Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

Bamiyan Buddhas, Beirut National Museum, Anna Boghiguian, Dario Gamboni, Man Ray, Gustav Metzger, Lee Miller, Michael Petzet, Michael Rakowitz, Hannah Ryggen
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On the Destruction of Art—or Conflict and Art, or Trauma and the Art of Healing /
Über die Zerstörung von Kunst – oder Konflikt und Kunst, oder Trauma und die Kunst des Heilens

With a text by Dario Gamboni in the Postscriptum / Mit einem Text von Dario Gamboni im Postskriptum

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On the Destruction of Art—or Conflict and Art, or Trauma and the Art of Healing

My dear friend,

Quite some time has passed since my last letter, and there are a few urgent matters that I would like to tell you about.

One day, when I was writing the place-name “Kassel” on my smartphone, I made a mistake and the word was automatically corrected by the intelligent digital device to “Kabul.” This made me think of the conflicted relationship between the technologies of communication on the one hand, and intentionality and language on the other. In turn, that made me think about conflicts in general (that is, not just war), and then about the destruction of art that often accompanies conflict as a form of trauma.

This notebook is a collage of fragments precariously held together by a sense that bodies of culture, just like bodies of people and other animate and inanimate elements in the world, survive the knots and circumstances of history sometimes intentionally and sometimes only by chance. It speaks of art objects and taking care of them through time. It speaks of art as a casualty and form of collateral damage but, at the same time, as something that can endure, exemplifying the possibility of survival.

The word “conflict” comes from conflictus, past participle of confergere, which joins cum (“with”) and figere (“to strike”), thus suggesting that violence (being against) and connection (being with) are correlated. Conflict, and by extension trauma, can be looked at from the point of view of inter-subjectivity, or within family ties, the intermediate social nexus, or in society at large, as well as in our multi-species environments, an unbounded world of the animate and the inanimate.

Conflict is a sharp contrast that explodes into violence, either physically or psychologically. In English, the word first appears in the 1400s and indicates the struggle between opposing peoples. In the 1700s—when commercial interests became prevalent with the rise of the bourgeoisie—the expression “conflict of interest” was in use, and by the 1850s—during the romantic, subjectivist century—it had started to be used psychologically. A conflicted person is a divided person, within whom incompatible urges or impulses are hosted. In twentieth-century field theory, for instance, a “conflicted” individual is attracted to two objectives that cannot be simultaneously reached.

In classical psychoanalysis, conflict is an internal struggle between basic impulses, such as hunger or the need for reproduction, and our social and moral prerogatives. It expresses itself through many psychic mechanisms such as removal, sublimation, and transformation (where, for example, the cause of pain is removed and transformed into a neurotic symptom, or a violent and aggressive impulse is transformed into fear of being persecuted). When we experience a state of emotional tension or pain, our impulse is to remove it psychologically. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), written by Freud after World War I, he notes that beyond every libidinal impulse there is a deathly drive to release and thus eliminate tension. In the same text, he also reflects on another theoretical problem. He notes that the soldiers who had come back from the war often relived their traumatic moments, such as the exact moment when a bomb fell near them, in their nightmares, and even when awake. Since this return and repetition of the traumatic event did not accord with the theory that the causes of tension and pain are removed psychically, the question of trauma remained open and unresolved for him.

The relationship between art and conflict follows different paths. An art object can be a terrain of contention where conflict is expressed through its symbolic or real destruction. But it can also be a form of direct activist intervention in a conflict. Or it can be information/
documented/denunciation—a form of alternative news media. Art can be a witness and can express trauma and catharsis on the affective level of an empathetic understanding and elaboration of pain; it is often a form of collective memorialization and mourning for the losses caused by conflict; and—apparently the most disengaged politically of all of the above—art can function as distraction and withdrawal from conflict within the legacy of a therapeutic notion of art. If people, art, and artists are under siege or occupation, it may be that only this last form of “withdrawn activity” is possible. (Yes, this oxymoron is deliberate.) These paths intersect at an infinite number of points. There is conflict on the level of language between a tendency toward aphasia (the absence of speech) and the move toward utterance, between ourselves as animals with semiotic embodied gestural and affective relational expressions and our subjectivity as intellectuals and producers of institutionalized knowledge. It is through the poetic voice that language rubs up against content in speech, where utterance is complicated, either censored from the outside or self-censored by the subject, interrupted by trauma.

“Trauma” in Latin, as well as the Greek τραύμα (tráuma), from which the Latin derives, indicates a perforation, a wound made by a sharp object; it is related to the Indo-European root ter—a “passing through” of an object or a body. It entered into English in the 1600s, and only in the late 1800s did it assume its psychological connotation—a psychic wound caused by an act of violence or an accident, or by any deeply disturbing experience that causes shock, distress, and disruption of one’s life. It is often discussed in relation to psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and literature and film studies. For Roger Luckhurst, author of The Trauma Question (2008), it is “a complex knot that binds together multiple strands of knowledge.”

Modern trauma research, which goes back to the early studies mentioned above, has increased exponentially since the 1970s, when the term “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) was first coined by Bessel A. van der Kolk as a severe anxiety disorder, a sense of a biological assault on the body that interrupts the flow of one’s experience to the degree where one is overwhelmed, cannot cope with the situation, and “shuts down” emotionally, losing the capacity to engage with one’s environment. It is cured in a variety of ways, one of which is encouraging the patient to relive the bodily movements and physical feelings that were experienced during the traumatic events.

But what if instead of the traumatized person, one were to think and see things from the point of view of the apparently inanimate artwork? Instead of exploring how we express trauma through artworks, we might explore how artworks themselves become traumatized, losing their orientation, severed from the experience of their environment (in an exhibition, in a collection, in a museum, in a public place, in the minds of the people who should engage with them). What would the traumatized subject “think” if that subject were an artwork or a cultural artifact? What does an object feel if it is attacked or destroyed or ignored or misunderstood, or even misplaced?

