



THE POWER OF
OBJECTS:
AN EXPLORATION
INTO THE WORK
OF CHIHARU
SHIOTA

Christina Cheadle
Senior Honors Thesis

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Introduction

“The shards of memory acquired greater status...because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities.”

Salman Rushdie¹

In 2014, Chiharu Shiota’s *Across the Continents* installation exhibited at the Sackler Gallery in Washington, DC (fig. 1.1). Consisting of over 350 single shoes collected from people all over the world, Shiota arranged the shoes outwards-facing to form a semi-circle from the back wall. A red string connected each shoe to a point on the wall, creating the semblance of a red cone hovering over the shoes. Shiota has created this exhibit several times since conceiving it in 2003, and while the basic idea and materials remain the same, each exhibition differs slightly.² In this specific 2014 installation, Shiota knew the individuals who once owned these shoes, and she attached a note to each shoe relaying in Japanese the memory associated with it. For example, a worn light brown shoe with leather laces includes a note: “These are shoes with which I happily supported myself working on a small plot of land and producing lots of vegetables” (fig. 1.2).³ Other shoes have more poignant messages, such as a child’s black shoe with a Velcro strap:

¹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, Reprint edition (London; New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 1992), 12.

² In other incarnations of this installation, the shoes’ biographies are unknown; Shiota has simply found the shoes at thrift shops or flea markets. In this case, no notes are attached, and yet viewers are still encouraged to imagine the memories that once existed within the shoes. At the least, a viewer assumes that at one point the shoes had an owner, and that they became worn through natural use. Important to note

³ Max Kutner, “What’s In a Shoe? Japanese Artist Chiharu Shiota Investigates,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/whats-shoe-japanese-artist-chiharu-shiota-investigates-180952458/?no-ist>.

My daughter who had a problem with her leg was fond of three activities: the synchronized swimming of handicapped people, her company, and the rehearsals and a concert of Beethoven's 9th Symphony which she went to. Because of her illness, her short life ended. These shoes met a lot of people and had many happy memories (fig. 1.3)⁴

The impact of these messages paired with shoes marked with the scuffs and scratches of daily wear transcends cultural boundaries, and indeed, Shiota – a Japanese artist by birth who moved to Berlin in her late teens to study under performance artist Marina Abramovic – considers herself a transnational artist, unaffiliated with a specific region. She claims this designation to prevent critics and viewers from pigeonholing her work.⁵ As part of her strong attempt to cross national boundaries, Shiota's installations intentionally incorporate commonplace objects in an effort to connect with a wide audience. As Shiota has explained through interviews, she chooses these mundane items because, speaking specifically of shoes, they connote humans' existences, connections, memories, and life-stories.⁶ By separating the shoes from their pairs, placing them in an environment that removes their function, and attaching string to them to remove them further from their intended purpose, Shiota's installation allows shoes to represent more than their function: They signify a history, or more precisely, the histories of those who wore them.

Shiota is not the first artist to incorporate such objects, personal or otherwise, into her work. Indeed, the items she most frequently includes – shoes, suitcases, and broken pianos – are practically cliché in their relatability and recent use. The fascination with a well-worn pair

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Toshikatsu Omori, "A Correspondence with Chiharu Shiota," in *Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines*, ed. Menene Gras Balaguer (Actar, 2014), 87.

⁶ Omori, "A Correspondence with Chiharu Shiota." Ibid.

of shoes Van Gogh depicted in 1886 has been the subject of important studies by Heidegger, Schapiro, and Derrida, all of whom considered the significance and, indeed, emptiness of Van Gogh's work boots.⁷ More comparably to Shiota's work specifically, Vivian Sundaram's *12 Bed Ward* and Christian Boltanski's *Personnes* use discarded shoes as proxies for the people who once wore them. Suitcases, meanwhile, are a facile signifier of transience and have been used in the contemporary art works of Jon Crispin and Fabio Mauri. Even the 'attacked' piano, which in the company of these others may seem arcane, has been the subject of works by artists including Annea Lockwood (*Piano Burning*, 1968), Arman (*La Piano de Neron*, 1965), and Douglas Gordon (*The End of Civilisation*, 2012). This is not a criticism of Shiota's work as derivative, necessarily, for her purpose focuses less on novelty than relatability; she deliberately selects these components because they prove the most cross-culturally powerful. My question, simply put, is why? What is it about shoes, suitcases, and broken pianos that encourages viewers to intuit in them the presence – or, more often, absence – of human life? Shiota has said that she hopes her work will incite feelings of nostalgia regardless of the viewer's background. What qualities make shoes, suitcases, and pianos so broadly nostalgic, giving Shiota's work its effectiveness?

I begin this thesis with a discussion of Shiota's *Across the Continents*. Seeing this exhibit in the spring of 2015 inspired what was to become this year-long project. Throughout this thesis, I explore Shiota's *Across the Continents* and her other works, incorporating my second major, anthropology, into the analysis as well. My investigation takes on this question using the anthropological concept of distributed personhood and abduction of agency, as it relates to Shiota's work especially but also more generally in modern and contemporary art. I

⁷ Derrida, Jacques, "Restitution of the Truth in Pointing," 1978.

will address each subject – shoes, suitcases, and pianos – through one of Shiota’s installations – *Across the Continents*, *Accumulation*, and *In Silence*, respectively (fig. 1.4,1.5). Each of these works, I argue, highlights cross-cultural and temporal boundaries due to the components’ concomitant themes of presence in absence and distributed personhood.

Personhood is a concept commonly used in anthropologic explorations related to identity and material culture. Chris Fowler succinctly defines the term as, “the state or condition of being a person.”⁸ When studied, anthropologists consider how different people or groups of people conceptualize their personhoods. As the field of anthropology has grown interested in materiality, personhood has become more thoroughly investigated. The idea of objects as items possessing agency in anthropological literature traces back to Pietz’ “The Problem of the Fetish” from 1987.⁹ The objects become more than their function; they become objects that are able to incite feelings within viewers.

Alfred Gell’s idea of “abduction of agency” helps to clarify this concept. In Gell’s 1998 book, *Art and Agency*, Gell uses abductive reasoning to criticize the previous anthropological focus on the aesthetics of art and to encourage anthropologists to focus on the agency of art.¹⁰ Quoting Eco, he claims that viewers undergo a form of abduction when viewing artwork where “we find some very curious circumstances, which would be explained by the supposition that it was a case of some general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition.”¹¹ Through this method, viewers are able to get a living presence response from

⁸ Chris Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood: An Anthropological Approach* (Psychology Press, 2004), 352.

⁹ William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 13 (1987): 23–45.

¹⁰ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 14.

¹¹ Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, First Edition edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 131.

inanimate objects. To explain this concept further, Gell uses an example of a picture of a smiling person. He says, “the appearance of smiling triggers a (hedged) inference that...this person is friendly, just as a real person’s smile would trigger the same influence.”¹² Gell considers this automatic reaction part of “indexical schemes,” or more simply, preprogrammed responses viewers have to certain images. He further says, “‘things’ such as dolls and cars can appear as ‘agents’ in particular social situations; and so...can ‘works of art.’”¹³ Someone looking at Shiota’s *Across the Continents*, for example, becomes able to see presence in the absence of the people who once filled the shoes that Shiota so carefully displays, without fully understanding why. Taking advantage of this principle, Gell supposes artists utilize a certain level of stylistic virtuosity in order to convey the desired affect.¹⁴

The concepts of personhood and abduction of agency help conceptualize the emotional poignancy of the quotidian objects in Shiota’s art through a third, but related, theory of distributed personhood. Marilyn Strathern, in her 1988 work *The Gender of the Gift*, supposed the idea of distributed personhood after working with gift societies of Melanesia.¹⁵ Here Strathern found that humans often understood themselves as ‘dividuals’ rather than ‘individuals,’ meaning that they conceptualize themselves not only by their bodily person but through their surroundings, possessions, and exchanges as well. This concept implies that an individual’s identity is not housed within the body but is instead divisible into multiple material parts.¹⁶ Although this may sound like an abstruse anthropological theory, its

¹² Gell, *Art and Agency*, 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵ Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, Reprint edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Gell, *Art and Agency*; Nancy Munn, *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim Society*, New edition edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1992); Marcel Mauss, *The Gift:*

manifestation is familiar and its consequences, as we will see, are far-reaching. An example of distributed personhood exists in a gift from a loved one. If a mother gives a daughter a necklace, and then later the mother passes away, the daughter may feel as though part of her mother still exists within the gifted object. This concept also explains the hesitancy one may feel to throw out a deceased loved one's possessions. The family member may feel as though the deceased's presence still exists within the items with which the latter once interacted. Therefore, distributed personhood attaches a name to a common phenomenon. Knowledge of these terms will prove helpful in understanding my argument as to how objects are able to abduct viewers' agency and thus possess power.

For Chiharu Shiota, shoes, pianos, and suitcases all possess a sense of agency. They contain intrinsic qualities outside of their functions that have inspired artists for generations. An anthropologically-driven analysis of these objects will reveal their intended functions. Up until this point, art historians and anthropologists have published theories and case studies explaining bits and pieces of this phenomenon. Gell's idea of abductive reasoning helps the viewer understand that perhaps art is not solely about aesthetics. Distributed personhood explains why the material remnants of someone's life can bring back their existence so potently. Biography of objects can account for the agency of an inanimate object, as explaining their ingrained history helps realize the multivalence of objects. Meanwhile, semiotic theory can show how the defunctionalization of objects (and subsequent refunctionalization) can unveil an entirely new meaning.

The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

Throughout my thesis, I apply this idea of the power of objects to a specific object in each of my three central chapters. I begin by introducing the object and the piece of Shiota's work that incorporates the said object. I then delve more deeply into the meaning behind Shiota's installation. Following this exploration, I look at the biography of the object with the belief that learning the history of the object helps my readers understand the seemingly inherent symbolism in each of them. Afterwards, I bring in other artists who have used these objects in their works, comparing and contrasting them to Shiota's art. Through this organization, I uncover the reason behind society's allowance of shoes, suitcases, and pianos to abduct their agency.

In *Shoes*, I discuss Shiota's *Across the Continents* in relation to Boltanski's *Personnes* and Sundaram's *12 Bed Ward*. I begin by exploring Shiota's piece through a semiotic lens, separating the connotative and denotative function of shoes. I claim that by defunctionalizing and refunctionalizing the shoes, Shiota, as well as the other artists, utilize the shoes' connotative rather than denotative functions. Additionally, I argue that these connotative functions have been created through the history of shoes and the idea of distributed personhood. This then gets reflected onto to the viewer through Gell's idea of abduction of agency, allowing artists to use these shoes to achieve relatively the same means in their works. In the case of these three artists, the shoes represent people and hope, or the loss thereof. I conclude this chapter with an in depth look at the power of shoes in the art historical canon with van Gogh's *Shoes* and the philosophical debate surrounding it. I incorporate this argument in order to intensify my thesis about the power of the inanimate object and its ability to abduct the agency of the viewer. While *Shoes* was interpreted differently by

Heidegger, Schapiro, and Derrida, its affective power and symbol of human existence remains clearly consistent throughout all of their analyses.

