# WHEN ART CEASES TO BE INTEGRATIVE: RECONSIDERING HANNA SEGAL'S AESTHETICS

## Era Trieman

**Abstract:** The present paper sets out to reconsider three key issues in Hanna Segal's theory of aesthetics: the role of aggression in creativity, artistic maturity, and the restorative function. In her seminal paper, 'A Psycho-Analytical Approach To Aesthetics' (1952), Hanna Segal identifies the roots of art in the depressive position. By drawing emphasis upon certain advances in our aesthetic conception, the question arises as to whether the theoretical implications of her paper ought to be revised. It appears that many of the contemporary psychoanalytic perspectives on art and creativity tend to omit an indispensable element: our innate propensity towards aggression. This paper deviates from Segal's emphasis upon integration and reparation to focus instead on the paranoid-schizoid elements of our aesthetic experience.

*Introduction*

In 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning' (1911) Freud presents us with two different approaches to libidinal impulses. The *pleasure principle* demands instant gratification; if this is not forthcoming the subject will turn to omnipotent mechanisms to sate his immediate needs. The *reality principle* involves a difficult recognition; the source of pleasure will not be readily available or possessed entirely and so the subject will have to wait patiently and work diligently in order to attain his limited and deferred gratification. Freud suggests that one species of thought-activity becomes split off and so eludes the strictures of reality-testing, thus remaining subordinate to the pleasure principle alone. The activity to which he refers is *phantasying*. Freud identifies the motive force of a phantasy as the unfulfilled wish, whose function is to alter the outcome of reality. On this premise a rather contentious analogy is drawn: 'The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy [...] while separating it sharply from reality' (1908: 144). In effect Freud has classified artistic

endeavours alongside phantasying as a circuitous means by which to sate the pleasure principle:

> *Art* brings about reconciliation between the two principles in a peculiar way. An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction ... and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however ... by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality. (1911: 224)

Segal would cast doubt over Freud's hypothesis: 'An artist does not operate mainly, as Freud originally thought, on the pleasure principle' (1991: 82). On the contrary, she distinguishes the artist as one whose fundamental task is to pursue the substance of *psychic truth*. 'Where the day-dreamer avoids conflict by a phantasy of omnipotent wish-fulfilment and a denial of external and psychic realities, the artist seeks to locate his conflict and resolve it in his creation' (ibid.).

What separates these potential explanations is the *nature of the conflict* that must be resolved. Freud approaches the matter of sublimation as a renunciation of instinctual aims, whereby frustrated sexual impulses may be deflected and discharged. Expanding upon Freud's (1920) subsequent discovery of the death drive, Segal envisages a different sort of conflict borne of the subject's annihilatory fears and innate destructiveness. When the breast withholds gratification and causes frustration, the infant launches a ferocious retaliatory attack by means of phantasy. The damage inflicted upon the loved object will cause the remorseful infant to feel utter despair, arousing feelings of guilt and loss that will ordinarily be assuaged through the act of *reparation.*

Though the root conflict has been defined differently, Segal notes that sublimation and reparation both necessitate a certain degree of *renunciation.* Whether it is the instinctual aim or the loved object that must be given up, 'a successful renunciation can only happen through a process of mourning', whereby grief must be followed by the

recognition of loss (1952: 202). With the renunciation of the lost object, the ego turns instead to symbol formation as a means of internal restoration.

Hanna Segal conceptualizes symbolisation as the outcome of a three-way interaction 'between the ego, the object, and the symbol' (1957: 392). The ego must grapple with a host of anxieties that arise in relation to its objects. In the paranoid-schizoid position the infant's primary concerns involve the apparent loss of the good object and fear of the bad object. The formation of symbols is a method by which the ego is able to cope with such anxieties; safeguarding the good by locating it somewhere constant and accessible, omitting the bad by projecting it outwards and casting it away. Throughout this early stage the infant remains 'under the sway of uncontrollable greedy and sadistic impulses' and will furiously attack the persecutory part-objects (1952: 197). These attacks will in turn conjure up the fear of retaliation and retribution. However, it gradually dawns on the infant that these contrasting part-objects are in fact two sides of the same *whole object.* This essential realisation ushers in a different sort of anxiety situation, known as the *depressive position.*

