

Helen Chadwick's Of Mutability: Process and Postmodernism

Racz, I

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**Helen Chadwick's *Of Mutability*: Process and
Postmodernism
Imogen Racz**

This article will discuss the making and historical research that underpins Helen Chadwick's *Of Mutability* (1986), and consider how these ideas were re-presented as a postmodern installation. The work is complex and multilayered in its references, and was constructed from what the commendation for the Turner Prize termed Chadwick's 'striking use of mixed media', which included photocopies, photo-booth portraits, computer generated drawings, gold leaf and composting material (Haworth-Booth 1989, 90). In preparation for making it Chadwick undertook enormous amounts of research into, among other areas, art and architectural history. She also made many sketches and notes where she explored the possibilities of her developing ideas, and numerous experiments where she tested the limits of the reproductive mediums. Although the installation borrowed heavily from historical prototypes, it was also distinctly of its time, decontextualizing and re-presenting images and ideas culled from history, and leaving possible interpretations open ended.

Of Mutability was based on the Vanitas theme, and constructed from a series of inter-related elements that was first staged across two of the Nash Rooms at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London in 1986.¹ (Fig 1) Chadwick began to work on the ideas just after she had finished *Ego Geometria Sum* (1983) and its related photographic work entitled *The Labours* (1984). Although very different, there are some correspondences. Like both of the earlier works, *Of Mutability* depicts Chadwick's

naked body as an inter-subjective site where production and reception come together, and both installations suggest the cycles of life. Like *Of Mutability*, *Ego Geometria Sum* is an installation comprising of a number of elements and discrete scenes, with a surrounding screen – in this case curtains – that demarcates the limits of the work. It is autobiographical, consisting of ten geometrical sculptures representing different objects selected from her past that were significant in her development, with photographic imagery on the surfaces depicting her adult body juxtaposed with scenes from her childhood relevant for that age. *Of Mutability* was not autobiographical in that sense, being a series of scenes about desire, although Chadwick wrote that she wanted to ‘make autobiographies of sensation’ (Warner 1986, n.p.), and in a letter to a close friend, Jurgen Waibel, wrote that while working on *Of Mutability* she was ‘the sole + independent subject of my passion’(AAD/2002/1/181). Through its play with historical tropes she created an allegorical work that questioned received paradigms, notions of truth and a stable sense of identity.

The article will discuss the transformation of the historical into the postmodern. It will first consider the work itself, with its overall cycle of meanings, and then consider the research and studio experimentation that led to the final presentation in relation to postmodern ideas of the time.

Of Mutability: cycles of meaning

Taking the concept of a formal, walled garden, *Of Mutability* comprised of two inter-related elements: the central pool and surrounding arcades entitled the *Oval Court*, and a glass tower filled

with composting debris in an adjoining room, but visible from the first, called *Carcass*. Chadwick said that the title, *The Oval Court*, implies both an architectural space and a place of courtship. It was to be a revisiting of the Garden of Eden, where a 'new Eve' would be uncovered, and female sexuality could be seen as a blessing rather than being shameful (Chadwick OM, 90-91). Chadwick described it as the dramatization of a prelapsarian state, untroubled by self-consciousness (Chadwick OM, 90-91). The press release announced that *Of Mutability* was a 'paradisaal landscape where nature and artifice are joined in an allegory of love' (T 955/7/8/331).

As the many photocopies of rococo paintings that Chadwick collected demonstrated, she was well aware of the tradition of the garden as a place for courtship. She kept copies of the eight canvases that Boucher had painted for a room in the Chateau de Crecy between 1750 and 1753 in a sketchbook, so were clearly things that she repeatedly returned to. Chadwick had also collected a copy of Fragonard's *The Progress of Love*, where each episode takes place within a garden (V&A AAD/2002/1/179). There is a theatricality in the paintings, which depict four stages of love from courtship to mellow reflection, but it is the setting of the enclosed world of the garden that provides the stage. The large paintings hung in the garden pavilion would have emulated windows with views onto gardens of pleasure over seen by the mythical sculptures that directed and reacted to the unfolding scenes.

(<http://www.frick.org/interact/fragonard>)

Stephen Walker has written that Chadwick was greatly influenced by Naomi Miller's *Heavenly Caves: Reflections on the Garden Grotto* (1982), in which she discussed the grotto as being a

place of mysterious forces, of transitional states of being and becoming. The book also discussed the grotto being like a theatre, a metaphorical portal, where to enter was to acknowledge the distance between outside and inside, between reality and illusion, and between nature and art. It was a gateway to wonder and knowledge (Walker 2013, 100).

