Contemporary Art and Political Violence: The Role of Art in the Rehabilitation and Healing of Communities Affected by Political Violence

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Abstract: *This paper will investigate how contemporary artists who use political violence as a subject matter in their work explain the relationship between art and that form of violence. Referring to interviews with Anita Glesta and George Gittoes, the potential of art as a means of healing communities and individuals affected by terrorism will be explored, alongside related issues of voyeurism, sensationalism and commercialism in art. The study will refer to the ideas of Collingwood and Tolstoy, chosen so as to represent two main schools of thought regarding artistic responsibility & morality and the appropriate intentions of artists. I will explain that both theories can be applied harmoniously to contemporary practise, to the understanding of the role and responsibility of contemporary artists, and discourse around the wider social value of contemporary art.*

Introduction

Contemporary art is used as a means for rehabilitating and healing communities affected by political violence in various ways, from the use of art therapy in the rehabilitation of prisoners and victims, to the wider use of art as a communal experience that enables shared memory and compassion in particular groups of people. The idea of art as useful for this rehabilitation and healing of communities has its roots in the notion of 'moral art' (Tolstoy, 1996: 223 – 224), or art that is socially responsible. In aesthetics and the philosophy of art, there are two broad schools of thought regarding how art can be socially valuable. The first, represented in this paper by Tolstoy, takes the position that art can only be moral if it is based on an existing morality, and that art practise therefore should be aligned with personal ethics. This idea has roots in Platonism[1] (Murdoch, 1977: 2), and the idea that art should reinforce morality rather than distract from it.

1 *Though Plato mistrusted the visual arts and poetry, there was some allowance for approved, moral literature, or that which could: "honour the gods and their parents" and encourage people to love one another (Plato, 2003: 76) He approved of work that was: "severe rather than amusing" and which "portrays the style of the good man." (Plato, 2003: 92)*

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The contrasting view is that art can be valuable whether or not it is aligned to a moral structure, regardless of whether it is intended to be moral. Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy,* even argues that rather than expect art to be justified by life and its moral structures, art itself justifies life: "Only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world justified." (Nietzsche, 1999: 33; Nussbaum, 2002: 59) Art can be decadent, but is no less important for being so, according to philosophers of art at this extreme of the spectrum. Oscar Wilde, in perhaps a slightly provocative tone, stated that "all art is quite useless" (Wilde, 1908: 1) and espoused the decadent ideas of the time – that art could be escapist, indulgent, and have nothing to do with the society it came from – but that it could not be called 'immoral' on that count. Art, he wrote, could only be judged by aesthetic standards, not moral standards. (Wilde, 1908: 1) Though Collingwood was no decadent, his view that art can be valuable to society without being specifically engaged with a particular moral structure (outside of the art itself) goes some way to defend this broad school of thought in the sense that he defends art as intrinsically valuable rather than dependent on an existing moral structure (or the morality of the artist).

Given the long history of this debate (which I have only skimmed over) in aesthetics, the philosophy of art, and to a lesser degree, the social sciences, why focus on Tolstoy and Collingwood in particular? Though Tolstoy is predominantly famous as a novelist, his views on art and morality, and essays on those thoughts, are significant even if less well known than his fiction. His ideas on the social value of art are well articulated and insightful, and though original in many respects, also represent an essentially Platonic view of art's value lying in truth and life itself, rather than escape from it:

> Tolstoy's view of art is discussed in most courses in aesthetics, particularly his main text *What is Art?* He believed that the importance of art lies not in its purely aesthetic qualities but in its connection with life, and that art becomes decadent where this connection is lost. This view has often been misconceived and its strength overlooked. (Mounce, 2001: vii)

That Tolstoy was a writer as well as a theorist is particularly interesting, granting him insight into the creative process and connection of art to community, having been in the centre of this process himself. His views are valuable on both counts: as a writer explaining the responsibilities and role of the artist in society, and as a theorist, able to detach from his own situation to consider the wider implications of his own thoughts. Collingwood, while not an artist himself, had strong connections with T.S. Eliot's work which is uniquely grounded in creative practice and connection to community. (Eliot,

2012: 505) Collingwood's views represent the established idea of art as intrinsically socially valuable, even if not intentionally so. An artist need not go out of his or her way to remedy a community's problems, for it is fundamentally social, and valuable on that count:

> Collingwood is anxious to show this does not entail aesthetic solipsism, as if the artist need not ever concern himself with others. Quite the opposite: necessarily the artistic achievement is collaborative, involving the audience and other artists. (Kemp, 2012)

Art is not new, and neither is political violence. There is much to learn from Tolstoy and Collingwood's thoughts on the matter, with potential applications to the relationship between contemporary art practice and political issues for a new perspective on the role and responsibilities of art in these settings. This should establish some foundation for a wider study, looking at additional arts forms not considered here as well as related research into the reception of these artistic efforts by the communities in question. If art can heal communities affected by political violence then it is worth investigating in-depth how this works (particularly what is required of the artist) and why. Another aim of the study is to look at the distinction between socially valuable art, compared to other art, and forms of media (including television and mainstream commercial films) that seem to sensationalize political violence, or be used as propaganda for one political viewpoint or another. That is not to say that no mainstream films are capable of rehabilitating communities, nor are valuable in some way, only that many films tend to sensationalise violence when it is the subject, rather than seriously deal with those themes. (Montgomery, 1942: 423 – 427) Although I would agree that art does not have to be intentional or sincere to have a positive affect on its audience – pure escapism can also heal and help people – I am more concerned with art that confronts social problems directly, and how it justifies this role.[2] The hypothesis of this study then is that contemporary art can be a means of rehabilitating and healing communities affected by political violence and does so distinctly from other forms of media whose purpose is sensationalistic and propagandistic.

