of Jones and Mundy—between the two pivots, a palindrome feeding into the other.<sup>167</sup> Detail by detail, Breitwieser’s impulse is a gathering of their museums spoken as inverted, as if fated and fatal—with each element not appearing of chance but seen “as a perfectly inverted and simultaneous determination, or perverse counter determination,”<sup>168</sup> coming to this point of a *duplicitous* meeting; this point where destruction congregates and is fomented. Baudrillard notes: “This is exactly what Bataille saw with his concept of expenditure and accursed shares. It is precisely the superfluous, the excessive that is essential. It’s there that all the stakes converge, where the energy of society is fomented.”<sup>169</sup> And perhaps these incidents make Bataille’s concepts oddly literal when he warns of an imperative: “The problem

posed is that of expenditure of the surplus. We need to give away, lose or destroy.”<sup>170</sup> Or, as Baudrillard observes elsewhere, “Art does not die because there is no more art, it dies because there is too much.”<sup>171</sup> Yet in these circumstances it appears that the very act of accumulation renders in part the work’s destruction (accumulated into galleries, warehouses, by Breitwieser and subsequently lost, and attempts to accumulate again by Jones and Mundy), as if stockpiling reveals a vulnerability.

Smith of the Art Loss Register observes in the aftermath, “It is shocking that these canvasses are lost forever,” noting “Destruction of canvasses on this scale is almost unprecedented.”<sup>172</sup> It is a sentiment echoed by the Strasbourg police on the finality of the destruction when they announced, “We’ve found the guilty parties, but the works can never be replaced.”<sup>173</sup>

### An homage to lost art

In attempting to represent what has been lost, the *Gallery of Lost Art* with its virtualized warehouse setting is presented as a vacancy, where the ghosts of art might be redeemed and exorcised or, like crime scenes, solved. Scored with an ever-present audio track attending the chalk and tape outlines of the deceased objects depicted, and with intermittent rumbles, creaks, and thumps in service of loss as homage, it sets an atmosphere ready for a séance. The soundscape is unnerving, sometimes new age, decidedly otherworldly, textured, echoes of whirs and orbitals, mysterious, and angular; sometimes expansive and other times rumbling, clunking, and menacing.

In this atmosphere we are left to wonder at the delinquency witnessed, objects that ought to be, of which we are deprived without consent, a theft in their makeup. Yet, this is to catch something mid-flight and halted, and to overlook the idiosyncratic rendezvous to which Breitwieser’s actions might also point, giving too much emphasis to the wreckage of the ship while overlooking the possibilities of where it lies. As Jean Tinguely told chronicler Calvin Tomkins:

Everything transforms itself, everything modifies itself ceaselessly, and to try to stop it, to try to check life in mid-flight and recapture it in the form of a work of art, a sculpture or a painting, seems to me a mockery of the intensity of life.<sup>174</sup>

Yet what remains of *Homage to New York* is only impressions—snapshots, writings, accounts, and old film footage—gathered as attempted replacements into the atmosphere of the *Gallery of Lost Art*, presented on top



of a white table with images and texts; what Mundy sees as “an almost archetypal example of ‘lost art.’”<sup>175</sup>

Constructed from teetering mechanics that dodder and rumble through half-anticipated mechanisms, Jean Tinguely’s *Homage to New York* took place in the Museum of Modern Art sculpture garden in March of 1960.<sup>176,177</sup> Salvaged from scrapyards in New Jersey and sources across the city, Tinguely cobbled together mechanical bits and pieces into a work designed to spectacularly undo itself before an audience in a one-time event. Bicycle-spoke wheels spin, frantically driving belts and propelling the motions of the machine, tethered to apparatuses with spindling thuds and drones from the overly complicated construction, igniting fires that attempt to consume this amassing of objects as it propels forward. A long strap dangles from above, and elsewhere the contraption paints frantically with a rudimentary reticulating arm attached to what appears to be a cleaning brush across a scrolling background, rolling itself up (revealing a bit then retracting) as a fire crackles below. A plonking melody from a burning piano, driven by wonky belts and carters, wheels within wheels, hammer strikes, thumping tubs and sawing, stomping puppet-like feet across its keyboard. Everywhere smoke, drumming, tandems, wagons staggering and scooting across the floor, and mechanical grinding as the piece teeters in on itself.

Tinguely’s sculpture was designed (although who knows how effectively it accomplished this task in the end) to destroy itself before the audience so that the work of art was revealed as the apparatus’s undoing. Of this process, Tinguely said:

What was important for me was that afterwards there would be nothing, except what remained in the minds of a few people, continuing to exist in the form of an idea. This was for me very liberating. The next day they just swept up and every trace was gone. It was just a marvellous thing people talked about ...<sup>178</sup>

What Tinguely attempts through spectacle, perhaps Breitwieser accomplished indirectly through clandestine acts—a gathering deed (bicycle wheels, coils, buckets, gears; or Boucher, Breughel, Cranach, and Teniers) that ultimately eliminates evidence (perhaps we should give more credit to Breitwieser’s mother, but their actions become tethered) so that art divulges a theft through an inversion of accumulation with a destruction that fascinates. A loss save the bits remaining in the minds of observers or swept up and disposed with the potato peelings. However, as the *Gallery of Lost Art* evidences, these objects still attempt to accrue and recoup a loss

even in their absence. For Tinguely, like Breitwieser, it is an idiosyncratic and peculiar accounting, as Tomkins recalls how events did not go exactly as planned in Tinguely's piece: straightaway a fuse blew, the paper in the painting machine began rolling the wrong way, and a burning trike rolled toward the audience.<sup>179</sup> Tomkins concedes:

From that moment on it was clear that the machine would proceed about its destruction in its own way, but the audience, unaware that Tinguely's machines hardly ever worked as they were supposed to, gave a collective groan.<sup>180</sup>

Unanticipated objects are shown not to behave as we might hope, and perhaps that is part of their charm. A compulsion distinguishes them from what we intend; takes them beyond our capacities, which characteristic Jones likewise attributes to the masterpiece. Through destruction, objects expose themselves as perhaps more cunning and talented than us, as inverted and confounding our expectations.<sup>181,182</sup> And amid a mischievous aptitude to destroy, these objects appear to become undone before our eyes, all for a capacity to confound, making plain an impulse that Tinguely observed of his objects:

They could live as long as they liked. At the same time they were placed in a situation that enabled them to be fragile; they had the good fortune to be endowed with the qualities normally found only in an improvisation, while simultaneously being part of a great sculptural machine.<sup>183</sup>

It is this capacity to be placed in situations *that enabled them to be fragile* that Breitwieser's objects likewise divulge, through their (*good* is perhaps questionable) *fortune* of being *endowed with the qualities normally found only in an improvisation*, and to instead find themselves caught up in the lucidity akin to the story of Bataille's cousin. Destruction reveals a fragile improvisation underscoring the object in which, for Tinguely and Breitwieser, what accumulates is inverted. With each passing instant, Tinguely's sculpture confiscates itself before the viewer, perhaps pulling a "Breitwieser," where what gathers (first under a coat) is destroyed to purge evidence from an inspector's prying eyes (then down the drain). Destruction, like theft pointing to absence on display, implies that it is not we who are in charge of dictating the terms of the object, but something else. Trundled outside our control, perhaps an object's revenge—what grants masterpiece status might also drive a fatal capacity to confound and resist our expectations and machinations.

Yet, when *Homage to New York* began to destroy itself for the audience, there was virtually no differentiation between the actions of gathering it together; the art *object* being the point where these two forces met. As engineer and assistant Billy Klüver observes, “The end of the construction and the beginning of the destruction were indistinguishable.”<sup>184</sup> Like an unknown masterpiece of Balzac, the art constitutes a removal of the separation between cause and effect that houses “the mystery of form” that “would shatter external form,” which is here the habitation of art and the implication of its absence.<sup>185</sup>

As *Homage to New York* began its twenty-seven minute process of unravelling in the Sculpture Garden of the Museum of Modern Art, a fire takes hold. Flames engulf the piano as it plays on and gallerist George Staempfli observed to Tomkins: “There is something very odd about seeing a piano burn ... All your ideas about music are somehow involved.”<sup>186</sup> And this is what becomes activated through destruction, where all our ideas about art become entangled in these events [likewise a piano playing in a flat below McCarthy’s narrator, and how it *sounded, its rhythms*]. However, as Tomkins acknowledges:

For the museum authorities, a good deal more than ideas about music was involved. They had not anticipated a fire and were understandably sensitive on that subject in view of the museum’s second-floor fire the year before, which had destroyed almost two hundred thousand dollars’ worth of paintings.<sup>187</sup>

[And yet ... if a shipman can resemble Whiteread’s dockworker, then Tinguely’s fire might likewise resemble the 1958 fire, where even Breitwieser’s thefts *are somehow involved* through their destruction and with what remains.]

Of the fire’s advance, Tomkins describes:

The concealed fire extinguisher was supposed to go off at the eighteenth minute, but the flames had spread through the whole piano and burned out a vital connection. Black smoke poured from the machine. With a limping, eccentric motion, the small suicide carriage broke away from the main machine, its flag waving. Then it stopped. Tinguely helped it along toward the pool, but its motor was too weak, and it never got there. The Addressograph machine started up, thrashing and clattering. It had been too badly damaged in transit, though, and it fell over after a minute or so, stone dead. Brilliant yellow smoke flashes now began going off all over the machine.<sup>188</sup>

It was against this backdrop that *Homage to New York* was ultimately pulled down [like Whiteread's *House*] and extinguished into a steaming lump by the fire department and security. Yet, Tinguely observes:

It would be beautiful if every work of art were like that. Perhaps they are, all the same – even the *Venus de Milo*, with the marvellous aspect it has today, has been modified, time-worn; it is truly more than the artist made it, and we have certainly accepted this modification.<sup>189</sup>

And perhaps *every work of art is like that* in its capacity to house a destruction and become *more than the artist made it*. Yet alongside resides a desire to fix things through the art object, which is here released with the object's crash, nonetheless giving rise to Jones's gathering and the yearning behind the *Gallery of Lost Art*. As Tinguely notes:

Only the fear of death makes us want to stop life, to "fix" it impossibly forever. The moment life is fixed, it is no longer true; it is dead, and therefore uninteresting. But now it's as though this monster of stability were pushing me, pushing me toward a certain point in myself where I will have to end all these experiments and experiences—or, rather, where the experiences I've had will have to be reconciled as one and the same.<sup>190</sup>

Perhaps it is this that the art object attempts to reconcile.

