

# James Joyce and the Arts

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# **“His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery”: Towards an Indirect Social Efficacy of Joyce’s Attitude to Mistakes – through (Beuys’) Art Responding to Joyce**

*Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes*

## **Abstract**

The heretofore unknown level of reality that we perceive in Joyce’s works partly owes to the fact that the writer makes active and positive use of his characters’ failings. He programmatically explores the gap between what one person says and what another understands and employs this insight to construct his writings, as well as an ethics of and in his work. This chapter first asks why it is important that Joyce embraces mistakes as portals of discovery, what kinds of mistakes may be meant, and then turns to artists who have taken up such an understanding in their works. I turn to Eco (open work), Senn (dislocation) and Maharaj (perfidious fidelity) to theorise the matter in relation to Joyce. This artistic and theoretical material together enables me to use Wollaeger’s argument on the social function of reading Joyce, as well as Social Science scholarship (Boltanski) on who in society is permitted to interpret freely and make mistakes. I will lastly turn to scholarship on unintended negative consequences, in order to make a case for an indirect social efficacy of art (history) and Joyce’s work in our mistake-adverse world.

## **Keywords**

James Joyce in Visual Art – Contemporary Art and Literature – Mistakes – Open work – Indirect Efficacy – Unintended Consequences – Joseph Beuys – James Joyce

Mistakes and misunderstandings are inevitable. The heretofore-unknown level of reality that we perceive in James Joyce’s works is partly the result of the fact that the writer’s active and positive use of his characters’ failings. He has come to be associated with the dictum that mistakes are portals of discovery,

even though it is Stephen Dedalus, his alter ego, who utters a similar sentence in *Ulysses*.<sup>1</sup> This is because Joyce programmatically explores the gap between what one character says and what another understands. From “rheumatic” wheels to “throwaway”, Joyce employs this insight to construct his writings, as well as an ethics of and in his work. As Fritz Senn outlines in his essay on Joyce’s “dislocutions”, the writer goes further:

To depart from the phrasing of a quotation may be due – on the realistic level – to defective memory or inner compulsions, but it is usually the author’s jujitsu strategy to exploit semantic energy for deflected intrinsic ends. From a normative point of view, such deviations are mistakes. *Ulysses* is full of errors and faults, lapses, slips, misprints, false analogies. [Senn concludes:] It is of course the reader who – potentially – executes all the mental shifts [...] by selective collusion [...] abrupt dislocation, through language, from whatever framework our habitual, unarticulated expectations seem to depend.<sup>2</sup>

In the following, I would first like to ask what it might mean, why it might be important that Joyce embraces mistakes as portals of discovery and what kinds of mistakes may be meant. Then I will turn to some artists who have – with reference to Joyce – adopted such an understanding in their work. Lastly, I will use some Joycean perspectives on social efficacy (Maharaj, Wollaeger, Knowles)

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1 The context is a discussion on Shakespeare involving Stephen Dedalus, Joyce’s alter ego: Mother’s deathbed. Candle. The sheeted mirror. Who brought me into this world lies there, bronzedlidded, under few cheap flowers. *Liliatarutilantium*.  
I wept alone.  
John Eglinton looked in the tangled glowworm of his lamp.  
–The world believes that Shakespeare made a mistake, he said, and got out of it as quickly and as best he could.  
–Bosh! Stephen said rudely. A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery.  
Portals of discovery opened to let in the quaker librarian,  
softcreekfooted, bald, eared and assiduous.  
–A shrew, John Eglinton said shrewdly, is not a useful portal of discovery, one should imagine. What useful discovery did Socrates learn from Xanthippe?  
–Dialectic, Stephen answered: and from his mother how to bring thoughts into the world. (*U* 9. 221–236)

Initially, Stephen’s interior monologue is devoted to his mother’s death. The mentioning of mistakes then irritates Stephen, as he has been accused of having made a mistake in not conforming to his mother’s deathbed wish by not praying. His life choices are determined by facing the effects of his “volitional mistake”.

2 Fritz Senn, “Variants of Dislocation” (Zürich: Haftmanns, 1983/1991), 125–39: 136, 138, 139.

and social science scholarship on unintended negative consequences, in order to problematize and motivate art and art history's – the humanities' – work in our current, mistake-resistant world.

