

Thresholds of Control

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I.

"We are survivors in this age," Saul Bellow's Herzog writes in one of his unsent letters. "To realize that you are a survivor is a shock. At the realization of such election you feel like bursting into tears – " (1)

Destruction art bears witness to the tenuous conditionality of survival; it is the visual discourse of the survivor. It is the only attempt in the visual arts to grapple seriously with the technology and psychodynamics of actual and virtual extinction, one of the few cultural practices to redress the general absence of discussion about destruction in society. (2) <>

Destruction art is interdisciplinary and multinational, combining media and subject matter. Destruction art addresses the phenomenology and epistemology of destruction and must be characterized as a broad, cross-cultural response rather than a historical movement. An attitude, a process and way of proceeding, destruction art is both reactionary and responsive; it is not an aesthetic, nor a method, *nor* a technique. Destruction art is an ethical position comprised of diverse practices that investigate the engulfments of terminal culture.

I have introduced the phrases "terminal culture" and "destruction art" as identificatory devices, terms that signify the conjuncted sites where social, aesthetic, and political interrelationships and practices collude in the question of survival. The term 'destruction art' is, thus, a concise index of a wide anthropological field, whereas the phrase "destruction-in-art" emphasizes the processes that determine its practices within the institutions of art. In this brief essay, I want to theorize destruction art in terms of its survivalist discourse as well as to contextualize its historical project.

II

In his singularly important work on trauma, the psychologist Robert Jay Lifton identifies a survivor as "one who has encountered, been exposed to, or witnessed death and has himself or herself remained alive." (3). Death here may be literal as in the actual extinguishing of life, psychological as in the destruction of the sense of Self, or ecological as in natural disaster. Whatever the text of survival, it must be read through the discourse of destruction. Lifton asks the rhetorical question: "Is Hiroshima our text?" (4) Indeed, as representation, Hiroshima identifies destruction as the extremity and the center of survival where the body figures as the text. Destruction art is a responsible commitment to the survival of the body.

Survival, Lifton writes, leaves a "death imprint" that is accompanied by "death anxiety, death guilt, or survivor guilt", guilt that entails a "sense of debt and responsibility to the dead." (5) Survival also causes a "psychic numbing" that incapacitates the individual's ability to feel and to confront certain kinds of experiences and impairs essential mental functions of symbolization. (6) He hypothesizes that a wholesale psychic numbing has occurred internationally, the result of the constant global threat of technological, ecological, or psychological annihilation. Destruction art represents this crisis of numbing with actions, events, and/or objects recapitulating the conditions, effects, and processes of destruction that interfere with survival and that have been repressed in and by the epistemologies of terminal culture.

Destruction art obliges critical reflection on the question of disappearance. Jean-Francois Lyotard takes up the problem of disappearance in his book Heidegger and "the jews" where he coins the phrase "The Forgotten" to signify a condition that is neither "a concept nor a representation but a 'fact' as Factum (Kant)" which we are "obligated before the Law ... to remember." (7) "The Forgotten" is "something that never ceases to be forgotten," a state that "one has tried to forget by killing it," but one that advances, nevertheless, "in the direction of the immemorial through the destruction of its representations of its witnesses, 'the jews'." (8) Here Lyotard indicates that "'the jews' are the object of a dismissal with which Jews, in particular, are afflicted in reality." (9) Lyotard's "the jews" is a refinement and historical specification of the "catastrophe" Nietzsche forewarned was the inevitable result of the "failure to reflect." (10)

Destruction is the agent and process of disappearance in our time, of "The Forgotten," "the jews." The interdependence of "the jews," and "The Jews" is relevant to destruction art and the materiality of survival. For the origins of terms of destruction art are located in the theoretical formulations of a *real* Jew and a survivor of Lyotard's signifying "the jew," namely a survivor of destruction: Gustav Metzger. In five manifestos written between November, 1959, and July, 1964, Metzger laid out the basis for "Auto-Destructive Art" that is also the foundation of destruction art. (11) Metzger intended "Auto-Destructive Art" to be principally realized in public monuments to be erected on civic sites. These structures would contain complex technological and electronic internal devices that would cause the structure to implode and self-destruct within a period of twenty seconds to twenty years. Site-sensitive and site-specific, interdisciplinary and requiring collaboration between scientists and artists, these works would be context-determined and, therefore, social, collective, and collaborative. Industrial and machine made, the structures would also be technical representations of the intrinsic interdependence of the processes of natural decay and disintegration and cultural, particularly urban, crisis. "Auto-Destructive Art" condensed a vast experiential and technological territory of destruction and its concomitant survivalist ethos into a manageable representation.

The temporal duration of "Auto-Destructive Art" would operate both as a representation and a presentation, an image and an enactment of effacement that recalled but also gave substance to the forgotten, "the jews." As the rematerialization of memory in its original destructive form, the absent presence of the felt past would return as known experience, no longer "there" but transformed into a new state "here." Destruction art in its first manifestation of "Auto-Destructive Art" is the constant public and social reminder of destruction, its agents, processes, and results.

