No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow:

Representing Trauma and the Everyday in Contemporary Art

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ABSTRACT

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Viola McGowan

This study aims to situate the contemporary art practices of American sculptor Dario Robleto and Canadian photographers Carlos and Jason Sanchez as explorations of trauma and fragmentation. As such, their artworks are transformed to function as relics and memento mori in order to refer to or negotiate past traumatic events. Examining the artists' practices through the lens of trauma theory, notions of the fragment and relics, this thesis investigates how they might relate to a larger history of trauma and how the construction of narrative is used to bring self-awareness to the viewer's sense of mortality and collective experience.

There are three main sections to this critical analysis, all of which employ psychoanalytical theory, socio-political theory, aesthetic theory, material culture theory, as well as theories of photography and sculpture, in order to frame the Sanchez and Robleto artworks as significant interventions from an art historical perspective as well as from a thanatological and anthropological perspective. Within this, notions of testimony, temporality and memory are investigated as they are activated through the sculpture, photography and installation examined in this thesis. The biographies of objects are also underscored in the analysis of the artists' creations as they illuminate commodity situations, socio-economic structures and psychological perception.

Witnessed in these artworks are elements of everyday situations and everyday objects that erupt with the imprint of trauma. While engaging with concepts of

reenactment, Robleto and the Sanchez brothers approach commemoration in a way that is simultaneously romantic and unsettling, revealing conflicts between social structures and material intervention.

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Introduction

This thesis addresses contemporary art practices that feature fragmented objects, which are transformed to function as relics and memento mori in order to refer to or negotiate past traumatic events. Contemporary artists Dario Robleto and the collaborative duo Carlos and Jason Sanchez serve as case studies as their artworks represent a "missed encounter with the real."[1] Here, we are able to witness elements of everyday situations and everyday objects that erupt with the imprint of trauma, which is commonly associated with physical or psychological damage, something that happens on a very intimate scale or something that occurs when witnessing a shocking event first hand. Of course, it must be stressed that not all traumas are alike and symptoms of emotional, psychological and physical trauma vary substantially from person to person depending on the cause of trauma, severity of the event, whether the event was on going, personal history of the traumatized person, coping skills and access to support.[2] However, we rarely consider the possibility of trauma when observing a disturbing event through popular media, which, as outlined further in the thesis, thrusts the extraordinary into the realm of the everyday– that is to say, ordinary or generic– short-circuiting and blurring the specificity of an event into a series of resemblances or 'like' events.[3] This thesis builds upon a common symptom of trauma found within the creative acts of Robleto and the Sanchezes, that of simultaneously producing artworks and engaging in the repetition

[1] Judith F. Rodenbeck, "Car Crash, 1960," in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, ed. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2006), 112.
[2] Help Guide, "Healing Emotional and Psychological Trauma," Web site, http://helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm (accessed August 11, 2011); Healing Resources, "Emotional and Psychological Trauma: Causes and Effects, Symptoms and Treatment," Web site, http://healingresources.info/emotional_trauma_overview.htm#3 (accessed August 11, 2011).
[3] Brian Massumi, "Everywhere You Want to Be: Introduction to Fear," *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi, 3-36 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 26.

or recreation of trauma. This recreation underscores a need for resolve and a desire to surmount a kind of social rupture.

Reenacting or reinterpreting the past through material interventions, the artists broaden the significance of an event and the narrative surrounding it; with such gestures, notions of proof are often reconsidered. Robleto and the Sanchez brothers stage encounters that challenge notions of proof by representing a "framed emptiness– as evidence."[4] In this case, the evidence points to trauma as the viewer is confronted with a lack of information and the task of suspending disbelief. Examining these art practices through the lens of trauma theory, as well as through notions of the fragment and the relic, this thesis explores how these artworks might also relate to a larger history of trauma and how the construction of narrative is used to bring self-awareness to the viewer's sense of mortality and collective experience. Certainly, the Sanchezes and Robleto are not the first to investigate notions of trauma through art making, although much remains to be written on the subject of sculpture and trauma. Explorations of the body, memory and ephemera have been taken up frequently as themes in contemporary art practices and the critical reception of such work assures us of its resonance.[5] However, my contribution as an art historian and the goal of this thesis is to analyze the Sanchezes' and Robleto's artworks as objects that enable us to locate the underpinnings

[4] This is a quote by Ulrich Baer referring to the photography of artist Meyer Levin. Ulrich Baer, "Meyer Levin's *In Search*/Mikael Levin's *War Story*: Second Witnessing and the Holocaust," in *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), 83.

[5] This is exemplified in contemporary artworks such as Marina Abramovic's *Nude with Skeleton* (2002/2005), Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), and Marc Quinn's *Self* (2006). Each of these works can be located in the realm of memento mori. Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) explores notions of the body and ephemera while also commenting on reliquary. A large scale (60 x 40 inch) cibachrome photograph of a small plastic crucifix immersed in liquid (speculated as being the artist's urine) reveals saturated tones of golden amber and red, which evoke the sumptuous jewel-like colors often used in religious artworks and reliquary, however, the combination of urine and cheap plastic crucifix disrupt spiritual allure. Here, a commentary on the sacred body and the 'every body' is made through iconography, bodily fluid and commodity-object relations.

of how the narrative of historical or dramatic events shape social behavior and how this narrative takes visual and material form. I propose that these artworks mediate temporality and exact a contemplation that allows them to transform while illuminating variations of moral, cultural and economic value.

There are three main sections to this critical and analysis, all of which employ psychoanalytical theory, socio-political theory, aesthetic theory, material culture theory, as well as theories of photography and sculpture, in order to frame the Sanchez and Robleto artworks as significant interventions from an art historical perspective as well as from a thanatological and anthropological perspective. The first section, "The Biography of Objects", engages Robleto's *No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow* (2005) (fig. 1) and the Sanchezes' *Between Life and Death* (2006) (fig. 2) with notions of commodity situations as proposed by social theorist Brian Massumi as well as anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff, respectively. Massumi believes that the capitalist economic structure markets fear just as it markets any other commodity and maps out the manner in which fear (as a commodity) is consumed and internalized. Similarly, Appadurai links the process of commodity circulation to political negotiations, deeming the *exchange* of an object or thing as its most relevant feature. Kopytoff also recognizes the significance of exchange as it adds to the *biography* of an object, which, in turn, can reveal complex social and economic factors. Subject-object relations are also examined through perceptions of fragmentation, trauma, anthropomorphism and fetishism as they convey a projection of life, death *and afterlife* onto an object. For example, I situate an aspect of Bill Brown's *Thing Theory* in dialogue with psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida's analysis of fetishism and the relic; Brown locates the breakage or fracturing of an object as a

transformation into *thingness*– which can be interpreted as a form of death, whereas according to Fédida the relic (fragment of the deceased) is activated through death and separation.[6] From works of mourning and relics to everyday objects and works of art, this section will uncover various operations and transformations of exchange and value.

The second section of the thesis, "Trauma, Repetition and the Fantasy of Referentiality," explores the Sanchezes' *The Hurried Child* (2005) (fig. 3) and *the Misuse of Youth* (2007) (fig. 4) as well as Robleto's *At War with the Entropy of Nature/Ghosts Don't Always Want to Come Back* (2002) (fig. 5). While the negotiation of trauma is present throughout these artworks, I argue that *perception* is a key concept, and therefore observe these artworks as microhistorical accounts, referring to larger narratives and dramatic events as well as to small-scale histories. As the result of *and* as the illumination of what Brian Massumi calls *ambient fear*, the relationship between public and private, mediatized and internalized realms, is unveiled in these artworks. Notions of representation and reception are central elements in the relationship between relic, fetish, fantasy and repetition, which will be unraveled with the expertise of Pierre Fédida and Georges Didi-Huberman. Also drawing on the fantasy of referentiality, Ulrich Baer investigates the use of photography in documenting trauma and its correlation to contemporary aspects of photographic production and digital manipulation.

This weaves into the third and final section of the thesis: "Testimony, Temporality and Memory." In this section, Dario Robleto's *War Pigeon With a Message (Love Survives the Death of Cells)* (2002) (fig. 6) and the Sanchez's, *John Marc Karr* (2007) (fig. 7) are discussed in relation to gesture, narrative and temporality in order to understand how these artworks function on a broader social scale. The performative

[6] Pierre Fédida, "The Relic and the Work of Mourning," *Journal of Visual Culture,* Vol. 2 (1) (2003): 64.

nature of these works is simultaneously seen as autonomous and dependent on the viewer's interaction. Theorists Mieke Bal, Svetlana Boym, Ernst van Alphen, Massumi and curator Johanna Burton all draw upon the importance of distance and discernment as a strategy to interact with objects and language, either to understand the testimonial agency of a work, or to renegotiate its meaning according to multiple narrative and a sense of nostalgia. The aesthetic relation between object (or language) and subject, or the "I and You", expands from person to person – to person to thing, which can also be linked to the referential capacity of memento mori and relics. The artworks' transactive process is not only a performative event but also involves an oscillating identity of sculpture, photography, and didactic text.

Dario Robleto is based in San Antonio, Texas; often referred to as an alchemist, he is "interested in materials that exist solely because of […] dramatic moments in history."[7] He is concerned with resuscitating fragments of objects, old and new, that constitute a shared past or an historical turning point, which he transforms into multi-layered artifacts evoking everyday commodities. Equally influenced by the notion of sampling and, by extension, DJing, artworks are often composed of melted vinyl records, carefully chosen according to artist and theme in order to bring multiple objects into dialogue with an anthem-like song (fig. 8).[8] The notion of sampling can also imply investing odds and ends with new meaning, which leads us back to his fusion of various materials: human bones, lead bullets and wedding rings excavated from battle grounds,

[7] Ian Berry, "Medicine on the Spoon: A Dialogue with Dario Robleto," in *Dario Robleto: Alloy of Love*, ed. Ian Berry, Elizabeth Dunbar, The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College, and Frye Art Museum (Washington: Washington Press, 2008), 257.
[8] See Robleto's installation *A Defeated Soldier Wishes to Walk his Daughter Down the Wedding Aisle*, 2004, incorporating the vinyl record of The Shirelles' *Soldier Boy* (2004).

Victorian mourning materials, old love letters, dinosaur bones, trinitite glass[9], audio recordings, and so on. These materials are often donated to Robleto, if not collected himself, and he maintains that they are handled with a great sense of responsibility and sensitivity.[10] As previously stated, an aspect of his work is text based; Robleto will often adopt titles of songs as the titles of his works but more often than not he forms poetic titles that become the impetus behind his research and creation. Accompanying this are his didactic panels, meant to balance the romantic/mystical quality of the sculpture with a factual list of materials.

Montreal artists Carlos and Jason Sanchez are known predominantly for their painstakingly constructed photographs, which are entirely produced in the same manner as film sets. The artworks take months of preparation and involve hiring a set crew, enlisting friends and family– or the odd stuntman– to appear in their mise-en-scène[11]; the sets are assembled in their studio or outdoors depending on their needs (fig. 9, 10 & 11).[12] Creating large-scale, chromogenic color prints and inkjet prints, ranging from 60 x 80 inches to billboard sized outdoor installations; the works generate tension and uncertainty. The brothers were heavily influenced by Vancouver artist Jeff Wall, who often recreates events from memory in a way that is perceived as a captured moment (fig. 12), investigating a form of mimesis central to Western traditions of art making. Even though the Sanchezes have stated they don't remember exactly how or where they were

[9] Resulting from the test site of the Atomic bomb, trinitite glass is composed of melted sand produced by the intense heat of the blast. This glass was once collected and sold as a novelty tourist item. It is not illegal to collect trinitite glass from the site.
[10] Berry, 264-65.
[11] Catherine Somzé, "Inventing the Real: The Artistry of Carlos and Jason Sanchez," in *Carlos and Jason Sanchez: The Moment of Rupture*, translated by Nate Lunceford and Claire-Marie Thiry, Montreal: UMA La maison de l'image et de la photographie, Toronto: Christopher Cutts Gallery (Amsterdam: Torch Gallery, 2007), 7.
[12] See the Sanchezes' photograph *Rescue Effort* (2006) plus images of production.

inspired for each photograph[13], they employ titles that guide the viewer toward stories covered by tabloids and the popular media, offering a fragmentation of such narratives within fixed material form. They have also created life-sized installations in which the importance of shared space is heightened under a common thematic: the presence of death within everyday social life.

[13] Joanna Lehan, "Staging Fear: The Art of Carlos and Jason Sanchez," in *Carlos and Jason Sanchez: The Moment of Rupture*. Translated by Nate Lunceford and Claire-Marie Thiry, Montreal: UMA La maison de l'image et de la photographie, Toronto: Christopher Cutts Gallery (Amsterdam: Torch Gallery, 2007), 16.

Section One: The Biography of Objects

This first section, *The Biography of Objects***,** will examine Robleto's sculpture *No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow* (2005) (fig. 1) and Carlos and Jason Sanchezes' installation *Between Life and Death* (2006) (fig. 2) through the notion of anthropomorphism and things–in–motion proposed by Arjun Appadurai as he refers to objects possessing careers, indicating the exchange of objects as the source of value as opposed to the result of value. Igor Kopytoff reveals the complexity of an object's biography, believing it to be an indicator of human social dynamics. Similarly, Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" examines subject-object relations that obscure materiality until an object ceases to function or breaks, casting it into the realm of *thingness*- a death as it were. Paradoxically, the relic, which is a fragment *par excellence*, is activated precisely at the moment of death[14], underscoring the importance of the fragment as that which refers to completeness as much as it refers to a rupture. Texts by Pierre Fédida, Jan Balfour, John Chapman and Bisserka Gaydarska will serve to identify the potential of the fragment as it contributes to the biography of an object, which in this case can be linked to both relic and a work of art.

No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow is an example of the artist's ability to collect fragments and fuse them into a sculpture that evokes trauma and ritual while simultaneously connecting the presentness of the everyday to the past. Depending on the venue, this particular artwork can be found resting on a pedestal or sitting on a wooden shelf affixed to a gallery wall and always presented under a glass encasement (fig. 13). And while this may be standard practice for a museum or gallery exhibition, this form of presentation also brings to mind religious reliquaries, which are presented behind glass or

[14] Fédida, 64.

contained within an ornate glass vessel and function in a similar manner as artworks within religious tourism.[15] The glass casing around the artwork suggests a certain amount of fragility, of sacredness and preciousness; the object is available only to our gaze, its tactile qualities available only to tacit knowledge or fantasy. Standing at 10 x 8 x 11 inches, Robleto's composition appears sepia toned and delicate. Upon approaching what seems to be a brown wicker basket filled with dried flowers we notice elements that affirm this sculpture as reliquary and relic: Five male wedding ring finger bones coated in melted bullet lead (from various American wars), each adorned with men's wedding bands excavated from American battlefields, lay side by side over a gathering of wax-dipped preserved bridal bouquets of roses and white calla lilies from various eras, dried chrysanthemums, and male hair flowers braided by a Civil War widow. All of these elements are carefully displayed in a rust covered basket, lined by fragments from a mourning dress.[16] There is an overwhelming sentiment of grief and preservation represented in *No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow*, stressed by the accumulation of (in)humanity in material form.

