

SABINE COELSCH-FOISNER
DOUGLAS BROWN
(Eds.)

The Museal Turn



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Recycling Waste as a Means to Cure Cultural Trauma in the Art Museum

Summary

The paper explores how Abject Art allows for the violent invasion of the culturally sanctified and symbolically purified museum space by the socially rejected 'waste' (bodily residue and shameful memories) that is artistically recycled so as to help spectators to come to terms with what they would rather repress: their all too human traits of physical and psychic vulnerability and fallibility. This exercise in 'the dialectic and drama of remembering and forgetting' aims to reach a shock-therapeutical effect by making us revisit past traumatic experiences which are constitutive of our selves, societies, and histories, which we are unwilling to recall but unable to forget. I analyse, in the concept-artists Chapmans brothers' abject art, the conjoining of body(waste)-horror with emotionally, ethically and socio-politically challenging topics related to cultural trauma and social cataclysm. I argue that their staging the ultimate taboo, exhibiting the devaluation of sacred art and humanity into abject waste, serves a triple purpose: it is, firstly, a postmodern artistic exercise to spectacularise the unimaginable; secondly, a morally responsible act to commemorate that which can never be understood but must be known; and thirdly, a psycho-therapeutical gesture that familiarises ourselves with 'the other within'.

It is a veritable challenge to try to trace the roots of Abject Art: apparently, its fascination with corporeal transgression and taboo has been inspired by a variety of sources including the Dada movement, Artaud's theatre of cruelty, Viennese actionism, and radicalised political, punk, and artistic performances of the 1960s, just to name a few. While the publication of psychoanalyst-philosopher Julia Kristeva's book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* in 1980¹ incited a revival and a renewed interest in this artistic mode, it entered into mainstream

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

only with the 1993 Whitney Museum exhibit *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire* in New York that featured provocative works, revolving around themes of spectacularised otherness and the horror of body-waste,² by the most popular members of the trend-making Young British Artists collective. The title of the exhibition attested that Abject Art as an aesthetic category has finally earned a canonised art-historical status. The troubling experience identified as the trademark of Abject Art considerably deviates from the classic *dulce et utile* (teach and delight) aesthetic tradition, in so far as it allows for the violent invasion of the culturally sanctified and symbolically purified museum space by the socially rejected 'waste' (bodily residue and shameful memories) that is artistically recycled so as to help spectators to come to terms with what they would rather repress: their all too human traits of physical and psychic vulnerability and fallibility. This exercise in "the dialectic and drama of remembering and forgetting"³ aims to reach a shock-therapeutical effect by making us revisit past traumatic experiences of exclusion which are constitutive of our very selves, societies, and histories.⁴ We are unwilling to recall but unable to forget the potential we carry to become and to turn others into dehumanised, decomposing, dead flesh.

This study focuses on perhaps the most controversial concept-artists of the 1993 NY exhibit, brothers Jake and Dinos Chapman. These *enfants terribles* have become infamous for testing the limits of representation through transgressive themes elaborating on horrific, thanatological, anatomical and pornographic aspects of the grotesque. Their provocative oeuvre contains odious oddities ranging from mannequins of children with genitalia instead of faces, to decaying corpses with skulls decorated by clown's noses familiar from joke shops, to drawings of mutant Ronald McDonalds and comical Hitlers, bronze sculptures of inflatable sex-toys and dog excrement, and defaced high artwork

² The first Abject Art exhibition displayed disintegrating, fractured bodies such as Cindy Sherman's androgynous mannequin-torsos and Robert Gober's phantom-limb-like prosthetic leg, decomposing or dissected bodies such as Helen Chadwick's neatly organised chunks of meat de-familiarised as a *locus* of self-identity, solid bodies turned inside out to reveal the hidden viscosity beneath the smooth skin-ego such as Andres Serrano's photograph of a holy crucifix submerged in his own urine, or Mary Kelly's postpartum documents analysing her baby's infantile faecal stains and feeding charts along with baby vests decorated with Lacan's intersubjectivity model and a pre-writing semiotic alphabet.

³ Walter Moser, "Garbage and Recycling: From Literary Theme to Mode of Production", *Other Voices* 3:1 (May 2007), <<http://www.othervoices.org/3.1/wmoser/index.php>> (4 July 2012).