Precisely twenty years after Metzger

was sent to England at the age of 12 in 1939 when his family was arrested by the Gestapo in Nürnberg, he formulated his theory. Twenty seconds, then, is a temporal analog for the seconds it took to destroy his personal world by killing his family; twenty years, the two decades of gestation in his own auto-transformation. Temporality in destruction art is the index of duration that confronts consciousness with the cycle of construction and destruction manifest in cultural artifacts and technological objects as well as in nature. This temporality reinscribes the psyche of the social body with a memory of the finite which must function as an affective agent in the reaggregation of a survivalist consciousness.

Temporality in Metzger's life signifies not only in cultural terms but in political terms as well. Metzger retained his Polish passport while living in Great Britain until 1948 when he decided to become stateless, This life-experience reflects the geo-politics of the disappeared which Paul Virilio has identified as one of the conditions of "Pure War":

Disappearance of place and individual, refusal of citizenship, of rights, of *habeas corpus*, etc., ... is spreading all over the world. It's easier to make people disappear one by one, ten by ten or thousand by thousand than to shut millions up into camps, as they did in Nazi Germany. Even if Gulags and concentration camps still exist – and they do, alas – disappearance is our future." (12)

The concrete evidence of corporeal existence in the carnage of bombed cities and towns with dead bodies to be buried or burned that was the result of past wars no longer exists since the crematoria and thermonuclear vaporization obliterate all reckoning with death and destruction. "Pure war" in this sense refers to the technical and psychological readiness and ubiquity of war that currently shapes political as well as social relationships, and that contributes to the "epistemo-technical," a way of knowing and being-in-the-world based in the technology of war." (13) "Pure War is neither peace nor war," Virilio claims, "nor is it, as was believed, 'absolute' or 'total' war, but rather, the military procedure itself which infects us with its ordinary durability." (14)

While disappearance is one of the conditions of the war-machine, what Virilio accurately calls "the machine of societal non-development," (15) Pure War is also the "logistics of war." The U.S.A. established such logistics in the late 1940s when Pentagon officials defined logistics as "the procedure following which a nation's potential is transferred to its armed forces, in times of peace as in times of war," (16) In writing about the "politics of meaning," Clifford Geertz noted, "One of the things that everyone knows but no one can quite think how to demonstrate is that a country's politics reflect the design of its culture." (17) But the country that developed and deployed the first atomic weapon made its politics very visible in civic life already by the early 1950s when it became public record that the U.S. civil core of engineers were engaged in the construction of such logistical sites, places where the military might "test" the effects of nuclear destruction on materials and techniques used in civic structures. One such site was illustrated in the periodical *Architectural Record* in 1952 where vivid images showed a destroyed two-story frame house, destroyed reinforced steel and concrete and office buildings, and other destroyed constructions." (18)

In the resulting Cold War rhetoric and muscle of weapons Metzger refined the dialectical aspects of his theories by extending "Auto-Destructive Art" to "AutoCreative Art" and he honed their ideological dimension. Destruction art should be politically affective and socially engaged, a practice in which artists struggle to dismantle the institutions of power that dehumanize, exploit and destroy. Destruction art should be concerned with the social body and collective practices as it "re-enacts the obsession with destruction, the pummeling to which individuals and masses are subjected," he wrote, and added:

The drop drop dropping of HH bombs ... mirrors the compulsive perfectionism of arms manufacture polishing to destruction point. Autodestructive Art is the transformation of technology into public art. The immense productive capacity, the chaos of capitalism and of Soviet communism, the coexistence of surplus and starvation; the increasing stockpiling of nuclear weapons – more than enough to destroy technological societies; the disintegrative effects of machinery and the life in vast built-up areas on the person. (19)

The self-conscious sophistication of contemporary intellectual "discourse" stands in marked contrast to Metzger's loaded and subjective "words," emotional words that embarrass but that are unmistakably real, the direct expression of an involved, impassioned, angry, and fearful victimized man.

Destruction art is oppositional in refusing the elisions of linguistic abstraction that unwittingly contribute to the perpetuation of the destructive epistemology of Western culture, an epistemology so thoroughly perfected by "defense intellectuals" in the policies and technology of extinction about which Carol Cohn has so insightfully written. Cohn despaired of the "enormous destructive power" of "the language of defense analysts and arms controllers" for its complete resistance to the "emotional fallout ... mass murder, mangled bodies and unspeakable human suffering" in which its languages conspire. (20) She rejected "the professional discourse," of the men whose minds are used "in the service of militarization" for its "extraordinary abstraction and removal" – smart bombs, friendly fire, clean bombs, countervalue attacks, and collateral damage – because of the ways in which it denied what she "knew in reality." (21) Related and deeply sobering, is Lifton's confirmation of her attack on such "professional discourse," when he observed:

A certain amount of numbing is probably necessary in most professional situations – in the midst of an operation a surgeon cannot afford to experience fully the consequences of failure – but it is surely excessive in our society and in our century. So great is the diminished emotion in professionals that it well may be that becoming a professional is in itself part of still another devil's bargain in which one ceases to feel much about the central – the most threatening – questions of our time. (22)

When John Latham incinerated burning towers of books, "Skoob Towers" (books spelled backwards), in the mid-1960s, when he chewed and distilled Clement Greenberg's Art and Culture, in 1966, (23) his gestures identified books as the carriers of the destructive epistemological and linguistic foundations of abstract rationality that justify and perpetuate destruction, the kinds of languages that imprint death and confirm the terrorist rationality of Robert McNamara who, in 1964, so chillingly coined the term "mutual assured destruction," MAD.

The denaturing and abstraction of the actual experience of destruction is the triumph of the technology of that destruction. In this situation, great care must be exercised to prevent theoretical abstractions from becoming part of the suppression of actual experience that culminates in the denial of identity altogether. Such denials conspire in the destruction of bodies and are the unforgivable consequence of mistaking the map for the territory. They are the decidable danger that resides in interpretations of Derrida's concept of "différance" that many have argued requires a "différance /deferment from/of any decidable statement of the concept of an identity or différence." (24)

The trust of destruction art is the survivability of the body, the very materiality of existence. In this sense, no group of artists has been as explicit as Survival Research Laboratories who have clearly stated the terms of their investigation and practice. Indeed, materiality is the business of art. Representation and observation, the visual conditions of materiality, are the residual features of the first act of the artist which is to recover the conditionality of materiality. This is why that, without eyes, art may still exist for those without sight. When faced with extinction, the artist must, if s/he takes responsibility for his/her trust, put art in the service of survival. This does not imply that all art must assume the task of destruction art, but it does mean that art has a particular social function which requires an ethical position on the question of survival no matter what formal resolution that work finally assumes. In this sense, I believe destruction art recovers the social force of art from instrumental reason and the economies of late capitalism. For destruction art constantly reinscribes the profound significance of the survival of the body in the oppositions it deconstructs.

The task of destruction art includes the deconstruction of the double character and indeterminacy of meaning in the binary division of creation/destruction and the elucidation of the signifying conditions of destruction. In this sense, the project of destruction art resembles the deconstructionist theory with which it emerged simultaneously but independently in the early 1960s. It is significant that Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1967) was published a year after Metzger brought the various tendencies of destruction art together as a cohesive discourse and representation in the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) in 1966. (25) Metzger's stated aim in organizing DIAS was to create an interdisciplinary forum for an inquiry into the relationship of destruction in art and society. (26) Derrida's parallel objective was to "seek a new investigation of responsibility, an investigation which questions the codes inherited from ethics and politics" in the "political and institutional structures that make possible and govern our practices." (27)

DIAS was also the model for a number of subsequent exhibitions in which artists learned to expand the languages of destruction art, and it was the prototype for *The Dialectics of Liberation*, organized by R.D. Laing and David Cooper. Such prominent intellectuals and public figures as Paul Goodman, Stokely Carmichael, Irving Goffman, Herbert Marcuse, Gregory Bateson, and others lectured at this conference which occurred in London ten months after DIAS, in July 1967. This coincided precisely with the three-day trial of Metzger and the Irish poet and playwright John Sharkey; Metzger's principle assistant in the organization of DIAS. The pair were found guilty of having presented Hermann Nitsch's 5th action of the Orgien Mysterien Theatre, a work the court described as "an indecent exhibition contrary to common law." (28)

The simultaneity of this conference with Metzger and Sharkey's trial is instructive in its juxtaposition of the divisions of power and authority that shape the systems, practices, institutions, and performances of Western culture. The textual and expository exegesis of those who participated in *The Dialectics of Liberation* was permissible, framed as it was in the vaguely sentimental idealistic terms of liberation, terminology that conformed to the authoritative, abstract, restrained, measured, and ostensibly objective codes of academic discourse. By comparison, "destruction-art" represented a direct, contentious, strident and unsentimental discourse and its practices were raw, passionate, involved, impatient, skeptical, pessimistically critical, and sometimes dangerous and out-of-control. (29)

In his lecture on "The Discourse of Language" Foucault described – the "logophobia" of Western culture as an "apparent logophilia," and he argued:

What civilization, in appearance, has shown more respect towards discourse than our own? ... Where have men depended more radically, apparently, upon its constraints and its universal character? But, it seems to me, a certain fear hides behind this apparent supremacy ... It is as though these taboos, these barriers, thresholds and limits were deliberately disposed in order, at least partly, to master and control the great proliferation of discourse' in such a way as to relieve its richness of its most dangerous elements; to organise its disorder so as to skate round its most uncontrollable aspects."
(30)

As part of the resolution to these controls, Foucault called for the restoration of discourse to "its character as an event." (31) Nitsch's work and the juridical response to it visited upon Metzger and Sharkey, indeed, returned the discourse of destruction to its "character as an event. 'The punishment meted out to the artists – and by extension to DIAS itself – inscribed upon them the "guilt" of destruction that must be read as the single-most important evidence of the affective role of DIAS and the events it sponsored in revealing the very systems, institutions, and epistemological foundations of destruction that it set out to criticize.