The Sanchez brothers' *Between Life and Death* (2006) features a wrecked passenger bus (1978 GMC City bus) with a holographic video loop projected inside depicting the near-death experience of a woman. The projection is paired with an ambient musical score, heard throughout the duration of the loop. The viewer stands at the back of the bus, peering in through the large rear window to witness a dark and tangled interior

[15] During the early medieval period in Europe, the force of demand for relics made them circulate with considerable velocity; a demand that can certainly be linked to the development of the religious pilgrimage as a form of tourist circuit, which, by extension, is comparable to the commodity value of artworks as part of museum and gallery tours. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed by A. Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 24.
[16] As mentioned in Robleto's didactic text, additional materials used in this artwork are: melted shrapnel, cold cast brass, bronze, zinc, silver, rust, mahogany, glass. Dunbar, 150.

and a series of projected flashbacks. And while the artwork seems to refer to a specific trauma, it is actually based on a synthesis of several oral accounts collected by the artists.

Between Life and Death begins with darkness, the sound of ambient music, and then, the projection of a woman stretched out across the bus floor, motionless. Her blond hair obscures her face until, slowly, we see the ghostly double of her body rise out and above her corpse (fig. 14). We are witnessing the reenactment of an out of body experience. Between the brief moments of the woman rising into a vertical position, she transforms into yet another woman with short brown hair. This is the only moment during the projection that suggests that the viewer is witnessing a *different* near-death account. The body on the floor slowly disappears and the floating female figure is met by a large blurry figure–a source of light– that mirrors her (fig. 15); the floating woman reaches into the source of light and extracts what appears to be a bouquet of red flowers, which begins to expand as if slowly blooming into an explosive light before fading away. The viewer then sees the woman's life flashing before her eyes; birth, childhood, adult life, before she is briefly met by the spirit of an elderly woman, the two embrace and fade out to darkness; the projection loop then begins again. Here, the devastating aftermath of a crash site (recreated by the Sanchez brothers) extends the tradition of memento mori into contemporary sculpture.

Robleto and the Sanchez brothers approach commemoration in a way that is simultaneously romantic and unsettling, however, it is undeniable that both are also engaged in what social theorist Brian Massumi calls the "capitalized accident form." In this way, fear is a commodity production (the aim of which is to control a population), which, in turn, produces *ambient fear*; the understanding that the potential for a general

disaster is woven into the fabric of day-to-day life.[17] As a form of consuming and internalizing, the self-conditioning to simultaneously fear and disavow the inevitability of tragedy and death can be understood as fetishistic behavior[18], linked to the use of relics and in this case artworks.

Similar to Brian Massumi, Arjun Appadurai reveals the process of commodity circulation as related to political negotiations. Stemming from a social-cultural anthropological and economic perspective, the political takes on several forms; that of display, sumptuary control or "decomoditization from above", knowledge, ignorance, and demand. Appadurai also relates the modern Western process of exchange to that of perceived primitive processes of exchange, revealing the similarities between the two.[19] Key to this scholarship is anthropologist Igor Kopytoff's study of the "moral economy that stands behind the objective economy of visible transactions."[20] Kopytoff believes that objects possess *biographies,* which reveal variances in economic and social value. In each case, the biography of a human (producer, trader, tastemaker or consumer) generates an aspect of the biography of an object and it is this biography that creates value, which can shift depending on the commodity context. Hence, different trope forms of

[17] Investigating the politics of commodity production, Massumi claims that just as an object can be marketed for consumption so too can fear. The author sees both of these stemming out of the power of late capitalism in an effort to control a population. Fear can be understood as the tragic event that could happen to *anyone* (the random victim) or that which is beyond our control- extinction, natural disasters, etc. Fear is sold and consumed, internalized through a constant bombardment of images, however, "the content of the disaster is unimportant. Its particulars are annulled by its plurality of possible agents and times: here and to come." Massumi, 11 (see the Sanchezes' *The Hurried Child* (2004) and Robleto's *A Dark Day For the Dinosaurs (Radio Edit)* (2004) as examples of artworks that depict possible disaster paradigm).

[18] Following the Freudian notion of fetish, where denial or disavowal is less concerned with repression than the *representation* inherent to the belief one wishes to maintain, which is simultaneously preserved *and* abandoned. Fetishism of an object or thing becomes both a substitution for loss and protection against it. Fédida, 65.

[19] Appadurai broadens the Marxist definition of the commodity in order to encompass bartering and gift giving, the Kula trade, religious relics and everyday objects. Appadurai, 18-22.

[20] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed A. Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64.

commodity situations create a plurality of forms of exchange and value. And what would define a commodity situation? Appadurai proposes, "that *the commodity situation in the social life of any "thing" be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature*."[21] This description broadens the scope of value as that which can be attributed to an object as much as to a *thing*.

Bill Brown investigates *thingness* in relation to the once whole object, as thingness becomes apparent when an object breaks; it comes to life as an object dies. But the *thing* is also amorphous in character[22], not only qualifying as a tangible fragment of an object but also qualifying as something encountered but not apprehended. One can imagine *things* "as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects– their force as […] metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols and totems."[23] It is precisely this metaphysical nature that resides outside or at least on the margins of economic value. Appadurai notes that during the early medieval period in Europe, commercial modes for the acquisition of relics were *less* desirable than either gift *or* theft, not so much due to moral aversion but rather because the offering or stealing of a relic (as a gesture) was more emblematic of the sacredness and preciousness of the object.[24] Investigating the paradoxical state of the relic as sacred and profane, French psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida examines the value of the relic or work of mourning as that

[21] Appadurai, 13.
[22] Brown, 65.
[23] Brown, 66.
[24] Appadurai, 24.

which dwells outside of objective monetary value.[25] While also taking into account relics that are objects once belonging to the deceased Fédida believes that these too hold introduced values based on perceptions of the deceased and of the mourners; "the relic assumes meaning in the desire to preserve some thing of that from which one becomes separated without."[26] In this way, the "career" of the object is immobilized, retained from the everyday and beyond usage, it stops "communication" with other everyday domestic objects. This idea of immobilization or a biographical embalming of an object creates a back and forth between notions of life and death, of object *and* subject.[27]

Dario Robleto's *No One Has a monopoly Over Sorrow* investigates the art of mourning and the fragmentation of such practices as a consequence of war. However, it also proposes the reinstitution of such practices as part of a communal gesture towards commemoration, by relating individual biographies to a national biography through the gathering of charged fragments. Reaching its pinnacle during the Victorian era, mourning customs were extreme in many regards and extended into forms of etiquette defined by the aristocracy. During a time of high mortality rates, the ritualization and pageantry of death permeated the everyday: articles of clothing[28], jewelry, postmortem photographs[29], accessories such as tear jars, funeral trappings, and commemorative artworks were

[25] The value of the relic is introduced between paradoxical meanings that are conferred onto the object: familiar yet strange; repugnant yet precious; everyday object and mysterious object; practical yet functionless. Fédida, 63.
[26] Fédida, 63.
[27] Fédida, 64.
[28] Clothing was perhaps the most immediate indicator of a person in mourning and could be worn for a period of a few weeks to years depending on their age and relationship to the deceased. Women in particular were expected to adhere to strict social customs of mourning, comporting themselves publicly as living memorials. Martha Pike, "In Memory Of: Artifacts Relating to Mourning in Nineteenth Century America," *American Journal of Culture*, Vol. 3, Issue 4 (Winter 1980), 650.
[29] Victorian productions of memorial photographs or mourning photography were highly staged events; a comparison can be drawn between this early practice and the Sanchezes' highly produced scenes.

significant aspects of communal forms of mourning.[30] Objects and materials of mourning connected the living to the dead, symbolically linking an intimate or individual state of being to communal state; "through these objects, death, time and distance disappeared."[31]

The violence of the First World War was unlike any war experienced before. New forms of automated artillery were used in battle and were meant to obliterate people (and places) rather than wound. This meant that bodies were rarely returned home in one piece– if returned at all, thus devastating families and disrupting mourning traditions that invested so intensely in the remains of the deceased.[32] Beginning simply as a title or poetic theme[33], *No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow* involves the biographies of various objects, people, places and eras, and proceeded to take shape through a story based on historical research. Slowly, the research guides the artist's imagination, leading to the collection of materials and, finally, sculptural form. The artist describes the findings of his research that inspired this particular sculpture:

> Apparently, during World War I, a group of French women petitioned the government to do something about [the] fact that they had nothing of their loved ones to bury; they said, "Please send someone back out on [the] battlefield and bring us home something, anything, a fragment of their uniform, their rings, anything- we need to bury something." When the government did not move quickly enough a group of women decided to do it themselves.[34]

Based on this account, Robleto imagined an infantry "moving across the battlefield, creating a wave of destruction, and the family members, the women, behind,

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[30] These objects served as a form of communal therapy and as a way to honor the dead. Elizabeth Dunbar, "The Reconstructionist," in *Dario Robleto: Alloy of Love*, ed. Ian Berry, The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, New York, Frye Art Museum Seattle (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2008), 227.
[31] Dunbar, 227.
[32] Berry, 258.
[33] Dario Robleto constantly adds to an archive of composed titles, a small fraction of which are song lyrics by various bands but the artist insists that most titles are his own creations. Berry, 261.
[34] Berry, 258.

slowly picking through that debris to bring something home."[35] The condition of damage was so great that it obscured individuality, objects would have to be shared, a "fragment of [a] uniform became everybody's fragment."[36] He went on to imagine a scenario in which women collected fragments in baskets, lined with material signs of love and bereavement; material from a mourning dress, a preserved wedding bouquet.[37] Within such a chaotic narrative, the artist was able to reinterpret historical evidence by engaging with found objects that carry their own biographies.[38] Of course, the viewer is not always privy to the biography of each fragment but the weight of symbolism and cultural meaning invested into the objects are understood as important. Paired with the artist's intentions, the objects' biographies and larger cultural meanings unite and, together, create a "communal body" similar to that which is symbolically projected onto a religious relic.

While the Robleto retells the story of French women scavenging the battlefield, the materials he uses to compose *No One Has a monopoly Over Sorrow* tell a slightly different story: melted bullet lead from various American wars, men's wedding rings excavated from American battlefields, finger bones, wax-dipped bridal bouquets from different eras, flowers braided out of soldier's hair by a Civil War widow.[39] And while the ambiguity of listing "lead from various American wars" or "American battlefields" tends to create larger (if not ongoing) narratives, nowhere in this description do we find

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Berry, 258-59.
[37] Berry, 261.
[38] In this way, the imagery of a landscape is compatible with what Anne Ellegood describes as an artist's desire to "explore and represent the confusion of contemporary life." It is an uncertainty reflected in the relationship between everyday objects, sculptural form, and the meanings simultaneously tethered to both while in flux through societal context. Anne Ellegood, *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas: Recent Sculpture* (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2006), 19 and 22.
[39] Description as per Robleto's didactic text. Elizabeth Dunbar, 150.

explicit evidence of the suffering of the French. In fact, relying solely on the more precise information stated in Robleto's didactic text, we are lead to believe that this sculpture is thematically American.[40] This leads me to conclude that while the artist clearly attempts to recuperate loss within this sculpture, he does so from the perspective and place of an American. Thus, Robleto's own biography is infused into the final art object.[41]

Borrowing from Appadurai, we can see how *No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow* complicates the commodity situation in the social lives of many things (i.e. wedding rings, mourning jewelry, bullets, etc.). In the making of this sculpture, the careers of objects are brought to a halt in one way and, by the same token, resuscitated through reintegration into a *different* form of commodity; this is what Appadurai might call the *diversion of commodities.* While Robleto will often purchase or excavate objects to incorporate into his sculptures, objects are also donated to him as a manner of contributing to his artwork. And while the notion of gifting in exchange for the non-material might seem contrastive to commodity circulation, the act of gifting blurs definitions between commodity exchange and sentimental exchange.[42] Another example of diversion involves tourist art, where aesthetic or ceremonial objects are made specifically for the consumption of larger economies, marking a cultural transformation

[40] In terms of commodity value as an art object, it is worth noting that Appadurai states: "those commodities whose consumption is most intricately tied up with critical social messages are likely to be least responsive to crude shifts in supply or price, but most responsive to political manipulation at the social level." Appadurai, 33.

[41] Undeniably, Robleto's biography (like those of the Sanchezes) plays a significant role in the lives of the objects he incorporates into his artworks. However, it is within the interest of this thesis to focus more on the biographies of objects and artworks rather than on those of the artists. By doing so, I aim to emphasize the potential scope of an object's trajectory as being complex, enveloped with the patina of several lives instead of being a derivative of the singular artist. The notion of the biography of an object is further developed in the following pages.

[42] Also see Appadurai's consideration of similarities between the gift and commodity in that the treatments of both are, in a way, historical products of capitalism. Appadurai, 12 and 19.

of the object.[43] Appadurai believes that "the diversion of commodities from specified paths is always a sign of creativity or crisis, whether aesthetic or economic"[44], which is interesting to consider in light of Robleto's practice– in which creativity, crisis and transformation are prominent themes.[45] This brings us to consider that Robleto also happens to have a successful career, his sculptures can be found in the homes of several patrons and in museums. Thus, his sculptures also have commodity paths; however, they circulate in a different commodity context or social arena than the individual objects that actually make up the artwork. Here, the diversion of commodities becomes an aesthetic of diversion, a form of decommoditization with the potential of "intensification of commoditization by the enhancement of value attendant upon its diversion."[46]

According to Igor Kopytoff, "one brings to every biography some prior conception of what is to be its focus."[47] Every person has many biographies- political, psychological, professional, familial, economic and so forth, and all of these become an aspect making up the entirety of one's life history. Given this complexity, Kopytoff sees the biographies of *things* as functioning in the same way, shedding light on a variety of social factors. While Kopytoff uses a car as an example in his original text, here, we will use the primary object of the Sanchezes' *Between Life and Death*, a 1978 GMC City bus, in order to outline the various aspects involved in an object's biography.[48] First and foremost, the *physical* biography of this object is quite different from its *technical* biography, its maintenance or repair record; while it may have been manufactured in

[43] Appadurai, 26.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Appadurai goes on to specify that a crisis might be economic hardship, forcing a family to commoditize heirlooms; diversion can also happen in a crisis situation of warfare and plunder. Appadurai, 26-27.
[46] Appadurai, 28.
[47] Kopytoff, 67-68.
[48] Kopytoff, 68.

