

Art for the Apocalypse: Sculpture by Frink in Losey's *The Damned* Susan Felleman¹

This essay is a slight revision of Chapter 4 of my book, *Real Objects in Unreal Situations: Modern Art in Fiction Films* (Intellect 2014), which concerns the material significance of the art object incorporated into the fiction film. By examining the historical, political, and personal realities that situate the art works, I demonstrate how they can operate as powerful players within films, exceeding the function of mere props, copies, pastiches, or reproductions, as well as how they sometimes remain unrecognized and unappreciated, despite their roles. The book's interconnected case studies examine particularly meaningful appearances of art in movies, including, in addition to the study of Elisabeth Frink's work in *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963), neo-classical sculpture in *The Song of Songs* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933) and *Pride & Prejudice* (Joe Wright, 2005), abstract painting by John Ferren and Paul Jenkins in *The Trouble with Harry* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1955) and *An Unmarried Woman* (Paul Mazursky, 1978), significant gallery scenes in *Venus vor Gericht* (Hans Zerlett, 1941) and *Muerte de un Ciclista* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1955), and other salient incorporations. I conclude that when real art enters into fiction films, it often comes to embody problems, themes and discourses—political, historical, existential, spiritual and sexual—in ways that other objects and actors cannot.

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Every alert citizen of our society realizes, on the basis of his own experience as well as his observation of his fellow-men, that anxiety is a pervasive and profound phenomenon in the middle of the twentieth century. The alert citizen, we may assume, would be aware not only of the more obvious anxiety-creating situations in our day, such as the threats of war, of the uncontrolled atom bomb, and of radical political and economic upheaval; but also of the less obvious, deeper, and more personal sources of anxiety in himself as well as in his fellow-men—namely, the inner confusion, psychological disorientation, and uncertainty.

Rollo May (1950, 3)

The Damned begins with a pan from the sea to sublime views of the cliffs along the English Channel coast near Portland in Dorset. As the

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credits run and James Bernard's somewhat desolate, then progressively dissonant modern score plays, the camera slowly pans and tilts, journeying from the long view of the coast to a rocky outcropping in the foreground. When it encounters Elisabeth Frink's sculpt-sculptures—dark, disfigured fragments upon the ground and rocks—they appear at first to be the charred remains of bodies.



Figure 1: Screenshot from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

That these are scenes of an abandoned disaster or a post-apocalyptic landscape is certainly the impression conjured by the music, Arthur Grant's black-and-white cinematography, Richard Macdonald's austere (and uncredited) production design, and the savage, scarred surfaces of Frink's works. Only near the end of the sequence, when a couple of such works, an equine head and one of her fallen men, appear on man-made structures—armatures or pedestals for working—along with a sculpture credit, can we *perhaps* conclude otherwise. With a cut, both sound and image change entirely: from the rugged, barren cliffs to views of the busy, touristed attractions of Weymouth, the seaside town nearby, beginning with the esplanade and a percussive rock-and-roll song, 'Black Leather,' which we soon enough associate with a biker gang whose actions comprise one of the narrative threads of this 'patchwork' film. This cut takes us from a scene that expresses the existential soul of the film and a setting to which we shall return, to a scene that enters into the narrative proper, and in which the protagonists are gradually introduced. The abrupt and graphic change in image and sound underscores the powerful contrast between the two proximate locations, which was very much the director's intention (Ciment 1985).

Joseph Losey was on the verge of a third act in 1961, on the very brink (as it were) of the collaboration with Harold Pinter and the art house films for which he may be best remembered, or at least most admired now. An engaged Communist and former member of the Federal Theater Project who had worked with Brecht, Losey was about 40 when he directed *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948), his first

feature film in Hollywood. Losey made five more there, before moving to England, blacklisted for refusing to cooperate with the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). He began directing in the United Kingdom under a pseudonym in 1954, and took pretty much what came his way, instilling each undertaking, however, with his own distinct sensibility. Losey finished *The Damned* in England in 1961 but Hammer Films did not release it until 1963 (then with severe cuts), and it was not seen in the United States until 1965, further changed and retitled *These Are the Damned*. *The Damned* was Hammer's title, probably an attempt to underscore genre by reference to—as well as to capitalize on—the success of Wolf Rilla's 1960 *The Village of the Damned*, another film about dangerous, unnatural children of the age of anxiety.² Losey had planned to call his film *The Brink*, a title that evokes the emotional, physical, political, and existential edginess of the story.³ Much as the imagery and associations of Chris Marker's titular jetty, Losey's title conjures a geographical edge, a historical threshold, an existential verge. This strange, arty genre film—a hybrid of science fiction, horror, and social commentary, adapted by Evan Jones from *The Children of Light*, a contemporary novel by H.L. Lawrence—in fact has much in common with *La Jetée* (1962, one year later), with its generic hybridity, apocalyptic omen, underground imagery, and evocative use of sculpture. *The Damned* tells the story of Simon Wells (Macdonald Carey), an American tourist who arrives in Weymouth, is lured into a trap by a young woman, Joan (Shirley Ann Field), mugged and beaten up by her brother King (Oliver Reed) and his gang. Later, Joan—perhaps remorseful—approaches Simon at his yacht, and, partly to defy her overprotective brother, she befriends and speeds away with Simon. King mobilizes his gang; their pursuit becomes threatening, turning Joan and Simon into fugitives. In their flight, the two break into and shelter in the studio 'birdhouse' of the sculptor Freya Nielson (Viveca Lindfors)—who scares them off as she returns—then flee again, scale a security fence, and fall down a cliff face. Slightly injured, and followed in short order by King, they stumble upon the top-secret