The "guilt" laid on DIAS is that of the survivor who bears witness for the social body. In this sense the individual body, the body of practices I am calling destruction art, and the social body have a symbiotic interconnection in that individual and collective bodies are also events in the history of society. In this context, as they have contributed to shaping social and political systems" the interventions of destruction art are central to any discourse on survival within or without the disciplines of art and aesthetics.

I have often argued that the primary communicating codes of the visual arts were transformed in the presentation of the body. Briefly restated, when the body becomes the material support, subject, and content of art it holds the possibility of shifting the determined and fixed relations demanded by the prior objective status of art into an interplay of subjectivities established and transmitted in body gestures, systems, and relations. In addition to the traditional metaphorical communicating mechanisms of the visual arts, such changes in the aesthetic sign supplied a metonymic and synecdochal means of connection, projection, continuation, and contingency. The private body was utilized as formal material, subject matter, and content into which the experiences and institutions of the body politic were collapsed. I want to suggest that in these terms, the body holds the possibility for becoming both an aesthetic and social sign that also commutes political power. Lifton believes that the task of the artist is "to reveal the exquisite details of the experience of desymbolization" and "the breakdown of viable relationships with symbols and symbolic forms (that) is an impairment in the 'psychic action' of the 'formative process'... associated with severe manifestations of psychic numbing." (32) In destruction art, the body conveys the interdependent, interconnected, and contingent state of the individual and the collective in survival. That embodiment holds the potential to reconnect experience to the objects of that experience and thereby to intervene in the destructive practices, institutions, and technologies threatening extinction.

The urgent need to dissolve over-determined rigid structures and to construct elastic social systems is evident although constantly undermined by fixed social identities. The unprecedented achievement of the body as an active agent in art has been to visualize the perpetually shifting, but mutually identifiable relations of power and need within the exchange of subject/object relations. This shift from the conventions of representation to those of presentation may effect a reduction in the alienation between subjects and objects by confronting individuals with their mutual roles as performing and observing subjects. This reduction, however, can never be resolved but, rather, must be constantly renegotiated on the shifting territories of power that continually redetermine subject relations. The performing body underscores the desperate need for negotiation in the question of the survival of destruction. In this way, destruction art performs its radical function in larger social formations. For, in order to recover the content of destruction which includes death, trauma, and pain, its signifying agent must be both representationally symbolic and presentationally contingent.

A vivid example of such practices is Metzger's "South Bank Demonstration," of July 3, 1961. Wearing a gas mask as a protective device, Metzger sprayed hydrochloric acid on three tarpelins – white, black, and red, a reference to Kasimir Malevich and Russian Suprematism – stretched over an enormous series of three frames feet high and 12 1/2 feet long with a depth of 6 feet. The nylon dissolved each within 15 seconds after contact with the acid. Metzger positioned himself against a complex of urban office buildings and a crowd of men, many in business attire. Visually suggestive of the military-industrial-complex, this image recalled the dire warning Dwight D. Eisenhower issued only five months before Metzger's lecture-demonstration. In his, farewell address from the White House Oval Office January 17th, 1961, Eisenhower cautioned:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every state house, every office in the federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

As the agent of destructive forces, Metzger represented war displaced from the actual field of militarized combat by utilizing the substances of destruction to dissolve materials and thus to reenact upon the "field" of the picture space the symbolic map of the conduct, process, content and result of destruction. His *action* situated war as representation in the civic built site of the production of destruction.

Only Metzger, Rafael Montanez Ortiz, and Wolf Vostell ever specifically identified their work with the terminology of destruction and systematically explored destruction as the principle focus of their work. (33) Moreover their formulations were not only very different but were even contentious' conditioned by the entirely distinct cultural contexts of Europe (Metzger and Vostell) and the United States (Ortiz), and representing unique responses to and ideological strategies for coping with and affecting their individual situations. Yet for all their differences, these three men share the critical social experience of having existed at the margin of Western cultural hierarchies in terms of the racial and religious discrimination and the actual or virtual annihilation they experienced: Metzger is the stateless victim of the Holocaust; Vostell, also a Jew, spent his youth in nomadic terror fleeing the Gestapo; and Ortiz is a darkskinned Puerto-Rican American of mixed heritage who spent part of his youth in south Harlem, the survivor of deadly adolescent gang-warfare of the Barrio and the vicious, relentless racism of the U.S.A.