**Where a creative act is always also an act of destruction, in that existing forms are called into doubt and dismembered; *Under Destruction***

Along with the *Gallery of Lost Art*, recent exhibitions have likewise addressed the overt implications of destruction in art; however, in focusing less on the loss of absent objects, an impulse is engaged where destruction attempts to give form, represent, or posit a gesture in itself. In *Under Destruction* a dynamic is examined between creation and destruction and how destruction might form a creative act in itself. Likewise, taking many of its influences from Tinguely's *Homage to New York*, the exhibition delineates a framework *where every creative act* is also acknowledged as *a destruction* in its own manner.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, the exhibition *Damage Control* was an extensive survey organized by the Hirshhorn Museum, in which destruction is presented as a means for making visible the unseen upheavals often understood as stemming from the rise of the atomic age and as a

response to war. *Damage Control* was accompanied by essays from Kerry Brougher, examining art's ability to make the invisible present; Russell Ferguson's essay, in which he traces a lineage of destruction in art while also looking at parallel impulses that have become housed together in the art object; and Dario Gamboni (author of *The Destruction of Art*),<sup>192</sup> who likewise looks at this ambivalence in art through the work of Gustav Metzger and the ability of art to present an oscillation. Through these endeavors, along with Jones's writing about destruction in his Museum of Lost Art and the Tate's *Gallery of Lost Art*, one might more accurately limn the legacy of destroyed art and begin to understand its implications in contemporary practice.

In his introduction for the exhibition *Under Destruction*, Roland Wetzel charts the continued influence of Tinguely's *Homage to New York* on contemporary art practices and its legacy for understanding the works on display. Starting with the city from which Tinguely drew inspiration, he sees it as a system with:

Its powerful, strident circulation, pressing human beings and goods through its arteries and producing great quantities of refuse in the process, bodied forth the very pulse of an age which was equally marked by the formation of political blocs, by the nuclear arms race and by the concomitant danger of world destruction.<sup>193</sup>

Yet curator Gianni Jetzer does not read *Homage to New York* "as a reaction to the global threat of a nuclear armament and the Cold War," but as an affirmative act through what was proposed.<sup>194</sup> Of its continued appeal and legacy, Jetzer suggests that it "strongly undermines the myth of the creating artist who adds objects to the world to be exhibited, collected, and eventually conserved," wherein anticipated is an inversion of the system of accumulation where concurrently the "act of creation and destruction became all of sudden simultaneous." And through it housing an *unknown masterpiece* ability to present *simultaneously* an opposition as *the mystery of form*, while likewise giving form to an "external pattern of creation and destruction that makes up our life."<sup>195</sup>

Tracing the influence of *Homage to New York* through the subsequent years, Wetzel sees that these "destructive tendencies in art gain in importance,"<sup>196</sup> developing as methods with the acknowledgment that "Every creative act is always also an act of destruction in that existing forms are called into doubt and dismembered, re-combined or re-thought."<sup>197</sup> In this capacity, the "artist destroys in order to create, but equally creates

in order to destroy.”<sup>198</sup> From here the two gestures become tethered, sketching a Big Bang-like descent where “creation and destruction have been a *couple maudit*” suggestive of a pairing for Bataille’s *Le Part Maudit* (*Accursed Share*).<sup>199</sup> However, in this capacity, it likewise becomes a question, that Jetzer asks, of whether destruction might “be considered as merely an additional color or . . . still a radical gesture” and equally whether destruction still has a meaning in itself “or is it just a mere vehicle”?

From this position, *Under Destruction* envisages the ambivalence between creation and destruction—with the use of destruction as a form-giving force<sup>200</sup>—that the exhibition used to investigate what destruction in art might mean now. Included among the selection is Jonathan Schipper’s *The Slow Inevitable Death of American Muscle*, in which two immaculately gleaming cars enact a car crash in extreme slow motion beneath the showroom display lights of the gallery; what Michael Wilson describes as bringing “the Hollywood action-film fantasy of an impossibly close view of a dangerously destructive event to life, ossifying the spectacle of a real-time collision and transforming it into a subject of sustained, even meditative contemplation.”<sup>201</sup> It is this ability to draw out and give form to an instant of impact and destruction, making it an object to be viewed, drawn against the framework of pristine cars that gives the piece its allure. The machinations of *The Slow Inevitable Death of American Muscle* propel the two cars together “over a period of anything between three-and-a-half days and several weeks” so that what the viewer witnesses within the gallery is a real time “ultra-slow-motion reenactment of a head-on crash,” where each “vehicle is eventually crushed three feet or so into the other.”<sup>202</sup> However, the process of this destruction becomes so protracted as to be almost imperceptible through the action of displaying it in the slowest of increments, like piano players approaching the bit they got wrong—*running through it slowly, slowing right down as they approached and reenacted*.<sup>203</sup>

Likewise, Christian Marclay lures art out of destruction with his video work *Guitar Drag*, on display in the exhibition. Projected and accompanied by “an ear-splitting sound track,” the piece documents the process of a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar being dragged at high speed behind a lorry.<sup>204</sup> Connected to an amplifier, the audio is the reverberations emitted as the guitar is destroyed through these actions.

Through this, art points as composer to the sound of destruction, which also leads to an inversion of what is before us and what becomes lost in the process of becoming observed or seen. In this way, *Guitar Drag* might anticipate something implied in a work such as Bruce Nauman’s

text piece from *Art in the Mind*: “Drill a hole in the heart of a tree and insert a microphone. Mount the amplifier and speaker in an empty room and adjust the volume to make audible any sound that might come from the tree.”<sup>205</sup> And perhaps an upended affinity between these two works emerges, where through amplifying the silence inside a tree, the silence gives form to its own destruction, like a guitar dragged behind a truck, showing destruction’s capacity to create, as well as creation’s capacity to destroy.