² In *The Village of the Damned*, a fairly faithful adaptation of the novel *The Midwich Cuckoos* by John Wyndham, all the inhabitants of an English village lose consciousness and recover simultaneously some time later. It unfolds that all the women of childbearing age were somehow impregnated; they all give birth, prematurely, on the same day, to uncannily similar children, with some odd physical and exceptional mental attributes, including preternatural intelligence and telepathic powers. As the children grow older, it becomes increasingly clear that they are inhuman, the spawn of some alien invasion. Rilla's film starred George Sanders and Barbara Shelley and was released by MGM.

³ "The Brink" was my title [...] and insisted on by me. But I lost. I liked the two meanings [...]. We toyed with the idea of "The Abyss," but that seemed very pretentious. And *The Damned* was entirely theirs, and I opposed it' (Losey, quoted in Ciment 1985, 204). The screenplay and shooting script held at the British Film Institute (BFI) Library preserve the history of the film's various titles, with *Children of Light*, the title of the source novel, crossed out and replaced with *The Brink* on some pages and with *The Damned* on others.

compound under the rocks where Freya's friend Bernard (Alexander Knox) oversees the confinement and experimental education of nine irradiated children.

As Dave Kehr notes (2010), *The Damned* is "a transitional work that stands between Losey's last un-self-conscious genre piece [...] and later art-house career". The film was beautifully photographed (if unevenly acted) on location in Dorset, a region selected for its consonance with the narrative, and even for topographical associations echoed by sculptor Elisabeth Frink's avian imagery, according to Losey:

I wanted a place that combined something absolutely bleak and wild and very ancient, which is Portland Bill, with something traditionally British, and that is Weymouth, of course, in the Bay. Portland Bill—bill does mean beak—is a kind of beak of bare rocks. In fact, it's a place where the British were developing germ warfare and also undersea warfare. So it was a very secret place, strange [...]. The Victorian-Edwardian seaside resort was absolutely ideal for contrast because it was obviously a kind of place for the Teddy boys, whose name is a diminutive for Edward because they affected Edwardian dress. They came out of poverty, unemployment, which was rife there as against these few old sea hotels which nobody went to excepting dying *rentiers*. (Ciment 1985, 199-200)

The Damned in some ways antedates by a decade elements of Stanley Kubrick's 1971 *A Clockwork Orange*. It brings an American tourist into a violent confrontation with the gang of Teddy Boys and ultimately into a deadly, dystopic government experiment with radioactive children. When asked about the affinities by interviewer Michel Ciment (1985, 200), Losey acknowledged that *The Damned* did "in a way anticipate" Kubrick's film but added, "I could never have made *Clockwork Orange* [...] I went to see it and [...] I simply had to leave because I knew I was going to be physically sick. I think it's a beautifully made picture and I would love to aspire to some of the technical and artistic things that Kubrick has achieved here, but I find it basically anti-social. Whereas I think my film is basically the reverse". Losey's admitted sensitivity to and implicit distaste for Kubrick's film reflects his temperament, his leftist politics, and his sensibility, as characterized by Dan Callahan. "The dominant themes of Losey's eclectic work are emotional instability, emotional and physical violence and perverse sexual power plays [...]. He has a mania for settings that express states of mind, and his camera movements are always abnormally sensitive and skittish" (Callahan 2003). This characterization suggests what would have drawn Losey to the work of Elisabeth Frink, who figures humanity in terms of animality and masculinity (there are almost no female figures in her

large oeuvre⁴) and whose style, it could be said, also manifests an ‘abnormal’ sensitivity.

