

Fragment / Part / Whole:

Matter and Mediality

in Michael Landy's *Break Down*

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## Declaration of authorship

I, Lindsay Polly Crisp, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Date:

## Abstract

This thesis investigates *Break Down* by Michael Landy (2001), in which the artist's 7227 belongings were systematically catalogued, dismantled and granulated. *Break Down*, it is argued, opens up alternative modes of engaging with materiality and mediality; this thesis explores an array of related concerns arising from the work. Landy's process of fragmentation elicits an inquiry into concepts of part and whole, single and multiple. The granulated material produced during *Break Down* provokes an account, via Deleuze and Guattari's concept of affect, of the fragment as narrative matter. Further, *Break Down* is considered in terms of its operations between the textual and the material. With reference to Friedrich Kittler's account of media as distributed and multilateral entities, this text explores the conventions pertaining to two textual forms deployed by Landy in relation to *Break Down*; the instruction manual and the inventory. Finally, Landy's father's sheepskin coat, the final object to be shredded during *Break Down*, is the fulcrum for an appraisal of the thing as an extension of personhood, and of human subjectivity as in some sense 'thingly'.

In this text, *Break Down* is constructed as an assemblage that operates at the intersection of a complex, mobile massing of currents and specificities; a framing that informs both the structure and the methodology of this thesis. Written, photographic and audio-visual source material is deployed here alongside close analysis of two important texts published by Landy in 2001 as accompaniments to *Break Down* itself: *Michael Landy / Break Down*, and *Break Down Inventory*. In addition, drawing upon Jane Rendell's strategy of 'site writing,' passages of close observational writing are used intermittently throughout this text to relay what might in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms be called the *becoming* of the texts and subjects under discussion.

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I write in loving memory of Eric and Allene Wright.

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Figure 1: Scene from *Break Down* showing conveyor belts, hopper and tonne bags filled with shredded matter, and Michael Landy's Saab, partially dismantled (Landy, 2008a, p.152).



Figure 2: Tonne bags of granules produced during *Break Down* (Landy, 2008a, p.186).

# 1 Introduction

Michael Landy's *Break Down* involved the systematic and comprehensive dismantling and granulation of the artist's personal belongings. *Break Down* took place between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2001<sup>1</sup> on a temporarily empty shop floor at 499 Oxford Street. This was the site of C&A,<sup>2</sup> a recently defunct department store, some material vestiges of which – plate glass windows, escalators, mirrored walls and pillars and 'pay here' signage - remained in place during *Break Down*. In this space, Landy installed an imposing industrial conveyor belt: a hundred metres of cerulean blue frame<sup>3</sup> with metal rollers that occupied most of the shop floor. The conveyor belt displayed Landy's belongings, in various states of dismantlement, deposited in shallow yellow plastic trays. Additionally, it contained the action, clearly differentiating the space occupied by Landy and the eleven assistants – or, to give them their formal title, 'operatives' (Landy, 2001a; 2008a, p.106) - who worked within the loop, from that of the viewing public. An object in one of the yellow trays would ride the circuit of the conveyor belt. This encircled four 'work bays' where different elements of the work of dismantling and shredding took place before ascending to the 'sorting platform', a raised section where items were separated into a row of shredders according to their material composition (Ibid., p.33).

Most existing accounts of *Break Down* focus on Landy's material practices in relation to his stuff; much less frequently discussed is the markedly textual nature of the work. Two publications by Landy form companions to *Break Down*. These

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<sup>1</sup> Although the work also involved two or three years of preparatory work. I take this from 1999, the date of *Michael Landy at Home*, a show at Landy's studio in which he developed the first ideas of *Break Down*. The work of inventorying his belongings is said in some sources to have taken a full year (Landy 2001a; 2008a), and elsewhere, it is seen that this was only completed several months *after* the show took place (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Cope (2000), in a newspaper article about the closure of C&A in the United Kingdom, explains that it 'was founded as a trading company in 1841 [...] by two Dutch brothers, Clemens and August Brenninkmeyer', who used their first initials to name the company, and opened the first United Kingdom branch of C&A in 1922. 499 Oxford Street – previously Hereford House, which was first another department store, and then an exhibition space – was purchased and redeveloped by C&A in 1938 (Sheppard, 1980), where it seems to have continued until the closure of the company in this country in 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Davies and Monika Parrinder (2003) specify that there were 160 metres of conveyor belt; Landy himself says that there were 100 metres (2008a, p.106).

are *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a), and *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b). *Break Down Inventory* is soberly presented, soft-bound in a matte, grey, cover. It comprises an exhaustive list of every item shredded by Landy. The entries, which include kitchenware, clothing, reading matter, art, cat toys, and Landy's car, appear in one run-on list. A frontispiece announces that 7227 items were destroyed during *Break Down*, weighing 5.25 tonnes; figures that vividly demonstrate the scale of Landy's project.

The second of these companion texts is *Michael Landy / Break Down*, 'a folder of documents, a merge of words, collages, sketches and photographs' (Hawkins, 2010, p.20). It is presented in the form of a plastic ring-binder, like an office folder of administrative protocols, organised into categories with yellow dividers. The tone of the contents hops between sections like the needle on a record player: the reader encounters a professionally printed and edited interview; a series of colour prints of collages in which the glue stick seems to be just out of shot; a hand written case study in which Landy experimentally dismantles a radio-cassette player (it takes ten days: see Landy, 2001a, p.108); a selection of media articles and samples of other material on the topic of consumerism; a series of Landy's drawings of his belongings which, in the wobble of their lines seem wilfully to bring Landy – his body, his hand, his relationship to the things he draws – into focus. In a photographic record of the artist's preparatory work, we see photographs of Landy examining a wire cage full of shredded plastic; tipping something out of a cardboard box into a bright blue hopper; standing impassively beneath a sign that reads, 'Recycling & Waste Management EXHIBITION' (Ibid., pp.76-106).

This thesis proposes that *Break Down* opens up alternative modes of engaging with materiality and mediality. The geographer Michael Crang (2012) arrives at my point of departure in his passing remark that the art work reveals:

a sense of dissipation and decay as temporality in the unravelling and unbecoming of things. In that unravelling the materiality becomes more evident as the form is lost' (Ibid., p.766-7).

Just so. *Break Down*, I propose, does not destroy so much as transform, changing the form of Landy's belongings and revealing as it does the mediality of matter. This analysis is structured through a deployment of Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory in which the assemblage is defined as a coming-together of elements in ways that are contingent yet productive. Indeed, these elements will

in themselves be multiple, and will interconnect in multiple ways. In these terms, this thesis will show, Landy's intervention exposes the play between singular and multiple, whole and partial, stable and mutable. In addition, I draw upon new media theory and in particular the work of the media theorist Friedrich Kittler, whose transformation of the term mediality has been defined as a 'generalisation' that can 'apply [...] to all domains of cultural exchange' (Wellbery, 1990, p.xiii). This thesis is therefore concerned with both the mediality of matter, and the material form and technicity of media. Matter, I argue, here figured in the fragments produced by Landy, can be seen through *Break Down*, to hold the signs of its own composition and of events that have contributed to its formation over time. Meanwhile, the texts produced by Landy provide a prism through which to view the ways in which media technologies require a particular substrate on which to emerge in the first place, but also in themselves constitute an assemblage that shapes the media objects that are produced.

This introductory chapter situates this thesis and establishes an account of the advances made here in relation to the existing literature. As such, it fuses the functions of an introduction (which provides a conceptual scaffold for the discussions to come) and a literature review (which situates these discussions in relation to the existing academic publications). I begin by reviewing and reflecting upon my own encounters with *Break Down*, and provide some initial discussion of methodological concerns that have shaped this text. I investigate how concepts of materiality and culture have been mobilised in existing commentary on *Break Down*, tending to permeate and foreclose existing academic literature on the work. Finally, I proffer an establishing discussion of the account of materiality provided by this thesis, which is framed by Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptions of multiplicity and becoming.

### 1.1 *Writing encounters with Break Down*

As will be discussed in Chapter 2: *Methodology*, there are profound implications for my treatment of context and scope in the choice to focus this inquiry on one art work alone. The work of this thesis is to investigate some moves through which the work is made and re-made; read and re-read. *Break Down* itself is the context for the discussions to come. This approach potentialises a rigorous examination of the way the piece works. One might, then, think of the schematic of the chapters to come as a looping conveyor belt like Landy's. The argument proceeds through a

number of turns, which are differently composed and yet interrelate and hook together, beginning and ending as they do with the art work, and with conceptualisations of mediality and materiality. The first, in Chapter 3: *Fragment / Part / Whole*, incorporates a direct confrontation with the material granulated by Landy in order to consider fragmentation as both a material process and an analytic concept. Chapter 4: *Manual*, and Chapter 5: *Line / List / Inventory*, examine the ways in which *Break Down* works between materiality and textuality, considering in particular the contents and material form of two texts by Landy: the instructions he provides for processing (2001a, pp.33-40) and the text in which he inventories the belongings shredded in *Break Down* (2001b). Finally, Chapter 6: *John Landy's Sheepskin Coat* reflects upon the ways in which Landy's belongings and Landy might, together, form a kind of nexus; an extended personhood. If this is so, I ask, what is implied about personhood, and about materiality, by Landy's work of breaking down?

Chapter 2: *Methodology* puts forth a sustained exploration of the underpinnings and implications of my deployment in this text of the strategy of site writing, adapted from the work of the scholar of art and architecture Jane Rendell (2005; 2010). The discussion to come is studded with passages of site writing. These passages encompass direct observations of material artefacts and art works, but also photographs, video footage, and occasionally accounts of my own encounters with and processes of writing and observation. In this thesis, passages of site writing (which are labelled 'observation', and appear in blue italics) may have a direct, illustrative function; for example, they might animate – and be animated by – conceptual elements of discussion. Further to this, in working between modalities of theoretical discussion and observational work, they provide interruptions and intrusions that better allow this text to accommodate complexity and multiplicity. In enabling me to place myself explicitly within the text of this thesis, site writing occasions a mobilisation of subjectivities that provokes a richer account of the work. In these moments, this thesis is revealed as a conversation between author, art work, and the questions; concepts; images, that are provoked by *Break Down*.

The use in this text of site writing passages, however, are not meant to prevent my also appearing in the text in other strategic points. Indeed, I want to include, here in the introduction, a meditation on my own long conversation with *Break Down*, which began in 2009 and was interrupted for two years by pregnancy and early

motherhood. In my earliest encounters with *Break Down*, the surface of the work that caught my attention; in fact, that caused me outright glee, was that of the bellicose punk prank. Imagine an artist who has struggled for years to establish himself, then once he has sold some work to the Tate, once he has bought his Saab, and his suit from Saville Row, begins to imagine how he might 'really fuck it up' for himself (Landy, 2008a, p.104; see also Berning, 2012; Corner, 2010; Landy, 2008b). Where are Landy's attachments? Pry them apart. Smash them with a hammer as hard as you can. Take love letters and birthday cards and family snaps and push them through the shredder. I do not want anything you can give me / now I am cold and without a coat / I don't need all that stuff any more / I have ruined everything. *Break Down*, then, appeared at first as a satisfying act of nihilism. There is, too, a brute pragmatism at work in this piece. There is a prankishness in taking objects that had previously been in use, in place, in Landy's home and subjecting them to a phoney procedure that leaves them beyond use or recognition. In much of his discourse on *Break Down* the artist draws on the space of the reclamation plant, where junk is sorted, processed, dismantled and shredded in order to salvage value before its final disposal. This adoption of modalities of system or process is set against a background of consumer culture and 'inbuilt obsolescence' which forces new purchases as belongings, on schedule, fall apart or become out of date (Miles, 1998). Landy's deployment of these processes brings to *Break Down* a mordantly didactic note (this is how a radio is constructed; this is how systematically to reduce a Saab to shards and shreds).

Protracted engagement with *Break Down* has, happily, obliged me to complicate these first responses. There is more to say here about loss and gain, destruction and creation in *Break Down*. As Landy himself observes, the work possesses a funereal quality (Corner, 2010; Cumming, 2002; Landy, 2002b; Wood, 2001); as such, it conveys a profound seriousness. Here, I think of the labour of clearing the belongings of the deceased, falling as often it does to bereaved family members, in which the disposal of trash, the discovery of treasures and the telling of stories entwine and enmesh the mourner. Landy's lost belongings are memorialised meticulously and through a variety of means. These include his tender illustrations in *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a; see Figures 26 and 27) as well as meticulous entries in the *Break Down Inventory* (2001b). Landy does violence to his own stuff, he stages material, social and cultural loss and in doing so, gives priority precisely to what cannot anymore be touched, smelt, tasted or seen. The

destruction of some objects in *Break Down*, particularly, as in the case of Landy's father's coat, where they mark a heavy loss of some kind, feels almost impossible to bear. Filmed after the end of the work for a BBC documentary, Landy appears ghostly; untethered; as light and dry as a leaf (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).

Finally, there is play and joy in *Break Down*. I find these qualities in the hyperbole of the work; its procedural notes and inventory; the nostalgia of the objects displayed and the 'Scalextric' form of the conveyor belt (Landy, 2001a, p.107). A lively potentiality emerges through the work, which can sometimes feel like an extended experiment in and homage to the charisma of stuff. This charisma proves to have a surprising impunity, surviving as it does through the processes of dismantling, sorting and shredding through which Landy gives back his belongings' raw materiality – their most fundamental affordances and propensities. It is this especially that first prompted my explorations of a theoretical account of matter and culture that might take into account the life of objects.

*Observation: Photographs of fragments produced during Break Down (Landy, 2008a, pp.186-93). Machines' innards fascinate. Circuit-boards present an intensity of minute connections: wires wink and join together with a pleasingly purposeful intent. A sheaf of personal letters reappears as a rustling mass of paper, layered, frayed at the edges, dry enough to rip or burn: shredded, it lies in the hopper as a lively mass of loops and coils. Clothing lies meekly empty, miming the human form. An oil painting reveals itself as a hard, bright surface with chipboard beneath; in the tray, post-destruction, it is a pile of wooden chips interspersed with moments of colour. The paint chips away from the casings of household goods when they are dismantled and shredded, leaving the bite of a newly exposed metallic surface brightly gleaming.*

## 1.2 Scoping literatures

A number of peer-reviewed academic publications comprise either an exclusive focus on *Break Down* or a discussion in which the work plays some substantial part. The publications surveyed here arise from a range of academic disciplines. Several (Beech, 2001; 2002; Charlesworth, 2002; Harvie, 2006; 2013; Davies and Parrinder, 2003; Lydiate, 2001; Maet, 2013; Perry, 2013; Yaeger, 2003) emerge broadly from arts disciplines, including art and literary criticism, architecture, theatre studies and

design. Further to this a significant body of recent discussion emerges specifically from the field of cultural geography (Armoore, 2009; Crang, 2012; Crewe, 2011; Hawkins, 2010; 2014). Finally, Day et al (2014) discuss the appearance in *Break Down* of themes of list and series as part of a paper that explores questions of methodology.

Given the range of disciplinary influences at play, it is striking that when examined thematically, the literature on *Break Down* yields a marked tendency to imagine the work as a study on, or illustrative example of, consumption, the meaning of belongings in an individual's life or conversely, the personal or cultural significance of the destruction of objects.<sup>4</sup> Further, in existing accounts, the material objects that appear in *Break Down* tend to be treated as marked by Landy's ownership of them, or expressive of something about Landy. In the following pages, these tendencies will be traced back into literatures on consumption and commodity, which I propose have productively shaped, but also curtailed, much existing scholarship on *Break Down*. Such literatures are taken to exist as part of (and not to be representative of, or necessarily exceptional within) an ecology of fields of enquiry in the social sciences and humanities that either centre upon materiality, or present serious implications for scholarly approaches to materiality. The current thesis does not attempt to produce a comprehensive mapping of such expansive projects as new materialism, speculative realism, or object oriented ontology. Nevertheless, I wish to acknowledge the influence of relevant texts on materiality from a broad array of fields.

The 'vital materialism' of Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010); Steven Connor's 'magical things' in *Paraphernalia* (2011); Sherry Turkle's edited collection of essays in which lives and thought are interwoven with our stuff, *Evocative Objects* (2007); James Gibson's work on material affordance (1979/1986); discussion of extended mind and material engagement by the philosopher Andy Clark (2009; 2011) and the archaeologist Lambros Malafouris (2013); the artist Gustav Metzger's piquant account of process and materiality in auto-destructive art (1996): all are embedded in the discussions to come. I will not explore their contributions in any depth at

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<sup>4</sup> A second significant thematic strand that reoccurs in existing publications on *Break Down*, regarding the modality of the list as deployed by Landy, I refer to Chapter 5: *Line / List / Inventory*, for full examination.



this moment, except to observe a certain coherence in the questions that emerge through this admittedly heterogenous assemblage of texts: of how matter might be active; might be communicative; might possess the potential to be enlivened by human intervention and projection; might be possessed of a liveliness of its own. Nor, indeed, should it be imagined that the texts cited here are unique in asking these questions.

In pursuit of these questions, the current text puts forth an account of materiality that is structured through an engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory – with a particular emphasis on their pivotal text *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987/2013). As will be discussed in Section 1.3, the prominence, in the works of Deleuze and Guattari discussed in this thesis, of matters of process or *becoming* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.410) is fundamental to the analysis that follows. This enables a complex conception of materiality as not only mutable, and expressive, but absolutely characterised by change, that exists in a universal oneness (Deleuze, 1970/1988, p.128) that is itself composed of difference. Deleuze and Guattari enable us to think of an intense thisness or specificity that does not emerge from the object in itself (since there is no object in itself) but is produced relationally.

### 1.2.1 *Consumption and commodity*

*Break Down* has tended to be considered in the light of concepts of commodity and consumption, sometimes to the exclusion of other domains of analysis. The current section summarises the constitution of these underlying concepts before, in Section 1.2.2, discussing the ways in which they arise in existing analyses of *Break Down*. A narrative of physical objects (and social practices that surround these) that pivots upon concepts of *value* provides a theoretical context for – and indeed, has tended to dominate – accounts of the work. In such accounts, our stuff is seen to communicate or embody aspects of social organisation and individual identity. Equally, identity, relationships, and cultures are seen to be constructed through engagements with material artefacts.<sup>5</sup> To explore the implications of this narrative

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is useful to consider the significance of this term *constructed*, since in the terms employed in assemblage theory, the concept of construction assists in thinking through, not representational or symbolic practices – or not necessarily - but specific processes through which entities or bodies of different kinds are literally *put together* (see DeLanda, 2006, p.3).

I turn to an essay collection, edited by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (1986). This text is valuable in the current analysis for the reason that it clearly establishes a concept that, as I will show, shapes many existing readings of *Break Down*. This is the proposal that ‘commodities, like persons, have social lives’ (Appadurai, 1986, p.3).

Significantly, ‘commodity’ (rather than ‘thing’) is the concept employed by Appadurai to distinguish between things ‘with a certain type of social potential’, which might gain, transmit and be constitutive of social meaning – and in particular, value – and, to cite his capacious alternative category, ‘other sorts of things’ (Ibid., p.6). In considering how an object might be understood or interpreted Appadurai draws upon an essay from the same collection – influential in its own right - in which Igor Kopytoff (1986) lays out an account of ‘object biography’ as a method for the analysis of material objects. Kopytoff suggests that an object be analysed in terms of its changing significance as it moves in and out of a commoditised state, gaining and shedding different forms of value as it is made, sold, given, lost, buried, rediscovered, used or displayed. Commoditisation is therefore not a stable state but ‘one phase in the life of some things’ (Appadurai, 1986, p.17). It is clear that the ‘other’ things referred to by Appadurai – that is, things that are not possessed of the ‘social potential’ for commoditisation - are not of interest to him. However, one might reasonably ask *what* ‘sorts of things’ they would be and how they might escape the purview of the value systems he describes. In Appadurai, we are not in fact thinking of ‘sorts of things’ but rather, things that invite certain kinds of treatment.

***Observation: Shell armlet displayed at Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge<sup>6</sup> (December 2016): I sit on the floor and peer through glass to observe this object, which itself sits in the bottom corner of its display case. The arm band is formed of a circlet of shell, off-white, about 6cm deep, which spirals slightly in on itself. A single shell has been sliced laterally to provide this object (that might almost seem to have been bent or moulded) with its form. The top edge of the shell has been well worked. Even where it was sliced, it has a gentle gleam and looks smooth and worn, as***

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<sup>6</sup> Catalogue entry: Shell Armlet; Conus shell with beads and padanus decoration, *Mwali* for *Kula*; *Massim*; Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea; c&d W.E. Armstrong; 1922.1643a.

*do its curved sides. It appears that the shell has been carefully kept; in particular, the only marks visible on the shell itself are its own brown dapplings. On an inside edge, I discover the catalogue number 1922.1643a written in black in a meticulous hand. Down one edge are two or three carefully made holes which again have been sanded to make smooth edges. Eight lengths of twine, each roughly 30 centimetres long, are attached here, and onto these, tiny red and white beads, each only about two millimetres in diameter, are strung. At the top and bottom of each thread are much larger, black beads, about one centimetre in diameter; their irregularities and bell-like shape suggests that they are made of seed-pods or similar. The red beads look like glass, and have the precise semi-transparent shade of pomegranate seeds. The white are entirely opaque: some have a very slight grain in their surface suggesting that they may be composed of shell. The eight strings of beads are arranged, some in alternate red and white, or with the two colours arranged in groups of three, and one or two entirely in red. It is observable that there are considerably fewer white beads. They are slightly grubbier than the armband itself, perhaps suggesting a difficulty in cleaning and conserving this part of the artefact – but also, one might imagine, the life of the object during which these strings of beads might often have been wound and run through fingers. Each of the threads has a large bead, a length of small beads, and another large bead. Emerging from this is a long, fibrous, grassy leaf, entirely dry and somewhat crumpled and torn, attached with a delicate wrapping of twine right at the tip. The tangled gathering of leaves, the smooth gleam of the shell, the richness of these hundreds of tiny beads, give the piece its liveliness and its sense of occasion and plenitude.*

While he wishes to follow objects in terms of their specific ‘forms’, ‘uses’ and ‘trajectories’, Appadurai never means to discuss the material composition or ontological constitution of things. Instead, he defines, he is interested in how things are put into play or ‘enliven[ed]’ through observable ‘human transactions and calculations’ (1986, p.5). An account of such ‘human transactions’ can be seen in his references to the set of practices through which the men of a group of islands near New Guinea exchange *Kula* objects (Ibid., pp.18-21). Though this is a group endeavour, an individual man’s social position is dependent upon his success. Further, *Kula* objects themselves gather a history; a collection of memories that is woven through with the status of its previous owners. The author goes as far as to explain that the objects are ‘decorated necklaces (which circulate [between islands] in one direction and armshells (which circulate in the other)’ (Ibid., p.18).

Nevertheless, one would be hard put to gain much beyond the vaguest understanding of the material qualities of these objects from this account, which focuses, instead, on the manner in which relations between groups from various islands are reified through formalised negotiations and exchanges. In the foregoing site writing of an object from the *Kula* system I work directly and specifically against the grain of the two foundational texts discussed here by performing an alternative approach to writing about a material artefact. This feels, if not precisely like *revenge*, at least like an act in which I do the armlet honour by retrieving and centralising an account of its form.<sup>7</sup>

In a synopsis of the development of material culture studies, the geographer Louise Crewe comments that:

In earlier accounts of consumption, commodities were followed to their points of origin [...] as a means to understand and locate value. Later work addressed the biographies of things beyond the point of sale, looking at cycles of use and reuse [...]. More recently a number of accounts have revealed potently how the biographical histories and geographies of things, and their connections to people and places, really do matter (2011, pp.27-8).

As Crewe suggests, there exists extensive discussion of objects as constituting, for example, some form of social value or a kind of personal value that relates to, supports or is constitutive of identity. If *Kula* was considered ‘the best-documented example of a non-Western, preindustrial, non-monetized, translocal exchange system’ (Appadurai, 1986, p.18), studies of Western material culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries frequently include discussion of individuals’ encounters with mass-produced or consumer objects – although again, such studies may not include much of a focus on the materiality of the physical objects under discussion. Crewe’s bivalent use of the term ‘matter’, then, aptly superimposes two important elements – ‘matter’ in the sense of physical substance and ‘matter’ in the sense of importance or significance. However, this coincidence of terminology is not unpacked or theorised. In particular, we never learn what it is (in Crewe’s terms) for a material object to ‘matter’ in the sense of being made of stuff.

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<sup>7</sup> That said, I am, it is important to acknowledge, writing about the *Kula* object specifically as a museum artefact. My account attempts to rescue the physical form of the object as it is now, but cannot hope to return to it the cultural context from which it was acquired, almost a century ago.

Crewe alludes to a significant field of literature in which consumption is deployed not only as a set of practices, but as a set of *values*. Further to this, a range of accounts emerge that supplement discussion of consumption and use by concerning themselves specifically with waste and the disposal of objects (see for example Crang, 2012; Edensor, 2005; Hawkins and Mueke, 2003; Hawkins, 2006; Hetherington, 2004; Rathje and Murphy, 2001). To quote another play on words, this time from Crang (2012) the *cast-off* can be considered a kind of *cast of* the individual or society that wants rid. In this sense, refuse provides insights via the ways in which different kinds of objects are treated in their afterlife according to different kinds of value. It can be seen, then, that there are significant continuities between this and the field of consumption studies more generally. Moreover, the developments discussed are broadly consistent with the approach taken in Appadurai (1986): in a similar way, the consumption and disposal of material stuff is defined through the attribution of value, and is taken to have an indexical relationship with the consuming person or persons. Consumption, through this lens, becomes a component of culture or identity; a foundational element of practices of citizenship, education, the organisation of families, as well as an indispensable scaffolding element of the assemblage that one might call personhood. Meanwhile, disposal appears as a kind of negative image of the same set of constitutive processes.



Figure 3: Underlined collage from Miles (1998, in Landy, 2001a, p.88).

In discussing *Break Down*, Landy himself has often deployed such an account. His own descriptions of the work (especially in the early stages) include a notion of consumerism as a social force. This approach can be seen in the artist's frequent citations of the sociological text *Consumerism – as a Way of Life* (Miles, 1998), one of a number of social theory texts along similar lines to appear in the *Break Down Inventory* and in Landy's research.<sup>8</sup> Miles presents the argument that consumerism is a defining feature of social life at the end of the twentieth century that is sold, falsely, as an 'inherently liberating' ethic:

A myth has therefore been perpetuated which centres on the belief that everyone can be a winner in a consumer society; that by extracting prodigious quantities of wealth from nature everybody can be given what they need; and everyone can co-operate against humanity's fundamental foe which appears to be nature itself [...] The benefits of consumerism in this sense appear to be filtering down. However, such a filter is only partial and merely serves to promote the idea that any form of consumption is inherently liberating when clearly it is not (Miles, 1998, p.150 [underlining reproduced from the cut-and-paste from this text in Landy, 2001, p.88: see Figure 3]).

In studies of consumption, a rich variegation is shown to persist in how people obtain, deploy and display their stuff. As such, we are offered a narrative in which human beings' ability for self-determination prevails and flourishes. This narrative takes place across a wide-ranging literature. In short, the argument is that consumer-capitalist acceleration notwithstanding, people continue to organise their lives in ways that are ingenious, provisional and (productively) chaotic, within and through material belongings and via practices of consumption. Human creativity persists. Individuals are bricoleurs who organise and reorganise a collage of material belongings in relation to constantly shifting tableaux of exigencies; influences; concerns. Again, such accounts of the material culture of post-industrial consumerism continue the emphasis proposed by Appadurai. As such, what these accounts account *for* is not the materiality of the consumer object, but the commodified object that is animated by the values and meanings projected upon it. As the geographer Kevin Hetherington remarks in his influential discussion on the disposition of objects in domestic space, 'the general move in much of this work on consumption has been towards recognising the skilled and

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the text, both whole and shredded, and Miles himself, appear in the BBC documentary on *Break Down* entitled *The Man Who Destroyed Everything* (2002). Here, Miles discusses consumerism in terms of 'the construction of need,' via cultural products such as makeover programmes, in order to 'offset unstable aspects of our lives'.

creative person making a social life for themselves through consumer practices' (2004, p.157). This narrative arises in Miles, as cited by Landy, when he argues that 'If consumers experience consumerism as a way of life then that life is necessarily authentic' (1998, p.159; reproduced in Landy, 2001a, p.89). Such concerns shaped the work of the anthropologist Daniel Miller over many years, as he pursued a concern with individuals' making of meaning, and the collaborative project of reifying social connections, norms and practices via material objects and practices belong to this tendency. Miller's study of the inhabitants of a South London street, for example, consists of a series of descriptions of encounters between researchers and participants through home visits in which they discuss participants' relationships, stories, attitudes – in the context of their belongings (2008; see also Miller, 1998; 2010).

It must, I think, be seen as an extension of this narrative of consumption as a set of creative (or meaning-making) practices, when, strikingly often, recent studies on material culture also include reflexive accounts by scholars of their subjects' or their own experiences with and uses of things. See for example the collected essays in Candlin and Guins (2009), which, while mainly comprising theoretical writings, devotes an entire section to such 'object lessons'. Similarly, the collection *Evocative Objects*, edited by theorist of technology and psychology Sherry Turkle (2007), is entirely composed, as the blurb on the jacket says, of personal reflections by 'scientists, humanists, artists and designers'. These accounts are compelling. Turkle herself prods through the cupboard in which family 'keepsakes [...] books, trinkets, souvenirs and photographs' (2007, p.3) are kept, in search of clues about her absent dad. We hear of a woman who uses her and her children's large collection of toys from McDonalds' Happy Meals to substantiate her commitment to a warm and friendly bond with her children and to enact her resistance to the preoccupations of her own upper middle class upbringing (Miller, 2008, pp.125-32). The media theorist Henry Jenkins analyses in memoir form his abiding preoccupation with buying, reading and collecting superhero comics. He describes the way this consumption practice (the buying, the reading, the keeping) creates a scaffold that connects him, in middle age, with the loving care he received as a child, entwining with his incipient grief to the extent that as an adult, he 'bought the comics on the way to the hospice' to visit his elderly mother (2007, p.196). Guy Julier, in the context of a general discussion of the design and functionality of the iPod, incorporates an account of the way the online and social connections

wrought via this object carry, for him, a weighty sense of emotional connection, too. Choosing particular pieces of music supplies him with a soundtrack; 'to accompany particular activities – commuting, jogging, ironing – turns these ordinary actions into filmic experiences' (Julier, 2009, p.478).

The pleasure of these accounts has to do with good stories. Indeed, they might almost constitute a sub-genre. As the geographer Harriet Hawkins notes approvingly in her own analysis of *Break Down*, Landy's belongings, collected and listed *en masse*, 'recall the eloquent objects of disposal tales, inheritance yarns and salvage geographies and their reciprocal, creative relations with people and places' (2014, p.123). Such 'yarns', however, convey not only a profoundly nostalgic energy, but also a pronounced social conservatism, which issues partly from the individuating power of such accounts. The focus, as often as not, is upon the insides of people's houses: one might wonder what, for the author, lies beyond those four walls. The zenith of this last tendency can perhaps be found in Miller's text *The Comfort of Things*, in which the author claims material objects are centrally important to the maintenance of relationships, which themselves are centrally important 'to modern life' (2008, p.287). Nevertheless, each house in the street visited during the project is, he suggests, self-contained, an entity in itself; the street in totality suggesting 'that concepts such as society or community [do not] play much of an immediate role in the lives of people who reside in a modern metropolis such as contemporary London' (Ibid., p.283). Due to the efficient running of 'the state', he suggests, there is not much of a reason to get to know the neighbours – as though it were possible to access 'basic education, health services' and so on without encountering other human beings. What emerges is an odd sense that the categories of 'relationships' on one hand and 'culture and society' on the other are constituted as in some way mutually exclusive.

In the accounts outlined above, things are handled, kept, trashed, put in boxes, on shelves, worn. Nevertheless, they remain inert. Their nature, capacities and significance rests entirely in the hands – and eyes - of their human owners. Little, if any specific acknowledgement is made of the materiality of the objects discussed, whether the bluntest description of the specific physical characteristics of the objects under discussion (texture, weight, composition, density) or a more finely formed account of matter as a surface of interaction that is formed somehow between a thing and a human being who handles it. One exception to this tendency



is the work of the literary theorist Steven Connor (2011), the author of any number of ‘inheritance yarns’ and other vibrant imaginings of the significance of small, seemingly insignificant objects. This can be seen in his writing of the sensuous mysteries of the button box in his childhood home ‘which doubtless had once held toffees or acid drops’ and now:

contained an entirely imaginary currency; there were extravagantly large, high-denomination flat discs, some of mother-of-pearl, that had once surely belonged to fancy items of evening wear or dressing gowns; middle-value buttons for coats and trousers and the small change of shirt buttons. The extraordinary variety of shapes and textures was accompanied by strange, musty perfumes (Connor, 2011, p.37).

Connor’s work is singular in that he imagines ‘magical things’ that accommodate and transport human thought, like metaphor made concrete. It is this appeal to ‘magic’ that provides space for something to happen that is a little beyond the ambit of human percept and interpretation. In the case of the button box, the shapes and textures of the buttons are examined, but in addition, the compelling detail of ‘strange, musty perfumes’ is powerfully suggestive of objects that are rightfully possessed of their own vibrancy; inhabiting entirely the potentiality to affect and be affected in any number of ways.

### 1.2.2 *Literatures on Break Down*

I turn, here, to explore the significant influence of scholarship on commodity and consumption on existing literatures on *Break Down*. Most authors who discuss Landy’s possessions do so in order to deploy the work as a case study of the treatment of different kinds of objects. Few provide a sustained engagement with the work, and fewer still discuss the specificities of Landy’s belongings, or the procedures that are brought to bear in *Break Down*. In several texts the work appears fleetingly in order to exemplify some other abstract principle that is at stake. These include the legalities of destroying works of art (Lydiate, 2001); the destruction of art as, itself, a variety of art (Maet, 2013); narratives of refuse as both beautiful and closely associated with trauma (Yaeger, 2003); as part of an assessment of the viability of some apparently political art works as genuinely radical pieces (Charlesworth, 2002, p.357); and in one case, seemingly to facilitate the use of Landy’s work *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)* (1998; see Figure 18) within an otherwise unrelated article on architectural detail (Garcia, 2014).

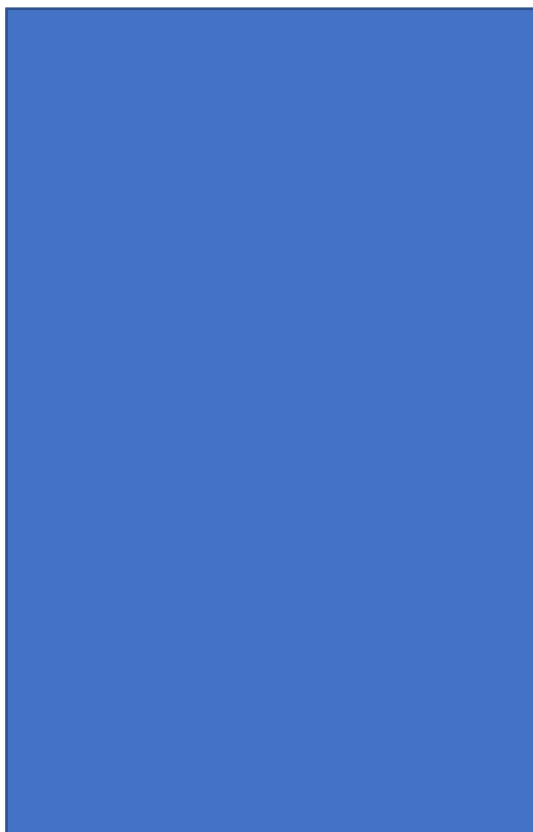


Figure 4: John Landy's sheepskin coat, in a yellow, plastic tray (Artangel, n.d.).

In the sub-group of texts that provide a sustained engagement with *Break Down* on its own terms rather than in order to exemplify a different concept (see Crewe, 2011; Davies and Parrinder, 2013; Harvie, 2006; 2013; Hawkins 2010; 2014; Perry, 2013), it is possible to identify significant continuities with research in which material objects and practices are analysed in relation to concepts of commodity and value. In particular, there is a strong relationship between the theme of material objects as a kind of prop for the formation of identity, and accounts of *Break Down* in which Landy's things appear as a direct reflection of their owner, or at the very least as fundamentally marked by Landy's ownership. For instance, the art historian Gill Perry (2013) calls up Michael Landy's use of his father's sheepskin coat (the subject of Chapter 6 of this thesis) to mediate discussion of his family home. The critic of theatre and performance Jen Harvie reads signs of Landy – the man, the consumer – from his assembled belongings:

their combined banality-yet-quirkiness betrayed the preferences, foibles and modest perversions of a social individual. Multiple bottles of HP sauce suggested Landy's love of the stuff. And a long list of single socks perhaps indicated his perennial ill-fortune at the laundrette but his commitment to making do in the circumstances (2006, p.70).

The geographer Louise Crewe employs *Break Down* extensively in an account of value as a multivalent quality that can inhabit a variety of locations, focusing especially on what she calls ‘the autotopographical value of things’ (2011, p.29)<sup>9</sup> in Landy’s work. The gist of Crewe’s argument is that the ‘absent-presence’ of previously owned, remembered objects is revealed through Landy’s use of an inventory:

Clothes are intimate. We wear them and feel them and leave our bodily effects on and in them, trapped between the fibres. Our clothes become us. We inhabit them, and they tell stories about us: where we bought them; when, where, and with whom we wore them; the places we went; the stains from the party, the rip from the fall as marks of value not disdain. They touch us and reveal significance and memory-value. Clothing is an object in the space between self and surround, a second skin, porous, absorbent, soaked in memories and steeped in stories (Ibid., p.39).

Sweat is not directly named here; nevertheless, it seeps through Crewe’s account in the pores and the soaking. This underlying image stands for the placing of Landy’s clothes as saturated, as if by perspiration, in his existence, his life. In this, Crewe performs the notion that our things are marked by – and could be materially indistinguishable from – their owners.

Much academic discussion of *Break Down* draws upon some notion of consumer capital as a kind of discursive runaway train. Within this narrative, individuals have no option but to define themselves from within and through the narrow confines of practices and concepts of consumption. It is from this standpoint that *Break Down* is positioned as a locus of resistance. The prevalence of such discussion must be seen in light of the fact that Landy himself drew on sociological texts on consumerism (as previously mentioned, the text *Consumerism as a Way of Life* [Miles, 1998] is especially visible) when preparing for *Break Down*. I infer from statements of Landy’s elsewhere, for example in his comment that ‘people don’t feel the need to question the validity of consumerism as a way of life’ (2008, p.107) that he has sometimes drawn Miles’ account of consumption into his own discussions of *Break Down*. This view is also espoused by Harriet Hawkins, who comments in relation to the book collection revealed in the ‘Reading’ section of

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<sup>9</sup> The term ‘autotopographical’ is not defined by Crewe herself, but I interpret it as referring to a spatial iteration of autobiography; a notion of material objects in relation to a concept of one’s own inner ‘map’.

the *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b) and the research process presented in *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a) that 'Landy takes consumption seriously as a transformative social and cultural force', and with regard to Miles' contribution in particular, that 'the influence of this and other texts is clear [...] in the ways Landy talks about consumption and consumerism' (Hawkins, 2014, pp.114-5). It is necessary to be cautious about the status of the artist's intentions in relation to *Break Down*, in order to avoid a unitary notion of the work as defined by Landy alone. That said, it is clear that the position discussed does make its way, via this narrative put forth by Landy, into a number of journalistic accounts and thereby becomes part of the public profile of *Break Down*.<sup>10</sup>

It is the moment of identification named by Crewe, in which objects inherit a kind of humanity from their owners, that prompts the artist and critic Dave Beech to comment that Landy's destruction of personal items – family photos; letters – alongside objects more recognisable as consumer commodities, 'a toaster or a Dyson [...] is a grisly excuse for a spectacle' (2001, p.31). In a notably hostile review and then as part of a longer piece of art criticism, Beech (2001; 2002) lays out the assessment that *Break Down* is an anti-political work of art.<sup>11</sup> Beech sees such issues as alienation and commodity fetishism as implicit in the form and procedures of *Break Down*. However, he argues, the work cannot be seen as a satisfactorily 'radical' critique due to the failings of the artist's own account of his work:

Destroying everything in his possession may well imply Landy's personal dissatisfaction with commodity exchange, capitalism or even the world of material existence, but Landy went to great effort – and often – to distance himself from the radical political critique of private property. His preference for a more religious iconography of symbolic self-cleansing may well speak against counting *Breakdown* [sic] as a political work at all (Beech, 2002, p.394).

Beech's criticism is problematic in its conflation of a number of factors. In particular, the category of the political, as proposed by Beech, is a peculiar entity; at once intensely narrow and consumingly capacious. This odd 'politics' holds itself apart from religious modes of expression, which are in Beech's account considered to be absolutely inimical to 'radical political critique'. As such, in this account,

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<sup>10</sup> A full review of accounts of *Break Down* in the popular media may be found in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.

<sup>11</sup> He isn't alone; in an admittedly more measured analysis JJ Charlesworth specifically names *Break Down* as an example of 'art with erstwhile political content' (2002, p.357).

Landy's work is 'anti-political' due to what is seen as the troublingly religious overtones of *Break Down*.

In effect, Beech sets up a 'straw man' argument in which he engineers an encounter between Landy and a set of premises and requirements that are largely imposed on the work by himself as the critic. He is especially troubled by the positionality of Landy within the work. Rather than generalising from Landy's actions in order to expose the alienation of ordinary people, Beech says, *Break Down* takes an ordinary experience of living in alienated modernity and particularises it to Landy. In exposing and performing his own experience as Landy does, Beech fears 'that he is doing this for us, like some Third Millennium messiah, suffering for our consumerist sins in an accountant's version of the crucifixion' (Beech, 2001, p.31).<sup>12</sup> However, the florid and rather specious accusations levelled by Beech are not born out by the markedly workaday and routinised mode of destruction employed by Landy. Consider, for example, the written procedures; the boiler suits; the cheerful, yellow plastic trays and the action taking place as it does beneath the fluorescent lighting of a former department store.<sup>13</sup> In these respects, it seems that Landy has, if anything, attempted to remove the viscera of glamour and sacrifice, replacing them with a regime of work, conducted in strict compliance with a set of guidelines.

Finally, it is to say the least odd on Beech's part that he expects *Break Down*, which as he notes is not described as 'radical critique' by Landy himself, *will* and *should* in some sense pertain to categories of the political as defined by Beech. As he acknowledges, Landy rejects Marxian accounts of the work. For example, when the critic Julian Stallabrass proposes, in the interview published in *Michael Landy*:

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<sup>12</sup> A new copy of his book, presented to Landy by Steve Miles after *Break Down*, is inscribed by the author: 'To Michael: Commodity? Jesus? ...or artist?' (Hawkins, 2014, p.115) in likely reference to Beech's critique. The image conjured by Beech's heightened language here is reminiscent of Landy's 2013 National Gallery show *Saints Alive*, in which a number of images of Renaissance saints were made in towering fibreglass and set to self-destruct through the operation of pedal-operated mechanisms.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in a short interview about *Break Down*, Landy's failure to claim a high profile in the performance of the work is picked out by the artist Gustav Metzger as a 'plus'. In Metzger's view, through this decision, which must to some extent be supported by the fact that Landy, like his operatives, wore a blue boiler suit, he dilutes the primacy of his own position as the artist, making him indistinguishable from the rest of, as Metzger says, 'a group of a dozen or so people.' Metzger, too, describes *Break Down* as a piece of political art that works against consumerism (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).

*Break Down*, that the work could be seen as a Marxist analysis of cultural capital, Landy says that he is 'more interested in the lifespan analysis of commodities' (Landy, 2001a, p.113). This notably bland response does not come across as the utterance of a would-be messiah – and of course, since it was not Landy's intention to achieve a political work along the lines proposed by Beech, it cannot be entirely surprising that *Break Down* does not meet Beech's criteria.

That said, as the artist himself remarks in conversation with Stallabrass before the show, '*Break Down* is critical of consumerism but at the same time it does not pretend to stand outside it. You can't stand outside it' (Landy, 2001a, p.113), which is, at the least, not a non-Marxist position. Following this nuanced statement of Landy's, the work of both Jen Harvie (2006; 2013) and of Harriet Hawkins (2010; 2014) accommodates a greater degree of complication and contradiction. In both, Landy is seen to work from within consumerism in order to produce something that works against the grain. Harvie asks how the processes of 'global consumer capitalism' (Ibid., p.62) might be interrupted through creative practices such as installation or performance art. In contrast to Beech, she has no quarrel with the way in which Landy deploys his private life in *Break Down*. Indeed, the notion of the personal-as-political is a defining rhetorical strand in an account in which Harvie identifies *Break Down* as an exemplar of what she calls a 'metonymic' work. This is to say that for Harvie political art is that which challenges the apparently unchallengeable and is therefore metonymic of larger-scale change. In her terms, such art may be a successfully political work, even in the face of the 'current intractability of...global consumer capitalism' (Ibid., p.63).

In Harvie's estimation, then, *Break Down* both deploys and interrupts the modalities of consumer capitalism. A similar analytic move can be observed in Hawkins' claim that in *Break Down* Landy deploys the very excess that characterises consumer capital. This analysis is written with close reference to Georges Bataille's account of excess, defined here as 'anything that is unproductive in a capitalist means-end economy' (Hawkins, 2010, p.20). For Hawkins, *Break Down* presents an amplification of the ethic of consumer capitalism such that the excess upon which it depends is revealed in its absurdity – a kind of physical performance of the *reductio ad absurdum*. It is this departure from notions of proportionality and functionality that forms the seditious quality of the work. Moreover, through his actions Landy gets at the moment when meaning cannot be

encapsulated in figurings of profit and loss, but instead escapes. There is, in these terms, always a little more than can be accommodated. As such:

excess, and its glorious expenditure in an art which is itself excessive, offers us a critique of the capitalist economy [...] Landy's work, like Bataille's, offers us the move from a rational, utility based knowing of the world [...] to a worldview in which there is an excess of meaning and moreover an affirmation of that which exceeds meaning' (2010, p.20).

Hawkins suggests that *Break Down* is 'generative' partly because of the way that Landy's destruction acts on meaning itself: its overturn of utilitarian terms, which opens up new conceptions of social processes, 'understandings and orderings' (Ibid., pp.21-2).

The discussions summarised here offer a picture of ways in which *Break Down* has been placed and deployed in relation to ideological debates about consumerism both by Landy himself and by critics and academics. Hawkins in particular brings a high degree of analytical power to the discussion. That said, none of these analyses provide a sustained engagement with the materiality of the work: this despite Hawkins' explicit acknowledgement of 'the ever-present risk that, despite their insistent materialities, the elements of *Break Down* are written out, buried under a wealth of ideas' (2010, pp.22-3). As I have discussed, as in accounts that deploy *Break Down* as a kind of worked example of consumption, an exploration of the very particular qualities of things, which has everything to do with the self-sufficiency and immediacy of the realm of the material, tend to go unseen and unsought. The material effects that surround us – or, that we surround ourselves by – are treated as a substrate for human sense-making and particularly for biographical narrative. Such discussions instil a fogging interchangeability between different kinds of things, and obfuscate, by taking for granted, the nature of relationships between person and thing, and the mechanisms through which such connections can be made.

Two existing publications on *Break Down*, by the geographers Michael Crang (2012) and Harriet Hawkins (2014), gesture toward a turn from a superficial account of Landy's belongings as containers for value, identity or autobiography to a consideration of how his actions disclose the materiality of these objects. Hawkins remarks that Landy's dismantling and shredding 'was able to turn attention toward the matter and materiality of his commodities – their substance' (2014, p.129). However, the discussion that follows, while illustrated with images of bagged,

labelled and shredded materials, provides instead a summary of Landy's treatment of matter via processes of dismantlement, sorting and display. Crang, meanwhile, proposes that:

there needs to be a move beyond the histrionic and powerful emotions that get picked up in reviews of work like Landy's (focusing on treasured clothes, the prize possessions, the artworks destroyed and their ilk) to see the limits of meaning in just stuff. Stuff that is so banal it hardly registers (2012, p.764).

In fact, even these two accounts depart very little from the approach outlined by Appadurai (1986) in the sense that here, too, there is a tendency not to study 'just stuff' or the 'substance' of things, but rather, things as commodities that are readable because they are put into play in a variety of ways during different 'life cycle' phases of production, consumption and disposal (Kopytoff, 1986).

In Crang's final remarks he returns to his main argument, that discarded objects constitute a kind of negative imprint of the priorities and values of contemporary Western society. By extension, Landy's belongings are presumably seen by Crang as having a direct and indexical relationship to Landy himself. I would also push back against his peculiar turn toward 'the limits of meaning'; a phrase that suggests a hermeneutic concern for unseen significance that seems at odds with his stated desire to consider 'just stuff'. In short, Crang extends significant ideas, but in all, his account lacks a unifying logic. Nevertheless, in working against the grain of Crewe (2011) and by implication others who limit their discussion of *Break Down* to the longevity of attachments or sedimented meaning/memory, Crang digs furthest toward the account of *Break Down* that I want to progress in this thesis. This is especially true of the exciting - if fleeting - notion, also extended in Hawkins (2014), that in de-forming his belongings, Landy reveals their materiality.

### 1.3 A 'working of matters': assemblage, affect, and *Break Down*

So, how should 'meaning' be defined if as Crang suggests 'just stuff', stripped of memories, affect, and other such 'histrionic' associations, can still 'mean'? This question forms an important marker or boundary point in terms of the contribution of this text to the existing literatures on *Break Down*. Having explored how materiality is treated in existing academic publications on Landy's *Break Down*, in this section I begin to distinguish my own approach in relation to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly in their text *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987/2013).



Here, the authors evoke a vision of the assemblage as an entire (though always unfinished or contingent) system, that includes intersecting objects and energies that work in a variety of ways and at a variety of scales, all of which are rooted in *process* and change - although such process itself here operates across different temporalities and features remarkable complexity and interdependency. As the philosopher Manuel DeLanda specifies, the identity of belonging to one assemblage in particular is not essential to any part of that assemblage, which could break off and work instead as part of a different assemblage (2006, p.18), and indeed, may well work as an element of more than one assemblage simultaneously. The artist and scholar of new media Chris Salter observes that the term 'assemblage', in Brian Massumi's translation of *A Thousand Plateaus*, arose from Deleuze and Guattari's original term *agencement*, which 'implies both *agency* [...] and *arrangement*, the ordering or placing of heterogeneous things in a mesh of relations' (2015, p.9; p.251 n.33). The implication here of action and relationship combining is helpful. That said, I do not employ the term agency in the coming discussions but turn, rather, to the concept of affect; that is, the extent to which an entity has the capacity to be affected, or to have an effect beyond itself.

Signally, the concept of the assemblage is sufficiently capacious to encompass the simplest and most complex entities and interactions. However, affect is central to a fully realised conception of the assemblage, since no element of this mass or gathering is in reality single. In other words, no one element or part can be isolated to do its work (its thing; its 'doing') away from the rest of the assemblage. This is because affect is not identical with any single object. Rather, it is contingent upon the composition and mechanisms of the assemblage. The same can be said in reverse: 'A weapon is nothing outside of the combat organization it is bound up with' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.464), and equally, as DeLanda comments:

the reason why the properties of a whole cannot be reduced to those of its parts is that they are the result not of an aggregation of the components' own properties but of the actual exercise of their capacities (2006, p.11; see also Bennett, 2010, p.21).

An assemblage, then, is a mass or massing in which relation and affect are co-constitutive. The concept of the multiplicity is helpful here, to call up the persistently emergent nature of the assemblage; a potentiality that is never exhausted and that is therefore profoundly concerned with 'relations of becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.410). In this becoming, objects, entities,

assemblages, multiplicities (which is to say *everything* and also *every thing*) are characterised by change; by process. What is revealed in Landy's dismantlings and shreadings is therefore not, as Crang suggests, the 'unbecoming' (2012, p.766-7) but very precisely the *becoming*, of physical things. The insertion of 'un' is not only superfluous. In addition, it incorrectly privileges the form of Landy's objects when whole. Conversely, as I argue in Chapter 3: *Fragment / Part / Whole* (pages 75-6), to examine *Break Down* through a lens of becoming is to understand that Landy does not destroy, but rather, transforms his belongings.

It follows precisely from this account of becoming that in this thesis material objects are taken to possess the capacity for mediality. Even the barest and simplest of objects, I observe, expresses through its form the narrative of its structure and composition; that is, the story of how it came to be as it is now. In developing this approach I take inspiration from the work of the artist and theorist of digital media Matthew Fuller, particularly in the pursuit of 'a materialism that acknowledges and takes delight in the conceptuality of real objects' (2007, p.1). Also salient and helpful here is the exploration of the Deleuzian concept of expressivity in DeLanda (2006, p.14). Objects possess an intrinsic capacity for expression. Examples provided by DeLanda include firstly, the atom whose frequency (and therefore chemical type) can be 'read' via a spectrograph, and secondly, genetic code. In the first example, expression is formed indexically with an external receiving surface of some kind – and as such, is bound up with its technicities. As DeLanda observes: 'in the absence of astrophysicists (or other users of spectrographs) the patterns [made by atoms when they come into contact with radiation] do not perform any function' (Ibid.). In contrast, genetic code encompasses its informationality within its function – that is, it incorporates its expressivity in the way it works. This text comprises both kinds of conceptual life (it couldn't fail to). As such the capacity of objects to communicate is generally seen to be contingent upon the assemblage of which they are currently a part. For example, one might turn to the construction of 'vibrant matter' by political philosopher Jane Bennett (2010). Here, material objects and forces have a life, in that they are possessed of affects (simply that) and further, possess an unreadable energy that transcends human experience and yet draws us to it. Early in her text, there appears a gathering of objects made eloquent specifically through their gathering; their proximities:

On a sunny Tuesday morning on 4 June in the grate over a storm drain to the Chesapeake Bay in front of Sam's Bagels on Cold Spring Lane in Baltimore, there was:

one large men's black plastic work glove

one dense mat of oak pollen

one unblemished dead rat

one white plastic bottle cap

one smooth stick of wood

Glove, pollen, rat, cap stick (2010, p.4).

In accordance with this meditation upon gatherings and dispersals, I would note that *Break Down* itself is (among other things) a collection of objects that call to one another. The proximity of one element to the others enables a narrative to emerge.

In this thesis, my first task is to relocate the materiality; to draw the specificities of Landy's belongings and the fragments and dust he makes of them back into the conversation. As such, the approach that I have already described, in which discussion of *Break Down* has often been limited to concepts of commodity and consumption, is extended to accommodate the sense in which artistic practice is specifically a kind of enquiry. As Salter shows, such work depends on the dynamism and vitality of matter – its capacity to be unpredictable or to produce the unknown (2015, p.14). I am, therefore, often concerned with the physical specificities of the material objects and substances under discussion – their size, texture, weight, composition, density – but only to the extent that I can work from these admittedly rather blunt parameters into their life, their becoming.

The fragments produced by Landy provoke questions about the values of part and whole; singular and multiple. Further – and still more importantly – the fragment in *Break Down* reveals the intrinsic mediality of material objects. They bear in their fabric the story of how they are composed and how they came to be; moreover, the basest facts of their formation are in turn constitutive of circumstances, practices, processes beyond themselves. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (pages 59-60), connections between materiality and what might be called 'meaning making' can be instantiated through the theory of affordances offered by the psychologist James Gibson (1979/1986) in which objects' concrete features are co-constitutive with the physical and cognitive capabilities of the creatures that perceive and interact with them. The material characteristics of any object in particular will be

implicated in a range of interactions, reactions and causalities, politics, states of affairs and cognitive and affective processes.

Therefore, in contrast with Crang's speculation regarding the 'meaning' of 'just stuff' (2012, p.764), 'meaning' appears in this thesis as a verb rather than a noun. Deleuze and Guattari present a vision of the book as an assemblage that comprises a range of forces or dynamics of joining and un-joining. This 'little machine' (1987/2013, p.2) occupies a space of both heterogeneity and homogeneity; singularity and multiplicity. It works in ways that are jointed and/or separate, and as such, might gather itself into a homogeneous mass and/or split off into discrete, heterogeneous parts. Accordingly I begin with *Break Down* not as a single object - 'a' case study - but rather as a multiple entity that gives rise to effects that are both haphazard and manifold. In this context, it makes little sense to speculate as to the intentions of the artist or indeed the possible personal significance of his belongings. It is more important to consider what the work does.

In a similar way, if as Deleuze and Guattari suggest such 'machines' are best investigated through their doings, fusions, re-fusions, inputs and outputs - it is important to turn away from any notion of the cultural artefact that makes or conveys 'meaning' in any simple, direct or unitary sense. The concept of the assemblage enables me to project an account of objects as instrumental in the telling of stories, the formation of subjectivity and the making and remaking of social connections. The things we own are, and are not us. This thesis complicates and deepens existing accounts of *Break Down*, by incorporating the dynamic nature of matter to explore conceptualisations of subjectivity and stuff, the extent to which material objects might become part of an extended human consciousness, and the ways in which we, as human beings, must consider ourselves absolutely part of and bound up in the material world. Chapter 6: *John Landy's Sheepskin Coat*, works at the intersections between three accounts of subjectivity and materiality: a Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of multiplicity; Winnicottian object relations theory and extended mind theory as employed by the philosopher Andy Clark (2009; 2011) and the archaeologist Lambros Malafouris (2013). I argue, then, that any account of the material in some way entwining with, supporting or augmenting human subjectivity should directly address, and indeed *arise from* an account of the nature of materiality in order to arrive at the most profound and

complex account of the subject. It should also include some attempt to account for the mechanisms through which this augmentation or entwining might work.



Figure 5: Fragmented matter produced during *Break Down* (Landy, 2008a, p.192).