This reminds me of Walter Benjamin’s description of Paul Klee’s Angelus Novus (painted the same year, 1920, as Freud wrote Beyond the Pleasure Principle), which was posthumously published as the ninth of his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in 1955—the year of the first documentation/denunciation—a form of alternative news media. Art can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble—not for the sake of rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.

In a later essay of 1931, “The Destructive Character,” Benjamin writes how the destructive character sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there, too, he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things way he everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force; sometimes by the most refined. Because he sees ways everywhere, he always stands at a crossroads. No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble—not for the sake of rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.

Yet destruction is difficult to recount, and in “The Storyteller” (1936), Benjamin points to a modern crisis in the ability to tell a story, “as if something that seemed unalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences. . . . With the [First] World War,” he writes, “a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent— not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?”

If Freud speaks of the neurotic repetition of trauma, and PTSD speaks of an interrupted experience due to trauma, similar to Benjamin’s observation above, then how can we apply these ideas to thinking from the point of view of the artwork? What do the rubble and the stones at the foot of the empty cavities in the cliff where the Bamiyan Buddhas once stood, prior to their bombing in 2001, see and feel? How do they speak, and how is their speech related to ours?
How does their violated materiality come to matter, and how does the example of their loss and damage help us to react to a sense of the precariousness of life, the loss and damage to a flow of persons projected onto, and projected from, those artworks?

Traumatized artworks appear to be on standby; they are silent, withdrawn from visibility and discourse like the house portrayed in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931), abandoned by humans and waiting in a suspended time for the end of the war and the return of its inhabitants; or like Walid Raad’s miniature “shrunk” retrospective of his own previous works in a model-size, tabletop exhibition space that he has been presenting in performative guided tours since 2008 (*Part I: Chapter 1: Section 139: The Atlas Group [1989–2004]*), withdrawn and “surpassing disaster” as Jalal Toufic has described in related texts. Such works are speechless, numb witnesses of conflict, traumatized subjects unable to tell their stories.

Aside from the Oedipus complex, Freud did not develop many theories around the relationship between conflict existing within the psyche of a single person, and external conflict, as a symptom or product of our interconnected relations. It was Melanie Klein, in her book *Envy and Gratitude* (1957), and later also Jacques Lacan, who looked at conflict in the dyadic mother-child relationship as constituent of subjectivity since birth. While at first, our mother’s body is felt to be the extension of our own, the moment we become aware of the separation between us, we feel loss, depression, and mourning. In turn, this can cause envy, which is an aggressive position toward the power the other has over us—the power to give or withdraw their bodies from us. Or alternatively there can be a sense of gratitude toward the other as a provider. When envy prevails, it is because we do not accept the existence of another person who is deemed a limitation. When gratitude prevails, a relation of creativity, dialogue, and integration is constructed—through our recognition that we do not define our identity alone. For there to be a conflict, both the child and the mother must exist in a state of aggression. The mother is afraid of the aggressive nature of the envious child. If she is not afraid, if she withdraws from conflict, the conflict is defused.

In conflict there is always a web of contradictory elements without a simple solution. Art is a striated space, and it allows one to hover and remain in the realm of ambiguity and contradictions, in the space of opacity. Therefore it is a space where one can exercise the capacity to understand complex and apparently unresolvable conflicts. Art is an exercise in ambivalence as opposed to violence, and also has the potential of inventing ways of life that can be less costly, more ingenious, and less demanding in terms of labor and time, and less self-destructive.

Art can suspend or increase conflict. If the context of the conflict is ignored, if one acts as if there were no conflict (*hós mē*, “as not”), if the artistic act withdraws from conflict, like the mother subtracting herself from the envy/aggression game, and engages with the traumatized art object from the point of view of gratitude, one can enter into a form of worldly alliance.

That is where the sphere of art, which is poised on the edge of the private and of history, becomes a location in which one can experiment with experience on the edge of the anthropocentric, where the rubble lies, and can build an imaginative society where the human is not at the center of our cosmology, but only one element within an accord of all the makers of the world, animate and inanimate, including traumatized people and objects.

Best,
Carolyn

Perhaps we might look at some pictures together, which I have gathered for you.
Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

Über die Zerstörung von Kunst – oder Konflikt und Kunst, oder Trauma und die Kunst des Heilens

Mein lieber Freund,

mein letzter Brief liegt nun schon einige Zeit zurück, und es gibt einige dringliche Angelegenheiten, von denen ich Dir gerne berichten würde.


In der klassischen Psychoanalyse ist der Konflikt ein innerer Kampf zwischen grundlegenden Impulsen, wie Hunger oder Reproduktionstrieb, und unserer gesellschaftlichen und moralischen Verantwortung. Er artikuliert sich in vielfältigen psychischen Mechanismen wie Verdrängung, Sublimierung und Umwandlung (wenn beispielsweise die Ursache eines Schmerzes verdrängt und in ein neurotisches Symptom umgewandelt oder ein gewalttätiger und aggressiver Impuls in die Angst, verfolgt zu werden, umgesetzt wird). In emotionalen Spannungs- oder Schmerzzuständen zielte unser Impuls darauf ab, diese psychisch zu verdrängen. In Jenseits des Lustprinzips (1920), das nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg entstand, bemerkte Freud, dass es jenseits aller Lebensziele auch Todestriebe gebe, um Spannung zu entladen und damit zu eliminieren. Freud reflektierte in diesem Text noch ein weiteres theoretisches
Problem: Er stellte fest, dass Soldaten, die aus dem Krieg zurückgekehrt waren, häufig ein traumatisches Geschehen, etwa den Moment, als neben ihnen eine Bombe fiel, in Albträumen und selbst im Wachzustand auf exakt dieselbe Weise nochmals durchlebten. Da diese Rückkehr und Wiederholung des Traumatischen der Theorie widersprechen, dass die Ursachen von Spannungszuständen und Schmerzen psychisch verdrängt werden, blieb die Frage des Traumas für ihn offen und ungelöst.