By looking at how the theoretical ideas about the moral responsibility of art offered by Tolstoy and Collingwood apply to the modern art practice of Anita Glesta and George Gittoes who explore themes of political violence in their work, it is possible to test this hypothesis. In particular, this study will illuminate (a) distinctions between

2 *Though a study into the effects of other media on communities affected by political violence would be an interesting area for further, related research. The benefits of comedy, especially, may be intriguing.*

their art practice and other forms of mass media, and (b) how they explain their work being healing and rehabilitative to communities engaged with it. The testing of the hypotheses offered here is limited to two case studies, so will serve as an initial illustrative study of the potential role of art in rehabilitating communities affected by political violence. I hope that further research can be built on this initial investigation, particularly regarding the use of more case studies, and a focus on the reception of these ideas and art practise on communities themselves, as well as the perceptions of the artists and theorists. This paper is the first step in that wider investigation.

Literature

In considering the potential for art to be used to heal communities affected by political violence, the ideas of Tolstoy and Collingwood are particularly interesting, as they both believe that art can be healing, though in two quite different ways. Tolstoy, in *What is Art?* encourages the idea that the artist must be intentionally socially responsible and resist all work that could be decadent. Collingwood, in *The Principles of Art* – believes that even art that is not overtly socially responsible can nevertheless be of great value to a community. I will briefly outline these two perspectives, before discussing further literature relating to these thinkers and to the wider subject of art and political violence. Before giving an overview of both key texts, I will mention relevant secondary literature.

Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art?*

The main theme that emerges from the essays of Tolstoy, according to Vincent Tomas, is that his opposition to indulgent or decadent art, and its "dehumanization… the divorce of art from life". (Tomas, 1996: vii) He argues that art is essentially the communication of feeling, and that that should be used to bring people together rather than simply for uses such as enjoyment or entertainment. The point and use of art is to communicate thought and emotion to others:

> Every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with him who produced or is producing the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously, or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression. (Tolstoy, 1996: 120)

The social value of art, according to Tolstoy, lies in its ability to communicate in a way that brings people together and encourages a true sense of community, a reiteration his previous point that well-being is rooted in relationships between people, and empathy therein:

> The consciousness that our well-being, both material and spiritual, individual and collective, temporal and eternal, lies in the growth of brotherhood among all men – in their loving harmony with one another. (Tolstoy, 1996: 33)

Art that Tolstoy considers valuable, then, is that which communicates feelings, and in turn 'unites mankind in brotherhood'. Art is valuable when it fulfils its potential to bring people together in harmony. (Tolstoy, 1996: 33, 120)

> Is it really possible, to tell someone else what one feels? (Tolstoy, 1995: 760)

> As every man… may know all that has been done for him in the realms of though by all humanity before his day, and can in the present, thanks to his capacity to understand the thought of others, become a sharer in their activity and also himself hand on to his contemporaries and descendants the thoughts he has assimilated from others as well as those that have arisen in himself; so, thanks to man's capacity to be infected with the feelings of others by means of art, all that is being lived through by his contemporaries is accessible to him, as well as the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago, and he has also the possibility of transmitting his own feelings to others. If people lacked the capacity to receive the thoughts conceived by men who preceded them and to pass on to others their own thoughts, men would be like wild beasts… And if men lacked this other capacity of being infected by art, people might be almost more savage still, and above all more separated from, and more hostile to, one another. And therefore the activity of art is an important one, as important as the activity of speech itself and as generally diffused. (Tolstoy, 1996: 223 – 224)

Tolstoy considers art to be essential to communities and key in encouraging the kind of empathy and understanding between people that is intrinsically healing and valuable for a community. As we will discuss in more depth later, with reference to the art practise of George Gittoes and Anita Glesta, when applied specifically to issues of political violence and experience of shared trauma, the role of the artist is especially valuable and necessary in developing a community's sense of camaraderie and support. Art that Tolstoy does not approve of, meanwhile, is that which fails to do these things, including "art for the sake of art", or decadent art, (Tolstoy, 1996, 14), which is not "justified by its social utility." (Mounce, 2001: 16)

> It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness. (Tolstoy, 1997: 100)

> [Art] flourishes when it has its roots in beliefs that are fundamental to the life of a people, these being religious in the sense that they give expression to what for that people is the meaning of life. It becomes decadent when it is cut off from those roots… Decadent art appeals

> only to a small section of society, such as the wealthy or leisured… It has a narrow range of themes, the chief being flattery of the wealthy or powerful, sexual attraction and that boredom or discontent with life which is characteristic of the leisured class… It cultivates obscurity and complexity of style. (Mounce, 2001: 40)

Tolstoy associated, to some extent, the status of the audience and intended audience of an artist with that artist's own moral basis, and the moral value of the art work. There is some underlying political assumption here that art which only appeals to the elite is not socially useful because it is not relevant to most people in society.

