

BROKEN VESSELS:

**The im-possibility of the art of remembrance and re-collection in
the work of Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski, William
Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng.**

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TEXT VOLUME

Abstract

This thesis is structured around investigating the philosophical and aesthetic problematics, politics, and possibilities of representing the past for the purposes of demythifying the present as well as commemorating the losses of history, as explored in the artworks of Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski, William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng.

The first chapter begins with Theodor Adorno's philosophical understanding of myth and history: how he is influenced by and then develops Karl Marx's critique of society, Sigmund Freud's critique of reason and its subject, and particularly Walter Benjamin's ideas of history as catastrophe, the role of the historian and his messianic materialism. The second section looks at Theodor Adorno's dialectic of art and society: immanent criticism in aesthetic practice, mimesis, and the shift in conceptions of allegory from Walter Benjamin's understanding to that of Jacques Derrida. The last section of the chapter looks at Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist theories against boundary-fixing, within that the ethical relation to the 'other' and the theorist/artist as psychic exile.

The second chapter deals with the politics of remembrance and representation — beginning with Theodor Adorno's historic interpretation of the Mosaic law against the making of images and Jean-Francois Lyotard on the im-possibility of representing the unrepresentable. The chapter is divided in two parts between the post-Holocaust European artists Anselm Kiefer and Christian Boltanski, and the post-aparthied South African artists William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng. It explores, within these artists' specific contexts, their formal and philosophical approaches to

myth and history, and the problematics of image-making, representing the unrepresentable, and commemorating the immemorial.

The thesis concludes by considering different conceptions of melancholia as they relate to these artists: the Freudian psychoanalytic approach, Benjamin's notions of the artist-genius, and Julia Kristeva's Lacanian reading of the humanist melancholic, concluding with the mythic-historical Kaballist notion of melancholia as the historical burden or responsibility to commemorate loss.

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Introduction

The chapters in this thesis cover approaches to post-Holocaust¹ and post-apartheid memoration, spanning a range of topics and concerns while they revolve around certain crucial problematics. Their aim is to address the politics of representation and remembrance while recognizing the responsibility of bearing witness. A key concern of this debate is the attempt of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard to address both the role of the historian and the artist as those who represent the past. South Africa has been contextualised here within a European discourse as these philosophers provide a model for thinking about a theme on which comparatively little has been written by South African scholars — addressing concerns about the mythification of the present and the commemoration of the losses and suffering of the past. For to say ‘after Auschwitz’ as in Adorno’s famous dictum or ‘after apartheid’ emphasizes without becoming a telos of prior history, that they have retrospective effects and prompt belated recognitions that can pose urgent questions to aspects of history that have had a different ‘face’ (LaCapra 1998:6). The exploration and interpretation of Holocaust memories is central to the

1. The term ‘Holocaust’ is utilized throughout this thesis. The term can potentially mystify the actual events, for “*Holokaustein* means to bring a (wholly) burnt offering; it was not the intention of the Nazis to make a sacrifice of this kind, and the position of the Jews was not that of a ritual victim”(Laqueur qtd. Biro 2000: 293). But as LaCapra (1994: 45) argues ‘Holocaust’ is perhaps one of the better choices in an impossible, tension-ridden linguistic field where resorting to terms such as ‘annihilation’ or ‘final solution’ might inadvertently repeat Nazi terminology. The term has also had a role in the discourse of the victims themselves, and the rather prevalent use of the term (including its use by nonvictims) has to some extent helped to counteract its sacrificial connotations without entirely reducing it to cliché.

artwork of such European artists as Anselm Kiefer and Christian Boltanski — juxtaposing their utilization of memory with that of the South African artists William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng, reveals varied attempts to rob myth of its power over consciousness and action, as well as to bear witness.

The first chapter focuses on Theodor Adorno's immanent criticism, his dialectic of art and society, and Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist understanding of the role of the historian/theorist/artist. Formulating his ideas on philosophy, Adorno draws primarily from three sources. His critique of the 'culture industry' supplements Marx's understanding of capitalism to expose the hidden, still potent elements of dominating totality that ideology seeks to mask. Furthering this, for the purpose of reinterpreting the progressive stages of emancipation from nature and class domination, Adorno reconstructs the triad of subject/object/concept, drawing from Freud's psychological critique of reason and its subject. Moreover, Walter Benjamin's ideas on historical rupture and utopian longing influenced Adorno in his understanding and questioning of the role of the historian. Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge, and Mofokeng are linked to Adorno and Benjamin in their attempts to articulate and identify historical origins, constructing history from the perspective of the present to utilize it as a critical tool to demythify the present.

In his dialectic of art and society, Adorno holds that art can potentially act as a criticism of the existing state of affairs. The process-like, temporal character of aesthetic experience is emphasized — based as it is on both memory and anticipation. The precondition of these mimetic movements is seen to be the otherwise irreducible separation from the world bound to language and consciousness, which Adorno draws from Benjamin's Kabbalist notion of the former originary foundation of language. Art that self-consciously and critically exposes its illusory claims to wholeness, whose moments and elements exist in constant struggle with one

another, is seen as a possible way of contesting the given, petrified arrangement of reality. This self-criticism is key to Adorno's philosophy of negative dialectics and aesthetic theory — with an emphasis on the breaks (*Brüche*) and gaps in the systematic unity of bourgeois thought, and is furthered by the poststructuralist Jacques Derrida. In their immanently critical 'doubt', Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge, and Mofokeng produce works which work against the pretence of wholeness, focussing their interpretive efforts on the fractures, ambiguities and contradictions, in turn echoing the processes of memory.

Adorno's notion of immanent criticism relates to Benjamin's conception of allegorical intention. Whilst for Benjamin allegorical discourse is linked to the expressionless-sublime, where the experience of unsurpassable emptiness paradoxically creates an 'horizon' in which transcendence becomes possible, Derrida argues that such transcendence or reconciliation of opposites and differences is always deferred or delayed. Derrida's ambiguous conception of mimesis in allegory is that it simultaneously prefigures and preserves, erasing it by repetition while still maintaining a trace of the original. Echoing Benjamin's ideas on the primordial anterior, Derrida's argument that every beginning is actually a doubling — in every act of representation there is already a reference to something past — is a crucial philosophical theme in the works of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng. What results is a play of absence and presence which takes shape in traces, metaphors, allegories, signs and images.

In the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard, text replaces mind as the locus of enunciation and difference replaces identity as the strategy of reading (Poster 1989: 22). The tendency in poststructuralism is to regard 'truth' as a multiplicity, to exult in the play of diverse meanings, in the continual process of reinterpretation, in the contentions of

opposing claims. Central to this is Derrida's deconstruction of the 'either/or' of the history of philosophy, scrutinizing and calling into question distinctions, dichotomies, dualisms and boundary-fixing. In this vein, Derrida brings out the aporetic quality of Levinas' ethical face-to-face encounter, suggesting instead that there is both sameness and radical alterity, symmetry and asymmetry, identity and difference in the relation to the 'other'. This relates fundamentally to the politics of representation which is often problematically centred around polar opposites — such as race in the context of South Africa or cultural identity in the context of post-war Europe — rather than recognising the slippage, the neither/nor of such dialectical relations. Derrida, Adorno and Benjamin agree that one must posit oneself as a psychic exile so as to be conscious of all forms of boundary-fixing and the violence that that entails — a position that Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng adopt. Within all this is an argument against the politics of forgetting, while recognizing the problematics of remembrance.

It is in this context of the politics of remembrance and representation that the second chapter is framed. For as much as the act of remembrance is a form of retrieval, recollection, restoration and commemoration, it can also be seen as forgetting, displacement, distortion or erasure. Acutely aware of the problematics of representation, Adorno reformulated his theories into an historic *Bilderverbot* — a prohibition on image-making that may create a fetishistic, libidinous relation between the viewer and object. At the same time, within his writings is an acknowledgement of the fundamental importance and responsibility of representation because of its ability to convey knowledge and, more importantly, bear witness. It is in this Levitical injunction to remember the past for the future to come that Adorno and Lyotard are linked dialogically. Lyotard recognises that one has to represent yet must not represent, arguing that postmodern art should present in such a way that testifies to the eventhood that representation

suppresses. So while the artists Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng acknowledge this failure, they continue to strive for the im-possible — delaying a possibility that may never be realised but still hoping and striving for it.

Rabbi Torton said, “It is not for you to complete the work, but that does not mean you can exempt yourself either” (Tenetting 21 Ethics of the fathers qtd Sutter 1997: 5).

The first part of this chapter deals with the politics of remembrance and representation in the works of the European artists Anselm Kiefer and Christian Boltanski. Kiefer, dealing with fragments of symbolic and mythological narrative, utilizes the allegorical process to extract meaning from the petrified and insignificant, forcing totality to disintegrate. What remains are critical representations of concrete history as unfreedom, imperfection and the brokenness of the sensual, which is crucial to Adorno’s vehement criticism of the fetishized object. Thereby Kiefer’s paintings are self-reflective in that they negate themselves as well as simplistic hopes of redemption through art. Through the formal processes of burning, scarring and wounding his canvasses, Kiefer as the artist/destroyer performs the cathartic, redemptive, essentially ambiguous process of destruction and repair. Throughout his works which lead into the architectural spaces of the tainted past, the recesses of collective memory, Kiefer grapples with the unassimilable trauma of the catastrophic losses of history.

Boltanski’s engagement with the Holocaust is also performed negatively, in that he shows the failure or im-possibility of truthfully embodying the presence of the past. In his installations that mimic the archive, he ‘remembers’ other people’s memories, and in so doing exposes his own complicity in this act of evil. Boltanski questions representations that attempt to refer accurately and meticulously to past catastrophes, specifically the Holocaust, revealing that these attempts

repeat a Nazi-like structuring of history and genocide in their ordering, objectifying and dehumanising impulse. His memorial works act as counter-monuments — works that haltingly attempt to commemorate while showing the im-possibility of doing so ‘after Auschwitz’, thus emphasizing the responsibility to remember against the desire for the illusion of closure and completion.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the problematics of remembrance and representation in the post-colonial and post-apartheid South African context, specifically in the works of William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng. Whilst Kentridge’s focus has been on the predominantly male, white South African’s present response to the apartheid past, such as guilt, responsibility and the repression of memory, he utilizes the narrative form of allegory to link the intimate and personal to broader social issues. Not unlike Kiefer, Kentridge uses the self-referential processes of Benjaminian destruction and redemption to narrate the absence or im-possibility of narration. Through his use of erasure which leaves marks and elusive traces of absence, he enacts the processes of recalling by effacing, remembering and forgetting.

Much like Boltanski, Santu Mofokeng reveals that archival documentation of the past is neither neutral nor beyond re-imagining, reaffirming Benjamin’s (1992: 248) statement that “there is no document of civilisation that is not at the same time a document of barbarism”. Thus he works with images sourced from state archives, constructing from their factual residue fictional narratives — Lyotardian ‘little narratives’ — that pose questions about black South African identity and what he terms ‘mental colonialisaton’. His landscapes, much like those of Kiefer and Kentridge, are marked by stories and suffering — but act as flawed witnesses or memorials to history as they are devoid of context and memory without being activated or constructed

through accompanying text, thus revealing to the viewer that it is his/her desire which is the subject of the activity of commemoration.

The work of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng confronts not just the aesthetic possibilities of visual practise but the theoretical and ethical im-possibilities of such a practice. Formally and philosophically, these artists probe the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas of their art of remembrance and re-collection 'after Auschwitz' and 'after apartheid', where history and its belated or deferred aesthetic confrontation and articulation are shown to be deeply painful social and cultural processes. Creating works that expose the Adornian *Brüche* of their own construction as well as their inability to hold and memorialize the immemorial, what is emphasized, in the vein of Lurianic 'broken vessels', is that the responsibility to remember and commemorate is that of the ethical viewer, whose memory must remain active and critical to the forces of the past in the present.

Chapter One

THEODOR ADORNO'S IMMANENT CRITICISM AND THE DIALECTIC OF ART AND SOCIETY

Universal history must be construed and denied. After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. Not to be denied for that reason, however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history — the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men's inner nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the Megaton bomb (Adorno 1990 : 320).

The project of Enlightenment in the Western world was concerned with the emergence of humanity through reason from its 'self-imposed condition of dependency' on the myth of nature. The type of reason at work historically in these rationalization processes is firmly associated with the 'logic of identity': it is a reason which plans, controls, objectifies, systematizes and unifies — a 'totalizing' reason. But in time, the capitalist economy, modern bureaucracy, technical progress and its ways of 'disciplining' the body, have assumed the proportions of a gargantuan process of destruction — destruction of traditions, of the ecological environment, of 'meaning systems' and of that unitary self which had been the product as well as the driving force of the Enlightenment process. Contrary to the Enlightenment myth of 'progress', history displays the ability to break dramatically with the course it has been following and open itself up to something radically different — a possibility made even more threatening by the lessons of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and more recently, by the system of apartheid. From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, with living memories of such barbaric totalitarianism, one tends to concur with the judgment of Adorno and his co-author Horkheimer (qtd. Bernstein 1991: 35) when they write in

The dialectic of Enlightenment (1944) that “the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant”¹.

The modern world has repeatedly shown itself capable of mobilizing counter-forces against this form of Enlightenment as a rationalizing process. The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, amongst them Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, engaged in an emancipatory turn to a critique of society — utilizing the past to demythologise the pervasive myths of the Enlightenment in the present, in an attempt to expose present ‘civilisation’ as pressing dangerously close to barbarism, as in Benjamin’s (1992: 248) famous quote that “There is no

1. Thus Adorno warns that any philosophy of history can have regrettable consequences, especially if it becomes an ideology or theodicy in which human initiative or suffering are cancelled out in the name of a higher law. As he and Horkheimer (qtd. Jay 1984: 110) state: “The philosophy of history repeats a process which occurred in Christianity: the goodness which in reality remains at the mercy of suffering is concealed as the force which determines the course of history and ultimately triumphs. It is idolized as the spirit of the world or as *an immanent law*... *Because history as the correlation of unified theory and as something which can be built is not good but horror, so thought is in fact a negative element* [emphasis added]. Hope for better circumstances — if it is not a mere illusion — is not so much based on the assurance that these circumstances would be guaranteed, durable, and final, but on the lack of respect for all that is so firmly rooted in the general suffering”.

document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism". This dyad *Kultuur/Barbarei* is central to the artworks of the European artists Anselm Kiefer and Christian Boltanski, as well as the South African artists William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng.

It is in Theodor Adorno's immanent criticism and dialectic of art and society, written during and after World War II, that the progressive stages of emancipation from nature and the corresponding phases of class domination, developed by Marx, are analysed as stages in the dialectic of subjectivization and reification. For this purpose, Adorno reinterprets the epistemological triad of the subject, object and concept in terms of a Freudian process of repression and subjugation in which the repressor — the subject — also appears as the victim. Adorno's term 'immanent criticism', is utilized to expose the inherent claims of reason or 'identity logic' in discourse, as well as in relation to aesthetic theory, where it is seen as the ability of 'true' artworks to critically negate themselves by exposing their attempts at reconciliation as failed and flawed — thereby becoming images of hope that reality can imitate.

Similar to Adorno's and Benjamin's critique of history and the idea of suffering as (part of) 'progress', the poststructuralists read history as catastrophe, as repetition in need of interruption through critical thinking and recollection. Jacques Derrida proposes an interminable deconstruction of the Western philosophical tradition — interminable because the internal structure of writing is trapped in an abyss of binary oppositions. Michel Foucault proposes the self-constitution of the critical theorist through a practice of opposition to the dominant discourses of the present conjuncture. Whilst Jean-Francois Lyotard advocates a celebration of multiple, competing discourses, an acceptance of the justice of the differend, of the im-possibility of

consensus².

South Africa, with its dark history of repression and inhumanity during colonialism and apartheid, bears a legacy of the power and destruction of the rationalizing, totalitarian impulses of the myth of Enlightenment. The work of the above mentioned theorists warn that the memories from those eras should not be relinquished to the myth of progress of a ‘new’ democracy³, but retained as critical tools with which to possibly resist forces of domination from reoccurring in the future.

ONE

Immanent criticism

2. Lyotard’s conception of consensus is in sharp contrast to the views of Jurgen Habermas, who felt that discourse is the possible vehicle of *resolving* differences, of coming to consensus. Habermas’s *Communication and the evolution of society* (1979) is a reconstructive project on the universal conditions for communicative action — aiming at the cultivation of practices that might bring one closer to the ideal of seeking to resolve conflicts through discourse (Bernstein 1991: 205-7), which the TRC in South Africa has attempted. Habermas feels that a more differentiated analysis of the conflicting tendencies of postmodernity, modernity and the Enlightenment legacy is needed — one that ‘does justice’ to the tendencies of growth and spread of systems *rationality* — those fragile practices in which the transcending power of communicative rationality can be discussed. Cf. p. 115 n21.

3. For as Terdiman (1993: 24) points out: “A myth of progress makes the loss of memory less troubling”.

i) Marx and the critique of society

Critical theory can be defined as an attempt to promote the project of emancipation by furthering what began as the theoretical effort of the critique of domination by the Enlightenment and continued by Karl Marx. Marx's critique of bourgeois society and its 'rationality of understanding' becomes compressed into a dialectic of history. In Marxist terms, the Enlightenment myth of 'progress' is seen to statically reproduce the conditions and relations of class domination rather than establishing a new order. It can be argued that in *The communist manifesto* (1848), Marx reintroduces difficulties when he 'canonizes' the proletariat as a universal class, thereby delegitimizing the perspectives of all other social groups (Poster 1989: 8). In addition, by taking the point of view of a social subject (the proletariat) he introduces the danger of levelling the position articulated by the theorist as identical with that of the social subject. In this inference, the theorist may 'stand in place of' rather than simply 'take the point of view of' the social group. Marx's theory constitutes the working-class subject in the image of itself, introducing into capitalist society a supplementary form of domination specific to theory. Marx continues to embrace the utopian counter-image from the Romantics, 'rationalizing' this in turn and thus reason asserts its totalizing impetus once again. With this aspiration to totality⁴, the

4. The concept of totality can be linked to Hegel's metaphor of *Aufhebung* — where a reconciliation is achieved by 'determinate negation', in which all otherness, difference, opposition and contradiction are reconciled (Bernstein 1991: 8). While it is now generally recognised that one should not give up the *promise* and striving for reconciliation, it is debated as to on what terms this attempt should be based — as will be discussed later. Most

dialectic of history ends by proffering itself as an instrument of legitimation and control in the service of modernizing elite groups.

critics of Hegel and Marx do agree, though, that both the aspirations for totality and reconciliation have resulted in legitimizing the dominance of 'others' by the groups that hold the power. The dominant tendency in Western philosophy and metaphysics has been to privilege and valorize unity, harmony and totality, and thereby to denigrate, suppress, or marginalise multiplicity, particularity and singularity (Bernstein 1991: 58). Cf. *Aufhebung* in the context of Adorno and Benjamin's concept 'constellation' p. 15 n10; Adorno's immanent criticism of the concept p. 21 n22 and Derrida on *Aufhebung* p. 46.

In the first half of the twentieth century Marxist theory was questioned with the establishment of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe, the rise of fascism in Central Europe, and the birth of the ‘culture industry’ in Western Europe and the United States. No longer could the working class be seen as the standard-bearer of freedom, the living negation of domination, the progressive side in contemporary class struggles that would surely end in a utopian community (Poster 1989: 1). The critique of the ‘culture industry’ by Theodor Adorno was theorized as a supplement to a Marxist understanding of capitalism. Workers, now considered ‘the masses’, are viewed as manipulated, depoliticized and reconciled to capitalist values by all aspects of popular culture, the ‘effects’ of which are seen as essentially related to myth⁵. Thus the entire panorama of leisure and daily life since World War II (jazz, sports, television, consumer goods) is seen to narcotize, numb and disenable the subversive energies of the working class. As long as domination occurs through capitalist society’s principle of exchange, which Adorno terms the rational form of mythic ‘ever-same’⁶, myth will dominate too. Adorno soon began to despair over the negative, liberatory powers of the working class — moving toward a ‘negative dialectic’, a claim for nonidentity and an appeal to critique as the last resort of a world without discernible hope for redemption. Exposing the increasingly hidden, but still potent elements of the dominating totality that ideology seeks to mask, Adorno (qtd. Jay 1984: 108) emphasizes the current power of the ‘ever-same’ in the hope of breaking its spell in the future, for: “Only he who knows the most recent as the same will serve what is different”.

5. Cf. this points to Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the Enlightenment as immanently mythic p. 14.

6. As Adorno writes in ‘Progress’ (1969), the convergence of ‘progress’ with its negation arises from society’s main principle of exchange. In the equal-for-equal of all exchange proceedings one act should cancel the other, with the resulting balance remaining the same. This would be if the exchange were just, but from time immemorial the more powerful opponent receives more, and thus: “the truth of expansion lives off of the lie of equality” (Adorno 1969: 99). Through this injustice, something ‘new’ occurs in the exchange and thus the process becomes dynamic. But the more the system expands the more it hardens into what it has always been and the life process itself rigidifies in the expression of the ‘ever-same’.

ii) Freud and the critique of reason and its subject

For the purpose of interpreting the progressive stages of emancipation from nature and then from class domination, Adorno reconstructs the triad of the subject/object/concept, drawing from the central figure of the psychological critique of the subject and its reason — Sigmund Freud. Freud's critique demonstrates the factual impotence or non-existence of the 'autonomous' subject by exposing the irrational nature of its supposed reason (Wellmer 1991: 59). As embodied beings or 'wish-machines' human beings are not conscious of their actions or desires — their 'reason' is merely an expression of psychic forces or an imprint of social power relations. The Enlightenment's philosophical subject with the capacity of self-determination is unmasked as a virtuoso of rationalisation in the service of alien powers. The now 'decentred' subject of psychoanalysis is a nexus of psychic and social forces, rather than a master of these forces.

Freud's radicalization of the psychological critique of rationalism released the concepts of the subject, reason and autonomy from Enlightenment's rationalist constellations. In *The dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), the suppression of one's inner nature is seen by Adorno and Horkheimer as necessary for developing a unitary self which is needed for the sake of self-preservation, whilst the control of nature is an external and social phenomenon (Wellmer 1991: 60). Having identified myth as illusion, they go on to destroy those legitimations which Enlightenment reason put in the place of myth. The hidden structure of Enlightenment's conception of reason, which Adorno terms 'identity logic', is exposed as the will to mastery and control (Bernstein 1991: 42)⁷

7. Cf. Nietzsche's *Will to power* (1901). This issue is crucial to the dialectical ambiguity in Kiefer's work, his understanding of the creator/dictator/destroyer, such as Nero, Hitler and Friedrich pp. 73-74; 82-85.

— a unifying, objectifying, controlling and disciplinizing reason, as Boltanski and Mofokeng explore in their archival works. At the heart of discursive thought an element of violence is discovered: a subjugation of reality, a defense mechanism, a procedure for controlling, manipulating and excluding. For Adorno as well as the poststructuralists after him, this identity rationality always seeks to deny, repress and violate otherness, difference and singularity. This form of reason, when unmasked, is intrinsically domination: the domination and control over nature, as Kiefer and Kentridge explore specifically in their landscape work, inexorably turns into the domination of men over men (and indeed men over women) and culminates in sadistic-masochistic self-repression and self-mutilation⁸. Thus Adorno's critique of identity reason or the 'philosophy of identity' is also a critique of *legitimizing* reason (Bernstein 1991: 43).

iii) Walter Benjamin: historical rupture and utopian longing

Adorno was heavily influenced by Walter Benjamin's *The origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) and his "Thesis on the philosophy of history" (1940), for Benjamin "viewed the modern world as archaic not in order to conserve the traces of a purportedly eternal truth but rather to escape the trance-like captivity of bourgeois immanence"(Adorno qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 61). Out of the fragments of history the idea of an epoch is constructed in the sense of an 'ur-history' of modernity. The Enlightenment myth of progress is exposed as a repetition of the archaic cycle of domination. As repetition, not linear history at all,⁹ the most modern now becomes defined as a figure of the most archaic — a montage where any moment may enter into sudden adjacency

8. Cf. this self-separation in the context of Derrida reading of the archive p. 211; in Kiefer's work p. 91 and Kristeva's Freudian notion of being stranger's to ourselves p.47 n58 and repression/splitting in Kentridge's work pp. 152-153.

9. For Walter Benjamin, there are primordial manifestations in the present — such as the name pp. 33; 81; 133 and

with another dialectical constellation¹⁰, such as Kiefer's 'adjacency' of such figures as Hitler, Nero and himself (figure 1) or Mofokeng's landscapes of the Holocaust, Vietnam and the Anglo-Boer war (figure 2). With Benjamin, the future as past, the future in memory, finds its secularized meaning in the 'second tradition', which acts as the will of communal forms even in the midst of unfavorable conditions, or respectively reworks the material of the 'first tradition', the prevailing culture (Smith 1989: 143). Fragmenting the latter, robbing it of unity, it thereby ascribes a second meaning to it and preserves it in this new context. What this dialectical thought promises is "a science of history whose subject matter is not a tangle of purely factual details, but consists rather of the numbered group of threads that represent the weft of the past as it feeds into the warp of the present" (Benjamin qtd. Eagleton 1981: 57) but where fragments that may have been lost for centuries are erratically, inconspicuously picked out and interwoven.

Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng share Adorno and Benjamin's ideas on the role of the historian, where history discloses itself only to the agitated gaze and responds coherently only to urgent questioning. For Benjamin, to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'¹¹ — it means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger (Eagleton 1981: 58). Benjamin is convinced that even the past, even the dead, are exposed to this danger (Todd 1984: 106)¹². Therefore one must exercise "resistance at all

the metaphor of the angel (*Angelus novus* p. 35) represent (Moses 1993: 185).

10. 'Constellation' is a "juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle" (Jay qtd. Bernstein 1991: 8). 'Constellation' is deliberately intended to displace and negate Hegel's master metaphor of *Aufhebung* — a reconciliation achieved by what Hegel calls 'determinate negation,' in which all difference, otherness, opposition and contradiction are reconciled (Bernstein 1991: 8). Cf. pp. 12 n4; 21 n2 and Derrida's 'neither/nor' relation to *Aufhebung* p. 46.

11. Cf. Boltanski's location of *The missing house* p. 133 n.48.

12. Benjamin, in *The origin of German drama*, argues that moral depth can only result from a confrontation with death or danger (cf. Benjamin's concept of the expressionless-sublime p.36). Benjamin is critical, in this context, of what he calls Nietzsche's 'abyss of aestheticism', of having transformed humans into mere aesthetic phenomena or

stages, not capitulation to the mainstream which courses through them” (Adorno 1989: 101). Tradition is nothing other than a series of ‘spasms’ or ‘cries’ within class history itself — the task of historical materialism is to draw them into complex constellation, and in so doing “brush history against the grain” (Benjamin 1992: 259). In his analysis, Benjamin focuses on the transience of the present and the need to redeem it for eternity, and blasts coherences apart in order to salvage them in their ‘primordial givenness’. This relationship to the historical past does not signal a desire to regress in time, but rather what renders the past so significant is the withheld encoded meanings and metonymies of the present (Caputi 2000).

From his analysis of Freud and Benjamin, Adorno sees this as wielding a mythical power over people reminiscent of primitive societies in which ‘first nature’ dominated as an inexplicable force. The historical origins of these conventions are forgotten and submitted to in a manner similar to primitive fetishes: “An archaic anxiety descends over all where the apparent world (*Scheinwelt*) of convention confronts us” (Adorno qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 55). The truth of any past phenomenon is no longer seen as static nor outside of history, but immanent and hence mediated by a constantly changing present (Buck-Morss 1997: 60). To identify the historical ‘source’ or prototype is to construct it from the perspective of the present, for the purpose of criticizing the present. History in connection with nature as its dialectical opposite, is utilized by Adorno as a theoretical tool to demythify sociohistorical phenomena and rob them of their power over consciousness and action (Buck-Morss 1997: 57). Similarly, in such works as Kiefer’s *Margarete* (1981) (figure 3) and Kentridge’s *Felix in exile* (1994) (figure 4) there is a dialectical play between history and nature with the aim of robbing myth of its power over the present. For

appearances, whose degree of self-consciousness — that is, the ability to tear the ‘veil of Maja’ once and for all, and to escape the doubling of Apollonian *Schein* — did not surpass the consciousness “which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it” (Benjamin 1998: 103).

history and nature are mutually determining, mutually corrective concepts, in each is a dynamic and static pole — transitoriness and myth¹³. The ‘sublation’ of the traditional antithesis of ‘nature’ and ‘history’ occurs in this moment of transitoriness. But to affirm transitoriness as the essential factor in both nature and history is ontology only in a negative, *antiontological* sense. It is in itself dialectical: for that which is transitory, the one-time, particular, material facticity, cannot be held onto, cannot be possessed. As Horkheimer (qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 94) wrote to Benjamin: “The injustice, the terror, the pains of the past [are] irreparable”. History is irreversible, a ‘one-way street’.¹⁴

For Benjamin, contra Horkheimer, the transitoriness of nature is the source of suffering but at the same time because its essence is change, it is the source of hope. Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng echo Benjamin’s hope that in remembering the past, corresponding between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol world of mythology, the oppressors of the past might be stopped from repeating their oppression in the future. For as Benjamin (1955: 1) writes:

The reflection that history is not just a science but also a form of memoration. What science has ‘established’, memoration can modify. Memoration can make the incompleteness (happiness) complete, and the complete (suffering) incomplete.

13. Adorno contends that whenever theory posits ‘nature’ or ‘history’ as an ontological first principle, the double character of the concepts is lost, and with it the potential for critical negativity. Either social conditions are affirmed as ‘natural’ without regard for their historical becoming, or the actual historical process is affirmed as essential and thereby the irrational material suffering of which history is composed is either dismissed as mere contingency or naturalized as essential. The result is the ideological justification of the present, given social order. Thus one must: “grasp historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, there where it is most historical, as itself natural being, or... to grasp nature there where it appears to harden most profoundly within itself, as historical being” (Adorno qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 55).

14. *One-way street* (*Einbahnstrasse*) is the name of Benjamin’s 1928 book of fragmentary recollections.

Through this hope, memory can be seen to alleviate the suffering of the past. The existence of past injustice and the continued memory of that injustice raises crucial questions for the South African debate of the rectification of injustices.

Adorno's aim is to destroy the mythical power wielded over the present, which is the source of a fatalistic and passive acceptance of the status quo. This demythifying process must relentlessly intensify the critical tension between thought and reality, instead of bringing them both to harmony. It is in the space generated by this process, the 'force-field'¹⁵, that Adorno places his hope for the future realization of freedom (Buck-Morss 1997: 49). Whilst recognizing that the contradictions of society cannot be banished by means of thought, Adorno emphasizes that contradiction cannot be banished within thought either. Thus neither concept nor reality is affirmed in itself, instead each is posited in critical reference to its other, each is affirmed only in its *nonidentity* to the other. This non-reconciliatory thinking or 'principle of nonidentity' is the foundation of his philosophy of 'negative dialectics'. The process of enlightenment would only be able to transcend and perfect itself within its own medium (the spirit controlling nature). The process of enlightening enlightenment about itself is only possible within the medium of conceptual thought, the necessary condition being that the concept itself is turned against the reifying tendency of conceptual thought. Thus Adorno (1990: 27) goes on to claim in *Negative dialectics* (1966), that *philosophy* strives "by means of the concept, to *transcend* the concept"¹⁶.

15. Adorno's term 'force-field' can be defined as: a "relational interplay of attractions and aversions that constitute the dynamic transmutational structure of a complex phenomenon" (Jay qtd. Bernstein 1991: 8). The task of comprehension requires doing justice to the delicate unstable balance of these attractions and aversions.

16. This notion is derived directly from Walter Benjamin's *The origin of German Tragic Drama* in which he argues against Heidegger that the history of philosophy is the renewal of recurring concepts, themes, questions and ideas — as opposed to inventing neologisms. Walter Benjamin (1998: 28) writes: "Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a round-about way to its original object" and "Ideas are displayed without intention [cf. 'Non-intentionality' p. 29], in the act of naming, and they have to be renewed in the philosophical contemplation. In this renewal the primordial mode of apprehending words is restored. And so, in the course of history, which has so often been as object of scorn, philosophy is — and rightly so — a struggle for the representation of a limited number

It can be argued that Walter Benjamin's ideas provided the foundation of negative dialectics, for as he (1998: 30) writes:

Again and again the statement that the object of knowledge is not identical with the truth will prove itself to be one of the profoundest intentions of philosophy in its original form¹⁷.

Whilst Benjamin recognises, in a similar vein to the poststructuralists and Foucault, that coherent attempts to appropriate the past presuppose a systematic view of history that will exclude details that do not fit into the dominating ideology of the day — he is also aware that the plea to forget nothing, in an attempt to counter this exclusion, turns into its opposite (Bronner 1994: 6). Thus, in his last written text “Thesis on the philosophy of history”, theology offers Benjamin (qtd. Bronner 1994: 6) the last desperate expression of human freedom under actual conditions which render hope impossible, as “only for the sake of the hopeless is hope given us”¹⁸. Liberation is transferred to the messianic realm,¹⁹ where redemption, which is simultaneous revolution and

of words which always remain the same — a struggle for the representation of ideas” (Benjamin 1989: 37). This is related to the argument that: “At the heart of the present, the most radically new experience thus simultaneously transports us to the very origin” (Moses 1993: 185). Benjamin sees philosophical and artistic representation qua renewal as a form of anamnesis — a recalling in memory of the primordial form of perception. He distinguishes ideas from visual anamnesis however: “Platonic anamnesis is, perhaps, not far removed from this kind of remembering; except that here it is not a question of the actualisation of images in visual terms, but rather, in philosophical contemplation, the idea is released from the heart of reality as the word, reclaiming its name-giving rights” (Benjamin 1998: 361). This preference of the word qua name over the image is of course related to the *Bilderverbot* — the ethical law against making likenesses – see p.54.

17. In this context, one can point to the South African debate around the politics of representation, recorded in Atkinson's & Breitz's *Grey areas* (1999), where the representation of a black woman or what appears to be a vagina is not the same as the object/subject depicted. Cf. in this context, Foucault's 1973 reading of the arbitrariness of the sign and the distinction he makes between resemblance and similtude in Magritte's *This is not a pipe*.

18. As Adorno (1978: 247) writes: “The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption”.

19. Benjamin's messianism is fostered especially by the Jewish Kabbalah, not only in his project of the future drawn from the past and the taboo against depicting the future. According to Gershom Scholem, Jewish messianism is mainly a theory of catastrophe which, within the duality of apocalyptic existence and of utopian hope, stresses the destructive and revolutionary aspect of redemption (Smith 1989: 152). There is no mediation between history and redemption; the element of progress or development leading into redemption is missing. Redemption is essentially unexpected, unless, in a reversed sense, it is sunk in the deepest catastrophe. Since the theory is not oriented to mere interiority, the possibility of messianic activism is nonetheless not lost, from lack of a mediation by the future, the

restitution in integrum, means liberation. He describes unredeemed history as a continuum of catastrophes, “a complete catastrophe which keeps on piling wreckage upon wreckage” and in it he calls the possibility of redemption *sparks* of hope in the *past*²⁰. Whilst Benjamin may regard every community of the bourgeois era as depraved and in a state of *rigor mortis*, he also considers everything to be provisional because of messianic hope which holds every existing thing in existential insecurity (Radnoti 1989: 152). This is because every element of the past becomes open to redemption on the messianic Day of Judgment. Indeed, for Benjamin every artwork enacts an analogy to the Last Judgement by criticizing its own appearance via the anti-aesthetic interruption brought forward by “a sublime counter-weight” (Menninghaus 1993: 170)²¹. Giving the apocalypse secular shape, enables Benjamin to reintroduce an emancipatory point of reference just as the possibility of instituting a genuinely classless society was becoming ever more remote (Bronner 1991: 134). A theological notion of *remembrance* contests the perversion of history by totalitarianism and becomes the only way to deal with that ‘single catastrophe’ on which one gulag after another “keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage”. Benjamin’s belief in the redemptive power of *Gedachtnis*, the reverential recollection of an object always prior to the remembering subject, is shared by Adorno (1978: 247), as seen in his conclusion to *Minima moralia*:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be

destructive, anarchistic element is predominant. Those are the birth-pangs which prepare for the Messiah (Smith 1989: 152).

20. Cf. Benjamin’s allegory of the *Angelus Novus* on p.35. South African artist Penny Siopis drew from this image in her allegorical painting, *Wreckage upon wreckage* (1989), which will be referred to in the section of Mofokeng p. 22 n43.

21. Cf. the expressionless ethical sublime according to Benjamin p. 36.

fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects — this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape. The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.

At a critical distance to history, standing on the threshold between the past, present and the possibility of a radically different future, is where Adorno as well as Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng place themselves. Adorno attempts to 'redeem' elements of the past, in the dialectical sense, as 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*)²², simultaneously 'preservation' and 'negation' (Buck-Morss 1997: 94). Dialectical, critical negation is utilized to articulate truth as untruth, applying consciousness 'against the grain of history' in order to demythify it and break its spell. He thereby attempts to rob the conventions of tradition of their mythic power, penetrating through their alien appearance and using those conventions as 'ciphers' of the truth that need to be interpreted (Buck-Morss 1997: 59).

Despite Adorno's exposure of the 'dark' side of the Enlightenment', he is still an heir to Enlightenment aspirations, for he self-consciously affirms the wildest utopian dreams of the Enlightenment — its *promesse de bonheur* and the end of all human suffering (Bernstein 1991: 42). Whilst the utopian hopes of the Enlightenment are hyperbolically affirmed, Adorno — in his

22. Adorno's use of this term is an example of his use of philosophy against itself — his immanent criticism of traditional concepts to begin the dismantling of tradition (Buck-Morss 1997: 94). Cf. pp. 15 n10; 21 n22; 46.

own mimesis²³ of redemption — holds up a vision of a non-antagonistic, non-hierarchical, non-violent, and non-repressive society (Bernstein 1991: 43). But Adorno affirms this promise negatively — as he says, it is a promise that is constantly being broken, or as Derrida suggests, is constantly deferred or delayed. The impossibility of bringing about such a change, making ‘present’ what inherently ‘lies beyond’, complements the ethical need to confront the encompassing reality of repression²⁴. It is argued that not simply an identification with suffering but guilt at the inability to eradicate its pervasiveness is what has produced the commitment to negative dialectics (Bronner 1984: 182) — which is also evidenced in the ‘historic belatedness’ of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng and their commitment to remembrance, commemoration and witnessing through their art. So these artists, as with Adorno, can be seen to never surrender to the concept of freedom from the dominating, mythifying forces of history, but retain a moment of hope for the hopeless. Adorno holds to the belief in the possibility of achieving utopia — or rather because utopia only exists in consciousness as a memory, in the value of such a belief, whether it be plausible or not (Jay 1984: 20). This is tied to Benjamin’s notion of the primordial form of perception where remembrance of the primordial past or origin as a remembrance of the future keeps alive the Utopian hopes and critical energies of previous generations²⁵ — that works against the re-appearance or the fateful repetition of the ‘ever-same’ in the guise of the new (Jay 1984: 104).

23. Happiness for Adorno is not a pale public *eudaemonia* or private well-being but an aestheticized, unrepressed sensuous gratification and ease, found in mimesis. Adorno’s notion of mimesis is negative, linked to the *Bilderverbot*, nonidentity and Walter Benjamin’s notion of anamnesis as linguistical, verbal, sonorous and non-representational as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. In this context, the work of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng evidence a negative notion of mimesis — that although constantly deferring the promise they know they cannot fulfill, they nevertheless continue to strive to. Cf. this notion of Lyotardian im-possibility pp. 58-61.

24. Cf. Lyotard’s im-possibility and the responsibility to bear witness p. 58.

25. The want to keep this transgenerational critical memory alive can be seen through the archival impulse of both Boltanski’s and Mofokeng’s work.

In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it (Benjamin 1992: 257).

This conception of utopia rests upon a ‘compact with failure’, a *telos* without teleology — it is really an illusion, a myth, and thus the inversion of what the Enlightenment sought to dispel (Bronner 1991: 189). Benjamin calls this sense of hope in the face of the failure to change the past, a ‘*weak* messianic power’.

TWO

The dialectic of art and society

Adorno derives his concept of truth through the immanent critique of the inherently identificatory character of all conceptual thought — what he calls ‘identity-thinking’. It is out of this critique of identity-thinking that Adorno’s basic conception of aesthetic experience, as the experience of the non-identical²⁶ arises (Osborne 1992: 27). Only in a world in which the structural opposition of objectivity to the needs and desires of the subject has been overcome — a reconciled society — will the idea of truth be realised. In the meantime, the possibilities for

26. Adorno argues that since one cannot think without identifying, the cognitive ideal of identity is inherently in the very form of thought. The splitting of objectivity in to the dichotomy of subject and object out of which the possibility of thought arises, creates an irreducible gap between subject and object that thought can never overcome alone. The critique of thought’s inherent claim to identity with its objects (‘identity-thinking’) is a task to be endlessly reiterated, since it acquires critical force only in relation to an ideal to which it must always aspire but which it can never meet. For Adorno, though, such a critique is two-sided: it is not only a critique of the untruth of conceptual thought, it is also a critique of objectivity in so far as it remains irreconcilable to thought — a critique of the irreconcilability of objectivity to the needs and desires from which the identificatory impulse of thought springs (Osborne 1997: 28). So “living in the rebuke that the thing is not identical with the concept is the concepts longing to become identical with the thing” (Adorno 1990: 149).

metaphysical experience, for the apprehension of truth, are restricted to those modes of experience which first register such a situation and second, consequently, anticipate a state of reconciliation: the reflective experience of ‘non-identical thinking’ (negative dialectics), and ‘authentic’ or philosophically reflective aesthetic experience (Osborne 1992: 29). Of the two, Adorno takes the latter as the more metaphysically substantive.

‘Non-identity thinking’ resists the compulsion to identification inherent in all conceptual thought by continual self-reflection upon the inadequacy of such thought. It can thus be seen to approach truth only *negatively*. Adorno views aesthetic experience as resisting identification through withdrawal — withdrawal from practical interests and thus from cognitive judgement (Osborne 1992: 30)²⁷. Through their autonomy, Adorno believes that artworks have properties which enable them to become crystallization points for a concrete space and a concrete time, which is simultaneously charged with meaning and with sensual force (Wellmer 1991: 96). Adorno focuses on illusion in art — art is illusion, mere appearance, the self-conscious presentation of an illusionary reality. But this illusion “is given to it by what is not illusion: the process of its production” (Adorno qtd. Osborne 1992: 30) and as such, art can become a possible medium for the expression of truth:

(The) mimetic language of artworks should most directly express what is, in the terms of a reified reality, the illusion of freedom. Illusion projects emancipation. Its truth content (*Wahrheitsinhalt*) subsequently provides illusion with an element of truth (Adorno qtd. Bronner 1994: 184).

27. The reason for this is that the non-identitarian character of aesthetic experience derives not from the subject, but from the specific character of its object: the Kantian autonomous work of art. The rise of industrial production influenced the rise of autonomous art: both are due to a process of cultural modernization which has led to the ‘disenchantment’ of the world, to the rise of the bourgeois class and the establishment of the capitalist mode of production (Wellmer 1991:95). By detaching itself from religious and cultic purposes, art becomes autonomous, and at the same time, potencies which have lost their religious significance become invested in art itself. As autonomous ‘products’ they have a significance, a life and a meaning of their own, beyond their immediate utility value.

Because art is governed not by the logic of identity, but by that of affinity, by the reflective intuition of the unity of the ‘one and the many’, Adorno sees it as the form of experience closest to the utopian idea of metaphysical experience, of reconciliation (Osborne 1992: 29). Furthermore, through its promise of non-illusion, its *promise de bonheur*, art is able to act as a criticism of the existing state of affairs. For Adorno, the experience of art, although privatized, is nonetheless the best bulwark against the absolute domination of the administered world (Jay 1984: 158). In *Aesthetic theory* (1969) he emphasizes the process-like temporal character of such experiences, which are based both on memory and anticipation rather than the repetition of the ‘ever-same’ generated by the culture industry.

i) Mimesis as an entree to the other

It is through mimesis that artworks become a possible site for the “experience of the non-identical” (Adorno qtd. Osborne 1992: 31). Adorno (1984: 80) defines mimesis as ‘the non-conceptual affinity of a subjective creation with its objective and unposited other’, where ‘mimetic moments’ are the movements which transcend the subject, in which principles of identification and self-assertion lose their significance, while the nonidentical, unintelligible and mysterious aspects of the world and the other come into view (Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 267). Benjamin's interpretation of Freud shows how in the process of perception, only those stimuli that consciousness does not vigilantly register will sink into the unconsciousness to lay memory traces there — and these traces, once revived, are at the root of the mimetic experience (Eagleton 1981: 35).

Adorno contends that the precondition of a mimetic movement toward the world is the otherwise irreducible separation from the world bound to language and consciousness. He draws the concept for these ‘experiences’ from Benjamin’s notion of a ‘mimetic faculty’ as the sensuous, onomatopoeic source of language. Benjamin’s adherence to the Kaballist tradition lends him a theory of language that posits an originary foundation, a blissful former unity unscathed by interpretation (Caputi 2000). This Kaballist notion argues that the unity contained in Adamic language empowered language with naming prior to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Words that merely communicate thoughts are due to this falling away from a prelapsarian state of mimetic unity between word and thing. As Benjamin (qtd. Caputi 2000) writes :

Language... only expresses itself purely when it speaks in name — that is, in its universal naming. So in name²⁸ culminate both the intensive totality of language, as the absolutely communicable mental entity, and the extensive totality of language, as the universal (naming) entity... Within all linguistical formation a conflict is waged between what is expressed and what is inexpressible and unexpressed.