Die moderne Traumaforschung, die auf die oben erwähnten früheren Studien zurückgeht, hat seit den 1970er Jahren exponentiell zugenommen, als Bessel A. van der Kolk den Begriff «Posttraumatische Belastungsstörung» (PTBS) prägte, eine schwere Angststörung, das Gefühl eines biologischen Angriffs auf den Körper, der eine Unterbrechung des Erfahrungsstroms verursacht, so dass die Person überwältigt ist, mit der Situation nicht umgehen kann und sich emotional «verschließt», wodurch sie die Fähigkeit verliert, sich mit ihrer Umgebung auseinanderzusetzen. Sie wird auf unterschiedliche Weise behandelt, beispielsweise indem der Patient ermutigt wird, die Körperbewegungen und -gfühle, die während der traumatisierenden Ereignisse erlebt wurden, noch einmal nachzuvollziehen.

Was wäre nun, wenn man dies nicht vom Standpunkt einer oder mehrerer traumatisierter Personen, sondern vom Standpunkt augenscheinlich unbelebter Kunstwerke betrachtete? Was würde das traumatisierte Objekt wahrnehmen oder «denken», wenn dieses Subjekt ein Kunstwerk oder ein kulturelles Artefakt wäre? Es geht mir nicht um eine Untersuchung dessen, wie wir durch unsere Kunstwerke Traumatisierungen zum Ausdruck bringen, sondern wie die Kunstwerke selbst (in einer Ausstellung, einer Sammlung, an einem öffentlichen Ort, in den Gedanken der Menschen, die sich mit ihnen beschäftigen sollten) traumatisiert werden, ihre Orientierung verlieren und von der Erfahrung ihrer Umgebung abgeschnitten werden könnten. Was empfindet ein Objekt, wenn es angegriffen oder zerstört oder ignoriert oder missverstanden oder gar verschleppt wird?


Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablöslich Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. (…) Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist dieser Sturm.1
In einem späteren Essay von 1931, »Der destruktive Charakter«, schreibt Benjamin:


und integrierende Beziehung – indem wir erkennen, dass unsere Identität nicht von uns allein definiert wird. Für die Entstehung eines Konflikts müssen sich sowohl die Mutter als auch das Kind in einem aggressiven Zustand befinden. Die Mutter ängstigt sich vor dem aggressiven Charakter des neidischen Kindes. Wenn sie keine Angst hat, wenn sie sich dem Konflikt entzieht, wird dieser entschärft.

In Konflikten gibt es stets eine Verflechtung widersprüchlicher Elemente ohne eine simple Lösung. Die Kunst ist ein gekerbter Raum, und sie ermöglicht es, im Reich der Mehrdeutigkeit und der Widersprüche, im Raum der Opazität in der Schwebe zu bleiben und zu verharren. Darum ist sie ein Ort, an dem man die Fähigkeit, komplexe und scheinbar unlösbare Konflikte zu verstehen, trainieren kann. Kunst ist eine Übung in Ambivalenz im Gegensatz zur Gewalt und besitzt auch das Potenzial, Lebensweisen zu erfinden, die weniger verlustreich, geistreicher und weniger arbeits- und zeitaufwendig und weniger selbstzerstörerisch sein können.


Das ist der Punkt, an dem der Bereich der Kunst, der am Rand des Privaten und der Geschichte balanciert, zu einem Ort wird, an dem man mit Erfahrungen am Rand des Anthropozentrischen, wo die Trümmer liegen, experimentieren und eine fantasievolle Gesellschaft aufbauen kann, in der das Menschliche nicht im Mittelpunkt unserer Kosmologie steht, sondern nur ein Element im Einklang mit allen belebten und unbelebten Weltenmachern ist, darunter auch traumatisierte Menschen und Objekte.

Beste Grüße,
Carolyn

Vielleicht könnten wir uns gemeinsam einige Bilder ansehen, die ich für Dich zusammengestellt habe.

