

3. RECOMBINATION demystifying creativity

EVERYDAY CREATIVITY: HUMEAN AESTHETICS

This chapter and the next will interrogate the myth of the creative genius which is now no longer subscribed to even by the more informed members of the fine art community. But if we examine the roots of deconstructive art in Surrealism and Dada we find that there is an element of mystification of creative process that harks back to romantic aesthetics. This mystification was confronted in the late 1960s by a new model of creativity emerged that was based on understanding art as a language, and with this came the concept of the viewer as a 'reader'. There was, however, no comparable renovation of the concept of the artist.

Claims that installation art can 'activate' the viewer deserve to be closely questioned. Being able to more or less walk into the work of art might appear to offer increased involvement and interaction but this is not always the case. Unless the installation offers an interaction device as can be the case in digital art, or adds a soundscape as is possible in video and digital installation, the principal mode of reception remains the gaze; and the principal mode of interaction remains the conventional role wherein the viewer 'reads' a work of art. The concept of the viewer as a 'reader' and art as a 'language' emerged out the rise of semiotic, structuralist and poststructuralist frames of reference in the 1970s and 1980s which had a specific impact on conceptual art of the late 1960s and 1970s. Although art since the 1990s is considerably less theorised than its precursors such frames of reference still apply, and in this and the following chapter the 'language' paradigm will be pursued by considering the narrative dimension of installation art.

Narrative is a useful metaphor because it both describes the typical way in which readers make sense of works of art and the typical structure of installation art. What is special about the 'walk in and aroundable' work of art is that the gaze can be divided across a spatially extended distribution of objects, rather than being focused on an integral object. This mode of

exhibition confronts the viewer with parts that challenge her to make sense of them. One can describe this process terms of a nonlinear narrative puzzle.

We are not speaking here of a jigsaw-like puzzle where the objective is to reconstitute an integral object. Neither is it akin to the classic narrative puzzle in which the reader looks out for clues and tries to figure out how the various threads will be tied up at the end. The artists examined in this chapter—Simon Starling, Jennifer Pastor, and Andreas Slominski—invite the reader not so much to find a solution as to engage in a creative thought process.

For Immanuel Kant the aesthetic experience consists of a phenomenological reflection upon the activity of one's perceptual processes. This is certainly an important feature of aesthetic experience, but it is entirely formal, entirely at the level of the signifier. Kant's focus on perception was to be reflected in the development of abstraction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The argument here is that the strategy of deconstructive art that was pioneered by Dada and Surrealism complements aesthetic reflection on perceptual process with reflection on creative thought process, in particular what David Hume (who was very influential on Kant) referred to as the 'association of ideas' and what J. S. Mills referred to as the 'stream of consciousness'.

A focus on creative process (creative cognition) that can lead to the formulation of creative games is one of the defining features of deconstructive art. But the central question remains as to whether this creative process is the exclusive preserve of the artist or whether the viewer can participate. The works that will be examined in this chapter are all indebted to the legacy of deconstructive art that can be traced back to Dada and Surrealism. Seminal deconstructive aesthetic methodologies such as automatic writing, montage, allegory and nonlinear narrative can be understood as technologies designed to explore creativity by defamiliarising the everyday and breaking through habituated thought processes.

Techniques such as automatism and montage can theoretically be used by anyone. But in practice they are methodologies and not an ends in themselves: they are tools. The end is to create a work of art which, however deconstructive, is *a construction*. In order to achieve this goal the effects of chance or montage are inevitably submitted to acts of conscious selection and recombination on the part of the artist, all of which becomes a time consuming process that ultimately involves years of practice. Often use of such tools becomes less an easy way to make art than an obsessive game.

At the same time, from Dada and Surrealism onward, there has been a focus on the notion that one might involve or 'activate' the viewer in the creative process. The logic informing this ambition is that art can mitigate the alienating, homogenising and regimentalising aspects of mass society. Accordingly, involving the viewer in creative process affords art a social relevance. Social relevance achieves its highest point when the artist becomes someone who formulates creative games for other people to play. But at present this is extremely rare in the field of fine art. The best that the audience can expect from fine art is to be offered the role of the 'reader'. But, as will be seen, even this role is threatened by an element of romantic mystification evident even in poststructuralist theory, as will be shown.

Returning to the topic of narrative, one of the significant features of Dada and Surrealism is that they were literary as well as visual art movements. Their approach to narrative was deconstructive but remains under the broad conspectus of what is being referred to here as the 'narrative continuum' with its linear and nonlinear poles. It seems useful to retain the concept of such a continuum if we are speaking of the viewer as a reader because totally nonlinear narrative can be unreadable.

In the sphere of the popular arts of cinema and literature the viewer is engaged via immersion in more or less linear narrative. There is no doubt that processes of identification and projection engage the viewer but it can be argued that in many cases this engagement is passive. In the introduction it was noted that in *S/Z* (1974 orig. 1970) Barthes introduced a distinction between the 'writerly' and the 'readerly' text. Andrew Milner

and Jeff Browitt explain that readerly texts position the reader as a ‘passive consumer’, whereas writerly texts ‘demand that the reader actively participate as *co-author* of the text’ (Milner & Browitt 2002: 113) [emphasis added]. Confronted with the nonlinear text the reader has to try that bit harder to make sense out of the work. But whether or not this constitutes the reader becoming a ‘co-author’ depends upon one’s definition of creativity.

If one defines creativity in the romantic sense as arising out of an ineffable nothingness then the act of reading a work of art cannot be defined as creative if it involves analytical thinking and the formulation of a coherent narrative concerning the work of art. Strangely, this romantic way of thinking still influences artistic production. For example, contemplating viewer interactivity the contemporary artist Renée Green notes the ‘political potential of ... “participatory mobility,” which is the process by which the viewer works to piece together the various parts of the work, rather than attempting to absorb and master it’ (Green 1999: 3). In other words the viewer’s role is to ‘piece together the various parts of the work’ without making sense of them! One is returned to the abstract formalism of Kantian aesthetics. Green’s statement clearly indicates that the anti-narrative stance is an enduring, defining feature of deconstructive art evident in Dada and Surrealist montage, through radical art of the 1960s and ‘70s and into installationism at the turn of the millennium. But from the reader’s point of view, formulating a *narrative* from the parts of a deconstructive work of art is an important component of the creative engagement that is ‘reading’ a work of art.

If one believes, like Green, that the reader ought not create a more or less coherent narrative about the work then one is effectively suggesting that the reader’s involvement should not be intellectual. One can also point here to the ludicrous implication that if creative process is antithetical to narrative then creating a narrative is not creative: which is absurd. The process of narrative construction entails an entwining of creative and analytical cognition. And if we are to be honest, this is the case with most

artistic production unless one believes that artists work entirely in a trance.

The viewer-reader's interpretation of a work of art can only be called creative if one includes intellect in one's definition of creativity. And I would argue that this is one of the defining features that separates properly thought out deconstructive aesthetics from its romantic predecessor. It is, for instance, implicit in Marcel Duchamp's criticism of 'retinal art' which indicates that art can be concerned with ideas. In other words one can think and be creative at the same time.

Confronted with a work of art that has fairly straightforward narrative the reader's faculties are not especially exercised but nonlinear texts demand more creative participation. The process of reading, or making sense of, a nonlinear work of art can be effectively described as one of narrative reconstruction or recombination which is most certainly both a creative and a critical-reflective act.

This process of 'making sense' can be considered creative, but only if we admit that creative and analytical thinking are interconnected rather being diametrically opposed. At this point, however, we encounter a fundamental problem because, historically, deconstructive aesthetics is the offspring of romantic aesthetics (Bürger 1984: 22) and this genealogy is evident in the fact that both romantic and deconstructive aesthetics are critical of reason. More accurately, deconstructive aesthetics criticises rationalism whereas romanticism rejects it out of hand (cf. expressionism). But the logical extension of the exclusion of reason from creativity is to picture creativity as a trance-like state or intoxication, and the blurring of the boundary between romanticism and deconstruction is evident in the fact that the Surrealists often subscribed to the trance model of creativity. One can also find vestiges of romantic aesthetics in aspects of French poststructuralism. Note Derrida's meditations on the creative potential of nothingness:

The pure book, the book itself, by virtue of what is most irreplaceable within it, must be the 'book about nothing' that

Flaubert dreamed of ... Rousset shows us the extent to which spirits as diverse as Delacroix, Balzac, Flaubert, Valery, Proust, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and many others had a sure consciousness of this. ... To these voices should be added that of Antonin Artaud, who was less roundabout: 'I made my debut in literature by writing books in order to say that I could write nothing at all. My thoughts, when I had something to say or write, were that which was furthest from me. ...' It is the consciousness of nothing, upon which all consciousness of something enriches itself, takes on meaning and shape. And upon whose basis all speech can be brought forth. (2001: 7–8 {}).

One can interpret this passage in various ways, for example taking 'nothingness' in the sense of the *tabula rasa* evident in Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of 'being and nothingness' or Freud's 'magic writing pad' which Derrida referred to directly. Even then, however, 'nothingness' is a little too close to the romantic concept of creativity that fuels traditional concepts concerning the preciousness (as opposed to ingenuity) of the aesthetic object and individual genius (as opposed to individual ingenuity).