### **A short one—damage control, an impulse**

In Kerry Brougher’s introduction for the exhibition *Damage Control*, he observes that while “destruction as a theme can be traced throughout art history, from the early atomic age it has become a pervasive and contextually rich element of contemporary visual culture.”<sup>206</sup> It is from the perspective of the atomic age and as a response to war and destruction that most of the items in this extensive survey are organized, charting a development of works “that offer overt displays of disasters either on a cataclysmic or everyday scale to more symbolic evocations” to address destruction’s place in our contemporary moment.<sup>207</sup> Starting with the example of Godzilla in relation to incidents such as that of Lucky Dragon at Bikini Atoll or Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Brougher, in his essay *Radiation Made Visible*, marks the capacity through which Godzilla was made to represent the threat and dangers of the atomic bomb, while giving form to invisible anxieties through making radiation visible.<sup>208</sup> Brougher observes:

Godzilla likewise represents the imposition of the new on the old, the inconceivable destructiveness of the new atomic age. But he is a creation of our own making. Like Dr. Frankenstein’s creature, he is our punishment for tampering with nature and defying God. And yet unlike Mary Shelley’s monster, who despite his ungodliness was in fact a mirror of humanity, Godzilla is not human (although clearly a man in a latex suit) ... rather, the King of the Monsters is human only in the sense that he symbolizes a dark piece of man’s mind, an unhealthy part, ripped out and expanded to an atomic scale and intent on destroying and killing on an “inhuman” scale.<sup>209</sup>

With Godzilla, through representing what was invisible, Brougher sees a physical manifestation of a “fear of that which cannot be seen, the fear of radiation, of the possibility of sickness and death descending unseen.”<sup>210</sup>

Brougher charges art with the responsibility to make the invisible visible in these instances, granting through destruction a means for representing and giving form to invisible tensions. In this he approaches works such as Andy Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series, as a means of making visible something ever present in the media (airplane and car crashes, electrocutions, riots, and assassinations), but at the same time offering a means for it to dissipate.<sup>211</sup> Of this disappearance through Warhol, he notes:

Even in his single-image canvases in the series, which in some respects magnify scenes and draw attention to what the viewer is looking at, and with titles like *5 Deaths* that bring the harsh reality of the image to the fore, the bright coloration and the degraded sharpness of the original photograph create a distance that allows for detachment.<sup>212</sup>

In this sense, the ability to give form to the invisible likewise allows the viewer to distance themselves from events. And in this the artwork shelters two impulses: a destruction that draws in the viewer through fascination, as well as an ability to distance and bring the chaos back under control, a *damage control*. However, far from just a means of playing with absence and presence through representation, destruction in art might also form gestures in response to the destructions of society.

### **Seeds of its own destruction: destroying a Qing Dynasty urn, and a parallel impulse in art emerging**

Likewise, in his essay accompanying the exhibition *The Show is Over*, Russell Ferguson traces the legacy of artists using destruction in their work. Starting with Filippo Marinetti and his Futurist Manifesto—drawn from a speeding car crash outside of Milan<sup>213</sup>—to Pablo Picasso with his picture as a “sum of destruction”<sup>214</sup> and Piet Mondrian with his remarks that “the destructive element is too much neglected in art,”<sup>215</sup> Ferguson begins to sketch a basis for examining destruction in art. Ferguson introduces Walter Benjamin's thoughts concerning the allure of destruction, in which “destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age.”<sup>216</sup> Yet Ferguson sees Benjamin as a foreshadowing, “Benjamin could understand the appeal of such ruthless simplification, and he was prescient in pinpointing how such an appeal could become one of the bases of a mass political movement.”<sup>217</sup>

However, this ability to *clear away* through destruction ultimately gave rise to fascism and culminated in the Holocaust, as Ferguson observes:



The result, of course, was one of the greatest disasters in history, one that resulted in millions of deaths, including Benjamin's own, by suicide, as he tried to flee the Holocaust.<sup>218</sup>

With this, Ferguson emphasizes the impossibility of representing this destruction traced through the writing and works of Theodor Adorno, Jean Fautrier, and Gerhard Richter, while simultaneously charting a withdrawal from these themes in America with the rise of McCarthyism.<sup>219</sup> From here, Ferguson gathers again as Robert Rauschenberg heaves his unsold sculptures into the Arno River in Florence, eventually proposes to de Kooning that he erases one of his drawings.<sup>220</sup> Similarly, he moves on to John Baldessari and his *Cremation Project*, in which the artist burned all his own work that he owned in 1970—also a clearing away, but similarly a recouping in the form of ash-baked cookies.<sup>221</sup>

Ferguson then traces the continuation of the postwar frame of mind in Europe, with events such as the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) in London in 1966 under the influence of Gustav Metzger—noting of the event that it “was still strongly inflected with the historical burden of the war’s devastation and the subsequent Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation, even as it was simultaneously a harbinger of future developments.”<sup>222</sup> And elsewhere Ferguson returns to sunlit California with Ed Ruscha’s *Royal Road Test*, in which a typewriter is thrown from a speeding car window and the destruction is documented, an act of destruction amid the desert landscape. The opening moniker of Ed Ruscha’s *Royal Road Test* proclaims: “It was too directly bound to its own anguish to be anything other than a cry of negation; carrying within itself, the seeds of its own destruction.”<sup>223</sup>

Within this general framework, Ferguson weaves in contemporary practitioners and artworks such as Ai Weiwei’s *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, in which the artist destroys an ancient ceramic object,<sup>224</sup> Jake and Dinos Chapman’s defacing of Goya etchings; and likewise Christian Marclay’s *Guitar Drag*. This contrast of destruction through gesture is followed again with Pipilotti Rist’s actions of smashing car windows with a flower in *Ever Is Over All*; Douglas Gordon’s selective burning of portraits from pop culture in the series *Self Portrait of You + Me*; Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Window Blow-Out*; Chris Burden’s *Samson*, in which a jack attached to a turnstile at the entrance to the gallery slowly applies pressure to the walls of the building as each attendee enters the building,<sup>225</sup> and Michael Landy’s *Break Down*, in which over the course of two weeks, the artist destroyed and catalogued every item he owned.<sup>226</sup> Yet Ferguson

wonders what happens after the pause of destruction,<sup>227</sup> (after the riot or smash-up) and proposes that one “solution is to separate ourselves from the wreckage and apply a self-consciously distanced, aestheticized approach to destruction that has already taken place”<sup>228</sup>—and indeed it appears that this marking and distancing is an impulse behind much of the work included in *Damage Control*.