Sometime before 1932, Man Ray made an ink-on-paper drawing of an *Objet à détruire* / *Object to Be Destroyed*. It was published in André Breton’s *This Quarter* that same year, accompanied by the following text by Man Ray:

```text
Cut out the eye from a photograph of one who has been loved but is seen no more. Attach the eye to the pendulum of a metronome and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well-weighted, try to destroy the whole at a single blow.
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The drawing was exhibited in Alfred Barr’s 1936 exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Presumably in 1923, Man Ray had made the first object version of this work by attaching the photograph of an eye to a metronome. He kept it in his studio while he painted, suggesting that the metronome was a witness to the art-making process, and perhaps what was being destroyed was time itself.

Arturo Schwarz remembers Man Ray telling him how he turned the metronome into the *Object of Destruction*:

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I had a metronome in my place which I set going when I painted—like the pianist sets it going when he starts playing—its ticking noise regulated the frequency and number of my brushstrokes. The faster it went, the faster I painted; and if the metronome stepped then I knew I had painted too long. I was repeating myself, my painting was no good and I would destroy it. A painter needs an audience, so I also clipped the photo of an eye to the metronome’s swinging arm to create the illusion of being watched as I painted. One day I did not accept the metronome’s verdict, the silence was unbearable and since I had called it, with a certain premonition, *Object of destruction*, I smashed it to pieces.¹
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Later, sometime between 1929 and 1932, he changed the original picture of the eye to that of his lover, muse, and fellow Surrealist Lee Miller, whom he had met in 1929. It has been said, both by Man Ray himself and by others, that when Miller left him in 1932, he destroyed the object with a hammer, only to remake it in order to exhibit it at the Galerie Pierre Colle in Paris in 1933 in an exhibition of Surrealist objects under the title *Œil-métronome* (Eye Metronome). In a 1975 interview with Mario Amaya, Lee Miller stated:

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We are in dispute of the very definitive fashion in which my eye was fixed to the metronome of the original *Objet à détruire*; I believe it was named *Objet à détruire* as a means of transforming it, like one of the wax dolls that one forces needles through. Because one moves the eye to make it tic-tac like an alarm, and one must buy a hammer in order to crush it.²
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Later on, Man Ray would continue to carry little cut-out Lee Miller eyes in his jacket pocket, and would occasionally buy a metronome and attach an eye to it, Tony Penrose, Miller’s son, told me when I visited him in 2010.

The 1932 unique replica of the first metronome was destroyed by dada “Jarivistes” led by the poet Jean-Pierre Ronnay when visiting a Dada exhibition in Paris in 1957. Perhaps musing on the fact that it is impossible to destroy memory intentionally, or ready-made art, given the non-unique character of its materials, Man Ray made a replica with Arturo Schwarz editions in 1958 in Milan, under the title *Indestructible Object*, and after a few more replicas made in 1961 (for his gallery Julien Levy), in 1963 (today in the collection of the Israel Museum), and in 1964 (today in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York), he finally activated a new version of the same artwork in 1965 (Editions MAT/Daniel Spoerri), which was conceived in an edition of 100. But the edition was never completed by the artist. In this way, Man Ray created a paradoxical situation in which the artwork was emancipated from its destruction, the limits of time, materiality, and the market. This constitutes one of the first conceptual multiples, freeing art from the ravages of time.

The artwork reappears with other titles at other times— *Lost Object* in 1945, transformed by a printer’s error into *Last Object*. In 1970, Man Ray decided to make a further variation, called *Motif perpétuel*, an edition of forty metronomes, each with a blinking lenticular eye, editioned by the Turin-based gallery Il Fauno until 1974.

Below left is an image of Lee Miller in Adolf Hitler’s bathtub in his Munich apartment on Prinzregentenplatz, taken during the afternoon of April 30, 1945. At the suggestion of David E. Sherman, a photographer for Life magazine, she was traveling through Germany as an embedded photographer with U.S. troops for Vogue magazine, and had spent the morning at Dachau concentration camp near Munich. She stayed in the apartment for several nights with Sherman, perhaps her lover at the time, who also shot this picture. The photograph appears to have been staged by Miller and speaks about the role of art in relation to world events or politics. It is a “traumatized,” silent photograph that suggests the impossibility of speech after what she had seen at Dachau that morning.

The same day the picture was taken, Hitler committed suicide in his Berlin bunker. On a symbolic and also on a bodily level, Miller takes his place, creates a substitution; in part she becomes the victimizer, washing herself of his crimes. It is a “mythic” photograph—as if she were attempting to cleanse humanity of its sins.

Miller was aware of the fact that Hitler was interested in art and had taken painting classes. On the table to the right of the image there is a porcelain figurine in the realist-nationalist neo-classical style of Germany and Italy in the 1930s and early 1940s, designed by Rudolf Kaesbach and produced as an edition by Rosenthal in 1936 with the title Die Ausschauende. Inspired by the Venus de Milo, as well as by Renoir’s La Baigneuse (1870), the figure’s arm is raised. Miller also raises her arm slightly, holding a washcloth. She may also have been thinking of Man Ray’s photograph of Meret Oppenheim, in a similar pose, with black ink or paint staining her uplifted arm, and holding a wheel—a subject trapped in the machine of modernity. If Man Ray’s image was in conversation with Marcel Duchamp’s La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même (1915–23), also known as The Large Glass, then Miller’s photo could also secretly refer to the structure of the Large Glass, with its bipartite universe. The small machine on the table near the sculpture would echo the Broyeuse de chocolat. Hitler is himself portrayed in the upper portion of the photograph, in what looks like a media or press image, as if the balanced world of Duchamp has been turned upside down, and his célibataires had made it into the upper portion. Could this be a feminist accusation against the patriarchal military world that lay behind the image?

The object/device on the table beside the little sculpture is probably a small device for calling servants. However, its shape alludes to that of a camera, and therefore to the device that permits the obscenity of photography’s detached power over life, a feeling akin to survivor syndrome that Miller may have felt in Dachau that morning with her camera. Her dirty boots lie at the foot of the tub and, on the nearby chair, her small watch is placed on top of the clothes she presumably wore to the camp.

Time has stopped. It is a photo of the camps, but indirect, without the literality of body horror.

Lee Miller shot this image of dead bodies beside a train during her visit to Dachau concentration camp on the morning of April 30, 1945.

The image shows what is left of one of the highly colored pastel-on-paper drawings representing a couple embracing, perhaps making love, that Metzger probably made between 1953 and 1957 when he took a studio in Kings Lynn in East Anglia. After drafting his “Auto-destructive Art” manifesto of 1959, he collected all the early drawings he had made since 1945 in a suitcase; he stored them away in 1965, above a garage at the home of a relative in North London, where they were kept until 2010. Most are in a relatively good state of conservation; however, this one in particular was destroyed by humidity and folding, suggesting a loop in time. It also presents a paradox, given the care the artist had put into conserving it, and given his later work based on the repetition of the trauma of destruction as an indirect act of outrage toward a twentieth-century society that appeared at the time—during the Cold War and nuclear-arms race—to be moving toward self-destruction once again. We opened the drawings together, and I took this photograph with my BlackBerry, by permission of the artist.