Losey’s and screenwriter Evan Jones’s considerable alterations to Lawrence’s story included changing a young British fugitive (a 25-year-old architect who is wanted for the murder of his unfaithful wife) into a middle-aged American tourist and the addition of a major character: the sculptor, played by Lindfors, whose cliff-top studio—referred to in the scenario as the ‘birdhouse’—is a key location and whose works function as visual omens of the social and technological apocalypse to come. According to screenwriter Jones, sculptor Freya Neilson was conceived expressly to employ the work of Elisabeth Frink (Dame Elisabeth Jean Frink, CH, DBE, RA, 1930–1993)—with whom Losey had recently become acquainted—and whose scarred, distressed, figural works of the period included anthropomorphic birds, winged men, fallen men, horse heads and other morbid ciphers of existential dread, which they embody in the film at the same time as they figure art as a redemptive alternative to the cold-bloodedness of both lowbrow Teddy Boy and highbrow Government scientist.⁵ The character of Freya herself stands for this view, as Losey made clear. Asked about the bird imagery in the film, which Michel Ciment found “ambiguous because the bird is a symbol of freedom, but at the same time there is something threatening about the birds in the sculptures of Elisabeth Frink,” the contrarian Losey responded by connecting Frink’s imagery to other elements of the narrative and *mise-en-scène*:

I don’t think it’s ambiguous at all—because the bird images of the helicopters, particularly when we get the three of them, is very sinister. And now even more so because of Vietnam and Angola [...] they were birds with no wings. They were always sort of blinkered science fiction warriors with masks for faces and tiny wings. You never feel about those birds that they can take flight [...]. Freya, the artist, represented the necessity and the right, if you can exercise it, to make your judgments on the merits of each case, which represents some kind of freedom. (Losey quoted in Ciment 1985, 202)

Losey’s response suggests that he wanted to shift the discourse of freedom from animal to artist and was perhaps attracted to Frink and her work precisely because of the way in which it eroded and troubled the more conventional symbolism and iconography of birds (is it coincidental, one wonders, that *The Damned*, although made somewhat earlier, and Hitchcock’s *The Birds* were released the same year?). And Losey perhaps perceived the actual artist as most fittingly to embody the righteous artist. In an interview, Frink re-

⁴ Frink’s *Walking Madonna* (1981) for the Salisbury Cathedral is a significant exception.

⁵ Evan Jones recalls that Losey expressly believed that art was a moral ‘counterbalance’ to the destructive violence seen in both Bernard’s officially sanctioned actions and the Teddy Boys’ criminal ones (interview with author, 2011).

called that Losey originally wanted the strikingly handsome sculptor to play Freya herself and she was prepared to do so until the role evolved into a more central and complex one, requiring an actor (Kent 1985b).

The numerous sculptures in bronze and plaster seen in *The Damned* represent her then current and recent works and range from small, tabletop figures to monumental over-life-sized works, including a couple in progress. Frink not only lent these but also was on location for their shooting and coached Lindfors on performing the sculptor's method of building up plaster, which was then ferociously worked and carved. According to Evan Jones (interview with the author), Frink was around for all the location shooting, seemed to thoroughly enjoy the process, and became quite good friends with Losey and members of the crew. There is no evidence that she was paid. She did receive a prominent screen credit, however, and there is anecdotal evidence that Frink welcomed the exposure, and that it enhanced her career (Gardiner 1998).



Figure 2: Screenshot of the credits from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

In terms of its material presence in *The Damned*, it could be argued that Frink's sculpture performs the film's most major role. Its eloquent hybridity, liminality, equivocality, and edginess are those of the film, in terms of genre, politics, and emotion.

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In Suffolk during the war there was a whole bunch of very jolly Polish airmen who used to come to the house. My mother made them feel very much at home. They'd sit around and drink a lot of vodka and be very noisy. Then they'd go off in their flying machines—and sometimes they got killed. We were right next door to an operational aero-

drome, and sometimes we'd see the planes coming home on fire.

Elisabeth Frink (quoted in Lucie-Smith 1994, 15)

Frink's father was an officer. She was not quite nine years old when Britain declared war, and the Allied flyers, flights, and accidents she saw on fields near her childhood home in Suffolk while her father was away fighting made a huge impression on her. Outwardly fearless and tomboyish and excessively admiring of the masculine and martial virtues she associated with her father, she was evidently inwardly affected and developed insomnia (a condition from which Losey also suffered) and recurring, violent nightmares, including those of burning, falling men (Gardiner 1998). Frink studied art at Guildford School of Art, then Chelsea School of Art. She was influenced by, among other sculptors, Auguste Rodin, Alberto Giacometti, Germaine Richier, and, as with many of her peers, Henry Moore, the dominant British artist of the period. Moore's drawings of London bomb shelters were iconic images for wartime England, and his 1943 sculpture of the Madonna and Child for the Church of St. Matthew, Northampton, closely echoed images of mothers with young children seen in many of the drawings. But if Frink's work is, like Moore's, organic—both figurative and abstract—it is in some respects the very opposite. While Moore's oeuvre abounds with smooth, sinuous, undulating, biomorphic variations on the female form, often reclining, Frink developed a style and iconography of rough, sinewy, broken, and virtually decomposing figures, animal, hybrid, and—when human—almost always male, and generally, when not fallen, vigilant and aggressive. Frink's abstraction is external; the figures are abstract in their thingness, their objecthood. They are figures turned to things, tormented, expressionist facture and facticity taking the place of individuation and verisimilitude. Powerfully affective, their affect is surface, not countenance or gesture. Many of the sculptures are fragments—partial bodies—and several are of hybrid figures, including variations on Frink's most well-known motif—the bird-man.