> To say that a work of art is good, but incomprehensible to the majority of men, is the same as saying of some kind of food that is very good but that most people can't eat it. (Tolstoy, 1996, 95)

As Tolstoy was writing from nineteenth century Russia, and working from essentially socialist principles, it is interesting to consider how that perspective could be applied to the modern world, and specifically art practise in the West. Though there are many people who are not wealthy, and who work often, there is nevertheless a culture of hedonism and capitalism that makes the decadence he speaks of the norm, rather than elitist exception. Either we can speculate that if most people are 'decadent' and find some social benefit in sharing experience of that kind of life, and its problems, then perhaps even work that depicts decadence can nevertheless be valuable to those people. Another option is that capitalism and decadence have a negative effect on art practise as well as society at large, which is an idea we will discuss later, in Anita Glesta's discussion of the commercialism of contemporary art as well as George Gittoes' condemnation of work by Damien Hirst, for example, whom he sees as representative of a decadent, overly commercial art practice.

So there are many interesting discussion points that Tolstoy's ideas provoke, especially in regard to the role and responsibilities of art (and artists) working contemporarily. Though Tolstoy's ideas about art, community and morality have been discussed by Vincent Tomas (1996), H. O. Mounce (2001) and John Dewey (1934), there has been no comprehensive work that looks at the beneficial aspects of the application of Tolstoy's ideas to issues of political violence and communal trauma, the particular benefit that art may have in those situations or the problems with such applications.

R G Collingwood's *The Principles of Art*

Collingwood argues, in the chapter *Art and the Community*

in *The Principles of Art* that, "the artistic achievement is collaborative, involving the audience and other artists." (Kemp, 2012) Art (including poetry as well as the visual arts) is language, and its value lies in the way it can communicate feelings between the artist and his / her community. He argues that the artist is inevitably collaborative, in the sense that he / she learns from other artists, and is inspired by his / her community. The audience (or community)'s experience of art practise is also collaborative, because they hold the same kind of feelings and experiences as the artist and rest of the audience, and it is that shared experience of art that brings people together. As Collingwood puts it:

> The artist… as spokesman for his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs. The reason why they need him is that no community altogether knows its own heart… For the evils which come from that ignorance, the poet as prophet suggests no remedy, because he has already given one. The remedy is the poem itself. Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness. (Collingwood, 1938, 317)

As art is naturally collaborative, it provides the ideal means to share experience and to bring people together. It is precisely that collaborative nature of art that makes is 'good', according to Collingwood, and 'community's medicine' for a lack of unity or communal understanding. (Kemp, 2012)

The work of Collingwood has been explored by various authors in relation to the meaning and point of art, notable examples including Kemp's *The Croce-Collingwood Theory as Theory* (2003) and Davies' introduction to Collingwood's *Performance Theory of Art* (2008). These recent studies explore theoretical inconsistencies and relationships to other art theory, but there is little analysis on the relation of Collingwood's ideas to actual works of art and literature or any social application of his theory. This problem is true of the secondary literature relating to Tolstoy's work as well. There is no substantial study of these ideas, which are fundamental to the understanding of artistic responsibility and morality, to any contemporary instances of socially responsible art. (Mounce, 2001) There is also no study that links these ideas specifically to the use of art to understand and recover from political violence. This is despite Collingwood's admiration of T. S. Elliot's *The Waste Land,* (Collingwood, 1938: 333) written in reaction to the devastation of the First World War and related crisis in London at the time. The poem is concerned with the resultant communal trauma:

> The decay of our civilisation, as depicted in *The Waste Land,* is not an affair of violence or wrong-doing. It is not exhibited in the persecution of the virtuous and in the flourishing of the wicked like a green bay tree. It

> is not even a triumph of the meaner sins, avarice and lust. The drowned Phoenician sailor has forgotten the profit and loss; the rape of Philomel by the barbarous king is only a carved picture, a withered stump of time. These things are for remembrance… There is no question here of expressing private emotions; the picture to be painted is not the picture of any individual shadow… It is the picture of a whole world of men. (Collingwood, 1938: 334)

Collingwood was particularly interested in the way in which *The Waste Land* was borne out of the artist's own experience and feelings, and how the connection between artist experience and audience empathy/relief were intrinsic:

> The whole poem may be seen as arising out of the speaker's experience of suffering and despair, related to the moment of illumination resulting from 'What the Thunder Said.' … The main voice in *The Waste Land* has had an overwhelming spiritual experience of a mystical kind, the result of a nightmarish vision of the society to which he belongs. His approach is that of the visionary who speaks in riddles and uses images and allegory rather than the language of reason. He speaks as one who has been initiated into the mysteries which he has been allowed to see in his vision. At the same time he, the poet/speaker, is prophetic in Collingwood's sense of the word: "The artist must prophesy not in the sense that he foretells things to come, but in the sense that he tells his audience, at the risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts." Again the role of the main voice as spokesman is clear. It expresses the general waste land condition as well as the universal need for redemption. (Hartveit, 1975: 11)

Tolstoy was also influenced by social problems when he wrote *What is Art?*(Mounce, 2001: 5) and it is interesting to relate those essays to contemporary instances of political violence and social problems similar to those they were initially written in an attempt to resolve. In art theory there is a general lack of research about how these significant and potentially useful ideas relate to contemporary problems and art. There is a need to update discourse around the quite abstract ideas of theorists such as Collingwood & Tolstoy and their application to contemporary art practice to better understand the connection between art and communities and how the former can be of value to the latter.