MANIFESTO

SELF DESTRUCTIVE ART

The manifesto entitled SDA

SDA is primarily a form of public art for technological societies.

SDA paintings and sculptures are constructed using a life-time varying from a few moments to twenty years.

When the disintegrative process is complete, all remains of the works are to be removed from the site and scrapped.

SDA can be created by traditional techniques, but the disintegrating factor is mechanics.

SDA can be machine produced and factory assembled.

In this case the artist's position is comparable to that of the architect or auto-bUILDER.

The artist may collaborate with industrial engineers.

The success of SDA paintings or constructions is a total unity of the forces of nature, method and vision of the disintegrator process.
These three pages, two of them hand-numbered as pages 18 and 19 and the final one unnumbered, were discovered by Chus Martínez in May 2011. I had asked her to look through the Gustav Metzger papers at the Tate archives in London, while I was looking at his drawings at Jayhawk storage. Never transcribed, published, or reprinted as facsimiles before, they are the artist’s notes, dated October 19, 1959, on “Self-destructive Art,” an expression that predates the term “Auto-destructive Art,” eventually chosen as the title of the manifesto to which they led. The manifesto was released as a leaflet dated November 4, 1959, and first distributed on the occasion of Metzger’s Cardboards exhibition at the café at 14 Monmouth Street.

A comparative analysis of these October notes illuminates his decision to use the term “Auto” instead of “Self.” In Greek, αὐτός (autós) means “him-her-it-same”; as a prefix it is used to indicate an event that is caused by one’s own agency, as in the term “automatic” (“that which moves by its own impulse”) and “auto-destructive” (“that which destroys itself”), and it has assumed a mechanical connotation in modernity. “Self” is very similar; it derives from the old Germanic pronoun selbaz, practically a synonym of the Greek autós. But in modern English, “self” developed to include the connotation of a subject having a form of reflexive self-consciousness. This may be the reason why Metzger chose not to keep the prefix “self,” since no reflective consciousness could commit such insane acts as those perpetrated during World War II, or those that seemed to be looming in the late 1950s during the nuclear-arms race. Another interesting point to note is that while the Greek autós is also related to the notion of “same” (“identical to that just mentioned”), the proto-Germanic selbaz comprises the root steis, which means quite the opposite—something “separate” or “apart.” Only a collapse of critical distance, a lack of separateness, could cause auto-destruction, while withdrawal, exodus, retreat from partaking in a contest—an “art strike” as Metzger put it in 1974, calling for artists to stop making works for three years, between 1977 and 1980—could have a generative human and radical political potential for the “self.”

Metzger’s October text develops in many other ways as well. By the time he released the November manifesto two weeks later, he had removed the materials and techniques used in auto-destructive art that were listed in these first notes. The November version also records the paragraphs substantially and makes a few more changes, such as replacing “technological society” with “industrial societies,” and adding the words “natural forces” as possible agents of auto-destructive art. The version of November 4 is as follows:

Auto-destructive art is primarily a form of public art for industrial societies.

Auto-destructive painting, sculpture and construction is a total unity of idea, site, form, colour, method and timing of the disintegrative process.

Auto-destructive art can be created with natural forces, traditional art techniques and technological techniques.

The artist may collaborate with scientists, engineers.

Auto-destructive art can be machine produced and factory assembled.

Auto-destructive paintings, sculptures and constructions have a life time varying from a few moments to twenty years. When the disintegrative process is complete, the work is to be removed from the site and scrapped.

G. Metzger

[handwritten addition] The amplified sound of the auto-destructive process can be an integral part of the total conception.

In 1960, a “second manifesto” appeared, a slightly altered version of the first, in which Metzger decided to re-integrate the list of materials and techniques:

Man in Regent Street is auto-destructive.

Rockets, nuclear weapons, are auto-destructive.

Auto-destructive art.

The drop drop dropping of HH bombs.

Not interested in ruins, (the picturesque).

Auto-destructive art re-enacts the obsession with destruction, the pummeling to which individuals and masses are subjected.

Auto-destructive art demonstrates man’s power to accelerate disintegrative processes of nature and to order them.

Auto-destructive art mirrors the compulsive perfectionism of arms manufacture – polishing to destruction point.

Auto-destructive art is the transformation of technology into public art.

The immense productive capacity, the chaos of capitalism and of Soviet communism, the co-existence of surplus and starvation; the increasing stock-piling of nuclear weapons – more than enough to destroy technological societies; the
disintegrative effect of machinery and of life in vast built-up areas on the person . . .

Auto-destructive art is art which contains within itself an agent which automatically leads to its destruction within a period of time not to exceed twenty years.

Other forms of auto-destructive art involve manual manipulation.

There are forms of auto-destructive art where the artist has a tight control over the nature and timing of the disintegrative process, and there are other forms where the artist's control is slight.


London, March 10, 1960

No. 13630 is an object resulting of the fusion of metal, ivory, glass, and terracotta objects that happened to be next to each other when a fire burned for long hours in one of the Museum storerooms. Nobody could reach this area and certainly not the first floor where the fire was raging. At this stage it is difficult to identify with certainty, from the terracotta and the ivory shards, the objects that burned. It is also quite impossible to determine the shape of the glass that melted and was combined with the other objects.

(From an e-mail sent by Anne-Marie Afeiche, Curator, Beirut National Museum, DGA, August 4, 2011)

No. 28108 is a combination of two bronze figurines (one human and one zoomorphic) from Byblos excavation, dating back to the Middle Bronze Age. Of course, the copper-alloy is very badly damaged, but the figurines are identifiable. There is quite a large bibliography concerning these famous Byblos ex-votos.

(From an e-mail sent by Anne-Marie Afeiche, August 4, 2011)

Michael Petzet has visited Bamiyan often over the past years. To describe that situation, he wrote:

In the endless history of destruction and decay afflicting the historic and artistic testimonies of mankind, the blowing-up by the Taliban of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, central Afghanistan, in March 2001 was a devastating act of iconoclasm, pointing to the various risks and threats with which our cultural heritage is confronted today. Without a thorough investigation of the site, one had at first to assume that after the destruction of these famous monuments, located in the middle of a spectacular cultural landscape, only rubble and dust would remain. Under these circumstances, opinions at a UNESCO seminar in Kabul in May 2002 were split in two directions: preserving what was left of the Buddhas after their destruction, or reconstructing them to their prior state. Additional proposals included a project by the Afghan sculptor Amanullah Haidersad.
to reconstruct one of the Buddhas in traditional techniques, i.e. hewn from the rock and coated with clay plaster, and one by the Japanese media artist Hiro Yamagata to create an enormous laser project with thirteen Buddhas.

