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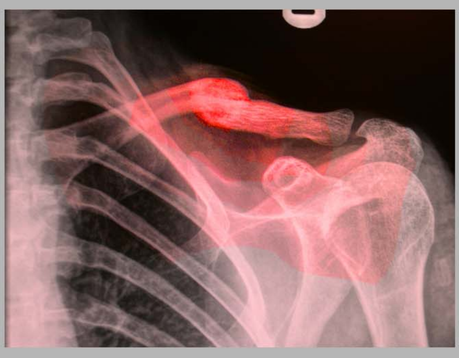

I started to discuss the ideas contained in this section in a less developed and shortened form in a previous text (below). I write by cutting and reassembling previous versions of writing, changing the order and context. I haven't referenced myself to specific sections because they are broken up and it would break the flow of text.

Sperryn-Jones, J. (2013) 'Breaking as making: A methodology for visual work reflected in writing'. In Walden, J. (Ed.) *Art and destruction*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press.

In 'Broken Arm' Henri Michaux observes, 'A while ago, on the very spot where the accident took place, right after the fracture, when I didn't know yet that my right elbow was broken, the spirit of my body had silently, secretly deserted it' (1994: 244). Oliver Sacks describes his broken leg as a 'phantom' and 'a corpse's leg' (1990: 88) and that, '...it was, in effect, mortified: it was neutrally, functionally and existentially dead' (1990: 83). Ann Oakley based a book on the experience of breaking her arm and notes that, 'It's a shocking to experience part of one's body as lifeless flesh when one 'knows' it isn't' (2007: 32). It seems that the lack of functioning and wasting away of a limb could provoke the same sense of abjection as a corpse. Sacks notes that his leg is, '...no longer a part of my 'inner image' of myself – having been erased from my body image, and also my ego, by some pathology of the most serious and inexplicable kind (1990: 81).

Julia Kristeva suggests the abject is caused by what makes our individual subjectivity ambiguous. Blood, urine and excrement can cause this since by crossing between interior and exterior they problematise the physical boundary of the body,

> A decaying body, lifeless... the corpse represents fundamental pollution. A body without soul, a non-body, disquieting matter, it is to be excluded from God's *territory*...if the corpse is waste, transitional matter, mixture, it is above all the opposite of the spiritual, of the symbolic, and of divine law (Kristeva 1982: 109).

The broken limb, then, is perceived as alien although ambiguously still attached to the body. Kristeva states,

> ...abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, whilst releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger (1982: 9).

It is not merely the alien limb that becomes ambiguous but that this ambiguity reveals a break in the coherence of the self and that in turn challenges the systems and orders that created this conception of self.

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (Kristeva 1982: 4).

Kristeva's notion of abjection offers the 'ability to theorise subjectivity as incomplete and discontinuous, as a process rather than a fixed structure' (Mansfield 2000: 80). Nick Mansfield suggests that,

> Implicit in this contrast is a whole cultural politics: the contest between a traditional power hoping to be able to control and manage a stable and knowable world, and a subversive force seeking to set the future of the world in motion again, into a hopeful and productive uncertainty (2000: 80).

In writing about Kristeva Nick Mansfield clarifies this,

> ...abjection both threatens and thrills us, dramatising the insecurity of our subjectivity and the possibility of its loss, but also offering us a freedom outside of the repression and logic that dominate our daily practices of keeping ourselves in order, within the lines, heads down. This ordered subjectivity is a comfort, but it is also a burden, and we flirt endlessly with what may be outside its limits (2000: 87).

Injury lends a glimpse of the structures that normally constitute us and therefore the possibility of moving beyond them. This point at which the structurality of structure is perceived is what Jacques Derrida described as the break. I find it interesting that a physical break, such as a broken bone, can lead to a philosophical break; Derrida's break.

Nick Mansfield also notes Kristeva's understanding of the inseparable relationship between self and society,

> ...shifts in the quality of selfhood are like tugging on the weave of a complex fabric. Inevitably, abstract systems of order, meaning, truth, authority and power will be affected too. Thus the meaning of the abjection of the individual subject and its clean and proper body is entangled in the abstract and general sphere of truth and power. Put simply, the stability of both the dominant symbolic and the political order relies on the individual subject's commitment to the desperate self-discipline of the clean and proper body (Mansfield 2000: 85).

Broken bones, therefore, can present two elements that encourage us to take risks and move beyond everyday routines and restrictions. The first is in wanting to break free from the restricting feelings of being in plaster or having limited in. The second is that alienation to the broken limb moves us to face a state of uncertainty by bringing it forcefully into our awareness.

Chapter 3 of Oliver Sacks's *A leg to stand on* explores the state of limbo he experienced for twelve days after he broke his leg. Sack's suggests the state of limbo is a result of an interruption to order or 'a rift in reality' and equates this with the experience with the abyss.

> The abyss is a chasm, an infinite rift, in reality. If you but notice it, it may open beneath you. You must either turn away from it, or face it, fair and square (Sacks 1990: 110).

Similarly in extreme sports once you decide to go over the edge, whether this is down a steep slope or over a jump, you have to commit completely and unwaveringly; indecision during an act of risk-taking is considered foolhardy and often leads to injury.

Oliver Sacks suggests that the limbo of injury is a journey of the soul to despair and back. About learning to be a patient, to be patient and passive and having to relinquish all his 'powers and pretensions, all my adult, masculine enterprise and activity' (1990: 113). He describes,

> This involved first a very great fear. For I had to relinquish, above all, the sense and affect of *activity*. I had to allow – and this seemed horrible – the sense and feeling of *passivity* (1990: 111).

In mountain biking the risk is chosen by the individual whereas in injury we have to accept an uncertain situation that is now beyond our control. In injury there is the uncertainty of whether the body will heal and the risk of facing this possibility. There is a need to master emotions of fear. The passivity required to deal with the uncertainty is similar to the passivity before uncertainty that is required to deal with the fear in chosen risk taking. The ability to master fear; remaining calm, clear and decisive in the face of uncertainty is central to both situations.

When I walk on the china twigs, snapping them underfoot and hearing them ping, I have a strong feeling of being in the present. I am not thinking about the past of making them or the future of them being broken but I am entirely concentrating on the experience of them breaking beneath my weight. This presence of the present is similar to how I feel when I am mountain biking. Oliver Sacks also notes an appreciation of the present whilst he is in the convalescent home and quotes Hannah Arendt, 'the quiet of the now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man...' (1990: 175). There is a sense of freedom with presentness, the weight of history is removed as are concerns for the future. The present escapes the structure of narrative and allows the experience of being present; here and now.

For me, the experience of limbo that accompanied the uncertainty of my wrist healing was defined, in part, by a lacking of narrative time. The presentness in limbo and presentness in mountain biking are similar and yet the two are different. The perception of the present in mountain biking is created by a focus on extension into the world and so backgrounding of the self. It is experience through the 'I' without reflection on the 'me'. Creating or maintaining self-narrative is just not considered in this mode. In limbo the experience is of a shattering of self-narrative. Neither state operates in conventional narrative time but the sense of the fragmentary is different. In breaking the loss of self-narrative is perceived as the fragmenting of an ideal whole, whereas in extended being the self is a fragment within the world.

Where life is experienced in presentness and as fragile, transient, in flux and uncertain it is fundamentally different to that dependent on building a coherent narrative and secure future.

experiencing risk