Secondly, this thesis focuses on the material processes that constitute *Break Down*. In relation to the two companion texts to the work, *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a) and *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b), text and practices of making text are considered in terms both of materiality and multiplicity. Given the emphasis, in *Break Down*, on the deployment of procedure, I follow Kittler (1985/1990; 1986/1999) in investigating bureaucratic writing as a mode that arises from, and that itself potentialises, particular historically and culturally specific conditions, including material conditions (see also Belknap, 2004; Fuller, 2007; Gitelman, 2014; Goody, 1987; Hayles, 2002; Kafka, 2007; 2012; Krajewski, 2011; Vismann, 2008). This focus on media as constituted via specifically *material* processes enables the development of a discussion of *Break Down* that can take on board the implications of fragmentation. As such, this discussion is intrinsically connected with processes of inventorying and narrativising, dismantling and granulating, displaying and disposing.

As Landy's belongings are reduced 'as close as possible to raw materials' (Sillars, 2009, pp.25-6), the fragmented sections are revealed as objects that possess their own mediality. By this, I mean that they speak very directly of their own composition, and of the moment, and manner, in which they became fragmented.

*Break Down* reveals the fragment as an object in its own right. The scraps and shreds that Landy makes of his belongings are shaken free from one narrative, their place and meaning in Landy's life, and simultaneously gain a new and materially intrinsic narrative quality, telling as they do of their own composition and of a moment of fissure, of breaking.

#### 1.4 *Chapters; loops; turns*

In the four main chapters that follow the introduction and methodology, this thesis explores a series of *turns* that reveal, in different ways, the pivotal themes of mediality and materiality as they arise in *Break Down*. In this final section of the Introduction, I show, by chapter, how the coming argument is to proceed.

In Chapter 2: *Methodology*, I consider the scope of this investigation and review the theoretical and methodological approaches that underpin this project. Having surveyed academic publications here in the introduction, in the methodology I review the use of journalistic and other non academic sources on *Break Down* in this thesis. I consider the challenges that inhere in considering a work like *Break Down*, which has no continuing material form. Since this project distinguishes itself through its close focus on a single artwork its material composition and organisation, I further discuss the methodological implications of this choice. Finally, the methodology includes discussion, with reference to Jane Rendell (2005; 2010), of the strategy of observation and description known as site writing, which I adapt for use throughout this thesis. Site writing provides an alternative mode of engagement with the subject matter that enables me to explore what it is to achieve a sustained focus on the matter of *Break Down*.

Chapter 3: *Fragment / Part / Whole*, attends to the nature of physical matter through close investigation of the fragments and dust produced by *Break Down*. The central claim of this chapter is that Landy does not destroy his belongings so much as transform them. What he accomplishes through the dismantling and grinding in *Break Down* is to re-narrativise material objects, rejecting their seemingly inert form and revealing their mediality. This discussion draws upon Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory and Gibson's theory of affordances (1979/1986) to develop an account of the fragment that responds directly to its physical form. In *Break Down*, elements of part and whole emerge at different moments of Landy's process. This process, and the nature of these fragments and

whole bodies, are considered in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the multiple. The distinctions between fragments and dust, substances that each have their own cultural significance, are brought into play to illuminate their place in Landy's project. Finally, an investigation is established regarding the fragment as a narrative object – an object that in its *form*, tells of its *formation*.

The fourth chapter, *Manual*, explores the significance of the procedures produced by Landy to define the work of his team of operatives (the eleven assistants who conducted much of the physical work of dismantling and shredding Landy's possessions). The chapter begins by presenting a review of the area of study known as new media theory or new German media theory, which will form a theoretical underpinning of both this, and the next chapter. Here, the manual for *Break Down* as set out in Landy's text *Michael Landy / Break Down* (2001a, pp.33-40) is analysed. I read Landy's manual against his notes on taking apart a radio-cassette player, and consider the working hand as an emblem of the Marxian concept of labour power (1867/1976, p.270). The significance of the manual as a textual form is further assessed through a focus on the use of 'event scores' or sets of instructions within the known as Fluxus art collective.

Chapter 5: *Line / List / Inventory* investigates the significance in *Break Down* of Landy's operationalisation of inventorying. The material iterations of *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b), as a printed text and in its earlier form as a spreadsheet, are considered in relation to theorisations of the inventory, the line and the list. These are forms that summon the modality of the series. The inventory also incorporates practices of numbering and the ordering of information according to a set of conventions that has its roots at the very beginnings of written language. As such, it can be understood as a narrative form, since it is inherently concerned with process, relationship and meaning. Further, the inventory, list and line are all in different ways fragmented forms that are inherently concerned with a body of data as a collection of parts and wholes. As will be seen, the list, in particular, appears as a mode in which qualities of dynamism and contingency are of primary importance: entries might be (and might *have been*) shuffled, re-sorted, added and excised.

Building on the discussion of fragment as narrative matter in Chapter 3, Chapter 6: *John Landy's Sheepskin Coat* also projects an extension of existing accounts of *Break Down*. Here I ask, if human beings use material objects as a substrate or

container for identity and attachments, how this work might be more securely accounted for. The final object to be destroyed during *Break Down*, a sheepskin coat owned by Michael Landy's father, is the fulcrum for an engagement with three divergent theoretical positions that nevertheless all contain elements of resonance and continuity on the relationship between things and people. These are the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of the multiplicity, the object relations theory of Donald Winnicott (1964; 1971/2005), and extended mind theory as discussed in the work of Clark (2009; 2011) and Malafouris (2013). The chapter comprises an examination of the literary trope of the second hand coat that is inhabited by its previous owner, followed by a close reading of discussion regarding John Landy's coat. While human affect can be seen to be scattered through and woven into the material world that surrounds us, this leads to a notion of personhood and identity that is multiple and contingent rather than fixed. Objects may appear to take up human qualities, but human beings are also thingly; made of stuff; intrinsically of the natural world.



## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 *One Work*<sup>1</sup>

This chapter introduces three important methodological elements of this inquiry into *Break Down*. First, it explores the implications of devoting an entire, book-length text to a single work of art and provides an overview of the range of materials and sources on which I draw in making this account of the work. I consider the fact that this art work, as a live event and an entity that could be visited, is in the past; therefore, this discussion cannot draw directly upon *Break Down* and relies on others' accounts of the work. Finally, this chapter provides an opportunity to consider the methodological implications of the questions of mediality, materiality and relationships between the two upon which this thesis hinges. In considering the material practices that have produced this text, I refer especially to the work of the new media theorist Friedrich Kittler (1985/1990; 1986/1999). This includes the fact, specifically, that it has been written, but further the ways in which writing 'writes' not only the thesis, but the object of these writings, the writer *as* writer and indeed, the act of writing itself (Rendell, 2010). I perform this complex configuration with a particular awareness of writing in my deployment of site writing, a strategy derived from the work of the practitioner and theorist of art and architecture Jane Rendell (2005; 2010). The coming chapter works between the psychoanalytic foundations of this observational writing technique and the theoretical approach taken in this thesis, which is inspired by, and/or takes after, Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this subtitle I acknowledge the excellent 'One Work' series of texts published by the London art organisation Afterall, each of which focuses on a single work of contemporary art. Working with texts from this collection has been essential in my own reflections on the methodological implications of making *Break Down* the sole focus of this project.

<sup>2</sup> Here in the methodology it is worthwhile to expand on one technical element of my writing in order to contextualise my approach in relation to this thesis. As I move through discussions that pertain to a number of objects and surfaces, I employ what is known as the *literary present tense* to discuss texts and art works. My intention here is to convey the sense that the texts under discussion *continue to speak* in the present, despite having been written in the past. I extend this convention to my discussion of this thesis itself. In doing so, I hope to communicate that I distinguish the chapters of this thesis – and this thesis as a whole – specifically as *texts* that continue to do whatever it is they do, and thus warrant use of the present tense (rather than records of work that I have done – although of course, they are that, too). This seems particularly important given the sense in which, in each of the loops of discussion comprised by this thesis, I

To examine *just one* art work must, itself, be seen as a specifically methodological decision that centralises the concept of multiplicity in this thesis. To take up *Break-Down* as the sole focus of this project reveals the work as a dense locus of intersecting influences, which in themselves provide space for exploration and/or ground for analysis. As discussed in the introduction, the substantial analyses that take place in the chapters that follow take the form of a series of discursive turns or gambits. These demonstrate how *Break Down* potentiates novel ways to understand the themes discussed. The art work appears, therefore, not as a vehicle for instantiation (for example of an abstract conceptual theme or theoretical argument) but rather as a distributed entity; a pack of connections, objects and energies that is ‘always in the middle’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, pp.306-7). As the artist and art theorist O’Sullivan remarks, one condition of this dense specificity is that the multiplicity has ‘no end [...], no origin or final cause’ (2006, p.28).

Odd things happen to scale when working with a single art work over a protracted period. Extreme proximity might be expected to summon *Break Down* in its very essence, this-ness or is-ness, but in fact fuzzes the edges, introducing a new layer of generalisation and expansiveness. Thinking this fuzzing experience through Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of multiplicity, one might say that through the sustained focus of this inquiry, *Break Down* emerges as almost limitless in its potential scope, in that the work is found to contain within itself a fundamental connectedness. Almost inevitably, therefore, it is necessary to cut through a dense mass of connections or tune out an overwhelming chattering in order to be able to speak at all.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, to present a sustained piece of writing from a position of *everythingness* would threaten the capacity of these writings to communicate. While the discussions to come are provoked by elements of *Break Down*, this thesis is a bus that will not call at every stop. In this sense, the guiding frame of the

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perform an encounter with some element of *Break Down*. Any convention of writing that enables me build in some sense of this staging or performing - to foreground in some small way the work done by the text rather than me, the author, is therefore a welcome tool in positioning this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> It is precisely the inability to do this tuning-in (or out) that, for Deleuze and Guattari, defines the psychiatric diagnosis of schizophrenia. As the cultural theorist Ian Buchanan comments, while this experience of intense connectivity with the essential currents of the universe may sound great - and even laudable or desirable – this ‘irruption of immanence’ should be understood as representing not only a theoretical gambit but a genuine area of human experience that can include for some a frightening and isolating ‘falling into illness’ (2015, pp.38-9).

question of materiality and its mediality, as it relates to and is revealed by *Break Down*, is a saving grace that helps me to cut a way through, structuring and guiding the formation of this thesis.

## 2.2 *Gone Work*

Running through the following discussion of the methodological features of this thesis is the fact that I did not see *Break Down* – and couldn't do so now, since the work has no continuing physical existence.<sup>4</sup> In this, as much as in Landy's deliberate destruction of his belongings, the work stages loss. By the same token, to think and write about this work is to prioritise specifically what cannot, any more, be touched, heard, smelt, tasted or seen. The abandoned shop floor where Landy's conveyor belt once stood now operates once more as an actual shop floor, and his granulated possessions lie in landfill site(s) somewhere, or may even have made their way through one of the reclamation facilities mimicked by Landy. How can one come to know an art work in these circumstances?

*Observation: 499 Oxford Street, January 2009. The pillars are still here, and the large plate-glass window onto the street, and from these landmarks I surmise where the production line might have stood and on which wall was displayed that list of the dead, the catalogue of Landy's belongings. In those windows crates containing the desiccated remains of these objects were displayed for passers-by to inspect – through them, pedestrians would have chanced to glance the process of destruction (or the production of dust). In the late-afternoon January gloaming people trudge towards Marble Arch, at the arse-end of Oxford Street. Just as Landy observed nine years ago, at least one in every two or three holds a carrier bag containing recent purchases. As I enter through the doors*

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<sup>4</sup> In this discussion, reflecting the importance of materiality in the thesis overall, I focus on the physicality of *Break Down*, in particular - and the conundrum presented by writing in its absence. I write, not about, but in the knowledge of, developments in contemporary art (particularly since the advent of the readymade and of conceptual art) that in any case put into question the centrality of the material form of a work of art. Adorno's assertion that 'in the modern artwork it is its abstractness, that irritating indeterminateness of what it is and to what purpose it is, that becomes a cipher of what the work is' (1970/1997, p.28) can here be run alongside the art theorist John Roberts' discussion of mutations in form and value in art after the advent of the readymade artwork. Roberts (2008) identifies that the avant-garde can be seen as a critique of previously assumed notions of canonical authority and subjective authenticity in art. The art writing and site writing strategies that I adopt in order to pursue the absent materiality of Landy's *Break Down* are, perhaps, so eminently suitable for this purpose because they have come into being specifically in the context of this indeterminacy in which the material form of the work is not, in any case, granted any particular primacy over its conceptual existence.

*at the corner of Park Street I am confronted by density and monotony above all else. The mode of display here is informed not by variety but by quantity. It is impossible to cross the floor without brushing against the stock; this is storeroom as much as shop. I take up a position opposite the doors where I can gaze across the plane where Break Down once was.*

*The surfaces of the floor, the walls, the ceiling are uniformly smooth and white. All faces and objects are suffused in light, lending an odd sense of vivacity to what, despite the continuous through-put of footfall, is an overwhelmingly moribund scene. On the shop floor no music plays and the main noise I can hear is the continuous hum of many voices. This low chuntering sounds more than serious: grave. As they enter the store each new visitor appraises the scene, their expressions speculative, sombre and purposeful. A continuous procession moves in through the doors at the corner of Oxford Street and Park Street before seemingly being absorbed into the store. Opposite me, a large set of shelves holds astonishing piles of knickers, all gorgeousness, polka dots and lace, and laden with such excess that the piles are dissolving into disorderly heaps under their own weight. As I watch, a worker conveying an overloaded rack of clothes to the shop floor unknowingly (unavoidably, in fact) grazes the display as he passes and a single pair of pants falls to the floor, where it seems momentarily to hover, all off-pink and cream like some delicious, abandoned creature before it is trodden and kicked out of sight.*

This piece of site writing records an expedition, very early in my work on this thesis, to the site at which *Break Down* took place. My pacings of the shop floor at 499 Oxford Street brings to the surface the physical transience of the work. This was not the only visit of this kind. At a certain point in my project, in order to create for myself a way into writing about *Break Down*, I found myself visiting spaces where Landy's works *used to be*.<sup>5</sup> I walked, gazed, consulted photographs and sometimes closed my eyes in order to retrieve some remaining element of the work, as if some fragment of the piece; some element of the experience of visiting in person, might linger. Such expeditions necessitated, I found, an imagined superimposition of 'now' and 'before', reminiscent of the imagining by the

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<sup>5</sup> I also visited the London branch of Louis Vuitton, the designer handbag retailer where Landy staged his *Credit Card Destroying Machine* (2010) and the Duveen Gallery at Tate Britain, where *Semi-detached* (2004) took place.



Figure 6: *H.2.N.Y. Self-constructing Self-destroying Tinguely Machine*, Museum of Modern Art, 17th March 1960 (Landy, 2006).

geographer Harriet Hawkins of *Break Down* as a work that summons, simultaneously, a number of different kinds of spaces (2010, pp.23-4).

Landy's remark, when asked to stage a reprise of the work at the Sao Paulo Biennale was that '*Break Down* [isn't] something you can revive like a musical' (Cumming, 2002; see also *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002). All the same, the notion of restaging the work entertains me. This remark, set alongside Landy's mocked-up photo of himself and the artist Jean Tinguely searching through a New York dump (Landy, 2009, p.130; see also Tate, 2009b),<sup>6</sup> provokes speculation. One might imagine his boiler-suited operatives sifting forensically through landfill sites for fragments of Landy's possessions; haunting online auctions and car boot sales for identical replacements, by catalogue number, of his Grundig satellite dish, his red,

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<sup>6</sup> This picture appears opposite an imagined interview between Landy and Tinguely, entitled *Heavy Meta: Landy and Tinguely in the Dump* (Landy, 2009, pp.130-4) and was made as part of Landy's project (so far unsuccessful) to re-stage Tinguely's *Homage to New York* (1960) in which the artist uses machine parts and wheels gathered from the dump to build his auto-destructive machine. Landy has said that his request was denied by Tinguely's estate because, known for having destroyed art as he is, he was deemed unsuitable (Landy, 2008b). However, Tinguely's work continues to be influential for Landy, and is cited very clearly in the forms of machine structures in the 2013 show *Saints Alive* and the work *Credit Card Destroying Machine* (2010). In addition, a retrospective of Landy's work was held at the Museum Tinguely in Basel (Museum Tinguely, 2016).

tasselled beret, and his Ikea Ingo chair self-assembly instructions (Landy, 2008, pp. 113-218); contacting his ex-partners and parents for copies (or faked-up re-draftings) of destroyed love letters; prints of family snaps. Contacting young British artists to ask them to provide re-workings or mock-ups of the works destroyed by Landy the first time around.<sup>7</sup> Locating, for extra verisimilitude, a stand-in for Landy himself – a man who hadn't already destroyed everything once. Workers in reclamation centres tend conveyor belts, sorting plastic from metal and textile. Landy's operatives stand alongside cheerful blue-framed disassembly lines, hammering, unscrewing, ripping and prying one component from another. Such procedures of deciding the destination or deployment of an object (using; displaying; storing; trashing) make a playful parallel with the scholarly work of pursuing *Break Down* through the surrounding evidence.

The scholar of art and architecture Jane Rendell considers the conundrum of how to investigate a work that not only isn't here, but further, may not be anywhere in particular: 'to write a site that one has not visited' (2010, p.187) or 'to imagine [a] work from the vantage point of another remembered or imagined place' (Ibid., p.149). In this, she brings forward a vision of art writing as a richly generative venture that can dynamically connect an investigator with her subject. These speculative investigations of Rendell's, like Landy's insertion of himself into Jean Tinguely's landfill-picking adventures (Landy, 2009; 2008b), are a kind of summoning of the present perfect. The longing *to have been there* that arises in both projects well describes the impulses and dilemmas that inhere in my work here. I will admit to having dreamed of a strategy (perhaps the covert release of a swarm of electro-tagged nocturnal bees, or the invention of some critical/analytical time machine) that could pick up the minute deposits of *Break Down* dust that must linger in the space once occupied by the conveyor belt at 499 Oxford Street. In just the same way, I discover, in his research into Jean Tinguely's *Homage To New York* (1960), itself accessible only via archival materials, Michael Landy himself

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<sup>7</sup> This *did* happen the first time around. Gary Hume, on hearing about Landy's project, swapped a painting that he had recently given to him for another version which he considered less successful: presumably, this is item A90 in the *Inventory*, listed as 'Gary Hume, *Clown*, gloss paint on wood, swapped work with the artist, 54 x 38 cm, 1997' (Landy, 2001b). As the story goes, Hume visited *Break Down* and, moved by the project, gave back the original gift to be destroyed. Another work from the same series had recently sold at the auction house Christies for £170,000 (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).

observes the ghostly white of Tinguely's whitewashed machine and fantasises that it might somehow bring itself back into existence:

it's like a silhouette, it's like an apparition in a way, it's like a ghost and I quite like the idea that once a year it sort of appears out of nowhere and re-enacts itself for 27 minutes and then it disappears again (Landy, 2008b).

In Landy's pursuit of *Homage To New York* as in this thesis, the lack of a physical work to directly observe and describe provides an opening for speculation or conjecture. This effect is both amplified through my focus here on a single art work, and, as will be discussed, exploited via the intermittent deployment, throughout the text, of site writing.

### 2.3 Sources

The introduction has comprehensively surveyed academic publications on *Break Down*; here, an overview of other sources is provided. *Break Down* trails a long tail of media coverage. There exists a large body of journalistic articles, including a great many interviews with the artist (see for example Berning, 2012; Cork, 2000; Cumming, 2001; 2002; Treneman, 2001; Walford, 2001; Wood, 2001); talks and interviews with Landy on video (Institute of Contemporary Art, 2012; Landy 2008b; Tate, 2009a; *Gaga For Dada*, 2016), a substantial section in Landy's book *Everything Must Go!* (Landy, 2008a) and other texts that provide an overview of Landy's work (Schwabsky, 2007; Sillars, 2009). The website of Artangel, the art organisation that produced the work, provides a substantial section on *Break Down*, which includes further interviews and audio-visual material (Artangel n.d.; Artangel, 2010; Artangel, 2015; Landy, 2002b; Landy and Lingwood, 2008). Finally, the documentary *The Man Who Destroyed Everything* (2002) was the first programme shown on the inaugural evening of broadcasts from the television channel BBC4 on 2 March 2002 (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2002). As a source, this provides a great deal of detailed information regarding the event itself as well as including footage of *Break Down* and of Landy himself, before and after *Break Down* took place.

The source material about *Break Down* is itself both iterative and fragmented. While the art event *Break Down* took place over a couple of weeks, the project as a whole spanned a period of years, beginning with the exhibition held in Landy's studio, *Michael Landy at Home* (1999) at which the concept of the work was

developed, followed by further research and planning. *Break Down* itself took place from 10 to 24 February 2001 (Landy 2001a; 2001b; 2008a), and the project of cataloguing Landy's stuff was only finished a year after the end of the show (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002). On reviewing accounts of the artwork it is striking that through this years-long process of making and speaking about *Break Down* Michael Landy adopts (and resists) a number of different accounts of - or warrants for - the work. At different times he presents *Break Down* as a piece about bureaucratic or industrial procedures, consumer capitalism, the utility of materials, environmentalism, inbuilt obsolescence, the material culture of identity and personal biography, a revolt against everyday life, and spiritual cleansing through destruction and a destructive and traumatic trial (see Cork, 2000; Corner, 2010; Cumming, 2001; Cumming, 2002; Landy, 2001a, pp.107-116; Landy, 2008, pp.104-8). This evidence that he has adopted a number of different narratives over time does not feel like an exposure of Landy; rather, to honour the several-headedness of his account of the work feels like an invitation to take seriously the notion of *Break Down* as a distributed entity.

The nature of *Break Down* appears to turn and turn about in these iterative tellings by Landy in a way that is reminiscent of the account of multiplicity by the ethnographer Annemarie Mol. Here, the term 'multiplicity' refers to the way an object might be defined through more than one set of epistemic conditions or perspectives simultaneously. As such, it *embodies* more than one set of conditions - that is, it is implicated within more than one assemblage - simultaneously (2002, pp.81-2). It can be seen that this condition, too, attaches itself to *Break Down*.<sup>8</sup> Writing about the work becomes, more than a recuperative endeavour, a venture that is recursive; that goes back over the same ground again and again, and yet generates new stories. As Mol says of her research on the treatment of arteriosclerosis, the disease is the pain experienced by the patient; the perception of his family who observe his physical capabilities; the image produced through an angiogram; the percept of the physician who physically examines his leg:

Multiplicity is complicated. Not only are there different "arterioscleroses" enacted in any single hospital, but there are also different styles of enacting these. There is

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, rather than a special case, I would suggest that it would be rather extraordinary to find an example of an entity that is *not* multiple in the sense that it is constituted by, and behaves according to the rules of, several perspectives or sets of conditions at once.



diagnosis, in which the questions “what is the matter?” and “what to do?” alternate and intertwine. And there is treatment. In treatment, doing is a matter of undoing. *Enacting* disease takes the form of *counteracting* it. But however much these styles of engaging with reality differ, the object, the “atherosclerosis” that is treated, *may* be similar to the “atherosclerosis” that was diagnosed earlier on (2002, pp.91-3; emphasis reproduced).

A similar multiplicity appears in the psychoanalyst Darien Leader’s account of narrative in which the bereaved repeat and replay stories of the lost loved one ‘like looking at a diamond not just from one angle but from all possible angles, so that each of its facets can be viewed’ (2009, p.28). One might think only of the fragments produced by Landy, which appear and reappear in a range of guises. As discussed in the introduction, the fragmented matter is, simultaneously - among other things - Landy’s lost possessions (for Landy himself and perhaps his family); broken and deformed parts of significant art works that were previously whole (within some sections of the art world); scrap material that has a market value (reclamation and recycling); a spectacle to be placed behind a plate glass window (as part of the art work *Break Down*); a substance the precise size of which is defined by the operation of the granulating machines and Landy’s procedures for his operatives (within the Manual for *Break Down*).

The experience of reading the texts that surround *Break Down* can be very like looking into Leader’s diamond and turning it over and over to see something almost - yet not wholly - similar in each of the facets. Landy himself materialises and re-materialises through these texts as though the artist were travelling around the conveyor belt of *Break Down* in various states of physical or psychic disassembly. He appears in print and in still and moving images, in the first and the third person, as a conversant and an interviewee. Inevitably - the artist ‘gave an average of six interviews a day’ during *Break Down* (Landy, 2002b) and in following years, continued to speak and write about it - he develops a schtick in which some phrases are uttered again and again and stories appear and reappear: for example, the work as an escape from consumerism (Cork, 2000; Corner, 2010; Cumming, 2002; Landy, 2001c; Stallabrass, 2000; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002; Treneman, 2001); the pain of destroying his father’s coat (Cork, 2000; Cumming, 2002; Landy, 2001c; Stallabrass, 2000; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002; Wood, 2001); his decision to throw his crying mother out of *Break Down* (Cumming, 2002; Landy, 2002b; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002; Treneman, 2001); his recasting of the two week event as his own funeral (Corner,

2010; Cumming, 2002; Landy, 2002b; Landy, 2008b; Wood, 2002). It must also be the case, since *Break Down* continues to be Landy's best known work, that each time he does a new project, more material on *Break Down* is published. This becomes rather derivative; therefore, as a general principle, the most recent interviews and articles to mention *Break Down* are only cited if they include some new element that has not already been covered in previous accounts.

## 2.4 Site Writing

**Observation: Observing myself writing (July 2014).** *Meta-cite-write. This is paralysing. To close my attention in on my own hand as I write short circuits my own attention. I write with a fluttery, uneven feeling of claustrophobia - of the inside-myself-ness of being a human, sitting here in this body, looking out of a pair of eyes, holding in my fingers a mechanical pencil that traces thin, emphatic lines and marks on a pad of yellow paper. The way I hold my pencil, not something I've attended to for years ~~and yet suddenly I remember the paralysis of not correctly holding a pen~~ M M M m m m the satisfaction, actually, of carving out, of crafting a row of characters f f f k k k my pleasure at the bend of an 'f' and its tail lolling comfortably just below the line. The friendly roundness of an 'e' eee e. ~~It is still~~, I have managed to make this external to me somehow, and yet it's still uncomfortable to be constrained to the space of the paper: the unscrolling text. ~~Where~~ The slippery feeling of the lead, worn against the smoothness of the paper: through my grip I can feel where the pencil is going. I can become quite distanced from the process and then it seems that the letters almost form themselves*

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*d d d n n n n n*

This thesis includes an encounter with, and extension of, the site writing of Jane Rendell (2005; 2010). Following her prioritisation of *situation* in terms both of subjectivity and space, I use the term 'site writing' to refer to the reflexive practice of writing descriptively about the world. Within the current text passages of site writing (which are labelled 'observation' and appear in blue italics) represent an attempt to score the (already absent) materiality of *Break Down* into the fabric of my own writing. This written pursuit of the work is therefore wholly speculative. In this methodology I have already devoted attention to the challenges of engaging with an art work that, like *Break Down*, has no physical presence. That said, it would be misleading to suggest that writing about art work that has a more

immediately tangible and visible form could be much *less* complex or problematic. This can be seen, for example, in Jane Bennett's concept, 'thing-power,' which she expresses specifically in terms of a certain inimical force between matter and human capacities for knowing and understanding. The vibrancy of thinghood, she suggests, is all but impossible to pin down or define. In Bennett's terms, 'vibrant things' have 'a certain effectivity of their own, a perhaps small but irreducible degree of independence from the words, images and feelings they provoke in us' (2010, p.xvi). I choose to attribute this moment of incomprehension to a limitation in human capacities for knowing and expressing rather than a mystical quality of all matter.

In this thesis, then, site writing is an attempt to understand the expressive power that suffuses the physical world, and in tandem, to resist 'this habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)' (Bennett, 2010, p.vii). This approach is embodied, for example, in my site writings in Chapter 3, on dust and the fragment, which, as I show, narrates its own becoming and the dynamism of its form with particular clarity. In site writing I tap into the *becoming* described by Deleuze and Guattari, in which things need to be imagined as essentially concerned with process (Buchanan, 2015, pp.29-30). My work therefore owes a debt to the project of the critic, Mieke Bal to use writing to achieve proximity to a work of art. Her proposal that 'strong works of art [hover] between' inert, describable 'thing' and vital, narratable 'event' (2001, p.124) is analogous to the Deleuzo-Guattarian vision of a dynamism that is immanent in the universe and vibrates through even the most seemingly inert of objects. This flickering between object and event expresses very well the kind of looking I have tried to achieve, and to convey in the writing of this thesis. Indeed, as I have mentioned, the subject of site written passages that appear in these pages is often not a work of art but an object or as seen in the passages of site writing above, scenes from my research process.

Nevertheless, in writing about art, through the attempt to translate from one medium into another, it might be expected that *something* will be lost. I don't intend this statement to be at all sentimental or melancholic about that lost something. As Salter pragmatically remarks, an incompleteness or loss of fidelity between subject and written account is simply 'the contradiction and tension that any [written] account of "unruly experience" has to deal with' (2015, p.14). In this section I explore the generative potential of site writing and suggest that its

capacity to produce new connections lie precisely in this loss of fidelity. Through this writing strategy, *something* new is produced, that was not immediately present in the form of the object of observation, and yet was also not hitherto accessible to me as the author.

Bal suggests that there is a tension between the scholarly imperative to weave texts together and to write, and the need for the form of the art work to be recognised and attended to directly (2001, p.124). This raises questions about the nature and life of a work of art as well as the recuperative, not to say constitutive, nature of art writing. In particular, it would be odd to claim that site writing is necessarily less contingent than the site – or the art work – that is the subject of such writing; this especially since these sections of my thesis in particular depend upon my own associative work as the author. If site writing presents a break in the formal academic register<sup>9</sup> generally deployed in this thesis, the practice of writing is itself put into play as a tactic for the explication of my own processes of engaging with the work. In the context of the ‘inventive methods’ discussed in Lury and Wakeford (2012, see also Day et al, 2014, specifically on number), however, this work appears as a practical mode of enquiry.<sup>10</sup> Site writing, then, is thought that works alongside itself, enacting itself, the subject of the enquiry, and the researcher, relaying the vitality of the phenomena under consideration through modes of reflexivity and speculation. As such, the practice of site writing sits well alongside the following reflection from O’Sullivan on art writing as an endeavour in which disciplinary discourses and registers are reconfigured and articulated in unfamiliar combinations in order to reimagine the subject: ‘By blurring discrete categories,

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<sup>9</sup> The particular cadences and requirements of academic writing as a mode of discourse are explored by researchers in applied English Ken Hyland and Feng Jiang, who define that in academic writing, ‘formality helps to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation by minimizing the context-dependence and fuzziness of expressions’ (2017, p.41). However, the observation that formality might be seen as a defining feature of academic writing is only useful if brought into a context in which academic written language is seen as a communicative strategy that is shaped by its specific purpose. Here, ‘formality’ is a distancing tactic that is deployed in order to communicate a properly sceptical scholarly approach. For example, Peter Crompton, a researcher in discourse analysis, defines that discussions of ‘hedging’ in academic writing have generally encompassed ‘impersonal constructions, the use of the passive, and lexis-projecting emotions’ (1997, p.271; see also Vassileva, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Contributors explore walking, tape-recording, making, counting, making, coding, and writing as examples of reflexive practices of academic enquiry.

producing new encounters and fostering monstrous couplings, new kinds of writing and new kinds of thought become possible' (2006, p.18).<sup>11</sup>

Rendell herself begins with Bal in the prologue to her text, *Site Writing*. If Bal wants to place the art with which she engages in her writing at the centre of that writing, Rendell further complicates this approach via analysis of the relationalities involved in such 'engagements'. As such, she produces accounts of art works that integrate:

the sites – material, emotional, political and conceptual – of the artwork's conception, exhibition and documentation, as well as those remembered, dreamed and imagined by the artist, critic and other viewers (2010, p.1).

Rendell clarifies her relationship with the works she discusses via an exploration of the spatiality that arises in the language employed in her art criticism. Rather than imagining a work being 'under critique' for example, she considers site writing to be a kind of remaking of the work from within, via the unique perspective of the writer. Instead of 'writing about' the work, therefore, she 'writes' it (Ibid., p.7). This relationality is constituted via a psychoanalytic account that works within and between a complex of mediations – 'me' and 'not-me', yes, but further the 'me' that has in fact been taken in from outside; the 'not-me' that has in fact been pushed into the outside world (and often, into a particular space or recipient) from within. For Rendell, these arrayed transactions, introjections and projections pertain closely to the practice of site writing (Ibid., pp.9-11). Indeed, such mechanisms reside not only in transactions between the analyst and analysand, but are

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<sup>11</sup> A sampling of the frayed narratives and, in the words of O'Sullivan (2006), 'monstrous couplings' (and more than couplings) of register that inspire my approach include Rachel DuPlessis' collaged criticism in *The Pink Guitar* (2006), the rich idiosyncrasies of Carol Mavor's novelistic philosophy, in which photographic images are woven through the text (2007), and the sweaty-palmed intercutting of genealogy and journal in Jackie Orr's sociology of anxiety and psychiatry, *Panic Diaries* (2006). Walter Benjamin's close description, philosophy and index-card flaneurism in Paris (1982/1999) progress somehow alongside W.G. Sebald's photographically-supplemented walks through time and loss (via Suffolk) in *The Rings of Saturn* (1998) and the feverish spoutings of lists, footnotes, dialogue, close description and sub-sub librarianship in *Moby Dick* (Melville, 1851/1994). The vivid engagement of Carolyn Steedman in both *Dust* (2001) and *Landscape for a Good Woman* (2005) transports her from the historical archives into altogether more lively – not to say risky – settings. Finally, I am inspired by the reflexive criticism of Janis Jefferies (2012), Annemarie Mol (2002) and Chris Salter (2015) in addition of course to Jane Rendell (2010): these four texts all model specifically the deployment of closely descriptive passages that intersperse passages of exegesis, throwing light, punctuating and animating the discussion. My own approach bears a particular resemblance to these last in that I have adopted a similar approach of presenting descriptive passages in italics at intervals through the text.

generalizable across a range of contexts and settings, and will be seen throughout individuals' relationships and encounters.<sup>12</sup> In transference, a generative space is created by the fact that the Other does not reside only within, or only without. Rather, as object relations theory suggests, an external object (that exists in reality beyond the person – say the string attached to a bobbin, or the figure of the mother who has just left the room) has its corresponding internal object (that has been introjected by the individual). The two are not entirely separate or entirely joined; instead, between them is a midway, or as Winnicott (1971/2005) says, 'transitional' space.

It is in this space that play occurs, that infants begin the process of separating from their primary carer, and that in adult life our most vivid moments of creative engrossment take place (Rendell, 2010, p.24). Such an account brings a doubleness – at least – to persons, objects and texts that work themselves through one another and yet might occasionally spring apart into singleness once more. In this sense, despite the singularity of the psychoanalytic vision of the subject,<sup>13</sup> the concept of transference brings with it the possibility of an account that can work alongside the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of multiplicity that runs through this thesis. In both, psychic entities have more than one single location or existence, and any object or entity one might name possesses a potentiality which is as multiple and diffuse as the number of people who might encounter it. The meeting between writer, writing and written that is figured by Rendell is shaped by a psychoanalytic account of the formation of meaning through encounter. Here, meaning lurks somewhere within, but might be accessed via creative and indirect approaches, and via the informative associations that might be made.

As such, in site writing the critic 'combines associative and attentive modes of writing, including forms of interpretation which construct, conject and invent' (2010, p.13). Following this, an encounter – a meeting – is staged in this writing of *Break Down*, on a number of planes simultaneously: between the viewer and the

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<sup>12</sup> Here, Rendell draws upon a range of psychoanalytic writers, notably Laplanche, 'who trained with Lacan' (Rendell, 2010, p.8).

<sup>13</sup> Relationships between a conception of personhood as conceived within Object Relations theory – in particular the work of Winnicott – and a Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of subjectivity as a multiple entity, are discussed in depth in Chapter 6, Section 6.3. In addition, the Deleuzo-Guattarian account of psychoanalytic approaches as contrasted with their proposed multiplicity is explored in Chapter 3 (pages 68-71).

work/site/sight that is being observed; between the art work and the system or procedure of writing itself; between the viewer and her experience of the act of looking and writing (Ibid., p.151). A psychoanalytic account might frame the work of site writing as a way to access the workings of the individual, self contained psyche as it works to tell itself stories – to place itself. By contrast, in Deleuze and Guattari, the unconscious emerges as ‘a capacity or capability of the mind whose limits are constantly tested without being reached’ (Buchanan, 2015, p.28; see also Holland, 1999, p.98). The emphasis here is on the unconscious as an element of psychic plumbing (or, given Buchanan’s mention of capacity which brings to mind the capacitor that temporarily stores electrical charge, perhaps electrical engineering): a joining point that has more to do with the strength of a variety of flows than the qualitative character of these.

In this context, site writing emerges as a strategy for making contact with an energy that not only connects me to the rest of the universe, but makes me in some senses indistinguishable from it. Via site writing, I reach from within the structure of this thesis into the dynamic, associative energies described by Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2013, p.15). As such, I employ the strategy of site writing to prioritise throughout this account, not a fixed authenticity but perhaps something of the life, the becoming, of *Break Down*. This site writing, a project of exhaustive looking and writing, might be brought into conversation with O’Sullivan on art and ‘the perception of affect’, a state that opens up the possibility of ‘the perception of small differences’ (2006, p.49). Citing practices including art, meditation, sadomasochistic practices and drug use as strategies for ‘accessing that which is normally ‘outside’ yourself (that is, outside your signifying self)’ (Ibid., p.47), O’Sullivan imagines ‘affect’ not as a fundamentally interior set of experiences, but rather as a mode in which we might open up or cut through our own subjectivity in order to perceive and connect with the wider world. In these terms, affect is ‘the matter in us responding and resonating with the matter around us’ (Ibid., p.50).

In imagining a writing practice that takes into account concepts of the multiplicity and affect, I turn to Kittler, whose account of ‘media’ that ‘determine our situation’ (1986/1999, p.xxxix) relates to the relationship between the speaker or writer and the technicity of media. In this account, mediality works directly via and upon us: as he comments, in handwriting ‘the body left [...] strangely unavoidable traces’ (Ibid., p.8). This plays into his sense of written language – and indeed, the writing

of language – as not only determined by the available technicities but, specifically, as a corporeal discipline that is shaped by, and shapes, human conditions of percept (Wellbery, 1990, pp.xxviii-xxx). This is inverted in Kittler's argument that the technicity of writing does not only record but *forms* 'our thoughts' (1986/1999, p.203). This important element of Kittler's account casts into doubt any notion that there exist essential human qualities that can be expressed through more or less 'authentic' methods, since surely if there exists a core or kernel of authentic personhood, it is this, rather than the mode of writing, that should determine what is written. The idea that writing can be constitutive of, rather than only constituted by thought, is significant because it helps to substantiate a notion of human subjectivity that accommodates a concept of personhood as a distributed phenomenon; an assemblage that comprises a multiplicity of elements.

In considering the implications of this account for my own site writing practice, I draw upon the work of Lambros Malafouris (2013), in which he attempts to find a space between philosophy, cognitive psychology, and archaeology to discuss the interrelated nature of human subjectivity and materiality. As I discuss in more depth in Chapter 6, we find here an account of the cognitive work that takes place *between* human systems of cognition and the material world, drawing out 'a cognitive landscape in which brains, bodies and things play equal roles in the drama of human becoming' (Ibid., p.2). To speak of 'equal' roles as Malafouris does here assigns to this unendingly complex and dynamic entwinement more of a sense of equivalency – not to say a more evenly weighted influence – than is quite warranted. It is difficult to conceive of a way in which we might ever be able to attribute the extent to which brain, rather than body, or things, rather than brain, may or may not form part of this scene, much of which unfolds in spaces that are interior to human thought and thus hardly open to observation or measurement. Nevertheless, the notion that personhood is not contained, and the material world not excluded by the epidermis, is compelling. Malafouris, following the philosopher Andy Clark (2011, p.76), posits that mind is not confined to the physical limits of the human body, but inheres through the entire apparatus, including extending objects. For example, a pencil and pad can here be seen as conduits for cognition (Ibid., p.6). As such, 'mark making' appears 'not as a passive representational object but as an active prosthetic perceptual means of making sense' (Ibid., p.180). One might therefore constitute the practice of site writing as a blurring of sight, thought and writing and the resulting observations not as



representations relayed and filtered (art work, eye, brain, hand, pencil – and again at the point of transcription, via keyboard and fingertips, eye, screen, brain) but as *thought-objects*, or as Malafouris has it, 'enactive projections' (2013, p.180).

Following Clark's discussion of extended cognition, one might consider the aforementioned set of written notes not as a *record* of thought, but as a kind of residue of *thought itself*, which is both embodied and made possible via 'the loop through pen and paper' (2011, p.xxv); that is, via the practice of doing writing. This connects with his conception of language as an example of an outside-the-brain apparatus that is intrinsic to the operation and extension of human thought:

As soon as we formulate a thought in words or on paper, it becomes an object for both ourselves and for others. As an object, it is the kind of thing we can have thoughts about. In creating the object we need have no thoughts about thoughts, but once it is there, the opportunity immediately exists to attend to it as an object in its own right (2011, pp.58-9).

Clark suggests that writing can be not only constitutive of, but identical with thought; this work of building chains of words substantiates and makes thought concrete. In this particular, writing constitutes an *objectification* of the experience of making observations, in order to enable reflection on and theoretical engagement with them. Malafouris' theorisation of material engagement, too, presents a fundamental challenge to received notions of human perception and experience as abstracted from the material. He demonstrates, instead, the material structures and complexes that make up cognition.

Therefore, to the extent that site writing works as an attempt to make close, exhaustive observations, it does so through the production of a further external object. In the terms employed in both Malafouris (2013) and Clark (2011), the distributive practice of site writing would be identified with the writer's own cognitive processes and *not* the processes or characteristics of the object(s) of her description. Site writing calls up the sense in which, through writing about an assemblage – this 'working of matters', *Break Down* – the processes of writing, its material product and the writer all become part of the assemblage. As Deleuze and Guattari say:

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor

one or several authors as its subject. In short, we think that one cannot write sufficiently in the name of an outside (1987/2013, p.24).

In summary, site writing works in the current text in several directions at once. It breaks open and animates theoretical discussion. This looking-and-writing narrates a moment in which I reach out, attempting to make contact with the material essence of the artwork (as it is or was), the theoretical work I use to cut into and understand the work, and the various commentaries that surround it. Working between registers interrupts the reserved tone of formal academic register and foregrounds the contingent and unstable nature of interpretation. Beyond this, and in the most pragmatic terms, site writing figures as a stratagem for *overcoming*, or cutting through, one's subjective point of view in order to engage with the universe at large, plugging theoretical exposition into the 'energetic vitality' (Bennett, 2010, p.5) of the material. Accordingly, the play between theoretical and site-written voices employed in the coming chapters produce an idiosyncratic perspective, a space from which to explore, and a thesis as 'assemblage with the outside' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.24).

### 3 Fragment / Part / Whole

In this chapter, the labour of dismantling and granulation in *Break Down* is reframed as a turn toward matter: its impunity and its mediality. The fragments to which Landy reduced his belongings form one of the most compelling elements of *Break Down*. The extraordinary tactility of the photographs that record this material seems to hold an unwonted charisma: I long to touch, to handle, to press my face into the shredded textiles and foam, to run my palm across the trays of chippings, to turn over and inspect these fragments, to pick them up and let them fall. The fragment opens up and disrupts conceptions of the nature of physical matter as stable or inert: through its very form it demonstrates the elementary, yet oddly elusive principle that *material objects are composed of matter*. However thorough Landy's processes of taking apart and pulverising his belongings, fragments prevail; that is, *matter* prevails. In this, *Break Down* discloses not only the immanence of matter but also the innately *narrative* nature of material things. This chapter puts forth an analysis of *Break Down* that attends to the character and agency of physical matter through close investigation of the fragments produced. In pursuit of the fragment – and of the intense specificity of a *fragment* in particular – concepts of multiplicity, part and whole are explored through the lens of Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory.

In considering human interactions with the properties and qualities of material objects the psychologist James Gibson's influential theory on affordances is also brought into play. Through Gibson (1979/1986) it becomes possible to understand objects via their properties in relation to the physical and psychological attributes of human beings or animals who interact with these objects. The quality of affordance is not to do with utility *per se*, but more precisely, interaction. A sharp edged object, for example, might afford either useful cutting or physical injury. It is salient to note a coherence that exists between Gibson's affordance theory and a Deleuzian account of affect,<sup>1</sup> defined as the extent to which an entity can '[affect] other bodies or [be] affected by other bodies' (1970/1988, p.123). An explicit connection can be observed in the following section from Deleuze on 'animal worlds defined by affects and capacities for affecting and being affected', in which

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<sup>1</sup> Itself arising in Deleuze's work on Spinoza (1970/1988).

it is shown that the tick is entirely enmeshed with its habitat via the small repertoire of affects that it possesses:

the first has to do with light (climb to the top of a branch); the second is olfactive (let yourself fall onto the mammal that passes below the branch); and the third is thermal (seek the area without fur, the warmest spot). A world with only three affects, in the midst of all that goes on in the immense forest (Deleuze, 1970/1988, pp.124-5).

Gibson's work is employed here to launch a comparative investigation into the fragment in relation to the capacities and characteristics of the human being. In this chapter, two related arguments are extended. The first is that material objects are in themselves medial; they are narrative in that through their very form and composition they communicate events. To appropriate the artist Gustav Metzger's formulation regarding auto destructive art (to be discussed further below) material objects can then be seen as bodies that comprise time, matter and process (1996, p.42). The second stratum of my argument here is that material things, through the specificities of their material composition, hold or receive narratives. This stratum approximates closely to the positioning in much existing scholarly work on *Break Down* on Landy's objects as holders of different kinds of value (e.g. economic value, personal, social or cultural value or significance).<sup>2</sup> It is here, therefore, that we might think of objects and substances as substrates for human thought or meaning-making. In short, the current chapter stages an investigation of affordance theory and Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptualisations of assemblage, affect and multiplicity. In so doing, I put forward the argument that the physical form of objects inform the stories that they tell, and that are told about them.

***Observation: Photographs of fragments in refuse bags (Landy, 2008a, pp.186-93).***  
*Metal shards, bright from recent cuts. Red edge-pieces, right-angled, have retained their shape the most, and lie alongside snippets of grille, mesh, black-painted, beige-painted, twisted. In a box of broken china the fractured edges show biscuit against the broken glaze. Shredded textiles lie densely together; worms of deep red velvet and pink felt are interpellated into a field of custard coloured foam stuffing sliced to angular chunks. White paper, cut into even spoons. Wood lies in shards that devolve into splinters, their*

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<sup>2</sup> Please see the fuller establishing discussion in the introduction (Section 1.2.1).

*newly exposed surfaces clean under the light. Red plastic granules form a charismatic sea, faceted, glamorous, with a giddy density of colour.*

In considering the fragment as a narrative object, I bring dust into focus as a comparator. It is a variant of the fragment that is helpfully both similar to - and yet dissimilar from - the larger shards and scraps produced by Landy. In considering the implications of affordance theory, dust provides a useful foil to the larger fragment in the coming discussions, because this fragmentary substance nevertheless possesses a very distinct set of properties and characteristics. One might observe that fragments and dust are granular and may be differentiated through description of the texture, size and shape of the component elements. To understand the importance of scale one might consider the affordances of differently sized fragments of stuff. The fragments of a broken china tea cup don't float; we do not risk inhaling them, and if they fell and somehow hit us in the head they might scratch or cut, but would be unlikely to cause a concussion. Stepping on either a grain of house-dust or the large, flat surface of a concrete breeze-block will not cut painfully into the arch of your bare foot as a shard of china might (difficult though it may be to envision, one might nevertheless accidentally step on a breeze-block).

The narratives that are projected onto both dust and the fragment – their value in meaning making – relate directly to their material composition and behaviour in space. Dust grains, which can be microscopically small, become visible when they gather together to form a loosely structured physical substance. Here one might think of the substances described by the writer on curious matter Steven Connor as 'quasi-choate' (2010), indicating the discrete nature of the flakes, particles, scraps, shreds, shards and crumbs in each; the way they 'hang together' without being entirely attached. Gibson alludes to scale in relation to the quality of 'affording support' – which is available from water in relation to a river-boatman, but not to creatures that are heavier or less well equipped to make use of surface tension (1979/1986, p.127). In a similar way, the floating or slow falling that is peculiar to dust, while rendering it disruptive and dreamlike in our reading of the substance, is not a distinct property of dust itself, being conditional not only on the size and density of the object but also on the resistance of the air in which it hangs. In comparison, the larger fragment – the granule, shred or splinter – is made through a more easily identifiable event: a moment of fissure or breaking. The size

of the fragment allows a different kind of interaction: it lies where it fell and invites touch. The fragment therefore invites – or *affords* – use as a souvenir: a piece of history that one might pick up, turn in one’s hand, rub with a thumb, put in a pocket.

This chapter, then, sifts through the friable substances produced by Landy. The first section investigates the layers and stages of fragmentation included in *Break Down*. A contextualising discussion of Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory is extended: in the fragmentation produced during *Break Down*, matter can be seen to have its own, distinct power to make changes in the world. This notion of matter’s own facility for causation is deployed as a frame to think, in the second section, through the fragments produced by Landy as fragments, or wholes, or fragmented wholes. The fifth section of this chapter incorporates a more dynamic and applied focus as is appropriate for investigation of the dynamic character of the fragment.<sup>3</sup> Finally, this chapter surveys the cultural uses and interpretations of fragments. Through these investigations I construct the central argument of this chapter, which is that what Landy does by ‘reducing’ his things ‘as near as possible to raw materials’ (Sillars, 2009, pp.25-6) is to give back to his belongings their essential properties and characteristics: to re-narrativise them on their own terms.

### 3.1 *Processes and stages of fragmentation*

This discussion begins with a summary of the processes undergone by Landy’s belongings during *Break Down*, posited specifically in terms of fragmentation. In each of these phases the objects used by Landy are constituted in terms of different kinds of narrative. In this section, conceptualisations of wholeness and fragmentation are interrogated at a number of levels: the ‘whole’ made up by the entire collection of Landy’s possessions; specific objects both as parts of the collection and whole things in themselves; the discrete parts of which objects are composed before dismantling; the fragments and dust that are produced when

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<sup>3</sup> Thus this section incorporates more intensive use of illustrations and passages of site writing through which I work the discrete properties and qualities of materials and objects into a theoretical analysis of bodies and parts – and vice-versa. As discussed in detail in the methodology (section 2.4), this writing practice, adapted from the work of the architecture and art writer Jane Rendell (2005; 2010), creates moments of displacement as the chapter shifts between registers of academic prose and close observation - sensual experience, daydreaming and description. These moments of textual fragmentation are signalled through the use of italics and blue type.

these are fed through the grinder. Here, it is pertinent to consider the argument of the archaeologist John Chapman that both ‘the relationship between parts and whole’ and that between ‘complete items and sets of items’ have their significance (2000, p.7). This tendency can be observed in *Break Down*, where Landy deconstructs not only each individual object but also the collection itself. It is the unsparing nature of Landy’s venture that speaks. While dismantling and shredding each of his belongings, he maintains the contiguity of the collection by treating each object alike and destroying the lot (this principle can also be seen in the work through which every single object owned by Landy is enumerated in the *Inventory*).

### 3.1.1 *Collection*

The objects begin as constituent parts of the entire assemblage of Landy’s possessions. The appearance of this collection as an entity in its own right is supported by discussion of the ‘7227 possessions’ owned by Landy before *Break Down* (Landy, 2001b). This figure, 7227, is called into play in order to support a discourse about consumerism which runs through Landy’s discussion of the work especially before it takes place. For example, it helps Landy to position his act, wryly, as ‘a kind of luxury [...] the ultimate consumer choice’ (2001a, p.109). Within the work, the import of each individual, entire object arises only in as much as it forms part of this particular body of objects. This interplay between part and whole is also emphasised by the material form of the *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b), described by Landy as ‘a material history of my life’ (2001a, p.109), the sheer heft of which seems to emphasise the magnitude of the collection. In summary, the perceived significance of Landy’s later reduction of the collection to fragments – the grandiose nature of the deed – depends heavily on his having as a starting point a cohesive and substantial collection of belongings, structured (as argued in Chapter 1, Section 1.2) via his own biography – his memories and experiences.

### 3.1.2 *Entire things*

When viewing the entire assemblage of Landy’s belongings, then, each object can be read as a fragment – a part of the whole collection. But of course, viewed in its own right, each coat, saucepan, piece of furniture or electrical gadgetry; each mug can be seen as a separate and self-sufficient entity: that is, a *whole*. That these whole or entire things each have a story is made clear in *Break Down Inventory*

(Landy, 2001b), where (as discussed in Chapter 5, pages 156-7) the ‘description’ column incorporates and to some extent conflates direct, objective description and biographical discussion about the provenance and use of these objects, and their personal value for Landy. Many objects also have value independently of Landy’s story; for instance, his jeans, gadgets and souvenirs all have a cultural life that works beyond him (see Harvie, 2006). In particular the art works that he destroys include some that have a clear art historical significance and in some cases, a high market value. This is seen most vividly in the example of Gary Hume’s painting *Clown* (1997 [Item A90, Landy, 2001b]): a work from the same series as that reduced to chippings by Landy had at the time recently sold at Christies for £170,000 (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).<sup>4</sup>



Figure 7: Operative dismantling Landy's Saab (Landy, 2008a, p.186).

### 3.1.3 Components

In an interview with Julian Stallabrass before the show, Landy alludes to his lifelong interest in taking things apart: ‘I was inquisitive about the mechanism, being able to see what was inside’ (2001a, p.107; see also Stallabrass, 2000; Landy, 2008b; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the next step is dismantling.

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<sup>4</sup> Though one wonders whether Landy’s plans were known at the time of sale: might the effect have run the other way, the price of this work bolstered through Landy’s intervention? See also page 46, footnote 7.

<sup>5</sup> This tableau from Landy somewhat echoes Baudelaire’s description of children who dismantle their toys, “to see the soul” and, to this end, turn the toys in their hands, shake them, strike them against the wall, and finally eviscerate them and tear them to pieces’ (in Agamben, 1993,



Some objects, such as items of crockery, are composed of one continuous piece and therefore reducing them to pieces involves just one step which is to smash them up (Artangel, 2015). Others require more attention. In order to meet Landy's requirement (in accordance with the procedures of the reclamation facilities at which he conducted research) that different materials – wood, plastic, metal, paper - be kept separate, objects are dismantled before being granulated.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 8: Landy's experimental dismantling of a radio-cassette player; illustration in the ring bound publication *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a, pp.72-3). Photograph by author, June 2015.

It is Stallabrass's suggestion that in dismantling consumer goods *Break Down* might constitute 'an exemplary piece of Marxism' (Landy, 2001a, p.113) in that it exposes to scrutiny the myth that is constituted by the apparently perfect whole of the consumer object – always already complete. In deconstructing objects, the

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p.57). However, Landy's 'inquisitive' dissections can be distinguished from this caricature of child-like behaviour. That Landy reminisces, in the sources cited, about his difficulties in putting the objects back together indicates that he did at least try to do so. Indeed, his mother, Ethel Landy, affirms that 'he'd actually put them back [together]' (*The Man Who Had Everything*, 2002). His earliest dismantlings seem, therefore, distinguished by a curiosity about – and a respect for – objects' workings, rather than any straightforwardly destructive or chaotic impulse.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion on how this work was undertaken, see Chapter 4 (pages 107-8, and the site writing on pages 122-3).

narrative exposed by Landy is that of production: that is to say, his action makes plain the fact of these objects as *produced*. The act of opening up an object might, Stallabrass seems to suggest, disclose or dispel the nature of its power or significance or to ascertain the underlying nature of the thing. Landy, however, explicitly resists Stallabrass's reading of *Break Down* as working against commodity fetishism: instead, he is more concerned about narratives that are perhaps more closely concerned with the material properties and affordances of the objects themselves: utility, re-use, inbuilt obsolescence and cycles of use and disposal. Accordingly, and despite its apparent violence, *Break Down* is not a frenzied work. Rather, a principled care can be seen in Landy's endeavour, in the process of researching and planning *Break Down*, of dissecting a radio-cassette player – a process that is recorded in detail in *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a, pp.51-74. See Figure 8 and Chapter 4, pages 120-2).

At the end of the dismantling stage, car parts revolve on the conveyor belt, clothing has been torn apart at the seams, plastic pried from metal, rubber tires separated from metal wheels and canvases taken off their wooden frames, which themselves have been dismantled, the metal pins that hold them together laid aside for another tray. These dismantled pieces are both components and fragments and they themselves can be seen as both whole objects – a whole piece of wood, for example – and parts of previous wholes.

#### 3.1.4 *Fragments*

The final step of Landy's process is granulation. Granulation is achieved via a number of methods, depending on the affordances of the material being broken down. However, in most instances, the dismantled parts of Landy's objects are put through industrial shredding machines to produce sacks of granulated matter of roughly similar sized pieces. As the critic Richard Shone remarks: 'When broken down and put into plastic crates on a conveyor belt, a Savile Row jacket (inventory number C 16) has much the same presence as a rag picked up off the pavement; a copy of THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE (R70) as much interest as a Synfibre Industrial Clothes Catalogue (R191)' (2001, p.236). That said, through the various grains, textures and the different behaviour of granules of metal as compared with plastic or wood, a narrative of matter-in-itself – stuff-as-stuff – begins to emerge. Here, it is worthwhile to consider Landy's intention, at the outset, to weigh the dismantled components of his possessions in order to discover how this body of

stuff was constituted. Operatives are instructed to weigh 'broken down components' (Landy, 2001a, p.38) and then record the weight of the material produced in a dedicated spreadsheet. This plan to observe and preserve the distinguishing features of the material 'reclaimed' from Landy's belongings reveals the following neat inconsistency: where the *process* of fragmentation removes from matter its previous context and meaning, desingularising and homogenising, the fragments themselves emerge as a force for singularisation and specificity, in a final signal of the tenacity of physical matter.