Other Literature

That is not to say that the use of contemporary art to affect social change and healing of communities has not been written about, just that it is often discussed without reference to these specific ideas. Various authors have discussed the connection between art and violence, as well as the ways in which contemporary art can be used

to help communities. (Bishop, 2012; Cleveland, 2008; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005; Thompson, 2012) Of the recent literature focussing on the use of art to effect social change regarding the rehabilitation and healing of communities affected by political violence, Cleveland's *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World's Frontlines*, which investigates art practise in the context of social upheaval, provided interesting case studies of art being used to heal and rehabilitate communities affected by political violence, as well as other social problems. Also *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, edited by N Thompson collects a series of case studies relevant to the topic of art and political violence, but as with Cleveland's study, it is merely descriptive and lacks any substantial theoretical engagement. Another relevant study is Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship,* which draws upon historical and theoretical background of socially engaged art. This tends to focus explicitly on group-focused participatory art practice, leaving out individual artists who are socially-engaged and art that is not intentionally communal or participatory, but which is nevertheless socially aware and responsible.

Considering Tolstoy and Collingwood's ideas again, this is problematic, because both agree that an individual artist can bring about social collaboration and 'brotherhood' without necessarily inviting his or her community to be overtly involved in art creation. So, although there is material describing various patterns and instances of artists and communities working together to bring about social change, there is little work on the philosophical origin of this tendency, twinned with a testing of these original ideas using contemporary examples. With that in mind, this study is an initial explanation of the reasons behind art being used as a means of healing communities, and an exploration of the contemporary application of these ideas.

Methodology

To provide evidence for the hypothesis that contemporary art can be a means of rehabilitating and healing communities affected by political violence, this study will draw upon interviews with two important contemporary artists who approach the subject of political violence in very different ways.

Participant 1: Anita Glesta

Anita Glesta is a New York City-based artist who witnessed the

9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers precipitating her questioning of the role of the artist in the twenty-first century. She chose to explore Picasso's iconic work, *Guernica* (1937), and having already worked with 9/11 survivors, consulted survivors of the Guernica massacre to find a parallel experience between those two events and the effects on the communities involved. (Koziol, 2007: 3) Glesta chose to use Guernica as a parallel subject, partly due to personal circumstance – her family had lived in the Basque Country in the 1970s, exposing her to its history, and she had returned frequently after the 9/11 attacks, leading her to compare the two instances of traumatic political violence and its effect on people living in those communities. (Koziol, 2007: 8) The detachment, according to Basque locals from actual community life at the time (citing images of a horse and bull in the painting, which was out of place in a painting of a Basque town, where donkeys would have been more appropriate) also fuelled Glesta's interest in *Guernica*. Glesta's reaction to this experience, not to mention her own experience of 9/11, can be seen in her desire to represent the community's experience as truthfully as possible, using oral testimonies rather than images. (Koziol, 2007: 10)

Glesta's other recent work includes *The Census Project* (2010), which was commissioned by the United States General Services Administration's Art & Architecture Program for instillation at the United States Census Bureau Headquarters in Suitland. The installation was, "an exploration of the diverse population of the United States," (Petty, 2010) – not only an artistic representation of the American population, but also a physical space for the 10,000 Census employees working there. (Petty, 2010) Meanwhile, *Echo of Faraday Wood* (1997) was situated in the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney and examined ideas of growth and decay, and the convergence of urban and natural life. (McGillick, 1999) The overriding theme in all of her work is, "the dynamic of how people interact with their environment." This often manifests in works that require the physical participation and interaction with the viewers. Her interest is twofold – firstly, re-examining the role of the artist and the artist's contribution to development of critical thought, and secondly of the contribution that artists can make in developing awareness of this landscape. This makes their role a political one, by breaking down the walls of the gallery and freeing artists to integrate ideas with actual situations." (MacGowan, 1999) Glesta's work on 9/11 and Guernica develops these interests and themes, and shows how this approach to making art can be intrinsically political and provocative without using especially political/violent imagery or explicit political declarations. Instead the politics of her work reside in encouraging people to think

for themselves. Rather than prescribing particular ideas, her work encourages a liberation of individual thought and experience, existing as a free-flowing process of communal communication and shared memory.

