



# **Gustav Metzger**

## **History History**



Generali Foundation





Africa Centre, 1966, London, venue of DIAS

## Kristine Stiles The Story of the Destruction in Art Symposium and the “DIAS Affect”<sup>1</sup>

The *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS) took place in London throughout September 1966. Gustav Metzger conceived and organized DIAS with the assistance of Irish poet, writer, and filmmaker John J. Sharkey, and an Honorary Committee of international artists, critics, and key figures of the British counterculture.<sup>2</sup> Around 100 artists and poets, representing some eighteen countries, contributed to DIAS. They sent photographs, original works of art, documentation, and theoretical texts to be exhibited, or they personally traveled to London to create destruction in art actions and exhibitions. Although they represented diverse nationalities, ethnicities, and genders, DIAS artists shared a commitment to the use of destruction as a mode of resistance to psychological, social, and political violence; they engaged destruction as a principle of organic life; and they addressed the processes and structures implicit in the interrelationship and interconnection between destruction and creation. While exploring destruction *in* art, they did not practice destruction *of* art, understanding destructivity as a causative principle consistent with, yet another dimension of, creativity and part of the cycle of making. They also utilized destruction as a seditious measure to critique conventional aesthetic forms, to expand the material practices and political languages of art and poetry, and to demonstrate the social necessity for artists' direct engagement in culture as a political force for change. It is noteworthy that many DIAS artists pioneered Happenings, Fluxus, Wiener Aktionismus, and Concrete Poetry, and that these media dominated at DIAS. DIAS represented the most concentrated influx of international experimental artists into London since the 1930s, laying global foundations for socially engaged art that had its first international expression there.

Affirming art and artists as a cultural force able to shape social and political life, DIAS artists stressed the centrality of art in producing new forms of knowledge, perception, and insight *in* life. This is *not* to say that they transformed art *into* life. Rather, destruction in art introduced

destructive processes into artistic vocabulary in order to collapse means, subject matter, and affect into a unified expression for the purpose of commenting directly on destruction in life. Their techniques included demolition and wreckage through such means as explosions, burning, tearing, axing, and cutting; the implementation of destruction by natural elements such as wind, fire, rain, water, and gravity; the destruction of diachronic narrative through sound, visual presentation, and performance; and the destruction of psychosexual conventions and social constraints through the creation of emotionally intense and conceptually challenging psychophysical situations. Embracing the seduction of destruction, DIAS artists understood the ancient interdependence of idolatry, iconoclasm, and sensuality, and they simultaneously perpetuated *and* shattered the triangulation of representation, desire, and dread.

DIAS reflected the mature theories and practices of men and women, many of whom were born in the 1920s and early 1930s and who had lived through World War II. They showed remarkable support for younger artists participating in DIAS, augmenting a dynamic cross-fertilization of generations. Thinking about the impact of DIAS as a cultural event, Jean-Jacques Lebel observed: "DIAS was only a symptom of this great subconscious upsurge of new effect and new desire. ... It was important for us to meet other people like ourselves, to realize that there was the beginning of a movement. ... It was a collective [that] affected our work as we went back to where we lived."<sup>3</sup>

A symptom it was. A movement it was not. DIAS was a unique convocation for which the term "symposium" is a misnomer. Rather, DIAS primarily offered a platform for diverse actions and exhibitions that occurred in dozens of London locations. The symposium itself, situated in the middle of the month (9 to 11 September), was a three-day forum for artists to present reasoned consideration of the theme of destruction, and moderate the impact of destruction art on a public unfamiliar with such practices. As symptom and sign, DIAS represented a multinational, artist-initiated, artist-controlled, and artist-defined event with a dedicated social aim. The enormous vitality and volatility of DIAS reflects its lack of academic, commercial, and/or institutional character. DIAS was not an historical "ism": although the international media and art journals widely covered it, and an effort was made to continue its momentum in future convocations, DIAS artists never exhibited again as a group.

DIAS did, however, present a resolute public face and share a turbulent camaraderie. *Life* magazine acknowledged this apparent unity when it featured a photograph of some participants in a special 17 February, 1967 issue on "HAPPENINGS: The worldwide underground of the arts creates The Other Culture." Such media and public recognition acknowledged DIAS as the representation of the counterculture analyzed by Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counterculture*, 1969. Decidedly non-conformist, engaged in but critical of mainstream society, the counterculture dispatched dissident social movements and lifestyles.<sup>4</sup> DIAS artists had already introduced new cultural formations in the watershed action art and poetry they practiced, and they moved in circles that included both the underground (associated with direct political activism) and various 1960s



subcultures (associated primarily with style).<sup>5</sup> Undeniably, the invitation that Metzger sent to the Dutch anarchist PROVO (from *provocateur*) aligned DIAS with radical European groups and events. One week after they led violent riots for sweeping social change in Amsterdam, two PROVO members, Irene Donner van der Weetering and Bernhard de Vries, came to London for a pre-DIAS press conference in late June. De Vries, a 25-year-old poet and artist, had been elected in the spring of 1966 to a seat in the Amsterdam Municipal government, after leading an equally fierce protest against (and throwing the first smoke bomb at) the wedding of Dutch Princess Beatrix to Claus von Amsberg, a German who had served in both the Hitler Youth and the Wehrmacht during World War II. The PROVO were directly connected with such anarchist groups as the Situationist International and Sigma, the latter founded by the radical writer Alexander Trocchi. Trocchi occupied an office in the basement of Indica Bookstore, which also housed the British underground newspaper, *International Times* (IT), then preparing its first issue for October 1966. Jim Haynes, an editor for IT, and (Barry) Miles, who co-founded Indica also in 1966, both served on the DIAS Honorary Committee.<sup>6</sup> These are just a few of the individuals, events, and places associated with DIAS and the dense network interconnecting the counterculture and underground of the period.

Nevertheless, for all their evident public unanimity, privately the artists were egocentric, contentious, and competitive. They were also primarily imposing, assertive, powerful men, who sought attention for their work and believed that it would change art and society. This is one reason that the connections forged in London virtually disappeared when artists returned home. In fact, most DIAS participants failed to respond to Metzger's and Sharkey's call for assistance when they were brought up on charges of having "unlawfully caused to be shown a lewd and an indecent exhibition" at DIAS. This charge came after police showed up after a presentation of Hermann Nitsch's *Orgies Mysteries Theater* (OMT) when two journalists (suspected of being government informants) notified authorities.<sup>7</sup> Ten months later in July of 1967, Metzger and Sharkey stood trial by jury for three days at London's Old Bailey, awaiting a possible six-months prison sentence.<sup>8</sup> DIAS was full of such contradiction. For despite his sophisticated handling of the media, despite his refusal to sponsor the killing of animals, despite his strong efforts to moderate destruction actions for safety, Metzger also invited provocation, celebrated the association of DIAS with anarchists, fed the media with salacious accounts of blood, nudity, and destruction, all the while fully aware of the probability of government surveillance. Indeed, Metzger is the central figure here. For while he conscientiously formed an Honorary Committee and gained the tireless assistance of Sharkey, Metzger was the "Secretary" of DIAS, the modest title he chose for himself and behind which he orchestrated DIAS.