While Sigmund Freud conceived of the so-called Freudian slips, characteristic mistakes in language, as something to be interpreted in a particular way, i.e. as giving access to the speaker's subconscious, usually to childhood trauma, Joyce considers mistakes and misunderstandings as something less one-directional. Joyce's is nevertheless a post-Freudian perspective: "who are we to control our scribblings", as he puts it. In Molly Bloom's case, the unawareness of the meaning of metempsychosis may have to do with class and education, but in general, the line between understanding and not understanding, as well as the reasons for mistakes are not so clear-cut. Mistakes are subject both to the particular character's motivations, associations and abilities, but will also continue in the work's reception, i.e. relate to those same factors in the individual reader. Multi-layered, creative readings of the works in relation to the recipients' knowledge, language, age and cultural backgrounds are encouraged directly through the challenge of interpreting Joyce. Stephen Dedalus, the writer's alter ego, mentions the diligent librarian immediately after proposing that errors are portals for discovery. But the challenge is not just book-based or academic. The reading group as a format that Joyce's later works necessitate and conjure is both academic and non-academic, even an art or "stealth" activity.<sup>3</sup>

Umberto Eco's book *Opera Aperta (The Open Work)* from 1962 consists of two parts, a general one that visual artists of the time on the European continent read with great interest and a second part entitled "The Poetics of Joyce" (published separately in English).<sup>4</sup> James Joyce became the main paradigm for theorising openness as the basis of both artworks and their active interpretation. Reading and viewing were no longer passive pursuits, but themselves creative endeavours, empowering anyone to perceive and thus also to construct their personally inflected meaning, even to tell their own story in and through the interpretation of cultural artefacts, while going further and further into an ever-changing depth. It is still possible to make (factual) mistakes in the interpretation of an open artwork, yet recipients are assumed to have the intelligence to think and feel for themselves and the wish to take on responsibility for the future life of the work. Responsibility is crucial. It does not imply that

3 Dora García's *The Joycean Society*, 2013, documents in film the *Finnegans Wake* reading group of the Zurich James Joyce Foundation and hones in on these "dislocutions". See: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "Mad, Marginal, Minor (Artistic) Research" / "De la recherche (artistique) folie, marginale et mineure", Dora García, *Mad Marginal: Cahier #4*, ed. Chantal Pontbriand (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 120–33, 298–312.

4 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Without place: Radius, 1962/1989).



FIGURE 3.1A & B Dora García, *The Joycean Society*, 2013  
IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ELLEN DE BRUIJNE PROJECTS,  
AMSTERDAM

the viewer or reader is more perfect than the mistake-making characters in the book, but that the trust that active reception will happen to the best of our abilities is considered to be a complement, as an enriching, important task for a diverse group of people who will accept the responsibility.

A decade after Eco, Harold Bloom in his 1973 book on the *Anxiety of Influence*, came close to establishing all strong and lasting interpretations as necessarily deviating from the intentions of the writer, hence likely “mistaken”. This is especially the case when that interpretation consists of creating new works



of art in response to an (overpowering) tradition: Bloom concludes that stronger works display a more independent, distanced relationship between the predecessor or predecessors and the visual interpretation, which is also (heightened through the movement across disciplinary boundaries) necessarily a misinterpretation. As such it can shed revealing light on Joyce's work. Bloom's three revisionary ratios (out of six) that focus on such distance thus describe the state of affairs most appropriately: *clinamen*, *tessera* and *kenosis*. They are respectively a swerve away from the model, its completion and antithesis, as well as a humbling movement towards discontinuity.<sup>5</sup>

According to this understanding, artists have to engage critically with what precedes them; they have to update, misunderstand and thus appropriate tradition, revealing through the "mistakes" their own time's changed perspectives and assumptions. On the one hand tradition, transformed by subsequent work as it is, is always necessarily misunderstood. On the other hand it gives tradition continued, even increased, value for the present.