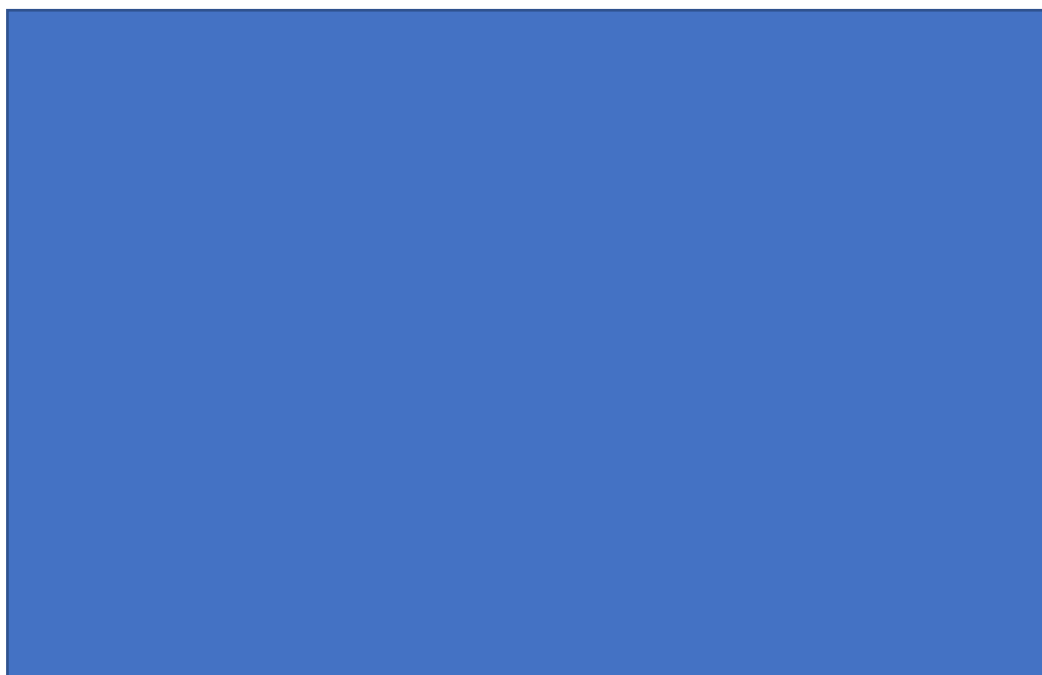


Figure 9: Fragments displayed in the shop window at 499 Oxford Street (Artangel n.d.).

### 3.1.5 *Display*

Finally, although not a fragmentary process, it is worthwhile to consider display as a companion to the phases presented above. On disassembly, the charisma of the whole object is found to have an unwarranted impunity, as neatly enacted by the visitors to *Break Down* who wanted Landy to display the granulated stuff that had been produced:

...people wanted to see all of the granulated and shredded goods. Originally it [the shredded material] was stored in the back room but [later on] we had them in front of the paned glass windows at the front of the store so that everyone could actually see the evidence. It was really important for people to see the material residues displayed (Landy, 2008a, p.108).

Here is a return to the collection. It is the collected mass of the granulated matter that is displayed in the plate-glass window of the empty shop at 499 Oxford Street

(the former department store where the work takes place) that lends it a sense of significance. At the end of *Break Down*, Landy's stuff is brought back together to form a whole: a graphic demonstration of the scale of the endeavour for the benefit of passers-by. The shredded material originally understood by Landy as a mere by-product of the project is unexpectedly reconstituted as something between evidence and aesthetic.

### 3.2 *Fragment and multiplicity*

The preceding discussion lays out the stages of Landy's processes of dismantling and shredding in terms of the various parts and wholes that emerge, and the different kinds of interpretation attached to these stages of fragmentation. I move, now, to elaborate on these initial discussions through exploration of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory and in particular, their conception of the multiple, which offers new ways to understand the plurality of Landy's project of deconstruction and granulation.

It is entirely in the spirit of the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of multiplicity that the archaeologists Marcus Brittain and Oliver Harris (2010, p.589) contend that 'the fragment [...] is neither part nor whole but an integral element in a connective flow incorporating a range of other substances'. That is to say, rather than imagining a finite 'whole object' that when shattered produces a number of self contained and finite fragments, one might choose instead to prioritise consideration of the constant change (if of a highly variable range of temporalities) that is inherent in all matter. Deleuze and Guattari envision the assemblage as a gathered, multiply connecting and reconnecting body or mass that is heterogeneous, dynamic and that produces and reproduces its own stability and instability (see for example Deleuze and Guattari, 1972/2013, pp.15-16; 1987/2013, pp.7-13). This schema accommodates the particularities of things and their power to 'happen' – or cause things to 'happen' - in the world, and as such offers opportunities for understanding fragmentation and wholeness, both in general terms and specifically in relation to Landy's project.

To project a more complete account of the multiplicity in contrast with the more unitary psychoanalytic model against which it was developed (Buchanan, 2015; Holland, 1999) I turn to the brief psychoanalytic reading of Landy's project in which Darian Leader suggests, given the completism of Landy's project, 'that in

fact he was trying to register the loss of only one, specific thing' (2009, p.35). This notion of the singular lack, the 'only one' lost thing, recalls the characterisation by Deleuze and Guattari of the psychoanalytic representation of desire as shaped around *one* lost or missing object *in particular*. In their analysis, this forms a logical paradox in which 'the world does not contain each and every object that exists; there is at least one object missing, the one that desire feels the lack of' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972/2013, p.39).

Deleuze and Guattari want to resolve this logically invalid proposition by introducing the element of production to the concept of desire. Rather than appearing as a negative image formed around its missing object, desire reappears in their work as a dynamic force, a thing in itself that propels and produces (Ibid., pp.36-40). But this counter argument is itself logically flawed and misses something important about the psychoanalytic account. Much like the frustrating parent who isn't currently in the room (and no matter what the baby might think) the lost object of psychoanalysis is not non-existent - it simply isn't *here*. When Freud's grandson plays *fort/da* (Freud, 1955/2001, p.15)<sup>7</sup> the cotton reel doesn't spin out of existence (some baby!) - the point of the game is that no matter how many times the game is repeated, when pulled back out of the cot the lost object is found still to be attached to the end of its length of thread - *da!* One might suggest

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<sup>7</sup> This refers to the game *fort/da*, famously devised by a boy of 18 months old, who, Freud observes, seems to mediate for himself the troubling disappearance and reappearance of his mother by inventing a game of disappearance and reappearance or *gone/here*:

*The child had a wooden reel with some string tied round it. [...] What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot so that it disappeared into it, all the while uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o' [which signified 'fort', or 'gone']. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful 'da!' (Freud, 1955/2001, p.15).*

While the object of this game might be the rehearsal of loss and the payoff, the celebratory reunion - 'da!' - for Freud, the most interesting element of this scene is the recursivity with which the baby undergoes the pain of separation again and again through this act of throwing away. While acknowledging the necessarily speculative nature of his theory, Freud suggests that such iterative actions signal a 'repetition-compulsion' that arises from a desire, written into us at a primordial or cellular level, to repeat the life-cycle of previous generations of organisms. In this sense, it is ourselves that we endeavour to return, through repetitive acts such as listing. Freud's vivid writings on human death as a space of continuity and regeneration at the microbial level recall the declaration by Deleuze and Guattari that 'we make no distinction between man and nature' (1972/2013, p.15). In the context of Freud's writing, which as Deleuze and Guattari argue privileges the figure of the single and independently viable human ego, it is striking to be given this fleeting glimpse into what seems a radically distributed vision regarding what it is to be human.

endless further instances in which an entity that does not precisely exist in the world is nevertheless thinkable and directly present for the thinker. The closest to hand may be the experience of bereavement. Here, the figure of the lost loved one is immanently - and imminently - present *precisely because* s/he no longer resides in the world. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that to be thinkable, an object must have some presence in the world. They infer from this that lack is a manufactured value that conceals, 'as a function of market economy' (1972/2013, p.41), the nature (literally) of human existence. But their reasoning here is inwardly flawed, since if the thinkable is included in the category of things that are in the world, this must include loss itself, and lost things.<sup>8</sup>

I do not aim to solve this impasse within the current discussion (as if I could). I opt, rather, to follow in this thesis the impunity of matter, which as will be discussed more fully in the coming section may change its composition but cannot disappear. Water may dissipate into steam; wax may melt and run; energy formerly contained within a stick of wood may escape as heat; the edge of a stone pavement may wear away; elements of an object that is put through a shredder may dissipate and escape in the form of heat and particles. Even so, no part of these changed substances and materials *leaves the system*. Everything that begins in the universe, remains in the universe, and everything changes. The concept of multiplicity, then, enables a move beyond notions of material and psychic artefacts as mutually discrete, static, whole and impermeable. Instead, we see a body of 'deterritorialized intensities' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.36) that work at a range of levels of complexity, the elements of which attach and detach with one another and with the whole, and are defined by their connections and movements; their force and composition in relation to each other. In order to understand this constellation of elements the notion of the internally-ordered and self-sufficient organism needs to be abandoned to be replaced by that of a distributed functionality: 'a body populated with multiplicities' (Ibid., p.34).

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<sup>8</sup> I do not mean to suggest here a notion of multiplicity – or indeed 'things that are in the world' as a set of sets, however. The assemblages that are loss itself, and lost things, will be made up of countless smaller bodies, will have an energy and affect and will join and unjoin with other bodies or entities, gaining and losing clarity or definition *just like any other entity*. Moreover, the set of 'things that are in the world' is suggestive of another set; 'things that are not in the world', which I imagine would be difficult to discern to the extent that it could be put to work in any useful way in the present discussion.

In its centralisation of the ‘*only one*’ specific, whole and totalising lost object, the psychoanalytic lack-story summons Deleuze and Guattari’s suggestion that for the neurotic ‘it is at one and the same time that they apprehend the object globally and perceive it as lost’ (1987/2013, p.30). However, they contend firstly that multiplicity is the space in which psychosis distinguishes itself from neurosis, and secondly that ‘the unconscious itself [is] fundamentally a crowd’ (Ibid., p.33). Where Leader (2009) imagines that Landy is looking for ‘only one, specific thing’, it seems that in the schizoanalytic terms of the multiplicity ‘only one’ is *precisely what he cannot have*, unless ‘only one’ is taken to refer to the entire sum of the universe. In the disjointed profusion of Landy’s belongings on the conveyor belt, or the more uncompromising blending of fragments of stuff tipped together into disposal bags, then, are the specificities of Landy’s life – or indeed, just his stuff – to be crowded out by the endless, shifting proliferations of the multitude? How in this case is it possible to speak of fragment and whole – and how might one be thought of in relation to the other? This concern for immanence, and intense specificity as understood via relationality, can be seen in the following discussion of the nature of the body by Deleuze:

a body, however small it may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body [...] You will define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable (1970/1988, p.123).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In considering these questions I turn to the work of the philosopher Eugene Thacker on univocity and essence; ‘the relationship between Creator and creature, or between Life and the living’ (2010, p.153; see also Deleuze, 1968/2004; Widder, 2009). Thacker identifies this as an important point of intersection between the Scholastic philosopher John Duns Scotus and the work of Deleuze, particularly in respect of his ongoing concern with the multiplicity. Where Deleuze and Guattari say that ‘we make no distinction between man and nature’ (1972/2013, p.15), ‘nature’ or Life appears – roughly - in the space that is, in Scotus, occupied by the Creator. The larger implication here is that the universe can after all contain within it elements that differ from one another (Ibid., pp.124-5), while also being united by a fundamentally defining creative force. As Thacker has it, the furthest reach of univocity would be a pantheism that ‘not only entails the negation of the divine, but [...] also entails a radical distribution of the divine, such that it cannot be separated from the earthly, or even the material’ (Ibid., p.135). Univocity appears here as a vision of Life and the living as profoundly immanent in one another and working within and between difference and particularity. The multiplicity, which as I have indicated might be imagined as a dynamic complex of relationality, does its thing on a ‘plane of immanence’ that, Deleuze emphatically states, cannot be transcended: there is ‘no supplementary dimension’ (1970/1988, p.128).

The Deleuzo-Guattarian account of multiplicity as a kind of distributed functionality – which is therefore concerned precisely with *affect* - recalls the nature of interactions between the physical properties of small particles and granules of matter. Consider the way that dust softly plays a three-dimensional game of TETRIS<sup>10</sup> with itself to land in an even layer on smooth surfaces, or the mechanism through which, if granules, shards and flakes of china are placed into a tray which is then gently agitated, the larger pieces will stay near the top (the position of each determined by the comparative size of the other granules in the tray). The behaviour and properties of each element (fragment) and those of the assemblage overall are mutually constitutive. Such chance yet ordered interactions are exquisitely captured by Brian Massumi in a description of the formation of sedimentary rock. I reproduce this at length since the form of the following excerpt is itself alluvial: one clause lands against another, clause upon clause, line upon line, repetition upon repetition; laying themselves horizontally across the page, one upon the next:

A grain comes to rest. Another joins it. Many grains follow from a variety of sources, brought to a point of accumulation by chance. Not brute chance. Chance discrimination: the accumulating grains are in the same size and weight range and share certain chemical properties. Not all grains answering to the description join the gang. Given a particular grain, no one, however savvy in sedimentation, can predict whether it will be one of the select. All that can be said is that a number of like particles probably will be. A statistical process of this kind, combining chance and approximate necessity, can be called “selection.” A selection is an act of perception, since something, in this case a set of natural laws, “perceives” the grains that come together in a layer. [...] Layer accumulates upon layer, stratum upon stratum (1992, p.48).

This account of the behaviour of small particles in a process of sedimentation arises, in its original context, as an illustration of the contingencies inherent in the formation of personhood and the absolute synonymy of human and nature in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Here, I draw back from that broader narrative (a detailed examination of which is the chief task of chapter 6 as a whole) to observe that this passage from Massumi is directly informative regarding the mechanisms that govern gatherings of stuff, whether in a river bed, in Landy’s trays of granulated matter, or under my bed. In each case, we see material objects with a

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<sup>10</sup> TETRIS is a computer game that ‘displays images of various two-dimensional geometric shapes’ and requires the player to make judgements ‘concerning the potential fit of such shapes into depicted “sockets”’ (Clark, 2011, pp.220-1).



facility for causation, not passive but vibrant; causing and undergoing change. This is matter as narrative; medial matter. The notions of facility, narrative and multiplicity sketched here form an underpinning structure for the discussions of fragments and dust that follow.

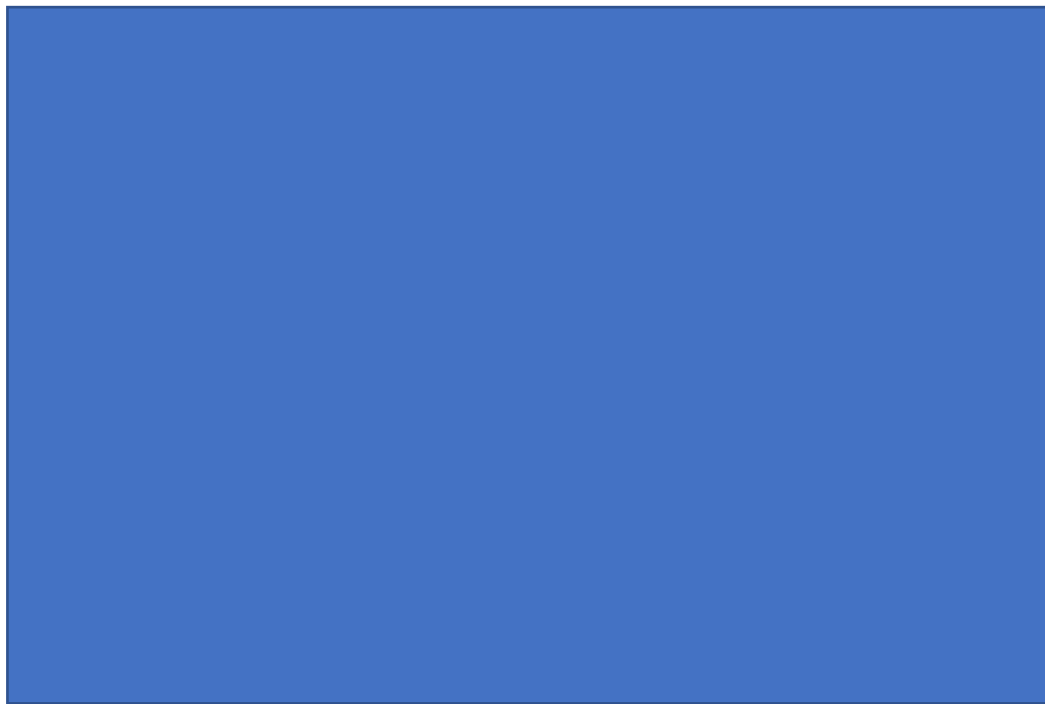


Figure 10: Yellow, plastic tray of ceramic fragments on conveyor belt (Landy, 2008a, p.190).

A final moment of consideration is owed to the notion of the Body without Organs. As Buchanan (2015, pp.25-7) suggests, this is not a concept, which is to say that it is not formed in a way that easily affords its direct application in analysis. Instead, I read the Body without Organs as a postulation that has to do with the relationship between part and whole. Massumi's 'muck', which pertains to connection and isolation, continuity and fracture, within and without, directly speaks to this scenario. Schizophrenia appears, then, as a mode of consciousness characterised by an inability to tune out one's absolute interconnection with the entirety of the universe (see for example Deleuze and Guattari, 1972/2013, p.32). In a similar way, a hearing aid user might find herself unable to filter out background noise in order to organise what she is hearing. While the organism is organised via points of intercourse (see also discussion of *schizzes* in pages 187-90 of Chapter 6), the Body without Organs arises as a strategic move in which these stratified relations are sealed off. Description of this entity as an entirely sealed carapace raises the image of the smooth, warm skin of a dolphin (without eyes, mouth, blow-hole, anus, urethra, fins, tail...) or an aubergine (without a stalk). It does not contain a void:

nor is it an individual psyche in compacted form, like a curled-up woodlouse, since in schizoanalysis this second notion, the individual psyche, is itself a redundancy. Instead, it is more like an interruption of individualised experience – a rejection of the organismic in favour of the multiple; the fluid. The Body without Organs is also not a fragment, since fragments require for their existence an originary whole: this stratified narrative that could only occur in one order is contrary to the multiple vision offered by Deleuze and Guattari. And yet, in considering the part and the entirety, and the fragmentary nature of the entirety, and the wholeness of the fragment, the Body without Organs, in its ability to be universe and fragment, broken and whole, might assist in resisting the most prescriptive conceptualisations of matter and the fragment in the discussion to follow.

### 3.3 *Tenacious stuff*

In this section I bring the critical implications of the impunity of matter into conversation with the figure of the fragment in *Break Down*. Here, the reference I make to stuff as something that continues and prevails is not metaphoric, but relates to the actual behaviour of matter. The logic of the chemical equation depends on the underpinning assumption that stuff can move around, but nothing entirely vanishes.<sup>11</sup> For a reaction (e.g.  $C + O_2$ ) to be resolved – that is, for it to reflect the behaviour of matter in the world – it must balance ( $C + O_2 = CO_2$ ); as that old chestnut of environmentalists has it, ‘there is no away’. A similar set of considerations is at play in the affirmation by the social historian Carolyn Steedman that dust:

is not about rubbish, nor about the discarded; it is not about a surplus, left over from something else: *it is not about Waste*. Indeed, Dust is the opposite thing to Waste, or at least, the opposite principle to Waste. It is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone (Steedman, 2001, pp.163-4; emphasis reproduced).

Steedman's indispensable contribution on the tenacity of physical matter opens consideration of differing theorisations of matter and culture. Her implicit designation of waste as inversely being to do with ‘going away’ should however be

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<sup>11</sup> It is perhaps worth acknowledging here that energy is dispersed as a result of some chemical reactions – for example, in the form of heat. However, since energy does not (as far as it is possible to know) *leave* the universe, this does not disrupt my point here, which is that things don't go away – they have the potential to change, but cannot entirely ‘disappear’.

read alongside the great body of work on waste as, specifically, *stuff that prevails*, thus obliging us to deal with it (see also the following examples on rubbish and dissipation: DeSilvey, 2006; Edensor, 2005; 2007; Hawkins and Mueke, 2003; Laporte, 2002; Min'an, 2011; Rathje and Murphy, 2001). In three representative accounts, we see the writer on waste Gay Hawkins (2006), who theorises rubbish precisely as stuff that stays with us, the geographer Kevin Hetherington providing a persuasive account of 'disposal,' as 'a continual practice of engaging with and holding things [...] in a state of abeyance' (2004, p.159) and the art historian Julian Stallabrass who considers that we might 'think of commodities as deferred trash' (2009, p.407). This article by Julian Stallabrass was originally published in 1996, five years before *Break Down* and it contains directly some of the points made in his interview with Landy, published in *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a, pp.107-116; see also Stallabrass, 2000). For example, he rehearses precisely a point he makes when interviewing Landy (cited on pages 65-6 of this thesis) when he posits that when objects are thrown away: 'Unmade, their polished unitary surfaces fall away, reinscribing in them for a time the labour that went into their making' (Stallabrass, 2009, p.408). Similarly, it is difficult to read the following passage without wondering whether Landy read it too:

In becoming rubbish the object [...] gains a doleful truthfulness, as though confessing: it becomes a reminder that all commodities, despite all their tricks, are just stuff; little combinations of plastics or metal or paper. The stripping away of branding and its attendant emotive attachments reveals the matter of the object behind the veneer imposed by a manufactured desire (Ibid., p.416).

The title of the BBC documentary that depicts Landy's production of *Break Down, The Man Who Destroyed Everything* (2002), suggests the hygienic notion of a uniform and inclusive annihilation. However, rather than 'destroying everything' it is more accurate to consider that Landy *transforms* his belongings into fragments, granules, and shreds. This may feel rather counterintuitive, but makes sense when thought through from the perspective of the molecules that had previously been participating in the event we would call a plastic crate, and following Landy's intervention were instead participating in a tray of red, plastic granules. Molecules follow the laws of physics, but – as far as it is possible to know – do not prefer to be part of one kind of thing or another. To cite Shone (2001), atoms are probably not disappointed to form part of a dishrag rather than a designer suit. The sacks of granulated material displayed by popular demand in Landy's shop window at 499 Oxford Street tell, above all, a story of matter that is

defined by change and that prevails. This moment in the work presents a profound challenge to human intentionality in the face of the properties of stuff.

That said, form does matter, and not only at the level of molecular structure. In considering this, I return to the concept from Deleuze and Guattari of affect – that is the capacity of an object or entity to receive and make effects beyond itself. The preceding discussion of affect concentrates specifically on the most starkly material configurations in which affect might be observed. However, an object can (probably will) participate in – or become – more than one assemblage at the same time. Moreover, the nature of assemblages is to incorporate different levels of signification and complexity. Therefore, Landy's red plastic crate is an assemblage. While it does incorporate the molecules that physically comprise its material form, it also draws together – or arises at the intersection of – innumerable other currents. These include the technologies that enable its mass production, the grocers' crates on which its design was based, and *Michael Landy at Home* (1999), the show of Landy's of which the crate was previously a part.

Here, we see again that affect does not 'belong' innately to the entity under consideration. Rather, it works relationally between the entity, and the assemblage in which it is implicated. Gibson's (1979/1986) demonstration of this has already been discussed in terms of the direct material features of the objects under discussion. In another example, the anthropologist Mary Douglas's seminal study on unruly stuff, *Purity and Danger* (1966/2002), we see how the affordances of different kinds of substance and object are interpolated in the making of cultural meaning. Here, the assemblage under question is not a material object – like Landy's red, plastic crate – but a cultural construct, 'dirt,' memorably defined by Douglas as 'matter out of place' (Ibid., p.44). The tenacity of matter is implicit in Douglas's account of depositions and gatherings of material that never simply disappear, but, if we are to maintain order, demand constant attention and work.

As well, one can see in this account the sense in which relationality is at work in defining matter that breaches our expectations if found in one place, while being fine in another. This matter possesses a different range of affects – that is, its potential impact on (and from) its surroundings – differ, then, depending on the particularities of the assemblage in which it is implicated. It might be expected that when Landy shreds his belongings and mixes the granulated fragments he messes with the prescribed order that Douglas observes. Two factors mitigate the threat.

Firstly, since Landy aims to separate different materials (2001a, p.39) the fragments produced are therefore rather homogenous: metal with metal, wood with wood, textile with textile (1966/2002, pp.47-8). Secondly, Douglas suggests that once objects decay beyond the point of being recognisable in their previous form, they lose their risky aspect (Ibid., pp.197-8), and indeed, this is the state of the fragments produced by Landy. They are dry, stable, comparatively large, easy to contain and somewhat unrecognisable; therefore, they are 'clean'.

There may be more transgression in Landy's mixing up of his private belongings (cooking utensils with socks; car parts with books). To communicate the way that domestic order (ostensibly based in modern scientific knowledge, for example, about the workings of pathogens) quickly blends into the symbolic, Douglas examines how objects from one area of the house feel polluting when moved to another: 'outdoor things indoors; upstairs things downstairs' (Ibid., pp.44-5). A toothbrush on the mantelpiece; a trowel in the bathroom sink; pants on the kitchen table. In this light, Landy's work does seem to wriggle out from the conventions discussed by Douglas. Is it possible to imagine such troubling pairings as 'pyjamas and mantelpiece', 'lego and bath' or indeed 'trowel and kitchen sink' - as openings?

Such misplacements appear, in this light, as moments in which, through accidental, productive misplacements, new lines of flight are opened up. A specific objects' proximity to other specific objects in a collection or assemblage lends different kinds of significance or perhaps makes available a broader range of readings or meanings.<sup>12</sup> As the archaeologist Mats Burström relates, regarding the interpretation of broken finds, 'fragments create tensions both between each other and with the other elements in the picture, effectively acquiring new meanings' (2013, p.316; see also Fuller, 2007, pp.1-2; Lichtenstein, 2009, pp.121-3).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The medial potentiality of what I call vertical relations between elements in an assemblage is considered in more depth in discussion of the list in Chapter 5 (pages 146-8).

<sup>13</sup> In this chapter, reference is made both to work of philosopher and art historian, Jacqueline Lichtenstein (2009), and of social historian and artist, Rachel Lichtenstein (1999).

### 3.4 'Quasi-choate' matter

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, dust appears here both as a sub-category of fragments (so dust might be seen as small fragments) and as a point of comparison with the larger granules produced by Landy. Alongside the range of parts and wholes that arise in the work, as surveyed earlier in this chapter, it could be said that there are other more obvious 'parts' that might be employed as a comparator with the granulated fragments that Landy displays in sacks. However, taking the next-biggest kind of 'part' defined above, the dismantled but as yet not shredded components of objects (the plastic casing of Landy's radio cassette player for example) it is clear that these are much more fundamentally different from granules. The component (the plastic casing) suggests a possibility that it could be reunited with the rest of its originating whole object (the radio cassette player). Inversely, one might also observe that the loss of direct utility in granulated matter exposes its base materiality. The granulated fragment and its smaller companion, dust, are beyond use, unless considered as raw materials. Finally, the fact that similar characteristics are shared between dust and the fragment particularly befits these substances for instantiation of affordance theory (Gibson, 1979/1986).

I can only imagine that the processes outlined in the first section of this chapter – the banging, tearing, wrenching, unscrewing and smashing undertaken by Landy's operatives – must have produced quantities of dust along with the fragmented plastic, fragmented metal, fragments of sponge, of textile and of wood that are the most visible physical products of Landy's *Break Down* (Landy, 2008a, p.108). However, dust is not incorporated in any of the documents and accounts of *Break Down*. Dust is an unruly substance: ubiquitous, insidious, inhalable – both ephemeral and enduring – escaping and persisting (see for example Olalquiaga, 1999; Steedman, 2001). It is imagined by Steven Connor (2010) as a kind of 'quasi-choate' matter – part of a 'great, diffuse class, undeclared, rarely described,' which also includes:

mist, smoke, dust, snow, sugar, cinders, sleet, soap, syrup, mud, toffee, grit. The category of the 'quasi-choate' is rhizomatic in its quivering, mobile vision of a material world that comes apart from, and re-joins, itself. Such pseudo-substances hover, drift and ooze between consistency and dissolution, holding together even as they come apart from themselves.

This is a useful starting point for the study of amorphous categories of material: however, I am less convinced about the inclusion in Connor's list of viscous

substances, and want to suggest that they should be considered separately from the powdered and the fragmented (although it depends on the soap; it depends on the mud - and snow, being crystalline, is different again). In the current discussion, substances that are broadly fragmentary in character – sugar, dust, cinders, mud, grit, perhaps smoke, since that is made up of small, airborne solid particles – pertain, where substances that are oozing, gummy or gelatinous and hang together more resolutely – mud, soap, toffee – do not.



Figure 11: House dust, gathered and photographed by the author, July 2017.

Dust might appear as a subset of the category, ‘fragments’; however, as already outlined, its primary use here is as a comparator with larger granulated fragments since as will be seen the properties of the two differ extensively. I follow the definition of dust as comprising a variety of fragmented and friable matter, as well as discrete items such as bacteria and skin cells. As the writer on dust Hannah Holmes defines, it is:

the individual fragments of a disintegrating world: the skin flakes, rock flecks, tree bark, bicycle paint, lampshade fibres, ant legs, sweater wool, brick shards, tire rubber, hamburger soot and bacteria (Holmes, 2001, pp.1-2).

As suggested by this list, dust can be envisioned as a collection of fragments on a very small scale. However, as Holmes suggests, household dust contains elements

that strain the notion of a 'disintegrated' or 'fragmented' substance: bacteria, pollen microspores and human skin cells, while issuing from or previously belonging to a larger body, are also discrete and complex objects, carriers of DNA that are uniquely fitted for purpose and environment (and therefore complete and whole).

I offer a reading of dust, therefore, that has to do with its unruliness and rejection of form. Its pleasures occur at odd moments, marking a slip from productive activity to an idle gaze: to place my finger on a dusty table-top and draw it through the grime to leave a shining path of exposed wood; to observe from my bed on a summer morning the dust motes shimmering, swimming and shifting in a shaft of sun. The constant falling-onto-surfaces of dust is not afforded by larger fragments, and perhaps it is to its effects in the domestic sphere – the drifting, the coating; the labour required in perpetuity to maintain dust-free surfaces in the home – that dust owes its troublesome reputation.

**Observation: House dust (March 2010).** *I am compelled to note firstly that I do not want this substance near me. A handful of dust, once the contents of my vacuum cleaner, shaken from containment onto a piece of white A4 on my desk. I wash the smooth/sticky patina from my fingertips before returning to observe. I imagine it smells – but does it really – this nest of stuff collected from the floors of my house? In my anxiety to avoid inhaling anything untoward, all I can detect is an edge of sweetness. It must be essence-of-house, containing all the life, all the movement, all the objects, somehow sloughed off to fall in drifts like post-apocalyptic snow. Plaster and lathe and paper-dust; the minutest motes of cotton from bedsheets and pillows. Hair. Skin. I do not want to attend to this substance; I do not want it near me. This gathering of stuff raises questions about what it is to be nondescript. Certainly, I can describe the origins of dust and its behaviour, lying like a tidal deposit to either side of my wooden steps, caught up in drifts resembling mountain ranges or cumulous clouds beneath my bed, resting like grey-green velvet or the bloom of a grape, over the floor, the shelves, the tops of books, the clock. I sweep with the side of my hand, make a little bout of dust, gather it into my cupped hand, walk to the window, careful not to lose any, release it and watch it fly apart in the wind. But looking at dust, just-dust, gathered hygienically on a sheet of white A4, not on the floor, not in the vacuum, not in the bin – I can find very few words to describe the stuff itself. Grey. That's the main thing; the odd lack of colour. Soft and slightly tacky to the touch, giving so easily that it can hardly be felt in a cupped hand. Then, aery, fractal, interrupted, ghastly, gathered in a body yet liable to lose itself, particular, opaque. The*



*light penetrates it unevenly to make internal fields of light and dark. The mass of it quivers as I exhale, held together by who-knows-what like an uncanny felt – almost-alive and therefore ghastly.*

This piece of site writing stages a confrontation with house dust (*my dust*) that brings us face to face with the impulses and sensations that inhere in Douglas's account, discussed earlier, of dirt as 'matter out of place' (1966/2002, p.44). This is a narrative that conveys panic and revulsion. Where dust threatens to usurp and engulf, cleaning brings with it fantasies of social order. Bataille conveys a notion of dust as a grotesque invading force when he remarks that the purpose of dusting and vacuuming is to exorcise 'the injurious phantoms that cleanliness and logic abhor' (Bataille et al, 1995, p.43). The dream of dust as matter with a life of its own is intimidated by the appearance of 'phantoms', here pitted against the regulatory regime of the Hoover. But it is matter that will 'gain the upper hand [...] Invading the immense ruins of abandoned buildings, deserted dockyards; and, at that distant epoch, nothing will remain to ward off night-terrors' (Ibid.). This thread of horror and disgust continues through Carolyn Steedman's upending of ivory tower fantasies of the researcher in the archive (2001, pp.17-28). Here she summons, instead of white gloves, archive dust coating clammy skin – and the hallucinatory fear of inhaling a fatal virus from the scraped sheep-skin parchment found in the grimmest vaults of the library.

Steedman's account of dust in the factory and in the archive dances between the specific and the distinct: the historical past acts on the present, freighted with disease, filling the nostrils and gritting the hairline. This is a vision of dust as a consuming, clogging substance that affords the congestion of the lungs of the children who work in the sorting of paper, leather and textiles (Steedman, 2001, p.20).<sup>14</sup> In Marx's account of the 'unhealthy jobs' engendered by large scale mechanised production, these shredded materials carry the spores of disease (Marx, 1867/1976, pp.592-3; 552). Marx also gathers evidence of the presence of

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<sup>14</sup> While there is too little space here thoroughly to discuss the dusty jobs that children do now, it is essential to acknowledge that such violently consuming occupations cannot and must not be relegated to the past. Globally, there continues to be a strong demand for children's labour power. Small children continue, in large numbers, to undergo the punishing rigours of physical labour of which western consumers are the direct, material beneficiaries.

fragmented matter, specifically delineated as: 'alum, soap, pearl-ash, chalk, Derbyshire stone-dust and other similar agreeable, nourishing and wholesome ingredients' (Ibid., pp.278; 358-9) added to the bread flogged to factory workers by their employers in nineteenth-century England. While sitting indigestibly in the stomach, dust also whirls in the disturbed space of the textile mill. To the factory owner, this 'devil's dust' (Ibid., p.313) or 'shoddy' merely represents lost value, to be entered in the 'out' column or if the price is right, repurposed as mattress-stuffing (Steedman, 2001, p.20). In the factory, however, it fills the air so completely as to transform human bodies into negative space. A contemporary report supplies:

... it is exceptionally unpleasant to stand even 10 minutes in the spinning rooms: for you are unable to do so without the most painful sensation, owing to the eyes, the ears, the nostrils, and mouth, being immediately filled by the clouds of flax dust from which there is no escape (Marx, 1867/1976, p.337).

Similarly, the dust that fell at Ground Zero is described by the cultural critic Marita Sturken (2007, p.180) as an enveloping and form-defying cloud: an ambiguous substance that appeared and reappeared as relic, forensic material and lethal pollutant. This ambiguity is mimed particularly clearly in the instance of the remains of a dust-covered shop display from nearby, which, when moved to a local museum, 'was treated not only as "historic and possibly sacred" but also as dangerous and toxic, attended to by a crew wearing hazard suits working in a sealed bubble' (Ibid.). The remains of the twin towers were variously washed from the hair, clothes and fingernails of survivors, scrubbed from walls and pavements, blessed, and forensically analysed in the search for evidence and human remains. It was also much-photographed, producing as it did 'haunting images of a cityscape coated in dust as if it were a few inches of snow, transforming the outline of debris into strange, layered shapes' (Ibid., p.175; see also Bird, 2003).

As this writing on 9/11 shows, dust contradicts, interrupts, disfigures and troubles intentionality and form. The theme of contamination emerges vividly in these accounts, yet dust also conveys a troubling and rather melancholy attraction. Celeste Olalquiaga catches the delectable passivity of this 'patina of shattered moments' (1999, p.94) in her mulling-over of a domestic dust that, like the dust of the twin towers, makes things new in its transfiguring shrouding of everyday objects - yet could be 'the last breath of tradition' (Ibid., p.91). As Bataille observes:

The storytellers have not realised that the Sleeping Beauty would have awoken covered in a thick layer of dust [...] Meanwhile dismal sheets of dust constantly

invade earthly habitations and uniformly defile them: as if it were a matter of making ready attics and old rooms for the imminent occupation of the obsessions, phantoms, spectres (Bataille et al, 1995, p.42).<sup>15</sup>

The sedimentation that mounts inexorably; the powdery substance that lies between sheets of paper and waits to be disturbed. Settling in drifts on the tops of shelved books, behind the attic door and under the bed, dust remakes the world in soft focus, accreting inaudibly while one is reading or sleeping. In short, the example of the dust covered room conveys most clearly the charisma of dust.

### 3.5 *The mediality of fragments*

In short, dust gains its narrative force from its facility to convey through its falling and coating a sense of time having passed. If dust works through the motif of the dust-covered and abandoned room, the affordances of the fragment play into its cultural life through the trope of the souvenir. Here and in the final section I explore the way that larger fragments enable apprehension of a different kind of event. That is to say that they embody a moment of fracture; a specific moment in which a break occurred. This idea arises in an essay by the scholar of museum studies Susan Pearce (2009), in which she says of flakes of paint employed as forensic evidence in a detective story that they:

have their own biography, as all objects do. They [...] have life events, which can be reconstructed through the study of physical analysis and records, written and unwritten. In many ways this material life history operates as a parallel life to that which the flakes lead in their 'real' life; it is a constructed narrative of events, presented as an explanation of why and how the traces come to be where they actually are at each specific moment. It would, of course, be equally true to say that paint traces generate their own narratives; it is their physical nature and the events they have been involved in which drive the story (2009, pp.463-4).

Here, apparently drawing on the methodological approach (from Kopytoff, 1986) of object biography,<sup>16</sup> Pearce confronts the ways in which a material object might both have meaning inscribed upon it from without, and also carry and convey its

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<sup>15</sup> Bataille's dusty spectres recall the stillness of the abandoned, dust-coated room that was discovered in the synagogue at Princelet Street. This scene is absolutely antithetical to Landy's project. When it was reopened by workmen (Lichtenstein, 1999, p.30), twenty years after the silent departure of its last tenant, the abandoned room presented a seductive tableau of time passing 'ragged clothes still hanging in the wardrobe, a fur dangling down through the collapsing ceiling, a pile of 78's, lamps and odd bits of candle, an old gas mask, scattered and prophetic-looking books in Hebrew, Russian, Hindustani' (Wright, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Kopytoff's influential paper on object biography is discussed in the introduction (page 18).

own meaning or narrative (no matter that the full extent of the narrative might be, ‘quite recently, this piece of crockery broke’) through its very form. In this final section of the current chapter I develop this second concept further, suggesting that the particular interest of the fragment arises from the *narrative* qualities of broken matter. The fragment has the capacity to express change; to record and mediate information about events happening in time. Where dust refers to time through its cumulative work to cover a surface, the fragment refers graphically to a specific moment in time in which the form of a single, concrete object changed: the moment of the cut, the break, the snap.

*Observation: Workshop on destruction with Michael Landy – online video (Hayward Gallery, 2012; see Figure 12).* It begins horse-shaped, hung all over with scraps and chunks of material – plumbing stuff maybe? Pans? Plates? Tubes? Kettles? The casings of computers and microwaves? The entire structure has a quality of indeterminacy partly owing to distance, and partly to the fact that it is entirely white – a uniform, off-white that makes me think of whitewash. We’re in a concrete courtyard – a sunny day – a background of pebble-dashed panels and the sound of a helicopter close overhead. Plugged in, the thing lurches into some kind of mobility and in movement it becomes clear that it is composed of a revolving platform – a drum – onto which objects have been attached - with string? Chain? Wire? A pole projects out at a diagonal. From the apparent density of its formation in movement the thing flies apart, revealing its own fragility. It sheds itself into its own works – stops itself – and one of the men (Landy?) swings a lump hammer at it until it begins to move again. The next time it fails some element of the machinery continues to twitch: troublingly a row of wires like tines of a garden rake play delicately in a movement like reflex knee-jerks, the fluttering of eye-lids or the legs of an upturned beetle. As it destroys itself the machine takes on more and more delicacy. Even its sound transforms from a flat clank to a sibilant tinkle like fragments of ceramic in a tray or shattered glass suspended by threads. Eventually, the machine gives off a refined little puff of smoke, which hangs opaquely against the concrete, its single arm still reaching quixotically toward the sky. Once the machine finishes its work, the camera picks its way across to survey the extruded remnants: wire basket; bracket; metal plate; canister.

The first comparator to hold up against category of the fragment is that of the whole. After all, a fragment holds within it the qualities of (and depending on its

material properties and the forces acting upon it, may have an indexical, jigsaw-piece relationship to) a previous whole. The loss of that previous thing inheres in the resulting fragments. Simultaneously, each fragment acquires its own wholeness immediately it splinters free: immediately Landy feeds his red, plastic crate through the shredder, the 'whole' of the crate disappears and each of the resulting shining, red, plastic granules assumes the quality of 'wholeness' in its own right. The fragment reveals the instability of the singular, exposing as it does the immanent possibility that seemingly stable, gathered entireties might break (or be broken) apart. Even the discrete bodies of the resulting shards need to be considered both as objects composed of particles, and as active participants in the material world beyond the finite limits of the space they themselves now occupy.

Along these lines, Jacqueline Lichtenstein (2009) proffers the criteria that a fragment should be defined as 'a compact object one can touch' and 'the whole from which it derives is a whole that can be broken up: divided into solid, compact pieces' as a result of 'a process of fragmentation'. Other specifications listed here have less credibility, however. Lichtenstein suggests that 'we must believe [the fragment] to be a detached piece of something. It cannot be a fragment of just anything' – she terms miscellaneous and indeterminate broken material mere 'pieces' (2009, pp.115-6). Later in the same discussion it is further defined that a fragment should be a remaining or 'surviving' piece: 'it is the missing pieces that confer on the surviving pieces [...] their status as fragments' (Ibid., p.119). In view of this last adjustment, the category of 'fragment', as proposed by Lichtenstein, takes on a rather self-erasing character. In these terms, on one hand the only thing standing between a random 'piece' of discarded marble and its canonisation as a fragment is our knowledge of its origins; while on the other, the status of an individual fragment depends on its status as a surviving part of an otherwise vanished object.

### 3.6 *Narrative object*

In the remainder of the current chapter an account is extended of the fragment as a narrative object and a souvenir; a pocketable token for – and perhaps a container for – violence. The seemingly comprehensive and self sufficient form of fragments comprises extraordinary complexity and plurality. If the fragment is narrative, the story it tells is of the process of breaking: of disassembly and fragmentation. In the

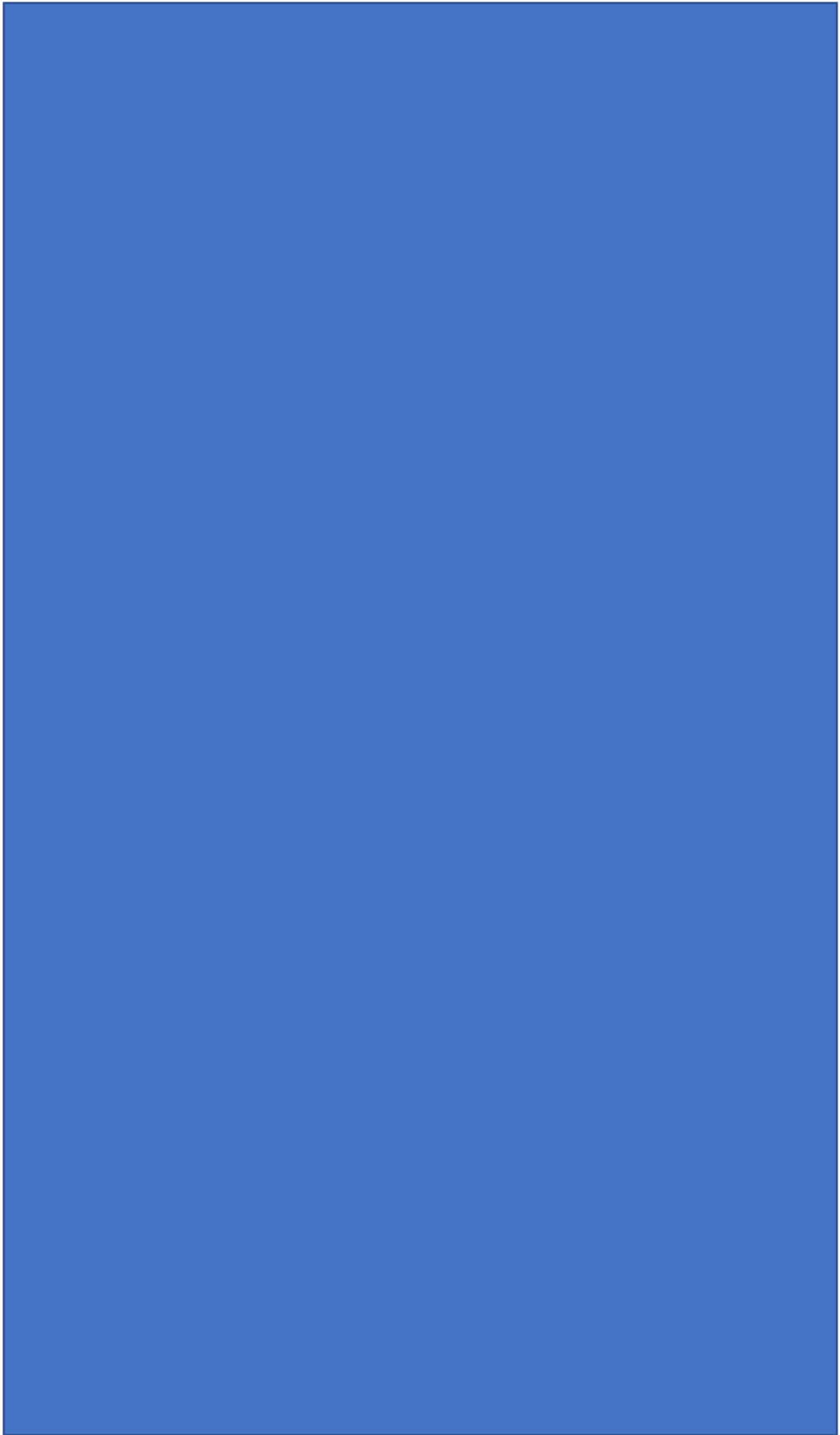


Figure 12: Three images from online video of Michael Landy destruction workshop (Hayward Gallery, 2012).

coming discussion, I consider fragmentation in the light of two layers, or gradations, of narrative that might be associated with an object. A first stratum, which is immanent in the material composition of the object, has to do with the indexical relationship that can be traced between the form of the object and events that have occurred in the past, through which the current composition of the object was reached. A second stratum relates to the entire range of human memories, inferences and interpretations that might be projected upon the object. In analyses of the fragment it appears that this second strata refers to and is intrinsically shaped by the first; that is, by the form of the object. As previously argued, if the fragment were the precise opposite of the whole. This is to say that if processes of breaking, splitting, flaking or splintering into many discrete parts were situated on one side of a flat binary in which a thing is either fragmented or it is whole, the category of 'multiplicity' would stand against that of 'fragment'. In fact, rather than operationalising this oppositional logic, it is my suggestion that the multiplicity *configures* the fragment – and in fact, matter itself – as containing, immanently, process and transformation.

The artist Gustav Metzger provides the useful specification that auto destructive art deploys the conjoined factors of 'material', 'process' and 'time' (1996, p.42). A member of the Fluxus group and author of three manifestos connected with auto destructive art, written in 1959, 1960 and 1961 (Ibid., pp.59-60), Metzger's work is concerned precisely with matter, its qualities and affects (in the Deleuzian sense: the propensity of a particular body to affect, or be affected). He is a Holocaust survivor who has consistently discussed his work in explicitly and directly political terms, and has campaigned for nuclear disarmament over many years. Metzger's anti-violence gave rise to his initiation of the Destruction In Art Symposium in 1966, a three-day conference followed by a month of art events and shows. This influential event was attended by 'some fifty avant-garde artists from ten countries [...] as well as scientists, philosophers and psychoanalysts' (Wilson, 2013, p.144; see also Cox and Landesman, 1966; Tate, n.d.; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Metzger is seen visiting *Break Down* and, with evident pleasure, closely inspecting items on the conveyor belt as they pass him by in the documentary *The Man Who Destroyed Everything* (2002), which also includes a short section on his acid works. In order to work against 'personal publicity', he opts to face away from the camera in his interview, leaving the viewer with the (as

*Observation: Gustav Metzger making an acid painting - online video (Contemporary Films, 2011). Monochrome footage. A shot from below. Metzger holds a gas mask over his face and positions the strap around the back of his head. A coil of tubing descends from the mouth piece and hangs, protruding slightly. He puts on a large pair of goggles and a white helmet. Using a large brush attached to the end of a long stick, he begins to make lunging and slicing movements: precise, canny, forceful, and abrupt. The shot shifts: he stands at a large piece of nylon that is stretched taut on a rectangular metal frame. Another shot, this time of the fabric after it has received the acid and the paintbrush has been removed. The surface springs, seizes, puckers, gapes. Holes travel and lengthen in a way that seems purposeful; alive. They ladder, and the ladders transform into viscous drips. The fabric shrinks away from itself. Holes leap together. Now, fabric hangs down in ribbons and sheets. Through an opening in the fabric we are shown a shot of St Paul's Cathedral. We are by the Thames. A boat chugs east toward Greenwich. Curls of nylon are lapped by the breeze. It is a bright day.*

Metzger's concern with material, process and time can certainly be identified in this inquiry into the behaviour of nylon when daubed with acid. The work was performed during the Destruction In Art Symposium, but Metzger also describes making an acid painting on the South Bank in London five years earlier in 1961,<sup>18</sup> as an artist member of the anti-nuclear group, the Committee of 100: 'It was partly me attacking the system of capitalism, but also inevitably the systems of war, the warmongers' (Philpot, 2009, p.25). The way the nylon curls and shrivels and the holes continue to spread and grow after Metzger has painted the acid is both compelling and repulsive. As I watch the online video of Metzger's happening on the South Bank, I am forcefully reminded of the stories of survivors of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose skin was burnt from their bodies by the heat of the blast, and hung down in ribbons. The work presents a direct confrontation with violent power, recalling the fragility of human flesh and opening up a visceral encounter between fragility and violence. The importance of

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it happens, far more memorable) image of the back of his head, a cap, the outline of his ears and shoulders in silhouette.

<sup>18</sup> The online video cited here (Contemporary Films, 2011) is attributed to a member of Regent Street Polytechnic in 1965, the year before the Destruction in Art Symposium. Metzger wears a gas mask and goggles as described in his discussion of the demonstration he gave with the Committee of 100 in 1961 (Philpot, 2009, p.25).



Metzger's acid works as anti-war pieces arises from an awareness of human bodies as *made of stuff*; bodies as fragile entities that suffer and fail when subjected to violence. What is demonstrated so directly in Metzger's acid piece is the function of violence itself as a substrate of government power. In this age of mutually assured destruction, our constant awareness of the threat of violence is in itself a violence. It is precisely this awareness that Metzger deploys (see Wilson, 2013, p.144) and works against by making visible the human, bodily implications in his work. Yet, much as this acid painting is an anti-war art work, it always continues to be 'about' what happens when acid is applied to nylon – how one substance reacts to the other.

To understand this further, one might turn again to Metzger's identification that 'auto-destructive art is *material* that is undergoing a *process* of transformation in *time*' (1996, p.42; emphasis added). This formulation, in which Metzger attempts to understand material/process/time as a single conjoined element, connects precisely with my own conception of the fragment as narrative object. There is no little accordance between the account of affordances in Gibson (1979/1986), in which the properties of objects and matter are considered in relation to the humans or animals that interact with them, and Metzger's discussion of the behaviour and capacity of certain materials to be transformed. Metzger considers matter and process in an especially Gibsonian manner when he discusses 'the aesthetic of falling bodies':

The movements in space of every part of the material is of the greatest importance. Different materials in various stages of transformation have differing speeds, rhythms, convolutions though space. Some forms are ejected and describing an arc, hit the ground. Forms may slide. Materials may liquefy and reach the earth as drops. Falling bodies include aerosols, dust, smoke, water droplets. All these forms are potential aesthetic phenomena (1996, p.43).

In discussing fragmentation itself Metzger observes that while some auto-destructive art works via processes of decomposition that might be very slow, even indiscernible, destruction might take place via more confrontational processes:

Matter leaves a work in fragments. These fragments could be in the form of solid blocks which hit the ground without shattering and are eventually removed. It is a misconception that *all parts* of an auto-destructive art sculpture have to *disintegrate*. Other fragments shatter on impact. Fragments leave the work as a result of explosions. Vibration may shatter fragments. Forms implode. Matter is carbonized and pulverized. Most of these transformations are visible (Ibid., emphasis reproduced).

In a similar way, it can be observed that in *Break Down*, different materials afford different methods of destruction. Landy's photographs afford tearing and shredding; canvases must be prised from their wooden frames; his lentils have merely to be emptied into the hopper, the foam from his furniture goes easily through the shredders; his car must be dismantled by a qualified mechanic (Artangel, 2015). This emphasis on the fragment as expressive of process, then, can be related directly to Landy's project to return objects 'as near as possible to raw materials' (Sillars, 2009, pp.25-6) and his focus, long before the show began, not on disposal but on object life-span and cycles of use (Landy, 2001a). In these moments, even while de-forming them, Landy makes visible in his belongings their most basic and inherent material properties, an action that incorporates a kind of grace, almost a moment of justice in which meanings imposed by human beings are erased in favour of the innate meaning – which is to say, the physical properties – of the objects he dismantles.

*Observation: photograph of materials retrieved from radio-cassette on weighing scales (Landy, 2001a, pp.72-3; see Figure 8). Copper wiring, bundled in short, even lengths like bright straw. Oblong and L-shaped sections of flat metal in a dull grey retain their screw-holes; like shapes from TETRIS, a mass of right-angles, they lie and half-slide in a pile to one side. Some white plastic sections (for corners or edges perhaps?) and a twist of red flex, plus, toward the back, something less easy to identify, flat and iridescent blue, fluted like foil from the neck of a bottle of wine.*

The charismatic qualities of the fragment – the peculiar 'aura' of shards, flakes, splinters and scraps – is discussed in depth by the archaeologist Mats Burström (2013, p.311). This can be seen in all of the fragment photographs that emerge from *Break Down*. An assemblage of fragments, photographed on Landy's electric scales (sadly, the number display is not quite in focus), is deeply tactile: one's first impulse is to hold and touch, to twist the lengths of copper wire, palm, arrange, and count. These fragments possess an attractive quality that emerges directly from their form. Burström projects two complementary accounts for the charisma of the fragment. He argues firstly that as somewhat anomalous objects that cannot always easily be accounted for, fragments leave space for interpretations of histories outside the margins: an invitation to plurality.

Secondly, projecting that if ‘all fragments were to fuse together into a complete and convincing whole, the magic would be lost’ (2013, p.318), Burström explicitly connects the attraction of the fragment with the space these objects leave for conjecture and interpretation, which exceeds the actual preceding whole object. In this moment of ‘more than’ and ‘beyond’ I see a re-emergence of the psychoanalytic conceptualisation, discussed earlier in this chapter, of desire as emerging from the gap left behind by a single and unitary loss. Here, however, since the archaeologist presumably has the fragment but not the whole thing, the site of that loss is ambiguous. Is it the gap formed by the remaining, missing pieces of the originary object that lets in this transcendent quality, ‘the magic’? Or alternatively, is the fragment itself a kind of gap in solid form? The classicist Glenn Most (2009, p.22) treads similar ground in a survey of the treatment of material and textual fragments from antiquity, conjecturing that ‘the very condition of fragmentariness’ holds a particular attraction, and positing that in its fractured and unbalanced incompleteness the fragment speaks to the breaks and discontinuities inherent in human life and experience. Like Burström, Most presents a vision in which some element of the whole is always, necessarily, hidden - but where Burström expresses no wish to complete the picture, for Most the fragment obsesses scholars more than the (imaginary) perfect whole precisely because we get to fill in the gaps, making an imaginary wholeness in lieu of the ‘shattered hopes of our own existence’ (Ibid., p.18). This phrasing feels somewhat sentimental, but perhaps a fragment really can be imagined as a gap in material form. The fragment is attractive, I propose, because it reifies, in the form of a small object, the splintered and contingent realities of human life.

In other words, the value of the fragment is that it *affords* use as a memento or souvenir, in the sense that it is a small, portable object that embodies a space, time or event and makes it – literally and figuratively – easy to handle. Here, I look to the work of the literary critic Susan Stewart (1993), who imagines the souvenir as a device that acts as a proxy for experience: ‘as experience is to an imagined point of authenticity, so narrative is to the souvenir’ (Ibid., p.136). As Stewart comments, part of the point of the souvenir is that we take it away with us. By definition, its purpose is to end up in places where it in some sense does not belong. Regarding practices of taking souvenirs – or fragments – away, the archaeologist John Chapman (2000) presents an important account of practices of breaking, relating most prominently to his theory of ‘enchainment’. Influential in archaeology, this

theory deals with the fact that many fragments of ancient, broken objects cannot be reconstituted at the find-site (because they are found incomplete). Chapman posits that the ostensibly 'missing' fragments may have been given to others and taken elsewhere in order to signify and reinforce social relationships through practices of breaking and distribution.