With a nascent ability to tolerate ambivalence towards the needed object, as opposed to splitting it into good and bad, the infant must learn to *integrate* feelings of love and hate. He must also recognise the damage that has been inflicted by his destructiveness, giving rise to 'the wish to restore and re-create the lost loved object outside and within the ego' (ibid.). One of the ways in which the subject may do so is through artistic modes of expression. Hanna Segal thus concludes that the creative impulse derives from the reparative impetus of the depressive position.

With a more integrated perception of the object, the propensity towards splitting and idealisation is diminished and so the good object is no longer felt to be indestructible. The ego becomes gravely aware of the threat posed by his unconscious destructiveness and henceforth becomes increasingly concerned with protecting the cherished object from the possessive and annihilatory tendencies that jeopardise its existence. Hanna Segal accordingly identifies symbolism as an essential manoeuvre of the depressive position: '[the] symbol is needed to displace aggression from the original object, and in that way to lessen the guilt and the fear of loss' (1957: 394).

There is much commonality between the concepts of sublimation and symbolisation, insofar as both necessitate an initial frustration followed by an alternate solution. It should however be noted that while sublimation places a particular emphasis upon the desexualisation of the libidinal drives, symbolisation does not specifically pertain to sexuality so much as to the frustrations caused by the loved object. Likewise the pleasure principle and the reality principle are closely aligned *but not the same* as the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. While in both cases there is a duality between immediate and deferred gratification, or between omnipotence and working through, Freud's *principles* relate predominantly to his drive theory, whereas the Kleinian *positions* are intrinsically defined by the nature of object-relations (1946).

If creativity amounts to a working through of the depressive position, as Hanna Segal contends, then it entails not only the recreation of a harmonious internal world but also the integration of the experience of its destruction. The subject must confront the chaos caused by his destructiveness, however, in so doing, he will forgo the blissful ignorance of a mind annihilated and unable to perceive. Having tasted the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge Adam and Eve become capable of guilt. Having lost their innocence of knowledge they can no longer stay in the Garden of Eden (Britton, 1992: 39). When Segal suggests that art emanates from the depressive position she refers to the impulse to 'recover and recreate this lost world' (1991: 94): 'The act of creation at depth has to do with an unconscious memory of a harmonious internal world and the experience of its destruction'.

The exemplary work of art may be able to provide a substitutive source of gratification, but it will always demand more of the subject. Heightening our aesthetic sensibilities to a pinnacle from which sorrow unexpectedly emanates, its sublime nature acts as a timely reminder of the harmonious world that has been lost: the Gates of Eden tantalizingly close yet ultimately beyond reach. If it is not too heretical, I would like to suggest that Freud misconstrues 'the aching despondency felt by the young poet', when he exclaims, 'No! it is impossible that all this loveliness of Nature and Art, of the world of our sensations and of the world outside, will really fade away into nothing' (1916: 305). The transient external world *will* indeed fade away into nothing, however the young

poet's despondency harkens back to the harmonious internal world that *has already* been lost.

*Discussion*

Segal argues that the artistic endeavor is one notable domain in which good aspects of the self are frequently projected and identified with, perhaps as a way of preserving a semblance of the ideal self. She notes:

> It is an important part of overcoming the depressive anxieties and completing the reparation, to allow the object to be separate once again. This enables the artist to have a certain objective detachment from his work and a critical attitude to it. He is never completely identified with it. (1974: 139)

Though it is not stated unequivocally, the above quotation does allude to the obscure boundary between self and object. The symbol acts as a mediator, enabling the object 'to be separate once again'. The artist is thought to remain firmly situated in reality, insofar as he maintains 'a certain objective detachment'. He does not become confused and is thus able to differentiate between internal and external.