One of the key psychoanalytic dimensions of destruction art is the charged emotional reaction to the anger and frustration these three experienced as the disempowered "other" within the Western male culture to which they belonged and which they theoretically controlled. This sense of being "out-of-control", in part, accounts for the violence of their rejection of the deceptive conventions of Western "creation" and the repressive sublimations it demands. The range of their destructions and the objects or human actions upon which they were visited, however problematic, must be characterized as parody, a profound disgust and rejection of the patriarchal models of discipline, punishment, violence, and authoritarianism so accurately theorized by Klaus Theweleit. (34)

Destruction art seems to produce a gendered response slightly different in men than in women. The body – actual or extended in mechanical robots – is the principle territory for the demonstration of destruction and survival in both men and women's productions. While male artists have explored the relationship of that body to the objects and technologies of destruction and to the assertion and recuperation of identity, women artists have regularly confined their investigations to the reconstruction of Self.

Yoko Ono's destruction scores for performances, paintings and sculptures onward from the late 1950s, and Niki de

Saint Phalle's paintings *Feu à volonté*, 1961, plaster-surface constructions filled with bags of pigment which exploded with color when fired upon with a rifle, demonstrate that women have not been exempt from the destruction of materials including the surfaces of their own bodies as the performances of self-mutilation by Gina Pane have shown.

But the vast majority of women's destruction art works explore the problem of the obliteration of identity and the decentering of Self. So that while the Holocaust may be our representative text, a text that is in part read through the technologies of destruction, that text must return to the reading of the material universe of the body's pain.

R.D. Laing recalled "a little girl of seventeen in a mental hospital" who told him that "she was terrified because the Atom Bomb was inside her." (35) This metaphor for the annihilation of Self that is bound to the destruction of self-esteem, intimacy, and the ability to love or be loved is also part of the trust of destruction art. In Yoko Ono's "Cut Piece," 1965, she sat motionless on a stage after inviting the audience to come up and cut away her clothing. This denouement anticipated the institutionalized objectification of women as cultural detritus so systematically presented by Karen Finley who, in an essay entitled, "I was not expected to be talented," wrote:

I'd like for you to feel pain, to feel my pain ... I hate people who have a reason for everything. They can't just accept the fact that bad things happen to good people because if they did they'd be like me – out of control (36)

Ono stated, "People went on cutting the parts they do not like of me." (37) Lynn Hershman whispers as a survivor to we who bear witness to her survival: "Don't talk about it." In her autobiographical video trilogy "Electronic Diary" (1985–1989), Hershman, significantly also a Jew, recounts in an autoanalysis the origins of her own eating disorders in physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and incest, violations whose origins and results she equates to the cosmology of Hitler, the vampire, and Holocaust survivors. Such works, in the actual body of the artist, intervene in the imagined neutrality between subject and object where they insert the voice of survival that is the representation of the pain of destruction. Destruction art is the renegotiation of that pain. Elaine Scarry has argued that "the only state that is as anomalous as pain is the imagination" and that "while pain is a state remarkable for being wholly without objects, the imagination is remarkable for being the only state that is wholly its objects." (38) Destruction art represents and presents the relationship between pain and imagining. "Pain does not simply resist language," it "actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned." (39) She continues:

Because the person in pain is ordinarily so bereft of the resources of speech, it is not surprising that the language of pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak on behalf of those who are. (This is how) this most radically private of experiences begins to enter the realm of public discourse. (40)

In 1962, Ono wrote "Conversation Piece" a score for an action requiring the narration of pain. Her score reads:

**Bandage any part of your body.
If people ask about it, make a story and tell.
If people do not ask about it, draw their attention to it and tell.
If people forget about it, remind them of it and keep telling.
Do not talk about anything else." (41)**

Invented and bandaged wounds articulate psycho-physical pain. This impulse to narrate suffering, to describe the unspeakable conditions of interior life is central to finding a voice through and by which to repossess and recover a sense of the concreteness of personal experience. More urgent is the need to communicate the auto-constructed reality to someone else – to materialize it. Western culture needs subjects to bear witness to the contents of survival and the historical bodies upon which the text of destruction has been inscribed. The body in destruction art bears such witness and thereby offers a paradigm for a "resisting body," that private, complex, signifying system of the Self, a person who acts both on behalf of the individual and the social body.

III.