In my second chapter, *Suitcases*, I compare Shiota's *Accumulation* to Mauri's *The Wailing Wall*, Crispin's photographs of mental hospital patient's abandoned belongings, and Gupta's *Vessel for the Seven Seas II*. I investigate the history of the suitcases, explaining its invention and rise in the early 20th century. I argue that part of the emotional poignancy of the suitcases in these pieces comes from the fact that often they are from the first half of the 20th century, and therefore bring in the concept of the outmoded. I also mention that part of the affect lies in the multiplicity of the suitcases. While Gupta's piece does not adhere to these categories, his work still uses suitcases as a means to convey themes of transience, life, and ephemerality. The personhood distributed within the suitcases is palpable when arranged by these artists. Viewers acknowledge that these suitcases once contained objects held most dear to an individual, thus at one moment in time they potentially represented the said person's identity. Once again, these objects abduct the viewers' agency and send a message that seems inherent within the object whose origins can be teased out with further research, as I have done.

Lastly, I investigate not only pianos, but the ritual of piano destruction or piano burning. I find that piano burning allegedly began in the Royal Air Force as a way to push back against the bureaucracy. With pianos and piano playing stemming from the upper tiers of society in the 17th century, this association makes logical sense. Pianos can also represent wealth and a desire for upward mobility. I mention that realtors have even been known to put pianos in a house in order to make it appear classier. From these connotative association, the act of piano burning stemmed and turned into an artistic movement as well as a military or

social one. Works such as Shiota's in *In Silence*, Arman's *Piano de Néron*, Lockwood's *Burning Piano*, and Gordon's *The End of Civilisation* all incorporate piano burning. As a result, the audience is addressed with a feeling of, how Gordon puts it, the end of civilization. The piano represents civilization and thus it is particularly poignant when one is destroyed. Upon a destroyed piano, one is no longer able to create, thus the music once created is lost forever, never to return. Again, the feelings of ephemerality, transience, and life permeate these works.

Shoes', pianos', and suitcases' simple and mundane nature belies their artistic power and effect. Bringing these concepts together under the frame of Chiharu Shiota's *Across the Continents*, *In Silence*, and *Accumulation* will help viewers understand the connection they feel with these quotidian material objects, in and out of an artistic landscape while providing a new perspective on her work. Using theories of distributed personhood and abduction of agency, I demystify the affective power that society has instilled within the mundane objects Shiota and other artists incorporate into their works.

Chapter 1: Shoes

Chiharu Shiota's *Across the Continents* installation at the Sackler Gallery in 2014 serves as the central artwork for this chapter (fig 1.1). I will explore shoes as a visual trope in art representing the people who once wore them and the memories with their lives. Using Shiota's work as a basis but supplementing examples from Christian Boltanski and Vivan Sundaram, I argue that through stylistic virtuosity and the biography of the object, artists often use shoes to convey the memories of those who once wore them. The viewer's agency is abducted due to the inherent symbolic meanings associated with shoes, as I will discuss, and because of the concept of distributed personhood, it is understood that the shoes represent the people who once owned them through their absence. After an investigation into the symbolic power of shoes, I end the chapter by placing shoes in an art historical framework by delving into Van Gogh's famous *Shoes* of 1886 and the philosophical debate surrounding this work. Shiota's *Across the Continents* represents a symbol prevalent in over a century's worth of art work, and through this chapter I explain the shoe's agency when taken out of its functional context.

Chiharu Shiota uses quotidian material objects in order to incite real or imagined memories from the viewer. In *Across the Continents*, Shiota uses shoes to achieve her goal. Conceptualized in 2003, this specific installation in the Sackler Gallery shares real memories with viewers through hand written notes attached to each shoe. In other installations, Shiota does not attach notes due to the unknown biographies of the objects. Still, however, she asks viewers to imagine the memories that once existed within the shoes. Viewers need not imagine Shiota's message at the Sackler gallery, as translations accompany the notes with specific memories collected from each donor. These notes facilitate connections between the

viewer and the object through the creation of shared memories. Shiota relies on a certain “horizon of expectations” that the viewer brings to her work.¹⁷ The notes help abduct the viewer’s agency further as they direct the viewer’s thoughts and feelings down the path that Shiota creates.

Before further analysis of *Across the Continents*, it is important to note the inherent modernism associated with the shoe. Anthropologist Tim Ingold draws attention to shoes’ signification of advanced society when he compares the “barefoot savage” to the “boot-wearing European.”¹⁸ Shoeless cultures, Ingold argues, are viewed derogatorily as primitive and savage to the refined shoe-wearers. He states, “to the affluent, the constriction of the feet [in shoes] remains as a sure mark of civilization as the freedom of the hands.”¹⁹ Shoes, therefore, represent civilization at a basic level. They separate those who use their feet solely as a means of walking, and those who use them as one would use his or her hands. Moreover, Ingold notes the subtle differences in walking between cultures and the ways that an emphasis on hands over feet symbolizes civilized cultures.²⁰ In this way, I argue that those who wear shoes unconsciously understand that shoes signify advanced cultures and have historically signified their supremacy. This is all to say that Shiota’s conception of the codified denotation of shoes exists only within her cultural sphere, though she perceives it to be a universal phenomenon. In fact, as Ingold points out, layers of classism and comparison exist within the biography of shoes as a sign, even at the denotative level. When one views shoes as

¹⁷ Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970): 7–37. “Horizon of expectations” refers to the knowledge the artist assumes the viewer to possess. For example, Shiota expects the viewers to recognize the objects as shoes. .

¹⁸ Tim Ingold, “Culture on the Ground The World Perceived Through the Feet,” *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 3 (November 1, 2004): 325.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 321.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

something to protect one's foot and nothing more, classism still exists within the object.

Those who choose to functionally wear shoes see themselves as more civilized and advanced than those who do not wear them at all. Shiota does not address this in her work, implying that she assumes that the viewers' horizons of expectation will include the assumption that everyone wears shoes, thus revealing the limitations of her claim to universality. She chooses shoes because she feels that her viewers will all recognize and relate to them.²¹ This is a reasonable assumption for Shiota to make based on where she exhibits, as it can be safely assumed that everyone viewing her show will recognize the shoes' forms. It remains important to keep in mind, however, that something as seemingly universal as shoes are still multivalent in history and meaning.

In addition to the biography of shoes as a whole, the biographies of these particular shoes strengthen the intended meaning of the piece. By removing the shoes' functions and placing them in an order meant to incite contemplation, Shiota encourages the viewers to see the shoes as something more than purely functional objects. Providing the lifespan of the shoe makes the absence of its owners more apparent, thus enhancing the efficacy of Shiota's important theme of presence in absence. Shiota's installation allows shoes to represent more than their function—the histories of those who once wore them. By separating the shoes from their pairs, placing them in an environment that removes their function, and attaching string to them to further remove them from their intended purpose, Shiota highlights the shoes as objects that serve as powerful vessels for conveying memory. Even when the shoes do not have attached notes, their existence as vessels of memories still prevails. Without direct

²¹ Sara Dal Soto, "Chiharu Shiota," *Nasty Magazine*, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.nastymagazine.com/digital/art/4341/chiharu-shiota>.

knowledge of the shoes' biographies, the viewers are still reminded of the existence of a history of ownership, even with the details unknown. By placing them in a museum setting, the absence of the owners becomes more salient and at the least, a viewer assumes that at one point the shoes had an owner, and that they became worn through natural use. Shiota plays on this idea of a material object's biography or lifespan to encourage viewers to explore memory and presence in absence.

While this artwork may appear to exist as an accumulation of familiar objects—shoes—Shiota ensures that the shoes represent more than their function. The salience of Shiota's piece lies in her ability to cause the reader to think about shoes in a different way through defunctionalizing the objects, inspiring both intrigue and nostalgia. In semiotic terms, the shoes act as signifiers. Shoes are denotatively understood in terms of their functionality: protecting one's feet when walking. However, Shiota encourages the viewer to look beyond the evident denotation to what she deems to be the often-overlooked connotation. According to Shiota, shoes connote humans' existences, connections, memories, and life-stories. While she discusses these additional significations thoroughly through her interviews on the subject, the formal elements of the piece also coax the viewer into believing Shiota's connotations.²²

The formal elements of Shiota's piece allow the viewers to follow her semiotic thought processes. For example, as previously mentioned, all of the shoes exist without their partners. Her de-pairing draws attention to the defunctionalization of the material objects and thus suggests that the shoes represent more than their common function. The shoes also sit on the floor in a fan-shape, with all of the toes of the over 350 shoes fanning outward, not restricted to facing only a single viewer (fig 2.1). This precise arrangement suggests time and

²² Omori, "A Correspondence with Chiharu Shiota," 90.

effort, and showcases the unnatural setting of the shoes. I believe that Shiota placed these shoes in this specific manner in order to convey to the viewer the footwear's symbolic significance beyond its codified denotative meaning. If the organization and defunctionalization of the shoes does not provide enough indication of the intended signifiers, Shiota attaches the aforementioned notes to the shoes to tell the viewer that the objects signify memories and represent their past owners. The multivalent meaning of the shoes creates a particularly poignant effect; Shiota utilizes a material she believes to have generally accepted denotations and then, through artistic organization, layers further connotations onto the objects.

Keeping in mind the significance of the shoes in *Across the Continents*, it is useful to consider the string as well, which contains its own set of signs and signifiers and completes Shiota's piece, further emphasizing her themes of memory and human existence. Shiota's codified meaning in this instance, often get lost when critics focus too heavily on her biography as a Japanese native. Shiota uses string in almost all of her pieces—red or black depending on the mood of the piece. In *Across the Continents*, Shiota ties a piece of red string to each shoe and pulls the string taut to a point on the wall. Eventually, all of the string connects in one place, amounting to more than four miles' worth of it. To Shiota, string exists as a material that connects things to one another. In *Across the Continents*, Shiota uses string for its denoted purpose. By connecting all of the shoes to a center point, Shiota aims to represent the connection between all humans. This universalism, then, is theoretically mirrored in her viewership as they respond to these shared memories of shoes and their significances. Shiota uses red string in this case in order to represent life.²³ In interviews,

²³ Ibid., 85.

when frequently asked for the significance of the string, Shiota will respond with a denotative and connotative answer. First, she feels that string mimics drawing, but in the third dimension.²⁴ Additionally, Shiota believes that string can connote the complicated web of ties between humans.²⁵ For example, string can get tangled and knotted, just like relationships between individuals. While this semiotic lens helps extract the intended meaning of *Across the Continents*, many curators and critics have ignored Shiota's explanations in favor of interpretations that privilege her Japanese heritage. For example, the string she uses has been compared to the Japanese art of calligraphy, even though Shiota dispels this interpretation.²⁶ Comparisons made between her use of string and calligraphy rely solely on the fact that the string is black and artistically woven, and she is Japanese.²⁷ I find that through this biographical lens, meaning becomes mapped on to the piece, and the string is continued analyzed in reference to Shiota's Japanese upbringing.²⁸ This is in part why I have chosen not to discuss her background in detail. While the biography of an artist can be an important interpretative tool, in this case, it overshadows the semiotic significance of the piece and shrouds the focus on memory and presence and absence.