The first mission of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) to Bamiyan in July 2002 focused for the time being solely on practical technical solutions to secure the existing remains. We were surprised to discover that in the niches that had housed the statues there was not just sand and indistinguishable debris, but the entire material of which the statues consisted before they were blown up: about 1,600 cubic meters of debris with rock fragments of the Western Buddha (height 55 meters) and 400 cubic meters of debris with fragments of the Eastern Buddha (height 38 meters), which had to be salvaged layer by layer and assigned to the various parts of the original statues.

Almost ten years after that first ICOMOS mission we have made considerable progress thanks to funds provided by the German Foreign Office and by UNESCO. In cooperation with colleagues from KWTH Aachen, TU Munich and Afghan colleagues, all identifiable small and large fragments weighing up to 60 tons have been recovered and stored in specially erected shelters to protect them against weathering. This enormous archive of fragments can be classified according to their original position through various procedures such as geological and geomagnetic prospection of the rock structure. After the removal of the debris, the giant feet of the Western Buddha are once again visible and the niche of the Eastern Buddha, with many original remains in situ, has been stabilized. This niche and the associated caves and wall paintings can be presented to future visitors, together with an exhibition of fragments in the partly reconstructed nich and Afghan colleagues, all identifiable small and large fragments weighing up to 60 tons have been recovered and stored in specially erected shelters to protect them against weathering. This enormous archive of fragments can be classified according to their original position through various procedures such as geological and geomagnetic prospection of the rock structure. After the removal of the debris, the giant feet of the Western Buddha are once again visible and the niche of the Eastern Buddha, with many original remains in situ, has been stabilized. This niche and the associated caves and wall paintings can be presented to future visitors, together with an exhibition of fragments in the partly reconstructed niches.

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On July 22, 2011, at 15:25:22 (CEST), a bomb detonated in Regjeringskvartalet, downtown Oslo, and damaged the tapestry I had seen the year before. Inger Raknes Pedersen, a conservator at Museumssenteret in Hordaland responsible for the preservation/repair of the tapestry, stated the following in a short telephone call:

The tapestry was mildly damaged after the attack July 22, 2011. Apart from water damage, dust, splinters, and a huge amount of glass dust covering the tapestry, the main damage is a tear in the bottom left corner of the tapestry. The water has now been absorbed and all particles are manually being removed with tweezers. The most urgent repairs are executed and we are now staring the process of returning the tapestry to its original state.

I wonder what “original” means and what the tapestry felt at the time the bomb exploded.

VIII.

This notebook is running out of pages and is coming to an end. It started with a note on silence, suggested by Benjamin’s notes on “The Storyteller.” It ends with notes on silence according to the Cairo artist Anna Boghiguian.

The following three images are untitled drawings by Boghiguian, all made during her travels in 2001 using colored crayon and pencil on 40 × 30 cm sheets of 200-gram Sennelier paper. As is usual for her, she combines drawing and writing into a seamless story. Each is followed by a transcription of the words that she wrote down in the drawings, as a form of both drawing and writing, a form of listening to silence that becomes a form of seeing.

In the words that I collected and put away in my thoughts were systems of reasoning or Dialects—thinking—Methods, relation → times
Words described who I am or who I transmit
To be through the sound system I build images of cities unique to that particular city. That I dream of . . . or remember in the depth of my mind the sounds of a city, the song of a crow makes India to me, yet the crow is everywhere in each Country I visit, but the way the crows sing in India is particular to that peninsula—

From Ear to ear to eye . . . From ear to ear to ‘They’ ear-dropped into all my Thoughts, my words and actions
They wove a story that made Out of me a Criminal, but
What was The Crime Political
Social or Religious, or all Together
a Fabrication I threatened
Something, Somewhere to the established Systems of politics That power that controls the system or everybody’s life
I couldn’t throw Stones to the existing System, as I cannot say I do not have My own Sins—But neither can I relate To the woven Story of my existence
That I can’t recognize as I or i.

The word created my mind. Images Took meaning
Stories was/is woven Through The words
that I have the passage from the outer ear to the Land of my inner Ear to formulate a given description of a set of action lived experience
Through hearing I created or met The world by where my dreams and created Those descriptions of the world within my mind. I stored the information necessary in my luggage—The
The Words I heard expressed/explained to me what the world is all about, and when I created Stories in my mind I used Those Vocabulary that was given to me
In a world of Silence there is no
W ords, no singing of Birds, nor Traffic
Nois, it is the Silence of lack of
Hearing different from Silence, The
Silence of Infinity . . . . . .
Dario Gamboni

World Heritage: Shield or Target?

The concept of “world heritage” is a relatively modern one. As French author and statesman André Malraux wrote in 1957, “for a long time the worlds of art were as mutually exclusive as were humanity’s different religions.” He noted that “each civilization had its own holy places,” which now, however, were “being discovered as those of the whole of humanity.” Malraux observed that for the first time, “dying fetishes have taken on a significance they never had before, in the world of the images with which human creativity has defied the passage of time, a world which has at last conquered time.”

Although this concept of world heritage is one of the twentieth century, it builds upon older concepts, such as the “historic monument” and “cultural property.” It shares with them the idea that certain objects possess a symbolic value that transcends their use and that a collective interest in their preservation takes precedence over owners’ rights to use or abuse their property.

The concepts of monuments and heritage originated in cultic objects and practices crucial to the identity and continuity of collective entities such as family, dynasty, city, state, and, most important, nation. The idea of a historic monument implied an awareness of a break with the past and the need for a rational re-appropriation (or a retrospective construction) of tradition. Its artistic dimension further required the autonomy of aesthetic values that had appeared in the Renaissance. The crisis of the French Revolution—which made a historical and artistic interpretation of the material legacy of the ancien régime indispensable to its survival—accelerated this evolution. The term “vandalism,” with its reference to the devastation of the Roman Empire by “barbarians,” condemned attacks against this legacy by excluding their perpetrators from the civilized community.

The art theorist Quatremère de Quincy, protesting against the looting of Italy by the French armies, expressed an early formulation of the idea of world heritage in 1796: “the riches of the sciences and the arts are such only because they belong to the universe as a whole; as long as they are public and well maintained, the country with which they are lodged is irrelevant: it is only the guardian of my museum.” In this prophetic view, ownership became stewardship, and rights gave way to duties. However, the “universe” it evoked was still limited to “civilized Europe,” and protection ap-

Postscriptum

