

Violence: Materiality Editorial

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On 22 July 2011, at 3:25 pm, Anders Behring Breivik detonated a bomb outside the entrance of the Høyblokka building in the government quarter of Oslo, killing eight people. Following the explosion, he drove to the island of Utøya and, dressed in a Norwegian police uniform, used firearms to kill sixty-nine individuals attending a Workers Youth League summer camp. In *Threads of Defiance* (2019), the biography of artist Hannah Ryggen, art historian Marit Paasche notes that the force of the explosion outside the Høyblokka building moved the lobby's security barrier, which weighed more than a ton, twenty metres. Inside the building was Ryggen's tapestry *Vi lever på en stjerne* (*We are Living on a Star*) (1958), whose flexible structure and light weight meant it fared a little better than the barrier. "For several days after the explosion, *We Are Living on a Star* lay on the floor in a pool of dirty water, mixed with concrete rubble and shards of glass."^[1] The tapestry was subsequently collected by KORO (Public Art Norway) and moved to the Conservation Services of the Museum Centre in Hordaland for restoration.

To set the material damage of Ryggen's tapestry alongside loss of human life risks evoking unintended comparisons. To be clear, the restoration of a tapestry brings back no human life. The conservators' repair work does offer, as Paasche notes, a symbolic act.^[2] The record of violence held in the tapestry's fibres now exist as material traces of the violence that occurred on that July day and provide one example of the materiality of violence—the theme of this *PARSE Journal* issue. The materiality under discussion here has been taken quite literally; it is not particularly anxious about debates around the dematerialisation of art, nor is it taking materiality as a term related to the digital realm. Contributors do not all work from the presumption that violence is wholly negative; many oscillate between literal and symbolic registers without allocating priority to either. What the discussions published here consider are the material records of actions understood—at least from some perspectives—as violent, and what this particular treatment of materials communicates today.

In her introduction to the anthology *Materiality* (2015), Petra Lange-Berndt writes, "For some, to engage with materials still seems the antithesis of intellectuality."^[3] Lange-Berndt continues by noting that "those who have been listening to them, who are not intimidated by materials, have not predominantly been academics but artists, designers, architects, conservators or technicians."^[4] The contributors to this journal issue confirm Lange-Berndt's observation that acute attention to materials is far from an anti-intellectual stance, but remains predominantly the work of practitioners. Contributors represent practices often associated with craft, such as textiles and printmaking, that tend to foreground material meaning. But also represented are music and other sonic art forms, where materiality and violence relate to compositional properties (such as structural and

conceptual complexity) or sensuous qualities (such as timbre and texture, density and volume). Alive throughout is the violent treatment of materials as premeditated or spontaneous action, and it may be for these reasons that a number of contributors have elected to use the format of the video essay.

Lange-Berndt also observes that even art historians who have taken up a particular focus on materials have tended to use them “*to think about* or *to think with*, and again act as the indicator of something else.”^[5] While thinking about and thinking with violence also appears in the strategies of contributors, it is not an exclusive or even predominant approach. The intentionally multidisciplinary content here includes curation and film (Carolina Rito), drawing and performance (Paulo Luís Almeida, Mário Bismarck and Sílvia Simões), printmaking (Niamh Fahy), textiles (Catherine Dormor), fashion (African Fashion Research Institute Collective of heeten bhagat, Siviwe James, Lesiba Mabitsela, Erica de Greef, Russel Hlongwane), opera (Jennifer Walshe) and music composition (Khabat Abas).

In keeping with the spirit of the original conference panel during which these conversations began, fellow contributors and conference presenters have been invited to share brief responses to each other’s contributions. These texts echo the dialogue prioritised during the conference format, underlining a desire to move away from the (often) pre-scripted delivery and instead meet to talk. While there is a certain irony in now capturing these thoughts in writing and other seemingly fixed formats, it is our hope that at least a taste of the experimental format that first launched these conversations has been preserved in the pages to follow.

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Footnotes

1. Marit Paasche, *Hannah Ryggen: Threads of Defiance* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2019) pp. 240.
2. Marit Paasche, *Hannah Ryggen*, pp 241.
3. Petra Lange-Berndt (ed.), *Materiality* (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2015) pp. 12.
4. Petra Lange-Berndt (ed.), *Materiality*, pp. 16.
5. Petra Lange-Berndt (ed.), *Materiality*, pp. 13.