Since the 1980s it has been *de rigueur* to use French poststructuralism as the principal frame of reference for addressing deconstructive art. But although there is much that is beneficial in this framework vestiges of romanticist mystification indicate that a more empirical approach to creative process could be of advantage. In this chapter I will attempt to shift away from the orthodoxy of French theory and deploy an alternative model of creativity in the form of David Hume's foregrounding of the autonomous association of ideas.

The concept of 'the association of ideas' originated in the empirical philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679),¹ and was elaborated and clarified by Hume (1711–1776) via the philosophy of John Locke (1632–1704). Moreover, the notion of the association of ideas had a significant impact on the evolution of the modern discipline of psychology via Hume's contemporary David Hartley (1705–1757). And with regard to deconstructive art, there is also a significant intersection between the association of ideas and the development of automatism in Surrealism.

André Breton was a medical doctor prior to becoming the leader of the Surrealist movement and Sigmund Freud's 'free association' word tests appear to have played a role in inspiring the technique of automatism. Louise Tythacott observes: 'Freud replaced hypnosis with his own technique of "free association" as the key for unlocking the unconscious and unravelling the mystery of dreams. The Surrealists, too, utilized the idea of "word association" to map in their own way the chance irruptions of the unconscious mind.' (Tythacott 2002: 52).

What is especially useful about Hume's thinking is that he suggests that the autonomous association of ideas (an unconscious cognitive process) is intimately interconnected with our everyday reasoning processes. Which makes a great deal of sense—unless we subscribe to the trance theory of creativity.

A prime instance of everyday creativity—often referred to by philosophers—is our use of language. In the course of speaking or writing it is possible to create unique idea combinations. I will take an instance of an association of ideas that appeared in an earlier draft of chapter four in the form of the phrase: 'social locus of self'. A search on Google for this phrase obtained no hits across literally billions of web pages. Which is to say this particular phrase is (Google) unique, original and therefore creative. The phrase 'social locus of self' is also an instance of an association of ideas, which is to say the everydayness of creativity as opposed to the overdramatised and mythologised accounts evident not only in romantic aesthetics but French poststructuralism. One can also cite the way in which a narrative such as this book is assembled over time by an accumulation of idea associations. Each association is a micro-creative act but the accumulation of this micro-acts can lead to a more complex construction. We are noting here the way in which creativity involves time, conscious reflection and selection. This is an important point because it indicates a critical difference between the creative engagement of the artist and the viewer due to the fact that the latter is usually considerably shorter in duration.

In this and the following chapter it will be argued that a turn to a more practical, everyday, concept of creativity than that offered by Romantic aesthetics is essential if the long-standing goals of activating the viewer and bringing art into life are to be attained. Otherwise the mystification of genius will continue to separate art from the everyday. We need to reconstruct our concept of artistic creativity by moving away from romantic aesthetics towards a framework akin to the concept of the viewer as reader.

Hume's philosophy is useful because of his foregrounding of everyday *imagination* as the principal mechanism of mind. The Humean association of ideas also connects with the concept of narrative because the chains of association produced by imagination ultimately coalesce into contingent narrative constructions such as those which the reader composes to make sense out of a work of art.

But before continuing with a theoretical consideration of the importance of Hume's philosophy for deconstructive aesthetics I would like to examine an actual instance of installation art that highlights the interrelated notions of the role of the reader, creativity, the association of ideas, narrative and 'making sense'.

THE PERFECT METAPHOR: JENNIFER PASTOR

Jennifer Pastor's *The Perfect Ride*, 2003, is an installation consisting of three parts, two sculptures and an animated film. Frankly, when confronted with the work one is baffled. We are presented with fascinating sculptural configurations but it is impossible to fathom their interrelationship with each other on the basis of their visual-corporeal presence.

What follows is an account based on a conversation between myself and Pastor in which she told me the story behind the work. I was impressed by her story because it was an especially lucid account of a creative process. Learning the background to *The Perfect Ride* most certainly enhanced my appreciation of the work. But it is worth noting that there remains a prejudice in the world of fine art that too much information about a work

will detract from its mysterious force. This particular aesthetic ideology seems designed to mystify the creative process in order to make the artist appear more extraordinary and therefore more valuable.

The only sense in which mystery is aesthetically valid is when the artist is playing a deliberate game of revealing and concealing, as in narrative play. But in literature such narrative games take the reader into consideration, for example by providing clues. In contemporary fine art there are no conventions governing consideration for the reader; although, there used to be prior to the advent of modernism, when art possessed a distinctly narrative dimension. And because the viewer does not usually purchase the work of art there is no economics of supply and demand connecting the viewer to the work of art as is the case in the other arts. In fact fine art is unique in this respect. Even collectors gain most of their knowledge of art from galleries, art museums and books.

The problems created by the apparent absence of narrative in contemporary deconstructive art is highlighted by the puzzle posed by *The Perfect Ride* because this puzzle cannot be solved by simply looking at the parts of the work; instead, we need to be told a story that unlocks the puzzle. When the work was exhibited at the Whitney in New York in 2004 a book was published about to accompany the work (Pastor 2004), but what is significant for the argument I am presenting here is that the story was not revealed in that book. It is touched upon in the most delicate and abstruse manner possible in Jan Tumlir's text as if it were something to be avoided in case it might spoil the aesthetic experience. According to this curious logic we might note the degree to which knowledge of the Bible will spoil our appreciation of Renaissance art.

The main feature of *The Perfect Ride* consists of a surreal sculptural configuration that looks like a cross between a machine and a bodily organ. This sculptural aspect of *The Perfect Ride* installation is a puzzle in itself due to its abstraction and distortion but it possesses a pictorial character that can lead the reader to determine that it is a somewhat surreal representation of a dam. A second aspect of the installation takes

the form of an animated film constructed out of line drawings of a rodeo rider. There was no problem regarding recognition here.

The problem arises when the viewer tries to seek a relationship between these two aspects of this installation. *The Perfect Ride* becomes a prime instance of the way in which the expansion of visual language beyond the integral object leads the viewer into the condition of the puzzle. It also reveals the problems that this entails in the absence of any clues regarding the narrative informing the work. There is also a third part of the installation which is a sculpture of the inner ear, but this takes the chain of associations beyond breaking point and I will not deal with it here. Pondering the possible connections between the animated film of the rodeo rider and the surreal sculptural depiction of a dam is sufficient challenge.

The problem with the puzzle presented to the viewer in *The Perfect Ride* is that it is extremely difficult to intuit the connection between the two main features of this work, and the third feature actually makes matters worse. If the artist was schooled in literary practice then she might have made the third term a clue as to how the main features interrelate; but we are not dealing with literature here we are dealing with a fine artist playing with nonlinear narrative in the absence of any conventions regarding how to take the viewer-reader into consideration. What is most remarkable is that the institutional and ideological framework that supports the production of fine art actually *encourages* the artist to create such insoluble puzzles due to an *institutionalised* lack of concern for the reader. This is not only the fault of deconstructive aesthetics it is endemic to modern art as a whole and stems from an emphasis on the total freedom of individual creative genius. This is paradoxically an effect of democracy but it often leads to undemocratic art and the effect that Marxist aestheticians have referred to as the 'autonomy' of fine art, which is to say its separation from everyday life.

The focus on total artistic freedom; and nonlinearity in deconstructive art actually detracts from the key goal of bringing art into life. Literature and film, in contrast, have much less of a problem in this respect due to

their focus on the reader, which is why they are so much more popular and have a more pronounced social impact.²

The Perfect Ride is a perfect instance for the current discussion because it typifies problems that affect fine art in general. Specifically, it is often the case that crucial information is left out of the presentation of works of art, and sometime deliberately so as to increase the mystery of the piece; although the omission was not deliberate in the case of *The Perfect Ride*. When we learn the story behind *The Perfect Ride* the relationship between the dam and the rodeo bull become revealed.

Those who subscribe to a romantic position claim that revealing the story spoils the work. An instance such as *The Perfect Ride* indicates that this is not the case, it actually assists the reader in his or her creative engagement as I will demonstrate.

The background to *The Perfect Ride* lies in another, discarded, project which was to be inspired by the structures built by craftsmen for State trade fairs in the US. Pastor attended many such fairs and spoke to the people concerned but became increasingly depressed about the validity of the project, the subject seemed so unremittingly functional. And as we know, fine art is not concerned with function. Her frustration built to fever pitch until one night in her hotel she watched a rodeo on cable TV and was struck by the bull's movements. She reports that in her imagination the 'bull became a single moving point like a spirograph' (Pastor 2005). She also noted that the blurrily moving bulk of the bull dissolved any clear delineation between its body and the ground upon and over which it was so frenetically moving.