Shiota's *Across the Continents* fills the room with memories and people with shoes, string, and notes. The shoes represent the wearers, prolonging their memory and existence, while the notes serve as additional reminders of their individuality. The string connects these memories in order to remind the viewers of the human condition of shared memory and

²⁴ Dal Soto, "Chiharu Shiota."

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Menene Gras Balaguer, "Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines," in *Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines*, ed. Menene Gras Balaguer (Actar, 2014), 124.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

interaction. When comparing *Across the Continents* to other artists' works who use similar materials in a similar fashion, Shiota's theme of the permanence of memory becomes more poignant.

Comparisons can be drawn between Shiota's *Across the Continents* and respective works by artists Christian Boltanski and Vivian Sundarum. Boltanski's famous *Personnes* from 2010, for example, consists of discarded clothes and shoes in various piles throughout a large central space in the Grand Palais in Paris (fig. 2.3). The title of the installation resonates with Shiota's theme of presence in absence within her works. The French '*personnes*' used as a noun translates to 'people' but as a singular pronoun means 'nobody.' It has been said that when viewing Boltanski's *Personnes*, "the irresistible metaphor springs literal in the visitor's mind, as if clothes could have bodies or faces."²⁹ As in Boltanski's work, Shiota's shoes seem to possess bodies or faces, and through attaching notes to the shoes, Shiota helps to literalize the metaphor in the viewer's mind. Boltanski's pieces often include themes of *momento mori* and human trace, utilizing personal materials such as hair, letters, and in the case of *Personnes*, shoes.³⁰ Contrastingly, Shiota's *Across the Continents* reminds viewers of the permanence of existence rather than the fleetingness of life. The red strings attached to the shoes, representing life according to Shiota, provide hope to the viewer and create a physical connection between all the shoes, and therefore people.³¹ Boltanski's shoes appear abandoned and discarded, mirroring the the artist's opinion on the life's transience and arbitration. Shiota suggests each shoe is, for its story, special, while Boltanski lumps them together

²⁹ Laura Cumming, "Christian Boltanski: Personnes," *The Guardian*, January 16, 2010, sec. Art and design, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jan/17/christian-boltanski-personnnes-paris-review>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Omori, "A Correspondence with Chiharu Shiota," 92.

anonymously. In both of these installations, the shoes possess agency for the viewer; the shoes are removed from their function, thus becoming symbols representing the people who once owned them. The symbolism of the objects that is unconsciously stored within viewers' minds allows the shows to possess the power to then tell viewers what message they should receive from the piece. However, Shiota's careful organization and composition of the shoes creates a piece wrought with hope and nostalgia, while Boltanski's creates the opposite effect.

Vivan Sundaram's *12 Bed Ward* from 2007 echos Boltanski's in theme (fig. 2.3).

Sundaram collected twelve barren metal bed frames and displayed them in an organized fashion, as if in a military bunk. There are six beds on either side of a middle aisle, with low lighting and high ceilings. The visual effect is raw and uncomfortable. On each bed Sundaram has laid the soles of shoes in lieu of a mattress or bedding of any kind. These shoes represent the people who have slept in the bed, but who do so no longer. Similar to Boltanski's *Personnes*, Sundaram emphasizes the fact that the once-owners of the shoes are now gone. The lighting in the room magnifies this effect further as it casts large shadows below each of the beds, thus seemingly multiplying the amount of shoes, and thus people, represented. Reminiscent of the piles of shoes in Auschwitz, the austerity of Sundaram's piece draws comparisons with a concentration camp. Again, while he incorporates similar themes and the same objects, Sundaram has created a piece different from Shiota's *Across the Continents* while nonetheless drawing upon the shoes' significance as vessels of memory. Perhaps Sundaram's shoes convey a sense of loss by instilling the viewers with somber feelings. Shiota, while her shoes too represent the people who once wore them, maintains the theme of life and connection in her piece with the help of string. Unlike Boltanski's *Personnes*, Sundaram's *12 Bed Ward* carefully organizes the shoes, yet he does so in a way that does not

give them prominence. Shiota celebrates the power of the shoes and any connotation, thought, or feeling associating with them by fanning them out in a carefully organized manner facing the viewers. She celebrates the shoes and their owners, paying further respects by elongating the life of the owner's memory through the attachment of notes to each of them. Each of these artist's defunctionalizes and then refunctionalizes shoes, thus turning them into agency-possessing objects representative of the people who once wore them. Like Boltanski's and Sundaram's work in symbolism but not effect, Shiota works manipulates the objects into vessels of memory and connection.

A further example of the power of shoes as an art object comes from the late 19th century proving that shoes have possessed a sense of abductive poignancy as subjects for art for over a century. Van Gogh's *Shoes* painting from 1886 revolves around what became the deceptively complex subject matter of a worn pair of shoes (fig. 2.4). *Shoes* and the subsequent writings on them provide evidence of the interest in quotidian objects dating back to the late nineteenth century. The intellectual debate surrounding the image includes names such as Heidegger, Shapiro, and Derrida. Somehow this seemingly simple image of an object so familiar to the viewer possesses the ability to inspire essays, debates, and an entire exhibition in the Wallraf Richartz Museum in Cologne in 2009.³² A Harper's magazine article questioned the painting's ability to conjure such responses.³³ The author supports my argument in a single sentence: "Sometimes shoes are just shoes, but the visitor coming away from this exhibition may realize that a pair of shoes can contain an entire universe."³⁴ This

³² Scott Horton, "Philosophers Rumble Over Van Gogh's Shoes," *The Stream - Harper's Magazine Blog*, October 5, 2009, <http://harpers.org/blog/2009/10/philosophers-rumble-over-van-goghs-shoes/>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

pair of shoes, bought by Van Gogh at a flea market, incited enough conversation to fill pages of scholarly articles. Shiota, too, collected shoes from a flea market, seemingly aware of society's same abduction of agency as perhaps was Van Gogh in 1880.

A closer look at Heidegger's, Shapiro's, and Derrida's comments on Van Gogh's *Shoes* emphasize the art historical relevance of my thesis. These three scholars all disagree on the meaning and purpose behind the image, but the object's agency remains pertinent. It has been unconsciously ingrained into society that certain objects, when taken out of context, can grow to possess a certain type of power. This power then incites feelings based on the way the object is expressed. The response to these objects becomes phenomenological for these three scholars, again a testament to the power of the object over the person. In an article entitled "Phenomenology and Material Culture," author Julian Thomas writes, "meditation on a discarded shoe can lead to questioning the nature of art." This statement rings true in Heidegger's, Schapiro's, and Derrida's discourses. In this instance, as in many other artworks incorporating shoes, including Shiota's, the shoes act as vessels holding the owner's memories and experiences. Shiota discusses this principle of distributed personhood through the term "presence in absence."³⁵

Heidegger deeply feels this sense of presence within absence when viewing Van Gogh's *Shoes*. On the work he muses:

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls... This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of

³⁵ Balaguer, "Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines," 124.

bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death.³⁶

Heidegger clearly saw the shoes as much more than pieces of material meant to protect one's feet. Van Gogh defunctionalized the shoes by painting an image of them to be hung on a wall, thus drawing attention to them as vessels of personhood (whether he did so intentionally is unknown). From a seemingly banal painting of shoes, Heidegger felt the presence of a peasant woman long gone. While the scholars following him, most notably Meyer Schapiro, responded to his assessment as invalid and poorly supported, the power of the shoes to act on Heidegger is very evident. The fact of shoes as a symbol exists regardless of the correctness of the interpretation of the artist's intention.

Responding directly to Heidegger's essay, Schapiro believed that Heidegger had "imagined everything and projected it into the painting."³⁷ Schapiro argues that Heidegger became too excited and thus over-imaginative when analyzing *Shoes* and missed Van Gogh's presence in the piece, thus misinterpreting the entire image. Schapiro includes an anecdote in his essay about Gauguin's recollection of Van Gogh's connection with the shoes he painting.³⁸ Van Gogh tells Gauguin of hardship he endured in his youth and says, "these shoes, as you see, have bravely endured the fatigue of that trip."³⁹ From this story Schapiro concludes "Gauguin's story confirms the essential fact that for van Gogh the shoes were a piece of his own life."⁴⁰ While Van Gogh painted several shoe pieces, regardless of the pair,

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, Revised, Expanded ed. edition (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 423.

³⁷ Schapiro, Meyer, *The Still Life as a Personal Object*, 1968, 430.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 431.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

shoes held a special meaning for him. This effect then transferred to Schapiro through the painting, as Schapiro views the image as an extension of van Gogh's presence.

Jacques Derrida, when reflecting upon van Gogh's *Shoes* and Heidegger and Schapiro's thoughts on the image, also feels the magnetic pull of the seemingly mundane object. The power of the shoes as a symbolic object is not lost on the philosopher, for he states, "From then on, if these shoes are no longer useful, it is of course because they are detached from naked feet and from their subject of reattachment (their owner, usual holder, the one who wears them and whom they bear)."⁴¹ Again, distributed personhood gets inadvertently defined in relation to van Gogh's *Shoes*. Throughout the rest of *Restitution of the Truth of Pointing*, Derrida deconstructs both Schapiro's and Heidegger's arguments offering the reader a seemingly endless amount of questions about which to muse on the subject of van Gogh's *Shoes*. All three scholars give the shoes in van Gogh's painting agency—the agency to inspire, to tell, to encourage. The viewers are not acting upon the shoes, although Schapiro argues that Heidegger unknowingly did so, but the shoes are acting upon the viewers. In this way, Schapiro, Heidegger, and Derrida have been abducted by the agency of the quotidian object and allowed it to represent more than its function and to possess a sense of agency.