Nominally, then, DIAS might best be considered an organizing structure, fleetingly embodied. It faded into invisibility, disappearing as a principle of its production, sharing the ephemeral nature of the destruction objects, performances, and site-specific installations it spawned and invited. In addition, the international unrest that erupted two years later, in 1968,

eclipsed DIAS, even though DIAS was part of the foundation for that tumultuous year. In what follows, I discuss selected DIAS events in order to convey its flamboyant character and challenging, controversial, and committed purpose before turning to its recuperation in art history and the changed climate for its reception. First and foremost, DIAS was the particular art historical contribution of Gustav Metzger. As the architect of DIAS, Metzger's theories of *Auto-Destructive* and *Auto-Creative Art* informed DIAS at every level. His aesthetic praxis and his prescient focus on destruction required deliberation on the causes and circumstances of the most pressing issue facing humanity then (and still today). His attention to destruction and his success at drawing out an international body of artists concerned with the same issue—a rally that not only identified and reinforced these artistic practices but summoned new work on the subject of destruction in art and society—set DIAS dramatically apart from other international convocations of artists, such as the German ZERO (1958 to 1961), Lebel's Festivals of Free Expression (1964 to 1967), and Fluxus Festivals (1962 to the present). But while I identify DIAS as Metzger's most decisive work of art, he himself did not exhibit at DIAS and only actively participated in the symposium, not wanting to risk a conflict between his roles as organizer and artist. The "DIAS affect" that I theorize in the conclusion of this essay extends beyond Metzger to the interconnected, interdisciplinary web of artists who participated in DIAS. As I shall show, the DIAS affect survives into the present, igniting aesthetic ideas, cultural practices, and social changes with some of the most strident, socially engaged, and politically astute art of this and the last century. Moreover, and following Hayden White's critique of history, it is through affect that the meanings of the events called "history" may best be understood in relation to the elasticity of time past, present, and future.

### I. The *Destruction in Art Symposium*

Standing behind a massive desk, Metzger opened the official DIAS press conference at 11:00 a.m. on 31 August 1966 in a room at St. Bride Institute. It was crowded with the Press, which "seemed receptive and interested."<sup>9</sup> He read the roster of participating artists, making it absolutely clear that destruction was an international phenomenon, and then invited everyone to move upstairs. Once there, artist Raphael Montañez Ortiz (known at DIAS as Ralph), a 6'5" dark-skinned Puerto-Rican American, approached a man sitting in a chair reading a newspaper. Looming over the unsuspecting reader, Ortiz said: "You're in my chair." "How can this be your chair?" the man responded. "It's a club chair." "No, it's my chair; I own it," said Ortiz. Turning to the club manager, Ortiz asked, "Will you inform this man that this is my chair?" Once Ortiz's ownership had been confirmed (he had surreptitiously purchased the chair the day before the press conference), the bewildered patron left the chair and Ortiz flew at it: "I picked up the chair and threw it across the



room. Everybody in the place stopped what they were doing and ... I leapt on top of it, kicking it and ripping it. Photographers were taking photographs and people were taking notes. I am tearing it and jumping on it and wrestling with it all over the ground and doing everything by hand. I pulled the springs out. Then I stood a few seconds away from it and went back and ripped and pulled at it putting the final finishing touches to the piece."<sup>10</sup> Metzger considered Ortiz's event "a great success" and recalled, "It took quite some time, perhaps ten minutes; he was slow with a rather majestic sort of motion."<sup>11</sup>

The London press reacted quite differently. A reporter wrote: "Today I had the misfortune to be introduced to sick art ... high-falutin', organised vandalism."<sup>12</sup> Then he wondered, "Or am I a complete square?" The following day, newspaper headlines heightened the DIAS scandal, exclaiming: "Chicken-Killer Says Ban Won't Deter Him,"<sup>13</sup> and "YOU CAN'T KILL A CHICKEN IN THE NAME OF ART."<sup>14</sup> Such histrionics purposefully insinuated that Ortiz planned to "splatter chicken blood on the people who watched."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, following a ceremonial custom that included his mixed Yaqui Indian ancestry, Ortiz did ritualistically kill and dissect a chicken and read its entrails on 4 September, but without DIAS sponsorship. Granada Television, one of the largest independent television networks in Britain, covered the event. When asked about acting with such aggressive self-interest, Ortiz responded: "I sort of felt that I was going to an art Olympics. I was going to do my thing and win the gold ... I was paying a lot of attention to the ideas that I had been working with. I was not going to be careful."<sup>16</sup> In this serious and simultaneously humorous comment on his feelings and intentions, Ortiz spoke for most of the macho participants at DIAS.

Further newspaper commentaries show that one event built upon the next in intensity. A *Guardian* reporter, for example, announced that the American "master of the happening," Al Hansen, planned events on Carnaby Street (center of stylish mod and hippie culture), a visit to a slaughterhouse, and a search for a World War II bomb crater.<sup>17</sup> This same reporter went on to describe "the man who once stuck his head in a Xerox machine is making a film of destruction in everyday life," referring to English sound and visual poet Bob Cobbing; and she called English artist John Latham a "home grown" artist who wanted to burn a *SKOOB Tower* (BOOKS spelled backwards) in the "Inner Temple gardens [site of British legal institutions] ... to expose the way the scientific establishment controls our belief systems." Latham would, indeed, burn a *SKOOB Tower* ignited with Irish whiskey in front of the British museum on 23 September. This event, while associated with DIAS in the public mind, was not sponsored by DIAS and ended when the fire brigade arrived.

A day before the symposium began, Canadian artist Robin Page performed *KROW I* (WORK spelled backwards) in the basement of the international counterculture bookstore, Better Books, which also hosted a press conference on DIAS and a makeshift exhibition of DIAS artists' documents that caused so much dissention among the artists that Belgian artist Jean Toche



Robin Page, KROW I, 1966, Better Books, London, performance



refused to participate further in DIAS. Austrian artist Otto Mühl found the exhibition "disorganized and very bad," and wrote home: "Vostell wants to make another one with us ... We're going to see that we do our events fast and then scram. ... As far as I can tell from the photos I've seen, we in Vienna are not weaker 'destruction people,' but stronger."<sup>18</sup>

A *Daily Mirror* account of Page's event restores some of the raw authenticity of Better Books and DIAS events: "Mr. Robin Page, who has threatened to start an art form that involves stamping frogs to death, gave a demonstration of his ideas yesterday. Wearing a silver suit, silver-painted helmet and rubber knee-boots, he bored and pickaxed through the concrete floor of Better Books. ... Chips of concrete flew at the audience. After half an hour Page struck water. Mr. [Bob] Cobbing, the manager, then said: 'This must stop!' Page ... downed his shovel, sat in the hole, and drank a bottle of beer. He said: 'I feel very good. I have no more doubts about anything. It is a beautiful hole. If somebody wants to buy it, the price would be 125 pounds. It's a major work, but I'm open to offers.' Two girls in mini-skirts then paraded with placards protesting against the possible killing of chickens. Page was unrepentant."<sup>19</sup> Quoting Page's clearly facetious comments, the journalist claimed that the artist planned to "put frogs on a board on which questions were written about Destruction in Art; if the frogs gave the wrong answers, they would be stamped to death."

For his part, Metzger's view of the hole was luminous: "Absolutely magnificent. Everything was right, even the place, which was a bit of a shambles, a bit dank, too dark. Bits of our exhibition were kind of flaking off the walls. It was electric, a bit dangerous. Then he stood there and said, 'A Hole is a Hole.' There was a wholeness to it."<sup>20</sup> Rather than emphasize the object status of art, Page exhibited its processes. Accenting action as a mode of production, he worked to mine, delve, excavate, and provide insight *into* the cycle of making that may result in new understanding. His KROW I was clear, brief, and to the point, subtle yet simple, full of humor and the joy of play at work. The whole hole of Page's KROW I derived from the Zen thingness and nothingness of a hole, the nothingness of its wholeness. In this sense, KROW I might also be said to have described the meaning and function of Art and, therefore, offered something to crow about. A 17 year-old girl, Elsa MacKay, one of the mini-skirted protestors, disagreed: "Soppy sort of hole it looks to me."<sup>21</sup>

Thus far I have introduced the texture of DIAS events, the complexity of the artists' social status, their exquisite humor and the wisdom and intensity of their work. I have tried to convey the irony and spectacle caused by the media and the public fascination with, and furor over, DIAS. I would now like to turn to a brief recitation of the symposium program in order to consider the breadth of the topics it covered.