As Stewart suggests (albeit with some scepticism) in a similar way, the souvenir might be seen as an attempt to make an enduring connection with a particular place. However, for Stewart, the souvenir – like the fragment – is always missing something. It is metonymic of the experience for which it stands. This holds whether, as in the case of the fragment, this metonymy is 'homomaterial' – that is, taken physically from its referent – or not. Here one might consider the Medieval British practice of sealing a deal using a broken knife, one part of which is held by each party to a legal agreement, or later, a legal document that was itself cut in a 'unique, zig-zag manner', again for purposes of authentication (Chapman, 2000, p.38). In both cases, the authenticity and reliability of the agreement made is signalled through the direct material continuity between the fragments kept by each party. In a similar way, in Stewart, the souvenir gains authority if there is some direct, indexical relationship between the keepsake and the object it signifies. Nevertheless, what it stands in for, it cannot entirely fulfil. Indeed, the entire function of the souvenir is precisely to act as the incomplete receptacle for 'a narrative discourse which articulates the play of desire' (1993, p.136), which is to say that the souvenir not only depends on a supplementary narrative to animate it, but exists in order to provide a space for this narrative.

In the literature on fragmentation, the story of the fragment as a manifestation of mortality in pocketable material form appears and reappears as though revolving on Landy's conveyor belt. For instance, the endeavours of forensic scientists at the gigantic Fresh Kills landfill following 9/11 suggest themselves as a worked example here, as tiny fragments of bone the size of a fingernail are found in the dust and debris and taken as direct referents for 'the body [...] to verify that such a person existed, and was there' (Sturken, 2007, p.209). The motif of mortal remains contained in a 'dirty' substance reappears in a study of preservation and memorialisation at the former concentration camp Sachsenhausen. Here, the anthropologist Howard Potter 'steals' soil samples from around the site: 'Tower A, the industry yard, the Pathology Building and the site of the Crematorium' (2006,

p.44). He dries and sterilises them in his oven before placing them in labelled glass jars to make an ethnographic object – a collection of vials – in an attempt to explore ‘how this materiality, the substance of the site, appears to produce memories, both for the former prisoners and the present-day staff’ (Ibid., p.41). In both examples, our mortal remains haunt the soil. Only through diligent sifting and processing can they be ‘found’ again – either figuratively or literally.



Figure 13: Shot of fragments on the ground in online video of *Break Down* (Artangel, 2015).

Gabriel Moshenska chronicles children’s engagement with ‘the material culture of warfare and violence’ (2008, p.108) via the widespread practice in Britain during the Second World War of gathering and swapping collections of shrapnel, ‘carrying them around, handling them and allowing others to sort through them as a form of display’ (Ibid., p.112):

As a commodity, shrapnel is [...] unique in its explosive means of production and distribution, being created very suddenly at high temperatures and altitudes and spreading itself across wide areas in an admirably democratic way. As a tradeable man-made commodity it was remarkable in being free, abundant, endlessly diverse and continually in production: in the world of collecting these are characteristics more usually associated with natural history specimens such as seashells (Ibid., p.111).

As Moshenska posits, testimonies from collectors suggest that these fragments helped them to represent the violence of their daily experiences to themselves. Indeed, such practices of collecting munitions continue to date; he provides a recorded instance of children in Israel collecting shrapnel in 2006. Shrapnel is

often shiny, sometimes bearing traces of its manufacture and its destructive journey; it is hard, and crucially, often small enough to pocket.

In relation to my framing discussions, earlier in this chapter, of concepts of affect and affordance, it is important to note, here, that the *physical properties* of the fragment- are intrinsic to its significance and usefulness for these children. In a similar way, the example of the souvenir postcard in which a small crumb of concrete from the Berlin Wall is presented safely encased within a plastic blister (Van der Hoorn, 2003, p.191) emphasises this move. Here, taking possession of a fragment of a monstrous object may have had an inoculating or perhaps even a homeopathic effect. The bearer might be protected in some way from the violent power of the historic events symbolised by the object. Alternatively, like the bearer of a religious relic, she might take into herself some of that momentous force. There is a coherence therefore between the case of Berlin Wall fragments and that of shrapnel collecting. In both, the ability to hold and touch the fragmented trophy - the ability to *have* it - is of central importance (Ibid., p.193). In light of Stewart's work on the souvenir more broadly, I propose that the role of these pocketed pieces of shrapnel and granulated concrete is to bring the experiences they represent down to size and enable their introjection by the collector:

to [reduce] the public, the monumental and the three-dimensional into the miniature, which can be enveloped by the body, or into the two-dimensional representation, that which can be appropriated within the privatized view of the individual subject' (1993, pp.137-8).

In all four of the examples rehearsed above - mortal remains in the 9/11 dust, dried soil from Sachsenhausen, shrapnel collected by children, and commoditised crumbs of concrete from the Berlin Wall - the fragment is presumed to have an indexical relationship with its originating 'whole' object. It is specifically this that fits it to act as a referent of or stand-in for the original. In the latter two examples, a sense of authority - a kind of embodied authenticity - is further reinforced through the connection, within the form of the fragment, to the moment of fracture. As Van der Hoorn says of shattered architecture:

Slashed into pieces, recycled, transformed, it can continue to live in fragmented form and act as an intermediary onto which people can project their memories, frustrations or experiences with regard to the object that used to occupy an important place (Ibid., pp.189-90).

Meanwhile, Sturken (2007, p.208) relates, a piece of metal from the jet that collided with the Pentagon is canonised through preservation, gathered by FBI agents and ends up in the possession of Donald Rumsfeld. This anecdote resonates in interesting ways with those previously detailed. Where collectors of shrapnel and Berlin Wall rubble are arguably attempting to make sense of violent events not of their making, Rumsfeld was in a position to become the architect of further shells; shrapnel; rubble: more deadly souvenirs for the children of Iraq and Afghanistan. One might speculate, indeed, given the sheer extent of the destructive power at his disposal, about what need Rumsfeld could possibly have had for souvenirs. Certainly, for the shard to proceed through the system as it did, presumably beginning as forensic evidence, labelled, contained, recorded and analysed, before finding its way to Rumsfeld's desk (as a trophy of sorts?) is not insignificant. Is it too much to imagine that in this case, the forensic and the magical combine to make a talisman that incorporates empirical proof (to echo Sturken, the plane was there: it existed) and a symbolic capture of chaotic, violent power that can be held and displayed?

M: I seem to remember you sprinkling some of my shredded Saab car underneath a sacred tree in India. Not that anyone was allowed to take any of the parts, but you somehow managed to get some out.

D: It was the sacred Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, which is meant to be the fifth incarnation of the tree that Buddha sat under. But it wasn't actually the Saab itself, just some plastic granules. For some reason I just felt moved to sprinkle some as a kind of offering. *Break Down* formed part of a spiritual journey that I went on. I went to India a couple of days after it had finished (Artangel, 2010; see also Landy, 2008b)

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I periodically wanted to rescue (for which read 'have for myself') some of his things, or to take a little bit of shredded paper or a knife blade as a souvenir (Walford, 2001).

As this pair of quotations show, Landy's fragments are also treated as souvenirs – which is to say that they are picked up and taken away, and, more than that, seem to possess a kind of narrative potency of their own. In a conversation between Landy and Dave Nutt, the mechanic who dismantled his car, the fragments are stolen and carried elsewhere. When Nutt takes a handful of plastic granules to Bodhgaya, he enacts enchainment theory (Chapman, 2010), as a fragment from one meaningful interlude is carried into another space. Here, the fragments are used

to enact meaning and relationship. This transformation of plastic pellet to sprinkled offering draws very clearly on the same repertoire of narrative and material strategies found later that year in the treatment of the fragments and dust of 9/11. Now, they are treated as a sacred relic-like substance; now as a source of forensic evidence; now as rubbish. Finally, since the granules are also stolen by members of the public (Cumming, 2001; Walford, 2001), I connect this act of taking with my earlier discussion of the fragment as inoculation or homeopathic particle.

Informed in particular by the work of Van der Hoorn (2003) on the fragment in war tourism, I propose that in the act of scooping granules from a tray when no one was looking so as to 'have [them] for myself' (Walford, 2001) such visitors hoped in some sense to take in a fragment of the power of Landy's act. To pocket fragments of Landy's de-formed stuff was to place themselves within the narrative in some small way and possibly to inoculate themselves – perhaps against the transgressive nature of the work – or alternatively, against consumer capital itself.

However, the aptest moment in *Break Down* takes place after the show has officially ended, when (Landy's assiduous labour of destruction notwithstanding) the resulting sacks of granulated matter have to be removed by refuse-collectors. Here, a sleight of hand occurs. In a doubling movement Landy appears to have destroyed his stuff – yet simultaneously we know that he has in fact converted it into a heap of scraps that '[end] up in landfill' (Landy, 2008a, p.105). After the show, the granulated remains of Landy's belongings manifest the impossibility of disappearance. Dust and the fragment signal a stubborn assertion of durability of physical stuff. In shredding his stuff, Landy exposes matter as multiple, dynamic, mutable and innately narrative.



## 4 Manual

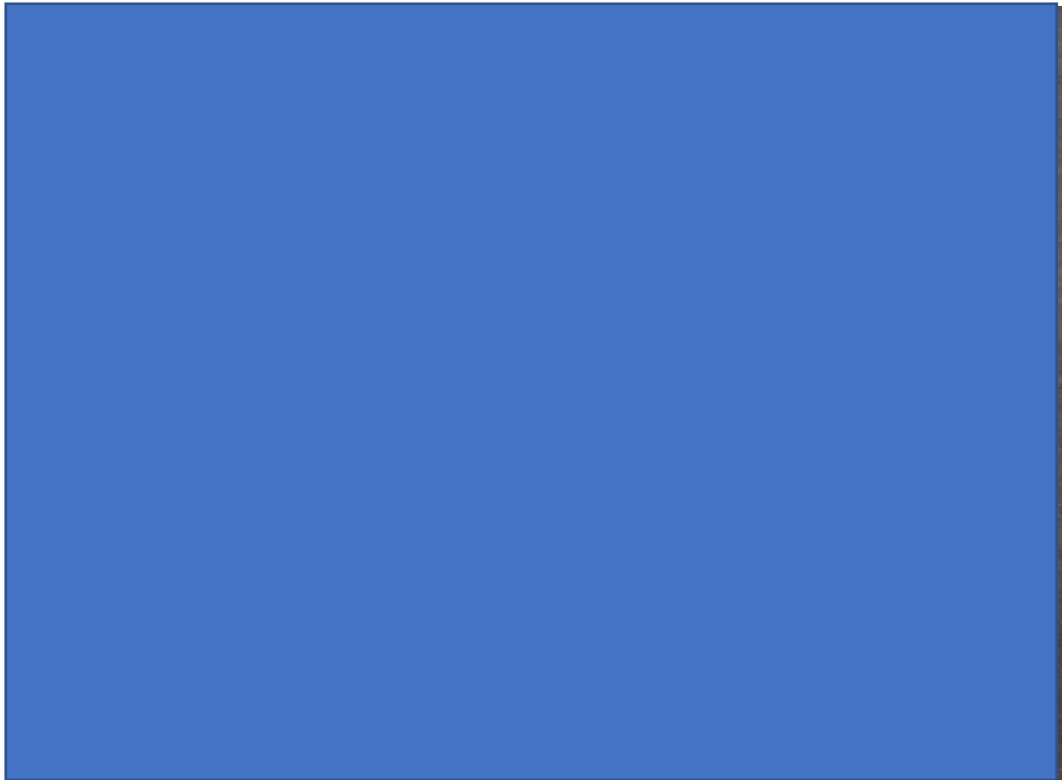


Figure 14: *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a), open to show ring binding. Photograph by author, June 2015.

The coming chapter takes as its central provocation a single artefact from *Break Down*; the manual written to guide the progress of the work. In etymological terms, the noun, *manual*, is rooted in the Latin term, *manus*, for hand, and is also connected with the adjective *manuālis*, which describes an object – often a book – ‘held in the hand, of a size to fill the hand’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017).<sup>1</sup> This sense of the term is suggested in its synonym, *handbook*, although *manual* is also strongly connected with a notion of work done with the hands. As a counterpoint to the manual, therefore, the hand is explored in this chapter as an emblem of labour-power in the sense proposed by Marx – that is, ‘the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being’ (1867/1976, p.270). Thinking from the perspective of the human being using her hands makes possible an account that takes in some

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<sup>1</sup> This is mirrored by the term used for the codex, which at that point took the form of ‘wax-covered wooden tablets hinged together’, in ancient Rome – *pugillares* – so named because, in contrast to the scroll, this record-keeping device could be held in one fist, or *pugnus* (Vismann, 2008, pp.41-2).

of the potentiality of personhood. As this chapter will show, this richness and complexity is overwritten by the manual, which contains within it the elision of labour power described by Marx. The manual is, I propose, a textual form that brings a purely conjectural state of affairs into being through the definition of specific actions or modes of behaviour. It works obliquely by predicting and marking the capabilities of the instruction-follower as well as the behaviour and capacities - in Gibson's terms, the *affordances* (1979/1986) - of the tools and materials that will be brought into play. In particular, the manual functions through the operationalisation of aspects of work, thought, behaviour and materiality, and simultaneously, by obscuring others (which, nevertheless, continue to be essential to the task).

Chapter 3: *Fragment / Part / Whole*, stages a close encounter with the fragments produced through *Break Down* and explores how their physical form, and Landy's processes of destruction, reveal concepts of fragment, whole, and multiplicity. Chapters 4: *Manual*, and 5: *Line / List / Inventory*, further progress the central original contribution of this thesis by exploring how *Break Down* works between materiality and mediality. As Harriet Hawkins remarks in her analysis of *Break Down*, the two texts that are most closely identified with this work, are '[o]ften marginalised, written out of accounts of *Break Down*', and yet should be treated as 'pivotal' to a thorough understanding the work (2010, p.20). I build upon her observation in this and the next chapter, by offering close analyses of the two texts that accompany the work, *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a) and *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b). As such, Chapters 4 and 5 also constitute a significant advance in relation to existing literatures on *Break Down*.

Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory, which provides the conceptual frame for this thesis, is revealed in distinctive ways through the new media theory approach used here and in Chapter 5. Through this lens, new media theory provides an account of media as an assemblage (Horn, 2007); that is, as a coming together of social and political conditions and technicities that may also *produce* certain social and political conditions and technicities. As such, the notion of a media object becomes broader and more inclusive. One might consider, for example, the mediality of a book; a desktop publishing program; an art work, but also a sock; a sandwich; a pile of dung; a plastic bag. Like more conventional media - like a book; like a film - any of these artefacts might be 'read'. In a similar way, their mediality

resides specifically in how they '[mobilise their] resources as a physical artefact' (Hayles, 2002, p.33). Further, an account of the material form of media can be supplemented through a consideration of the technicity of their genesis – their writing or their making - '[layered] with a sense of their own fabrication' (Fuller, 2007, p.2).

This chapter opens with an introductory discussion on new media theory. The material form of the text *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a) is investigated, and I perform a close reading of one of its sections; the 'Manual' in which a set of protocols are laid out for use by the eleven blue boiler suited operatives who assisted Landy (Ibid., pp.33-40). This reading of Landy's manual is placed alongside an anatomisation of the manual as a textual form. Landy's procedures are investigated in the light of practices of making, using and publishing instructions or 'event scores' within the Fluxus group, an informal collective of artists, working internationally, which achieved prominence in the early 1960s. They are also set alongside Kittler's account of literacy as a specifically bodily disciplinary strategy, in relation to which I consider the operationalisation in the manual of the hands of the work. Here, it is salient to turn to the compendious written commentary by Landy on his dismantling of a radio cassette player, performed as preparation for *Break Down*. This account, which seems in some ways to resemble the form of the manual, offers in fact a fundamental challenge to the form of the manual in its prioritisation of the sensual experience of working with one's hands.

#### 4.1 *Material media*

The main argument put forward in Chapter 3 was that fragments possess a narrative potentiality - a certain mediality that arises specifically from their form. This concern regarding the expressive capacities of Landy's granules echoes studies that examine as media objects a range of technologies, events and entities that are all in some way or another conductive. The media historian Ben Kafka estimated, in 2012, that a 'technical turn' in which 'humanists have started to think seriously about the technics of knowledge' had taken place over the previous 'decade or so' (2012, p.110). Exploring closely related territory, the scholar of cultural studies Eva Horn introduces a special edition of the journal *Grey Room* on 'new German media theory'. Here, she makes the provocative suggestion that such work moves beyond a conception of media as providing 'the conditions of possibility for events – be

they the transfer of a message [or] the emergence of a visual object'. She proposes, further, that media that 'are in themselves events: assemblages or constellations of certain technologies, fields of knowledge, and social institutions' (2007, p.8):

Doors and mirrors, computers and gramophones, electricity and newspapers, television and telescopes, archives and automobiles, water and air, information and noise, numbers and calendars, images, writing and voice (Ibid., p.7).

Joseph Vogl, in the same edition of *Grey Room*, notes that the 'field of inquiry' known as media studies encompasses:

physical transmitters (such as air and light), as well as schemes of notation, whether hieroglyphic, phonetic and alphanumeric. It includes technologies and artifacts like electrification, the telescope, or the gramophone alongside symbolic forms and spatial representations such as perspective, theatre, or literature as a whole (2007, p.15).

Horn also acknowledges the mediality of everyday 'cultural techniques': 'body techniques (such as cooking or hygienics), elementary cultural practices (such as cultivating the soil), and symbolic operations (such as cooking, counting or measuring)' (2007, p.12; see also Siegart, 2007). These objects and practices are themselves analogous to the pivotal positioning by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan of the light bulb as 'pure information' (1964/2001, p.8), and the inclusion by Kittler of 'all kinds of cultural exchange' within 'the concept of medium' (Wellbery, 1990, p.xiii).

In considering this exciting array, what becomes clear is that due to their transitive and necessarily relational nature, media cannot be considered as having an existence, nature or set of effects that are inherent or inert. The scholarly approaches introduced by Horn require a decisive step away from hermeneutics: from 'the quicksand of such predicaments as "sense," "meaning," "interpretation," and "beauty"' (2007, p.9). Instead, the field of new media theory produces a historiographical account of media in which they are treated as assemblages, comprising, among other things, technical capabilities and systems of knowledge (Vogl, 2007, p.16).

This approach is identified by both Horn and Vogl as Foucauldian or post-Foucauldian. As Wellbery says in his excellent introduction to Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800 / 1900*:

Kittler's discourse analysis follows the Foucauldian lead in that it seeks to delineate the apparatuses of power, storage, transmission, training, reproduction and so forth that make up the conditions of factual discursive occurrences. The object of study is not what is said or written but the fact – the brute and often brutal fact – that it is said, that this and not rather something else is inscribed (1990, p.xii).

A clear connection can be drawn between this approach and the assemblage theory of Deleuze and Guattari that underpins the analysis projected in this thesis. This connection appears distinctly in Vogl's discussion of media that arise 'in a coming together of heterogeneous elements – apparatuses, codes, symbolic systems, forms of knowledge, specific practices, and aesthetic experiences' which, in certain precise, historically specific ways, constitute media 'as an assemblage, a "dispositive" (in Foucault's sense) of heterogeneous conditions and elements' (2007, p.16).<sup>2</sup> As Horn suggests, the work of Kittler forms an indispensable contribution to the field of new media studies. His work further resonates with that of both Foucault and McLuhan in offering the narrative that the apparatuses we use to write are not neutral but rather remake the work of writing itself. Much as technological advances emerge only via 'a specific assemblage of diverse conditions, factors and elements' (Vogl, 2007, p.23), such apparatuses shape the nature and capacities of textuality.

In *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Kittler's opening statement, 'media determine our situation' (1986/1999, p.xxxix), might initially be read as a comment on the experience of the reader who takes up, or is taken up by, one inflected account rather than another. In fact, as will be discussed, it has much broader implications. These include the ways in which technicities of writing intervene in and form upon the body of the writer, configurations of social and cultural power that give rise to new forms of media, and the ways in which new forms of media also form surfaces from which new configurations of power can arise. As Matthew Fuller suggests, if Foucault lays out a historiographical account of discourse as an operation of power that emerges from specific institutional formations, Kittler's work, in tracking their

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<sup>2</sup> While Horn does not directly reference the work of Marshall McLuhan, his contribution must be acknowledged. McLuhan's sense is that media both influence 'the form of human association' (1964/2001, p.9) and work as an 'extension' of 'our human senses' (Ibid., p.23). His insight is that the form of media must be afforded significance beyond what might be called its 'content' or 'message', which he considers irrelevant. In this, the work of McLuhan accords strongly with that of Kittler, who is nevertheless cited more often here because the particular specificity and exactitude that emerges from his historiographical approach is helpful given the specificity of my own focus.

transformation or translation into specifically material strategies, represents an important further expansion. Kittler, however, occludes important elements of Foucault's work in considering that, due to his methodological focus on printed text, his work ceases to be applicable 'at the point where modern electronic media emerge, between 1860 and 1870' (Fuller, 2007, p.61). Inversely, to follow this line would be to overlook a Foucauldian account of the 'dynamics of composition and arrangement' to which the texts he examines refer, including 'the "apparatuses," "instrumentalities," "techniques," "mechanisms," "machineries," and so on by which they are wrought and made available' (Ibid.). As such, Kittler, like Foucault, exposes the inadequacies of conventional humanities analysis in which form and content are opposed, or imagined to occupy separate (if overlapping) ontological categories.

Indeed, a common discursive thread that unites the texts discussed in this section is the notion of the assemblage in which an entity works in a particular way due to the relationship of the element to the rest of the assemblage. This constitutes an important moment of congruence between new media theory and the Deleuzian concept of affect (1970/1988). Here, as previously discussed (see for example Chapter 1, pages 32-4, and Chapter 3, pages 59-61 and 71-2) the capacity of an object to effect change upon, and be changed by, objects and forces outside itself is defined in relational terms. This is to say that the capacities and affordances of any entity in particular are determined by the assemblage(s) in which it is implicated. Horn concludes that inquiries within the field known as 'new German media theory' have moved beyond a focus on the technicity or putative 'ideological contents' of media, toward an emphasis on media as a 'process' or 'event'. As such, she describes a body of work that, I suggest, coheres with and can work alongside the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of the desiring-machine (see discussion in Chapter 1, pages 36-7, and Chapter 6, pages 187-92). Horn's assertion that 'the refusal to specify what media *are* leads to a focus on what they *do*' (Horn, 2007, p.11; emphasis reproduced) is akin to Deleuze and Guattari's, that:

We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with. In connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in what other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed (1987/2013, p.2).

In both cases (and in the current text) it is the *working* of the object under discussion that has significance. Where it pertains to speak of 'meaning', this

relates to the *act* of meaning – meaning is something that is done, not a singular object that might be unburied and examined.

#### 4.2 *Michael Landy / Break Down*

**Observation: *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a) (March 2017); see Figure 14.** *The text is presented in a plastic ring binder. On opening, the binder lies flat on my desk; the metal ring mechanism attached to the back cover with studs. The pages are held in place by a clip that can be pushed down onto the rings. To open the pages, one must loosen the clip. It is also possible to remove pages by looping one's fingers into one of the rings and prying it apart (and indeed, when I received my copy, the pages needed to be put back in the right order). The text is organised using shiny, yellow card dividers with titled tabs that stick out to the right, and include a numbered guide to the contents and page numbers of that section. The pages themselves are a soft, grainy, white paper, which is a little yellowed at the edges. As well as printed text, the binder includes a number of reproductions of images in black and white - of Landy's sketches of his belongings, documents associated with the work, and handwritten notes on dismantling a radio cassette player – as well as colour photographs and scans of documents, objects and collages associated with the process. An A3-sized fold-out, printed in colour, shows a collage, including texts, handwritten notes, promotional materials and objects such as a toy refuse lorry, gathered as part of Landy's research process.*

This chapter examines not only a specific text - a manual written by Landy – but *the* manual as a type of media object. This chapter works between two sections within the text, *Michael Landy / Break Down*; 'Manual' and 'Case Study' (Landy, 2001a, pp.33-40; 51-74). Before looking further into the content of these sections, it is worthwhile to observe that the material form of *Michael Landy / Break Down* prefigures Landy's use of the manual as a textual mode that is bureaucratic in character. For this reason, I begin this section with some discussion of bureaucracy as an operationalisation of mediality.

A number of important studies on bureaucracy draw to some degree upon the previously discussed insights of new media theory. As such, the material and technological basis of administrative texts and procedures is given precedence in these texts. An excellent example can be found in Lisa Gitelman's (2014) history of the printed form, which exists specifically to enforce procedure through the

creation of 'blanks' into which certain kinds of information must be added. Other prominent contributions come from Markus Krajewski (2011) on the card index, and Cornelia Vismann (2008) in her superb history of the file. But it is Ben Kafka (2007; 2012) who most compellingly expresses what is at stake in such discussions in his vivid anatomisation of bureaucratic paperwork as an ideological apparatus that channels – that is, both takes in, and gives out - *need*. Kafka, investigating the praxis of paperwork, provides insights into the significance of seemingly inconsequential developments in the technicity of writing and record-keeping. He traces the first recorded use of the term, *bureaucracy*, to the mid-1700s: as he observes, by the mid-1800s it was widespread in France, Germany and England (2012, p.79). This explosion of the term gives onto a matching explosion in bureaucratic work as a mode of centralising power. As such, seemingly inexorable proliferations in the collection, organisation and strategic deployments – including the storage and retrieval - of information are commonly viewed as the output of a 'manic' state (Ibid., p.82). Such practices are resistant to logic, overwhelming in volume and often curtail, if not paralysing, individuals' capacity for sensible self-determination. The form, the filing system, the stamp: these mundane and seemingly neutral artefacts appear anew, not only as filters for state power, but as harbingers of a chaos that is seemingly ungovernable (even by governments).

Like Kafka, Cornelia Vismann, in her history of the file, introduces an account of material technicities that arise from and give onto particular configurations of state power. The technology of the ring binder develops, Vismann explains, in step with the popularisation of the typewriter (further implications of which are discussed later in this chapter) and, one would assume, the hole punch. In particular, the typewriter necessitates the use of single sheets of paper (rather than the handwritten record-keeping books and ledgers that had previously been used). It facilitates the easy production of identical carbon copies of documents which can be filed instead of drafts, therefore removing the potential for gaps in interpretation between the draft and the final document (2008, pp.129; 133). Vismann provides a material and technological history of the ring binder, including a first iteration secured with a bolt, the introduction of a lever to open and close the arches, and a clamp to secure the pages within. Finally, slits were added to the front to enable the file to be closed without pressure on the cover, and a circular hole on the spine to enable easy retrieval from the shelf (Ibid., pp.129-32). Beyond her enumeration of these satisfying technical details, Vismann



demonstrates that the binder also binds together two disciplinary currents: ‘the mechanized world of the ordering apparatus and the alphabetical world of letters’ (Ibid., pp.132). The lever arch file and its alphabetised sub-dividers impose an externally produced, pre-existing logic upon their contents.

Landy’s unusual deployment in *Michael Landy / Break Down* of a ring binder with dividers, rather than the book-like binding more often deployed in published exhibition catalogues, can therefore be viewed as more than a mere stylistic twitch. In view of the cultural significance of the ring binder as discussed in Vismann (2008) and Kafka (2012), this can be considered a significant choice. The material form of the published text in which Landy’s manual appears draws upon narratives of bureaucracy – or, as Kafka has it, ‘paperwork’ (Ibid., p.118). As such, the reader is placed in the role of the clerk who is obliged to locate or file a particular document in the correct place – or indeed, the operative who must find the right passage in the manual in order to know how to proceed. The apparent neutrality of the bureaucratic system – a neutrality that has been exploded by both Kafka and Vismann – is ironised in order to claim for *Break Down* a heightened authenticity. The impassive flatness of the capitalised section titles protruding from card dividers and the numbered sections and tables in the manual clash with wilfully wavy line drawings of Landy’s possessions (see for example Figures 26 and 27), collages, and grainy photographs of objects, mid-dismantling. The ring binder form of *Michael Landy / Break Down* expresses the centrality, in *Break Down*, of narratives of procedure working against another quality that might be called personhood or humanity. As Vismann suggests, in the wake of the introduction of the lever arch file and its dividers judgements about the classification of documents do not fall to human operatives. Rather: ‘[t]he entire order of the bureau can now rely on prefabricated ordering automatism’ (2008, p.133; see also p.138). In this sense, the binder and its dividers works in much the same way as the manual. Specifically, through the strategic operationalisation of readers’ eyes and hands, the manual overwrites their critical capacities.

### 4.3 *The manual*

The manual is, I want to argue, a disciplinary formation that works as an extension of the reader’s cognitive and bodily engagements with the materials and objects at hand. The operation of the manual depends upon an occlusion of the act of reading, and of the work that it initiates and guides. It appears to work directly

upon objects that must be adjusted, disposed and positioned in certain, specific ways but, in fact, works upon the mind and body of the reader and instruction-follower. While constructing and placing her in relation to the work that must be done – literally, the task at hand - the manual does so invisibly. As the linguists Jerry Samet and Roger Schank suggest, ‘instructional texts’ incorporate, intrinsically, a kind of alienation, since in such texts:

the basic connections [...] are not exactly the causal links between the steps; it is more the contribution that the ordered execution of each step makes toward some specific end (1984, p.77).

In other words, the procedural text does not tell the reader *why* it advises one action rather than another. It is, rather, designed to drive toward a practical outcome that may or may not be explicitly named within the text. As such, the manual effects a contained and limited set of changes. For this reason, the experience of working with a well-designed set of instructions to build a piece of furniture or kit, or to operate a gadget, often contains an obscure pleasure. The functions and capacities of the object spring suddenly into relief. The significance of work that one has already done becomes clear only after the fact. Following a manual requires us as readers to give over our sensory, bodily and cognitive processes to a set of intentions and relationships that is not of our making and the logic of which we may not entirely perceive. Anticipating the sense of the instructions; hopping a couple of steps ahead; guessing: such misapplications of independent thought have the potential entirely to ruin the process.

In Landy’s manual, a set of procedures is provided for the operatives’ use. The text was prepared for Landy in advance of the show by his friend and colleague Clive Lissaman, who also compiled *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2008b; Tate, 2009a; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002). This manual was written not by the management at a reclamation plant but an artist’s assistant. Given that, one might say that Landy’s manual *mimics* bureaucratized process through its numbered form, use of imperatives, and the formality of the job title, ‘Operator’ or ‘Operative,’ as applied to the assistants who will perform this work. Landy’s manual focuses particularly on the disposition of objects and dismantled and shredded matter in the space, the display of objects and the operation of the accoutrements of the show – for example, the yellow trays that revolved on the conveyor belt, and the shredders themselves. The procedures position Landy as the boss, ‘overseeing [the]

whole project' (Landy, 2001a, p.33), including references to the need to seek his guidance regarding what should be placed on the conveyor belt and the size of the granules to be produced by shredders. 'Michael Landy will retain the keys' to the cage in which as-yet whole possessions are stored before processing (Ibid., p.34).

Processes regarding the granulation of dismantled objects are carefully defined, as seen in the below extract:

#### Shredding and Granulating

1. The wheeled containers holding the dismantled components will be moved manually from the area below the Sorting Platform to Work Bay 2, the shredding and granulating Work Bay. The containers below the chutes cannot be moved without the approval of Michael Landy and will only be moved when a suitable quantity of material has been accumulated.
2. Each material will be shredded and granulated separately in order to keep the potential of cross contamination to a minimum.
3. Only trained Operators can use the shredding and granulating equipment.
4. A list of materials suitable for shredding and granulating will be made available to those working in this area. Large bulky items, such as cast steel from a car engine casing, may not be suitable for shredding in the UE45 shredder. These will be put on one side.
5. The screens that determine the size of the shredded material can only be changed with the approval of Michael Landy (Ibid., p.39).

This section includes the arrangement and operation of the containers, sorting platforms, and shredding and granulating machines. It explicitly defines the relationships that hatch onto the operation of these machines. For example, Michael Landy oversees the process and shredding is an activity open only to those operators who have undergone training. However, predominant use of the passive tense throughout this procedural document has the effect of divorcing the work that is to be done from the person of the worker, effectively neutralising their labour by rendering it invisible. In this light, Landy's manual can be seen to enact what I argue is a key principle of the manual more generally in that it works specifically by obscuring the worker and the energy, thought, and manual skill they draw upon in their work.

As such, the manual for *Break Down* exemplifies my argument that *the* manual - as a textual form - offers an opportunity to observe on the page the abstraction of labour power (Marx, 1867/1976, p.270; see also Hawkins, 2014, p.126). It is, for Marx, precisely the process through which the vital energy of the worker is extracted and folded into material products, that gives the commodity its charismatic power

(Ibid., p.165). Alienation – wherein the worker sells her own labour power ‘as a commodity’ (Ibid., p.271) – is the traumatic moment in which, in order to live, one is obliged to snap off bits of oneself and slot them into the system like coins into a giant gas meter. This is why Hawkins (2010) is able to discuss fetishisation (that is, the elision of layers of the production process, and in particular the concealment of labour power within the commodity as described above) as a rejection of ‘ourselves’. *Break Down*, she suggests, engenders a ‘nested space’ that incorporates factory, shop floor and rubbish dump (Ibid., pp.23-4). These occluded spaces act as vessels for rejected parts of the production process that are disavowed or unknown because they are expressive of the mere materiality of consumer objects in a way that threatens to puncture the veneer of consumerism.

These observations are significant in the context of *Break Down* because this is a work that plays with dynamics of labour relations. The very reason that *Break Down* could take place at 499 Oxford Street was that the department store, C&A, that had previously occupied the space had recently ceased trading in the UK, resulting in around 4800 redundancies, although the company continued to trade in other countries (Cope, 2000). Indeed, Landy describes the way that during *Break Down*, former customers of C&A would attempt to return purchases made on the site a couple of weeks previously and ‘[w]e would have to explain to them that they wouldn’t be able to get their money back or exchange them with other items’ (Landy, 2002b).

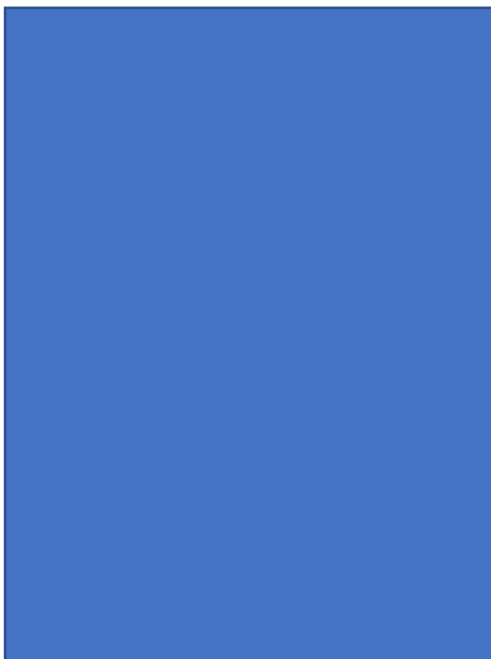


Figure 15: Detail from *Closing Down Sale* (Landy, 1992).

The proximity of *Break Down* to the recent, high-profile losses of income and occupation that resulted from the closure of C&A is a compelling detail. It is difficult not to make a connection, here, with a recurrent theme, in Landy's work, of the empty shop. For example, visitors to his 1990 show *Market* were confronted by an enormous, open, warehouse space filled with the kinds of stall structures, made of plastic crates and fake grass, often found in markets. However, these stalls were empty; cast adrift in a space denuded of the usual markers, objects and practices (Landy, 2008a, pp.15-32; 102). In another example, Landy's mischievous show *Closing Down Sale* (1992; Figure 15), the gallery of Karsten Schubert in Charlotte Street, London, was temporarily transformed into a lurid, and markedly downmarket, shop, crammed with supermarket trolleys of 'unwanted consumer goods, including stuffed toys, broken electrical equipment and laminated day-glo signs' (Landy, 2008a, p.43).<sup>3</sup>

Other works by Landy show that labour power and labour relations are, for the artist, an enduring concern. Most pertinently, in the caustic installation piece *Scrapheap Services* (1996; Figure 16), acquired by the Tate in 1997 (Landy, 2008a, p.55; see also *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002), Landy established a corporation for the disposal of 'people who no longer had a role to play in society' (Ibid., p.103). The work includes a logo, an advertising slogan ('we leave the scum with no place to hide'), a uniform for its workers and an assemblage of branded equipment, including litter-pickers, a dust-cart with brushes, and a giant shredder called 'the Vulture'. Thousands of 'waste people,' cut by hand by Landy from discarded tin cans, litter the ground, helplessly awaiting collection. The physical appearance in *Break Down* of the operatives who must follow Landy's instructions forms an interesting point of connection between the two works. Landy's use of blue boiler suits (which Landy himself also wears) echoes the red boiler suit he proposes as the uniform for workers in *Scrapheap Services*. This telegraphs a certain interchangeability between the operatives. Like the yellow plastic trays or items in the inventory, they are incorporated, through the uniform they wear, into the logic of the piece as 'units' rather than individuals.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As a result of this show, in which no sales at all were made, Landy was dropped by Karsten Schubert in 1992 (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the clear critique of unemployment and the narrowing of 'human value' to exclude all but economic criteria that is clearly being made in *Scrapheap Services*, this work has

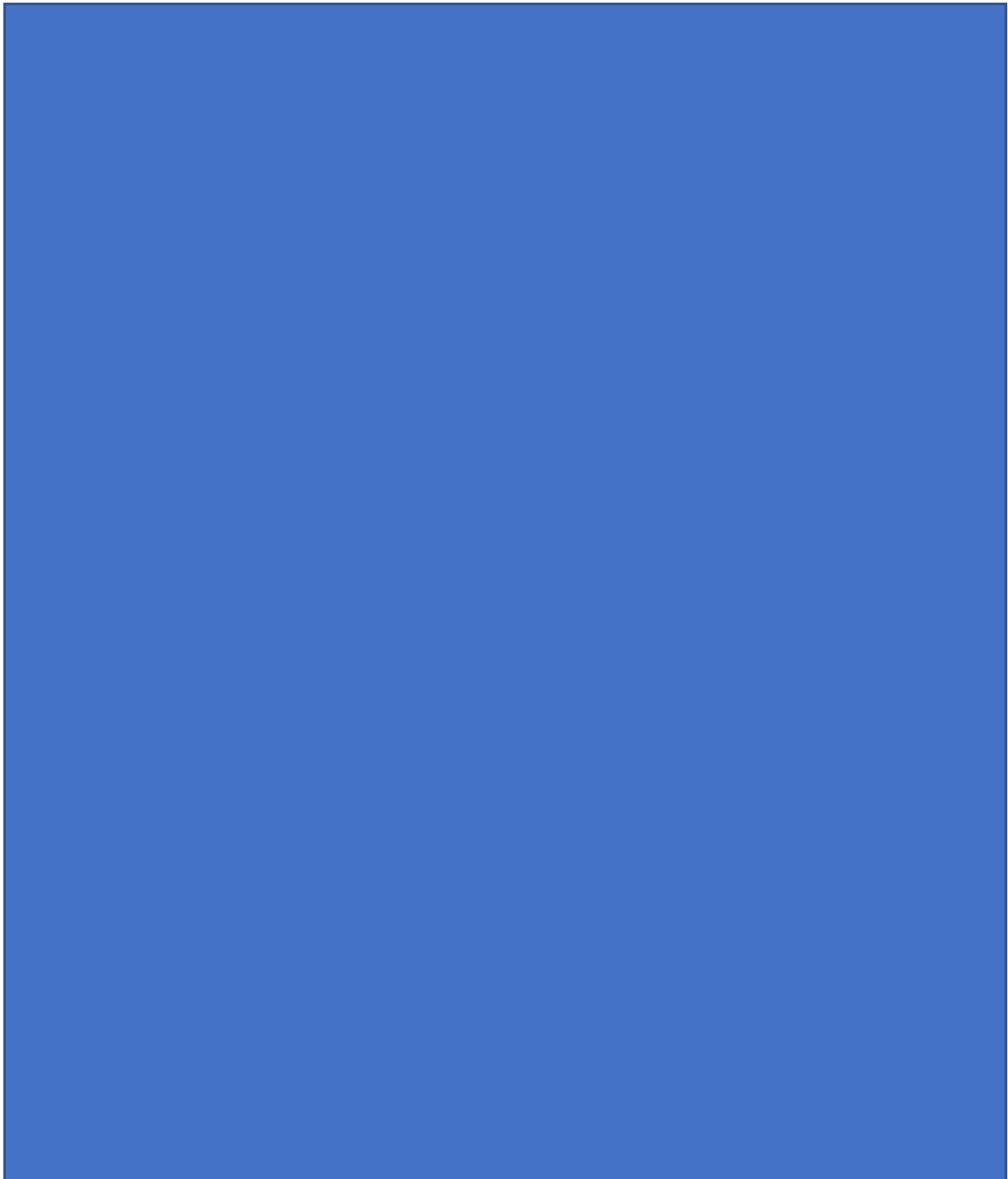


Figure 16: *Scrapheap Services* (Landy, 1996).

#### 4.4 *Event scores*

With one eye on the massed, and absolutely interchangeable tin people in *Scrapheap Services*; and another on the boiler-suited operatives in *Break Down*, one might ask, what is it to be an instruction-follower? This question is asked in interesting ways by members of the Fluxus group. This collective came to

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been linked closely with the impact of John Landy's industrial accident in particular (Steiner, 2008, p.311; see also Hawkins, 2014, p.127). This narrative in which Landy's father is discarded once he loses the ability to do manual labour is discussed in depth in Chapter 6. However, it is worth noting here that this narrative is clearly implicated in the terms of the discussion, above, of the abstraction of labour power.

prominence in the early 1960s and are known for their use of event scores – instructional texts for actions or performances. The work of the Fluxus group – its works, gatherings and other projects – is often described as being constituted via a pragmatic response to the conditions and opportunities that happened to occur. Commentators observe that Fluxus formed around the spaces, funds and combinations of individuals that arose, such that the art historian Owen Smith describes it as a ‘need-based “movement”’ (1998, pp.5-6; see also Higgins, 1998, pp.220-22).<sup>5</sup> This spirit of pursuing fruitful exigencies also shapes Fluxus works themselves, which deploy DIY, and mackled-together strategies, often incorporating inexpensive materials or objects that happened to make themselves available. Fluxus is perhaps especially well known for putting on ‘concerts’ and performance pieces, directed or shaped via event scores (Dezeuze, 2002, p.78).

Fluxus event scores are considered sufficiently interesting, and have been produced in sufficient quantity, to merit an entire exhibition at the Museum for Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark in 2008, which also gave rise to an excellent set of reproductions in the accompanying catalogue (Hendricks et al, 2008). They vary in form and complexity; for example, one might view the work *Proposition* (Knowles, 1962), the instructions for which read, simply, ‘make a salad,’ alongside *TRACE* (Watts, 1963), a contrivance through which the card on which the instructions are written is marked by a long scorch-mark, caused, presumably, by the procedure indicated in these instructions:

1. Remove Box on scored line; hang card on wall
2. Open box, remove contents
3. Take down card & place on horizontal surface
4. Place contents in center of card, light one end with match

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<sup>5</sup> Conversely, some accounts reflect an impulse toward creating an identity for Fluxus that had longevity and stability, as embodied in the naming of the group, the periodic ejection of group members who were deemed not to comply properly with this identity, the production and publication of Fluxus documents and objects, and the writing of a manifesto and a history of Fluxus (Friedman, 1998c, p.252; Higgins, 1998, p.220; Ono, 2008, p.40; Smith, 1998). In such accounts, this second impulse is strongly embodied in the figure of the artist and leading organiser George Maciunas (Friedman, 1998b; Friedman, 1998c). There is also a suggestion that a Fluxus identity has sometimes been superimposed over work – and artistic reputations - that had already been made (Ono, 2008, p.39; Owen, 1998, p.7). This lends to my own sense that Fluxus is best seen as a term that describes a tendency - a loose and somewhat mobile grouping - rather than being deployed as a descriptor that could be applied in any more straightforward and specific way.

5. When extinguished hang card on wall (Watts, 1963)

It might be observed that while, as procedures go, 'make a salad' might seem the simpler of the two, both works incorporate and make use of complexity in that they can be followed in many thousands of different ways. Indeed, the more simply and minimally stated (and therefore more open) the instruction, the more iterations will be possible. One might make a salad using different salad ingredients, different kinds of utensils and containers (or no utensils and container), while naked, wearing a diving-suit and so on. One might decide to test the definition of 'salad' by making it minute, or gigantic, or entirely from raw meat. Indeed, in 2008, Knowles performed *Proposition* at the Tate Modern, and in 2016, at Art Basel (Tate, 2008; Neuendorf, 2016). Both times, she made an enormous salad in a tarpaulin the edges of which were held by assistants. At the Tate, the ingredients were cast into the tarpaulin over a balcony, from which the dressing was also poured. Knowles mixed the ingredients using a rake (but it would be fine just to make a salad).

Further, while one might follow the instructions in order to stage a Fluxus performance, as the artist Marianne Bech suggests, event scores – the documents – should themselves be thought of as creative works (2008, p.10). In considering this point it is worthwhile to keep in mind that the audiences attending Fluxus performances generally did not have sight of the score – they 'were usually given the title and author of the piece and sometimes the name of the performer' (Dezeuze, 2002, p.78). That said, the art critic Anna Dezeuze asserts that they are a valuable focus of study in their own right. This is supported by the anecdote in which, when George Maciunas wants to publish a collection of event scores, the artist George Brecht asserts that the 'each score' should be treated as 'an artefact as well as a reflection and an initiation of a process [...] the score itself had to be scrupulously right' (Andersen, 2008, p.22; see also Hendricks, 2008, p.15).

As textual artefacts, event scores can be seen to play around with exigency, defining some conditions while leaving others open in order to bring an unending stream of different outputs from the same originating instruction. Bech comments that event scores provoke new possibilities via 'misunderstanding, error and confusion' (2008, p.10) and another Fluxus member, Eric Andersen, describes the instruction that incorporates 'a maximum of implications' (2008, p.22). These remarks both accord with a definition of the Fluxus score by Dezeuze as intervening in a 'field of possibilities' (2008a, p.25). As such, the event score reveals to participants and



audiences the sheer extent to which any instruction is subject to unending variation:

all Fluxus scores operate as a means of isolating specific events, moments, concepts, or perceptions [...] [to signal] a continuum of infinite interpretations (Ibid., p.30).

This concern with potentiality is explored in more depth by Dezeuze in an article in which she positions ‘chance and choice’ (2002, p.82) as two arenas in which a range of possible outcomes proliferate. Dezeuze describes a move, in Fluxus instructions, from the implementation of mechanisms that operationalise ‘chance’ – for example, via cards that can be distributed at random or dice that can be thrown, to the use of simple (and often somewhat gnomic) instructions that force the performer to ‘choose’ a response. As she observes, these contrasting strategies can be seen in a pair of scores by George Brecht. The first, *Motor Vehicle Sundown* (1960), works across two pages. It incorporates a set of forty-four instruction cards, each specifying an action – ‘accelerate motor’, ‘pause (1 – 13)’, or ‘inside light on (1 – 5), off’ – and a system of shuffling and dealing the cards in order to randomise these actions, and coordinate the sequence of events, since this is a work for ‘any number of motor vehicles’. The second strategy appears in *Two Vehicle Events* (1961), which incorporates the following pair of instructions, presented as a bullet-pointed list:

- \* start
- \* stop

The concepts of multiplicity and fragmentation discussed in Chapter 3 reappear in relation to the operationalisation of combinatorial potential in Fluxus works. Multiple possible outcomes are arrayed around each instruction. Here, it is instructive to consider the work of Ben Kafka on bureaucracy. With reference to the early, journalistic work of Karl Marx, Kafka makes what seems to me the central statement of his text when he comments that bureaucracy contains a fundamental instability, since procedures that may appear entirely impermeable are in fact vulnerable to exigencies. Processes may therefore lead in any number of unpredictable directions. It is, Kafka suggests, therefore ‘paperwork’ itself that must be scrutinised, over and above the possible motives of those who operate bureaucratic procedures. In a similar way, event scores deploy not only plurality, in which an instruction might figure a number of possible outcomes, but

multiplicity, in which the instruction can stand for all of its possible outcomes at once. As the artist and cultural theorist Brandon LaBelle suggests, in the event score:

language becomes the work; the event score articulates, implies and performs the very thing written, yet only in the moment of being read. In this way, the work functions as a conceptual space – of proposition, of imagination, of enactment. [...] Meaning is found in the event itself, not as a singular interpretive moment, but as an extended and reverberating multiplicity (2002, p.49).<sup>6</sup>

Landy's manual for *Break Down* is not an event score in the sense that it does not summon eventualities in the same purposeful way. It was written in response to a direct need, since Landy was attempting to direct a team of assistants to complete a complex, practical task, set in front of an audience of members of the public, and with a strict time-limit. In other words, Landy's manual differs from a Fluxus score in that the latter *tactically*, and in a spirit of exploration, make spaces in which a range of eventualities might develop.

Nevertheless, some of the most interesting moments in *Break Down* occur, as Deuze has it, in 'chance and choice' (2002, p.82), when instructions and practice fall out of step. This happens where the instructions provided are impossible due to constraints that they do not anticipate, or, relatedly, where they simply fail to encompass the full complexity of the task. In the first, significant amounts of direction concerning the labelling, weighing and recording both of objects and their dismantled parts is outlined in these instructions. Grids are shown that provide a method of recording the weight of various material components of objects, for example. One section of video shows a series of actions that would conform with the instructions. When Landy's mug is smashed with a hammer, the resulting shards are weighed and the weight is recorded in a spreadsheet against its serial number (Artangel, 2015). However, in practice it seems that these instructions were not consistently followed. Evidence from both Michael Landy and Leo Walford, a visitor to the show, suggests that in practice there was insufficient time to follow the procedures (Tate, 2009a; Walford, 2001). Landy's own 244-step dismantling of a CD radio cassette player (Landy, 2001a, pp.51-74; to

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<sup>6</sup> See also the account by the performance theorist Natasha Lushetich (2012), in which the Fluxus score is situated as a deployment of grammar and as such, a strategy for the production of relationalities.

be discussed in the next section) demonstrates that to strip each object down to the extent that its material components might be separated, weighed and recorded would have been an entirely more monumental task.<sup>7</sup> This becomes clear when one considers the practical implications of the fact that the range of materials anticipated in the manual are delineated in some detail:

Ceramic  
 Glass  
 Metals  
 Organics  
 Paper/Card  
 Plastic  
 Rubber  
 Synthetic Liquids  
 Wood  
 Other  
 (Ibid., p.38).

In addition to the instructions that were not, in the event, followed, one might observe that the obverse is also true. Almost inevitably, in the manual for *Break Down* some significant elements of the work are not anticipated. For example, the instructions include scarce indication regarding the treatment of granulated material save one note that ‘yellow trays should contain either a possession(s), broken down components *or shredded/granulated matter*’ (Ibid., p.37; emphasis added). This supports my observation in Chapter 3 (Section 3.1.3 and page 96) that Landy’s own plans for and narratives of *Break Down* do not, in prospect, accommodate the fragments that were produced (Landy, 2008a, p.108).

The range of component materials that might be encountered has been listed. However, in a second instance of the instructions failing to incorporate important

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<sup>7</sup> One might conjecture an alternative, very interesting piece of work in which a space is given over to the much more painstaking dismantling of the artist’s possessions suggested in the instructions, for however long it might take. As I picture this work, I imagine serious quiet; a devotional scene of processing, weighing and displaying in which the copper wire shines in one enormous mound; the insulation material from around the flex in another. Suits could be unpicked, stitch by stitch, and sellotape picked away from abandoned pieces of packaging. Perhaps, in a sense, this long serenade is what Landy’s belongings really deserved. This alternative work however would take a number of months rather than the fourteen days that Landy had at 499 Oxford Street.

elements of the work that had to be done, no guidance is provided regarding the correct approach to dismantling and shredding various types of objects and materials. Turning again to online video footage of *Break Down* (Artangel, 2015), the operatives seem to conduct their work in a uniformly sober and competent fashion. Their faces, no matter what they are taking apart, show absorption in the work they are doing, and they work methodically and deliberately. They are engaged in a performance of ‘following the instructions’ – and yet, in lieu of precise, written instructions to organise the particular tasks they undertake, they must deploy their own creative imaginations to find the best way to take these objects apart. This is especially interesting where an object does not accommodate ‘dismantling’ in the same way an appliance like the radio/cassette player (which can be unscrewed and levered apart) might. An operative is seen looking at a pen and ink work by Landy. He tears the work first into lengthwise strips, and then into squares. Similarly, garments appear to have been taken apart at the seams before being shredded – this, despite the likelihood that the shredder could have taken both the paper and the fabric without this treatment.

Landy’s manual for *Break Down* attempts to anticipate and circumscribe the range of possibilities. Like a Fluxus score, this text engages with potentiality in that some actions are allowed to proceed while others are stopped. That said, a manual must have a certain amount of relevance to the practical task at hand; where given instructions do not pertain (because it would take too long to separate Landy’s belongings by material, for example) they are dropped. Indeed, the sense of the manual as a text in which directions are given without being accompanied by a rationale is as present in the moments when the operatives must invent their own processes as anywhere else. These are the moments in which the parameters defined in the manual – the kinds of material that might be encountered; the work that would need to be done to shred and sort them; the amount of time this might take – collapse. One might, here, revisit the related observation in Samet and Schank (1984) regarding the particular kind of knowledge or sense that is given to us by instructions, which tell us what to do next, but not what will result, or why this might be desirable. Landy’s procedures, again, in a moment of accordance with the Fluxus score, require only that the instruction-follower or operative should enact the instructions. The manual, as a form, is a conjectural text – as such, it does not allow for the dilemmas it presents in the moments when it either fails to anticipate and therefore mark out an action that will be needed, or gives an

instruction that is impossible to follow. It contains within itself, therefore, a logic of functionality that may or may not produce an actual function or utility.

#### 4.5 *Hands*



Figure 17: Hands of an operative unpicking John Landy's sheepskin coat (Landy, 2008a, p.162).

The manual, I have said, is a disciplinary strategy that works upon, while also obscuring, the body, and the embodied power and intelligence of the worker or Operative. In this respect, Kittler's maxim that 'media determine our situation' (1986/1999, p.xxxix) opens up an account of the ways in which media technologies have a constitutive relationship with their operators. The typewriter; the desktop publisher; the spreadsheet program: all remake, in their different ways, practices of writing as well as the written product itself. Kittler suggests, in relation to the new capabilities of the typewriter, that 'our writing tools are also working on our thoughts' (Ibid., p.203). The example of the typewriter – its arrayed type-bars which fly up to imprint each letter onto the paper; the way in which each key must be individually struck by the fingertips with a certain, determined force – illustrates especially well Steven Connor's observation that writing 'digitises' language, breaking it into units that have, between them, a relationship of equivalency:

Writing broke up continuous events into discontinuous objects; indeed, writing made it possible for speech to be considered as consisting of distinguishable or comparable forms of event, such as ejaculations or sentences (2016, p.36).

Connor suggests that this logic of fragmentation or unitisation, in which recognisable chunks of sounds can be reproduced and recognised, also inhabits speech itself. All language, therefore, includes as part of its logic and its replicability an element of digitisation. It is salient, in the context of the current argument, to read this alongside Kittler's earlier historiography of phonics in the early 1800s, a system of literacy teaching that continues to be used in British schools. This schema breaks language into a series of phonemes. The child is instructed to reproduce these sounds with her mouth as part of a strategy for teaching reading through the memorisation of signs and the 'oralisation' of sounds. As such, Kittler demonstrates, turning first to reading and then handwriting, the teaching of literacy becomes a 'coercive' technique that works via the body of the learning child:

The phonic method culminated in the description or prescription of a new body. This body has eyes and ears only in order to be a large mouth. The mouth transforms all the letters that assault the eyes and ears into ringing sounds (1985/1990, p.33).

To adapt Kittler's vision of a human body that is remade via phonic disciplines of literacy teaching, one might imagine that in the case of the manual, the body of the reader 'has eyes and ears only' to facilitate the operation of an enormous pair of hands that take in written words and translate them directly into a precise series of actions; specifically, into manual work.

Indeed, in his work on the typewriter, Kittler remarks that in industrialisation: '[w]hen men are deprived of the quill and women of the needle, all hands are up for grabs – as employable as employees' (1986/1999, p.187). Here, Kittler traces how, through the introduction of this machine, gendered roles relating to intellectual and manual work were operationalised in the figure of the female typist from the late 1800s onwards. He provides a devastating series of eight case studies of literary texts that were produced via dictation and typing via 'literary desk couples' (Ibid., p.214) in which the role of the typist is simply to take in and reproduce in type the words of the author. The typing woman becomes an extension of the typing machine. I describe, at the beginning of this chapter, the experience of using the manual in which one's own critical faculties are overwritten by the procedure. In just the same way the typist is constituted through typing not as a writer but as an operator or cipher; an ear or eye and a pair of quick hands through which written language can flow. She is the living element that allows the author to pour his

words into the typewriter and see them emerge in print. A moment of correspondence arises in a discussion on the history of software by the theorist of culture and media Wendy Hui Kyong Chun. Here, the figure of the woman-machine reappears in the shape of the female ‘computer’ whose work was, like that of the woman-typewriter, routinely overwritten. As Chun comments, ‘programming became programming and software became software when commands shifted from commanding a “girl” to commanding a machine’ (2004, p.33).<sup>8</sup> During World War II in Bletchley Park, ‘Wrens’ (members of the Women’s Royal Naval Service, referred to by Turing as ‘slaves’; a designation that, as Chun observes, continues to be extant in computing) assisted in the operation of computers. However:

this man-machine synergy [...] treated Wrens and machines indistinguishably, while simultaneously relying on the Wrens’ ability to respond to the mathematician’s order (Ibid., pp.33-4).