⁴ Human societies define their standards of normality by circumscribing a realm of otherness labelled impure, containing elements (lowly corporeality, psychic disorder, marginalised social classes) they wish to exclude for the sake of preserving the stability of the system.

meant to "rape creativity".⁵ The Chapmans' abject art complements body(waste)-horror with emotionally, ethically and socio-politically challenging topics related to cultural trauma and social cataclysm. Their staging the ultimate taboo, by exhibiting the devaluation of sacred art and humanity into abject waste, serves a triple purpose: it is, firstly, a postmodern artistic exercise to spectacularise the unimaginable; secondly, a morally responsible act to commemorate that which can never be understood but must be known and, thirdly, a psycho-therapeutical gesture that familiarises ourselves with 'the other within'.

The Chapman Brothers' 2008 *Fucking Hell* is a diorama-series of 5000 miniature wax figurines of Nazis and their victims displayed in ultra-violent scenes of torture, pain and death in a nightmarish Hieronymus Bosch-style, arranged in glass cases in the shape of a swastika.⁶ The grotesquerie of the *Hell* sculpture results from the meticulous microscopic perspective forcing us to take a close look at demented frenzies of human violence and violated humans. Disclosed as documented historical facts, they let us become empathically and sympathically engaged with the most horrific events we would rather turn our eyes away from, or stare at silently mesmerised. In the Chapmans' words, the goal of "nasty art"⁷ is to make spectators conscious of the culturally stigmatised and suppressed nastiness of our existence, to provide an idea of the inconceivable 'non-being' that is a necessary counterpart rendering meaningful our very 'being'. They help us imagine the dangerous, disordering, nonsensical "otherness"⁸ that is always out of place and incorporated within the inside of the social/representational system (of individual lives' and collective history's meaningful narrative) only as its outside. The *Hell* exhibition is meant to provide a philosophical commentary on founding ambiguities of Western culture, ranging from religion's macrodynamic to psychology's microdynamic levels. According to the Chapmans, Christianity's major commandment is the prohibition to kill, but it is based on the murder of the son of God and "a

⁵ *The Rape of Creativity* was the title of the Chapman Brothers' April-June 2003 solo show at Modern Art Oxford where they undertook to systematically deface the mint collection of Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* print-series.

⁶ This is a sequel to their 1993 *Disasters of War* now on permanent exhibition in the Tate Gallery, centrepiece of the Royal Academy's Apocalypse exhibition in 2000, and an extended remake of their 2000 installation *Hell* destroyed in the Momart warehouse fire in East London in 2004.

⁷ "Jake & Dinos Chapman Video Interview on 'If Hitler Had Been a Hippie How Happy Would We Be' ", *The White Cube Gallery Website* (2008), <<http://www.whitecube.com/exhibitions/jandd/video/18/>> (27 March 2010).

⁸ Anthropologist Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark, 1984) discusses the same cultural gesture of "permanently thrusting aside [otherness/ dirt] in order to live" (Kristeva, p. 3).

voyeuristic identification of guilt".⁹ Similarly, conforming to the logic of negativity governing our identity and social constructions, we "learn what we have in the face of what someone else does not have".¹⁰ Others' instability serves as a negative reference point in determining limits of our stable selves. In fact, the anti-aesthetics of "nasty" Abject Art invading the cleanly museum space literally stages disorder as the basis of order, waste as the ground of purity, through foregrounding the liminal space of the abjected "constitutive outside".¹¹ Thus, what is disclosed is the share of forgetting in remembering, and those uninhabitable, inarticulable, uncontrollable, even inhuman, zones of being which prove to constitute the "founding repudiation"¹² and the traumatic kernel of our socially organised, 'sane' subjectivities and memories.

Moments of non-being, near-death experiences when the human being is utterly de-humanised can only be 'recycled' as repressed traumatic residue of a past deprived of the possibility of becoming future, as flashbacks of collective cultural memory one might (prefer) not to have ever seen. Driven both by a desire and a reluctance to forget/remember, the spectator, like the traumatic amnesiac, faces insupportably violent somatic experiences of the past, whose psychic resolution begins with the repressed memory returning solely as a bodily sensation, with no visualising capacity, sequence or logic. The *Hell* sculpture faces us with abjection's crushing "weight of meaninglessness about which there is nothing insignificant", the "willed and terrible suspension of being" to which we react in a "twisted braid of affects and thought"¹³ surfacing in violent bodily reactions such as nauseous disgust, outraged horror, frustrated giggle, blushing, compensatory yawning, or tremulous excitement. In Kristeva's view, these gut-reactions are self-protective gestures meant to expel the "other" in order to re-constitute the imaginary self-sufficient, ordered, 'safe' symbolic self's psychosocial/representational sphere. They function as primary safeguards protecting us from the defiling abject, to place and displace that which is 'not me'/non-being', yet engulfs me at the border of my condition as a living being.¹⁴