In this context, Adorno argues that pain, negativity, and the ability to wish refer to the unovercomeable lack that is given in language. Human needs and wishes have been split up²⁹ and scattered over many different linguistic signs so that gratification becomes impossible. Deep within these conditions of language and consciousness is the origin of the longing for reconciliation articulated in religion, art, and utopia. But until a redeemed mankind re-enters a state of grace in which words are once again similar to the things they name, *memory* will have to struggle to rescue the remnants of the original mimesis or that experienced in early

28. Cf. the issue of the name according to Derrida contra Benjamin p. 81 and in the context of Kiefer’s *Heavenly palaces: Merkabah* p. 100, Boltanski’s *The missing house* p. 131 and Mofokeng’s *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1950* p. 217.

29. Cf. Julia Kristeva’s notion of the sorrow of the floating signifier pp. 238-239.

childhood³⁰, while at the same time resisting the illusion of its current possibility (Jay 1984: 76). The mimetic experience implies the recognition of mediation between worlds and people, opening up an entree to the world and to Others (Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 267). It fulfills the preconditions of understanding, so allowing for a partial overcoming of the subject-object split. Through mimesis the world is ‘translated’ into images, put at one’s disposal in the form of memory and ideas. For Adorno, art is mimetic in that it plays its metaphysical role by expressing in the form of a ‘trace’ that material unity of subjectivity with nature (objectivity) that is denied by the opposition of subject and object in conceptual thought³¹, and which exists and is reproduced only through *practice*.

ii) Immanent criticism in aesthetic practice

It is through the idea of a work of art as an enigma that Adorno develops his account of the significance of the ultimate irreconcilability of mimesis and rationality for art’s critical function. Art is enigmatic in the sense of riddles or puzzles which have no explicit solution but nonetheless contain potential solutions, and thereby instigate an endless search (Osborne 1992: 32). Thus the complete or final interpretation of a work is impossible and because of the ultimate irreconcilability of its basic moments, no work of art can be completely successful. For while classical art portrayed a harmonious totality, using nature symbolically for the ahistorical representation of the ideal, its ‘beautiful illusion’ (*schöner Schein*) covered up the antagonisms

30. Cf. Boltanski on childhood p. 103 and Kentridge’s nostalgia for childhood experiences p. 147 n14.

31. It is this non-conceptual character that is crucial to art’s metaphysical role as a “spokesperson for the repressed nature” (Adorno qtd. Osborne 1992: 31) — that art expresses not only the suffering of man caused by social injustice but also that of the nature they have so harshly dominated. This is evident in the intrinsically utopian ‘mimetic moment’ which preserves a memory of man’s prehistoric oneness with nature and is thus a prefiguration of a possible restoration of that condition in the future (Jay 1984:156).

and contradictions of reality (Buck-Morss 1997: 56). But this classical ideal of organic unity or the harmony of the elements of a work is unattainable, and, at the very least, 'untruthful'. In this sense, artworks always fail as "Art cannot live up to its concept" (Adorno qtd. Osborne 1992: 33). This 'failure' however is not, according to Adorno, a deficiency — rather it is only because of it that art is able to function as a medium of truth. It is through the dialectic of reconciliation and irreconcilability, that is generated within every work by the ultimate irreconcilability of its mimetic and rational moments, that the configuration of these two moments within the work produces an image of truth (Osborne 1992: 32). In a work of art, the mimetic moment dialectically interpenetrates, without ultimately being reconciled with, the rational, constructive moment — in such a way that it is expressed through it, while through its difference from it, acts as an immanent criticism of it. In addition, the constitutive failure of the work to achieve organic unity produces an interpretative indeterminacy that sets the work free from the determining intentions of its producer — 'non-intentionality'. It thereby produces an autonomy as an apparently self-determining object. It is as 'images of reconciliation' in the sense of being free objects that artworks are irreconcilable to and critical of the lack of freedom in society.

The relative success or failure of individual works depends on the precise way in which the irreconcilability of their mimetic and rational moments is expressed through the formal properties of the work. Therefore works of art "must not erase the fractures left by the process of integration, preserving instead in the aesthetic whole the 'traces' of those elements which resist integration," for, "a work of art is as much a sum total of relations of tension as it is an attempt to resolve them" (Adorno qtd. Osborne 1992: 34). Art transcends the antagonisms between the elements not by 'resolving' them, but by mediating them through their technical articulation: art must "hold fast to the idea of reconciliation in an antagonistic world", while "firmly rejecting the

appearance of reconciliation”. What remains is not some ‘beautiful illusion’ that can be referred back to something else but the possibility of making visible an absence — something that does not yet exist, that refers to something that might sometime be: “The being-in-itself art is not an imitation of something real but an anticipation of a being-in-itself yet to come” (Adorno qtd. Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 290). This injunction to remember for the future to come is seen, for example, in Boltanski and Mofokeng’s archival impulse. In this archaic character of mimesis, artworks can be seen to refer to Utopia³².

Thus Adorno sees what he terms ‘de-aestheticized’ or ‘true’ art, as art that self-consciously exposes its illusory claim to wholeness and self-sufficiency as more capable of negating reality than that which maintains the pretense (Jay 1984:54). The artwork, whose moments or elements exist in constant struggle with one another, becomes for Adorno the most obvious way of contesting the given petrified arrangement of reality (Osborne 1992: 35). This self-criticism is key to Adorno’s philosophy of negative dialectics and aesthetic theory — in their immanently critical ‘doubt’, Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng produce works which work against the pretense of wholeness. For every genuine artwork “exposes something which is lacking” and thus makes the individuated person aware of a repressed subjectivity and becomes “a medium for the unconscious history writing of society” (Adorno qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 79). Opposing ‘beauty’ and myth, Adorno (qtd. Wellmer 1991: 11) writes:

32. Since art is the sphere of seeming reconciliation, it is by definition the Other, the negation of an unreconciled reality (Wellmer 1991: 9). Art can thus only be true in the sense of being faithful to reality to the extent that it shows reality *as* unreconciled, antagonistic, divided against itself. But it can only do this by showing reality in the light of reconciliation, i.e. by the non-violent aesthetic synthesis of disparate elements which produces the illusion of reconciliation. The “light of redemption” which, according to Adorno, should be cast upon reality through the medium of art, is not only of this world — it issues from a world that lies beyond space, time, causality and individuation (Wellmer 1991: 12). At the same time though, Adorno cleaves to a sensualist concept of happiness as the epitome of sensual fulfilment. As with Benjamin, the theological motif interacts with the sensualist one to produce a utopian perspective in which the hope of redemption is nourished by the yearning for a lost paradise, the return to the origin which Benjamin (qtd. Moses 1991: 181) calls “the unfinished restoration of revelation”, which is simultaneously primordial and radically new.

It has taken upon itself all the darkness and guilt of the world. All its delight is derived from the recognition of misery; in all its beauty from the renunciation of the semblance of beauty.

Thus art does not progress for Adorno, it ‘pulsates’ (Bronner 1994: 192)³³. Adorno contends that bourgeois art and philosophy are not simply ideology and should be interpreted as more than false consciousness; that the truth content of bourgeois thought lies in the opposite direction — in the ‘breaks’ (*Bruche*) in its logic, the gaps of its systematic unity, a notion which is furthered by poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida. The fractures, ambiguities, contradictions are the philosophical details upon which Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng focus their interpretative efforts. For in the gaps and ruptures of history which the demythifying consciousness articulates and intensifies, lies the hope of a historical progress that will be no mere myth (Buck-Morss 1997: 56).

iii) Walter Benjamin’s and Jacques Derrida’s conceptions of allegory

For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably (Benjamin 1992: 247).

In the context of the immanent criticism of the artwork, Adorno draws from Walter Benjamin’s exploration of allegorical intention in *The origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). For artworks, no less than philosophy, forward a truth in need of judgment but where the evaluation is never final and judgments or verdicts remain open to renewal. Both Adorno and Benjamin hold that past works are mediated through time in which their meaning threatens to disappear: “indeed, the

33. Thus this can be seen to relate to Lacan’s idea of the unconscious as ‘pulsating’: “I have constantly stressed the pulsating function, as it were, of the unconscious” (Lacan qtd Bois & Krauss 1997: 161).

truth character of the work is bound precisely to its decay” (Adorno qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 51). The past is approached as a set of ‘ruins’ in need of restoration and the present as more than that which initially meets the eye (Bronner 1991: 133). These ruins harbor an untapped content — as explored, for example, in the architecture of Kiefer’s *Shulamith* (figure 8), Boltanski’s faces as ruins (figure 22), Kentridge’s mining detritus (figure 24) and Mofokeng’s gravestones.

In his study of seventeenth-century allegorical drama, Benjamin (qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 56) brings nature and history “out of infinite distance and into infinite proximity”, making them “the object of philosophical interpretation”. The ‘truth’ discovered in this literary form, one which Benjamin feels has been lost in the history of its interpretation, is that allegory is not an arbitrary representation of the idea which it portrayed but is instead the concrete expression of that idea’s material foundation. Specifically Benjamin demonstrates that allegory is the “mundane exposition of history as the history of world suffering” expressed concretely in the form of ruins, concretely, as the decay and suffering of ‘first nature’. Allegory as a continual substitution of disparate particulars is possible precisely because “things and occurrences do not meaninglessly stand next to one another, but rather refer to one another” (Benjamin qtd. Bronner 1994: 133) — a notion that the poststructuralist Jacques Derrida develops. The allegorist’s contemplative mode is seen to be dialectically opposed to the ‘beautiful illusion’ of classicism, instead “the false appearance of totality withers away” (Benjamin qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 56). For the figure of allegory is reflexive — its ‘wound’³⁴ shows that there is a gap within the sign which cannot be concealed by a supposedly ‘organic’ rhetoric (Geyer-Ryan 1994: 109). In its place is a critical representation of concrete history as “unfreedom, the imperfection and brokenness of the sensual”, or as Adorno (qtd. Wellmer 1991:11) insists, “the darkness and guilt of the world”. The

34. Cf. the ‘wound’ in Beuys p. 65 and in relation to melancholia and commemoration pp. 232-233.

allegorical mode of portraying truth is meaningful only in times of historical decay hence its greater relevance for the ‘present’ (Buck-Morss 1997: 58) — both for Kiefer and Boltanski in post-war Europe, as well as Kentridge and Mofokeng in post-apartheid South Africa.

With allegory, the ‘essence’, rather than lurking behind the object as its repressed secret, is dragged into the open, causing a ‘shock’. These revived memory traces come from the unconscious. Freud’s theory of memory traces is seen to allow Benjamin in *Trauerspiel* to subordinate ‘experience’ to the *écriture* of emblem — for now writing has rudely invaded the inmost sanctum of experience itself, exposing itself as nothing other than a set of inscriptions³⁵. A lack of stable meanings and the profusion of possibilities assigns philosophy the task of rediscovering some hidden vestige of Adamic language, burdening philosophy with the quest of recognizing the traces of former bliss in the signifying chaos of the diversified world (Caputi 2000)³⁶. Thus the allegorist is melancholic, for as Benjamin (qtd. Caputi 2000) writes:

In the language of men [things] are overnamed... [This is] the deepest linguistic reason for all melancholy....
[O]vernaming as the linguistical being of melancholy points to [a] curious relation to language³⁷.

Showing the influence of Benjamin’s work, Adorno (qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 76) states that “only in traces and ruins” is there “hope of ever coming across genuine and just reality”. Hope for the

35. For Walter Benjamin writing and experience can never coincide. In the first case, writing and experience inhabit two quite separate systems: what is lived cannot be traced and what is traced cannot be lived. In the second case, experience is divided by the ‘trace’ between consciousness and the unconscious: the moment when the stimulus implants itself in the consciousness is disjunct from the moment when it comes to fruition in the unconscious (Eagleton 1981: 35).

36. Cf. Benjamin’s ideas of philosophy as the renewal of reoccurring themes, concepts, questions and ideas p. 19 n16.

37. Benjamin perceives in the expression of mourning a deep yet withheld connection to the One whose absence it laments — for the measure of one’s sorrow is the measure of a former intimacy. Thus his interest in ruins and decay, for the sadness of the squalor unveils a relationship to Adamic bliss, a life never severed from God (Caputi 2000). Cf. Kristeva’s ideas on the sorrow of the floating signifier pp. 238-239.

future is grounded in those nonidentical ‘traces’³⁸ of utopia — those small details which slip out of the conceptual net — experienced within the present. The trace is in one sense petrified physical residue or, in the case of Benjamin’s Freudian theory of remembrance, the unconscious track — indicating those elements of the productive process which, in still clinging to an object, help to defetishize it (Eagleton 1981: 32). The trace is also what marks an object’s historicity, the scars it has accumulated at the hands of its users, the visible imprint of its variable functions. The traces inscribed on an object’s body are the web³⁹ that undoes its self-identity, the mesh of consumptional modes in which has been variously caught — as evidenced in the process of facture in Kiefer’s paintings and Kentridge’s drawings as well as the ‘photographic portraits’ of Boltanski and Mofokeng⁴⁰.

For both Benjamin and Adorno mimetic experience is tied to recollection. Whilst for Adorno, the mediation of differences must be in the exclusively conceptual medium, Benjamin argues that the subject is formed by dealing with objects, spaces and sounds (Geyer-Ryan 1994:121) — for there

38. Aby Warburg’s conceives of the trace as that which is left by events and energy that affects living matter — as a form of preserving and transmitting energy, or an ‘engram’ (Gombrich 1986: 242-243). The potential mnemonic energy conserved in this engram may be reactivated and discharged according to certain stimuli, or when one ‘remembers’. According to Warburg, mnemonic energies derived from intense basic experiences of primitive humans, are seen to be preserved in the symbol, which corresponds to an engram. As Warburg (qtd. Gombrich 1986: 267) states: “The task of social memory shows itself here clearly as the ‘mnemonic function’ preserving, by means of ever-renewed contact with the monuments of the past, the rising sap from the subsoil of the past into the classicizing forms, and thus preventing a form instinct with dynamism from becoming an empty flourish.” If the symbol is disconnected from its original dynamic force and is emptied of contact, Warburg believes it becomes a menace, ‘empty rhetoric’ (Gombrich 1993: 251). Warburg views symbols as charged with the energy of primitive forms of existence and are surrounded by the awe of the myth-making mentality. Essentially though, because to him tradition is neutral, he does not recognize that it, as well as its myths and symbols should be challenged — thus the privileging of allegory for Benjamin, Derrida and these artists. Moreover, Warburg privileges the classical or Apollonian symbolic art over the Baroque-type Dionysian allegorical art, which he considers degenerate. This marks a significant difference between his philosophy of the history of art and Walter Benjamin’s.

39. Cf. the ‘web’ in Pollock’s work p. 17 n49 and the ‘web’ of wire in Boltanski’s *Monument* series p. 128.

40. The erasure, preservation or revival of traces in these artist’s works is then a political practice that depends on the nature of the traces and contexts in question: the object may need to be treated as a palimpsest, its existent traces expunged by an overwriting, or it may secrete blurred traces that can be productively retrieved. What is at issue is not just a rubbing or inscribing of surfaces but a recognition that all objects are archeologically written in their deepest being, internally constituted by the changing script of their social relations, which never adds up to a fully coherent text (Eagleton 1981: 33). Cf. these artist’s archeologism in the context of melancholia and commemoration pp. 237-235

is no remembrance of things, but rather through things⁴¹. Allegory presents both the possibility of giving and transforming the meanings of things. The very arbitrariness of the relations between signifier and signified in allegorical thought encourages “the exploitation of ever remoter characteristics of the representative objects as symbols” (Benjamin qtd. Eagleton 1981: 20). The immanent meaning that ebbs from the object under the transfixing gaze of melancholy, leaves it a pure signifier: a ‘ruin’, ‘trace’ or fragment surrendered unconditionally into the allegorist’s power (Eagleton 1981: 20). Allegorizing the image of Paul Klee’s *Angelus novus*, Benjamin (1992: 258) writes that it:

Shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating... His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

The mortified landscape of history which Kiefer (figure 5), Kentridge (figure 4) and Mofokeng (figure 2) depict and explore in their work, for Benjamin is redeemed not by being recuperated into spirit but by being raised to the second power — converted into a formal repertoire, fashioned into certain petrified enigmatic emblems which then hold the promise of knowledge and possession (Eagleton 1981: 20).

Benjamin describes allegorical discourse as having the doubleness of the death’s head: “total expressionlessness — the black of the eye sockets — coupled to the most unbridled expression

41. Cf. the melancholic’s belief in things instead of people p. 235.

— the grinning rows of teeth” (Benjamin qtd. Eagleton 1981: 20). This ‘expressionless’⁴² (*das Ausdruckslose*) is akin to the category of the sublime contra beauty, such as Grunewald’s *Isenheim altarpiece* (1515) (figure 6) — an image of petrification that paradoxically pre-figures the ethical sublime transcendence of fallenness. This expressionless moral sublime causes an interruption or shock of mythic appearance or ‘beautiful illusion’, as Boltanski explores in his installation sites such as *The missing house* (1990) (figure 7) and Kiefer suggests in the monumental emptiness of *Shulamith* (1983) (figure 8). The experience of the vertiginous depth or emptiness is found in both the allegory and the sublime — for fear is the glimpse into the abyss when meaning flows out of phenomena (Geyer-Ryan 1994:117). What is experienced is the reference to something lacking, to “a poverty of experience” and to an unsurpassable emptiness — as Kentridge writes “Her absence filled the world” (figure 10). Thus paradoxically it creates, for Benjamin, an ‘horizon’ wherein transcendence becomes possible (Bronner 1994: 133). In this context, Jacques Derrida (1978: 92-93) writes that metaphysical transcendence is desire — the desire that permits itself to be appealed to by the absolutely irreducible exteriority of the other but to which, he argues, one must remain faithfully inadequate. This is because for Derrida, one never quite achieves a genuine *Aufhebung*, a reconciliation of oppositions and differences — it is always *deferred*, or delayed (Bernstein 1991: 179).

This issue of transcendence is the fundamental difference between Benjamin and the poststructuralists, even though Derrida sees writing and reading as mimetic too. In their study on

42. Benjamin’s concept of the ‘expressionless’ invests the lack indicated therein with a meaning — the purposeless, disinterested, unconceptualizable character of the beautiful in Kant and the imagelessness of God (Menninghaus 1993: 166), which comes from the Jewish prohibition of the image. This imagelessness is reformulated not only as a commandment of passive respect before divinity but also as the active production of imageless as the action of breaking with aesthetic phenomenon. Thus every work of art must stage a conflict between “the beautiful semblance and its mortification, so that the life surging within it... becomes motionless, as if in an instant, appear[s] petrified” (Benjamin qtd. Menninghaus 1993: 167). Cf. Adorno’s interpretation of the Mosaic prohibition pp. 53-57.

mimesis, Gebauer & Wulf (1995:302) define Derrida's ambiguous conception of mimesis as being, on the one hand, deformation, descent, eclipse but at the same time, uneven assimilation, dissimilar similarity. On the other hand, what is crucial is that it generates desire and thus aims at assimilation and doubling. This sense of 'doubling' is what links Derrida to Benjamin's idea of the death's head, because in allegory meaning is irreducibly multiple. In this circulation of signifiers, any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. Derrida sees mimesis as simultaneously preserving and prefiguring (to show, to exhibit, to indicate, to say by pointing, to silently name) — cancelling the original by copying, erasing it by repetition, while maintaining a 'trace' of the original. Thus this metamorphosis is not total, but through the trace, observes a silence which allows the past to speak: "The silences in allegory mean as much as the filled-in spaces, because by bridging the silent gaps between oddly unrelated images we reach the sunken understructure of thought" (Fletcher's qtd. Eagleton 1981: 24). This is the sublime ethical and conscious silence that follows decision-determining knowledge, not the tragic silence which is unconscious, mythic, fateful. As Derrida (1983: 59) writes:

A discourse would once again compel me to reckon with the present state of force and law. It would draw up contracts, dialecticize itself, let itself be reappropriated again.

The silence calls out unconditionally: it keeps watch on that which is not, and on the chance of one day still honouring the promise to recall⁴³.

Thus for Derrida, there is no first writing and no first reading; every beginning is actually a doubling (Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 294) — in every act of representation there is already given a reference to something past, which is a crucial philosophical theme in the work of Kiefer,

43. Derrida (1978: 67) argues that God separated himself from himself in order to let humans speak — he did so not by speaking but by keeping still and letting silence and signs *interrupt* his voice (letting the Tablets speak). This is the ethical silence of allegory. Cf. This notion in the Lurianic Kabbalah p. 53 n5.

Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng. Kristeva describes this as the emptiness of the abject — the position in which neither object nor subject exist but rather the pure moment of splitting⁴⁴, the very creating of positionality itself (Geyer-Ryan 1994: 121). Whilst objects in allegorical spectacles are always strictly coded, images, far from being hierarchically ranked, are piled in a seemingly haphazard way one on the other with no ‘totalizing’ aim in mind. With the poststructuralist understanding of allegory, lost are certainty, truth and the claim to revelation that Benjamin suggests — what exists instead is a play of signs, analogy, chains of images, the compositional principles of which conceal themselves in the invisible. In his *Mimesis des articulations* (1975) Derrida writes how the ‘between’ of mimesis encompasses its own time, its own form of representation, which is neither real nor imaginary. The central concepts of Derrida’s thought, (‘pharmakon’, ‘hymen’⁴⁵, ‘between’, ‘threshold’, ‘trace’) suggest how only a mimetic approach brings to expression their specific character of gliding, of ambiguity — of the indeterminacy that characterizes Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng’s work (Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 303). Difference, too, based on distinctions, delimitations and new combinations, can be defined in reference to mimetic processes. This component of difference⁴⁶ distinguishes mimesis from processes of mere imitation and reproduction. Texts and the signs that constitute them come into a mimetic relation and refer to one another; sign worlds and simulacra come into being, with no longer any fixed point from which to judge them. What results for Derrida, is a play of absence and presence — it takes shape in metaphors, allegories, signs, and images

44. Cf. splitting in Kentridge pp. 152-153 and self-estrangement in the archive p. 211.

45. Cf. the threshold as the hymen in Derrida versus Luce Irigaray’s notion of ‘two-lips’ in Whitford 1991: 173-175.

46. Frederic Jameson’s characterization of the aesthetic of postmodernism as an aesthetic of the ‘allegorical’ is reminiscent of the aesthetic of Adorno and Benjamin, and beyond them, Derrida. As Jameson (qtd. Wellmer 1991: 39) states: “an explicit repudiation of the aesthetic of the ‘symbol’, with its organic unity seeks a designation for a form able to hold radical discontinuities and incommensurabilities together without annulling precisely those ‘differences’”. Jameson sees the postmodernist repudiation of the violence of a ‘totalizing’ reason as the opportunity for a new, dialogic, postmodern concept of totality. In Adorno’s terms, Jameson has in mind the ‘non-violent unity of the many’, he himself speaks of a ‘relationship by way of differences’.

(Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 306). Thus mimesis resembles truth insofar as truth never resembles itself, can never resemble itself, and never ceases retreating and donning masks.

THREE

Critical Theory and the French Poststructuralists

From Marx through to Adorno, the idea of reconciliation remains an utopian counter-image to the reification, fragmentation and alienation of modern society, firmly tied to identitary reason, as much through negation as through its anticipation of a perfection of ‘meaning’. Thus the utopian counter-forces to modern ‘rationalism’ remain dependent upon the rationalist myth of modernity. The modernist critique is redirected in postmodernism towards exposing that as much as modernism knows its own parameters, it can only expand the interior space of modernity, not surpass it. It is the very attempt of radical surpassing — utopianism — that postmodernists, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard, have since called into question. Perhaps postmodernism is not a radical rupture at all but rather a *postmetaphysical* modernism (Wellmer 1991: vii).

The poststructuralists take a step beyond Adorno’s negative reversal: the problem they perceive is not that reason has ‘turned into’ domination but that all discourses are always already implicated in power (Poster 1989: 22). Thus it is not that an absolute ground has been swept out from under one’s feet by certain historical events but that *such grounds* are the source of the theoretical problem in the first place. While Adorno historicizes the critique of Enlightenment

reason, the poststructuralists treat it at the levels of epistemology and language.

The (phal-)logocentric philosophical tradition, with its strong assertions about truth, is for them complicit in the disasters and abominations of twentieth-century Western history. Animated by a rereading of Nietzsche, especially by his critique of truth and its association with power, they learn that truth is not a transcendent unity (Poster 1989: 15). Indeed, there are no more fitting testimonies to the Nietzschean critique of reason than the technical rationality in the organization of Auschwitz and the system of apartheid, and the scientific creativity that made Hiroshima feasible.

While the theorist's situation may contain many dangers, Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard argue that the quest for certain truth and the claim of having attained it are the greater dangers. On this difficult, tragic issue of the relation of politics to truth, the poststructuralists in general strive for a cosmopolitan position that makes every effort to recognize differences, even uncomfortable or disagreeable ones, and for a theory of truth that is wary of patriarchal and ethnocentric tendencies that hide behind a defense of reason as certain, closed, totalized (Poster 1989: 16). The tendency in poststructuralism is therefore to regard truth as a multiplicity, to exult (as has been discussed in the context of Derrida and allegory) in the play of diverse meanings, in the continual process of reinterpretation, in the contention of opposing claims. Text replaces mind as the locus of enunciation and difference replaces identity as the strategy of reading (Poster 1989: 22).

Foucault views history as a form of both power and knowledge, where claims to know the truth about the past are merely a mask for a will to domination (Harootunian 1988: 113). As with

Adorno, Foucault views the desire to know the past as driven by a will to domesticate and control it in order to validate the present. The past is the locus of genuine difference that is distilled into a linear narrative that attests to the current regime of identity and sameness (Harootunian 1988: 114) . At the heart of this history, identity presides to ensure that a single culture has enabled a specific group of individuals to form a collective ‘we’⁴⁷ . Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng explore this will to power, where ‘history as a blinding to the Other’ (Levinas qtd. Harootunian: 113) is the narrative that is exclusionary of certain objects while privileging others and smooths out heterogenous elements in order to secure homogeneity⁴⁸ . In novel ways this again shows us the truth of Benjamin’s (1992: 256) claim, “There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism”.

According to Lyotard, ‘little narratives’ resist incorporation into totalizing histories of cultural representation because of the way in which the *event of performance* (not simply the act of telling but the implicit pragmatics of narrative transmission) functions as a *figure*⁴⁹ , so as to displace the scientific claims of narrative theory. In addition, through Freud’s psychoanalytic

47. Similar to Derrida’s conception of the theorist as exile p. 48, Kiefer chooses like Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng, to create ‘spaces’ of undecidability to problematize the collective ‘we’ and permit radically contradictory readings about morally charged subjects (Biro 2000: 4-5). In the need for ‘we’ — the face-to-face encounter and the possibility of empathy and agreement that it promises — lies the fundamental human need to move beyond individual existence into a shared sense of community. ‘Undecidability’ is one response to the contradictory nature of ‘we’ — its necessity as well as its inherent dangerousness, which is created by the modern problem of normativity.

48. Georges Bataille defines ‘heterology’ as the opposite to ‘homogeneity’. The latter is the principle of the given social order, the subsumption of the non-identical — where the theorist using ‘homological’ appropriation presupposes a standard or normative measure (Bois 1997: 52- 57) . ‘Heterology’, preferred by both Georges Bataille and Derrida, is the “science of what is entirely other” (Georges Bataille qtd. Bois 1997: 52), where the formless matter that heterogeneity claims for itself, resembles and is comparable to nothing, especially not what it ‘should’ be, refusing to let itself be assimilated to any concept whatever, to any abstraction whatever. It is in this approach to the ‘other’ that Levinas and Derrida differ essentially (Cf. Levinas’s metaphysical Other). For Bataille, one can think of God only on the same level as shit — they are both wholly other.

49. For Lyotard, ‘narrative’ is not a *concept* that allows us to unlock the meaning of culture — it is rather the rhetorical figure that opens culture as a site of transformation and dispute.

critique of the subject, Lyotard recognizes that reason does not have the power to forget, for what is repressed will return in different forms. What seems most crucial for Lyotard (qtd. Seidler 1998: 107) is an obligation to remember what the West is so ready to forget: “The Forgotten is not to be remembered for what it has been and what it is, because it has not been anything and is nothing, but must be remembered as something that never ceased to be forgotten”⁵⁰. For denial is a form of ‘forgetting’ not simply on the part of individuals but also in terms of collective memories (Seidler 1998: 120). It is not simply a matter of identifying the ‘guilty’ parties, allowing them to carry the blame for others, but involves a deeper remembering of what has been so easily ‘forgotten’ in the grand narrative of history — a remembrance that imbues Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng’s work with melancholy. He insists that Europe has to remember what it does not want to recognize – that after Auschwitz there is a call for a different kind of philosophy and social theory (just as in South Africa after apartheid) – one which does not forget so easily. As Lyotard (qtd. Seidler 107) writes:

This slaughter pretends to be without memory, without trace, and through this testifies again to what it slaughters: that there is the unthinkable time lost yet always there, a revelation that never reveals itself but remains there, a misery; and that this misfortune, this soul, is the very motive of thought.

Derrida aims to *resist* the unrelenting tendency of the will to knowledge and truth. He shows that ‘reason’ — when unmasked — always seeks to appropriate, contain, dominate, suppress or repress what presents itself as ‘the Other’ that it confronts (Bernstein 1991: 71). This is the ‘logic’ at work in cultural, political and socio-economic imperialism and colonization — even the ‘logic’ of ethical imperialism where the language of reciprocal recognition and reconciliation

50. Adorno (qtd. Herf 1997: 10) suggests, perhaps more vehemently, that “the extinction of memory is far more the accomplishment of an all too wide-awake consciousness than of its weakness in the face of overwhelming power of unconscious processes”. In his understanding, the weakness of public memory about the crimes of the Nazi era was due to labours of this “all too wide-awake consciousness”, which remembered all too well what it would rather not

masks the violent reduction of the alterity of ‘the Other’ (*l’autrui*) to ‘more of the same’. One must acknowledge the radical incommensurable *singularity* of the Other (*l’autrui*), to recover a sense of radical plurality that defies any facile total reconciliation (Bernstein 1991: 72).

Jacques Derrida and deconstruction

Adorno seizes upon the motif of mastery and control — he deepens and seeks to explode it in his ‘negative dialectics’. For him, fantasies of ‘organic wholeness’ are always regressive — which is why he privileges allegory over symbol; the word or name over image or icon⁵¹. For Adorno, as for Nietzsche before him, the *proton pseudos* of discursive reason lies in the generality of concepts, in the fact that they ‘identify’ things which ‘do not go by the same name’. But there is a mimetic force at work in the life of linguistic meaning which enables what is non-identical in reality to be reflected as something non-identical in linguistic meanings. Adorno (qtd. Wellmer 1991: 71) sees language as possessing such a mimetic force, thus he demanded of philosophy that it strive “by means of the concept, to transcend the concept”. In this, Adorno’s philosophy runs up against the limits of language — or more precisely, of the language of the *philosophy of the subject* — because it expresses the secret of the philosophy of the subject, but without comprehending it (Wellmer 1991: 73)⁵². Linguistic philosophy too has decentred the subject and

see.

51. Cf. Adorno and the *Bilderverbot* pp. 53-57. Even in the style and content of his forays (he rejects any distinction between style and content) Adorno always aims at undermining and defeating any final synthesis — any positive *Aufhebung* (Bernstein 1991: 41) cf. p. 12 n4; 46. In this one can see one of the many ways in which Adorno’s writing anticipates the deconstructive critiques of logocentrism.

52. Adorno conceives of ‘the non-identical’ as something which has its integrity violated by the generality of the concept, which is ‘prearranged’ (Wellmer 1991: 64). This ‘violation’ of the ‘non-identical’ by the concept also constitutes the untruth of the conceptual judgement. By applying the metaphors of ‘prearranging’ and ‘truncating’ to language as a whole, an intentionalist prejudgement about language is revealed as a naturalistic variant of the philosophy of the subject-as-constitutive-of-meaning. Wellmer (1991: 64) argues that the critique of identity reason ends in an aporia because it repeats once more that very ‘forgetfulness of language’ characteristic of

criticized the objectification of linguistic meanings. By doing so it has also destroyed the premises upon which the philosophy of consciousness was able to interpret the unity of the subject and the ‘identificatory’ concept as the two poles of a ‘reifying’ spirit which is instrumental in its very origins (Wellmer 1991: 70).

Jacques Derrida consistently opposes a ‘logic of apartheid’ (literally and figuratively) as radical separation into ‘natural’ kinds. Derrida, much like Benjamin, Adorno and Foucault, is acutely sensitive and alert to the multifarious ways in which the ‘history of the West’ — even in its institutionalization of communicative practices has always tended to silence differences, to exclude outsiders and exiles, those who live on the margins (Bernstein 1991: 52)⁵³. Echoing Benjamin and Adorno’s conception of language, Derrida (qtd. Bernstein 1991: 192) claims:

[the] event of a rupture, the disruption, presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had begun to be thought, that is to say recreated... henceforth, it became necessary to think both the law which somehow governed the desire for a centre in the constitution of a structure and the process of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions from this law of central presence — but a central presence which has never been itself, has always been exiled from itself into its own substitute.

Derrida is deeply suspicious of all forms of boundary-fixing, including that between theoretical and practical-political-institutional ‘domains’ — scrutinizing the precise ‘points’ where

European rationalism, which it had itself in a sense criticized. The critique of discursive reason as *instrumental* reason as conceived by Adorno is, Wellmer contends, still surreptitiously psychological, i.e. intentionalistic, without acknowledging the fact, it still draws on the model of a subject that is ‘constitutive of meaning’ and posits itself against a world of objects in transcendental singularity.

53. The so-called ‘conversation of mankind’ of linguistic philosophy is recognized by him as just that — a conversation of *mankind*, primarily white mankind. Born a French Algerian Jew, Derrida is perhaps sensitive to this issue because of his very own feelings of ‘otherness’ — French, therefore not African, Jewish therefore not French. This could be one of the reasons why Derrida is seen to ‘speak’ to those who have felt the pain and suffering of being excluded by the prevailing hierarchies embedded in the text called ‘the history of the West’ — whether they be women, blacks, or others repressed by exclusionary tactics (Bernstein 1991: 52). Thus Derrida teaches us how much can go wrong — even tragically wrong — in the folds of communication.

distinctions, dichotomies, dualisms break down and are called into question. It is as if Derrida is attempting to expose that the deepest desire in the Western philosophic tradition, the metaphysical tradition, has been to locate some fixed permanent center, some ground⁵⁴. Metaphysics is not only the history of the search for a series of substitutions of center for center by which a ‘reassuring certitude’, a ‘metaphysical comfort’ is sought — it also establishes ethical-ontological hierarchies in which there is subordination and violence (Bernstein 1991:176). Derrida deconstructs the ‘Either/Or’ which has haunted so much of the history of philosophy, especially modern philosophy: either an absolutely stable foundation and fixed point or intellectual and moral chaos. His point is not that one can get along without demarcating boundaries but rather there is no boundary-fixing that cannot itself be questioned. It is non-reducible heterogeneity and heterology that he as well as Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng attempt to make manifest. Thus Derrida (qtd. Bernstein 1991: 210) writes:

Deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore a vocation — a response to a call — “an openness towards the other”⁵⁵.

Derrida is influenced by the French Jewish thinker, Emmanuel Levinas, who contends that the primary thrust of the Western philosophical tradition has always been a drive to reduce, absorb, or appropriate what is taken to be ‘the Other’ to ‘the Same’— where difference and otherness disappears. Levinas seeks to escape this philosophical imperialist violence of ‘the Same’ and ‘the Other’ by opening the space for the absolute exteriority of the metaphysical Other (*l’autrui*)

54. Bernstein (1991: 192) argues that this is true not only of the Western metaphysical tradition but also of the theological tradition that construes the narrative of history as a ‘development’ from original innocence through the ‘fall of man’ to a final redemption. And ethical discourse, as it partakes in the search for a first principle to ‘ground’ moral action, is part of this same metaphysical, ontotheological history. Therefore Adorno’s notion of assessing moments of history from the standpoint of redemption or in the light of the messianic Day of Judgement, is also a part of this history.

55. Cf. in this Derrida echoes Adorno’s call for mimesis as an entree to the other pp. 26-27.

which he sharply distinguishes from the ontological Other (*autre*) (Bernstein 1991: 69). The metaphysical Other is an “other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same. It is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other” (Levinas qtd. Bernstein 1991: 70). It is this radically asymmetrical relation between the I and the Other (a ‘relation’ that defies reduction to reciprocal equality) that characterizes what Levinas calls *the ethical relation*, the incommensurability of ‘the Other’ with the I⁵⁶. Much like Adorno’s theory of mimesis and nonidentity, the incommensurability and asymmetry of ‘the Other’ (*l’autrui*) is manifested in what Levinas calls the ‘face-to-face’⁵⁷ encounter, the primary ethical relation that can never be reduced to the ‘totality’ of ‘the Same’ and ‘the Other.’ Much like Benjamin’s theory of allegory vis-a-vis symbol this works against what Adorno sees as fantasies of ‘organic wholeness’.

Derrida deconstructs Levinas’ texts to expose the double-bind logic of his argument — bringing out the aporetic quality of Levinas’ position by questioning the intelligibility of the notion of the Absolute Other and absolute exteriority. Derrida (qtd. Bernstein 1991: 72) agrees with Levinas that “the other is the other only if his alterity is absolutely irreducible, that is, infinitely irreducible”. But, contrary to Levinas, who claims that “to make the other an alter ego... is to neutralize its absolute alterity,” Derrida argues that “if the other was not recognized as ego, its entire alterity would collapse”. Derrida’s ‘logic’ here is the ‘neither/nor’ — but it is not the ‘logic’ of *Aufhebung* in which all differences and oppositions are ultimately reconciled neither the Adornian sense of negative *Aufhebung*. There is both sameness and radical alterity, symmetry

56. Cf. Lyotard’s conception of incommensurability pp. 59-60.

57. Cf. the face in Boltanski’s ‘photographic portraits’ pp. 114-118 and Kentridge’s character’s mirror-identification

and asymmetry, identity and difference in the relation with ‘the other’ — above all in the ethical relation. Thus in Kiefer’s series Shulamith and Margarete are apart and a part, as are Soho, Felix and Nandi in Kentridge’s films. This relates intimately to the South African debate around the politics of representation and remembrance, which is often centered around the polar opposites of race, rather than recognizing the slippage, the ‘neither/nor’ that many artists, such as Kentridge and Mofokeng, attempt to represent ethically.

One of Derrida’s (qtd. Bernstein 1991: 178) typical strategies, much like the landscapes of Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng or the photo albums of Boltanski and Mofokeng, is to start with what seems so familiar and then to show by a meticulous and rigorous analysis how it “develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally [but not quite] coincides with its opposite”. An awareness is created that one is always threatened by the uncanniness of what is canny; one is always in exile — even from ourselves⁵⁸. Thus the devious tactics and strategies designed to exclude, outcast, silence, and exile⁵⁹ the contaminating ‘Other’ have never been quite successful

p. 178-179 (figure 45).

58. In *Das Unheimliche* (1919) Freud (qtd. Bernstein 1991: 178) reveals "that the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich/heimlich*] which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfills this condition: ... the prefix ‘un’ [‘un-’] is the token of repression... Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*" (Freud 1991: 178). In *Strangers to ourselves* Kristeva (1991: 170) writes how in *Das Unheimliche* an uncanny foreignness can be seen to creep into the ‘tranquillity’ or appearance of reason, that “Henceforth, we know that we are foreigners to ourselves, and it is with the help of that sole support that we can attempt to live with others”. Kristeva (1991: 192) notes that Freud does not speak of strangers in his *Das Unheimliche*, perhaps because he aims to teach one how to detect foreignness in oneself. Furthermore, Kristeva (1991: 191) claims “That is perhaps the only way not to hound it outside of us”. By recognizing one’s ‘disturbing otherness’, she, as does Derrida, believes one can have the courage to call oneself ‘disintegrated’ in order not to integrate foreigners nor to exclude them — but rather to welcome them to that ‘uncanny strangeness’. One should analyse the foreigner by analysing oneself: “The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners” (Kristeva 1991: 192). What she is suggesting is a politics, beyond brotherhood, where the difference within each person is the ultimate condition of their being with others. This political ethic would involve cutting across borders, governments, economies et cetera, and would work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of the unconscious, but which she recognizes as “desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible” (Kristeva 1991: 192). Cf. Kiefer’s identification as Shulamith/Margarete pp. 91-92 and Kentridge as Nandi pp. 167; 179.

59. Some of Derrida’s most passionate prose can be found in his descriptions of the dynamics of exclusion and his

(Bernstein 1991: 179), as Mofokeng explores in his post-colonialist archive.

Not only does Derrida vividly describe and condemn the violent logic of exclusion and exile, he also plays on the sense of the exile as bearing witness⁶⁰. For no code can close the gap or diminish the undecidability that one confronts in making an ethical-political decision or choice: “This particular undecidable opens the field of decision or of decidability” (Derrida qtd. Bernstein 1991:176). The theorist should situate him/herself on the margins, in ‘exile’ of the dominant, dominating powers — but not in place or as a replacement or representative of the ‘other’ — where he/she may be perceptive to the forces at work in both. Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng place themselves at this distanced but rigorously engaged ‘space’ of

apologia for what is exiled, a motif played out in his essay *Racism's last word*, written for the catalogue of *Art contre/apartheid* (1983: 54-55): “By isolating being apart in some sort of essence or hypostasis, the word [apartheid] corrupts it into a quasi-ontological segregation. At every point, like all racisms, it tends to pass segregation off as natural — and as the very law of origin. Such is the monstrosity of this political idiom. Surely, an idiom should never incline toward racism. It often does, however, and this is not altogether fortuitous: there is no racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, colour, birth — or, rather, because it uses naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse — racism always betrays the perversion of man, the ‘talking animal.’ It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates”.

Many of the motifs which are played out in Derrida's critique of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence are given a forceful ethical-political expression here — the motifs of exclusion, violence, the condemnation and abomination of what is taken as Other, the power of the ‘word’, the establishment of fixed ‘natural’ hierarchies and borders. In this overtly political essay another theme that surfaces in Derrida’s critique of the history of metaphysics — the complicity of the West, the sense in which racism itself is a ‘Western thing’. He emphasizes the duplicity, the ‘double-bind’ logic — the hypocrisy of a Europe which at once denounces apartheid and yet preserves it.

60. Edward Said, in *Culture and imperialism* (1993: 403), discusses the origins and benefits of the ‘exile as witness’. He shows that throughout time, as struggles for independence produced new states and new boundaries, they also produced homeless wanderers, nomads, vagrants, “unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional power, rejected by the established order for their intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness”. These people are seen to exist between ‘the old’ and ‘the new’, between the old empire and the new state — their condition articulates the tensions, irresolutions, and contradictions in the “overlapping territories” of past and present. Said (1993: 402) argues that the theorist must live as migrants do, whose power is not aggressive but transgressive. The ‘emigre consciousness’ discovers in its marginality that “a gaze averted from the beaten track, a hatred of brutality, a search for fresh concepts not yet encompassed by the general pattern, is the last hope for thought” (Adorno qtd. Said 1993: 404). Walter Benjamin saw ‘exile’ as a mythic condition, not simply an individual fate, but a collective exile from sources of knowledge and ‘truth’. For Scholem (qtd. Rabinbach 1989: xiii) the inner nihilism of Judaism comes from God who is alienated from the world and thus exile is the most fundamental condition of existence — “such is the state of creation after the breaking of the vessels”. Cf. pp. 37 n43; 53 n5 and this issue in Kiefer’s *Heavenly palaces: Merkabah* p. 99 n96 and Kentridge’s tea-cup p. 168. Because being in ‘exile’ — as belonging, as it were, to both

indeterminacy where the theorist supposedly may be at his/her most critical and perceptive. In positioning oneself as a psychic exile, particularly at a time of crucial flux and ‘change’ such as in the post-war European or the South African post-apartheid context, the theorist/artist can remain aware of the Benjaminian premonitory ‘sparks’ that warn of past dangers reoccurring in the present. For one is not only in ‘exile’ to political ideologies or sources of knowledge — but also standing on the threshold of the past/present/future, in the sense of Benjamin’s angel.

Central to the contexts of these ‘moments of danger’, in Benjaminian terms, of post-war Europe and post-apartheid South Africa, are the concerns of these theorists. The immanent criticism that Adorno insists on, exposes the will-to-power that he, Benjamin, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard are critical of — crucial to any historian/artist who attempts to represent the past, in all its difference and sameness to the present. Positioning themselves as self-critical psychic exiles, Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng in their art of remembrance and recollection attempt to rob myth over its power over consciousness and action. These artists are concerned with bearing witness to the past and commemorating the losses and exclusions of history, in the Adornian hope, albeit it fragile (a weak messianic power) and continually deferred (as Derrida insists), of a better future to come in the face of the Benjaminian wreckages of catastrophic history. For as Benjamin (qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 52) writes:

One used to consider the ‘past’ [*Gewense*] as the fixed point, and saw the present as attempting to lead knowledge gropingly toward this firm ground. Now the relationship is to be reversed, and the past becomes the dialectical turning, the dawning of the awakened consciousness.

sides of the divide or in the threshold between them — enables one to critically comprehend them both.

Chapter Two

MEMORY AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism (Benjamin 1992: 248).