Implicit in both scenarios is – among other things - the systematic erasure of women’s labour power: “Typewriter,” after all, signifies both: machine and woman’ (Kittler, 1986/1999, p.216).<sup>9</sup>

This eliding tendency is keenly conveyed in the ink sketch *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)* (Landy, 1998; see Figure 18) which gives considerable prominence

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<sup>8</sup> It is instructive to think, here, of the work of Stafford Beer on the cybernetic factory. As Andrew Pickering (2011) relates, input and output units would ideally be enabled to communicate via some lively and responsive entity. This has tended to mean that there is a requirement for human beings who enable machines by making judgements and managing the interface between ‘in’ and ‘out’ units. Beer turned to a number of highly interesting alternatives to human operatives, including the ecology of fauna and flora found in a pond (the composition of which alters dynamically in response to factors such as oxygen levels). One might observe that pond life here occupies roughly the same position in relation to the transmission of inputs as do the male instructors to computing machines in Chun (2004), while the woman-computers might seem to form part of the machine itself. Chun’s main work in the text cited above is in fact to expose a cross-cutting moment of invisibility. While labour is obscured by the instruction manual, she suggests that the ways in which the instruction manual – or the software programme – might write *us* or reconstitute our desires, is also obscured.

<sup>9</sup> One might compare these two cases with Ben Kafka’s account of the emergence of the bureaucrat, which he rightly identifies as a moment in which the state depends on a mass ‘alienation of clerical labour’ (2012, p.84). As Kafka observes, early anxieties about bureaucracy arise from the fact that the sheer volume of work to be done demands that the state should employ a great number of – to use Landy’s term - operatives. As a result, inevitably, ‘the proximity of clerks to paperwork invested them with a degree of power completely out of proportion to their social and political status’ (Ibid., p.81). Here, it appears that their attachment to mechanisms of power increases male bureaucrats’ visibility and power rather than decreasing it as in the cases of the typing and calculating women discussed above.

to working hands, while still maintaining a certain distance from the notion of persons doing work. It is important to take into account the rhetorical function of this ink on paper work, which was made in the planning stages of *Break Down* and in effect forms part of a proposal for the later work. This and other similar works were exhibited at the show *Michael Landy at Home* in 1999, at which Landy first discussed the practicalities of staging *Break Down* with James Lingwood, the co-director of Artangel, the arts organisation that ultimately supported the development of *Break Down* (Landy, 2008, p.104). As well as showing how *Break Down* might work, *P.D.F (Product, Disposal Facility)* also constitutes a sort of visual Curriculum Vitae. Landy's belongings include elements of previous works such as the extensive collection of red plastic crates used in his show *Michael Landy at Home* (1999), and, resembling the sign on a men's toilet, a cut-out figure like those used in *Scrapheap Services* (1995). Hands and bodies appear everywhere in *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)*; however, those performing the labour of dismantling Landy's stuff are represented either by an apparently empty (headless, handless) sweatshirt, or by disembodied hands. The hands carry, place, pick fragments from a conveyor belt, wield tools and hold objects as though exploring the easiest way to twist them apart. In one place, in a particularly strong moment of resonance with Kittler's account of the fragmenting discipline of literature above, we see a row of disembodied hands and eyes at a sorting table. As a further extension and representation of this trope, we also see the tools wielding themselves. This is particularly unnerving when a knife, saw or screwdriver seems to bear down of its own accord upon objects such as Landy's slippers or iPod. This is a logical extension of the modality of the manual, containing as it does the illusion that it works directly upon the materials at hand, overwriting the presence of the operator who loses ears and eyes and eventually becomes nothing more than an extension of the pliers; the scissors.

In a counter movement to the alienation that inheres in the form of the manual, then, we might think ourselves into what it is to experience our own labour power. What is it, specifically, to work with one's hands, using the fingers, thumbs, palms and wrists to manipulate objects? Another text included in *Michael Landy / Break Down* assists in this. In a painstaking account of dismantling his CD radio cassette player Landy describes (rather than, as in a manual *prescribing*) an extended series of precise manual actions. Here, he attends to the dismantling, weighing, and



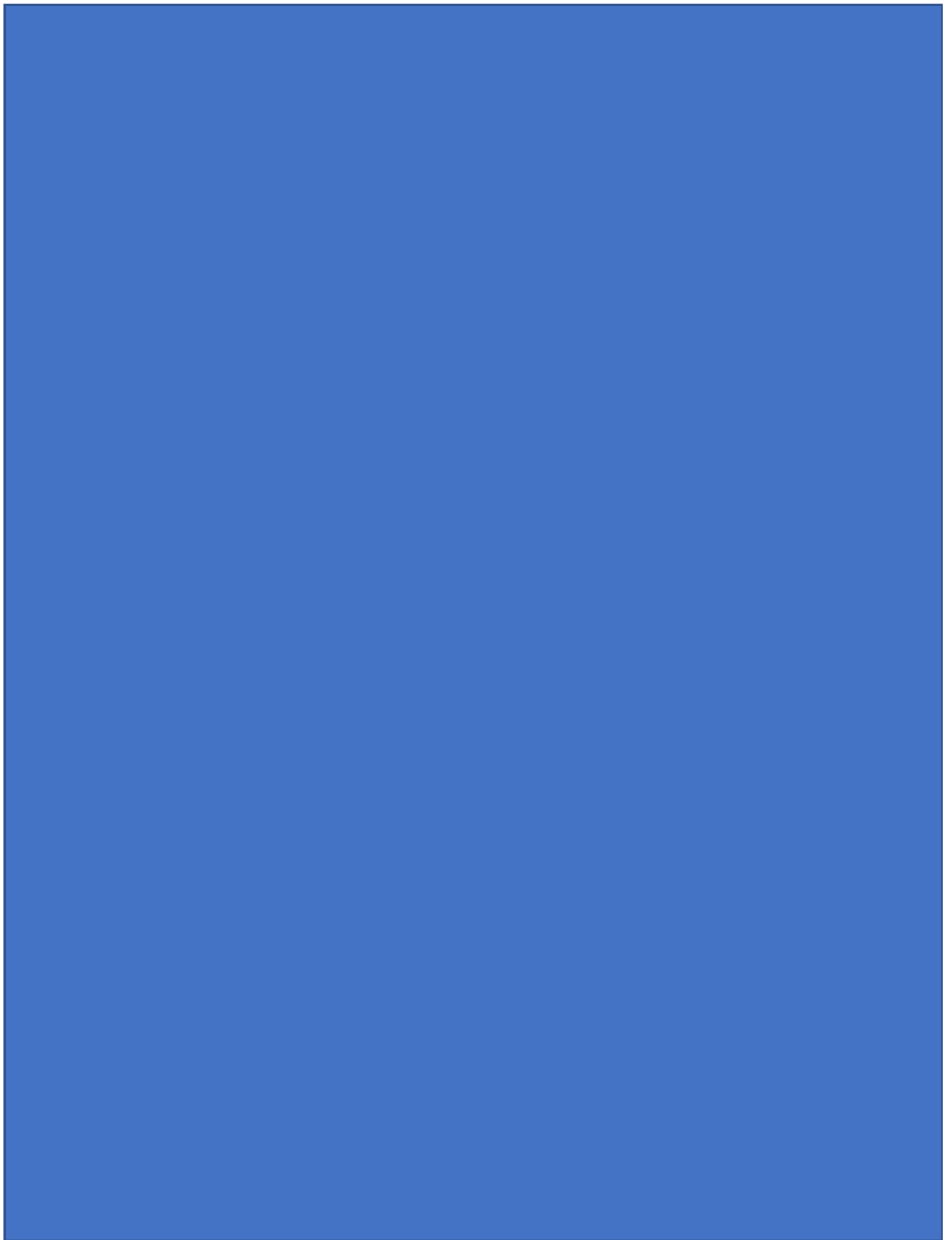


Figure 18: *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)* (Landy, 1998) [Image rotated].

sorting into component parts of this single object, writing down each individual step as he works. The entire process takes the artist about ten days (Landy, 2001a, p.108). He encounters wires, circuit boards, plastic casing, and obscure numberings and labellings; his notes are full of the tools he uses, the precise actions he takes with his hands and the qualities and properties of the material he encounters. In

the course of Landy's exploratory dissection, in his hand-written notes on the entire process, the schematic simplicity of the manual dissolves into thousands of hand movements. Through Landy's description of the work, we as readers are called into the perspective of the individual who is absorbed by his work. He is absorbed, in fact, in an observation not only of the object he is dismantling, but the full richness and complexity of his own energy, ingenuity and dexterity – precisely, his own labour power:<sup>10</sup>

I run a knife along cable – and then pull away  
blue/brown electric cables  
AND then pull first blue plastic away from cooper wiring – as it expands  
turns a lighter type of blue – running knife  
along prising away blue cable cover away from  
BLUE cable cover for mains wiring (Landy, 2001a, p.57).

This written account continues at some length, since the entire process is documented in full. It is, precisely, an inversion of the opacity of the instruction manual, written as Landy works on and discovers the affordances of the object in relation to capacity of his hands and tools to dismantle it. Like a manual, Landy's language here is spare and functional. Nevertheless, the verbs that appear – run; pull; prise – convey a vivid sense of a brain thinking; hands thinking too; wielding a knife; the knife thinking; exerting more or less force in one direction or another. Landy also notes observable changes in the materials (observe, for example, the plastic becoming a lighter blue as it is stretched away from the copper wiring within). In addition, he occasionally records his own feelings as part of the process: 'unwind – cooper – exasperated – cut it with a knife' (Ibid., p.65).

***Observation: Dismantling and granulating in Break Down – online video (Artangel 2015).*** *Tear pages from a book and feed them into a shredder. Use a jigsaw to cut through the wing of a car. Carefully lay a large photographic print on a table and then tear into strips about five inches wide, and then tear the strips across the other way, and then lay the pieces in a pile and then put them in a yellow tub. With great care and delicacy hammer a mug into fragments of about one inch square, and tip them into a ziplock bag. Place an armful of stuffing into the hopper and watch it surrendering softly*

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<sup>10</sup> The note quality and episodic updating by Landy creates repetitions, misspellings (reproduced here), and a tone that might at first feel rather breathless in the quotation above. If read slowly, I think this more properly conveys Landy's deep absorption in the work. For this reason, Landy's own line-breaks have also been reproduced.

*to the revolving teeth of the granulator. Watch the teeth consuming rolls of paper, which vividly twitch and writhe. Cut through a passport with a pair of scissors. Pull plastic off copper wire with a pair of crimpers. Wrangle wires from their shell with your fist. Unscrew the parts from a washing machine drum, then take out and dismantle the engine with a screwdriver. Lever apart the delicate components of a camera lens. Using a stanley knife, cut the upper from the sole of a pair of brown leather shoes. Slice open the plushy back of a teddy and empty it of fluff. Using a hacksaw, remove the head of a toilet brush; an electric toothbrush. Scissor apart a floppy disc. With a hammer, bludgeon apart the opening mechanism in the base of a pedal bin. Systematically beat fissures into a large piece of plate-glass. Fold a vinyl record in half until it cracks. Turn the wooden frame of an armchair upside down; locate and remove the screws. Lever the cotton from the sticks of cotton wool buds using a knife. Allow film to spool to the ground, holding the reel by your fingertips.*

This site-writing attends to the manual ingenuity that Landy's operatives employ. It is written as a series of directives in search of the fineness of detail required for Landy's manual truly to have anticipated the material specificities of the task. Seeking a centralisation of the experience of working with the hands, I review, here, a run of references that specify and explore manual expertise and the sensual experience of working with the hands. A first example arises in an ethnographic study in which the media scholar Sarah Pink and her colleagues explore how health care workers use intuitive insights that arise from touch while drawing upon a body of formalised expertise in order to prevent infection. Deploying the hand as a site of analysis, the authors consider expert practices of touching, hand-washing and antibacterial hand gel application that are mediated via workers' medical training. Such practices, it is observed, are highly routinised, with (for obvious reasons) a striking degree of uniformity and precision in their execution by participants. Nevertheless, these routines were supplemented by workers' finely detailed, intuitive, physical knowledge, which took in the feel and texture of the antibacterial gel. They:

appeared to feel and know themselves to be safe (or protected from acquiring and transmitting microorganisms) through the embodied, sensory, and affective experience of the material qualities of the gel. For instance, participants commented on its strong alcohol smell (associated with antiseptic properties); wet, yet quickly evaporating, or even 'tingly', sensation (negating the need to physically dry hands); and sticky residue (enabling them to feel and judge adequate coverage) (Pink et al, 2014, p.434).

This vivid summation is consistent with Chris Salter's comment, in the process of learning the procedures involved in growing a tissue culture as part of an artist's placement at a laboratory, that:

The smell and feel of ethanol sprayed onto latex glove-encased hands in order to disinfect before beginning the culturing process forces a sensorial experience tensioned between clinical sterility and tactile heightening. It almost beggars description, this sense of moist, alcohol-covered hands at one moment feeling watery and irriuous but all too soon dry and rubbery (2015, p.141).

As in Pink et al, hand hygiene appears here as a bodily discipline that arises from an area of professional expertise. In a reflexive account of his emersion, as an artist-practitioner, into the working context of the laboratory, Salter seems to feel these procedures as an imposition of this discipline upon his person. His description is almost erotic in the passivity it summons; simultaneously, it mobilises an anxious and somewhat eerie dissociation. Salter's hands are, perhaps, not quite his own (and what is a rubbery hand if not corpse-like). Later in the same passage, Salter puts forth an account of tissue culturing as a procedure that is done specifically with the hands. His account is richly illustrated with photographs of his and his mentor's gloved hands manipulating pipettes and containers. In observing his mentor's work, he admires the 'fine touch' and 'steady hand' (Ibid., p.150) with which she manipulates containers and pipettes to perform the necessary processes while avoiding cross-contamination between the different materials used. In his first attempts at doing this work himself, the full extent of her expertise becomes clear as his own unskilled body leaks and blunders:

my hand shakes with nervousness and sweat drips onto the hood's metal grill; the result of my position standing directly before the hood results in mismatched coordination between my hands and the rest of my body. I now suck the cells into the pipette. Unfortunately, due to the angle at which I hold the gun, I also cannot see the tiny measurement marks on the glass (Ibid., p.147).

Salter repeatedly calls upon the markers that reveal him as a non-expert and outsider in the environment of the scientific laboratory. However, it is in this laborious encounter between Salter's hands and the materials and equipment used in culturing - in the comparison between his mentor's hands and his own - that the nature of this field of expertise is fully revealed.

Writings on the hand as a sensing and working organ bring forth that which is obscured in the manual as a textual form. Like *Break Down*, the foregoing pair of descriptions present a group of workers who, in working with their hands, follow

a set of pre-decided protocols. The instruction manual does not include instruction-followers' intuitive, sensory engagement with their work, which is nevertheless essential to the task. To draw again upon Marx's account of labour-power, this obscured category encompasses the abiding capacities of 'human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc.' (1867/1976, p.134). As such, it encompasses the entirety of personhood - that is, our native physical strength, manual dexterity, mental acuity, percepts, and attachments. It is *this* that writings that detail and examine the work of the hands prioritise. The close conjunction in Marx of 'hands' and 'brains' summons, too, the notion of the hand as a thinking thing. In Andy Clark's extended mind theory (as discussed in the methodology, pages 56-7 and Chapter 6, Section 6.4) the concept of thinking via the hands would be uncontentious. Here, the 'goings-on' of cognition 'prove perfectly and productively able to span brain, body, and world' (2011, p.xxviii). In Clark, the hand writes, pokes and pushes to gain information about the nature of objects, and feels the way using a white stick (Ibid., pp.xxv; 17; 31). The tips of the fingers are not the edges where 'me,' or 'thinking' ends and 'not-me,' or 'not-thinking' begins. Rather, they are joining surfaces - as Malafouris puts it, also in relation to the stick used as an aid by a person with visual impairment, '*a pathway instead of a boundary*' (2013, p.244).

The strength, dexterity and sensitivity of the hands is, then, an important element of the range of human capacities that afford the extension of cognitive processes into the surrounding world. This can be seen in a tableau by Mitchel Resnick, a researcher in technology and education, in which he discovers, in a school physics lesson, a puzzle that, unlike the 'paradoxes' - logic problems and questions about deep space - that he has already encountered, can only be solved by manipulating the object. It was:

remarkably simple: two wheels and an axle, with a pin hanging down from the middle of the axle (not quite hitting the ground) and a string at the end of the pin. The teacher asked: What happens when you pull on the string? Since the string is attached to the end of the pin, it seems that the pin should come toward you. At the same time, it seems that the wheels should come toward you. Both can't be true [...] Another paradox! But this object was different from the stars of my childhood: you could hold it in your hands and test it out. Indeed, I went home, took apart an old toy truck, and made my own version of the puzzle, testing pins of different lengths. Even after I "knew" the answer, I loved tugging on the string and thinking about the paradox (2007, pp.40-1).

Resnick means to demonstrate the notion of material object as aid to thought - a thing for thinking. However, it is specifically his hands here, not his eyes (and, for

this reader at least, certainly not this written description, which sadly is not accompanied by an illustration) that enable him to solve the problem – firstly by making his own version of the object - and then, more directly, by ‘holding it in his hands’. Precisely similar, and undeniably easier to visualise, is the example in Steven Connor’s work on ‘magical objects’<sup>11</sup> of an infant engaged in a similar kind of manual puzzling:

The baby was entirely absorbed in a game that involved stretching and releasing the strap of its mother’s handbag, while sliding the buckle up and down its length. [...] I have never seen such absorption and intentness, and have never forgotten it. The baby was simultaneously concentrated and abandoned, utterly in and at the same time utterly out of this world (2011, pp.1-2).

Again, while the author intends to discuss the way in which humdrum objects can seem inhabited with a life or potentiality beyond human intention, it is the hands that conduct this ‘push-me-pull-you investigation’ (Ibid.). Such absorbing work, which transports one from what is to what might be, is somewhat akin to the concept of the epistemic action. This physical move or adjustment, rather than only having a direct, ‘pragmatic’ purpose, assists us in gaining or organising information – that is, it helps us to *learn* (Clark, 2011, pp.70-9). This is reframed by Lambros Malafouris in terms of the difference between ‘representational’ work done by the brain, and ‘performative’ work in which the puzzle is solved materially, ‘without any need for mental representation’ (2013, p.219; see also pp.237-9). Andy Clark uses the computer game TETRIS to exemplify the epistemic action; I propose as an alternative the challenge of slotting packets of food into the freezer. While it *might* be possible to judge by eye the most efficient arrangement of fish fingers, ice-cream tub and bag of peas, an epistemic action would be to physically fit the objects into the space, perhaps rotating them or reordering them. I don’t deny that this epistemic action in particular happens to overlap with the pragmatic work that needs to be done (that is, *putting the food in the freezer*). Nevertheless, it can be seen that the physical experiment of trying out the available gaps replaces a mental procedure in which I would otherwise be obliged to picture the fish fingers fitting (or not) beside the potato waffles.

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<sup>11</sup> See discussion of Connor’s use of the term ‘magical’ in relation to materiality in the introduction (page 25).

Malafouris proposes a subtler example of the epistemic action in his observation of the potter, whose:

hands are skilfully sensing and grasping the wet clay so that the potter can decide precisely how much forward or downward pressure is needed to center the lump of clay on the wheel. What is it that guides the dextrous positioning of the potter's body? How do the potter's fingers come to know and control the precise force and position of the appropriate grip for the shaping of the vessel (2013, p.208).

As Malafouris says, the 'constituents of creativity are *in the throwing, in the shaping*' (Ibid., p.213; emphasis reproduced). Thought is a diffuse set of processes that are located in the hands, in the clay, and in the brain. The action of the hand is similarly indispensable in the speculative interactions described in both Connor (2011) and Resnick (2007). However, the material and manual interventions that they describe tell the human interlocutor something, not only about the particular object(s) they are handling, but about how things work in general. In other words, they describe a specifically philosophical puzzle made concrete and worked – which is to say, thought – manually. Salter asks how, 'in the act of making something', 'humans and materials [are] coproduced' (Ibid., p.240). The artist, physicist, potter, or baby, discover something about the material that they manipulate. Further, though, their actions illuminate something about the way the world hangs together. Landy's disassembly of his CD radio cassette player, his twisting, wrestling, unscrewing and scraping makes a different kind of sense when considered as a variety of distributed thought. We might feel we already 'know' that an electronic object like this must include a drastic and intricate tangle of materials. However, Landy, in his hours of manual puzzling, is bound to encounter the nature of the entanglement in a different and more profound way.

The hand – the hand that is experienced by its owner as it works – reappears in *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)* (1998; Figure 18) via the lines that have been made by Landy. In his drawing, the artist describes the straight, hard lines of the conveyor belts and (equally distinctly) the objects that travel upon them. Landy brings to his portrayal of the objects themselves a heightened attention: the surfaces, contours and textures of household goods and souvenirs are rendered with care and the unevenness of their texture and contours offer a marked contrast with the straight lines and surfaces of the conveyor belts. This applies in particular to the sheepskin coat belonging to Landy's father. In a moment that augurs the primacy of this object throughout accounts of *Break Down* the coat appears toward

the centre of the frame, and three years before *Break Down*, it is already in the process of being taken apart. The seams of the jacket and its stiff bearing possess real vitality and immediacy in this illustration, which shows the garment, with arms outstretched, under attack by no fewer than three Stanley knives and a pair of scissors. Landy is known for making exceptionally fine drawings that summon almost hallucinatory amounts of detail,<sup>12</sup> but in *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)*, the line itself seems almost to take precedence over its subject. Indeed, at some points the line of the conveyor belt runs directly *through* the objects on it, suggesting that the belt was drawn first and the details elaborated afterwards.<sup>13</sup>

The specificity, delicacy and precision of Landy's emaciated line brings a vulnerability to the piece. This resounds in the only truly whimsical detail; the spindly legs that support the conveyor belts. These legs are distinctly dubious in terms of their possible stability. They look, to say the least, likely to collapse under the weight of a mattress or a refrigerator. In addressing the practical consideration of how Landy's conveyor belts are to be planted onto the ground – but doing so in such an inadequate manner – these frail little conveyor belt legs more than anything else situate the work midway between spaces of conjecture, procedure, diagram, and concrete, *manual* work.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example his series *Nourishment*, made in 2002 (and an example, *Creeping Buttercup* [Landy, 2002a] in Figure 29). These works are hyper-detailed, taking in each line, blemish and contour, to the extent that their subjects are made to appear uncanny.

<sup>13</sup> In this, Landy's representation of *Break Down* is reminiscent of strategies employed by the artist Paul Klee in his line exploring works. One thinks particularly of the overlapping lines in *Perspective With Inhabitants* (1921) which, in a play on perspective, lies the people standing in a cuboid space down across the floor. The art historian James Smith Pierce (1976) identifies this and other similar configurations in Klee's work with his enduring admiration of childhood uses of the line, which he considers a stratagem in its own right.



## 5 Line / List / Inventory

In this chapter, *Break Down* is reimagined as an operationalisation of the list. This occurs on two fronts: first, the physical form of the conveyor belt used by Landy, and second, his literal use of the strategy of listing in the *Break Down Inventory* (2001b), the text in which the collection of belongings granulated by Landy is listed in its entirety. The linearity of the inventory and its force for particularisation is, it will be suggested, reified through the physical conveyor belt form of Landy's 'destruction line', not least in the sense that the list-like form of the conveyor belt recruits it as a kind of text in itself – a concrete version of an inventory (Davies and Parrinder, 2003). Conversely, the linear form of the inventory makes of *Break Down Inventory* a kind of textual conveyor belt. Landy's use of the *Inventory* – the fact of its writing and its existence during and since *Break Down* – has previously been constituted as a foundational element of the work by Harriet Hawkins (2010; 2014). Further, the theorists of design Colin Davies and Monika Parrinder identify that the work itself operates in a list like way:

When entering the 'Break Down' exhibition, after the initial impact of the physical apparatus of the show, including 160 meters of conveyor belt, you are aware of the paraphernalia of list-making; inventories, sub-headings, sponsors and other to-do lists that literally acted as an aide memoir of Landy's life at that moment. At the end of the 14 days, over 5000 personal items had been granulated, crushed, shredded and carefully logged. This infantry eventually materialised as a book to document the event and separately, a limited edition bound copy of the list of items destroyed – his life reduced to a graphic artefact (Davies and Parrinder, 2003).

The coming discussion continues to work via new media theory approaches, as introduced in the previous chapter (Section 4.1). Here, media objects are seen to arise from specific formations termed 'discourse networks' by Kittler (1985/1990) and defined, by Wellbery, as the 'linkages of power, technologies, signifying marks, and bodies' (1990, p.xiii) that form social life. Chapter 4 lays out an account of the significance of an ostensibly bureaucratic or pragmatic document such as the protocols written to guide Landy's operatives in their work, and considers the formation of the instruction manual deployed in *Break Down*. This provides a starting point for a consideration, in the current chapter, of the ways in which discourses and practices associated with the form of the list are deployed by Landy in his *Inventory*. This chapter begins by eliciting connections between the multiplicity (as introduced in Chapter 3, Section 3.2), and the concepts of series

and line as employed to explicate media practices of listing, inventorying and procedure. In a section on the conveyor belt, these conceptualisations of linearity and accrual are expanded in relation to *Break Down*. Next, examples of the textual form of the list are surveyed. Here, the list emerges as a generative form that is often performed parodically where it appears in literature and art. With these insights in mind, the discussion returns to Landy's *Inventory* with a detailed consideration of the implications of its textual and material composition. The computer spreadsheet programme used to draft the *Inventory* is investigated alongside its form as a printed book.

### 5.1 *Series and line*

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of axons and dendrites (elements of the structure of the neuron that, respectively, pass on and receive neurotransmitters) is a useful starting point for thinking through concepts of series and line.<sup>1</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the physical form of these long connectors that carry impulses from one part of the brain to another enables Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013, pp.15-16) to employ them as both an example of and an analogy for their account of continuous shifts in formation in the multiplicity. These elements of neuron cells, linear in form, have ends that meet but do not join, demonstrating that the brain, rather than being the stable and durable object we might imagine, is a dynamic entity; 'a whole uncertain, probabilistic system' (Ibid.). In the context of the current discussion, this metaphor borrowed from neuroscience is helpful in plotting points between the multiplicity and line or list. In the fluctuations of the multiplicity, lines can be drawn, or joins made and unmade. In a first example, the line, an entire thing, splits off into versions of itself that operate at a variety of levels of signification. Here, one might revisit the image of Freud's young grandson as he plays *fort/da* (Freud, 1955/2001, p.15), throwing a cotton reel into his cot and then

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<sup>1</sup> Although his work is not central to the analysis presented here, I also look to the work of Tim Ingold in understanding the nature, function and practices related to line. For Ingold, line stands in for qualities of connectivity, as seen in the following quotation, taken from the very end of his text on lines: 'drawn threads invariably leave trailing ends that will, in their turn, be drawn into other knots with other threads. Lines are open-ended' (2007, pp.169-70). While Ingold hardly cites Deleuze and Guattari (and their work is in many senses fundamentally different) the open-ended line that appears in his work nevertheless seems to me to be closely related to their dendritic connection in an account that prioritises connections and processes of connecting rather than the resulting formations.

retrieving it.<sup>2</sup> In so doing, one might consider not the cotton reel that reliably continues to exist even when it is out of the baby's sight, but the thread. Think of the line that connects the boy to the cotton reel. Consider the *affordances* (Gibson, 1979/1986) of that thread; the way that it invites holding by one end, while the other end can be thrown away, right out of sight and yet be connected to the thrower. Consider, too, that this physical thread evinces another entirely more complex line – a line constructed by the infant that connects him with his mother, despite her absence. This line is therefore not singular, but a multiple entity, possessing as it does (for the baby, or at least, for his grandfather) an existence that is aside from – although, as I argue, rooted in – its physical form.

**Observation: *Picture of Spatial Growths – Picture with Two Small Dogs* (Schwitters, 1920 and 1939), Tate Modern, London (November 2016).** Framed in black, a deep box with a glass front gives a cabinet-like impression that is increased by the depths of the object itself. Adding to the dolls-house sense of the piece, approximately ¼ of the way from the top a rectangular grotto holds at the back a newspaper cutting, like wallpaper for the pair of tiny, ceramic dogs that stand within. A thin curve of plywood protrudes like a fin, supported by a wooden block and adorned with white plastic. Various other lips and flanges interrupt the flatness of the work. A plywood disc. A wooden half-circle. A wisp of wool teasings. There is what looks like a wooden door knob with a chunk cut from one side; a strip of paper forming a bridge. These disruptions of the smooth surface of the backing board seem to underpin a sense of accretion that is also suggested by Schwitters' layerings of materials and papers. The work is a kind of journal. Sections of newspaper text, sweet wrappers decorated with a picture of an orange on dark green, an orange Rizla packet, a theatre ticket, handwritten notes, an envelope posted from Oslo in 1937. Along the bottom, a small section of lace, off-white like a petticoat-edge – a square of black, woollen stuff, a circle of black lace. At the centre, an envelope-sized rectangle of blotting paper holds layers of ink-leavings. A scrap of muslin and tissue-paper punched with glue is like a skin through which previous accretions show. Shifting

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<sup>2</sup> See also discussion in Chapter 3 (page 69) and Chapter 6 (page 195, footnote 13). Since Freud deploys the *fort/da* tableau to illustrate his account of repetitive urges as rooted in the death drive, I quite see the irony in my returning to this story several times in my writing of this thesis.

*and swilling over and across one another, they look as though they are at sea; or perhaps as though they are the sea.*

A second instance of multiplicity can be found in *proximity*. In strictly material terms, this might be seen in terms of the mobility given by the bobbin *to* the thread; the ability to be retrievable that is received by the bobbin *from* the thread. In addition, the assemblage of thread / bobbin gain their particular significance – are able to ‘matter’ in a specific way – when the baby who plays with them joins the constellation: baby / thread / bobbin. This chapter also discusses the inventory or list as textual forms that bring into propinquity discrete elements that agitate modes of expression into life. As discussed in Fuller (2007, pp.1-2) a similar phenomenon arises in the collagings of the artist Kurt Schwitters. In *Picture of Spatial Growths* (1920 and 1939), quotidian scraps attached to the backing board – the bus tickets, envelopes, tearings of fabric and sweet wrappers – form an inventory of a specific period of Schwitters’ life. As Fuller observes, these artefacts awake in one another an odd, proximal and reciprocal potentiality: through closeness alone they elicit something lively and eloquent from one another.

This chapter investigates moments in which line and series are enacted in *Break Down*, especially in the textual and material form of the *Break Down Inventory* and in Landy’s conveyor belt. First, I establish a basis on which these terms, ‘line’ and ‘series’, can be employed. This begins with a conception of numbering as constructed via – and constructive of – a range of social and meaning-making practices. In the following quotation from the introduction to a survey paper on ‘everyday numeracy as it is practiced with and without numbers’ the anthropologist Sophie Day and sociologists Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford propose that:

rather than looking at the ‘essential’ characteristics of numbers (if any such exist), our aim is to understand numbering in terms of the apparently endless ways of being and having relations, making relations between the one and the many, the part and the whole’ (2014, pp.128-9).

Following the approach taken by Day et al, in the coming discussion numbering is considered as a variety of social practice that is, as such, relational rather than absolute, and that possesses the capacity to produce and enact meaning. I employ the terms line and series in this discussion to describe the kind of numerical activity that can be seen in a row of knots on a string, or the chalk laid down when

a line is drawn on the pavement. One might envisage this via the image of a person uttering a series of words, since one cannot speak more than one word at the same time. All of these must appear *before* or *after*; *above* or *below* other parts of or participants in the same line or series. Series and line are, therefore, defined here as sequences of things, items or events that occur *consecutively*. In some instances objects might appear in a specified order or according to a specified logic - for example, in the progression, 1, 2, 3, 4, where each consecutive number is larger by one than the number that appeared immediately before it. This non-random sequentiality is not, however, a requirement of series or line. If I muddle up a sentence, one might nevertheless sensibly call the result, free though it is of much sense, a *series* of words: of / sensibly / muddle / might / one / is / it / similarly / words / a / sentence / free / up / call / if / I / sense / a / of / as / the / result / series / much / line / or. Similarly, if numbers appear in a random order - say, 3, 2, 4, 1 - or are repeated - 1, 1, 1, 1 - what appears might nevertheless be described as a *series* of numbers. Other possible examples of series include the blip-blip-blee of Morse code, or the pulses of light from a lighthouse.

Linear organisation should not be considered a necessary condition of a series. Indeed, while in an attempt to demonstrate series of things that do not occur in a spatial line I have continued to group together the same kinds of things, this is not, in fact, formally necessary. The potential for series to be constituted on a purely logical basis can be seen in the example of numbering, which can work entirely via a logic of equivalence, at an entirely referential level (see Chilver, 2014; Day et al, 2014; Guyer et al, 2010). It is, for example, possible to perform the thought, 'three', without having in front of me three things. One might further imagine things that happen one after the other in time as I write with the window open on a summer day. A bell chimes, someone walking by outside says 'pardon?', there is a flash of light as an opening window reflects the sun and the noise of a car as it passes, a fly lands on my arm. These, taken together, constitute a series of happenings connected only by the fact that they are perceived to have happened, one after the other. However, this example harbours at least two further complications. The first is that things do not tend to happen purely *consecutively*. The light, the forward movement of the car and the manoeuvrings of the fly would, I imagine, all continue concurrently, even if one only perceived them one at a time. Secondly and connectedly, each element in a series might continue to relate to other structures (or, in other words, to be implicated in other assemblages). This is clear in the list

of things happening above, where I have deliberately tried to make an assemblage of different kinds of things, but it applies, I think, to each of the other instances of series that I relate here. Grains of chalk that make up a chalk line on the pavement continue to have a connection (a common history) with the stub of chalk that I put back in my pocket, and will eventually disperse, being worn or washed away in a variety of directions. Each word deployed as part of a series of words has a range of correspondences and associations quite apart from this deployment in particular. The apparent flash of light from a lighthouse issues from a revolving lamp that in fact continues to be visible from other positions even if it can't be seen continuously from a single position. The example of knots in a piece of string seems less likely to contain elements of association that relate differently to the individual knots. That said, if the knots are meant for counting, the recording of histories or the casting of a spell (see also Day et al, 2014, pp.140-2), even they will have their own connections in which the rest of the knots in the series may not be implicated.

One might observe, finally, that my example of a series of different kinds of occurrences on a sunny day fails, in fact, to make a series of different kinds of things. The five elements in this series – bell noise, 'pardon?', flash, car noise, fly – are part of a series that is united specifically in terms of *the surface upon which the series emerges* – that is, the sensory environment of the author.<sup>3</sup> Series, it can be seen, relates to objects that through some parameter or another are the same kind of thing, or more specifically, emerge in relation to the same substrate. This applies to each of the examples of series presented in this exploratory discussion. It is easiest to think this in terms of the chalk line, which relates directly to a physical surface upon which particles of chalk are deposited. However, it does relate to numbering too, even if in this case the 'surface' under discussion is logical rather than physical. On this basis, series is inherently relational, but depends not on

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<sup>3</sup> Here in particular it can be seen that there is some similarity between my conception of series (and, discussed later in this chapter, list) and Guattari's *seriality*, in which the members of a group all orient themselves toward the same 'exterior object [...] without really being aware of one another' (Genosko, 2000, p.63). Evidently my discussion does not apply the same contextual specificities as Guattari's. However, in relation to conceptions of psychic processes (as discussed in Chapter 6: see especially page 188) it might be noted that this is an instance in which Guattari draws upon Winnicott's account of transitional formations in order to discuss psychic entanglements as they appear in the constellations – or more properly, assemblages – of patients and workers in psychiatric institutions. Here, the institution itself becomes the transitional object.

which element appears before or after which, but on the context in which the series occurs. This insight underlines the relevance of the coming discussions on series, line and list to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of assemblage, in which, as discussed in the introduction (Section 1.3), the capacities, strength and temporality of any entity – that is, its affect - is defined only in relation to the assemblage in which it is implicated.

The series, thus constituted, is present in line can be seen in the writings of Sybil Moholy-Nagy on the work of the artist Paul Klee. Here, she identifies the line precisely as a modality of accrual. As she remarks, for Klee, the line is 'successive dot progression [that] walks, circumscribes, creates passive-blank and active-filled planes. Line rhythm is measured like a musical score or an arithmetical problem' (1968, p.9). In the *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, a publication that is above all else a meditation on line, Klee himself uses a row of lines to indicate a series of divisions or units, which are expressed through the annotation '1+1+1' (1968, p.22). The logic of this intervention is that a numerical accretion also works through the drawing of the single line as it progresses along the page. Further to this, the art historian James Pierce examines the facility of the line to communicate the dynamism that inheres in the world. In reviewing works of Klee's that have been inspired by the strategies of children's art, Pierce suggests that a preoccupation with movement – not of the subject of the mark, but of the mark-making implement - connects 'the sequential nature of line' to writing (1976, p.87-8). In a similar moment, the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2007, p.34) draws connections between trace and thread, weaving and writing. In these reflections on text and textile we see that much as the line can work through a productive tangle or matting, it may also move in a single direction as it progresses through the formation of letters in a written sentence. This conception of the line as a mode of accrual provides a foundation for the coming discussions of the dual action of the list. As I will show, this arises in *Break Down* both as a stratified configuration and as a textual mode that opens, through its operationalisation of proximities, a generative space.

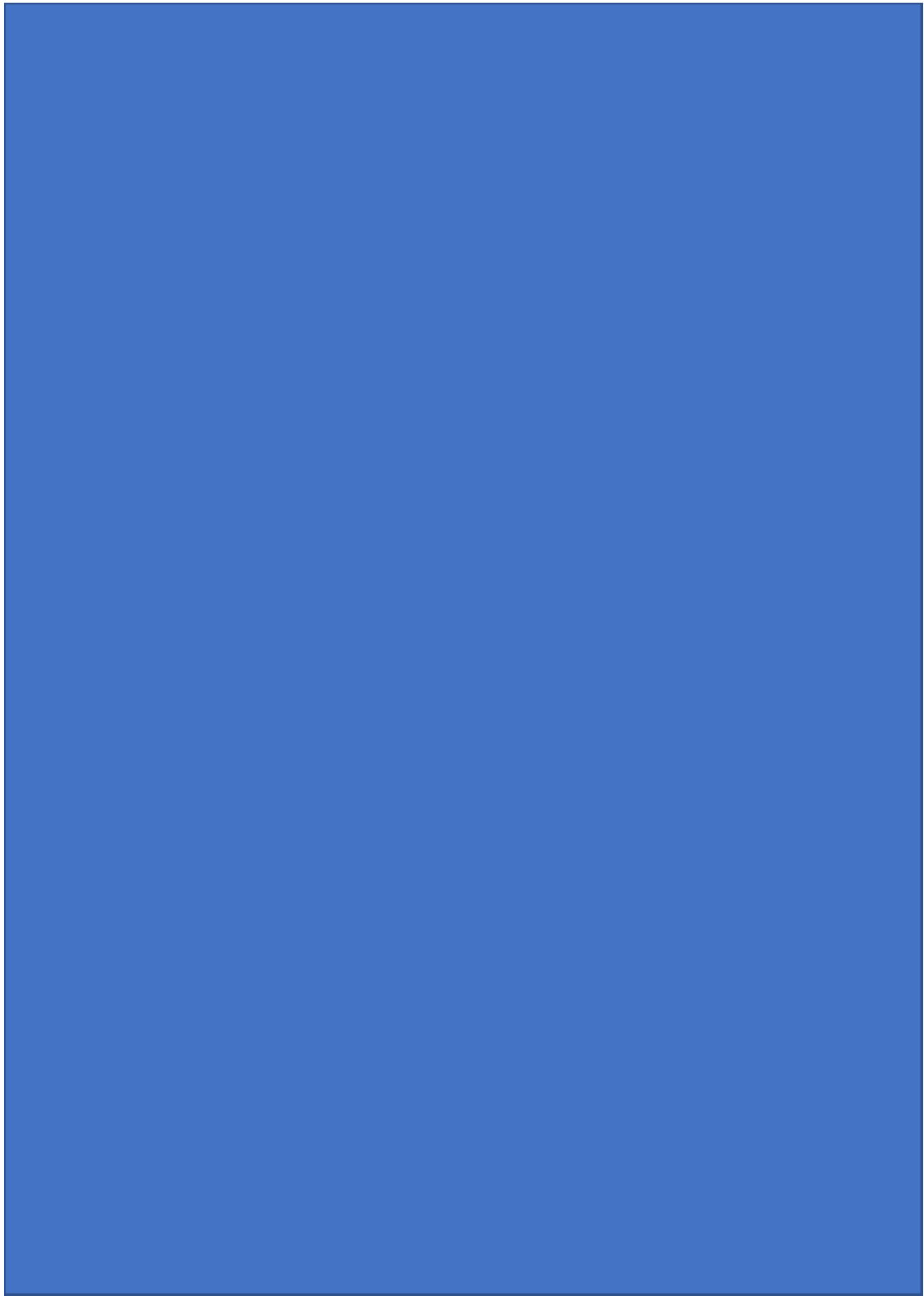


Figure 19: Photographs of conveyor belts and containers at waste reclamation facility from Landy's research preceding *Break Down*. Taken from *Michael Landy / Break Down* (2001a, p.91 [note hole punch marks to left margin of page]).



## 5.2 Conveyor belt

Landy's conveyor belt dominates accounts of the material form of *Break Down*. This object provides an opportunity to explore further the modalities of both line and list. The technicity of this large structure is captured in Michael Landy's description of its form and function in conversation with James Lingwood (Co-director, Artangel) several years after the event:

There was a hundred metres of conveyor belt looping around the space. And an area in the middle was raised up, so that the sorting could happen there. There were four bays, deconstruction bays where everything was allotted a number – a car bay where my Saab 900 was taken apart, an electrical bay, a shredding and granulating bay (because we were essentially breaking everything down into its material parts then shredding and granulating it). A furniture and artwork bay also. There was an organised team of eleven operatives who did the deconstructing and recycling with me (Landy, 2008a, p.106).

A bewildering array of personal belongings is displayed by Landy in *Break Down*, a work that has been described as 'a list in action' (Davies and Parrinder, 2003; see also Hawkins, 2010). The list is a good metaphor, too, for the action of a conveyor belt – and vice versa – as both work by moving things along in sequence. In this section the physical structure of Landy's conveyor belt itself is considered, and Landy's mappings of the large, mechanical structure that forms the main physical framework of *Break Down* are brought into play.

First, though, it is worthwhile to investigate how the conveyor belt might work as a conceptual component of the current discussion. Line and series inhere in the form of both the list and the conveyor belt. In order to think the conveyor belt in relation to the present discussion, I turn to the typology proposed by Ingold of the line as either trace, fold or thread. Here, a *trace* is a mark left on a surface (like a line drawn in pencil, or a snail's trail), a *fold*, crease or cut forms a line that remains in the contours of the surface, and a *thread* exists in three dimensions and 'has' a surface rather than 'being on' a surface. As a concrete, linear form, the conveyor belt corresponds with the third variety of line defined by Ingold; the 'thread', which is defined as:

a filament of some kind, which may be entangled with other threads or suspended between points in three-dimensional space. At a relatively microscopic level threads have surfaces; however, they are not drawn *on* surfaces. Here are some common examples: a ball of wool, a skein of yarn, a necklace, a cat's cradle, a hammock, a fishing net, a ship's rigging, a washing line, a plumb line, an electrical circuit, telephone lines, violin strings, the barbed-wire fence, the tightrope, the suspension bridge (2007, p.13).

Only the sections of Landy's conveyor belt that ascend to the sorting trays make use of rubber belts, which would give the kind of continuous surface imagined by Ingold. The level sections use a series of metal rollers that lie horizontally across it like railway sleepers (see for example Artangel, 2015). Nevertheless, the long, twisting form of the thing in its entirety forms an overall line that references the concept of series as laid out earlier in this chapter. For example, Harriet Hawkins describes Landy's 'un-manufacturing' of objects through which they:

are simultaneously fast-forwarded to the landfill [...] as they are "tracked backward" through their production process. With each turn the objects take around the conveyor belt system they are moved closer towards both of the normally "excluded" others of the commodity form; their manufactured nature and their potential fate as rubbish. In this tracking backwards *Break Down* enacts the assembly processes, it recalls the machines and methods used, the labour employed and the raw materials which once constituted the objects (2010, p.23).

The focus here is not on the state or number of Landy's possessions, but an accumulation or layering of processes (listing; dismantling, sorting, granulating) that act recursively upon the objects processed via the progressive gathering motion of Landy's conveyor belts. Similarly, Day et al (2014) in their account of numbering as method (that is, of numbering as incorporating a set of practices that are constitutive and relational; bound up in the making of meaning rather than dealing in absolute terms) draw directly upon the image of Landy's conveyor belt as it 'move[s] yellow boxes full of Landy's possessions towards completion, adding a bit at each pause or stage, in the way of a sum,  $1+1+1$ ' (Ibid., p.144). Here, *Break Down* is reimagined as an exercise in 'accretion'.

James Lingwood first suggested the use of a conveyor belt in *Break Down* when he visited the show *Michael Landy at Home* in 1999. As Landy says, before that he had not fully considered how the project should work: 'I envisaged things on a table that would end up in this big waste disposal bin. What should happen in between was less clear, what kind of form it might take' (Landy, 2008a, p.104; see also Berning, 2012; Landy, 2008b). The 'research' section of *Michael Landy / Break Down* includes photographs that document Landy's visit to a reclamation facility that uses roller conveyors in a blue metal frame the same shade as that eventually used in the show (Landy, 2001a, pp.90-1; see Figure 19). The connection with these industrial units in which rubbish are sorted is made explicit in Landy's conversation with Julian Stallabrass, published as part of the same text:

The work is based on material reclamation facilities, in which materials that have value are reclaimed from the waste chain. Conveyor belts carry the materials and people sort them. [...] *Break Down* is a bit like a Scalextric version of a material reclamation facility with all my possessions circulating on a roller conveyor until they are taken apart' (Ibid., p.107).

This apparatus displays Landy's belongings as they ride the circuit: 'The conveyor belt is like a plinth in a way, it – er – conveys what's going on' (Ibid, p.107). Harvie describes it as 'a sort of mobile catwalk on which to parade in intimate detail his possessions' (2006, p.66).

Landy's reference to the conveyor belt in *Break Down* as a 'Scalextric version' of the real thing is echoed in the schematic notion of the plan of the conveyor belt published in *Michael Landy / Break Down* (2001a, p.33; see Figure 20). The concept of the Scalextric – toy racing cars on a track, powered by hand held controllers – signals miniaturisation, which again implies an alteration of the relationship of viewer and object, and an intensification of vision (Stewart, 1993, p.53). While Landy's rendering of the apparatus of the reclamation facility is in fact accomplished through the use of a full-sized industrial conveyor belt, this version nevertheless appears as a play thing (perhaps because it is so clean and bright). This sense of Landy's conveyor belt as a toy or a carnival ride – or at least, something that is either miniature or oversized - inflects other accounts of the work. As Harvie comments, the conveyor belt itself can be seen as 'a giant fetish object' (Ibid.) and this is echoed in a newspaper review in which the toy character of the conveyor belt is emphasised:

He has built a conveyor belt and designed it to look like a gigantic toy train set or futuristic factory. It is painted turquoise blue, laden with bright yellow plastic crates containing his things, and is operated by men and women wearing matching blue boiler suits (Wood, 2001).

One might pause, here, to meditate upon the question of what 'a gigantic toy train' might resemble, other than a full-sized train. Landy's conveyor belt is pristine and bright, but despite its shiny presentation, is in fact precisely the same as those used in reclamation facilities. It is therefore the same size. That said, a theme of miniaturisation emerges through the presentation of this conveyor belt as a novelty or toy object, due in part to the fact that Landy's line does not go anywhere, and instead circulates in perpetuity.

The scalextric and the train set are toys that use a line of rail or track and that map or deploy spaces in that they describe a specific line or space on a table or the floor – again, usually a circuit. As the literary critic Susan Stewart (1993) suggests, schematic representation of this type at once distances and sharpens one's vision of the object(s) under depiction. This logic is replicated in the diagram that appears at the beginning of the 'manual' section of *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a; Figure 20). Here, *Break Down* appears as a system of channels through which Landy's belongings are poured; lines through which they must travel. As such, the conveyor belt is emphasised as a technology that orders and serialises both the items that are to be processed and, in the 'work bays', the endeavour of dismantling and granulating them. The inflated rationality of this vision is conveyed in the architectural character of its design and layout on the page and the blue and yellow 'Ikea' colouring of the page on which it appears, which cites the appearance of the conveyor belt itself (Harvie, 2006, p.68; Wood, 2001). The regularity of the lines - the striated bends, arrows, and steps to each end of the sorting platform – suggests that these may have been taken from a library of possible architectural components in a computer design programme. This drawing is diagrammatic in that it is understood that its purpose is not to reflect the dimensions of the conveyor belt – and does not need to do so in order to perform its function of representing the various tasks involved.

The plan, then, is not designed to describe the conveyor belt as such but to situate the processes that *Break Down* comprises. The journey of Landy's yellow, plastic trays, containing entire objects, components and fragments, are dictated by the ordinary journey of the conveyor belt; its constitution in space determines their trajectory. As Stewart demonstrates, in the miniature there emerges a hyperactive precision; a psychotic clarity and exactitude that brings with it an unlikely sense of being able to gain an omniscient perspective. In a moment that works between discussions on listing in the following sections, and topographical diagramming here, Stewart draws upon Borges' reflections upon a (fictional) attempt to describe the entire world in verse to observe that 'attempts to describe the miniature threaten an infinity of detail' (1993, p.52).

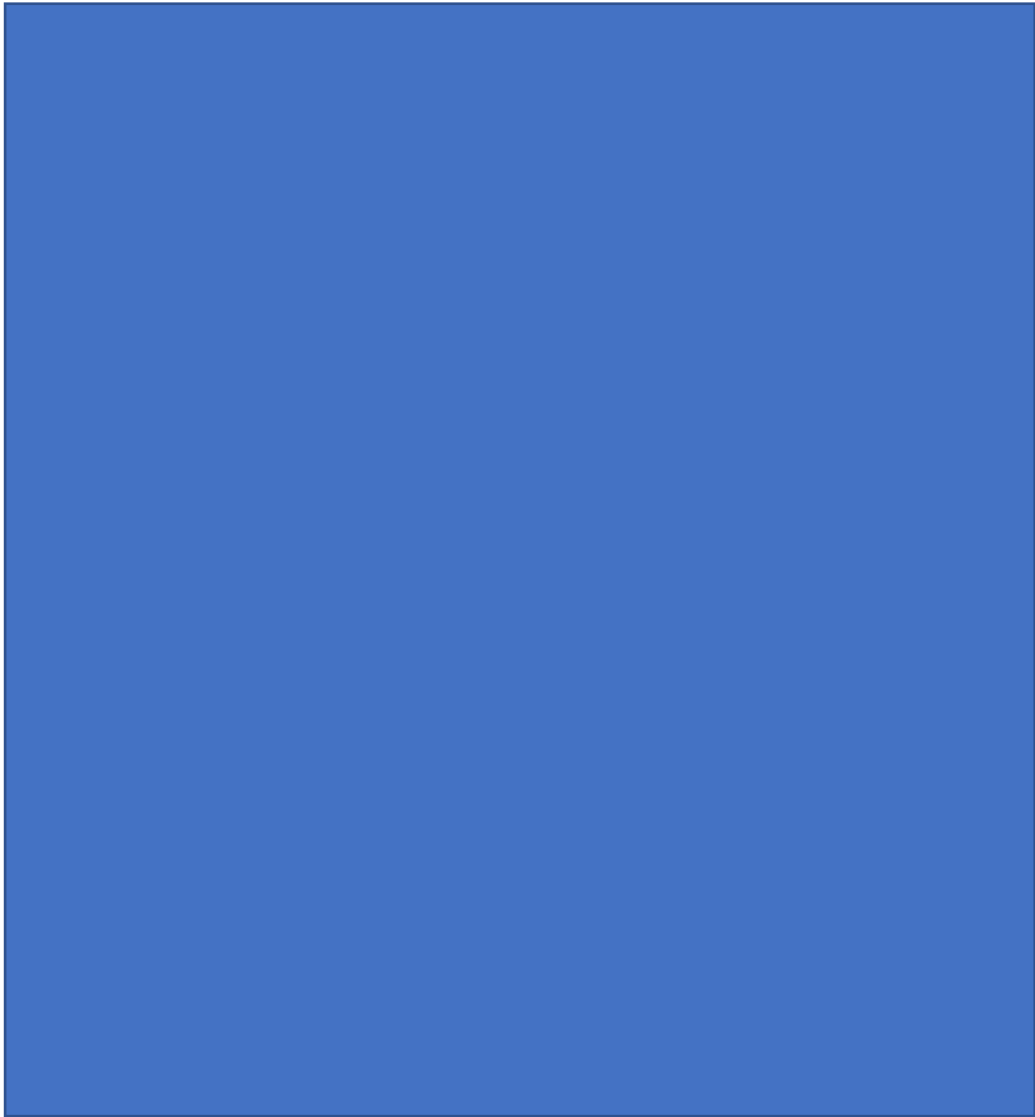


Figure 20: Plan (Landy, 2001a, p.33)

This is a vision that works between the above schematic plan and the iteration of Landy's conveyor belt imagined in his pen and ink work, *P.D.F (Product, Disposal Facility)* (1998; see Figure 18) as discussed in the previous chapter (pages 120-2 and 127-8). This drawing, I suggest, opens up ways of thinking about completion, universality and specificity, and the impossibility of finishing lists. If as the critic Umberto Eco suggests in a survey of artworks that display profusion, 'there is a swing between a poetics of "everything included" and a poetics of the "etcetera"' (2009, p.7), this sketch both conveys and contains profusion. A body of objects and structures entirely fills - and seems to continue beyond the edge of - the picture space. This gives an impression of an extended continuity. It seems at first glance that Landy's projected endeavour of dismantlement might extend in all directions and forever. However, on closer inspection objects only occasionally disappear beyond the frame. The action is mostly bounded by the edges of the picture, giving

an overall containment to the piece. The conveyor belt zigzags from top to bottom, punctuated by arrows that indicate the direction in which they travel. By keeping his depictions of the work within the frame throughout, Landy depicts a process that is *continuous*, since it is joined from beginning to end, but not *infinite*. In Eco's terms, this signifies that in the modality employed by Landy 'everything [is] included' (2009, p.7); the subject of the work is both inclusive and finite.

In *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)*, then, Landy's imaginary conveyor belt works between profusion and specificity as it transports everything he owns to granulation. Its significance depends upon precisely the conversation between everythingness and thisness that is called up by Deleuze's use of the term 'haecceity'.<sup>4</sup> The picture space, while encompassing much, is shallow, and the perspective bends somewhat, since the viewer is evidently looking from one side of the scene and yet the surface of some conveyor belts are angled slightly toward us. This foreshortening emphasises the diagrammatic or map like nature of the work. Landy's conveyor belts are tables for holding and displaying the world's strangeness. As such, Landy's dad's coat, his fridge, his mattress, become mythic objects. *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)*, like the bigger work, *Break Down*, that follows it, is art as list, communicating to the viewer a pressing abundance of things. Crowding bodies, hands and unmanned tools unrelentingly poke, slice and unscrew electronics, slippers and books which helplessly submit to these savage attentions. Hectic levels of particularisation feature evenly across the entire work: wherever the eye falls, there is detail. In the teeming specificity meticulously caught within the wide frame of *P.D.F. (Product, Disposal Facility)* Landy raises up a feeling of expansive profusion.

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<sup>4</sup> See also Chapter 3 (page 71, footnote 9). One might, here, consider the account of univocity developed by Deleuze in response to the work of the scholastic philosopher John Duns Scotus. Here the universe - Creator and creature, Life and living - sings with one voice; a voice that *is* difference and which therefore depends on infinite variety – that is, on specificity, thisness or haecceity. As Eugene Thacker (2010; see also Deleuze, 1968/2004; Widder, 2009) comments, Scotus' univocity comprises firstly, the separateness and specificity of things, secondly, the 'common nature' that is a field through which it becomes possible for things that are different to nevertheless be compared, and thirdly, the 'common nature' that is 'the univocity of all common natures' (Thacker, 2010, p.123). That is to say, univocity is the relationship between the relationships between things – 'the nature of all common natures' (Ibid.). In both Duns Scotus and Deleuze, relationship can only take place if each creature has its own specific characteristics and limits. For this reason, it is haecceity, the specific essence of 'this in particular', which creates the possibility of 'common nature'.

### 5.3 *List*

In this section, I present an account of the list as a riffing form that is inherently concerned with repetition and the endeavour of categorisation of collections of parts. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, line is distinguished from the series in general in that the line occurs specifically in space – which is to say that it is both a serial and a spatial formation. Where the conveyor belt is a variety of *line*, the list appears in this context as a form that is both serial and linear since it (a) presents a series of entries, one after the other and (b) is presented in a line, across, and often down, the page. Here I look to the line-thinking of Klee (1968), Moholy-Nagy (1968) and Pierce (1976) on Klee, and Ingold (2007), all of whom provide accounts that pertain directly to the current consideration of list – and indeed, line itself - as a form that is concerned with both series and text.

Just as some of the conditions defined earlier in relation to series also appear in the line, so it is for list. For example, list entries are ordered one after the other. As in the series, while a list *may* be organised in a particular order, this is not an essential condition but a contingency of the form. That said, some important distinctions can be made between series and list. While, as I have shown, there are almost no limits to the medium or means through which a series might work the list occurs in language alone. Like the series, parts of which are always united by their substrate, the list is distinguished by its categorical nature. In addition, the list is always a list *of something* (Eco, 2009, pp.113-6). Imagining again the person who utters a series of words – let's say, 'one; thought; baby; grass; eleven' – this series can be defined as a *list of words*, even if they have little else in common. As such, the inclusion of entries in a list is an act of categorisation.

