

**Article Outline and Food for Thought  
for *Cornelia Parker: The Dream Life of Objects*  
written by Nancy Princenthal**

Artist: Cornelia Parker

Work: Exploration into the nature of material objects through:

- Deconstruction

How does deconstruction change meaning?

Can meaning be entirely destroyed?

**Deconstructionist Theory:** Images are texts that convey meaning so the separation of the image/form from its common or assumed meaning creates new meaning. By taking the meaning away from something, new meaning is created.

Associated with the work of Jacques Derrida, deconstruction is a method of reading, which effectively turns texts against themselves in order to reveal repressed polysemy [Multiple meanings]. It involves looking for moments when the text rhetorical strategies (i.e. the language it uses, the way it is constructed) contradicts what the author claims to be saying (Ward). In a sense the one viewing the artwork is also looking for what the artist has not said or included in a piece.

- “Translation of solid matter into to two dimensions”
- Questioning an “inanimate objects inner life”

Parker often uses things that have been blown apart and suspends the pieces in mid-air

- *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View* (1991)- garden shed blown up by the London Army School of Ammunition
- *Mass: Colder Darker Matter* (1997)- remains from a church that had been struck by lightning
- *Hanging Fire* (1999)- a small wooden structure burnt under unknown circumstances

In the article the author writes, “...such perplexity is a big part of Parker’s undertaking, with the result that much of her work has status as evidence; being the viewer means becoming the judge. Sometimes, this has to do with simple credibility: we must take it on faith that the spectacular acts, or illustrious names, associated with much of it are verifiable.” What is “evidence”? Do you see Parker’s work as “evidence”? Can any artwork be considered evidence?

Parker deconstructed two garment and titled them *Dress, Shot with Small Change* and *Suit, Shot by a Pearl Necklace*. Is there significance in a woman’s piece of clothing being pierced by something a man might carry in his pocket? Is there significance in a suit, traditionally male’s garment, being shot with a necklace usually associated with females? Would the meaning change if the pieces of clothing were shot with bullets?

Parker explores the “irreducible nature of matter”

- *Breathless* (2001)- A variety of flattened horns such as trumpets and tubas arranged and suspended from the ceiling.
- *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (1988-89)- Flattened objects such as eating utensils and plates suspended just above the ground so shadows are cast

The concept of “flat” for consideration

Flat: A visual awareness of the actual properties of the art piece. For example, Henri Matisse made it a point to place an emphasis on the actual flatness of the canvas in several of his paintings such as *Interior in Aubergines*. In this case, Parker is placing the emphasis on the flatness of objects.

Do the definitions and/meaning of these objects change because they are no longer functional? If something is functional, can still be art?

- *Wedding Ring Drawing* (1996) consists of wire drawn from two melted wedding rings stretched out into a single 40-foot long circular thread
- *Measuring Niagara with a Teaspoon* (1997)- A silver spoon drawn to the height of Niagara Falls

Consider the secret world of subatomic particles: “The Heisenberg uncertainty principle, formulated by the German scientist Werner Heisenberg, states that in the world of subatomic particles, the very act of observing alters the reality being observed, and therefore, in that world of subatomic particles, one can never measure all properties exactly.” (*Understanding Uncertainty*)

## Reference List

*Permanent Collection*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 2, 2010, from Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston: <http://www.icaboston.org/exhibitions/permanent-collection/artists/parker/>

Princenthal, N. (2000, September). Cornelia Parker: The Dream Life of Objects. *Art in America*, 112-116.

*Understanding Uncertainty*. Retrieved August 19, 2010 from Discovery Education: <http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/programs/understanding-uncertainty/>

Ward, Glenn (2003). *Teach Yourself Postmodernism*. McGraw Hill; Chicago, IL