Van Gogh's *Shoes*, Boltanski's *Personnes*, and Sundarum's *12 Bed Ward* offer further examples of shoes in art in addition to *Across the Continents*. While there is room for some stylistic virtuosity within each piece of art, the central subject remains the same. Placing a worn shoe in a work serves as a symbol of memory. People distribute their personhoods into material objects, such as shoes, and artists later capitalize on this facet of the human

⁴¹ Derrida, Jacques, "Restitution of the Truth in Pointing," 440.

condition. As I mentioned while discussing the biography of shoes, although they may seem ubiquitous and universal, they represent civilization in a way often overlooked by viewers. Artists incorporating shoes into their works assume a basic level of cultural understating. This is important to keep in mind as we continue into the subsequent chapters, where I discuss suitcases and pianos, objects that, while easily identifiable to patrons of an art gallery, imply a certain way of life that is not as universal as the artists may think it to be.

Chapter 2: Suitcases

In 2012, photographer Jon Crispin began photographing the leftover suitcases of mental hospital patients from the 1910s through the 1960s.⁴² At first wanting to connect the suitcases to their owners and their respective mental illnesses, Crispin soon realized that the suitcases alone told enough of a story. Photographing the suitcases open with the contents displayed, Crispin allows his images of “ghostly remains” to narrate the lives of these often forgotten citizens (fig. 3.1).⁴³ He contends that through airing these long lost suitcases, he is paying homage to these patients. Crispin gives agency to the objects, suggesting that the suitcases hold the owner’s identity. He explains that he “was constantly affected by the items, and that’s my goal with photographs.”⁴⁴

Crispin’s photograph series is, in some ways, not unlike Chiharu Shiota’s *Accumulation* (fig. 1.4). Shiota once again places power in a mundane object—in this case, suitcases. While these are not exactly parallel examples, artists such as Fabio Mauri and Subodh Gupta also have found the affective power of suitcases as a material, thus emphasizing the pattern of suitcases in art. In a transient world, suitcases have come to represent more than just vessels for carrying bathing suits and sunscreen on vacation. During times of great migrations, people have left their previous lives behind carrying only a suitcase. I believe that within a suitcase lies more than just possessions, but a person’s connection to his or her identity. These suitcases then become vessels, housing an individual’s personhood. When put into a piece of art, such as Shiota’s *Accumulation*, the viewer becomes aware of

⁴² Hunter Oatman-Stanford, “Abandoned Suitcases Reveal Private Lives of Insane Asylum Patients,” *Collectors Weekly*, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/abandoned-suitcases-reveal-private-lives-of-insane-asylum-patients/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

luggage as a vessel of personhood and thus the suitcases abduct the viewer's agency, reminding them of the transience of life and the existence of identity within objects.

Her most frequently assembled work, *Accumulation* consists of dozens of antique suitcases stacked in a pyramid against the corner of the exhibition space, creating a large, curved wall of suitcases (fig. 3.2). The suitcases vary in color and style, but there is no mistaking them for anything but luggage. By contrast to *In Silence* and *Across the Continents*, Shiota's *Accumulation* varies greatly from place to place, with the title changing occasionally. Antique suitcases remain the focus however, usually stacked in large, organized piles. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on a specific installation created for the Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art in Japan, entitled *Accumulation-Searching for the Destination*. Other titles for her similar works include *Where to Go, What to Exist*, at the Kenji Taki Gallery in 2010 (fig. 3.3). Similar to *Accumulation*, this exhibition consisted of stacked antique suitcases acquired from local antique stores and donations, this time in a U-shape, creating a walkway within the surrounding suitcase wall. In both instances, the viewer becomes overwhelmed with the height and vastness of the suitcases. The antiquity and refunctionalization imply a missing owner, as Shiota removes the suitcases from their anticipated context and places them in one in which they can no longer be used. In this early work, *Where to Go, What to Exist*, Shiota places a few suitcases open and places photographs or newspaper clippings within them, making it obvious to the viewer that the objects represent the people who once owned them. In her later works with suitcases, Shiota's message is more implicit; through simply refunctionalizing the suitcases their affective power is made clear. As

she claims in an interview with *Nasty* magazine, “I don’t want to deliver a rational message but create an emotional impression.”⁴⁵

In 2014, Shiota created suitcase pieces twice—this time incorporating her signature red string for the Busan Biennale in South Korea (fig. 3.4). For this piece, Shiota attached a red string to each of the suitcases and hung them from the ceiling. They gradually descended, appearing as a swooping staircase made of luggage. Dozens of suitcases floated above the viewer under a sea of red string. Shiota recreated this piece in the UK, which she then entitled *Dialogues* (fig. 3.5). While the organization of the suitcases is different in each of these exhibitions, the overall effect is the same. Shiota once again captures human identity within the objects she utilizes. The objects act as representations of the people who once owned them. Just as with shoes and pianos, society has created an agreed upon meaning for these objects, one that transcends their utilitarian function—I will discuss this concept in further detail later. The denotative function of a suitcase is to hold possessions while moving from one place to another, but history and globalization has led to a connotative meaning that has given the object agency.

The string used in *Dialogues* creates an aesthetic impact that differs slightly from the works in which she does not use string. As her signature material, the majority of her works incorporate string of either red or black variety. She has said that the red string represents life and living, but she has not stated that the black sting represents the opposite in any way.⁴⁶ This soon developed into her signature as Shiota feels that string holds power as well as beautiful aesthetic quality. In an interview she stated, “string can sag, connect or loosen. It has

⁴⁵ Dal Soto, “Chiharu Shiota.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

so many human qualities; it has tension.”⁴⁷ Shiota dyes the yarn either red or black, depending on the installation. The string helps accomplish the abduction of agency the artist seeks to create through her work, as they represent the connections the objects once had with people by being physically attached to the objects in the installation. Specifically, the red string, as used in *Dialogues*, represents the life that was once associated with the now abandoned suitcases. Further aesthetic choices made by Shiota help convey the feelings of loss and remembrance she works to create.

The title of Shiota’s suitcase-based work on which I focus, *Accumulation*, speaks to the power of the multiple suitcases instead of just a single one. The way in which she stacks the suitcases in all of her installations ensures that each piece of luggage is visible. In *Dialogues*, Shiota displays the suitcases so that it looks like there are more than there actually are, creating a scene of a waterfall of staircases. This technique makes the effect of her work more potent, as the themes of home and transience do not appear as an isolated incident as much as motifs that can be ceaselessly traced through time. The suitcases in *Accumulation* mirror the literal accumulation of the people and lives that have once owned each one of them. The present form of “accumulate” implies that the accumulation is ongoing, allowing the viewers to thread the feelings portrayed within the piece into their own lives. Of Shiota’s work, a curator once stated that it “digs into one’s depths to release the mystery and shadowy parts, a subterranean complex that cannot be solved by science and reason, a reassuring yet disturbing magic.”⁴⁸ The multiplicity in Shiota’s suitcase pieces contributes to the abduction

⁴⁷ Kelly Crow, “In Washington, 300 Shoes Tied to Memories,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2014, sec. Life and Style, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/a-japanese-artist-brings-300-shoes-and-memories-to-washington-1408142916>.

⁴⁸ Numa Hambursin, “A Viper in the Tall Grasses,” in *Chiharu Shiota: After the Dream* (Montpellier: Lienart Editions, 2013), 21–22.

of agency the viewer receives from her works. The room not only is filled with suitcases, but a crowd of people, embodied through their possessions.

Shiota's art work with suitcases can be compared to Jon Crispin's, Fabio Mauri's, and Subodh Gupta's. Each of these artists chose suitcases as a material with which to work. They hail from four different countries on three different continents, yet all identify with the same themes evoked by suitcases. There has been an unspoken, agreed upon meaning, a connotative function, instilled within them. Alfred Gell argues that viewers tend to see art objects as representative of persons.⁴⁹ This relates to the idea Marcel Mauss formatted in his book, *The Gift*, when he conceptualizes individuals' personhood as existing outside the body as an amalgamation of his or her possessions and exchanges.⁵⁰ Gell theorizes that this idea can be extended to art objects in the sense that within these objects we can see the owners' personhoods. These four artists have each tapped into the fact that the suitcases represent more than luggage, they embody their owners. Crispin, Mauri, and Gupta use this symbol of movement, change, and re/dislocation to pay homage to those lost in years of turbulence and migration, while Shiota creates suitcase art in order to reflect on the transience of life and identity. The question then remains, however, as to how suitcases acquired this sense of agency. These artists chose materials independent of one another, yet captured the same facet of the human condition. Luggage as displayed in these artworks has a relatively short 120-year history, within which it transformed from a convenient way to carry one's possessions to an agency-possessing symbol of human migration and identity.

⁴⁹ *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

⁵⁰ Mauss, *The Gift*, 66.

Walking into the 2015 Venice Biennale, a visitor would be struck by Italian artist Fabio Mauri's *The Wailing Wall* (fig. 3.6). This installation incorporates suitcases of a similar distinctly old-fashioned, 1930s-style to those of Shiota. Mauri builds a square wall of these suitcases and allows viewers to circumambulate it. In this exhibition, Mauri says he channels the memory of concentration camp victims in contrast to Shiota whose work conveys a less event-specific message.⁵¹ The suitcases serve as vessels for abductions, asserting their agency upon the viewers. In a review of Mauri's exhibition, it was said that *The Wailing Wall* "speaks directly to the implied humanist import of all politicized art where lives are rendered real and accountable."⁵² Looking at the wall of suitcases, Mauri does not want the viewers to see functional luggage but the lives lost in concentration camps in Nazi Germany. Like Shiota, Mauri identified that personhood can be more poignantly distributed through some objects rather than others. In this case, society has inadvertently given suitcases enough agency that the distributed personhood within them appears inherent.

In an essay on Shiota's oeuvre, David Elliot makes the connection between her use of seemingly abandoned objects, particularly suitcases, to objects displayed in Holocaust memorials, especially suitcases, specifically the piles of suitcases from concentration camps. Shiota, however, while not ignoring this potential connection to be made between her work that of artists such as Boltanski and Mauri, who deliberately channel the Holocaust in order to remind viewers of those frequently forgotten, feels that her installations "remind us of the hopes, ambitions and fears of all people who have been forced into such physical upheaval."⁵³

⁵¹ "Enwezor Foregrounds Engaged Art at Biennale," *Canadian Art*, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://canadianart.ca/reviews/socially-engaged-art-takes-centre-stage-in-okwui-enwezors-all-the-worlds-futures/>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ David Elliot, "Time and Distance: A Poetry and Silence," in *Chiharu Shiota: Other Side* (Eastbourne, UK: Towner, 2013).

Shiota focuses less on loss and more on the potential for the future. Even within her titles—*Searching for the Destination; Where to Go; Dialogues*—she keeps the viewer in the present and pushes towards the future through reminding them of the past.