The art of remembrance and recollection, even when immanently critical of its own history as a tool of oppression and propaganda for dominating powers, is still problematic. Theodor Adorno, returning to Germany after World War II, became acutely aware of the problematics of representation and formulated his theories into an historic *Bilderverbot*. At the same time though, Adorno is very much emphatic not only about the potential for art to act as a criticism for the current state of affairs, but also the injunction for art to bear witness to suffering — a site of remembrance as a warning of the dangers in the past. Francois Lyotard, furthering this call for witness, grounds his hope in representations of the past that testifies to differences as well as attempts, im-possibly, to commemorate the immemorial. This is so that, as Adorno (qtd. LaCapra 1994: 46) states:

Enlightenment about what happened in the past must work, above all, against a forgetfulness that too easily goes along with and justifies what is forgotten.

As much as art may function as a concretized visualization and installation of philosophical and ethical concerns, it also functions as a visual trace or record of psychological processes. That is, formally and philosophically, the work of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng probes, thematizes and instantiates the aesthetic and ethical dilemma that both frames and drives its very being: how to represent the unrepresentable at a time when the past is only known through

images, films, photographs, testimonies and documentation. In addition, whilst Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng all grapple with the knowledge that in both Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa art was used to oppress and further the aims of the oppressors, and that the testifier always falls short of the testified — they too acknowledge the call to bear witness ethically to the sufferings and loss of the past. Their work confronts not just the aesthetic possibilities of visual cultural practice but the theoretical and ethical im-possibilities of such a practice. History, particularly history ‘after Auschwitz’ or ‘after apartheid’, can perhaps be encountered and grasped only through the acknowledgment of the very inaccessibility of its original occurrence and experience¹. Creating works that show within them the Adornian *Brüche* of their own construction, as well as their inability to hold memories and fully commemorate the immemorial, they emphasize that the responsibility is that of the ethical viewer, whose memory must remain active and critical in the present. For art should be: “a place of observation, information, and witness. A satellite is a guard, it keeps watch and gives warning” (Derrida 1983: 55).

i) Adorno and the politics of representation

Images of the past are the spoils of war carried on behind the winner's triumphal chariot (Benjamin qtd. Rogoff 1995: 120).

The complex relationship between culture and barbarism and the dangers inherent in the aestheticization of horror, are ethical issues of continuing relevance, as emphasized by Adorno's much-quoted maxim “Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch” (to write poetry

1. Cf. p. 66 n31, this relates fundamentally to melancholia in the context of commemoration p. 236.

after Auschwitz is barbaric). Adorno² made the statement in 1949, in the penultimate sentence of *Cultural criticism and society*, an essay otherwise unconcerned with aesthetics. Out of context even in its original context, later qualified and perhaps regretted, Adorno's statement has nevertheless come to function as a moral and aesthetic dictate. While his pronouncement speaks of the present³ (a time 'after Auschwitz'), its aesthetic ethics remain deeply embedded in the past.

Because during fascism the creation of art and literature posed a serious, mythic power, after the Holocaust it was brought into question. This explains why literary representations of the Holocaust in Germany were (and sometimes still are) especially valued if they hold few characteristics of an act of creativity or imagination (Van Alphen 1997:18). Fictionalizing was taboo, while what was considered to be the most appropriate genre for representing the Holocaust — ego-documents, personal testimonies modeled on journalistic or documentary accounts — had to be bare and realistic. Aesthetic experience and the transmission of historical knowledge were conceptualized as polar opposites instead of as mutually supportive processes, a dichotomy that both Boltanski and Mofokeng engage with in their archival works. The hierarchical opposition between history and imagination could be seen to have collapsed into another hierarchy: objective remembrance versus aesthetic pleasure and distraction. However Adorno neither justifies nor legitimizes this opposition. When Adorno's statement was repeatedly used in this context, he (qtd. Van Alphen 1997: 19) readdressed it:

2. Integral to this, Saltzman (1999: 17) argues that 'after Auschwitz', the cosmopolitan, assimilated Adorno (born Wiesengrund) confronts the implications of his paternal Jewish heritage in his research on anti-Semitism. Cf. Benjamin on the expressionless and moral depth p. 16 n12.

3. Cf. Andrew Benjamin (1994) on repetition and the present in *Object painting*. Cf. Adorno's conception of history as an ur-history, or as Benjamin argues, repetition — the archaic in the present p. 15.

When it [the Holocaust] is turned into an image... for all its harshness and discordance it is as though the embarrassment one feels before the victims were being violated. The victims are turned into works of art, tossed out to be gobbled up by the world that did them in. The so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. The morality that forbids art to forget this for a second slides off into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic stylistic principle, and even the chorus' solemn prayer, make the unthinkable appear to have had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, something of its horror removed⁴.

This is echoed by Derrida (1983: 54), commenting on the potential for both Europe and South Africa to forget in the post-apartheid era:

If we could forget about the suffering, the humiliation, the torture and the deaths, we might be tempted to look at this region of the world as a giant tableau or painting.

With Adorno's 'after Auschwitz' dictum, the biblical prohibition on images experienced a theoretical rebirth within postwar aesthetics (Saltzman 1999: 19). The Second Commandment⁵, proposes a world without images, in which not only God but no other thing (be it from the earth, the sea, or the sky) may be represented. Further, the Second Commandment does not simply prescribe that God should not be portrayed, but also implies that God cannot be portrayed —

4. This is influenced by Walter Benjamin's criticism of what he sees as Nietzsche's abyss of aestheticism p. 16 n12. It is argued that it is neither possible nor warranted for artists to create images as documents close to the 'truth' of reality. For as Sartre (qtd. Amishai-Maisels 1995: 49) points out, feelings of beauty and horror are not mutually exclusive -- there is a danger that the artist could succeed in turning the "acts of violence, mutilated corpses and living bodies racked, tortured and burned" into something beautiful. Adorno (qtd. Amishai-Maisels 1995: 49) stresses an additional danger: "The so-called artistic representation of naked bodily pain... of the victims felled by rifle butts, contains, however remote, the potentiality of wringing pleasures from it... Genocide, when it is made into a cultural possession... makes it easier to continue playing with the culture that gave it birth... The distinction between executioner and victims grows hazy".

5. Exodus 20:4 : "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." The prohibition has also influenced Islamic art and Western mystical abstraction, such as the blank canvasses of Malevich and Mondrian. This is linked to the Lurianic Kabbalist notion of *zim-zum* — that God withdraws in the process of creation. He contracts himself in order to create a space within himself where the world can arise. Dominating Barnett Newman's broad empty canvasses, emptiness is creative as well as the void which will suck the world down again at the end of the cycle. Both Newman and Kiefer have actually used the Lurianic term *zim-zum* in their work (McEvelley 1996: 4). Cf. p. 37 n43.

beyond the knowable or perceptible, God is thus unrepresentable⁶. Taken with Adorno's postwar proscription lies that Hebraic prohibition — the intertwined dicta leave us with an aesthetic ethics of visual absence and poetic silence⁷.

It is in the poetry of Paul Celan where it is thought that silence has been articulated most clearly, has been given its inaudible voice — a poet whose work is quoted directly in the work of Kiefer and Mofokeng. “Celan’s poems articulate unspeakable horror by being silent⁸” (Adorno qtd. Saltzman 1999: 20) insofar as they thematize the very silence and impossibility their existence would seem to disrupt. Whereas it may have been Celan's lyrical evocation of the death camps, *Todesfuge*, that occasioned Adorno's dictum, *Tubingen, January* (qtd. Saltzman 1999: 19) echoes its ethics of impossibility and unrepresentability:

Came, if there
 came a man,
 came a man to the world today, with
 the patriarchs'
 light-beard: he could,
 if he spoke of this
 time, he
 could
 only babble and babble,
 ever-, ever-
 moremore.

While Derrida (1978: 69) argues that to gain access to absence or the unrepresentable is to lose

6. Cf. Lyotard on the unrepresentable and the immemorial pp. 58-59.

7. Walter Benjamin (qtd. Rabinoch 1989: xi-xiii) sees language as a non-violent sphere of redemption — an idea of language as the human expression of the inexpressive with “a residue of the creative word of God”. Cf. Benjamin’s ideas on language pp. 26-27.

8. Cf. Primo Levi on chemistry qua purification in Leonard 2001; cf. Derrida’s notion of ethical silence in allegory p.37.

it, to show it is to hide it, to acknowledge it is to lie, he also finds the most ethical attempt at working with this problematic in the works of a Jewish poet, Edmond Jabes (1977: 51-52):

I carry deserts in my chest, the hot sand of silence. The sea around, the distant sea, is the fringed shawl around my shoulders undulating with the tremor of my voice in prayer.

Adorno's language of proscription and prohibition is all the more insistent when he (qtd. Saltzman 1999: 20) writes not of poetry but of painting: "The Old Testament prohibition of graven images can be said to have an aesthetic aspect besides the overt theological one. The interdiction against forming an image — of something — in effect implies the proposition that such an image is impossible to form". Yet at the same time, Adorno proposes a visual alternative or fulfilment of the aesthetic prohibition: the visual practice of painterly abstraction is seen as a mode of aesthetic representation that avoids in its non-referential, nonfigurative and autonomous aspect that which Auschwitz and the Hebrew Bible expressly forbid. For intense ascetic modernism (as in the literary works of Kafka and Beckett) in its pursuit of its internal laws of development, involves a 'de-aestetization of art' — progressive liberation from the mythic, cultic, ritualized context out of which it emerged (Jay 1984 :157), defying, perhaps even precluding fetishistic, animalistic behaviour thus fulfilling the requirements of the 'taboo on sensuality' (Saltzman 1999: 20). In contrast, Adorno (qtd. Jay : 148-149) vehemently criticizes the work of Stravinsky and Wagner because of the epic of totality and veneer of wholeness in the concept of *Gesamtkunswerke*, for it "simulates the unity of internal and external, of subject and object, instead of giving shape to the rupture between them", overwhelming the spectator.

Essentially, the fundamental import of the biblical prohibition for the Judeo-Marxist tradition is not its ethical stance on the making of images, but rather against the *worshipping* of images

(Saltzman 1999: 20)⁹. Adorno (qtd. Saltzman 1999: 20), writing against a spectatorial experience of pleasure and desire, again invokes a language of prohibition and taboo: “Perhaps the most important taboo in art is the one that prohibits an animal-like attitude toward the object¹⁰, say, a desire to devour it or otherwise to subjugate it to one’s body”. Adorno's is an ambivalent spectatorship — a viewing position of Kantian disinterestedness which is simultaneously deeply wary of fetishism. Adorno holds that presumptive spectators, hearing in their ears the Mosaic ‘no’, would already have forgone the prospect of fusion with the material image or the pleasure of the spectatorial process, that may suspend traumatic knowledge (Saltzman 1999: 22). Instead, they would view as ethical spectators and thus would accede to knowledge.

It is in the call for knowledge in Adorno’s writings that there is an acknowledgment of the fundamental importance of the aesthetic representation because of its ability to convey knowledge and, more importantly, to bear witness (Saltzman 1999: 23)¹¹. Adorno (1962: 761) emphasizes that the world must be kept informed of the suffering of victims, and it is the indispensable task of art and literature to provide that knowledge:

I do not want to soften my statement that it is barbaric to continue to write poetry after Auschwitz; it

9. In smashing Aaron’s golden calf, Moses prevents the Jews from looking, from entering into a fetishistic relationship with the object and displacing their adoration from God to icon. In this vein, Adorno argues against spectacle which could create a fetishistic relation between the viewer and the object. Cf. Guy Debord’s *Society of the spectacle and other films* (1992).

10. Cf. the Greenbergian Modernist disjunction between high and low art compared to postmodernism’s and Kiefer approach to this issue pp. 77 n53; 79n56.

11. For if to make images or worship images is to transgress the Second Commandment, to play Aaron rather than Moses, then to remain silent is to transgress the law of bearing witness, the law of Leviticus 5:1 (Saltzman 1999: 23). This would be to perpetuate the ‘silence’ which characterised the Holocaust, first in a Nazi policy of Night and Fog and then in a postwar silence of those ‘unable’, or unwilling, to mourn. Derrida (1978: 67) writes that the difference between the Rabbi and the poet is that the Law (Rabbi) becomes the question and the right to speech (poet) becomes the *duty* to interrogate. Both involve acts of interpretation, but literature/art is the “dream-like displacement of [the] question” (Derrida 1978: 78). In this context, Kiefer ambiguously identifies with Aaron as the false prophet p.69 n38, just as Boltanski calls himself a ‘bad preacher’ p. 125, and Kentridge identifies with Daniel as seer and messenger p. 161 n32.

expresses, negatively¹², the impulse that animates committed literature.... It is the situation of literature itself and not simply one's relation to it that is paradoxical. The abundance of real suffering permits no forgetting... But that suffering — what Hegel called the awareness of affliction — also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids.

This is the ultimate paradoxical logic engendered by an historical event (such as the Holocaust) whose very horror, exceptionality and incomprehensibility at once forbids expression and at the same time, demands remembrance. This is because, in the *absence* of remembrance, forgetting may be repeating and the failure to understand may be to condone (Landau 1995: 24). Yet as Freud argues, repetition may be the rehabilitation of repressed trauma, as 'acting-out', that is permeable (Derrida 1978: 196)¹³. Repetition, in its empirical/circular displacement, allows a difference each time repeated — allowing the postmodern neither/nor dialectic to surface¹⁴. For according to Derrida, memory and promise, repetition and rupture always come together. Concerning the complex temporality of past-present-future, Derrida (qtd. Bernstein 1991:219), in a manner that is reminiscent of Adorno and Benjamin, writes:

My own conviction is that we must maintain two contradictory affirmations at the same time. On the one hand we affirm the existence of ruptures in history, and on the other we affirm that these ruptures produce gaps or faults (*failles*) in which the most hidden and forgotten archives can emerge and constantly recur and work through history. One must surmount the categorical oppositions of philosophic logic out of fidelity to these conflicting positions of historical discontinuity (rupture) and continuity (repetition), which are neither

12. Cf. Walter Benjamin's the 'expressionless', of the doubleness of the death's head pp. 35-36.

13. Cf. Axel Honneth's (1993: 94) Horkheimerian questioning of the restorative power memory has in the context of dead bodies, where he writes in the context of Benjamin's mystico-materialist philosophy of history: "The programme requires a form of historiography that is capable of methodologically reproducing the pattern of magical experience to such a degree that the epochs disclosed by it open up as spheres of communication within which we can enter into interaction with forgotten victims for the purposes of moral rehabilitation". But he continues: "even if such a methodological reproduction of quasi-magical experience were possible, it would still be unclear to what extent it would be meaningful to speak of a communicative relationship to people or even groups of people who belong to the realm of the dead". Cf. Benjamin on transgenerational memory p. 23.

14. Derrida (1978: 67) writes that if the origin is God speaking, then writing/inscription is repetition. God did this on the Tablets — but each repetition is different. Cf. Andrew Benjamin and repetition in Paul Celan's *Todesfugue* in the context of Kiefer's inscription pp. 80-81, Boltanski's repetition in his re-photographing of his 'photographic portraits' p. 117 and repetition in the context of the archioviolithic death drive in Boltanski and Mofokeng p. 218.

pure break with the past nor a pure unfolding or explication of it.

ii) Lyotard and representing the unrepresentable

In similar manner to Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard's 'demand' of history writing is that it becomes responsible to the singularity of the event, and seeks to 'testify' to history as a site of dispute, of differends. The crucial importance of Lyotard's insistence on the event as a figure for historical representation is not to deny the importance of history as a site of oppression — rather it suggests that repression does not simply take place *in* historical representation but that oppression begins in the modernist thought of history *as* representation (Readings 1996: 61). The task of historical writing is not to give voice to the silence of the oppressed because, for Lyotard, that would only betray that silence — a crucial concern in the context of the South African debate on the politics of representation. The most persuasive argument for this comes in Lyotard's remarks on the condition of historical writing after the Holocaust.

Dealing in a sense with the *Historikerstreit*¹⁵, Lyotard contends that if one is to represent the Holocaust as part of history then it becomes just one more atrocity among others in the long history of man's inhumanity to man. In a similar manner to Adorno, Lyotard believes that in order to respect the impossibility of atonement, of coming to terms with horror by representing it, one must write a history that will testify to the unrepresentable horror without representing it. This amounts to the deconstruction of the binary opposition¹⁶ between voice and silence, history and the unhistorical, remembering and forgetting (Readings 1991: 62). As Kiefer, Boltanski,

15. Cf. the German Historian's debate pp. 61-63

16. Cf. Adorno's subject/object, signifier/signified pp. 24-25.

Kentridge and Mofokeng attempt, it is a history directed towards the *immemorial*, to that which cannot be either remembered (represented) or forgotten (erased), a history which evokes the figures that ‘haunt’ the claims of historical representation — haunt in the sense that they are neither present to them nor absent from them¹⁷.

What really preoccupies us, whether historians or non-historians, is this ‘past’ which is not over, which doesn’t haunt the present in the sense that it is lacking, missing¹⁸. It neither occupies the present as a solid reality nor haunts the present in the sense that it might indicate itself even as an absence, a spectre. This ‘past’ is not an object of memory in the sense of something which may have been forgotten and must be remembered (in the interest of ‘happy endings’ and good understanding). This ‘past’ is therefore not even there as a blank, an absence, terra *incognita*, but it is still there (Lyotard qtd. Readings 1991: 62).

Lyotard’s work moves from postmodern history writing as work of ‘anamnesis’, a refusal to forget the unsayable or unrepresentable, to the *immemorial*¹⁹. This is an attempt to testify to that which cannot be said²⁰ — a sense of memory as the persistence of affects which will not be forgotten and yet cannot be remembered either (Readings 1991: 100). At the same time there is

17. This postmodernist neither/nor dialectic is opposed to modernist either/or. Derrida (1986: 329) writes that the opposition of metaphysical concepts (speech/writing; absence/presence) is never the face-to-face of the two terms, but rather hierarchy and subordination. The postmodernist attempt is to not neutralize nor limit the two terms, but to rather act in an allegorical ‘double gesture’ or ‘double writing’. Deconstruction is the closure of this metaphysics of presence — it must fissure the structure and history of metaphysics by “organically inscribing and systematically articulating the traces of the before and the after from within and without metaphysics” (Derrida 1986: 172). As Lyotard (1982: 1015) writes:

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.

18. This is an implicit critique of Freud’s sexist notion of the girl/woman as lacking or missing a phallus.

19. In this context, Derrida (1978: 66) writes that the site (land) calls from beyond memory but is always elsewhere (exile) and is also in the future — the site is *immemorial*. Wandering in the desert, the site is the land to come (‘milk and honey’) which is always deferred — as Moses one will always sit outside from it and wait.

20. Cf. Walter Benjamin’s moral or ethical duty or depth p. 16 n12.

an opening towards just such an anamnestic aesthetics of pathos, of sublime incommensurability, in the suggestion that the affect is figural and resists being reduced to an exchangeable unit, a value defined relationally in a system. The consideration of the resistance of the incommensurable in terms of the temporality of the event marks Lyotard's turn to a postmodern politics of indeterminacy²¹.

For Lyotard (1982: 1013) what is at stake is to make visible that which can be conceived but can neither be seen nor made visible. He (1984: 1014) argues that "modern aesthetica is an aesthetic of the sublime"²² but a nostalgic one²³. Much like Adorno, he contends that while in modern aesthetics the unrepresentable is suggested only as the missing contents, the form in its 'beautiful illusion' continues to offer the viewer solace or pleasure. These sentiments do not constitute the 'real' sublime sentiment: "which is in an intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain: the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be

21. In this context one can relate LaCapra (1998: 34) discussion on how the sublime itself seems to involve at least three components: a rupture or blockage of some sort (such as understanding); a flooding of the system or potentially traumatising excess (such as anxiety, terror, or something beyond understanding — in Kant, the unsettling apprehension of that which cannot be comprehended); and elation (such as at having survived the risk of rupture and excess). In this way, the historian's account somehow repeats the anxiety-producing rupture and excess active in the object of study but, in Lyotard's contention, should resist or recoil from elation. Cf. Derrida and repetition p. 57.

22. Lyotard (1982: 1012) discusses how the sublime sentiment is, according to Kant, a strong and equivocal emotion, in that it carries with it both pleasure and pain. LaCapra (1998: 35) offers a 'definition' of the Kantian sublime: it is incomparably or absolutely great; surpasses every standard of the senses; stems from the mind and is projected onto nature yet is excited by scenes of wild disorder and desolation; is marked by 'attraction-repulsion' and pleasure in pain. Moreover, the epitome of the sublime is in one's strangely disconcerting, deeply ambivalent relation to a hidden, radically transcendent divinity. According to Walter Benjamin, the ethical sublime can be evoked by the near-death experience, by coming to the brink of the abyss or of annihilation while escaping death and destruction oneself p. 16 n12. In addition, while in Burke, Klopstock and Kant the aesthetics of the sublime is connected to motion, sometimes as mystical ecstasy and enthusiasm, Benjamin's expressionless-sublime is a "sober, decidedly anti-enthusiastic gesture of protest [which] altogether opposes ecstatic intoxication or enthusiastic soaring" (Menninghaus 1993: 169). Cf. the 'expressionless' pp. 35-36.

23. According to Lyotard (1982: 1014) the modern aesthetic involves the withdrawal of the real and the sublime relation between 'the presentable' and 'the conceivable'. This highlights the powerlessness of the faculty of presentation, the 'nostalgia for presence' felt by the human subject and the 'obscure and futile will' which inhabits the viewer in spite of everything. For Lyotard, unrepresentable, radical alterity is misappropriated when it is rendered immanent or 'spectacularized' (LaCapra 1998: 32). Cf. Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics/nostalgia for presence p. 59 n17.

equal to the concept” (Lyotard 1984: 1014).

Instead, postmodern art or literature should be that in which the unrepresentable is in the presentation itself — art which denies itself the ‘solace’ of unself-reflective illusion, as well as collective nostalgia for the unattainable (Lyotard 1984: 1014). Ultimately art must constantly attempt to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable²⁴. History, like art, becomes the site of the recognition that there is something that cannot be said. This is the incommensurability to which the aesthetic may testify, though it has no language in which to speak of it that would not reduce incommensurability to the compatibility of a single voice. One cannot simply transgress the outer limits of the theater of representation: one has to represent, yet must not represent — one must present in such a way that at the same time testifies to the eventhood that representation suppresses. So while Lyotard acknowledges this failure, he feels that one must continue to strive for the im-possible — delaying a possibility that may never be realized but still longing or striving for it. As Adorno (qtd Saltzman 1999: 47) writes:

the abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting . . . [it] demands the continued existence of art [even as] it prohibits it. It is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it.

24. What Lyotard explores in such writings as ‘Jewish Oedipus’, is the aspect of the Second Commandment prohibition that Adorno exposes — the taboo on any ‘sensual’ or libidinous relationship with the image (Saltzman 1999: 21). In this account, to sculpt an image of God is to create a material image, a maternal image, and to encourage its sensual worship. Thus for Lyotard, to tear oneself away from that which incites one’s senses and rather to direct one’s thoughts toward the unrepresentable God – is to turn away from the desire for the maternal and to rise toward the sublime father and respect his law (Saltzman 1999: 21). In Freudian terms, Mosaic law articulates the threat of castration brandished in opposition to a fundamentally incestuous desire. Cf. feminist critiques of the (woman’s) identification with the mother’s iconic body, calling for a critical and indexical re-presentation, as in the work of Mary Kelly: “She would argue that the kind of feminist art practice which offers ‘empowering’ iconic representations of the woman’s body risks delivering up the female spectator to identification with an ideal mother, an illusionary mirror-image of herself as whole, self-sufficient and autonomous — in short, a female version of the bourgeois subject” (Iversen 1997: 38).

Part One

POST-WAR EUROPE AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

It was during the Nuremberg²⁵ interregnum that the postwar debate about the memory of the Jewish catastrophe took place, just as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission brought the issues of memory and justice to the fore in post-apartheid South Africa. The German Communists and Soviet occupation authorities regarded Soviet suffering, triumph and the narrative of Communist martyrdom as the core of postwar memory, whilst the memory of the Holocaust was merely a competitor for the scarce resource of postwar recognition (Herf 1997: 381). During the founding years of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer's implicit argument, as leader of the Christian Democrats, was that the establishment of a functioning democracy required less memory and justice for the crimes of the Nazi era and more integration of those who had gone 'astray'. Kurt Schumacher took the opposite view, that a 'new' democracy must be accompanied by a settling of accounts and bringing the guilty to justice (Herf 1997: 267). German cultural discourses have also been dominated by the tensions inherent in the construction and reconstruction of successive and conflicting narratives of its own history. It is argued that with West Germany's *Historikerstreit* (the German historical debate), neo-Conservative historians have sought to relativize the Fascist era by stressing those aspects in which other countries have undergone so called 'comparable experiences' (such as,

25. In this complex relationship between memory, justice and democracy in West Germany, German philosopher Herman Lubbe (qtd. Herf 1997: 7) argues that 'partial silence' about the Nazi past had been a "social- psychological and political necessity for the transformation of our postwar population into the citizenry of the Federal Republic". Echoing many arguments for amnesty in the TRC process — for postwar integration of those Germans compromised by their beliefs and actions in the Third Reich, silence about these crimes was thought of as 'necessary'. It is argued that memory and justice could have produced a right wing revolt that would undermine a still fragile democracy. So democracy was built on a shaky foundation of justice delayed— hence denied— and weakened memory. This inherent tension between memory and justice on the one hand and democracy on the other is one of the central themes of both post-war German and current South African history.

totalitarianism and genocide) (Rogoff (1995: 117). The opposing argument is put by the proponents of the *Sonderweg* ('Unique path') who emerged from the post-1968 schools of history, and who refuse the notions of historical relativization, conceiving of the Nazi state's activities as institutional continuities located within a specific development of German history. Is Auschwitz and everything for which it stands unique, or simply, yet another Benjaminian catastrophe? One might argue that the Holocaust is both unique and comparable but at the same time, is neither unique nor comparable – for there is a sense in which comparisons are irrelevant and superlatives are questionable, except perhaps as expressions of one's own inadequacy in trying to come to terms with problems. The theoretical framework which has emerged from Adornian and poststructuralist discussions of historical practice negates the 'black-white' positions of comparability and uniqueness. At best, assertions of uniqueness or of comparability have to be justified in problematic ways that will vary with one's subject-positions and judgements concerning the needs of a situation or context. In this context, Hartman (qtd. LaCapra 1994: 10) notes:

The aim of judgment in historical or literary-critical discourse²⁶... is not that of determining guilt or innocence. *It is to change history into memory: to make a case for what should be remembered* [emphasis added]. This responsibility converts every judgment into a judgment²⁷ on the person who makes it.

German post-war visual art

26. Cf. Handelman (1991) on the problem of history as a prison-house of language.

27. Cf. Kafka after the Kabbalah and the notion that we are judged by the celestial courts without respite — in that sense history is read as judgement, even though the Kabbalistic celestial courts are ultimately a reflection of the inner depths of the human psyche in Grozinger's 1994 book *Kafka and the Kabbalah*. Cf. Scholem's and Walter Benjamin's history as catastrophe p. 20.

Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile, social system that continues to totter along the deadline (Beuys qtd. Rosenthal 1987: 56).

After the war, allied administrators hoped that traditional German cultural institutions could help reunite and recondition West Germans to keep them focused on the task of transforming their country into a successful Western-style capitalist society. The cultural administrators realized that the Nazis utilized art to construct an idea of ‘Germanness’ and to build a sense of national identity. In an attempt to prevent a similar ‘misappropriation’ in the future, such themes, as well as the traditional German forms and styles encouraged by the Nazis, were suppressed through the promotion of abstract art²⁸. The presumed mute surfaces of abstraction were seen as the perfect screen on which to project ‘new’ beginnings and visually symbolize the *Stunde Null* (‘zero hour’) and the *Wiederaufbauung*, the ‘rebuilding’ of a cultural present devoid of a past. Thus the so-called ‘economic miracle’ of the 1950's was a “hollow miracle” — for West Germany prospered at the expense of memory (Steiner qtd. Saltzman 1999: 15). But, against this, the belated emergence of such artists as Joseph Beuys and, even later, Anselm Kiefer marked a radical departure from both the aesthetics and ideology of postwar abstraction.

Joseph Beuys helped to reintroduce the possibility for a referential, anamnestic, psychological and political art practice in postwar Germany²⁹. *Auschwitz Vitrine*, Beuys’s 1955 competition

28. The Federal Republic’s eagerness to avoid national undertones in art meant that it opened itself defenselessly to any dominant cultural influence that came from the western allies, which in effect created a form of cultural colonialism (Rogoff 1990: 21).

29. Beuys’s work, though, can be seen as deeply problematic in that it is an ethically compromised point of origin for the emerging postwar generation. This is due to the fact that Beuys’s objects can now be seen to signify his own personal mythology (a deeply ahistorical mythology of the death and rebirth of a German Luftwaffe pilot at the hands of the Tartars) as much as they do the death camps. But, as Saltzman (1999: 13) argues, even if Beuys’s project sought to fictionalize or mythologise his life, to universalize Auschwitz (“the human condition is Auschwitz”), or to present the notion that ‘the wound’ or trauma is universal and not historically or nationally specific, and even if he resurrected the obsolete conception of the artist as saviour and the artwork as auratic – it is perhaps ‘redeemed’, because it opened the door for deeply psychological, anamnestic and historical artworks in the next generation of post-war artists.

entry for an Auschwitz memorial, can be seen to signal the break of German artists from the visual silence of abstraction and aesthetically confront the legacy of the Nazi past — partly because of the work’s specifically German referentiality (Saltzman 1999: 13). The form of the Auschwitz piece can be seen to provide a grounding for an alternative form of historical narrative. Unlike documentary realism or any conventional commemoration, Beuys’s work is not of a coherent, heroic or monumental narrative. Rather it is a testament to absence, because of its small, fragmented, humble appearance and the prolonged process of spectatorial reading — perhaps Beuys’s understanding of the absence at the heart of Adorno’s taboo (Rogoff 1995: 121). The work can be seen to commemorate, bear witness to what is no longer and to what cannot be recuperated in direct historical narrative. In its conscious resistance to simplified forms of historical signification, an involuntary collective memory is triggered. Beuys’s point of entry is a thematization of the tension between collective and individuated notions of ‘the wound’. For Beuys it was not enough to bear witness to one’s suffering and decline – sickness had to be made manifest (Borer 1996: 24). He presented his traumatic relationship with history through the healer’s imperative diagnosis: *Show your wound*³⁰. Throughout his oeuvre, signs of sickness and death are multiplied, for as he (qtd. Borer 1996: 24) ‘diagnosed’, there is “a fatal process whereby the world is being destroyed, in hitherto unprecedented proportions”.

The belief and defining principle of the 68-era student rebels and their culturally engaged compatriots such as Anselm Kiefer, was that postwar Germany needed to confront and acknowledge its repressed past that had been shrouded in silence during their childhoods in the

30. Derrida (1978: 641) argues that poetic/aesthetic discourse takes root in the wound (for Edmond Jabes roots ‘speak’ and words want to grow) — alluding to the ‘ageless wound’ of the separation with God. One can argue that the ‘loss’ of Beuys’s generation, which is both forgetfulness and distractedness, is the cardinal point in his thinking: reversed, because his entire project hinges on the necessary return to elementary forgotten knowledge (Borer 1996: 14).

1950's. The aesthetic confrontation with the traumatic national history that was begun by Beuys in 1955, can be seen to be an essentially belated experiencing of his own traumatic history — whereas for the next generation of artists, authors, and filmmakers, that history could only be confronted but never reclaimed, as a primary experience (Saltzman 1999: 15)³¹. The metaphors of silence and exposure, taboo and transgression, repression and acknowledgment of the older generation and of modernism, was reappraised as overtly binary and lacking in subtlety and complexity (Saltzman 1999: 16). Rejecting such binarisms, they returned to German themes as the suppressed and undigested residues of Nazi complicity that remained to be confronted in German society³².

ONE

31. LaCapra (1998: 20-21) distinguishes between primary and secondary memory. Primary memory is that of a person who has lived through events – this memory almost invariably involves lapses relating to forms of denial, repression, suppression and evasion. Secondary memory is the result of critical work on primary memory, whether by the person who had the initial experiences or by a secondary witness such as an historian. But there is an argument that no memory is purely primary, because it has always already been affected by elements not deriving from the experience itself. To the extent that an event is traumatic, it creates a gap or hole in experience and is processed through the mediation of forms, types, archetypes, and stereotypes that have been assimilated or elaborated in the course of life. In this sense there is no fully immediate access to the experience itself even for the original witness, much less the secondary witness. ‘Working-through’ requires that acting-out be supplemented by secondary memory and related processes (such as narration, analysis, bodily gesture, or song). One might also add re-enactment in artmaking such as Kiefer’s painting = burning, Boltanski and Mofokeng’s re-objectification in their ‘photographic portraits’ and Kentridge’s erasure.

32. The anti-authoritarian revolt of 1968 was quite pointedly addressed to the generation responsible for Nazism and resulted in a dramatic confrontation between sons and fathers, bringing this charged Oedipal dynamic to the social and cultural fore. They suggested that Hitler was neither an anomaly nor the sole cause of the German crimes against humanity, but that ‘ordinary’ Germans had played their part in the Nazi horror and by refusing to confront their culpability might do so again in the future (Biro 2000: 156). For if Germany was suffering from a collective repression of the past (diagnosed as an ‘inability to mourn’), then it was their self-appointed task to rouse Germany from this prolonged melancholic state of historical amnesia.

Anselm Kiefer

Born on March 8 1945, two months before the end of World War II, Anselm Kiefer grew up in West Germany — a country engaged in the twin processes of rebuilding and forgetting. Having to face up to dissolution of the world promised by Enlightenment thought, including the place it assigned to art, Kiefer symbolizes the plight of a whole generation forced to grapple with the breakdown of received values in response to tragic events in twentieth-century history.

Although the avant-garde were radical in their criticism of bourgeois society and of the institutions of the art world, Kiefer's challenge extends further toward the roots of modern humanity's outlook. He actively employs ancient historical sources, the practices of the alchemist, mythological and cosmological narratives, as well as his own German tradition to undermine modern assumptions of universal knowledge, historical progress and a purely aesthetic, autonomous role for the arts. Even though Kiefer's beginnings are firmly embedded in the German protest culture of the 1960's and thus he is highly critical of the Romantic myth of the artist as male genius (whose mirror image is the tyrannical destroyer), he nevertheless problematically paints in the 'great' German tradition (Huysen 1998: 30)³³. With what seems incredible naïvete and insolence, Kiefer continuously draws from the icons, motifs and themes of the German culture and political tradition which had energized fascist culture³⁴ — but with a

33. Cf. Kiefer on this very notion of 'great' German personalities pp. 78-79; 82.

34. Huysen (1998: 32) details some of Kiefer's usages of this past — he provocatively reenacts the Hitler salute in one of his earliest photo works (figure 1); he turns to the myth of the Nibelungen, which in its medieval and Wagnerian versions has always functioned as a cultural prop of German militarism; he revives the tree and forest mythology so dear to the heart of German nationalism; he suggests figures from German philosophy, art, literature and the military (including Fichte, Klopstock, Clausewitz, Heidegger and artists such as Friedrich) most of whom have been tainted with the sins of German nationalism and certainly put to use by the Nazi propaganda machine; he reenacts Nazi book burnings (figure 15); he paints Albert Speer's megalomaniac architectural structures as ruins and allegories of power; he conjures up historical spaces loaded with the history of German-Prussian nationalism and

critical edge. This nationalism/fascism problematic has had his countrymen up in arms³⁵. Kiefer's choice of medium, his experimentations on the threshold between painting, photography and sculpture, also have a critical edge, as they refuse to submit to the teleologically construction of the modernist view of representational painting as a form of regression (Huysen 1998: 35)³⁶. The reproach against his work being figurative and representational can be seen to miss his sensitivity to the materials (such as straw, sand, lead, ashes) which work against the grain of figuration and representation. For Kiefer's is a kind of painting that represents, without being grounded in, the ideology of representation — that places itself self-consciously after conceptualism and minimalism³⁷.

i) 'After Auschwitz'

In situating his work in and between the epic time of the Hebrew Bible, the historical time of

fascist chauvinism (such as the Teuteburg forest) (figure 10), and he creates allegories of some of Hitler's major military ventures. Huysen points out here that most of these icons are treated with subtle irony and multi-layered ambiguity, occasionally even with satirical bite (such as in *Operation Seelion*).

35. Many Germans believe that Kiefer's problematic 'Germanness' has undeservedly enhanced his reputation in the United States (Huysen 1992: 85). They are seen to have given in to the lure of morbid images of an aestheticized apocalypse and to the hype about the artist as redeemer. In some ways it is true that in the United States, the Kiefer 'triumphalists' have embraced him as the 'lone artist-hero' (as they did Pollock) who is not properly appreciated in his home country for political reasons. Others, while acknowledging that Kiefer 'at least superficially' assumed the position of a repentant German, still accuse him of 'bad faith' — of romanticizing the German fall instead of commemorating the Jewish tragedy (Biro 2000: 186). By representing events that many critics and cultural theorists deem 'unrepresentable' in a way that appears to cloak the naked reality of genocide in multiple and ambiguous symbolic overlays, these works are still sometimes seen to romanticize, trivialize, or obscure the actual events of the Holocaust. Cf. the reception of Kentrige and Mofokeng's work p. 146 n12.

36. One should note that of the reasons why Adorno vehemently criticised Wagner's and Stravinsky's work as regression was because they revived older forms and restored neo-classical forms.

37. Cf. Richter after minimalism and conceptualism. In *Piet Mondrian — the battle of Teutenberg forest* (1976) (figure 10) Kiefer deliberately juxtaposes Mondrian's grid with the mythological German tree, the one "sign" deconstructing the other — a play between the one degenerating or regenerating the theosophical or alchemical pretensions of the other. Cf. Boltanski's use of the minimalist grid as mournful geometry p. 124.

Byzantium and the more recent time of Nazi Germany and the Second World War, Kiefer historicizes the *Bilderverbot*, in the spirit of Adorno, and points to the political uses and abuses of both representation and iconoclasm (Saltzman 1999: 26). From his paintings involving Aaron³⁸ to those of the Iconoclastic Controversy of Byzantium to those on Shulamith (figure 8) and Lilith (figure 11), Kiefer navigates the theoretical and aesthetic terrain of the biblical prohibition on image making. He does so, not only through the textual referents of his titles but through visual enactment — the contesting strategies of photography, painting, writing, and burning. His work aesthetically embodies the dialectic of figurality and discourse, image and word, representation and iconoclasm.

For if Kiefer's work represents history, it does so only with the foregrounded acknowledgement that such an endeavour is fundamentally compromised, if not impossible. In this way, his work acts as Adornian 'broken promises' whose fulfillment, in the spirit of Derrida, is perpetually deferred. In Kiefer's work the very act of creating and of being an artist-creator, is always grounded in a present shaped by the legacy of historical trauma. His work mediates the relation between a deeply traumatic history that he and his post-Holocaust spectators cannot fully know but to which it nonetheless bears witness and provides access. Kiefer is animated by the ambiguous, problematic and im-possible Lyotardian need to give voice to that which was silenced and to those who were silenced (Saltzman 1999: 47). Thus laden with what Saltzman (1999: 2) terms 'the burdens of historical belatedness', Kiefer's work, as with that of Boltanski,

38. In the Exodus tale, Moses is unwavering and loyal while Aaron is a troubled and troublesome figure. He creates the Golden Calf, and thus as an artist is similar to the painter-monks of the Iconoclastic Controversy — and to Kiefer. Aaron's staff is linked throughout Kiefer's works to Kiefer's palette, both are magical and transformative to warn and perhaps redeem (cf. Michael Fried (1998: 191 & 205) on Courbet's brush as bi-gendered], for the *lead* 'rod of Aaron' (a medium Kiefer utilizes extensively) sprouts ripe almonds to warn other tribes of acting against God (Rosenthal 1987: 121). In addition, Aaron's character flaws were seen to be because of his racial link to the Egyptians, a link that Kiefer saw as their accident by birth, with his 'character flaws' being because of his Germanness. Cf. earlier mention on Aaron p. 56 n11.

Kentridge and Mofokeng, posits itself between impossibility and possibility, deferral and realization, repression and acknowledgement.

i. a) Myth and history

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various events that may be separated from it by thousands of years (Benjamin qtd. Eagleton 1981: 48).

I can see more and more cyclical movement and, above all, happening at the same time... the belief in a linear, eschatological development leads to the danger of legitimizing temporary catastrophe's. Do you not think similar catastrophe's can re-occur, over and over again albeit in a different form (Kiefer qtd. Hartley 2000: 201 n. 18)³⁹.

In the vein of Walter Benjamin, Kiefer presents his own contemporary moment as a time of great danger — a 'present' radically permeated with meaning from the past. Rather than merely illustrating myth and history, his is a sustained reflection on how mythic images function in history, that myth can never escape history and that history in turn has to rely on mythic images (Huysen 1998: 27). While much of Kiefer's mythic painting seems energized by a longing to transcend the terrors of recent German history, both Kiefer's subject matter and aesthetic execution emphasize that this longing cannot be fulfilled (Huysen 1998: 26). Kiefer combines history and myth to argue, as did Adorno and Horkheimer, that beneath Western society's pretensions to have laid a culture grounded on reason, lies a powerful residue of mythic unreason⁴⁰. He works like a secular *bricoleur*, whose gargantuan appetite for mythic stories and

39. Cf. Lowith's (1964: 214-222) famous reading of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrent, Adorno on the 'ever-same' pp. 12-13 and Benjamin on history as repetition p. 15.

40. Aby Warburg argues that Clio, the Muse of history, owes her beginnings to her mother, Mnemosyne, who is more instinctual and primal (Schama 1995: 18). Warburg's project is to counter instinct, which can lead to madness,

references is interpreted through an acute Adornian consciousness of loss and insight into the Lyotardian im-possibility of attaining some ultimate reconciliation. For Kiefer myth itself is neither some primary reality nor guarantee of an unquestioned origin⁴¹ but, much like Kentridge's work, is appropriated in an attempt to construct meaning and reality via storytelling in images.

Kiefer suggests that the German past is latent or inherent to the contemporary German world which has repressed it — as Walter Benjamin argues that the prehistory or archaic is embedded or latent within the modern world. His 'tragic' vision helps to unmask repressed features of the past that ideas of historical progress obscure — an unmasking that is also seen in Kentridge and Mofokeng's art. Kiefer uses the traditions of the old and new to articulate the obsolete yet unconscious hold of German authenticity and authority (Kuspit 1993: 533). As psychoanalysis excavates the 'buried' past with the intention of transforming the psychic present and preparing for a better psychic future, so art must examine the unconscious import of conscious artistic articulation to be liberated from the power of the unexamined unconscious. While modernism achieved its authority and authenticity through its implicit utopian commitment to both art and society, postmodernism is a critical working-through this obsolete commitment in order to be liberated from it. Kiefer's work is a reminder that there is no escape from the recognition of our own archeological condition (Kuspit 1993: 535). His (qtd. Huyssen 1992: 98) solution lies in something like the Jungian archetypes:

with Apollonian reason.

41. For as Walter Benjamin (1998: 45) writes: "The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance". Cf. p. 33.

Our memory, is not just formed when we are being born; it comes from far away, has scored basic experiences and attitudes that have accumulated in thousands of years.

The layered and fragmented complexity of the mythic materials, names, and symbols are what Kiefer attempts to capture in visual sedimentations, where: “No learned exegesis will ever put all the fragments back together again” (Huysen 1992: 98).

Kiefer, much like Kentridge, constantly crosses the threshold between painting and storytelling where what remains are the fragments or Adornian *Brüche* from a memory that itself lies in ruins overlaid by the debris in the present (Huysen 1992: 90). In his work, words and image combine to form material Benjaminian *Denkbilder*, thought-images in which narrative and conceptual, material and pictorial elements remain in a permanent allegorical fluctuation that elude any attempt to pin them down (Huysen 1992: 92). Kiefer’s mythic repetition does not provide a stable ground — the same names and words appear on different pictures, complicating the web⁴² of narrative and pictorial elements where the disparate narrative elements (as Derrida points out with circular/empirical displacement of repetition) never amount to some metanarrative — yet they do pivot around the messianic urge to transcendence. Kiefer’s appropriations, in the manner of Benjaminian and Derridian allegory, use the meanings that have been historically associated with other elements in order to create new meaningful configurations (Biro 2000: 155). Kiefer uses allegory against the dangerous spell of the symbol and myth — for allegory is the vision of the irreducible ruins of time and history in opposition to the unified, seamless and romantic realm of the symbol. Allegory preserves the Adornian gaps, the disparity, the differences and works against history as a smooth narrative, “the lull of ideological sleep” (Handelman 1991:

42. Cf. Pollock’s *Out of the web no.7* (1949) and Kuspit’s discussion of his archeologism p. 75 n49.

116-117). Kiefer engages the mystical tradition in art as well as history to deconstruct them — creating an incomplete mosaic which exposes in their momentousness that they are both hollow and that neither provides the perspective needed to create a total world view (Kuspit 1993: 109). By mixing both modern and premodern time frames, Kiefer's works seem to repudiate the linear account of history as a series of distinct world ages, creating a Benjaminian Ur-history. In addition, the quotation — or 'appropriation' — of preexisting forms and styles suggests the 'saturated' state of contemporary culture. Kiefer works within this saturation to produce undecidability that, as both Derrida and Lyotard argue, creates dialogue.