GMC's Canadian plant, its repairs were most certainly made elsewhere. The bus can also furnish an economic biography; its initial worth; its sale price; the rate of decline in its value; its response to the recession; the patterning over several years of its maintenance costs; its eventual removal from the transit system and replacement with newer models; its resale price to the Sanchez brothers and, its cultural and economic value *after* its transformation into art object. This is what Appadurai might deem *commoditization by diversion*, wherein "the everyday commodity is framed and aestheticized" and where value is accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts.[49]

The bus also offers several possible social biographies: one biography may concentrate on its place in the passenger's economy while it still ran as a city bus; another may relate to the history of its ownership and the society's class structure. A third aspect of biography might focus on the role of the bus in the sociology of the artist's relations, which might include the accessibility of the bus as object of purchase for the artists, marking a turning point in their professional lives as it was transported to Art Basel Miami and lauded at the *Scope* exhibition in 2007. Whole objects, however, are not the only forms privy to biography. Even when objects break, their fragments have a mutable potential to become *other* objects, implying "enchained social relations" not only between the use value (repurposing) of object and fragments but between the various people engaged in their use.[50]

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[49] Appadurai, 28.

[50] Archeologists found that during the Paleolithic era, enchained relations between households and everyday items as fragmented objects were repurposed and circulated in small-scale societies. Relatable to Appadurai's interpretation of the commodity, in this case, goods did not reflect but negotiated status. John Chapman and Bisserka Gaydarska, "The Fragmentation Premise in Archaeology: From the Paleolithic to More Recent Times," in *The Fragment: An Incomplete History*, ed. William Tronzo, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009), 138-41.

Seen in this way, the Sanchezes' bus possesses a complex life history that has been doubly layered by the event of its transformation into an art object and by extension its representation of yet another object involved in another event (or as we now know, several events given the different testimonies of those who had near death experiences). What the viewer sees, however, is apparently the aftermath of a collision, and so, the site of trauma. Externally, the bus' crushed state references the act of impact but it also reveals an anthropomorphic quality that allows the viewer to not only empathize with an object but with the projections of the women inside of it. In this way, *Between Life and Death* suggests the physical and psychological nature of trauma. Here, the implication of biography and fragmentation of something or someone "other" is represented not only through the layering of testimonial narratives but through a temporal fragmentation: literally, a life flashing before one's eyes. Brown might advise us that in this particular case, the bus, while technically broken, nonetheless functions as an art object and thus *performs*.[51] The transformation of a "dead commodity into a living work […] shows how inanimate objects organize the temporality of the animate world."[52] Here, the broken object is not just a *thing* it is the imprint of an action– of a movement,[53] of things-in-motion.

Truth in Fragments

According to psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, trauma is the failed translation of an unremembered experience; it is the result of a missing original.[54] Both Robleto and the

[51]Brown, 65.
[52] Brown, 77.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Baer, 70.

Sanchezes' use the notion of the fragment as an artistic strategy; as a way to fuse remnants of material components (physical construction) and as a way to address psychological or ideological ruptures. Despite the fact that fragmented elements are brought together to form a whole, the object as a whole remains untrue[55]; a complex construction that precludes authenticity. Thus, fragmentation and trauma reveal similar qualities. The fragment, if anything is an imprint, the negative-index of a once–whole form, it proposes that which is missing– that is, its completeness. The only object that lies outside of this logic is the relic as the fragment is simultaneously not the whole (not the central drive of the fetish) yet stands as the whole– the *part* illuminates the whole.

Of course, the use of fragments is not exclusive to current art practices, it has a long standing presence throughout the history of 20th century art and while it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a complete overview of the fragment in the last century we could certainly situate it in a number of iconic artworks. Picasso's collage (fig. 16) incorporated torn pieces of newspaper articles and other elements relating to his everyday experience, something that Clement Greenberg later described as bas-relief.[56] In photomontage, seen in Dadaist works such as John Heartfield's *Fathers and Sons* of 1924 (fig. 17); a response to the mechanization and fragmentation of bodies during World War I**.** Robert Rauschenberg's *combines* (fig. 18) literally introduced and merged fragments of the everyday and debris with the reverence of painting attributed to Abstract Expressionism, reinvigorating contemporary sculpture. Like Duchamp's readymades (fig.

[55] Following Theodor Adorno's dictum: "The whole is untrue." This was Adorno's reaction in opposition to the Hegelian concept that the "true is the whole" meaning that a form cannot be dissociated from its essence. Jan Balfour, "'The Who is the Untrue': On the Necessity of the Fragment (After Adorno)," *The Fragment: An Incomplete History*, ed. William Tronzo, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009), 83.

[56] Charles Stuckey, *Minutiae and Rauschenberg's Combine Mode*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Organized by Paul Schimmel, *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines* (Los Angeles: MOCA, Steidl, 2005), 199-200.

19), the conceptual nature of Rauschenberg's Combines extended through the reign of Modernism and would encapsulate an attitude towards everyday objects and even rubbish that would manifest itself through Pop Art[57] and most recently, in a sculptural movement that has been described as Unmonumental.

In 2007, the New Museum in New York City created a group exhibition (with accompanying catalogue) titled *Unmonumental*. A collage aesthetic reigns throughout the exhibition, where amalgams of disparate materials are juxtaposed to elusive narratives. Here, a sense of uncertainty becomes aesthetic and the infinite gesture of the monument is replaced by an expression of fragmentation, fragility[58] and plurality, which set out to work against hierarchy.[59] The curators attempt to define the Unmonumental sculpture as a "revival"[60] of early collage and assemblage, a continuum responding to the fragmented nature of mediated life. It would seem counterintuitive then to claim that the Unmonumental attitude leaves no room for masterpieces[61] or heroization when it can hardly distinguish itself from the lineage of aforementioned art practices that we have ultimately come to heroize. The exhibition includes thirty artists and over one hundred objects including Isa Genzken's *Elefant* (2006) (fig. 20). Composed of familiar items (wood, plastic tubes, plastic foils, vertical blinds, plastic toys, artificial flowers, fabric, bubble wrap, lacquer, and spray paint), *Elefant* is a collection of everyday objects that seem to recline precariously on a white plinth. Curator Laura Hoptman depicts the

[57] See Claes Oldenberg's Pop Shop and his soft sculpture- derivative of Duchamp's typewriter cover readymade.
[58] Richard Flood, "Not About Mel Gibson," in *Unmonumental: Going to Pieces in the 21st Century*, New Museum (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2007), 12-13.
[59] Laura Hoptman, "Unmonumental," in *Unmonumental: Going to Pieces in the 21st Century*, New Museum (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2007), 134.
[60] Laura Hoptman, "Introduction to the Exhibition, Floor 2," *Unmonumental: Going to Pieces in the 21st Century*, New Museum Web site, Mp3 file (2008), http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/4 (accessed March 2, 2011).
[61] Flood, 12.

sculpture as "an elephant's equivalent; if that animal […] was described in the language of things in the world– everyday things– of culture rather than nature."[62] While the Unmonumental certainly responds to a new global climate through a sense of fragmentation it nonetheless presents itself as a simplified commentary on consumption and hierarchy that has been addressed in early Dadaist collage and beyond.

What is different about the work of Robleto and the Sanchez brothers in relation to the Unmonumental model is that they compose a polished looking work that convinces the viewer of its "completeness" or truthfulness while it is actually composed of fragments. Here, fragments are internalized, underlying the surface. The viewer takes notice of Robleto's use of fragments once they've read his didactic texts or once they consider the fragmentation of psyche and body in the Sanchez' installation. While there are many examples of artworks that comment on the fragment as a state of being, commodity culture, consumerism, and capitalism, Robleto and the Sanchezes artworks offer not only a veiled accumulation of fragmentation within their practices but a rejection of the instant gratification that so commonly accompanies the consumption of fragments under other circumstances.

Following Theodor Adorno's dictum that "the whole is the untrue", it would appear that the truth *is* actually claimed in fragments. Jan Balfour addresses Adorno's stance on the work of art and the fragment by asserting that "works of art that represent totalities in a world that is not itself totalized […] are, to that extent, *false*" and that in the "damaged world" the fragment as art form is truthful.[63] Indeed, the art practices of the Sanchezes and Robleto become truths *and* falsehoods as their creative "wholes" are

[62] Hoptman, "Introduction to the Exhibition, Floor 2," Mp3.
[63] Balfour, 86.

constructed through fragments. In each case, the fragmented part illuminates the whole, or rather, proposes a larger perspective of a whole through an accumulation of fragmented truths and biographies. As Adorno states: "the turn to the friable and the fragmentary is in truth an effort to save art by dismantling the claim that artworks are what they cannot be and what they nevertheless must want to be; the fragment contains both those elements."[64].

When pondering these artworks as true or false, fakes or facsimile, we must consider the desire to believe in the fragment as that which is not incomplete but that which indexes the larger whole. In both art practices, fragmented narratives are projected into the sculpture or installation rendering them inextricable from the artwork as a whole. Here, the referent is simultaneously absent and present[65]; producing a contemplation of mythological effect not unlike that evoked by memento mori and relics[66], the communal implications of which simultaneously tether the narrative of mortality while keeping the fragment in flux.

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[64] Balfour, 86.

[65] It should be pointed out here that Marcel Duchamp held a strong interest in recontextualizing and recycling everyday objects as well as *his own* previous works in order to explore the possibilities of meaning and reception. However, it was his alter ego, Rrose Sélavy and her products as well as the resurgence of reproduced readymades that introduces the notion of fake and facsimile into his work, "renewing and reinventing an object from his own past with a sleight of hand." Gavin Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 61.

[66] One example, as outlined by Didi-Huberman, is the incredible persistence of the shroud of Turin as being an object of controversy and an object of *proof.* On a similar note, Walter Benjamin revealed the fluctuating nature of authenticity with regards to relics: "At the time of its origin a medieval picture of the Madonna could not yet be said to be 'authentic.' It became 'authentic' only during the succeeding centuries and perhaps most strikingly so during the last one [19th century]." Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 217-251 (New York: Schocken Books, 1936), 243.

Section Two: Trauma, Repetition and the Fantasy of Referentiality

The Western public has been conditioned to hear about or see representations of violence through the popular media, most commonly delivered in a journalistic style. Here, reality and spectacle are delivered with conditioned detachment. According to art historian Jane Blocker, "when the West imagines its own witnessing, it conceives of that witnessing in terms that are both photographic and godlike: as itself unseen, as omniscient, disembodied, and disinterested."[67] How is this witnessing shaped and is it possible to understand its representation as the negotiation of traumatic experience? In this section, notions of trauma, repetition and the fantasy of referentiality are explored through two photographs by Carlos and Jason Sanchez: *The Hurried Child* (2005) (fig. 3) and *the Misuse of Youth* (2007) (fig. 4), as well as Dario Robleto's sculpture, *At War with the Entropy of Nature/Ghosts Don't Always Want to Come Back* (2002) (fig 5). Notions of repetition and fantasy are visible in these works as, say, in Robleto's audio recording of the deceased (encased in a cassette made of human bone dust) evoking the potential to be played over and over again; or in the Sanchezes' reenactment of the JonBenét Ramsey story; as pageant darling and victim, relived to a varying degree in the young girl posing in the Sanchezes' photograph; or as the complexity of perception and resemblance as seen in the doubling, melding and blurring of two men in camouflage uniforms.

Theories of trauma and concepts of reenactment will be presented with the assistance of Ulrich Baer as he investigates the use of photography in documenting trauma. While Roland Barthes asserted that photography acts as a medium to register disturbances in civilization, Baer questions if photography can also *cause* disturbance;

[67] Jane Blocker, *Seeing Witness: Visuality and the Ethics of Testimony* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 53.

noting the impact of the camera and flash on the subject at the moment the photograph is taken.[68] Texts by Pierre Fédida and Georges Didi-Huberman will be introduced as they present the relationship between relic, fetish and the fantasy of repetition. These theories support Brian Massumi's examination of representation and reception, notably relating to the politics of fear, what he has deemed *ambient fear*, and how it has affected the transmission of mediated traumatic experience. The aforementioned art works will serve as examples of how ambient fear has pervaded the West and how it manifests itself in art practices that present behavior associated with fetishization, scenic verisimilitude, and aesthetic shock, ultimately extending the "commodification of tragedy."[69] As the artists deal with issues stemming from dramatic events and narratives covered by the media or recorded in the annals of history, their work will be touched upon as microhistorical accounts within the history of current events.

A young girl stands alone at the front of a stage, her hands are clasped together, weighing down the skirt of her dress, resting over the ruffles as though to cover herself. Her left knee bends slightly over the right simultaneously suggesting a mannered pose for the sake of attention while revealing an awkwardness and discomfort. The reluctance of her display is undermined by her short frilly pageant dress, her grotesquely applied makeup and the pearl necklace and crown framing it, the kitschy wall of gold curtain in the background, the illuminated stage framing her small figure, and the catwalk which thrusts her forth into a dark abyss. Where have we seen her before? Why is she being offered to us in this manner? Cut to two male soldiers in a desert trench. One has been shot, his blood has stained the sand, he gazes up to another soldier sprawled over him,

[68] Specifically studying Charcot's experimentation, activating hysteria through photographic flash, also linking the mechanical flash to the psychological flashback. Baer, 26.
[69] Blocker, 52.

they grasp each other in a moment of heightened anguish. Upon closer inspection, the uncanny reveals itself, the men appear to be simultaneously dissolving into one another and into the desert background. Who are these men? Where are they? How does the viewer receive such an image? Is this a documentary or photojournalistic image? While open to interpretation by the unassuming viewer, these photographs are, in fact, the laborious products of contemporary artists Carlos and Jason Sanchez.

Resting on a pedestal, under glass, Dario Robleto's small white cassette awaits investigation. Its state of deterioration is quickly observed, lending to the impression of an unearthed artifact; the exterior casing has rusted, along with segments of audiotape that has been pulled a part from its interior. The artifact in question is dated 1972 (incidentally, the artist's birth date) and labeled *A Polar Soul Production*. Each side displays three songs: Side 1; *Ghosts Don't Always Want to Come Back, Hippies and A Ouija Board (Everyone Needs to Cling to Something*), and the partially illegible *The Ma[…] of Your Demons*. Side 2: *At War With the Entropy of Nature, Humans Will Make Animals Pay (Pay Real Good)*, and the partially illegible *Human Be*[ing?] *Unpeeling*. Some of these songs serve the double function of referring to titles or themes of the artist's other sculptures, forming a series. The reference to hippies is not only used in Robleto's piece, *Our 60's Radicals Forgot to Stay Suspicious* (fig. 21), but most poignantly in *Hippies and A Ouija Board* (fig. 22), a work that ages an already aged idealism by referencing snake oil salesmen of the nineteenth century, in this case, not only peddling elixirs but deteriorated folk and rock records (singles) by some of the most prolific American artists of the 1960's. Essentially, the artwork seeks to criticize a product/lifestyle that claimed the ability to change the future, producing an effect akin to

what Didi-Huberman would describe as "seeing something in the desiring of seeing something."[70]

These historical references are used to further reinforce the meaning of *At War With the Entropy of Nature*, found *within* the sculpture as specific materials and conveyed through a didactic panel. As indicated by the artist, the cassette is made from carved bone and bone dust from every bone in the body, trinitite, metal screws, rust, typeset. We are told that the audiotape is an original composition of military drum marches, various weapon fire, and soldiers' voices from battlefields of various wars made from E.V.P. recordings (electronic voice phenomena: voices and sounds of the dead or past, detected through magnetic audiotape).[71] A technology introduced for mass-consumption in the mid 1960's and now on the brink of obsolescence, endless loop cassettes were made to play in a continuous loop without stopping or whenever an audio device was triggered. Robleto's tape has the potential to be played repeatedly, carrying with it the atrocities of war as perpetual reminders. However, the artist offers no device to make this possible. In this way the sounds of war and voices of the past are never quite heard and never quite silenced, until once again, despite the desire to contain and manage their existence, they slowly continue to decay from material form.