Subodh Gupta's *Vehicle for the Seven Seas* from 2003 primarily taps into the underlying theme within all of these suitcase-related works: human transience. Gupta's sculptural work is composed of shiny silver aluminum suitcases on a bronze luggage cart (fig. 3.7). The use of the aluminum references Gupta's love for the stainless steel plates and utensils used by most middle class Indian families including his own.⁵⁴ This sheen of aluminum can be seen throughout Gupta's work, yet even with the signature silver the poignancy of the suitcase as a material remains. For Gupta, these suitcases represent the kind that "the Indian migrant workers bring back to India, symbolizing the materialistic fruit of their labor, this work also represents the widespread history of displacement and migration particularly relevant to Gupta's home state of Bihar."⁵⁵ Unlike Gupta, as a transnational artist who desperately desires to remove her ethnicity from her work, Shiota's *Accumulation* makes fewer references to her background and home country. Instead, Shiota aims to appeal to a general population of viewers and gives the freedom to the audience to bring their own horizon of expectation to the work. She does not leave the interpretation completely up to the audience however, a necessary caveat since her work can so easily be related to the

⁵⁴ Soutik Biswas India correspondent, "The Stainless Shine of Indian Artist Subodh Gupta's Art," *BBC News*, accessed February 23, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-25874132>.

⁵⁵ "SUBODH GUPTA (B. 1964) -Vehicle for Seven Seas II," accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/sculptures-statues-figures/subodh-gupta-vehicle-for-seven-seas-ii-5661022-details.aspx?intObjectID=5661022&lid=1>.

Holocaust. Her titles help guide the viewer in the direction she wants them to go—towards the future, through the past.

In an exhibition dedicated to the history of suitcases, the Daniel Gross of the Smithsonian Magazine claims that “they carry in their design a subtle history of human movement.”⁵⁶ Surprisingly, the modern suitcase only came into existence around 1900. Prior to suitcases, large wooden chests and trunks were the main method of storing one’s possessions while traveling. With steamships being the primary mode of transportation, waterproofing one’s luggage and making it durable enough to withstand the intense movement within the steamship’s hold were the main priorities. Additionally, prior to 1900, vast land travel was reserved for the wealthy who had porters to carry their luggage for them; therefore, convenience of luggage shape was not important. In the late-nineteenth century, land transportation was revolutionized with the age of mass tourism. It was no longer only the wealthy who could travel for leisure, thus creating the need for carrying cases for which seas of porters were not necessary. By 1911, suitcases took up several pages in catalogs, particularly in North America with the people of these countries’ penchant for travel and migration.⁵⁷ Originally suitcases had proportions bulky by today’s standards, but much more wieldy than a trunk. When steamship travel declined, suitcases no longer had to be both waterproof and sturdy, thus styles more similar to those of today came into existence.

By the 1920s, suitcases began to carry symbolic significance as well as people’s possessions. In books such as *The Hardy Boys* series and movies such as *The Woman in the*

⁵⁶ Daniel A. Gross, “The History of the Humble Suitcase,” *Smithsonian*, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-humble-suitcase-180951376/>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Suitcase, suitcases functioned as symbols of mystery.⁵⁸ Clues were often to be found inside suitcases, as their contents offered a glimpse into their owner's personhood. There is something both intimate and exciting about looking in someone else's suitcase, as Jon Crispin shows viewers in his sanitarium work. As automobile and plane travel became more popular, suitcases had to become lighter and more easily transportable. The round, hard plastic style started in the 1960s with rolling suitcases patented in 1970. Thus the style of suitcases utilized in Shiota's, Crispin's, Gupta's, and Maori's art all precede the 1960s. This provides a relatively short period of time in history to which the suitcases, and thus the works of art reference—1900-1960.

Interestingly, artists less frequently use the hard, shiny, rolling suitcases of modern day travel to convey their message, even though the function of both objects remains the same. The use of antique suitcases in Shiota and others' work, aside from the biography of the object, gains power from the concept of the outmoded. This concept finds reference in surrealist art, but also applies to these suitcase works, as part of the emotional poignancy of the pieces lie in their antiquity. Objects can possess the aura of their once-owners, therefore, "it returns as a comforting, rather than a disturbing reminder...thus the outmoded object becomes something of a talisman which symbolizes...a time before alienation."⁵⁹ It is the fact that these objects are outmoded that allows viewers to reminisce about the time before they fell out of use. To quote German scholar Walter Benjamin on the subject of the outmoded,

⁵⁸ Franklin W. Dixon, *Hardy Boys 52: The Shattered Helmet* (Penguin, 1973); Franklin W. Dixon, *Hardy Boys 54: The Mysterious Caravan* (Penguin, 1975); Franklin W. Dixon, *Hardy Boys 21: The Clue of the Broken Blade* (Penguin, 1942).

⁵⁹ Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 60.

“Bretonian surrealists were the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the “outmoded”...the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago...they bring the immense force of “atmosphere” concealed in these things to the point of explosion.”⁶⁰ This “energy” of the outmoded, specifically in relation to suitcases is what abducts the viewers ability to have a completely subjective reaction to the piece. This “energy” is the personhood that has been distributed into and onto these objects. Viewers look at the suitcases and think about who once carried them and with what they were once filled. These outmoded suitcases likely once possessed someone’s most loved objects. The term outmoded provides an art historical term with origins in the concept of distributed personhood. The outmoded objects represent the relationships that people once maintained with said objects.

For Subodh Gupta and Fabio Mauri, their use of suitcases pertains to the specific moment in time which they try to capture. Gupta selected a specific type of suitcase to cast in aluminum to accurately represent the period in which he grew up in his home state of Bihar seeing the migrant workers leave their homelands in search of prosperity. Quoted in his exhibition catalogue, a lyric from a Bihari musical epitomizes Gupta’s message: “It is not the train, it is not the ship that is our enemy, but rather the money that compels our husbands to migrate to other lands.”⁶¹ The suitcases in *Vehicle for Seven Seas* represent the hope and potential for prosperity in a time when expansive land travel was still novel and there was hope of a better, far away place. While that idea may still exist today, modern technology has made it so easy to learn about other places that hardly any mystery of travel remains.

⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York, 1978), 181–182.

⁶¹ “SUBODH GUPTA (B. 1964) -Vehicle for Seven Seas II.”

Mauri, even more so than Gupta, channels a specific timeframe in his work as he intends it to make a statement about the Holocaust. The 1940s stay consistent with the timeframe put in place by the history of suitcases and with the type of suitcases Mauri incorporates. When victims of the Holocaust packed their suitcases, they did not know to where they were headed. The suitcases represented the unknown into which these people moved. Retrospectively, the sadness infused into these objects can be suffocating, as viewers know that any hope of return packed into these suitcases was for naught. However, looking into one of these suitcases would have provided an interesting perspective into these individuals' identities, as they packed their entire lives into one small piece of luggage. Not only have suitcases historically held possessions for travel, but in times of great migration, they held the most important objects individuals' owned, thus acting as extensions of these individuals' selves.

Crispin's work conveys a similar message to that of Shiota, but in a less figurative way since his limitations rest on the availability of the suitcases at the sanitarium. Shiota, contrastingly, collects antique suitcases wherever she can find them, making their message more implicit and less straightforward. The suitcases in Crispin's work portray the hope of the patients that they will one day be able to collect their possessions and return home. Shiota channels these feelings of hope and magnifies them as she stacks suitcases to overwhelming heights in her exhibitions. The suitcases, perhaps subconsciously, create a sense of nostalgia in the viewer. They facilitate a yearning for the past when a suitcase represented hope of a better life, in the case of migrants, or the great unknown, in the case of travelers. Regardless of the ambiguity of the origins, the suitcases in her exhibitions all possessed owners at one point. Just as the suitcases and their contents filled the owners with feelings of mystery, the

viewers now feel that the suitcases intrinsically possess a sense of mystery, hope, and nostalgia that is then inflicted upon the audience. Returning to Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*, the suitcases exist as abductions of agency, relegated to creating these feelings within viewers only slightly modified based on the orientations of the objects.⁶² In these works of art, the objects—the suitcases—tell the viewers what to feel.

Again, it is important to note that Shiota creates work for an audience with certain similarities in their horizon of expectations. The use of suitcases implies that all of the viewers will not only recognize the shapes, but the connotative meaning of them as well. This is not an absurd assumption to make of patrons of the art galleries in which she exhibits, but once again it is important to note that her universalism is a biased one. Among her intended audience, which reaches far and wide as she exhibits all over the world, Shiota achieves her goal of choosing objects that resonate with the vast majority of her audience. Mauri, Shiota, Gupta, and Shiota all hail from different areas of the globe yet choose objects that within a sixty-year time frame were able to be symbols of migration, mystery, hope, and identity. Retrospectively, these suitcases can sometimes be fraught with despair and loss, more potently so when placed in a large pile, but in the moment of travel they represent the hope of unpacking and resettling. Packing a suitcase means that one intends to unpack it, and in cases of displacement, rebuild ones' life beginning with fragments of the past.

Accumulation allows viewers to overlay their own respective thoughts and feelings onto the installation, with the implication that certain themes will be consistent among said reactions. The power of the suitcase comes from the mystery of what is inside, emphasizing the importance society places on possessions. People construct themselves from the objects

⁶² Gell, *Art and Agency*.

they own, thus each suitcase in Shiota's work serves as a proxy for the person who once carried it. We distribute our personhood, and in times of travel or migration, we select the objects we feel are most important and place them in a suitcase, keeping them with us and therefore keeping our identities whole.

In Orhan Pamuk's Nobel lecture following the Turkish author's Nobel Prize for Literature, he discusses the existential crisis he had when his father bequeathed him his suitcase. In this lecture, Pamuk grasps the symbolic significance of the suitcase, which he dates as pre-1960, placing it in the category of those used by the previously discussed artists. Pamuk states that upon opening the suitcases there was a potential that "I would have to acknowledge that inside my father there existed an entirely different man."⁶³ Within his father's suitcases were manuscripts, notebooks, and other personal writings, the likes of which Pamuk had never glimpsed. Pamuk believed that by reading the documents within this suitcase, he could potentially discover a side of his father that he never knew existed. Suitcases exist as vessels for one's identity, and Shiota's *Accumulation* visually captures this sentiment in the same way that Pamuk does in his lecture. *Accumulation* exists as a large pile of individual identities, at one time filled with the hope of moving or travelling to a place where they could take the possessions that most embodied themselves and retain a semblance of personhood.

⁶³ Orhan Pamuk, "My Father's Suitcase," (Nobel Lecture, December 7, 2006).