That may sound as if misunderstandings exist to enable continued canonicity and with it the retention of the status quo. This is arguably not how Eco and many theorists after him understood the notion of the empowered, active recipient. One can claim by contrast that such thinkers prepared the ground for widespread anti-authoritarian changes in Western thinking, art and politics around 1968: one began to consider it as inevitable and preferable to misunderstand creatively, albeit responsibly. *Kenosis*, the humbling movement towards discontinuity, signals towards such understanding of creative reinterpretation. Having thus prepared the ground in terms of Joyce's understanding of mistakes, and suggested links between this and the theoretical and social understandings of the reception of (his) open works, I will now turn to visual art and its responses to Joyce in relation to its attitude to mistakes, in order then to apply the findings from both sections to our present condition.

In art history, the exploitation of "errors" or the involuntary generation of form, is prominently associated with Max Ernst, whose decalcomania technique was put to use in works such as *Europe after the Rain* of 1933, a more or less randomly generated, alternative "map" of Europe, envisioning an unrecognizable

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5 See the introduction to Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). "Bloom challenges the commonplace notion that [...] tradition is a benign and empowering source of influence on modern poets. Instead, Bloom argues, for poets since Milton the achievements of their great precursors are barriers to their own aspirations to originality. 'Influence', Bloom insists, 'is *Influenza* – an astral disease', and against its threat, strong poets learn to protect themselves by 'misreading' their predecessors. Such 'creative misprision' operates through six techniques, or 'revisionary ratios', which together form the foundation for Bloom's manifesto for a new 'antithetical criticism'", 14.

continent after the catastrophic war it correctly predicted. The painting used to belong to Carola Giedion-Welcker and Sigfried Giedion, friends of the Joyces in Zurich. Joyce dined underneath this work. Here, the artist's non-willed production of creative form opposes the far-reaching flaw of Fascist orthodoxy: the claim to possess logic and truth, i.e. not to make mistakes.

Marcel Duchamp's work *Large Glass*, 1915–23 was broken in transport, whereupon the artist decided to leave it in this cracked state. While Joyce and Duchamp lived not too far from one another in Paris and Duchamp's partner, Mary Robinson, turned a first edition of Joyce's *Ulysses* into an artist's book with a slipcase, using maps, there is no proof that they ever met. I was able to trace the rediscovery of Duchamp in the 1960s (which proceeded on the basis of his notes e.g. for the *Large Glass*) as having been driven by artists like Joseph Kosuth, Richard Hamilton and Brian O'Doherty – all of whom had their ways of thinking and aesthetic preferences trained by obsessively reading Joyce, especially *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce's (or Stephen's) dictum that he wished through his art to hold the “cracked looking glass of a servant” to Catholic Irish society may have less to do with Duchamp's motivations to leave the *Large Glass* broken than with the wish to let chance enter the work.

Robert Rauschenberg's lithographic stone broke in the printing process – but he decided to go ahead and incorporate the mistake, creating a richer, more complex work: *Accident*, 1962. Rauschenberg was married during his Black Mountain College times to Susan Weil, who has created many Joyce-related works. Rauschenberg himself was certainly exposed to Joyce's writing, as was John Cage, the composer, who was part of the same Black Mountain community. Cage had already discovered *Finnegans Wake* in his youth, when during his travels in Europe he read it in instalments as *Work in Progress* in the avant-garde magazine *transition*. In his *Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake*, 1976/79 Cage would gather sounds in all places that are mentioned in *Finnegans Wake* and arrange them according to chance operations, using the I Ching. The contention here is that there are no categorical mistakes: all sounds are “composable” and artists can create work out of anything, especially chaos, or “chaosmos” (*FW* 118.21), as Joyce puts it in *Finnegans Wake*.

My interest here lies not with adding to the list of such instances of – directly or indirectly – Joyce-related incorporation of mistakes and / or chance into art, but with introducing an artist, who appears to have learned from this and from whom we can learn about certain ideal or inevitable (i.e. “mistaken”) ways of one tradition relating to another: Joseph Beuys.

Like some of the artists above, Beuys read Joyce's works during his formative years, when he was recovering from a depression and was searching for ways to create art that could respond to some of the urgent needs of the time, such as

democratizing post WWII societies. Beuys created works in which he wrapped plasters or felt around sharp knives, meaning that one should not only dress a wound, i.e. attend to fixing the results of a violent gesture or mistake, but also pay attention to what caused the wound, help the perpetrator. *Show your Wound* is a motto and work title in Beuys' oeuvre: acknowledging mistakes and failures is of course the first step towards preventing their violent recurrence.