Though it was earlier stated that symbolisation emerges from the depressive position, Segal draws our attention to something rather more primitive known as the *symbolic equation*. The concretisation of the symbol is a predominant feature of the paranoid-schizoid position and is especially likely where projective identification has been excessive. It may be seen as a continuation of the infant's early attempts to possess the ideal object or to control the persecutory object. The attack on the symbol does not resolve the conflict felt towards the original object, nor does it diminish anxiety; it therefore amounts to an unsuccessful sublimation. It is only when the subject has been able to achieve a depressive level of functioning (to give up and mourn the object) that the symbolic equation may instead become a representation of the lost object. It could therefore be concluded that the quality and function of symbolisation alters according to the ego's level of cohesion and interaction with its objects.

It seems as though Segal strongly associates such identificatory processes with paranoid-schizoid connotations and perhaps this does not entirely convey the relation of the artist to his work. Roger Money-Kyrle beautifully elucidates the link between the depressive position and our aesthetic sensibilities as follows:

> Thus, from the conflict between the desire to possess and consume the object, and the desire to preserve it forever from these predatory appetites, emerges the beginnings of a non-utilitarian attitude to it as something to be admired and loved but not used up. (1961: 114)

What I find especially compelling about Money-Kyrle's explanation is that it encapsulates the entire *transition* between the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive position. The work of art *is* regarded as a separate and integrated entity, yet there remains 'that peculiar sense' in which it is *still* felt to be 'a part of the self', a remnant of the greed and omnipotence of the paranoid-schizoid position, in which the good breast is devoured and becomes merged within the possessive ego (ibid. 115). If our non-utilitarian attitude towards art may be understood in terms of differentiating between self and other, protecting the cherished object and maintaining its integrity *(a recognition of reality)*, one should equally consider our more visceral attitude towards art in terms of cannibalistic incorporation, merging with the ideal object, a union of omnipotent gratification *(the remnants of primitive unconscious phantasies)*.

Once again our discussion has hinged upon the artist's relation to phantasy and reality. It has been suggested that the artist maintains a certain objective detachment from his work; nonetheless it is still ambiguously felt to be part of the self, not unlike the residual detritus of Tracy Emin's iconic installation piece (Fig. 1).

One of the potential limitations of 'A Psycho-Analytical Approach To Aesthetics' is that it does not seem receptive enough to the traces of primitive mental functioning that persist in our artistic endeavours. The central argument of Segal's thesis, rather stringently made, is that 'a satisfactory work of art is achieved by a realization and sublimation of the depressive position' (206). But what does 'satisfactory' actually mean?

Fig. 1: Tracy Emin, *My Bed,* 1998

Is it a qualitative judgment and, if so, does it not become highly susceptible to critique? There is something inherently problematic about stipulating 'the pre-condition of both genital and artistic maturity' (200) as though sexual and aesthetic creativity were entirely synonymous. Our critique ceases to be impartial if our impressions of the artwork are contingent upon extraneous factors, such as the degree of the artist's psychic integration or libidinal maturity. It is as though, in trying to provide a universal theory of creativity, Segal has unwittingly acquiesced to a normative paradigm of taste.

For the sake of comparison, I would like to consider the subversive aesthetics of Jean Dubuffet and those who have since championed Art Brut as an affront to the artistic establishment. Dubuffet audaciously proclaims that 'art is creation in process' but 'culture is creation of the past' (Blackwood, 1973). The artist must strive to remain in motion and constantly inventive, while the critic is left to chronicle that which has already been and gone. Roger Cardinal outlines the ethos of Art Brut as follows: 'Only art that embodies an authentic *pureté* (raw purity) can be expected to convey anything like a true dynamism. All other kinds of art are so to speak *cooked* according to the fastidious recipes drawn up by the chefs of culture' (1972: 26). Michel Thévoz goes one further by suggesting that creativity is, *in its essence,* a transgression of norms and a

repudiation of reality: 'art creation always and in every case has an asocial and therefore, in the eyes of the public health officer, a pathological character' (1995: 175).