Destruction is endemic to Western structures of knowledge and conditions of culture. This negativity – and by extension destruction when it occurs in art – *have appeared* to defy (and threatened to destroy) Western social and aesthetic canons of truth, harmony, and order. But, far from rejecting the aesthetic and social values of Western culture destruction art unveils its structural principles. In a recent study of the developmental role played by ancient Greek mathematics in gaining "an advantage in war, John Onians considered the embeddedness of militarized consciousness in Western cultural production." (42) He noted the simultaneous dependence upon the mathematical harmony" proportion, and order in Greek warfare as well as in art and architecture, and observed that war is the most important "theme' in Greek painting and sculpture, and a structural principle in Greek architecture. He traced this to patterns of representation in the complex treatment of war in the *Iliad*, a book which attained "almost biblical authority" among the Greeks. (43)

Onians points out that the same harmony, number, and order to be found in Greek mathematics that determines art, music, and architecture equally regulated the Greek military phalanx, and "Hesiod, in the *Theogony*, makes Harmonia a daughter of Ares, god of war." (44)

Western society and its most compelling aesthetic productions continue to perpetuate the epistemological ethos of destruction. But art that once reflected, mirrored, and passively represented the abstract conventions and patterns of knowledge now actively present the literal embodiment of psychic wounds, urban bedlam, and militarized consciousness at the crisis core of terminal culture. But this epistemology also has healing roots, traditions, that are

intertwined in the very technology, languages, and practices of destruction.

Foucault recovered the Greek term *epimeleia heauton* which stood for the psychological and intellectual condition of being interested in taking care of one's self, of work on the self. (45) The term equally described the responsibilities of power. *Epimeleia heauton* implied attention, knowledge, technique, a work of meditation that required understanding the necessities of the world, not imposed upon the individual by civil law or religious obligation, but rather as a choice about existence made by the individual who decided whether or not to care for the self, and thereby, to care for the world. Foucault pointed out that *epimeleia heauton* described a condition in which individuals "acted so as to give to their lives certain values (for) it was a question of making one's life into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a techne – for an art". (46)

Destruction art communicates the visual knowledge that may recuperate the materiality of life from the violent, discontinuous destructions that imperil survival. The body may be a tool in the techne of survival and may function as a transit between agency and process, language, experience, and their objects to close the lesion between techne and logia (word, speech, or knowledge) that has inhered in the modern concept of technology. just as destruction art is the image of resistance in the form of an event, it is also an important means to survival that must be continuously explored.

(1)

Saul Bellow, **Herzog** (New York: Viking, 1964) as quoted in Robert Jay Lifton's *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers. 1987): p. 244. I am grateful to Susan Roth, Professor of Psychology specializing in trauma and stress disorders at Duke University, for introducing me to the work of Lifton and I would like to dedicate this essay to her. I would like to thank also Jill Memdith. David Castriota, and Julie Walker my colleagues at Duke University for their critical editorial suggestions. → [back](#)

(2)

Lifton has observed that in working on the problem of mass psychological trauma he "came to a terrible' but 'essentially accurate, rule of thumb: the more significant an event. the less likely it is to be studied,' op cit. p. 32. Bruno Bettelheim observed a similar phenomenon in his own investigations on the topic of violence when, in a public lecture I heard in San Francisco in 1982, he noted that violence as a category of investigation remained largely absent from philosophical dictionaries. My own study of destruction confirms Bettelheim's and Lifton's observations. For the category "destruction' is absent from most philosophical dictionaries and does not even appear in Raymond Williams' "keywords" with such entries as "alienation," "family," "technology" and "violence." See Williams' revised edition of *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.) → [back](#)

(3)

Lifton, *The Future of Immortality*: p. 235. → [back](#)

(4)

Ibid: p. 31. → [back](#)

(5)

Ibid: pp. 236–240. → [back](#)

(6)

Ibid: p. 245. → [back](#)

(7)

Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, trans., Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts with a Foreword by David Carroll (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press' 1990); p. 3. Originally published as *Heidegger et "les juifs"*, Paris; Editions Galilee, 1988.

(8)

Ibid: p. 43. → [back](#)

(9)

Op. Cit.: p. 3 → [back](#)

(10)

Friedrich Nietzsche, "Preface' (November 1887–March 1888), to *The Will To Power*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York; Vintage Books, 1967): p. 3. → [back](#)

(11)

Personen: - (conspirat). (245) [The User] (477) _sanman (7167) 3A Klasse, Volksschule Vereinsgasse, Vienna (596) 66b/cell (1274) 91v2.0 (1195) Abe Yoshiyuki (224) Abe Kyoko (6978) Ablinger Franziska (6333) Abraham Ralph (59) See Gustav Metzger's *Auto-Destructive Art*: Metzger at AA (London, October, 1965). This publication is part of the collection of the Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart. The text contains all of Metzger's manifestos "Auto-Destructive Art," 4 November 1959; "Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art," 10 March 1960; "Auto?Destructive Art – Machine Art – Auto-Creative Art", 23 June 1961; 'MANIFESTO WORLD,' October 1962; and "On random activity in material/ transforming works of art,' 30 July 1964. Metzger prepared the publication as an expanded version of a talk he gave at the Architectural Association, 24 February 1965 which he published in June, 1965. In this document Metzger develops his "aesthetic of revulsion' (p. 13) and places "Auto-Destructive Art' in the context of "anxiety, despair, nihilism, alienation" that are "not only connected with psychology, religion, social systems, but with a profound awareness of failure on the biological plane." (p. 22) → [back](#)

(12)

Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, trans., Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); p. 137. → [back](#)

(13)

Ibid., p. 21. → [back](#)

(14)

Paul Virilio, *Popular Defense & Ecological Struggles*. trans.. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series' 1990); p. 35. Originally published as *Defense populaire et Lutttes ecologiques'* Paris: Edition Galiliée, Paris.