In this context, the series of photographs entitled *Occupations* (1969) (figure 1) feature the artist himself performing, citing, embodying the Sieg Heil gesture⁴³. Kiefer violates a taboo by assuming the identity of the conquering National Socialist who occupies Europe. But multiple ironies begin to appear: the Sieg Heil figure is minuscule, dwarfed by the surroundings; in one of the photos the figure stands ridiculously in a bathtub; there are no jubilant masses, marching soldiers nor any other emblems of power and imperialism. Thereby the artist does not identify with the gesture of Nazi occupation, he ridicules and satirizes it⁴⁴. Rather than seeing this series of photos as only representing the artist occupying Europe with the fascist gesture of conquest, one may view the artist as occupying various framed image-spaces: landscapes, historical buildings, interiors — precisely the image-spaces of most of Kiefer's later paintings. The Sieg Heil gesture can be read as a conceptual gesture that reminds the viewer that Nazi culture had

43. The connection to the Mao Zedong' salute in Kiefer's works *Let a thousand flowers grow* (2000) implies that Mao, too, is involved in despotic Hitlerianism procedures — trapped by his own despotic image, his icon — saluting it amongst flowers (which will perish) without knowing that he is saluting his own failure (McEvelley 2000: 19). Kiefer makes versions of the icon not to promote faith in it, but to point to its inauthenticity and to cause suspicion.

44. Even though he is 'properly critical', this does not lay to rest the spectator's fundamental uneasiness at whether irony and satire are the appropriate mode for dealing with fascist terror or if it belittles the very real terror which the Sieg Heil gesture conjures up for a historically informed memory (Huyssen 1998: 31-34). Cf. this

most effectively occupied, exploited and abused the power of the visual, especially the power of massive monumentalism and of a confining, even disciplining, central perspective. The theatrical moment of the gesture also indicates Kiefer's need to enact aggressive episodes in the German past, so as to engage and reconstitute German arrogance (Kuspit 1993: 111). Kiefer can be seen to reconstitute the collective, national identity involuntarily given to him by history, that he destroys to find his human identity⁴⁵. Kuspit (1993: 109) argues that "Kiefer can best be understood as a conceptual performance artist deconstructing the concept of the German," as he mocks the sense of uniqueness and heroic pretentiousness of both German identity and modern artistic identity, using hybrid forms of both to dissect them⁴⁶.

In his work, German myth exists only as a series of tragicomic representations that add up to nothing more than a pathetic delusion of grandeur (Kuspit 1993: 108). In the same way, modern art has come to the end of its history and what remains is a 'warehouse' of mythic styles that are simply the depictions of the bankruptcy of myth. Kiefer appropriates past styles, such as Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, so as to understand the nature of the commitment involved in their

nationalism/fascism problematic in *Shulamith* pp. 93-94.

45. Kuspit's term 'transmuting externalisation' relates to Kiefer's destructuring of the German psyche by decomposing its structure and turning it against itself. According to Kuspit (1993: 111), Kiefer suggests that the German self was ill-formed and he must therefore reverse the process by which the German self came into being. He sees the German self as having no control over its aggressive impulses and idealised its erotic impulses to the point of uselessness. This split manifests as the brutally materialistic (war) or the spiritually sublime (music/ philosophy). 'Transmuting externalisation' means reenacting history on the artistic stage, acting against it in the imagination. Thus Kiefer creates images of destruction of spiritual images to clear the ground of the German psyche so the new self can grow – see pp. 82-85. By synthesizing the traditional and the modern, the mythological and the historical, the simulated and the real, Kiefer achieves a puzzling and provocative mixture of elements that raise questions, much like Adorno and Horkheimer, about the power that assumptions and imagined scenarios have over the collective life of a people, forming myths that provide an identity and a basis for action (Gilmore 1990: 9).

46. Kiefer suggests that there is very little depth to being German today and demonstrates the idea of the 'eternal German' as absurd, pathetic (Kuspit 1993: 108). In works such as *Occupations* (figure 1), he presents the image of the 'eternal German' as a joke that makes itself manifest in insolated historical moments in which the Germanic was not as triumphant as it supposed, reducing it to the symbolic fiction it is. With the loss of unity of coherent historical episodes, the 'German' evaporates into a series of discontinuous dream sequences.

invention (Kuspit 1993: 533)⁴⁷. The abstract, idealised methods create a sense of the inescapable, fundamental association with tradition, in order to dissolve or ‘de-signify’ the particular historical tradition of being German. In this context, Kiefer can be seen not simply to appropriate past authoritative, authentic styles but to complexly synthesize them to achieve an emancipatory effect — in what Kuspit terms ‘positive archeologism’⁴⁸.

ii. Kiefer as artist

Kuspit (1980: 191) argues that ever since Gauguin asked the questions *Whence come we? Where are we going? Who are we?* the best art attempts to find depth of meaning in an increasingly secular and banal world. In this context, Pop Art revealed meaning in a self-banalizing secularity, whilst Pollock’s very energy seeks meaning⁴⁹. Kiefer suggests that for art to have

47. Cf. Kentridge’s appropriation of art styles (p. 160) as well as his (pp. 173-174) and Mofokeng’s use of the South African landscape genre (pp. 224-226), as well as Boltanski’s (pp. 112-114) and Mofokeng’s understanding of their own medium of photography, specifically in relation to photo-journalism (pp. 203-209).

48. Kuspit (1993: 529) terms ‘archeological’ art as art that exposes what lies beneath or determines the artistic appearance of a particular style, by utilizing the rules that establish art’s discursiveness. In this art, Kuspit contends, the pull or gravity of the repressed can only be uncovered by a kind of archeological excavation, as Freud suggests with psychology and Benjamin with history. Kiefer’s art is a “superior example of archeologism” (Kuspit 1993: 532), in contrast to Sherrie Levine’s ‘negative archeologism’. Kiefer uses well-known methods, such as Abstract Expressionism to establish an indirect, unexpected discourse about the contemporary German world, with a new intensity. In a similar manner, Boltanski uses the archive, Kentridge narrative, and Mofokeng documentary photography.

49. There is a dialectical connection between the social (representational) and the personal (abstract) in Pollock’s art (Kuspit 1980: 188-190). Pollock intervenes with his physical person as well as his gesturing art — thus his sense of painting is as a disruptive social performance, an ‘argument’ for a revolutionary artistic presence in the world, where the artistic is the revolutionary. Kandinsky saw abstraction as the artistic unconvention that can imply depth of meaning with a rawness and directness that representationalism can only suggest as a nuance of the surface of objects. As such, abstraction works against the ‘charisma’ of surface by disrupting the order which creates it and which it reflects, particularly the hierarchical ordering of space and the objects in them, as with Pollock’s *Out of the web no.7* (1949). In Pollock, the realization of the all-over picture suggests the loss of surface and the plunge into the depth:

One might say that in Pollock the dialectic between shallowness and depth between a surface that is constantly betraying itself and a depth that is emerging or else submerged like a lost Atlantis, i.e., a depth that is archaeologically trying to restore itself- creates a sense of apocalypse, a sense of apocalypse which dominates the paintings and which can be interpreted socially (Kuspit 1980: 188).

value, it must be a means of uncovering repressed content (Kuspit 1993: 532). He appropriates past styles not to give identity (as in the past, to identify one as having authenticity or authority⁵⁰), but for an ‘extra-artistic’ purpose growing out of a profound political and historical need (Kuspit 1993: 535). Kiefer’s postmodern project moves toward the (compromised) recovery of a repressed history, be it the repressed history of modernity, of modern Germany (the Holocaust, barbarism, totalitarianism), or the repressed history of modernism, of modernist painting (referentiality, figuration). He abstractly brackets art history so that its meaningful structures might become evident, excavating content repressed by the contemporary world, in his exhaustive uncovering of the rules for making art (Kuspit 1993: 109). With postmodernism, content can be seen to replace form in importance, because content gives art its inner necessity and purpose, allowing art to transcend its thematization of itself.

Kiefer’s consistent undecidability, in his rejection of any single intersubjective perspective, and his frequent evocations of the artist’s potential violence, suggests that art’s proper political function is to generate debate and not to imply a clear course of collective action (Biro 2000: 9)⁵¹.

ii. a) Aesthetic archeologism

This submerging/emerging, covering/uncovering of surface in Pollock’s works relates as much to Kiefer’s archeologism, which can also be interpreted socially as uncovering repressed content. Cf. melancholy and covering/uncovering in Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng’s work (pp. 237-238).

50. One can argue that this is the same reason why Boltanski chose to replace the use of his own urine on the biscuit tins with Coca Cola – see pp. 119-120.

51. As Kiefer (qtd. Biro 2000: 288) states: “I believe art has to take responsibility, but it should not give up being art. Many kinds of art are very effective as art. Minimal art is a good contemporary example. But such a ‘pure’ art is dangerous to content, which must always be there. My content may not be contemporary, but it is political. It is an activist art of sorts”.

Kiefer is the ‘undisguised storyteller’, the orchestrator of a visual *Gesamtkunstwerk*⁵² — a ‘total’ experience of art which is operatic, poetic, epic (Schama 1995: 126). By focusing on the multiple forms and problems of representation, Kiefer mixes diverse modes of representation and abstraction, juxtaposing content with a rich formal display of different textures, materials and gestures (both human and mechanical) to show the connection between representation and humankind as self-manipulating instrumental rationality — as both the Frankfurt School and the poststructuralists argue. Appropriation is used to sift and investigate his visual tradition, suggesting that Kiefer understands both his contemporary moment and his historical past to be driven by competing world views as well as the Adornian gaps (moments of disjunction, unconsciousness, and death) allegorically encoded into almost every aspect of the visual (Biro 2000: 154)⁵³. Both individual and collective identity are historically produced in Kiefer’s work through an ambiguous and dialectical interaction of self/other, individual/society, national/foreign elements (Biro 2000: 149). This lateral Derridian slippage of the thematic connections undermine the authority of linear causal narrativity (McEvelley 2000: 23), much like Kentridge’s yet-to-be-completed narratives and Mofokeng’s juxtaposition of catastrophic landscapes from different time periods.

52. This theatrical aspect of Kiefer’s work may be compared or juxtaposed to Adorno’s calls for an anti-theatrical (to use Michel Fried’s term) and ascetic art as exemplified by the stark and ‘silent’ writing of Beckett and Kafka because it does not create a spectatorial, fetishistic relation with the reader/viewer. Kiefer’s theatricality is essentially postmodern.

53. Kiefer eludes the traditional dichotomy of the sublime and the beautiful and opens it up a third term: banality, cliché, the trivial (Huysen 1992: 100-101). With this triangular constellation, Kiefer can be seen to destabilize the discourse of the sublime both visually and conceptually, and suggest that the nonrepresentable sublime (Abstraction Expressionism) can be just as banal as ‘fake’ beautiful illusion offered by the culture industry (Pop art). What can be seen as Lyotard’s still-metaphysical discourse, is demystified by Kiefer — bringing the sublime down from “the pedestal of the nonrepresentable”. What distinguishes Kiefer’s use of this triangulation of the sublime, beautiful and banal, is its linkage, both conceptually and aesthetically, to storytelling and to memory.

Kiefer appropriates Pop Art, like Gerhard Richter⁵⁴ before him, to analyse the postwar tradition of monumental painting — in order to produce undecidability around (to demystify) the cult of ‘great’ German personalities and thus provoke questions as to how the representation of historical individuals affects the contemporary construction of individual and collective identity. Thus, in works such as *Ways of worldly wisdom* (1980) (figure 12), Kiefer refers to Andy Warhol's de-skilled painterly technique as a way of commenting on the lingering legacy of Nazism. Warhol's *13 most wanted men* erodes historical specificity by decontextualizing his portraits, no longer giving the identity of the represented subject (Biro 2000: 293). As Rosenthal (qtd. Biro 2000: 293-294) notes:

Like the American artist, Kiefer looks at the heroes of his country in a deadpan way; the result is a kind of jingoism in which these individuals take on the character of gods. The portrayals by both Warhol and Kiefer leave their subjects slightly hollow, all surface and no inner core. When they burn in Kiefer's paintings, we do not witness the incineration of flesh and blood but the cremation of icons⁵⁵.

54. By representing the Federal Republic of Germany in an international context (Richter's *48 Portraits* represented West Germany at the Venice Biennale) through a work that appeared to have an American antecedent — an antecedent that comments upon the commodification of the high-art sphere (its development of multiple ties to capital and mass culture) — Richter suggested that this was potentially the fate of Germany's high-art sphere as well (Biro 2000: 178). Richter's work seems designed to provoke questions as to whether the artist — who traditionally both glorified his or her human subjects and stood for a heightened form of human existence (the genius) — was able, in the context of West Germany in the early 1970's, to depict actual historical individuals without mystification and without conferring upon them an unearned aura of greatness. In Pop style works, such as *Ways of worldly wisdom* (1980) (figure 12), Kiefer continues the multiple lines of questioning brought up by the two antecedent works — *48 portraits* by Richter and *13 most wanted men* by Warhol. Represented the Federal Republic at the Venice Biennale, the work presents a text book illustration (the title is from German high school textbooks) of the ‘genuinely’ German, with the two sides of German ideology — German land (such as March Heath) and German people (Kuspit 1993: 112). Cf. in *Memories and heroes*, South African sculptor Anton van Wouw presented perspex portraits of ‘everyday people’ floating in front of steel portraits of icons from the past, of Boer leaders (Williamson 1996: 83). Cf. the anti-fascist Austrian artist Gottfried Helnwein's installation *Selektion* consisting of an extensive 100m “picture wall” incorporating the strangely haunting and beautiful images of 17 children's faces aged between 6 and 7 years old. Writes Sanders (2000: 92): “With eyes half closed or staring blankly ahead, they represent the collective ineptitude of racial selection... as if to drive the point home, Helnwein chose to include insidious examples of Nazi racial propaganda, black and white pseudo scientific charts that outlined the supposed differences between the perfect Aryan type and inferior subhuman degenerate.” Within a week all 7 children's portraits had had their throats cut, a poignant and disturbing reminder of racial tensions still present in Germany. Cf. Boltanski children's portraits pp. 114-118 (figure 22).

55. In the context of Adorno's *Bilderverbot*, this destruction of icons is significant – see pp. 53-57

Kiefer's work implies that a lack of a critical attitude toward Nazi attempts to hypostatize and mythologise a standardized image of 'Germanness' was one of the preconditions for the horror of Nazi rule. This appropriation warns spectators against complacency in the production and reception of aestheticized representations of public personalities (Biro 2000: 180) and attempts to further Adorno's notion of the ethical spectator.

Kiefer's quotation of Abstract Expressionism can be seen to emphasize the deliberateness or subjectivity of Kiefer's art, at the same time as it problematizes the concept of the artist as subject. The 'meaning' of Abstract Expressionism (what its 'abstract' forms have come to 'represent') has everything to do with the projection and destabilization of different forms of subjectivity (Biro 2000: 189). With Jackson Pollock, the physical inscription of painterly traces signify the opposite of subjectivity, intention, and history — images of the 'formlessness', the decay of meaning, that resulted from the breakdown of certain types of postwar subjectivity (in his case, American). The meanings that have been historically attached to Pollock's drip canvases can work to produce an undecidable play of multiple forms of subjectivity on both an individual and a collective level. Kiefer's treatment of abstraction points to its fundamental Adornian negativity that is undecidable: despite the fundamental negativity of abstraction within modernism, abstraction will always ultimately be recuperated by representation and will project a set of meanings that will include a vision of the individual and collective subject (Biro 2000: 189)⁵⁶.

56. Kiefer's work is a self-conscious rejection of a view of painting like Clement Greenberg's or Adorno's ascetic modernism since, like so many postmodern artists, he employs a multi-media approach, mixing sculptural, photographic, and print elements into his paintings. In addition, he violates another feature of Greenberg's (qtd. Gilmore 1990: 8) claim that "modernist painting asks that a literary theme be translated into strictly optical, two-dimensional terms before becoming the subject of pictorial art—which means its being translated in such a way that it entirely loses its literary character" since he deliberately evokes literary and historical images for purposes beyond painting itself.

In addition, Kiefer's appropriation and quotation of words and lines of poetry calls for more from the spectator than simplistic indulgence of the visual. By reincorporating text, the paintings can displace and rework strategies of representation and mimesis, breaking the spell of the image as a pure and unmediated illusion, instead producing an estrangement effect (Huysse 1998: 39). This undermines, as Adorno insists the ethical image-maker should, the false immediacy of visual representation or 'beautiful illusion', suggesting that his images have to be both seen and read. As with Kentridge, Kiefer uses his own handwriting, furthering Derrida's (1987: 181) argument that writing perhaps communicates but does not exist — only 'barely' in the form of the "most improbable signature"⁵⁷. Like details of extracts and fragments, signatures are detachable.

In works such as the *Shulamith/Margarete* (figures 8 & 3) series, the image is moved beyond the image: 'painted words' (Benjamin 1994: 47)⁵⁸. It is this combination that effaces the possibility of a reduction, within any putative interpretation, of paintings to words. The line "Your golden hair Margarete/ Your ashen hair Shulamith" from Celan's *Todesfugue* opens a field or play of repetition⁵⁹ in the painting (Benjamin 1994: 45-47). The line, in being what Andrew Benjamin terms 'a part/apart', open the possibility of a presence that eschews the distinction between the

57. In a similar vein, Derrida (1978: 68) writes that "writing is displaced on the broken line between lost and promised speech" — it is a detour to the 'Infinite Detour'. Cf. Benjamin on primordial perception and language pp. 26-27.

58. Cf. Jabes' (1977: 153):

(The word beyond the word... outlasts the object it names, outlasts its actual reason in an intimate unreason of being. A pale nude across the bars of logic. A word that takes wing from the unspoken word as breath does from the inert body. Soul-word with memories of day and blood.
The light comes at the end of our weak nights.)
And yet the book is made of the sun's silence.

Cf. Foucault's 1973 reading of Magritte's *This is not a pipe*.

59. Cf. Derrida on circular repetition p. 57.

literal and the figural. In the poem the line serves as a refrain (a line that takes place with repetition and allows for a reconciliation of all the verses that the line frames), the repetition becoming dynamic as the line's 'identity' shifts — so removing the centrality of the ideal (repetition as Same) in the problem posed by presentation as representation. Even though the formal presentation still occurs, what is given is the affirmed presence of the same and different. In Kiefer's paintings, the introduction of a line whose plurality is marked by irreducibility becomes part of the 'work' of the reworking of repetition, as with the repetition of re-photographing in Boltanski's faces and Mofokeng's archival photographs.

In such works as *Shulamith* and *Heavenly palaces: Merkabah* (1990) (figure 11), Kiefer's 'painted words' suggest a memorializing impulse (Saltzman 1999: 43) — for to name is to memorialize and vice-versa⁶⁰. For “only that which is written gives me existence by naming me” (Derrida 1978: 70), but as it comes into existence, it loses its significance by being named for “all letters form absence./Thus God is the child of his name” (Jabes qtd Derrida 1978: 70). For a name, as a word with letters, signifies absence and separation. As Derrida (1978) writes, in writing's representation of itself the subject is shattered and opened, much like the broken vessels of the Lurianic Kabbalah⁶¹. In addition, the Hebrew inscriptions, to many spectators undecipherable, essentially mark not only the absent Jew but also the absent reader of Hebrew. The words emphasize what is unassimilable and what will not pass away, even if repressed. For according to Walter Benjamin, names as metaphors of origin open up both the immemorial given

60. This memorializing function of words can be seen in Isaiah 56: 5: “Even unto them I will give my house and within my walls a monument (*yad*) and a memorial (*vashem*), better than sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting memorial that shall not be cut off.” The literal translation of the Hebrew words *yad vashem* (the name of the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem) is ‘a place’ and ‘a name’ (Sutter 1997: 617).

61. Cf. Kiefer's *Heavenly palaces: Merkabah* on the Lurianic breaking of the vessels p. 99 n96, also Kentridge's tea-cup p. 168.

(always beyond) and the unceasing arising of the new (Moses 1993: 183). They embody the failed attempt of making the invisible visible again and thus maintain this longing to commemorate at the level of desire⁶².

ii. b) Painting as enactment⁶³

In *Occupations* (1969) (figure 1), Kiefer's absurdly solitary figure making a Sieg Heil sign quotes but contrasts Casper David Friedrich's mystical sea-gazer in his *Traveller looking over a sea of fog* (1818) (figure 13). With this and other works, Kiefer forces together culturally accepted elements of German heroic and mythic traditions with their unacceptable historical consequences. Thus for Kiefer to understand Fascism, he reenacts it (Schama 1995: 123). Kuspit (1993: 114) describes Kiefer's reenactments of German ideology as "ruthlessly anatomizing it, until on the table of his art there is only its corpse⁶⁴, never to be put together again". Kiefer's *modus operandi* displays something of the complex view he has of the artist's imagination — that it in many ways resembles the imaginary powers of dictators or generals, who exercise

62. In this context one can cite Bergoffen (qtd Rogoff 1995: 139): "As desire the human subject is the lack seeking to overcome itself as lack; the finitude seeking immortality; the limited in quest of the unlimited; the singular seeking the absolute. To understand desire as central to the human experience is not to suggest that humanity is teleologically oriented towards its object of fulfillment but rather to indicate that in *naming* our objects of desire we are attempting to fix what cannot be fixed in the hope of transcending the condition of our existence. That is, if to be human is to be desire, then no *named* object can arrest the dynamic of desire that is the human being [emphasis added]". Cf. Counter-monuments and the issue of sustaining the viewer's desire at the level of desire — Kiefer's *Shulamith* pp. 95-96, Boltanski's *The missing house* p. 136 and Mofokeng's *Sad landscapes* pp. 227-228.

63. 'Enactment' can be linked to the psycho-therapeutic action of 'acting-out' so as to 'work-through' trauma (LaCapra 1994: 47). In 'acting-out', the past is compulsively repeated as if it were fully present and memory as well as judgement is undercut. Without working-through, what is not confronted critically does not disappear and tends to return, as Freud argues, as the repressed. One may contend that for Kiefer painting = burning = enacting, thus presenting the viewer with his 'acting-out' so that the viewer may be faced with their own 'working-through', a process that can never be completed, but is always deferred. Cf. mourning versus melancholy in the context of commemoration pp. 229-241.

64. Cf. Walter Benjamin's expressionless sublime in relation to the corpse pp. 35-36; 119; 139 n1.

power over the collective mass (Gilmore 1990: 8)⁶⁵.

Whilst Kiefer revives motifs in which myth is condensed (such as the tree and the forest), this does not take place within the confines of documentary realism. For Kiefer does not intend to convey a coherent, continuous German history but rather, as with Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng, the Benjaminian ruins of history. His is history painting that equates man the builder with man the destroyer and is linked to Walter Benjamin's 'dialectics of destruction' — the dialectical and redemptive process of destruction against destruction, as the mortification of the spectacle, the 'beautiful illusion', the aesthetic appearance of well-being. As with Kentridge's erasure against erasure, Kiefer can be seen to deconstruct in order to reconstruct, or complete, self-understanding. Kiefer's "reactive, hyperbolic, regressively destructive" enactment exists in order to create a new order of human self (Kuspit 1993: 110). He uses 'barbaric' German methods (destroying civilization to ironically 'return to nature') against the idea of the German, in the hope that the phoenix of the newly German self will rise from the destructive, arrogant German self in ashes. In this way, he revives the shamanistic function of art, much like Beuys, as he alchemically purges the old German inhuman self.

One of Kiefer's primary means of destruction for possible redemption, is burning⁶⁶. Integral to this Benjaminian redemption through destruction is alchemy. Much like alchemy, allegory as the

65. Kiefer expresses his conquest of a subject matter for art outside itself not only by means of a different art styles, but also thematically in his paintings as a struggle within art, a *Bilderstreit*. Some of his paintings of the late 1970's represent this battle literally: the artist's palette is shown in places where battles were fought or are commemorated. In these works, the palette shifts between being a weapon, a soldier or a trophy (Van Alphen 1997: 7).

66. Fire is a symbol of the divine and demonic at once (Rosenthal 1987: 156). Kiefer's use of fire both depicted or enacted, has many references — biblically: Jesus, Lucifer, the burning bush, the fires of hell; in antiquity: Prometheus as the bearer of fire was simultaneously the hero and avenger; as well as the sacred fire of shamans. At the same time, in the Old Testament, God said "In the beginning there will be light" — fire as light is linked to the moment of creation, illumination, breakthrough and awakening, as in Walter Benjamin's 'dialectic of awakening'. The alchemist is the 'master of fire', often shown bearing a flaming torch-lamp (as Kiefer depicts himself in *Man in the forest* 1971).

‘melancholy-science’ contains a hope for magical knowledge and transformation (Handelman 1991: 126). The alchemic process ‘magnum opus’ seeks to transmute the ordinary, base materials (such as lead earth and stone), into gold as the ‘eternal perfection’ or ‘universal redemption’⁶⁷. When burnt, straw is reduced to ash⁶⁸ and lead is purified into gold through the alchemic fire. *Nigredo* (the title and inscription of a 1984 work by Kiefer) is the result of first stage of this process — where an egg is placed in the anathor furnace, and a symbolic sexual union occurs with the hot, solar male and the cold lunar female. The event is filled with pain and rage as the matter is destroyed and opposites dissolve into liquid *nigredo*, the return to ‘precosmic chaos’ preceding the moment of rebirth. After he referred to it in *Nigredo*, Kiefer started doing it literally — painting, burning, and melting — with the canvas becoming the fetishistic object, much against Adorno’s proscription, for the alchemist-painter. But in this context, the alchemic potential for ‘terrible’, ‘sinister’ experiences of ‘blackness’, spiritual death and descent into hell, is integral to understanding Kiefer’s work (Rosenthal 1987: 127). The second phase or spiritual state is *albedo*, when the black of *nigredo* becomes white, lead takes place of earth and resurrection or a new consciousness (awakening) is formed. While Beuys’s’ fat and felt can be read to embody an emphatic vision of healing and nurturing, Kiefer’s lead remains fundamentally ambivalent: it may turn into the alchemist’s gold, but it is poisonous (Huysen 1992: 92)⁶⁹. Lead protects against radiation, but absorbs all light. It is grey, dead matter, but

67. Gold is also related to fire, light and then back to darkness and lead. The alchemic process is quite the opposite to Bataille’s ideas, who seeks to desublimite gold and lower the body. Freud argues that gold = shit as both are wholly other waste products.

68. Derrida relates ash to the Holocaust in ‘Cinders’. Straw recalls both the beauty and mournfulness of hair because it suggest the abjectness of the concentration camps, as well as the impossibility of redeeming the past and the hopeless as signified by the saying “clutching at straws”. Straw is also seen by Kiefer as manure, warmth in winter that is also transfigured as it ferments. He uses it as the vulnerable stage set for human history, both because of the danger of fire but also from Kiefer’s understanding of *Faust* — where Margarete, the symbol of German idealism and naivete, lies on a bed of straw. Straw is also related to Margarete’s golden hair – see p. 92.

69. Similarly, in *Let a thousand flowers bloom* (2000), Kiefer often represents flowers such as the *digitalis* which are both medicinal and poisonous.

begins to shine when subjected to processes of erosion, oxidation and alchemic transformation. It is associated with Saturn (the least-lit planet in our solar system), with darkness and melancholy — central to the artistic imagination and a prevalent element in the psyche of the post-Auschwitz generation in Germany (Huyssen 1992: 92).

The work *Nero paints* (1974) (figure 14) refers to Nero fiddling while Rome burned but also refers to Hitler's scorched-earth campaign, the mass destruction of World War II, as well as the history and guilt of the German nation. Kiefer questions how can one fiddle or paint sublime images knowing this history of atrocity. Yet this is precisely what Kiefer does — he paints, ironically performing Hitler, he burns, scars, and wounds the landscape, so that telluric matter and materiality may possibly be turned into uranic spirit and spirituality (Schoeman 2000: 71; Hansen 1998: 94). Through the purification of fire, through a state of utter devastation, the merely beautiful is paradoxically transmogrified into the sublime (Schoeman 2000: 72). In works such as *Nero paints* and *Painting = burning* (1974), painter and dictator cause the land to be scorched — the one out of destruction for its own sake (war), the other for rejuvenation and enlightenment (art) (Rosenthal 1987: 60). Both see themselves as on a sacred mission, building in order to create, the deluded seekers of immortality.

It is history, German history, that stunts the painterly flight toward transcendence. Painting crashes, redemption through painting is no longer possible, mythic vision itself is fundamentally contaminated, polluted, violated by history (Huyssen 1989: 45)

The palette in these works includes and inhabits both heaven and earth, conscious and unconscious and is the ultimate mimetic tool — it depicts, measures, interprets and transforms

the subject. Through the palette, Kiefer (qtd. Rosenthal 1987: 60) establishes an antagonistic I-Thou relationship with his subject — “the palette wants to abolish the beauty of nature”. The palette is the chariot⁷⁰ or vehicle for liberation from the servitude imposed by nature, (earth, mother, history) and allows the artist to enter mythic time, above history⁷¹. The palette is seen to have a redemptive, male character — with it, the artist can ‘love’ the earth, cover and fertilize her with his seed. Thus the palette as giver of paint (seed/life) is regenerative and restorative. In his ‘palette pictures’ Kiefer idealizes art because of his expectation that it can ‘derealize’ the traditional German self (Kuspit 1993: 111).

In the series *Ways* (figure 12) the palette hangs from the tree, referencing the Norse myth, where Odin hung upside down from the Yggdrasil tree and had a transcendent experience when he fell and hit his head on the earth, resulting simultaneously in his death. The works may also reference Christ on the cross⁷² — suspended between the female (earth, mother, the bonds of the material) and male (heaven, freedom, transcendence). In later works, lead wings are attached to trees — using both the cross/tree reference and flying. This may suggest the artist cannot transcend history in such contexts as post-war Germany or post-apartheid South Africa — but rather is burdened by the obligation to bear witness, as Adorno and Lyotard insist, to the suffering and loss of history. This is furthered in *Icarus—march sand* (1981) (figure 5), which shows a flying

70. The mystic traveller of the Kaballah travels in a chariot to arrive at the throne of God (Saltzman 1999: 40). Cf. *Heavenly palaces: Merkabah* p. 99.

71. Rosenthal (1987: 18) interprets this through the Jungian principles of ying-yang as distinctions between male and female. Male-yang is light with its origins in the heavens; female-yang is dark, passive and earthy. This relates directly to the symbolic alchemic sexual union between hot, solar male and cold, lunar female. By putting himself in the landscape, Kiefer shows himself as bound to the mother and not able to transcend, as artist, man and German.

72. The crucifixion, in Jungian terms, is seen as the moment of intersection between the human and the divine — the human figure, representing the ego, is nailed to the cross, signifying the divine (Edinger 1987: 98-99). Through the crucifixion, man could attain knowledge of his shadow and his duality (symbolised by the two thieves, as well as the sun and moon in early depictions). On the one hand, the shadow is seen as a regrettable and reprehensible weakness, on the other, healthy instinctivity and the prerequisite for higher consciousness. Cf. Boltanski’s *Monument* series and

palette as art striving for the infinite (Rosenthal 1987: 80). Icarus can be seen as the alter ego of the artist — the heroic winged palette who fails in his striving for the sun. But in this work, the flames that melt his wings (lead not wax) are from the earth, not the sun — the fire of history, not the want for transcendence (man not God) cause his failure. For essentially, the artist cannot remove himself from, escape or transcend reality, before he has ‘truly’ dealt with or worked-through the brutalities of history (a finality that is impossible)⁷³. This painting expresses paradigmatically the at times unbearable tension between the terror of German history and the intense longing to get beyond it with the help of myth. While the desire for renewal, rebirth, and reconciliation evidenced in these paintings may be overwhelming, they suggest that this desire cannot be fulfilled, is beyond human grasp and will always be deferred⁷⁴.

Kiefer’s works, especially his landscapes, have been described as apocalyptic and catastrophic — landscapes after the end of history, ‘after Auschwitz’. The violence palpable in the burning and ripping, the bruising and scratching of the very surfaces support that reading (Huysen 1992: 98). His photographic images are often eroded, faded, scuffed, overlaid, making the pictorial space both real and fictive. As with Boltanski and Mofokeng, by altering his photographs in various ways he exposes the futility of attempting to seize or define reality with the accuracy or permanence of documentation: his elusive, slipping images and picture-making processes deliberately emphasize this paradox. Even his paint is not brushed on or applied with a palette knife, but is forced and extruded. But Huysen (1992: 98) points to what he calls the “undeniable and stunning beauty” of the visual effects, such as the luminosity of the horizon in some works

the placement of ‘photographic portraits’ as interchangeable surrogates for Christ p. 116.

73. Cf. melancholia in Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng pp. 229-241.

74. Cf. Adorno’s notion of ‘true’ art as ‘broken promises’ pp. 28-30 and Derrida’s philosophy of delay p. 36.

and the utopian promise of the lead book in front of the oceanscape in *The book* (1979 - 85). For these landscapes hold the differed, im-possible promise of an imaginary alchemic beginning or creative chaos — where trajectory of the grey and dead primary matter of lead towards new dimensions of visuality is always deferred.

iii. Landscape and architecture: the *Margarete/ Shulamith* series

Kiefer⁷⁵ can be seen as a ‘woodland exorcist’ — one who tracks down ‘ogres’ of myth in their own ‘lair’⁷⁶ (Schama 1995: 120). As with Kentridge and Mofokeng’s use of landscape, Kiefer draws on German nature myths for, as Jung has argued, the universality of such myths testify to their psychological indispensability in dealing with internal terror and cravings. The German Romantics used and developed the cult of Arminius and the cult of Teutoburger Wald⁷⁷ to bring

75. Simon Schama (1995: 120) points out, interestingly, how Kiefer has played on the semantics and meanings of his own name. In masculine terms *der Kiefer* is the maxilla (the jawbone instrument of speech) — Kiefer as artist becomes carrier of the jawbone, Samson amongst the Philistines, the riddling speaker in the land of the mute. In reference to the Teutonic myth, Kiefer plays on the term *die Kiefer* as the pine tree and St. Anselm as the herald of resurrection — “the evergreen of the beechwood” (the name of the concentration camp *Buchenwald* is literally ‘beech tree of the forest’). In this context, one should point out that to Aby Warburg, the tree is a metaphor for the growth of memory.

76. Kiefer is an heir to this tradition. Walter Benjamin, as a youth, was involved in *Jugendbewegung* — the ‘new’ generation that showed a contempt for bourgeois urban materialism and extolled nature, especially the sublime German forest, as having transcendent value. In 1971 in the *Gretenburger Wald* outside Dusseldorf, Beuys and over 50 students swept the woods with birch brooms in a ritual exorcism of the bourgeoisie and painted crosses and rings on the threatened tree, affirming the ancient Teutonic cult of the wood-spirits. In addition, Beuys’s entry into *Documenta 7* in Kassel in 1982 was *Seven thousand oaks* which were to be planted in the centre of German cities. He called this living oak versus dead concrete *Verwaldung* — afforestation as redemption.

77. Hermann was the son of the chief of a German tribe, who had made a military career in the Roman army. When he returned to his tribal identity, however, he raised a rebellion against the Roman empire, which culminated in the slaughter of an entire Roman army in Teutoburger Forest in 9 AD. This event, which reclaimed German soil for people with German blood, has become a key element in several episodes of German cultural history, functioning as the primary symbol of the origin of German cultural identity, which is why Kiefer utilizes it in *Piet Mondrian — Hermannschlacht* (1976) (figure 10). Kuspit (1993: 105) cites this excerpt from Emil Nolde’s *Jahre der Kämpfe* in which these ideas are powerfully and emphatically stated: “The southern sun, tempting us, the Nordic people since time immemorial, stealing what is most our own, our strength, our reticence, our innermost tenderness... Who amongst us knows the Edda, the Isenheim Altaer, Goethe’s Faust, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, all these ruins hewn in stone, these proud, sublime works of Nordic-German peoples! There are eternal truths, and not intoxications of the day”.

out the ancient mystic of rustic innocence, martial virility and woodland naturalism (Schama 1995: 101-105). The enemy was no longer Rome, but the entire Enlightenment tradition of humane liberalism. With Nazism, the Jews were linked to commercialism, the material, the city, whilst the ‘heroes’ of the Third Reich (Hitler, Goring and Himmler) were all photographed in woodland scenes, exploiting the cult of Hermann (Schama 1995: 118).

Kiefer works against the Romantic’s transcendent view of land exemplified by Caspar David Friedrich’s association of the evergreen with Christian architecture of resurrection — addressing true idolatry (landscape) versus the pagan primitive grave (architecture) (Schama 1995: 14). Kiefer implies that landscape and buildings achieve meaning through events that occurred there (Rosenthal 1987: 119). His architecture are interiors concerned with enclosure and ceremony — from the 1980’s the buildings are no longer of wood, nor the landscapes simple clearings in the forest, but destinations, fixed focal points — with a failed sense of aspiration and symbolic presence as in temples and churches⁷⁸. In these works, the buildings now appear lifeless and isolated from nature, which with no natural light deny the possibility of illumination through myth⁷⁹.

Kiefer explores the role of landscape and architecture as innocent or complicit witnesses to the horror of the Holocaust (Bohm-Duchen 1995: 134) — as do Kentridge and Mofokeng in the context of colonialism and apartheid. Most directly focused on the Holocaust is the series of monumental mixed-media canvases he produced in the early 1980’s, entitled either *Margarete* (figure 3) or *Shulamith* (figure 8). Whilst these paintings locate themselves firmly within the

78. These works recall the influence of Van Gogh’s *Crows over the wheatfields* (1890) with its suggestion of death and resurrection but Kiefer transposes the theme of the afterlife to transformation in this life and history (McEvelley 2000: 22). Cf. Mofokeng’s *Where did the road lead when it lead nowhere* (c.2000) (figure 57) pp. 220-229.

79. Cf. Boltanski’s inversion of traditional conceptions of light pp. 128-130.

historical terrain of the twentieth century (such as *Shulamith*, anchored within the architectural spaces of Nazism) the images hover within a mytho-poetic sphere (Saltzman 1999: 26). For their naming and iconography refers to Paul Celan's poetic evocation of the Holocaust and the death camps in *Fugue of Death*:⁸⁰

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
 we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening
 we drink and we drink
 a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margareta
 your ashenes Haar Shulamith he plays with his vipers

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a Master from
 Deutschland he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then as smoke to the sky
 you'll have then a grave in the clouds there you won't lie too cramped
 Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
 we drink you at midday Death is a master from Deutschland
 we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
 this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue
 he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
 a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete
 he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
 he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus
 Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 dein ashenes Haar Shulamith.⁸¹

80. Celan wrote *Todesfugue* while in a concentration camp in 1945 and was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. He committed suicide in 1970.

81. Biro (2000: 183) offers an outline of the narrative of Celan's poem: an anonymous Jewish narrator, speaking in the third person, describes the violent day and night experience of living under the domination of Death, an anonymous German man, presumably a concentration camp guard, who lives in a house, writes to his beloved in Germany, plays with a snake, and periodically emerges to mistreat his Jewish prisoners, order them to dig graves, and eventually shoot them. 'Margarete' stands for the idealized German woman the 'golden haired', absent partner to whom the man writes. Using a fragmented and repetitive language suggesting the breakdown of rational experience, Celan pairs and contrasts Margarete with Shulamith: Margarete's female Jewish counterpart, whose grave in the air the Jewish slave workers are forced to dig. At the end of the poem, after the Jews are apparently shot, Celan concludes with a synecdochic verbal image of the two absent women: "your golden, Hair Margarete/your ashen Hair Shulamith". Here, in this image, German and Jew are linked by a mutual longing for their absent beloveds: a mutual longing that perhaps suggests a desire for a different relationship between German and Jew than the one represented

Celan's poem situates a contrast between two forces, two moments that become history: one is marked by the name⁸² Margarete, the figure of Germany, and the other by the name Shulamith, the figure of the Jew. This bifigural nature occurs throughout Kiefer's work — male/female, German/Jewish, Modern/postmodern, Romantic genius/tyrannical destroyer. Whilst the names are at first contrasted, and in the final two lines they abut (leaning on or against each other), what they never form is an integrated whole. This irreducibility also figures in terms of the oppositions between life and death, solidity and smoke, 'golden hair' and 'ashen hair'. Their presence eschews both mediation and indifference, synthesis and singularity. It is thus that the contrast and inseparability of Shulamith and Margarete means that they are apart, yet form a part (Benjamin 1994: 46). It is precisely in terms of the 'apart/a part' that the words forming part of what is framed as well as how the combination of oil, straw and emulsion signal a more significant and radical division within the frame.

In both poem and paintings, the names 'Margarete' and 'Shulamith' are present because of the impossibility of any consideration of the history of Germany independently of the Holocaust. It can be argued that they are inseparable because they are the light and dark sides of the self⁸³ — that the destruction of the dark side (the Jew) leads to the self's loss of unity, the destruction of humanity (Kuspit 1993: 110). Through the textual appropriation, Kiefer emphasizes his own connection to the subject position of the German victimizer: "Your golden hair, Margarete" is one of the few lines in Celan's poem that seems to be uttered from a German perspective (Biro

in Celan's poem.

82. Cf. naming pp. 33; 81; 131.

83. Cf. the inseparability of Kentridge's characters Soho, Felix and Nandi pp. 153-154.

2000: 190). The German in Kiefer's art can thus be seen as an arrogant, incomplete, destructive human, who is satisfied with his partial self, just as Soho is in Kentridge's films. By identifying his representation with one of the few subjective images attributed to the victimizer in *Todesfugue*, and by literally writing it as does the male German protagonist in the poem, Kiefer connects a Jewish representation of the German perpetrator to his own person.

The *Margarete* paintings (figure 3) are composed of straw, embedded in and loosely covering painted canvases with thickly encrusted surfaces of his signature landscapes. In Goethe's *Faust*, Margarete's (or Gretchen's) perfect state is ravaged by love. Her tragic suffering is resolved at the end of Part I where she is 'redeemed', and at the end of Part II with "Woman eternal draw us high" (qtd. Rosenthal 1987: 97). For Kiefer, no such redemption is possible for Margarete exists as the noble, idealistic, daylight realm that is deluded and does not acknowledge its own shadow (Rosenthal 1987: 104)⁸⁴. Kiefer's Margarete, who is at once Celan's and Goethe's, is a blond-haired (*strohblond*, literally straw-blond) figure of German womanhood corporealized and metaphorized in straw. If Margarete symbolizes the old German love of the land, idealism and racial purity, Kiefer shows that all is blackened because of her dangerous idealism (Rosenthal 1987: 96), much like Boltanski's mournful geometry because of the idealism of Mondrian and Malevich.

For Kiefer, the landscape is the field of history. But if history is not just the recitation of events, then the presence of the field is Kiefer's response to the question of how the event of history is to be represented — as the Benjaminian concept of the field of repetition (Benjamin 1994: 47). Much like Mofokeng's series *Sad landscapes* (figure 51), the repetition of landscape is

84. Cf. Boltanski on light and darkness pp. 128-130.

contemporaneous with the impossibility of the fields being reduced to a simple enactment or repetition within the genre of landscape. In this context, the straw's presence is also enacted within the logic of the apart/a part. The Germany in question is not an element of a tradition that can be denied or displaced. Not only is this rendered impossible by the interplay of apart/a part, it is also marked by the furrows, the place. These designate the field of renewal⁸⁵ — but renewal not in the sense of the new but in the co-presence of the again and the anew.

In contrast to the organic imagery of the *Margarete* paintings, the *Shulamith* (figure 8) paintings evoke deeply recessional architectural spaces or built environments, reminiscent of the spaces of Boltanski's installations. The brilliant colours, planarity and highly textured materiality of *Margarete* (1981), its insistent presence, contrast dramatically with the empty, dark, cavernous space of *Shulamith* (1988). Kiefer represents a vaulted, brick chamber, an architecturally exacting rendering of Wilhelm Kreis's *Mausoleum for German war heroes*. It is legitimate to ask whether Kiefer indulges the contemporary fascination with fascism, with terror, and with death ('fascinating fascism' as Susan Sontag calls it). The ruins of fascism in the mode of Benjaminian allegory seem to hold the promise of a beyond, to suggest an as yet absent reconciliation (Huysen 1998: 38-39). In Kiefer's painting, the overbearing monumentalism of size and subject matter is emphasized by the central point perspective driven to an extreme. But this monumentalism is undermined by the claims the multiply layered surfaces make on the viewer, by the fragility and transitoriness of the materials, the eerie effects of the use of photography overlaid by thick oil paint, emulsion, shellac and straw. Like dream images, the architectural structures that seem intact are intriguingly made to appear as ruins: the resurrected ruin of

85. Cf. the yogi position known as *shavasana* or corpse position, which is simultaneously also a space of begetting (McEvelley 1996: 4).

fascism as simulacrum, as the painterly realization of a contemporary state of mind (Huysen 1998: 38-39)⁸⁶. Kiefer here quotes the Romantic appeal of ruins and the inherent ambivalence of the ruin as celebration of the past, of nostalgia and feelings of loss; as well as the real ruins left by fascism of bombed-out cities and the destruction left in the wake of fascist invasion and retreat. Such depictions are problematic because they can be seen as monuments to the demagogic representation of power and to affirm, in their overwhelming monumentalism and relentless use of central-point perspective, the power of representation that modernism has done so much to question and to reflect critically. Perhaps Kiefer intends to confront the viewer with their own repressions of the fascist image-sphere so as to counter the by-then halo litany about the fascist aestheticization of politics (Huysen 1998: 39). By recreating the aesthetic lure of fascism for the present, the viewer is forced into a confrontation of the possibility that he/she is not immune to what may be rationally condemned. If such images seduce spectators, lure them in, but in their historical referent remind of the danger of that spectatorial dynamic, then Kiefer's paintings would seem to instantiate not just the Adornian *Bilderverbot* on image-making and viewing, but its qualification (Saltzman 1999: 29). Thus even as Kiefer's *Shulamith* indulges a certain 'fascination of fascism' in the spectatorial lure of the material image, it simultaneously blocks and ruptures that unity, giving its viewers unassimilable Derridean allegorical fragments of history.