According to Giovanni Levi, the microhistorian observes at close scale in order to reveal new histories or new fragments of large-scale histories. The goal of microhistory is to appeal to the concept of 'representativity' by not only taking into account the agency of a particular person (the agency of an individual in relation to a social norm) but also holding the historian (author or researcher) accountable. In other words, the author should

[70] Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Index of the Absent Wound: Monograph on a Stain," trans. Thomas Repensek, MIT Press, *October*, Vol. 29 (Summer, 1984), 67.
[71] Dunbar, 100.

promote self-awareness by taking into account their own position (or *scale* according to Levi) in relation to the particular person(s) examined. The microhistorian must be conscientious of their own research and of motives, which might be projected onto the subject. This small-scale observation seeks to forgo relativism in the hopes that discoveries might lead to broader understanding, whether that is of general phenomena or individual lives. Levi believes that "the particular dimensions of the object of analysis do not necessarily reflect the distinctive scale of the problem posed."[72] In other words, researching a specific person in a society (historical or contemporary) can sometimes lead to indications of a larger narrative at play just as it can uncover an unrecorded divergence from a larger historical narrative. This assertion reflects the significance of case-studies for microhistorians, specifically the social circumstances at play and the contradictions and fragmentations therein.[73] In terms of narrative, the role of the particular (or particular event) is an intriguing aspect of Robleto and the Sanchez' works which function as microhistorical accounts. Robleto uses fragments of various everyday artifacts while the Sanchez brothers use friends or family members as models.

While their artworks connote fragments of recognizable narratives and events, their respective processes convey additional meaning, which is to say that there are multiple histories within the production of their works. Levi asserts, "the smallest dissonances prove to be indicators of meaning which can potentially assume general dimensions."[74] And indeed, the small-scale conflict or tension in an artwork can resonate with as a symptom of a greater social discord. *The Hurried Child* and *The Misuse of*

[72] Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter Burke (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 100.
[73] Levi, 111-12.
[74] Levi, 113.

Youth are precise indicators of dissonance within a larger history. These works take on conflict but do not attempt to reassure the viewer regarding such discord, if anything they not only reenact but *regenerate* conflict on a small scale by grappling with broader narratives. Likewise, Robleto's audio recording encased in a cassette made of human bone, trinitite[75] and rust indicates a transcendental quality to that which might otherwise be relegated into obscurity; the voice of the deceased captured in an outmoded medium.

When we gaze back at the young pageant girl we are prompted to vaguely recall the tragic and sensationalized story of JonBenét Ramsey.[76] We recall the media frenzy that took place following the child's disappearance and the eventual discovery of her body (fig. 23). We are prompted to recall this particular event as one story amidst a broader American obsession with missing children, an obsession disseminated on the backs of milk cartons and specifically themed television shows, practices which have slowly dissipated in favor of faster paced media. However, the Sanchez image is not only what historian Peter Burke would call an "influence of narratives"[77], he goes on to explain that it is also what anthropologists call a social drama, an "event which reveals latent conflicts and thus illuminates social structures."[78] I submit that the social structure revealed in the Sanchez photographs is what Brian Massumi would call *ambient fear*,

[75] Glass formed by sand and heat from explosion at the test site of the atomic bomb.
[76] JonBenét Ramsey (August 6, 1990 – December 25, 1996) was an American child beauty pageant star that was discovered murdered in her home in Boulder, Colorado in 1996. The case, which after several grand jury hearings remains unsolved, continues to generate public and media interest. Media coverage of the case has often focused on Ramsey's participation in child beauty pageants, her parents' affluence and the unusual evidence in the case. The Ramsey family has filed several defamation suits against various media organizations over reporting of the murder. In February 2009, the Boulder Police Department reopened the case. *Wikipedia*, "JonBenét Ramsey," Wikipedia Web site, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JonBenét_Ramsey, (accessed June 25, 2011).
[77] Peter Burke, "History of Events and the revival of Narrative," In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter Burke (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 285.
[78] Burke, 293.

likened to a "background radiation saturating existence."[79] This social structure will be explored in relation to Massumi's theories regarding the dissemination of fear within a capitalist structure in order to understand the transmission and reception of the Sanchezes' photographs. Massumi believes that the mass media short-circuits the singular event resulting in the blurring of a specific event into series of *like* events, incidents transmitted in a way that they resemble one another, externalizing and objectifying memory into a repeatability that distances the cause from the effect.[80] According to this theory, when viewing *The Hurried Child*, we are simultaneously witnessing the *like* event of JonBenét Ramsey and participating in the objectification of another child– the actual event of the child posing for the Sanchez photograph.

The short-circuiting that Massumi refers to, also described as a "media affect-fear-blur" and "low-level ambient fear" [81], implies the ability to function within a state of apprehension and to adapt to (or learn to consume) the constant bombardment of traumatic imagery derived through popular media. This is the collective perception of being human in what he calls a "capitalized accident form".[82] Expanding on this, the author maintains that, just as the capitalist structure that produces consumer culture markets a generic identity to a specific identity in order to sell a product, it also utilizes the media to disseminate fear in order to control society in the same manner.[83] In other words, fear is something that has been marketed and exploited by the media and those in

[79] Massumi, 24.
[80] Massumi, 26.
[81] Massumi, 24.
[82] Ibid.
[83] I.e., Capitalist structure is responsible for consumer culture, which is produced through marketing, for example: marketing a generic commodity like a watch to the faceless consumer by linking the object to a subject (ordinary to extraordinary) or even better, linking an object to an ordinary person who experienced the extraordinary (a collision of everyday product/object, everyday person, and a form of chance). Massumi, 24.

power just as fear-appeasing products are then marketed for our consumption. Massumi sees power under late capitalism as a two-sided coin; on one side is *deterrence*, which determines nothing but the potential for human disaster [this is the acceptance that after the event of one disaster another similar or *like* disaster is possible]. The other side of the coin reveals power as *determining*, here; disaster has a face, bringing specificity to deterrence by "applying it to a particular found body."[84]

We might attempt to relate the notion of ambient fear and the capitalized accident form to Giovanni Levi's notion of the *particular*, in this case, an agent susceptible to multiple dangers within multiple contexts– immediate family, community, nation, and so forth. The difference between these approaches remains, however, in their claims regarding the proper distance needed for observation and perception. Massumi, as distinct from Levi, sees the content of the event and the particular agent as unimportant. The particulars become annulled by a "plurality of possible agents and times: here and to come."[85] Levi deems that a broader social context can have affect on an individual (and vice versa), but that the particular is of extreme importance; and so, observing this at close scale unveils the intricate reality of a social norm. One could see this as observing closely in order to understand observation at a distance. Massumi claims there is a

[84] Massumi, 22. "Deterrence is the perpetual cofunctioning of the past and future of power: the empty present of watching and weighing with an eye to avert. It is the avoidance of the accident on the basis of its past occurrence. It is power turned toward the event." An example of deterrence and determining can be found in the events of 9/11 (as multiple disaster sites) and that which followed as families and friends posted images or necrologies of loved ones (victims either missing in action or deceased) at the sites (World Trade Center, etc.). Intensifying the aftermath was the invention of the U.S. Homeland Security Advisory System, a color-coded terrorism threat advisory scale, implemented in 2002 after the September 11attacks and referred to as 'terror alert levels' by U.S. media. Implemented under the guise of safety and as a means to disseminate information regarding national threats, the advisory code was never seen below orange (high alert) or yellow (elevated alert). The public ultimately came to dismiss the constant state of yellow/orange terror. Its function as a form of government control (through fear) had been thwarted by the occurrence of ambient fear and fear fatigue. Officially phased out by the U.S. government as of January 27, 2011, CNN Wire Staff, "U.S. Replaces Color-coded Terror Alerts," CNN Web site, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TRAVEL/01/27/terror.threats/ (accessed June 14, 2011).
[85] Massumi, 11.

blurring between individual identity and the masses under the social circumstances of fear. Turning once again to the artworks, the Sanchez brothers play with the generic quality of this perception in that their images are not indexical but emulate indexicality. Thus, the child evoking JonBenét Ramsey becomes generic, a stand-in for past and future victims, as do the soldiers: generic people blending into generic places. In this way, the models used in the photographs also become a generic commodity for the consuming gaze; the emulation of tragedy and violence repeats into blurred memory.

Ambient fear is associated with the psychological construction of emotional defenses that include fear fatigue and compassion fatigue. This is a case of being inundated with images of trauma and disaster. The media's treatment of war is done in such a manner that it becomes a non-event. The distance that it produces becomes a "mystification of truth" and a "colonization of existence by the capitalist relation."[86] In accordance with Massumi's *like* events, political philosopher Thomas Dumm believes that the replication of horrible events through televised news is a preparatory tool that generates *fear fatigue*, resulting in nothing more than a familiar shock or a feeling of uncanniness.[87] He relates the televised news to serial-episodes found on television, in which micro-narratives take precedence over complete narratives, and the structure of the broadcast flows from the most 'newsworthy' event to the banal (if it's a slow news day) fragmenting narrative wholes.[88] There is only a *semblance* of conclusion for each story, and when it comes to war, it seems that the narrative is perpetual. Dumm believes that television simulates war without contributing to its abolition; instead it reconstructs truth

[86] Massumi, 28.
[87] Thomas L. Dumm, "Telefear: Watching War News," *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 308.
[88] Dumm, 316.

and "disarms opposition by dissolving it. In this way potential resistance to war is made irrelevant by being made uninteresting."[89]

The Sanchez photograph, *The Misuse of Youth*, works in a similar manner in that the narrative is present yet mysterious, never quite fixed in the sense that the soldiers and location are generic and the narrative is open. The soldiers' apparent dissolving into one another and into the background mimics the media's treatment of war as a generalized event in which the only people who are affected are combatants, victims are faceless, and any reason for protest has faded with the onset of compassion fatigue. The vagueness of location in the Sanchezes' photograph removes the soldiers from a distinct place and time, although it can be argued that their digital camouflage uniforms might situate them in the present. This digital camouflage was specifically designed to simulate the texture of typical terrain for the purpose of masking or increasing a combatant's amount of time before detection. The development of "digicam" was made possible through running "multiple fractals (graphics with feed back loops) and advanced algorithms through computer based graphics programs."[90] These programs organized pixilated color patterns by blurring them into one another and in this way, soldiers' uniforms can be related to the notion of a pixilated body– and by extension the virtual body– as transmitted through various forms of media technology. As such, the transmission of images of war, much like *The Misuse of Youth*, thrusts the pixilated body into the vast space of media communications, blurring specificity of person and place.

The Sanchezes' photograph possesses the potential of functioning through the same sources of transmission as those of photojournalists– the same media circuit that

[89] Dumm, 314.
[90] Guy Cramer, *The Science of Digital Camouflage Design,* "Recent digital developments," http://www.hyperstealth.com/digital-design/index.htm (accessed June 14, 2011).

generates ambient fear: through the televised news, Internet and print. However, there is a distinction to be made between them, defined by the boundaries of the art world: the field of cultural production. Similar to news editors, tastemakers construct the symbolic and economic value of artworks through means of transmission. Artistic value is specified by the parameters of *the field of cultural production,* which begins with the "belief in the value of work […] linked to the institution of the work of art as an object of contemplation."[91] This belief is formed through the involvement of tastemakers: critics, publishers, gallery directors and agents, whose roles are crucial in producing and cultivating consumers to become aware of the Sanchezes' photographs, defined as art. While many photojournalists have the opportunity to develop their works into large formats for commercial exhibition purposes, in museum and gallery settings[92], much like the Sanchez brothers (*The Hurried Child* and *The Misuse of Youth* measure 60 x 76 inches and 60 x 88 inches respectively), the inverse cannot be said.

The controlled and simulated nature of the Sanchezes' photographs is revealed only through reading about their process, as the photographs do not expose themselves as such. Every set is painstakingly constructed, sometimes taking months to produce; while every action is artificially provoked, there is little room for chance, and each captured image is subject to digital editing if deemed necessary. Much like the news broadcast,

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[91] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or; The Economic World Reversed," in *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 36.

[92] Benoit Aquin, for example, is a Montreal photographer who began his career as a photojournalist but has successfully crossed over into the fine art world. As of 2009, he has been represented by commercial art gallery Pangée, has been awarded the Prix Pictet (2009) in France and has been collected by the Montreal Museum of Fine Art. An ongoing project of his has been the coverage of the global food crisis, however, his most recent series covered Haiti after the earthquake of January 12, 2010. While the artist initially went to Haiti as a volunteer for the Centre d'étude et de coopération internationales (CECI) documenting difficult subject matter, there is an undeniable aesthetic appeal to Aquin's works, formatted in large scale (60x80 inches), crafted through light and composition. This series has since been on exhibition at his commercial gallery with a percentage of the profits going to aid groups in Haiti.

their micro-narrative is shaped according to whichever stories influence them and edited according to aesthetic intentions.[93]

Comparable to the reenactment produced in the Sanchezes' photograph, Robleto's *At War with the Entropy of Nature* also suggests reenactment, not only in the looping of an E.V.P. recording but as a reference to another form of controlled dramatic event: the Civil War reenactment. Robleto's cassette reveals not only a controlled and contained version of a dramatic event as it also implies the non-specific, or generic, in that the voices of soldiers past are disconnected and disassociated from their physical bodies and from their individuality. Their messages, recorded and mediated, are ultimately unheard. This manner of retelling and acting out history is relatable to Massumi's notion of *like* events, the "capitalized accident form" and Dumm's "fear fatigue" in that the atrocities of the Civil War are diluted by temporal distance, the act of repetition and the distraction of materialistic "authenticity". These elements produce a consumable experience that is marketed as both hobby *and* patriotic tribute. Mock battles and "impressions"[94] are organized to recreate what is (somewhat paradoxically) referred to as *living history*; revisiting a violent event while abstaining from injury or death, evoking what Massumi calls "the mystification of truth." This "parodic replication" becomes a preparatory act, defining the "contemporary politics of fear"[95], while embodying the past– recapitulated to a varying degree with each act.[96]

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[93] Lehan, 14-17.