With Thomas Demand’s photograph *Landing*, a scene is portrayed just after a visitor has stumbled down the stairs at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and smashed into three Qing Dynasty vases on display. The photograph depicts a staircase landing, window as backdrop, with fragments of shattered white and blue ceramics littering the floor. Of the scene, Ferguson muses how the work “suggests an unintentional reprise” of the aftermath of Ai Weiwei’s *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, yet Demand’s photograph is a meticulous reconstruction of a conservator’s photograph taken after the vase incident at the museum. Demand’s image painstakingly recreates the photo taken by the conservator documenting the damage—however, as the conservator attempts to undo the damage to the vase from the accident, Demand aims to reconstruct a perfect model of the image of the accident, which he then photographs.

Of this inversion, Ferguson notes:

So we have again a kind of destruction in reverse, as Demand begins from the accident and works backwards toward a reconstruction of the scene that is entirely under his control. In Demand’s photograph, we can see brought together in a single image two of the parallel impulses that have always drawn artists to destruction. On the one hand there is a fascination with the moment of destruction itself and its anarchic pleasures; on the other hand, there is a desire to bring this chaos back under the control of the artist.<sup>229</sup>

Moreover, it is this impulse that Jones and Mundy pursue in their attempts, through the Museum of Lost Art or the *Gallery of Lost Art*, to recreate works that have been destroyed; and, conversely, it is the fascination and pull of destruction in both Tinguely’s *Homage to New York* and Breitwieser’s actions. Through a reverse capacity, each instance bleeds into the other, emerging as a single object to house these two parallel impulses in the work of art.

### A manifesto, or if it did not exist it would have to be invented: the duck/rabbit puzzle

In Dario Gamboni's accompanying essay from the exhibition *Damage Control*—"Sixty Years of Ambivalence"—he traces an ambiguity between iconoclasm and the destruction of art that he began with his *The Destruction of Art*.<sup>230</sup> With it, he aims "at understanding what the close relationship with destruction, including the self-destruction of *Homage to New York*, revealed about contemporary art within a broader context."<sup>231</sup> From this, Gamboni turns to the ideas and works of Gustav Metzger.

In Metzger, Gamboni finds a crucial ambivalence between his attack on *capitalism* with the *drive toward nuclear annihilation* and, conversely, the desire to see destruction integrated through science and technology—perhaps akin to the way that Ferguson observes in *Demand a desire to bring this chaos back under the control of the artist* but also the riot of destruction itself.<sup>232</sup> In this manner, Gamboni notes that Metzger "conceived of the relationship between the destruction he advocated in the arts and the destruction he denounced in the military, technical, and economic domains as both mimetic and critical."<sup>233</sup> Through these gestures, as Metzger proposes, "art demonstrates man's power to accelerate disintegrative processes of nature and to order them."<sup>234</sup> Yet, through this hastening and ordering, at the center of Metzger's intentions is perhaps a desire to distinguish between a destruction in art and the destruction of art (and also within the culture at large).<sup>235</sup> Or, if it appears an iconoclasm in Metzger, then it is perhaps instead toward destroying the *image of destruction* present in society through the challenge of the destructive gesture. Through this, destruction is seen within the kinetics of the challenge as "something that sets the destructive process in motion,"<sup>236</sup> as opposed to what becomes represented (say, as in a painting of a destroyed city or broken vases in a museum). In this sense, Metzger's gestures attempt to resolve a volatile remainder through art, forming a valve where destruction reveals how cause and effect are contained one in the other (as opposed to trying to preserve or represent this remainder).

In his *Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art*, Metzger proclaims he is "Not interested in ruins (the picturesque)," but instead "Auto-destructive art re-enacts the obsession with destruction, the pummeling to which individuals and masses are subjected."<sup>237</sup> However, with destruction, we see precisely this interest in the picturesqueness of ruins—the impulse of museums and galleries of lost art (of Jones or the Tate), and even the conservationist urge behind Demand's recreation of the vase accident—to

preserve and *represent* the loss of the ruin. Nevertheless, it appears that with the activation of this impulse through auto-destruction that Metzger seeks, it is instead to distinguish and reenact as challenge. Of this turn, Justin Hoffman says, “In the second manifesto, Metzger explains that he does not see destructive art as some sort of picturesque romanticism of ruins. He does not want to preserve something upon which the traces of the past can be seen.”<sup>238</sup>

Metzger instead attempts to reenact this destruction “to highlight processes that already exist but are too little noticed,”<sup>239</sup> contrasting Brougher’s reading of *Radiation Made Visible*, where the compulsion aims to *preserve something upon which the traces of the past can be seen* or represented (through Godzilla or Warhol’s *Death and Disaster* series). Whereas Jones and Mundy (or the conservator) attempt to reconstruct an implied ruin in which we might be able to walk in the present, from the destroyed object, Metzger seeks to point to the destruction in the manner that Whiteread’s destroyed *House*, through circumstances, did in action. In this sense, Metzger tasks art with the capacity to be both the site and “an instrument for transforming peoples’ thoughts and feelings, not only about art, but ... [through destruction] to change peoples’ relation to themselves and society.”<sup>240</sup> His approach seeks not to preserve but to reenact destruction as a means for creation, declaring of its necessity, “If auto-destructive art did not exist it would have to be invented.”<sup>241</sup> And perhaps, in this sense, it is; every day and in its own manner.