While I regard the theoretical exponents of Art Brut with a pinch of salt, its gradual emergence into the cultural mainstream has profoundly challenged our preconceived ideas of what constitutes "art".



Fig. 2: Gaston Duf, *Rinauserose Viltrities,* 1950

So what exactly does 'artistic maturity' signify? Perhaps this phrase ought to be addressed in its inverse. I will cite just a few examples from the Art Brut collection, curated initially by Jean Dubuffet during the 1950s and thereafter developed by his protégé, Michel Thévoz. The idiosyncratic works tend to be immediately recognizable. Gaston Duf (1920-1966) (Fig. 2) returns time and again to a subject that he identifies as the Rhinoceros, a remarkable brightly coloured assemblage, hairy and ocular, sharp-fanged and phallic. The bizarre form seems replete with part objects. Maybe the fearsome entity could be interpreted as a reflection of sadistic attacks upon mother's body? Or the

delusional phantasy of an invulnerable omnipotent self? 'He himself stated that the massive beast meant a lot to him because it was hard and strong, the exact opposite of the soft weakling that he was' (Cardinal, 1972: 98).



Fig. 3: Aloïse Corbaz, *Mythe Atalante lance des pommes d'or,* 1946

Consider also the charming naïveté of Aloïse Corbaz (1886-1964) (Fig. 3), whose irrepressible infatuation with her former employer, Kaiser Wilhelm II, finds expression in copious illustrations of an embracing couple adorned in regal attire. I suspect that Segal would deem these works to be artistically immature. They have a compulsive and unintegrated quality, quite distinct from the working through of the depressive position. The grotesque beasts and radiant lovers are, if anything, more reminiscent of the process of splitting in the paranoid-schizoid position. They are quintessential examples of the artistry of schizophrenia and indeed were produced from within the confines of an asylum. These works are nonetheless utterly compelling. Why then do they remain so evocative?

Riccardo Steiner provides us with the following contemporary perspective:

the importance of this notion of fluidity, this possibility and necessity to be able to use phantasies and feelings that are part of the paranoid-schizoid position, much more linked, for instance to the primary process and its logic than to the depressive one, has often been underrated and has lead to a moralistic identification of creativity as such with the depressive position, with its total objects and so on. (2000: 269)

Steiner's critique raises some interesting issues. The use of the word 'moralistic' seems an intriguing choice, as though Segal were depicting a wholesome breed of artist who felt compelled to *atone* for their earlier destructiveness. Moreover it seems debateable whether the integration of 'total objects' should be considered a necessary criterion for the visual arts. To think of the artist in these terms alone is to reduce the creative process to something controlled, rational and structured. But most significant seems to be the notion of *fluidity.* Indeed, as Marion Milner discloses in her book, *On Not Being Able To Paint* (1950), there is something precarious about the creative act, eliciting 'a fear of losing all sense of separating boundaries; particularly the boundaries between the tangible realities of the external world and the imaginative realities of the inner world' (32).

One gets the sense that creativity resides upon a *precipice,* as though the artist brazenly delves into the chaotic and undifferentiated, seduced by the fecundity of a primitive state of mind. Milner's academic contemplation of the creative process certainly attempts to draw upon this wellspring of inspiration: 'I had turned to such free drawing in a desperate attempt to relieve the mood of furious frustration [...] it certainly was a genuine expression of a mood, also a very intense one' (18-19). Milner tries to ascertain whether the method of free association could be translated into 'free drawing' by releasing her pencil to wander of its own volition.

The same technique would be deployed by André Masson (Fig. 4) , whose *automatic drawing* sought to penetrate the pure forms of the *invisible world*. Working often with glue and sand, Masson's anatomical compositions depict orgiastic scenes of violence, ancient sea creatures recoiling and punctured, gnashing and slaughtered. The

crude lines convey a true dynamism in the formal attributes of the savage creatures along the ocean floor, while vividly evoking phantasied scenes of primordial sadism submerged within the depths of the mind. William Rubin states that 'automatism allows the



Fig. 4: André Masson, *Battle of Fishes,* 1926

expression of primitive, instinctual feeling [...] [which] served psychologically for Masson as a symbolic counterthrust to the disruptive elements of his personality, whose unconscious and instinctual drives are the subjects of the pictures' (1976: 26).