The Chapmanian works' artistic quality is often questioned on grounds of abusively benefiting from the calculable nature of the corporeal gut-reactions when affronting spectators with shock-effects of tastelessness ranging from obscenity to sacrilege. Their trademark manipulative indecency is clearly summarised in critic Johann Hari's line: "The Chapman Brothers offer a kind of

⁹ "Jake & Dinos Chapman Video Interview".

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kristeva, pp. 2, 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

punk art that spits in your face, punches you in the stomach, and nicks your wallet while you are puking on the floor".¹⁵ The violent bodily displeasure predominating over critical self-reflection¹⁶ directly involves spectators in a co-authorial interpretive process paradoxically based on the refusal to create meaning. Abject art revalues the wasted, the residue and supplement (beyond all stories) as inspiration and turns "cultural suppression into subcultural artistic revelation".¹⁷ By virtue of a complex dialectical dynamics it is not only the artwork that has to be protected from the spectator, but the spectator's integrity is just as much endangered by the artwork's provocative effects.¹⁸

The choice of words *The New York Times'* art review uses to describe the first abject art exhibition back in 1993 clearly reflects the ambiguity of the reception-process fusing "intelligent anger", "instinct for provocation", "provocation and theory", "exercise in *déjà vue*"¹⁹ – contradictory aspects which make the appreciation of abject art displayed in the museum space particularly challenging. Abject art, indeed, does offer an exercise in *déjà vue*; though not necessarily in the sense used by the critic referring to the spectator's boredom felt over the unsurprising routine of the tired counter-tradition. On the contrary, our emotionally-charged cognitive dissonance provokes an utter temporal confusion, whereby the psychically intense, troubling experience seems to have already happened previously someplace, sometime, somehow repeating itself; fusing a sense of familiarity with uncomfortable strangeness.²⁰ Ironically, *déjà*

¹⁵ Johann Hari, "The Art of Subverting Enlightenment", *The Independent* (5 February 2007), <<http://www.johannhari.com/2007/02/05/the-art-of-subverting-the-enlightenment->> (26 March 2010).

¹⁶ Interestingly, abject art criticism almost never takes place on grounds of its theoretical over-investment that produces a meta-narrative criticism of the embeddedness within ideological, representational mechanisms.

¹⁷ Jeff Persels and Russel Ganim use the expression in relation with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque in their "Scatology, the Last Taboo: An Introduction to Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art", in *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Arts* (Studies in European Transition; Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), pp. xiii-xxi. As Ossian Ward suggests, we experience a literalisation of metaphors of the 1909 Futurist manifesto calling museums "absurd abattoirs" and "cemeteries of empty exertion" doomed to be demolished. In Ossian Ward, "The Chapman Brothers/Tom Friedman", *Time Out London Art Review* (13 June 2008).

¹⁸ See: Chapman in Sean O'Hagan, "Loads of Talent but no Real Taste: An Interview with the Chapman Brothers", *The Observer* (3 December 2006).

¹⁹ Holland Cotter, "Provocation and Theory Meet Head On", *The New York Times* (13 August 1993), <<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/13/arts/review-art-at-the-whitney-provocation-and-theory-meet-head-on.html?pagewanted=1>> (29 March 2010).

²⁰ In Kristeva, the abject is often related to an early, pre-symbolic infantile bodily experience (e.g. food loathing, the rejection of maternal milk for the sake of circumscribing the boundaries of one's nascent identity) that gains meaning only later, retrospectively from

vue, literally meaning 'already seen' emerges in terms of the unrepresentable and inappropriate. In fact, *déjà senti* ('already felt') or *paramnesia* (from Greek *παρά παρα*, 'near' + *μνήμη mnēmē*, 'memory') would be more fitting terms to describe the destabilised spectators' feelings upon the emergence of 'embodied memories' related to repressed corporeal experiences one believes to have successfully denied and forgotten, yet which the abject artwork insidiously resurrects.²¹

The Chapman brothers locate their work at the violent intersection of remembering and forgetting, in the light of the pessimistic belief that all artistic representations necessarily destroy what precedes them.²² Presence is doomed to be lost and substituted by art. Via a metatextual gesture, the Chapmanian creativity often concerns the destruction of destructive art, to challenge forgetting by means of spectacular, bitterly self-ironic misreading.