This observation led Pastor to a remarkable demonstration of the capacity of the imagination for cognitive quantum leaps that connect one idea with another in a manner the Surrealists referred to as 'a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities'.³ The movement-image of the bull-ground reminded Pastor of an experience of seeing the Hoover Dam in which she was struck by the way in which the gushing water seemed to merge into the dam's structural-mechanical configuration. Which is to say, in metaphorical terms, the force of nature that is the flux of water

inundated the human-made apparatus. In her imagination the fusion of the moving figure and its static ground evident in her experience of the dam became comparable with the fusion of figure and ground evident in the rodeo bull. In our conversation Pastor observed that the ‘relation of the bull to the ground is like the relationship of the dam to its surroundings’ (Pastor 2005); both are in movement, both are ‘alive’ and interconnected.

We now have enough information to appreciate the core of *The Perfect Ride* and explaining it did not take a great deal of words. We are in possession of the key that unlocks the core of the work and can pose the question as to whether *The Perfect Ride* is the kind of puzzle that can facilitate a creative engagement of the viewer. In order to answer this question I deliberately made the account of Pastor’s story as close to her version as possible extracting any creative additions of my own.

From my experience of coming to grips with the nonlinear narrative puzzle that is *The Perfect Ride* I would suggest that it is only when the reader is in possession of the background story that any kind of creative interpretation can be made. After hearing her speak about ‘fluid embedment’ and her description of an earlier sculpture in terms of a burgeoning fecundity I began to see the dam apparatus as strangely sexual. That is not especially creative because Pastor provided such a big hint. But I went on to connect this sexual fluid-dam with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘desiring machine’ that derives in turn from Freud’s association between machinery and genitalia.⁴ I also brought Marcel Duchamp’s *The Large Glass*, 1915–1923 into the chain of creative associations because it, like Pastor’s dam, is an apparatus of desire. Pastor’s description of the blurring of figure and ground as she watched the rodeo bull’s movements led me to recall Henri Bergson’s suggestion that the movement of an object in time cannot be grasped by rational cognition but only by intuition, due to the fact that it could not be cut up into analysable segments. Then I noted that photographers, most notably Jules-Etienne Marey were able to capture what Deleuze has referred to as the movement-image (*image-mouvement*).⁵ Finally, thinking back to Pastor’s description of the movement of the rodeo bull in terms of a moving point, I noted that Marey

pioneered the motion capture technique of applying dots and lines to the joints and limbs of his subjects before photographing them.

Normally in art writing one would intertwine one's own thoughts with those of the artist and significant features of the work and create a more or less coherent interpretive narrative. I have deliberately separated the two here, and left my chain of thoughts as a patchwork rather than forming them into a more coherent narrative-like structure. This was done in order to better answer the question as to whether *The Perfect Ride* is a 'writerly' text. And on the basis that it stimulated a creative train of thought on the part of this reader I think that *The Perfect Ride* can be called 'writerly'. But what is important to note is that the creative engagement was triggered by the narrative behind the work *more than by the work on its own*; which emphasises the *conceptual*, as opposed to the purely sensory, nature of nonlinear narrative sculptural installation.⁶

The next issue I would like to address is whether my creative engagement with *The Perfect Ride* constitutes 'co-authorship'. I would *not* go so far as to say that. It took Pastor several years to create *The Perfect Ride*. 'Co-authorship' is too strong a term; a better way of describing the creative-interpretive process would be to suggest that the reader *contributes* to the work of art. What is most important, however, is that such creative engagement is possible. And if that requires additional information being made available then that should not be understood as 'spoiling' the work. Otherwise we fall back into a romantic mystification of the creative process, and assign the artist the status of genius that leads us to forget about the viewer-reader.

DISCURSIVE OBJECTS AND THE UNCERTAINTY OF LANGUAGE

It is notable that the chain of associations made by Pastor concerning *The Perfect Ride* were visual whereas the connections made by myself were verbal. She works with visual materials I work with words, but one is no better, or worse, than the other, especially in Hume's scheme of things. For Hume both verbal and visual and indeed any mode of what he calls 'ideas' are grist for the mill of autonomous association that is, in his view, the

fundamental mechanism of mind. For Hume the principal faculty of mind is imagination which makes his approach especially appropriate for aesthetics.

In my account of *The Perfect Ride* I mentioned the Surrealist dictum concerning the ‘juxtaposition of distant realities’ and in this chapter I will also address the work of Simon Starling who has described his work in terms of ‘connecting the previously unconnected’. The reference to Surrealism is apt here on two grounds: firstly, because the reference to juxtaposition and connection are similar to what Hume termed association; and, secondly, because of the relationship between Surrealism and Freudian psychoanalysis.

Considerations of creativity within the world of contemporary art remain predominantly informed by the intersection of Freudian psychoanalysis and Surrealism’s development of techniques such as automatic writing and painting and montage. But there are problems with using Freud as a basis for a theory of creativity because he believed that imagination was inherently driven by primal and potentially ‘savage’ desires. This leads Freud to posit a clear dichotomy between the ‘primitive’ unconscious and ‘civilised’ reason. Robert Bocoock observes:

Freud assumes that there has been some progress in rational thinking which has been made by Western peoples, and shares with Max Weber an interest in this unique form of rationality. He does not assume that it is easily achieved or maintained by either individuals or in whole societies, but he does assume that there is a significant qualitative difference between primitive thought (*la pensée sauvage*) and rational thought. (Bocoock 2002: 82)

For Freud the autonomous association of emotionally charged image-ideas in dream points to the primal nature of the unconscious mind. In contradistinction to this savage mind stands language with its capacity to classify the world, promote social intercourse and weave cultural discursive formations. Thinking with images, epitomised for Freud by dreaming, becomes understood as less evolved than language. One might extrapolate on this premise and suggest that higher beings than ourselves may think entirely in mathematics; but it is also possible to observe that

many mathematicians think with images. Take, for example, Albert Einstein's thoughts on the topic:

What, precisely, is 'thinking'? When, at the reception of sense impressions, memory-pictures emerge, this is not yet 'thinking.' And when such pictures form series, each member of which calls forth another, this too is not yet 'thinking.' When, however, a certain *picture* turns up in many such series, then—precisely through such return—it becomes an ordering element for such series, in that it connects series which in themselves are unconnected. Such an element becomes an instrument, a concept. (in Holton 1996: 197) [emphasis added]

Einstein clearly includes 'pictures' in a reasoning process that he describes in terms of a recurring picture that 'turns up in many ... series' and thereby links these chains of image-ideas. Einstein acknowledged a debt to Hume's philosophy and one can detect a distinctly Humean resonance in the passage quoted above. Compare it, for example, with Hume's assertion that:

ALL the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS. The difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning (Hume 1963: 25)

Hume becomes important for a discussion of creativity when he stresses the role of the imagination in the formation of ideas from sense impressions. For Hume there are two modes of ideation: ideas of memory and ideas of imagination (Owen 1999: 67). And what is significant about this separation is that the mechanism of thought is situated by Hume firmly in the domain of imagination. David Owen notes that Hume's 'conception of reason explains reasoning in terms of *a subset* of properties of the imagination' (Owen 1999: 11) [emphasis added]. *For Hume*

imagination is the engine of thought not language. This is especially important when one considers that a criticism of the hegemony of rationalism lies at the heart of deconstructive aesthetics. Hume allows such a criticism without having to enter into the mystification evident in romantic aesthetics and aspects of poststructuralist aesthetics. Hume's is a reasonable critique of reason.

From a Humean standpoint autonomous interconnections between the materials within the multimedia storehouse of the mind becomes the infrastructure for the formation of verbal concepts. One might also note that the chain-like character of language appears to recapitulate the process of the association of ideas—like most processes in the brain, these two can engage in dialogue. But unless we are both alert and in a reflective mode we can miss those occasions when original idea connections, or recombinations, come from autonomous unconscious process rather than from conscious cognition.

Appealing to a pre-semiotic, eighteenth century philosopher to address problems in contemporary art may seem anachronistic but that is far from true because Hume is pointing to a process that lies beneath the surface of language yet is intimately entwined with it. Structuralism and poststructuralism are characterised by an obsession with language which is problematic from the standpoint of visual art theory. Hume offers an interesting, and potentially more embodied, alternative.

Hume's account of imagination in terms of the association of ideas is a also a precursor to the connectionist movement in contemporary cognitive science. Since the advent of computers the dominant model for unconscious mental activity has become that of 'information processing' which in the latter part of the twentieth century became increasingly modelled in terms of the autonomous association of data now referred to as connectionism in artificial intelligence, cognitive science, psychology and philosophy of mind (cf. Daniel Dennett).

As the genealogy of connectionism can be traced back to Hume's emphasis on the association of ideas the latter can hardly be called outmoded. In significant respects Hume's model is more productive than

Freud's dichotomous representation of the unconscious as a 'savage' mind that can wreak havoc if it takes over from reason and common sense. If Descartes split mind from body then Freud painted an even more fragmented picture of humankind. However, it would not be productive to become embroiled in a discourse of either/or; Freud's thought is immensely valuable and it would be better to see Hume's ideas as complementing those of Freud, and vice versa.