The techniques of free drawing and automatism could be considered attempts at reparation, though not so much in the conventional Kleinian sense of the term. Rather than the integrative quality of working through, Milner resolutely strives to *stay* with the raw emotion, but manages to forge some sort of objective detachment by transplanting her frustrations *into* the artistic medium. To an even greater degree, the artistic endeavours of Masson seek to distil the primitive instinctual feeling: it does constitute a sublimatory displacement of energy, but crucially the *affective quality* of the instinct is neither altered nor diminished.

It is interesting to compare Freud's notion of desexualisation in the sublimatory process to Thévoz's explanation of the visceral quality of Art Brut: 'a really inventive drawing is no longer merely a means of conveying an imagined scene: it is itself invested with a sexuality released from its usual objects […] it becomes as it were an extension of

the body, a libidinal surface' (1995: 105). The stylistic details appear to corroborate our speculations: the engulfing voracious works of Duf seem saturated with libidinal intensity; the kaleidoscopic drawings of Corbaz are densely compact with circular forms, filling any blank spaces to deny separateness. If the artistry of schizophrenia is felt to be part of the self, a libidinal surface endowed with affect, to what extent could this also be true of the wave of Abstract Expressionism that artistically defined the 1950s?

It is Segal's contention that the artist *must* separate from his idealised object, for 'it is only when the loss has been acknowledged and the mourning experienced that re-creation can take place' (1952: 199). Hans Joachim Kleinschmidt does not seem to think that such a renunciation is mandatory, arguing to the contrary that:

> the creative push is the search for the "perfect" communication of feeling [...] the search goes on interminably for an oceanic blending with the *idealised* mother, the unobtainable infantile love which must elude the adult ego. (1967: 100-101).

Could it be that the 'adult' ego has long since relinquished the ideal maternal imago, while within each of us an infantile part of the ego remains extant, continuing its search for unobtainable pleasures? If so, it would be useful to reflect upon the 'fluidity' with which the artist is able to invoke paranoid-schizoid phantasies and oscillate between different modes of mental functioning.

Echoing the suggestion made by Kleinschmidt that omnipotent phantasies 'must elude the adult ego', Money-Kyrle also regards the ego as a fluid entity straying towards the pleasure principle against its better judgment. He is of the opinion that each individual is confronted with the unpalatable *reality of difference:* between self and other, between the sexes, and between generations:

> Quite often, no part achieves this kind of cognitive maturity. An individual in whom all parts have achieved it exists only as a standard of cognitive normality which no one quite achieves. (1968: 693)

It could well be argued that 'A Psycho-Analytical Approach To Aesthetics' unduly exalts the depressive position as a standard of cognitive normality. Segal would contemplate the quandary of the artist's reality-sense from a rather different vantage point in a subsequent paper entitled 'Delusion and Artistic Creativity' (1974), a reflection perhaps of the profound theoretical advances in the Kleinian conception of the paranoid-schizoid position. Here she alludes to the ambiguous, somewhat precarious, regard with which the artist beholds his work: '[he] creates an illusion, but at times it comes close to a delusion' (139).

It is suggested that the artist and the creator of the delusion both vividly sense the destruction of their inner world: they must face the crisis of the depressive position, confronting an awareness of the parental couple from which they are excluded. Having viciously attacked the parental couple in phantasy, the artist is able to grant his objects their vitality, fertility and separateness by means of a symbolic restoration. The individual suffering from a delusion will instead refuse to acknowledge the fact of having been borne of a parental couple and so will forge an omnipotent self-image as a denial of conception, nurture or need.