The *Oval Court* had a raised blue platform in the centre of the room representing a pool, in which twelve scenes of allegorical figures and their attributes appeared to float with five golden balls. Eleven of the twelve scenes depicted composite figures constructed from small pieces of overlapping photocopies taken from Chadwick's naked body, with accompanying drapery, animals, birds, fish and plants. The twelfth had Chadwick's hands emerging from the body of a skate. Surrounding this pool was a paper arcade with swags, topped by images of Chadwick's crying face, hung around the walls.

Framed in the opening of the *Oval Court's* adjoining room was a tall, glass tower that had been built on site to the specifications set by Chadwick's partner Philip Stanley, and filled with composting food collected from her neighbours along Beck Road; a metaphor of death and decay to be seen alongside the life and fruitfulness of the floating figures (Collins, 1994). Chadwick later wrote that she intended *Carcass* to be a counterpoint to the pool that extolled 'the pleasures of the flesh by physically presenting a more corrupt version of the body as stuff'. However, *Carcass* was actually very much alive, with the contents bubbling and emitting an aroma, whereas the pool Chadwick likened to 'a blue corpse' (Collins 1994). In later exhibitions the installation remained the same, apart from *Carcass*,

which was depicted as a projected image – it had leaked all over the floor of the ICA after being moved (T ICA 955/7/7/59).ⁱⁱ

Like *Ego Geometria Sum*, the scale of elements in *Of Mutability* was determined by Chadwick's body, so that the central pool was related to the proportions of her hand, and the five, golden spheres, which celebrated the sense of touch and suggested values of purity in their colouring and form, had varying diameters from 24 to 15 inches and were in proportion to the size of Chadwick's thumb and fingertips (Evans in Brittain 1999, 145). The idea of the spheres derived from a mixture of influences. Marina Warner has contested that they were from the Atomium at the Brussels World Fair of 1958, where the interconnected spheres of the building emulated the once irreducible element of life, the atom, and which points symbolically towards eternity and the infinite (Warner 1986 n.p.). However, Chadwick had also taken pictures of some gold balls from the gates of the Portsmouth Naval Base, and had collected magazine advertisements for Lil-lets tampons showing a ball and chain in a desert, for a furniture manufacturer depicting a wooden sphere on a table, and of a poet in woodland with a globe in the sky (V&A AAD/2002/1/179). While the letters to the Naval Base were requests for information about the size, material and construction of the golden balls, the balance of the wooden sphere on the table and the link between the poet and globe, combined with the Atomium, suggest visible manifestations of her earlier research into the symbolism of geometric shapes in Christianity. Spheres, she wrote were associated with 'eternity, heaven, perfection', which contrasted with what was written lower down the same page of her notebook. 'Nudity: both base and elevated ... purity + innocence of Adam and

Eve ... If decorated with jewels = lust vanity + worldly corruption' (Chadwick EGS, 70). The advertisement that linked monthly reproductive cycles with a ball and chain, echo both Judy Chicago's and Chadwick's early works reclaiming menstruation as a natural part of female experience, and also society's construction of it as a constraint and taboo. In relation to the figures and golden balls of the *Oval Court*, the worldly female figures, adorned with rings and bracelets, surrounded with drapery and attributes, and depicted at the height of passion at the point before decay, contrast with elements of perfection and the eternal: a juxtaposing of the transcendent and transient.

The figures in the pool conform to a narrative – although obscure – a cycle of desire and life that incorporates ideas from Christianity, the Labours of the Months, the elements, as well as from nature and contemporary life. The layering of Chadwick's ideas and imagery make it impossible to create a definite reading. Unlike Fragonard's paintings, where the viewer can 'read' the images through allegorical meanings that link with the enacted scenes, and the use of perspective that allows the viewer to be in the image, *Of Mutability* presents scenes within a pool, and suggests an arcade, while simultaneously confirming their falsity (Jones 2006, 9).

In preparation Chadwick made numerous detailed notes that drew on her extensive reading, and she frequently changed her mind. On the first of four pages stapled together, she writes 'various "nymphs" within pool:- enchanted – mid gesture'. She then has thought through four areas – air, sexual, summer, and winter. Against these she lists attributes, so that air, for instance, includes wings, feathers and drapery, while sexual includes underwear,

stockings/bra, lace, and hankie. Summer has daisies, daisy chains, garlands, and winter is associated with furs, fur cones and bones. These ideas were then fleshed out on the second page, which included 'harvest: corn/ grasses', or the combination of 'spring' with the element of water and '7 nets for fishing, 7 fish, shellfish' associated with it. She also made many pencil diagrams where she tried out different orders for the scenes (V&A AAD/2002/1/180).