There is a multiple work of Beuys that consists of an early computer print-out, into which he has inserted marks with a pen: a correction of what the machine had apparently calculated in error. The simple message is that one needs human intelligence, social warmth and flawed beings – in order to correct the mistakes of inevitably flawed machines and only seemingly fail-safe systems. This stance is not anti-science: Beuys was the co-founder of the Free International University for Interdisciplinary Research. It is more an insistence on multiple, open perspectives.

How did Beuys respond to the humanity of Leopold Bloom, to the mistake-embracing, social warmth of Joyce's universe? To answer this would take a great deal longer than I have time here. However, I can summarize some of my work on this question by pointing to Beuys' so-called *Ulysses Extension* body of drawings, ca. 1957–62. In Harold Bloom's terminology, such an extension would be called *tessera* if it also formulates an antithesis. It does: while in Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, the land-walking advertising agent, becomes the modern-day Odysseus, Homer's cunning and humane mariner, Beuys saw his task as introducing "Penninus", a figure that shares the conical hat with Odysseus, and the traversing of land with Bloom: for Beuys he is a personified connection of the Apennine mountains in Italy and the Pennines in Scotland, thus spanning Europe North to South.<sup>6</sup> The Penninus motive, a schematic mountain with an "O" or sun on it, also resembles the book with spine and open, roof-like covers. The motif is borrowed from Joyce's layout of a page from *Finnegans Wake*, where the letters form a delta (Greek letter and river delta) and are crowned by the sun, which can also be read as French for "eau", water. The cycles of water and life, occurring in books, in mythical time and today: these are the broad connections Beuys found in Joyce's work and they led him in the *Ulysses Extension* drawings to formulating a proposal of sculpture for the site of the extermination camp Auschwitz, i.e. to confront his own history as a German soldier in WWII.

Joyce's understanding of the materiality of language, as shown in the river-delta / water / book motif that Beuys transposed to Penninus, also led the

6 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "I will re-create *Finnegans Wake* anyway': Joseph Beuys reads James Joyce", *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 17.1 (2018), 164–66.



FIGURE 3.2 Joseph Beuys speaking at the Ulster Museum, Belfast, in front of his exhibition *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, November 1974  
 PHOTO: BILL PORTER, COURTESY THE ULSTER MUSEUM

German artist to the sculptural materials that would become characteristic for him: the words he balances out in this drawing from the *Ulysses Extension* are “fat” and “felt”, as well as the German “fett” and “filz”, which in Beuys’ handwriting are similar.

It appears that Joyce’s own approach towards traditions – such as to use Homer’s epic as both scaffolding and a quarry to be pillaged – share the *modus operandi* of strong legacies with visual artists working on him. It is thus true of artists’ work in relation to Joyce that it

cannot be fully justified in the straight line of a verifiable cognitive, hermeneutic interpretation. What Derrida in *Specters of Marx* says of his

relation to the Marxian heritage might be said of the strongest [legacies.] Each is a “performative interpretation, [...] an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets”. Only such faithful-unfaithful appropriation can be a responsible reception of such a legacy.<sup>7</sup>

Visual artists in that faithful-unfaithful mode can reference their literary model quite directly without being called epigones. For instance, Beuys formulated a “confession of faith”-like text in a work on Joyce (*Joyce with Sled*, 1985) that could not have been addressed to a visual artist. Beuys does not illustrate *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*, he borrowed Joyce’s layout formulations, some motifs, but particularly his thinking, his multiplicity of sources, his stylistic means and what he considered to be the underlying humanity and applied them to his own concerns, historical and cultural position, language and art form. Beuys’ distance from Joyce, the degree to which he misunderstands the writer and expands on his work, i.e. joins in the appreciation of mistakes, is the paradoxical measure of the adequacy of his response.