Finally, I would like you to read the following text, perhaps in a few days’ time, since its tone differs substantially from the preceding sections of this notebook. I hope you will not forget. It is a republication, by permission of the author, of Dario Gamboni’s article “World Heritage: Shield or Target?,” published in 2001 after the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (b. 1957) is Artistic Director of dOCUMENTA (13).
plied essentially to Rome, heir to Greece and the “capital city of the Republic of the arts.”

In the nineteenth century, the development of capitalism, industry, and technology, together with the belief in progress and modernization, led to an enormous increase in the destruction of material culture. Confronted with this destruction, English critic John Ruskin asked from his generation that it become a steward instead of an owner. In reference to historic buildings, he wrote in 1849: “We have no right whatever to touch them. They are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us.” Ruskin regarded restoration as the worst form of destruction because it meant “a destruction accompanied with false descriptions of the thing destroyed.”

But the construction of a national heritage—as a decisive contribution to the definition, promotion, and celebration of national identity—implied a considerable degree of intervention and was often predicated upon the manipulation or obliteration of earlier, competing cultural, regional, or transnational entities. On a larger scale, colonialism, ethnology, and the development of museums encouraged the destruction, the selective preservation, and the appropriation and concentration in the West of relics from the material culture of the whole world.

A growing consensus about the importance of cultural heritage and the necessity to protect it was finally prompted by the two world wars, unprecedented in their inclusion of civil targets and means of destruction. Cultural heritage thus became included in the attempts to achieve an international management of conflicts and to limit the damages and sufferings inflicted by wars.

**International Protections**

Measures for the protection of cultural heritage were adopted in the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, but they had little effect during the First World War. Nonetheless, by then, “vandalism” had become an argument of propaganda, and the parties in conflict accused each other of intentional destructions. Other attempts at heritage protection followed, such as the Pact of Washington in 1935 (also known as the Roerich Pact) and the creation of a commission by the League of Nations in 1938.

The most important breakthrough came after the Second World War, in the context of the new international treaties and institutions, with the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954 (the Hague Convention). Its text made the idea of world heritage a central argument for the adoption of international rules. It stated clearly that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the whole world.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, UNESCO adopted several recommendations and two conventions dealing with the protection of cultural property. The 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property reflected the expansion of the notion of cultural heritage and the construction of its national versions in developing countries. The 1968 Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works and the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage were in response to the impact of the worldwide expansion of technological progress and modernization in a time of peace. The introduction to the 1972 Convention declared that while the responsibility for ensuring conservation of the elements of world heritage situated in its territory lies primarily with each state, “it is the duty of the international community as a whole to cooperate in ensuring the conservation of a heritage which is of universal character.” A World Heritage Committee was made responsible for the establishment, updating, and publication of a World Heritage List and a World Heritage in Danger List. The protection of heritage benefited increasingly from private institutions and nongovernmental organizations such as the World Monuments Fund, created in 1965, and, more recently, the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), formed in 1996 by the International Council on Archives, the International Council of Museums, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the International Federation of Library Associations.

The creation of the ICBS followed the war in the former Yugoslavia, which was an internal rather than an international conflict and which was rooted in competing claims about identity, turning the elimination of cultural property into a major weapon instead of a by-product of military operations. The conflict prompted a critical assessment of the Hague Convention and resulted in the Second Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

At the conference on the Second Protocol in 1999, the director-general of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, noted that the recent assaults on the heritage were “part of the attack on the people themselves” and left an enduring trauma “because of the much greater difficulty of people’s rehabilitation when everything dear and known to them has been swept away.” The Second Protocol extends application of the
The Worldwide Conversion

This worldwide conversion is fraught with difficulties, resistance, and supported by the globalization of Western values and references, and Françoise Choay, the “ecumenical expansion of heritage practices” is or “cult” of heritage point out. For French architectural historian that is also distinctly Western in origin, as critics of the “religion”
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The Impact of World Heritage

What has been the impact of the concept of world heritage on attacks against art and cultural property? To answer that question would require a long inquiry, complicated by the fact that for all its protective intent, the notion and its expansion are part of a process of modernization and globalization that has considerable destructive implications. In a sense, “world heritage” is an ambulance that follows an army and tries to precede it.

The summary account given above can suggest that all would be well if the international measures adopted for the protection of cultural heritage could be implemented. But although things would certainly be better, there are more fundamental problems. One of them is the ambivalent character of listing. Claiming for certain objects a special attention and protection has the simultaneous and sometimes more real effect of abandoning other objects to environmental, economic, or political hazards. This character can be minimized, but it is inevitable to the extent that preservation and destruction are two sides of the same coin. “Heritage” results from a continuous process of interpretation and selection that attributes to certain objects (rather than to others) resources that postpone their degradation. Quatremère de Quincy and Ruskin tended to advocate a sort of passive preservation. However, we have come to recognize that designating something as heritage is a critical act, leaving no object untransformed.

This reality gives a great weight to the author and to the criteria of this selection, particularly when there exist competing authorities about, and definitions of, a given heritage. In this sense, the concept of world heritage suffers from the fact that it amplifies an idea originating in the West and tends to require an attitude toward material culture that is also distinctly Western in origin, as critics of the “religion” or “cult” of heritage point out. For French architectural historian Françoise Choay, the “ecumenical expansion of heritage practices” is supported by the globalization of Western values and references, and this worldwide conversion is fraught with difficulties, resistance, and misunderstandings. And while “cultural consumption”—for instance, by tourists—is often crucial in providing the incentive and the means for preservation, it can result in the physical and intellectual destruction of the cultural objects being “consumed.”