In a column on another sheet headed by 'Fertilisation', she wrote '12 figures: allegories of love, 12 months, 12 Gates to Jerusalem, 12 Gates to Paradise', followed by more contemporary allusions, '2 flowers: daisies, Flora? Passion. 2 Vanity: mirror/Venus veils (add fan?)'. She noted the elements in the same way, thinking about which attributes she could use (V&A AAD/2002/1/180). Like her notebooks, these sheets were things she repeatedly returned to, as the different coloured inks and pencil attest, as her ideas changed and developed, and the number of scenes to be represented increased and decreased.

In the final work her naked body is depicted at varying angles as they fall back, fly, and float. Each figure represents different stages and forms of pleasure, with the attributes relating to the overall iconography. The cycle is not a programme in the traditional sense, as there appears to be no logical progression, and many of the scenes contain contradictory elements, such as including things that she had listed under air, alongside those listed under land. However in all of Chadwick's works there is a balance between avid research and intellectual grasp, and the spiritual and instinctive.



Outline of final program constructed from notes in sketchbook 2, photographs of the final installation and details from actual work

The arcade surrounding this pool consisted of a colonnade of paper pillars with sepia line drawings based on the columns of Bernini's Baldacchino in St Peter's Basilica Rome (V&A AAD/2002/1/205). These were surmounted with swags of leaves arranged in ogee arches, with the keystones depicting her crying face. These were made from repeated photocopy enlargements of four photo-booth portraits using the machine that had been newly installed in the National Portrait Gallery (Rideal et al 2001, 100). Like the allegorical statues in Fragonard's gardens, her face oversees and reacts to the unfolding scenes below. She wrote about these crying heads showing desire flowing into sadness as one realizes the impossibility of desire to endure, while simultaneously repairing the self and dissolving the ego into love. The falling tears turn into the swags of fruit and flowers, transforming sorrow into abundance (Chadwick OM, 83). For Chadwick, the metaphysical question was the relationship of the senses to the spirit. The installation was not to be a pleasure palace of the senses, but a resolution of desire and love, of body and soul/ego (Chadwick OM, 83). 'I'm trying to make images of a kind of physical identification of the self through exploring physical matter – and by implication mortality, desire...because it's a kind of space that none of us can really know for ourselves and because, for many people, it's a troubled terrain' (Januszczak 1987, n.p.).

Historical research and 'thieving'

In her preparation for *Of Mutability*, Chadwick read, annotated and kept photocopies of texts about many artists and ideas, and for this work she was particularly interested in the rococo. Her ideas crystallized when she visited the pilgrimage churches in the Bavarian countryside one snowy Easter. She visited *Die Wies* by Domenikus

Zimmermann (1745-1754), an elaborate rococo church with blue, white and gold decoration covering the lofty, interpenetrating spaces. It was here that she gained the idea of the tears from the weeping heads feeding the pool of the Oval Court. 'The church is dedicated to a statue that wept, and the rocaille wasn't just a decorative device but related to the thaw and the landscape and the passion, to the melting of the snows at Easter and to rebirth' (Warner 1986, 43).

The Oval Court was also inspired by the blue and silver *Hall of Mirrors* of the Amalienburg, a hunting lodge in the grounds of the Nymphenburg Palace near Munich (1734-49). Again Rococo in style, it is full of light and reflective surfaces, with the mirrors reflecting outside nature. She loved the idea of it being like a 'kind of dance...a dream, a confection...Its not about power but...an attempt at finding a spiritual path through a pleasure principle' (Warner 1986, 43). She later described rococo rooms as 'constructed fantasies', where 'autocratic linear architectural space breaks down and becomes dissolute and organic' (Collins 1994).

Chadwick did not translate ideas from the rococo into *Of Mutability* through light and reflection, but through the blue, white and gold colours, through the artistic play of two and three dimensions, the decorative conceits of textiles, plants and animals, and the joyous physicality of the figures.