To explore the gradations between symbolic restoration and manic delusion, let us consider Werner Herzog's spectacular masterpiece, *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). The film revolves around the émigré protagonist, played by Klaus Kinski, who is determined to build a magnificent European-style opera house in the depths of the Amazon. Needless to say, the expedition ultimately succumbs to its inevitable demise. His journey through the dense rainforest could be regarded as a metaphor for the desire to enter and control the fearsome realm of parental sexuality. Fitzcarraldo ardently pursues the unobtainable. The opera house is a delusional construct, a mirage amidst the untameable overgrowth. Nonetheless, undeterred in his Oedipal strivings, he attempts to transcend the Ucayali's insurmountable obstacles in defiance of nature.

I would like to draw attention to another of Segal's remarks: 'as in every work of art, the [artwork] contains also the story of its own creation' (1974: 138). Nowhere could this be truer than in the chaotic method of Werner Herzog (Fig. 5), the sheer audacity of his creative vision seems to emulate that of his protagonist, as though the film amounts to a record of its own inception. It has often been suggested that the climactic scene of the

gravity-defying steamship seems a suitable analogy for the director's own quixotic ambitions. It is well documented that he refused to use a small-scale model, opting instead for utmost truthfulness. There is no sense of 'objective detachment' as Herzog



Fig. 5: Still from *Fitzcarraldo,* 1982

evocatively comes to embody the character of Fitzcarraldo, navigating a local crew of oarsmen and mechanics upstream, venturing into the unknown in search of something elusive, an indefatigable vision. The production has garnered almost as much attention as the film itself, while many of the anecdotes beggar belief. 'There is a mysterious truth in what we did', Herzog proclaims, 'I was the axis of a wheel that was spinning out of control' (Cronin, 2002: 177, 183).

When Flaubert says, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi", it is understood by Segal to mean that the author has bestowed symbolic form upon one of his internal objects, enabling him to comprehend Madame Bovary's mental constellation as though it were a segment of his own. However it occurs only too often that the quality of a symbol spills over into something else, from an object-representation to a self-identification. *Fitzcarraldo* provides us with a keen sense of the powerful identificatory processes inherent beneath our creations, while posing some serious questions about the permeable nature of the boundary between phantasy and reality. Has the director been able to

effectively sublimate or should we instead think of his grand enterprise as a rather wild and dangerous form of enactment?

If fiction is supposed to be a mirror to reality it is liable to be a fearsome thing when the obscure boundaries become ruptured, when semblance becomes too real.

Often an artwork will be held in higher regard if its maker is deemed to be authentic enough. The practice of method acting comes to mind. For instance, it is known that Daniel Day-Lewis had to withdraw from the stage while performing *Hamlet* at the National Theatre after he experienced a 'vivid, almost hallucinatory moment' in which he became engaged in a dialogue with *his own* deceased father, lost to him at an early age (Hattenstone, 2003). 'The aim on a conscious level was to try to understand. I don't mean in an intellectual way, because that is the death of all work that we do, but I mean in my... organs' (ibid.). This was not meant as hyperbole: to inhabit his role, the actor strives to reverse the process by which the symbol became a separate entity. The identification is so intense that it transcends the psyche, harking back to the instinctual roots of the soma.

Contemporary art seems to increasingly challenge the separating boundaries between phantasy and reality: 'its aim is to foster the discovery of new ways of experiencing and thinking about reality' (Abella, 2010: 177). The performance pieces of Marina Abramović often implicate the audience in the spectacle, epitomising our insatiable appetite for experiential transgression. *Using her own body as the medium* she attempts to elicit the primal substance of humanity by transforming into a libidinal surface for the aggression of others. *Rhythm 0* (1974) is set in a bare room with an assortment of objects laid out on a table. Having assigned a passive role to herself, Abramović acts like a marionette while audience members impose their will upon her. The inquisitive audience initially respond with adoration (stroking, kissing, adorning etc.) but with no fear of retribution their inhibitions soon fade. Through an abdication of will she becomes the maternal body that is subjected to the sadistic phantasies of the infant: her clothes are shorn with scissors, her skin cut with scalpel. The performance itself is a shared enactment, whereby taboo phantasies become actualized in reality. The line is only drawn when a loaded pistol is held to her neck, at which point the gallerist intervenes and throws it out the window. *Imponderabilia* (1977) (Fig. 6) involved Abramović and her partner standing naked by the front entrance of the MoMA so that

audience members would have to turn sideways to squeeze past them; enacting another violation of the Oedipal taboo by looking, touching, penetrating the parental couple:



Fig. 6: Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Imponderabilia,* 1977

what grips us so powerfully can only be the artist's intention [...] [he aims] to awaken in us the same emotional attitude, the same mental constellation as that which in him produced the impetus to create. (Freud, 1914: 212)

Our discussion thus far has mostly centred upon the motivations of the artist and the psychical processes involved in his creative endeavours.  The question that remains to be asked is, *what factors contribute to our appreciation of the work of art?*

Segal sets out to comprehend the aesthetic experience in terms of *psychic resonance,* focussing on the mutual working through of the depressive position. The artist, she claims, has managed to create a unified world out of the chaos and destruction

of the paranoid-schizoid position. The spectator subsequently identifies with this process of ruination and restoration, and thus 're-establishes his own internal objects [...] and feels, therefore, re-integrated and enriched' (1952: 204-205).

Often the damage will be beyond repair, meaning that restoration is only viable internally. Peter Fuller demonstrates this attribute of the depressive position with reference to the Venus de Milo (Fig. 7) , a paragon of ancient Greek beauty, whose remnants have been severely damaged with time: 'a characteristic of the original statue was its sense of wholeness: the dominant feature of the surviving part is that of fragmentation' (1980: 97). Nonetheless, it could be argued that the mutilation actually *enhances* the aesthetic poignancy of the Venus: 'she is a representation of the internal "Mother" who has survived the ravages of a phantasised attack' (ibid. 121). To behold the Venus is to recognize the savagery that has been inflicted upon our objects, but also to find reassurance in the object's strength and resilience *insofar as she has endured*. The mutilated Venus does not conform to the fallacious standards of totality. Her fragmentary nature arouses our curiosity and elicits a reparative urge to complete the object internally. The Venus gives tangible symbolic form to the mutilated maternal imago, while encapsulating the remorse and compassion of the depressive position.

But what if the symbol were to be irretrievably destroyed? Most likely it would evoke tremendous anxiety, exacerbating the sense of guilt and loss felt towards the original object. Consider, for instance, the profound identificatory connection felt towards historical artefacts. The act of iconoclasm is not merely the desecration of inanimate sculptures; it is an assault upon revered symbolic formations that have become endowed with the qualities of our most cherished objects. Is the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan not resonant on a societal level with the murder of the primordial father by the insurgent horde?

Remaining conceptually with the perpetual interplay of aggression and reparation, Adrian Stokes suggests that, insofar as art is a communicative endeavour, *projective identification must be an integral factor*. The spectator attributes parts of himself to the artwork and thereby recognises his internal objects as manifest externally. He has thus become 'assimilated in an active aesthetic transformation' (1965: 13) wherein the artwork does not exist objectively but is instead saturated with (perhaps impregnated by)
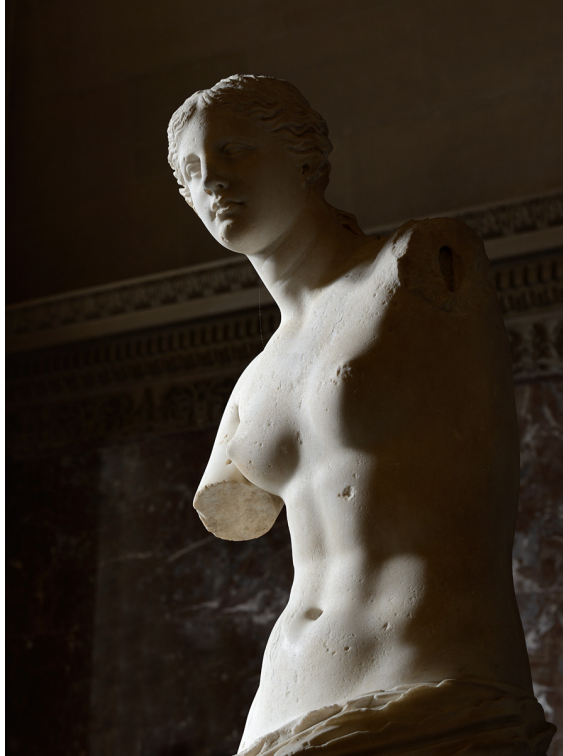
Fig. 7: *Venus de Milo,* circa. 130-100 BC