Unlike Freud, Hume does not consider thinking with images as necessarily conjoined with overpowering passions and primal desires. He refers, in contrast, to the power of association as 'gentle force', 'a kind of *attraction*, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to show itself in as many and as varied forms'. (Hume 1963: 34, 35–36). For Hume, evidently, the forces of nature that lay within the human psyche were not reducible to savagery (Freud) or madness (Locke, see below). As such his concept of imagination as a gentle or subtle force of attraction serves to complement the more pathological states of mind referred to by Freud. And, although Hume does not use this concept, one can note a similarity in tone, at least, between the concept of the 'gentle force' of imagination and the contemporary concept of creativity as play.

Hume's 'gentle force' also serves as a foil to the some of the more dramatic portrayals of the struggle between the linearising regimentation of society and the flux of desire promulgated in aspects of French philosophy such as Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome metaphor, for example, describes the flux of desire that is the engine of creativity as akin to schizophrenia (1984; 1987). These are compelling and dramatic formulations which echo the drama of human experience but can also be used as an ideological apotheosis of the individual creative genius to a level above what Nietzsche referred to as the 'herd'. I also quoted Derrida earlier and noted that the notion that artistic creativity arises out of an ineffable nothingness is fundamental to the romanticist mystification of artistic genius. It belongs to a period in history when artists rebelled against mechanisation, and it

seems utterly anachronistic in the age of the computer—especially when the computer is becoming such a powerful creative tool for musicians, video artists, animators and interactive artists. And when the Internet is becoming a sphere for the formation of digital creative communities such as youtube.com and flickr.com.

Peter Bürger has noted (1984) that deconstructive art emerged as a backlash against nineteenth century aestheticism and its doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake). It is ironic, therefore that, bolstered by aspects of French theory, deconstructive art at the turn of the millennium seems to be softening its stance towards aestheticism and the mystification of creativity. The object of bringing Hume into the discussion of deconstructive aesthetics is to argue that there is absolutely no need to subscribe to the romanticist position that creativity arises out of a mysterious nothingness. Such a notion is not a key, or essential, component of deconstructive art, indeed it appears to be thoroughly detrimental to deconstructive art. The fundamental argument in this chapter is that neo-romantic mystification of creativity detracts from the long overdue consideration of the creative role of the reader and the relationship of such a consideration for our understanding of the artist's creative process.

Hume's philosophy builds upon that of his predecessor Locke who pointed to the mental phenomenon of an autonomous association of ideas. Significantly, Locke's attitude to this cognitive phenomenon is not unlike that of Freud's attitude to dream. In his study of the philosophy of Hume, Charles William Hendel Jr. observes that in 1700 Locke focused on:

complex ideas arising in the mind independent of our will. He seems to have been impressed by what [Nicolas] Malebranche [1638–1715] had described as the chance or customary connections of ideas. These compound notions were the source of most of our errors. ... Locke called it 'the association of ideas.' It is 'a sort of madness,' 'something unreasonable in most men,' a 'connection of ideas wholly owing to chance or custom' (Hendel 1925: 100)

Notice Locke's reference to 'madness' which was to be a central premise of romanticist aesthetics evident in modern art in the forms of Symbolism and Expressionism. What is remarkable about Hume is that he takes an entirely different standpoint. Hendel notes that Hume was much taken by Locke's notion of the association of ideas.

Hume seized upon this phrase 'association of ideas.' It seemed a happy designation for all *activities* of mind whatsoever that are *not voluntary*, ... What appeared to be such an anomaly to Locke was in reality the very rule throughout the realm of human understanding. Our most important conceptions were produced not by our deliberate will as rational beings but by our natural or instinctive imagination. (Hendel 1925: 101)

Hume's position is not only radically different from Locke but also from Freud who, like Locke, understood the autonomous association of ideas as inherently irrational. For example, Kaja Silverman quotes Freud discussing what he refers to as the 'dream-work':

The dream-work is not simply more careless, more irrational, more forgetful and more incomplete than waking thought; it is completely different from it qualitatively ... It does not think, calculate, or judge in any way at all; *it restricts itself to giving things a new form* ... Little attention is paid to the logical relations between the thoughts (in Silverman 1984: 61) [emphasis added]

The phrase 'giving things a new form' is instructive because it implies a creative process and, indeed, this notion becomes the focus of psychoanalytically based theories of creativity such as Surrealist automatism. The crucial notion is that there is a mysterious form-giving force (libido or desire), which might be conceived of as a surrogate for God in the wake of the death of God. This surrogate God is a chthonic deity, consisting of powerful and primitive forces that can engulf the rational ego. The human drama of Freud's 'savage mind' narrative appeals to the romantic to the extent of ignoring the degree to which Freud also understood the mind, like Hume, in terms of cognition.

Like Freud, Hume also noted the relationship between imagination and emotion but, crucially, his object of enquiry was not people who are in

psychological distress. His was a phenomenological investigation of his own, by all accounts, remarkably balanced state of mind. As has been noted, in stark contrast to Freud, Hume described the affective power that drove the autonomous association of ideas as a 'gentle force' (Hume 1963: 34). For Hume, evidently, the force of nature that lay within the human psyche was not necessarily savage, today we might describe it as 'playful' in addition to being capable of more aggressive expression.

Importantly, the term 'gentle' in Hume's usage also implies that the ideas that are autonomously combined by the mechanism of mind are not necessarily welded together permanently. Freud, in contrast, focused on neurotic and psychotic ideation in which the association of ideas is extremely difficult if not impossible to dissolve due to the power of its affective bond. Hume, in contrast, observes that the 'uniting principle among ideas is not to be considered as an inseparable connection' (Hume 1963: 34). This makes sense if we shift our attention from neurotic and superstitious ideation to processes of reasoning.

Hume's account of imagination as a fundamental cognitive process contradicts the romantic proposition that the creativity is the sole preserve of exceptionally sensitive or tormented individuals. Unsurprisingly, artists exhibit the same range of personality types as do any group of human beings. Another critical feature of the mechanism of imagination conceived by Hume is that it not only fuses ideas but also breaks down complex ideas (e.g. impressions of objects) into simpler components. Hume's atomistic concept of cognition can be compared with the concept of a free play of signifiers within a universe of difference that informs poststructuralist theory; in particular, Derrida's concept of deconstruction. In the Humean model of mind imagination deconstructs sense impressions into fragments that become free-floating idea-fragments that can be recombined into new ideas. The beauty of this model is that it is supported by very contemporary research in the field of cognitive science.⁷

If we combine the notion of imagination as a process of breaking down complex ideas and recombining them into new idea complexes then we have a model of cognition that is an eighteenth century precursor of late-

twentieth century deconstruction. But the notion of the deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas is also an intrinsic part of early modernism as is witnessed by Walter Benjamin's 1936 eulogy to the miracle of cinema in his landmark 1936 *Work of Art* essay:

Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. (1973: 236)

Benjamin also focused on the capacity for montage that is such an intrinsic feature of the cinematic medium. Reality is broken into thousands of photographic fragments that can be recombined in a multitude of different ways. Benjamin's delight in cinema resonates with his revolutionary Marxism and the notion that old ways of understanding the nature of society can be deconstructed and recombined to create a new society. But the notion that tradition and convention are social constructions that can be taken apart and rebuilt is also evident in Hume's theory of mind. As V. C. Chappell notes:

Hume realizes that the philosophical position he has been developing is not only destructive of the metaphysical views of a few philosophers, which is after all a mark in its favor. It also subverts, or threatens to subvert, common sense, the common beliefs that all of us hold and the common principles that all of us employ, and indeed cannot help employing, in our everyday dealings with one another. (Chappell 1963: xxxiii)

Belief systems like neurotic fixations are not easy to take apart due to the emotive power that binds their idea formations together. When it comes to religious and political beliefs we no longer dealing with a 'gentle force'. But in principle Hume's notion that all idea complexes are contingent and capable of recombination is extremely modern it is, indeed, postmodern—

emphasising, if it needs to be emphasised any longer, that postmodernity is nothing other than a heightened mode of modernity.

TRAUMA AND METAPHORISATION

Freud has been more influential on deconstructive aesthetic theory than Hume especially in France where Surrealism remains a philosophical force—one can cite the considerable influence of Georges Bataille on contemporary French philosophy. But from the point of view of the attempt in this chapter to moderate the irrationalistic emphases of Freud's intrinsically pathological model of mind one can note that the ideas Freud uses to analyse dream processes are remarkably similar to the basic principles Hume identified as informing the association of ideas.

Freud posited two processes: condensation and displacement. 'Condensation' refers to the connection of the conventionally unconnected and displacement is characterised by substitution. These two processes parallel two out of the three principles of cognitive association that Hume identified: contiguity and similarity (Fieser 2004). Hume's third principle is cause and effect, which seems rationalistic; but in a manner that pre-empts Friedrich Nietzsche who argued that metaphor was the substrate of language,⁸ Hume contends that our perception of causality is an effect of imagination. In a period in history swamped by *recherché* French philosophy it is extraordinary to find that some of the most fundamental notions informing poststructuralism were preempted in the work of a plain speaking, eighteenth century empiricist. Hume's account of the autonomous association of ideas is a prime instance of how one can be both rational and creative. From the standpoint of a Humean aesthetics the artistic aspirant does not have to delve into mad love, schizophrenia and drugs in the manner of the Surrealists, because the autonomous association of ideas is quite simply an everyday operation of the mind. It is, according to Hume, the fundamental mechanism of mind to the extent that it feeds reason.