In his opening comments to the symposium, Metzger stated: "In the context of the possible wipe-out of civilization, the study of aggression in man, and the psychological, biological

and economic drives to war are possibly the most urgent work facing man." DIAS, he continued was intended "to isolate the element of destruction in new art forms, and to discover any links with destruction in society."<sup>22</sup> Among the topics Metzger listed for discussion included: "ART: Architecture, film, Happenings, language, music, plastic arts, theatre. SOCIETY: Atmospheric pollution, creative vandalism, destruction in protest, planned obsolescence, popular media, urban sprawl/overcrowding, war. SCIENCE: Biology, economics, medicine, physics, psychology, sociology, space research."<sup>23</sup>

Over the next three days of the symposium, many texts sent to DIAS were read. These began with the New York Museum of Modern Art's broadside for Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York*, 1960, which included excerpts written by Alfred Barr, Peter Selz, Dore Ashton, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Marcel Duchamp.<sup>24</sup> A letter from the Situationist International was read that announced the death of *Auto-Destructive Art*. George Maciunas wrote to say that Fluxus was not about destruction, but opportunistically included his own tract *U.S. Surpasses All Genocide Records*, 1966, possibly written expressly for DIAS. Papers and manifestos by Marta Minujín (Argentina), Bernard Aubertin (France), and Milan Knížák (Czechoslovakia) were read, as well as works by French poets Jocelyn de Noblet, Pierre Garnier, Paul Armand Gette, and Julien Blaine. German artist Werner Schreib read excerpts from the German scholar Peter Gorsen's *Sexualität im Spiegel der Modernen Kunst* (1963), as well as a paper on his own *Pyrogravure* paintings, made with fire, smoke, and explosives. Perhaps most astonishing to Metzger was the material sent by the Argentinian artist Kenneth Kemble about the *Arte Destructivo* group he founded in Buenos Aires in 1961. Kemble sent texts, photographs, and a cassette tape of "Ideas for Destruction Applied to Music and Poetry" that included 28 compositions in which readings by Picasso, Goethe, Aldous Huxley, Aristotle, and others had been superimposed with poetry, sound-texts, and noise to "change linear meaning by semantic explosion and implosion, spelling, syllabic indifference, and disintegration of vocalized sound."<sup>25</sup>

One panel during the symposium was devoted entirely to the Viennese artists in attendance: Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, Hermann Nitsch, Kurt Kren, and the then 19 year-old Peter Weibel. Anticipating contemporary installation art, Weibel lectured on the Viennese concept of "room painting" and how its environmental effect united artist and public in art's "social function as communication." Weibel also spoke about Kren's films, suggesting their power to terrify and emancipate spectators. Nitsch read from his own writings and emphatically insisted that he was *not* a political artist. However, he "agreed with DIAS" because, "[i]ntensity protests automatically. In my heart any political thinking should die. ... We have enough to fight when we struggle for a deep life and persist in that in our work without ideology. The vivacity of life realizes itself there, like a plant that grows well."<sup>26</sup>



Brus later highlighted this larger purpose: "Neither destruction nor violence have ever been the theme of my actions. I considered them as an expansion of Art ... react[ing] consciously or unconsciously to these phenomena. Art always relies on hope, even if its expression is sometimes as negative as can be."<sup>27</sup> Then, explicitly breaking the rule against performing during the symposium, Mühl and Brus both did so. Brus's action particularly impressed DIAS artists with its dramatic concentrated violence. Brus silently stood at the lecture table and blew up a large brown paper bag. Holding the end tightly to prevent his breath from escaping, Brus laid the bag on the table and suddenly brought his head crashing down, exploding the bag and smashing his head. Commenting on the "hot air" of talk at the symposium, Brus also seemed to suggest that Nam June Paik had not risked his body as a medium in 1962 when he had performed *One for Violin (Solo)*, raising a violin over his head and smashing it on a table.

No longer isolated at Europe's periphery, the Viennese found themselves in a context of radicalism that emboldened them. They were able to attend DIAS under the officious moniker "Institut für direkte Kunst," a parody of bureaucratic institutions invented by Mühl and Weibel for the purpose of fooling the Austrian state into funding the artists' trip to London. Their ruse succeeded. Only Rudolf Schwarzkogler remained behind. Seen for the first time outside of Vienna, their unprecedented art catalyzed DIAS with its radical form and powerful social commentary. DIAS was crucial to the Viennese, as Weibel explained: "It sounds banal but London was like heaven. ... It was so open. Brus wrote a postcard to his wife: 'Soon we will become millionaires.' It was the first time we had a big audience. People were applauding. It was a great success."<sup>28</sup> "When back in Vienna," Brus added, "I had the feeling to have been thrown in a cesspool."<sup>29</sup>

DIAS enabled the Viennese to understand that their work belonged to a larger international context replete with other artists dedicated to using destruction as a means to critique society. Mühl's sardonic humor tempered the serious symposium discussions, making his grim dismemberment of traditional culture even more ferocious. While they created additional performances after the symposium,<sup>30</sup> the films Kren screened had an immediate impact at DIAS.<sup>31</sup> British film critic Raymond Durnat explained: "Kurt Kren's interventionist film records of the [Viennese] happenings disrupt their chronological and dramatic continuity by quickfire intercutting, ... concentrate on detail, allow no image to linger or impact to fade, let no progression or gestalt distract the spectator from their succession of libidinal promptings and joltings, [and his] mathematical schemes for the cutting ensure that Kren, in altering the happenings' structures, does not substitute his own."<sup>32</sup>

On the last day of the symposium, German artist Wolf Vostell discussed the differences between Happenings and Fluxus. As the participant who was most critical of DIAS, Vostell later admitted that the strength of DIAS resided in its theme, the "highly developed strategies" of DIAS artists, and he confessed: "Fluxus is a form of provocation, but DIAS was content *and* provocation."<sup>33</sup>

Welsh artist Ivor Davies read a *Destructivism Manifesto* written expressly for DIAS. Ortiz commented that, "It is only as a result of our psychological evolution that we have been able to remove ourselves in any sense from the cycle of helplessness inherent in nature and the natural destructive cycle." To which Page responded (in a general discussion on the subject "To Kill or not to Kill" that followed) that the inevitability of the human condition suggests that, "man is no longer a harmless animal without choice." This situation prompted Page's ironic suggestion to smash frogs unable to answer questions about destruction in art. Finally, the last panel of the symposium included Yoko Ono, Anthony Cox (American filmmaker and Ono's partner at that time), Pro-Diaz (Brazilian working in Paris with explosives on paintings), Barbara Gladstone (21-year-old American dancer trained by Martha Graham), Graham Stevens (recent graduate of architectural school), and Dick Wilcocks (young British poet).