A close look at *Hell* reveals a grotesque detail: a miniature Hitler figurine perched on the side of a mass grave, while musingly painting a joyous landscape with a pink house and a sunny sky. That tiny canvas appears to be brought to real life in the Chapmans' recent project. Departing yet again in search of time past, they exhibited, along with the rebuilt *Fucking Hell* installation, Hitler's watercolor landscape paintings bought anonymously from collectors around the world (for a total of £115,000) and then transformed by painting kitschy, naïve, infantile rainbows, psychedelic skies, floating hearts and smiley faces into the background of each picture. The 2008 show at the Mayfair White Cube gallery was given the title *If Hitler Had Been a Hippy How Happy Would We Be* to draw on the macabre joke that the Second World War and the Holocaust might not have happened if Hitler had been more fulfilled as a painter.²³

The Chapman brothers' abject artistic gesture is self-contradictory for various reasons. The gallery speaks in the name of aesthetic value or rather insignificance, claiming that they "annihilate bad art",²⁴ the rubbish of an amateur rejected by the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna for his lack of talent. In a similar vein, Jake Chapman claims to have "prettified" the dictator's "awful

within the symbolic realm, on such critical, borderline events of adulthood as illness, mental trouble, crime or war, all provoking psychic, spiritual and physical disorder.

²¹ As Hal Foster puts it in Lacanian terms, we witness a shift from the Real understood as an effect of representation to the Real understood as a traumatic event. See: Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic", October 78 (Fall 1996), pp. 107-24.

²² Jake & Dinos Chapman Video Interview on "If Hitler Had Been a Hippy How Happy Would We Be", *The White Cube Gallery Website* (2008), <<http://www.whitecube.com/exhibitions/janddd/video/18/>> (29 March 2010).

²³ Ben Hoyle, "Jake and Dinos Chapman Go to Work on 'Abject' Hitler Art", *The Times* (30 May 2008).

²⁴ Hoyle, "Hitler Art".

landscapes".²⁵ Tim Marlow, director of the exhibition stresses the importance of historical connotations related to the Fuehrer's lowly art, recalling how the same "monstrous imagination" that failed in artistic accomplishments was terribly fulfilled in politics, and arguing that the abjectification of "abject paintings" associated with the ultimate crime of humanity, the Holocaust carries out a moral mission by ruining the Nazi memorabilia that remain highly collectible. Yet, this is also a par excellence case of recycling waste, since the Chapman's resulting work, ruining the artistically worthless, turning trash even more trashy, is now available as a job lot for £685,000.

According to Walter Moser the artistic preoccupation with "ruins, rubble and rubbish" always represents "an intrusion of the past of a system into its present", supporting the "dialectic and drama of remembering and forgetting", while potentially revealing the *Homo Sapiens' Homo Detritus* facet, his non-being "human and social refuse in a world of refuse created by him".²⁶ Moser's remarkable ideas on garbage's cultural reappropriation seem to come true via the Chapmanian strategy of defacement that interestingly combines reutilisation and recycling as means of destructive (re)production. On the one hand, by virtue of reutilisation, Hitler's paintings (even though they are put to different use and function) remain by and large materially intact and recognisable, apt to provoke the *Aha-Erlebnis* of cultural anagnorisis and recalling the sombre memory of the identity of the object in its first use. On the other hand, by the more intense transformation occasioned by recycling, the identity of the object is erased or homogenised to be recuperated as secondary raw material (*Sekundarrohstoff*) ready to come back into a new production-cycle of postmodernist, self-reflective re-use. Unlike its material-technical equivalents, cultural recycling is not all about forgetting: despite the emergence of new meanings, a memory trace persists through time and, once reactivated, necessarily renders the historical nature of the process apparent, endowing spectators with the bifocal perspective of 'then' and 'now'. As Moser suggests, recycling can be compared to historically, discursively grounded practices of "parody, pastiche, collage, montage, epigonism, rewriting, remaking, sampling, reconversion, mixing"²⁷ in so far as forgetting is revealed as an inevitable component of cultural memorial and representational practices. Another common denominator is the multiple authorship of creative activity. The canvases of shiny hellish landscapes belong just as much to Hitler, as to the Chapmans, and to us. The accomplished artwork "falls off and away" from the creator onto its public, like waste – psychic residue

²⁵ Richard Brooks, "Tracey Emin Puts on a Show for Royal Academy", *Times Online* (25 May 2008), <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article3998904.ece> (29 March 2010).