Participant 2: George Gittoes

George Gittoes is an artist who has worked in many war zones over the past forty years, including Rwanda, Bosnia, Somalia, South Africa, Southern Lebanon, and most recently Iraq and Afghanistan. His paintings are usually large canvases depicting a variety of horrors he has observed or which have been relayed to him in the war zones he has visited. (McKenzie, 2010) He has also made films about artists in various areas of conflict, (Bendel, 2011) and is interested in the use of art to escape one's situation (notably through comedy and story-telling). His work looks to expose political violence and "the futility and madness of war." (McKenzie, 2010) Gittoes' work is particularly important and successful for its re-appropriation of journalistic activities (going to the front line himself, filming combatants and victims) while retaining his artistic freedom, independent interpretation and access to a unique platform for the communication of his work to a different audience. He is able to cover wars and stories that mainstream media would tend to ignore, "for issues of political and economic expenditure." (Dillon, 2011)

Gittoes has used films, notably *The Bullets of the Poets* (1987) and (most recently) *The Miscreants of Taliwood* (2011) as well as large figurative canvases, installations, graphic novels, and journals that include drawings, cartoons, collage and writing. *Rwanda Maconde* (1995) for example, details a massacre at the Kibeho refugee camp, and includes drawings of a mother and child in a mass grave, and a boy staring into space, traumatised. His recent series of paintings, related to a graphic novel of the same title, *Night Visions* (2010), depicts United States soldiers, and their experiences in a ficionalised war zone, based on Gittoes' own experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan during the recent 'War on Terror'. (Dillon, 2011) His body of work is expansive and varied, but the subject of political violence and war, and its human effects persists throughout.

Rationale

The reason these two artists were chosen for interview is that although they are both interested in political violence as a subject

matter, they approach it in quite different ways. Where there are similarities, they are in the subject matter approached, rather than in approach taken: both artists have responded to aspects of the War on Terror – Glesta by dealing with the attack on the Twin Towers and the issues of communal trauma due to political violence in her work, Gittoes by covering various war zones and acts of political violence, including the effects of the War on Terror on civillians & soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. But while Glesta uses installations and writing in her artworks, distancing herself from the use of visual depictions of violence (as explored later in the study), George Gittoes seeks out violent imagery, seeing this as a necessary part of his exposition of the atrocities of war. By interviewing them both about their views on violence and art I hoped to elicit an explanation of the difference between socially responsible contemporary art, and sensationalistic art/media.

By interviewing artists that are, in these ways, so different, I hope to uncover the common reasons that make much contemporary art socially responsible, and in doing so come to some conclusions about what characteristics point to art being socially responsible, across the board of contemporary practice. I conducted these interviews by email, which was a beneficial approach. Both artists were given the same questions, so that I could compare their answers more succinctly. Participants were able to answer at a time most suitable to them for thinking about the issues in a relaxed, free environment. The respondents were also given open-ended questions, meaning that they could provide as much detail as they liked, allowing previously unconsidered insights and ideas about the subject to come through. Using these email interviews also built in the possibility for follow-up questions and clarification if necessary. (Meho, 2006)

Theoretical Framework

I will consider the insights of Collingwood and Tolstoy, and the interviews with Anita Glesta and George Gittoes, from a post-positivist constructivist theoretical point of view. The paper will focus on the way in which social interaction and shared ideas, particularly through art practice, are significant in communities' understanding of political violence, (as influenced by depiction of them through art) and therefore their effects and 'reality' to those people. (Nicholson 2002: 122 – 123; Wendt, 1999) Considering how art has been used with intent for healing and rehabilitating communities, the ideas purported by constructivism can be said to go some way to explain how we might understand contemporary art as a means of social change with

relevance in broader community and international relations. It is how political violence is interpreted which potentially makes the difference between a community being chronically traumatised and problematic, and a community able to find meaning in this political violence in order to move forward. Since locating meaning of "things and events" (Nicholson 2002:123) in social interaction is central to constructivism, it is appropriate to apply that theoretical perspective to a study of art and community. In terms of methodology, this theoretical background is consistent with using the qualitative method of interviewing two artists about their subjective experience of art practice and its relation to community. The questions therefore focussed on their experience of the link between artistic expression and audience as well as the wider nature of art (the articulation of subjective emotion and experience) as a means of changing social reality.

Results

By thematically analysing these interviews, the study aimed to highlight particular insights, challenges and possible problems in the intention and use of art to rehabilitate and heal communities, as well as gain insight into the difference between contemporary art's use of subject matter of political violence (from the perception of these artists), compared to mass media coverage. It explored the specific ways that contemporary art can be healing and rehabilitative, by referring to the participants' art practice. The key insights that emerged were in the areas of (a) artists' work and social responsibility, (b) community, and (c) depiction of violence, which are discussed first with reference to the interview with Anita Glesta, and secondly with that of George Gittoes.

Anita Glesta

Artists' Work & Social Responsibility

The key insights to emerge were that Glesta is "mistrustful of the violent / political image and its inherent propagandistic aspect"… She believes that there are, "more interesting ways of being subversive or activist as an artist without an overt political narrative." On the question of whether or not art should be intentionally political or rehabilitative, Glesta answers that she has: "No belief that art should or should not function in any prescribed way." She believes in art for art's sake, but sees that art can have healing capacities and sees this as a positive effect. She believes that art can be moral, and that as an artist she has

a, "moral responsibility to give back to the world" through art, which she considers a gift she's grateful to have.