Like the backgrounds in rococo paintings and rocaille in the buildings, Chadwick included many decorative aspects in the 'still lifes' of the pool that brought together nature and culture. Chadwick thought that these aspects gave a greater sense of transience, saying that 'austerity implies endurance' (Warner 1986, 46). Drapery

tumbles around one figure and another appears to 'sit' on a cushion of cloth. Ribbons play in the wind, ropes with tassels bend and twist, and feathers float. In addition to these cultural objects are the soft surfaces of lamb and rabbit, the crusty hardness of crabs, the crisp shoots of wheat and grasses, and the slime of squid and skate. It is a cornucopia of texture, of fine detail and contrasting elements. They represent the frivolous and ephemeral things related to the Vanitas theme, which has, in Northern European, Calvinist thinking, always been a female vice, but in Chadwick's work was being celebrated.

Some of the figures in the pool were directly based on those by rococo artists. In her sketchbook she had a photocopy of one of the many nudes by Boucher resting on a sofa with elaborate drapery, from which she developed a series of annotated drawings. On one she gives the nude a 'furry pillow', a 'pelt? under legs'. These drawings were translated into a figure associated with 'foreplay', and depicted with rabbits, a wishbone and fur (V&A AAD/2002/1/179). The figure with the lamb was derived from a particular tumbling figure within an untitled frieze of female acrobats. She stuck a small photocopy of the image onto an A3 sheet, and then drew some pencil sketches based on its pose all around it (V&A AAD/2002/1/179).

(Figs 2 and 3) This direct development from historical paintings was replicated for other figures.

In contrast to John Berger's pithy dictum that 'men act and women appear', the images that Chadwick collected and drew were of strong, active females (Berger 1972, 47). In Ruben's *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, one figure of which became that in the scene 'rock pool placenta', and Tiepolo's *Apollo and Daphne*, (figure with squid and crab), for instance, the female figures were the objects

of unrequited and resisted lust, but were not passive victims. Chadwick collected their twists and turns that, in their new contexts, were transformed from resistance into images of women who were in control of their sexuality. (Fig 4)

Chadwick also kept photocopies of paintings and sculptures from a broad range of other artists of works on particular themes. For instance, she collected details of paintings by Correggio, Tintoretto and Leonardo da Vinci depicting the myth of Leda and the Swan (V&A AAD/2002/1/179). In Chadwick's version, the swan is in fact a goose. The accompanying figure has a shrouded head, which she later wrote was loosely based on Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St Teresa* (1647-1652), but Chadwick also had an image of *The Lovers* (1928) by Magritte in her collection, depicting the torsos of a kissing couple with hooded heads (Evans in Brittain 1995, 146).

The arcades around the walls based on the barley sugar columns of Bernini's Baldacchino in St Peter's Rome were topped by swags of fruit and flowers in ogee arch formations. She gained this idea from the windows that she saw in Venice. In her sketchbook she had collected postcards of facades various buildings, including the Ca d'Oro, the Doges Palace, and the Basilica of San Marco. She had also taken a number of photographs of elaborate windows in Venice (V&A AAD/2002/1/179). Later in this sketchbook she had thought about 'Venetian ratios', listing various proportions and coming up with an ideal of '6 ½ = 13 = 26', which again brings one back to the importance of reconciling the eternal and the transient.

The idea for the crying heads that topped the swags came from the eight 'stemme', or heads, that were above the coats of arms

of the Baldacchino. Unusually, in the Bernini, they depict seven female heads, which programmatically move from happy to contorted with pain, with the eighth head being of a baby/cherub. The myth was that the Pope's favourite niece had a difficult pregnancy, but then safely delivered a baby. Chadwick had collected an article about these stemme, and had underlined several passages, including that discussing the emotional transformation of the heads as one 'which is quite comparable to that of giving birth: from confusion to knowledge, from agitation to quietude' (V&A AAD/2002/1/179).ⁱⁱⁱ In preparation for the heavily pixilated photocopy enlargements of the crying heads on top of the swags in *Of Mutability*, Chadwick had made three contact sheets of photographs depicting her head and naked shoulders in different moods: smiling, sad, wrinkled brow, and pain, with her head sometimes to one side, sometimes upright (V&A AAD/2002/1/179). Clearly, as with the drawings that she took from the figures in paintings, her preparation was very thorough, and served to distance the elements from their prototypes.

The Photocopy: development of imagery

Chadwick acknowledged the incongruity of using hi-tech machinery associated with business, logic and the creation of order to produce images representing irrational and emotional aspects of feeling (Blackford 1986). However, she enjoyed the idea of 'sabotaging the conventions of business machinery [and] computer technology'. It was made possible by a new photocopier brought out by Canon that they rented to her for a modest fee, and which used a particular type of toner (Collins 1994).