In *Joyce in Art*, which had Beuys as a case study, I was able to ascertain that the socio-politically engaged artists of the 1960s and 70s have the strongest claim to “owning” Joyce, but – again – not by illustrating the writer, who was too apolitical for Western literary scholars at that time, but by reacting to his writing in a faithfully-unfaithful manner, re-interpreting his open works and self-assuredly, responsibly “mis-”understanding tradition.<sup>8</sup>

The writer on art and curator Sarat Maharaj – again with Joyce in mind – had developed a theory in 1994 on the untranslatability of the other, juxtaposing multi-lingual *Finnegans Wake* and his own experiences of South African apartheid.<sup>9</sup> He critiqued the still popular notions of multiculturalism and hybridity under the title of *Perfidious Fidelity* and posited that seeing the other, one should never remain unseen – and that hybridity has both positive and negative or impossible sides. What is not to be understood – or only to be misunderstood – can still be endured, accepted or appreciated: approached ethically, affirmatively. This, to me, is a central point, to be distilled from Joyce’s works and scholars in his wake (Eco, Maharaj, Nussbaum, Lerm Hayes), but especially to be seen in the worlds that artists make with the faulty or failing

7 Tom J. Cohen, Hillis Miller, Barbara Cohen, “A ‘Materiality without Matter’?”, in *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xvi.

8 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Joyce in Art*. Introduction Fritz Senn, envoi James Elkins, design Ecke Bonk (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004).

9 Sarat Maharaj, “Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other”, in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press, Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994), 28–35.



FIGURE 3.3 A & B *Joyce in Art*, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, June-August 2004  
 CURATED BY CHRISTA-MARIA LERM HAYES WITH THE RHA'S  
 DIRECTOR PATRICK T. MURPHY, PHOTO COURTESY THE CURATOR  
 AND THE RHA. HERE WORKS BY: JOSEPH KOSUTH (CEILING), MAN  
 RAY, E.L. KIRCHNER, GEREON INGER, RAYMOND PETTIBON, TONY  
 SMITH, JOSEPH BEUYS

materials at their disposal, when their ways of working chimes with Joyce's thinking about mistakes.

To turn to Social Science: when one takes such an unfaithfully / faithful, ethically affirmative notion and seeks to tease out its social implications or possibilities, one may hone in on Luc Boltanski's insights<sup>10</sup> that dominant members of society are allowed to have an indirect, questioning relationship to tradition, power or the law, being trusted to understand, act responsibly in the best interest of the shared system, even to understand it in their individually independent way, which to some degree can include misunderstanding. On the other hand, those who are dominated need to take a direct approach to what they are told, adhering to the letter of the instruction, in order not to be disciplined. Yet this (in those circumstances desired) compliance disables active participation in repairing the system, once any misunderstandings or mistakes occur.

Unintended consequences abound, social scientists tell us,<sup>11</sup> when it is not acknowledged that interpreting traditions, laws or tasks is active and creative.

10 Luc Boltanski, speaking at the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, 24 September 2014. See also: Luc Boltanski, *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation*, trans. Gregory Elliott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

11 Chra Ali Rashed and George Mouyiasis, *Negative Unintended Consequences of Innovation – a case study regarding innovation and sustainability: The new Extended Value Creation*

When openness is not acknowledged, creativity and responsibility are discouraged or isolated, relegated specifically to narrowly understood artistic activity, mistakes of the unintended, uncreative kind do not only occur more frequently, but repair mechanisms also do not function as well or as quickly as they should. The paradox ensues that by being mistake-averse, such a system creates a situation in which mistakes occur more frequently and become worse. Educating people to have an active, responsible attitude towards traditions, rules etc. is inevitable. That Boltanski considers this to be a dominant attitude should not make us forget that the implication of what I've been saying is also that that dominance can never be without humility and creativity. It is not a positivist, static kind of assertion of power.

“Unintended consequences” is the fashionable way of referring to and accounting for grave mistakes: the use of that phrase has multiplied.<sup>12</sup> The phrase acknowledges good intentions and implies that nobody can be blamed directly, yet, something major went wrong: from the global economic “downturn” in 2008 and Brexit to the crisis of universities and of course the global natural environment. We appear to act against our own best interests in many core areas of our lives. Rashed and Mouyiasis conclude that such mistakes are the result of attempts to control and regulate too tightly what should be based on strong cultures of human responsibility.<sup>13</sup>

Can art and the humanities draw in decision-makers, who have the wish to acquire cultural capital, and recommend or model the different behaviours, different ways of thinking: valuing complexity, mistakes, individual responsibility and the paradoxical power, achieved through humility, that characterize art and culture? I do not know. In 2014, I tried by curating a small exhibition by a friend of Beuys', Royden Rabinowitch, whose Joyce- and Brancusi-related *Greased Cone*, 1965, I showed in a new version in Belfast, Northern Ireland, for the benefit of the local politicians.<sup>14</sup> The discussion was meaningful. It focused

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*Mechanism for Global Sustainability, the SNE SFI GS-framework.* (Linköping: Linköping University, 2013).