> I am deeply grateful and fortunate to be able to do what I love. I feel that I must share this and rise to the occasion of using it as much for myself as to benefit others if I can. It does not preclude doing the work I love to satisfy myself but more often than not, that intersects with this broader interest of being able to consider humanity into the work either through including people into interactive participation as a public artist or through the concepts I am engaging with my work in the studio. (Glesta, 2012)

Her personal drive, in the Guernica work especially, is: "to demonstrate the universality of human survival in the face of needless violence and destruction." (Glesta, 2012) So Glesta believes that art is valuable in its intrinsic artistic beauty and goodness, as well as an ability to show the universality of human experience (particularly survival when relating to political violence).

Community

Glesta is open to working with the community, but does not mind if people like or dislike her work, hoping rather to "get people thinking" and communicating. She bears in mind when making installations that affect community the practical concerns and desires of the community to some extent, however:

> How people respond to my work, my viewers or audience, is never a driving force for me at all. In a personal way, individual's response never informs my work. However, on a larger level both in terms of the circumstance for or in which I am creating a work for a site, I am always considering who is there living now and who might have been there at another time. Those are always my concerns. (Glesta, 2012)

In terms of whether or not it matters that her art is healing or rehabilitative, Glesta says that while, "it's nice if it happens," it is not her intention:

> I consider my relationship with my viewers to be much more akin or analogous to the relationship of the author with his reader rather than the visual artist with the object that is just a visual experience. (Glesta, 2012)

Art is a dialogue, and Glesta considers that worthwhile in itself, rather than an intentional remedy for societal problems. However, the two effects are often interrelated, and she considers that a positive outcome of her art practice.

Depiction of Violence

Glesta is suspicious of violent imagery because of the way "it is more likely to end up over the sofa of a wealthy person… than in a place where the violent activity may have occurred". So the violence, whether intended or not, ends up glamorized or sensationalized because of the commercial nature of the art world. If it is accessible to a wider audience or community, however, then there is more potential for the art to be useful and to have integrity, she says:

> If violent subject matter is not necessarily limited to visual imagery or is sited in a more accessible way for those who might really benefit from the awareness that it is trying to evoke, than I believe it can be socially responsible. That being said, those who are experiencing the violence of the book's content might not read a book that is about violence. Will the reader benefit and become active from what he or she may have read? Then the answer would be yes. (Glesta, 2012)

Glesta herself prefers to use "oral narratives, symbols or text rather than overt imagery," (Glesta, 2012) partly because she thinks our society has been "bombarded" with violent imagery and that people are "numb" to it, so it has less effect in terms of making people think or be compassionate.

> We saw this beginning to happen in the sixties with the Vietnam War on TV and much more with the Gulf War… I have used the words of survivors of the bombing of Gernika and Holocaust survivors in my ten-year project of interviews with the survivors. I believe that the spoken words from these people had more power and depth than any imagery that I could make. (Glesta, 2012)

Another interesting point she made, in terms of the attempt to communicate horror and trauma in art, was that she didn't feel that visual art could work as well as written and oral communication. In her experience:

> Having been in the middle of the bombing and as a witness to this violent destruction I knew that no image I could make could possibly match the tragedy of this indescribable event. However, the spoken words of those who have had some time and distance from a like experience might be able to offer a sense of continuity and humanity with how we all survive this unspeakable violence. (Glesta, 2012)

George Gittoes

Artists' Work & Social Responsibility

Compassion is a central drive in making art, and Gittoes is, "highly influenced by the reactions of viewers to my work." (Gittoes, 2012) Gittoes believes that by being compassionate in this way, art can be morally and socially responsible and useful, despite the art world often being commercially driven:

> The vast majority of artists do art to either sell, so it usually has to be pleasant and decorative, or to make their names in the art world. Neither of these aims interest me. War is barbaric and I describe my life work as a "war on war". I want to see humans evolve socially beyond the need for violent physical aggression. My art has developed through trial and error." (Gittoes, 2012)

Being comic, he says, is a way of relieving people from shocking aspects of war, and central to his role as an artist. He has managed to combine this humour with a generally sincere attitude to his work, believing it necessary for there to be some respite, and to include the efforts of some individuals in war zones to rise above their situations.

> Humour has become a bigger and bigger factor. When serious subjects have humour inserted into their structure it is a huge relief and assists people to absorb the impact of the more shocking aspects. (Beldel, 2011)

His perceived role as an artist is deeply political, too. He believes that:

> Art and film which propagates the myth of the Patriotic Killer Hero ultimately propagates war… I want my art to be like Perseus mirror-shield to reflect the worlds horror back on itself. Perhaps if more artists thought this way we would have a better chance of disempowering the Medusa. (Gittoes, 2012)

Community

Gittoes emphasises that he has always been involved practically as well as artistically in the communities he has used as subject matter. Helping (practically) is key: "When the horror of the events were over I was able to live with the memories not because of the art I had created but because the memory of those I had helped." (Gittoes, 2012) Having worked as an art therapist in a mental institution, he believes art is very useful in rehabilitating individuals as well as the wider community:

> I believe this function should not be underestimated as an alternative to harsh medications. In the wider sense, when art is combined with love it

> can do miracles to heal both humanity and the planet. (Gittoes, 2012)