We forget that this is the case because, like metaphor, the products of imagination that become accepted into social currency become treated over

time as if they were natural and God-given, and not the products of a creative process. Accordingly, *reasoning* should not necessarily be equated with convention-bound rationalism. Reasoning, as a *process*, can be quite as creative as the dream and daydream beloved of romantic aestheticians.

Hume's account of the autonomous association of ideas—and especially his account of causality—is useful to this discussion because it blurs the distinction between creative thinking and reasoning. In effect it deconstructs the orthodoxy of French deconstruction by imploding the binary opposition between creativity and reason implicit in the writings of theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. While Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari hurl the tool of reason that is language into the romantic abyss of the unconscious (Derrida even uses the term abyss in describing deconstruction),⁹ the plain-thinking empiricism of Hume brings creativity into the light of the everyday.

It is significant, therefore, to note that the dichotomy that Freud tried to delineate between the 'primitive' thinking with images (dream) and the logic of language soon imploded. Freud's principles of condensation and displacement quickly melded with the discourse of semiotics that arose in the early twentieth century leading to Freud's successor, and Surrealist fellow-traveller, Jacques Lacan's famous observation that 'the unconscious is structured like a language'—which Joël Dor notes is 'rooted in the Freudian theory of the dream' (Dor 1998: 11). The realisation that condensation and displacement parallel linguistic processes is reinforced by Silverman who quotes the semiotician and film theorist Christian Metz observing that 'the basis for the frequent association of the terms "condensation," "metaphor," and "paradigm" would seem to be that all three derive from the perception of *similarity*. In much the same way, displacement, metonymy, and syntagm are all seen as involving the principle of *contiguity*.' (in Silverman 1984: 87) [emphasis added]. It is significant that without any reference to Hume, Silverman's meditation on the semiotic ramifications of Freud's condensation and displacement leads to two of the three 'principles of association' identified by Hume: similarity and contiguity.

The parallels between metaphor and similarity, and metonymy and contiguity help identify a connection between language and creative process. This is a crucial step towards establishing a postmodern concept of artistic creativity congruent with the postmodern concept of the viewer as reader. Turning from the viewer-reader to the artist one can conceive of creative process as occurring in the synaptic universe of the brain where information is fragmented and recombined by autonomous creative processes that are fundamentally unconscious. This schematic account of artistic creativity is a fusion Humean cognitive atomism with the Freudian concept of the unconscious mind.

The brain is a biological computer that first emerged in reptiles half a billion years ago. We know little of how the human brain works even now, which is why philosophers such as Hume remain useful. But we do know that it consists of a massively modularised and interconnected synaptic universe within which enormous amounts of multimedia data (linguistic, visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, kinaesthetic etc.) are stored in a dynamic, nonlinear distributed system. It is within this extraordinary synaptic manifold—the unconscious dimension of which is informed by reality but is, simultaneously, detached from reality—that the autonomous association of ideas can take place.

But crucial to a deconstructive model of creativity is the notion that the unconscious must first be informed, be loaded with information before the process of decomposition and recombination can take place. Whereas romantic aesthetics understands creativity as arising out of nothingness, deconstruction requires pre-existing systems that can be taken apart and recombined.

When considering creativity it is also necessary to admit that it is not exclusively contained within the unconscious. In order to lead to a creative product, the autonomous association of ideas that takes place in unconscious cognition must enter into consciousness. And when this happens the idea fusions of unconscious process are judged according to the genre or artistic language game that the artist is working within. And this process keeps on iterating because a work of art is usually created or

built up over time. It consists of a series of micro-creative acts that are subjected to conscious reasoning and judgement and assembled into a whole.

At this point we can join up the discussion of the congruence of the postmodern concept of the viewer-as-reader with the concept of the art game first mentioned in the introduction and elaborated upon in chapter two. If the viewer can be understood as a 'reader' then the artist can be understood as both a designer and player of art games. In order to define the art game more precisely we can compare it with sport. The crucial difference between art and sport is that in sport the athlete plays a game with fixed rules. The athlete is celebrated for his or her prowess in playing a specific game according to the rules. In art, the situation is quite different because the rules of the games played are not fixed. It is the case that some artists play art games with hardly any change to the rules, and we say their work is 'derivative'. That is a criticism based on the fact that we *expect* artists to change the rules of art games, or genres. But fundamentally it seems reasonable to suggest that when we are speaking about artistic creativity we are speaking about art games or art-language games.

Artistic creativity should not be understood *entirely* as the juxtaposition of *distant* realities within the synaptic universe of the unconscious mind. One must also include the processes of reasoning and judgement that put the various micro-creative acts together to build up a whole, to *construct* a particular gamespace of ideas: disarranging and rearranging the components of that gamespace. In other words the nonlinear cognitive process that is the autonomous association of ideas is complemented by a more linear, chain-like construction process.

And this chain-like process of construction can be understood in terms of Hume's third principle of association which is cause and effect. We might assume that cause and effect is a quintessentially rational mode of cognition. But for Hume cause and effect are the product of imagination not reason; a conclusion that points to the intrinsic contingency of our causal models of the world.¹⁰ David Owen notes that for Hume the autonomous association of ideas is the fundament of what we call reason:

Whereas Locke seemed to rely on the notion of the faculty of reason, God-given for the pursuit of truth, to fill out his account, Hume realizes that *the causal story is all there is*. (Owen 1999: 63) [emphasis added]

In other words, the linear chains of ideas, the narrative constructions that we use to explain the world around us are built on the shifting sands of imagination. Owen continues, noting that Hume:

denies that reason is an independently functioning faculty. Instead, he explains reasoning and the formation of belief in terms of *causal principles of the imagination*. (Owen 1999: 63) [emphasis added]

The Humean imagination is a foil to the dark abyss of Freud's unconscious. Understood from a Humean perspective creativity is part and parcel of the everyday. It is quite simply, for Hume, the *fundamental* mechanism of mind, the substrate of language and reason. This is not to say it is the *principal* mechanism of mind because conventional common sense and conscious and conventionally determined thought processes seem to outnumber our creative insights. Creative insights appear to demand more mental energy to effect the associative process (the juxtaposition of distant realities) than does the more stereotypical, conventionalised mode of conscious cognition where the associations only have to be re-membered. Imagination is not simply re-membering which is to say combining fragments of memory into a coherent narrative-like memory, it entails putting those fragments together in a new combination.

As noted earlier Hume's focus on imagination as the association of ideas resonates with contemporary explorations in artificial intelligence and artificial creativity (e.g. Stephen Thaler's 'Creativity Machine'). The major difference evident between contemporary connectionism and Humean associationism is that contemporary cognitive science accepts the role of chance—or, more exactly, probability—whereas Hume did not. In this sense Dada and Surrealism were remarkably prescient. And with regard to my use of an eighteenth century philosopher to reconstruct aesthetics at

the turn of the millennium, it can be noted that one of the most effective systems of probabilistic inference used in the cognitive science/artificial intelligence communities at the turn of the millennium was devised by the eighteenth century mathematician Thomas Bayes (c. 1702–1761), a contemporary of Hume. The search engine Google uses Bayesian inference. It seems unfortunate that Hume was not acquainted with Bayes' ideas.

CHAINS AND TRAINS

Returning to the aesthetic issues, another important feature of Hume's subsumption of causality into imagination is that it indicates the possibility of creating chains and trains of thought. Owen quotes Hume emphasising that association occurs not only between two discrete ideas but also in sequences:

That we may understand the full extent of these relations [of association between ideas], we must consider, that two objects are connected together in the imagination, not only when the one is immediately resembling, contiguous to, or the cause of the other, but also when there is interposed betwixt them a third object, which bears to both of them any of these relations. This may be carried on to a great length; tho' at the same time we may observe, that each remove considerably weakens the relation. (in Owen 1999: 78)

Owen notes that this passage is 'extremely important' because 'reasoning, for Hume as for Locke, is a chain of ideas'. More explicitly, one can add that *language* is essentially a chain-like mode of *constructing* sense, and so is narrative. The significance of such observations is that the chain-like structure of language may be the mark of its origin in the autonomous association of ideas. Talbot J. Taylor is informative on this point when he quotes Hume's contemporary the French philosopher Étienne Bonnot Condillac (1715–1780) who treated the subject of language directly:

If a thought is not linear in the mind, it has a linear order in discourse, where it is analysed into as many parts as it includes component ideas. By this means we may observe and even understand what we do when thinking; consequently we may learn

to control our reflections. Thinking thus becomes an art, and it is the art of speaking. (in Taylor 1997 139)

Condillac clearly associates thought with language but what is interesting is his use of the terms 'linear' and 'not linear', where the 'not linear' describes what happens in the mind and the linear what happens when we speak or write or otherwise articulate a formation determined, in part, by conventional rules. Condillac's comments indicate that the linear construction of ideas in language (and one can add narrative) allows the conscious mind to compare and contrast the products of nonlinear (creative) process with the edifice of conventional knowledge in order to evaluate whether such products are a contribution to extant knowledge or simply useless mutations.