But by transforming a fascist architectural space dedicated to the death cult of the Nazis into a memorial for Nazism's victims, Kiefer reveals fascism's genocidal telos in its own celebratory memorial spaces (Huysen 1998: 42-45), exploring their inherent Freudian death drive. The

86. Cf. dream spaces, allegory, ruins in the context of melancholy pp. 236-237.

image opens up the possibility of *working-through* Germany's fascist past⁸⁷. The space is no longer celebratory: it has been transformed into a space for mourning the victims of the Holocaust. The menorah⁸⁸ can be seen to transform the commemorative potential of the space, whilst all the other fires in the chamber are extinguished with blackened cutout. A black sooty, ashen residue covers the upper half of the painting, out of which emerges, in the upper left hand corner the name 'Shulamith'. Unlike most of Kiefer's linguistic inscriptions which scrawl and expands across the centre of his images, the inscription of Shulamith is placed in tiny, white characters in the uppermost corner of the canvas. The inscription is not integrally related to the pictorial space but is consigned to the margins, the framing brick work of the outermost arch. Shulamith is represented metonymically only in the ashen surface of the canvas. Similarly, Boltanski's *The missing house* (1990) (figure 7) can also be seen to mark and configure absence — consisting of commemorative name plaques reminiscent of German obituary notices and plaques on the Western Wall. Much like *Shulamith*, *The missing house* engages its viewers in the retrieval of a complex past by combining the allusive aesthetic of the ruin, historical facts and the powerful allegory of a destroyed house. But even as *Shulamith* thematizes and instantiates the Lyotardian impossibility of representation, its incommensurability, the unrepresentable, Kiefer's image nevertheless exists as visual object.

This problematic evidences the pull between the Adornian *Bilderverbot*, Lyotardian impossibility and the Levitical call for witness. The monumentality of the rendered space, the

87. Cf. mourning and melancholy in these artist's works pp.229-241.

88. As Stephan Zweig's (qtd. Liptzin 1944: 221) character states in *The buried candelabrum*: "The menorah symbolized light — the outer light that enabled one's senses to become cognizant of this physical world, and the inner light that enabled our souls to attain clarity and insight into the eternal laws that stem from God". This symbol is opened up allegorically in Kiefer's *Shulamith* as it is in Boltanski's treatment of light as devotional candles p. 128-130.

determined referencing of the absent Jew and the historical trauma of the Holocaust, serve to configure a pictorial space of memory akin to the memorial. If *Shulamith* gives spectators a space of memory, albeit painterly and two-dimensional, then Kiefer's work can be linked with commemorative monuments in Germany of the 1980's that James Young (1993) has termed *Gegen-Denkmal* ('counter-monuments') in his study *The texture of memory* (Saltzman 1999: 32). 'Counter-monuments' eschew figuration and are characterised more by absence than presence, more by impermanence than permanence. While *Shulamith* might seem to remain monumentally present, its powerfully monumental form ultimately acts only as a frame⁸⁹ that configures nothing but an emptied, cavernous void (Saltzman 1999: 35). Despite, and maybe because of, its sheer size and the dramatic perspectival illusion of space, the viewer is forced into confrontation with its emptiness, an emptiness framed and made meaningful through the absent referent, Shulamith, the Jew. Moreover, Kiefer's work has come to emblemize, in the deep ambivalence of its reception, Germany's conflicted struggle with remembering and or representing the past.

iv. Counter-monuments: *Heavenly Palaces: Merkabah* (1990)

89. This can be seen as what Derrida calls the *passe-partout*, which frames within the outer frame that which is between the visible edging and the phantom in the centre (outside/inside, figure/ground, etc). This makes or lets appear in its empty enclosure.

All beginnings are invisible: we learn to see little by little. In this way the book is made (Jabes 1977: 16) .

Throughout time, the ‘heroic’ book has been seen as the inheritor of the great traditions of prophecy and human thought. Walter Benjamin saw the book not only as a fragment of the world, but a little world in itself, which the reader inhabits (Sontag 1996: 125). Similarly Derrida (1978: 76) writes that one emerges from the book only within the book, for the book is not in the world but the world is in the book. In keeping with the most ancient of Jewish memorial media, the first ‘memorials’ to the Holocaust period were in narrative — the *Yizkor bucher* (‘memorial books’) turn the ‘site’ of reading into memorial space (Young 1995: 79)⁹⁰. In response to what has been called ‘the missing gravestone syndrome’, these ‘sites’ of memory created by survivors are interior spaces, imagined grave sites, for as the preface to one of these books suggests: “Whenever we pick up the book we will feel we are standing next to [the victims’] grave, because even that the murderers denied them”⁹¹. From the more secular tradition of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, are the volumes of the *xylotheque*, the ‘wooden library’. These German stories were bound in the particular wood of the tree in the story to suggest the union of culture and nature (Schama 1995: 19). Kiefer seems to draw from these influences in *The cauterisation of the rural district of Buchen* (1974) (figure 15), a wooden book referencing⁹² at once the scorched earth military campaigns of Hitler’s armies, to the book burning, looting, destruction and killing of *Kristallnacht*, to the fires of the crematorium and the victims of Buchenwald (literally ‘beechtree forest’). The book is burnt by Kiefer, exposing the dangerous

90. This is another way of describing Kiefer’s paintings — their textuality: reading and inscription; signature and erasure; writing and erasure; palimpsest allegory and Freud’s mystical writing pad. Cf. Kentridge’s drawing and process of erasure in this context pp. 169-171.

91. Cf. Mofokeng’s ideas on the gravesite and burial in his *Sad landscapes* p. 224.

92. Cf. Saltzman 1999: 82 on how the art historical references of the work link from the aesthetic project of Luciano Fontana to the very literal destruction of painting.

optimism of the 18th century cult of nature to fire, whether alchemic or as redemptive wrath.

There is an uncanny affinity between Kiefer's processes and the mystical processes of creation transcribed in the Kaballah — his use of lead, his interest in alchemy and transformation, his insistent reliance on language and on the word (Saltzman 1999: 36). The particular catastrophe of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 is where the modern Lurianic Kaballah transposed *historical* trauma, the expulsion of the Jews, into *mythic* trauma, the shattering of the mystical vessels⁹³. As such, historical trauma and suffering, and the possibility of redemption relates dialectically to the mystical story of creation, destruction and redemption, and vice-versa. This is key to Kiefer's mytho-historical work, such as his 1990 book project *The heavenly palaces: Merkabah* (figure 11), which narrativizes and contextualizes the aesthetic and ethical dilemma with which his work has been preoccupied.

The first means of entry into the embedded narrative structure is the book cover: atop the photographic base and a field of acrylic paint and ash, are the German words *Die Himmelspalaste* ('The heavenly palaces') and the Hebrew word *Merkabah* ('Chariot') in Kiefer's looping handwriting. While each opened spread of pages functions as a coherently conceived image, the drive or compulsion created by the simple act of sequentially turning the pages sets the stage for a visual story to emerge. On page after page of his book project, Kiefer presents shadowy black and white photographic images of a cavernous interior, punctuated only by solid pillars and diaphanous shafts of light. The interior is a cellar which, in contrast to the attic space

93. As Adorno (1990: 372) argues, the Kaballah, if it cites tradition, must also admit its dependance upon historical states of mind. Scholem (qtd. Rabinbach 1989: xxxi) points out that this relationship between historical and mythic trauma is *dialectical* — the Kaballists rooted their mythic mysticism in history quite contrary to various other mythic sects: "For today's man that mystical totality of 'truth', whose existence disappears particularly when it is projected into historical time, can only be visible in the purest way in the legitimate discipline of commentary and in the insular mirror of philosophical criticism."

as the storehouse of familial history, is devoid of objects — a space that seemingly holds no memories or past. But even as the visual referent of cellar (the ruined chambers of the artist's studio space) locates the work in the present, it is the textual referent that takes the work out of its state of perpetual present and into a past, into the mytho-historical world of Kabbalah.

The invisible form of the book is the legible body of God. In the fire, words are cinders (Jabes 1977: 231).

The work seems to illustrate the mystical world of the Kabbalah and the *Hekhalot*, the celestial regions of the mystical world through which the mystic seeker travels in a chariot before arriving at the throne of God⁹⁴. Shifted into a visual terrain, Kiefer's project presents a tale of artistic and divine creation, a tale of emergent figuration and a return to abstraction: first the photographic image itself comes into focus and resolution, as the cellar space takes on an increasing clarity and legibility⁹⁵, but immediately following this clarity, the photographic image is consumed by painted and applied matter, out of which a figural representation emerges (Saltzman 1999: 40-42). There, loosely rendered in sketchy, gestural paint is a woman's head, from whose opened mouth emanates a field of white paint and ash, recalling the 'divine' light preceding the 'breaking of the vessels'⁹⁶. On the following pages, the figure is concretised and transformed into photographic form — a nude woman shot from torso up, hands clasped behind her head,

94. Cf. this mystical allegory of the chariot in Patrick White's 1961 *Riders in the chariot*, as well as the ambivalence of his Jewish characters within the story.

95. While this may be, in Kiefer's work the fragile photo emulsion seems to always suggest decomposition, hinting that very little would be needed to wipe the image or humankind's traces from the face of the earth, much like Kentridge's erasable charcoal marks p. 169.

96. The Jewish mystic Isaac Luria (Lurianic Kabbalah) wrote of God's emanation, as an outpouring of his attributes revealed in divine lights flowing into primeval space, but where good and evil flow down. As the light rains down, human try contain it in vessels that are flawed and which shatter loosing good and evil on earth. Similarly, in the writings of Dionysius the Aeropagite, the heavenly hierarchy is invisible to man until the appearance of the 'Divine Rays' — light that comes down from heaven and restores one to a higher spiritual condition. Kiefer represents this light as lead (Rosenthal 1987: 138), suggesting that this historic illumination is also a tragic burden.

opens her mouth in a scream of either ecstasy or horror. The emanations from her mouth slowly take shape on the following pages until the substance disperses once again into arrested flows of matter, completing the cycle of form and matter, figuration and abstraction.

This woman appears not as a metonymic trace (as is typical in Kiefer's work) but as a figural representation, and as such, may represent a concretized amalgam of the mythical Jewish figures that appear in other Kiefer works. The embodied female presence is a manifestation of the feminine mystical presence of the Song of Songs, at once Shulamith and her dark side, Lilith⁹⁷, emerging upon and then disappearing from the pages of Kiefer's book. If her source is both the early and later Lurianic Kabbalah, she may embody aspects of cosmic creation and catastrophe — in line with his interest and concerns as artist-creator-chemist. But she is first and foremost the transposition of historical catastrophe and trauma — a history of catastrophe that now ends not with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain but with genocide 'after Auschwitz'.

This work suggests a memorializing, anamnestic impulse⁹⁸ to reintroduce into the landscape of postwar Germany the absent outsider, the Jew, signified in the foreign sounds of the Hebrew language — not only of the absent Jewish culture that once was Germany's but the absent reader of Hebrew (Saltzman 1999: 43). To many spectators indecipherable, illegible inscriptions, these words emphasize, much like Kentridge's discordant music, what is unassimilable and yet persistent — a past that will not pass away. Thus as obscure or irretrievable as the reference to Jewish mysticism may be and as inaccessible as the textual and religious tradition may be to a contemporary audience, it performs the task of suggesting a Lyotardian sense of the immemorial.

97. Cf. the sign of Lilith in the context of melancholy p. 240.

98. Cf. Benjamin's notion of anamnesis as a recalling in memory of the primordial form of perception p. 19 n16.

Moreover, as with the *Yizkor bucher*, the book project itself leaves behind a concretized trace of the Jewish past, re-presenting and preserving in the present⁹⁹.

99. In this way it acts much like Rachel Whiteread's *Nameless library* (c2001) (figure 16), which extends her sculptural predilection for solidifying the negative spaces around everyday objects — making the book itself the central memorial motif. Cf. p. 134. One can also compare Kiefer's work to Micha Ullman's 1996 installation beneath Berlin's Bebelplatz, formerly Opernplatz, site of the May 11, 1933 Nazi book burning. Beneath the infamous square and visible only through a small translucent glass window, lies a stark white room lined with empty book shelves, the ghostly and barren opposite of Kiefer's massive leaden book-filled shelves nearby in Berlin's newly renovated Hamburger Bahnhof (Saltzman 1999: 34). Whilst Kiefer's memorializing impulse may result in a somewhat traditional (in its striving for permanence or concretization) response to the monument, Ullman's is what perhaps leaves the viewer with the sense of their own obligation to remember, because (as will be discussed in relation to Boltanski's *Missing house* and Mofokeng's *Sad landscapes*) there is nothing tangible to relieve or transpose the burden of remembering from the viewer.

TWO

Christian Boltanski

The French artist Christian Boltanski shares this sense of the Levitician call to witness and commemorate the loss and suffering of Jews during the Holocaust. Framing his work within the specifics of memorials and archives, he uses fragments (*Adornian Brüche*) as relics of the past in the hopes of creating Benjaminian premonitory ‘sparks’ to warn of similar dangers in the present. In the search for effective public-commemorative representations Boltanski, much like Mofokeng, navigates between cold historical fact and moody evocation — vacillating between transforming museum spaces into dysfunctional archives or into pseudo-religious settings. His work recognizes that, as Adorno and Lyotard insist, artistic representation often fails the incommensurability of the loss and trauma that occurred during the Holocaust and can also create a libidinous relationship with the viewer when they broach the horror of torture and death to evoke an empathetic response. But at the same time, his work also shows that mere historical conventions (the assembled material facts and documents in archives and museums) mimic the cool factual calculations and dehumanization of a fascist regime as well as Enlightenment ‘reason’ that, as Adorno and the poststructuralists argue, does violence and excludes the ‘other’. Thus Boltanski’s historical installations do not rely on the presence of objects to make their point, but rather their confrontational absence (Van Alphen 1997: 14). His works appear as a long and difficult labour of mourning, the slow emergence of a memory repressed by guilt that haunts survivors, much like the historical belatedness that Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng seem to experience. ‘Phantom’, in psychoanalysis, means the pain from family secrets which is passed

down from generation to generation. It is as if the phantom has entered Boltanski's consciousness and, after various enigmatic combinations, forms an identifiable picture in his works (Semin 1997: 80). Phantom also relates to the (photographic) image itself as *eidolon*¹, and so Boltanski — like Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng — understands implicitly the thematization and literalizing of the formal characteristics and impossibilities of his medium itself.

The task is vast and my means is frail (From *Daily report* 1997: 128).

Christian Liberte Boltanski was born in 1944 in France, very soon after its liberation. During the war, his assimilated Jewish father hid himself under the floorboards of their home after a staged divorce from his Catholic wife. The suspicion of their neighbours during the war, as well as Boltanski's 'difference' in his childhood, seems to have had a profound effect on him. Much like Kiefer's identification with both Jews and Germans, Kentridge's identification with black and white South Africans and Mofokeng's identification with experiences of loss in South Africa, the Holocaust and Vietnam — Boltanski can be seen to have a split identity, identifying with his Catholic mother and with his father's Jewish² suffering (Kuspit 1997: 99-100).

Boltanski's work can be seen as self-healing, however ambiguous the cure and impossible the

1. Barthes (1982: 9) discusses the *eidolon* in *Camera lucida* (1980), alluding to Plato's allegory of the cave.

2. Boltanski (qtd. Gumpert 1994: 96) terms his Jewishness 'culture/non-culture': "A strange relation to the divine, the feeling of being simultaneously part of the 'chosen' and the least of men, has driven me to affirm then contradict myself, to cry and laugh at myself, to say that I paint without painting . . . In Jewish culture, I'm drawn to the fact that one says one thing and its opposite at the same time, or the way of answering a question with another question and constantly mocking what one does. I imagine that my ambiguous relationship with painting and my use of photography are linked to this Jewish consciousness, if I so much as have one. I do photography, considered a less noble art than painting, as if I were afraid to confront this very sacred art. Anyway this is all very fuzzy in my own mind; I have no Jewish culture. I am like the Indians who, in westerns, serve as guides to the soldiers: they forgot everything, but when they drank, Indian dances came back to them". Boltanski chose not to mention his Jewish origins at the start of his career, because they testified to a difference, while his work explores in the manner of Adorno the impenetrable mysteries and myths of the 'normal'. His work prevents an exclusively moral, political or religious reading even if it takes from the registers of morality, politics and religion (Semin 1997: 80). Cf. Kentridge's Jewishness p. 148.

working-through. His work re-enacts and multiplies the trauma of his childhood with his endless representations of children that are all implicitly representations of himself. This can be seen as an attempt to get to the root of his childhood depression, in a search for self-forgiveness³, as much as it takes ‘revenge’ on the children who caused him pain (Kuspit 1997: 105). He struggles with his own violence and destructive intention, which is sometimes directed at himself and sometimes at others, much like the burning in Kiefer’s painting and the erasure in Kentridge’s drawings. As Boltanski memorializes the children (figure 20), just as Mofokeng memorializes the colonial subject in *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1950* (in progress) (figure 17), he also destroys them and simultaneously himself. This ambivalence is embodied, amongst other ways, in the ‘chiaroscuro’ of the photographs, which creates a play between the obscure and straightforward, the indistinct and unmistakable.

i) ‘After Auschwitz’

My work is not about xxxxxxxx it is after xxxxxxxx (Boltanski qtd. Van Alphen 1997: 93).

Boltanski’s work is not explicitly about the Holocaust but the complex mechanisms that make horror possible. Boltanski produces what Van Alphen (1997: 21) terms ‘Holocaust-effects’ by means of a reenactment of principles that in a sense define the Holocaust — the emptying out of subjectivity that led to the wholesale destruction and genocide. One such mechanism is the

3. Perhaps this self-forgiveness is for his guilt or shame resulting from the pious and patricidal Oedipal impulses Boltanski experiences. What should be his ‘heroic’ father, becomes a pathetic figure, hidden in a dungeon, self-buried. Boltanski might blame his father for his loss of childhood, or at least, transfer his self-hatred or repulsion as being an ‘other’ onto his father. By his desire to exorcise that identity from himself, he in effect wishes his father dead. In essence, self-forgiveness might be to forgive himself for being born Jewish. As well as this, he seems to have inherited his father’s ‘survivor’s guilt’, which many of the survivors of the Holocaust experienced — the self-reproachment and guilt which death leaves among the survivors (Rudnytsky 1987: 21). Adorno writing specifically on “the drastic guilt of him who us spared” in the Holocaust, says in *Negative dialectics* (1990: 363) that “his [the survivors] whole existence since [Auschwitz] has been imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed

mechanical transformation from subject to object. As Roland Barthes (qtd. Semin 1997: 87) writes in *Camera lucida* (1980), this is experienced when posing for a photograph: “I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a microversion of death (of parenthesis). I am truly becoming a spectre”. Boltanski deconstructs the promise of the photographic portrait of providing an exact, faithful correspondence to a historical or living reality. One is confronted rather with the allegorical split between signifier and signified or the disappearance of the signified altogether. His work succeeds in failing to provide living realities that correspond with the represented persons — they provide neither presence nor reference, only a signifier: faces (Van Alphen 1997: 112)⁴. The dead portraits are in tension with their frequent framing as monuments, memorials, altars, or shrines. These installations suggest the desire to remember, to memorialize, to maintain contact with the subjects portrayed. But instead of making the portrayed subject present, the photographs evoke a sense of the presence of absence, as with Kiefer’s *Shulamith* (figure 8) and Mofokeng’s *Sad landscapes* (figure 2).

Another mechanism includes language, as Boltanski and Mofokeng deal with in their captioned photographs, such as the former’s *10 photographic portraits of Christian Boltanski, 1946-1964* (1972) (figure 18) and the latter’s *Bishop J. G. Xaba* (figure 19). The photograph’s association with language (the press, the archive or history writing) is the place where manipulations may take place, as Walter Benjamin argues in his *A short history of photography* (1931). The act of referring to a factual reality allows Boltanski the artist to qualify himself as a historian. Modernist disciplinization led to an image of history as something that can be ordered,

thirty years earlier”.

4. Cf. Levinas and Derrida on the face-to-face encounter pp. 45-46 and the discussion on Boltanski’s faces pp. 114-

understood, explained — essentially Boltanski turns to the archival mode of representation as a way of evoking the Nazi structuring of history and genocidal practices (Van Alphen 1997: 121). Whilst Boltanski turns the past into something that suggests the sublime, that recedes into absence when one tries to grasp it, by *failing* to domesticate the past and by showing the Adornian *Brüche* to counter ‘beautiful illusions’, he presents the very opposite of a well-ordered and understood image of history.

In Boltanski’s work, the Holocaust is evoked not only by reference to its victims, but also by means of the connotative effects of the photographic signifiers — the enlarged images, which transform the faces into skeletal vestiges⁵ (figure 22) are reminiscent of the photographs published after the war (Van Alphen 1997: 99). This effect intentionally complicates Boltanski’s position as a ‘good’ archivist or historian of Holocaust studies. In addition, he brings together, without overt comment, images of Jewish victims of the Holocaust — reminiscent of the lists of people who died in the camps. Compiled by the Red Cross after the war so relatives could find out if their family members had survived, the pictures evoke the incomprehensible number of concentration camp victims. Nevertheless, the object of these representations remains the archive as institution, not the ‘archived’ subjects themselves.

Boltanski’s engagement with the Holocaust is performed negatively — its failure or impossibility, in the Lyotardian sense, is shown. Much like Kiefer, he defines the past and future, in terms of a sublime chaos that defies order (Van Alphen 1997: 122). This sublimation is not performed as in the case of Nazism, as a way of legitimizing the utopian thinking of fascism,

118.

5. Cf. Walter Benjamin and the skull or death’s head in context allegory and transcendence pp. 35-36.

because for Boltanski, as for Adorno, the Holocaust signified the end of any utopia:

For a long time humanity was in a childhood-like state believing that things would get better and better, that man would become more and more wise. What is terrible is that after the Holocaust we can see that it was not true. And now with the end of Communism, which is something very sad, we no longer have a good utopia any more. Communism was the last Christian utopia. Holocaust was the worst thing that could happen. In the 19th century it was possible to believe in a moral utopia and a scientific utopia. Today we have lost everything (Boltanski qtd. Van Alphen 1997: 121).

Boltanski presents a fresh awareness of the modern sickness unto death, the want to avoid death that is inescapable (Kuspit 1997: 109). Much like Walter Benjamin's project, in works such as *Monuments; the children of Dijon* (1986) (figure 20), Boltanski presents his viewers with identity as *momento mori*, allegorical collections of relics or souvenirs from dead past — an information overload of death. Thereby, foreshadowed in every face and object, the viewer is initiated into his/her own death (Kuspit 1997: 97). The specter of those who died in concentration camps is also summoned in displaced belongings (*Reference vitrine* 1970) and the second-hand garments (*Canada* 1988, figure 21), conspicuously evoking the idea of absence. Similarly, the faces of those he reproduces endlessly can be seen to stand in for the millions of murdered Jews. All endure in monumental darkness, part of an ever growing inventory of history and suffering — the growing 'wreckages' of Benjamin's landscape of history.

ii. Boltanski as artist

I'm an extremely traditional painter. Like all artists, I work to produce emotions in the viewer. I work to make the world laugh and cry. I think that painters have always had more or less the same thing to say, the same desire to capture reality, but each time they express it with ways and means that are slightly different. I ask a lot of questions about art and its purpose or non-purpose, but, at the same time, in some vague and inexplicable way, I still believe in it (Boltanski qtd. Gumpert 1994: 57-58)

Boltanski's art is essentially melancholic — as with the other artists, he identifies art as an 'absurd' activity through which the artist constantly and inevitably confronts failure, but nevertheless persists in finding hope and meaning in it (Gumpert 1994: 155-6). This is linked to a nostalgia for the traditional avante-garde, with its strong sense of purpose and its power to disclose that which is concealed or repressed — a melancholic nostalgia that Kiefer and Kentridge also share. This sense of failure and Lyotardian im-possibility is tied to his deferred attempts, in the Derridean sense, to bear witness and commemorate the loss that his work tries to comprehend — what Adorno calls 'broken promises'.

ii. a) The counter-archive

The installations of Christian Boltanski mimic the archive, but also produce a certain distance from its customary effect. Throughout his work, the same faces are returned to over and over again, revisiting anonymous people neither he nor the viewer will ever meet. This evidences circular repetition in Derrida's conception, much like Celan's refrain in *Todesfugue*, where the image each time is presented differently, as well as the melancholic desire to recover the object of loss in an attempt to return, as Walter Benjamin argues, to the origin. The work has to do with death but is also a witness to the loss of identity and memory entailed in the entry into the archive.

The archive is thought of as a repository of history, where its keepers (the *archon*) are entrusted with the responsibility of remembering. But archives have often been used to control the past, present, and future — for by elevating its own historical record the group in power de-stabilizes

and threatens to extinguish the value of individual memory⁶. Excluded from official history, the unofficial account is known only in its absence or through repressed traces. In addition, the differences between fact and fiction, document and account, can be manipulated so as to consolidate power in the hands of repressive regimes — as evidenced in both Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa. Caught between history and memory, the archive offers a radically imperfect account of the past. As Derrida writes in *Archive fever* (1995), as repositories of history archives do not have fixed, stable meanings but rather constitute a collection of traces or fragments that are linked by memory to what they are meant to record. In this is a claim for memory that is prior to any archive, something has occurred that cannot be named⁷, that has been witnessed and persists, but remains impossible to speak of, to record — the Lyotardian immemorial.

The detached position of the historian⁸ involves more than neutralization — he/she in a sense reenacts the Holocaust or what led to it precisely by assuming the detached position of an administrator of extermination. Instead of providing ‘real’ understanding of the Holocaust, the historian provides his/her readers with an Holocaust performance (Van Alphen 1997: 119). Critically aware of this, Boltanski the artist presents himself as a self-reflexive historian in the manner of Benjamin and Adorno. He confronts us with the awareness that historical accounts

6. In occupied Czechoslovakia, the Nazis undertook a project to collect "possessions of both historic and artistic value" of departed Jews from the protectorates of Bohemia and Moravia (Gumpert 1994: 162). With these objects they intended to create a repository which, after the war, would function as a museum to a distinct race. For this purpose, the Jewish Museum in Prague was renamed the Central Jewish Museum. Its acquisitions paralleled the fate of the Jews: first the captivity, then to extermination. No category of personal possessions was left untouched — liturgical books and popular novels, portraits and genre paintings, furniture, kitchen utensils, clothing, pianos, and synagogue implements were all amassed. This bizarre plan by the Nazis to create a museum has paradoxically resulted in one of the world's most important collections of Judaica. They eerily echo Boltanski's *Inventaires* and the archival project of Mofokeng's *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1940*.

7. Cf. Walter Benjamin and the primordial anterior p. 71 n41. Cf naming pp. 33; 81; 131.

8. Cf. Benjamin's allegorization of the *Angelus novus* qua historical materialist p. 35 — “the petrified angel of

cover up, hence make absent, the truth that they are supposed to be revealing (Van Alphen 1997: 100). Similarly, he suggests that art that tries to refer accurately and meticulously to the Holocaust tends instead to repeat the Holocaust in its ordering, classifying, objectifying and dehumanizing impulse⁹ — as argued in Adorno's critique of 'organic wholeness' and Benjamin's critique of symbolic or mythic totality and the illusion of beauty. From this perspective the photographic portraits, the vitrines, the reconstitutions, the inventories all belong to the same historical paradigm: they are all extreme examples of non-narrative genres that stand for bare realism. They embody the promise of the presence of the past but that promise in Boltanski's art, like Adorno's philosophy, is constantly broken or deferred.

Both Boltanski and Mofokeng expose the family album as an 'intimate' archival medium bound up in a fixed set of meanings or cultural codes that blocks access to their subjects. The snapshots that fill family albums in fact do the opposite of capturing and representing the reality of a family. The traditional meanings of the family photo album overrule the subjectivities that are supposed to reside in the snapshots:

history" (Schoeman 2001).

9. In the 1985 film *Shoah*, Lanzmann modeled himself on the image of the archivist, whilst Spielberg, in *Schindler's list*, identified himself as a storyteller (Van Alphen 1997: 95-96). Lanzmann, convinced of the basic untruthfulness and negative effects of any realist narrative account of the Holocaust, did not try to represent the event but collected memories of the victims. Lanzmann insists that his film is not a documentary but a performance, for much like an analyst he asks survivors to go back to the places where they lived the events of the Holocaust. Spielberg, in contrast, does not present traces of the Holocaust, but re-presents the Holocaust in the traditional realist mode — a coherent narrative account with redemptive closure. Relying thoroughly on realist conventions, he creates the illusion of transparent entry to the historical events. Lanzmann criticizes Spielberg because the film's closure seems to suggest that the Holocaust was meaningful in that it led to the birth of the state of Israel. To avoid this idea of reconciliation Lanzmann ended his film with the images of a moving train, to signify his conviction that the Holocaust never ends and redemption is impossible, much like with Kiefer and Mofokeng's images of railway tracks — cf. p. 209. Although *Schindler's List* has perhaps done more than any other medium to engage a mass audience, it has done so by sentimentalizing and cosmeticizing the Holocaust. With the more recent Benigni's *Life is beautiful*, which was showered with Oscars, it has been argued that the film is a benign force of Holocaust denial — its audience comes away feeling relieved and happy, and rewards Benigni for allowing them, at last, to escape. Boltanski in a sense, presuming already that Spielberg's approach has shown itself as dangerous and outmoded, goes beyond this and problematizes Lanzmann's attempts to be neutral or detached.

I had become aware that in photography, and particularly in amateur photography, the photographer no longer attempts to capture reality: he attempts to reproduce a pre-existing and culturally imposed image (Boltanski qtd. Van Alphen 1997: 110).

In *Sans-souci* (1991) Boltanski reproduces found snapshots of several German families, which document the lives of ‘ordinary’ people during extraordinary times. The Nazi soldiers in these photographs — affectionate friends, lovers, husbands, fathers — show no signs or symptoms of the ideology and destruction in which they partake. Connected to Hannah Arendt’s term ‘banality of evil’¹⁰, this can be read as a reflection of Boltanski’s disinclination to ascribe blame¹¹, where he exposes the potential evil inside each person, much like Kentridge’s characters which are not mutually exclusive, neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’¹².

Most of Boltanski’s photographic works confront the viewer with absence, not presence; with objects, not subjects; with cadavers, not living human beings. As well as this, the works featuring images of murderers or Nazi soldiers confront us not with absence, but with lies — *Reserve: Detective III* is not a ‘real’ or ‘truthful’ archive, because the boxes contain only unrelated newspaper stories. Thereby Boltanski questions the presumptive ‘truth’ behind the archive, and

10. Concomitantly, Scholem is critical of this stance, which he saw in Hannah Arendt’s idea that machinations of Nazism served to blur the distinction between victim and torturer. He sees this as a “will-to-overstatement” (Scholem 1976: 302).

11. In this context, some interesting (and chilling) observations on how dehumanization affected Nazi Germany is brought up in Bruno Bettelheim’s book, *The informed heart*. The book reveals the absolute mass state perfected by the Nazis to be as dehumanizing for its administrators as it was for its victims. In certain respects, the mental states of the Jews and the SS became mirror images of each other: “Both believed that members of the other group were sadistic, uninhibited, unintelligent, of an inferior race, and addicted to sexual perversions, both groups accused each other of caring only for material goods and having no respect for ideals, or for moral and intellectual values... But the strange similarity indicates that both groups were availing themselves of analogous mechanisms of defense. Moreover, each group thought of the other in terms of a stereotype and was thus prevented from realistically evaluating any member of the other group and thus its own situation” (Bettelheim qtd. Westerbeck 1997: 35).

12. In this context, Benjamin (1998: 233) writes: “Evil as such, which it [allegory] cherished as enduring profundity, exists only in allegory, is nothing other than allegory and means something different from what it is. It means precisely the non-existence of what it represents”.

in turn, encourages the viewer to do so too. This is much like Mofokeng's use of text with partly fictional information to question the 'truth' of the language of the archive.

Boltanski foregrounds the 'Janus face' of historical realism (Van Alphen 1997: 120). His acts of reconstruction and making present force the viewer into an awareness that what is being reconstructed is forever lost¹³ — and that, as Adorno and Lyotard argue, the Holocaust itself is unreadable or incomprehensible. Evidencing Derrida's 'archive fever', Boltanski is concerned with mnemonic traces and questions history as it is constructed by conventional archives. Like the objects in archaeological¹⁴ collections, his archives attempt to yield information about a culture whose people have disappeared, who have become nameless. But in his works, such as *Reserves*, which refer to locales where objects no longer perform their original functions, Boltanski mocks the futility of all attempts to preserve¹⁵. Like the earlier *Vitrines*, they suggested loss — the cessation of life — that inevitably accompanies storage and categorization (Gumpert 1994: 132).

Moreover, Boltanski counters the archival burying of the past which creates solace in the notion that the concentration camps are in the past and were perhaps an aberration or an irrepeatable

13. In her *Zombie* (2000) exhibition, Penny Siopis also recreates the obsessive archival impulse of collecting, ordering and storing. But she disrupts the viewer's nostalgic desire to process, and thereby access, these inanimate objects into a system of remembrances, by utilizing a net to break up the viewer's vision. Increasing this sense that what one attempts to be reconstruct is forever lost, the figures featured in her found, home movie clips act as 'zombies': dead and displaced in time, yet undead or resurrected through their capture on film.

14. Cf. the archive as relates to archeology in relation to Mofokeng p. 199.

15. In Boltanski's *The angel of accord* (1986) he deals pointedly with death and the archive, as the installation is in an archeological museum. With *Reserve du Musee des enfants* (1982), the work's location in the museum's reserves (an area used to store works of art not on exhibition) contributes to its melancholy ambience. Works of art (which supposedly immortalize the subject) relegated to storage are in fact forgotten, in spite of the museum's specific charge to commemorate. Boltanski exposes museum archives as uncannily poignant places, documenting and chronicling the histories they are charged to preserve — but which repress that which is not currently of 'importance' or may challenge the status quo.

nightmare of history. For the archive, as Derrida (1995: 75) writes, must balance its opening towards the future that is unknowable with the Levitical injunction of memory — bearing witness to loss and suffering in the past. Works such as *Reserves: Les Suisses morts* (1990), much like Mofokeng's *Sad landscapes* (figure 2), are ineluctably current, everyday and banal — that in their impassive Benjaminian quoting of mortality offer a chilling rebuke, a 'shock' to such hopes (Gumpert 1994: 132).

ii. b) Photography

The common image at the end of the war of the inmate standing at the barbed wire fence, influenced photo-journalists who often re-posed the inmates behind the barbed wire — moving the image from art into 'reality' and reinforcing it as a 'documentary' image. From 1945 on, a single strand of barbed wire in front of a figure, a head or a hand, was enough to represent the camps, demanding very little (too little) knowledge from the spectators. Cattle-cars and railway lines¹⁶ symbolized the deportations, skeletal figures were identified immediately as survivors, and children were used to express the innocence of the Holocaust's victims. Evidenced with photo-journalism both after the Holocaust and during apartheid, such documentary 'evidence' gains, in Susan Sontag's (qtd. Bohm-Duchen 1995: 128) words: "the status of ethical reference points... in danger of losing their emotional charge," and that "'concerned' photography has done as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it".

In response, artists hoped that instead viewers might delve into the artwork in an attempt to solve

16. Cf. Mofokeng's and Kiefer's response to such images p. 209. See also photography during apartheid pp. 203-204.

its ‘puzzles’ and thereby might begin to grapple with traumatic history and the problems it raises (Amishai-Maisels 1995: 54). Yet this creates the danger Sartre warned against — of betraying the anger or grief of the victims for beauty. That art may yield pleasure only, as Adorno argues in his famous dictum, is seen as a barbarous response to a barbarous past. But despite the problematics of the politics and ethics of representation, the call for witness persists, as both Adorno and Lyotard insist. In addition, many contend that the survivors of the Holocaust and successive generations — as is the case with Boltanski in this context and Mofokeng in the South African context — have a special responsibility to keep those events ‘alive’ in memory (Van Alphen 1997: 93), so as to be vigilantly aware, in the Benjaminian sense, of the forces reoccurring in the present.

Boltanski reconsiders the validity of photography which has been taken for granted by society’s myths and categories. Beginning with the premise that the family photograph album has become an essentially ‘universal’ phenomenon in modern life, Boltanski breaks the contrast between the ‘culture’ of family and its rituals by dismantling what has become accepted as ‘real’ and replacing it with a fiction he creates (Perloff 1997: 64). The play between fiction and reality is crucial to all artists of this thesis — such as myth and history in Kiefer, ‘imagined histories’ in Kentridge and ‘fictional autobiographies’ in Mofokeng — creating Adornian constellations or juxtapositions so as to rob myth of its power over consciousness and action in the present. This play gains its vigor through photography because of the ‘authority’ of the ordinary photograph. Roland Barthes considered photography a form of ethnography, an issue crucial to the postcolonial debate on the politics of representation. According to Barthes, the intense violent, momentary pleasure (*jouissance*) that accompanies one’s reception of the photograph’s ‘unique Being’, is individual and ‘magical’.

Boltanski revises Barthes' 'authentication', dealing instead with the crucial issue to him, Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng — of how one documents what has occurred only once when the event itself is perceived to be a simulation, and to what extent the experience has become collective, rather than the fiercely personal experience it was for Barthes: "In most of my photographic pieces, I have utilized this property of the proof one accords to photography to expose it or to try to show that photograph, lies, that it doesn't speak the truth but rather a cultural code" (Boltanski qtd. Perloff 1997: 42). For Boltanski, the Barthesian *souvenir d'enfance* becomes a kind of empty signifier, an allegorical site for assumed identities and invented¹⁷ situations (Perloff 1997: 47). For Boltanski, the individual transcendence Barthes wrote of is no longer possible. The referent is *they* (not Barthes's *she*) and the shock of recognition is now the viewer's recognition of the interchangeability of human beings — an interchangeability paradoxically born out of difference, since each person has different desires, problems and goals. This notion of the interchangeability of human beings strikes a strong melancholic tone in his art. Personal tragedy — for Barthes, the loss of an adored mother; for Boltanski, the loss of childhood — gives way to a more collective senselessness. In addition, as soon as the click of the shutter has taken place what was photographed no longer exists — the subject is transformed into object "and even into a museum object" (Barthes qtd. Perloff 1997: 35). Thus when one looks at a photograph, one is looking at the dead: "Death is the *eidōs* of the Photograph", and by extension language.

Boltanski primarily presents the face in his photographs. As Walter Benjamin argues, the pictorial genre of the portrait, whether painterly or photographic, cherishes the cornerstone of

17. In his work, memory plays between remembering and forgetting: "I have very few memories of childhood and I think I undertook this seeming autobiography precisely to blot out my memory and to protect myself. I have invented so many false memories, which were collective memories, that my true childhood has disappeared" (Boltanski qtd. Perloff 1997: 47). Cf. the archeological aspect of all these artists works versus their complicity in the very forgetting they are trying to counteract p. 237.

bourgeois Western culture: the uniqueness of the individual and his accomplishments (Van Alphen 1997: 100-106)¹⁸. Boltanski's portraits challenge the unity between photographic signifier and signified by focusing intensely on the very idea of reference¹⁹, the presumed premise of portraiture as well as of photography. In many of his works the 'capturing of reality' happens twice: first the images are found, then they are rephotographed (captured and recaptured). This transformation occurs as one views the work — the first few faces activate the traditional belief in portraiture where the presence of the unique individual is palpable, but with the repetition²⁰ and amount of images one senses a lack of presence, a profound absence of the unique human being. The sameness of faces is reinforced by the enlargement of the photographs, resulting in a collection of exchangeable objects. Thereby Boltanski undercuts two standard elements of portraiture, with the idea that photographs have no referent and negating the 'presence' of the individual.

The face of hope is a grain of wheat.

The face of pain, a mirror (Jabes 1977: 52).

The faces, recalling Walter Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, exist as fragments of existence excavated from some ruin of time — as does the architecture of Kiefer's *Shulamith* (figure 8), Kentridge's mine scenes (figure 24) and Mofokeng's gravestones in *Sad landscapes*. The face guards against forgetting, as Claude Lanzmann (qtd. Rogoff 1990: 63) confirmed with his 1985 film *Shoah*: "the

18. This traditional characterization of the genre foregrounds those aspects of the portrait that depend on specific notions of the human subject and of the practice of representation. A person's subjectivity is defined in terms of its uniqueness and originality, not its social connections; one's interior essence or presence is key, rather than some moment of short duration in a differential process. Continuity or discontinuity with others is denied so that the subject may be presented as a personality. As for the represented object, its subjectivity can be equated with Enlightenment notions like 'self', 'personality', or 'individuality' (Van Alphen 1997: 101-106)

19. Cf. Andrew Benjamin on reference in Kiefer and Celan p. 80 and Benjamin and Derrida on allegory pp. 31-38.

20. Cf. Derrida on repetition and death drive p. 218.

unspeakable is given expression through the face... faces often say more than words”²¹. For Sartre the face is simultaneously the instrument for projection and reception and thus is the absolute means of communication (Rogoff 1990: 63). Similarly, Emmanuel Levinas believed implicitly in the ‘face-to-face’ encounter as a means of ethically identifying with the Other, but as Derrida points out, this idea posits the Other as either the Same as the self or totally alien — instead it is a neither nor dialectic. Boltanski’s works exclude the possibility of a complete identification and yet the photographs maintain the possibility of a type of identification and a form of connection (Benjamin 1984: 67). The faces are enlarged, blurred, cropped — all in effect, removing their difference and making them Same. The photographed faces of the children in *Monument: the children of Dijon* (1986) (figure 20) initially bring with them the supposed reality of photography, but are treated and illuminated in such that they almost appear as the living dead. Thus the possibility of the ‘face-to-face’ encounter is precluded by the ways in which these faces are presented. But the human face, while anonymous, does not vanish into it — it neither presents nor does not present. In addition, whilst these faces may be meaningless apart, they exist as part of a collective — each face is evidence of a crime committed and forgotten (Kuspit 1997: 97-98). Moreover, as Benjaminian death’s heads, none have priority but are all are equal before God and the devil — “ashes to ashes, dust to dust”. In the Venice installation of *Monument: the children of Dijon*, the face that takes the centre of the altar should be seen as at the place of privilege (the Christ-like centre). But in emotional terms, he/she is no more important than any other, acting instead as a surrogate for all of them as all take turns on

21. Similarly, Westerbeck (1977: 33) writes that the historic confrontation recreated over and over again in Marcel Ophuls’ film *The memory of justice* suggests that all history must finally become a catalogue of sorts, a face-to-face encounter of the kind contained in the interviews on which this film is based. The protagonists of history, Ophuls seems to suggest, must ultimately face each other, and be reconciled. This recalls similar attempts by the TRC and what many regard as the failure of re-conciliation, or as Lyotard argues the im-possibility of consensus as oppose to Habermas p. 10 n2.

the cross — the periphery and centre coincide (Kuspit 1997: 104)²².

Boltanski expands his notion of objectification to include the very business of fabrication. By resurrecting images he had used in earlier pieces and deploying them in new configurations, he simultaneously emphasizes both photography's inherent reproducibility and its potentially dehumanizing property²³. By the time *Enfants de Dijon* were incorporated into versions of the *Monument*, the black-and-white portraits were third- or fourth-generation prints²⁴. Derrida (1995: 85) calls this the “impossible archeology of nostalgia”, the painful, anamnestic desire for a return to the authentic and singular enigma — the origin, the most archaic place of absolute commencement (Derrida 1995: 91)²⁵. Enlarging the faces until they had lost any trace of individuality, Boltanski transformed them into skeletal vestiges — their eyes reduced to empty black sockets, their smiles metamorphosed into the grimace of death, recalling Benjamin's death's head. According to Benjamin, the transformation of the living body into a corpse is linked to the sublime which rises out of the critical decline of the beautiful (Menninghaus 1993: 168). Boltanski here uses the close-up not only to magnify but to exclude, pointing to the potential power of the camera to manipulate and control, as Kentridge explores in his images of surveillance and control through sight. The transformation of the children into black and-white photographs is analogous to the objectification and dehumanization of the Jews during the Third Reich (Gumpert 1994: 99), much like Kiefer's enactment of burning recalling the scorched earth

22. This links to Walter Benjamin's ideas on the experience of the closeness and distance of aura: “the upsurging of the immemorial amidst the actual, the epiphany of the most distant in what is closest at hand” (Moses 1993: 184).

23. Cf. Benjamin (1976: 612-634) on this reproducibility in “Art in the age of mechanical reproduction”.

24. As Adorno states in *Negative dialectics* (1990: 364) “guilt does not cease to reproduce itself, because not for an instant can it be made fully, presently conscious”. Thus perhaps Boltanski's repetition of these images is tied to the Freudian deferred action of repression. Cf. p. 240 n15.

25. Cf. Benjamin on the origin p. 71 n41.

policy and cremation of the concentration camps, and Kentridge's performativity of racist policies through the process of erasure. But at the same time, Boltanski's use of chiaroscuro, which is both dramatic and gentle, forceful and fading, and gives the faces an interior life and emotional complexity (Kuspit 1997: 98). The blurring is a sign of temporal emotion, whilst the scratches, fading and dust that covers the faces, can be seen as the grime of time which covers and contaminates innocence. Whilst Boltanski presents mnemonic traces and materialized memories, he perhaps suggests that nothing survives in memory but appearance²⁶. For as Jabes (1977: 84) writes:

The stone
supports
oblivion.
But a speck of dust
can overcome it.

ii. c) Objects as index

The photographic portrait claims by convention to refer to somebody and to make that person present, but Boltanski's works expose their failure in both respects. His indexical works, in contrast, claim no particular presence: they simply show someone's belongings, not the person (Van Alphen 1997: 115). These installations come closer to fulfilling the standard claims of portraiture because likeness or similarity has been replaced by that which abuts, but does not assimilate (Van Alphen 1997: 115). But Boltanski problematizes this too — revealing in works such as *Reference vitrine* that the link between the objects and person is fictitious, creating

26. Photography as memory as appearance — this points to the problematic beauty or illusion in Boltanski's work — something Adorno would be critical of. But Boltanski may be creating this as a warning to his viewers to be critical not only of images but also memory, which must be critically tested.