Chapter 3: Pianos

A memorable scene in *Great Balls of Fire!*, a 1989 film starring Dennis Quaid and Winona Ryder, revolves around a scene of Quaid as musician Jerry Lee Lewis lighting a piano on fire on stage (fig. 4.1).⁶⁴ Lewis was known to have done so during his lifetime, although documentation of it was difficult to find. On the cover of his 2006 album, *Last Man Standing*, however, Lewis stands in front of a burning piano, evidence of the power of the image in association with him (fig. 4.2). While this example resides in pop culture, this destructed piano trope has appeared with semi-frequency throughout the last century of art and culture. For example, artists such as Annea Lockwood, Arman, and Douglas Gordon all play on variations of this trope. One of Chiharu Shiota's most famous pieces contains this motif in the form of both a performance and an installation entitled *In Silence* (fig. 4.3).⁶⁵ *In Silence* begins with Shiota setting fire to a piano, most often a grand piano but not always, and around fifty chairs (fig. 4.4). After the fire burns out, she arranges the piano and chairs in a room as though a recital were about to take place. Shiota then wraps the scene in black string, thereby defunctionalizing the objects further. The persistence of this seemingly obvious or cliché theme in art provides evidence of the powerful symbolism of the piano. As historically a representation of the upper-class lifestyle and a mode by which to create, destroying it speaks to viewers on both a socio-economic and philosophical level.

Just as with shoes and suitcases, but more so with pianos, these objects represent civilization and when destroyed or taken out of their function, it causes a reaction within the viewer. Depending on how the defunctionalized objects are then displayed, it creates a sense

⁶⁴ Jim McBride, *Great Balls of Fire!*, Biography, Drama, Music, (1989).

⁶⁵ Mami Kataoka, "Eloquent Silence," in *Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines*, ed. Menene Gras Balaguer (Actar, 2014), 124.

of either hopelessness or nostalgia. Gordon's destroyed, abandoned piano creates a sense of despair in contrast to Shiota's *In Silence* which can fill viewers with feelings of somber remembrance. Just as with shoes, the care Shiota takes to display them creates a different message than when they are tossed into piles as in Boltanski's *Personnes*. Shiota's careful display of objects representative of civilization and society allow her works to be perceived in a more hopeful, less despairing manner.

Shiota claims personal experience as inspiration for her *In Silence* piece. When Shiota was a young girl, her neighbor's house burned down. After the fire died down and Shiota looked at the remnants of her neighbor's house, she saw only a charred piano remaining.⁶⁶ This image stuck with Shiota throughout her youth and into her adulthood, driving her to recreate it in 2002 for her first showing of *In Silence*. While this personal narrative may have inspired *In Silence*, it does not account for the popularity and emotion-evoking qualities of the piece. Rather, this memory speaks to the intrinsic effect pianos have on society. As I will discuss, social and historical events have led some viewers to place symbolic value this musical instrument to the point that a destroyed piano is able to have a relatively universal effect on intended viewers. For Shiota, the beauty of her piece lies in the memory of the sound that was once created by the piano and the realization that it can no longer produce that sound ever again. Dolores Denaro, author of an exhibition catalogue on *In Silence*, claims that when viewing, "feelings alternate between safety and cold, fascination and unease."⁶⁷ Additionally, Denaro believes that this piece helps awaken the viewers to their own state of being. Shiota

⁶⁶ Balaguer, "Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines," 124.

⁶⁷ Dolores Denaro, "Awakening to One's State of Being," in *Chiharu Shiota, Zustand Des Seins / État d'Être / State of Being* (Bienne, Switzerland: CentrePasquArt, 2008), 80.

enjoys “visible traces of the past woven into the present” and thus draws attention to the transience of life.⁶⁸ This association with musical instruments and transience dates back art historically to the seventeenth century with the rise of the popularity of vanitas.⁶⁹ In these still life images, artists often included musical instruments as iconographic symbols of ephemerality.⁷⁰

Shiota also calls attention to the strings in *In Silence*, a signature and unique part of her work. She states that “the room retains the memory of the sounds, hovering in thin air, visualized by the threads.”⁷¹ The strings add an additional defunctionalizing and aesthetic effect to the work, but the charred piano remains the focal point. The chairs and the strings serve as aesthetic and symbolic support for the piano centerpiece. The chairs represent proxies of the people who once listened to the piano, paradoxically filling the room with their absence. The string, too, fills the room, making the installation appear not empty but absent of those who once created the sound and those who once listened to it. Viewers are sometimes able to walk around the installation through walkways created in the yarn (fig. 4.5). As they move through the installation, the strings surround their visual fields, just as the sounds of the piano would once consume their auditory environment.

In Silence has been compared to the famous John Cage composition, *4'33"*, consisting of a musician coming onto a stage as though he or she were preparing to play a piano but instead sitting in silence for the eponymous length of time (fig. 4.6).⁷² Cage encourages the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁹ Hans J. Van Miegroet, “Vanitas,” *Grove Art Online*, n.d.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Denaro, “Awakening to One’s State of Being,” 85.

⁷² Over the course of four minutes and thirty-three seconds, the performer makes three distinct movements, for example opening and closing the piano. Other than that, however, the performer makes no noise and relative silence fills the room for the duration of the performance.

viewer to listen to the sounds within the silence, thus questioning the definitions of silence and music. Of the premiere in 1952, Cage states,

They missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out.⁷³

Like Shiota's *In Silence* coming more than half a century later, Cage draws attention to the absence of sound through the presence of an unplayed musical instrument. While Shiota accomplishes this by burning the piano and setting up the installation as though a performance were about to take place, Cage does so by placing a performer in front of the instrument. Of *In Silence*, curator Menene Gras Balaguer says,

Everything in the world is imbued with the traces that the people who have been in contact with them left behind. Silence becomes a noise that we have to learn to listen to, because it seals the absence of people who have disappeared in the present, who were once in contact with one object or another...What is deposited in objects is constitutive of memory – it begins with a point and becomes a line, and then a thing – which we represent in words and articulate through language.⁷⁴

Both *4'33"* and *In Silence* attempt to capture the presence in the absence of individuals. By drawing attention to the silence, Shiota and Cage remind the viewers of what should be there in a manner more poignant than if music were present.

While silence ties these two pieces together, incorporating the overarching theme of presence in absence and therefore the transience of life, the piano remains a key object within both pieces. An unused or destroyed piano serves as a potent reminder to the viewers of this ephemerality of existence, more so than other instruments; albeit a destroyed piano does so in

⁷³ James Pritchett, Laura Kuhn, and Charles Hiroshi Garrett, "Cage, John," *Grove Music Online*, n.d., <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2507&dat=19660129&id=uGtAAAAAIBAJ&sjid=e6MMAAAAIBA J&pg=5907,4673287&hl=en>.

⁷⁴ Balaguer, "Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines," 17.

a more abrasive manner than does an unused one. Historically, pianos have been a symbol of wealth and status. Invented around 1700 for Ferdinando di Medici, pianos, deriving from the harpsichord, originally cost enough to make them financially inaccessible to most families.⁷⁵ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pianos became more globally widespread in households, schools, and other public institutions, making music more accessible to those outside the upper tiers of society. During this time, knowledge of a musical instrument, often the piano, was a requirement for the upper tiers of the society to be considered well-mannered, and thus the instrument remained associated with higher socioeconomic status.⁷⁶ Due to this association, particularly in the United States, the piano became a symbol of striving for upward mobility;⁷⁷ even today some real estate agents will move a piano into a home in order to “class it up” (the average price of a Steinway, inaccessible to most, is about \$80,000).⁷⁸ However, modern technology and the demands of twenty-first century life have started to make pianos a symbol of the past in American culture, thus the height of pianos’ popularity remains in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁹

Piano burning is thought to have started among the Royal Airforce between the First and Second World Wars.⁸⁰ While the historical evidence of these origins is not prevalent, piano burning has a permanent place in fighter pilot lore. Allegedly, as technology was

⁷⁵ “The Piano: The Pianofortes of Bartolomeo Cristofori (1655–1731) | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *The Met’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, accessed February 27, 2016, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cris/hd_cris.htm.

⁷⁶ Los Angeles Times, “The Piano’s Status in U.S. Living Rooms Is Declining,” *Latimes.com*, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/home/la-hm-pianos16-2009may16-story.html>.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ “Pianos - Steinway & Sons,” accessed March 13, 2016, <http://www.steinway.com/en-us/pianos>.

⁷⁹ Times, “The Piano’s Status in U.S. Living Rooms Is Declining.”

⁸⁰ “Piano Burning: A Way To Say Goodbye...,” *Fighter Sweep*, January 18, 2015, <https://fightersweep.com/1207/piano-burning-way-say-goodbye/>.

improving in the early-twentieth century, larger amounts of pilots were dying as training became more dangerous, thus creating a need to draw more pilots from the general population instead of just the upper classes as was previously done.⁸¹ In order to ameliorate this social downgrade in pilots, the RAF attempted to teach the pilots skills equivalent to those of the upper classes, including piano lessons. Fighter pilots like to say that one day in one of these training camps, the clubhouse burned down, taking the piano inside with it.⁸² Because of the depression, the RAF did not have the funds to replace it. Members of the RAF realized the benefit to this destroyed piano, as it spelled the end of their much hated piano lessons. Word spread throughout other RAF bases and soon pianos all over British Airforce bases were being dragged out and burned as an act of defiance against the bureaucracy.⁸³ This practice spread globally, and eventually turned into a way to memorialize the loss of a beloved pilot.

Art historically, piano burning also has a place within the canon. Annea Lockwood, Arman, and Douglas Gordon are three artists—in addition to Shiota—who have created works centered on piano burning. Hailing from different continents and countries, these artists all burn pianos as a symbol of destroying civilization. Gordon does this in an obvious manner, entitling his piece, *The End of Civilisation*, while Arman and Shiota do so more subtly, allowing the viewers to subjectively derive meaning from the burned pianos in addition to the civilization-based symbolism.

New Zealand artist and composer Annea Lockwood was one of the first artists to incorporate a burning piano into their work of art. In her *Piano Transplants* series, conceptualized in the 1960s, she first destroys an already damaged piano through burning (fig.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

4.7). In a design similar to those in the Fluxus movement, whose members were interested in destroying musical instruments, Lockwood provides specific directions in order to properly burn a piano.⁸⁴ The steps are as follows:

Set upright piano (not a grand) in an open space with the lid closed.
 Spill a little lighter fluid on a twist of paper and place inside, near the pedals.
 Light it.
 Balloons may be stapled to the piano.
 Play whatever pleases you for as long as you can.⁸⁵

Of this piece, Lockwood states that the beauty and artistic lies in the sound the piano makes while it burns, as opposed to the other three ways she suggests destroying a piano which focus on the visual aspect of the destruction. Of the choice to use pianos, Lockwood went with availability and emotional poignancy. At the time of the first *Piano Transplant*, Lockwood lived near a piano graveyard—a place where people would dump old, broken pianos. She also believed that, “Firewood takes you a certain distance, but I thought it wouldn’t have nearly the resonance of something like a piano burning.”⁸⁶ In the early 1960s, Lockwood identified pianos as possessing agency and that when destroyed, resonate with a viewer. The sounds made as the piano burned added an oratorical element to the piece as the piano seemed to die screaming as each cord popped and smoke poured out of its keys.⁸⁷

Lockwood’s piano represented not only the single piano in the moment, but the history of the piano as a class symbol. Destroying a piano not only destroys a possession but puts an end to the potential that the piano represented—the ability to create. Whether creating music

⁸⁴ Fionn Meade, “There Are Many Ways to Destroy a Piano — Magazine — Walker Art Center,” March 2, 2016, <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2016/andrea-buettner-piano-destructions>.