The unconscious cognitive processes described by Hume and by Freud (albeit with different emphases) have the ability to take ideas apart and recombine them—that is a nonlinear, deconstructive process. The conscious faculties, in contrast, appear to be linear and *constructive*, in the sense that they seem principally concerned with referring to and maintaining the stable (albeit inherently contingent) picture of reality that convention offers.

As noted at the start, the point of this discussion of creativity is to draw parallels between the creative engagement of the viewer-reader and that of the artist. Consequently, I will now examine some case studies of artists whose practice can be understood in terms of an artistic language game.

SIMON STARLING'S SYSTEM

Simon Starling's work offers a prime instance of a creative process in which the autonomous association of ideas operates in conjunction with the toolbox of reasoning: system, rules and conventions. Starling describes his working method as 'connecting the previously unconnected', which recalls the Surrealist's 'juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities'. But Starling's work does not exhibit any obvious evidence of a Surrealist influence. Specifically his work does not subscribe to the Surrealist

supposition that creativity stems from a Freudian ‘primitive’ unconscious; a concept exploited, for example, in the work of contemporary artists such as John Bock, Paul McCarthy, Jason Rhoades and Elke Krystufek.

Starling’s work does exhibit a creative process, indeed it can be said to *represent* creative process. But his approach is of particular interest to the discussion in this chapter because it flags an intersection between the autonomous association of ideas and rational-analytical processes.

Thus, in *Inverted Retrograde Theme*, 2001, Starling creates a connection between sculptural processes and an instance of artistic system in the form of Arnold Schönberg’s twelve-tone technique of musical composition which uses the chromatic semitone scale rather than the more harmonious diatonic scale. The score illustrated below is from one of Schoenberg’s students Anton Webern’s *Concerto* which uses Schoenberg’s twelve tone technique.¹¹



The first three notes are the ‘original’ cell, the following three notes are its ‘*retrograde inversion*’ (backwards and upside down). The third cell is ‘retrograde’ (backwards) and the fourth is ‘inverted’ (upside down). And one can make the general comment that despite the fact that modern Western music is so bound up in scales it appears to be capable of enormous creativity. Indeed, music can be taken as an instance that supports Michel Foucault’s claim that discipline and system can be *productive* as well as restrictive; a notion that is diametrically opposed to the romantic concept of creativity.

Pressing home this point we can observe that the creative process in music can and does interact with linear systems because the diatonic and chromatic scales are linear systems that serve as a scaffolding for harmonic and melodic permutations as well as deliberate cacophony. One might also

observe that at one point in his career Marcel Duchamp gave up art for chess which is another instance of a rule-based system that is capable of multilayered and approximately infinite permutations.

Returning to Starling, the Secession commentary on his *Inverted Retrograde Theme* notes that: 'aspects of mirroring, inversion and translocation, which are characteristic for twelve-tone music, are transferred to the installation'.¹⁰ What is interesting here is that creative process is being interconnected with what might be referred to metaphorically as 'information processes' that reflect the mathematical-like concern with structure and pattern evident in musical composition.

Starling's approach to sculptural installation fits very well into the argument regarding the interrelatedness of creative process and reasoning implicit in the Humean account of imagination and the association of ideas. The very fact that Starling is making reference to a system, indeed a now historic, conventionalised, system, shifts the consideration of his creative process away from a romantic focus on the unknowable depths of the unconscious mind towards an intersection of knowledge, discourse, convention, intuition and system.

The twelve tone system in music arose out of the modernist desire to escape tonal music with its hierarchical focus on a key. One might compare Schoenberg's deconstruction of tonality with the Cubist deconstruction of Renaissance perspective and its hierarchical focus which is the vanishing point. In place of a single, totalising perspective and hierarchical structures modernist/postmodernist aesthetics promulgates a vision based on multiple perspectives and non-hierarchical, nonlinear structures.

But Schoenberg's permutational system remains a system, like the harmonic system of keys imposed on the diatonic and chromatic scales. Similarly Cubism is systematic as is evident in the fact that it was the seed that gave rise to rationalistic geometric abstraction epitomised by De Stijl and Constructivism.

At the turn of the millennium it is time to acknowledge, after Hume and after Foucault, that there can be a rapprochement between creative process

and reasoning, between the nonlinear and the linear. Otherwise deconstructive art falls into the trap of binary opposition (linear = rational vs. nonlinear = creative) that is the fate of all rigid ideological thinking.

The condition of possibility of any deconstructive act is the existence of a conventional system. There is no question of the recombination arising solely out of nothingness. Moreover, the pulling apart of such systems and remixing or recombining inevitably leads to a new system, a new convention.

Few people would suggest that composers are not creative due to the fact that they work with notational *systems*. Notationally based music, therefore, becomes a paradigmatic instance of where creative process and sensuous materiality (the sensuousness of sound, the sensuousness of the hands and mouth on instruments) intersects with the game-like permutative processes of systems that allow an approximately infinite number of multilayered moves.

The twelve tone technique of atonal music is about transposition and transformation and so is Starling's approach to sculptural installation; not only in *Inverted Retrograde Theme* but in all his work to date. In *Inverted Retrograde Theme* we witness the system in Starling's dismantling of a grand piano and reconstructing it in an inverted state. This process entailed creating a mould of the piano's cast-iron frame that was used to produce negative castings in a manner reminiscent of Rachel Whiteread's negative sculptural castings of domestic objects and spaces. The two halves of the casting box were exhibited along with the inverted piano frame (a recurring feature in contemporary sculpture and sculptural installation). Starling also created an inside-out soundboard and piano body.¹¹

What Starling is doing here is not surrealistic or mystical, it is transformational in the semiotic sense of transposing a technique from one art form onto another: in this case he is mapping a musical method onto a sculptural process.

One of the key features of Starling's situational montage is that almost anything can be brought into the mix. Thus, instead of taking the

fluorescent lighting in the Secession gallery for granted he incorporated it into his work as a visual-kinetic accompaniment. Starling had the gallery rearrange its fluorescent lighting so that there were twelve rows each made up of seven tubes (the seven notes of the diatonic scale ABCDEFG). He had these lowered from the ceiling so that they hang over the tables upon which the transformed piano components are displayed. He then used time switches to transpose a simple Schönbergian twelve-tone composition into a rhythmic sequence of lights flickering on and off.

One commentator on Starling's work has perceptively observed that 'each object triggers a process of translocation, circular returns and violent leaps in time and space' which seems appropriate. But the same commentator also suggests that this process leads to 'our perception of the meaning of objects is ruthlessly revised'. It is the word 'ruthless' that I would quarrel with. It implies transgressive quality whereas Starling's work seems both more playful and considered. The commentator's aesthetic frame of reference seems out of tune with Starling's approach which seems more akin to Hume's description of the association of ideas as a 'gentle force' rather than the more violent transgressiveness of the Dada and Surrealistic, and Expressionist traditions.

One cannot deny the intelligence and ingenuity of Starling's work, but if we pursue the notion that installation art ought to entail an 'activation of the viewer' we must ask whether Starling's work provokes a creative engagement on the part of the viewer. As in the case of Pastor's *The Perfect Ride* the answer is that Starling's art language games are not only devised by the artist but also played by the artist. In that sense, like most contemporary fine art, Starling's work elicits the conventional mode of reception which is *reading* the work of art.

However, like *The Perfect Ride*, Starling's work is a writerly text in the sense that it has the character of a puzzle that is especially rewarding to the assiduous reader who takes the trouble to unravel it. But there is another feature to Starling's work that deserves attention. His transformational, transpositional strategy is not limited to *Inverted Retrograde Theme* it is evident across his entire oeuvre to date. This means

that when we solve one work it is much easier to appreciate the other works that we encounter. Like *The Perfect Ride*, however, it is often the case that we absolutely need to know the narrative that lies behind the work, to the extent that if the gallery/museum omits to inform us of it, then our appreciation of the work is prejudiced.

INTERACTIVE VISUAL MUSIC: TOSHIO IWAI

Starling's approach in *Inverted Retrograde Theme* may be 'writerly' but it is not interactive. In this sense we can compare and contrast Starling's encounter with music with the work of Toshio Iwai, a Japanese interactive installation artist who emerged in the 1990s and who has expanded visual art into the dimension of sound art. Iwai's exploration of interactive visuosonic installation began with his fascination for a traditional music box that played music using holes punched in a strip of card. One scroll played 'Happy Birthday' and Iwai wondered what would happen if he inverted it. He rotated it anticlockwise and in so doing imposed an inverted retrograde transposition. The resulting melody is quite beautiful but it sounds as if it were transposed into a minor key making it somewhat melancholic, Iwai calls his inverted retrograde theme 'Unhappy Birthday' (Iwai 2006). As an interactive artist Iwai was interested in this action in terms of a game. He could not read music, as is the case for most non-musicians, and was interested in the relationship between the attractive visual pattern of holes punched into the music box scroll and their capacity to produce tonal constructions that pleased the ear whichever way they were passed through the music box.