Other examples of Gittoes using art to benefit community are his film about "artists in Jalalabad using their skills to effect social change and work to a better and more equal Afghanistan by artistic means," and the "cinema circus" which he took around remote areas of Afghanistan to encourage children to be creative:

> These raggedy children have never been to school or known modern medicine or warm clothing against the cold – so imagine the delight I feel to bring them film, art, acting and music. After the show most of the kids tell us they want to discover how to be artists rather than soldiers for the Taliban. (Gittoes, 2012)

Depiction of Violence

Gittoes himself uses violent images in his work, but doesn't consider it gratuitous. He considers it important to expose the true horror of war and violence. For example, in a film about the Taliban's execution of a child and the use of films to desensitise and 'shut down' other film industry in Afghanistan, he depicts violence. But he does so with the intention of exposing these violent films [of the Taliban] and the political structure behind them. Likewise he uses violent imagery in paintings to expose the pain people are put through during war. Gittoes disapproves of and dislikes Hollywood blockbusters that are gratuitously violent, as well as contemporary artists such as Damian Hirst, who use depictions of violence simply for shock value and to sell paintings.

> In art I find much of Damien Hirst's work designed to shock and I suspect this is for nothing more than sensationalism in a formula that has worked to make him internationally rich and famous. I recently saw a piece of his where two bodies are lying on hospital style metal stretchers. Their entire bodies are covered except for their genital area. A dark skinned man has his penis and testicals revealed through a jagged hole in the blue sheet – same with the white skinned woman. I see this as pure sensationalism - a crude shock, [and] horror gimmick. (Gittoes, 2012)

Gittoes is very clear that his own work resists such sensationalism and is distinct from not only other artists who use violence irresponsibly, but also the wider media:

> I can not think of any example in my art where I have used violence gratuitously. It has only ever been depicted as a means to either alert the world to atrocities or to make an important point as with the decapitation. This is not like the commercial film industry where gratuitous violence is used as a form of entertainment and movies like SAW and Texas Chainsaw massacre exploit the outer limits of what is shocking. Personally, I can not watch this type of film and do not believe that just

> because they are made within the fiction film genre they are justifiable. (Gittoes, 2012)

Discussion

The implications of thematic analysis of the interviews will now be discussed, referring to the two initial areas of investigation: (a) The distinctions between socially responsible, moral art practise, and other forms of mass media and (b) examples of [the artists'] work healing and rehabilitative communities engaged with it. Firstly, while both artists think that there is a clear distinction between socially responsible, moral art practise, and other forms of mass media, they disagree on the ways in which this distinction can be drawn. While Glesta thinks that it is better to steer away from the visual depiction of violence in contemporary art, because other media is full of these images and that 'bombardment' has desensitized the public, Gittoes disagrees, and has used violently imagery in his own painting and film work. Gittoes explains that his work is violent because it is a way of exposing the horror of war and violence, and says that this kind of work is distinct from other media use of violent imagery because of its intention and context. Gittoes says that his violent imagery is never gratuitous, because he ensures that these images are explained by text and photographs that show his personal connection to the subject, as well as the real-life context and severity of the work. Thus this cannot be compared to the use of sensationalistic violence in Hollywood blockbusters, or even Damien Hirst's work, Gittoes argues. He says that his work is sincere and political, and in that context is justified and socially responsible, whilst these other uses of violence are clearly without sincerity or social context. When justified thus, Gittoes' experience and opinion about the use of violent imagery in his work harmonise with Tolstoy's own explanation of such art:

> To take the simplest example: a boy having experienced, let us say, fear on encountering a wolf, relates that encounter, and in order to evoke in others the feeling he has experienced, he describes himself, his condition before the encounter, the surroundings, the wood, his own lightheartedness, and then the wolf's appearance, its movements, the distance between himself and the wolf, and so forth. All this, if only the boy when telling the story again experiences the feelings he had lived through, and infects the hearers and compels them to feel what he had experienced – is art. (Tolstoy, 1996: 122)

Gittoes' use of emotionally provocative images and narratives, in painting and film, is an instance of the communication of feeling and experience that Tolstoy promotes in his distinction between socially justified and decadent art. It is clearly a fine line, in some cases people may feel the same emotion watching a gratuitously violent horror film

as they do experiencing one of Gittoes' paintings. Tolstoy, however, argues that there is a distinction in the sincerity of the communication, the truth of the experience shared, and the worth of the intention of the art practise itself. (Tolstoy, 1996: 223 – 224) So in noting the genuine experience drawn upon by Gittoes, it becomes easier to understand the art practice that Tolstoy encourages in *What is Art?* – and to see the subtle distinction between socially justified art and that which is decadent. (Mounce, 2001: 40)

A deeper point suggested by both artists is that there is a real challenge in making art that deals with issues such as political violence, in the sense that both artists admit to having trouble doing justice to the real-life pain and severity of their subjects. Both said that it was difficult to express how bad or wrong certain situations were (9/11 and Guernica for Glesta, and various wars and instances, including a woman being facially wounded and a child being decapitated by the Taliban, for Gittoes). This seems particularly interesting in the context of Collingwood's discussion about art being the remedy of community, just by communicating its problems and feelings. (Collingwood, 1938) Another important point that emerged from the interviews with Glesta and Gittoes is that there are different ways and levels of collaboration between artist and community, and this very much depends on the artist's particular sense of purpose and possibly his / her personality. While Glesta is interested in how the community reacts to her work, to a point, it is not her driving force. Rather it is a sort of welcome side effect of her work. She is more interested in the inherent value of art as art, which she thinks is her duty as an artist to produce. She does not think that art needs to have a social responsibility *per se*. This is clearly in conflict with Tolstoy's objection to 'art for art's sake', or art without clear social engagement. Glesta's perception is more in line with Collingwood's idea that art just needs to be in tune with society's problems, rather than actively engaged with them to be socially helpful.