⁸⁵ “Anneal Lockwood » Composer,” accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.annealockwood.com/index.htm>.

⁸⁶ Frank J. Oteri, “Anneal Lockwood Beside the Hudson River,” *NewMusicBox*, January 2004, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/anneal-lockwood-beside-the-hudson-river/>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

or one's status as an upper-class citizen, pianos hold this power. Arman provides another example of the agency of pianos with his *Piano de Néron* (fig. 4.8). Of Arman's work with a similar method, it was said that he possessed a "black humor" for destroying the sacredness of music instruments.⁸⁸ Arman would burn and destroy musical instruments, then fasten their carcasses to wood panels and hang them up for display. At the time his works such as *Piano de Néron* of 1965 and *Chopin's Waterloo* of 1962, some felt that the Arman and others in the Neo-realist movement may be making a joke implying the end of civilization (fig. 4.9).⁸⁹ Regardless of whether or not Arman intended for this reception with his burned piano displayed within a plastic case, viewers saw the piano as a representation of civilized people.⁹⁰ The burned piano became a symbol for more than simply a musical instrument; its historical relevance and association with aristocracy bled into Arman's work, implying to a viewership with a similar horizon of expectations that by destroying a piano Arman was destroying civilization as well.

Douglas Gordon carried this theme of the piano as a representation of civilization into his piano burning work of 2012. The Turner-prize winning artist created *The End of Civilisation*, a 360-degree film in which Gordon burns a piano on the border between Scotland and England (fig. 4.10). Of his choice of a piano as a material, Gordon says, "a piano started to represent for me the ultimate symbol of western civilisation. Not only is it an instrument, it's a beautiful object that works as a sculpture but it has another function

⁸⁸ Carol Martin, "Fanning the White-Hot Heat of Creation," *The Glasgow Herald*, January 29, 1966.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

entirely.”⁹¹ For the film, Gordon places a grand piano on the border and then lights it on fire as the sun goes down.

The piano spread about 150 years after its invention, permeating what are considered to be “non-Western” nations such as Japan and China. However, in these nations the piano still represents civility and class, thus the destruction of it can be understood across cultural borders. Therefore, these artists on three different continents have taken pianos to represent the same symbol aside from simply a musical instrument capable of producing sound. Chiharu Shiota’s piece epitomizes the themes captured in Lockwood’s, Arman’s, and Gordon’s works. Shiota incorporates both a performance and installation in her piece. The performance encapsulates the destruction of civilization, as the grand piano is slowly burned. The fact that Shiota burns chairs as well only further supports this message. Chairs have long been considered a pivotal sign of civilization as it is stated that, “a chair is the first thing you need when you don’t really need anything, and is therefore a peculiarly compelling symbol of civilization.”⁹² This conceptualization of chairs may be unconscious within the viewer but adds to the potency of the message of *In Silence*. Cultural biases may come into play more in relation to chairs than pianos, however, since many nations—such as Japan—value sitting on the floor and therefore do not place as much cultural importance in the chair.

Following the performative aspect, the installation piece recalls notions conveyed in the sound and silence of Lockwood’s and Cage’s works. These three artists capture the essence of presence in absence. A curator of Shiota’s work, Akira Tatehata says of *In Silence*,

⁹¹ Alan Sykes, “Burning Grand Pianos on the Scottish Border,” *The Guardian*, May 22, 2012, sec. UK news, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/the-northerner/2012/may/22/douglas-gordon-talkin-head-cumbria-scotland>.

⁹² Ingold, “Culture on the Ground The World Perceived Through the Feet,” 339.

“Shiota seems to have created with the ‘soundless piano’ a paradoxical sight that signifies literally the absence of what is expected...[the piano] still holds its own memory of the past peaceful days.”⁹³ In all of these artist’s works, the piano is not only able abduct the agency of the viewer, inflicting conflicted feelings about the current state of civilization, but its function is able to still be served through its defunctionalization. Through the destruction of the piano, the lack of sound makes its purpose as a musical instrument more poignant, as the viewer is reminded that it can no longer create noise. The piano is reduced to a nonfunctional pile of burned wood, as Arman showcases in his work, and it forces the viewer to reflect on the agency they placed inside the object in the first place. Shiota’s piece confronts the viewers with the realization that they have allowed an object to abduct their agency to the point that they have placed it on a pedestal associating it with upper-class society. The accounts for how Shiota believes viewers react to *In Silence*: “feelings alternate between safety and cold, fascination and unease.”⁹⁴ These pieces draw attention to the status society places in objects that in the end turn into nothing more than burned piles of wood.

The emotionality of Chiharu Shiota’s *In Silence* lies in the simplicity of the work. By destroying an object so familiar to the viewership, then placing it in an organizational manner to hint that nothing is wrong draws attention to all of the thoughts, feelings, and historical significance the piece holds. Lockwood, Arman, Gordon, and Shiota capture the three-hundred years of social-historical significance pianos possess, and reflect it back onto the viewers by destroying the pianos. The emotional affect pianos are able to instill within someone makes the audience reflect upon the reasons behind the piano’s ability to do so.

⁹³ Akira Tatehata, “The Allegory of Absence,” in *Chiharu Shiota: The Hand Lines*, ed. Menene Gras Balaguer (Actar, 2014), 154.

⁹⁴ Denaro, “Awakening to One’s State of Being,” 80.

Pianos have been revered for hundreds of years, the mere viewing of one in a house for sale makes a potential buyer feel as though the location is classier. These musical instruments are able to assert a power over society, only because society has let it happen. Just like suitcases or shoes, it is not until the function is removed that someone can take a step back and reflect upon the significance of the object as more than its denotative function. *In Silence* captures all of the clichés and motifs that these artists have developed over the last half of a century, all the while playing off of the social significance civilization has place on an unsuspecting musical instrument.

Artur Schnabel, a famous Austrian composer once said, “The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes - ah, that is where the art resides.”⁹⁵ By burning pianos, Lockwood, Arman, Gordon, and Shiota have perpetuated this thought into an artistic movement that spans decades. The power of the piano lies in its silence, for that is when an audience is truly able to reflect upon its meaning.

⁹⁵ Artur Schnabel, *My Life and Music* (New York : Gerrards Cross, Eng: Dover Publications, 2012).

Conclusion

Distributed personhood and the abduction of agency have acted as connecting theoretical threads throughout the whole of this investigation. Gell's concept of abduction of agency, I argue, should be applied more frequently and thoroughly to installation art in general. Common tropes such as shoes, suitcases, and pianos—to name only those I have investigated here—begin to possess agency over time as society attaches inherent characteristics to said objects. Artists take advantage of the idea of abduction of agency, whether or not they are conscious of it. As discussed, Shiota, Boltanski, and Sundaram all chose shoes as a material because of the messages they convey to the viewer. They all made the same assumption of shoes' power, and assumed—correctly, one presumes—that the viewers would have similar horizons of expectations. While they displayed the shoes differently based on the nuanced messages of their respective pieces, agency that the viewer may have possessed in interpreting the symbolic significance of shoes was abducted. As a result, in each of the installations, shoes stood as proxies for the people who once wore them, representing civilization and life.

Based on the ways these shoe installations were displayed, however, sometimes the pieces conveyed a loss of civilization and/or life. In Boltanski's and Sundaram's, for example, the mood of the pieces was much more somber than that of Shiota's. Because of the Boltanski's haphazard piling of the shoes and Sundaram's orientation of them within a prison-like room, the viewers received messages of loss and hopelessness. This stands in contrast to Shiota's work that exudes the care and effort taken to orient the shoes in an organized manner, culminating with red life-threads attached to each one. However, the main symbols of the shoes remain the same, regardless of their orientation. Through the defunctionalization and

subsequent refunctionalization of these quotidian objects, they have been instilled with inherent and subconscious symbolic meaning, allowing them to abduct the viewer's agency.

Critics of Shiota's work often cited her Japanese heritage, mapping meaning onto her installations against the artist's wishes. While I find these interpretations interesting, if not incorrect, I did not feel as though a foray into Shiota's Japanese heritage would help the reader understand why her installations are able to be viewed globally and are able to elicit similar responses no matter the location. It also would not help the reader understand why other artists have been doing similar works with similar quotidian objects for over a century all over the world.

It is because of this that I turned to anthropological studies of materiality, and I believed that by combining the disciplines of art history and anthropology, I would at last be able to understand for myself the importance and artistic recurrence of these distinct quotidian objects. Shoes, suitcases, and pianos all represent civilization in one way or another. For centuries people have used shoes as a way to distinguish the "barefoot savage" from the "civilized Europeans."⁹⁶ Suitcases became commonplace in the early-twentieth century as travel technology increased, allowing more frequent vacations and migrations, thus symbolizing an increasingly civilized world. Pianos, the most bourgeois of the three discussed objects, historically symbolized society in the sense of the term meaning, "a group of fashionable, wealthy, or otherwise prominent people."⁹⁷ As a symbol of upward mobility, pianos represent the most civilized of society—a group of people with enough leisure to take up an expensive musical instrument.

⁹⁶ Ingold, "Culture on the Ground The World Perceived Through the Feet," 325.

⁹⁷ "Society, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 22, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/183776>.

Additionally, the close physical connections these objects maintain with their owners while in use allow part of the once-owners to remain within the objects. Shoes, suitcases, and pianos maintain part of the personhood of the people who once interacted with them. In the case of Shiota's treatment of objects, the theory of distributed personhood appears most pertinent in relation to the shoes and suitcases. While it can apply to pianos, Shiota focuses on the sound that once emanated from the pianos more than the people who created that sound, though this remains an important part of the work evinced by the empty chairs, for example. The entire concept of "presence in absence," to employ Shiota's often-used phrase, though it is an idea invoked by many artists' works, as we have seen, is based on this concept of distributed personhood – a theory that is prevalent in anthropology but, until this thesis, has been unnamed in relation to art history. Objects do not technically possess agency, but people do, and by transferring personhood into objects, we instill them with a sense of agency that then reflects back onto us as viewers.