The *Birdman* was another idea that possessed her, possibly inspired by the work of the French sculptor Germaine Richier, [...] possibly too by César, [...] and certainly by photographs of the death of the Frenchman, Leo Valentin, in 1956 during a flight of a few miles with wooden wings [...]. Valentin's story brought out her horror of heights. She had stuck the *Paris Match* photos on the wall of the studio, where they remained, and she began from there, developing the idea into a form of bird man unrelated to Valentin. That someone had dropped in space as he had terrified her, and it is possible that this fear was locked in with childhood experiences [...]. She had nightmares of great black wings beating past her until the end of her life, as if she were at the epicenter of a tornado; of bombers, limping back from raids, which might suddenly fall from the sky;

even about falling through space herself, and tried to expel them in her sculpture. (Gardiner 1998, 80)

Elisabeth Frink's career was marked by unusually early success. Having studied sculpture with Bernard Meadows, Frink had her first exhibition at the Beaux-Arts Gallery, London, while still a student in 1951; it was well received. The Tate Gallery bought a bird and Frink received some commissions; the next year—at just 22—she was exhibited at the Tate, and in 1953 she won one of the British prizes (there were preliminary national rounds) in the international competition for the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner, a controversial Cold War undertaking that never, ultimately, resulted in a monument.⁶

Frink was loosely associated with and the only woman artist among an avant-garde circle of British sculptors, many of whom had been pilots during the war. “The craggy rhetoric of their angular forms spoke of their terrible experiences—of fear and anxiety in the face of danger,” Sarah Kent (1985a) notes, implicitly invoking the structure of feeling that Herbert Read characterized as a ‘geometry of fear’ in the essay he wrote for the British Pavilion exhibit at the 1952 Venice Biennale:

These new images belong to the iconography of despair, or of defiance [...]. Here are images of flight, of raged claws ‘scuttling across the floors of silent seas’, of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, the geometry of fear [...]. Their art is close to the nerves [...]. They have seized Eliot’s image of the Hollow Men, and given it an isomorphic materiality. They have peopled the Waste Land with their iron waifs.⁷

Read’s criticism was informed by psychoanalysis—Freudian, Kleinian, and at this point, Jungian—as well as Surrealism and Exis-

⁶ This international competition, organized by the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, with a public announcement in 1952, was controversial from the outset, perceived by the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries as a Cold War provocation, a charge that, according to Robert Burstow, was not entirely unjustified. The idea for the exhibition was that of Anthony J.T. Kloman, an American former gallery director and US cultural attaché; and although it was not known at the time, there was CIA involvement. In a well-researched and informative article, Burstow contrasts the actual complexities and aesthetic concerns of this postwar sculpture competition — in which the abstract winning entry by Reg Butler (selected by a jury that included Herbert Read, Alfred Barr Jr., and Will Grohmann, among others) caused some consternation, with the much more well-known arguments about abstract painting, Abstract Expressionism particularly, and its role in Cold War politics, as discussed in my book. On the competition and Butler’s winning design, never realized, see also Tate’s catalogue entry for Butler’s working model for the sculpture (1955–1956): <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/butler-working-model-for-the-unknown-political-prisoner-t02332/text-catalogue-entry>.

⁷ The sculptors exhibited in the ‘New Aspects of British Sculpture’ section of the Pavilion were: Robert Adams (1917–1984), Kenneth Armitage (1916–2002), Reg Butler (1913–1981), Lynn Chadwick (1914–2003), Geoffrey Clarke (b. 1924), Frink’s teacher, Bernard Meadows (1915–2005), Henry Moore (1898–1986), Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005), and William Turnbull (1922–2012).

tentialism, and he would have seen these symptomatic and disturbing forms as socially productive, according to David Hulks (2006): “It was nothing less than the artist’s duty, Read and his followers argued, to face society with its ‘darkest imaginings,’ [...] ‘to give shape to the compensatory values and content of which it is unconscious.’” Frink was a half-generation younger than most of the male peers and had not been included in the Biennale selection accompanying Read’s essay. But, along with an entire generation, she was a bystander to some of the same ‘terrible experiences,’ the existential, psychological, social, economic, and physical upheaval and devastation of the war, which, along with the fascinations and horrors of her childhood, very much informed her work of the postwar period, which had distinct formal affinities with those artists and was dominated by cycles of birds. Of these Frink said, “the birds at that time were really expressionist in feeling [...] that is, emphasis on beak, claws and wings—and they were really vehicles for strong feelings of panic, tension, aggression and predatoriness” (Kent 1985, 10-11).