Gamboni declares of destruction’s ambivalence: “Destruction appears, therefore, as a Janus-like figure, a duck/rabbit picture puzzle. This ambiguity and oscillation is made visible” through the works.<sup>242</sup> It is likewise from the views of the works presented in this investigation into destruction of art—through the news, popular media, and recent exhibitions—that a further oscillation is generated between Jones (or the Tate or Demand or Warhol) and the enactments of art (Metzger, Tinguely, Whiteread, Schipper, and Breitwieser) to which destroyed art continues to point. Destruction emphasizes an ability to be both rabbit and duck—ruin, as well as action—forcing “us to reflect upon what we see, what we expect, and what we desire.”<sup>243</sup> It is this capacity to bring *together in a single instance two parallel impulses*<sup>244</sup> emerging through destruction, removing impediments of *effect from cause, one inevitably contained in the other*<sup>245</sup> so that *the mystery of form* is revealed through the intimacy that *would shatter external form*<sup>246</sup> that we must come to terms with if we want to understand what art and its destruction implies; herein a propensity “*where one might*

least expect it"<sup>247</sup> to reveal through the *negative analogue of the miracle, something we find all the harder to believe.*<sup>248</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Genet, Jean. "A Reading of The Brothers Karamazov." Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. *Grand Street*, no. 47, 1993. [www.grandstreet.com/gsissues/gs47/gs47b.html](http://www.grandstreet.com/gsissues/gs47/gs47b.html) (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 The idea of the shipwreck implied in the ship will be examined in more detail later, but it takes cues from Virilio's ideas of the accident and Bataille's notion of the negative miracle.
- 4 Kerouac, Jack, and Howard Cunnel. *On the Road: The Original Scroll*. London: Penguin Classics, 2007. Editorial note on p. 401.
- 5 Thomas Mann uses a phrase "the solvent of forms of life which are absolutely fixed," and this tension between a "solvent of forms" and what appears fixed suggested a name for the process examined in this volume, see: Mann, Thomas. *The Magic Mountain*. London: Penguin Books, 1960. p. 400.
- 6 Virilio, Paul, and Sylvère Lotringer. "The Accident of Art." In *The Accident of Art*. New York, NY; Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e): Distributed by the MIT Press, 2005. p. 64.
- 7 Ibid., p. 63.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 This is from a forthcoming essay titled "The Show" by Pavel Büchler that will appear in an anthology on group exhibitions set for publication by Kunsthalle Bern. Text was courtesy of the artist.
- 10 Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share. Volume II, the History of Eroticism. Volume III, Sovereignty*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991, p. 206. Subsequent references: *The Accursed Share* (vols II and III).
- 11 Jones, Jonathan. "Stolen, looted, lost and burned." *The Guardian*, September 4, 2003.
- 12 In Italo Calvino's novel, *Invisible Cities*, the narrator, Marco Polo, describes and evokes a series of imagined cities to the emperor Kublai Khan.
- 13 See Brautigan, Richard. *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1971. p. 16; Barnes, Julian. *Flaubert's Parrot*. London: Picador, 1985. p. 38.
- 14 Again, this suggests perhaps a site such as Brautigan's library of unpublished books, which resides on a nondescript sloping lot *overgrown with tall grass and bushes and flowers and wine bottles*. See Brautigan, *The Abortion*, p. 23.
- 15 Jones, "Stolen, looted, lost and burned."

- 16 Lefebvre, Henri. *The Missing Pieces*. Translated by David LeHardy Sweet. Whitney Biennial. Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- 17 Ibid., p. 22.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 23–24.
- 19 Ibid., p. 25.
- 20 Ibid., p. 26.
- 21 Ibid., p. 27.
- 22 Ibid., p. 85.
- 23 Jones, “Stolen, looted, lost and burned.”
- 24 *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Edited by Jack Flam. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1996. p. 42.
- 25 Jones, “Stolen, looted, lost and burned.”
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 This relation to Virilio is examined in more detail later.
- 28 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vols II and III), p. 205.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., p. 206.
- 32 This will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.
- 33 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vols II and III), p. 206.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Jones, “Stolen, looted, lost and burned.”
- 36 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vols II and III), p. 206.
- 37 Jones, “Stolen, looted, lost and burned.”
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 In this case with regards to his notion of sacrifice.
- 40 Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991. p. 189. Subsequent references: *The Accursed Share* (vol. I).
- 41 Gamboni, Dario. *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*. London: Reaktion Books, 1997.
- 42 Smith, Timothy R. and Jacqueline Trescott. “Gauguin masterpiece unharmed after attack at National Gallery.” *The Washington Post*, April 4, 2011.
- 43 Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, p. 18.
- 44 It could also be argued that this is what Gamboni does through the collecting and telling of his accounts of destroyed work, which forms his research.
- 45 This is a reference to a quote at the end of Kenneth Goldsmith’s *Soliloquy*. Perhaps this desire to make what is invisible tangible is an impulse behind projects such as this, in which every word uttered for a week is transcribed,

as a gesture toward “If every word spoken in New York City Daily were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard.” See Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Soliloquy*. New York, NY. Granary Books, 2001. Postscript.