Chadwick had clearly been considering the use of the photocopier machine for some time prior to making *Of Mutability*. While *Ego Geometria Sum* was being exhibited at the Aspex Gallery in early 1984, Chadwick asked for a photocopier to use in a children's workshop, where she wanted them to create images from their imagination, by creating Photostat collages by placing things – or indeed their own bodies – on the photocopier plate (AG HC B).^{iv} The workshop announcement said that what the children were to do was paralleled in Chadwick's own practice.

As Chadwick was to write, the photocopier was a very direct and efficient medium that did not rely on the need for assistants. One just pressed a button and the image appeared (V&A AAD/2002/1/168 file 1). It did not produce a consciously framed, complete image, but, as with the outline for the children's workshop, each element could be built and combined with other images. In her notebooks Chadwick wrote in excited terms about 'photocopies as electrons!' She saw the photocopy as revealing a series of traces that allowed the self to be an event, an energy field, rather than matter. 'At the speed of light I no longer exist' (Chadwick OM, 74). Echoing postmodern ideas about the loss of a stable identity, Chadwick saw the photocopy as a means to dissolve the boundaries of self and create a dynamic potential (Chadwick OM, 74).

An earlier photocopy work by Chadwick called *One Flesh* (1985) can be seen as a useful foil to *Of Mutability*, and was, in some ways, a bridge between *Ego Geometria Sum* and the later work. It was a postmodern reworking of the traditional early renaissance seated Madonna and Child, and confounded the usual sanitized image. In this, the female is contemporary - Chadwick pressed the flesh of her

neighbor Paula and that of her baby daughter Caresse onto the photocopy plate – and obviously a nursing mother. While suggesting a particular historical trope, Chadwick undermined this through the infant being female, through depicting the gold halo as a floating placenta, and the Madonna figure snipping the umbilical cord with a pair of scissors. In this work the physicality of birth, of being a nursing mother, the blood and pain are represented, and as with the figures in the Oval Court, the hands have rings and a bracelet, and there is a chain necklace, all of which help to keep the figure contemporary and human (Saunders 1989, 122-123).

There are numerous photocopy trials of breast, hand and fabric (V&A AAD/2002/1/174). Unlike painted depictions that manifested an ideal of a religious concept, the reproductive technique was complicit in returning the image to the real world. Rather than suggesting the separation of the spiritual and physical, which underpins the belief of the Virgin birth and was outlined in a book that Chadwick had recently read: Marina Warner's *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, this work, like *Of Mutability* depicted the physical and the emotional worlds, while simultaneously undermining them (McKellar in Pollock and Turvey-Sauron 2008, 202-212). Unlike early religious paintings and manuscripts, where the time and skill required added to the preciousness of the devotional subject matter, this mechanical production, with its matt surface and composite construction, did not even have the overtones of art photography.

For Chadwick, the loss of materiality, sensuality and tactility of the original was important as she wanted to subvert the immediate response in the audience, and because *Of Mutability* was the first

work where Chadwick engaged so directly with flesh. The photocopies of the animals, fish and birds were taken from real, dead examples. The lamb was a natural casualty of lambing that she gained from her brother who was a shepherd (Collins 1994). She had to teach herself to gut a fish and eviscerate the goose, as she wanted to investigate both the interior and exterior of the animals (Collins 1994). She used the goose entrails in the section suggesting Leda and the Swan, and kept the bird in her studio for a week until it became too unpleasant, but ate, and enjoyed, the monkfish and skate. The skate was so slippery – she said it kept producing slime – that it repeatedly slipped off the photocopier plate (Collins 1994). It is this physicality, as well as that of the figures, that Chadwick wanted the audience to experience not as ‘reality’, where the audience is a ‘voyeur’, but as a kind of mirror identification, where the symbolism and language were broken down (Collins 1994).

The thousands of trials that Chadwick made – the hand closer, further away, slight changes in grip or pose, changes in density of tone, different coloured papers and inks – showed how the distances from the plate increased or decreased the resolution (e.g. V&A 2002/1/168 or 177). The tests showing her hand, flat against the glass and then at different distances reveal how quickly the resolution goes, so that while objects sitting on the plate were in clear detail at certain distances they loom, ghost-like.