1978. Military socialism is the term Virilio uses to describe the ways in which the military sustains and perpetuates itself by making continual war on its own civilian populations. → [back](#)

(15)

Paul Virilio 'Pure War, p. 221. → [back](#)

(16)

59) Abt Robert (859) Acevedo Victor (6587) Achituv Romy (901) Achitz Roman (7257) Achleitner Friedrich (6378) Adamczyk John (6639) Adams Ernest W. (1289) ADILKNO (5647) Adriaansens Alex (25) Adrian Robert (5596) For a thorough study of nuclear strategy see Lawrence *Freedman's The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's Press. 1983). For a consideration of how these strategies figured in the creation of Metzger's "Auto-Destructive Art," see my unpublished doctoral dissertation *The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS): The Radical Cultural Project of Event?Structured Live Art* University of California, May' 1987, especially chapter 1.2; "Jews, Bombs. and Activism: A Biographical Legacy" in which Metzger's political activism, especially in the "Committee of 100" is discussed in the context of the Cold War' pp. 63–89. → [back](#)

(17)

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, Inc.' Publishers. 1973); p. 311. → [back](#)

(18)

See "Architects Design a Bombed-Out Town," *Architectural Record* 112:1 (July 1952); pp. 185–88. → [back](#)

(19)

Gustav Metzger. "Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art." 10 March 1961. 20.) Carol Cohn 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 12:4 (Summer 1987); p. 691. → [zurück](#)

(21)

Ibid; p. 688–689. → [back](#)

(22)

Lifton, qq1 *The Future of Immortality*, p. 240. → [back](#)

(23)

See, John Latham: *State of Mind* (Düsseldorf: Städtische Kunsthalle, 1975). → [back](#)

(24)

For example. see Gayatri Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman", in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1983): p. 184, 169–95. → [back](#)

(25)

See Jacques Derrida, *De le grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967). "DIAS' was the temporary organization for a multicultural' multidisciplinary international event that attracted nearly one hundred artists and poets (most of whom were the pioneers of Happenings and Concrete Poetry) from fifteen countries in Eastern and Western Europe" the United States' South America' and Japan. Several psychologists also attended. "DIAS" was important in identifying artists internationally who pioneered destruction art. Documentation and destruction sound tapes were sent to "DIAS" by the Argentina painter Kenneth Kemble who had assembled a group of poets and painters (Luis Alberto Wells' Silvia Torras, Jorge Roiger. and Jorge Lopez Anaya), in 1961' for an exhibition he titled *Arte Destructivo* that took place at the Galerie Lirolay in Buenos Aires. Shortly after this exhibition the group dissolved and it was not until "DIAS" that this work was recovered. → [back](#)

(26)

See the many "DIAS' Press Releases written and distributed by Metzger in the collection of the Archiv Sohm. Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart. → [zurück](#)

(27)

Jacques Derrida, "The Conflict of Faculties" in *Languages of Knowledge and of Inquiry* ed., Michael Riffaterre (New York; Columbia University Press, 1982) as quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982); p. 156. → [back](#)

(28)

Based on notes taken by the journalist Sheldom Williams during the 'DIAS' trial, I reconstructed the trial in my dissertation. The official transcripts of this trial have all been destroyed. → [back](#)

(29)

For various accounts of "DIAS" events and related material see my essays: "Synopsis of The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) and Its Theoretical Significance", in *The Act* 1:2 (Spring 1987); pp. 22–31; "Sticks and Stones; The Destruction in Art Symposium" *Arts* 65:5 (January 1989): pp. 54–60; and 'Readings: Performance and Its Objects' *Arts* 65:3 (November 1990): pp. 35–47. → [back](#)

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Michel Foucault "The Discourse on Language' originally delivered in French at the College de France on December 2, 1970' reprinted in *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language* (New York: Harper Colophon Books): p. 218. → [back](#)

(31)

Ibid: p. 219. → [back](#)

(32)

Lifton, *The Future of Immortality*: p. 245. → [back](#)