In the list, each entry is construed as having a single and flat relation with the pre-existing title or category to which it is appended. This view of the list is typified when the theorist of language Jack Goody discusses the list as a strategy that can 'take category items out of the sentence structure and group them by similarities' (1987, p.275). The list is constituted, then, via a ready-made logic that is applied from above rather than arising from the specific characteristics of its individual items or members. This kind of stratified modality repels argumentation, story, or the progressive development of an idea, referring instead to just one argument: the inclusion or exclusion of a particular item on the list or the applicability of the criteria in each case. For this reason, the list is often considered to embody the

qualities of ‘the authoritative and totalising’ (Tankard, 2006, p.341) by giving an impression of closure, inclusiveness and an assumed self-sufficiency.<sup>5</sup>

The most nostalgic (not to say regressive) surfaces of this argument can be observed in accounts of the list by literary critics Robert Belknap (2004) and Paul Tankard (2006). Tankard identifies the internet as a producer of lists of ‘nuggets’ of information – as Belknap says, ‘the apotheosis of lists’ (Belknap, 2004, p.xii) - where once there might have been theses and arguments. Similarly, in Belknap’s preface the quality of the ‘virtual’ is set up in opposition to that of the ‘literary’ without much in the way of elucidation regarding how either category might be constituted, how they might operate or what they might signify. It can be seen that Umberto Eco (2009), citing Belknap (2004), also exercises a separation between literary lists and those that have a practical purpose.

However, such taxonomic discussions of ‘virtual’ versus ‘literary’ or indeed ‘literary’ versus ‘pragmatic’ lists seem misguided. The ‘pragmatic’ seems rather a capacious category, including without much in the way of differentiation or specification categories such as the itinerary, contents page, receipt, catalogue and guest list, as well as the inventory. Rather than indicating any ethical or aesthetic qualities in particular, all that use of the term ‘literary’ seems to signify for Belknap is that such lists are ‘made up’, as opposed to being written for direct practical purposes.<sup>6</sup> As such, he argues, the ‘pragmatic’ list is infinitely extendable, where made up lists are subject to a fundamental foreclosure. As Eco comments, this argument ‘can easily be turned on its head: insofar as practical lists designate a series of things that, when the list is drawn up, are what they are and no more, then such lists are finite’ (2009, p.116). Meanwhile, there is no reason that an invented list of the type that appears in a poem, play or novel should not continue indefinitely.

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<sup>5</sup> In the list-studies of Paul Tankard (2006) and Robert Belknap (2004), examples of ‘low-brow’ lists are employed to illustrate this point. In Belknap for instance the mode of the ‘ranking’ – the pop culture convention of the top ten, for example – is identified as a variety of list that can be superimposed over almost any area of social or cultural life ‘as though the aim of everything – every experience, every work of art, every personality, every event – were to find its place in a single hierarchical plan’ (2004, p.x).

<sup>6</sup> A useful repositioning of the quality of the literary is provided in Kittler (1985/1990) and also in Welberry’s introduction to this text, in which he observes that ‘if literature is medially constituted – that is, if it is a means for the processing, storage, and transmission of data – then its character will change historically according to the material and technical resources at its disposal’ (1990, p.xiii).



Welcome complication is provided by the art theorist Andrea Phillips (2012), who offers a focus on the constitutive nature of lists. She argues that any list might potentially continue indefinitely, since any change in the world they seem to enumerate and contain must be reflected in the list itself: along similar lines, one might call upon Susan Stewart's remark in her discussion on practices of collection that 'to play with series is to play with the fire of infinity' (1993, p.159). The list plays the quality of containment against the possibility of unending variation. This infinite potential for proliferation gives rise to the kinds of lists that inhabit our lives (or my life, in any case): scraps of paper, creased into softness, torn, starred, crossed out, with additional entries in increasingly smaller script which climb the margin or eventually peter out at the bottom right-hand corner of the page. A list that has been handwritten on paper, a finished and unmarked specimen might here be reclassified as an abandoned list. The ruination of folding, scribbling, circling, adding, tearing, drawing of arrows and crossing out of entries is, simply, the work that has to be done to maintain it in step with the world and work to which it refers. Therefore, while appearing to offer 'rationalisation', the list plays between finite and infinite and 'performs across registers' (Phillips, 2012, p.99). In this sense, the list takes as its basic underlying condition a state of fragmentation. By this I mean not only to suggest that the list acts as a compilation of entries, but further to this (and simultaneously) that it functions to *break things down*.

The title of *Break Down* might therefore be taken to refer not only to the transformation of Landy's belongings which are themselves broken down into shards, fragments and dust, nor even to Landy's state of mind as he enacts a mid-life crisis by getting rid of everything, imagining this work as a means 'to really fuck it up for myself' (Landy, 2008a, p.104; see also 2008b). Rather, the title of the work might be seen to refer quite simply to the *Break Down Inventory*, which provides a fully itemised 'break down' – a complete list – of everything that Landy owned before the show took place. As Phillips comments in her exploration of the ubiquity of lists and listing:

speaking at once of the technicity of my/your life and the endlessness of our labour, my/your list both absorbs and refracts the stressful intensities of our openings and closings, gaps and double bookings, opportunities and frustrations (2012, p.96).

It is the moment of breaking down, or fragmentation in the form of *refraction* that interests me here, since in everyday usage it is this that fits the list as a tool to make

manageable – to bring into scope - a variety of tasks that might otherwise escape us (me). This notion might be applied and explored via a comparison between the broad, overall aim; ‘go to the Co-op’, as compared with the refracted version that becomes visible in the multiple entries on a shopping list;

AAA batteries  
 potatoes  
 fish fingers  
 frozen peas

The first would at least get me as far as the shop; the second, in which the various tasks involved are broken down, split up, named individually, arrayed, gives me a fighting chance of being in a position both to give my son his tea and have working lights on my bike.

We’re listing slightly; back in line. It is my contention that there is a space of continuity between list, line and number that is captured to some extent in each of the accounts of listing encountered in this chapter. That is to say, there is some consistency; to some extent, they line up. The constitutive role of the list appears in Chilver’s comment, as part of his development of a relational approach to number in art, that ‘number is usefully thought as the set whose members are identified by the inventory’ (2014, p.240). Similarly in her exploration of list as method Phillips provides as an initial remark the ‘visual predicate’ that defines the list: that of the column (2012, p.96; see also Goody, 1987, p.274). While it is undeniably a convention of list-writing, the column form is less than axiomatic. For example, even lists that appear in Phillips’ own prose tend not to be organised in this way but instead, are generally demarcated with commas as seen in the following enumeration of types of device employed in contemporary art: ‘a list, an experiment, an archive, a joke, a party, an instruction, a walk, etc.’ (Ibid., p.107). This last is not presented in a vertical column, but can still very easily be defined as a list (and it still maintains a horizontal, linear form on the page). An important quality of the form is nevertheless conveyed in Phillips’ discussion of the columnar list. As she remarks, in logical terms the relationship of each entry to each other entry is vertical, or paradigmatic, like the warp on a loom in relation to the weft of the grammatical relationship between words in a sentence (see also Tankard, 2006). Therefore, while entries in a list may themselves have an internal grammatical structure - for example, a list might comprise a series of complete

sentences - they are rendered non-grammatical by the form. In effect, each entry in the list functions nominally, referring to one item (a material object, a concept, a memory, a task, a category, an experience) in particular.

#### 5.4 *Listing and multiplicity*

This vertical relationship between list entries has been represented in a number of ways: for example, Belknap employs the analogy of electricity passing through circuits in series rather than in parallel (2004, p.21). I also want to draw into this discussion the helpful account in Ingold (2007, p.156) of the *guideline*, which 'is intrinsic to the plane' – for instance, the lines of a stave in musical notation or those that demarcate the parameters of a graph, and the *plotline* – the musical notes or the data indicated on that graph - which, if excised, 'would leave the plane intact'. Ingold summons the material form of the printing press here, in his deployment of the image of the galley and the type that can be inserted into it. To push this further (and to depart to some extent from the graphic and material examples provided by Ingold), in a psychoanalytic exploration of grief, Darien Leader comments that in order to move on from a loss, one must first understand (in some way) the difference between structure and specificity. One must distinguish the object one mourns from 'the place they have occupied for us' in order, eventually, to be able 'to put others into that same empty space' (2009, pp.131-2). If syntax can be seen as a kind of guideline or framing device, the plotline summons the paradigmatic relationship between the various entries on a single list. The complex potentiality that arises through these vertical relations is vividly summoned in Fuller:

There is an interplay between the one and the multiplicities it contains, that it might be, that it might have been, that it weaves in and out of as relations of dimensionality. Elements in a paratactic list always open up into a matrix of immanent universes. Each of the elements in a list is hypotactically stacked in relation to the immanence of what it is next to, what it abuts to and differs from. Such hypotaxis is virtual, that is, for its actualisation it demands power from the imagination (2012, p.14).

In the list, a form emerges that affords the freedom and transformative capacities of the multiplicity, and which therefore cannot be entirely delimited or expressed (Ibid., p.155). It therefore becomes possible to posit an account of the list as a fundamentally liberatory form, in the sense that it accommodates jumps in and out of the linear order defined through its form. Indeed, it does so far more readily than prose, which is described by Tankard (2006) as a continuously 'spooling' form.

The list affords escape from its own written order, providing a space for interruption and provisionality. As such, it subverts the authority of prose, which demands to be read from beginning to end (and otherwise refuses to make sense).

The modality of the list is at least in part concerned with the recursivity of '1+1+1' (Klee, 1968, p.22; see also Day et al, 2014, p.144), causing the author to hit the comma or return key again and again in order to arrive at the beginning of a new line. This repeating structure summons the Freudian conception of repetition as produced by a 'death drive' (Freud, 1955/2001; see also Buchanan, 2015, pp.32-4). Citing this motif, the psychoanalyst Darian Leader shows in his account of melancholia that the modality of the list is closely related with processes of mourning (or attempts to mourn). In this account the work of mourning is about enumeration: 'like looking at a diamond not just from one angle but from all possible angles, so that each of its facets can be viewed' (2009, p.28). Here, Leader refers briefly to *Break Down* 'in which all of [Landy's] personal possessions were ground into dust by a machine he had installed to literally break down his life' (Ibid., p.33). The work is deployed by Leader as an illustrative example in his discussion of the listing quality of grief, in which the bereaved replay on a loop their memories of the deceased. He comments, with regard to 'the list published by Landy of the thousands of objects he destroyed' that this 'serial, list-like quality [...] frustrates our desire to create stories' (Ibid.). There is some resonance between this account from Leader and the comparison, by Tankard (2006), of the trapping nature of 'spooling' prose with the potentialities for new kinds of connections and associations as presented by the list. In Leader, *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b) appears as an apparatus for mourning and in particular for resisting an artificially truncated mourning: to insert too readily a real loss into the realm of story, he claims, risks short-changing the mourner by placing their loss within the clichés of narrative structure. That said, 'on its own, the work of listing and reshuffling may indicate precisely a block to the mourning process' (Leader, 2009, p.34) – which is to say that listing might signal a jamming of the works: a failed or stuck mourning. Here, the mourner finds herself in difficulties. What is required in order to un-jam the process is some sense of narrative – but it is the foreclosures that inhere in narrative convention that cannot be allowed, and that the list enables us to avoid. Yet for Leader, if list is not enough, neither is narrative: an unspecified 'something more has to take place' (Ibid.).

Tankard gets us further toward imagining the nature of this ‘something’, identifying as he does the liberatory potential of the list as a text that does not require its readers to follow the progress of a particular argument or narrative in order to gain from the reading. His response to the line of the list relates directly to the form of the poem, which, he claims, is also vertically structured (in contrast to interminable horizontality of prose). This notion of list and poem as vertical, skippable, refracted forms summons Ingold’s reflections on the broken line:

fragmentation can be read positively in so far as it opens up passages [...] that might have been closed off, allowing inhabitants to find their own ‘ways through’, and thereby to make places for themselves, amidst the ruptures of dislocation (2007, p.167-9).

The fragmented nature of the list, then, and its reliance on the vertical relation between each of its entries, opens the way to the list as a ‘poetic’ form. This vision of line breaks that are productive, making space for new meanings or narratives, echoes directly a fascinating comment in Belknap, that in the rhythmic unfolding of the list, ‘sometimes all hell breaks loose, and in some psychedelic jam of language an ecstasy overwhelms us’ (2004, p.xiv). Here – perhaps due to the mention of jam – I am moved to consider the famous list from the penultimate section of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, of the objects on Bloom’s dresser. Other lists go haywire in other ways, but this example provides an apt demonstration of my contention that it is the recursive movement of the form that gives it the excessive quality that might be called, in Darien Leader’s terms, ‘something more’:

On the lower shelf five vertical breakfast plates, six horizontal breakfast saucers on which rested inverted breakfast cups, a moustachecup, uninverted, and saucer of Crown Derby, four white goldrimmed eggcups, and open shammy purse displaying coins, mostly copper, and a phial of aromatic violet comfits. On the middle shelf a chipped eggcup containing pepper, a drum of table salt, four conglomerated black olives in oleaginous paper, an empty pot of Plumtree’s potted meat, an oval wicker basket bedded with fibre and containing one Jersey pear, a halfempty bottle of William Gilbey and Co’s white invalid port, half disrobed of its swathe of coralpink tissue paper, a packet of Epps’s soluble cocoa, five ounces of Anne Lynch’s choice tea at 2/- per lb. in a crinkled leadpaper bag, a cylindrical canister containing the best crystallised lump sugar, two onions, one the larger, Spanish, entire, the other, smaller, Irish, bisected with augmented surface and more redolent, a jar of Irish Model Dairy’s cream, a jug of brown crockery containing a noggin and a quarter of soured adulterated milk, converted by heat into water, acidulous serum and semisolidified curds, which added to the quantity subtracted for Mr Bloom’s and Mrs Fleming’s breakfasts made one imperial pint, the total quantity originally delivered, two cloves, a halfpenny and a small dish containing a slice of fresh ribsteak. On the upper shelf a battery of jamjars of various sizes and proveniences (Joyce, 1922/1969, pp.595-6).

In its entirety, this scene, in which Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom return late to Bloom's house, has the structure of a kind of catechism, in which each element of the humdrum actions performed is relayed to the reader in a form that extends well beyond the credible comprehension of the actors in the moment of their acting. Detail is piled upon detail in a precarious ecstasy, as though Joyce means to experiment with how much detail can be loaded on before the entire edifice collapses under its own weight. His listing of the items in the dresser appears, therefore, as an unstable, semi-inflated thing that lists in the sense of listing to one side. This askew sensibility is further underpinned by the appearance of Joyce's characteristic portmanteaus: *moustachecup*; *goldrimmed*; *halfempty*; *coralpink*; *leadpaper*; *jamjars*. These jammed-together words feel both jaunty and rickety. In addition, it might be observed they work in a way that is closely analogous to the nominal character of all list entries. In just the same way, in Joyce's joined words, the insertion of a descriptor into the body of the noun conveys an underlying essentialism which pushes these objects forward in their very specificity and peculiarity. Partly because of their uncompromising distinctness and partly because through their joining they physically overwrite a space that would usually exist on the page, the portmanteaus raise up in the text a sense of claustrophobia. There is decomposition here, and disarray. While each individual entry feels entirely reasonable and proportionate, it is Joyce's shuttling strategy of laying object over object over many pages that gives this penultimate chapter of *Ulysses* a credulous hilarity. This relentless seeing suggests in the end either godlike transcendence or the compensatory clear-sightedness of the irredeemably hammered.

In short, this excerpt from Joyce reveals the list as a generative form. Indeed, it is this native fecundity and liveliness that prevents it from becoming the psychic dead-end feared by Leader (2009). Belknap's ecstatic 'jam' (2004, p.xiv), evokes, therefore, the image of a mass of influences and fragments boiled together in the cranium to make a new, sticky cohesion. Similarly, albeit through use of an imagery that is, mercifully, altogether less repulsive, Fuller animates an account of meaning as relationally constituted when he remarks that:

the accretion of minute elements of signification into crowds, arrays, and clusters allows a reverberation of these cultural particles between them and together, the connotations of one flying off the lick of another (2007, p.14)

I read in Belknap's arresting phrase, 'some psychedelic jam of language' (2004, p.xiv), a sense that the list - its very form - potentialises reading, but also repeating, mainly the same but somewhat different, to operate variations on a theme, to play around - that is, to riff.

### 5.5 *Listing with one eyebrow raised*

As Phillips contends, in contemporary art the list tends to be employed with one eyebrow raised, working as it does as a play on the modalities of the artistic and the practical. She suggests that the list is 'a system of relations between elements, these elements being both the contents of any list [...] and the structures to which they are linked' (2012, p.99). Context is important, and in the main, deployments of the list in art and in literary texts are performed aslant. This tendency is epitomised in a purposely overblown episode in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* in which an intriguing 'manuscript' that promises to reveal grim secrets is uncovered in a sinister cabinet on a stormy night. The candle belonging to the protagonist, Catherine, is suddenly blown out before she can read it, leaving her in a state of high agitation - but in the morning, the first sheet she reads turns out to be nothing more than an 'inventory of linen'; that is, a 'washing bill':

She seized another sheet, and saw the same articles with little variation; a third, a fourth and a fifth presented nothing new. Shirts, stockings, cravats and waistcoats faced her in each. Two others, penned by the same hand, marked an expenditure scarcely more interesting, in letters, hair-powder, shoe-string and breeches-ball. And the larger sheet, which had inclosed the rest, seemed by its first cramp line, "To poultice chestnut mare," - a farrier's bill! (1818/2003, pp.163-4).

Austen lists the lists, using their utter mundanity to explode the melodramatic imaginings of the night before. The extravagant sufferings of Catherine - 'her feelings at that moment were indescribable. Her heart fluttered, her knees trembled, and her cheeks grew pale' (Ibid., p.161) - are brought into contact with the tedious recurrence of the need, week after week, for the washing to be done, and new shoe-string purchased.

This tableau directly exemplifies the argument, in Tankard (2006), that the list is often deployed against the grain. This may, as in Austen, satirise the 'literary'. Alternatively, an implied irony falls back upon the list itself. Due to its incongruous inclusion in a literary work (and, similarly, looking to Phillips, we might add, an art work) we know that it is not to be read entirely 'straight'. As Tankard suggests:

The natural functions of lists are perceived to be scholarly, scientific, administrative – all functions of literate culture. [...] Thus the uses of lists in non-scholarly, nonadministrative discourse – the impractical discourses of literature – are usually humorous and parodic' (2006, p.347).

I am not convinced by this 'humour'. Certainly, none of the examples I review here – apart from Joyce's – make me laugh. Where such sources refer to 'joke' and 'humour' I want to refer to something quieter: a twist of the mouth; a kind of mordancy. The joke, or perhaps I should say the *rub*, is that the previously discussed conception of the 'pragmatic list' as a stable referent that in some sense performs a direct mimesis of its subject(s) are in themselves rather troubled. The credulous straightness of the bureaucratic list is harnessed and undercut by enactments of the form in art and literature. As the artist and writer John Chilver suggests, such endeavours are 'about rhetoricising the list' (2014, p.245), which is to say that they expose the ways in which listing is constructive, rather than simply reflective, of its contents. In the examples that follow, as in the *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b), what is exposed is the ultimate impossibility of objectivity and completion. For example, to return for a moment to the excerpt from Joyce (on page 149 of this thesis) it can be seen that what he mocks is the notion of completion itself. The shuttling action of the list works as a contrivance for the capture of the entirety of life in its multiplicity; that this venture is – naturally – hopeless, brings to the work a sort of skewiff, teasing quality. The scope of Joyce's listing is an important constituent in the status of this work as an epic, as can be seen in the omniscience of its knowledge and attention and the way in which the most profound subject matter is awarded the same quality of attention as the contents of the kitchen dresser. Simultaneously, and for the same reasons, it is necessary to imagine this listing as parodic. Joyce, in performing this doomed attempt to convey the universe entire and complete, mocks the very notion that such a thing might be possible.

A further example of this aslant listing can be seen in J.G.Ballard's short story, *The Index*, which takes the form of the back pages of a fictional biography of the main character, Henry Rhodes Hamilton (HRH). As shown in the below selection from entries listed under 'H' the piece reproduces the conventions of paratext while simultaneously allowing it to tell a story:

Hamilton, Henry Rhodes, accident-proneness, 118; age, sensitiveness about, 476; belief in telepathy, 399; childhood memories, 501; common man, identification with, 211; courage: moral, 308; physical, 201; generosity, 99; Goethe, alleged



resemblance to, 322; hobbies, dislike of, 87; illnesses: concussion, 196; hypertension, 346; prostate inflammation, 522; venereal disease, 77; integrity, 89; languages, mastery of, 176; Orient, love of, 188; patriotism, renunciation of, 276; public speaking, aptitude for, 345; self-analysis, 234-67; underdog, compassion for, 176; will-power, 87

Hamilton, Indira, meets HRH in Calcutta, 239; translates at Gandhi interviews, 253; imprisoned with HRH by British, 276; marries HRH, 287; on abortive Everest expedition, 299; divorces HRH, 301

Hamilton, Marcelline (formerly Marcelline Renault), abandons industrialist husband, 177; accompanies HRH to Angkor, 189; marries HRH, 191; amuses Ho Chi Minh, 195; divorces HRH, 201

Hamilton, Ursula (later Mrs Mickey Rooney), 302-7; divorces HRH, 308

(Ballard, 1977/1991)

To 'read' the life story of HRH requires direct and quite detailed participation on the part of the reader. One might at several points need to mark a spot with a finger and turn the pages back and forth.<sup>7</sup> The details are opaque, and the tone entirely determined by the protocols of index-writing. The entire weight of the narrative is shifted onto the *content* of each entry, that is, the items in the list. Most of these are preposterous and grandiose; some are pooterish – 'hobbies, dislike of'; some, exposing – 'illnesses: concussion, 196; hypertension, 346; prostate inflammation, 522; venereal disease, 77'. The reader is left to conjecture, for example, by what means Ghandi's denunciation might connect with his outing to Harry's Bar and introduction to James Joyce by Ernest Hemingway, all of which occur on page 256 of this fictional text.

Ballard's piece aptly exemplifies the previously cited accounts of parodic listing in Tankard (2006) and Phillips (2012), since its effectivity has to do with a disjuncture between the contents of the list and its mode of delivery. A similar disjuncture can be seen in a section from Georges Perec's project to record in exhaustive detail every feature of a certain square in Paris:

Fleeting slogans: "De l'autobus, je regarde Paris [From the bus, I look at Paris]"

Ground: packed gravel and sand.

Stone: the curbs, a fountain, a church, buildings...

Asphalt

Trees (leafy, many yellowing)

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<sup>7</sup> Further, reading an online transcription of the text meant typing page numbers into a 'search' box to see what patterns emerged as I clicked on the 'up' and 'down' arrows to move from one entry to the next.

A rather big chunk of sky (maybe one-sixth of my field of vision)  
 A cloud of pigeons that suddenly swoops down on the central plaza, between the church and fountain  
 Vehicles (their inventory remains to be made)  
 Human beings  
 Some sort of basset hound  
 Bread (baguette)  
 Lettuce (curly endive?) partially emerging from a shopping bag  
 (Perec, 1975/2010, pp.5-6).

This list reproduces a concern with procedure, since Perec is following a self-imposed system of his own devising in his project of looking and writing. There is an earnestness to his listing: his tone here is not at all arch, but rather self-conscious. Throughout the text and especially in these first pages, Perec plays between the assumed formality and objectivity of his adopted style, and his location as the subjective observer. This can be seen in a certain unevenness of attention. 'Human beings' receive a single, shared entry, where the endive 'emerging from a shopping bag' has an entry of its own. The entry for 'stone' becomes overwhelming and ends with an ellipsis. There is a kind of sheepish humour in 'some sort of basset hound', while the sudden 'swoop' of pigeons provides a rare moment of animation in a notably static scene.

Finally, a list from Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979/1998) makes nonsense from the way in which the list, as discussed earlier, not only describes, but constructs its components through categorisation. As in Perec's list, a certain licentiousness can be identified in the following scene, set in a library for the classification and conservation of 'confiscated books', where oppressive regimes with punitive policies regarding books are categorised as follows:

the countries where all books are systematically confiscated;  
 the countries where only books published or approved by the State may circulate;  
 the countries where existing censorship is crude, approximate, and unpredictable;  
 the countries where the censorship is subtle, informed, sensitive to implications and allusions, managed by meticulous and sly intellectuals;  
 the countries where there are two networks of dissemination: one legal and one clandestine;  
 the countries where there is no censorship because there are no books, but there are many potential readers;

the countries where there are no books and nobody complains about their absence;  
the countries, finally, in which every day books are produced for all tastes and all  
ideas, amid general indifference

(Calvino, 1979/1998, p.235).

This final list is somewhat analogous to discussion in Foucault (1966/2002) of a list of ‘animals’ taken from Borges, which includes a promiscuous assortment of classes of beast. As Foucault comments, it is funny and yet tests our tolerance, due not to the nature of any one entry in particular, but the troubling fact that they are unified within the same list. He draws a comparison, here, with the case of ‘certain aphasiacs’ who, if given an assortment of balls and ends of wool, are unable to arrange them according to any consistent schema, taking up, rather, classifications including a variety of discontinuous factors; colour, length, texture and so on. In so doing, they ‘create a multiplicity of tiny, fragmented regions in which nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected islets’ (Foucault, 1966/2002, p.xx).

A similarly parodic vein can be seen in various features of the *Break Down Inventory*. Here, we must begin with its very existence. There is no sense that a full list of Landy’s possessions was needed in any practical way in order for the work to take place. Further, while some of the works of art destroyed might be deemed worth recording and preserving via the recording function of the list, the majority – and perhaps all – of the rest of Landy’s possessions are unlikely to be missed by anyone save the artist himself. A refrain can be caught here, between Landy’s listings and the undifferentiated focus given by Joyce to each of the objects in Bloom’s kitchen dresser. In *Break Down Inventory*, it is precisely the futility of the action of recording the existence (and subsequent destruction) of such banal flotsam as a small rubber spatula (K1631), a pair of purple woollen socks (C490) and a 500g packet of Tesco’s red split lentils (P2876), for example, that gives this list its excessive quality. This looming redundancy is drilled home through the use of series numbers which – also – completely lacks a direct purpose. These numbers, which consist of a letter (‘A’ for art; ‘R’ for reading matter) and a number, have no practical relationship to the work of taking apart and shredding as it took place. There is evidence that the dismantled pieces of some of Landy’s possessions retained their number after being deconstructed (Artangel, 2015). However, this does not seem to have been done consistently, and I see no sign that the shredded

remains at large were awarded any continuous connection with their previous existence though Landy's systems of recording and sorting.

The text of the *Inventory* has an easily decipherable logic, however, in that objects are organised into groups. The below selection shows entries from the 'Clothing' category:

- C493 Hometown Boys country-and-western style hat with feather and ribbon
- C494 Red beret with brown leather rim and tassels, present from Janine Ferris
- C495 Worn straw Ska hat with brown ribbon with hole in it
- C496 White woollen cossack hat padded lining and metal adjustable buckle
- C497 Medium size white cotton short sleeve top
- C498 Brown and white check nylon shirt, size 16" neck
- C499 One red and one brown polyester skull cap hat
- C500 Green tweed flat cap with popper fastener on peak and green silk lining, purchased in Loughborough, 1982
- C501 Camouflaged army hat with wide brim and adjustable string, purchased on trip to White Water with Richard Flood
- C502 White T-shirt from Scrapheap Services with faded black Jelly Tots sweet wrapper screenprint on front
- C503 Medium size black cotton underpants
- C504 Calvin Klein medium size black cotton underpants
- C505 Alexandra red polyester baseball cap with adjustable red plastic fastener, as worn in Scrapheap Services
- C506 Blue and white lined swimming trunks with drawstring once owned by Angus Fairhurst
- C507 Plain blue baseball cap with adjustable plastic fastener, purchased while on holiday in Dalyan, Turkey
- C508 Plain medium size white cotton T-shirt
- C509 White cotton floppy cricket hat with zip-up pocket
- C510 Medium size grey cotton underpants
- C511 Blue swimming trunks with elasticated waist and drawstring, purchased at the Blue Lagoon, Iceland
- C512 Paul Smith pair of worn checked cotton socks with holes in them, once owned by Ian Davenport

(Landy, 2001b).

Despite the apparently even distribution across Landy's belongings of his systematic work of disassembly (in the sense that everything that Landy owned is listed; everything is to be shredded) this listing works differently on the different kinds of entries. Art works are treated formally, given the name of the artist and often the year as well as a description of form and materials using the kind of

format used to label works by galleries and in academic writing. Pop music compact discs are given their code numbers and record company names. Clothing and kitchenware are not always dated or given a name – although designer and branded objects often are. These ordinary things are very often given a story that relates to Landy’s family or situates him within the art world: see for example the hat bought in the company of Richard Flood (presumably the curator) or the swimming trunks of Angus Fairhurst.<sup>8</sup> That said, the very proximity of items with highly evocative stories or (in)famous associations to the most basic needments – medium sized pairs of cotton pants and tee shirts – ironises these more resonant entries and roots them in the territory of utility. Similarly, Landy’s family memories rub against evidence of his connections with well known figures from the art world and young British artists to produce a vivid impression of narrative: of the living of a life. Just like Ballard’s index, this list of Landy’s things enables the reader to flick back and forth, reconnecting items and constructing some version of his life story.

It is instructive, here, to consider the impact of the format of the *Inventory*. Landy’s written descriptions are organised into a single column so that naming and describing are effectively treated as a single function. This decision on Landy’s part returns us to the notion that the list – even the list that is made of full sentences – escapes grammar. Every list entry is in essence a nominal entity: a noun, or a noun-like thing. As discussed earlier in relation to Joyce’s portmanteau words, this joining results in a funny essentialism in which the story of the thing seems to become an intrinsic part of the thing itself, as seen in the below entry:

L2027 Small metal crucifix, once owned by Ethel Landy

The superimposition here of Landy’s narrative – ‘crucifix once owned by Ethel Landy’ – and the part of the text that offers the most direct description of the object – ‘small metal crucifix’ – reveals firstly the material specificity of the object itself – its status as a thing that has a particular quiddity. What is implied by Landy’s use here of ‘metal’, rather than any more specific identification (which might have occurred if the object were made of silver or gold)? This might suggest that the ‘metal’ in question was inexpensive. I imagine an object that is perhaps rather dull,

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<sup>8</sup> Fairhurst was a well-known fellow member of the group known as the young British artists, who died, it should be noted, seven years after Landy’s *Inventory* would have been written.

that would sit lightly in the palm of the hand. Alongside this I begin to conjecture the possible significance (personally, socially, among one's family) of destroying a religious symbol, and one once owned by one's mother at that. The curious use of the passive – not 'given by' or 'stolen from' but 'once owned by' – seems suggestive of the porous atmosphere in which in parenthood one's personal possessions somehow end up owned by one's child (and here I find myself identifying with Ethel). This is all present in item L2027, wrapped into a single entry that works as a single and encapsulating signifier. This thought experiment, which effects a notional separation between object and narrative, opens up the possibility of a critical engagement with list entries beyond the flatness of the most immediate message of the *Break Down Inventory*. This thing – and this – and this – were here, and they were owned by Landy.

### 5.6 *The material form of Break Down Inventory*

This section audits the contents of the *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b) and their relationship with its material form. The list is one possible refinement of the broader definition of the series; the inventory is a more specified category again. Like the list, the inventory presents a *series* of entries that fit a particular category and that may or may not be presented in a particular order – but the inventory is a *written* form since its purpose is record keeping, in general for the listing of material objects. Since the *Inventory* was written using a spreadsheet programme, I investigate the character of this medium in particular.

Number and containment are the key principles that structure the text of the *Inventory*, which in the print version, published by Ridinghouse<sup>9</sup> in 2001, is prefaced by a note that provides the complete number of entries in the list (7227) as well as the combined weight of these objects (5.75 tonnes). This unembellished presentation of the twin facts of the number of objects destroyed and the physical weight of these objects, draws upon the convention of the list as impermeable by analysis or discourse (Tankard, 2006). Landy's *Inventory* appears to be self-sufficient, to possess an entirely and directly mimetic relationship to its subject. As such, it works to elevate the authority of *Break Down* itself (by which I mean the

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<sup>9</sup> 'An imprint of Thomas Dane and Karsten Schubert' (Landy, 2001b): Karsten Schubert has represented Landy in the past, and Thomas Dane is his dealer at the time of writing (July 2017).

appearance of moral veracity and significance that has accrued to Landy's work). In referring to the weight of Landy's shredded belongings, I am drawn to consider the physical form, and in particular the bulk of the book itself. My copy of *Break Down Inventory* weighs 720g. The weight of the book performs a dual role in the construction of its own meaning and significance. Its size speaks of the genuinely colossal nature of Landy's endeavour. Simultaneously, as argued in the previous section, the form of the text and its contexts, Landy's adoption of a bureaucratic modality, and relatedly the excessive completionism of his approach, which has produced this heavy inventory, are performed in a parodic manner.

This turn toward the material form of the print copy of *Break Down Inventory* is enriched through reference to media histories, including historic emergences of practices of writing and organising text and the development of the electronic spreadsheet programme. In discussing media histories of ancient Roman and medieval contexts respectively, both the cultural historian Cornelia Vismann (2008, pp.41-3) and the theorist of new media Katherine Hayles (2002, p.99) note the transformative power of the introduction of the codex (the book with pages, preceded as it was by the scroll) due to its affordance of non-sequential reading. Pages enable the reader to flick backwards and forwards; the facility for re-reading and cross-referencing of passages re-connects texts with themselves in new ways. This material detail relates very directly with discussion, above, of the vertical (paratactic) relation of one list entry with the next, in which the shuttling motion of the list appears as an alternative to the modality of prose, which unspools like ribbon from a bobbin. Indeed, along similar lines, Tankard speculates over how conventional expectations of texts might have developed 'if rather than having invented the codex to replace the scroll, something like a text cassette had evolved, that presented text like tickertape' (2006, p.353).

The original form of *Break Down Inventory* as an electronic spreadsheet (a media form that affords scrolling in perpetuity) is directly reproduced through use of a grid in the print copy. Indeed, despite its publication in the form of as a codex (a book with pages), the printed text of the *Inventory* refers in its physical form to the



Figure 21: Entries in *Break Down Inventory* presented in 'landscape' orientation.





Figure 22: Front cover of *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b). Photographed by the author, June 2015.



Figure 23: Folded page edges of *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b). Photographed by the author, June 2015.

scroll-like continuity described by Tankard. It is not designed to be unfurled - on close examination it is clear that one would have to destroy the book to prise it free of the binding. However, its pages are folded double, with a fold at the outside edge, and printed only on a single side of each continuous sheet so that the text appears on one side of what appears to be a long zig-zag of paper (Figure 23). Presented in 'landscape' orientation, the text runs from the beginning to the end of the inventory in order of serial number, giving the impression that the entire runs down a single, continuous sheet of paper, much as if it were printed for a scroll, rather than a book with pages.<sup>10</sup> In addition to doubling the weight of the physical text, this folding works to emphasise the theme of series: the vertical relationship of each entry to each of the others. Belknap defines the list as 'a formally organised block of information that is composed of a set of members' that 'joins and separates at the same time', figuring at the same time 'the sum of its parts and the individual parts themselves' (2004, p.15). In precisely the same way, the formation of the print copy of *Break Down Inventory* speaks of the equivalence of every entry with every other entry, securing at the same time the unique position and place of each.

### 5.7 Spreadsheet

This section investigates the implications of Landy's use of the spreadsheet in the initial gathering of the information contained in the *Break Down Inventory*. The importance in the current discussion of material form as directly constitutive of and entangled with the content of a text has already been discussed. Here, I map the constitutive capacities of the spreadsheet and make connections between these general points and the particular features of the spreadsheet used in the writing of the *Break Down Inventory*. I follow the media theorist Lev Manovich in imagining that the electronic database offers a distinctive 'way to structure our experience of

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<sup>10</sup> This feature of the *Inventory* differs specifically from the practice, in early book-binding, of leaving the edges of the pages 'uncut' – here, razoring the folds on the outside edges of pages was left to the reader. The folds of the *Inventory*, on the other hand, do not impede our reading of the contents since text is purposely not printed on the inside of the folds. The protagonist of Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* describes reading a book that is constructed in precisely a similar way, although this appears to have been an error. Cutting the pages open with a paper knife, he unexpectedly encounters an unprinted page: 'an intact blank really reigns on the two sides that confront each other. You turn another page and find the next two are printed properly. Blank, printed; blank, printed; and so on until the end' (Calvino, 1979/1998, pp.42-3).

ourselves and the world' (1999, p.81).<sup>11</sup> In this account, Manovich sets the list (or database) in opposition to the narrative (or algorithm). It is his proposal that the potential for new items to be added at any point 'without in any way modifying the logic of the database' (Ibid., p.83) forecloses the development of a narrative that makes sense *as* narrative. In digital media, he argues, this relationship is turned upon its head since the range of possible options (clips, pictures, data) are 'stored in a database' while the narrative – which is to say, the links made between these options – is more fleeting. This seems to me a troublesome position, since these links – algorithms – are in themselves 'stored' either as part of the program of a game or in the eventual form or ordering of the thing if we are imagining a film, for example. Actually, what this account of vertical and horizontal relations shows is that a database modality is present in language even at the level of the spoken sentence, in which paradigmatic relations work in the imagination rather than the digitised store of the database. If anything, I wish to suggest that database and the story are more closely aligned than might first be imagined.

In considering how the material form of the spreadsheet in particular is constitutive of its contents, one might begin with the spreadsheet as a tool of accountancy. The electronic spreadsheet, which as will be seen was only developed in the late 1980s, nevertheless succeeds from the earliest emergences of writing, which according to Vismann arose in order to enable practices of accounting. Here lists function not to reflect but to eventuate exchanges – they 'do not communicate, they control transfer operations' (Vismann, 2008, p.6). Accordingly, Mesopotamian clay tablets (emerging from the Babylonian Empire in the third millennium BCE) use pictograms to convey such matters as 'the per-capita consumption of female workers, lists containing inventories of wheat and beer, lists with names of trees, shrubs, and administrative offices, lists for those training to become compilers of lists' (Ibid.; see also Belknapp, 2004, p.9).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I include the spreadsheet in the definition by Manovich of the database as a 'collection of items on which the user can perform various operations: view, navigate, search'.

<sup>12</sup> In his expansive work on the relationship between oral and written language, Jack Goody opines that there is too little evidence to award to the Mesopotamian tablets the status of being the site of the emergence of writing (1987, p.18). That said, in this account as in those discussed above the earliest examples of writing identified seem to have worked as aids to counting, if not accountancy.

The information recorded in Mesopotamian plaques is organised spatially, and its positioning in itself ‘encodes the values of an entry’ (Vismann, 2008, p.6). That this convention is extant can be observed in the conventional use of ‘in’ and ‘out’ columns in both ancient and contemporary accountancy, or at the back of this text, in the form of the bibliography. Here, through a formalised set of conventions and processes the fields of author surname, title, place of publication and publisher are distinguishable from one another partly because it is accepted that they should always appear in the same, prescribed order. This strategy of communicating meaning partly via the placing of an entry on the page or in relation to other types of information is formalised in what tends to be seen as the first spreadsheet programme, VisiCalc. This is described by its author, Dan Bricklin, as follows:

The screen has a command area at the top where the cursor location was displayed, as well as the formatting setting for the cell and its formula. The main area has rows and columns labelled A, B, C across the top and 1, 2, 3 down the side. The cursor highlights a cell which displays the calculated results. There are commands, including those to blank a cell, clear the sheet, delete, insert, and move rows/columns, edit the contents of a cell, format a cell for text or numbers as left/right justified, currency, etc., global settings for all cells for formatting, etc., printing, copying of cells with the copies modifying the references to be absolute or relative, save and load, locked titles synchronized with the scrolling, and multiple windows into the same data (Bricklin, 1999/2017).

As Bricklin says (supported by Power, 2007), this first spreadsheet programme is notably similar in its functions and underlying logic to those commonly used today. The electronic spreadsheet differs from a paper form or a table in that it is infinitely expandable on either axis and able to receive any kind of data (as long as the receiving cell is correctly instructed as to what kind of information it should be displaying). As in a word processing document, content can be moved or copied, but the spreadsheet has the additional capacity to make and repeat calculations, and can sort information, for example by size or into alphabetical order. That said, the spreadsheet continues to structure entries through the ancient form of the grid. As the media historian Lisa Gitelman demonstrates in her exhumation of the history of the blank in printed forms and books – the cheque-book or accounts book for example, ‘documents establishing the parameters or the rules for entries to be made individually in pencil or ink’ (2014, p.23) – such electronic documents strongly echo these printed blanks. Just as the form delimits the text that can be added, ‘metadata necessarily direct and delimit (that is, encode) the appearance of text on screen: Metadata make the blank, and data are poured in’ (Ibid., p.26).

While Gitelman does not suggest that the blank inevitably demands to be filled, Goody posits that:

so powerful are these elementary forms of what the creators of computer software call “spread sheets” that anyone composing a matrix is almost forced to fill all the gaps, to leave no “empty box”. The table abhors a vacuum (1987, pp.275-6).

I wonder whether Goody has taken on board the affordances of a spreadsheet, and in particular the ability of the spreadsheet to extend indefinitely.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the emphasis on boxes and blanks here and in Gitelman in particular is analogous to the moment when, in beginning to play with perspective, Klee lays out a grid of horizontal and vertical lines. Here, his annotation, ‘1+1+1’ (1968, p.22) indicates that for Klee the grid is precisely about the accrual of single units that appear one after the other. Accordingly, what is striking about the form of the spreadsheet is the laminations that are afforded by this form between each entry and the next, as each ‘1’ that is, each single entry, stands in its own cell. In the *Break Down Inventory*, other strategies that separate each entry from the others include the capital letter at the start of each entry, and the serial number. Indeed, in her investigation of deployments of the database as a predictor of specific behaviours labelled risky or even insurgent the geographer Louise Armoore (2009) draws briefly upon Landy’s *Inventory* as an enactment of what she calls the ‘pixelation’ of human identity into a number of sortable, searchable predictive characteristics. The nature of this sorting, specifying feature of the spreadsheet is its reification of sameness and difference – the simultaneity with which it pulls together, while holding separate, the elements that are entered into its cells. It is this sense that *Break Down* – and the *Break Down Inventory* – reproduce and parody the use of algorithmic predictions of behaviour for marketing purposes. For example, when Stallabrass mentions ‘data-mining,’ Landy says that the existence of the *Inventory*, in combination with his lack of belongings, will make him ‘the perfect person to sell to’ (Landy, 2001a, p.108). As Armoore comments:

Because codified data can be used to visualize a person, no matter how absurd or tenuous, the artists who experiment with alternative ways to visualize a person do

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<sup>13</sup> Although in the first prototypes, there was only ‘a matrix of five columns and 20 rows’ (Power, 2007). In any case, Landy was in no danger of continuing to fill his electronic ‘spread sheet’ *ad infinitum*, for the simple reason that he only possessed 7227 items.

so against the grain, offering new modes of attention that attend also to the calculation that is made (2009, p.27).

In other words, Armoore understands *Break Down* to be working against the grain of this pervading surveillance by working what she calls 'pixelation' through via active decision making rather than the deferred responsibility commonly enacted through the use of algorithms in surveillance. I have discussed the way in which entries on the list bring with them the residue of previous contexts, and further to this, gain new significance in relation to their neighbours. This relational mediality exposes a space in which the imaginative work of the observer is called into play. Armoore demonstrates that such generative work between confluences of different items on a list of characteristics or factors occurs, too, through the operation of predictive algorithms.

This opening up of conversations between previously unrelated objects, which Fuller calls 'unknown combinatorial potentials' (2007, p.14), is therefore an important strategic capability of the *Break Down Inventory*. That the entire collection of Landy's belongings might provoke such conjectural sparks of significance can be seen too in an account of *Break Down* in which Tim Cumming lists a succession of random objects that he sees while visiting the show: 'A pair of boots, computer parts, electrical wiring, mattress stuffing, drawings, prints, photographs, exhibition catalogues, a bread basket, a red, wooden wagon wheel' (2001). Cumming's listing is in some ways akin to Joyce on the contents of Bloom's dresser in that it works to emphasise the grand scale of Landy's project, a sort of sprouting profusion as object succeeds object to form a chaotic melee. As a side-effect, the computer parts and electrical wiring inherit some earthiness from the pair of boots and the bread basket, whose wholesome solidity is itself softened by the close proximity of the mattress stuffing. The informational qualities of 'drawings, prints, photographs, exhibition catalogues' are dampened: the fact that they are *made of stuff* raised up, by their inclusion alongside the boots and the 'red, wooden wagon wheel'.

While a range of strategies employed in the writing of the *Break Down Inventory* perform the lamination of each entry from the others, therefore, this list also affects an accretion. Like the refracting list in Phillips (2012) Landy's spreadsheet performs the modality of '1+1+1' (Klee, 1968, p.22; Day et al, 2014, p.144); a space of simultaneous gathering together and breaking down. Rather than acting as cold

storage for ideas that reanimate only when purposely and directly interpolated into the arc of a story, Landy's *Inventory* is revealed as a generative space.

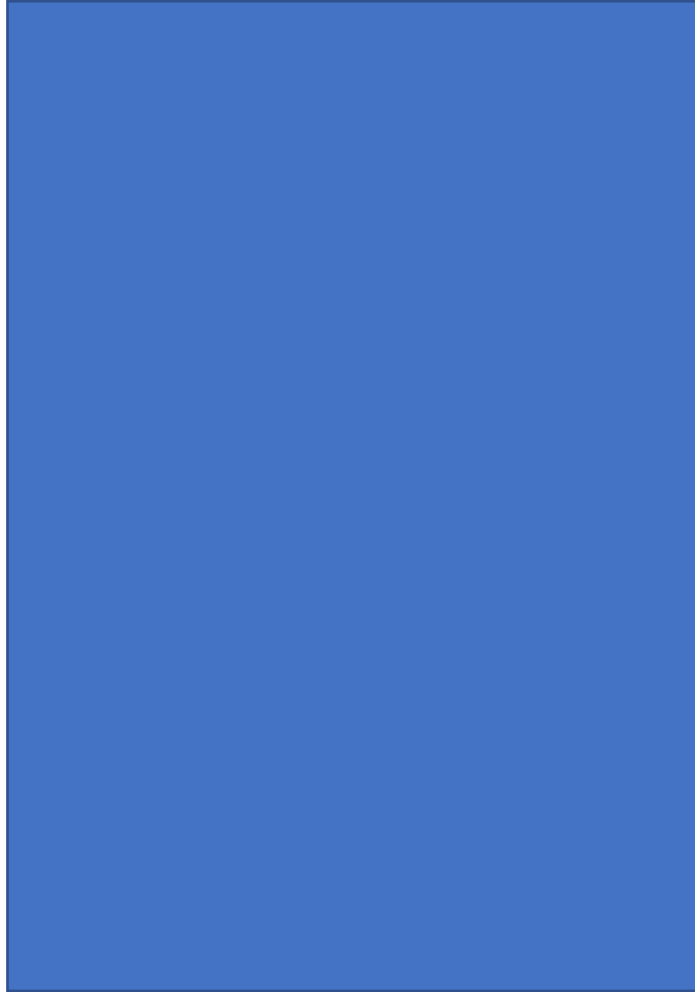


Figure 24: John Landy's sheepskin coat in the process of disassembly by an operative (Landy, 2008a, p.194).



## 6 John Landy's sheepskin coat

The central provocation of this chapter is the story of John Landy's coat. If objects in the world act as part of a refracted (which is to say, a fragmented) version of *self*, it is interesting to imagine what Landy does when he transforms everything he owns (the miscellany – the tin-openers, souvenirs, junk-mail and official correspondence - alongside the more personal mementos) to shreds, granules, pellets and dust. In accounts of the work, Michael Landy's father's sheepskin coat, shredded during *Break Down* with the rest of Landy's possessions, becomes the receptacle for some heavy, woolly narratives of family, inheritance and loss. In telling the story of the coat as frequently as he does, Landy makes it clear that he is executing the destruction of a deeply significant personal possession. The story unfolds over many tellings (see for example Berning, 2012; Burn, 2004; Cork, 2000; Cumming, 2002; Harvie, 2006; Landy, 2002b; Perry, 2013; Stallabrass, 2000; Steiner, 2008; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002; Walford, 2001; Wood, 2001): John Landy's immigration from Ireland as a teenage boy; his life as a manual worker, a digger of tunnels who enjoys his work; his industrial accident at age 37; the life of ill-health that follows and the appalling inadequacy of the financial compensation that he receives from his employers. His son, Michael Landy, is witness to all of this: recipient of the story and at some later point, recipient of the coat.

This chapter gathers around the story of the sheepskin coat three threads of theoretical discourse in a plaiting motion, handling first one concept and then the next to bring together a fat thread of discussion. The three sections of this discursive plait are firstly assemblage theory as it appears in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2013; 1987/2013), secondly, extended mind theory from Andy Clark (2011) and Lambros Malafouris (2013)<sup>1</sup> and thirdly, psychoanalytic object relations theory; particularly the work of Donald Winnicott (1964; 1971/2005). I

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<sup>1</sup> Extended mind theory is a theorisation of the extension of cognitive function via material objects. As will be discussed, any account of these two theorists must incorporate a number of important distinctions, not least in disciplinary terms, since Clark is a philosopher who writes about cognition, while Malafouris, while himself drawing upon a number of theoretical bases, including psychology and philosophy, is an archaeologist. Although Malafouris uses the term 'material engagement theory', for convenience – and to accentuate relevant connections between the two theories and the current discussion – I refer to this entire body of work as 'extended mind theory'.

work these three perspectives one around the other, gathering them into my discussion while minding the ways in which they diverge, to enable consideration of the relationships between thingly personhood; subjective thinghood: subjectivity and materiality as revealed through *Break Down*. The first section of this chapter develops a discussion of the contours of this entwined entity of thing/person as it is revealed in accounts of *Break Down*. In the second section I discuss the utility of object relations theory (particularly the work of Donald Winnicott) as a supplement to extended mind theory that offers ways to think through the possibility of an extended emotional<sup>2</sup> life. I also work this through in the opposite direction, considering how the insights of extended mind theory might assist in elaborating further Winnicott's concept of the transitional object. In the third section, I consider John Landy's sheepskin coat and its destruction, via close reading both of accounts of the coat itself, and an examination of the literary trope of the abandoned coat that carries upon it some element of its previous wearer. I move, then, to consider ways in which Deleuze and Guattari's conception of multiplicity works into the realm of extended meaning-making and personhood. While Winnicott centralises the material qualities of physical things but nevertheless positions material objects as recipients or containers of psychic projections, Deleuze and Guattari turn this vision inside-out, offering instead a dispersed unconscious: a flow that is fully enjoined with the rest of the world. In the fifth and final section I enact a re-evaluation of the questions posed in this chapter. If human thought and feeling are scattered through or projected into the

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<sup>2</sup> A note on terminology: in this thesis as a whole I deploy the term 'affect' in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense – meaning the capacities of an entity to have an effect and to be affected by entities beyond itself. To distinguish from the more encompassing Deleuzo-Guattarian interpretation of the term, in this chapter I make use of other terms, such as 'emotion' and 'feeling', and occasionally to the 'psyche'. Here I should acknowledge the more common usage in which 'affect' refers to territory that might in everyday parlance be discussed in terms of 'emotion'. Where the term 'affect' used in this sense appears in quotations, it has been allowed to stand – however, for the sake of disambiguation, I have decided not to use the same term. It should be acknowledged that this is an imperfect solution, since 'affect,' as used in relation to psychic processes, takes into account a subtler and more complex realm of attachments, fixations, affiliations, debts, and pleasures than can readily be summoned through other terms. Further, since affect (in the sense of psychic process) is concerned with intersecting flows of a range of qualities, strengths and speeds, it should itself be seen, in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, an assemblage (and is certainly contained within Deleuze and Guattari's broader concept of affect, as demonstrated for example in Kathleen Stewart's text *Ordinary Affects* [2007]). The alternatives are, for a variety of reasons, more specific and limited terms; emotion, for example, might be seen through this lens as a sensory output that arises from the complex assemblage at which I gesture here.

material world, what thingly values might we need to incorporate into our concept of what it is to be a human being?

### 6.1 *The biographical thing*

What is the life of things, in relation to human thought and emotion? In staging this conversation I am stimulated by a broader and more encompassing narrative on the material object as a container for psychic processes; personhood; biography, in which the material world is perceived as existing beyond the surface of one's eyes and epidermis and simultaneously, our stuff - Landy's stuff - is taken as a direct and externally readable representation of elements of his personal history. For example, Jen Harvie (2006) suggests that *Break Down* provides a 'metonymic' victory over capital when, despite rigorous processing via the inventory and destruction-line, Landy's things overspill the bounds of this self-imposed bureaucracy to reveal aspects of his identity. As detailed in the introduction (Section 1.2), biographical narratives of Landy and his stuff draw upon a body of social scientific discussion regarding human agency and consumer capitalism. As represented in the account by Kevin Hetherington of 'the skilled and creative person making a social life for themselves through consumer practices' (2004, p.157), via practices of consumption, people are seen to continue to organise their lives in ways that are as ingenious, provisional and productively chaotic. This narrative is supported through reference to individuals' endlessly demonstrated capacity to find meaning in the materiality of the world that surrounds them and particularly in the commodity. Consumers appear as bricoleurs, organising and reorganising a quotidian collage of material belongings and practices (see for example Miller, 2008; Jenkins, 2007; Julier, 2009).

Such concepts arise frequently in the existing literature on *Break Down*, partly because Landy himself assimilates sociological accounts of consumption, citing in his work – often through inclusion in the collages made in the preparation phases of *Break Down* - texts such as *Consumption: As a way of life* (Miles, 1998).<sup>3</sup> This discourse which one might call 'identity through consumption' is exemplified for example in the interview question in which Landy is asked whether 'the evidence, and the inventory, add up to a true picture of who he is' (Wood, 2001). Similarly,

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<sup>3</sup> See also introductory discussion in Section 1.2.1.

writers on design Colin Davies and Monika Parrinder state that while Landy's *Break Down Inventory* is a list, it is also, and nevertheless, 'a resonant representation of identity' (Davies and Parrinder, 2003). Even a visitor to the show who clearly does not 'buy' this discourse nevertheless seems to feel a need to look for Landy in his stuff:

Seeing all his possessions travelling around in front of us seemed to say virtually nothing about him, except that he had the same sort of stuff that other people had. Some of his things obviously meant more to him than others, and there was a suggestion that he was a little peeved by the thoroughness with which operatives despatched his family photographs - scribbling on the faces before tearing them up. But his possessions did not provide any sort of window into telling me what sort of a person Michael Landy is (Walford, 2001).

In such accounts of *Break Down*, Landy's individual material practices can be precisely detailed (see Section 1.2.1). However, they provide little discussion of the psychic mechanisms through which such work takes place. In contrast, in imagining a procedure through which life, feeling, or power might be breathed into a fetish object, Malafouris (2013, p.133)<sup>4</sup> opens the way to considering what it might be not only to think or feel 'via' material objects, but to recognise the extent to which thought and feeling might occur within the object. His material engagement, then, is not meant as analogy, but as the statement of an actual state of affairs that cuts fundamentally across narratives of personhood or subjectivity as entities or qualities that are singular, or self sufficient, or that originate within the innate constitution of the individual.

That said, the stories that are told by Malafouris reveal the warmth and depth of the narratives constructed by human beings via their stuff. Michael Landy seems to exemplify such instincts in relation to his father's sheepskin coat, which he uses to tell a story that positions his family in social and class terms, and him in relation to his dad. Indeed, the narrative of John Landy's accident - and the motif of material objects as extensions of the person of his dad - run through Michael

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'fetish' is used in Malafouris in the anthropological, rather than the Marxian sense. Malafouris makes a comparison between the unknown agency of material objects and the mechanisms or practices through which fetishisation occurs - which is to say, through which objects gain a human, or person-like status. The implications of such transactions are explored more fully later in chapter 6. Through his deployment of this concept Malafouris hopes to gain a methodological approach that enables 'a return to the things themselves as socially alive and active in a primary sense' (Malafouris, 2013, p.133). In short, it is more 'productive', in Malafouris' view, falsely to impute causal capacities to the material world than to wrongly imagine it as inert and passive.

Landy's work. After *Break Down*, this narrative theme emerges in two shows, *Semi-detached* (2004) and *Welcome to my world (built with you in mind)* (2004).<sup>5</sup> As the art historian Gill Perry suggests, 'the narrative of the sheepskin coat' merges into that of *Semi-detached*, which 'presents the history of a traumatized family whose social patterns have been distorted' (2013, pp.48-50) by the after effects of John Landy's accident. If *Scrapheap Services* is a satirical mocking of callous responses to – and deployments of – redundancy and unemployment by the Thatcher government,<sup>6</sup> *Semi-detached* and *Welcome to my world* are, while maintaining that rage, more vulnerable, emotional shows depicting from a son's perspective the native significance and worth of a human being – John Landy – who does not earn money.



Figure 25: Image from *Shelf Life* (Landy, 2004).

*Semi-detached* is a comprehensive survey of John Landy's life and situation (Landy, 2008a; Landy, 2008b): hence the famous recreation in the Tate Britain's Duveen Gallery of the front and back of 62 Kingswood Road, Landy's parents' pebble-dashed, semi-detached house. This minutely accurate, full-scale model takes in the configurations of airbricks, drainpipes, trailing wires, corrosion on the letterbox

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<sup>5</sup> The two are connected in that *Welcome to my world* comprises detailed sketches based on the photographic images from Landy's parents' home, previously used as projections in *Semi-detached*.