[94] Reenactors describe their actions as "first-person impressions" wherein they take on the role of a known person (noted General, etc.,), or unknown soldier or civilian by interacting with other reenactors and spectators as though they were in 19th century. Of equal importance: "wearing historically accurate clothing is essential to [an] "impression" and attention to details is important, i.e. Civil War soldiers or civilians didn't have digital watches or plastic frame eyeglasses." *Civil War Reenactment HQ*, "Reenacting for Beginners," http://www.reenactmenthq.com/beginners.asp (accessed June 13, 2011).

[95] Dumm, 308.

[96] Dumm, 309.

On the subject of repetition, French literary theorist Gérard Genette argues "[w]e cannot vary without repeating nor repeat without varying."[97] This statement might be analogous to a spiral rather than a loop in that reenactment, like resemblance and referentiality, will always manifest a slight difference, which can never be actualized as an original act or event– this might suggest closure or completion. For Genette, completion is the "repose of identity", which is "no more the aim of art than of life; it is its end, the fall into entropy, whose other name is death."[98] Ultimately dealing with themes of mortality, the notion of repetition found in Robleto and the Sanchezes' artworks can be interpreted as forms of disavowal (of death) as much as they can be interpreted as memento mori (a reminder that life is fleeting). Not only do they function within Massumi and Dumm's theoretical framework of a capitalized relation to media and fear; they also function as sites of disturbance defined as trauma. The traumatized subject does not recognize that they are traumatized; yet they engage in repetitious this form of behavior in an effort to surmount psychological distress without managing to achieve relief. Instead, behavior becomes an act of renunciation and an attempt to distance the self from the awareness of the trauma. It is a perpetual paradoxical state.

As artworks and as products of ambient fear, the doubling of real and simulacral in Robleto and the Sanchezes' practices can be associated with the fetishization of a "missed encounter with the real."[99] This necessitates a complex relationship between perception and resemblance that will be outlined with the assistance of French

[97] Gérard Genette, *Essays in Aesthetics*, translated by Dorrit Cohn (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999),103.
[98] Genette, 107.
[99] Elements of reenactment in these works can also be linked to repetition in early performance art and Pop Art, which Rodenbeck proposes as symptomatic of postwar subjectivity (traumatic reaction to World War II). Rodenbeck, 112.

philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, as well as French psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida, both of whom analyze the relationship between the fetish object (representing disavowal) and the relic as specifically representing the disavowal of *death*. Didi-Huberman draws upon the notion of representation and resemblance in his essay, "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)", as he observes how the desire to witness can *will* the experience of witnessing something, specifically, the absent body of Christ in the shroud of Turin. The author examines how material form can lend itself to fantasy and excessive naturalism within this context, a trait that can be examined in Dario Robleto's *At War with the Entropy of Nature* as the artist seeks to summon and capture the past while containing it in a manageable and familiar form, appeasing the fear of death by transforming it into a consumable object.

Didi-Huberman sees photography as being the impetus behind the famous shroud of Turin[100], beginning with Secondo Pia, who, upon photographing the relic in 1894, had discovered the form of a face and body (presumed to be Christ's) within the photograph's negative (fig. 24). In this way, the image acted as *proof* of a miracle, a resurrection in photographic terms.[101] In other words, the miraculous appearance of Christ came through the process of a double-negative. The shroud itself is seen as the *negative-index* of Christ's body during and after the *act* of the passion offering a *retracement* ultimately leading to the gospels. In a similar way, the photographic process capturing the shroud could only reveal the form of Christ's body through a negative. Herein lays the hypothesis; that this *trace* is revealed within the simultaneous effacement and creation of figuration (development stages of the photograph), which is based on the Hegelian

[100] Not to be confused with the Veil of Veronica, also an index of the Passion, however, pre-crucifixion.
[101] Didi-Huberman, 67.

concept of *Aufhebung*, a term meaning to move in contradiction, "truth as a delirium of absolute translucidity."[102] In turn, belief in the original effacement of this *trace* authenticates the relic. This negative-index (negative trace) can also be compared to the behavioral symptoms of trauma: proof of that which is absent. Furthermore, this negative trace also enables a comparison between *At War with the Entropy of Nature* and the notion of relic; as trace or negative index, the E.V.P. recording offers us a trace of that which is absent. The voice of a spirit defines the absence of a body, hence the material that composes Robleto's sculpture acts as the negative index of a body.

The relic's function as the negative index of a body is what Pierre Fédida describes as a narcissistic aspect; not only is it a reminder of life (memento mori) but it is also a reminder of the preservation of one's life.[103] Here the work of mourning represents proof that the dead will not return. It is an indicator of an absent body and yet it defies the appearance of death through preservation, by resisting decomposition. In the case of Robleto and the Sanchez brothers, the attempt to resist decomposition is made visible in the creation of works that seek to reanimate or revisit the past. That being said, Robleto's cassette *does* appear to be decomposing and the Sanchez brothers' photographs seem to be short-circuited and consumed just as the images and narratives that inspired them were consumed.

While it simultaneously acts as a memento mori, the relic, like the fetish object, represents a triumph over psychological threat and a protection against it. According to Fédida, the visibility of the relic assures the "belief against the anxiety of destruction"[104] as it represents a substitution for the acknowledgement of reality, a reality that constitutes

[102] Didi-Huberman, 71.
[103] Fédida, 63-64.
[104] Fédida, 64.

the deceased- that which is hidden and no longer visible, that which represents fear and the unknown. The fetish object permits a person, in "reconstituted knowledge", to accept reality but it also replaces an abandoned belief (or trauma), "bringing knowledge to a stop upon a reality substantiated by visibility."[105] Similarly, the relic shares this function of stoppage, permitting forgetfulness and surreality as it stands in for memory, much like sculpture and photographs. Placed into context with what Brian Massumi calls "ambient fear", Fédida's analysis of the cognitive relationship to a relic can be observed as the "discourse of the self within the condition of possibilities of being a victim" an objectification and transference of fear. This becomes the basis of dialectical reckoning, between the thoughts/fantasies expressed and their development into (and perception of) material form.

Didi-Huberman analyzes the relationship between the relic and hermeneutics by adapting a discourse about perspective; while close inspection prioritizes materiality and compromises beliefs, physically distancing oneself from the shroud allows *elaboration*, an associative psychological process or "game of near and far"[106], which supports the projection of fantasy onto material form. The power of narrative is made possible through elaboration and *secondary elaboration*, which subsumes a particular image into a more complex scenario. Here, the image is a photographic detail that suggests a *scene*, understood as a means of staging where thoughts become images– a scenario.[107] *Elaboration* additionally functions to sustain the power of verification (reality) through a "fantasy of referentiality."[108] This process gives way to what Didi-Huberman calls

[105] Fédida, 65.
[106] Didi-Huberman, 71.
[107] Didi-Huberman, 73.
[108] Didi-Huberman, 74.

"scenic verisimilitude"– pure resemblance.[109]

Scenic verisimilitude, also referred to as excessive naturalism, is described by Didi-Huberman as "abject proof" and as a "new art of iconic devotion", this too can be exemplified to a degree in the Sanchezes' photographs as they objectify and engage another child in the reenactment of the JonBenét Ramsey narrative. The young girl posing in the Sanchez image is an example or trace, not only of the aforementioned victim (simultaneously representing Ramsey as present body/absent body) but a trace of the JonBenét Ramsey narrative, transmitted and short-circuited by the media and imprinted into the national psyche in the form of Massumi's ambient fear.

While the Sanchezes' studio setting can be examined as the site of an event for those involved in the artistic process– or for those who are aware of this process– no memory of or experience of tangible place is offered within the artworks. The Sanchezes' titles forgo place and specific identity in favor of the generic, the *theme*. Likewise, Robleto's sculpture combines various eras, places, events and bodies. Through this, their narratives float without end. *The Hurried Child* suggests the begging of a narrative just as *The Misuse of Youth* suggests no end in site; it signifies not only the men in the photograph but also evokes the abuse of power at the hands of governments. To borrow from Ulrich Baer, these artworks "challenge our understanding of the nature of proof by presenting a staged and self-conscious refusal of information- a framed emptiness- as

[109] To illustrate excessive naturalism as a form of staging, or consideration of representability, Didi-Huberman references the experiments of French surgeon Pierre Barbet, who, in 1935, staged a series of crucifixions with donated corpses in an attempt to recreate the last stages of the Passion while proving that Jesus Christ's wrists had been the point of nail entry and not his palms. Proving this would clarify exactly which part of the body could be located by the bloodstains on the Shroud of Turin. This reenactment is what Huberman calls a "fantasy of referentiality". A type of analysis that brings on a "new art of iconic devotion." Didi-Huberman, 78-79.

evidence."[110] It is the open-endedness of Robleto and the Sanchezes' narratives that lead the viewer to reconsider her/his position. Baer maintains, "acts of secondary witnessing depend less on geographic or cultural positions than on becoming aware of our position as observers of experiences."[111] Keeping in mind that a narrative's end determines the reader's or viewer's interpretation, Burke suggests choosing an alternative ending to a historical narrative. This encapsulates Robleto's desire to repair historical events. The artist might extend a narrative past an actual social event in order to allow the receiver to reach his or her own conclusions about its significance.[112] For example, *At War with the Entropy of Nature* takes the event of the Civil War and extends the narrative past its ending as a fixed date, as something simply recorded in the annals of history. For Robleto, the significance of the Civil War does not culminate with a specific date, if anything; the recording of spiritual unrest proposes that it never ceased. Of course, the viewer is not given the privilege of hearing the recording, instead, we are prompted to suspend disbelief, understanding that the narrative of war is not only echoed in this work but also represented as ongoing, in mutable form. Here, the alternative is to "confront the viewer with moment[s] that had the potential to be experienced but perhaps [were] not."[113]

Roland Barthes has stated that trauma in photography only exists if the trauma actually occurred, that is, if it carries connotations of actual occurrences (the photographer had to be there to capture a catastrophe). The more direct the trauma, the more difficult the connotation, as connotation is a structured signification, an institutional

[110] This quote was used in reference to the respective photographic series of Mikael Levin and Dirk Reinartz. Baer, 81.
[111] Baer, 83.
[112] Burke, 290-91.
[113] Baer, 8.

activity functioning to integrate the viewer and to reassure them.[114] Conversely, Barthes believes a "mythological effect" reveals itself in the non-traumatic image, which he deems inversely proportional to its traumatic effect.[115] Although photojournalism thrives on the traumatic, Massumi would agree that while the degree of trauma, and its transmission, is distorted, its signification is now structured in a way that does not reassure but still normalizes. Baer links the digital manipulation of a photograph to the "Democritean mood," the new imagination. He claims "it is precisely the construction and encoding of a meaning that had never existed which takes place in every photograph, that links photography, at least on a phenomenological level, to trauma."[116] He goes on to note that this method of photographic reconstruction addresses an event that breaks with known practices of historicization, just as the traumatic event breaks with conscious memory.

While trauma is intrinsic to the account of the events they seek to recreate, there is an absence of transparency in the works of Robleto and the Sanchez brothers, thus trauma is emulated but remains uncaptured. It is precisely this absence that becomes vital in examining these works as material representation of the elusiveness, the simultaneous presence and absence, of trauma. Ulrich Baer describes the production of this absence best when he writes: "the sense here is of being called to respond, to reflect on the voiding of the sense of place that resists its own framing and emplacement."[117] The issues revealed in the Sanchezes' works are cultivated through popular culture, through orally transmitted information as well as print media. The Sanchezes have noted that in

[114] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text / Roland Barthes*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, c. 1977), 209-10.
[115] Barthes, 209-10.
[116] Baer, 86.
[117] Ibid.

many cases, they cannot remember exactly where or when they were exposed to a story that inspired them[118], while Robleto will gravitate towards a singular object or words that seem to propose a narrative. As microhistorical accounts, the artists' practices suggest a problematic scale of observation, that is to say, an observation that does not reside outside of that which is being studied: narratives which have been culturally internalized; depictions of the self (through the guise of objects and other people) within the condition of capitalized society. These artworks are not only reenactments or products of ambient fear, they are behaviors and conditions, symptomatic of trauma.

[118] Lehan, 16.

Section Three: Testimony, Temporality and Memory

Relics carry the weight of the past. Even if the relic in question is scientifically proven to be fake, it will nonetheless succeed in conveying an aura of sincerity. The relic becomes an object of biography, an extension of the past into the present, which, as uncovered in the previous sections, is dependent on a long-standing model of fetishization, strengthened by the temporal quality of storytelling– or recounting of the past– and the overall importance of the object as it is inserted into that narrative. In this way the object becomes integral evidence to the narrative's status as testimony. Indeed, the status of the object as proof is woven together through an understanding of testimony, temporality and memory, which this chapter will explore as applied to Robleto's *War Pigeon With a Message (Love Survives the Death of Cells)* (fig. 6) and the Sanchezes', *John Marc Karr* (fig. 7). In order to recognize how these artworks function on a broader social scale, it is essential to look at narrative within an expanded notion of time and space. Combined, time and space activate an artwork creating a performative component to the viewer's experience.

Theorists Mieke Bal, Svetlana Boym, Didi-Huberman, Ernst van Alphen and Massumi all draw upon the importance of distance and discernment as a strategy to interact with objects. Whether it is by physically walking around an artwork and projecting a narrative onto it or understanding the testimonial agency of a work or renegotiating its meaning according to a sense of nostalgia; the aesthetic relation between object and subject, or the "I and You", expands from person to person – to person to thing. Van Alphen overtly links the referential capacity of language and its subjective quality to concepts of testimony. In other words, while the act of testimony is understood

as substantiating an event, the subjectivity of witnessing an event is coupled with the complexity of expressing what was witnessed and the complexity of understanding or receiving what the witness expresses. Whether what is at stake is oral or transcribed expression, historical documentation or present source, testimony implies an exchange between two or more people. Van Alphen identifies this exchange as a "transactive process" between parties (the testifier and the listener or addressee of the testimony) as well as between the past and the testifier.[119] This is to say that there is a "temporal shift-in-permanency of the events" allowing the addressee of the testimony to take on a constructive role as a witness in their own right.[120] Through the perceptual shifts and oscillating identities of sculpture, photography and didactic text, I propose that the artworks of Dario Robleto and the Sanchez brothers become testimonial vessels, ultimately engaging the viewer and artwork in a performative exchange, an "I and You" relationship.