unconscious phantasy.

It is notable that numerous critical theorists have been influenced by the concept of an intrapsychic rapport being forged through cultural productions. For Walter Benjamin the artwork acts as a medium inviting contemplation; 'before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations' (1968: 238). Susan Sontag seems to personify the artwork as though it were a relational being, 'art cannot seduce without the complicity of the experiencing subject' (1967*:* 22). Roland Barthes is unequivocal when he states, 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author', for it is argued that authorship imposes rigid limitations upon the text (1977: 148). Each of these theoretical contributions exalts the *dialogical nature* of the artwork, transforming the experiencing subject into an active participant whose associations, eroticism and sentience give the artwork its infinitely subjective meaning.

It would appear as though the artwork has been exalted as a magical entity; inducing our contemplative associations, seductively arousing our sexuality, giving birth to our individuality. However, it is clear that these are primarily *maternal functions*. So

why have they been attributed to the artwork itself? To answer this one may refer to the Winnicottian conception of the early infantile situation, whereby it is thought that the emergence of human subjectivity is contingent upon a good-enough environment. By anticipating moments of need and anxiety, the nurturing mother creates 'the *illusion* that her breast is part of the infant', under his magical control, so to speak (1971: 11). To diminish the overwhelming feelings of helplessness, mother provides the infant with an illusory sense of non-differentiation, emboldening his omnipotence and primary narcissism. By these means, annihilatory fears can be modified into less daunting experiences and so the infant gradually develops a sense of reality. Could it be that the artwork fulfills a similar function, that of *illuminating our unformulated experiences?*

Unwittingly we have ventured into the *intermediate space* of the transitional object, whose magical attributes seem beyond interrogation, a liminal entity that returns us to a merged state, inducing an experiential transformation. Whereas the aesthetic theory of Hanna Segal hinges upon the categorical differentiation between self and object, I do not think that such a coherent detachment is necessarily the norm. On the contrary, it is often the case that the artist seems to instil a segment of themselves into their work. Consider, for instance, the beguiling installations of Anish Kapoor curated around the Palace of Versailles. *Dirty Corner* (2011) (Fig. 8) ushers the spectator into the maternal womb, irreverently dissonant amidst the majestic gardens of the *ancien régime.* It is not merely a representation of the genital part-object; it evokes omnipotent grandiosity, taboo phantasy, cosmic dimensions. With a distinctly immersive quality it lures us into a vague and uncanny rendezvous.

Having contemplated the affective composition of libidinal surfaces, the boundary-blurring emulation of characters, and the utmost identificatory efforts of the method actor, it could be said that *separation between symbol and self occurs to varying degrees*. I have deliberately opted for examples that seem to defy separateness, that evoke the phantasy of merged states or the omnipotent appropriation of the ideal object, that apparently reside upon the precipice of delusion and pathology. To denigrate these artworks on account of their unintegrated attributes would seem anachronistic in light of the broadened horizons of contemporary art. It is true that certain artworks have an

edifying or didactic influence upon us; some reassure or placate us with their unity, others will impress us with their virtuosity and refinement. However I would argue that



Fig. 8: Anish Kapoor, *Dirty Corner,* 2011

contemporary art increasingly tends to reflect primitive modes of functioning, encouraging destructive impulses to flourish unbridled.

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