<sup>6</sup> See earlier discussion of *Scrapheap Services* in Chapter 4, pages 109-10.

and patchings of mortar. It is a portrayal of the house to which John Landy has been increasingly confined over the years since his accident.

As Perry suggests: 'deprived of the "external" spaces of his working life,' for John Landy, 'DIY was no longer simply a hobby, but a means of negotiating both his masculinity and his domestic confinement' (2013, p.48). The house is cut in half to reveal a smooth, blank intersection, upon which visitors view three projection works: *Four Walls* incorporates images from John Landy's collection of DIY manuals (Landy, 2008, pp.290-5; Steiner, 2008, p.312), hailing the loving work of making and maintaining a home, while also putting into question the idealised simplicity of the ethic of home improvement, via a series of static, mannered, instructional images. The other two series survey objects in situ at 62 Kingswood Road. *No.62* (2004) shows a grittier, mackled-together reality that incorporates images of dust, cobwebs, desiccated insects on windowsills, medication annotated for dosage in spidery biro. But *Shelf-Life* (2004) has a particular kinship to the sheepskin coat destroyed in *Break Down*. As suggested by the title, *Semi-detached*, the 'detachment' of Landy's project to provide a disinterested, systematic audit of his dad's life (Ibid.) is betrayed by works which convey, through the acutely attentive treatment of the subject by Landy, a tender attachment to this house, and to his dad's things. The clutter, dust and accumulation detailed here and in sketches in the show *Welcome to my world* might from some overly-hygienic perspectives seem prurient and rather attacking of Landy's dad. However, what these images convey is the living detail of the fragility and vulnerability of a person and his domestic surroundings.

**Observation: Stills from Shelf Life (2004, in Landy, 2008a, p.304).** *It is here that Landy records his dad's arrangements of objects – magazine clippings, tools, photographs, washers, batteries, cable clips, plugs, pen-knives and tippex, some of which, still in their blister packs, hang on the wall on nails. In one poignant still, a detailed close-up of a black plastic comb, still holding deposits of grease, flakes, and a fan of trailing white hairs. These gatherings of things, by now so infrequently used, are arrayed around the shelf. They form a pleasing composition that seems to express John Landy's careful work of making and remaking himself through his surroundings. This assembly of possessions and their arrangement in relation to one another seem very clearly to act as an organising structure for the man himself, as well as being marked by his presence in other ways. Labels, hand-written to organise phone numbers or a complex regime of*

*medication, even a moth that died and spent years drying undisturbed in the dust: all bring an imminent sense of the person, his habits, and the transience of his presence.*



Figure 26: Illustration from *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a, p.41)

If belongings can act 'as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought' (Turkle, 2007, p.5), this suggests that ownership is not a straightforward matter of the owner's entitlement to dispose of the owned object as she wishes. Instead, the connection between person and thing begins to acquire the more complex lines and furrows of a relationship. Landy forges a narrative of self and of the mundane facets of his relationship with his own things through annotated line drawings of soon to be granulated objects in *Michael Landy / Break Down*. A drawing of a cassette tape is accompanied by the comment, 'the song *Old Tige* would make me cry as a child'; a tube of eye cream: 'clinique eye saver silver comes of ends up that you have glitter eye lids'; a sports holdall: 'lucky purple bag'; a belt buckle: 'old belt buckle that I've been wearing for years Abigail thought it was very me' (Landy 2001a, pp.41-50).<sup>7</sup> Likewise, as discussed in Chapter 5 (pages 156-7), biographical snippets emerge in the cataloguing work of the *Inventory*: exemplary

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<sup>7</sup> Original spellings and punctuation have been preserved. Landy played the cassette of *Old Tige* for his father when he visited *Break Down (The Man Who Destroyed Everything, 2002)*.

are items Ago – Gary Hume, *Clown*, gloss paint on wood, swapped work with the artist, 54 x 28cm, 1997; E1064 – Habitat adjustable aluminium bedside lamp with 40 watt bulb, stolen from Karsten Schubert's cottage, Snettisham, Norfolk; R4368 – Teddy bear Christmas card from John and Ethel Landy (Landy, 2001b), all of which combine as components of Landy's life story.

Cumulatively, then, a gathered and discrete biography does seem to appear through the bricolage of Landy's life as it appears in *Break Down*. This collection of objects is more than a randomly aggregated bunch of stuff (Cumming, 2001; see also Hawkins, 2014); indeed, in the months before *Break Down* Landy discusses this corpus of material as a self-portrait of sorts (Cork, 2000). It is the fruits of a lifetime of consumption; a unified whole that stands in some way as an authentic account of the man. It is indicative of the compelling nature of this aspect of the work that despite pronounced differences in approach between two of the main published academic discussions of *Break Down*, both Jen Harvie (2006) and Harriet Hawkins (2010; 2014) attend closely to the question of objects as biography. As Harvie says, 'Multiple bottles of HP sauce suggested Landy's love of the stuff. And a long list of single socks perhaps indicated his perennial ill-fortune at the launderette but his commitment to making do in the circumstances' (2006, pp.70-71). In her account of the work, Hawkins observes that objects 'are given social lives, biographies, by human storytellers' (2010, p.30), conjuring not objects with agency, not objects entirely separate from human agency, but something else, formed 'unevenly' partway between the two. Certainly, it is clear that for many what animates *Break Down* is the sad poetry of abandoned belongings that, we imagine, must form part of Landy's identity, his personhood.

## 6.2 *John Landy's sheepskin coat*

Mirroring the notion of an object that is biographical – or that somehow possesses human qualities - Harriet Hawkins makes the following intriguing remark on the sheepskin coat belonging to Michael Landy's father, John Landy:

The biographical moment of the object is a shared one; it exists, it is recounted because of the family history that the coat narrates. [...] The boundary between object and person is increasingly fluid and, on the surface at least, increasingly symmetrical (2010, p.28).





Figure 27: Sketch of John Landy's coat and handwritten retelling of its story (Landy, 2001, p.110).

This section explores the ways the coat has been made to signify Michael Landy's family life, and to stand in for John Landy himself, in accounts of *Break Down*. In order to discuss further the idea of a coat that is inhabited by its former owner, I review appearances of second-hand and abandoned winter coats in three literary sources, before returning to an evaluation of the notion of the sheepskin coat as a transitional object in the sense proposed by Winnicott.

It is relevant to begin with a close analysis of a quotation in which Landy recounts the story of his father's coat:

I think the sheepskin coat was there on the conveyor belt from the first day and it just kept travelling round and round. A few of the things I had more attachment to I destroyed last. I also had my record collection playing throughout the two weeks and this jollied the whole occasion along. It made us more destructive in a productive sense. The last song we played every night was Joy Division's *Love Will Tear Us Apart*.

The sheepskin coat was something that my Mum had bought for my dad, but then he had a mining accident and couldn't wear it any more, so it was stored away in a cupboard. Over those two weeks the coat became my Dad in a way. My Dad is still alive, but somehow it became him. It was the last object we destroyed from all the 7,227. Just before that we'd destroyed my BMW speakers, my record collection, so

for the first time it was quiet, though there were thousands of people in the store that last day. All that was left was my Dad's sheepskin coat ... One of the operatives, Barry, shredded it and then there was nothing left (2008, p.108; ellipses reproduced).

It is the quiet that surrounds this telling that is compelling, and the plainness of the delivery, which seems to convey real loss. This episode forms a focal point; indeed, it seems almost the dramatic core of *Break Down*. The artist resists bombast or emotional spectacle in his characteristic unvarnished, direct language and (ostensibly) light tone. Notwithstanding, the implications of what Landy is saying – that the coat ‘became’ his dad, and was then destroyed – are deeply serious. The qualifiers sprinkled throughout (‘I think’; ‘in a way’; ‘somehow’), the ironic timbre of the specification of brand in ‘BMW speakers’ and the rote word play of ‘destructive in a productive sense’ all work to give an impression of detachment, helping Landy to resist a slip into confessional mode. However, the appearance of the song title, *Love Will Tear Us Apart*, cannot but provoke questions. Is love tearing Landy apart? Is Landy tearing love apart? In the final two sentences of the excerpt cited above Landy’s tone is more direct and grave: the rhythmic penultimate sentence and the string of equally-stressed syllables in the final phrase ‘and then there was nothing left’ communicate a stark finality.

**Observation: From video of *Break Down* (Artangel, 2015).** *There is something expressive about the material form of the coat itself: its softness; the way its thickness and slight inflexibility allows it to appear still to be inhabited by its wearer; the wrinkles, like the skin of an elephant; the way the warmth is trapped in by keeping the wool on the inside; those patch-pockets and seams that are not hidden but poke out, showing its construction. The form of the thing summons a sense of the weight of a sheepskin coat on the shoulders and the way its thickness restricts arm movement. The coat has been folded down into a flat, yellow container that rests on the metal rollers of the conveyor belt. It lies on its back with its arms folded flat to its sides like a man in a coffin. A procession of pallets shoulder their way along from right to left, transposing from the horizontal onto a diagonal belt with a regular shuffle. Landy’s dad’s coat moves up the diagonal and pockets first, lapels last, disappears into the top left corner of the screen. I listen for the noise of the bottom corner of each plastic tray against the black rubber of the conveyor but the soft, regular thud that I imagine is obscured by the ambient hum of voices and a high whine that might be an alarm or a small revolving motor. Off-camera, a brittle, plastic snap: another. A tray of smashed ceramics enters to the right and as it*

*trundles onto the diagonal it is a pleasure to hear the bright rasp of the broken shards as they fall across themselves into the bottom corner, and then out of sight.*

Over the course of *Break Down*, the sheepskin coat is subjected relentlessly to description and depiction in interviews, sketches and photographs. It lies meekly in its yellow plastic tray and travels around and around on the conveyor belt. The artist gives 'an average of six interviews a day' during *Break Down* (Landy, 2002b), producing in the process a remarkable volume of iterations of the story of the coat, most of which cover similar ground. There is, perhaps, a hint of impatience with this unrelenting recycling of this narrative, which in the end becomes rather sentimentalised, in Landy's terse account of the coat in a more recent journalistic rendering of the story: 'The last thing to go was my dad's sheepskin coat. People clapped, and then it was over' (Berning, 2012). The story of John Landy's injury appears in most accounts of *Break Down*, though emphasised differently in different accounts: the politicising injustice of the accident and its effect on Landy is only fully recognised in an interview published in *The Times* a few months before *Break Down* (Cork, 2000) – although here, about four months before the show, while the story of John Landy's accident is present the coat is not. In *The Guardian* a year after the event the following account appears:

[John Landy] received compensation, but it was a pitiful recompense for what's become a lifetime of chronic ill-health, and there is a clear and powerful undercurrent of anger in Landy and his work that is borne of his father's experience (Cumming 2002).

Most sources simply comment that due to its sentimental value the coat was – or will be – the last object to be destroyed. Even in the more detailed academic analyses of *Break Down* (Hawkins, 2010; 2014; Harvie, 2006; Perry, 2013) the action and implications of *shredding* the coat in particular are not unpacked in detail. However, the more serious connotations of Landy's reappear at odd moments: Landy says explicitly that shredding the coat 'will feel a bit like disposing of my dad' (Landy, 2008a, p.11) or comments that 'I'm going to kill the operative who destroys my dad's coat,' (Wood, 2002). Finally, in an account that includes a sustained focus on the processes of destruction in *Break Down*, a visitor to the show records the destruction of the coat. In a compelling moment of excess that graphically reveals the final, fragmented form of the coat while continuing to reproduce its corporeal or bodily qualities, he observes that 'a fist-sized piece of

fluff' escapes the shredder (Walford, 2001).<sup>8</sup> Here, at the end of the show, the coat has not only become Landy's dad, but has in some way performed his demise. Indeed, in the BBC4 documentary *The Man Who Destroyed Everything* (2002), Michael Landy reveals that his father suffered a heart attack three months before *Break Down*, and John Landy himself makes, grinningly, the following half-suppressed comment regarding the destruction of his coat: 'That put the nail in the - that *really*-'.

The theorist of fashion Elizabeth Wilson (2003, pp.1-4) meditates on the disquiet that surrounds the clothes of the deceased, examining the way that a coat in a museum or thrift shop is in some sense occupied by its previous wearer.<sup>9</sup> For Wilson this shifty feeling is connected with the function of clothes as an extension of the body. If clothes are human and corporeal, then so might the clothes of the dead be cadaverous. The figure of the garment and specifically the coat that stands in for the body of its previous owner or is inhabited by their spirit encompasses the benign (a longed-for trace of the lost one) as well as an uncanny dread. Charles Dickens (1903) draws on this theme in journalistic writings on his perambulations around Monmouth Street. The following excerpt is striking not only for the garment's summoning of its previous owner, but also for the crepuscular vision in which it is the coat itself that is 'deceased':

We love to walk among these extensive groves of the illustrious dead, and to indulge in the speculations to which they give rise; now fitting a deceased coat, then a dead pair of trousers, and anon the mortal remains of a gaudy waistcoat, upon some being of our own conjuring up, and endeavouring, from the shape and fashion of the garment itself, to bring its former owner before our mind's eye (Ibid.).

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<sup>8</sup> This account offers an unusual perspective on *Break Down* in that it provides a reflexive discussion of the author's thoughts and reactions as a member of the audience. Walford also records noticing a strong current of offence among viewers, and feeling a strong urge to take or replace things from the conveyor belt – even to remove scraps of granulated matter to take as a memento. The resentment of many viewers as recorded in this piece perhaps lends credence to Landy's remark that when he descended from the high platform where he stood for much of the day to supervise the work of *Break Down*, he 'felt vulnerable. [Shredding possessions] is not something one should be doing in the consumerist mecca of Oxford Street' (Landy, 2002b).

<sup>9</sup> The trope of the haunted garment is also rehearsed in popular fashion writing by Justine Picardie (2005, pp.60-5) and in a comic piece by Simon Doonan (2000) in which he employs a psychic to accompany him to a vintage clothes shop. As he suggests, due caution is required when buying cast-offs.

In a lurid example of this trope, a ghost story entitled *The Coat*, the narrator is stalked by a haunted overcoat in a derelict house while sheltering from the rain:

And now It was coming into the room – with an indescribable bobbing sort of motion, the empty sleeves jerking grotesquely at its sides, the skirts flopping and trailing in the dust, was coming slowly towards me; and step by step, with my bulging eyes riveted in awful fascination on the Thing, I was recoiling before it [...] with deadly malevolent purpose, the Thing crept towards me. The empty sleeves were rising and shakily reaching out towards my throat. In another moment they would touch me and then I knew with the most dreadful certainty that my reason would snap (Smith, 1973, p.71)

The compelling details here are the semi-formed mass and incoherent movement – bobbing, jerking, flopping - the emptiness, alongside its unshakeable *intent*. The author calls up that propensity of overcoats to hold a shape and therefore to seem somehow-inhabited – a tendency which, one might observe, certainly affects John Landy's sheepskin coat. The coat that holds an imprint of its owner arises, too, in an episode in Daphne Du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* (1938/2003) in which the narrator, newly arrived at her husband's great house, unwittingly wears the raincoat that had belonged to her predecessor, his deceased, first wife, and finds her lipstick-marked handkerchief in the pocket:

I must have been the first person to put on that mackintosh since the handkerchief was used. She who had worn the coat then was tall, slim, broader than me about the shoulders, for I had found it big and overlong, and the sleeves had come below my wrist. Some of the buttons were missing. She had not bothered then to do it up. She had thrown it over her shoulders like a cape, or worn it loose, hanging open, her hands deep in the pockets (Ibid., pp.132-3).

Here, one might read a more pragmatic though no less compelling story of habitude sunk into the things we handle or wear every day. Rebecca's mackintosh has been marked by her wearing and in particular the detail of the missing buttons '[record] the body that had inhabited the garment' (Stallybrass, 1998, p.196). In the insouciant detail of a coat thrown on like a cape, the ease of hands deep in pockets, the 'pink mark' of lipstick on a handkerchief, the coat summons for the narrator a vivid impression of the dead woman's physical presence.

A coat affords a boundary that allows one to walk in the cold or wet without becoming cold or wet oneself. It is worn on the back like a shell. A rain coat forms a cold, slick outer layer against which raindrops can fall and slide (Belmonte, 2007); a heavy winter overcoat, meanwhile, is somewhat permeable, soft and fibrous. It is organic in appearance, like a layer of fur. The uncanny facility of a thick winter coat

to hold the shape and posture of its wearer makes John Landy's sheepskin coat in *Break Down* a material memorial to the man (no matter that he is still alive at the time of the show). There is history in the bulges and creases, and this is called up beautifully by the fact that the marks of previous wear and especially worn-in folds in the arms were known by clothes menders of the nineteenth century as 'memories' (Stallybrass, 1998, p.196). In its emptiness, the second-hand coat functions as a marker of negative space that refers to the absent body of its original owner. It is through this quality that something of the vitality of previous owners can be found in their clothes.

**Observation: From video material showing John Landy's coat being taken apart (The Man Who Destroyed Everything, 2002).** *Landy looks down from the sorting platform. He wears plastic safety goggles. He holds on to the rail. John Landy's coat lies in a yellow, plastic tray. With no clear space in the work bay, the tray containing the coat is placed slantwise on top of a couple of other trays. It looks surprisingly light. With two hands, the operative picks up the coat, and you can see him getting a sense of its consistency and weight by passing it across with a brisk little movement from hand to hand. Still some life there; it lolls like a child being lifted into bed. He begins to feel for the buttons. Cut away: two cameras – one, a big television camera. Cut back: the coat is open now, and the operative is already at its woolly insides, nipping its seams with a stanley knife. Cut away – another camera and a line of spectators. A man in a green cagoule stands side-on to the work bay. He keeps glancing at his companion. Cut back: the operative is putting pieces of the coat into the shredder. Perhaps fortunately, it's too high for him to place them with any kind of ceremonious purpose; he has to half throw them to get them in there at all. Cut to Landy: he's still standing on the platform. He grasps the rail with his hands, and gazes through his safety goggles. The camera is prurient. It loses and then regains focus. Hovers. A close up. The corners of his mouth pinch. He searches with his eyes. A camera flashes. He turns, head then body. He walks out of shot.*

If ever there was an example to recommend a psychoanalytic account of *Break Down* (symbolically destroys father: *check*) wouldn't Landy's shredding of his dad's sheepskin coat be it? As discussed earlier, the significance of his father and his father's things runs through Landy's work. That said, the work of *Break Down*, its imposition of bureaucratised and industrialised processes on Landy's work of disposal (the warm coat folded into a shallow plastic tray, circling on the conveyor

belts under fluorescent light) works to hold the coat – the event – at a remove from Landy himself. In addition, as seen in discussion on dust and the fragment in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3), to shred John Landy's coat is not to destroy it as such but merely to transform it into fists of fluff and fibre. What Landy exposes in *Break Down* is that material objects are not inert but dynamic. He reveals the process inherent in each object; its life cycle both in cultural and physical terms. We see this in his research before the event on the notion of ergonomic 'life cycle assessment' of commodities, compulsory obsolescence and recycling (Landy, 2008a, pp.102-3; 109-10). In *Break Down* he turns objects into narratives – stories of their own composition.

This in turn inflects Landy's actions when he destroys the sheepskin coat. I propose the following narrative. The coat becomes a cipher for – that is, in some way it stands in the place of - Landy's dad. It is a soft, warm, human-shaped thing that is metonymic of all the numerous unquantifiably precious things – the kinds of belongings that in some way constitute a debt or exact a price from their owner - the love letters, photographs and art works that are also shredded during *Break Down*. The coat – and all of Landy's other belongings – are inventoried. They revolve on the conveyor belts, are dismantled and shredded by Landy's operatives and finally, sent to landfill. Through *Break Down*, Michael Landy's dad's sheepskin coat ceases only to be a coat and becomes a story that twists, opens and resolves. The coat becomes a story. In particular, it becomes a way to tell the story of a human being who was treated as though he were garbage: who cannot work, who is loved by his son. In raising up the story of the sheepskin coat Landy devotes the entire work to his dad, stripping back his possessions over the fortnight of the show until his dad's coat is the one thing to remain.

They buy it on hire purchase. John Landy has an accident that damages his spine, and then it is too heavy for him to wear. His son receives the coat - what a burden, what a debt - too heavy for him to wear either, and through *Break Down*, he pulls off the magic trick of both keeping the coat and throwing it away.

### 6.3 *Object relations and the multiplicity*

In order to extend this analysis more fully into discussion of the structures, strategies, flows – in other words, the assemblage that might be referred to as emotion or attachment – I read extended mind theory alongside object relations theory and especially Donald Winnicott’s contributions on the transitional object. Winnicott supplements extended mind theory – and the work of Malafouris in particular – in that he explicitly positions material objects in their very materiality as the recipients or containers of particular psychic (not only cognitive) objects, values or processes. That said Winnicott does not offer an account of the nature of matter *qua* matter. In object relations theory the external achieves significance only as an accessory to internal processes; therefore, the physical object is treated as a surface for the reception of psychic projections. It is nevertheless useful to bring object relations into conversation with Landy’s *Break Down* because it enables discussion of the ways in which material objects and substances work in relation to psychic processes. I begin by providing a brief introduction to object relations theory. In the context of this chapter, it is also important to position object relations theory in relation to the Deleuzian concept of the multiplicity, sometimes discussed using the term ‘schizoanalysis’: the two perspectives share a defining acceptance of the notion of an unconscious, despite the fundamental differences regarding its formation and nature that will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The emphasis on distributed qualities of the human psyche as expressed in my summary of object relations theory below might seem at first to suggest a direct affinity between this and Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage-thinking. In fact, as will be seen, Deleuze and Guattari project an extension of psychic process between the person and the object as part of a total connection with the currents of life that move through, and beyond, the individual, merging person and universe. In contrast, in object relations theory we see in operation a notion of the unitary or molar human figure that begins and ends with itself. That said, in the concrete specificity particularly of Winnicott’s accounts of interactions with objects in play, I find object relations theory to be a useful conceptual tool to articulate the nature of individuals’ relationships with things (and individuals’ *doing of* relationships, via things).



Object relations theory begins with Melanie Klein's elaboration of psychoanalytic theory and in particular her description of the first months of an infant's life (1946/2000). At the very beginning, she suggests, the infant does not perceive any boundary between itself and the rest of the world. As the baby begins to learn the cause-and-effect in which crying brings sustenance and comfort, she attributes the force that causes these necessary things to be delivered directly to her own will. Over the first months of life the baby is obliged to recognise her own (at first unbearable) separateness and vulnerability. As Winnicott (1964) suggests, it is the task of the primary carer (generally described in these texts as the mother) to uphold this misconception, gradually managing the infant's disillusionment from her first phantasies of omnipotence as she recognises her mother's, and her own, separate, independent nature and begins to form a new conception of herself as a discrete entity that is both physically and psychically bounded. Given the immediacy, urgency and wholly engrossing nature for the infant of the most basic corporeal experiences and processes of taking-in and pushing-out, in object relations the infant psyche is located in the physical body as well as the mind. The Kleinian conceptualisation of the part object is an attempt to account for the baby's earliest comprehension of the independent existence of her primary carer, in which the body is fragmented – or understood and experienced in terms of discrete parts – in order to keep the positive experiences from the negative. This 'split' is achieved by consuming the good (whole, safe, satiating and comforting) object, for example, the breast from which nourishment comes. Meanwhile, the terrifying rage that occurs when sustenance is not available or the nurturing parent does not come quickly is pushed out, creating a bad (fragmented, unreliable, thwarting, dangerous) object. As Klein says: 'the bad object is not only kept apart from the good one but its very existence is denied, as is the whole situation of frustration and the bad feelings (pain) to which the frustration gives rise' (1946/2000, p.134). In the Kleinian account, an infant, well supported, can in time move from the fragmentation of this early stage, known as the paranoid-schizoid position, toward a self that is experienced as integrated and self-contained.

The account provided in object relations theory is of a psyche that makes use of and actively incorporates its psychic and material surroundings. This theory can be reframed in terms of a reconceptualisation of the human psyche that, while a single or molar entity, is nevertheless multitudinous in its reach or capacities. Indeed, in Winnicottian object relations especially it is specifically the externality

of the material object that fits it for use as an exploratory tool - or to think this more precisely in the terms employed in extended mind theory, an *extension* of the psyche. This is not clear-cut, however, since it is also true that in object relations theory, material objects and substances do not work for or by themselves but are *animated* through their reception and containment of psychic projections. For both Klein and Winnicott, clinical practice incorporates play, including children's arrangement of and talk about things (a map, some string, a spatula, a soft piece of blanket). As such, their work incorporates physical, external objects and prioritises the material characteristics and capacities of these objects. However, in Klein particularly, while external objects are important in infants' processes of coming-to-terms with their own position in ontological terms, the internal is not a simple, mimetic repeat of what is going on in the world around the child.

Winnicott goes much further towards suggesting that the material surroundings of the baby directly shape her inner life. The 'transitional' space described by Winnicott is the space of the always-unfinished move between subjective and objective; the (ideally) sheltered materiality of apparently omnipotent infancy towards separation and the ability to tolerate the concept of an external world that exists independently. This move is always partial and unfinished and the notion of transition; the importance of what Winnicott calls 'the intermediate area' continues – and continues to employ physical *things* external to the body to stand in for values somewhere in between interior and exterior - into adulthood. His well known essay *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena* (1971/2005, pp.1-34) marks the beginning of a split between Winnicott and Klein, who omitted the piece from an edited collection specifically because it provides a more diffuse account of influences on the psyche (Glover, n.d., Ch.6). Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2013) stage a very similar argument with Klein when they assert that while children's first experiences may occur around their families, the 'amazing' encounters they have do not pertain exclusively to familial relationships. Instead they posit a psyche that is not singular in focus, but instead is distributed, enabling the child to relate to his surroundings and play 'let's pretend' without these activities always having to relate back to the mother and father. The following excerpt from Deleuze and Guattari is strikingly reminiscent of Winnicott, in the attention it pays to the importance of the material qualities of a child's immediate environs:

Let us consider a child at play or a child crawling about exploring the various rooms of the house he lives in. He looks intently at an electrical outlet, he moves his body

about like a machine, he uses one of his legs as though it were an oar, he goes into the kitchen, into the study, he runs toy cars back and forth. It is obvious that his parents are present all this time, and that the child would have nothing if it were not for them. But that is not the matter at issue. The matter at issue is to find out whether everything he touches is experienced as a representative of his parents (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972/2013, pp.61-2).

In considering the differences between the two, it is helpful to contextualise the Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of multiplicity in terms of their work against psychoanalysis. Here, the work of Klein is deployed as an example of the imposition of narratives of family. The clinical practice of psychoanalysis emerges as a set of procedures that rely on the domination of the analysand, whose experiences, concerns, dreams and fixations are rewritten *on and in the analysand him/herself* (1972/2013, pp.60-1). In contrast, what we are shown in Deleuze and Guattari's 'schizophrenic' phantasies of wolves, birds or fields of tiny cavities, is that the mechanisms of hegemonic power permeate our inner narrative at all levels, not least the unconscious. This is where we take in, and/or are taken into the energy of the pack; 'an unconscious that is social, historical, and natural all at once' (Smith and Protevi, 2013). There is no boundary point through which the libido cannot progress – instead, it 'suffuses everything' (Ibid., p.40). As Brian Holmes (2013) has it: '[b]y recognizing the schiz of the self, you can start to hear a collective assemblage of enunciation, even when the speaking subject is ostensibly an individual'. Freud's failure (and therefore Klein's) is, Deleuze and Guattari argue, the failure to comprehend this fecund multiplicity, substituting a molar account of '*the father, the penis, the vagina*' (1987/2013, p.31). Nevertheless, it is conceded, in her 'marvellous discovery of part-objects, that world of explosions, rotations, vibrations' (1972/2013, p.61) Klein brings to the surface something of vital importance, even if the discovery does not lead her to effect a fundamental reshaping of her understanding of the psyche.

In assemblage theory what is important is not the *nature* of the part-object; the truncated psychic entity imagined by Klein, but rather the way it *works* by connecting and disconnecting with other entities. For example, rather than considering the breast as a self-contained presence, Deleuze and Guattari write about the machine of mouth-and-breast, which facilitates the flow of milk. They imagine these sites of corporeal conjunctions or processes (*schizzes*) between or within bodies as slicing functions and flows; however, rather than merely severing (literally, marking a cut-off point) these slicings are generative. Like punctuation

in a sentence, *schizzes* define and remake the machines into which they cut. In this way Deleuze and Guattari establish a way of talking about a lively, heterogeneous and internally responsive multiplicity which is 'rhizomatic'; that is, 'libidinal, unconscious, molecular, intensive'. This stands in opposition to another kind of account which is, conversely, 'arborescent'; that is, sequentially hierarchical; 'unifiable, totalizable, organizable' (1987/2013, p.37).<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the productive mess proposed in Deleuze and Guattari's account of multiplicity, the psychoanalytic account appears as a defining example of the external imposition of an inflexible schema or theory (or *tracing*) as opposed to the lively, responsive dance of counter-description or mutual inscription described by Deleuze and Guattari as *mapping* (1987/2013, pp.11-13). In Chapter 3 (pages 68-71) I allude to the multiplicity as an inclusive concept that needs to be understood as working across the ambits of the physical, social, and psychic. In phantasies of a number of teeth in a mouth, beetles in a swarm; when preoccupied by fragments jostling and shifting in a tray, or transported by the sight of dust motes shimmering, swimming

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<sup>10</sup> The allowances made in the Deleuzo-Guattarian account for decomposition and reconstitution as a vital element of the production of desire can also be expressed analogously through an account of the ambiguity, conditionality and *mess* of the mouth-and-breast machine. Thanks to Klein, the breast appears frequently in discussions of the part object cited here. However, it is called up in the most markedly squeamish tones. There are two exceptions: in a typically warm, if idealised account, Winnicott shows the sensual, soft and, especially, time consuming trial and error of a baby and mother 'getting the idea' of infant feeding (1964, pp.45-9). Secondly, in the only rendition to come close to acknowledging mess, Brian Massumi enacts a satisfactorily messy replay – lumpy infant regurgitations remain invisibly on 'the grown-up baby's chin' as it exhales 'a smell of rot' (1992, pp.72-7) - which is nevertheless permeated with disgust.

The detached good and bad breasts in Klein evoke a vision of these truncated entities floating ghoulishly in mid-air, or presented on a plate a la Saint Agatha. In *Anti-Oedipus* the cartoon sink-plunger/milking machine noise of a vacuum forming is faintly discernible as the 'organ-machine' breast, 'a machine that produces milk,' 'is plugged into an energy-source-machine' infant mouth; 'a machine coupled to it' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972/2013, p.11). The entire procedure appears to take place in a vacuum. One imagines the docking of a space-station. For Deleuze and Guattari the whole point is that desiring-machines may facilitate squelchy, drippy and above all, haphazard proceedings – all of which renders the 'plugging', the passive tense, and the indefinite article entirely inapt.

In pursuit of the lively contingencies of the multiplicity, I want to evoke instead as an illustration of productive complications that run together: the particular timbre of infant cry that provokes a letting-down of milk (it's not entirely an *illusion* of early infancy that infants make their own milk appear); the satisfying flow; the milk that appears too slowly, provoking frantic rage; the gushing flow that appears too quickly and which seems to scare; the functional 'coupling' or alternatively, the sleepy infant mouth that is never quite wide enough open (never quite hungry enough?) and over time makes a wound on the breast; the milk that is fatty; the milk that is thinner but more sugary; the milk that conveys chemical pollutants with which the mother has come into contact, years past, hitherto stored in the fatty tissue of her breasts, into the tiny body of the suckling infant. It's the very *profuse* nature of causation – and the mess - that makes the multiplicity a good way to describe things.

and shifting in a shaft of sun, we are connected with the swarm, which is to say, with all of nature; with the unconscious.

On the basis of his work on transitional phenomena it seems likely that Winnicott, as much as Deleuze and Guattari, might have said that Klein miscomprehends part-objects by imagining them as purely phantasmic and framing the dramas of the psyche purely in relation to the Oedipal triangle: ‘the famous Mummy-Daddy-Me’ (Genosko, 2000, p.54). I have proposed that the Deleuzo-Guattarian account of the psyche as multiple and refracted is perhaps not so remote from object relations as written by Winnicott, given the account he provides of a distributed psyche that incorporates material, external objects. Indeed, in a later critique, Guattari describes psychoanalysis, as Genosko says, as a ‘politico-religious movement with a vested interest in the collective paranoia which it studies’ (Ibid., p.57). Here, Guattari draws upon and generalises from Winnicott’s account of transitional phenomena to posit a therapeutic triangulation that includes a critical account of the psychiatric institution within which analysis takes place.

Fadi Abou-Rihan lays out some points of commonality in an introduction to schizoanalysis from a psychoanalytic perspective:<sup>11</sup>

Much as the Winnicottian found object is hardly inert, the flow described by Deleuze and Guattari is far from being a mere traffic in static consumable objects. What is at stake here is the production of an entire schema of production, distribution and consumption, of needs and demands, of recordings, exchanges and circulations – a production of, in sum, a construction that not only crosses the boundary between the collective and the individual, the economic and the psychic – as ideology, culture, thought or belief – but also a construction that reconfigures the materials and components of experience itself, whether psychological or not. Here, Deleuze and Guattari’s view of production as the grounding of what it is to be human – their version of an *arche* – is no more abstract or overarching than, say, Winnicott’s promotion of playing as natural and universal [...] (2015, p.24).

I agree with the gist of Abou-Rihan’s argument here. Winnicott’s transitional phenomena does, like the flows imagined in Deleuze and Guattari’s work on the multiplicity, depend on a vision of the psyche as an entity that is simultaneously mutable in form, and dependent on the concrete, physical environment. However,

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<sup>11</sup> Hence, I think, the somewhat defensive tone. It might come as a jarring surprise to readers accustomed to the Deleuzo-Guattarian argument that psychoanalysis works through the external imposition of Oedipal narratives, to be reassured that the work of Deleuze and Guattari is *not inflexible* and *just as dynamic* as Winnicott’s.

it is essential to acknowledge that the foundation of the two approaches differs entirely. Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis turns Winnicott's assumptions about the nature of the psyche inside-out. Where Winnicott emphasises the importance of material objects as extensions of the self, not quite part of, or separate from the subject, in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, a person might (perhaps) experience herself as a whole, self-contained individual, but in fact is always part of the far bigger 'whole'; the world at large.

#### 6.4 *Thing human / human thing*

Of the two writers on extended mind theory discussed here, Andy Clark (2011) offers an account of the nature of matter that does not extend much beyond reference to Gibson's account of affordances (1979/1986). As this might suggest, he employs matter only in as much as the human body and mind itself might employ them. Lambros Malafouris goes further towards a consideration of the ontological status of matter, suggesting that the power of non-human entities to make changes in the world – one might call it a facility for causality – is a matter of process and connection, not a fixed attribute that can be located in one place or another (that is, to things or humans). As he says, 'agency and intentionality [...] are the properties of material engagement' (2013, p.119). Both Clark and Malafouris offer an account of objects outside the human body as integral to human cognitive function (and Malafouris significantly extends this by offering an account in which matter *might be* vitally constitutive of human psychic processes and cultural lives). The meticulous explorations provided by both authors open up a set of parameters, questions, and concerns to guide the encounters that follow.

The notion of biographical things or transitional objects that exist somewhere between the internal and external is an apt example of a material object acting as a physical extension of *consciousness*, not just cognition. To begin to think between Winnicottian object relations and my discussion of extended mind theory, it is important to consider that neither Clark (2009; 2011) nor Malafouris (2013) seek to *demonstrate* that an extension of emotion or attachment occurs between person and object. As I will discuss below, this is *certainly* not the kind of transaction that interests Clark. Where Malafouris' worked examples come closer, even the most expressive, his account of the relationship between the work of the mind and hands in relation to the affordances of clay in his 'cognitive ecology of pottery making' (2013, p.207; see also page 127 in this thesis), does not directly

encompass the realm of the structures, parameters and relationalities that produce emotion. When discussing physical objects that have more longevity than pixelated screen images Clark *does* confront the possibility of losing the material accoutrements of one's extended mind – however, this eventuality is considered only in terms of the immediate *cognitive* and practical difficulties that might be caused.

For instance, in a key example of extended mind – a thought experiment concerning a notebook used by Otto, a man with memory loss, to remind him of the location of the museum – Clark (2011, p.224) acknowledges that the notebook could be lost. However, he observes, one might equally lose a memory 'kept' in one's brain – or indeed, a part of one's brain, to disease or injury – as lose one's brain-extension, the notebook. In opposition to those who suggest that emotion may also be distributed across or contained by material objects (an approach he terms 'extended *conscious* mind'), Clark rigorously defends his projection of an extended mind theory as applicable to cognition but *not* consciousness, and therefore *not emotion*. He works systematically through various attempts to assert or support a theory of extended conscious mind and concludes that most are not supported by the available evidence, and if they were, this evidence would upset the one theory that currently works as a logical argument. Therefore, in his estimation, 'joy' – indeed all emotion and the entire 'machinery of conscious experience is probably all in the head' (2009, p.987).

Malafouris diverges from Clark in his account of emotion and its potential extension into the surrounding material world, remarking that it is only helpful to discuss the extension of human cognition via the material world if 'the sensual, affective and emotional aspects of human intelligent behaviour' (2013, p.85) are also taken into account. In exploring the kinds of psychic connections that might be made and held together with the assistance of physical objects Malafouris characterises cognition and emotion as absolutely entwined. As he seems to suggest in the below excerpt on memory, it is only necessary to consider the contours of this cognitive/emotional function to understand how difficult it could be truly to bisect the two categories:

If we are to understand the idiosyncratic abilities of objects, past or present, to make us forget or remember, to guide our everyday interaction, to channel and signify social experience, and to sustain our embodied routines, we should resist or bypass our modern representational or computational preoccupations and

allow a truly meaningful sense of how the material world constitutes our existence as human beings to emerge (2013, p.87).

I imagine that Clark would contest this conception of the 'truly meaningful' since in his account 'meaningful' is a value that has to do with the statistical validity and significance of empirical evidence. In other words, the two arguments run on the basis of entirely different criteria. Where Clark argues on the basis of *what can currently be demonstrated* in cognitive terms and through the operation of logic, Malafouris discusses the *potential utility* of the proposed theoretical approach.

However, what unites the perspectives of Clark (2009; 2011), Malafouris (2013) and Winnicott (1964; 1971/2005) is that it is the externality, and the specific form of material objects, that enables them to form part of the human assemblage. To take seriously Malafouris' suggestion that 'the material world constitutes our existence as human beings' (2013, p.87) it is necessary to imagine that it is the very unbiddable nature, the ontological opacity of things, that enables their affordances as extensions or receptacles for human thought and feeling. This can be considered via Clark's discussion of the 'epistemic action' (2011, p.70; see also Salter, 2015, p.103) – the physical action designed to advance one's knowledge (as opposed to a 'pragmatic action' that achieves an immediate practical goal). Here, we see for example that a note written on paper not only holds one's thoughts, but by making them other or apart from us, can enable the extension of further layers of complexity. In Malafouris (2013, pp.209), the figure of the potter who, with fingertips, senses and works with the subtle densities of a specific ball of clay that cannot be known *a priori*, to make a pot of a particular height or with sides of a particular thickness, is another example. This concept can be developed further into the territory of the psyche via Winnicott's close description of a baby's explorations of the affordances of a piece of fabric in the following excerpt from his work on transitional phenomena. While thumb-sucking:

- (i) with the other hand the baby takes an external object, say a part of a sheet or blanket, into the mouth along with the fingers; or
- (ii) somehow or other the bit of cloth is held and sucked, or not actually sucked; the objects used naturally include napkins and (later) handkerchiefs [...]; or
- (iii) the baby starts from early months to pluck wool and to collect it and to use it for the caressing part of the activity [...]; or



- (iv) mouthing occurs, accompanied by sounds of ‘mum-mum’, babbling, anal noises, the first musical notes, and so on (1971/2005, p.5).<sup>12</sup>

Here, Winnicott conveys a profound respect for the baby’s own discovered strategies of exploration and comfort. Since it is an exploratory, as well as a comforting action, these explorations most certainly constitute epistemic actions as defined by Clark. Processes of understanding, by feeling against the skin, qualities such as soft, woolly, inside and outside, damp and dry – are positioned as essential to the infant’s work of placing him or herself in the world. The treasured soft toy or other object used by some babies and young children during the process of psychic separation from their primary carer is called a ‘transitional’ object not (only) in reference to a temporal transition, but also to a transition that occurs in relational terms, not for some symbolic reason but because the object is made to exist between the child’s inner life and the outer life with which she must come to terms.

It can also be seen that the specific affordances or properties of the object are therefore essential to its usefulness as a transitional object. In Winnicott, a ball of string that can be looped and hooked around the furniture is useful to the boy-analysand specifically for its capacity to do this (Ibid., pp.22-7). Indeed, multiple uses array around each object, user and context so the string might also tie a sapling to a supporting post; a ball of string might also be rolled across the ground like a ball, or used to make a trail. More relevant in relation to Winnicott, the ball of string contracts - or gives rise to - multiple figurative potentialities. In his case study on ‘string boy’ we are presented, therefore, with a ball of string which can be held in the hands, and a ball of string that can wrap around chair legs in order to wrap and bind elements that might otherwise fall apart (1971/2005, pp.20-7).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Here, in the immersive detail with which Winnicott describes the textures and valences of encounters with physical things, he demonstrates a special facility for taking on board the significance of the immediate physical surroundings of the individual. The psychoanalyst (and analysand of Winnicott’s) Margaret Little, recounts a tale in which, during a talk at the British Psycho-Analytical Society in wartime London there were ‘bombs dropping every few minutes and people ducking as each crash came. In the middle of the discussion someone I later came to know as D.W. [Winnicott] stood up and said, “I should like to point out that there is an air raid going on,” and sat down. No notice was taken, and the meeting went on as before’ (Little, 1985, in Glover, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 5 (pages 130-2) for a discussion of multiplicity in relation to the bobbin and string in Freud’s discussion of the symbolic game *fort/da*. In relation specifically to the ‘string boy’ case,

*Observation: Sketch of Landy's father's coat (Landy, 2001a, p.110; see Figure 27). The sheepskin coat seems postured half toward the viewer, its vivacity clear in the arms, which seem to stand forward, and especially in the wooliness of its collar and seams. The dark of a buttonhole, a slightly gaping pocket, and the ends of the sleeves, shore up a sense of heavy warmth. Landy's handwriting wavers below, itself a dense fabric.*

Something of the life of objects as suggested by Winnicott can be seen in Landy's sketch of his dad's coat. The power of the transitional object rests on its concrete capacities and properties: it 'must seem to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or life of its own' (Ibid., p.7). The quiddity (that is, the 'this'-ness) of Landy's dad's coat is similar to that of the teddy or blanket with its particular smell. In Winnicott's terms, Landy's dad's coat is a clearly applicable example of a transitional object: it is a thing that holds some important value for Landy, partway between himself and the outside world. Compellingly, this is not presented by Landy as an act of imagination. Rather, as he says, the coat 'became' his dad. This moment of magical thinking is reminiscent of Malafouris' description of the ways in which fetish objects (in the anthropological sense: see page 172, footnote 4) are 'generated' through a cognitive process through which an intangible value appears to inhere in and animate a physical object, so that 'interaction between persons and fetishes resembles interaction between persons rather than interaction between persons and things' (2013, p.133). Here, it may seem that humans have power over things, and/or things have power over humans. Indeed, it is in precisely this sense that such an object can be said still to be inhabited by its former owner. It is this space – the same space in which a mourner might embrace and bury her face in the fibres of a now-empty garment – to which Winnicott addresses himself.

### 6.5 'and then there was nothing left'

In considering these articulations of thing and human Michael Landy's transformation of his belongings into fragments and dust is brought into conversation with the notion from extended mind theory that our cognitive functions are woven through, scattered, and refracted across, the material objects

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see also Mavor (2007, pp.58-60). As she warns, this case of Winnicott's, while informative about string, boyhood and transitional spaces, also deploys a notable, and distressing, 'effemophobia'.

that surround us. The material destruction of *Break Down* is perhaps especially provocative when considered in the light of this account of the mind as an assemblage that includes material objects. Where in many accounts *Break Down* is treated as in some sense standing for other conditions, values or circumstances, in the context of extended mind theory it is important to reclaim and restate the actual state of affairs in which Landy *really was reducing all of his belongings to granules and shreds*.

This chapter has pursued the narrative in which Landy somehow destroys his dad by shredding his coat in *Break Down*. This final section will explore the idea that in granulating all of his possessions the artist is in some sense destroying himself. In this moment, *Break Down* appears as an attempt to rend and test the fabric of connections and associations of which Landy himself is composed: to destruction-test what he is made of. Looking to extended mind theory, what might it mean to destroy all of one's belongings in a context in which objects are not only companions to thought and feeling, not only close accomplices but actually *integral* to the assemblage that forms the entirety of the person? What is it for a person to lose or break an object that has formed part of – and in actual fact, *is* part of – his cognitive and psychic apparatus and as such, is synonymous with his experiences and memories? In this final section of the chapter, conceptions of personhood as multiple are brought into conversation with Landy's endeavours of destruction.

A number of accounts of *Break Down* speculate on the work as an act of self-destruction, or a calling-up of the imagery of death and bereavement. In a representative example, Burn (2004) interprets the work as 'a ritual acting out of the disintegration that is the only end of every human life'. This appearance of material fragmentation as a metaphor for the fragmentation of subjectivity or self is echoed in some ways by Landy's comment – on a number of occasions – that the process of destroying his belongings was a death of kinds. This reading of the work recalls the episode in which Landy's mother attends *Break Down*, perhaps imagining that (as in some of Landy's previous works) the project will involve some element of allegory, make-believe or sham. She realises that Landy is indeed in the process of destroying his own possessions in their entirety and becomes distressed – so Landy asks her to leave. It is striking that Landy so immediately connects this with a narrative about his own death:

I spotted my mum crying and it started to feel as if I was preparing for my own funeral. So I had to come down the ladder and throw her out. I wondered whether I was the first artist ever to throw his mum out of his own exhibition (Landy, 2002b; see also Cumming, 2002; *The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).

Jen Harvie also picks up on this theme of death and bereavement in her remark that *Break Down* was:

a sort of hyperbolic clearing away of a life – the kind of thing we do when close friends or relatives have died, or when people anticipate their own deaths. [...] For me and others I spoke to, there was something intimately affecting about watching this rite of passage, this clearance of a life, this self-imposed watershed that Landy was performing (2006, pp.28-9).

In a macabre moment, Landy comments that toward the end of the fortnight the viewing platform from which Landy supervised the work of destruction 'had transformed into my gallows' (Landy, 2002b), and on a number of occasions, that the event was like his funeral. In a representative instance he says:

This is a celebration of a life, but I'm still alive. People come in who I haven't seen for years. It's really nice. I'm happy every day. It's like my own funeral, but I'm alive to watch it (Wood, 2001; see also Burn, 2004; Corner, 2010).

There is in *Break Down* an elegiac strand in which the seemingly pragmatic labour of disposal appears as a *memento mori* – for Landy, for his father, or maybe for anybody who uses material objects as containers for all the various ways in which we produce and reproduce our internal lives (so all of us, perhaps). This surfaces not only in the act of destroying objects but also in the way that Landy's things on the conveyor belt might, Landy hopes, remind visitors of their own things – they might 'see objects they recognise, maybe something they've just bought, that they have in their carrier bags' (Landy, 2001a, p.108; see also Stallabrass, 2000; Landy, 2008, p.106). Cumming (2001) also equates things destroyed with human beings deceased, commenting that *Break Down* 'encourages the witness to [...] wonder how much of what it is to be human is in what we own' and characterising the catalogue of objects displayed on the wall as 'lists of war dead'. In a later text he compares the missing belongings of Landy's which escaped being destroyed to missing limbs (Cumming, 2002).

This theme in which perishing stuff is metonymic of the perishing human body re-emerges in relation to Landy's later work *Semi-detached* (2004), in which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the artist considers and frames his father's house

and effects in ways that seem absolutely bound up with the older man's mortality. As the artist himself has said:

As Dad was slowly deteriorating so was [the house]. Because the only jobs he was kind of left with was jobs around the house. So as he was kind of deteriorating, his body was deteriorating and so was the house, so he kind of started to lose interest in the house and somehow the house, I kind of thought, became his body, in a way, kind of slowly falling apart (Landy, 2008b).

This extraordinary utterance by Landy feels absolutely connected with the space in *Break Down* that is occupied by the shredding of his father's sheepskin coat. In a similar way, it opens up an array of responses, including the tenderness and disgust that can arise from an awareness of the acuteness of another's corporeal vulnerabilities. It is also striking that in recording the minutiae of his father's belongings, Landy makes explicit the connection between body and belongings in a way that never quite occurs in his discussion of *Break Down*. Only one journalistic article on the work makes any such suggestion. Here, in an interview nine years after *Break Down*, Landy relates that he was 'paranoid' throughout, drinking heavily, taking Solpadeine and smoking 'secret fags' to relieve his anxiety. In a precise reversal<sup>14</sup> of his account in Wood (2001) at the time, he says:

People turned up who I hadn't seen for years. It felt like I was attending my own funeral and I became obsessed with the thought that I was witnessing my own death, or jinxing myself or my family (Corner, 2010).

The effect of this 'destructive and nihilistic' act was so intense, he comments, that he came to a complete standstill, making no art for a full year afterwards. It may be, then, that Landy himself experienced the work as an act of negation that worked not only on his stuff, but on himself. To think through this conflation of the shredding of things and human death I return to the notion from Clark (2009; 2011) and Malafouris (2013) that extended cognition absorbs things into the human machinery. In the above discussions of biographical and transitional objects I showed that things' reception of these refracted human/thing, thing/human values imbues things with human qualities (like the things as missing limbs called up

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<sup>14</sup> Although in relation to such inconsistencies between Landy's various accounts of the work, it is imperative to return to the image of the prism given to us by Leader (2009), also discussed in the methodology (page 49). Accordingly, to discover two contrasting statements by Landy about the same events is not to be thought as exposing an untruth: merely, another facet of the work has emerged.

Cumming's meditations on the piece) –which is why an abandoned coat might be so loquacious about its former owner.



Figure 28: Three images showing Landy getting a new key (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002).

Extended cognition, in its cognitive approach to psychology (especially in the work of Andy Clark for whom brain biology and observable outputs of cognitive processes are the sole subjects of research) and its demonstration of the ways human beings depend on external objects to be able to function cognitively, demands that human beings be considered as 'thingly' (that is to say, part of or arising from the 'natural').

This presents a moment of possibility: a discursive cut into the imposed margins that hold in place the categories of human and thing. In declaring that 'the unconscious is totally unaware of persons as such', Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2013, p.61) imagine that the unconscious connects into the gigantic and monolithic emanation that they term *hylè*; the sum of material flows and energies that make up the category one might, loosely, describe as 'all life'. This grand presencing is not meant as an occult force, but in its immanence, could be experienced as a place in which human identity in the singular surrenders to or is transcended by the multiplicity. Perhaps this goes some way toward imagining why Landy, hitherto so resistant to spiritual or idealised readings of the work, says a year after the show that during *Break Down* 'something else was going on' (Cumming, 2002). This 'something else' is also important to Hawkins (2010). She suggests that this transcendent quality is conveyed in the 'intimacy' of Landy's wobbly sketches of destroyed objects (see Figures 26 and 27), and the story of the sheepskin coat. Conversely, she suggests that it also arises in the dehumanisation of the operatives, made thingly as they are by Landy's requirement that they wear identical boiler suits and follow Landy's instructions (Hawkins, 2010, pp.27-30). Landy's destructive work, then, objectifies the human subject while effecting a subjectification of objects. The 'sacrifice' practiced in *Break Down* makes fluid the boundaries between people and things.

Consider, from the documentary *The Man Who Destroyed Everything* (2002) the image of Landy on a February morning just after the end of *Break Down* (see Figure 28). The beginning of the scene in which Landy leaves the flat to get new keys is conspicuously hokey. As Landy leaves, his partner, the artist Gillian Wearing, says goodbye and picks up the phone as if to make a call, but then fumbles her performance and laughs delightedly into the camera. Landy performs his walk down the stairs and along the road to the shop, smirking past the camera as if enjoying the conceit, or alternatively, in resistance to the need to act naturally.

Cold, bony, and grinning; still in his boiler-suit and a jacket too thin for the weather, he looks frail and insubstantial. At a certain moment, it seems to me that the thingness of his things has been subsumed into the boiler-suited body of Michael Landy. In becoming thingly, Landy diminishes himself, but simultaneously, he inhabits the immanence of the material world. The inescapable and monumental nature of matter means that it can stand in for – or perhaps, that it *is* - the ‘something else’ that is beyond human comprehension or reach. Meanwhile, the absolute impunity of the physical matter that always outlasts subjectivity (the sacks of shards that still sit at 499 Oxford Street as Landy chooses new boxer shorts) mimes our perishability. *Break Down* is a work in which Landy's odd socks might carry a trace of their owner, but more significantly, shows us that materiality both constitutes and exceeds us.

*Break Down* both transmits and intercepts the moment in which the solidity and continuity of physical objects stands in for the – putative – solidity of human narratives. For this reason, the suddenly quiet falling away that Landy describes, and the elegiac quality of those final moments in which Barry the operative feeds John Landy's sheepskin coat into the shredder, are, I would suggest, the very centre of the piece. The woolly weight of human relationships and the moment in which that weight is held in abeyance, firstly through its projection onto a collection of objects and then, in a further moment of interruption, through these repeated acts of destruction (or transformation – dismantling, sorting, shredding) are the life of the work. We are transported, once again, to the enticing shards of plastic, wood, wire and metal produced in Landy's crushers, which are in many ways the true product of *Break Down*. These offerings, the ejected fragments of Landy's material life, glitter and vibrate with charisma.



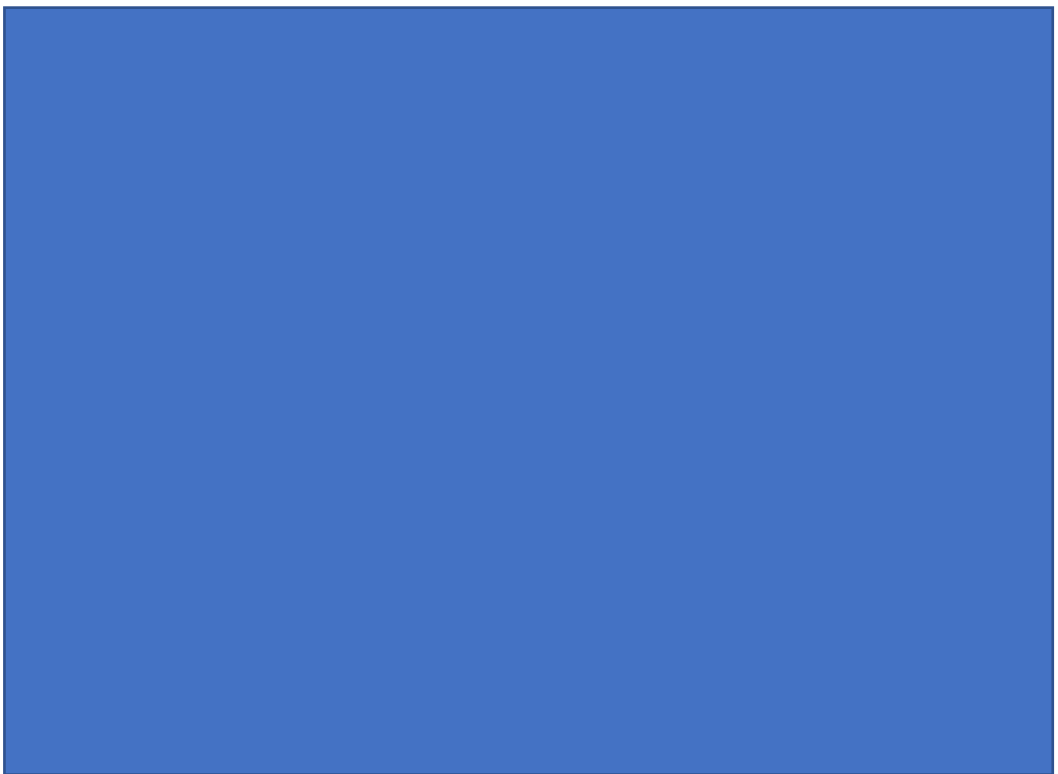


Figure 29: *Creeping Buttercup* (Landy, 2002a).

## 7 Conclusion

After *Break Down*, Landy does not make art for several months. Then, he produces a series of etchings, with the title *Nourishment*, that depict in hyper-detail the sparest of plants that Landy ‘picked from around the estate where I live’ (Cumming, 2002). An example can be seen in *Creeping Buttercup* (Landy, 2002a; Figure 29) in which Landy catalogues the roots of the plant with the same magnificent delicacy and specificity as the wiry stalks, the leaves and the small, hardy, flowers. The discussions that follow in this conclusion return to this etching by Landy, and the range of pertinent associations that it produces. These associations enable me to open out the discussion to consider critique and analysis beyond *Break Down*. They relate to imagery deployed by Deleuze and Guattari (for example: 1987/2013, p.5; see also O’Sullivan, 2002, p.84) regarding the root and the rhizome as modalities that are distinct, but not isolated, from one another. These modalities will be discussed in relation to fluctuations and currents in the field of Cultural Studies that have contributed to the iteration of site writing developed in this thesis.