In Robleto's work, temporal and testimonial encounters relate to a larger narrative at play. Much of the artist's work incorporates text as testimony: letters to or from soldiers from various wars, commemorative poetry, embroidery, cartes de visite (which could either indicate a person's name or their photograph) as well as memorial guidelines and campaign awareness promoted by committees such as the Southern Diarists & Poetry Society (fig. 25).[121] These work as testimony because every textual encounter is the

[119] Van Alphen, following testimonial theories of Psychoanalyst Dori Laub. Van Alphen, "The Revivifying Artist: Boltanski's Efforts to Close the Gap," in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, ed. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2006), 224-25.
[120] Van Alphen, Laub relates her theory to Holocaust victims who do not testify "from the position of having been a witness, but out of the need to retroactively constitute the possibility of witnessing." The addressee takes on responsibility for bearing witness, making possible the repossession of the act of witnessing, which is also reclaimed or reconstituted in testifying. Van Alphen, 224-25.
[121] See Dario Robleto's artworks: *The Southern Diarists Society*, 2006, *Obsequies in Albany*, 2006, *When Pincushions are Political*, 2005, and *A Soul Waits for a Body That Never Arrives*, 2004-05. While it is

product of an act, a performance, and a *gesture*. As the viewer moves around *War Pigeon With a Message (Love Survives the Death of Cells)*, which, measuring a modest 8x11x5 ½ inches, rests delicately on a pedestal under encased glass, objects reveal themselves in the rubble: fragments of the graffitied Berlin wall, a WWI bullet, rose petals, and most strikingly, the carrier pigeon with WWII-era I.D. tag. The pigeon is seemingly defeated and yet its fragile bones have oxidized, indicating a prolonged– if not defiant– decomposition. Clutched in its talons and dutifully held above the chaotic mess is a letter, a plea from a Civil War-era woman to a Confederate General asking for the return of her prisoner of war husband, which in this narrative, remains undelivered; the outcome of this story is therefore unknown. The inclusion of this letter in Robleto's piece (and to a varying degree the graffitied rubble) could be a nod to early 1970's mail art in which the text of a letter was framed by the addressee or receiver and the function of establishing contact became the content of the artwork.

Ernst Van Alphen turns to semiotician Roman Jakobson in order to distinguish functions of language and how they might relate to 1970's mail art, specifically that of French artist, Christian Boltanski. Jakobson lists six functions of language, all of which are present within written expression, one of which is usually dominant: Emotive, conative, metalinguistic, referential, poetic and phatic. The *emotive* function suggests the expression of the speaker or writer while the *conative* emphasizes the reception of words– the reader's reaction. Using language to analyze codes of expression is *metalinguistic* but when language is employed to express the context of language in the

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uncertain that the Southern Diarists Society actually existed, women's organizations were common during the American Civil War. These organizations often campaigned for the care of wounded soldiers by writing letters and creating pamphlets to send to larger aid societies. They also took part in sewing handkerchiefs and bandages to be sent to soldiers in active battlefields. "Women During the Civil War," Historical Society of Pennsylvania Web site, http://www.hsp.org/node/2028 (accessed June 8, 2011).

object world the *referential* function is dominant. Poetic function applies to language being used to foreground a message. Finally, according to Jakobson the *phatic* function of language, which can be closely linked to conative function, is described as being used primarily to establish contact with a receiver. In this case, the phatic is that which is stripped down to the most minimal yet nuanced form of communication: that which verges on the non-verbal, to best express a desired contact between viewer and artwork.[122]

Certainly, all of these functions are present; the referential and metalinguistic bound between the sculpture and texts, while the emotive and poetic are grounded in the title of the piece, which equally employs a conative function; the first part of the title, *War Pigeon With a Message*, positions the entire piece (texts and sculpture) as the delivery and declaration of this message, which is revealed in the second part of the title distinguished in parenthesis: *(Love Survives the Death of Cells)*. Observing *War Pigeon With a Message*, the viewer does not know the exact content of the letter so dutifully clutched, just as they do not know the content of the graffitied message scrambled amongst the rubble– fragmented remnants of the Berlin wall.[123] The essence of the letter has been re-transcribed by Robleto, the original intent of which has been suspended and rerouted through artistic intervention; we find ourselves (the viewers) as the receivers of the letter. The phatic function is dominant, as together, the text and object establish contact with the viewer, the conative function presenting itself in the message as reassurance (love survives death). Here, the phatic is "defined in its relation with the

[122] Van Alphen, 228-229.
[123] During the 1980's, the wall dividing East and West Berlin served as a public site of expression for many artists (and non-artists), specifically in West Berlin. In stark contrast, the eastern wall remained blank, however these two seemingly opposing visual characteristics can be interpreted as being in dialogue with one another, if not proposing a visual dialogue of political and ideological divide.

viewer, in its processing by the viewer"[124], it is a central component to the "material condition and scene of an encounter"[125] between voices of the past and present. Of course, Van Alphen deems this "an impossible ambition" within the confines of the museum or gallery space where the viewer is already anticipating an encounter with a work of art. According to the author, the context of this encounter "activate[s] a mode of looking which transforms the viewing experience into a grasp on the aesthetic."[126] However, when this work of art subverts expectation by revealing itself as a plurality of histories, as Robleto's work does, the viewer begins to reassess what they are looking at.

In the past four decades, the definition of sculpture has become somewhat contentious; its physical and theoretical boundaries have been pushed and extended by artists, scholars and critics alike. While critical theorist Rosalind Krauss sought to determine the physical characteristics of sculpture in order to distinguish it from other forms of object making, recent curators and theorists, such as Johanna Burton, Svetlana Boym and Mike Bal, have not only begun to reassess Krauss's definition for the sake of contemporary sculpture practices but have supplemented practice *and* theory by addressing the conceptual and philosophical capacity to transcend the temporal and spatial understanding of an object. Within their theories, temporality is observed through an awareness of narrative and a porous sense of sculpture. This porousness evokes the legacy of Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay of 1979, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, wherein the author reacted against using the umbrella term 'sculpture' to describe new works such as minimalism and earthworks. She warned, that although malleable, the continuous expansion and heterogeneity of the term *sculpture* could potentially lead to its

[124] Van Alphen, 230.
[125] Van Alphen, 233.
[126] Ibid.

collapse.[127] Her method was to define what sculpture *wasn't* (i.e.: not architecture, not landscape), to begin a negative assessment in order to come to a conclusion– or inclusion– of what sculpture *was*. Seemingly at odds with this method of definition, Bal and Boym are preoccupied with sculpture (modern and contemporary) that *is* architecture and landscape while simultaneously assessing that which lies *outside* of the work. Enter art historian Johanna Burton, who argues that Krauss' "strategy of negative definition can be seen as operating according to the logic of the *supplement*: calling attention to the frame only in order to point outside of it."[128] This reassessment unites all four theorists in that they all seek to define the potential of sculpture by investigating its relationship with space.

For Krauss, sculpture through inverse logic became pure negativity, a combination of exclusions in opposition to architecture and landscape. With this in mind, Krauss was able to situate sculpture in the expanded field while arguing independent positions for other forms of art that modern historians had too eagerly categorized as sculpture (what Krauss defines as site construction, marked sites and axiomatic structures). It was this very strategy of negative definition that offered Johanna Burton a contemporary perspective on the state of sculpture in the *collapsed field*, which she sees as "less of a crisis than a state of being"[129], confirmed by the nature of its reception. As the negative of Krauss' structured field, Burton's notion of the collapsed field merges negative terms and produces positive terms.[130] In this case, the collapsed field resembles an infinite and open state of possibilities, which Burton links to installation practices,

[127] Rosalind Krauss, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, *October*, Vol. 8. (Spring, 1979): 30 and 33.
[128] Burton, 13.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

characteristically surrounding the viewer and fueled by audience presence. Installation, according to Burton is not sculpture, hence not-not-not, it is an expanded field that places the *viewer* at the center.[131] Conversely, sculpture is still seen as somewhat autonomous, that which is placed at the center of a space in relation to the viewer, never fully grasped as one cannot fully see it from all angles at once.

Going back to Robleto's sculpture, we can see how it simultaneously involves the emplacement of architecture and landscape while creating a non-place. His imagery generates a new topography merging history with sculpture, compatible with the desire to "explore and represent the confusion of contemporary life,"[132] an "uncertainty" reflected in the relationship between everyday objects, sculptural form, and the meanings simultaneously tethered to both while in flux through societal context.[133] The title of this piece, *War Pigeon With a Message (Love Survives the Death of Cells)*, carries a dual meaning in that emotions are inscribed into memory, which apparently transcends the physical/corporeal realm. Surviving the "death of cells" evokes the oppressed nature of the wartime body as a vessel, composed of cells in its living state. In this case, each component of the sculpture points to a different time and place as well as different means of testimony: the sent letter, the release of the pigeon, the fragments of the Berlin wall; these elements invest a macro historical narrative with microhistories, creating dialogue between particular artifacts and the viewer.

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[131] Burton, 15.
[132] Burton's, co-curator for the exhibition *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas: Recent Sculpture*, Anne Ellegood, distances sculpture from installation claiming the former as informed by the space (architecture) in which it is exhibited but not a part of it. Instead, the author describes the exhibition as a landscape and the museum space as topography of sculpture. Anne Ellegood, 19.
[133] Ellegood, 22.

The artifacts assembled in Robleto's sculpture represent a revised topography, arranging histories, narratives, and mediums into a new form of landscape. This is congruent with Svetlana Boym's notion of the "off-modern", a physical and temporal distance from an object that serves to reactivate or renegotiate meaning. Specifically looking to the Russian avant-garde, Boym references the power of nostalgia as an ephemeral connection to the past, present and future. The off-modern perspective "allows us to frame utopian projects as dialectical ruins, not to discard or demolish them but rather to confront and incorporate them into our own fleeting present."[134] Off-modern architecture is porous, sitting on the threshold of the past and future, real and virtual.

Experiencing the Off-modern means to be "engaged in a double movement between theory and practice, between imaginary architecture and material experience."[135] This double movement is exemplified in Vladimir Tatlin's legendary *Monument to the Third International*, 1920 (fig. 26). Tatlin's piece is not architecture, not landscape and not monument in that was never fully realized as intended, however, it succeeds in its conceptual framework as ephemera. Sketches, photographs of the original models– models that are now lost– as well as reconstructions of the tower, not to mention the reconstructions of a reconstructed prototype[136], which are exhibited simultaneously in various locations around the world in a range of material manifestations, all position Tatlin's tower as not only sculpture (as per Krauss' theory[137]) but as an object dwelling in

[134] Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern*, Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 36.
[135] Boym, 37.
[136] Nathalie Leleu, "The Model of Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International: Reconstruction as an Instrument of Research and States of Knowledge," *Tate Papers, Online Research Journal*, (Autumn 2007): http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/07autumn/leleu.htm (accessed April 25, 2011).
[137] Krauss argued that for centuries sculpture and monument shared the same logic of commemoration, however, this logic began to fail during the late nineteenth century. Citing Auguste Rodin's statue of

what Boym calls "paradoxical ruinophilia". This corresponds to a political object that has been translated into artistic sign and connected to the status of the ruin. In this case, the tower gains such status through the socio-political context of its creation (Socialist movement and constructivism), the loss of original models (and their subsequent reconstruction), the incompletion of its construction as originally intended and, through this incompletion, its enduring relationship with nostalgia.

It is precisely this nostalgia that points to the communal component of such a work, what Boym calls a "complete environment" in the sense that the accumulation of objects and testimonial accounts (the documented reports of Tatlin's contemporaries as well as the documented process of rebuilding the tower[138]) create a unified and stabilized whole. These gestures "transcend the everyday [in order to] inhabit the most uninhabitable ruins […] while preserving memories"[139]; they are gestures of nostalgia and they are narrative, as nomadic as Krauss's modern sculpture. This is Boym's architecture of the Off-modern: new buildings/ installations/ sculptures that neither destroy the past nor rebuild it. This co-creation with the material remainders of history promotes a "spatial extension into the past and future, into different existential topographies of cultural forms."[140]

As various contributors reconstructed Tatlin's tower, so too is the past reconstructed and repaired in Dario Robleto's sculpture. While Boym theorizes how political objects might be translated into artistic signs connected to the status of ruin,

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Balzac, which was commissioned as a monument for a specific site but failed at this when the commission collapsed and multiple versions of the sculpture were created and collected by various museums. In this way, the sculpture is no longer linked to the fixed state of monument, it is the negative condition of this state; it is nomadic. Krauss points out that modern sculpture has since derived from this, absorbing its pedestal and claiming autonomy. Krauss, 33-34.

[138] Leleu, "The Model of Vladimir Tatlin's Monument."

[139] Boym, 35.

[140] Boym, 36.

Robleto utilizes elements of everyday objects, which, when combined, can also be perceived as political in their transformation into relic or memento mori. Robleto's artworks commemorate monumental loss without being monumental; their ability to connect with a range of objects, particulars, anonymous voices, places and eras suggest that they are physically and theoretically nomadic. Like Tatlin's tower, *War Pigeon With a Message* succeeds in weaving in and out of its ruin-like state through memory and material form. This sculpture activates narrative through the power of nostalgia and a mythical quality, creating a scenario based on perception. [141]

Cultural theorist Mieke Bal examines the artwork of Louise Bourgeois – specifically the series of sculptures titled *Cells* and *Spiders* (fig. 27)– as being a form of architecture mediated through narrative, space and memory[142]; more specifically, this encompasses both memories projected onto the works by the public and those private memories belonging to the artist. This further supports Burton's stance on the state of sculpture in the collapsed field as well as Boym's expanded view of temporality, the *off-modern*. The author proposes Bourgeois as a cultural philosopher with a theoretical position on the role of narrative in the discourse on art and sees her artworks as overcoming the confines of sculpture by heightening the viewers' awareness of temporality. This temporal undertaking, imposed onto the viewers' experience of the artwork as they walk around it, provokes a narrative of viewing, which in turn challenges the narrative of memory. Here, memory is likened to found objects, presented as

[141] See previous section on *Trauma, Repetition and the Fantasy of Referentiality.* Secondary elaboration is a psychological process in which perception (visual and psychological) aids in projecting fantasy onto an object, which facilitates narrative and the development of a narrative scene into scenario. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Index of the Absent Wound: Monograph on a Stain*, trans. Thomas Repensek, MIT Press, *October*, Vol. 29 (Summer, 1984), 73.
[142] Mieke Bal, "Narrative Inside Out: Louise Bourgeois's Spider as Theoretical Object," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1999), 103.

fragments, "scraps and bits" of the past, deliberately placed in Bourgeois' *Cells* and transformed by what they evoke for the viewer. In so doing, the artist makes these objects "hover on the undecidable yet profound divide between memory and trauma."[143]

Revisiting Robleto's *War Pigeon With a Message*, it becomes evident that the scene of this encounter corresponds to Bal's notion of *performative narrative*, a product of the viewer's experience which positions them as narrator. The objects and the tactile sensations of the sculptures/architecture act as a progressive force, guiding the viewer's experience into perpetual discoveries and memories, ultimately conflating temporalities, biographies, reality and fiction.[144] This is one of three narrative modes referred to by Bal that are evoked through sculpture. Aside from the performative mode, the narrative of *anteriority* is characterized by the insertion of a previously-narrativized object or specific iconography into a work of art, which then functions as a measuring stick against which the viewer can understand or receive meaning[145]; *processual* narrative serves to reactivate old stories staged by an artist which then linger in the viewer's mind not only throughout the immediate experiencing a work but long afterwards. These three concepts of narrative modes are valuable in analyzing Robleto's sculpture. Here, Bal's narrative modes gain momentum as the viewer comes across the artwork, presented and, from a distance, perceived as a whole, an object on a pedestal encased under glass. Also relevant here is that Burton's notion of the collapsed field (the negative of Krauss' structured field) merges negative terms and produces positive terms.[146] The viewer is prompted to discover the intricacies of the piece through active observing, reading the sculpture as

[143] Bal, 110-11.
[144] Bal, 125.
[145] Bal, 121.
[146] Ibid.

three registers: first (bottom) register, rubble, rose petals and WWII bullets; second (middle) register, pigeon skeleton, I.d. tag; third (top) register, scrolled letter fastened with orange ribbon. While registers can be interpreted from top to bottom, the sculpture can also be processed by combining the reading of registers while simultaneously walking *around* the work. This allows the viewer's gaze to not only rise and fall but to see *through* the sculpture, visually collecting the objects, associating memories and projecting meanings. What may have been an indiscernible and chaotic scene from afar is now a multilayered register that offers itself as a whole; a whole composed of matter as much as it is wrought with transparency, wreckage and cracks. *War Pigeon With a Message* is literally porous and demonstrates a state of historical and material collapse as much as it symbolically redefines historical narrative. Borrowing the vocabulary introduced by Johanna Burton, it could be said that the sculpture merges negative terms and produces positive and terms[147] by conflating notions of collapse and resistance. This artwork is not architecture, not landscape and not monument, and yet it evokes just that. Neither rebuilt nor demolished, it is precisely this liminal quality that renders the sculpture into what Boym describes as "dialectical ruins", engaging political remnants into "paradoxical ruinophilia".