Very few women actively participated in DIAS: only Ono, Gladstone, composer Anna Lockwood, and singer and composer Susan Cahn. Metzger had attempted to bring Carolee Schneemann, but she was unable to find funding. Ono's participation was key for Metzger, as her work related destruction to interpersonal, often intimate, human relations. Her quiet, self-contained, meditative approach to the very concept of destruction had a counterbalancing force for the heady machismo of male participants. Ono explained at the symposium that she did not understand the concept of destruction *if* it meant that Japanese monks who burned their temples to prevent them from deteriorating were destructive. "People have to take off their pants before they fight," she continued, "such disrobing is a form of destruction." "Happenings," she believed, had become "establishment," and she considered her work to be only "a rehearsal and not an ultimate state of mind." Her personal presence radiated in many DIAS performances including the famous *Cut Piece* that followed the symposium. Indeed, DIAS reserved two entire evenings at the Africa Centre for Ono to perform on 28 and 29 September. "We charged a lot of money for this," Metzger remembered, "Because we thought there would be a lot of interest and we needed the money. I don't think we paid Yoko, but maybe we gave her 30 percent or something. She was desperate. She needed money. It was expensive [to put on her show]. Nitsch was, too."<sup>34</sup>

The hours of discussion at DIAS had been the fruit of years of preparatory research by artists who honed their various theoretical points of view in an attempt to make their aesthetic and philosophical positions consistent with their critique of historical conditions. However contradictory and convoluted their ideas, and crude and unfiltered their art appeared to some, and however uncommon and strange, repulsive and frightening their expression was to others, DIAS artists recognized the need for a fully developed praxis and they were earnest in their labor. Nevertheless, some found DIAS vulgar and overstated. Others perceived the artists' interest in theory too sober. Bruce Conner, for example, refused to participate: "I did not think of any good reason to participate in the creation of a new art game of chatter and self-importance and counting of angels on their



pinheads.”<sup>35</sup> Other artists like Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, Claes Oldenburg, and George Brecht, considered DIAS too extreme.<sup>36</sup>

When Metzger and Sharkey wrote to Dick Higgins asking for suggestions for artists to invite from New York, he responded that “many of the New York big names” could not be considered potential contributors, adding: “Warhol ... may be destructive but I think he doesn’t know it.”<sup>37</sup> Higgins was wrong in at least one “big name,” because Ad Reinhardt sent a beautiful hand-written text entitled *Program for Program-Painting*, which Metzger reprinted on the cover of the *DIAS Preliminary Report*, the program of DIAS events. Despite his reservations, Higgins supported DIAS: “Things certainly must be roaring for the DIAS. It’s all the talk here [New York]. You did well to involve Al Hansen. He’s calling a press conference, and he’s already preaching up such a storm. Six or seven people have already telephoned me asking if I know any details. Al’s even talking about coming to London himself. If he can. I hope someone can be found with a spare cot, because, compared to him, any church mouse is a billionaire.”<sup>38</sup> Once in London, Hansen presented himself as a lunatic fireman, wearing a fire helmet, for example, to perform in Nitsch’s OMT action. He also set off chaotic explosions on an abandoned motor scooter chassis on the London Free School Playground, a key site for DIAS activities and events.<sup>39</sup> The quintessential existential jester in the court of DIAS, Hansen’s very presence warned of the folly of self-importance.

Many more historical performances took place during DIAS, not the least of which was the grand finale on 30 September, featuring many events at the Mercury Theatre. Among those who participated was English artist Barry Flanagan, then an art student. Flanagan was fresh from chewing up a copy of Clement Greenberg’s famous formalist treatise *Art and Culture*, 1961, during a party he helped Latham organize one month before DIAS (but after several pre-DIAS press conferences had already set the stage for new forms of destruction). Latham permanently lost all teaching positions in England for his indigestible indiscretion, but the infamous *Still and Chew/Art and Culture*, 1966–1967, eventually found its way into the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In any case, for the last night of DIAS events, Flanagan set up an ephemeral sand sculpture in the main aisle of the theater, situating his miniature earthwork so that the audience and DIAS participants would scuff through it, erasing and scattering its presence. English artist Mark Boyle also participated in the last evening with *Projections*, a slide-projection event in which the photographs of DIAS artists and their works that Boyle had taken throughout the month were permitted to remain in the projector long enough to scorch and disappear, leaving the theater with the stench of burned cellulose. Ortiz called *Projections* a “voodoo slaughter,” presumably of DIAS itself.

The cataclysmic increase in world destructive potential since 1945, is inextricably linked with the most disturbing tendencies in modern art, and the proliferation of programmes of research into aggression and destruction

Program for Program - Painting

1. THE RE-DESTRUCTION OF THE VERTICAL STRIKE AND HORIZONTAL BAND IN ART.
2. THE RE-DISSOLUTION OF LINE AND EDGE, COLOR AND CONTRAST IN ART.
3. THE RE-OBLITERATION OF TEXTURE AND BRUSHWORK IN ART.
4. THE RE-ABROGATION OF ASYMMETRY.
5. THE RE-ANNIHILATION OF THE SCULPTURAL FORM.
6. THE RE-DEMOLITION OF SHAPE, FORM, AND FUNCTION.
7. THE RE-NEGATION OF STYLIZATION.
8. THE RE-NULLIFICATION OF SUBJECT.
9. THE RE-EXTERMINATION OF NEO-EXPRESSIONISM.
10. THE RE-DEVASTATION OF MEANING.

Ad Reinhardt, 1966, New York

Composition in art.  
and smear in art.  
and sign in art.  
spontaneity in art.  
a reaction in art.  
alism and neo-pop in art.  
ity and rusticity in art.

## THE GUARDIAN

London

Friday September 9, 1966

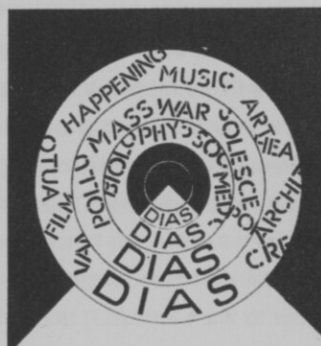
### Art that is ripe for destruction

The Destruction-in-Art boys are among us and we shall ignore them, as they put it, only at our peril. They are from 10 countries and have assembled in London for a three-day symposium starting today. They will exhibit photographs of men sitting in the dripping blood of eviscerated animals, which is said to be art; they have bashed a hole in the basement floor of a London bookshop and struck water, which is said to be art; they are bickering over whose works shall be exhibited, and with them this also is said to be an art. Some of them would like to stamp on frogs or crucify a lamb. They have smashed up a piano, though Laurel and Hardy used to do it better.

Now, why shouldn't an artist affront us to make us see what he wants us to see? If he shows us men sitting under a bleeding sheep it

may only be to remind us that we usually eat the sheep without thinking that it died, which is fair enough. And the destroyers have at least a case when they argue, as they seem to argue, that men are violent and that this violence may be diverted: better that canvases should be ripped, or chickens decapitated, than that a single man should be hurt. But pictures of women bundled up in transparent sacks, or of men smeared with blood and muck, whatever the artistic purpose, are more likely to degrade than to exalt. Violence makes violence.

The destroyers-in-art include writers who obliterate words, burn books, and cut odd words out of dictionaries and paste them up haywire. They tear books apart and shuffle the pages so that the narrative now reads surprisingly (which is art). Words are displaced and lines transposed in a new and meaningful way. Some newspapers, it seems, especially in their hurried first editions, have long possessed a natural aptitude for the new and the meaningful. That's art. Or is it? More often it is error. Just as destruction-in-art is mainly perverse, ugly, and anti-social.



## II. The Reception of DIAS

By 1979, the year that I began my research on DIAS, it had been forgotten. Moreover, many of its participants firmly believed that they, and by extension DIAS, had "failed" because they had not changed society.<sup>40</sup> Metzger remembered few details in 1982 and together we reconstructed his memory based on my previous three years of interviews and research. Ortiz had never discussed either DIAS or his notorious destruction-actions with his wife of seven years, even though he meticulously maintained his DIAS archive in their small New Jersey apartment.<sup>41</sup> These experiences reflect the general situation in the early 1980s for DIAS participants. Today, by contrast, an entirely different scholarly and intellectual climate exists. Many of the artists have been accorded their rightful place in art history, and even highly controversial Wiener Aktionismus is now accepted. Information on the counterculture that 25 years ago could only be obtained through artist interviews and artists' archives has become the celebrated *bête noire* of Cultural Studies, itself founded in the intervening years; and information about "the 1960s," once scattered in libraries with rare collections, limited edition journals, and underground newspapers, may be traced readily on the Internet.