Panic, tension, aggression, and predatoriness are manifest in spades in *The Damned* and are often connected to Frink’s imagery. Within five minutes of the start, Simon (Carey), the American visitor, has been brutally beaten and robbed by a gang, having been lured by Joan (a very pretty but wooden Field), sister of King (Reed), the leader of a biker gang. He affects the sartorial style of a Teddy Boy, while most of his gang wears black leather. Losey contrasts the unruly aggression and predatoriness of the displaced working class (indeed servant class) that this gang represents to that of the more ‘elevated’ protagonists of the other axis of the story, the sculptor Freya, and secretive government scientist and ‘public servant’ Bernard (Knox, who, like director Losey, was blacklisted and unable to work in the United States at this time).⁸ The exposition presents Freya and Bernard as ex-lovers, still friendly (in an edgy way) and connected by the ‘birdhouse,’ the beautifully situated, remote cottage studio and terrace overlooking the sea at cliff’s edge on his property that she rents in summer. In the film’s second scene, Freya brings Bernard his rent in the form of one of her sculptures, one that she calls ‘my graveyard bird,’ a harbinger of themes to come.⁹

⁸ Evan Jones recalled that Macdonald Carey, too, was in exile due to the blacklist, the character of Simon changed so that he could be cast, but I do not find independent evidence of this (interview with author, 9 July, 2011).

⁹ Frink also at this time was at work on a series of very similar birds called *Harbinger Birds*.



Figure 3: Screenshot from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

It unfolds that Bernard's secrets—which will ultimately be the death of Simon, Joan, King, and Freya—involve his perverse utopian experiment with deadly, irradiated children.

One learns only at the film's climax that the children's 'mothers were exposed to an unknown kind and level of radiation by an accident' and that Bernard believes these survivors, who are themselves radioactive and immune to its fatal effects, are the only hope for the survival of mankind, which he is convinced will soon be annihilated by nuclear fallout. The sequence in which we are introduced to the children reveals the political topography of *The Damned*. It starts, echoing the credit sequence, with a long, aerial shot that pans from the sea—where Simon and Joan are rowing a dinghy toward the shore and the bill upon which stand Bernard's house and Freya's birdhouse—accompanied by score and the sound of gull cries. A cut to another long shot of seascape shows a long view of Bernard's house atop the cliff. Another cut shows a different view of the coast and sea, and then a reverse tracking shot reveals this to be the view through the window of a building in Bernard's secret compound, where a team of experts conducts the education and controls the upbringing of the irradiated children by remote. A Frink sculpture—one of her *Bird Men* or *Sentinel* figures from ca. 1961—that begins the scene standing on the window sill, is not only part of the *mise-en-scène*, along with at least two other of her works and several additional modernist artworks and furnishings of the period, but also part of the action and the dialogue.



Figure 4: Screenshot from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

As the camera tracks backward, it gradually reveals a group of men (and later one woman) in a conference room. A uniformed officer, Major Holland (Walter Gotell), grabs the Frink figure and says, “like a bird in a gilded cage, eh Dingle?” His reply from Mr. Dingle (Brian Oulton), a grumpy schoolteacher type—“more like a gilded bird in a rather rusty cage”—leads to an extended disagreement that reveals tensions around class and the institutions of education and military, while underscoring the way that the bird and flight iconography of Frink’s work relates to some of the salient themes of the film: freedom and imprisonment.

The imprisoned children whose education and well-being is the business of these technocrats, soldiers, and teachers, it is established, have never seen in the flesh any people besides themselves, except occasionally men who enter, when absolutely necessary, in full hazmat gear, and who look so alien that the kids, who have only a classical British education upon which to base their conclusions, refer to them as ‘the black death,’ unknowingly projecting their own toxicity onto the interlopers (although it is also possible we are meant to infer that the children have been raised to fear them). The children are interned behind and below the massive stone cliffs upon which much of the action takes place, in a cave that, at its forbidding edges, is dark and rough-hewn—like the natural formations outside and the sculptures associated with them from the outset—but at its center is a chic, albeit airless and impenetrable, high-tech, modernist boarding school, in which the children have been raised to care for and educate themselves with remote assistance from the team above.



Figure 5: Screenshot from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

Bernard is rather a Wizard-of-Oz-like figure, with whom they communicate by closed-circuit television.¹⁰

When Simon and Joan, then later King, encounter the children, they find a preternaturally civilized culture of nine 11-year-olds who are (paradoxically, given that they are supposed to be radioactive) ice cold to the touch, well-educated, and well-spoken, seemingly very mature but at the same time terribly naïve, in the thrall of fantasy and family romance. They tell Simon and Joan that they had hoped that they were their parents, coming to rescue them; at the same time several of them cherish strange fantasies about their situation and origins. They have discovered one obscure, unfinished corner of the cave that is inaccessible to the video cameras that constantly survey them and there have established a sort of clubhouse, where they have dedicated fantasy ‘memorials’ to made-up parents using pictures cut out from magazines and art books. At age 11, the children are between childhood and adolescence: just beginning to rebel, conspire, and chafe at the Draconian constraints and obscurities of their world. A leitmotif of the script is the phrase, “when the time comes...,” used repeatedly by Bernard to defer answering the children’s existential questions, as well as some practical ones, and parroted by them in their attempts to master the mysteries of the Platonic cave-cum-modernist crypt-like universe to which they have been confined all their lives.