Iwai studied computer science and from a mathematical perspective one can consider the relationship between the pattern of holes in their 'correct' orientation and in their 'inverted retrograde' orientation in terms of isomorphism. The mathematician Douglas Hofstadter author of the Pulitzer Prize winning book *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, defines isomorphism as 'an information-preserving transformation' (Hofstadter 1980: 8). It is this quality of 'information preservation' that Iwai saw in his music box scroll

experiment. Moreover, for him this particular information is ‘aesthetic’, it is both pleasing to the eye and to the ear.

As a visual artist Iwai understood the pattern of holes in the scroll in terms of abstract art. But he was even more impressed by the fact that the ‘beauty’ inherent in the structure of the hole pattern was preserved even when used the ‘wrong’ way. Iwai points to the way in which a modern painting can often remain attractive even when turned upside down. Indeed Wassily Kandinsky reported that one of the experiences that led him to abstraction was seeing one of his early Fauve-like paintings upside down yet still functioning as a composition (1977 orig. 1912). One could call the Gestalt that is the composition a ‘narrative’, using the term in an expanded sense that connects with concepts such as composition, structure, system, information, game, organism, machine, discursive form, or cultural construction. We can also return to Einstein’s connection between thought and what he calls the ‘picture’:

What, precisely, is ‘thinking’? When, at the reception of sense impressions, memory-pictures emerge, this is not yet ‘thinking.’ And when such pictures form series, each member of which calls forth another, this too is not yet ‘thinking.’ When, however, a certain *picture* turns up in many such series, ... Such an element becomes an instrument, a concept. (in Holton 1996: 197) [emphasis added]

Einstein’s cognitive ‘picture’ is a structure that makes sense, and the concept of isomorphism reveals that it is possible to make sense of the same ‘picture’ from multiple points of view. If we invert the picture it makes sense in a different way. If we play a music box scroll backwards then the same ‘picture’ opens up a new perspective. This way of thinking is also inherent in structuralism and poststructuralism and represents one of their most valuable contributions to the concept of art as a language game.

As an artist, however, Iwai went further using his programming skills to create interactive installations that combine visual formations and sound formations. Unlike Starling’s more traditional approach to art where the viewer focuses on how the artist constructs and plays his or her creative

game, Iwai's work is in the form of an interactive installation. His brilliance lies in his capacity to move beyond the artist's game towards the construction of creativity games that involve the viewer in a creative process. In *Piano As Image Media*, 1995, the viewer-participant uses a trackball to generate a music scroll represented as a sheet of transparent material made up of a matrix of dots of light that moved upwards towards a piano keyboard. When the light dots reached the keyboard they activated the piano creating tonal structures without the need to know how to use the piano keyboard. A vertical screen ascended from the piano to the roof generating three-dimensional abstract patterns as interpretations of the tonal picture. *Piano as Image Media* was exhibited at the Play Zone at the Millennium Dome in London, 1999–2000. Currently (2006) Iwai's work has not been recognized by the fine art system.

For another installation Iwai created a musical glass bead game similar in appearance to the Chinese game Go. Viewers are presented with a table on which there is a grid of holes in which they can move glass balls. The patterns thus formed are projected onto a wall and Iwai's software turns the pattern into a diatonic, digital tonal soundscape. The table is scanned by a line of light as in a photocopier and this line of light represents the play head of the device.

Iwai's approach is totally different to that of Starling. Whereas Starling is fundamentally concerned with being an artist and making ingenious objects for the informed viewer to admire, Iwai is concerned with involving the general public. And it should be mentioned here that like all digital interactive work his works can involve viewers in creative activities even within the maximum security environment of the art museum.

Iwai's musical Go-board is not simply a sculpture it is something designed *to be used*, ideally by two people creating a collaborative composition. But the purpose of Iwai's objects is creative play. Iwai's work is more concerned with the viewer *doing* than 'reading'. Which is to say his work is more embodied, a goal that fine art aspires to but seldom achieves.

Whereas Starling's work is relatively difficult and therefore confers intellectual credibility not only on its creator but also on those who understand it, Iwai's art is highly accessible. Indeed he has created a collection of his visual music games for the Japanese gaming company Nintendo (for the handheld DS game machine) and has recently invented a new digital musical instrument the Tenori-On. One can pose the question as to whether Iwai's art entails a dumbing down of art? If we compare his work with Carsten Höller's slide installation, *Test Site*, exhibited as fine art in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in 2006 then we have to answer no. It is time that Iwai was celebrated in the Turbine Hall because his accessible interactive installations attain the goals outlined by Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) to a significantly greater extent than the artists dealt with in that book.

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH VIEWERS: ANDREAS SLOMINKSY

The final artist I would like to deal with in this chapter is Andreas Slominski. Unlike Starling or Pastor, Slominski *does* take the viewer into consideration, but not in the relational aesthetic mode evident in Iwai's work. Slominski has created what might be termed anti-interactive installations that, from one viewpoint, serve to highlight the lack of concern for the viewer-reader that has become entrenched in the dominant discourse of deconstructive art. His work is playful, but it is also serious because of the issue of viewer exclusion that it raises.

We can begin with Slominski's installation *Bucket of Water*, 1998. The basic aim of this work is simple, to place a bucket of water in an art museum's shop. But Slominski goes about achieving this task in a most convoluted manner. He commissioned a plumber:

to come install a 15-meter long pipe from the nearest bathroom to the bucket. In no time the pipe, including a faucet, was installed and the artist was able to fill the bucket. After that was done the pipe was removed and all traces of the action were eliminated, leaving only the bucket full of water behind. It is important to mention that this action took place with no audience present. The only thing the

audience was able to see later was the relic of the action, a bucket of water, sitting lost and seemingly forgotten in a museum shop as if the cleaning personnel had left it behind by accident. ... the only documentation of the activity were photographs in the publication. (Hoffmann, 2003)

One's immediate response is that the installation would have had much greater sculptural impact if the plumbing had been left. It would have constituted a surrealist or dadaistic sculpture. But that is precisely why Slominski did not take this approach. It would have been too easy for the audience to understand. *Bucket of Water* is certainly extremely puzzling, but as in Pastor's *The Perfect Ride*, Slominski presents the viewer with a puzzle that is impossible to unravel.

In *Bucket of Water* what is not said, not seen, not known is more important than that which is in evidence. There are several levels to this work and at one level Slominski is playing with the notion of conceptual art—a subset of deconstructive art. In particular, he is showing the potential absurdity inherent in the minimal-conceptualist genre. One thinks here of Sol LeWitt's famous neo-romanticist assertion: 'Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.' (LeWitt 1969). The artist is so different from the ordinary person that he or she is akin to a 'mystic' a visionary, one who stands above the herd. One thinks also of the metaphysical absurdity of the blank canvas; or the empty gallery which, in spite of being a cliché by the turn of the millennium, won Martin Creed the prestigious Turner Prize in 2001 simply because he added a timer to the light switch in the gallery to make the lights go on and off (*The Lights Going On and Off*, 2001). In contrast to Creed, Slominski seems more aware of the total absurdity of a mode of art that rewards the artist for playing whimsical games that take absolutely no account of the general public but focus entirely on the art cognoscenti. This is not a new observation Jürgen Habermas has already made it on several occasions.

Where Creed's sense of the playful accommodates itself to the *Realpolitik* of 'art for the art institution's sake', Slominski's approach is more

genuinely deconstructive because he highlights the absurdism of institutionalised transgression and aesthetically conservative, neo-romantic appeals to the ‘mystic’ nature of creative process. In this sense his approach can be compared with deconstructive gestures such as Maurizio Cattelan’s *The 6th Caribbean Biennial*, 1999, discussed in the introduction.

Like Cattelan, Slominski’s principal deconstructive weapon is humour. As Freud observed (2001 orig. 1905) humour can be taken seriously. More to the point of this chapter we might say that the playfulness of the mind, in particular its capacity to wander from one idea to another and make nonlinear connections between ideas can and *should* be taken as seriously as its capacity to create coherent and functioning constructions. And after Hume and post-Humean advances in contemporary cognitive science we can confidently suggest that there is nothing mystic about creative process—apart from the ‘mystic’ that is in all of us: the miracle of consciousness. By pointing to imagination and creativity as a fundamental mechanism of mind Hume’s philosophy helps democratise our notion of creativity. And by keeping the audience in the dark Slominsky foregrounds the way in which fine art makes the ordinary extraordinary, he exhibits its strategy of mystification.

Another instance of Slominky’s deconstruction of the romantic concept of creativity is *Self-Portrait with Sombrero*, installed at the Kunsthalle Zurich in 1998. Patrick Frey reports:

Kunsthalle visitors were greeted only by a pair of photographs (one of the artist's face framed by the circular opening; the other, shot from the adjoining room, of his arm, camera in hand, poised to take the first picture) and the sombrero itself, the top and brim of which had been trimmed to allow the artist to position his face for the "portrait." The only additional clue to the elaborate procedure involved was the still visible holes at the top of the wall. (Frey 1998)

Compared to *Bucket of Water* the viewers to this Slominskian installation were afforded with a veritable plethora of clues. In this case we are most certainly speaking here of a puzzle that takes the viewer into consideration

and which could be solved via some ingenious pondering. The only key prop that is missing is the ladder. The viewer-reader would need to use his or her imagination/intelligence to insert this vital missing fragment into the puzzle.