- 46 Jones, “Stolen, looted, lost and burned.”
- 47 McCarthy, Tom. *Remainder*. London: Alma Books, 2007. p. 5.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid., p. 100.
- 50 Ibid., p. 5.
- 51 Ibid., p. 14.
- 52 Ibid., p. 60.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid., p. 61.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Edited by Jack Flam. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1996. p. 147.
- 59 McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 105.
- 60 Ibid., p 173.
- 61 The knight’s tour is a sequence of moves of a knight on the chessboard such that the knight visits every square only once. This sequence of moves was plotted over an apartment building, and the narrative is revealed through this device.
- 62 This name combines Herman Melville’s *Bartleby* and Valery Larbaud’s *Barnabooth*.
- 63 Perec, Georges. *Life a User’s Manual*. London: Harvill, 1996. p. 117.
- 64 It might also be interesting to think in relation to his half-namesake *Bartleby* and his desire to not do or abstain as an action, where the character’s efforts form “footnotes commenting on a text that is invisible, which does not mean it does not exist, because this phantom text could very well end up held in suspension in the literature of the next millennium.” See Vila-Matas, Enrique. *Bartleby & Co*. London: Vintage, 2005. p. 3.
- 65 Perec, *Life a User’s Manual*, p. 117.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid., pp. 118–119.
- 69 Ibid., p. 119.
- 70 Duchamp: “I believe that a picture, a work of art, lives and dies just as we do. That is, it lives from the time it’s conceived and created, for some 50 or

- 60 years, it varies, and then the work dies. And that is when it becomes art history. So, art history only begins after the death of the work, but as long as the work lives, or at least in the first 50 years of its life, it communicates with people living in the same period who have accepted it or rejected it and who have talked about it. These people die and the work dies with them. And that is where the history of art begins.” See: Antoine, Jean and Marcel Duchamp. [www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/An-interview-with-Marcel-Duchamp/29278](http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/An-interview-with-Marcel-Duchamp/29278) (accessed February 14, 2015).
- 71 McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 284.
- 72 Excerpted from the afterword of the German edition of *53 Days*. See: Bellos, David. *Georges Perec: A Life in Words*. London: Harvill, 1999. p. 704.
- 73 McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 9.
- 74 This is from a text that Perec wrote as producer for the film *Les Jeux de la Comtesse* that was directed by Catherine Binet. See: Bellos, *Georges Perec*, p. 684.
- 75 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vol. I), p. 10.
- 76 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vol. I), p. 11.
- 77 In a discussion following his lecture *Tragedy’s Philosophy and Philosophy’s Tragedy* in which he remarks on Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*, about how contemporary art has become trapped in a circuit of reenacting art and artists that have come before. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSSJ2RhdCmE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSSJ2RhdCmE) (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 78 Jones, Jonathan. “Lost art comes back to haunt us.” *The Guardian*, June 6, 2012.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 *Robert Smithson*, p. 146.
- 82 Jones, “Lost art comes back to haunt us.”
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Graham-Dixon, Andrew. “This is the house that Rachel built.” *The Independent*, November 2, 1993.
- 85 *The Sunday Times*, November 8, 1993. Retrieved from: [www.artangel.org.uk//projects/1993/house/press/press\\_coverage](http://www.artangel.org.uk//projects/1993/house/press/press_coverage) (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Graham-Dixon, “This is the house that Rachel built.”
- 88 Jones, “Lost art comes back to haunt us.”
- 89 Roberts, Alison. “Best and worst of art bites the dust.” *The Times*, January 12, 1994.
- 90 Ibid.



- 91 Jones, "Lost art comes back to haunt us."
- 92 Wroe, Nicholas. "Rachel Whiteread: a life in art." *The Guardian*, April 6, 2013.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Jones, "Stolen, looted, lost and burned."
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Jones, "Lost art comes back to haunt us."
- 97 "The *Gallery of Lost Art*." The Tate. <http://galleryoflostart.com> (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 98 Jones, Jonathan. "Now you see them: the eternal allure of lost art." *The Guardian*, July 1, 2012.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 *Erased De Kooning Drawing*. Traces of drawing on paper with label and gilded frame. 1953. SFMOMA.
- 101 Jones, "Now you see them."
- 102 Balzac, Honoré. *The Unknown Masterpiece*. Translated by Ellen Marriage. The Macmillan Company, 1901.
- 103 Jones, "Now you see them."
- 104 Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, p. 9.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 Ibid., p. 10.
- 107 Ibid., p. 8.
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 Ibid., p. 9.
- 110 Ibid., p. 7.
- 111 *Robert Rauschenberg: Man at Work*. Directed by Chris Granlund. Phaidon Video, 2001.
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- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Agamben, Giorgio. *The Man without Content*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. pp. 7–8.
- 115 Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, p. 30.
- 116 Ibid., p. 31.
- 117 Jones, "Stolen, looted, lost and burned."
- 118 Jones, "Now you see them."
- 119 Agamben, *The Man without Content*, p. 8.
- 120 Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, p. 8.
- 121 Ibid., p. 32.
- 122 Agamben, *The Man without Content*, p. 9.
- 123 Ibid., p. 9.