The Damned’s dismal, dystopian narrative is fraught with political, social, existential, and psychological horrors. Class antagonism, technocratic hubris, and Oedipal abjection are funneled into a crucible of deadly conflicts, all of which can be read as both political and psychosexual allegory. At the time the film was made, at the height of the age of anxiety, the underground complex in which the children are confined would have evoked the bomb shelters that

¹⁰ The set includes classic mid-century furnishings designed by Eames, Eero Saarinen, George Nelson, and Finn Juhl, among others, such as were sold by Herman Miller, Knoll, and Heywood-Wakefield.

were so familiar during the last war and the fallout shelters that were at the ready for the next. This real-world imagery was layered with utopian and dystopian images of the high-tech spaces of security and control belonging to the cold war popular imagination, which also had real-world correlatives. At other levels, the cave is, of course, a paradigmatic image for philosophy and psychology. These levels of meaning that pertain to *mise-en-scène* are found, too, in the narrative.

The world of the film is strangely parentless. Not only are the nine children orphans; so are King and Joan. And none of the adult characters are parents, although both Joan and Freya display maternal feelings toward the children. It is as though the nuclear family has been destroyed, replaced by nuclear technology. This parentlessness might seem ironic, in that the Atomic age was the heyday of the nuclear family, but it reflects aspects of recent British history and society that form the background to the world in which both novel and film were conceived. World War II wreaked havoc on families all over the world. In Britain, thousands of children lost one or both parents and thousands more were separated from their families in massive evacuations to the countryside. Elisabeth Frink, a child during the war, as noted, grew up in the countryside, so avoided evacuation. But due to her home's proximity to Stradishall, where there was a RAF base, and Great Wratting, with its airstrip, "Lis could hear continual aerial activity from the house — bombers taking off for raids on Germany, and returning, sometimes badly shot up and in flames [...]. In the summer of 1941, a Wellington crash-landed in a field [...] only a couple of hundred yards away" (Gardiner 1998, 11). Finally, for her safety, Frink was sent away to her godmother at Chypraze, near Exmouth, Devon, where Saturday art classes at a convent school with a French nun, Sister Vincent-Paul, fostered her artistic talents. Frink was already scarred by the war in the skies around her and by the absence of her father to whom she was very close and who survived the war but was a career officer and away fighting with the British Expeditionary Force. Her earliest work, at 13—"very frightening drawings that she saw as images of the apocalypse"—reflected the trauma and angst of her generation (Gardiner 1998, 14). Frink's mature work continued to give form to anxieties that were widespread in postwar Britain and beyond and that society itself was forced to meet on many fronts.

The social and psychological traumas and upheavals associated with the many thousands of bereaved, orphaned, and institutionalized children were the source of considerable theoretical, institutional, and governmental agitation and change in the postwar period. A psychoanalysis dominated by object relations, the pre-Oedipal reformulations that Melanie Klein innovated in the 1930s and brought with her to Britain, and that took several more turns in the work of theorists of the war- and immediate postwar-years (in-

cluding D.W. Winnicott, John Bowlby, Emmanuel Miller, and Michael Ballint) was central to policies and institutions that became prominent in the crucible of a society at war and ravaged by it, including the Tavistock Institute, “a center of analytic innovation [that] described itself as a mixture of Freud, managerial innovation, and sociology” (Zaretsky 2004). Old-fashioned Freudianism turned toward children and their individual and group misfortunes, too; Freud’s daughter, Anna, exiled from Vienna and active as an analyst in England from 1938, and carrying on her father’s legacy after his death there the following year, became director of the Hampstead Nurseries for homeless children. In 1944, with Dorothy Burlingham, she published *Infants Without Families*, the results of a four-year study of the Nurseries, and in 1945 established the journal, *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (Zaretsky 2004).

Explicitly parentless, Joan and King, as well as the other members of the gang, the youths of 1960 in *The Damned*, would have been born just before or during the war and can be imagined to belong to a generation of orphans, evacuees and witnesses to unmanageable horrors. King’s aggression, particularly, is given an obvious psychosexual pathography, one that can be seen in Freudian or Kleinian terms. He is wildly volatile and proprietary about Joan (who is of age), although he uses her as bait to lure mugging victims like Simon. He is convinced of the sexual predatoriness of all men. Joan reveals that he locked her in a cupboard when she dared go out with a boy once and accuses him of locking her up and trying to prevent her being a woman because he has never had a girl. The implication is that King projects onto other men his taboo incestuous desires and/or onto her an unacceptable desire for men. In one of *The Damned*’s most powerful scenes, Losey uses Elisabeth Frink’s sculptures to suggest and provoke these unruly, distorting psychic urges—distinctly paranoid, probably homoerotic, and certainly Oedipal. King (whose name was Rex in the novel) has traced the runaway Simon and Joan to Freya’s birdhouse (whence they fled when they saw her returning) and there confronts the sculptor. Here, not for the first time, Frink’s sculptures seem to play the dual role of art objects (material and cultural) and what Melanie Klein would call ‘partial’ objects—archaic, phantasied internalizations that are the psychic source of introjections and projections. As King suspiciously interrogates Freya—who knows nothing of Joan and Simon—and accuses her of amorality, he is manifestly affected by the sculptures that surround him. He puts his hands to the neck of a life-sized *Warrior* (ca. 1954), with a strangely erotic strangulating action.