David Lowenthal—author of The Past Is a Foreign Country and Possessed by the Past—also ties the particular focus of preservation to the global diffusion of nationalism and capitalism, which makes “material relics precious symbols of power and icons of identity.” While recognizing the benefits of material preservation, he emphasizes its costs, contradictions, and problems—for instance, the segregation of the past and the stress engendered by multiple claimants, since “a material relic can be in only one place at a time.” He also reproaches it with excluding other ways of coming to terms with a legacy (more common in other cultures), such as preserving fragments, representations, or processes rather than products. Even if they are meant metaphorically, the terms cultural property and cultural heritage connote physicality and ownership, suggesting that collective memory is supported primarily by tangible goods. Professor Frank Matero notes that “for some traditional societies, the concepts and practices of conservation are often viewed as antithetical to the role of continuing traditions.” But that tradition is dynamic, he adds, and even when conservation professionals intervene as cultural “outsiders,” they can shape conservation treatments and policies in a “culturally appropriate” way—that is, in accordance with the beliefs and values of the relevant groups. However, what if there are conflicting beliefs and values, or if those beliefs require material elimination rather than preservation?

The Buddhas of Bamiyan

Major steps in the protection of cultural heritage often follow the acknowledgment of failures. A more recent case in point could be the Taliban’s decision to eliminate all pre-Islamic artifacts in Afghanistan—and especially their destruction of the two fifth-century giant statues of Buddha located in Bamiyan. These acts were condemned by international institutions as an assault on world heritage—the General Assembly of the United Nations termed them an “irreparable loss for all mankind”—but they could in no way be prevented. As a result, UNESCO has established a special policy to rescue as much Afghan heritage as possible, supporting nonprofit organizations working to take cultural objects into safe custody.

As with many earlier iconoclastic actions, there are diverse and often contradictory indications about the Taliban’s motivations and
purposes. Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar’s edict of February 26, 2001, stated that the statues “should be destroyed so that they are not worshipped now or in the future.” This is consistent with the general ban on images, including family photographs, imposed upon the Afghan population by the Taliban rulers, whose ultraconservative culture is influenced by their Pashtun ethnic origin and their adherence to the Wahhabist strain of Sunni Islam. The official religious motive must therefore possess some relevance; according to one source, a visit to the Bamiyan statues by Italian Buddhists triggered the decision, and it is more generally noted that Taliban clerics had objected to pre-Islamic figures on display in the briefly reopened National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul.

However, no one could ignore the fact that the Buddhas at Bamiyan had lost their religious function over a millennium ago, and that other Islamic authorities and countries unequivocally protested against their elimination. Moreover, the Taliban’s own official position previously had been to protect Afghanistan’s cultural heritage; in July 1999, Mullah Omar had issued a decree inspired by international conventions.

Other factors must therefore have been involved—some regarding military operations and internal politics, others regarding international relationships. The Bamiyan province houses the Afghan Shiite Muslim minority, and in the months and weeks preceding the edict, it had changed hands several times between the Taliban and the opposition. The cave surrounding the largest statue of Buddha had even been used by one of the Taliban’s opponents to store ammunition, until the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan’s Cultural Heritage (SPACH), an organization created in 1994, had obtained the removal of this hazard.

There are several international factors to consider. According to some commentators, the order to destroy idols served to cover up the widespread smuggling of valuable pre-Islamic artifacts out of the country, especially toward Pakistan—smuggling that could only be carried out with the connivance of Taliban authorities. But many signs relate the decision to destroy the Buddhas of Bamiyan to the Taliban’s frustration at failing to achieve international recognition and to the economic sanctions imposed upon the country by the United Nations Security Council because of its links to Islamic terrorism. Mullah Omar’s edict was issued while a SPACH delegation was in the country and during an international conference organized by UNESCO in Paris that was focused on the fate of cultural heritage in Central Asia.

The Taliban’s failure to obtain recognition by the United Nations—which, by the way, made it impossible to nominate the Bamiyan Buddhas for the World Heritage List—weakened the position of the moderates among them, who had obtained the reopening of the National Museum in Kabul. It may also have turned the concern for the statues expressed by the international community, whose ostracism the Taliban resented, to the monuments’ disadvantage. Returning or reducing the Buddhas to their original religious function (against all evidence to the contrary)—and exercising upon them the most radical right of the owner—amounted to a provocative affirmation of sovereignty, not only upon the territory and the people but upon the values.

If this interpretation is correct, the Taliban refused to take part in the world cult evoked by Malraux, instead subjecting it to the primacy of their understanding of Islam. This meant defining the Buddhas as idols but attacking them as works of art and icons of cultural heritage. A Taliban envoy later declared that the decision had been made “in a reaction of rage after a foreign delegation offered money to preserve the ancient works at a time when a million Afghans faced starvation.” The Taliban’s disingenuous expressions of surprise at the outrage caused by their act—Mullah Omar was quoted as making the typically iconoclastic statement “We’re only breaking stones”—can also be understood as a criticism of Western materialism. This criticism is typical of a movement that, in the words of one commentator, “draws vitality from the perceived evils of foreign cultural imperialism.”

Like the emblem developed in the twentieth century to signal monuments worthy of special protection, the notion of world heritage, intended as a shield, may instead act as a target. This is hardly surprising. The history of iconoclasm shows abundantly that the act of symbolizing—tying certain objects to certain values—sometimes has contradictory effects. It recommends certain objects to the care of those who share these values but attracts the aggression of those who reject them or who feel rejected by them. In 1915, Hungarian historian Julius von Végh wrote that “even our age of rational thinking and middle-class self-control” did not prevent art from being endangered, “all the more as it stands today more than ever at the center of interest of all civilized people, a world of its own, a guarantee for the modern spirit and thus, at the same time, its Achilles heel, the point at which the cultivated may most easily be touched.”

Within Western societies today, attacks against works of art often spring from situations or feelings of exclusion and from the absence of access to legitimate means of expression. On the world level, the real success of the idea of world heritage will depend upon the degree to which the universalism born of European Enlightenment comes to be perceived as truly universal, rather than appearing as a new form of colonialism or the cultural face of economic globalization. This cannot be provided by Malraux’s “imaginary museum”—a “world of images” unified and devoid of conflicts. Instead, what we will need is a forum in which several worlds, with differing visions of heritage or legacy, can come into contact, communicate, and negotiate those differences.
Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

On the Destruction of Art—or Conflict and Art, or Trauma and the Art of Healing / Über die Zerstörung von Kunst – oder Konflikt und Kunst, oder Trauma und die Kunst des Heilens