In tandem with the compelling image of the plant in its entirety, the state of affairs identified by Deleuze and Guattari, in which things are ‘always in the middle’ (1987/2013, pp.306-7), contains an implication for the writing of this conclusion. The constantly mobile, connecting and reconnecting assemblage makes finishing tricky: it is difficult to find the ends because there are no ends. Indeed, the longer I work with *Break Down*, the more it seems to have something to do with everything. As the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart remarks in relation to her text *Ordinary Affects*, this inquiry:

doesn’t mean to come to a finish. It wants to spread out into too many possible scenes with too many real links between them. It leaves me – my experiment – with a sense of force and texture and the sure knowledge that every scene I can spy has tendrils stretching into things that I can barely, or not quite, imagine (Stewart, 2007, p.128).

I identify this discovery of the perpetual expansions, contractions, and shiftings of knowledge with my deployment of the notion of an art work as ‘an assemblage [...] and therefore unattributable’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.2). Metaphors of inside and outside; before and after; (buried) roots and their (visible) sproutings - are logically superfluous in the context of the assemblage theory that frames this thesis. Nevertheless, in view of the need for finishing (the need *to* finish and the

need *for a text to finish*), such concepts provide helpful vocabularies and points of departure for thinking beyond the immediate focus of this project into the broader communicabilities of its methodology and theoretical composition in the fields of Cultural Studies and art criticism.

To make use of these useful, if inapt, constructions, then: this concluding chapter incorporates, in Section 7.1, a look back into the preceding discussions in order to offer some final remarks on the entwined forces or energies of materiality and mediality, specifically in relation to *Break Down*. Sections 7.2 and 7.3 might be seen, in Stewart's term, as 'tendrils' that project outwards to consider the broader implications of this project in relation to two areas: respectively, the strategy, or method, of site writing and its significance in the field of Cultural Studies, and the broader implications of the theoretical work of the previous chapters, in which the work of Deleuze and Guattari is developed in response to *Break Down* (and vice-versa: in which my response to *Break Down* is thought and worked in relation to Deleuze and Guattari) in relation to art criticism more generally. The final part of this chapter takes the form of an afterword on what escapes. Here, I perform an exploration of some connections that ticker-tape through the back of my mind as I write, which do not form part of the main logic of my argument, and yet have been formative in the processes of engagement with *Break Down* described here.

### 7.1 *Matter as medial, and material text*

Beyond (though always arising from) *Break Down*, a single, defining, inquiry, into relationships between materiality and mediality, runs through this thesis. This section will review how this conversation has unfolded specifically in relation to *Break Down*.

It is this that shapes Chapter 3: *Fragment / Part / Whole*, on fragmentation, multiplicity, and the mediality of fragments, which carry upon themselves the narrative of how they came to their present form. It also underpins analysis, in Chapters 4: *Manual* and 5: *Line / List / Inventory*, of the interplay between textuality and materiality in *Break Down* as it arises in the procedural guidelines written for Landy's operatives (Landy, 2001a) and in his *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b). Finally, it is this that propels the investigation, in Chapter 6: *John Landy's Sheepskin Coat*, of entwinements between personhood and thinghood. These elements of the current thesis all depend upon some account of multiplicity, and all prioritise the

material form of objects and their interplay with – indeed, their constitutive role in – human processes of thought.

This study also puts forth an explication of the treatment of materiality in previous publications on *Break Down*. In Chapters 3: *Fragment / Part / Whole* and 6: *John Landy's Sheepskin Coat*, accounts of *Break Down* in which the work is framed primarily via concepts of consumerism or (Landy's) subjectivity are elaborated through critical complexifications of materiality, and cross-connectivities between categories of subjectivity and matter. In existing literatures on *Break Down*, the objects processed by Landy, whether complete, dismantled or granulated, appear to be discrete in themselves; possessing some kind of innate stability or completeness. This inquiry extends from these beginnings the proposal that Landy's belongings at whatever stage in the process of dismantling and shredding (and like all material objects) are characterised by change, process, and transformation. As such, a conception of materiality is developed that builds upon and theoretically repopulates accounts of *Break Down* by engaging firstly questions regarding the materiality, composition and capacities (in material and philosophical terms) of the objects under discussion, and secondly, the mechanisms through which material objects become important for the formation of identity. I argue that a material object cannot be comprehended if it is not understood in terms of process; ergo, *in order to think about fragments it is necessary to consider fragmentation*. In Chapter 3: *Fragment / Part / Whole*, *Break Down* is revealed anew through the material form of the fragments produced, through an account of Landy's work as processual and dynamic. The fragment itself, which bears the marks of its coming into its present form, must, I suggest, be seen as an epitomal expression of matter as inherently narrative. It is, then, the granules produced in *Break Down* that provoke the pivotal proposal that matter possesses the capacity for mediality.

This discussion of Landy's processes of dismantling and granulating objects opens up a further exploration regarding questions of material form and the concept of affect (in the Deleuzian sense: that is, the extent to which an entity can be altered, and effect change beyond itself). In *Break Down* Landy does not destroy, but rather transforms his belongings. Does Landy's entire collection of belongings differ in any meaningful way from individual items extracted *from* that collection? In what ways does a cd-radio-cassette player, whole, differ from the same object,

unscrewed and lying together in a heap of components, wire and metal plates? Does a pile of Landy's granulated stuff differ especially from his stuff before dismantling and shredding? As observed in Chapter 3 (page 75), molecules have no discernible preference for being part of one or the other (unless, I suppose, a physical force such as magnetism is involved – in which case 'preference' is expressed through their material properties). Moreover, the granules produced by Landy possess, as Jane Bennett (2010) would say, a 'vibrant' energy that emerges precisely from their thing-ness - and that prevails even as objects are taken apart and shredded. To get at form and how it matters, it is necessary to make enquiries regarding the nature of the assemblage in which this pile of fragments is part. The question at issue, I have said, is *affect*; therefore, the significance of form does not inhere in the object alone. Indeed, in the context of assemblage theory, to speak of the 'object alone' is nonsensical. Affect can work at the basest, most physical level - remember, for example, the tray of fragments (Figure 10) in which, when gently shaken, the largest particles rise to the top of the pile (see Chapter 3, page 72). It can also be seen in the affordance theory of James Gibson (1979/1986) in which the qualities of objects (at the basest level; their shape, bulk and density, for example) interact with the visual fields and physical capabilities of the animals that interact with them to produce possibilities for interaction or use. Examples might include a slot that affords posting, a blade that affords cutting, or a log at just knee-height that affords sitting.

Things also possess affect in the realm of personhood, or identity. In the narrative that arises again and again in the existing literature on *Break Down*, Landy's belongings are seen, in some unspecified way, to supplement or express his identity or biography. This thesis re-opens and complexifies that narrative in order to consider precisely the nature of this relationship. Chapter 6: *John Landy's Sheepskin Coat* works between extended mind theory (Clark, 2009; 2011; Malafouris, 2013), Winnicottian object relations theory and a Deleuzo-Guattarian account of the multiplicity in order to achieve an account of personhood and its relationships with materiality that draws upon the implications of the notion of affect as discussed previously. Since affect does not inhere in an entity, but rather, arises from its relationality within an assemblage, I argue in Chapter 6 that neither individual identity, nor the material objects that might be said to have some kind of 'personal value' can be seen as possessing their own, discrete stability. Instead,

the workings or doings of every entity under discussion must be considered in relation to the rest of the assemblage.

Form and affect become significant in specific ways when considered in relation to the role of material objects in the constitution of subjectivity. In his account of the capacity of things to perform a role that is both 'me' and 'not-me', Donald Winnicott (1971/2005) specifies that the material form of the object concerned is of direct importance to the processes he describes. Here, human subjectivity resides not only in 'the biomachinery contained within the ancient skinbag' (Clark, 2011, p.76). Rather, in a further appearance of the theme of fragmentation, it appears to be broken apart and refracted, scattered and seeded through the material objects that surround us. If in their account of the extended mind both Clark and Malafouris make a case for thought as a distributed entity, Winnicott supplements these in his work on material 'transitional objects' as the recipients of specifically *psychic* processes. Thought, emotion and identity depend upon and are indeed utterly wound up in material objects that are exterior to the person. In extended mind theory, by contrast, the quality of thingness is invited right inside – is, indeed, essential to – the experience of embodied personhood. Meanwhile, mind is scattered into and through matter. Drawing these accounts together has enabled me to confront anew the implications of Deleuze and Guattari's account of the figure of the human being – including what we might experience as our most interior perceptions and experiences – as entirely continuous with the universe in its entirety (1972/2013, p.15). In contemplating Landy's comment that *Break Down* felt like enacting his own funeral (see for example Burn, 2004; Corner, 2010; Wood, 2001) I have suggested that the act of shredding material objects that have housed or embodied elements of his thought, identity and psyche has grave implications. In footage of Landy just after *Break Down* (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002) the artist seems to have taken upon himself the quality of the thingy; he wears prominently upon himself the fragility of being a person, living in a body.

Turning now to the field of material text, Chapters 4: *Manual*, and 5: *Inventory / List / Conveyor Belt* evaluate *Break Down* as a work that operates between matter and text through an examination of two specific examples of deployments of text in relation to *Break Down*. These are firstly, the set of instructions devised for use by Landy's assistants and later published in *Michael Landy / Break Down* (Landy, 2001a), and secondly, *Break Down Inventory* (Landy, 2001b), which provides the full

list of Landy's belongings. This pair of chapter-long investigations consider the material form of both texts, and the relationship between the texts and the material objects and practices that are implicated in *Break Down*.

In investigating Landy's written protocols for *Break Down*, the instruction manual is anatomised as a textual form that provides a schema for a series of prescribed actions or procedures without being required to explain its logic to the reader. Its overwriting of the critical and sensory faculties, can, I have proposed, be seen as a performance of the abstraction of labour power, in broadly Marxian terms (1867/1976, p.270), and in light of Kittler's account of writing as a specifically bodily discipline (1985/1990, p.33). In effect, I argue, the manual reads its reader, the instruction-follower, as an enormous pair of hands. Further, and with reference to the practice, in Fluxus, of using event scores, I suggest, the manual enables us to explore the limits of intentionality. It is the omissions and gaps in Landy's instructions that via as Deuze says of Fluxus, 'chance and choice' (2002, p.82), open up some of the most fertile spaces of potentiality in *Break Down*.

The inventory employed by Landy works, I argue, both to enumerate the objects destroyed during *Break Down* and to underpin the sheer scale of the endeavour. Here, the list - as a literary and textual form - is surveyed. The mediality of Landy's *Inventory* is explored through analysis of both the material form of the published text, and the desktop spreadsheet programme that was used to collect the entries. The *Inventory* constitutes a line-like construction of items that appear in series. Similarly, the conveyor belt is a list-like thing, that, in presenting one item after another in succession, mirrors both the instruction manual and the inventory. As such, the motif of the conveyor belt, the form of which dominates the material configuration of *Break Down* in situ at 499 Oxford Street, is deployed as the starting point for an investigation of the operation of line and series as they appear in Landy's plans and representations of the work. The logic of the inventory is therefore in some sense constitutive of the material form and processes of *Break Down*, since, as Day et al observe, the work relies upon the modality of a line or series of entries that call up the form of the conveyor belt. Here, one item follows another, each in turn occupying the same space, '1+1+1' (2014, p.144; see also Klee, 1968, p.22).

## 7.2 *Site writing and cultural studies*

This section evaluates the deployment and adaptation in this thesis of the art writing strategy originated by Jane Rendell (2005; 2010), site writing, and takes a sounding of the significance of this work beyond its direct relationship with *Break Down* as the work under consideration here. The distinctive adaptation of this strategy in this thesis both arises from, and represents a contribution to, the broader field of cultural studies. As Simon During explains in his introduction to the definitive collection *The Cultural Studies Reader*: ‘when it first appeared in Great Britain in the 1950s [cultural studies] studied culture in relation to individual lives’ (1993, p.1), including a concern for the ordinary details and practices from which ‘individual lives’ are constituted. The development of art writing that has emerged through this thesis certainly owes a debt to this first iteration of the discipline in the sense that it has centred upon the ‘textualizing and historicizing [of] everyday life’ (Ibid., p.25).<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to specify, however, that this thesis as a whole, and my extension of site writing in particular, contribute not so much to this first wave of cultural studies, described by O’Sullivan as ‘a fundamentally hermeneutic project’ (2002, p.83), but more specifically to a more recent, more broadly ‘heuristic’ cultural studies (Ibid.). In exploring the capacities of the newer project to which the current thesis contributes and pertains, O’Sullivan works with Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the rhizome, the mobile gathering and regathering of joining points or moments in which energies meet and combine or work upon one another; disconnect; reform (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, pp.5-7). He deploys this concept from *A Thousand Plateaus* in order to explain the sense in which ‘as soon as cultural studies becomes fixed, (becomes a discipline) then the real work of cultural studies will be going on elsewhere’ (O’Sullivan, 2002, p.88). However, this is not a new insight; something not dissimilar is already in play almost a decade earlier when During defines in his opening remarks that ‘cultural studies is not an academic discipline quite like others,’ since ‘[i]t possesses neither a well-defined methodology nor clearly demarcated fields for investigation’ (1993, p.1). He opens, and leaves open, the question of whether cultural studies contributes ‘its own orientation’ in relation to existing fields of social ‘analysis’ (Ibid.). In effect, then,

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<sup>1</sup> Albeit specifically in Britain and markedly in relation to working class and youth or ‘sub’ cultures.



During, like O'Sullivan, leaves open the question of its existence as a discipline at all. Cultural studies is a discipline, and a plurality. It is prompted to disaggregate by its own aggregation, to disestablish itself by its own establishment, so that the particularities of its boundaries and concerns never quite resolve into clear or singular focus.

**Observation: Plant (March 2018).** *First, I loosen the soil around it, exploring with my fingers, scraping, revealing. I try not to pull until the end, when I find that the tap-root has pushed itself intransigently into and through an especially dense clod of soil, which I can't shift with my fingers (and a spade would break the root in any case). It tautens, then finally relents with a little snap. I bring it inside, wash my hands and find myself cleaning the mud from the root as well, careful not to damage it, with a movement of the fingers – a gentle rub – somewhere between washing hair and washing salad. I lay the root tenderly down on a sheet of white paper. It is difficult to see this plant as a single, entire, thing. Its up and its down communicate in such different ways. The leaves, the size of finger- and thumb nails, reach up to collect sunlight; stalks channel energy back down underground. The roots search and spread. I put aside an impulse to try to sum the thing up, compelled, instead, to catalogue it. The smell: peering closely at the plant, I smell the loamy sweetness of soil, and the brighter sweetness of the plant itself – a smell that I can only describe as 'green'. The leaves: heart-shaped, with a scalloped edge. Their veins seal the edges of puffy subdivisions, like quilting, and observed against the light, glow an acerbic, lime-green. Rubbed gently between a finger and thumb, they feel so soft that I inspect the leaves closely, convinced that I will find minute hairs – but find none. The leaves of this plant bear five nibbled holes altogether, and some ragged edges too. The stalks: those that carry the leaves are like little unclosed tubes – like tiny, green, gutters. They join, with a slight bulge, into thicker, more fibrous stalks, purple, the colour of bruises. Stalks become blanched white where they enter the ground. They take on a translucent, succulent look. The roots: the centre of the plant is a knot (a corm?) that gives out the roots; the stalks. This is where the plant gathers itself together; where it begins (or ends). The palette here beneath the soil is quite different – a yellow-white-brown. To me, an above-ground creature, the first metaphors that occur are deathly. Roots: the colour of milky eyes staring into soil; the colour of maggots. But as I observe I find myself transported by the liveliness and obduracy of roots. The profuse complexities of this beard that extends itself into the earth. Tendrils rest luxuriously under and across one another like lovers' legs. The roots give out the most exquisite little hairs – tiny-baby*

*roots that push further and further out from the knotted centre of the plant. At this point, I have been observing the plant for an hour, bending in close to catch the finest detail. In the end, it is the audacity of sending these most delicate, vulnerable parts out to explore what the plant does not yet know that most astonishes me.*

These two differently constituted accounts, in During (1993) and O'Sullivan (2002) of the discipline of cultural studies as a mass that writhes itself apart while simultaneously returning to itself summons the chaos of the root structures recorded by Landy in his etching *Creeping Buttercup* (2002; Figure 29). As O'Sullivan suggests in his revisiting of Deleuze and Guattari's working of the rhizome against the arboreal, or root structure, for Deleuze and Guattari, the root signifies not mobility but stratification. As they suggest, the arboreal structure might be exemplified by 'grammatical trees' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.4) that diagrammatically construct knowledge in a linear, hierarchical fashion in which relationships between the constituent entities described are fixed. What is required within the current analysis, however, is not an oppositional account of linear fixities of root structure versus mobile dynamisms of the rhizome. As O'Sullivan remarks, following Deleuze and Guattari's lead, it is worthwhile to retain arboreal structures so as to be able to make strategic use of them. In any case:

[I]t is the nature of the rhizome to be broken, it is the nature of the root to produce rhizomes. For in reality these two are entwined; the rhizome in the root and the root in the rhizome. Cultural studies, within the academy, may be ossified, may be frozen, but that does not mean that we have to go elsewhere. Rather, we switch registers (O'Sullivan, 2002, p.89).

In a similar way, cultural studies retains (and in institutional terms, needs to retain) its disciplinarity while remaining, through its complexities and mobilities, a multiple entity. It 'has an object of study,' and, 'in common with other disciplines, [it] operates to fix knowledges' (Ibid., pp.81-2). Simultaneously, it provides a space of productive volatility. It is therefore more apt to speak of this protean, relationally defined, and dynamic cultural studies as a strategic or procedural force than to attempt to describe what it is *per se*, since its affects (in the form of its topics and methods of study, theoretical concerns and so forth) cannot operate, or even exist as a valid logical proposition, unless in relation with those of other entities.

Since I write here about a methodological approach, site writing, I use the current section of this conclusion chapter to consider strategy in the vulgar sense of ‘things that are done’ in the production of knowledge. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that within the heuristic of cultural studies this term, *strategy*, should be taken to apply equally to theory and methodology. In view of the relationality that produces specificities in the Deleuzian account (Thacker, 2010; see also Deleuze, 1968/2004; Widder, 2009), theory – or method – does not hover above and describe or act upon the subject unilaterally, but is fully implicated in it. My development of site writing explores the relationship of this thesis to *Break Down*, a work that has no continuing material existence (as a work – its remains do, of course, continue in the world, in some form). Concurrently, site writing here arises from and responds to the condition of writing in cultural studies more broadly – by mapping relationalities between the critical analysis undertaken in this thesis, and the subject of the thesis.

The above specification of a cultural studies that is both rhizomatic *and* root-like is necessary to introduce the implications for cultural studies of the development of site writing in this thesis. Before moving on, though, it should be said that relational and (broadly) practice-oriented approaches to methodology are in no way specific to cultural studies. As the scholar and yoga practitioner Antonia Pont suggests, ‘practising can be understood as (constituting) a context in which ideas about intention, activity, action, desire and “discipline” are tested, unsettled and clarified’ (2017, p.16). Such work has arisen right ‘across and between disciplines in the social sciences, the humanities and the natural sciences’ (Lurie and Wakeford, 2012, p.4). In this space, I will not chronicle the development and proliferation of such approaches more broadly, nor attempt to map their many instances in full, but provide select examples from texts already cited in this thesis. I look first to Harriet Hawkins, who, in the text *For Creative Geographies*, focuses on ‘the nature of geography-art relations [...], and what could be identified as their core analytics’ (2014, p.2). It is not the *themes* that arise in works of art that are useful in this reframing, but the close examination of the fibre of *encounters* between geography and art. Sophie Day, Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford, writing about the methodological implications of ‘numbering practices’ in social and cultural research, discuss ‘the ways in which numbers both involve participation and themselves participate in the composition of forms of social life, that is, how numbers participate in *ecologies*’ (2014, p.127; emphasis reproduced). Looking to

accounts of specific practices or actions, Howard Potter (2006; see pages 92-3 of this thesis) frames his anthropological encounter with, and questions about, the mud that is omnipresent at the former concentration camp, Sachsenhausen, through the devising and making an object of memorialisation and/or objectification. He gathers mud from different parts of the site, dries it (in his oven at home) and places it in labelled vials, in a presentation box. The artist Chris Salter involves himself in a wide array of experimental and speculative activities in which art encounters natural science. These include his participation in the precarious and highly precise manual procedures involved in growing a tissue culture (2015, pp.141-50; see page 125 of this thesis) and elsewhere in the same text, his enquiry via the recording of the sonic atmosphere in and around the glacier at Jungfraujoeh (Ibid., pp.74-80). As Lurie and Wakeford remark in their introduction to the edited collection *Inventive Methods*, such strategies are valuable in enabling a rethinking of ‘the empirical investigation of the here and now, the contemporary [because] they require their user to reflect critically upon the value, status and significance of knowledge today’ (2012, p.3).<sup>2</sup> In particular, ‘inventive methods’ oblige their users to reflect upon, by participating in, the constitution (in direct rather than metaphoric terms) of their subject as it territorialises and deterritorialises; is configured; de-configured; reconfigured.

In relation to the current project, an important element of Lurie and Wakeford’s intervention is their suggestion that it is fruitful to investigate the moments in which distinctions between the subject of one’s investigation, the method used, and the method-user, collapse in on one another. This rethinking of distinctions between object (the written), subject (the writer), and method (the writing) brings a new focus, on the workings and relationships between these positions and functions, which has framed and defined the development of site writing in this thesis. As in Rendell (2005; 2010), my site writing identifies and places the practice of writing itself in relation to the text/s under observation. Indeed, ‘site’ in Rendell’s site writing refers not only to the object of observation, but also to its writer, and writing. Like the note-writing that, as Andy Clark (2011) proposes, is not only a record, but a *component* of that thought, a key point of consistency between the passages of site writing that appear in this text is the way they reveal,

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<sup>2</sup> See page 52, footnote 10 of this thesis for a list of some methodological strategies (or strategies remade as methodologies) investigated in this collection edited by Lurie and Wakeford (2012).

at irregular intervals, its authoring. More than that: site writing places me (and hopefully, imaginatively in my shoes, the reader) within encounters that have become part of this inquiry, firstly through the practice of having and writing the encounter, and then through their inclusion in the text.

Further to this, site writing is a space of productive failure.<sup>3</sup> Site writing was, at the start of this project, an attempt to bring myself as the watcher and writer as close as possible to the art work. As such, at the simplest level, this strategy graphically reveals and enacts a central 'bind' or dilemma of this inquiry, which is that 'the art work' no longer exists. I have therefore been obliged to look to materials and processes that arise from or are in some way provoked by the art work. This has both enriched the foregoing discussions, and I would suggest, bound it more closely with an impulse toward the pursuit of what Jane Bennett (2010) might call the 'vibrant' life of matter. As such, it also contains moments of slippage. First, I have expressed hesitation regarding Bennett's construction, 'vibrant matter,' not wishing to imbue matter with a self-sufficient 'life'. Instead, I suggest, any 'life' at all, whether human or otherwise, whether relating to an especially highly activated (human) perception of the potentialities that array themselves around a particular object, or the activation (independently of human intervention or not) of these potentialities, or in relation to such perceptions and activations in themselves - is produced relationally (see Chapter 3, page 52).

In a second slippery moment, I became increasingly aware that to claim that site writing might, in any uncomplicated way, bring the materiality of the work into the text would be to discount the nature of observation and writing (even though it was specifically this that inspired me to begin to use site writing). Does a certain hermeneutic threaten to arise from my use of this methodology? This would certainly be true if site writings were written to 'relay' to the reader a 'real' experience that is taken to lie at their inception. And yet, to think of site writing in terms of is to reconsider. The passages of site writing presented here form *part of* the encounters that I experienced while writing them: *part of* the brain-flesh-lead-paper apparatus that enabled me to have these encounters at all. Site writing is, therefore, *not only a representation, but a direct record (both integral to and*

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<sup>3</sup> See O'Sullivan (2009, p.251) for an account of failure as productive in the context of contemporary art.

*formative of) those encounters* – the intensities and affects that fall into and across me as I write, embodied in the site-written passages that have been reproduced in this thesis.

Finally, and as I discovered in the writing, above, of a weed from my back yard, it is unlikely that the full complexity of the tangle of roots site written above could be adequately described in words, since to focus on a single root only obscures the importance of the others, and the in-ter-determinacy of the plant as a whole. The roots drawn by Landy – and those site-written in the passage above – possess their linearity and stratification. Indeed, they are intensely organised; each element of the root structure doing its thing; performing its function in relation to the plant as a whole. Simultaneously, roots present a delirious, jumbling profusion that is impossible to unpick with the eye, drawing the viewer in and in. Landy's etching might, then, be seen as an experiment in the capturing of complexity; part of the miracle of the work being its completion, since, when writing, one feels one might never reach the end of the densities and intricacies of roots.

In relation specifically to the development of site writing in this thesis, and its relationship to cultural studies, it is apposite to observe that this dilemma between the close observation of specificity, and the working of an assemblage, is present in some way in each of the site written passages in this thesis. Site writing holds the writer somewhere between an encompassing view of an entire working, and the particularity of what can be observed, and how closely. Any scene that can be site written might be anatomised, and in relation to an array of currents of attention or concern. This can be productive. Consider, for example, the analysis in Mol (2002), in which a single clinical diagnosis, arteriosclerosis, is shown to fan out into a seemingly unending range of expressions (patients' descriptions of the pain they experience; their relatives' accounts of the same; medical professionals' readings of scans; re-imaginings of the disease in relation to its possible treatments). *Break Down* is plural, and this plurality is embedded in the structure of the foregoing text. In each of the four main chapters of this thesis, I pick up a thread – an artefact, whether material or philosophical – that arises from *Break Down* and develop a discussion in relation to its associations. But it is essential to preserve a concept of the work (or the plant) as a 'working' ('planting') that cannot be accounted for through an understanding of its components alone. If, as Lury and Wakeford (2012) suggest, 'inventive methods' require of their users a critical

engagement with the constitution of knowledge, site writing in this thesis has enabled – *required* – me to negotiate this important moment of tension between the system and the specificities of its parts.

As discussed in the Methodology (Section 2.4) Rendell's site writing springs from art writing (see Bal, 2001) and is informed by psychoanalytic theory rather than the Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory through which I animate it in this thesis. Rendell's sense is that site writing operates in a similar way to free association in psychoanalytic practice, acting in relation to the deep, immediate responses of the analysand/art writer, so that writing becomes a way to contact one's unconscious. Here, it is salient to return to Deleuze and Guattari and their centralisation of 'the polyvocal connections of truly free free-association' (Holland, 1999, p.45; see Chapter 6, Section 6.3). In thinking the work of site writing through a Deleuzo-Guattarian account of multiplicity, the 'me' persona that I perform through site writing resembles less an isolated, interior thing, and more a sea that extends beyond the beach on which I currently stand to other shores that I could hardly begin to imagine. As Guattari announces: 'the ego is the whole wide world: I am all that! No more than to the cosmos do I recognise any limit to myself' (1989/1996, p.168). As such, human identity (what we might experience as our individual consciousness) acts in a kind of auxiliary role, 'authorised to speak in the first person' (Ibid., p.160) while in fact, a joining point and 'terminal' for affects.<sup>4</sup> Psychoanalytic practices, including free association, can then be seen as strategies for relaying themes or refrains in new contexts in order to produce 'new ways to speak and to see things' (Ibid., p.168).

In this light, languages often used in relation to psychic processes, of 'outside' and 'inside' is not apt. Yet, in the foregoing discussion it has been useful to draw upon Winnicott's account of the me-but-not-me 'transitional object' – the soft, grubby comforter that enables the child to separate from her parent by introducing an entity that exists part of the way between her 'inner' life and the 'outside'. This is due specifically to the contribution made by Winnicott regarding the particular significance of an object's affordances in relation to the psychic processes in which they figure, or rather, that they materialise and mediate. As is observed in Chapter

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<sup>4</sup> 'Terminal' here is not to be understood as an end-point, but rather as a display-point, like a computer terminal: a node with an expressive or communicatory function.

6, such 'transitional' practices are eminently transferable, and continue throughout adulthood - for example when absorbed in the plot of a novel (Winnicott, 1971/2005, p.18). In reflecting now upon my own engagements with site writing, I conceive of this practice as, itself, a 'transitional' process; a transporting practice through which sensual experiences and encounters can be 'externalised' to enable one to observe them.

I follow Rendell in employing an inclusive definition regarding what might constitute the 'site' in site writing. Like her, I take myself as the writer, and the writing I enact, as sites in themselves. Further to this, her main foci are works of art, architectural objects, and objects that imply some kind of treatment of space; however, Rendell writes a variety of sites, both physical and imaginary, and including reminiscences. In one example, she site writes an exhibition that is yet to take place:

The artworks were not yet in existence. In their place I was sent a map and photographs of the small fishing village in which the artworks were to be installed as well as the artists' written statements and visual proposals. I used my encounter with these representations to create a fiction, structured as a walk through the sites in which the artists intended to locate their projects. [...] I invented a subject, a mermaid maybe, half-woman - half-fish, who arrives in a town she does not know and in passing through finds that it feels familiar yet at the same time strange - uncanny perhaps (2010, p.186).

That said, the sites of this thesis differ somewhat from Rendell's. Firstly, in terms of external foci alone the notion of a site is perhaps more broadly defined here. This I think is due not to any essential element of Rendell's, or my, conception of site-writing: rather, it arises from a difference in focus. Where Rendell writes specifically about art and spatiality, my focus, beginning though it does with Landy's *Break Down*, spirals out from the art work to incorporate an array of other objects; artefacts; moments. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, this broad focus connects with the development in British cultural studies (by which I mean cultural studies in the broader sense, taking into account its earliest iterations as discussed earlier in this section) of the study of everyday life; the turning of an anthropological lens upon quotidian practices with which its proponents were familiar (During, 1993). To be absolutely clear, it is *because I work in cultural studies* that I explore *Break Down* from a perspective that begins with a focus on the material outputs and processes of the work (and not its art historical precedents, or the intentions of the artist). It is this focus that provokes my writings



of physical sites where Landy's work used to stand, enabling me to consider the space and the light there, but also in some sense to 'visit' the work itself. Similarly, I have 'visited' aspects of *Break Down* when site writing works by artists other than Landy, a quivering pile of dust and an uprooted plant on sheets of white, A4 paper on my desk, online videos, and photographic images from *Break Down*. Other site writings have been narrative in shape, describing not images or tableaux but encounters or events that took place over a short period of time, such as my visit to 499 Oxford Street, or (below) a memory of my son's explorations with found objects in the park.

In this thesis, the example from *A Thousand Plateaus* of the 'book machine' has inspired me to ask, in relation to *Break Down*:

what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2013, p.2).

To ask such questions is (in the terms used by O'Sullivan, 2002) to work heuristically rather than hermeneutically. It is to consider a cultural artefact (such as an art work, yes, but also, such as a pile of dust gathered on a sheet of paper) in terms not of layers of representation or 'meaning', but of relation, composition and function. As in the current thesis, the perspective offered by O'Sullivan (2006) is not confined to objects such as art works, or artistic practices such as Landy's. He explores the significance of practices through which human beings can reach out from the constructed and isolating formation of their subjectivity in order to experience their membership of and absolute conjoinment with a universe that exceeds them. He lists as examples art, meditation, and sado-masochistic play; I would add a variety of generative and connecting activities that I have undertaken during and alongside this project: washing up, running, marking essays, breast feeding my infant son, reading theory, breaking stuff. Site writing.

Such transformative – in Winnicottian terms, 'transitional' – activities have helped me to interrupt the flow of my own analysis of *Break Down* in order, as O'Sullivan suggests, to 'switch registers' (2002, p.89). In this sense, Rendell's site writing, which includes close description, but also dream, fiction, and reminiscence, that 'works' on a broader spectrum than mine. Any insight reached through the site writing developed in this thesis hinges upon an encounter with the concrete: the material. Nonetheless, writing about my own house-dust opens up my thinking

about the particle: about different varieties and sizes of particles and their significance in philosophical terms. Visiting the Duveen Gallery at Tate Britain, where Landy's *Semi-detached* (2004) once stood, provides a more vital sense of its scale, and the politics of this work in which a scale model of Landy's childhood home in its entirety fits easily within – is enveloped, or indeed, *housed* by – this canonical space. Playing-writing-replaying-writing online video of Landy's operatives taking apart his stuff (Artangel, 2015) enables me to take into account the thousands of small movements and actions – twistings, scrapings, bendings, tearings – of which *Break Down* is composed. Finally, in this chapter, site writing a weed from the back of my house allows me to think through the life and power of Landy's series, *Nourishment*, as I encounter the springy determination of roots, and more than that, the beauty of the plant as an entire structure – not the beauty of its appearance, but of its workings. In writing, I begin to question the metaphors that are often brought to bear in relation to the plant in which the roots serve the stalks; the stalks serve the leaves. I begin to be able to countenance – to hold in my head – a conception of the plant as an entire thing – not catalogued and segmented into components, but a working, a joining, a becoming.

Similarly, in considering *Break Down* through the lens of cultural studies – as, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, a 'working of matters' (1987/2013, p.2) – it becomes clear that the present text, and I as its author, join ourselves into this 'working'. Site writing seeds throughout this thesis an acknowledgement of this important moment of implication: it is impossible to write about an assemblage from the outside. Through the act of writing, the writer and text join this knot of currents and affect(s). From the moment I begin writing this thesis, and you begin reading – we become part of the assemblage that is *Break Down*.

### 7.3 *Assemblage(s) and art criticism*

This section presents a discussion of how the application of Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage theory enacted in the previous chapters might speak to art criticism more broadly. This is framed by an exploration of the concept of assemblage in contemporary art, which is applicable at various points in this thesis. Rather than attempting an inclusive review of such broad fields this section focuses on the work of authors already cited in this thesis – for example, in relation to assemblage theory, Guattari, and Deleuze and Guattari, Manuel DeLanda, Matthew Fuller and

Simon O'Sullivan, with the addition of a small number of others including Stephen Zepke and Kathleen Stewart - in order to provide an indicative discussion.

The foregoing chapters have prioritised material practices, products, or outputs that accrue around *Break Down* as a way of exploring the work without always and necessarily giving precedence to the fact that it *is* a work of art rather than another kind of thing. My decision to take this approach in the current thesis echoes Deleuze and Guattari's approach, for example in relation to their work on Kafka (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975/1986) or Bacon (Deleuze, 1981/2017) in that I treat mediality (that is, the capacity to mediate) is as a quality that is thoroughly immanent – which is to suggest that mediality is absolutely ingrained in and through every part of the universe. Before moving on to examine through this lens the importance of material output and process in *Break Down*, it is worthwhile to consider O'Sullivan's analysis of specific ways in which art (and particularly contemporary art) acts, that makes it different from other kinds of thing. This is important, since in relation to my postulation that mediality is immanent in the universe, one might sensibly ask to what this mediality pertains. Although the foregoing chapters have not focused on this question, *Break Down*, as an art work, is generative of potentialities that would not be present if it were a house clearance or a recycling plant in operation. O'Sullivan (2009) relates these potentialities in terms of a kind of discursive hiccup: a stoppage in which freedom can arise, for something other than the dominant narrative to emerge. This might sound *useful* (if breaking apart dominant regimes of communication is a thing you want to do) but such caesuras cannot occupy a space of utility in any straightforward way, since they work specifically through a break in the stratifications through which communication becomes possible.

Art can be imagined 'as an event that interrupts knowledge – that breaks information. In fact, art is one of the very few things we have left that is able to creatively make this break' (O'Sullivan, 2009, p.250). O'Sullivan's account of the break that is produced specifically by art includes instances from contemporary art to which I will return later in this section. In relation to *Break Down* in particular, however, to think of that hiccup or stoppage in the usual progress of logic or sense is to recall the many aspects of the work that are in some sense excessive, including the outright scale of the material purge exercised by Landy, but also, the operation of the detailed manual to which his Operatives must adhere, and the wanton

completism of the *Inventory* (Landy, 2001a; 2001b). In this sense, the work occupies – and inflates – a bureaucratic logic which, as Ben Kafka suggests, permeates everyday life, and embodies state power, in ‘the modern era’ (2012, p.9) so densely scaffolded is it by ‘paperwork’. It is no contradiction to observe that the operation of the principles set out in the manual for *Break Down*; the manic detail of the inventorying of the objects destroyed, is entirely superfluous to the process. Indeed, central to Harriet Hawkins’ analysis is the statement<sup>5</sup> that in this work, ‘excess, and its glorious expenditure in an act that is itself excessive, offers us a critique of the capitalist commodity’ (Hawkins, 2010, p.20). *Break Down* therefore:

offers us the move from a rational, utility-based, knowing of the world in which there is nothing that cannot be made to make sense, to a worldview in which there is an excess of meaning and, moreover, an affirmation of that which exceeds meaning (Ibid.).

The remainder of this section evaluates the significance of the deployment of assemblage theory over the previous chapters, while keeping in view this special capacity of art for wriggling free of knowledge – of the straightforward, or the linear – into a space that is less easily named and in which currents can meet and react in new ways. Manuel DeLanda suggests that the assemblage ‘must [...] account for the *synthesis* of the properties of a whole not reducible to its parts’, even though ‘the parts of an assemblage do not form a seamless whole’ (DeLanda, 2006, p.4; emphasis reproduced). As might be inferred from the intervention regarding site writing and cultural studies in Section 7.2, in responding to *Break Down* as an assemblage, the work is examined specifically in terms of its outputs and processes. *Break Down* is an art work that comprises (among other things) a set of procedures in which complete objects belonging to Landy are merely taken apart, sorted, and shredded; a negligible amount of waste (what’s another few tonnes?) sent to landfill.

The attention given to the work as a set of material processes with physical outcomes that extend beyond the fortnight long period of *Break Down* and beyond the bounds of the art work’s account of itself, is therefore a fundamental element of the contribution made by this thesis and the originality of its commentary on *Break Down*. In particular, I argue, to focus on material flows in this way, is not to

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<sup>5</sup> First cited in the Introduction to this thesis (pages 30-1).

minimise the importance of *Break Down* as art, but rather, enables the construction of a more deeply profound account of the life of this work. For the artist Andrea Eckersley, the material is a surface or locality – a specificity – that ‘constitut[es] an assemblage of affects in an event’ (Eckersley, 2017, p.163). This applies as much to the accidental, inconsequential gubbins that lies around wherever we look – the *bits of stuff* that are so pervasive as to be invisible – as to the material that is made to speak via the scientific encounters deployed by Chris Salter, or the ‘physical aspects’ of an art work – which may include ‘clay, screen, canvas, board or wall, gesso, pencil, pigment, fluids or liquids’ (Ibid.) as much as the belongings, conveyor belts, yellow trays and so on that were mobilised by Landy. As Salter suggests, it is the unknowability of matter that produces the ‘accidents, failures, misunderstood situations, resource limitations, and misused techniques [that] are essential elements of art in the making’ (2015, pp.14-15). Working with matter therefore forces open a chink, a schism in artistic intentionality which produces the potentialities that are specific to art – as O’Sullivan comments, in utilising the aleatory, ‘that which goes beyond conscious control’ (2009, p.255), it is possible to short circuit the well-worn paths by which we otherwise tend to produce “just-more-of-the-same’ (Ibid.). The above examples from Salter (2015) and Eckersley (2017) also demonstrate that matter does not act alone. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Deleuzian concept of affect has been crucial to my argument that the properties of an object or body are not innate, but relational in nature. As Eckersley suggests, art works ‘generate encounters’ but also work through encounters between materials and ‘intensive elements such as the artist’s intentions and desires’ (Ibid., p.163) – not to mention the artist’s mediation of paint with surface; of clay with hand, of hand with pliers, hacksaw, lump hammer.

To explore the importance of affect, I expand my use of the term *assemblage* here to encompass the use and significance of the term in relation to assemblage art. The assemblage in the sense of an arrangement, or *gathering* of things while not explicitly discussed, does nonetheless appear at various points through this thesis. As well as providing a new lens through which to view *Break Down* itself, assemblage, as it arises in contemporary art, provides an opportunity to situate this discussion in a broader context. Anna Dezeuze’s assertion of ‘the value of conceiving assemblage as a model of engagement with the world rather than as a formal category’ (2008b, p.31) is a helpful starting point. As she says:

assemblage presented itself as the privileged expression of a new consumer subject whose very identity was defined through an increasingly accelerated cycle of acquisition and disposal of objects. While the concrete nature of assemblage allowed it to underscore the new dominance of the commodity, it was its emphasis on process that suggested the ways in which subjects are formed through this changing set of relations. Through suggestions of transformation, loss, or reinvention, assemblage effected a temporalization of the object that articulated new forms of late-capitalist subjectivity (Ibid., p.32).

Assemblage art emerges in the early years of the twentieth century, notably in the work of Picasso as well as Schwitters, whose *Picture of Spatial Growths* (1920 and 1939) is site-written on pages 131-2 of this thesis (see also Fuller, 2007, pp.1-2) and came to prominence in the 1950s and '60s. The 1961 exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, curated by William Seitz at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, is identified in some accounts as the point at which assemblage art became widely recognised (Seitz, 1961; see also Kelly, 2008) and, Dezeuze suggests, might 'mark' its 'simultaneous culmination and demise' (2008b, p.31). Seitz himself diagnoses assemblage art as 'primarily *assembled*' of 'constituent elements [that] are preformed natural or manufactured materials [...] not intended as art materials' (1961, p.6; emphasis reproduced). Following Seitz, the art historian Julia Kelly defines that assemblage art produces:

art galleries full of obsolete consumer goods, cobbled-together contraptions, ripped and squashed materials, configurations of rusty scrap, and awkward proppings of everyday things. All of these share an aversion to preciousness and to certain notions of artisanal skill and aesthetic effect. They also trouble the category of art, through materials, execution, and presentation (2008, p.24).

In its emphasis on found and as Kelly (2008) says, 'non-art' objects, assemblage art pivots on questions of the production, elision, or nullification of context in similar ways to readymade art. Both forms are, as Stephen Zepke says in relation to the readymade, 'constructed by the detachment of a material object from the seeming self-evidence of its form, function and meaning, allowing it to congeal a singular and immediate assemblage of sensory affects' (2008, p.34).<sup>6</sup> Keeping in mind Dezeuze's vision of assemblage art as process rather than 'formal category,' it is the cobblings, the rippings, the squashings, and the proppings that matter here, since

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<sup>6</sup> And indeed, Section 7.3 makes use of two papers that relate to the readymade: discussion of the ethics of the readymade in relation to theory from Deleuze and Guattari from Zepke (2008), and of database art in relation to assemblage and readymade from Wun-Ting Hsu and Wen-Shu Lai (2013).

what is produced by assemblage art is a range of encounters between previously unrelated 'non-art' materials.

As Fuller suggests, such encounters produce new 'combinatorial potentials' (2007, p.14). Materials and objects, put together, accrue new energies and significances – are able to act in new ways - in relation to one another. In a similar vein (although via a theoretical construction that differs both from Fuller, and this thesis), Seitz refers to this productive practice of placing previously unrelated objects in proximity to one another in art, via the concept of aura from Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1955/1999).<sup>7</sup> As Seitz remarks, '[p]hysical materials and their auras are transmuted into a new amalgam that both transcends and includes its parts (1961, p.83; see Kelly, 2008, p.27). The implication here is that a certain energy accrues to encounters between these truncated scraps of culture at a moment when they are entirely divorced from any 'originary' source and even cut off from their own previous 'wholeness'. This moment affirms the multiplicity of artefacts, which are shown not only to have a variety of originary points or contexts, but also, in concert with the contexts in which they are newly conjoined, to *produce new points of origination*. As Guattari suggests (in relation to Duchamp's readymades) such works play with and 'trigger [...] a constellation of referential universes' (1989/1996, p.164). Such multidimensional encounters and resonances can be observed in any number of examples discussed in the preceding chapters. In a 'non-art' example that nevertheless occupies similar territory, Jane Bennett memorably turns to a moment in which she was drawn into contemplation by an accumulation of miscellaneous objects, including a dead rat, 'in the storm drain to the Chesapeake Bay in front of Sam's Bagels on Cold Spring Lane in Baltimore' (2010, p.4; see also page 35 of this thesis). As she says:

When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with one another, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me. For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noted the bottle cap, and so on (Ibid., p.5).

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<sup>7</sup> Here, Benjamin suggests that in mass reproduction, cultural artefacts – works of art, for example, or pieces of music – when recorded and mass-produced, are denuded of some essential, in-dwelling energy, the 'aura,' that arises in the original, but not the reproduced.

In *Homage to New York* (1960, see discussion in pages 47-8), Jean Tinguely's accrual of things from the dump – bike and pram wheels; a weather balloon; a piano; paper; a fire extinguisher – 'works' together in that their arrangement and relationality is – at least to some extent – mechanical. Further to this, as photographs of *Homage to New York*, Landy's works for his show *H2NY* demonstrate, the same moment of conversation and transformation is present here. The enormous balloon bequeaths an aerial quality to the piano; the spokes of the bike wheels lend the mass of the entire thing a spindly precarity. Finally, as discussed in Chapter 5, pages 166-7, *Break Down* itself can be reframed as an assemblage work in which Landy's stuff is removed from the context of his home and recombined in new ways, enabling his belongings to converse with or reveal one another in unanticipated ways. As discussed there, this works in relation to Landy's *Break Down Inventory* (2001b), in which entries in a spreadsheet (and later, a book), spin a different significance off their new proximities.

These assemblages show affect working. Specifically, they show affects that accrue to a particular object – a bicycle wheel, a dead rat, a sheepskin coat – changing as it is combined with or placed against new objects. In thinking this in terms of the Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage, the example from Bennett (2010) is helpful since it captures the aleatory character of the assemblage; the manner in which agglomerations of objects can form and re-form in ways that receive human influence by chance, if at all. As O'Sullivan (2008, p.253) observes, 'the object isolated from a given series works as a trigger point or a hatch-way into different fields of significant'. Here, arise some broader connections with Chapters 4 and 5, on Landy's manual and the *Break Down Inventory* (2001b). One might look to Wun-Ting Hsu and Wen-Shu Lai (2013) on database art, which, they suggest, draws upon the modalities of readymade and assemblage art by bringing about encounters in which one (digital) object is brought into contact with another (although largely dispensing with the moment in which an artist might choose and bring about these encounters in favour of chance selections via an algorithm, or interventions by the audience). To extend this logic, I would suggest that the Fluxus score, in putting into play series' of movements or actions through 'chance and choice' (Dezeuze, 2002, p.82; see Chapter 4, page 112-13) – so that in effect, one move or act is juxtaposed randomly with another, or with a particular object, for example – might also be seen as deployments of assemblage. Here again, it is possible to see assemblage, in allowing this 'productive encounter with chaos' (O'Sullivan, 2009,



p.255), this needle-jump between relationalities and beyond information. These juxtapositions may include (though are not limited to) a flickering between different kinds of context. This flickering-between takes in categories of art and ‘non-art’; a distinction that has *not* been significant in the constitution of my argument in the foregoing chapters. To expand upon the implications of this decision in particular, it is productive to look to Zepke’s interrogation of the Duchampian readymade via Deleuze and Guattari. As he suggests, the readymade, which for Duchamp is a conceptual entity, is reconstituted, in Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, to centralise, instead, affect. Relationalities produced by the readymade are related via a range of forces, not (only) subjectivity and are ‘in constant contact with a multiplicity of possible futures [...] and so produces conformity or resistance to the powers controlling the present’ (2008, p.35). As this might suggest, to consider art in terms of affect is also to instigate a move from imagining encounters and juxtapositions between similar kinds of thing (objects), to considering how different kinds of thing might encounter one another.

I constitute ‘similarity’ and ‘difference’ here in a similar way to the earlier investigation of series and line in Chapter 5 (pages 133-4). Here, I explore how a range of inputs that arise from different sources and take different forms – ‘[a] bell chimes, someone walking by outside says “pardon?”, there is a flash of light as an opening window reflects the sun and the noise of a car as it passes, a fly lands on my arm’ - may nevertheless form a single *series* of events. This possibility arises, I argue, because they become manifest in relation to a single surface; here ‘the sensory environment’ of the person who experiences them. In relation to the complexity and heterogeneity of the impulses, encounters, and connections that might possibly form a series of imprints (so to speak) on a person, the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart explores an ‘ordinary affects [which] are a kind of contact zone where the overdeterminations of circulations, events, conditions, technologies, and flows of power literally take place’ (2007, p.3). Stewart’s account of affect, too, is written as a collection of tableaux, the details of which are impressed upon Stewart in the course of her daily encounters with and within and as part of ‘the ordinary’: ‘a world of affinities and impacts that take place in the moves of intensity across things that seem solid and real’ (2007, p.127). In the scenarios enacted here, Stewart records in minute detail a range of *different kinds of thing*, that operate at different strengths, levels of significance and temporality: sensations, looks, feelings, and interactions, car journeys, anecdotes and family

lore, parking, entering and leaving familiar and unfamiliar buildings, sitting in various spaces that abut various other spaces more or less narrowly, and with more or less intensity. In so doing, she creates a fragmentary account of a psyche that is profoundly shaped through these affects. Moreover, she communicates something of the multidimensional complexities and multiplicities of the Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage.

#### 7.4 *Afterword: on what is/n't here*

I end by extending into this afterword, the furthest edge of my thesis, a reflection on preoccupations and concerns that have shaped my thought. While not forming part of the logic or narrative of this thesis, they do underpin it. As such, they form part of an account of my encounter with *Break Down*, and an explanation – at least in part – of why it is such a significant work of art.

*Reminiscence: Material engagement at the 'horse park', Alexandra Gardens, Cambridge, summer 2015. In Alexandra Gardens, as well as plane trees, grass, the best and highest swings in town, a good slide, and the 'horse' that earns the park its name for my son and his friends (long, with seats, a kind of horizontal see-saw with a sinister, nostril-flared horse head) there is also a climbing frame with platforms. To one side of this climbing frame, there is a peculiar tray with two kinds of metal mesh, one punctured by round holes, one by long, thin slots. One day, when my son is about three he begins to collect handfuls of daisies, twigs, pigeon feathers, leaves and the shards of plane-tree bark that lie on the ground. We carry these over to the tray. At first, we just gather more and more stuff, but then my son begins to play with his collection. He begins to sort; to think, with his fingers, about the daisies, the sticks, the bark, and the slots in the tray. He posts things through, but also experiments with leaving objects sticking out of the holes. He works intently for a long time, and when he turns to something else, he leaves behind a diorama of daisies, feathers and twigs with their stalks (or quills) posted through the round holes; plane-tree bark and leaves posted jaggedly partway through the long, thin slots.*

I do not mean to say that my son meant to make a diorama; certainly, the question of what precisely he 'meant to do' would have been entirely without interest to him at the time. Nevertheless, his play happened on that occasion to leave behind a satisfying grouping of natural objects, structured by the affordances of the metal

trays. I wish now that the above reminiscence could have been a direct observation. I wish I had at least taken a photograph (although I am, of course, also aware that in doing so I would have corrupted the immediacy and simplicity of this process, which was his, not mine). It was only recently, when I described this thesis to a new friend, an artist, as we stood together in the ‘horsey park’ watching our children, that I understood in retrospect the significance of that moment of observing as my son thought with objects. Despite my earlier reading of the work on material engagement cited in this text; despite a period as an education worker assisting young people to make art at the Kettles Yard gallery in Cambridge, it was at the park that I gained an intuitive insight into the potentiality that resides in things, and especially in fragments. There is a creative power that resides in matter. Thought itself can reside in the work of handling and sorting demonstrated by my child. It is this that underpins my thesis.

In my very earliest writings on *Break Down*, I was drawn especially by the scope and scale of the rage that I read into Landy’s destructive act and, as I imagined, his rejection and betrayal of domestic and family obligations through this work.<sup>8</sup> Since then I have journeyed in my reading via social scientific consumption studies to texts that take into account conceptions of becoming and affect – of vibrant matter and of a dynamic personhood that is formed and shaped through material engagement. As such, the focus of my investigations has shifted, from my earliest excursions into whether *Break Down* could be seen as a ‘political’ work, via examination of the ways in which the work might express, contain within it, and perhaps counter commodity fetishism.

The thesis I now conclude comprises a subtler examination of the work, the themes it provokes, and the ways in which these themes are animated in or by *Break Down*. In parallel, I have followed my child through his first years of life. In tandem with him, I have woken again to the Life that occupies a place in relation to the living that the Creator might occupy in relation to creation (Thacker, 2010, p.135). At the

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<sup>8</sup> My understanding of *Break Down* has also been complicated by my increasing knowledge about this and Landy’s other works. It was impossible, for example, to hold onto my earlier, rather blunt concept of Landy as a man throwing over his social connections after having become better acquainted with *Semi-detached* (2004) in which his parents’ house is recreated in the Duveen Gallery at Tate Britain, accompanied by a series of minutely-detailed sketches that tenderly and unsparingly document his father’s life.

park, we spent hours among the vibrant becomings of leaves, nuts, seed husks, twigs, webs. Further (lest this account begins to feel too pastoral), I should acknowledge the presence of other interesting items that were, for my son's own good, shuffled out of sight – the cigarette dimps; the shards of broken glass; the bottle top; ring pull; abandoned bolus of chewing gum. These shifting attachments and intellectual roamings do not often surface in the preceding discussions, but the new respect I found for the 'thisness' of small and fragmented things – things that are perhaps of no great importance, that might be found on the ground – fed directly into my regard, in this discussion, for the beauty and potentiality of the fragments that Landy produced. They also shape the debates that, as I have discussed, underlie much of this text, between, on one hand, theorisations of materiality that centralise consumption and commodity and on the other, standpoints that are more profoundly informed by becoming or multiplicity.

A final strand of thought and feeling that lies below the surface of this text while still in some sense propelling it has to do with emotional and physical survival. In *Nourishment*, the series of works that includes *Creeping Buttercup* (Landy, 2002a; Figure 29), Landy depicts botanical specimens. Specifically, he draws weeds that must subsist in the meanest of soil, pushing their way through concrete and between paving slabs and occupying the tops of walls in an endeavour to find the light. The series feels like a response to and continuation of Landy's immediately previous work, both reproducing *Break Down* and turning the earlier work inside out. This can be seen firstly in Landy's turn from a complex, years-long project to a comparatively simple subject. His use of pen or pencil and paper, and the technique of etching, must also be seen as an assertion, or claiming, of traditional art skills. Landy's works reproduce the weeds – and sometimes the tins or bottles in which he stands them – in a concerted enumeration of each tiny detail, reiterating the inventorying spirit of *Break Down*. There, as in *Break Down*, it is possible to locate an energy that has to do with auditing; with documenting. Finally, just as 'consumerism as a way of life' (to appropriate the title of the 1998 text by Steven Miles cited by Landy; see Chapter 1, pages 21-2) might be said to offer human beings a very poor, thin cultural soil, *Nourishment* elicits a vision of an urban botanical life that seems to receive very little in the way of the things that are needed to live. Yet the plants depicted by Landy evidently *need* very little, and perhaps we do too. Life finds itself; lives itself. Stalks sprout, leaves leaf, flowers

flower, and human beings will also do what they must – literally, will make a life for themselves – with the poorest and thinnest of materials.

Nevertheless, these plants have *roots* – Life cannot be separated from the living, which is to say that we living beings need – as Landy says – *nourishment*. Further, the living do not do their living independently, but are possessed of affects that can only work relationally, as can be seen from the roots that tangle energetically, miraculously, whitely, through gritted concrete and compacted earth for – as Landy says – *nourishment*. If the sentences above, on life that lives itself and human beings who need little to survive and to create have a rickety, jumpy feel – if in fact, they feel a little queasy – that is because I write on the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2016. Today, the tentative homes, the improvised shops and eating places of the ‘jungle,’ the refugee camp at Calais, are to be dismantled and destroyed; as the homes and hospitals of Aleppo are bombed to fragments and dust. I write with dread in my heart. In Calais, the bulldozers wait. Children are counted, but these precious human fragments, these beads who carry who knows what in their pockets, will not all stay on their thread. Some will be lost. On days like this, *Break Down* appears anew. In the plate-glass window, we display tonne-bags of shattered brick and bone. The operatives in their work bays, labouring on with pliers and hammers, are just doing their jobs. They cut up passports; they shred clothes and family photographs. The conveyor belt carries us from one place to another but never offers safe harbour. The list on the wall; the list on the wall; the list on the wall. Michael Landy, walking wraithlike in his boiler suit the chilly morning after *Break Down* ends (*The Man Who Destroyed Everything*, 2002; see Figure 29) cannot, even in this most vulnerable moment, begin to inhabit the precarity of the migrant who has been counted, who must leave behind his belongings without counting them, who combs his hair and stands in line to board a coach. He does, though, enact the fragility of a person, living in a body. The fragility of *being* a person, living in a body.

I have written almost nothing about migration, bombings and brick-dust in this thesis, nor about the small bundles of belongings – photograph; phone and charger; t-shirt, coins – that are carried onto boats or along motorway embankments. I have not written about the daily reality that has pervaded (and sometimes impeded) my writing of this text, of occupying and working within spaces of learning and thought as they are broken up and reconfigured in

increasingly hostile ways. I have not written about the desk in my grandparents' house, which one day in 2014 was found to contain, among a great many other things, a tennis ball and a number of small, useful tools, maybe 70 years old, belonging to my great grandfather (he put them in there one day and closed the drawer, and never got them back out again). I have not written about ship-breaking, mudlarking, landfill picking or any number of other desperate practices of retrieval and reclamation that are referenced in the form of Landy's *Break Down*. Nevertheless, these attractions, terrors, impulses, attachments, encroachments, lie somewhere in this text, and propel it.

*Observation: at home (October 2016). My son is four. He places Lego figures on the windowsill, in groupings that suggest encounters or confrontations. He suspends an old enamel kettle on a piece of string that is tied to the fence and slides it from one end of the garden to the other by its handle. He climbs onto my knee, placing himself (inadvertently, but exactly; precisely) between me and this work. I close my laptop. He wriggles. He picks up cutlery from the table, and as I watch, arranges it from end to end in a long line: knife knife knife fork fork fork spoon spoon spoon.*

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