Figure 6: Screenshot from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

The editing creates a distinctly paranoid atmosphere, with a cut from a shot of King suddenly looking back over his shoulder to close-ups of two other sculptures in the room; it is as though he is responding to the blind ‘look’ of the gaunt male figure or beastly *Horse’s Head* (ca. 1954; see Shaffer et al. 1984, catalogue no. 20; fig. 61). The tension then escalates as King inserts his fingers into the hollow eye sockets of the *Warrior* (1954, see Shaffer et al. 1984, catalogue no. 22), calls Freya’s work ‘nasty,’ spits at it, and then—grabbing an axe—runs outdoors and attacks a supine plaster figure, breaking it into pieces. When Freya screams and tries to restrain him, the two struggle on the ground, rolling together to the very edge of the cliff—to the brink—the action almost indistinguishable from a sexual assault.

While King acts out his psychic abjection, on people and objects, Bernard is his temperamental opposite: cool, rational, withholding, and is delineated as more a case of sublimation—he collects art rather than destroying it—but one whose repressed instincts may mirror King’s. The scenario uses the elevations of its locations to map out the ‘terrain’ of psychic outcomes¹¹: the repressed character has created an underground world, buried in stone; inside it is very orderly, modern, and rational, but still a prison. The well-behaved children use a recording of Byron’s “The Prisoner of Chillon” to obscure their rebellious planning. While Bernard’s underground world is characterized by repression, Freya, on high, *expresses*, through art—high art—what Bernard *represses*. “If I could explain these,” she says of her sculptures, “I wouldn’t have to make

¹¹ “Losey, almost alone except for Wyler among contemporary directors, makes brilliant use of different levels. A Losey film, in fact, looks rather like a contour map drawn up on scale paper. This is particularly noticeable in *The Damned*, where the minus 10 level means the children living in their prison under the cliff; zero is sea level, the beach at Weymouth, the atomic scientists’ control-room, the little town besieged by the motor-cycle gang; and the plus 50 level is the cliff-top where Freya vainly erects tortured sculptures which seem already ravaged by radiation sickness and death” (Jacob 1966, 65).

them.” The critics explain, though. Paul Mayersberg notes that, “the bird suggests man’s desire to be free—not the illusory freedom of sailing away, but a freedom from fear and oppression, a freedom of the spirit.” However, Mayersberg (1963, 33) notes, “the sculpture Freya gives to Bernard is a ‘graveyard bird.’ Bernard’s project is associated with death and the same bird recurs as a menacing shadow behind him when he addresses the children on a closed-circuit TV screen”.



Figure 7: Screenshot from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

I would note, relative to this, that when King and his gang are stalking Joan and Simon, King’s position is in a graveyard, whence he communicates with his minions by whistling phrases from a song (‘Black Leather’) like a bird ... a graveyard bird. Moreover, Freya’s name is that of a Norse goddess, one whose iconography connects to Frink’s. Freya is something of a bird-goddess; she wears a cloak of falcon feathers and she receives those who die in battle. As Gilles Ménégaldo (2000, 64) observes, the use of Frink’s sculptures not only contrasts creative instincts with destructive ones, but they are also resonant, in their “tormented, incomplete, hybrid aspects, with the themes of nuclear apocalypse and physiological mutation”.

These incomplete, hybrid aspects signify on a psychic register, too. They not only suggest partial objects but also dissolution of the human—a crisis of personhood—that Julia Kristeva would call ‘abjection.’ Elissa Marder’s (2012, 60) observation that “one of the defining traits of being human is the incorporation of animal figures within the psyche, [...] uncanny traces of our radical alterity” is part of her larger theoretical investigation into the primal scene and “how, throughout human history and culture, humankind has attempted to reconcile the conceptual abyss between the apparently self-evident materiality of the maternal body and the radical unthinkability of the event of one’s own birth” (Marder 2012, 2). Marder (2012, 2-3) substitutes for ‘Mother’ the term ‘maternal function’ that permits a view of *The Damned*’s parentless spaces as symbolic:

The maternal function operates at the outer limits of the human [...] opens up a strange space in which birth and death, *bios* and *techné*, the human and the nonhuman are brought into an intimate and disturbing proximity with one another [...]. the maternal function has always been that of an ambiguous ‘container’ (the womb) that fails to contain the unruly contradictions at work in the concept of birth. The ‘womb’ that holds the body before the beginning of life is structurally indistinguishable from the ‘tomb’ that holds the body after the end of life. Indeed, in mythology, literature, and art the womb is often depicted in strikingly technological terms.