Despite these developments, most scholars have entirely overlooked the fact that while academics aligned with Deconstruction deconstructed Enlightenment constructs and humanist epistemologies in the 1970s and 1980s, artists had already confronted the material, psychophysical, social, and political dimension of destructive experiences since the late 1950s. Summoning destruction to mitigate the commercialization and fetishization of form that accompanied the loss of connection to social meaning in contemporary art of the period, DIAS artists examined and exposed contradictions in social and political practices. In this sense, DIAS artists wielded destruction *against* destruction as a means to deconstruct cultural assumptions about artistic creation and contributed to the conceptual and social context that reinforced the emergence in the late 1960s of the philosophical movement of Deconstruction that followed the publication of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* in 1967. This decisive text appeared one year after DIAS and nearly a decade after many of its artists and poets, such as Henri Chopin, Latham, Lebel, Nitsch, Ortiz, Vostell, and Metzger, had begun to use destruction to analyze culture, religion, philosophy, society, politics, and the media in their art.

The last twenty years have also witnessed a significant development in the understanding and reception of the concept of destruction in art and society. For example, it may be hard to believe in 2005 that violence, as a category of investigation, still remained largely absent from philosophical dictionaries in 1982, as psychologist and Holocaust survivor Bruno Bettelheim remarked then.<sup>42</sup> The term destruction, let alone the arcane category "destruction in art," did not appear in the 1985 third edition of Raymond Williams' influential *Keywords*, a sociological study of



how key words shape and alter cultural and political understanding of new social practices.<sup>43</sup> By the 1990s, however, destruction, violence, and their correlates (trauma and abjection) had garnered newfound attention. Metzger's work on destruction began to receive renewed consideration, followed by interviews and publications in the late 1990s, and capped by a BBC special in 2004. This history of reception is meaningful because it belongs to what I theorize as the DIAS affect, namely the generation of mental states that lead to social and cultural changes. To emphasize affect here is to consciously shift focus from the traditional notion of factual historical data and art historical "influence" (based on adaptation of visual style) in order to attend to the tangible and intangible transference of ideas and feelings through society by emotions and actions that may result in entirely different visual and behavioral forms of cultural address, but that carry the genealogy of their prototype.

To make this point more strongly, it is important to reiterate that my research in the late 1970s on DIAS began in an art historical situation lacking "key words" to guide its interpretation and in dialogue with artists who felt that they had failed. Add to this the fact that many influential critics of the period (and into the present) privileged Minimalism as the "advanced" art of the mid-1960s. This made access to underground radical art more difficult, and they wrote *as if* Happening, Fluxus, and Wiener Aktionismus had not preceded Minimalism, *as if* DIAS had never existed, and *as if* they could effectively expunge such experimental modes from the histories of art. A consideration of the function of affect, to which I shall presently turn, I hope will assist in the reconsideration of how different spheres of awareness contribute to the repercussion of ideas well beyond formalist concepts of stylistic influence. In this way, the nuance of cultural transmission may be better explored, deliberated on, and advanced as affinities occur in layered temporal, situational, and parallel, but visually different, places and practices in a wide variety of cultural, social, and scientific modes of production.

In this regard, little could contrast more starkly with Minimal Art's pristine appearance and exhibition venues in the mid-1960s than the sites and objects of DIAS. Yet such divergent environments reflect the values and aims of different avant-gardes of exactly the same period, which some champions of Minimalism have failed to grasp. Neither have they understood the paradox that DIAS artists identified: by the late 1950s, the need to change the very function of objects in both capitalist and communist cultures required unraveling the vaunted value of individual works of art by disembodiment of base matter as a means to reveal destruction in society. DIAS artists found a material process by which to deconstruct the sensuality of objective forms and strip away the seductive amnesia and traumatic forgetting embodied in formal aesthetics to confront the psychological and social necessities of contemporary life. Minimal Art and some of its apologists have neither answered to, nor accounted for, such necessities. Although Conceptual Art achieved the most concrete and systematic disassembly of conventional art institutions, DIAS was its rude

herald. Blowing up and burning down conventional forms of representation, dismantling language, paring the lumpy body from the skeleton “to brew a body and soul extract”—as Brus insisted—DIAS echoed the historical denunciation of the humanist project already engaged by Lautréamont, Nietzsche, Jarry, Dada, Artaud, Surrealism, and Bataille.<sup>44</sup> The problem was, of course, that the very means of destruction distracted from its social aims even though the content of destruction in art directly connected to and commented on Adorno’s belief that “writing poetry [and making art] after Auschwitz is barbaric.”

### III. Conclusion, the “DIAS affect”

Picture a cluttered stretch of open land in London about two city blocks long with only a few trees. The site had never been completely cleared of the rubble left from German bombs during World War II. The intervening years added the burden of urban junk: broken furniture and scraps of metal, glass, paper, and car parts. A section of brick wall at the perimeter of this *terrain vague* provided a makeshift surface for public announcements, including the following notice, painted like graffiti: “YES. LONDON FREE SCHOOL PLAY GROUND. PLEASE HELP US TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN BY GIVING AN HOUR ANY EVENING OR SUNDAY TO CLEAN.” This chaotic place was the London Free School Playground where artists assembled to practice destruction in art.

Now visualize an elegant hall, dating from 1776, with high ceilings and a surrounding balcony supported by delicate iron columns with ornate brackets. Mounted on the walls are photographs of Brus’s *Selbstbemalung*, Nitsch’s *Orgien Mysterien Theater*, and Mühl’s *Material-aktionen*. There are texts exhibited by Robert Filliou (France), Mathias Goeritz (Mexico), and Diter Rot (Germany), many of which had been brought to DIAS by the German Fluxus and Happening collector and archivist, Hanns Sohm.<sup>45</sup> In a corner of the room lie the remains of a wooden piano and upholstered armchair destroyed by Ortiz, with strings, keys, raffia, and springs spilling onto the floor. A panel of DIAS speakers sits at a table before the audience. This building, which still stands on King Street in London’s Covent Garden, is the Africa Centre, founded in 1961 by President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Laurean Cardinal Rugambwa, an Archbishop of Tanzania. The Africa Centre officially opened in 1964 as a platform for the discussion of African liberation movements and other gatherings of cultural and political merit.

These two places epitomized the local atmosphere in which DIAS unfolded. Metzger was quite content with the scale and presence of the Africa Centre but would have preferred a less forlorn site than the war-torn urban playground, the only place available where explosions and the use of fire could take place. Co-founded by Michael X, a Trinidadian emigrant and founder of the militant Black Power movement in Britain, the London Free School Playground also sat on

Notting Hill, which had witnessed massive race riots in late summer of 1958 when a virulent white backlash broke out against the thousands of West Indian immigrants who had come to England in the 1950s and settled in the district. Unprecedented at the time in England, this racial violence led to the passing of the first Race Relations Act in 1965 and to the establishment of an Afro-Caribbean multicultural festival on Notting Hill in 1964 that has become internationally famous. As Notting Hill symbolized Britain's Civil Rights movement, the Africa Centre represented the end of the British Empire and colonization.

Before Notting Hill became the site of massive gentrification and Hollywood films, along with the Free School Playground it inspired Pink Floyd's famous punk rock song, "Another Brick in the Wall," 1979. The band's anti-establishment lyrics stood in marked opposition to war, and for resistance to mindless institutional bureaucracy, avoidance of numbing educational inflexibility, and defiance of vapid, uninspired mainstream and academic cultures. In their aggressive dress, acid-colored Mohawk hair, and reckless, chaotic conduct, the punk subculture succeeded in circulating the issues raised by DIAS, whose affect haunted Punk in Britain and beyond.