²⁶ Moser, "Garbage".

²⁷ Ibid.

from a traumatic historical heritage and rubbish recycled by means of a postmodern anti-aesthetics – becoming a resource for communally responsible self-expression,²⁸ creating a degenerate art the Nazis would have loathed.

Obviously, reactions to cultural, artistic recycling are contradictory. Some art historians are outraged by the Chapmans' "violating something much more sacred to the art world than the human body – another work of art".²⁹ However, James Smith, chief executive of the Holocaust Centre in Newark believes that painting over Hitler's original historical artefacts is "the most appropriate form of vandalism [ever] encountered".³⁰ It signifies making a point about the past and its relation to the present through demystifying cultural cataclysms as merely all too human. Revealing Hitler's mediocrity as a painter illustrates that "it takes neither a genius nor a psychopath to organise genocide".³¹ Simultaneously, the art and the artist are dragged down from their tyrannical pedestal.

Undoubtedly, the 'smiling face doodles' on Hitler's brushstrokes, like the earlier 'Lego toy figurine-like' miniatures portrayed in *rigor mortis* of war scenes, use grotesque means to evoke the darkest moments of human history, collective cultural traumas we paradoxically identify simultaneously as 'unspeakable' and 'unimaginable', yet compulsively try to re- and re-narrate for therapeutical and moral commemorative purposes. In my view, the Chapmans' projects attempt to provide an answer to Theodor Adorno's famous philosophical dilemma concerning the barbaric impossibility of producing poetry after Auschwitz on grounds of the irresolvable tension between ethics and aesthetics.³² Adornoian anxieties concerning post-Holocaust-art fear, that means inherent in artistic creativity itself, might transform the ultimate inhuman sin and the sinister memory of the genocide into a valuable cultural property apt to offer cathartic pathos, purification and relief through 'purging', commodifying and neutralising the traumatic event as "representation as"³³ and thus, in the long run, reproducing and validating the cultural values of the society that generated the

²⁸ As Moser quotes Jonathan Culler, "Trash has thus become an essential resource for modern art, and in a world of rubbish, art has learned to exploit rubbish", in Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 179-81.

²⁹ See: Richard Dorment on the Chapmans' defacing Goya in Richard Dorment, "Inspired Vandalism", *The Telegraph* (27 May 2003), <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3593618/Inspired-vandalism.html>> (29 March 2010).

³⁰ Hoyle, "Hitler Art".

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Theodor Adorno, "An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society", *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), pp.17-34, p. 34; and Rolf Tiedemann, ed., *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003).

³³ Richardson, "Ethical Limitations".

cataclysm. As Anna Richardson highlights, any artistic form of speaking up about the Holocaust runs the risk of turning the victims' pain into aesthetic pleasure and denigrating survivor testimonies. Conforming to the early Adornoian logic, fictitious reformulations of the catastrophe – especially excessive ones – can possibly lead to negations of real excesses of authentic violence by relating them to imaginative capacities of invented horrors.³⁴ If not, the difficulty in acknowledging an immense cultural trauma as the Holocaust leads from initial repression to a growing fascination with sanitised – softened and sentimental or shocking and sensationalist – images spreading in popular cultural representations, which "[...] affirm life rather than death, survival rather than destruction", individual kindness rather than majority tragedy, and even find the place for melodramatic happy endings to replace the "uncompromising horrors of reality" – as Susan Marshman opines in her analysis of *Schindler's List* or *Life is Beautiful*.³⁵

However, as Richardson warns us, imposing a limit on Holocaust-representation may reproduce the oppression of free speech associated with Nazism. Despite our imaginative reluctance, and the impossibility of truthfully representing the extremely horrific presence that is meant to belong to the past, we feel a duty to testify by communicating messages of/about the victims, surviving and dead.³⁶ The same ambiguity is foregrounded in any museum exhibit dealing with residues of cultural memory, tackling the question how to tell a story that is never fully ours to tell. Despite Adorno's grim view of the 'museal' as an unpleasant display of "objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying"³⁷ the universal willingness to commemorate suffering experienced in order to possibly prevent suffering caused³⁸ naturally leads to the creation of memorial museums. They are referred to by a variety of names such as museums of human suffering, museums of remembrance, museums of human rights – all undertaking to make

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Susan Marshman, "From the Margins to the Mainstream? Representations of the Holocaust in Popular Culture", *eSharp: Identity and Marginality* 6:1 (Autumn 2005), <http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41177_en.pdf> (26 March 2010).