The narrative behind the work is simple: Slominski deciding to take a photographic portrait of himself wearing a sombrero. A seemingly simple goal, but Slominski made it considerably more complex by electing to take the photograph in the corner of the room at ceiling level while standing on a ladder. The fact that he was crammed into corner necessitated cutting a hole in the wall to reveal his face on the other side. This in turn necessitated cutting a second hole for his arm to hold the camera. Additionally, the rim of the sombrero had to be cut to fit into the corner. Everything that Slominski performed for this occasion was functional. His construction of this apparatus forms a coherent whole. It is not even purposeless because the purpose is to take a self-portrait wearing a sombrero. The fundamental problem with this contraption is that it is unnecessary. But its very unnecessaryness becomes a commentary on deconstructive art in the same way as does his total neglect of the viewer-reader in *Bucket of Water*.

From the standpoint of an artist constructing an art puzzle that engages the viewer in a creative interaction, however, *Self-Portrait with Sombrero* is successful. It provides sufficient clues for the assiduous viewer to work out the eccentric narrative informing this work. The fact that the story is bizarre is necessary feature of the work because this challenges the viewer to juxtapose distant realities or connect the previously unconnected. When one puts the pieces of the puzzle together and says to oneself 'he must have cut those holes in the wall to take the photograph of himself' then one has to a certain extent entered into the creative spirit of Slominski's art game. More particularly, one has stepped outside of the boundaries of common sense into the territory of imagination. One has entered a world of play in which silliness, accidents and mistakes are grist for the creative mill.

When we have examined a third work *Cough Syrup Transport System*, 1998, we will begin to see a nonlinear pattern, or *system*, in Slominski's work. *Cough Syrup Transport System* entailed placing a spoon carrying a dose of cough syrup into a Cardan's suspension apparatus used to keep mariner's compasses horizontal. This was in turn placed within a Vibro-Shock safe which is designed to give substantial resistance to shocks and vibrations. The safe was placed in a van (an ambulance may have been better) and carried from one end of Berlin to the other, completing its journey in the Deutsche Guggenheim at Unter den Linden.

As in the case of *Self-Portrait with Sombrero* a simple action, transporting cough syrup to a destination (one usually transports it in the bottle!) is made extremely complex and elaborate. Like *Bucket of Water* this work is essentially the artist's game, all the viewer sees is the spoonful of cough syrup. In *Self-Portrait with Sombrero* the artist let the viewer become involved in the game by leaving clues that made the work a soluble puzzle. But in most cases he deliberately abuses his artistic license to keep the viewer in the dark.

What then does this say about the artist's game? In the case of Slominski we can forgive his abuse because unlike many other artists he seems highly aware of the absurdity of leaving the viewer in the dark. In fact this has become the essence of his game. And it is good for us the viewer, because here at least is one artist who is drawing attention to the problem. In effect he is trying to provoke a response from the viewer such as the one I am offering here. But rather than being annoyed with Slominski I find that his work makes me more annoyed at the artists who do not seem to realise that they are ignoring the viewer. They seem to be clouded by a market-driven resurgence of conservative neo-romantic conventions at the turn of the millennium, in sharp contrast to Bourriaud's claims for a renaissance of the goal of bringing art into life via 'relational aesthetics'.

Bucket of Water, *Self-Portrait with Sombrero* and *Cough Syrup Transport System* all possess the character of witticisms or jokes. But a joke provokes laughter whereas Slominski's actions produce intellectual, and even politico-aesthetic contemplation. Yet the fact that we do not usually

engage in intellectual dissections of jokes is largely due to convention. Similarly, it is also custom that places works of art in a framework that demands serious consideration and analysis such as is being carried out here. Place Slominski's actions in the framework of a television show with a jaunty title such as 'Let's Do It the Hard Way!' and we would have comedy where the main response would be laughter not intellectual consideration. As in the seminal instance of Duchamp's urinal *Fountain*, 1917, we see that the significance of a work of art is defined not by what it is in itself but by its institutional framing.

As in the case of *Self Portrait with Sombrero* the complex procedures accompanying *Cough Syrup Transport System* are unnecessary. They serve no pragmatic purpose; but the work does possess aesthetic purposes. For example it points to the way in which doing things the right way is habituated, mechanical and fundamentally uninteresting. Slominski's contrivances reveal that taking everyday actions apart and putting them back together in convoluted fashions not only makes them interesting it can also be used to construct a creative puzzle that might elicit creative engagement on the part of the viewer.

We can see from the instances cited here that the degree of viewer engagement depends upon the number of clues given to the viewer. I actually think that *Self Portrait with Sombrero* is more sophisticated, from a deconstructive aesthetic point of view, than the other works by Slominsky we have considered, because it comes closer to the condition of the art game which was put forward in chapter two as an effective solution to the problematic disregard for the viewer evident in deconstructive art at the turn of the millennium.

In the following chapter I will continue to explore the concept of recombinatory strategies and their relevance to the relationship between the artist and the viewer-reader. But the focus will turn more towards the interconnection between authorship and narrative.

1 (Lowry 1982: 14)

2 There is an economic imperative at work here in that if a writer or filmmaker does not please the consumer his or her work will fail. The same is true for music and the performing arts. There is no such economic imperative for the artist who only needs to please the art institution—a closed system with its own economic engine in the form of collectors, state funded museums and auction houses.

3 André Breton quoting Paul Reverdy in the First Manifesto of Surrealism.

4 Evident in his analysis of Daniel Paul Schreber a German judge who suffered from schizophrenia (O'Neill 1996: 224).

5 I think we need here to overcome the mystification of creative process that Freud may have encouraged by his declaration that it was completely different qualitatively from rational thought. The position here is that cognition is a continuum and that nonlinear cognition (creativity, intuition) complements linear cognition and vice versa.

6 Since the rise of the appreciation of Duchamp, Dada and Surrealism that took hold in the 1960s we speak of 'conceptual art'. This is an interesting term because it undermines the assumption that the work of art is paramount. This is an especially important observation for installation art because it is argued that this mode of art necessitates the presence of the viewer because it is unrepresentable. I would argue that it is not much more difficult to represent than is a film. In most cases a video gives a very good idea of the nature of an installation. But what is even more interesting is that in many cases one's immediate experience of the installation is one of perplexity due to the puzzling nature of nonlinear narrative. And it is only when one reads about the work that one begins to be able to appreciate it. The only cases where an installation is unrepresentable are those in which sensation is foregrounded and it was argued in chapter one that if a work is totally focused on sensation then it is not deconstructive because it has little conceptual dimension. One can now add that works that focus on sensation do not afford the reader with an opportunity to be engaged in a creative association of ideas.

7 Take for example the instance of Stephen Thaler's Creativity Machine. In his initial experiment Thaler was influenced by reports on near death experiences and wondered what would happen to an artificial neural network if it were dying. Tina Hesman reports that Thaler designed a program called the Grim Reaper that 'dismantles neural networks by changing its connection weights. It is the biological equivalent of killing neurons' she continues: 'On Christmas Eve 1989, Thaler typed the lyrics to some of his favorite Christmas carols into a neural network. Once he'd taught the network the songs, he unleashed the Grim Reaper. As the reaper slashed away connections, the network's digital life began to flash before its eyes. The program randomly spit out perfectly remembered carols as the killer application severed the first connections. But as its wounds grew deeper, and the network faded toward black, it began to hallucinate. The network wove its remaining strands of memory together, producing what someone else might interpret as damaged memories, but what Thaler recognized as new ideas. In its death spiral, the program dreamed up new carols, each created from shards of its shattered memories. "Its last dying gasp was, 'All men go to good earth in one eternal silent night,'" Thaler said. But it wasn't the eloquence of the network's last words that captured Thaler's imagination. What excited him was how noisy and creative the process of dying was.' (Hesman 2004). What is significant about the functioning of Thaler's 'creative' neural network is that creativity is described in terms of information fragments being recombined in different ways.

8 Gregory Moore cites Nietzsche announcing: 'tropes are not just occasionally added to words, but constitute their most proper nature ... What is usually called language is actually all figuration' (Moore 2002: 10).

9 In *Of Grammatology* Derrida writes: 'An entire theory of the structural necessity of the abyss will be gradually constituted in our reading: the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self. Representation in the abyss of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc.' (1976: 163).

10 Today we can add value to Hume's ideas by noting that from the point of view of complexity studies causality is not straightforward, there are systems within systems and effects of crosstalk between systems that make specifying causal relationships problematic. Nevertheless we need the simplification offered by causal models to help make sense of our complex environment.

11 Wikipedia item on 'twelve tone technique': <http://www.wikipedia.org>