Indeed, Metzger's use of destruction to launch a critique of totalitarianism and capitalism was taken up by many artists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, although they knew nothing of Metzger's work. I am thinking especially of the San Francisco group Survival Research Laboratories (SRL), founded in 1978, and Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), founded in the former Yugoslavia in 1980 (an umbrella organization that also incorporates such groups as Laibach and Irwin, themselves associated with Slavoj Žižek's theories). Shades of Metzger's concepts assume a different shape in the voices of NSK. For example, in a 1965 lecture at the London Architectural Association, Metzger observed: "*Auto-destructive Art* is a comprehensive theory for action in the field of the plastic arts in the post-second world war period. The action is not limited to theory of art and the production of art works; it includes social action. *Auto-Destructive Art* is committed to a left-wing revolutionary position in politics, and struggles against future wars."<sup>46</sup> In a 2004 video, NSK remarked: "All art is subject to political manipulation except that which speaks the language of the same manipulations; every new order presupposes the existence of disorder and is already affected with an inherent virus of future disorder."<sup>47</sup> While NSK appears to leach from its public persona the ambitious commitment explicit in Metzger's words, the same driving social aims remain implicit in their concepts. At the same time, NSK's aesthetic strategy consists in what some members of the Slovene School of Psychoanalysis theorize as over-identification with the symptom such as fascist costumes and flirtation with the visual codes of totalitarianism. These would seem to undermine Metzger's experience and work, even though the group has clearly inherited the otherwise substantive imperative to critique the social and political structures of oppression unleashed by the DIAS affect.



SRL is closer to Metzger and DIAS in its robotic displays of explosive mayhem and destruction, parodying military practices and especially recalling Ivor Davies's outlandish destruction installation at an actual Army Drill Hall in Edinburgh where he held a DIAS press conference on 1 September 1966. During the event, Davies fired objects that were wired to a switch box and dressed an anatomic model in clothes packed with color-filled balloons that symbolized body fluids, its male "genitalia" a long metal pipe injected with a clear milky substance. In 1982, Mark Pauline and SRL would "manufacture maniac machines with personalities ... [and] dynamite detonations spurting blood, rockets on cables, dead animal-robot mutations, mechanical flipping men, huge blowers, giant paintings of public figures being mercilessly mocked and tormented, [creating] the general atmosphere of a rusty carnival in hell exuding sweat, fire, and poisonous fumes."<sup>48</sup> Despite these similarities, the difference in cultural reception between DIAS and SRL is stunning: in 1966, Davies was able to convince an unsuspecting military, having no concept that his "presentation" might be associated with art, to lend its facilities for such a display; by the early 1980s SRL would carry out its events late at night as surreptitious guerrillas in parking lots, under freeway overpasses, and other unauthorized public sites. By the 1990s, a group like the Spanish La Fura Dels Baus, which also belong to the DIAS affect, would attract hundreds to large-scale public festivals of destruction actions.

Affect accumulates value over time and cannot be measured in terms of labor or consumption. Art operates through affect to permeate cultural ideas, often imperceptibly. John Latham has long theorized such effects as the long-term "time base" of art.<sup>49</sup> Yet, while scholarship on the role of affect increasingly appears in the sciences and literature and while affect plays a central but uncharted role in art, it has been neglected by Art History. Charles Altieri's important study of the aesthetics of affect, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 2003, attempts to remedy this situation and provides an introduction to the meaning of affect that is useful for my discussion of DIAS. In particular, Altieri argues that the affect of the arts brings out "an aesthetic dimension ... in all areas of our lives, [and] takes many forms, some of which do not involve conceptual formulations of any kind, and [includes] many modes of expressive activity ... not available when we think in terms of beliefs."<sup>50</sup> Continuing, Altieri writes: "Affect refer[s] to the entire range of states that are bounded on one side by pure sensations and on the other by thoughts that have no visible or tangible impact on our bodies. ... Affects are immediate modes of sensual responsiveness to the world characterized by an accompanying imaginative dimension."<sup>51</sup> Affects are to be found in feelings or "elemental ... states characterized by an imaginative engagement in the immediate processes of sensation"; moods that variously alter one's sense of subjectivity making it "diffuse"; passions "within which we project significant stakes for the identity"; and emotions.<sup>52</sup> All of these states are pertinent to the transmission of affect, but I am particularly concerned with the translation of emotions, "which contribute to the construction of attitudes that typically establish a particular cause and so situate the agent within a narrative and generate some kind of action or identification."<sup>53</sup>

I became interested in the issue of affect when I first began to follow the movement of Metzger's ideas through and across culture. One example is remarkable. In the early 1960s, Metzger began to lecture on his theories of *Auto-Destructive/Auto-Creative Art*. In 1962, artist-educator Roy Ascott (who would later become a member of the DIAS Honorary Committee) invited Metzger to lecture at the Ealing School of Art in London, where Pete Townshend, soon to become lead guitarist of the rock group The Who, studied.<sup>54</sup> Townshend later credited Metzger's lecture with giving him the idea to destroy his guitar during musical performances. If one extrapolates from how the destruction of musical instruments became a metaphor for the destruction of hypocritical social and moral behaviors and values, as well as a symbolic model of protest against the Vietnam War, then Townshend's act of destroying his guitar could also be understood as a sign for war resistance, awakening protestors to action. Such an account of the affect of Metzger's ideas necessarily condenses complex successions of cultural concepts but demonstrates one of the ways in which artists' theories and works enter society and alter it. Indeed, the "value" of such transmission, as Altieri writes in another context, "lies in how selves inhabit the affects more than in how they interpret them."<sup>55</sup> How Townshend *emotionally inhabited* the idea of destruction contributed to new attitudes that enabled audiences to interpret and expand upon his actions, thereby influencing millions to adopt a different *and constructive* view of the use of destruction in art and society. I would argue that such a history establishes a chain of remembrance that began with Metzger's tragic Holocaust experience, the mourning that he creatively transformed in DIAS into a consideration of how destruction in art might be used as a parallel image for, and critique of, social destruction. This view, then, informed the technique of artists through whose work such concepts transmuted again into forms for and of cultural resistance.

Another influential DIAS affect occurred almost immediately after DIAS when the psychologist Arthur Janov drew upon Ortiz's action, *Self-Destruction*, (performed 22 September at the Mercury Theatre) as the impetus for the development of his Primal Scream Therapy.<sup>56</sup> In his performance, Ortiz entered the stage, previously set with milk bottles, a large rubber duck, a diaper, and a large talcum powder canister to enact a childlike Oedipal crisis. Continuously crying, "Mommy, mommy, mommy, ma, ma, ma, ma," in a gesture of psychological regression he ripped off his suit, put on a diaper, powdered himself with talcum powder, and banged the rubber duck violently, and then guzzled the milk, vomited onto the stage, slapped the puddle angrily, and crawled off stage still crying, "Mommy! Mommy!" Janov recalled that his theory emerged after one of his patients told the story and requested him to follow in his therapeutic practice the actions "of a man named Ortiz who was currently doing an act on the London stage."<sup>57</sup> Significantly, Janov's bibliography for his 1970 book *The Primal Scream* includes the very authors Ortiz studied to arrive at his performance: Viktor Frankl, Sigmund Freud, R. D. Laing, Rollo May, Abraham Maslow, among others. In addition, in 1970 Mühl underwent Janov's therapy, which contributed to the *Self-Realization*

actions that he instituted at the Actions-Analytic Commune. The same year, Ono and John Lennon also worked with Janov, who identified their most emotionally vulnerable album, "John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band," as their "Primal album." In these multifaceted ways, Ortiz's work rapidly translated into intellectual, artistic, and popular culture, reaching millions of people who had never heard of him or his art and returning to inform the lives of other DIAS artists.