- 124 Jones, "Now you see them."
- 125 "The *Gallery of Lost Art*." The Tate. <http://galleryoflostart.com> (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 126 Ibid.
- 127 Mundy, Jennifer. *Lost Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2013. p. 9.
- 128 "About the *Gallery of Lost Art*." The Tate. <http://galleryoflostart.com> (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 Mundy, Jennifer. "Life Doesn't Last; Art Doesn't Last." The Tate. <http://galleryoflostart.com/#/3,0/essay> (accessed April 17, 2013).
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- 132 Mundy, Jennifer. "Nine Eleven." The Tate. <http://galleryoflostart.com/#/6,17/essay> (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 133 Mundy, Jennifer. "Burnt Memories." The Tate. <http://galleryoflostart.com/#/2,0/essay> (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 134 Mundy, *Lost Art*, p. 271.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 Ibid., p. 270.
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- 138 Ibid., p. 269.
- 139 Baudrillard, Jean. *Fatal Strategies*. Translated by Philip Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski. New York, NY; Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e); Distributed by the MIT Press, 2008. p. 219.
- 140 Ibid., p. 110.
- 141 Leader, Darian. *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002.
- 142 Ibid., p. 2.
- 143 Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa*, p. 46.
- 144 Ibid., p. 88.
- 145 Ibid., p. 164.
- 146 Ibid., pp. 68–69.
- 147 Henley, John. "Priceless art haul destroyed by thief's mother." *The Guardian*, May 16, 2002.
- 148 Broughton, Philip Delves. "Mother of art thief destroys £1bn hoard." *The Telegraph*, May 16, 2002. Although the *Telegraph* later revised this amount to more like £100 million. Broughton, Philip Delves. "Treasures from the deep." *The Telegraph*, August 3, 2002.
- 149 Henley, "Priceless art haul destroyed by thief's mother."
- 150 Broughton, "Treasures from the deep."

- 151 Riding, Alan. "Your stolen art? I threw them away, dear." *The New York Times*, May 17, 2002.
- 152 Broughton, "Treasures from the deep."
- 153 Ibid.
- 154 Riding, "Your stolen art?"
- 155 Hooper, John. "Connoisseur turned crook who plundered Europe's galleries for the simple love of art." *The Guardian*, February 5, 2003.
- 156 Ibid.
- 157 Broughton, "Treasures from the deep."
- 158 Ibid.
- 159 Bellos, *Georges Perec*, p. 684.
- 160 Interestingly, at the time of the writing of this book, Tom McCarthy is supposedly writing a screenplay for turning *Remainder* into a film, and there are rumors that Breitwieser's story may also become a film.
- 161 Hooper, "Connoisseur turned crook."
- 162 Broughton, "Treasures from the deep."
- 163 Ibid.
- 164 Henley, "Priceless art haul destroyed by thief's mother."
- 165 Broughton, "Mother of art thief destroys £1bn hoard."
- 166 Henley, "Priceless art haul destroyed by thief's mother."
- 167 The use of the word *palindrome* here is indebted to an instance in Dario Gamboni in his essay "Sixty Years of Ambivalence," in which he applies the term in passing to Dara Friedman's video *Total*. Brougher, Kerry, Russell Ferguson, Dario Gamboni, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Musée d'art moderne Grand-Duc Jean, and Kunsthau Graz. *Damage Control: Art and Destruction since 1950*. p. 206.
- 168 Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 110.
- 169 Ibid., p. 104.
- 170 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vol. I), p. 69.
- 171 Baudrillard, Jean, and Sylvère Lotringer. *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*. New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 2005. p. 64.
- 172 Broughton, "Mother of art thief destroys £1bn hoard."
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- 175 Mundy, Jennifer. "Like a Falling Star." The Tate. <http://galleryoflostart.com/#/14,0/essay> (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 176 Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*.
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- Yorker (courtesy of Calvin Tomkins Papers, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York) and retrieved from [www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/homage-destruction](http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/homage-destruction) (accessed April 17, 2013).
- 179 Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, p. 178.
- 180 Ibid.
- 181 Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 219
- 182 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vols II and III), p. 206.
- 183 Interview conducted by Calvin Tomkins for a 1962 article for *The New Yorker*.
- 184 Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, p. 177.
- 185 Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, p. 8.
- 186 Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, p. 179.
- 187 Ibid.
- 188 Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, pp. 179–180.
- 189 Interview conducted by Calvin Tomkins for a 1962 article for *The New Yorker*.
- 190 Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, p. 186.
- 191 Jetzer, Gianni and Boris Grojs, New York, NY: Basel, and the Jean Tinguely Museum. *Under Destruction: [anlässlich Der Ausstellung "Under Destruction," Museum Tinguely, Basel, 15. Oktober 2010 – 23. Januar 2011; Swiss Institute Contemporary Art, New York, 6. April – 4. Juni 2011]*. Berlin: Distanz-Verl., 2010. p. 24.
- 192 Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*.
- 193 Jetzer and Grojs, "Under Destruction", p. 23.
- 194 Ibid., p. 36.
- 195 Ibid., p. 24.
- 196 Ibid., p. 23.
- 197 Ibid., p. 24.
- 198 Ibid.
- 199 Ibid.
- 200 Ibid.
- 201 Ibid., p. 103.
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- 203 McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 61.
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- 205 Lippard, Lucy R., *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object From 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997. pp. 162–163.
- 206 Brougher *et al.*, *Damage Control*, p. 8.
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- 221 Ibid., pp. 111–113.
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- 226 Ibid., p. 154.
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- 229 Ibid., p. 169.
- 230 Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*.
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- 232 Ibid., p. 169.
- 233 Ibid., p. 178.
- 234 Metzger, Gustav, and Andrew Wilson. *Gustav Metzger—Damaged Nature, Auto-destructive Art*. London: Coracle, 1996. p. 59.
- 235 Brougher *et al.*, *Damage Control*, p. 178.
- 236 Metzger, Gustav, Sabine Breitwieser, and Generali Foundation Austria. *Gustav Metzger: History History*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005. p. 22.
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245 Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, p. 8.  
246 *Ibid.*  
247 This will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.  
248 Bataille, *The Accursed Share* (vols II and III), p. 206.