- 12 The University of Amsterdam library “catalogus plus” records search results for publications with this phrase until 1999: 4682 occurrences; 2000–2007: 7472; and 2008–2015: 11,174 occurrences. <[http://lib.uva.nl/primo\\_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=UVA](http://lib.uva.nl/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=UVA)> [accessed August 2016].
- 13 Hannah Arendt already concluded as much – and Rashed and Mouyiasis maintain that Charlie Chaplin best encompasses their findings when he says: “more than machinery, we need humanity” and “Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want” (Rashed and Mouyiasis, 2) (from *The Great Dictator*, 1940).
- 14 The exhibition also contained two Rabinowitch drawings and a vitrine with Friedrich Schiller's *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1794, material pertaining to Beuys' presence in Northern Ireland, 1947, relating to Rabinowitch's and Joseph Beuys' gift of



FIGURE 3.4 *Equilibrium? Royden Rabinowitch: Historical Turning Points and Artists' Solidarity*, January 2014, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast, curated by Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, showing Royden Rabinowitch, *Greased Cone*, (1965) 2014, and *Barrel Construction*, (1965) 2013

IMAGE COURTESY THE ARTIST, THE CURATOR AND GTG, BELFAST

on local knowledge of working with rolled steel in ship-building, materiality and social warmth, the abject and the role of accepting disgust as not just characteristic of the other, the cone as symbol of hierarchy etc. In Rabinowitch's sculpture, it is also a response to Constantin Brancusi's *Portrait of Joyce*, made of a cardboard disc and copper spiral. (The disc has a slit to the centre that lets it be formed into a cone). With the politicians I discussed the fact that loving affirmation of a flawed world, including our own flawed selves, as seen particularly in our bodies, is a necessary ingredient of a working democracy. Martha Nussbaum had made that point forcefully – and she chose Joyce's *Ulysses* as privileged example.<sup>15</sup> It is impossible to know the outcome of my small effort at mediating art to politicians.

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artworks to the Muzeum Sztuki, Łódz, during Martial Law in Poland, 1981, exhibited in Warsaw, Winter 1988/89 (when the Iron Curtain began to crumble), and Rabinowitch's gift of the *Greased Cone* displayed at a public collection in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Museum, where the work was first planned to be shown, had cancelled the exhibition with two weeks' notice and declined the gift. The Arts Council did not respond to a letter offering it. The *Greased Cone* (together with any archival holdings relating to the exhibition) has now found a permanent home at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands.

15 E.g. in the passage: *Ulysses*' "sexual explicitness and its insistent sexual focus can now be seen to have political significance. For, first of all, they are a linchpin on the project of restoring the reader to acceptance and love of the body, with all its surprises [...] a focus



Do societies learn from the mistake-valuing art and art-historical / humanities paradigms to underpin modest and sustainable futures? Again: it is impossible to tell. But that does not mean that one should not try. Art history should not – and today mostly does no longer – espouse certainties, focus on facts, dating and ascribing as aims in themselves, but it values the openness that draws viewers in, so that they are taken seriously as makers of meaning and that they can become partners in forging a new, creative responsibility. When social scientists study unintended consequences, they turn to what one could call indirect efficacy: they point to secondary stakeholders and wish them to be treated as primary.<sup>16</sup> Art is – I would like to argue – a secondary stakeholder in any and all contexts.

What role (if any) does art history – and by extension the humanities – then play in mediating the habit-breaking mistakes and misunderstandings with which art operates? It may well be the discipline that has a more complex understanding of itself than any other field (as visual culture, curatorial practice, exhibition history, aesthetics, cultural studies, at best: Aby Warburg's discipline without a name). It employs the most diverse methods and modes of outcome (curated exhibitions, their catalogues, guided tours, monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, co-creation with artists). In the light of what has been said, all this is necessary. It is as it should be: the epistemological maturity of a discipline that once set out to discover fakes (intentional mistakes).