The tests for holding the mirror for the Venus/vanity figure – whose pose strongly resembles that of Venus in Agnolo Bronzino’s *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* (1540-1546), for instance, were carried out on both acetate and paper. There are many slight variations of grip – thumb up, thumb around, and slight variations in the placing of

the fingers. Although the mirror is not heavy, she really grips it with tense wrist and hand. (Fig 5) The angle of the mirror faces out in both tests and in the depiction of the Venus/vanity figure, so that the figure would be unable to look at her own reflection, but it faced the viewer for them to consider their reflection V&A 2002/1/172). In the final work, the forms emerge from the paper pool with shadowy elusive edges, and with varying degrees of resolution. As Chadwick later wrote, she was interested in the 'falseness of the photographic image, with its appearance of truth' (Evans in Brittain 1999, 147). When asked which photographers she admired, Chadwick said Man Ray. She found his images 'very elusive... suspended' and spoke of his photograms as seeming to 'float like an aura, a presence left behind' (Evans in Britain 1999,148).

Postmodernism

Postmodernism, its meaning and significance for art, was feverishly discussed in Britain during the 1980s, in conferences, including those at the ICA, in many new publications, and in art journals such as *Art Monthly*, and its characteristics were variously described according to the position of the writer or speaker.^v It was interpreted broadly, from eclecticism and diversity after the metanarratives of modernism, to kitsch, loss of emotional content with the reduction of things to image, parody and post-structuralism. John Tagg described the significance of postmodernism as 'the shattering of every kind of belief and the invention of other realities. True postmodernism is the challenging of all that has been received' (Tagg 1985-6, 4).

John Roberts, who was to ask Chadwick to exhibit both at the Serpentine Gallery in 1983 and at Aperto '84, reported on a conference held at the ICA on postmodernism in 1982 (18). He wrote that there were three main areas – 'theatre', 'language' and 'research'. Theatre, he wrote, was the condition of the hybridization of art and the repositioning of the viewer as a self-conscious subject. Language shifted the artwork from being medium specific to culturally specific, and research created different procedures that led to an opening out of ideas. All three categories are relevant for understanding the theatricality and staging of *Of Mutability*, with its incorporation of diverse artistic and philosophical research, and combination of contemporary mediums with allegorical language that encouraged the audience to become active and reflective viewers and allowed for an opening out of possible interpretations. For the purposes of this article, I wish to concentrate on these and add a fourth that questioned authorship and a stable sense of identity, and show how these ideas came together in the work.

Frederic Jameson argued that the proliferation of styles and forms of criticism in art, architecture, literature and music, the loss of the author and his or her place in a linear history, and the new aesthetic linked to popular and everyday cultures, were all symptoms of social and political changes that could be dated to the late 1950s and early 1960s (1984, 59 and 1985, 124-125). These factors meant that the relationships between signifiers and what they represented had been undermined, and an unstable and mutable sense of self, or the 'I' as it was termed, had evolved (1985, 119). Chadwick wrote about postmodernism in her notes headed 'Theory and Practice, Fiona Barber', where she wrote that the dismantling of the

patriarchal and authoritarian ideas framing modernism gave rise to the more plural responses of feminist critique and the multiplicity of meanings of postmodernist practices (Chadwick OM, 68). She was also acutely aware of the fracturing of the 'I', writing in her notebook for *Ego Geometria Sum* of her need to 'rescue' hers (Chadwick EGS, 23).

In a text that developed from a 1984 article in the *New Left Review*, Jameson discussed the loss of emotional content in postmodernist imagery through comparing Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980) with Van Gogh's painting of *Peasant Shoes* (1886). He argued that there was a depthlessness in Warhol's image that allowed for no real emotional engagement on the part of the audience. Being printed, unlike Van Gogh's painting, there was no mark of the author (1991, 1-6).

Distrust in the author's mark, with its historical baggage linked to gender, skill and authority, was a significant factor in the choice of many feminist artists to work with photography, performance and collage during the 1970s, and was to be important for Chadwick in her choice of working with photocopies and other reproductive media in *Of Mutability* and related works. She was 'like many contemporary artists, distrustful of the conceit of the artist's hand. This talented hand, able to toss off these beautiful creations' (Blackford). It was a way of removing the authorial mark, with its modernist history of expressing the being of the artist, while simultaneously presenting herself as image within the work.

Chadwick's layering of ideas and tropes within *Of Mutability* allows the meaning to become more fluid and open. In 1982

Benjamin Buchloh wrote about how when an image was appropriated and used in different contexts, the original meaning becomes depleted, but then gains a second/doubling of meaning in relation to its new framework (46). Jameson also wrote about the transformation of reality into image, and how, through photography, fragments of time become presented as perpetual presents (1985).

