



Concepts and Practices of Disruption and Interrogation in Contemporary Art and Indo Tibetan Buddhism, A Practice Based Enquiry

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‘MY VOWS’, was made in France by Annette Messager in 1988. It is a compelling object for numerous reasons; the social and political context from which it emerged, the materials from which it is made, their complex configuration and, not least of all, the impact of the work when viewed in a gallery context. Commentary that surrounds the work has tended to locate it temporally and politically in the tumultuous context of the post 60’s student riots in France and theoretically it has been connected with ideas from feminism and post modernism.

These accounts of the work come from the decade following its inception. Although ‘My Vows’ continues to be exhibited periodically in contexts different to those surrounding its beginnings, it is commonly exhibited within cues that establish its relevance within the referents of these theoretical frameworks.

My own encounter with the work however, initially in reproductions and then with the actual work, has not reflected available commentaries. My own reading was immediately connected to a range of ideas from Indo Tibetan Buddhism that I have become increasingly engaged with over the past seven years or so. The commentaries I have mentioned that I have met with via the art education environments I have occupied in roughly the same time frame (seven years), make sense intellectually and artistically. I have however, continued to be left with questions about why, in understanding this particular work, Indo Tibetan Buddhism has resonated more powerfully, conceptually and experientially.

These questions have offered an opportunity to unpack aspects of coming to know this work via the frameworks and sensibilities that have shaped my experience as a viewer. They therefore have inevitably required me to consider the influence of Indo Tibetan Buddhist ideas in contemporary cultural life alongside considerations informed by the arts.

Such considerations have driven an investigation where I have considered alternative paradigms that have shaped conceptions of the subjective and that have therefore informed my reading of the work. These paradigms consist mainly of aspects of the trajectory of Western intellectual thought that has shaped contemporary theory and of Indo Tibetan Buddhist senses of the subjective that are available to me in a contemporary context. Although different in intention, scope and context and therefore generative of different possibilities in reading ‘My Vows’, some illuminating similarities between the Western intellectual tradition and this



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tradition of Buddhism have emerged. These concern the functions of disruption and interrogation in Indo Tibetan Buddhist ideas and practices and contemporary art.

In this presentation I will discuss the disruptive and interrogative tendencies of these two fields of thought and practice that have emerged in my research. My presentation will include images of the work 'My Vows' and images of my own studio work that has fuelled the development of research questions.