The hybridization and fragmentation involved in conflating temporalities, biographies, reality and fiction can be interpreted as democratic[148], allowing voices and stories of the past to interact with the present. However, in the same way, Robleto's message is precarious. Just as the carrier pigeon would have transported urgent messages, communication was at the mercy of several exchanges before reaching the intended

[147] Ibid.
[148] Massimiliano Gioni, "It's Not the Glue that Makes the Collage," *COLLAGE: The Unmonumental Picture*, ed. Lisa Phillips, New Museum (London: Merrell, 2007), 12.

recipient, the addressee. Perhaps this is an intentional aspect of *War Pigeon With a Message (Love Survives the Death of Cells).* While we can interpret the sculpture according to the title, this work will always covey meaning differently according to the viewer's projected narratives, and in this way, Robleto's sculpture remains theoretically autonomous and nomadic.

Photography, Temporality and Memory

Temporality is coupled with memory and testimony in the Sanchez brother's portrait of John Marc Karr, a man who in 2006 confessed to the murderer of child pageant contestant JonBenét Ramsey, although his claim was later proven to be false. The photograph reveals Karr appearing freshly groomed wearing a neatly pressed red dress shirt, buttoned all the way up- with the exception of the collar. Although we can only see him as a bust, he seems dressed to have his portrait taken, not too formal, not too casual– but this is no ordinary portrait. The viewer sees him standing with his back towards the camera, gazing intently at himself in a mirror. The photograph is quite large, 60 x 90 inches, and while Karr's back is turned to us the diagonal angle of the photograph brings his reflection into focus, allowing the viewer to scrutinize the man in the portrait at close proximity– so that we are apparently just as close to him as he appears to be to his reflection. Because Karr has been captured while transfixed by his own reflection, the viewer's gaze goes unchallenged and we are offered to inspect, dissect the texture of his skin, the furrow of his brow, the bags under his eyes, the small cut above his lip. Is this intentional? Has Karr deliberately offered himself to us in this way?

Karr's notoriety for false testimony takes us back to Ernst van Alphen's consideration of language as subjective, in which the linguistic deixis, requiring the presence of others in the temporal present ("I and You"), is linked to concepts of testimony and inextricably associated with the utterance of words, the reception of utterance, as well as gestures. Karr's projection into the media spotlight is predicated on utterance as much as that utterance depends on gesture; the false testimony, the claim of memory through insertion of the self into an act, a traumatic event, the violent gesture. Karr was ultimately dismissed as evidence found at the crime scene did not match his DNA. Reminiscent of Theodor Adorno's aphorism "the whole is untrue", or rather, that the truth is made up of fragments, in this case, the fragments (DNA) left at the scene did not correspond to the whole as presented in the physical body John Marc Karr. As the Sanchezes' practice revolves around producing a moment (or staging a moment) rather than capturing a moment, it is clear that the same Adornian aphorism applies to their works. More pointedly, if truth is instead claimed in fragments[149] then we must read Karr's portrait as such; as a whole illuminated by its parts– temporal and experiential breaks.

In her article "Haunted Stages: Performance and the Photographic Effect", Peggy Phelan states: the "photographic effect composes two acts and two temporalities. The interpretive act that occurs at the moment the image is taken and the interpretive act that occurs when the image is seen."[150] While I agree that there are indeed two acts at play,

[149] Jan Balfour, "'The Whole is Untrue': On the Necessity of the Fragment (After Adorno)," in *The Fragment: An Incomplete History*, ed. William Tronzo, Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009), 83-91.
[150] Peggy Phelan, "Haunted Stages: Performance and the Photographic Effect," in *Haunted: Contemporary Photography/Video/Performance*, ed. Jennifer Blessing and Nat Trotman (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2010), 62.

there is one more act to be identified in the portrait of Karr; that of him gazing into a mirror, implying an introspective moment that bounces off of one portrait to the next (that which is in focus and out of focus), between past-present and present-future, delineated by an ornate gold frame. The third portrait represents all of the temporalities and spatial differences: between Karr, the camera and the viewer is a whole made of fractured projections and memories. Karr's gaze suggests the reproduced moment through memory just as the photograph is the reproduction of a moment.

With the application of Freudian, Benjaminian and Barthesian theory, Ulrich Baer uncovers the relationship between camera and subject as well as the varying temporalities represented in the captured image: past-present; the reenactment of trauma and present-future; the image suggesting a frozen moment, the prospect of the future, and impending death.[151] As underscored by Boym, the viewer can also be taken into account here as a personification of the present.[152] Baer theorizes that the camera's flash functioned as a trigger in cataleptic patients, causing a "double petrification", "mechanically causing in the body the same things that happens on the film […] *intense immobility*."[153] This constitutes a collision of temporalities, the reenactment of trauma and the recording of the reenactment, which is closely related to the "doubling of real and simulated"– a common theme in the Sanchezes' work. Certainly, the doubling of the Sanchezes' artistic practice and process (real and simulated) with Karr's testimony based on false memory (also real and not-real) is actualized in this portrait as a meta-meme. It is a layering of narratives and narrations; those produced by Karr, the Colorado state police, the news media, and

[151] This theory was developed by Freud and Roland Barthes respectively, noting that the photograph embalms or preserves the photographed subject. Baer, 53-60.
[152] Boym, 36.
[153] Baer, 39 and 51.

those produced by the Sanchezes. As producers, and therefore authors/narrators of the photograph in question, the Sanchez brothers have indeed become intrinsic to the account of this specific event (as well as the others they seek to recreate).

According to Mieke Bal, there exists a realm where narrative becomes a tool, not a meaning; a mediator, not a solution; a participant, not an outsider."[154] While Bal refers specifically to the meeting of architecture/sculpture and space as mediated by narrative, I believe that narrative can be used as a tool to explore the Sanchezes' portrait of Karr as well as the space represented in the photograph as if it was a sculptural installation. My objective is to approach the architectural space seen within the photograph as well as that experienced by the viewer outside of the photograph by employing Svetlana Boym's notion of temporality, "between imaginary architecture and material experience."[155]

Mediated by an ornate gilt frame we find two spaces, the space in which Karr stands and, defined yet again by *another* frame (that of the actual photograph) defining the space in which the viewer stands. Pulling back into the portrait, the viewer gains access to yet another space, the reflection of the room in which the subject stands. We see that this space is dimly lit save for the source of light streaming down directly upon Karr and in the background a soft light illuminates two curtained windows from the outside. The background is out of focus, however, a white door is visible to the back of the reflected room, it appears closed, proposing that there are in fact two openings to this space: one; the physical space of the viewer, two; the psychological space of John Marc Karr. This is the architecture of the psyche, reaching past the door to the room in which Karr is standing and into the unknown, reaching into the viewer's physical space and into

[154] The author refers specifically to the relationship between sculpture, architecture and narrative. Bal, 103.
[155] Boym, 37.

their psyche into the conscious and subconscious (known/unknown). It is indeed by exploring all of these spaces that the viewer's sense of narrative pronounces itself like a "third-person voice." Here the "narrative of viewing rivals the narrative of memory whose presence one senses yet cannot grasp"[156], this is what solidifies Karr's figure at the center of the Sanchezes' photograph as autonomous. Strikingly, the narrative linking space, architecture and photography (in lieu of sculpture) is the representational narrative of the psyche, subconscious and consciousness symbolized through the varying temporalities of space within the frame. Try as one might, the viewer will never see the entire space within the photograph, while narrative and imagination can take us into the fractured spaces, it will never offer the whole, as that would encompass the architecture of the psyche, filled with memories that we cannot grasp.

For Bal, memories are not narrated; they are integrated into narrative frames "derived from the cultural stock available to us"[157] and so it is fitting that the Sanchez brothers would choose to produce a portrait of Karr. Their subject is a part of the cultural stock from which the Sanchezes' consciously and subconsciously derive inspiration: popular media.[158] In order to understand how elements of testimony, temporality and memory are conveyed by popular media we must also understand that a dominant mode of communication is often used to control a population under the guise of delivering with sincerity and integrity. Brian Massumi theorizes that in the same way that a capitalist structure produces consumer culture and markets products for consumption it also markets fear in order to control the same society. As much a part of commodity culture as

[156] Bal, 110.
[157] Ibid.
[158] While many of their artworks emerge from the headlines of news media, the Sanchezes have noted that in many cases, they cannot remember exactly where or when they were exposed to a story that inspired them. Lehan, 16.

any other product, fear in the form of a specific (known serial killer) or generic (terrorist attack, natural disaster) identity can be linked to the generic identity of a consumer (i.e.: something bad could happen to anyone). This linking of generic and specific creates a relationship between the virtual and the actual.

In this way, the photograph of John Marc Karr emulates the system of virtual and actual (similar to notions of deterrence and determining[159] outlined in the second section of this thesis), the popular media's proposal of events in a very specific manner that inevitably distorts the viewer's perception. This is how testimony, temporality and memory are shaped according to Massumi's notion of a "media-fear-blur"– or power under late capitalism. The media frenzy surrounding the JonBenét Ramsey case offers determining and deterrence, in that tragedy had a face (the victim) but it was also a seemingly gratuitous crime that remains unsolved and open to this day. For those who remember Karr as someone whose media exposure is inextricably linked to testimony, the Sanchezes' portrait provokes a pivoting reception. He is simultaneously the cause of tragedy (deterrence) and not the cause.

Baer asserts that "[f]lash photographs [of cataleptic patients] cannot offer proof but are only testimony: 'before, this–after, that.'"[160] Indeed, in Karr's case, testimony is not the same as proof; however, the perception of his character has been embalmed just as much as his likeness. Revisiting Bal's claim that memories are integrated into narrative frames "derived from the cultural stock available to us"[161], it seems fitting that the

[159] Like a two-sided coin; "*deterrence*, determines nothing but the potential for human disaster [ie: the acceptance that after the event of one disaster another similar disaster is possible, distance between cause and effect]" while *determining* grants specificity to a deterrence by giving disaster a face, applying it to a particular found body- be it victim, victimizer, or both. Massumi, 22.
[160] Baer quoting Didi-Huberman. Baer, 39.
[161] Bal, 110.

reading of Karr's portrait is derived not only from his testimony but from the nature of sensationalism in popular media, compounded by the Sanchezes' artistic re-visitation and institutional endorsement[162] of such creations. Bal's notion of processual narrative resonates loudly here as memories and temporalities clash; old stories are reactivated through the photograph and reflections of Karr's image offer him as a generic monster, or the innocent man with a dubious past, or the perpetual suspect, with an embodied potential for tragedy.

Likened to the game of "near and far" proposed by Didi-Huberman, physical and psychological perceptions of Robleto's *War Pigeon With a Message* and the Sanchez brother's *John Marc Karr* are summarized by fragments that "mime, in however negative fashion, the fragmented world out of which [they] partly sprang and to which [they] partly return."[163]

[162] This photograph was exhibited at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal during the *Quebec Triennial: Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed*, Montreal, Quebec, May 24 to September 7, 2008.
[163] Balfour, 88.

Concluding Remarks

In the context of this thesis, the value of the artworks under consideration is comparable to the value of reliquaries, in that they possess a mythical quality. The viewer is not explicitly asked to believe in the authenticity of these artworks (be it the authenticity of materials or conceptual approach), just as one is not explicitly told to believe in the authenticity of a relic– context is everything. Instead, we are prompted by our emotions, by faith, to believe in the power of an object or fragment, to believe that it possesses an inherent mythical quality. Robleto's and the Sanchezes' artworks serve as reminders of the complexity of mortality, Robleto in particular gestures towards notions of immorality, however, both practices suggest the fragmented nature of memory and the fleeting nature of life. Indeed, the artworks analyzed here lend themselves to greater existential questions as notions of perception, observation and participation have emerged throughout this thesis, each being crucial to experiencing artworks that deal with death or trauma.

Another important consideration throughout this thesis is how themes of reenactment and fetishization underscore the paradoxical notion of holding a traumatic event close in order to distance or free us from it. That being said, it can be speculated that the creation of such artworks serve as examples of negotiating with the chaos of life, as romantic and unsettling as they may appear. Dario Robleto and the Sanchez brothers create artworks that suggest the presence of trauma in the everyday just as they suggest the aspiration for relief, a form catharsis. *Do these artworks actually represent resolution?* No. However, I do believe that Robleto and the Sanchezes have picked up a proverbial torch, previously carried by artists of the past– like John Heartfield and Robert

Rauschenberg– who have tried to make sense of fragmentation through material intervention. Perhaps this torch, once symbolizing the examination of modernity and the excessive production that comes along with it, now signals a possible step towards resolution or an adaptation to what was once a kind of overwhelming experience.

Notions of fragmentation, of commodity and material relation have lent themselves to forms of art making that express a Western obsession with consumption; a consumption that no longer represents progression but overindulgence, a kind of abject excess. I use the term *abject excess* as it combines two defining phenomena: one being the metaphysical quality that Bill Brown described as exceeding the materialization of an object (its aura or totemic value)[164], which we can deem as the "excess" *perceived* within or projected onto an object; on the other hand, excess has come to characterize overabundance and accumulation, that which is unnecessary and indulgent– far from mystical or metaphysical and quite the opposite of spiritual, in this case, excess is the object as *thing*. Inspired by Didi-Huberman's notion of abject-proof[165], that which is *abject* (dejected, hopeless or both) can nevertheless be located in both forms of excess in the conscious (or subconscious) desire to attain resolution through material form. I believe that abject excess not only sums up notions of material perception but it also encompasses the traumatic effects of Massumi's capitalized accident form and the media-affect-fear-blur that follows.