Derridean allegorical doubling that emphasizes that the sign is, as Umberto Eco (qtd. Van Alphen 1997: 115) states, “everything which can be used in order to lie”. The installations are not ‘real’ indexes but ‘look like’ such, they are indexes parading as icons. Referentiality and the problem of presence in these allegorical works is again foregrounded as a failure.

Clothes, like photographs, emptied of the presence, can connote death:

What they have in common is that they are simultaneously presence and absence. They are both an object and a souvenir of a subject, exactly as a cadaver is both an object and souvenir of a subject (Boltanski qtd. Gumpert 1994: 110).

The black-and-white, tin-framed²⁷ photographs of children’s clothing in *The Clothes of Francois C.* (1972) recall warehouses in the death camps, where inmate’s belongings were sorted and stored. The clothes become indexical traces (which like allegorical signs, point elsewhere in comparison to symbols that represent or contain wholly) of the millions who were put to death in the camps. This recalls Benjamin’s notion of corpses in allegory as representing, like the death’s head, the expressionless moral sublime — the interruption of mythic appearance or illusion. In *Reserves: The Purim holiday* (1989), visitors had to walk on the soft clothes to see the exhibition, creating an effect of walking on human bodies — suggesting that viewing these images implicates the audience. For if Boltanski as artist has been a vendor of corpses, as he has claimed, then by extension the viewer has by the mere act of looking been their consumer (Gumpert 1994: 122).

27. Cf. Kiefer’s alchemy and the transmogrification of lead and tin into gold p. 84, which may also relate to Boltanski use of electrical lamps when alluding to the divine light of devotional candles pp. 128-129 or the menorah p. 95 n88.

The biscuit tins (figure 25) Boltanski uses trigger memories of childhood: they are used by children to store treasured objects. As boxes, they become tombs encasing and burying the memories of those dead — revealing a covering/uncovering, burying/exhuming dialectical play in his work, much like Kiefer and Kentridge's process of facture, as well as Mofokeng's archive. Often placed in stacks with a face attached to them, figures are suggested — thereby acting as the photographed person's surrogate presence (therefore absence). Boltanski prematurely ages these tins, first with his own urine, which in the action of 'pissing on the dead' has subversive/heretic implications, later with Coca Cola — removing the autographic significance of the work in which the 'presence' of the artist is crucial and irreplaceable.

As with Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng, Boltanski constantly widens his message from the specificity of himself and the Holocaust. The use of tin boxes to store memories is not limited to the West — Boltanski points to an unidentified photograph (a scene in Shanghai) in which tin boxes contain references or objects of the deceased. Despite assumptions that the children pictured in such works as *Les Enfants de Dijon* were concentration camp casualties, Boltanski (qtd. Gumpert 1994: 118) emphasizes that they are “neither heroes nor victims, but dirty kids that one sees every day”. In addition, titles such as *Canada* as well as prominently arranged garments with contemporary logos (figure 21), emphasize the works' contemporary significance — arguing in the vein of Benjamin and Adorno, that the dangers involved in the Holocaust are as possible in the present as they were in the past.

ii. d) Site-specific installations

Boltanski's work can be described as true *Gesamtkunstwerke* as each installation is simultaneously painterly, architectural and sculptural (Kuspit 1997: 100). Not only is his choice of setting a type of context, the setting forms an integral part of the work, such as *The missing house* (1990) (figure 7). Although the transformation of art into aesthetic form is inescapable, in an attempt to counter this process, Boltanski makes art that endorses individualized engagement with the viewer. This is because Boltanski (qtd. Van Alphen 1997: 60) recognizes that as soon as the viewer's expectations are confirmed, the mode of looking transforms the viewing experience into a grasp of the aesthetic:

For me the most interesting period is the one in which the spectators are not yet aware that what they are experiencing is art. During this moment — which is relatively short — you can engage spectators by presenting them with something that is art without telling them that it is art, very soon they realize that it's art, complacency sets in, and all they see is an outer form. That's also quite sad, because out of all you've created, the only thing left is the aesthetic form. Everything you have wanted to say disappears.

Central to Boltanski's art is the ambiguous Derridean play between objectification/identification, absence/presence, physicality/ephemerality. These oppositions have psychological and aesthetic resonances²⁸ in the relation between the uncanny and the sublime (Van Alphen 1997: 169-201).

28. As Freud stresses in his essay *Das Unheimliche*, that which is experienced as uncanny is something that is not strange but well known and familiar, though it has been repressed. According to Freud, the reason for repressing something familiar is a problematic experience in the past that blurred the demarcation of the self. The threatening, blurring experience is then projected in the present onto something alien, outside the self. Etymological analysis of the English words *canny* and *uncanny* — 'possessing knowledge' and 'beyond knowledge' — suggests that through this connection between the impossibility of knowledge and the uncanny one enters the realm of the sublime (Van Alphen 1997: 198). In Edmund Burke's *Philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* (1757) knowing is connected, by opposition, to the sublime. Burke argues that whereas knowing is a form of setting limits, the sublime implies the impossibility of setting limits, and hence, the impossibility of knowledge. Schelling sees the uncanny as a necessary precondition for the sublime, a force to be overcome — where the overcoming of the uncanny results in the sublime (Van Alphen 1997: 199—201). For Schelling, the uncanny is not only a precondition of the sublime, it is at the same time its opposite. He opposes the uncanny to the sublime by means of dichotomies: dark interior versus the clear sky of the exterior, obscure power versus the freedom of the

The uncanny is based on a primal repression (in Freud, the slaying of the father) while the sublime is in turn based on a repression of the uncanny. The uncanny is based on the repression of something familiar, which is then projected onto something alien, exterior or ‘other’. Kristeva (qtd. Caputi 2000) argues that the boundaries between self and other, between what is retained and what is expelled, remain charged with feelings of longing and dread:

The object confronts us.. Within our personal archeology²⁹, with our earliest attempts to release hold... It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with a constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as secure as it is stifling.

The sublime, in contrast, involves a repression of the dark and obscure power of the uncanny into the interior, reversing the direction of the repression. After the destabilizing threat caused by the uncanny has been repressed inward, the subject’s orientation can still be directed outward — there is a continued interest in that which is beyond the self and beyond the grasp of the self. Instead of safeguarding the self there is an inclination to lose the self in the extensions of the ungraspable and unattainable, and thus to engage with it. According to Walter Benjamin, the experience of the expressionless sublime, of sublimated revulsion, finds its sign in the trope of allegory (Geyer-Ryan 1994: 108). Benjamin thus re-read the sublime as an ethical, anti-mythical interruption as it has the ‘power of petrification’, interrupting motion (Menninghaus 1993: 170).

This implies that the concepts are no longer confined to atemporal, formal terms but become bound up with experiences, happenings and historical events. Boltanski’s installations play constantly with this — in the sites he chooses (cathedrals, cellars or museums) (figures 26 & 28)

mind, religion versus poetry, the secrecy of the interior versus the vast openness of the exterior. Walter Benjamin’s expressionless-sublime is by contrast a “power of petrification”, it checks motion and interrupts it (Menninghaus 1993: 170).

and the face's collectivity (figure 22) an encounter with death (the dead child within us; the knowledge of our own mortality; the incommensurability of Holocaust deaths) creates a sublime experience that is both inclusive of and beyond the self. His work has been described as sombre and theatrical, intimate and stark, intellectually vigorous and emotionally playful (Kuspit 1997: 97), knowingly treading a fine line between sentiment and sentimentality (Bohm-Duchen 1995: 143), because he (qtd. Gumpert 1994: 62) aims at triggering collective experiences:

I don't want viewers to discover; I want them to recognize. For me, a work is in part created by the people who look at it, who 'read' it with the aid of their own experiences. I called one of my series *Stimulating images* to suggest that what is being shown is only a stimulant: it permits each spectator to feel something different.

In *Shadows* (1985) (figure 23) and *Candles* (1986) (figure 27), Boltanski compels the audience into an encounter, using naïve, childlike motifs that lure the viewer into an engagement with his work, much like Kiefer's use of toys in *Operation Seelion* and Kentridge's puppets in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* (1998). By creating a kind of magical theater, he conjures up a child's world in which the transcendent and distant world of aesthetics does not exist³⁰. Once the viewer is seduced into spontaneous and direct engagement with the work, it becomes apparent that the naïve, childish strategies have in fact seduced him or her into an allegorical encounter with death³¹. Another

29. Cf. archeology in relation to melancholy in artists's works pp. 237-238.

30. Van Alphen (1997: 169) argues that by deliberately avoiding the strategies of conventional art, Boltanski keeps the aestheticizing approach to art at bay. In this context, one can look at Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1996) (figure 41), which audaciously tries to address the Holocaust in a comic-book format, asserting what is the unspeakable into the context of what can be seen as one of the most vulgar and commodified vehicles of popular culture. Yet, as LaCapra (1998: 5) points out, the comic book has at times been an experimental form exploring contested areas of modern culture, and Spiegelman utilizes it to remove the viewer from the distance that aestheticized art can create.

31. As Gumpert (1994: 80) describes: "At first, unsuspecting viewers were enchanted with the spectacle of moving images that covered the walls... Gradually, however, the shadow's more sinister qualities came into focus. The figures themselves, literally suspended in air, underwent an iconographic metamorphosis as viewers realized that what they were looking at was an army of hanged men, interleaved with menacing skeletons and supernatural beings. Among the group and constructed out of wire, the hunched figure of the grim reaper, scythe in hand, reinforced the bleaker aspects of this macabre dance of death" (figure 23). These figures recall the Tarot card of the Hanged Man

example of his tragi-comic style which counters the aesthetic distance is *Reserve: the dead Swiss* (1990)³², where the laughter at the phrase ‘dead Swiss’ is preempted so as to trigger a shock, an awareness, of the ridiculed ‘dead Jew’ laughed at not so long ago. This ‘shock’ can also be related to Walter Benjamin’s idea of the sublime as an interruption to the lull of the status quo.

Boltanski’s own psycho-social pathology is reflected in his installation sites (Kuspit 1997: 99-100). In the 42nd Venice Biennale, *Monuments: the children of Dijon* (1986) (figure 20) was installed at a former prison, recreating the claustrophobic dungeon of his father’s hiding as well as an emotionally tortured state. In contrast, when exhibited in Germany at the Kunsthalle Hamburg, a place of threatening oppressors (the keepers of the prison) — the dungeon was recreated as a cathedral or transformed into a shrine, as with Kiefer’s transformation of Kreis’ *Mausoleum* into a memorial in *Shulamith* (figure 8). Incorporating the sites, Boltanski enacts a rationalization of the irrationality of the death in the images, problematizing the Enlightenment or Christian clarity — French reason (symbolic of his father) and Catholic ritual (symbolic of his mother) — which have been applied to suffering, so as to soothe it or to give it authority and perhaps even purpose (figure 26)³³. In addition, Boltanski uses Minimalist techniques in his installations but imbues them with emotional meaning. In this, he draws from the transcendentalists Malevich and Mondrian, the pioneers of geometric abstraction, but re-

and the self-sacrifice of Odin, the chief of Norse gods — bringing, like Kiefer, a play of history and myth into these macabre yet playful works.

32. In France ‘the Swiss’ as neighbour seen as ‘other’ — they are perceived as rather ridiculous characters, who are slow and pathologically attached to cleanliness and civic rules. The title *Reserve: the dead Swiss* would probably get responded to as funny, as if they are not suffering subjects worthy of pity, compassion as if not mortals. Misanthropy is always self-hatred, and the ‘Swiss’ becomes an abstraction to act as the victim of expiatory sarcasms.

33. The mathematical grid and religious structure of the site play on the idea that ‘reason’ or religion redeems the misery or misfortune of the war. In Venice, the drapery hiding the portals becomes the drapery of mourning, recalling the angel’s drapery in Dürer’s *Melancholia I* (1514) (figure 62). The dungeon aspect of his installations can be linked to his father’s suffering, while the cathedral aspect is linked to the care and schooling of his Catholic mother. Such play of dualities is seen in Kiefer’s work — Jew/German, Rome/Germania; barbarism/civilization;

objectifies Malevich's 'non-objective' feeling by grounding it in personal and historic reality (Kuspit 1997: 104). The idealism of their original geometry symbolised eternity, but in *Monuments: the children of Dijon* the geometry is blackened and mournful much like the landscapes of *Margarete* (figure 3) — suggesting that this idealization is not only missing, but may be the cause of catastrophes such as the Holocaust.

Moreover, Boltanski's installations deal with the issue of iconoclasm and of the Adornian *Bilderverbot*, as they are based on the walls of commemorative plaques in churches (Semin 1997: 63). The framing is extremely close to that of a icon, or the imprint of Christ's face, the Holy Face of the shroud of Turin³⁴. Just as the iconoclastic dispute, of whether it is sacrilegious to represent the divine in its incarnate form, has never really been resolved, neither has the artistic debate of whether an image is 'true', 'real' or not and what separates the model from the copy. Through Boltanski, as the self-confessed 'bad preacher'³⁵ — both intermediary and stage manager — relics assume a magical value. Boltanski works on the permeable boundary between the idol and the icon, images that are venerated and those that are looked at — obstructing the spectator's view of the images whose presence he wishes to preserve. His double-framed photographs, as in *Monuments: the children of Dijon*, consist of an outer frame which is hard, austere, metal and with an inner frame covered in Christmas paper that is ornamental, soft, warm. The tension and irony in Boltanski's work is concentrated into these frames — severity at odds

Apollonian/Dionysian.

34. In the Le Consortium installation of *Monument: the children of Dijon*, the works were exhibited on a wall covered with white cloth. This refers to the traditional cloth of honour reserved for sacred figures, but as a simple, anonymous drapery creates a space of absence which enhances the presence of the children, making them angels (Kuspit 1997: 94-97).

35. This notion of the 'bad preacher' is linked fundamentally to Aaron as the false prophet, as Kiefer identifies himself with Aaron p. 56 n38 and to Kentridge's identification with Daniel p. 16 n32. Cf. Derrida on the Rabbi versus the poet p. 56 n11.

with decorative delight, delicate luminosity versus grim darkness (figure 34). The reality of the photographs works with and against the pleasure of viewing, enforcing Adorno's call for ethical spectatorship. This extends to Boltanski's awareness, as can be extended to Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng, of the limits and dangers of a body of work perceived in an unequivocal manner as a funereal celebration or an offering (Semin 1997: 80-87).

iii. Commemoration: The *Monument* series

By its very nature, when it comes to describing reality, art always demands a certain intensification, for many and various reasons. However, that is not the case with the Holocaust. Everything in it already seems so thoroughly unreal, as if it no longer belongs to the experience of our generation, but to mythology. Thence comes the need to bring it down to the human realm. This is not a mechanical problem, but an essential one. When I say, "to bring it down," I do not mean to simplify, to attenuate, or to sweeten the horror, but to attempt to make the events speak through the individual and in his language, to rescue the suffering from huge numbers, from dreadful anonymity, and to restore the person's given and family name, to give the tortured person back his human form, which was snatched away from him (Appelfeld qtd. Langer 1991: 1).

Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng's works attest to the problem of commemoration³⁶ 'after Auschwitz', which is now traversed by an Adornian doubt that had not before existed — that there may be no way to commemorate or give voice to the forgotten and therefore that there is no reconciliation with the living and the dead (Benjamin 1994: 64). Their works can be seen to enact, thereby cause, this recognition of Lyotardian im-possibility. Furthermore, this recognition plots the works' own limits — towards an affirmation of commemoration's presence as an

36. The emotional problem and archaic paradox of traditional memorial art is how to represent the dead as though they are still alive, whilst acknowledging that they are irrevocably dead (Kuspit 1997: 98). For mourning involves an unconscious fantasy of resurrection as well as an acknowledgement of loss — the hope for reunion with the dead works against the despair of the loss, wishful thinking versus painful testing of reality. Traditionally the task of commemoration has been perceived as the replacement of an absence with a presence, the invisible with the visible (Rogoff 1995: 129-131). This would be to effect a form of historical reconciliation so as to satisfy the mourning-desire for a concrete material presence as a tangible manifestation of some process of resurrection or redemption which is taking place.

insistent demand occasioning the response of vigilance (the Adornian ethical spectator) and the vigilance of response (Benjaminian active memory). Thus part of the artist's and the viewer's investigation of the possibility of memory and commemoration forms part of the process of commemoration.

Boltanski's *Monument* series (figures 20 & 28) pointedly invokes both funerary sculptures and public memorials. The *Monuments* resemble Byzantine icons, the electric lights standing in for devotional candles and the photographs of metallic wrapping paper for their hammered surfaces of gold, copper, and tin, recalling alchemic transformation as well as Adorno's *Bilderverbot*. In this Boltanski abuts the borderlines separating the icon from the idol and problematizes the desire for closure, as well as post-Holocaust Jewish identity as a replacement for religion³⁷. In *Monuments: the children of Dijon*, the grid of coloured rectangles acknowledges and replaces the face's lost bodies, but is a futile substitution for the body is irrecoverable, consumed by time. They are 'figures' of absence, the immaterial ghosts who are reconstructed, not in the idealized form of eternal geometry, but rather blackened mournful geometry (Kuspit 1997: 104). Only the spirit remains, embodied in the photograph, where the exaggerated chiaroscuro has spiritualized it. The grid-altar bodies (figure 20) are castrated versions of the phallic hermae figure from ancient Greece which symbolised good luck and acted as charms against the evil eye (Kuspit 1997: 104). Boltanski's figures instead, if one looks them in the eye, makes one aware of one's

37. Perhaps unintentionally, Boltanski problematizes the phenomenon that has occurred with many second-generation Jews in Germany. This generation has drawn on Holocaust memory as the ultimate tool for constructing identity and community (Rapaport's 1997: 27). Their ultimate metaphor, it provides the framework for representing the past, understanding the present, and envisioning the future. It is argued that the Holocaust in collective memory has become a substitute for religion, a surrogate that bestows the same sense of unity and purpose that was earlier granted by religion (Rapaport 1997: 102). One could make a similar argument in the context of post-apartheid South Africa —such as in the theological overtones of the TRC which recreated the confessionals of the church and promised redemption, as well as the 'heroes of the struggle', especially Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, who have become icons.

own mortality³⁸.

In this context, Kuspit (1997: 106-7) argues that Boltanski's installations, such as *Monuments the children of Dijon*, however allegorical, subjective and personal, are appropriate avant-garde monuments to memorialize the twentieth century. His installations can be seen as monuments to social reality as well as the psychological truth of a century which experienced death on a greater scale than ever before. They can be seen to deal with and enact the manner in which death almost erased the gains by science and technology which have perhaps served death as much as life. The Holocaust destroyed, once and for all, the tottering belief that science and technology were securely harnessed for the good of humanity; as scientists, politicians, bureaucrats and generals found the means progressively to give destructive expression to their decisions and fantasies (Landau 1995: 18). Boltanski's work can be seen as the consummate experience of the wilted and fragmented sense of existence created by annihilation anxiety and living death — by the Benjaminian wreckage of the twentieth century³⁹.

The traditional idea of a monument — of solemn, respectful remembrance — is undermined by such devices as the tangled web⁴⁰ of black wires leading to the small bulbs (figure 20), which disrupt the ordered arrangements of photographs because this 'game' is governed by emotional

38. Cf. sight and identification in Kentridge's work pp. 182-186.

39. Moreover, the importance of works such as *Reserve: Les Suisses morts* is that while not concerning itself directly with the aftermath of the Holocaust, it still involves the recognition that the present is determined by it (Benjamin 1994: 60-64). The work consists of the reproduction of photographs accompanying death notices in Swiss newspapers and raises the problems of a potential banalization of death, of rendering it kitsch, or of giving it individual 'authority'. Boltanski seems to question the attempt for an 'authentic' form of remembrance linked to the 'authentic' death — of the impossibility of any death maintaining its privacy or intimacy after Auschwitz because the structural and institutional forms of the interplay of death and remembrance are already determined by the actualisation of mass death.

40. Cf. web in Pollock's paintings p. 75 n49. Cf. constellations in Walter Benjamin and Adorno p. 15 n10.

rules (Kuspit 1997: 97-98). These wires can be read as traces of memory prior to the archive, which lead from the source (light-source) of the event, and disrupt the ‘official’, ordered and manipulated archiving of the past.

Words distribute silence, lamps an absence which gives light — Reb Aggar (Jabes 1977: 171).

A constant characteristic of Boltanski’s work is semi-darkness, a sense of burial which is also evident in Kiefer’s *Shulamith* (figure 8) and Mofokeng’s projections (figure 29). The light illuminating his works comes from candles or the faint electric bulbs of nightlights. Boltanski’s work can be seen to question the theological and secular relationship between light and truth. He inverts notions of darkness as evil, sinister, night, death, the absence of light and life (Gumpert 1994: 94), as well as conceptions of light as knowledge, truth, illumination⁴¹ or revelation. Rather than the shadows being the site of deception, in Boltanski’s work they are sites of an illumination given by subjugated light⁴². The photographs in *Monuments*, presented in tin frames perched on double stacks of rusty biscuit tins, are lit from above by extendable lamps. The aggressive glare of these lamps evokes the lights used in interrogation rooms (figure 22). Instead of illuminating they are blinding, a figurative way of objectifying or even killing a person (Van Alphen 1997: 98), obscuring the enlarged faces even further. The realistic illusion of a living subjectivity, as in the standard view of photography and of the portrait, have become

41. Cf. Burke on the sublime and a species of darkness which by its very intensity denotes a species of light p. 238 n13.

42. In *Shadows* (figure 23) the shadows which are cast on the walls are part of the object’s presence (Benjamin 1994: 65-66). Their presence though is tenuous and traversed by inescapable uncertainty and doubt — they flicker and dance as the light source moves in the wind and dim with the passage of time. While shadows depend upon light, they also demand the obscuring of light — but here shadows have become the moments and movements of revelation. What has been created is an entire scene in which the universal and transcendental interplay of truth and representation are distanced by a staging of the illuminating and instructive power of shadows. Putting out the lights need not be interpreted simply in terms of loss, but as attesting to an inescapable fragility of memory. Besides its childlike, nontraumatic mode of representation *Candles* (figure 27), like *Monuments*, evokes the memorializing function of a monument, not unlike Kiefer’s *Shulamith* and Mofokeng’s light boxes — the narrow shelves with

empty, blinded faces. The lamps also refer to a religious context, not as the affirmation of art as a post-Enlightenment replacement for religion, but rather that they mark, on the one hand, the absence of the religious community as a community of mourning, of commemoration, and on the other, the trace of an event beyond or resistant to recall⁴³. This can be seen to locate the work within the absence of community and the presence of an absolute loss, such as in *The missing house*.

With his lighting, easily extinguished by cutting the power Boltanski could be suggesting that in the absence of commemoration, of light, the dead are nothing and death, oblivion — but he could also be suggesting that bright light as presumptive ‘truth’ will probably extinguish the small flickers of memory, the small voices of commemoration. Possibly, he is also suggesting that it is only possible to commemorate and resurrect the dead in each person’s memory. Boltanski also emphasizes photography’s close ties to memory and death, because all fail to preserve what they record — photographs perish as that they are made only of paper (Gumpert 1994: 80). One could argue that whilst Boltanski, as with Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng, may continually strive as Lyotard insists and show his failure to commemorate, to make visible those who died — it is precisely because it is ‘after Auschwitz’ that such commemoration must *not* come to fruition in art or history writing, because then the responsibility will be lifted from the viewer and the memory will not be kept alive. If the Benjaminian premonitory sparks were removed from memory in the present and buried in artworks, archives or the past, they would not be able to warn of possible repetitions of such heinous forces or events in the present or future.

candle and figure form a kind of shrine.

43. Cf. Benjamin primordial p. 33 and Derrida’s reading of the *khora* in *On the name* (1995).

I acknowledge the blaze. But I stress the shadow, the witness stem, not the rose (Jabes 1977 :24).

iv. Counter-monuments: *The missing house (1990)*

What I do is similar to what a Zen master does. He tells a little story and each listener gives his own meaning to the story. I try to make pieces very open; each person brings his own story to it (Boltanski qtd. Czaplicka 1995: 159).

In connection to his allegorical intentions, Boltanski speaks about cultures of objects as opposed to cultures of knowledge: he gives the example of the Zen temples in Japan which are so fragile they need to be rebuilt every few years, but are called monuments because the people know their story and significance (Garb 1997: 17). Thus knowledge and memory is not deposited on the object, but rather is the viewer's responsibility. This is the slow process by which 'thingness' is evacuated from the activity of commemoration and what remains is the process (seen specifically in the process of facture in Kiefer and Kentridge's works), not the form, of mourning work (Rogoff 1995: 133). Because monuments necessarily mediate memory, even as they seek to inspire it, they can be regarded as displacements of the memory they are supposed to embody. The traditional monument (like the family photograph) supplants a community's memory-work with its own material form. As Pierre Nova (qtd. Young 1995: 83) warns: "The less memory is experienced from the inside, the more it exists through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs". For once monumental form is assigned to memory the obligation to remember has been diverted, thereby relieving viewers of their memory burden.

By creating common spaces for memory, monuments propagate the illusion of common memory (Young 1993: 6). Both the reasons for memory and the forms memory takes are always part of a socializing system whereby fellow citizens gain common history through the memory of their

forbears' experiences⁴⁴. Part of any state's aim is to create a sense of shared values and ideals, as well as the sense of common memory as foundation for a unified country — public memorials and national days of commemoration work to create common basis around which national identity is forged. In assuming idealized meanings, memorials tend to concretize particular historical interpretations — but once created they take their own life, often stubbornly resistant to the original intentions and in some cases, turning around to recast these ideals in the memorial's own image (Young 1995: 81-82), as Kentridge illustrates in *Monument* (1990) (figure 30). An example is Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (1919-1920) (figure 31): now a hollow relic of an utopian future that never was, it has become an unintentional monument to lost idealism and the impossible (Kuspit 1997: 106-7). Instead of changing and adapting to its environment, the traditional monument remains static, a mummification of often forgotten ideals. 'Monumental history' is, after all, Nietzsche's disdainful term for any version of history calling itself permanent and everlasting — it is instead what Benjamin recognizes as a petrified history that buries the living. For monuments may not remember events so much as bury them altogether beneath layers of national myths and explanations, as Kiefer re-enacts and warns in his study of Kreis' Mausoleum in *Shulamith*.

Like any public art space, Holocaust memorials are neither benign nor irrelevant but suggest themselves as the basis for political and communal action⁴⁵. One of the responses to Germany's

44. Young (1995: 80) lists some of the reasons given for Holocaust memorials: some are built in response to traditional Jewish injunctions to remember; others according to a government's need to explain a nation's past to itself; some aim to educate the next generation and to inculcate in it a sense of shared experience and destiny; others are expiations of guilt or as self-aggrandizement; still others are intended simply to attract tourists ('memory-tourists').

45. Where art traditionally can be seen as self-reflective, the aim of memorials is not to call attention to their own presence so much as to past events. Whilst monuments go against the grain of modernity's ideas of permanent revolution or change, avante-garde art in contrast emphasizes momentous responses to the unrecurrent present rather than, as Adorno and Benjamin insist, sustained reflection or mediation on the burden of fate or history (Kuspit (1997: 106-7). They can be seen as antithetical to the durability of the monument, which marks time to stop and call

memorial ‘conundrum’ is the rise of what Young (1995: 85) terms ‘counter-monuments’: self-conscious and immanently critical (in the Adornian sense) memorial spaces which are conceived to challenge the very premise of their being as monuments. A monument against Fascism⁴⁶, therefore, would have to be a monument against itself: against the traditionally didactic function of monuments, against the tendency to displace the past that should be commemorated — and finally against the authoritarian aestheticization that reduces viewers to passive spectators⁴⁷.

In 1990, Boltanski was commissioned for *Die endlichkeit der Freiheit* (‘The liberation of freedom’), which was conceived as a response to Berlin's historic self-estrangement. Boltanski located an apartment complex destroyed during World War II (figure 7)⁴⁸. The names of the

attention to it, and outlasts the moment of its occurrence. But by combining these approaches, Young (1993: 12-13) argues that the monument may have a basis for political and social action — questioning not only how the monument maker's era and training shaped memory at that time, and how the monument reflects past history, but, most importantly, what role the monument plays and its consequences in current history.

46. *Monument against fascism* is the title of the counter-monument by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz. They designed a 12-metre-tall lead-covered column in Hamburg and invited visitors to inscribe their names on it as memorial graffiti while the column was sunk into the ground over a span of seven years. For the artists, the spectacle of Germans burying their anti-Fascist monument seemed to exemplify Germany's national memorial ambivalence. As Young (1995: 89) argues, how better to remember a vanished people than by an ever-vanishing monument and how better to remark an absence than by creating a monument that feeds on its own absence? In the end, the artists hoped, the vanishing monument will have returned the burden of memory to the visitors — now all that is visible are the ‘memory-tourists’ who are forced to remember for themselves.

47. Young argues that these artists contemptuously reject the traditional forms and reasons for public memorial art — as the spaces that either console viewers; redeem such tragic events, or indulge in a facile mending of the memory of the lost Jews. Instead of searing memory into public consciousness, the fear is that conventional memorials will seal memory off from awareness altogether — that to the extent that monuments are built to do the memory-work, the German public might become that much more forgetful. They believe, in effect, that the initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them.

48. The house is located between the graves of the historian Leopold von Ranke (1795- 1886) and the Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729- 1785). At one end of the street are the remnants of the oldest Jewish cemetery of the city, whose single and last marked grave is ironically dedicated to Mendelssohn, the Jewish German philosopher who propagated tolerance and laid the groundwork for the emancipation of the Jews in Germany (Czaplicka 1995: 162). Toward the other end of the street, in the churchyard behind the Protestant Sophienkirche, stands the tombstone of Ranke, whose famous phrase about reconstructing history ‘as it actually was’ (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) suggests that history could only be known from the documents and monuments of the past. This argument is vehemently criticized by Benjamin p. 16. In the significance of its insignificant siting, and in the dignified, subjective artistic expression of the *Missing house*, the hope is that the viewer might linger in this Benjaminian ruin between the graves of these two figures, between Enlightenment and history and begin to critically question such notions of tolerance, humanity and history-writing.

house's previous occupants, their occupations and dates of their deaths, are listed on plaques attached to the two adjoining walls of the surviving structures. Presented in bold black letters against a white field of large nameplates in black frames, they imitate the death notices of German newspapers. This mode of display is much like memorial plaques on the wailing wall, linking the work to the commemoration of the loss of Jewish people, as well as Kiefer's inscription of Shulamith and Mofokeng's attempt to give back the names to those in his archival photographs⁴⁹.

Documents on the former residents were displayed in specially designed vitrines at the city's former museum of industry, still bombed-out. This documentation makes *The missing house* a work of history as well as a work of art (Czaplicka 1995: 167). To enter Boltanski's open-air 'museum', viewers had to descend⁵⁰ the only physical evidence left of the devastated museum, an eroded granite staircase — in itself a monument, similar to Tatlin's, to the impossibility of utopia and lost idealism but in this case not only modernism's but Germany's too. The fact that the viewers had to descend to read the information suggests archeology and excavation — the process of working-through the past whereby one must act-out, confront and literally 'go down to that level'. The descent, as the opposite of ascent, suggests the very impossibility of transcending the horror of the Holocaust through historical analysis, much like the failed flight in Kiefer's palette works. In this 'museum' Boltanski presents counter-archival histories (the Lyotardian 'little narratives' of some of the residents), reconstructed amid the ruins of histories

49. This naming is essentially melancholic. As Benjamin (qtd. Caputi 2000) writes: "That which mourns feels itself thoroughly known by the unknown. To be named — even when the namer is godlike and blissful — perhaps always remains an intimation of mourning. But how much more melancholy is it to be named not from the one blessed paradisaical language of names, but from the hundreds of man, in which name has already withered, yet which, according to God's pronouncement, have knowledge of things. Things have no proper names except in God... In the language of men, however they are overnamed". Cf. p. 9; 33; 81.

50. Cf. the descending/ascending dialectic in Benjamin's notion of the fall from the bliss of Paradise and Kiefer's

destroyed. As Boltanski (qtd. Garb 1997: 19) states: “Part of my work is about small memory... those memories are very fragile; I wanted to save them”.

The missing house configures an empty space into a commemorative and a historical site that inspires contemplation (what Czaplicka (1995: 161) calls *eine Denkstätte* — a ‘contemplative site’). In contrast, Rachel Whiteread’s *House* (1988) — a ghostly apparition of the filled-in space of a now demolished row of houses in London — and her *Nameless library* (c2001) (figure 16) for the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial⁵¹ in Vienna — the positive cast of the space around books in an anonymous library turned inside-out — show that materiality can also be an index of absence. These artists’ interplay between facts, fascination and beauty, between the archive, aesthetics and the commemorative, mediates history in a manner that engenders a profound reflection on the meaning of past events. In Whiteread’s latter work, Boltanski’s *The missing house* and Mofokeng’s series *Sad landscapes* (figure 2), the artists are less concerned with images of destruction than the terrible void this destruction has left behind — effectively configures a departed presence of humanity for, as Walter Benjamin (qtd. Menninghaus :177) writes:

It is as it were the sunset behind the abandoned stage of the world with its deciphered ruins.

Rather than recalling some dramatic historical event or setting such as death in the concentration

work in Schoeman 2001. Cf. the plunger in Kentridge’s *Mine* (1990) (figure 38) pp. 156; 158-159.

51. As Starrs (qtd. Young 2000: 112) writes: “Rather than a tomb or cenotaph, Whiteread’s work is the solid shape of an intangible absence — of a gap in a nation’s identity, and a hollow at a city’s heart... symbolizes a world whose irrevocable disappearance can never be wholly grasped by those who did not experience it, but whose most lasting monuments are the books written by Austrian Jews before, during and in the aftermath of the catastrophe brought down by them”. In this way, Whiteread melancholically concretizes this gap as an always open ‘wound’, much like Kiefer’s lead books and Kentridge’s erasures p. 233.

camps, the house refers to everyday life and to the common life that was destroyed. This pattern of reference makes it exceptional in postwar German commemorative practices because it refers directly to the living, to the common and everyday, and only indirectly to the victims of Nazism — enabling a more personal involvement on the part of the viewer (Czaplicka 1995: 168).

Boltanski employs a visual rhetoric of absence (an empty urban lot) while combining various historical indications to engage the visitor's retrospective imagination and therein to make her or him mindful of history. This absence provides for a contemplative circumstance that may lead to commemorative insight, to recall Aby Warburg's (qtd. Czaplicka 1995: 158) phrase, to a "retrospective contemplativeness". The relic place and its aesthetic entices the viewer to engage his or her own imagination in a process of reconstruction or a contemporary consciousness of history through which Benjaminian premonitory structures may show themselves. Whilst the constellation of material, formative, and factual elements that compose *The missing house* allows for the greatest subjective involvement and simultaneous self-reflection, it also demands the best-informed and cognisant viewer (Czaplicka 1995: 172). In addition, because the explanatory panel at the entry to the empty lot has also been removed, the visitor is left even more to his or her own devices in relating the names to the place and impossibly trying to 'fill' the empty space — much like Kiefer's *Shulamith* (figure 8) and Mofokeng's *Sad landscapes* (figure 51).

This engagement encourages a reconstruction of the past in the present where the experience may lead to a consciousness of history or to a process of, what Czaplicka (1995: 187) terms, 'analytic commemoration', but might better be termed, in reference to Adorno, the commemoration of the ethical spectator. Moreover, *The missing house* may create the uncannily sublime experience in which individual histories of the dead (names), social history (the house in

a city) and the personal memory of the living beholder all converge — creating what Benjamin would call an anti-mythical interruption to the lull of everyday life. This allegorical aesthetic of the ruin, evidenced in fragments, traces, and the signs of material decay, may conjure up an image of melancholy in its absence of completion or mourning⁵². But this ‘romantic’ tendency is compensated for by a factual historical presence in the form of documentation (Czaplicka 1995: 185-187). Both the house as melancholy ruin and the failed documentation, point to the need to bear witness to the losses in the Holocaust as vital to face the future — that there should never be a time to put ‘it behind’ the present. This combination may stand as an indicator of the unrepresented, the unsaid and demands that the viewer engage his or her imagination, knowledge, and memory in a process of commemoration.

52. Cf. allegory, ruin and traces in relation to Adorno, Benjamin and Derrida p. 31-38; cf. melancholia, allegory and ruins pp. 235-236.

Part Two

POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

While South Africa tries to create something ‘new’ out of the ruins of the apartheid past, crucial concerns evidenced in the face of post-war Europe surface again: Adorno on the ever-same, Benjamin’s (1992: 247) notion that “Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens disappear irretrievably”; Lyotard on history-writing and Derrida’s ideas on revisionism. South Africa is at, what Benjamin would call, a moment of danger, wherein the ethical theorist/historian/artist positing him/herself as a psychic exile, must look for the premonitory ‘sparks’ of the past in the present to warn for the future to come. In addition, art ‘after apartheid’ has shared many of the ethical and aesthetic concerns of art produced after the Holocaust. Many South African artists in their art of remembrance and recollection have grappled with similar problematics as Anselm Kiefer and Christian Boltanski — the Adornian ethics and politics of representation, exemplified in his historic *Bilderverbot*; the Lyotardian im-possibility of representing the unrepresentable; as well as the Levitical call or injunction to remember, to bear witness to loss and suffering within the context of South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past.

i) Art during apartheid

In the post-World War II period, the South African apartheid state became the emblem of the continuation of racism after the Holocaust and of the intimate relationship of capitalist and

colonialist structures of power. As an embodiment of a ‘monstrous white supremacy’ (Hooks 1998), moral questions were often simplified and externalised. Against this background, the concept of a ‘resistance aesthetic’ arose, where artists took an active role in the attempt to effect change in the country (D’Amato 1999: 43). South African artists were called on by resistance movements to be ‘cultural workers’, to use cultural resistance as a tool of political power. This mandate was reflected in the language and structure of the African National Congress, originally formed as a revolutionary organization against apartheid, which adhered to “a straightforward Leninist prescription of art as a weapon of struggle” (D’Amato 1999: 45). It can be argued that “the organisation of culture in wartime is a reflection of the organisation of the war itself” and that such artwork “is the footman of war ideology” (Finci 1999: 16-18). The formation of ‘art forces’ can in effect give support to militancy, expressed in the representational, propagandistic character of such artistic activity.

But as discussed in the context of Adorno’s *Bilderverbot*, art that refers to traumatic events, that endeavours to correspond most closely to ‘reality’ or attempts to give ‘voice’ to the silenced, often detracts from and betrays the grief of those whose experiences it attempts to represent. For as Lyotard argues, artworks cannot be commensurate with nor appropriate to the trauma of events such as the Holocaust or apartheid. Of course, the attempt of these artists is comprehensible if one bears in mind that with war, neutrality is often impossible and that simply by deciding to speak the artist takes up a position on the side which makes his/her voice heard (Finci 1999: 16-18). The artist opposes horror with suffering, but as Adorno has argued, how can one express horror without the expression itself being horrifying? Perhaps only through Walter Benjamin’s notion of allegory as representing, like the death’s head, the expressionless moral sublime, can the artist endeavour to create interruptions to mythical appearance and illusion.

In the context of anti-apartheid movements, Derrida (1996: 11) speaks of the ‘inescapable injunction’ where — without forgetting the heroism and suffering nor the crimes and the torture — one must also not forget that causes leading to ‘emancipation’ are seldom ‘pure’, morally untarnished, or only internal. In addition, the ANC prescription of a ‘people’s culture’, it could be argued, was as onerous as the state-sponsored apartheid culture — as the exclusive emphasis on the history of the struggle for freedom in South Africa within a Marxist-socialist frame of reference, threatened to replace one kind of political illiteracy and intolerance with another (Hickson & Kriegler 1996: 138). Moreover, as can be argued in the vein of Benjamin’s “Thesis on the philosophy of history”, the danger is that once art is made in celebration of a struggle or revolution ‘won’, it can act as endorsement or reinforcement that can easily be manipulated by the new power brokers. In this context, Albie Sachs’s 1989 paper “Preparing ourselves for freedom” speaks, in much the same tone as Adorno and Derrida, against the limitations of interpreting art as a strictly political weapon, and suggested a more open and inclusive approach:

The power of art lies in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions, hence the danger of viewing it as if it were just another missile firing apparatus (Sachs qtd. Koloane 1999: 27).

Sculpted in 1986, in the midst of a state of emergency, the *Butcher boys* (1985-86) (figure 33) have come to express the darkness of a country prior to its liberation (Jamal 1996: 13). These bodies reflect on the body politic of South Africa under apartheid — bodies part destroyed and part formed in memory¹, much like Boltanski’s faces (figure 25). Unlike the often reactive,

1. Cf. Walter Benjamin’s fragments and corpses pp. 82; 119. This relates to Benjamin’s idea of allegory, where “its revolting wound shamelessly proclaims that there is a gap within the sign that cannot be concealed by supposedly ‘organic’ rhetoric. And yet due to precisely this breach between the body and meaning, the body appears all the more naked” (Geyer-Ryan 1994: 107). Cf. the ‘wound’ in Kiefer’s and Kentridge’s process of facture in the context of melancholy pp. 232-233 and Jabes’ quote on the ‘wound’ p. 239.

proscriptive or didactic work of many artists during that period, in this work Jane Alexander chose to problematize notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, as the bodies are not only of victims but also distorted bodies of perpetrators (Gillman). In addition, the bleached colourlessness of bones make it impossible to differentiate or ‘remember’ skin colour. The spines are ripped open as an unravelling of the figure from within and without — perhaps a stage in the unravelling of South African sensibilities (Gillman). Unlike so much art produced during apartheid, which seems to have dated, this work’s urgency is as prevalent in the present because:

When you stare into the eyes² of Alexander’s sculptures they do not look back. They are looking at something else. They can see what we are choosing to forget. They exhort us not to forget... they force a recognition that the past is never over (Nicol qtd. Jamal 1996: 13).

ii) Art ‘after apartheid’

As Adorno and Lyotard argue, poetry ‘after Auschwitz’ is essential, but it must remember in its very form that experience and that silence. South African art, too, has attempted to deal with its complex and specific past. The urgency has shifted to history-writing and art which might critically probe the ‘heritage’ of a ‘shared’ past in which both the ‘villains’ and the ‘victims’ are seen and understood within their socio-cultural and historical contexts. One of the challenges has been to ‘remember’ the complexity of the multi-faceted perspectives — those not only of the perpetrator and the victim, but as is explored specifically in the work of Boltanski and Kentridge, also the silent bystander, for “Men are accomplices to that which leaves them indifferent”(Steiner qtd. Christov-Bakargiev: 31).

2. Cf. eyes in Boltanski’s ‘portraits’ p. 127; sight in Kentridge’s works pp. 182-186.

This, in generalized terms, is where historiography and culture finds itself in South Africa after apartheid, where artists wishing to return to the silent or silenced landscapes of the past have had to recognize that testimony often falls short of the testified. Perhaps it is only as the event becomes a recollection, an image of something past, that the artist can begin to deal with what happened. This activity, as theorists such as Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault and Derrida have demonstrated, is archaeological — a turn to memory as a means of excavating silence. South African artists cannot simplistically write alternatives to the accepted texts by subverting, for example, the white and male-dominated constructions of the past through accounts written from the margins of black or female experience. Instead today's artist is faced with the very Lyotardian im-possibility of representing the immemorial. This crucial shift towards an intimation that something may in fact have happened that cannot quite be accessed, has resulted in many artists fabricating or constructing metaphors and allegories — stories or Lyotardian 'little narratives' — in which not history, but what Brink (1999: 42) calls "imaginings of history" are created.

The need of some artists to face history and confront memories, to bear witness to loss and trauma so as to combat the desire for historical amnesia, was paralleled in the mid 1990's by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In a series of public hearings, the TRC attempted to record the pain of the past, to open and 'clean' the 'wounds' of apartheid so as to commence the process of 'healing the nation'. The concept of art as healing is very much in line with the national project of 'reconciliation', as Nelson Mandela (qtd. Richards 1994: 74) stated at the opening of the *Culture and development conference* in 1993: "It is our hope and fervent belief that the universal language of culture will show us the ways in which to transform and heal the consciousness of all our people". The artist's potential role in collective cure, in the nation

healing/building mandate, is to offer moments of vision in which healing becomes a distinct possibility.