Gittoes, meanwhile, thinks that art should be actively socially responsible and political, and is very open about his work being a means of protest against war and violence. He points to his own history of practical aid and anti-war activism, concurrent with his artistic practice, and suggests that art should be a part of political activism in a wider sense, when it is engaged with those issues. This suggests that he thinks that although art is valuable to society, it is not enough to 'just' be an artist. This is the main point on which Glesta and Gittoes diverge: Glesta thinks that being an artist is enough to contribute

positively to society even when it is not actively socially engaged. Gittoes, meanwhile, thinks that art not only should be socially engaged and active in the community, but also combined with other community work:

> When the horror of the events were over I was able to live with the memories not because of the art I had created but because the memory of those I had helped and the sense that if I had not been there these people would have died or not been treated by doctors. (Gittoes, 2012.)

Gittoes and Glesta have different intentions when it comes to their art practise's relation to social responsibility, despite similar interests regarding subject matter, and compassion regarding those subjects. This is itself relevant: art being healing and rehabilitative is not necessarily determined by artistic intentions or philosophy. As we have seen with Glesta, an artist does not have to be particularly socially active or overtly political to make art that heals and rehabilitates, and provokes people to be political. This is in line with Collingwood's insights into the role of art as a 'remedy' for society, simply in being accurate and sincere. Gittoes, meanwhile, sees his activism and art as combined, which influences the effects his work has on his audience, while Glesta sees it as a welcome side-effect, rather than an intended one:

> People from places where there has been long suffering under violent regimes or war always welcome my work and see me as an advocate. The Kurdish people who ran the apartments where I lived in Baghdad would always great me with: '… We love you being here because you are always creating while everyone else who comes here is destroying.' (Gittoes, 2012)

> The employees really took ownership of the work. I think everyone was surprised about that. It was not my intention to make the employees happy about that though I did think about giving them more places to 'be' throughout the seven-acre landscape by creating oversized number benches. They were happy with that and I was thinking of their physical comfort and how they navigated this space in my design for that… I have been really pleasantly surprised that I have rock star moments there because of the content of the work, not just the sculptural or more formal design aspect of this work. (Glesta, 2012.)

The main insights that have emerged from these interviews and consequential analysis are: (a) Whether an artist uses visual depictions of violence or not, there are convincing ways to distinguish socially valuable from other forms of media; (b) There is a real challenge in accurately and sensitively dealing with the subject of political violence in art, in doing it justice, and both artists emphasised that challenge; (c) There are different ways and levels of collaboration between artist and community, and (d) This very much depends on the artist's particular

sense of purpose and possibly personality. The important point here is that no matter the particular artist's intentions or philosophy regarding how socially engaged art should be, art can be healing and rehabilitative. Intention does not determine effect.

So the results and analysis of the interviews with Glesta and Gittoes have confirmed the hypothesis in the sense that both artists agreed that socially valuable contemporary art can be distinct from other forms of media that is sensationalistic or exploitative, though again, they had slightly different ideas about how that distinction can be made. The results also supported the idea that contemporary art can be a means of healing and rehabilitating communities. There were examples of both artists' work having healing and rehabilitative effects on the communities they were concerned with despite very different ideas about depiction of violence, and actual interaction with communities. This reinforces the idea that art can be healing and useful even if it is not intentionally so, which is more in line with Collingwood than Tolstoy's theory.

Conclusion

That art is distinct from other forms of mass media in being helpful and healing to communities was established in this study. The ideas of Tolstoy and Collingwood have been explored using contemporary examples. Different levels of social engagement were also discussed, pointing ultimately to the conclusion that intention of the artist, and actual social engagement, does not necessarily determine social value and effect on community, supporting Collingwood's theory of art and social responsibility more than that of Tolstoy. The interviews with George Gittoes and Anita Glesta illuminated contemporary art practice engaged with social problems and political violence in particular, and how those artists explain their motives, intentions and ideas about the relationship between artists and the wider community. Through those discussions, insights about the various ways that contemporary art can be socially valuable, whether intentionally or not, and whether alongside other political activism or not, illustrated the possibilities open to contemporary artists engaged with issues of political violence, and concerned about the value of art in that context.

Further research that would deepen and expand this study might be best focussed on investigating how members of communities affected by political violence view the importance and healing

possibilities (and realities) of art, as well as a more quantitative measure of how well contemporary art heals and rehabilitates communities affected by political violence. It would also be useful to interview a wider selection of contemporary artists, possibly including writers and musicians as well as visual artists, in order to expand the understanding of the relationship between art and the community, and the potential rehabilitative and healing qualities therein.

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