³⁶ The complexity of the post-traumatic amnesiac reactions challenging all interpretive activities on grounds of their unimaginability are reflected by the closing lines of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a Nobel-winning novel on the difficult experience and memory of slavery: "This is a story to pass on. This is not a story to pass on". Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Picador, 1987), p. 275.

³⁷ Theodor Adorno, "The Valéry Proust Museum", in *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), p. 173 quoted by Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum", in Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 318-34, p. 327.

³⁸ Sybil Milton quoted in Crane, p. 329.

powerful statements against war and violence by documenting hardships encountered by people of different times and places (ranging from depicting pains of immigrants arriving on Ellis Island, mass violence of genocide in Armenia, Cambodia, or Croatia, or victimisations by socio-political conflict like in Ireland or the Gulag).³⁹ By now, the question is "not *whether* but *how* [a cataclysm] should be represented".⁴⁰

While the Chapmanian oeuvre clearly evokes Adorno's argument on the failure of culture, on "all culture after Auschwitz, together with the urgent critique of culture (being) *garbage*",⁴¹ the impossibility of artistic creativity is by no means connected to its non-permissibility. The ambiguous, uncomfortable reactions provoked perfectly illustrate that the Chapmans' art has nothing to do with mass culture's pre-digested works condemned by Adorno for preventing individuals from thinking for themselves. The exhibit's cruel subtitle "The aim of all life is death", matching the 'hellscape' of Hitler's unimaginative canvases and the detailed miniature models of torture-scenes, problematises the impossibility and necessity of remembering and forgetting at the conjunction of art, abjection and trauma. It addresses our culture's "compassion fatigue" and "pathos habit" resulting from viewers' "over-exposure to images of excessive violence" and the resulting demand for ever more violent scenes apt to feed our compassionate dependence on catharsis.⁴² Moreover, it reflects on the ultimate travesty that in museums of remembrance victims remain known by their scattered belongings and not their spiritual works, while images of their deaths are meant to recall their lives.⁴³ The terrifying anti-aesthetics of death-images clearly subvert the classic artistic aims to transmit knowledge and entertainment, through illuminating that "reason wide awake can produce monsters"⁴⁴ (with reference to the systematicity of Nazi genocide) and that the bliss of the artistic sublime is drawn from a distanced contemplation of others' real suffering.

³⁹ Terence M. Duffy, "Museums of Human Suffering and the Struggle for Human Rights", in Carbonell, ed., pp. 117-22.

⁴⁰ Thomas Trezise, "Unspeakable", *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14 (Spring 2001), pp. 38-63, p. 43, quoted in Richardson, "Ethical Limitations".

⁴¹ Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics* 6:359: "The fact that it could happen in the midst of all the traditions of philosophy, art and the sciences with all their enlightenment, says more than just that these traditions and mind in general were unable to take hold of men and change them [...] all culture after Auschwitz, together with the urgent critique of culture, is garbage", quoted in Tiedemann, ed., p. xvi.

⁴² Sarah Kent, "Shock and Awe", *Manchester Creative Tourist Guide* (19 August 2009), <<http://www.creativetourist.com/features/shock-and-awe>> (26 March 2010).

⁴³ See: James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), quoted in Marshman.

⁴⁴ As Hari suggests, this can be an allusion to the famous claim of Goya (defaced by the Chapmans) "the sleep of reason produces monsters", in Hari, "The Art of Subverting".

However, instead of a safe glimpse here we get an overwhelming scream of horror. The show illustrates why Adorno himself retracts his initial claim twenty years later suggesting that "a perennial suffering has just as much right to find expression as a victim of torture has to scream".⁴⁵ Indeed, these artworks seem to break the silence of the museum space with a laughter of horror characteristic of the grotesque. With Adorno, one can regard this as the bitter price each work of art has to pay that comes to life despite the total disillusion of humanity. Instead of mimetically re-presenting the unspeakable historical trauma, having absorbed and transcended the aesthetics of pain and death in an Adornoian fashion, the Chapmans adopt a shock-therapy of carnivalesque familiar from the *dance macabre* of the *memento mori* tradition, while re-imagining the past from a postmodernist, self-ironic distance aware of its own very insufficiency.