[164] As outlined in Section One of this thesis, Brown examines things as "what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects– their force as […] metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols and totems." Brown, 66.
[165] Outlined in Section Two of this thesis (page 39-40), when extreme or excessive naturalism (i.e.: the use of actual bodies) is employed in reenactment or in a form of staging in order to negotiate an event and propose a revelation of truth. Didi-Huberman, 78-79.

Throughout this thesis, traumatically fragmented objects have served as examples of the divine and of the everyday, of the material present and of a transcendence of the past. Robleto and the Sanchez brothers' artworks illuminate larger social or political narratives and, at times, reveal a desire to recant collective distress through paranormal phenomenology, through magic and through the phantasmagoric, as though these *should* be qualified as aspects of the everyday. Here we find the concept of healing and reconciliation linked to the concept of empathy as object and bodies ultimately intertwine, referencing one another. As objects are inextricably involved in our lives, as they are inevitably extensions and reflections of ourselves, why wouldn't artists reveal the amalgamation of objects and bodies as forms of political, economical and social excess? This amalgamation as excess leads us back again to a reflection of Massumi's notions of ambient fear, generated through broadcast media and other fear formats. Abject excess is conveyed through popular media, artistic and material intervention while also resounding with excessive naturalism, what Didi-Huberman called "scenic verisimilitude".

Excessive naturalism is also exemplified in exhibitions such as Gunther von Hagen's *Body Worlds*, where human bodies are turned into plastinated objects for scientific display. Although *not* an artistic commentary per-se, corpses are often fragmented in their dissection or used like props along side other props (as though occupied with a soccer ball, basketball, skateboard, chess board, etc.), a frozen juxtaposition that simultaneously suggests embalmment as much as it is meant to suggest an in-depth examination of *motion* and *life*. While it is safe to say that exhibitions such as *Body Worlds* intend to educate the viewer in a manner that relies on scientific

detachment, the excessive naturalism of their display is nonetheless emphasized through the insertion of a *commodified object*. This emphasis can easily be found in the work of Dario Robleto and, to a lesser extent, in the Sanchezes' use of the bus as commodity in *Between Life and Death*. The combination of ephemera, object and trauma have influenced the creation of memento mori as artistic genre (or artworks that deal with trauma for that matter) in such a way that objects and bodies have become more or less equivalent. As outlined earlier in this thesis, it is often the object or fragment that reinforces the relationship between the living and the dead; with this in mind, I submit that excessive naturalism will take prominence in future art practices.

Undeniably, the biographies of Dario Robleto and the Sanchezes play significant roles in the lives of the objects that are incorporated into their artworks. However, by broadening the possibility of biography, as that which can be accumulated in an object, we can shift towards a discussion of the artworks as "communal bodies". In this way, the artworks allow us to locate or *imagine locating* those who have shaped the biographies of the objects in question. Thus, the artist is no longer central but one among many to have entered into the life of the object. There is a link to be made between the objects as *things-in-motion* and *emotions*[166] evoked in viewing the artworks, the connection is empathy, empathy for the lives of those whose intersections with objects come to be represented through the materiality of the everyday– objects that in turn represent an accumulation of trauma or mourning. The evocation of empathy is in itself a virtue of the artworks that bridge viewer, object/fragment, and those whose biographies compose the material's mystical patina, its affect. Through this understanding, Robleto's and the Sanchezes' artworks incite the desire for reconciliation, for healing and resolution, as

[166] Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim is to be credited for suggesting this emphasis.

though one's empathy simultaneously generates an emotional wince, in potential anticipation of the repetition of past traumatic events.

While much has been written about the subject in the realm of photography, there is still a good deal of scholarly work to be done in analyzing trauma and the fragment in relation to contemporary sculpture and installation practices; this thesis has therefore attempted to open up this discussion. Indeed, Robleto and the Sanchezes' artworks, like relics, reveal a capacity to incite elaboration beyond the scope of this modest analysis. The more fragmented the objects the greater their reanimation.

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Figure 1. Dario Robleto, *No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow*, mixed media, 2007,
Men's wedding ring finger bones coated in melted bullet lead from various American wars, men's wedding bands excavated from American battlefields, melted shrapnel, wax-dipped preserved bridal bouquets of roses and white calla lilies from various eras, dried chrysanthemums, male hair flowers braided by a Civil War widow, fragments from a mourning dress, cold cast brass, bronze, zinc, silver, rust, mahogany, glass. 11 x 10 x 9 inches, Collection of Julie and John Thronton, Austin, Texas, image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2. Carlos and Jason Sanchez, installation view of *Between Life and Death* at the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec, 2006, 1978 GMC City Bus, 2 lap tops, 3:28 video loop, sound system, video projector, eyeliner screen, image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 3. Carlos and Jason Sanchez, *The Hurried Child*, Chromogenic color print, 2005, 60 x 75 inches, edition of 5 image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 4. Carlos and Jason Sanchez, *The Misuse of Youth*, Inkjet print, 2007, 60 x 88 inches, edition of 5, image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 5. Dario Robleto*, At War with the Entropy of Nature/Ghosts Don't Always Want to Come Back*, Mixed media: Cassette; Carved bone and bone dust from every bone in the body, trinitite, metal screws, rust, typeset. Audiotape; An original composition of military drum marches, various weapon fire, and soldiers' voices from battlefields of various wars made from E.V.P. recordings (electronic voice phenomena: voices and sounds of the dead or past, detected through magnetic audiotape). 2002, 2 ½ x 3 ¾ x 5/8 inches, Collection of Julie Kinzelman and Christopher Tribble, image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 6. Dario Robleto, *War Pigeon With a Message (Love Survives the Death of Cells),* Mixed media; Pigeon skeleton, WWII-era pigeon I.D. Tag, homemade paper (pulp made from human ribcage bone dust and a Civil War-era letter that a Union soldier's wife wrote to a Confederate General pleading for the release of her P.O.W. husband), WWI bullet, ribbon, rose petals, rust, dirt, rubble from the Berlin Wall. 2002, 8 x 11 x 5 ½ inches, collection of Garret Siegel, Arlington, Vermont, image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 7. Carlos and Jason Sanchez, *John Marc Karr*, Inkjet Print, 2007, 60 x 95 inches, edition of 5, image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 8. Dario Robleto, Installation view of *A Defeated Soldier Wishes to Walk his Daughter Down the Wedding Aisle*, mixed media, 2004, Cast of a hand-carved wooden and iron leg that a wounded Civil War soldier constructed for himself made from melted vinyl records of The Shirelles' "Soldier Boy" and femur bone dust, fitted inside a pair of WWI military cavalry boots made from melted vinyl records Skeeter Davis's "The End of the World," oil can filled with homemade tincture (gun oil, rose oil, bacteria cultured from the grooves of Negro prison songs and prison choir records, wormwood, goldenrod, aloe juice, resurrection plant, Apothecary's rose and bugleweed), brass, rust, dirt from various battlefields, ballistic gelatin, white rose petals, white rice. 21 x 20 x 80 inches, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Tina Petra, Ken Wong, and Gibson Dunn, image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 9. Carlos and Jason Sanchez *Rescue Effort*, Chromogenic color print, 2006, 42 x 74 inches, edition of 5, image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 10. Carlos and Jason Sanchez, image of set production for *Rescue Effort*, 2006, image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 11. Carlos and Jason Sanchez, test shot during production of *Rescue Effort*, 2006, image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 12. Jeff Wall, *Mimic*, Cinematographic photograph, 1982, Transparency in lightbox, 78 x 90 inches, image courtesy of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto.

Figure 13. Dario Robleto, Exhibition view featuring *No One Has a Monopoly Over Sorrow* (right) encased in glass and mounted on wall, photograph courtesy Andy Cross, The Denver Post.

Figure 14. Carlos and Jason Sanchez *Between Life and Death,* 2006, view of holographic projection in crashed bus interior.

Figure 15. Carlos and Jason Sanchez *Between Life and Death,* 2006, view of holographic projection in crashed bus interior.

Figure 16. Picasso, "Still Life with Cane Chair", collage mixed media, 1907, 27 x 35 inches, image courtesy Musée National Picasso Paris.

Figure 17. John Heartfield (1891–1968), *Fathers and Sons,* 1924 gelatin silver print of photomontage, 14.8 x 15.9 inches, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Kunstsammlung, image courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Figure 18. Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, mixed media, 1955, Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 6’ 3 1/4 x 31 1/2 x 8 inches, Gift of Leo Castelli in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr., image courtesy the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 19. Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913, Reproduction of 1913 original, diameter 25.5 inches, mounted on a stool, 23.7 inches high, Private collection, image courtesy MarcelDuchamp.net.

Figure 20. Isa Genzken, *Elefant* (detail), 2006, Wood, plastic tubes, plastic foils, vertical blinds, plastic toys, artificial flowers, fabric, bubble wrap, lacquer, and spray paint, 78 ¾ x 86 ½ x 39 3/8 inches, Collection Marie and Peter Shaw, image courtesy neugerreimschneider, Berlin; Daniel Buchholz, Cologne; David Zwirner, New York.

Figure 21. Dario Robleto, *Our 60's Radicals Forgot to Stay Suspicious*, Mixed media; Cast of homemade paper (pulp made from cotton, military sheet music from American wars, and bone dust from every bone in the body), dehydrated bone calcium, bone charcoal, ground trinitite from Trinity test site, c. 1945, wheat starch, cold cast steel, nickel, zinc, melted bullet lead, rust, shatter-proof Lexan, typeset. 2003-2004, 25 x 21 x 2 inches, Collection of Black Byre, Lose Angeles, California, image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 22. Dario Robleto, *Hippies and a Ouija Board (Everyone Needs to Cling to Something)*, Mixed media; Suitcase: cast and carved dehydrated bone calcium and bone dust from every bone in the body, microcrystalline cellulose, cold cast iron and brass, rust, antique syringe, crushed velvet, leather, thread, water extendable resin, typeset, Ouija board. 2003-2004, 42 in. x 23 in. x
Blanton Museum of Art, Purchase through the generosity of The Brown Foundation, the Michener Acquisitions Fund, and the Blanton Contemporary Circle, 2004.

Figure 23. Cover of *People Weekly* featuring JonBenét Ramsey, Archived March 24, 1997.

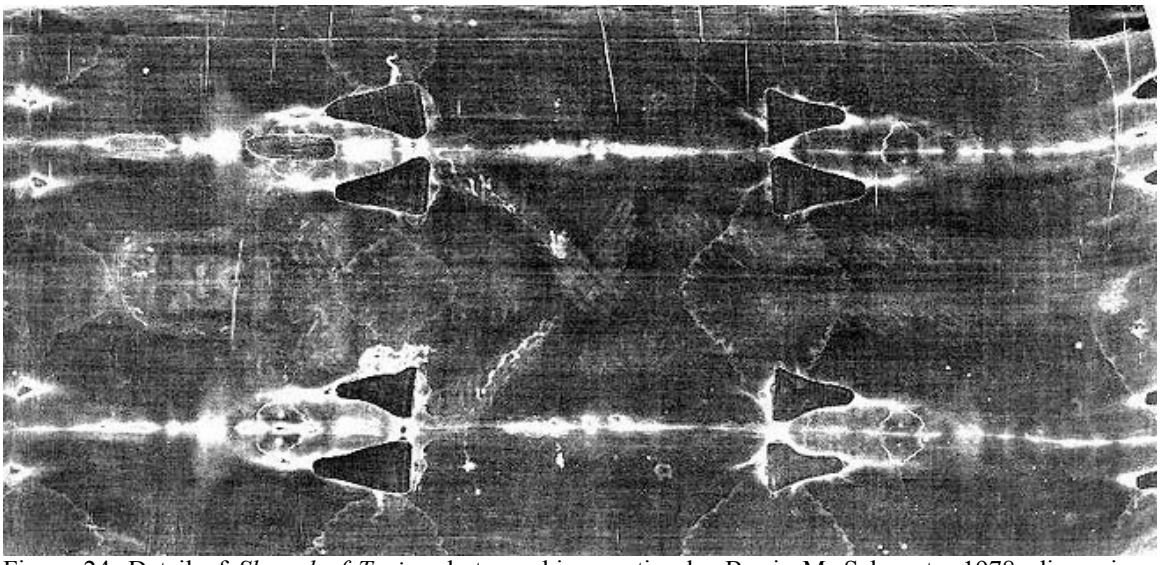

Figure 24. Detail of *Shroud of Turin*, photographic negative by Barrie M. Schwortz, 1978, dimensions unknown, image courtesy Barrie M. Schwortz Collection, Shroud of Turin Education and Research Association, Inc. (STERA, Inc.).

Figure 25. Dario Robleto, *The Southern Diarists Society*, Mixed media; Homemade paper (pulp made from brides' letters to soldiers from various wars, ink retrieved from letters, cotton), colored paper, fabric and thread from soldiers' uniforms from various wars, ribbons, lace, cartes de visite, antique buttons, excavated shrapnel and melted bullet lead from various battlefields. 2006, 45 x 37 x 6 inches, image courtesy Ansen Seale.

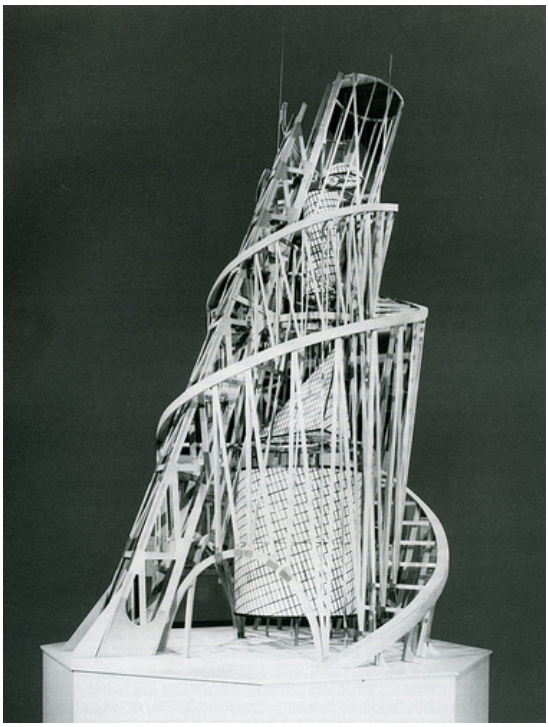

Figure 26. Vladimir Tatlin, Model for the *Monument to the Third International*, 1919-20, (original lost) authorized reproduction by Ulf Linde 1979, Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne, image courtesy Centre Georges Pompidou.

Figure 27. Louise Bourgeois, *Spider*, mixed media, 1997, Steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric, rubber, silver, gold and bone, Private collection, image courtesy Rafael Lobato and Cheim & Read, New York.