Whilst this sense of interaction, catharsis and cure (much like Beuys's artist-healer) is understandable and perhaps necessary in a bruised and traumatized society, it could also facilitate forgetting — where the healing of wounds or working-through of mourning leads to closure³. Lingered throughout, is the danger of the silences imposed in the name of the reconciled nation⁴. The trauma and loss which resulted from the violent encounters with colonialism and apartheid is often recast as totalizing nationalist rhetoric. This recasting reconfigures and erases the fragmented character and silences of embodied experiences of violence (Robins 1999: 123). In this context, the TRC has been heavily criticized for silencing the more 'banal' institutional effects of apartheid and for narrowing down the notion of victimhood for the broader purpose of nation-building. Within all this, is the pressure to 'forgive and forget', to break with the past — for supposedly: "Apartheid is dying. If we become overly preoccupied with it we run the risk of inheriting the stench of a corpse" (Elliot qtd. Koloane 1999: 29). Thus many artists who continue to deal with the memory of this trauma have been accused of being 'stuck on the struggle' (Williamson 1998: 7). Supported and sustained by the media, the impulse is for a grand concluding narrative which will accompany entry into a globalized economic and international interaction with the world (De Kok 1999: 61). Thus Breyten Breytenbach (qtd. Kellner 1997: 290), like many others, argues that the "rainbow nation concept is a pot of shit"

3. Cf. mourning versus melancholy in the works of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng pp. 229-241.

4. Whilst most people wish to avoid an obsessional attachment to the grievances of the past which might lead to vengeance or self-destruction, not to mention the impotence of melancholy, there is also an argument that denial of the details of the past might bind the nation to that history of grievance and the reproducing of that history, even more powerfully than revenge might (De Kok 1999: 60). In this context, Kader Asmal quotes Alexander Solzhenitsyn (qtd. Krog 1998: 37): "By not dealing with past human rights violations, we are not simply protecting the perpetrators' trivial old age; we are thereby ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations."

that manipulates South Africans into a kind of ‘thought censorship’. He sees South Africa as a diseased society caught in a self-moralising condition, one that has been brutalised and ‘terminally maimed’ by the desire to be morally correct. As J. M. Coetzee (qtd. Williamson 1996: 22) observes of the damaged evolution of South African culture:

The deformed and stunted relationships between human beings that were created under colonialisation and exacerbate under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life. All expression of that inner life, no matter how intense how pierced with exultation or despair, suffer from the same stuntedness and deformity.

The emergence from the apartheid era called into question much of the evidence and strategies that resulted in South Africa’s myopic vision⁵. The past has also been re-envisaged in a search beyond the legacy of colonial domination and therefore a large part of the public discussion around this transition incorporates the historical relationship between Africa and Europe as an important subtext (Cameron 1999: 40)⁶. Whilst this debate may have encouraged artists to re-assess their positions in a post-colonial/post-apartheid society, some argue that what has emerged is a practice fraught with political correctness and categorisation⁷ (Kellner 1997: 30). Concurrently, Okwui Enwezor argues that many use the pretense of not wanting to adhere to political correctness as a form of evading political responsibility — that labelling something

5. This relates to repression p. 229 n1 or what Freud terms the ‘blindness of the seeing eye’. This is also links South African society to Adorno’s claim of the “all too wide-awake consciousness” of post-war German society. Cf. sight in Kentridge’s works pp. 182-186.

6. This questioning, in turn, has played a growing role in the way a contemporary South African artist might develop the discourse of cultural identity. The phrase ‘cultural cringe’ (coined by critic Robert Hughes) describes the feelings of overwhelming inadequacy experienced by artists in countries like South Africa or Australia when comparing their work with that of artists operating in the New York-Cologne axis (Williamson 1998:7). In this context, the *Laager* formation of Wayne Barker’s installation at the Second Johannesburg Biennale (1997) was chosen for its associations with nationalist isolation.

7. In relation to this issue of political correctness, is the recent debate on the politics of representation in the South African context. Disparaging phrases abounded, such as ‘revisionist colonialism’ (Kellner 1997: 30), in a debate where race was the formative principle and priority issue for cultural production, by both black and white artists alike. Cf. Atkinson’s & Breitz’s *Grey areas* (1999).

‘p.c.’ is often a way to discredit ideas and to foreclose debate on urgent questions (Becker 1998)⁸. It is also acknowledged that the South African art world was the product of the will of the dominant culture — reflecting that culture’s prejudices, predilections, fears, affinities and anxieties (Kellner 1997: 30). This J.M. Coetzee (qtd. Williamson 1996: 25) calls the “unnatural preoccupation with power and the positions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation”.

The South African submission to the 46th Venice Biennale (1995) *Identita et ulterita* (‘Identity and difference’), dealt with these issues in an interesting manner. Malcolm Payne proposed constructing walls facing onto the pavilions of three countries involved in the imperialist history of Africa (USA, UK, Netherlands), as monuments recalling the past as well as symbolic of the rebuilding process of South Africa. In allusion to the international isolation and the silence of oppression during apartheid, the exhibition venue provided by the municipality of Venice in the absence of a South African pavilion, was bricked up with small boxes of memory⁹. Randolph Hartzenberg placed a tap bandaged to a cough-mixture bottle in his box, suggesting the makeshift suturing of wounds and the ineffectual medicine provided for the task¹⁰. Brett Murray

8. In this context, Dorfman (qtd. Williamson 1999: 35) writes: “That language of them and us, of treachery and loyalty carries on into democracy. It’s essential to transgress that line too — criticism is basic to a healthy democracy. It’s the only way government will be able to understand its own mistakes. I worry about hiding things too much. It can become, and often perpetuates, the political culture of a nation. That’s where the media and the arts play an important role. When established criticism gives rise to such a level of horror stories that people can’t absorb them any more, the arts are able to created the distance, and conversely ensure the immediacy, of such stories.”

9. The work responded to Ilya Kabakov’s emptying out of the Russian pavilion, and Hans Haacke’s Benjaminian excavation/destruction of the floor of the German pavilion (both of the 1993 Venice Biennale), but contrary to these gestures of destruction, the presence of South Africa was marked via construction (Powell 1995).

10. Similarly, in the *Fault lines* exhibition (which was concerned with TRC hearings), Hartzenburg worked with salt as symbolic of sustenance, pain and healing. Salt too is an ambiguous choice, as ‘bad medicine’ it can refer to ‘salt of the earth’, ‘salt in the wounds’, taking something with ‘a pinch of salt’ (in fact, in *Salt theater* he provided bags of it). Not only similar to Beuys in his choice of evocative organic materials, his performance component in *Salt theater* works with collective memory transmitted through ritual rather than chronicle — perhaps suggesting the unwitnessed and unrecorded pain of the apartheid era (Dobuw 1996).

took banal, painted landscapes and townscapes and pointedly populated them with such images as a touristy tribal couple — fusing tragedy and comedy to critically comment on the convergence of culture in contemporary South Africa.

In many ways the 46th Venice Biennale work epitomizes much post-apartheid work — the idea of the artwork as, at the same time, a site of memory, a clearing of the past and a record of identity. As with post-Holocaust Europe, the two generations in post-apartheid South Africa (one which worked during apartheid; the other in its aftermath) differ and compete in their approaches to the past. It has been argued that the discourse of the resistance aesthetic has continued in post-apartheid South Africa, but in adapted form. That whilst it may have begun with a sole focus and as a direct confrontation against the repression of apartheid, the ‘culture of the struggle’, as artists such as Kendall Geers argue, has simply continued in the ‘self-criticality’ in art as both a political and an aesthetic ‘struggle’ (D’Amato 1999: 48). As Brett Murray (qtd. Williamson 1999: 38) states:

My intentions haven't changed. I want to reflect on what is happening in South Africa. There are still abuses of power — all those endemic problems that come with bad government — I'll always throw stones at that¹¹.

In this context, the ‘older’ generation do seem more informed by a ‘struggle mentality’ — engaging in issues of personal and collective guilt and memory often in a more ‘serious’ light. While still questioning and probing, the ‘post-apartheid kids’ (a phrase coined by Stephen Hobbs) seem to toy, play and comment ironically and often wittily, on the pervading influence of the past in the present. Both generations have evidenced a move away from the collective to

11. In a similar vein, writer Riaan Malan (qtd. Williamson 1996: 83) argues that “South Africa's mostly the same sunny, tragi-comic, backward and violent place it's always been” — but what needs to be acknowledged, now that there is the pretense of all being ‘normal’, is that South Africa is still as dangerously fractured and problematic as it

personal issues of identity and responsibility, which was often neglected and subordinated before, due to the focus on the external ‘enemy’ during ‘the struggle’ and the larger project of mass liberation. The questioning of the South African dependency on the complexities of heritage for one’s received identity has led to the searching through and analysis of archives (public and private), as well as dealing with issues of race, gender and sexuality — often on an intimately personal level.

The artworks of William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng grapple with the thematic and problematic of representing the complexities of memories of the apartheid years. Whilst both artists lived through some of those years, unlike the European artists Kiefer and Boltanski who were of the second generation, their artwork also evidences the crucial ethical concerns of Adorno’s *Bilderverbot* on representing the unrepresentable and Lyotard’s concerns on commemorating the immemorial — all the time, balancing the crucial need to bear witness to the trauma and loss that was evidenced in colonial and apartheid South Africa, so as to allow for premonitory Benjaminian ‘sparks’ to warn of dangers in the present.

Both Kentridge and Mofokeng have been welcomed into the international artworld as receptive to the (t)issues of memory. In many ways, they represent those elements of South Africa in step with Western liberal values and aesthetics: the considered and serious resistance to apartheid, as well as the supposedly non-racial, liberal, non-hierarchical ‘new South Africa’¹².

was during apartheid — in a Benjaminian moment of danger.

12. Some argue in Kentridge’s case, that by choosing a white male of the older generation, as a representative of the ‘new’, the ‘West’ is ignoring and excluding those who supposedly “more readily qualify as credible (artistic) representatives” (Chambers 1997: 4). Rather patronisingly, Chambers also states that it is unlikely “in the extreme” that a black South African artist, given access to a space such as the Serpentine, would have filled it with such “introspective meanderings” — this argument suggests an ignorance of the shift in most post-apartheid art, where many artists from varying backgrounds are very much involved with their own “introspective meanderings”. A

THREE

William Kentridge

I was raised to be aware of the nature of the society we were living in. Kids I went to school with grew up in a world where hatred and terror were normalized (Kentridge qtd. Hooks 1998).

William Kentridge was born in Johannesburg in 1955. Growing up in the home of two distinguished lawyers, he was made aware at an early age of the dangers and injustice of the apartheid system, both to the victims of the oppressive regime and in the corruption of the entire social order. When he was six years old, he saw on his father's desk photographs of victims of the Sharpeville massacre¹³. The 'shock of nonrecognition' he experienced, though painful, passed and he has spent much of his artistic life attempting to revive the clarity of that moment — where the world 'shift[ed] irremediably' — so as to resist the 'compassion fatigue' that comes

contrary argument, in favour of the 'West's' embrace of his art, is that it might signal a willingness to learn of the complexities of life under apartheid, when before the outside world's collective conscience was often too easily swayed by the courage and 'righteousness' of anti-apartheid art (Cameron 1999: 42). In this sense, both Kentridge and Mofokeng's work offers a point of entry, an empathetic way in, to understand the realities and complexities of life in South Africa, in contrast to the rhetorical, stereotypical and simplified view that the media presents to the international community (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 10). Nationally, Kentridge has been heralded as one of the major figures of post-apartheid art, partly because of his 'history' of anti-apartheid work. Mofokeng is considered as "one of South Africa's photographic greats" (Friedman 1997) and, even though he produced work during apartheid, as "South Africa's most accomplished 'new school' photographer" (Blignaut 1997). These artists' acceptance by the international community, in an art world which places perhaps too much importance on this reception, has also elevated their positions nationally. Essentially, it is rather difficult to gauge the South African reception of their work because of the lack of comprehensively critical publications on artists' work written by South African critics. Judging from reviews, though, there has been very little criticism and mostly praise for Kentridge's work in particular. In some respects one may feel that there is a general consensus that his work is above reproach (because of the anti-apartheid work and his international reception), which is not only dangerous but also stunts growth and understanding of the complexities of the work.

13. His father served as counsel for the victims' families.

from repeated exposure to violence¹⁴ (Ollman 1999).

Descending on the two sides of his family from Lithuanian and German Jewish¹⁵ immigrants, Kentridge relates not only to the South African experience, and his own position within it, but also to the utopian moment in the history of the Russian Revolution and to the catastrophe of the Holocaust (Godby 1999). This influence recalls the Benjaminian dialectic of utopian hope and history as catastrophe. His ‘Jewishness’ is further complicated in its relation to the South African Jewish community. Whilst there were prominent Jewish people in anti-apartheid movements, the community did little as a whole to speak up against the injustices of apartheid, which Kentridge describes as “an uncomfortable irony to live with” (Hooks 1998)¹⁶.

i) ‘After apartheid’

I have never tried to make illustrations of apartheid, but the drawings and the films are certainly spawned by, and feed off, the brutalised society left in its wake. I am interested in a political art, that is to say an art of

14. Kentridge describes the nostalgia in the work as connected with moments of childhood that one tries to reclaim as a touchstone for authentic experience (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 9). This ‘nostalgia’ is comparable to what Boltanski attempts to capture and question in his work with childhood. Thus it is not nostalgia in the sense that Lyotard and Adorno criticize p. 60, but rather a nostalgia or desire for an openness to experience that resists ‘compassion fatigue’ or indifference, where Benjamin suggests that one is open to the ‘shocks’, not the lull, of history pp. 16; 33.

15. The look of his male characters are based on his grandfather and himself and the names are Jewish — in this sense his Jewishness is not hidden. In addition, Kentridge’s themes can also be seen to recall the preoccupations of Holocaust survivors (Christov-Bakargiev 1999:34). The hard physical toil and the notorious bunk-beds stacked one above the other as depicted in *Mine* (1991) (figure 3), bring to mind drawings by artist-prisoners such as Henri Pieck, Auguste Favier, Boris Taslitzky. As in the works of Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng, further associations arise through the imagery of gassing or burning: the crematorium chimney, smoke, as well as the sombre, charcoal atmosphere. His images of processions of black workers suggests not individuals but the dehumanised masses incarcerated in the camp. It can be argued that the Holocaust becomes a symbol of the tragedy of modernity as a whole in his and Mofokeng’s work. In addition, Kentridge’s technique of erasure enacts that just as many Jews were ‘erased’ from Europe so too the beaten or shot bodies that lie bleeding to death in *Felix in exile*, are reabsorbed by the landscape, leaving little or no traces. His erasure though is imperfect — it leaves traces to commemorate this loss.

16. For more on the subject of the reactions and responses of Jewish anti-apartheid activists to the Jewish community’s ‘silence’ in South Africa see Sutter’s *Cutting through the mountain* (1997).

ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings. An art (and a politics) in which optimism is kept in check and nihilism at bay (Kentrige qtd. Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 14).

Kentrige's art is not 'about' apartheid in the explicit sense, but rather 'after apartheid'. It raises the underlying questions — which similarly inform the works of Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng — of how any visual artist working today can produce representations of vast, complex cultural and/or political issues, so as to commemorate the loss and trauma of the past and to warn of similar dangers in the present. For as Kentrige (qtd. Hooks 1998) asks, "how does one relate a private experience of a public trauma?". As discussed, in Europe after WWII, Adorno argued that it is ethically unjust to create an aesthetic experience out of such brutal real-life events or from documentary photographs and footage, and as Lyotard insists, it is impossible to render through the mediation of language the horror of the experience. For images from the media, of people killed or starving, begin to fit into a bank of images where the initial shock is dulled, 'compassion fatigue' sets in and the import becomes diluted and normalized. This naturalization of systems such as apartheid or the Holocaust, has allowed for amnesia, often willful, which tries to block out the past, as well as a refusal to accept accountability for the terrors of the past. Kentrige's interest is this human act of disremembering, for: "The disaster always takes place after having taken place" (Hartman qtd. Ollman 1999).

As with Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng, burial or closure is denied in Kentrige's work, instead the lack of fixity sustains the viewer's desire to commemorate. Kentrige's historical and geological sense of change is evidenced in a preoccupation with layers, erasures, shifts — both in his drawing technique as well as with his narrative. Much like Kiefer's, his works are archeological tracings at the root of which lies "an anxiety about relinquishing meaning" (Kentrige qtd. Williamson & Jamal 1996: 51). Kentrige focuses on the question of historical

memory, how people seem to forget so quickly, and as with Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng, is influenced by a sense of historical belatedness — the Levitical injunction to bear witness to the losses and silences of history. Echoing Benjamin and Adorno, Kentridge argues that this sense of responsibility or guilt leads the artist to work from the perspective of redemption, rather than working for redemption (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 75).

Alas, there is lyric poetry. Alas, because of the dulling of sensibilities we must have in order to make that writing or reading possible. But of course, also, thank goodness that such poetry can still be read. The dulling of memory is both a failure and a blessing (Kentridge qtd. Hooks 1998).

In this statement, made in response to Adorno's famous dictum, Kentridge suggests that time's dulling of intense passion allows other less bleak, more lyrical moments to surface — that while the realities of the past may be too hard to describe and the evocation might be flawed, there is still a responsibility, as both Adorno and Lyotard stress, to bear witness to the immemorial. Language and history-writing appears to Kentridge to remain separate from the conditions it describes and the South African condition constitutes a history that in a sense has already been written (Godby 1999), but which does not testify to the immemorial. In an attempt to counter and expose this, his work deals with the drama of history and his place in it: the ambiguous experience of both witnessing and participating in the tragedy of apartheid. His and Mofokeng's work does not simply call attention to the state terrorism of apartheid, but also requires viewers to look beyond this external cruelty in the past to an inner landscape in the present which is also fraught with issues of power, of 'right' and 'wrong', of domination and submission (Hooks 1998). The works deal with the relationships between desire, ethics and responsibility, between subjugation/emancipation, guilt/confession, trauma/healing. 'Political' without being prescriptive or polemical, the diseased body politic is probed leaving traces of indecisions,

erasures, reversals and alterations (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 9). In this way, a fetishistic relationship with the viewer is prevented, as Adorno insists, showing instead the failure of the artwork to hold or preserve memory and shifting the responsibility of commemoration to the viewer — even if the problematics of the melancholic's fetishization of things remain.

i. a) Nationalism and identity

Whilst Kentridge's constantly changing drawings create merging, overlapping or dividing personae, providing commentary on issues of identity, his work, much like Kiefer's, could be interpreted as an allegory of nationhood (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 30). This is connected to the irony of contemporary South Africa which is striving to forge a new, post-colonial, post-apartheid 'Rainbow Nation' in a post-national age (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 10). Invocations of spectacular history (in South Africa of the 'struggle'; in post-war Germany of the 'resistance') serve as a device for establishing a cohesive myth of nation and a unifying narrative in which to interpret the past, present and future. Nationalism and its all-pervading and insistent presence at the heart of cultural histories, attempts to deal with trauma as a relation between victims and perpetrators — as a legacy of guilt (Rogoff 1995: 116). In South Africa, this legacy has been further problematised by the TRC, where by reducing apartheid to its worst perpetrators it removes from beneficiaries the sense of their own complicity and social responsibility (Mamdani 1998). But as Marlene Dumas (1999: 129) writes, addressing South African artists:

Don't move too quickly into grey areas. Racism is (still) present tense history (all continents included). White people share a collective guilt that will not be forgiven in our lifetimes. No matter how often we say we're sorry, no matter how long we spend studying the past, reading and quoting the right books, no matter what our individual deeds are. This is our fate. This is the black and white of it.

Whilst Kentridge's work tackles South Africa's history, memory, industry, ideology, nativism, politics and fraught racial relations, these issues are brought down to scale and concentrated in the workings of the psyche of both the victim and perpetrator, demagogue and conscientious objector (Enwezor 1998: 66-69). This politically-grounded art acknowledges the possibility of a complex moral framework for human thought and behaviour on an intensely intimate level. As with Boltanski's and Mofokeng's work, history and fiction merge — Lyotardian 'little narratives' or Brink's 'imagining's of history' — individual stories of personal grief, loss, triumph and violation, work alongside and against the collective, nationalist narrative which threatens to simplify and exclude the complexities navigated in a changing culture. This marks the significant shift of post-apartheid art because, as discussed, in the decades of popular resistance personal suffering was subordinated to the larger project of mass liberation. His film series as a whole works like a diary or rough draft, leaving hesitations, mistakes and suggestions — constituting a yet-to-be-completed, deferred investigation into the troubled, amnesiac white South African psyche (Coetzee 1999: 93).

The shaping of subjective identity on a personal and public level is investigated through shifting notions of history and geography. His work explores the border zone between remembering and forgetting, where identity arises and is hybrid, multiple and shifting. In a similar vein to Kiefer's work, by analysing his own position in the milieu of "white guilt and middle-class sentimentality", Kentridge reenacts some of the ways in which the white population had sought to avert its gaze from the anxiety and 'horror of blackness' (*Swartgevaar*) that surrounded it during apartheid and colonialism (Enwezor 1998: 66-69). When repressing¹⁷ the knowledge that

17. Cf. repression in Freud p. 229 n1 and the 'blindness of the seeing eye' in Kentridge's work p. 182; cf. Kristeva's notions of 'splitting' p. 47 n58; cf. the violence of the One in relation to Mofokeng's archive pp. 210-211..

leads to trauma or guilt, one might split oneself or construct walls within, so as to attempt to blind oneself so as to normalize, mask, eradicate or simply survive the harsh realities of such systems. This is, in J. M. Coetzee's (qtd. Ollman 1999) words, the notion of the self as “multiple and multiply divided against itself”. A recurring image in his work is of people turning their backs and closing their eyes — literalising the ambiguous anti-theatrical thematic of turning inwards. Kentridge tries to unravel the sense of madness or schizophrenia of the contrary multi-layered and complementary parts of oneself. This notion is explored in *Stereoscope* (1999) (figure 34) where, like 19th century stereoscopic photographs, the image and central character is split into two in the manner of allegorical doubling¹⁸. But whilst the two Sohos combine to make one stereoscopic image and seem identical, they often get out of sync.

He avoids the central, authoritarian modern gaze by splitting the Self into many different voices and identities, such as Soho and Felix (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 34). Soho Eckstein (figure 35), the wealthy white industrialist, descends in part from the corrupt cast of characters in George Grosz's prints and drawings indicting the Weimar bourgeoisie (Ollman 1999)¹⁹. He puffs on a cigar and wears his pin-striped suit like protective armour, whether at his desk or comatose in hospital. Felix Teitlebaum (figure 36) is the more empathetic white liberal who as the solitary

18. In a similar vein, his theatre work with puppets that are manipulated and performed by actors within full view of the audience, allow the characters to gradually take on a double or even triple image where neither puppet nor operator take precedence (figure 40). This results in intense and sometimes volatile experiences, such as when, in *Faustus in Africa* (1995), the witch-puppet turns and attacks her own manipulators. The effect of this multi-personal representation becomes almost one of witnessing the character's relationships with their selves (Sacks 1995: 31). This notion of the self-as-other is also explored in Kiefer's *Shulamith/Margarete* series p. 91.

19. In much of his early work, his frequent references to the art of George Grosz, Otto Dix, and Max Beckmann seemed to compare the fragile world of Weimar with Johannesburg high society in the last years of apartheid. The work of William Hogarth provided a model of inhuman cruelty and bizarre contradictions, to offer insight into the 'insane' world of apartheid (Godby 1999). Deriving from Goya's understanding of the human condition, Kentridge's human figures are set somewhere between the Enlightenment hero and the inert character of a marionette, defining the human condition as a contest between individual reason and the brutish expression of appetites (Godby 1999), as in *Sobriety, obesity and growing old* (1991) (figure 44).

melancholic observer is depicted in heroic nudity. Since both have contrary characteristics, neither has a monopoly on our empathy nor can they be easily dismissed as alien in action or instinct (Ollman 1999)²⁰. From film to film they move in and out of psychic and physical equilibrium — often converging and merging with each other. Felix’s association with water and fish suggests, in Jungian analysis, that he embodies the unconscious desires or ‘shadow’ of Soho — such as in *Johannesburg, the 2nd greatest city after Paris* (1988)²¹ where he confronts Soho with a fish and the two battle each other. Thus Soho and Felix represent complementary impulses that coexist within each individual, rather than mutually exclusive types. By asserting the fragmented, fluid nature of individual identity, the films (much like Boltanski’s albums of Nazi Germany, Kiefer’s *Shulamith/Margarete* series and Mofokeng’s *Sad landscapes* series) work to destabilize the triad of mutually exclusive roles that comprise the standard scenario for injustice — perpetrator, victim and bystander. This shifting, splitting, condensing and dividing which characterizes the uncertain process of his allegorical narrative, images and drawing style, suggests an approach of Adornian self-doubt or Derridean undecidability that Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng also share.

i. b) Post-colonialism

The term ‘post-colonialism’, far from being a term that can be indiscriminately applied also appears to be riddled with contradictions and qualifications. A concern explored in both Kentridge and Mofokeng’s works, post-colonialism deals with the contestation of colonial

20. Soho, for all of his ruthlessness and greed, is lonely and doubt-ridden and Felix, who seems painfully vulnerable, nevertheless takes advantage of an opportunity to carry on an affair with Soho’s wife. This crucial swapping of identities thematizes the evil within all of us and is also crucial to Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng’s oeuvres.

21. Cf. Walter Benjamin’s (1979: 146-162) “Paris, capital of the 19th century”.

domination and the legacies of colonialism as well as imperializing/colonizing — subordinating/subjectivizing — discourses and practices (Loomba 1998: 10-12). Kentridge (qtd. Sack 1995: 31) “wanted to open up this albatross, see what was inside, re-stuff it, and send it back to Europe”²². But the nostalgic concept of an innocent classless pre-colonial Africa can, too, be seen as highly problematic because it obscures the contradictory relationships at work within Africa in the present. The challenge, which both Kentridge and Mofokeng grapple with, is to move beyond reactive and circular patterns of thinking which might perpetuate such power relations. But even in such a late film as *WEIGHING... AND WANTING* (1998), Kentridge, far from presenting a hopeful picture, continues to thematize the endemic nature of conflict, as well as the insecure, precarious and fragile nature of all forms of psychic, domestic or social harmony (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 18).

Both *Mine* (1991) (figure 32) and *Monument* (1990) (figure 30) suggest that the conditions of colonialism and imperialism are not yet dead enough to be memorialized (Ollman 1999). For capitalism does not override and liquidate racial hierarchies but continues to depend upon, and intensify, them²³. It is argued that the South African labour system is the most effective system for the capitalist exploitation of labour yet devised, founded as it was on the three institutions of

22. His *Faustus in Africa* (1995) is set in a non-specific country but with very specific references to colonial Africa. As in Goethe's *Faustus*, the realpolitik of South Africa, Kentridge (qtd. Williamson & Jamal 1996: 50-51) argues (in much the same tone as Adorno's ideas on the 'ever-same'): “[is] about good vanquishing evil, the new system replacing the old... this ongoing negotiation in which old devils of the past keep their places... The idea that evil people should pay for their deeds, that they get taken down to hell. My experience is that they don't. They stay on their farms and they get their pensions.”

23. If imperialism is defined as a political system in which an imperial centre governs colonised countries, then the granting of political independence signals the end of empire, the collapse of imperialism. But since imperialism is primarily an economic system of penetration and control of markets, then political changes do not basically affect it, but simply redefine the terms (Loomba 1998:6-7). This is the case of 'American imperialism' which wields enormous military and economic power across the globe without direct political control. The new global order does not depend upon direct rule but allows the economic, cultural and (to varying degrees) political penetration of some countries by others. This also makes it debatable whether once-colonised countries can be seen as properly 'post-colonial'.

the rural reserve, the mining compound and the controlled urban 'location' (Loomba 1998: 127). Kentridge uses the city of Johannesburg and images of mining to demonstrate how imperialism originates in the metropolis and leads to domination and control. The analogy between the anatomical body and the body politic is played out against a landscape with mine dumps, drive-in screens and scrapyards as the waste products that exist at the city/body's limits (Cameron 1999: 57).

Kentridge explores the persistence of racial injustice on an intimate and personal level. His deft transmutations and the stark contrasts between the isolation of power and the camaraderie of servitude can be seen in both the narrative, images and title of *Mine*. Every minor gesture made by Soho triggers a corresponding reaction, on a momentous scale, for the miners who are, literally under his thumb. The capitalist's indulgences are also played against the shocking deprivation of the miner's below-ground world (Cameron 1999: 60). In one sequence, Soho's coffee plunger descends through his desk into the dark, layered subterranean mine, excavating not just earth but also history (figure 32). The plunger passes through the miners' plank-like bunks and continues deeper into the dark past, until it reaches an historical diagram of a slave ship. His project recalls Lyotard's, who stresses that one needs to remember what is forgotten in this story so often told, such as how the place of slavery and colonialization in sustaining the early developments of capitalism and the meaning this has for the ordering of relations of 'race', is marginalized.

In *Monument* (figure 30) Soho appears as a civic benefactor, basking in self-righteousness as he dedicates a public sculpture of a black labourer that, as in Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* (Kentridge's starting point for the film), is ultimately revealed to be a living man. As crowds

cheer Soho's 'gift' the slave lifts his head and opens his eyes — the viewer meets the man's levelling stare and hear his laboured breath. Making a similar argument to James Young, the film suggests that in time such self-serving monuments work against the intention of their makers — in this case a sense of impending revolution or retribution is suggested²⁴. In addition, the film grapples with the complex dilemma of representing the 'other' in a country such as South Africa. Set in 1990, the film warns that such flaccid attempts of speaking on behalf of the oppressed are, as Foucault argues, often self-serving and silencing. Whilst the white African artist cannot simply continue pursuing the fiction of making South Africa 'white', he/she cannot speak on behalf of the 'black' in an attempt to give voice to the 'other'. Kentridge has depicted various black Africans as characters whilst recognizing that it is virtually impossible for a member of the 'ruling class' or its members to represent the silenced without becoming the unwitting vehicle for that group (Cameron 1999: 45). Acutely expressing this cultural dilemma — to which the only alternative would be artistic silence — he explores a zone of uncertainty and shifting meanings through the allegorical portrayal of his own personal situation²⁵. Thus Kentridge focuses on the intimate mechanisms of individual anamnesis, on remembering one's indirect responsibility for the brutal conditions of apartheid (figures 37 & 38), taking what Enwezor (1997: 25) argues is the only 'viable' position for a white South African artist.

24. Cf. counter-monuments pp. 130-132, as well as Kiefer's investigation of the death drive in such monumental project's as Kreis' *Mausoleum* pp. 93-94.

25. As Kentridge (qtd. Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 10) states in relation to his depiction of Nandi in *Felix in exile*: "I disagree that all portrayals — the fact of portrayal — entails paternalism. It implies that all representation are equal — that one does not have to look at them. I think Nandi is interesting in this regard. I struggled for a long time to find, not a form, but a persona for her. Victim yes. But she had to be more, too. When she gained her theodolite and started drawing the landscape herself, she found her place in the film. Perhaps she could be a displaced self portrait — is this imperialism to the nth degree? Maybe, but it ceased to be a problem that interested me. I was then intrigued by my personal displacement to her — the eyes looking at each other" (figure 45). Cf. Kiefer as *Shulamith/Margarete* p. 91, Boltanski's conflation of his own childhood with the children who died in the Holocaust p. 103 and Mofokeng's linkage of various South African sites with the landscapes and mass graves of Vietnam and the Holocaust pp. 220-229.

Kentridge's films explore the relationship of the individual to society. In the vein of Adorno's and Benjamin's analysis, they work somewhere between individual experience and mass experience; the mystical experience of the landscape and the experience of the city dweller; the limits of rationalism in the tradition of European scientific knowledge and the decay of civilizations. In this sense, his character Felix (figure 36) recalls Kafka, for as Benjamin writes Scholem: "Kafka's work is an ellipse with foci that lie far apart and are determined on the one hand by mystical experience (which is above all the experience of tradition) and on the other by the experience of the modern city dweller" (Benjamin qtd. Scholem 1989: 233). For Benjamin, the city dweller's experience is of being at the mercy of vast bureaucratic machinery, whose functioning is steered by the authorities who remain nebulous even to the executive organs themselves, let alone the people they deal with (Scholem 1989: 223). Soho, Felix and Mrs Eckstein's self-absorption is symptomatic of this experience and of their having cut themselves off from nature (Cameron 1999: 53). Whilst their lives are characterised in terms of the buildings they inhabit, the growing masses belong entirely to the surrounding landscape, such as in *Johannesburg: the 2nd greatest city after Paris*. The black men enter the scene in a ribbon, or river of life, that winds its way through the barren landscape — indicating revolutionary force and collectivist strength (Ollman 1999). But Kentridge problematizes the sense of promise that this river brings for as the film ends, the men dissolve into a smudged grey sky of uncertainty. The traces left by the past oppression form a barely perceptible part of the current landscape, into which all future efforts at a meaningful reconciliation will also be absorbed.

"A city," said Reb Ammar to his younger son, "is a heart whose beat you can no longer hear.

"You get out of the city and you discover its secrets hidden in the sand."

"How could I tear from the desert a confession that the city has hidden from me?" the younger son asked.

"No confession," continued Reb Ammar, "but the distressing cry of the sea which is in the stones, gagged with cement" (Jabes 1977: 39).

Soho's interior life is presented as requiring excavation²⁶, so as to uncover his repressed secrets and memories that may begin an awareness of his complicity and responsibility. In *Mine* (figure 32), Soho coffee plunger plunders not only through earth but history — much like Kiefer's process of facture in his landscapes. In *History of the main complaint* (1996) (figure 48), as Soho is examined by doctors, each touch goes deeper into Soho's unconscious and closer to the guilty memories that seem to underlie his present medical emergency. The motif of the stratification of memory in Kentridge's works is brought to fruition in *WEIGHING... AND WANTING* (1998) (figure 43), where recollections of both the personal and the collective past lie shattered underneath layers of rock and, recalling Walter Benjamin's notion of history as excavation, must be retrieved and reassembled before they can be applied to the experience of the present (Cameron 1999: 71). Building off the geological motif deployed in *Mine*, the scanned brain transforms into a kind of porous rock in which are embedded layers of his own fossilised memories. In the previous films, Soho's indifference to nature is synonymous with his characteristic callousness towards the people around him²⁷. But *WEIGHING... AND WANTING* presents a sense of Benjaminian awakening in line with this theme, where despite its apocalyptic overtones, it seems that Soho has taken stock of his life and begun to thoroughly reconsider his priorities (Cameron 1999: 71). As Soho speculates: "In Whose Lap Do I Lie?" the film quickly accelerates into a series of contrasting images: scars across a back become pylons in the landscape then a body again. Shattered parts begin to form into a whole and Soho rests his head against the rock's surface in a melancholic gesture of solemn integration with nature .

26. Cf. excavation versus entombment in the context of melancholy p. 237-238.

27. Cf. Benjamin's p. 15 and Adorno's pp. 16-17 ideas around nature and history.

ii. Kentridge as artist

As is argued in relation to Kiefer and Boltanski, Kentridge presents *Gesamtkunswerk* with his varied combinations of art forms — music, narrative, theatre and visual art²⁸. Theater and opera themselves, not just their classic texts, are treated as found objects, echoing the experimental stage works of Weimar Germany: Piscator's 'epic theater' which integrated live players with background film projections (Ollman 1999), as well as Brecht's allegorical dramas.

I feel I'm part of earlier heroic attempts of connecting the world with art (Kentridge qtd. Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 33).

The traces of art-historical sources in Kentridge's work provide yet another level on which to explore the mechanisms of forgetting and remembering (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 11). Working within a culture highly aware of its relegation to the international periphery, Kentridge adapts major works from the European 'centre', whilst attempting to avoid reinforcing old colonialist hierarchies or ceding his own vision to their established authority (Ollman 1999). His artistic heritage is extremely complex, beginning with Daumier, Grosz²⁹, and Goya, through to early 20th century artists like Max Beckmann and Otto Dix. Most immediate and relevant for him was the oppositional vanguard art from the early 1900's "when there still seemed to be hope for political struggle rather than a world exhausted by war and failure" (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 10). By alluding to these socially engaged art movements, in works that evoke the recent past,

28. Cf. in this context of *Gesamtkunswerke*, Adorno's vehement criticism of spectacle pp. 55-56.

29. It is argued that, rather than painting and sculpture, the more populist artistic languages such as posters or theatre have tended to serve in modern history as vehicles for progressive ideas (Cameron 1999: 40-41). From Honore Daumier and George Grosz p. 153 n19, Kentridge invokes the tradition of political illustration — of satire, realism and social protest. Whilst he is not a caricaturist, his drawings contain the same authority of line and his characters are weighted by a similar feeling of gloom (Taylor 1999: 100-111). Surrealist, allegorical images of animals and objects combine with the detritus drawings.

Kentridge (as with Kiefer and Boltanski) presents a paradoxical approach to modernism that implies a nostalgia for these utopias while recognizing that they have failed (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 15)³⁰.

Kentridge (1998a: 140) describes his position as an artist as “At the edge of huge social upheavals yet also removed from them. Not able to be part of these upheavals nor to work as if they did not exist”. In his films, the artist is linked to the figure of the melancholic³¹, solitary, passive character Felix (a word with resonance to ‘exile’) who is essentially self-satisfied, hopeful, and fatalistic (Cameron 1999: 50). Whilst Kentridge may be uncomfortable with its passivity, this Derridian position of psychic exile, neither active participant nor disinterested observer, allows him the necessary distance to comment critically on what he sees — as in *WEIGHING... AND WANTING*, where Kentridge is, at once, the dreamer who gives rise to the image, the one who writes on the wall, as well as the decoder who interprets the sign³². The viewer is invited to experience Soho/Felix/Nandi as an extension, or alter ego, of the artist himself onto the morally complex playing field of South African public life. The interplay between masking and revealing becomes a matter of constant Derridian allegorical slippage.

30. As Kentridge (qtd. Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 16) states: “The artists working in Weimar were working in a state of siege. In other words, the subject matter was about the possibility of failure, of attempts to transform the world, and the project is similar to mine”. Cf. Lyotard’s notion of im-possibility p. 61.

31. Cf. section on melancholia pp. 229-241 and Kentridge’s ambivalence to this position of witness pp. 184-185.

32. *WEIGHING ... AND WANTING* connects Kentridge, as a false prophet, to Daniel who had wisdom in interpreting dreams and visions. In the Biblical story, Daniel was summoned by the king to decode writing on a wall [cf Boltanski’s *Missing house* (figure 7) and Kiefer’s *Shulamith*(figure 8)] and told Balthazar that he has been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and because he had not humbled his heart before God, his kingdom had come to an end. It also connects Kentridge to the messenger of this message — because just as the disembodied hand, Kentridge’s hand draws his ‘messages’ — paintings/drawings/writing (cf. Derrida’s *Memoirs of the blind* 1992). Kentridge describes the starting point for the film, as a ‘comforting’ dream he had of an image on the wall from which meaning emerged (Ollman 1999). This points not only to Kentridge’s hope as an artist, much like Benjamin’s hope for the historian as in *Angelus novus*, being a seer and messenger, but also that his drawings might occasion a moment of Benjaminian awakening and pose questions in the minds of those people who dominate and oppress. It also connects Kentridge to Kiefer’s identification with Aaron p. 69 n38 and Boltanski as a ‘bad preacher’ p. 125. Cf. Derrida on the Rabbi versus the poet p. 56 n11.

Whilst Kentridge used his own face and body as the model for Felix, Soho is modelled after his paternal grandfather resembling an older version of the artist himself. This adds an Oedipal anxiety and play within his works, indicating both pious and patricidal impulses not only towards the older generation, but also towards himself—much like Boltanski's destruction against the children/ himself, Mofokeng's destruction of the colonial black subject/himself and Kiefer's destruction of the artist-hero/German/himself. In addition, it expresses an ambivalence towards the privileges and comfort of the class to which he was born, as well as the tunnel vision of this class (reflected by his cast of characters) who often appear powerless to alter, or even recognise, their actions and their fate (Cameron 1999: 57).

Kentridge's characters act as repositories, not only of his own, but also of South Africa's different and convergent ideas and history. In sharp contrast, the younger artist Brett Murray presents sculptures in which the part that stands for the whole is turned in on itself and is used in such a way as to make a nonsense of the figure's function or identity. In works such as *Oros goes Ndebele* (1994) (figure 39), the subject or message is expressed less through observation than through ideation—rendering the human form as the vehicle for a kind of *idee fixe* (Powell 1999: 54). His figures are conceived according to a sustained and consistent formula and are thus more or less interchangeable, in this regard not dissimilar to Boltanski's portraits (figure 22). Kentridge instead, in the humanist tradition of Goya, explores the ways in which experience and idiosyncrasy leaves traces on the human body. The character's identities are defined cumulatively rather than categorically, revealing subtle nuances rather than the quick legibility of caricature. This approach complicates easy distinctions of 'right' and 'wrong', in a similar vein to Jane Alexander's *Butcher boys* (figure 33) and Boltanski's albums of Nazi families—

rejecting, in the manner of Derrida, the embodiment of binary opposites in an attempt to shift liminally between these spaces.

ii. a) Narrative

It is about the impossibility of factuality. Facts are not enough. Facts are not fixed. The contradictions and dislocations are the interesting things, rather than the consistences. It is not the strength of passion but its briefness that interests me (Kentrige qtd. Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 17).

Like dense, insistent poems, the unscripted narratives of Kentrige's films reckon with the tenuous nature of memory, both personal and historical. They exist as rough drafts, or as Derrida (1987: 181) might say also of Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng's works, a "detailing of extracts, fragments, detachable as signatures". With their transmutations and erasures, they epitomize the provisionality of becoming which involves both doing and undoing (Ollman 1999)³³. His incessantly altered world mirrors the ambiguous dialectics of the political process where South Africa is now re-drawing itself — drafting, erasing and reformulating its structures of power and social relations. At the same time, Kentrige's animation process evidences the desire to keep alive and bear witness to the transient, evolutionary stages.

In his films, scenes constantly shift with a range of highs and lows, where a light moment suddenly gives way to terror (Hooks 1998). Rife with metaphor and allegory, marked by sudden surreal shifts in tone and perspective, the characters, narrative, music and drawing style lack any definite, fixed identity — each form open to a multitude of transformative possibilities. These

33. As poet Breyten Breytenbach (qtd Ollman 1999) puts it in *Fragments from a growing awareness of unfinished truths* (1996): "South Africanness now is an itinerary (and a topography) of becoming in the making". Cf. Mofokeng's landscapes as thresholds of becoming pp. 224-226.

permeable, porous, liminal boundaries between the felt and the imagined, the seen, remembered and desired, are what give Kentridge's characters and narratives uncannily daunting yet convincing emotional weight³⁴ (Ollman 1999). Because his primary media is charcoal and pastel, the process of erasing and re-drawing enables his subjects to metamorphose into imaginary creatures, cities, selves³⁵ and inanimate objects³⁶. Similarly, in theatre works such as *Faustus in Africa* (1995) (figure 40), he pairs the actions of characters on stage with visions and memories projected behind them so as to dissolve the barriers between inside and outside, now and then — creating Benjaminian 'dialectical images' which bring the past and present into a constellation. In this context, the disjunction in his films, the incomplete contradictory elements, impulses and sensations, similarly create Benjaminian 'shocks'. These shocks not only move the viewers, break the lull of their day-to-day life, but also signal a hope that in those brief moments a recognition or awakening might occur. Working against the lull of completed narratives, the stories are characterised by incompleteness and awkwardness — they stop where they should continue and gaps are left for the viewer to bridge.

The work is also characterised by a sense of immediacy. Popular forms — cartoons, puppets³⁷,

34. For instance, in *WEIGHING... AND WANTING* when Soho rests his head in the woman's lap an image is established of intimacy and security. When the relationship erodes Kentridge erases her and her lap transforms into a telephone — as Sartre would argue, a relatively crude vehicle for communion when compared to skin against skin or the face. The telephone changes into a black cat, a surrogate presence that only underscores the depth of his loss (figure 35) — much like Boltanski's use of the stacks of biscuit tins as a surrogate for lost bodies in his *Monuments* p. 127 (figure 25).

35. Cf. Brink and 'imaginary history' p. 141 and the melancholic's dream states p. 236.

36. Cf. the melancholic allegorist's fixation on objects p. 235.

37. Whilst Kentridge (qtd. Ollman 1999) attempts to establish characters "with gravitas, a certain weight", both the carved wooden puppets and the charcoal drawings have a sense of vulnerability and transitoriness already built in. Jarry (from whose play the *Ubu* films are drawn) believed that puppets, being passive and rudimentary, "convey concisely and accurately the outline of our thoughts" (Jarry qtd. Ollman 1999). But as a member of the Handspring Puppet Company states: "A lot of directors of normal theatre are nervous of puppets. They invariably become the neighbourhood of the fairies... Because they're made of wood they have to be wished into life so the viewer can become actively involved. It goes back to playing with toy cars or dolls as a kid" (Kohler qtd. Worsdale 1997: 14-

media images — are defamiliarized in a similar manner to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986)³⁸ or Boltanski's shadow puppets (figure 23). The extraordinary juxtapositions work to unsettle the viewer's reading of the scene — making it uncanny. Thus he presents a psycho-topography by pictorially linking, through metamorphosis and allegory, the landscape, natural and built, to the psychic unrest of his characters. This can be seen in such films as *WEIGHING ... AND WANTING*, where as Kentridge (qtd. Godby 1999) states:

I had seen the MRI brainscans of a friend's head and knew they had to be in the film — not for their meaning but for the urgency with which I wanted to draw them (which is always a mixture between the formal interest — how the fixed images of the scan translate themselves into charcoal and pastel — and the chain of associations the image leaves in its wake).

In this film, Soho finds a stone and brings it in to his house, turning it over in his hands as if searching for clues to his own isolation. Kentridge's choice of the inanimate stone suggests not only the *petro*, the sold rock on which the spiritual 'home' or meeting place for the Self and Other is built, but also his character's and his own Benjaminian melancholic belief in things instead of people. Indeed, Soho's relationship with his wife has violently broken down — at another point, he holds a china cup to his ear as one would a seashell, listening it seems for the lost rhythms of that intimacy (figure 42) — but even this cup gets broken (Ollman 1999). The

16). In addition, this use of non-art objects, much like Boltanski's shadow-puppets (figure 23) or Kiefer's toys in *Operation Seelion*, also serves to break the aesthetic distance and engage the viewers on a more spontaneous level — creating Benjaminian 'cessations of happening'.