Of Mutability comprises of a composite of time, purpose and mediums that transform the originals into image. The columns of the surrounding arcade were printed from a computer-generated line drawing, taken from squared-up photographs that Chadwick had taken of the Baldacchino in Rome. The paper is thick, with brass holes at the top for hanging. The image sits well within the paper strips, which would inevitably curl away from the wall. While suggesting three dimensions, the reproductive qualities and flatness are ever present.

The construction of each scene in the pool from hundreds of pieces of photocopy paper also distances reality. Small elements are sometimes on discrete pieces of photocopy. Frequently images of cloth or body are cut through, creating a discontinuity of line, so that the process involved in fracturing, bending, elongating and compressing are visible.^{vi} The edges of the scenes would also have been evident to the viewer. Chadwick wanted the installation to have a degree of frailty, and in exhibition the photocopies were not stuck down. (The notes for the ICA guards suggested that there should be no open windows.) (T ICA 955/7/7/59)

The re-presentation of historical elements trigger a recollection of the original, while divorcing each from its original

contexts. The barley sugar columns and swags suggest the baroque. The feathers, bones, nuts and cloth all have iconographic meanings that date back to Medieval and Renaissance religious paintings, Vanitas subjects, and book illuminations, misericords and paintings depicting the Labours of the Months. The gestures and poses of the figures derive from a variety of different eras - from the Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo - and from different subject contexts, from performing acrobats to mythological figures attempting to escape rape. Unlike a synecdochal relationship of a quote to its source, which can evoke a whole text, those within *Of Mutability* confound these links. The transformation both takes away from the original meanings and places them within new contexts (Greaney 2014, 2-3).

What Chadwick sought was an art that was 'baroque in its search for totality through dramatic illusion' (Evans in Brittain, 147). What unites the different elements in *Of Mutability* is the fact that they appear coordinated through the blue photocopies. Likewise, the scale of each part of the pool in *The Oval Court* is – inevitably - related to real life. However, while a photocopy has a direct relationship with what is placed on the plate this reality, in the installation, is subverted. As Chadwick noted, 'the photocopy image does not have the same degree of actuality as the photograph' (147). Where the nuts, feathers and cloth touch the plate the images are crisp and clear, while any distance at all makes them increasingly blurred. Chadwick's body is pressed to the plate, so that image shows every crease of compression, while the contours are immediately blurred. The subversion of Chadwick's image as being her own, but being something read through historical types, fragmentation and the unreality of image echoes the notes taken by Chadwick from Sue

Arrowsmith, *Eggs of the Night*, where she writes that the subject adopts different identities, and thus becomes a cypher, as the self is obliterated (Chadwick OM, 76).

Chadwick did not leave the figures in historical guise. Her own body was a contemporary figure, with her hairstyle, rings, bracelets and necklace all being of the 1980s. Some of the elements in the still life scenes, like stockings and durex are also modern, so although her borrowings from history are evident, the contemporary is always visible. In the section of the pool that she called 'Rock Pool Placenta', she annotated the working drawings with 'Deep Sea Figure...Fishing... Fertilisation', and her notes say 'Revelations – the Leviathan...Mermaids purse...Stockings as Durex...Falling/Spiralling BIRTH' (V&A AAD/2002/1/179). She annotated one of the sketches for the cornucopia figure with a reference to the greed of the 1980s, writing 'vomit fruit [and] money'. (Fig 6) Instead of the fingers sprouting shoots in the figure that is based on Daphne in Tiepolo's *Apollo and Daphne* (1744-5), they are capturing squid and crab on lines (V&A AAD/2002/1/179).

Chadwick wanted herself to appear as subject, object and author and thus confound the immediate viewer impulse to objectification. The only way that she thought the audience could read the installation was through a kind of mirror identification (Cocker 1995, n.p.). The idea of multiple identities suggested through borrowing from history dissolving the image of self as something real, is augmented when considering Roland Barthes essay 'Authors and Writers', which he begins with 'Who speaks? Who writes?' (185-193) In this, he discusses how it had been authors who had owned the rules of language in France, between the sixteenth to nineteenth

centuries. It was them who worked up their utterances into things that were always unrealistic, but in ways that allowed the text to question the world and that had no fixed answers (186-7).