This notion of the maternal function connects the dots between the excessive, almost hysterical anxiety that characterizes *The Damned*, its strangely motherless world, its Cold War politics, the uncanny spaces—both primordial and futuristic—of its ‘strikingly technological’ subterranean lab school and the abject, incipient, partial, bestial forms of Elisabeth Frink’s sculptures.

* * * * *

I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now.

Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (1951, trans. 1955)

In a review of an exhibition of Frink’s work at Waddington Galleries exactly contemporaneous with the production of *The Damned*, Jasia Reichardt captured how the tension or equivocation in Frink’s work between human figuration and inhuman thingness is an existential achievement:

[...] the falling men, the anxious bird figures, the ovoid heads that, like corroded stone, seem to disintegrate into shapeless and uncontrollable forms, reveal a sense of tension which arises directly from the predestined situation in which the subject finds itself. Whether the man has actually fallen, or is in the process of falling, he becomes in his strange and undignified way, a mere object [...]. Yet, he is elevated from the state by becoming a sort of symbol. The fragility, which is suggested by the very idea of a bird, is contrasted by the powerful, enigmatic and formidable bird-image Frink presents. The obvious tension is the result of this contrast, and of the artist’s conscious choice to react to the quality in the bird which is that of the bird of prey. Thus Frink’s art is the art of anguish, not the anguish of Rodin’s hell, but rather that of Beckett’s *Molloy*, where no human ideals and feelings are spared, but can only be reconstructed from the inevitable disintegration they must undergo. But Frink’s concern with anguish never becomes objective, and her works convey the impression of an experience relived again and again. (Reichardt 1961, 22–23)

Reichardt's articulation of what she referred to as Frink's 'Brutalism,' a sense of existential predestination, an anguish 'relived again and again,' illuminates the mise-en-scène of *The Damned*, with its vivid contrast between outside and inside: the austere sublimity of the exterior landscape and the high-tech sterility of the cave. Just as that cave in which the irradiated children dwell is philosophically Plato's and psychologically the womb-tomb—the secure, controlled container that expresses the inconceivable and inextricable origin and end of being (when King enters and touches one of the chilly children, he proclaims, with horror, that they are dead)—the Frink sculptures are philosophically symbols of the human condition—of futility and mortality—and at the same time, psychologically, the partial objects, the parental imagoes, and the incorporated animals of archaic, infantile phantasy.



Figure 8: Screenshot from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

Losey ends the film by returning to and repeating for a third time the movement from sea to land with which he opened the film. This time the movement is connected to a machine—an avian machine—the helicopter. It tracks another that will follow, hovering over Simon's yacht until it is ascertained that he and Joan, already sick, have died of radiation poisoning and can neither infect nor inform the outside world of the lethal experiment they have stumbled upon. The children, who had escaped, have been rounded up by 'the black death' and returned to their prison; King, pursued by the helicopter and already sick, has crashed through the rails of a bridge, and to his death in the frigid waters. The camera-copter pulls away from the other machine and the receding craft and turns back toward the shore and the Portland Bill, atop which Bernard stands, aiming a pistol. He shoots Freya, who had been using what little time she knew was left to her now that she had been exposed to radiation and to Bernard's secrets to work on her massive bird-man sculpture.

She falls. An aerial shot follows the loud chopper's own shadow as it circles around the fallen figure; then there is a cut to a longer

shot of the solitary *Bird Man* on the brink, ‘a piece of sculpture’, according to the screenplay, ‘which expresses man’s inspiration and his blindness,’ facing out to sea, the sound of the chopper fading.¹²



Figure 9: Screenshot of the credits from *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1963) | © Hammer Film Productions

A series of shots of the desolate rock faces below, buffeted by waves, is accompanied by the plaintive score, the sounds of screeching gulls, and the echoing screams of the entombed children, whose cries for help – the last shot, a picture-postcard view of the Weymouth esplanade, assures us – will never be heard. Frink rejected the notion that her birdmen had anything to do with the myth of Icarus (Kent 1985b, 45). But for Losey, perhaps, it was a different matter.

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¹² From a much thumbed and hand-annotated screenplay and shooting script of *The Damned* held by BFI Library’s Special Collections. The monumental sculpture appears to be the *Bird Man* (1959, see Shaffer et al. 1984, catalogue no. 62) that was cast in cement as a London County Council commission for the Sedgehill School in the Greater London district of Bellingham, until it was irreparably damaged and finally removed. The school building itself was recently torn down and replaced with a new building.

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