From a Joycean perspective, Mark A. Wollaeger adds an important point to this argument. He writes: "To recover and redeploy the avant-garde energies of Joyce's texts [...] criticism must exploit critical and pedagogical opportunities opened up by interdisciplinary methods. [...] It] requires an extra-literary

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on the body's universal needs is an essential step on the way to the repudiation of localism, therefore of ethnic hatred. [...] the novel suggests [...] that the root of hatred is not erotic need [...], rather, the refusal to accept erotic neediness and unpredictability as a fact of human life. Saying yes to sexuality is saying yes to all in life that defies control – to passivity and surprise, to being one part of a very chancy world. [...] this yes to humanity, Joyce suggests, is the essential basis for a sane political life, a life democratic". Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The intelligence of emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 709.

- 16 Rashed and Mouyiasis state: "By taking secondary stakeholders and treating them as primary, this research aims to provide an insight regarding [unintended negative consequences of innovation] in terms of a silent actor, the social natural environment (the society and the natural environment). As an outcome of ignorance, environmental destruction, due to corporate innovation-practices, eventually may lead to a future case of corporate crime. [...] The innovation value-add [sic] needs to consider non-value adding mechanisms regarding secondary stakeholder importance, for responding to unintended [negative consequences of innovation]". Rashed and Mouyiasis, 2.

vantage”,<sup>17</sup> – through turning to art. Artists are arguably needed, in order for us to see clearly (albeit only ever indirectly) the contribution to cultural discourse that Joyce’s embrace of mistakes entails.

In the context of mistakes and of the state of affairs in art history, I would end by arguing that we understand art accurately when artists and scholars occasionally trade places.<sup>18</sup> All this does not necessarily make ours (or the humanities) the favourite fields in the eyes of those who still consider it possible or desirable to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings. The under-funding of art and the atrophy of philosophy and art history, when no creative industries agenda seems to justify continued existence, e.g. in UK or Dutch universities – is tantamount to “shooting the messenger”, as well as the doctor. When only the canon and numbers of visitors or auction results are considered to be apt justification for our work, unintended consequences cannot but abound.

It could be viewed as a digression to state this so clearly and turn to the seemingly never-ending university protests, but I feel strengthened in noting an inevitability of this association by Sebastian Knowles’ recent book, *At Fault: Joyce and the Crisis of the Modern University*:

Joyce has a lot to teach us. In the modern university, if we would only listen to him. [...] If a university is a place of learning, then mistakes must and will happen within it. That’s how all of us learn. If learning is trial and error, then we’ve kept the trial and eliminated the errors. The modern university has lost its way: in its search for rectitude and the comforts of perception, it has failed to attend to its greatest and most vital purpose.<sup>19</sup>

17 Mark A. Wollaeger, “Stephen/Joyce, Joyce/Haacke: Modernism and the Social Function of Art”, *ELH* 62.3 (1995), 691–707: 692. Wollaeger elaborates: “An accurate assessment of avant-garde potential requires that one step outside the Joycean labyrinth in order to undertake historically conceived interdisciplinary work: in a given historical moment, how is spectatorship constituted in relation to reading? [...] What kind of political effects can be achieved in different media? Does the increasingly visual nature of culture and society [...] render literature more subversive yet less effective? Or more effective by virtue of its marginality?”. *Ibid.* 702–03.

18 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do With Art (History)?* Inaugural lecture 537 (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers / Amsterdam University Press, 2015). <[http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF\\_Oratie\\_Lerm\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF_Oratie_Lerm_WEB.pdf)> [accessed 29 April 2019].

19 Sebastian D.G. Knowles, *At Fault: Joyce and the Crisis of the Modern University* (Gainesville et al: University Press of Florida, 2018), 39.

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We – as Joyce readers, art practitioners and analysts of both – have the imaginative, necessarily interdisciplinary tools to show and stand for what is otherwise: the kind of responsible humanity that art can help us to rediscover. As I hope to have shown, what provides those tools is particularly art of the faithfully-unfaithful, open and mistake-embracing kind, such as that which responds to Joyce.