In an entirely different context, DIAS participants Mark Boyle and Joan Hills, who developed *Son et Lumière* exhibitions, credited both Ortiz and Metzger in their work. They dedicated a section on "vomit" of *Son et Lumière for Bodily Fluids and Functions*, 1967, to Ortiz that visualized such bodily fluids as saliva, earwax, tears, urine, sweat, blood, sperm, and gastric juices; and they dedicated a section on "earth" in *Son et Lumière for Earth, Air, Fire and Water* to Metzger. The latter acknowledged Metzger's first projections of liquid crystals to produce moving images in the 1960s. These projections inspired the light shows that Boyle and Hill later developed for the rock band The Soft Machine, for Jimi Hendrix, and for other rock musicians with whom they worked. Such light shows anticipated the whole tourist industry of *Son et Lumière*, to say nothing of the eventual development of MTV that successfully fused the Surrealist visual complexity of the juxtaposition of incongruous elements with artists' film and video work (such as that of Kren and Conner) and the aura of the live sound and light performances of Rock 'n' Roll bands. To suggest such a scope for the DIAS affect is not to claim the originality of these various modes of production for DIAS, but to underscore how affect represents the ways in which "emotions play in our psychological lives ... generat[ing] behavior and ... other mental states" that can lead to new and original forms of art and culture.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the deepest and most sustained example of DIAS affect in the arts has been the international impact of Wiener Aktionismus on the development of a certain genre of violent self-expressivity in performance art. The ways in which the Viennese artists courageously exposed and confronted the traumatic effect on the psyche of the profoundly destructive history of western culture and religion provided *the* aesthetic model for artists to represent pain and suffering in ever more violent terms. The violent history they represent has been equally augmented by the increase in wars, genocide, environmental destruction, and natural disasters that have led to what I have theorized as "cultures of trauma."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, an entire corpus of feminist, gay, lesbian, and transsexual performance, as well as other aspects of identity politics (including post-colonial subjectivities) may be found in the simultaneously liberating and potentially harmful ways that Wiener Aktionismus has been interpreted. DIAS is also responsible in this nexus. DIAS strengthened the resolve of the Viennese who became more strident upon their return to Vienna. At that time, Brus and Mühl in particular began to make "political actions," or *Zock* Festivals, characterized by strong ideological and inflammatory performances culminating in the infamous *Art and Revolution* at Vienna University in the summer of 1968.<sup>60</sup> Among the many incendiary acts performed at the

*Art and Revolution* action, Brus undressed, cut himself on the chest and thigh with a razor-blade, urinated and then drank it, defecated on stage and smeared the feces on his body, and then masturbated while singing the Austrian national anthem. Although Brus retired from performing actions in 1970, unwilling to harm his body further, his intrepid readiness to submit his body to intense, expressive purpose authorized other artists to do the same. The principle legacy of Wiener Aktionismus, and by extension DIAS, has been the pervasive increase in danger to performers over the past thirty years, such as the bloodletting actions of Franko B in the late 1990s and 2000s. Couple such artist's actions with theories that unreflectively celebrate "transgression," "narcissism," and "masochism" and the situation appears increasingly sobering.<sup>61</sup>

Returning to the immediate question of the DIAS affect, DIAS was also the catalyst for the Dialectics of Liberation Congress, organized only ten months after DIAS by psychiatrists David Cooper and R.D. Laing, along with the assistance of Joseph Berke (an American psychiatrist who worked with Laing in London at Kingsley Hall, famous for its application of anti-psychiatry to heal severe schizophrenia; Berke delivered a paper at the DIAS symposium entitled "Man as a Self-Destroying Art"). While DIAS attempted but failed to attract a wide body of scholars from various fields, the authority of their academic and professional status enabled the Dialectics organizers to bring social scientists, political figures, scientists, intellectuals, and activists to London, ironically at precisely the same moment that Metzger and Sharkey stood trial in July of 1967. Whilst DIAS organizers faced prison sentences, the Dialectics presented discussion rather than images and actions, thereby demonstrating the difference between the passive cultural reception of officially sanctioned modes of academic address and the unpredictable and uncontrollable power of artists' interventions that society continually suppresses, censors, and prosecutes.

Still other instances of the DIAS affect include the founding of the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) in 1969 by Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche, closely associated with Ortiz's various destruction actions and exhibitions in New York. John Latham and Barbara Steveni also founded Artist Placement Group (APG) in 1966 in the heady context of DIAS. The aims of APG to place artists in business, educational, and other forms of institutional practices (as a means to integrate artistic approaches to problem solving) equally reiterated concepts considered at DIAS. In an entirely different vein, the architect Graham Stevens credits DIAS with being the first art venue that supported his fledgling creation of pneumatic environments. These led directly to Stevens's many scientific patents, environmental consultations around the globe, and art.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, this is just a beginning of the list of affects spreading out rhizomatically from DIAS, a form of expansion that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would theorize in part under the cultural instruction by DIAS participant Jean-Jacques Lebel.<sup>63</sup>

DIAS artists understood the significance of their undertaking, even if they could not anticipate or recognize the force of their historical extension. "We [were] the first generation to live



beyond that [Second World] War, and to *have* to create an ethos for ourselves, to recognize ourselves, and to create some kind of sense for another generation, to create some sense of bonding," Barbara Gladstone remembered after reflecting on her participation in the DIAS symposium.<sup>64</sup> While DIAS may have reflected the "ethos" of one generation, it left its affect on many subsequent generations. The DIAS affect reflects the aims and purposes of Metzger's art, the most important object of which was DIAS itself. DIAS must enter the histories of art as a model for post-studio, socially engaged international art practices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and form part of the texture and fabric of how art and artists contribute to social reform, for better or worse. In conclusion, the words of psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, a specialist in trauma, provide a compelling parallel to the DIAS affect: "The more significant an event, the less likely it is to be studied."<sup>65</sup>

- 1 This essay represents the first publication of many aspects of my unpublished dissertation *The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS): The Radical Project of Event-Structured Art*, University of California at Berkeley, 1987. My dissertation also includes the first biographical sketch of Metzger's life up to and through the period of DIAS. I would like to thank Gustav Metzger and Sabine Breitwieser for the invitation to contribute to this catalogue, which brought me back to this 900-page opus and will bring me forward to its revision in a book, *The Story of DIAS and the DIAS Affect*. Laurel Fredrickson, Susan Jarosi, and Jay Bloom thoughtfully read versions of the text. Anna Artaker patiently supported a difficult writing period and superbly edited this essay; Cosima Rainer graciously assisted me with many details of my interaction with the Generali Foundation. Most of all, my gratitude extends to Metzger and all DIAS artists, whose affect shaped my life.
- 2 The Honorary Committee included Wolf Vostell, Enrico Baj, Mario Amaya, Frank Popper, Bob Cobbing, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Ivor Davies, Roy Ascott, Jim Haynes, and (Barry) Miles.
- 3 Lebel, Jean-Jacques. Unpublished interview with the author, Paris. 27 to 29 October 1980.
- 4 Roszak, Theodore. *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition*, Doubleday, Garden City 1969.
- 5 On subcultures and the underground, see Nuttall, Jeff. *Bomb Culture*. Dell, New York 1968; Melly, George. *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain*. Allen Lane, London 1970; Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Methuen, London 1983; Nelson, Elizabeth. *The British Counter-Culture, 1966–73: A Study of the Underground Press*. St. Martin's Press, New York 1989.
- 6 Yoko Ono, fresh from participation in DIAS, met John Lennon at Indica in November 1966. Through DIAS, she became associated with the underground.
- 7 This suspicion was more than counterculture paranoia. Harvey Matusow participated in DIAS. He had been a member of the Communist Party, before becoming an informant for Senator Joseph McCarthy in the American "red scare" of the 1950s. After recanting and serving over three years in jail for perjury, Matusow remade himself as an artist.
- 8 My dissertation reconstructs this trial, which concluded in a relatively light fine.
- 9 Ortiz, Raphael Montañez. Unpublished interview with the author, Piscataway, New Jersey. 4 to 6 May 1982.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Metzger, Gustav. Unpublished interview with the author, Frankfurt, Germany. 13 to 17 May 1982.
- 12 London, John. "The Artist – 1966," in: *The Evening News*, London. Wednesday, 31 August 1966.
- 13 N.N. "Chicken-Killer Says Ban Won't Deter Him," in: *New York Times International Edition*, Friday, 2 September 1966.
- 14 Fielding, Henry. "Thursday Diary," in: *Sun*, London. Thursday, 1 September 1966.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ortiz/Stiles.