Slavoj Žižek argues – in relation to the Western world's first major twenty-first century cultural trauma, the September 11th 2001 terror attacks of the WTC towers – that the return of the repressed 'real' proves to be, on account of its traumatic and excessive character, impossible to be integrated into what we experience as reality. The traumatic kernel of the 'real', (re)embodying the 'unimaginable impossible' itself, compels us to experience it as a "nightmarish apparition", an "unreal spectre", a spectacular semblance that can be sustained only fictionalised, as a "reality transfunctionalized through fantasy".⁴⁶ The Chapmanian oeuvre's phantasmagorical scenarios of extreme hellscapes of suffering undoubtedly challenge rational discourse and mimetic representation as the ultimate basis of knowledge and question the significance of reasoned judgment throughout the artistic process of the construction of meaning. Paradoxically, the "emphasis on non-knowledge, the irrational, foolish or absurd"⁴⁷ serves to violate spectators' subconscious resistance to knowledge.

Inspired by Adorno, who claimed that the world outlived its own demise, and needs art as its unconscious chronicle, the Chapmans urge us to learn to live with our collective cultural traumas while taking precautions against their recurrence.⁴⁸ A trauma that cannot be properly remembered by even the most realistic documentary can be adequately commemorated and warned against via

⁴⁵ Rolf Tiedemann, "Not the First Philosophy, but the Last One: Notes on Adorno's Thought", in Tiedemann, ed., pp. xi-xxviii, p. xvi.

⁴⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 18-20.

⁴⁷ "Jake and Dinos Chapman: Bad Art for Bad People", *Tate Liverpool Website* (15 December 2006-10 March 2007), <<http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/jakeanddinoschapman/guide/room1.shtml>> (29 March 2010).

⁴⁸ In fact this historiographic metafictional play is reminiscent of the one adopted by Quentin Tarantino in his recent, 2010 World War II movie *Inglorious Basterds*, a blockbuster on accounts of having found the adequate means to speak the unspeakable in an era of spectacularity and scepticism.

fantasy-work fuelled by non-knowledge, the nonsensical and the 'impossible'. The aim is not to understand but to know. As Primo Levi puts it, "perhaps one cannot, what is more must not, understand what happened, because to understand is to justify [...] If understanding is impossible, knowing is imperative, because what happened could happen again".⁴⁹

The Chapman Brothers as imaginative chroniclers of our times are often compared by critics to the Brothers Grimm.⁵⁰ However, their reimaginings of the historical past tackle serious ethical questions: the human psyche's craving for horrors and the sublime, the likelihood of our species' recreating hell had it ceased to exist,⁵¹ the search for the work's meaning in the artist's symptomatic traumas instead of our collective cultural malaise,⁵² the appropriation of authorship by rewriting, and the lost belief in art's redeeming quality.

Through the Chapman brothers' 'creative vandalism', disorder is interpreted as a means to maintain order, social status quo, and justice by virtue of an art that does not lay claim to be labelled as Art. As cultural suppression becomes artistic revelation, as the waste-like traumatic remainder of cultural memory/amnesia is revalued as inspiration, in a multimedial metamorphosis, the exhibition hall fulfils the function of the psychoanalyst's couch, the courtroom of the post-structuralist subject-in-process, the anatomical theatre, and the cabinet of curiosities. Bringing to full realisation Foucault's ideal of the *heterotopia*,⁵³ the museum hosts a multitude of spaces which affirm difference, and provide an escape-route from authoritarianism, repression and inhumanity.

⁴⁹ Primo Levi, *The Truce* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), pp. 395-6, in Richardson, "Ethical Limitations".

⁵⁰ Rachel Campbell-Johnston, "If Hitler Had been a Hippy, How Happy Would We Be, Mason's Yard, SW1" *Times Online* (30 May 2008), <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article4029998.ece> (29 March 2010).

⁵¹ Ironically, as Dinos Chapman says in an interview, for their 2008 show the artists actually rebuilt a "newer, improved, bigger and brighter" version of *Hell* destroyed in a Momart fire in 2004, see O'Hagan, "Loads of Talent".

⁵² Chapman in Hoyle, "Hitler Art".

⁵³ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Places: Heterotopias", in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 229-36.