Through this discussion, I hope the reader develops an appreciation for the connection people have with objects. The emotional power of Shiota's installation art is often explained through the aesthetic qualities of her pieces. This, however, only explains one aspect of a more intense exchange of ideas and feelings between the artist and the viewer. Shiota's *Across the Continents*, *Accumulation*, and *In Silence* allowed me to explore the power of objects in art, and solve the mystery of, "why shoes?" Society has allowed objects to possess agency because of unconscious associations made when viewing art. Hopefully through a critical analysis of these powerful objects, the agency can be returned to the viewer, as they will know exactly why a single shoe, an antique suitcase, and a burned piano are so "powerful."

Figures

Figure 1.1

Chiharu Shiota, *Across the Continents*, 2015, Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C

Figure 1.2

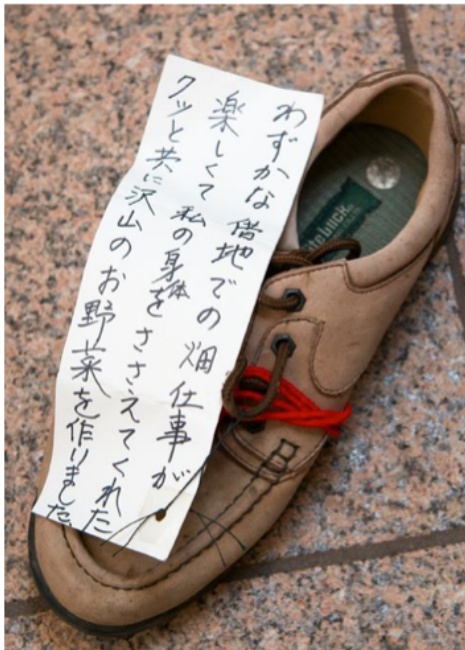
Chiharu Shiota, *Across the Continents*, 2015, Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C

Figure 1.3

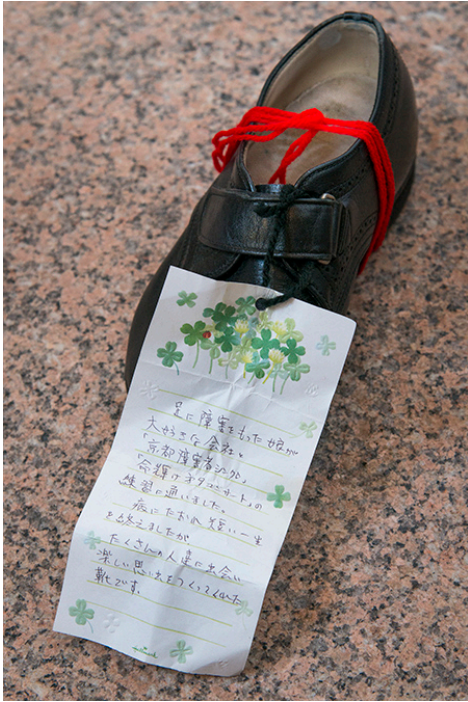
Chiharu Shiota, *Across the Continents*, 2015, Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C

Figure 1.4

Chiharu Shiota, *Accumulation - Searching for the Destination*, 2012, Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, Kagawa

Figure 1.5

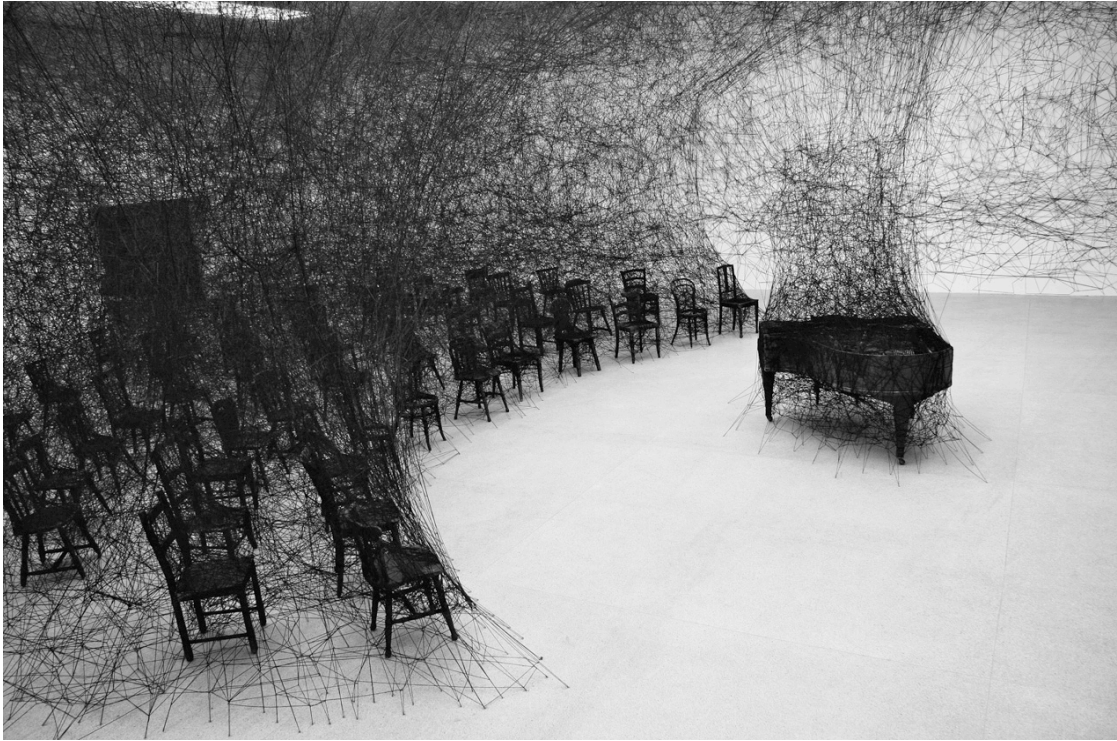
Chiharu Shiota, *In Silence*, 2008, CentrePasquArt, Biel – Bienne

Figure 2.1

Chiharu Shiota, *Dialogues from DNA*, 2004, Manggha, Centre of Japanese Art and Technology, Krakow

Figure 2.2

Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010, Grand Palais, Paris

Figure 2.3

Vivan Sundaram, *12 Bed Ward*, 2007, Hangar Bicocca, Milan, Italy

Figure 2.4

Vincent van Gogh, *A Pair of Shoes*, 1886, Paris, France

Figure 3.1

Jon Crispin, *Freda B*, 2013

Figure 3.2



Chiharu Shiota, *Accumulation - Searching for the Destination*, 2012, Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, Kagawa

Figure 3.3



Chiharu Shiota, *Where to Go, What to Exist*, 2010, Kenji Taki Gallery, Nagoya

Figure 3.4



Chiharu Shiota, 2014, Busan Biennale, Busan, South Korea

Figure 3.5

Chiharu Shiota, *Dialogue*, 2014 New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall , UK

Figure 3.6

Fabio Mauri, *The Wailing Wall*, 2015, Venice Biennale

Figure 3.7

Subodh Gupta, *Vehicle for the Seven Seas II*, 2003

Figure 4.1

Dennis Quaid as Jerry Lee Lewis in *Great Balls of Fire!*, 1989

Figure 4.2

Jerry Lee Lewis Album Cover, *Last Man Standing*, 2006

Figure 4.3

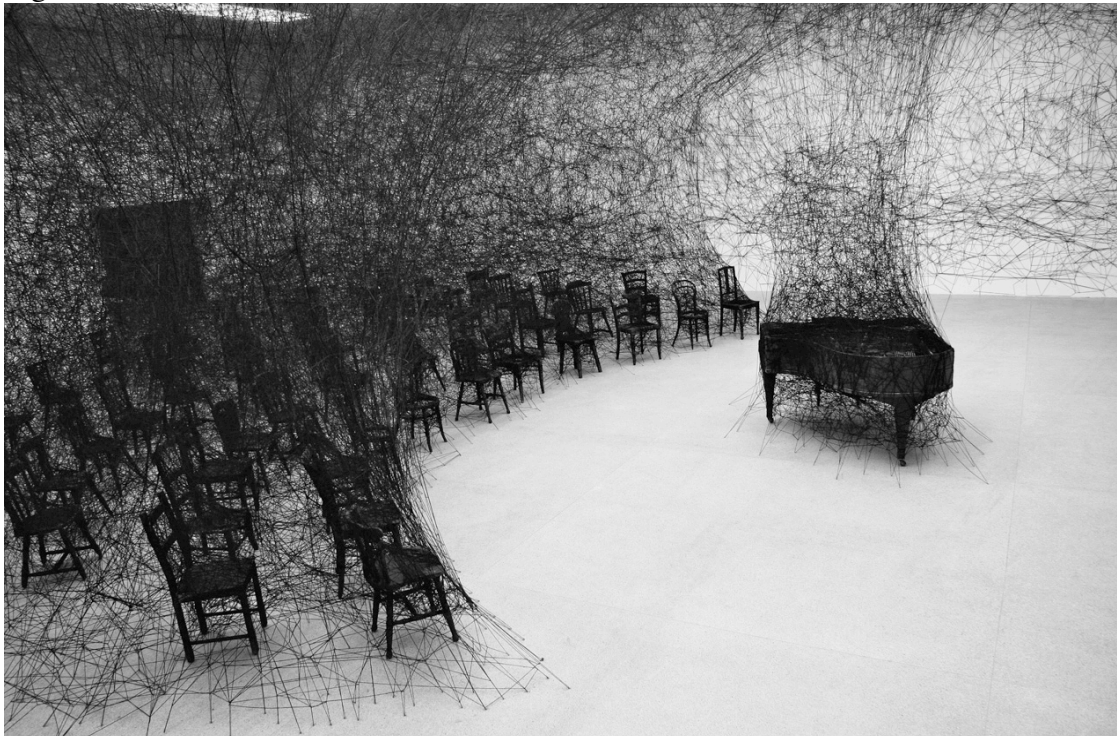
Chiahru Shiota, *In Silence*, 2008, CentrePasquArt, Biel – Bienne

Figure 4.4

Chiahru Shiota, *In Silence*, 2008, CentrePasquArt, Biel - Bienne

Figure 4.5

Chiahru Shiota, *In Silence*, 2008, CentrePasquArt, Biel - Bienne

Figure 4.6

John Cage, image from a performance of *4'33''*, 1952

Figure 4.7

Annea Lockwood, *Piano Burning*, 1968, London

Figure 4.8

Arman, *La Piano de Neron*, 1965

Figure 4.9

Arman, *Chopin's Waterloo*, 1962

Figure 4.10

Douglas Gordon, scene from *The End of Civilisation*, 2012

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