- 17 Shearer, Ann. "Art limb from limb," in: *The Guardian*, London. Thursday, 1 September 1966.
- 18 Mühl, Otto. Letter to "Friedel," 8 September 1966, in Otto Mühl Archive, Friedrichshof, Austria.  
Conversation with Vostell confirmed this comment. Vostell, Wolf. Unpublished interview with the author,  
Berlin. 15 June 1979.
- 19 James, Paula. "Destroyers Stage Their First Event: In the Name of Art He Creates ... A Hole,"  
in: *Daily Mirror*, London. Friday, 9 September 1966.
- 20 Metzger/Stiles.
- 21 James, Paula. "Destroyers Stage Their First Event ...," in: *Daily Mirror*, London. Friday,  
9 September 1966.
- 22 Metzger, Gustav. Abstract of his opening remarks at DIAS symposium, excerpted, in: *Excerpts from  
Selected Papers Presented at the 1966 DIAS*. In the present book: 241.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Unless otherwise cited, the record of the symposium comes from archived unpublished notes taken by  
Ivor Davies.
- 25 Kemble, Kenneth. Unpublished interview with the author, New York. 24 February 1986.
- 26 Nitsch, Hermann. Unpublished interview with the author, Prinzendorf, Austria. 8 September 1982.
- 27 Brus, Günter. Letter to the author, 17 May 1986.
- 28 Weibel, Peter. Unpublished interview with the author, Vienna, Austria. 9 September 1982.
- 29 Brus/Stiles.
- 30 Nitsch presented the 21st performance of the OMT, and Mühl, Brus, and Susan Cahn performed *Ten  
Rounds for Cassius Clay*, a tribute to the African-American boxer, who having changed his name to  
Muhammed Ali refused to fight in Vietnam, dispatching the US government with the famous rejection,  
"I ain't got nothing against them Vietcongs."
- 31 Some of the films Kren presented on 15 September include: *48 Köpfe aus dem Szondi-Test*, 1960,  
*Bäume im Herbst*, 1960, and *Mauern-Positiv-Negativ und Weg*, 1961, and Mühl's *Papa und Mama*, 1964,  
*Leda and the Swan*, 1964, *O Tannenbaum*, 1964, and *Cosinus Alpha*, 1965, as well as Brus's *Ana*, 1964,  
and *Selbstverstümmelung*, 1965.
- 32 Durgnat, Raymond. *Sexual Alienation in the Cinema*. Studio Vista, London 1972: 135.
- 33 Vostell/Stiles.
- 34 Metzger/Stiles.
- 35 Conner, Bruce. Letter to the author, 15 December 1985.
- 36 My assertion is based on communication with all these artists.
- 37 Metzger/Stiles.
- 38 Higgins, Dick. Letter to John Sharkey, 27 July 1966.
- 39 Hansen, Al. Unpublished letters to the author from 1980 to 1987.
- 40 Lebel/Stiles.

- 41 See Stiles, Kristine. *Rafael Montañez Ortiz. Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche, 1968-1988*,  
El Museo del Barrio, New York 1988.
- 42 Obvious exceptions include: Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* and *The Destructive Character* from  
the 1930s, reprinted in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, New York 1975: 277-304; Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, Harcourt, Brace, and World,  
New York 1970; and John Fraser's *Violence in the Arts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1974.
- 43 See Williams's revised *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Oxford University Press,  
New York 1985.
- 44 Brus, Günter. "Zerreißprobe," 1970, in: Hubert Klocker (ed). *The Shattered Mirror: Wiener Aktionismus*,  
*Wien 1960-1971*. Ritter Verlag, Klagenfurt/Austria 1989: 142.
- 45 Between 1979 and 1982, I worked in Sohm's Archive then located in his home before it moved to the  
Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart. Although Sharkey was my first tutor on DIAS, Sohm was my first tutor of  
Happenings, Fluxus, Wiener Aktionismus, Concrete Poetry, the counterculture, and the underground.  
My scholarship is in Sohm's debt.
- 46 Metzger, Gustav. *Auto-Destructive Art: Metzger at AA*. Creation/Destruction, London 1965: 1.
- 47 Neue Slowenische Kunst quoted in Michael Benson's video *NSK: Predictions of Fire*, 2004. This statement  
is an obvious reiteration of Walter Benjamin famous comment on barbarism in his "Theses on the  
Philosophy of History," in: *Illuminations*. Schocken Books, New York 1969: 256.
- 48 "Mark Pauline," in: *RE/Search 6/7* (1983): 23.
- 49 Latham, John. *Event Structure: Approach to a Basic Contradiction*. Syntax, Calgary, Canada 1981.
- 50 Altieri, Charles. *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affect*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca  
and London 2003: 3.
- 51 Ibid: 2.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 New types of art education can be traced through British art schools in the 1950s, especially Roy  
Ascott's Ground Course at Ealing Art School in 1961. This history is also part of the DIAS affect.
- 55 Altieri, Charles. *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affect*. Cornell University Press,  
Ithaca and London 2003: 256.
- 56 Janov, Arthur. *The Primal Scream: Primal Therapy: The cure for Neurosis*. Putnam, New York 1970.
- 57 Ibid: 9-10.
- 58 Elster, Jon. *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions*. Cambridge University Press,  
New York 1999: 137.
- 59 See Stiles, Kristine. "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma,"  
in: Jean O'Barr, Nancy Hewitt, Nancy Rosebaugh (ed). *Talking Gender: Public Images, Personal Journeys,  
and Political Critiques*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1996: 36-64; originally published in



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[http://www.duke.edu/~awe/publications/shaved\\_heads.html](http://www.duke.edu/~awe/publications/shaved_heads.html)

60 Brus quoted in: Klocker, Hubert (ed). *The Shattered Mirror*. op. cit.: 209.

61 See, for example, Amelia Jones's attempt to re-theorize narcissism as redemptive in her *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis 1998. For further consideration of such issues, see my "Never Enough is Something Else: Feminist Performance Art, Probity, and the Avant-Garde," in: Harding, James M. (ed). *Avant-Garde Performance, Textuality and the Limits of Literary History*. University of Madison, Wisconsin, Madison 2000: 239–289.

62 Stevens, Graham. Unpublished interview with the author, Heathrow, England. 20 October 1985. Among many other things, Stevens invented the waterbed and the "Hovertube" (a pneumatic tube used to walk on water).

63 See Stiles, Kristine. "'Beautiful Jean-Jacques': Jean-Jacques Lebel's Affect and The Theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari," in: *Jean-Jacques Lebel*. Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, Milano 1999: 7–30. Also on affect in art see, Kristine Stiles, "Remembrance, Resistance, Reconstruction, The Social Value of Lia and Dan Perjovschi's Art," in: *Idea*. Cluj, Romania 2005.

64 Gladstone, Karyn (Barbara). Unpublished telephone interview with the author, 4 May 1984.

65 Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age*. Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York 1987: 32.