Chadwick intended the images to suggest action and dynamism rather than being a fixed event. The impossibility of the figures shown, with the inclusion of extra arms and hands in some cases, two heads for Harvest, their elongation and contortion, combined with the mosaic of fragments visible to the eye, allowed the images to be seen as traces of movement and feeling. The combinations of supporting attributes around the figures, which mixed cultural and natural references, were also designed to open up meaning. They were to intended to address the title – ‘all is change – from the moral to philosophical + amoral interpretation (Chadwick OM, 74-75).^{vii}

The theatricality of uniting disparate elements culled from art and architectural history, and their re-presentation using diverse means was heightened through the obvious allegorical underpinning. As Marina Warner wrote, allegory signifies a second layer of meaning hidden within an image, and she cites the symbolic form of Justice with her raised sword above law courts (Warner 1985, xix). Certainly the Vanity figure in *Of Mutability* has elements of the traditional personification of blind Justice in the blindfold, upraised arms and alert pose, which combine with the contemporary overtones of Chadwick’s haircut, rings and modern figure. It also resembles the pose of Bronzino’s *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*. When seen against the other figures and attributes within the pool, which also have strong links with different works of art, together with surrounding arcade and bubbling tower of composting waste, this scene becomes less easy to read.

Writing about the artifice in Eisenstein's films, Roland Barthes discussed what he termed the third meaning, or the 'obtuse' meaning, which he thought of as a supplement that is at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive (Barthes in Sontag 2000, 320-327). His contention was that obtuse meaning is not objective; it cannot be described as it does not copy as such, and it distances itself from its referent. It is an accent, creating a fold in language (327). As Rosemary Betterton noted, allegory was an important feature of postmodern art in the 1980s as it allowed for multiple readings (1997, 2-5).

This article has discussed the research and making of *Of Mutability*, and how Chadwick transformed historical prototypes into a contemporary installation. Chadwick's toolbox of historical thieving, contemporary mediums that distanced the physicality of images while retaining their links with photographic 'truth', the layering and ambiguity of meaning through subverting and re-presenting cultural and everyday tropes, and the plurality of means all make *Of Mutability* a theatrical presentation, where the viewer was forced to become a reflective and active participant. This, combined with the loss of the authorial mark, the fracturing of the 'I', and the use of self-representation are all pertinent to contextualizing *Of Mutability* within the postmodern discussions of the day.

ⁱ The exhibition ran from 28th May to 29th June 1986. From the ICA it travelled to the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, Spacex Gallery Exeter, Harris Museum Preston, the Kunstverein, Freiburg, and the 3rd Eye Centre in Glasgow.

ⁱⁱ See letter from Helen Chadwick to Bill McAlister at the ICA, June 28th, 1986. Tate archive, 955/7/7/59, 1 of 2, (ICA folder)

ⁱⁱⁱ The article was Philippe Fehl, 'The "Stemme" on Bernini's Baldacchino in St Peter's: A Forgotten Compliment', n.d. no source, 484-490.

^{iv} See letter from Sarah Watson to Helen Chadwick, 14 February 1984, and sheet announcing the workshop. In AG, Helen Chadwick, file B.

^v See for instance the ICA Documents series launched in May 1984 that were collections of papers based on the major discussions at the gallery. The first was *Desire*, second *Culture and State*, third *Ideas from France*, the fourth was a double sized issue on *Postmodernism*, and the fifth was *Identity*.

^{vi} See final work in V&A Prints and Drawings dept.

^{vii} See also the interesting discussion about Chadwick's composite imagery in relation to Hogarth and Boullée, in Stephen Walker, 'Helen Chadwick's Composite Images', *Journal of Visual Culture*, (April 2015), 74-98. Online: <http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/14/1/74.full>.

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Archival material

The V&A archive of Art and Design has a large archive related to Helen Chadwick's *Of Mutability*. I have referred to this in text as V&A, followed by the folder/box number.

The Tate archive has two areas pertinent to this article, folders related to Helen Chadwick, and folders that are filed under the ICA. I have referred to these in text as T followed by the relevant coding.

The Aspex Gallery archive has several folders related to Helen Chadwick. I have referred to these as AG and then the relevant coding.

The Womens Art Library has a good range of material filed in the artist box: Helen Chadwick, in their archive. I have shorted this to WAL.

Helen Chadwick kept extensive notes in small notebooks, which are available at the Henry Moore Institute archive, and online at Helen Chadwick, Turning the Pages

<http://hmi.onlineculture.co.uk/ttp/ttp.html>. I have referred to these

in text as Chadwick OM for that related to *Of Mutability*, and
Chadwick EGS for that related to *Ego Geometria Sum*.