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aesthetic + computation group (7190) agent.NASDAQ (584) Agentur BILWET (5646) Aichinger Rene (6583) Aigner Renata (6556) Aigner Markus F. P. (6342) Aikawa Ichiro (497) Aistleitner Viktoria (7258) Akaiwa Yae (499) Akita Masami (481) Al-Zahabi Suhair Mohamed Khair (1346) Alex Galloway (6506) Alexander Joe (619) Alexander Amy (6930) Allen Rebecca (71) Allik Kristi (6819) Alma Julien (404) Alman Flavia (6756) Alonso Jason (7014) Alt James K. (7013) Altmüller, Bogner (6326) Alton-Scheidl Roland (5781) Alvarez Javier (154) Amacher Maryanne (173) Amann Sirikit (103) Amerika Mark (637) Amirkhanian Charles (56) Amkraut Susan (6886) Ammer Ralph (589) Ananny Mike (7077) Anders Anna (5540) Anderson Laurie (5808) Anderson Todd (5836) Anderson David P. (512) AndIn his "Destructivism: A Manifesto,' 1962. Ortiz wrote: (The) destroyers, materialists, and sensualists dealing with process directly .. am destructivists and understand the desperate need to retain unconscious integrity The artist's sense of destruction will no longer be turned inward in fear. The art that utilizes the destructive processes will purge, for as it gives death, so it will give to life. "This manifesto appears in my catalogue Rafael Montanez Ortiz: Years of the Warrior 1960 – Years of the Psyche, 1988 (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1988): p. 52. Ortiz's performance work is particularly important in terms of the influence it had on Arthur Janov's formulation of "primal scream" psychotherapy. See Arthur Janov, *The Primal Scream: Primal Therapy: The Cum for Neurosis* (New York: A Delta Book, 1970): pp. 9–11. Wolf Vostell developed his practice of de?coll/age during the late 1950s after having noticed the term in *Le Figaro*. in 1954, when it was used to describe the simultaneous take off and crash of an airliner. His syllabic division of the word decollage inverts the constructive process of collage and deconstructs the binary creation/destruction into semiotic units that transform in time: "dé" and "coll" name oppositions while "age" refers (in French) to temporality. Vostell's sensitivity to the semiotic range of the French term *décollage* owes something to the context in which such poets/painters as Raymond Hains, Jacques Villeglé, and Françoise Dufrene in Paris, and Mimmo Rotella, in Italy, developed *L'affiche lacerée*. → [back](#)

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o Asuhiko (6878) Andrevon Philippe (195) Andrews Lori B. (5507) Ängelslevä Jussi (7408) Angerer Marie-Luise (5452) Anker Andrew (6991) Ankerl Martin (556) Anstey Josephine (753) Anticon (1309) Anuff Joey (6947) Anuradha R. V. (5513) Anzai Toshihiro (6845) Apel Ted (6538) Archimedia (689) Ardelt Rudolf (7095) Arge Zimbabwe (7156) Armaly Fareed (5857) Arn Robert (6418) Arnold Stephen (10) Arquilla John (5627) Art & Com (779) Art D 'Ameublement (6038) Asakawa Jun (385) Aschauer Michael (1245) Ascione Patrick (6779) Ascott Roy (7) Assmann Peter (5749) association.creation (6511) Atherton David (131) Atmanspacher Harald (5960) Auer Tina (7413) Auinger Sam (38) AusstellungSee Klaus Theweleit: *Male Fantasies. Volume 2: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Originally published as *Männerphantasien*, Volume 2. *Männerkörper: Zur Psychoanalyse des weißen Terrors*' Verlag Roter Stern' 1978. Some of these works include the menacing explosives spectacles staged by Ivor Davies' John Latham and others in the 1960s or Survival Research Laboratories in the 1980s; the burned and exploded books, paintings' and musical objects produced by John Latham, Gustav Metzger, Milan Knizak, Rafael Ortiz, Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys, Robin Page, Jean Tinguely, Arman, and many others; the "Archaeological Finds" – destroyed furniture created by Rafael Ortiz from 1959–1965; destroyed objects of all variety by Metzger, Vostell, Kenneth Kemble, Bruce Conner, and many others; and psycho?physical performances by Hermann Nitsch, Otto Mühl, Günter Brus, JeanJacques Lebel, Rafael Ortiz, and others. → [back](#)

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R.D. Laing. "Preface to the Pelican Edition," in *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1970): p. 12. Originally published in London by Tavistock Publications, 1959. → [back](#)

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Karen Finley' "I was not expected to be talented," in *Shock Treatment* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1970): pp. 104–110. → [back](#)

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Yoko Ono, "Statement" in the *Village Voice*, October 7, 1971, p. 20. → [back](#)

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Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985): p. 162. → [back](#)

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Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit* 2nd Edition. with an Introduction by John Lennon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970): n.p. Originally published by in Tokyo by Wunternbaum Press, 1964. → [back](#)

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Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self. Volume 3: The History of Sexuality*, trans., Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986): pp. 50, 60–66. Originally published as *Le souci de soi* by Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1984. → [back](#)

(46) See Michel Foucault in Herbert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); pp. 243–45.