Damien Hirst and the legacy of the sublime in contemporary art and culture


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ABSTRACT

Research Questions:
• How can we understand the legacies of the eighteenth-century sublime in contemporary culture – including commercialised and commodified forms?
• What are the insistent reiterations of tropes, affects and themes of the sublime doing in contemporary art and culture?
• How are the aesthetic forms of the sublime bound in to economic, social and political histories?
• What happens when we read Hirst in terms of the histories of the sublime? And the sublime through Hirst?
• The work also more generally sets out to examine the cultural forms of our own global-capitalist moment, and to think this within the longer histories of capital.

Research Context
• Hirst is a highly successful artist but there is a dearth of serious critical writing about him. Most extant work on the yBas was produced in the 90s, as part of a critical polemic around the work. My own work starts from the historical distance which is now opening up between then and now to read Hirst as art history.
• The work also positions itself with regard to a currently burgeoning body of literature around the sublime. I draw on the different approaches of aesthetics, criticism and cultural history to read the relation between past and present forms of the sublime.
• My work focuses on the intertwinement of the sublime (from its earliest histories) with commodified culture, rather than just high culture.

Research Methods
• Hirst is treated as a cultural symptom.
• The work investigates forms of historical repetition (Nachträglichkeit, Nachleben, figurality, hauntology, etc.)
• Hirst is a focal point for a wider exploration of a wide-ranging cultural history. Other objects of inquiry include: Alexander Pope and the Scriblerians, Bertolt Brecht, John Singleton Copley, James Thomson, Bruegel the Elder, Piranesi, Wordsworth, Steven Spielberg, Mary Shelley and Emile Zola.
• My approach is broadly Marxian, but I also critically interrogate Marx, and draw on other approaches including those of Freud, Lyotard, Derrida and Braudel.
• Particular attention is given to the early eighteenth century.

Findings:
• The strength of Hirst’s best work stems from its condensation of social contradiction into complex, haunting images – images which are in turn haunted by the histories of sublimity, an aesthetic formed in, and which also serves to help form, capital’s imaginary. Hirst and the sublime are bound in to a representational logic of an imperialism common to our own moment and that of early modernity. Such links to the imperialist imaginary beleive the use of the sublime by contemporary leftist theorists (such as Lyotard) to valorize the sublime.

Item Type: Thesis (PhD)
sublime; bathos; Damien Hirst; Eighteenth-Century Culture, Literature, Theatre, Art and Society; Scriblerian satire; capitalism; globalisation; commercialised culture; popular culture; contemporary art; young British artists; Charles Saatchi; commodification; culture industry; consumption; modernity; aesthetics; Marxian thought; Alexander Pope; Dunciad; Peri Bathous; John Gay; Beggar's Opera; Colley Cibber; Henry Fielding; James Thomson; Robert Walpole; Jonathan Wilde; John Singleton Copley; Berthold Brecht; Bruegel the Elder; Steven Spielberg; Jaws; Peter Benchley; Emile Zola; Wordsworth; Piranesi; Mary Shelley; Fernand Braudel; Jacques Derrida; Jean-François Lyotard; Edmund Burke; Immanuel Kant; (Pseudo-)Longinus; John Dennis; George Gilder; Peter de Bolla; Financial revolution; Imperialism; markets; meat; shop windows; fps; plagiarism (eighteenth-century); masculinity; class; nachträglichkeit; figurality; spectrality; phantasy; phantasmagoria; Camp; sharks in modern culture; labour; cultural representations of slavery

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Critically engaging with the work of continental philosophers, Theodor W. Adorno, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Francois Lyotard and of contemporary artists Joseph Beuys, Damien Hirst, and Boaz Arad, the book confronts the shared cultural conditions that made Auschwitz and Hiroshima possible and offers searching meditations on the structure and meaning of the traumatic historical ‘event’. Ray argues that globalization cannot be separated from the collective tasks of working through historical genocide. He provocatively concludes that the current US-led War on Terror must be grasped as a include Damien Hirst's terrifying and unsettling sculpture of a dead tiger shark in a of the connection between the sublime and Damien Hirst's art see: Brooks. Art, Emergence, and the Computational Sublime - CiteSeerX. Art, Emergence, and the Computational Sublime. Jon McCormack and Alan Dorin. Centre for Electronic Media Art. School of Computer Science and Software Art, Terrorism and the Negative Sublime - PhilArchive. Nov 14, 2009 - art world were responses to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen called them “the greatest work o Image: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. Exhibitions. Damien Hirst. ‘The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living’ has become embedded in popular culture as one of the most iconic images of contemporary art. Conceived by Hirst in 1989 whilst at Goldsmiths, the ‘Natural History’ work consists of a thirteen-foot tiger shark preserved in a tank of formaldehyde, weighing a total of 23 tons. Thought of prior to the sculpture, it was taken from Hirst’s student thesis on Hyperreality and the work of Robert Longo and Umberto Eco. Hirst recalls liking the title’s poetic clumsiness because of the way it expressed, “something that wasn’t there, or was there”.[1].