38. In Spiegelman's *Maus* (figure 44), human characters are portrayed as animals (mice, cats, pigs) which denies preconceptions and aesthetic distance, allowing for more engagement and emotional poignancy. Similarly, in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997), a pair of walkman headphones come onto a pig's head, and then the pig's head explodes. Whilst this references an actual occurrence during apartheid, when a walkman with booby-trapped headphones, which had first been tested on a pig, was used to kill a black anti-apartheid activist, it also has many other resonances. According to *Chambers twentieth century dictionary* (1993), to call one a 'pig', is to suggest that they are greedy, dirty, gluttonous or cantankerous; to be 'pig-headed' would infer that the person is ignorant, or stubbornly obstinate; to 'make a pig's ear of something' is to make a mess of it, to do something badly or clumsy. There was also an infamous instance, in South Africa, of a pig's head left outside the court of a Jewish judge, as an anti-Semitic gesture. The pig as 'other' can be connected to both black people during apartheid, as well as the Jew.

cup/shell suggests the longing for the sea, of bathing in water as an encounter with nature, or as Edmond Jabes' (1977: 102) character Yukel quotes: "Get me out of my shell. I am thirsty for the groundswell". When Soho slides into an MRI chamber, the stone is etched with lines that mimic the stratified imaging of the man's brain under the scanner. In the end, the teacup that has been shattered — its very drawing torn to small pieces — restores itself, but keeps its scars. Soho rests his head on the stone outside, longing for reintegration with nature (figure 43).

The combination of performance, music and drawing which may be seen as an extension of Kentridge's interest in collage structure, produces a kind of total artwork or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. His art and its reception, suggests that the language of the art can be both the object and the international, as if there were a kind of Benjaminian Ur-language or way of thinking (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 34). Like a diary or journal, the films manifest a perpetual reckoning with the self, its internal conflicts and contradictions, its yearnings for comfort, its search for a place within the family and the world (Ollman 1999). Kentridge, it can be argued, chooses to image such an ephemeral, subtle and powerful thing as desire, which in psychoanalysis at least, sits outside of language — in the images of water, the sounds and silences of his music, as well as the traces of his drawings.

(The sea of my memory is white. It will be blue if I want, with words joining in dreams and the violence of waves swelled and beaten down by fever...) (Jabes 1977: 93).

In his films, spoken words, muted to incomprehensibility, infiltrate the soundtrack. As Kentridge (qtd Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 33) states, the music "often indicate(s) what needs to be heard or seen, outside of oneself". Thus sound is used, instead of language, to play with and against the concentrated, discontinuous narratives. These muted words as well as his handwritten titles,

much like Kiefer's scrawled words, in their undecipherability articulate the Lyotardian longing to say the unsayable, because embroidered into desiring, neither before or after it, is loss (Atkinson 1999).

The cry sings because in its enigma, it brings forth water from a cleft rock, the unity of spurting rupture (Derrida 1978: 76).

The tactile experience of water³⁹ and wetness, can be seen as both an expression of Felix's passion as well as a sensual refuge (figure 44) (Cameron 1999: 68-70). In *Felix in exile*, the melancholic Felix stays locked in his room, unable to place himself in the midst of societal change until the image of his face in the shaving mirror transforms itself into Nandi's (figure 45) and water begins flowing through the space in between and beyond their physical boundaries. This spatial rupture allows an interaction between the self and 'other'. But as Atkinson (1999) writes, the 'other' is also the unconscious, the subversive field of traces, memories, and losses which is outside of representation. It is a suppressed presence, an absence felt all the more strongly for the spaces and objects it informs but which it does not fully inhabit. Thus the landscape is thirsty for water and the two characters, as white and black South Africans, male and female, both long for interaction, for a formless, liminal engagement beyond physical, mental and legally-enforced boundaries⁴⁰.

39. Kentridge's Kieferesque parched and barren landscapes are often flooded with water in his films. The flooding suggests the descent into water of the hero's journey which signifies a reckoning with the unconscious (such as Homer's *Aeneid*, where the descent into the underworld entailed facing the ghosts of the past) — after which one may transcend the earth/mother/history. But as with Kiefer's palette works and the descent into the museum as part of Boltanski's *The missing house*, fulfilment is deferred in Kentridge's work. Water as fluid of the earth, is also linked to internal fluids of body — life-giving sperm, water in the womb — which bring fertility and life. The water may also connect with external bodily fluids such as tears of sorrow, or pain, or the sweat of guilt or regret — and as salt water are connected to both regret, loss and healing (figure 46).

40. Cf. Kristeva and the abject in the context of longing p. 121.

Water may also signify the longing for the redemption of the moral individual (Cameron 1999: 66). But whilst water may cleanse and purify, it may also erase — or, as in the sense of Pontius Pilate and Lady Macbeth, the erasure may allow physical cleansing, but not psychological. Kentridge deals with this in *History of the Main* (1996), where the water on the windscreen mingles with the red crosses (the damning evidence of hurt inflicted on the ‘other’ which has in turn hurt him), but is erased by the windscreen wipers, the blinking eyes and the artists technique. The blue bowl of water beside Soho’s hospital bed, is the only blue in the film and perhaps signifies the possibility of transcendence — but is left unused. Thus one may surmise, that water in Kentridge’s film is not only connected to longing or desire, but also to repressed knowledge that might lead to a true awakening — an awakening that is always deferred in his films. But as shown in *WEIGHING... AND WANTING* (figure 42), as Soho listens for the sound of the ocean in a teacup his increasingly fragmented memories of desire become trapped more deeply underground, whilst the freshly drilled wells collapse around him. Perhaps the broken teacup suggests not only the failed promise of this broken vessel to bring in its domesticated form the sound of the ocean. This image, in reference to the Lurianic Kabbalah, perhaps signals a hope that the water, as ‘seeds’, will be poured in small quantities over the earth (figure 46). This may also be Kentridge’s longing — that his artworks (as broken vessels) in their failure to hold memories and commemorate, may shift the responsibility to the viewer to continue the ‘work’.

ii. b) Drawing and film

As Derrida (1987: 179) argues, the acute oscillation of the seismograph’s point, which remains continuously in contact with what it incises, is more sensitive than distantly objective approaches — because it too leaves gaps and fissures. Both the seismograph’s point and Kentridge’s

drawings for projections are dynamic: the process of facture remains visible, establishing a jerky effect that causes the viewer to perceive the spatial and temporal disjunctures of the drawing, rather than creating an illusion of fluid movement (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 12). The heterogenous marks of the charcoal suggest the fragments and Adornian *Bruche* of history. Like the echoes of past art that pervade the drawings, the smudges and shadows reflect the way in which events are layered in life, how the past lingers and affects the present through memory. This technique echoes Derrida's (1978: 209) idea of psychic writing, which has an absence of exhaustible and absolute infallible codes and evidences a sense of allegorical displacement similar to dream⁴¹. Mirroring psychological structures, the process of re-drawing and erasure can be seen as a polemic for the undecidability or indeterminacy in Kentridge's approach. Kentridge (qtd. Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 34) argues that: "There needs to be a strong understanding of fallibility and how the very act of certainty or authoritativeness can bring disasters".

The white sketch on white page is the sketch of a scream (Jabes 1977: 37).

Whilst the dark, heavy images seem solid, they can easily be partially removed by erasure or scrubbing the surface⁴². Traces, "evidence of some disturbance" (Kentridge 1998c: 108), are left, so that each stage of the drawing carries with it the visual memory of its recent past. Much like

41. Displacement occurs because 'psychic writing' is tied to the subconscious and in a sense supplements perception before perception is conscious of itself (Derrida 1978: 224). As Kentridge (qtd. Godby 1999) himself states: "One of the reasons of making images in the first place, rather than writing, is because certain objects or parts of the work seem appropriate to it without your being able to give a clear reason why. It's one of the principles I work with to allow disjunctions, to encourage things that shouldn't be together". This Surrealist technique recalls Brecht's technique of *Entfremdung* (alienation) contra empathy or identification. Cf. Adorno's critique of *Gesamtkunstwerke* and the tendency to overwhelm the spectator pp. 55-56.

42. The fragility and temporalness of the artwork suggests its inability to hold memory and to commemorate. This can also be found with Kiefer's transient materials, such as straw (figure 3) and ash (figure 8), as well as the photoemulsions which suggest that they can be smudged or removed with a cloth (figure 11). In Boltanski's work, this is seen in the fragility of the photographic paper and in the lighting of the *Shadow* (figure 23) and *Candle* (figure 27) works. In Mofokeng's work, the transience of the slides (figures 29 & 55) suggests as with *Boltanski's Monument* (figure 28) works, that as soon as one cuts the power, the images will be lost — thus must only be sustained in the viewer's memories.

Freud's 'mystical writing pad', his drawings attempt to perform more than a sheet of paper, which conserves traces but becomes quickly saturated, or a slate, which wipes traces totally away. Like Kiefer's surfaces, the shadowy echoes of past states can be seen on the heavily-worked surfaces, resulting in a distinctive, melancholy presence — a sense of the presence of absence. Within the spaces of absence, loss, and figuration seen in Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng's works, a dialectic between language and the grieving mind exists where, what Sacks terms, 'fictions of consolation' are constructed and identity is recomposed (De Kok 1999: 62). The traces of the erased forms bear witness to their erasure and the passing of time — just as the disjunctive process of memory, its traces and asymmetrical rhythms suggests the presence of the disappeared.

Kentridge's is a Derridian (1978: 231) approach to the trace as a shift and play between the seed and mortal germ, wealth and weapon, detritus and penis⁴³. Kentridge's erasure against erasure is a Benjaminian dialectic of destruction against destruction, which is necessary to clear the way for the foundation of one's own work⁴⁴. The technique of erasure echos and re-enacts the segregation, differentiation and exclusion of nationalism — so as to, in the words of Walter Benjamin, 'rub against the grain'. As the edifices of apartheid are being dismantled, papers are being shredded, signs painted over, departments and streets renamed. Similarly the thick black block-out over former state president F. W. de Klerk's testimony to the TRC, which significantly does not erase his name from the report, speaks not only of the attempt to erase the ills of the

43. In many ways, this recalls Kiefer's Derridian approach to his palette, which shifts between being a weapon, soldier or trophy to the giver of paint (seed/life) which is regenerative and restorative. This links to both these artist's Benjaminian destruction against destruction.

44. It could also be argued that such an approach, much like the Nietzsche's creator (or Kiefer's Nero) who breaks the plates of value only to make new ones, reveals the artist's position as a spiritual outsider in a frenzy of aggression, justifying his savageness by his own vulnerability (Finci 1991: 17).

past, but also to abdicate guilt. In this context, Gavin Younge (qtd. Jamal 1996: 14) speaks of “the elision of memory of a certain period - the desire to forget”. Kentridge draws on the disintegration of the image allowing the reinvention of these memories by envisioning them anew (Enwezor 1998: 66-69).

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of the original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars (Walcott qtd. de Kok 1999: 62).

Whilst this glueing together may be the key function of culture in a time of social change (de Kok 1999: 62), it must involve seeing and feeling the fragmented, mutilated shards and the Adornian breaks, before the ‘white scar’ can be celebrated. This ‘cracked heirloom’ metaphor for the processes of memory in South Africa cautions against the construction of a unified and sanitized past, arguing instead that contradictory voices should be heard — exemplified in the sequence of the teacup in *WEIGHING... AND WANTING*, both metaphors recalling the ‘breaking of the vessels’ of the Lurianic Kaballah. The task of memory (and of art as Adorno insists) should therefore not be to reconstitute a wholeness which needs to lie about the fracture, but to reconstitute turbulence and fragmentation (Nuttal & Coetzee 1999: 5), so as to remind those in the present of dangers that may not be past, as well as to commemorate that which can only be found in the *Bruche*.

The works explore the borders between memory and amnesia, drawing⁴⁵ and erasure. The use of

45. Kentridge deals pointedly with the very subject of drawing in *Felix in exile*. As Nandi begins to draw, beacons rise up from the ground, enforcing a recognition of the brutalities and silences of history onto the landscape. Nandi draws and records (figure 47) on paper the evidence of the violent massacre, so that it will not simply be reabsorbed into the terrain. Felix ‘sees’ this only through Nandi’s drawings, an emphatic statement of the potential of art to inform and force realizations. In the same film, papers that cover the wounded bodies like bandages (figure 4) return

the same sheet of paper to create and then rub out the images, depicts the past in a perpetual state of willful erasure in the present. Just as Kentridge represents landscape and the body as a cultural constructs⁴⁶, he similarly represents the story and distances it by making drawings based on film techniques, so that they too become objects of representation (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 17). Whilst they draw on cinematic effects, such as close-ups or long-shots, his drawings can be seen as post-cinematic. Unlike conventional cell-animation which fuses thousands of drawings into a slick, seamlessly continuous whole, Kentridge's process is overtly raw and hand-wrought — yielding an impression of time and space as altered by every arrival and departure (Ollman 1999). This sense of the frieze-frame creates Benjaminian 'dialectical images' where constant collisions, or shocks, arrest the flow of thoughts from the ideological lull in a 'messianic cessation of happening' (Rabinbach 1989: xxi).

iii. Landscape: *Felix in exile* (1994)

"And the fields? Aren't the fields changed by what happened?" poet Carolyn Forché (qtd. Ollman 1999) in *The angel of history* (after Walter Benjamin) asks of historical battlegrounds, "How can the fields continue as simple fields?". This sense of disbelief at the erasure, renewal and banality of natural terrain, is the shared concern of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng — in whose work landscape serves as an emblem both for remembering and unremembering. *Felix in exile* explores the analogy between landscape and mind: just as the

as drawings — suggesting that by witnessing, wounds may be treated and that the lost will be 'remembered' in art.

46. Cf. Adorno on nature, culture and myth pp. 12-17. Cf. Boltanski's exposure of the family photograph as a cultural construct pp. 113-114 as well as landscape and myth in Kiefer pp. 88-89.

mind protects its equanimity by forgetting or repressing what it does not wish to remember and allows events that are seemingly indelibly imprinted onto memory to fade and become elusive, so too the landscape hides its historical past from the eye, in a natural processes of erosion, growth and dilapidation.

Kentridge's (qtd. Ollman 1999) ambivalence to the landscape is expressed in his description of drawing the terrain "almost as a revenge against its nothingness"⁴⁷. Enacting the process of disremembering and the naturalization, the landscape is drawn schematically, under a perpetual state of erasure. In *Felix*, Kentridge (1998c: 127) attempts "recording the people. Giving burial"⁴⁸ to those anonymous figures in the photographs; planting a beacon against the process of forgetting the routedness of our recent past" — just as Nandi does in the film. Thus whilst some may argue that this is very much in line with the master-project of unburying the national past (Coetzee 1999: 84), one may also note that much like Kiefer's sedimentation and Boltanski's lighting, Kentridge's is a process not only of unburying but also burying; not only exhuming but also entombing; both covering and uncovering⁴⁹.

There is also a similarity between painting or drawing which is oblivious to its position in history and the terrain which also hides its history (Kentridge 1998c: 126). Thus Kentridge exposes and critiques the very genre of landscape⁵⁰ that he utilizes. Characteristic of 'official' South African expression, to the white artist it is an icon of privilege and propriety and to the black artist it is a

47. Whilst this statement articulates the frustrated desire on Kentridge's part to bear witness and grasp the void, the Other, the unrepresentable that has so fascinated so many artists (such as Barnett Newman) — it is also an indirect admission of the inherent destructiveness of representation. This destructiveness is also seen in Kiefer's enactment of burning and Boltanski's revenge against the children of Nazi Germany and the objectification in his and Mofokeng's 'photographic portraits'.

48. Cf. ideas on burial pp. 224; 239.

49. Cf. melancholy and archeology in Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng's works pp. 237-238.

50. Cf. Andrew Benjamin on repetition and the landscape genre in Kiefer's work pp. 92-93.

symbol of repression and dispossession (Deliss 1997:150). In white South African representations, there are two primary conceptions of landscape — one linked to the British colonialism with its obsessions with the border between order/disorder, culture/barbarity; the other with Afrikaner isolationism⁵¹, which sees land as a refuge, the mythically privatised place of purge, purification and promise (Richards 1991: 126). A tension exists between versions of the land as something one can divide and own on the one hand, and on the other the view of land as something that denies the viewer/owner access, perhaps more recently because of the guilt associated with the position of the white viewer (Nuttal & Coetzee 1999: 14). In the poetry of urbanization by black South African writers, mining is sometimes described as a process that empties the land of meaning and disturbs one's proper relationship with the ancestors⁵².

Whilst Kentrige sees the landscape genre as least appropriate for recording his experience of Africa, its very failure has served as a source of endless fascination for him (Godby 1999). Cultural theorist Kate Soper (qtd. Blazwick 1997: 7-9) characterises contemporary attitudes: “while the ecologists tend to invoke nature as an independent domain of intrinsic value, truth or authenticity, postmodernist cultural theory and criticism emphasises its discursive status, inviting

51. The tradition of Western landscape painting as it was imported into South Africa culminated in a representation of the artist-hero contemplating the majesty of Nature that had been provided for his use. The colonial representation of the country as empty and unoccupied prior to European arrival, is best exemplified for Kentrige in the work of Pierneef, who was the ‘darling’ of apartheid state and Afrikaner nationalists (Enwezor 1998: 66-69). Pierneef arranged the South African landscape into a vision of pure nature with majestic primal forces, where only a particular aspect (tree; kloof; escarpment) is isolated. To Kentrige (1988c: 109), these are paintings of “landscape in a state of grace”, “documents of disremembering”. This tradition of the denial of the social history of the landscape, the elimination of the history of conquest and appropriation, together with the history of the spoilage of the landscape, Kentrige (Godby 1999) emphatically calls “the plague of the picturesque”.

52. This is because leaving the land where one's ancestors are buried, severs the link (Nuttal & Coetzee 1999: 14). There is a sense that even in if land restitution are made, as is being in South African now, the particular kinds of relationships with the land cannot be remembered and reconstituted. This sense of alienation is investigated in Zwelethu Mthethwa’s interiors of hostile dwellers (figure 59) as well as Mofokeng’s *Sad Landscapes* pp. 188 n2; 226.

us to view the order of ‘nature’ as existing only in the chain of the signifier”⁵³. This Adornian inscription of nature within social and economic systems is given an overwhelming poignant expression in Kentridge’s landscapes. His charcoal drawings of the South African landscape are a kind of dystopic picturesque, where the landscape appears like a ‘drawn’ scene or an imperfectly erased ‘text’ to be recovered and ‘read’ (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 26).

The landscapes that appear in Kentridge’s works question and counter earlier depictions of Arcadian views exposing the fallacy of a romantic ideal of pure, unadulterated ‘nature’ in an area of Africa where the terrain has been ecologically disrupted and abused. Elements such as mining and civil engineering detritus, act as evidence of human passage, the historical traces of the history of South Africa (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 26)⁵⁴. Kentridge further contradicts the ideal of the empty landscape by populating his barren wastelands with processions of labourers, thereby rendering ‘visible’ the erased and segregated population. Moreover, in such works as *Colonial landscapes* (1995-6), the charcoal drawings of a lush and bountiful imaginary African landscape are populated with red pastel surveyors’ theodolite marks — indicating how such

53. As Blazwick (1997: 7-8) points out, in the immediate post-war period its manifestation in art has tended towards oppositions — it has symbolised archetypes, origins, utopias, essential and immutable truths (cf. Walter Benjamin’s ideas on origins pp. 33; 71 n41), which, by inference, our urban culture lacks; it has represented a loss, not only of an Edenic environment, but also of our true selves. By contrast, the so-called posthuman 1980’s saw the emergence of nature purely as cultural construct — an idea explored by Adorno pp. 14; 16-17.

54. The Kiefferesque bereft, plundered and ravaged landscape, which Kentridge calls a “disaster zone” (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 22), is a prominent motif from *Johannesburg, 2nd greatest city after Paris* to *Felix in Exile*. The history of Johannesburg is of unbroken, wholesale exploitation of the land for its mineral wealth, beginning at the end of the 19th century. The landscape of *Felix* is that of the East Rand, the mining areas near Johannesburg, where virtually all the mines in this area are now derelict ruins. The mine dumps and abandoned machinery which punctuate this area serve as nostalgic remnants. Clive van den Berg (1998: 123), an artist who has made extensive use of such sites points out that while mine dumps are enterprises of battle and labour, documents of history, they are also sites for contemplation and refiguring because of their silence, emptiness and history. Kentridge’s use of such sites suggests not nostalgia, but that just as it is dangerous to return to an imagined distant past in order to invest one’s belief in a South African natural paradise where humankind is perfectly integrated with its surroundings, so it is pointless to try to return to an idealised state of pre-colonial ‘harmony’ with nature. Kentridge seems to suggest that what is necessary is a collective acknowledgement of the damage that has been inflicted on the land and its people (Cameron 1999: 47).

landscapes are more projections of, and onto, the land than accurate depictions⁵⁵.

In *Felix in exile*, the very act of marking space becomes almost tantamount to surveying it in an archeological dig: loosening it and making it reveal itself (Enwezor 1998: 66-69). The red crosses⁵⁶ serve not only to demarcate ('X marks the spot'), but also to suggest that the images need to be read, not passively accepted or viewed as a vista — breaking the fetishization that Adorno speaks against. Kentridge critiques the tendency to view landscape as a phenomenon of 'pure undisturbed nature' by drawing it as if it were a naked body: ploughed, eroded, bruised, battered (Enwezor 1998: 66-69). The suggestion of measuring and taking stock creates not only a distance, but also a sense of unease, for the landscape is targeted and bruised. Red crosses mark the points of stress on the body-landscape as spots where death occurred. Similarly, Brett Murray superimposes red dots onto his perspex planes, which he describes as bullet holes (Powell 1999: 59). Both the red crosses and red dots emphasize the underlying, unseen element of violence in the South African landscape, as the colour suggests both blood and wounds.

In his films, there are constant and almost obsessive thematic references of the landscape in relation to the human body — where the land is also used as a metaphor for the body and vice versa. As Kentridge (qtd. Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 26) states: "Bodies, in South Africa, are marked spatially: the dream of the apartheid map was to fix racial identities within designated geographic space: Separate Development". In *Felix*, bodies felled in violence dissolve into the earth, and the land, like the psyche, becomes an opaque receptacle for trauma. Similarly, in

55. In this context, Brett Murray's series *Own* (1997) (a play on words much like Kentridge's *Mine*) reproduces in metal the lines of eighteenth-century watercolour representations of South African landscape, similarly suggesting that the act of representation is at the same time an act of appropriation (Powell 1999: 59).

56. The fact that they are crosses carries the dual significance of erasure, and the Christian symbol of bearing pain.

WEIGHING... AND WANTING, physical abuse is associated with the disruption of the landscape where the charcoal marks indicating lacerations on the back of a naked woman are transformed into parts of a civil engineering structure⁵⁷.

A scene towards the end of *Felix* shows bodies being covered by newspapers (figure 4), which are absorbed into and eventually disappear without a trace into the landscape. Similarly, towards the end of Terry Gilliam's 1985 film *Brazil*, Robert de Niro's character encounters individual sheets of paper, which he tries to shake off. Eventually they encompass him and he disappears with only the newspaper remaining, which blows away. In April 2001, footage of the Ellis park football 'disaster' showed officials covering dead bodies brought down to the field with newspapers. Later, to appease the press, they had a 'press covering', in both senses, where disclosure of information and responsibility was deferred. The black ink which remains on one's fingers after writing or paging through the newspaper is, according to Freud, excremental. One can thus argue that to be covered with newspaper is in a sense to be covered with one's own waste.

At the same time, though, in *Felix* the papers cover bodies like bandages and later return as drawings. This suggests how the 'writer' or artist, as exile, can bear witness. For as Derrida (1978: 74) states: "The Jew — he weeps for the lost voice with tears as black as ink". Walter Benjamin (qtd. Rabinbach 1989: xxvii) saw in newspaper writing the potential for releasing

57. Elizabeth Alexander argues that historical trauma resides in the flesh as forms of memory that can be reactivated and articulated at moments of collective spectatorship. The experience or witnessing of terror can be taken in the body — it is, in Alexander's words, "recorded in muscle memory as knowledge" (Van Alphen 1999: 271). Upon exposure to corporeal images of terror this muscle memory activated and literally experiences pain. Arguably, this could have been the experience of some of the victimised at the TRC hearings. In this film, Felix having witnessed the events of Nandi's death, seems to experience pain that leads to an awakening. Similarly, in *History of the main complaint*, Soho re-experiences his psychic pain through flashbacks, and only then awakes. But mostly, Alexander's argument is for the pain to be awakened through collective spectatorship — what Kentridge is sensitive not to inflict.

those ‘divine sparks’ which, according to the messianic ideal, are buried in the debris or ruins of history: “The place where the word is at its most debased — that is to say, the newspaper — becomes the very place where the rescue operation can be mounted”. Kentrige’s work evidences a play of such ideas — where writing, as Derrida (1978: 231) describes it, is neither excrement nor sweet nourishment but liminal, something in between⁵⁸.

The characteristically forlorn, barren Kieferesque landscape experiences a moment of hope in its flooding of water. Felix’s state of psychic exile lasts up to the moment when the image of his face in the shaving mirror (figure 45) transforms itself into Nandi’s and water flows through the space.

Yukel summoned up silence which is a lake within the word. He told how he had burrowed his way through the sounds to the water in order to bathe in it (Jabes 1977: 129).

This spatial rupture suggests the resonance in each person of desire and longing, a hunger for completion⁵⁹. From this point of flooding, a general breakdown of physical boundaries takes place as pictures of the landscape float off the wall and around the room. The film closes tragically with Nandi’s death and Felix’s recognition of his inability to rehabilitate the charred landscape. In a sense Felix has become something worse than Soho’s obstinant greed — a prisoner of his own delusions of poetic sympathy towards the world (Cameron 1999: 68-70). Here Kentrige criticizes the Romantic artist-dreamer, as well as his own nostalgia for revolutionary art. Like Soho, however, it is not until suffering an unbearable loss that Felix

58. Cf. thresholds and in between spaces in Benjamin’s *Arcades project* Rendell: 1999: 168-191 and Stoljar 1996: 99-113, which are essentially feminine according to Irigaray; cf. Whitford 1991.

59. Cf. water, sound and desire in Kentrige’s work pp. 166-168.

awakens⁶⁰ to find himself more totally alone than he ever imagined possible — which links to Benjamin’s notion that the experience of death awakens one to life. While the films leading up to *Felix in Exile* might lead us to suspect that Felix has exiled himself for personal reasons, the evidence here seems to suggest that he is not yet capable of finding himself in this new society⁶¹. Felix’s identification with Nandi⁶², her loss and the subsequent tie to the landscape push him to the brink of a radical reconsideration of his place in the world.

iv. *History of the main complaint* (1996)

In Kentridge’s film *History of the main complaint* (1996), whose title and subject is past, the project is not to understand history for its own sake but rather much like the projects of Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng, the relationship of the individual in the present to the past (Godby 1999: 107). The fracturing of time in the film creates Benjaminian dialectical images which act as frieze-frames or flashbacks bringing the Then and Now into a constellation — which suggests that the narrative of *History*, in the spirit of Adorno, is actually an Ur-history. Moreover, in the

60. This awakening after a near death experience, which is also suggested in *History of the main complaint*, recalls Walter Benjamin’s notion that only the experience of death awakens one to life p. 16 n12. Cf. the Odin myth in the context of Kiefer’s palette works p. 86.

61. A similar response is evoked in the works of Jo Ractliff (qtd. Dodd 1999 2), where landscape and memory are described as: “That thing of not feeling at home in the world in a particular way. Always suspended in some kind of doubt about what you can claim as yours or your history here or where you fit in here”. This need not be confined to the white South African sense of landscape but rather landscape, in both these artists’ works, seems to serve as the medium of recognizing, in the Kristevian reading of Freud, that we are not only strangers to the ‘other’ or to nature, but also to ourselves. This ties in very much with the notion of self in Kentridge’s works — the split identity of *Stereoscope*, where the right hand does not know what the left is doing; the variable self-portraits of Soho, Felix and Nandi, as evidenced poignantly in this film, as well as Soho’s flashback memories in *History of the main complaint*, in which his past seems unfamiliar territory. It is also explored in Mofokeng’s work in relation to the landscape pp. 224-225.

62. Cf. Kiefer’s identification with Shulamith p. 91 and Boltanski’s with the lost children of the Holocaust p. 103.

incident of the wristwatch exploding, the film suggests that time might be experienced as actually stopping, as in Benjamin's 'dialectics at a standstill' — the revolutionary cessation of time as continuous or homogenous. The Lyotardian 'little narrative' is clearly metaphorical: Soho's body represents the body politic and his car journey as the journey through South Africa's past. The central figure is Soho Eckstein (now combined with characteristics of Felix's and sharing his psychological depth) who is overburdened with the past to a point where he has forgotten it⁶³.

Kentridge has used the genre of landscape, such as in *Felix in exile*, as the medium of memory in which the past is made present. In this film, the vehicle of memory is the body, which carries within itself the trauma of its history (Godby 1999: 109). Soho recovers in hospital from an accident experienced at the end of his journey through South Africa's past. Much like Jane Alexander's *Butcher boys* (figure 33) which takes the human figure as its subject to explore the muteness, brutalization and horror of South Africa in the 1980s (Powell 1995), Soho's body becomes the sick body politic of an unreconciled state (Godby 1999). Pathos is linked to pathology with medical and psychoanalytic metaphors (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 22-23).

Unlike Leonardo da Vinci, the artist-anatomist, who studied corpses in the name of scientific pursuit of the human anatomy, Kentridge looks inside the body to explore the seemingly dichotomous relationship between the surface, the convincing veneer of the body and what lies beneath or within the complex 'mess' of conscience. An array of diagnostic machinery records Soho's comatose body's unconscious memory of the violence it had experienced as witness, bystander and perpetrator (figure 38). As Kentridge (1998a: 140) points out, these internal

63. Cf. Boltanski use of the memories of his childhood to forget with p. 114 n17.

images are already metaphors for messages that may be apprehended but can never be grasped. Through these representations, knowledge of the body comes as a report from a distant and unknown place, which points to the irreducibility of our mind's otherness in this split between body and consciousness, what is seen and unseen — Kristeva's Freudian notion that we are strangers to ourselves.

Although stemming from the TRC, guilt does not seem to enter the *Ubu* works (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 33). But *History of the main complaint* is constituted as a philosophical inquiry into the relationship between individual and collective guilt. As he is prodded by the doctors examining him (figure 48), each touch goes deeper into Soho's unconscious, closer to the guilty memories that seem to underlie his present medical emergency. Lying in a coma in hospital he relives two incidents: first he witnesses a man being beaten in the middle of the road as he drives past (figure 37); next a man suddenly runs in front of his car and is killed. The metaphor of damage caused by wilful blindness is clear (Williamson 1999: 35). The points of impact on the victim's skull are marked with red crosses which is superimposed over Soho's. By transferring the trauma of the victim to the witness, Kentridge is commenting on the indivisibility of South African society (Godby 1999: 108), much like the apart/a part dialectic of Margarete and Shulamith. A whole field of these crosses appears on the windscreen, and is wiped away; an eye blinks, with the same effect.

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse (1998), depicts the protagonist's journey as an interior voyage, imaged in the diagnostic machinery around his bed, until he returns to himself, healed by anamnesis⁶⁴ (Godby 1999). In contrast, at the end of *History*, Soho awakes from the coma, but the redemptive bowl of water is still there, untouched and unused. The suggestion is that Soho has not cleaned himself

64. Cf. Walter Benjamin conception of anamnesis after Plato p. 19 n16.

because he has not truly ‘awakened’ and taken responsibility for the past. Instead, he returns to his office unchanged — the business paraphernalia representing the continuity in the exercise of economic power, as well as the tendency of that power to absorb or deny the violence on which it is based (Godby 1999: 108).

The mundane image of the car journey can be seen to represent the collective experience of apartheid. The representation of memory in this commonplace form demands that each person acknowledge his or her involvement in the violence of the past — not necessarily direct political involvement but complicity through some degree of knowledge upon which the apartheid state depended (Godby 1999: 111). This is also suggested by the eyes reflected in the rear-view mirror (figure 49). As Michel Foucault has demonstrated, the person reflected in a mirror is simultaneously present and absent (Godby 1999: 108). Kentridge’s mirror seems to reflect the eyes of not only the driver of the car, but also the spectator of the film.

It can be argued that South African society’s consciousness is ‘mirrored’ in images of eyes and the associations with sight throughout Kentridge’s works. In *History*, the image of the eyes seeing and then closing suggests regression. This Freudian ‘blindness of the seeing eye’⁶⁵ describes the strange, paradoxical state of mind in which one knows and does not know at the same time (Rudnytsky 1987: 21-22). The quest for self-knowledge is confronted by a barrier of the self-imposed injunction not to see, perhaps what Adorno suggests in his statement of the “all too wide awake consciousness” of post-war German society — wilfull blindness. This suggests that Soho, and by inference South African society, is in unconscious possession of the ‘truth’ that is consciously searched for but has been blinded from.

65. Cf. Derrida’s book *Memoirs of the blind* (1992); cf. Oedipal and Odinic self-blinding in Schoeman 2001.

But Kentridge rarely offers the viewer a direct gaze onto the world. Rather, the indirect, oblique, allegorical views underline the way in which knowledge is negotiated between experience and memory, as well as mediated through communication systems and cultural stereotypes (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 35). In *Ubu tells the truth* (1996-97) (figure 50), the most obvious protagonist is a camera and a tripod, which sees everything and then uses its knowledge to try to wipe out non-corroborating witnesses. The camera eye and tripod constitute an ambiguous image: it is an emblem of surveillance, a central, hierarchical and controlling eye; and the artist's gaze, which allows his drawings and films to be made (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 35). The figure of the camera also implicates the witness as an active agent in the carrying out the atrocities (Cameron 1999: 79), because by recording injustice without acting to prevent it, one is as guilty as if carrying out the outrages personally. In *Felix in exile*, the blurred distinction between self and other occurs by mirror-identification (figure 45) — the viewer does not see Nandi directly, but through a telescope as Felix's memory of her. Similarly, the landscape and the bodies of dead protestors are seen only through Nandi's theodolite (figure 47), framed by red contours and marks on the land/paper⁶⁶. Sight through the cross-hairs of the telescope and theodolite function as a mandala, which orders and discriminates different areas in the field of vision, whilst uniting them into a comprehensive whole (Edinger 1987: 104). This echoes the apartheid state's concept of 'separate but equal'. The framing of optical apparatus suggests not only clearer vision through lenses and surveillance through sight but also, as Derrida (1987: 178) suggests, the telescopic

66. In Burchell's *Genadendal* (1811) the telescope implies the notion of territorial surveillance as the allegory of territorial possession (Delmont & Dubow 1997: 13). The telescope-motif implies the colonial imperial-given 'right' to comprehend and command. In this context, the 'History' painting in the centre of the pile of Siopis's *Piling wreckage upon wreckage* (1989) shows white settlers 'penetrating' and 'discovering' Africa. These notions of possession and control are echoed by the magnifying glass lying on the surface of a sculpture of a black man and other instruments of visual discrimination, such as binoculars (Siopis 1989: 85). This motif of surveillance through sight occurs throughout her oeuvre, as evidenced in the many optical apparatus in *Zombie* (2000).

sight of rifles⁶⁷ which ‘see’ to kill.

In *Stereoscope*, the mandala concept relates to the co-existence of contradictory strands that are synthesized into one subjectivity (figure 34). The ambiguity of this optical device suggests both a feeling of doubt about the supposedly positive value of dispersed, multiple identities, and the loss of self as the cost of bringing these disparate parts together (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 23). This issue of the ambivalence of sight is continued in *History*, where in the space of the screen windscreen, eye and monitor become metonymically the same (Coetzee 1999: 92). In addition, the view into Soho’s body is only through picture imaging techniques such as CAT-scan and X-rays. Whilst ways of looking inside the body, at the body’s ‘secrets’, function as a metaphor for looking inside thought processes or conscience (Kentrige 1998b: 112), the ubiquitous presence of high-tech medical equipment also conjures impressions of the state’s surveillance apparatus (Cameron 1999: 71).

Whilst the camera may be a tool of authoritarian surveillance and control, it is also Kentridge’s instrument for the fluid recording and erasing of images. With this, he may be suggesting that art does have a role to play in society but, as Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng also suggest, not through definitive judgements and prescriptions. It may also point to the idea that the artist is not separate from the society he seems to observe and thus should not be excluded from the need for a general anamnesis (Godby 1999: 110). The metaphor of Soho’s body as the sick body politic is extended to the group of physicians (all self-portraits of the artist) who attempt to heal the patient without being able to diagnose the cause of his sickness (Godby 1999: 108). By including

67. Freud too made this connection in his *non-vixit* dream, in which a look ‘annihilated’ a friend (Rudnytsky 1987: 35). Cf. Wim Wender’s 1997 film *The end of violence* where camera surveillance is used to control and to kill.

himself in the role of Soho's physicians (figure 48), Kentridge suggests his own inability, as an artist contra to Beuys, to diagnose and heal through his art. In addition, the eyes in the rear-view mirror (figure 49) as well as being Soho's and the spectator's, are also the eyes of the artist. The closing of these eyes can also be connected to Freud's 'close the eyes' dream — which symbolically embodies both the devotion to the father⁶⁸ and the will to castrate and kill him⁶⁹. Just as Kentridge enacts in *History*, in Freud's dream he metaphorically closes his own eyes at the same time and in this identification, son and father become one through a gesture that expresses both love and hatred.

This perhaps sheds insight into why the sustained act of looking, the archetypal gaze, becomes such a crucial motif in Kentridge's work — and perhaps why he tries to rid himself of it. In *Felix in exile*, while Felix uses his vision passively as one who stands outside the circle of events, Nandi uses it to explore, document and build a credible future in the remains of a horrific past (figure 49). Later, he simply watches as abuses continue and Nandi is killed. Similarly, in *Johannesburg, the 2nd greatest city after Paris*, Felix is a witness of protest marches (figure 36); in *History* Soho/Felix observes violent brutality through the window of his car (figure 37). As he watches, the injuries of the victim are transferred to Soho as witness, but the fact that Soho and the physicians who attend him wear identical suits and ties, renders the idea of moral responsibility utterly circular: the physician is hardly distinguishable from his patient who, though only a witness, bears the injuries of the victim. This is extended to the viewer as witness, who is made aware of the psychological quality of their spectatorial participation. Fantasy, in the

68. As previously discussed, Soho is modelled after Kentridge's paternal grandfather.

69. As stated in reference to Boltanski's obscuring, blinding lights — blinding is metaphoric way of killing a person. But this closing of someone's eyes and blinding them, is further complicated in Freud's sense — because the dream referred to the actual duty of the son to the father after death (to close his eyes). In Kentridge's film, Soho too is comatose.

form of dream imagery and chance, provides a medium through which the spectator may connect with the drama of the film; and the collage devices of flashbacks, crosscuttings et al, create a psychic space in which viewers may ponder their own history (Godby 1999: 110). This may suggest that for Kentridge, the artwork can only invite⁷⁰ the viewer to begin a process of self-anamnesis, acknowledging not only the complex nature of human experience but also the constant potential for what is not simply ‘inhuman’ action.

By making such films as *History*, in which the main characters are caught up in seemingly pointless brooding about their personal affairs, Kentridge makes an important point about the peculiar form of ‘tunnel vision’ characteristic of societies both during and after traumatic events. Stressing the importance of remembering against lapsing into amnesia or psychic removal, Kentridge, as with Kiefer, Boltanski and Mofokeng, makes the uncomfortable themes of guilt, complicity and indirect responsibility key issues in his art (Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 31). Soho’s recovery at the very moment of his memory recall suggests that liberation from the burden of responsibility comes only with the insight allowed by memory, the retrospective gaze⁷¹ (the rear-view mirror) — each individuals’ acknowledgement of his or her complicity in the violent history of South Africa. Perhaps Kentridge strives to create these Benjaminian moments of awakening, in the hope of a ‘new’ moral vision⁷², against all odds. So that, as Derrida (1983: 54)

70. Cf. Boltanski’s notion of art as a stimulant only p. 122.

71. Cf. Benjamin’s (qtd. Menninghaus 1993: 187) backward gaze, as he writes in relation to Kafka’s story: “The true measure of life is memory. Looking backwards, it runs through life like lightening. In the little time taken to turn back a few pages, memory moves from the next village to the place the rider decided to set off. Those for whom life has been transformed into writing — as with the Ancients — can only read such a text backwards. Only thus do they encounter themselves, and only thus — fleeing from the present day — can they understand life”.

72. This hope for a ‘moral vision’ as a basis on which to reassess the past more fundamentally is echoed by Ndebele (1999:24). He argues that the desire of many intelligent Afrikaners for a volkstadt or for language rights, however valid, represents in its continued exclusivity of ‘others’, a “tragic failure of social conscience”. In the same vein as *History*, it is suggested that the future of Afrikaner culture may lie in its rediscovery of social morality. In this context, Jacques Coetzer’s *Plastiekboere* series presents scenes of Afrikaner boyhood — cars, toy soldiers — which

writes, “in tomorrow’s rear-view mirror; the late, ultimate racism” will be “the last of many”.

allude wittily to Anton van Wouw's sculptures of the Afrikaner rebel heroes who lost the war to the British (Williamson 1996: 107). His images of ‘heroes’, much like Kiefer’s *Operation Seelion*, are rather images of defeat and delusion.

THREE

Santu Mofokeng

Acutely aware of the power and inherent danger of his medium, photographer Santu Mofokeng attempts a sense of that which the camera cannot ‘capture’ or represent — the Lyotardian immemorial. Suffering from a similar burden of historical belatedness as Kiefer, Boltanski and Kentridge, he also attempts the im-possible in striving to bear witnesses to the loss and suffering experienced through the many catastrophes of the twentieth century, as Adorno insists is the responsibility of artworks. Through his landscape works and his project on a post-colonialist archive, he attempts to bring out the Benjaminian premonitory ‘sparks’ in the fragile hope of creating an awakening to similar dangers re-occurring in the present.

When I was born to a migrant and a domestic worker, Johannes and Martha Mofokeng... the address given as home was my mother’s place of employment (Mofokeng qtd. Viviano 1998).

Santu Mofokeng was born in 1956 in Orlando-East, one of the oldest townships of Soweto. It could be argued that his mother’s employment as a domestic worker in a ‘white’ suburb as well as being brought up in Soweto, has influenced Mofokeng’s interest in family photographs. He himself sees these photographs as an area of commonality between these two worlds which were kept apart by apartheid — at the same time emphasizing that these photographs “are similar to the images in albums the world over: weddings, birthday parties, school trips, portraits” (Mofokeng qtd. Viviano 1998). His father’s employment as a migrant labourer is perhaps part of what pulled Mofokeng, a city-dweller, to the landscape. As mentioned in the discussion of

landscape in Kentrige's *Felix in exile*, there is a sense in black South African writing that once one has left the landscape, the connection with the ancestors is severed. Mofokeng presents the landscape as a spiritual space that he cannot gain access to — his titles, such as *Chasing shadows* (c. 1997) and *Lunarscapes* (1994) suggest this. As an alien place it reflects that he, and by implication South African society, is estranged from parts of itself. As with Kiefer, Boltanski and Kentrige,, he seems to exist separately as a Derridian psychic exile, presenting both the landscape and family photographs to be analysed or 'read' as cultural constructs or text¹, that nonetheless have traces of the experience of loss².

i) 'After apartheid'

Where did the road lead when it led nowhere (Celan qtd. Mofokeng 2000b).

Whilst Mofokeng (2000b) states that “the Holocaust and apartheid are the two most memorable evils which hypnotized the world this century”, he also recognizes that comparing them can easily obscure, blur or trivialise their particular effects. Writing about memory, history, and the Holocaust, Friedlander (qtd. Robins 1999: 121) elaborates on the process whereby memory

1. Cf. the landscapes of Kiefer pp. 88-89 and Kentrige in the context of mythical/cultural constructs pp. 174-175 and Boltanski on the family album as following a cultural code pp. 113-115. Cf. Adorno and Benjamin on history and nature as mutually determining pp. 15-17.

2. Mofokeng takes this sense of loss and estrangement beyond the particulars of the South African landscape — emphasizing in his writing the experience of trauma of the Holocaust and the Vietnam War. Interestingly, a critic (Singer) was asked at the opening of his *Sad landscapes* if the artist was Jewish because of his interest in and references to the Holocaust. The interest in the Jewish experience of the Holocaust can also be seen in the title of one of his series, *Where did the road lead when it lead nowhere* (c2000), a quote from Paul Celan's poetry, which works like Kiefer's *Shulamith* to frame the work. The imagery in his landscapes, such as of train tracks disappearing into the distance (figure 57) and barbed wire, reference documentary photography produced after the Holocaust. Mofokeng like Kentrige, extends the horror of the Holocaust as symbolic of barbarism that can occur again in the present in varied contexts. In addition, he finds an underlying sense of the experience of loss and trauma of such events as the Holocaust, the Vietnam war and the South African concentration camps, in his present memory of apartheid. Thus his work is not about these historic events but, much like Boltanski's, is “after xxxxx” — the whole avalanche of the Benjaminian 'wreckages' which litter and are erased by the landscape and memory of the twentieth century.

eventually becomes ‘mere history’:

For a whole age group, still active on the public scene, this past remains part of personal memory. With the passage of two or three decades at most, the memory of the Shoah will be essentially ritualized for some and historicized for the great majority, like any other event saved from oblivion. The destruction of the Jews of Europe will become an empty formula and, in any case, ‘mere history’.

As with Kiefer, Boltanski and Kentridge, Mofokeng recognizes this is part of the dilemma of how to deal with the memory of the past in the present. As he (2000b) asks: “Who owns this memory? what is re-memorized (re/membered) and how? how long is the memory? what do we do with the memory? do we need this memory? who can be trusted with this memory?”.

Whilst issues of class, race, gender, cultural heritage and geographical location inflect victimization into differentiated victimizations, Irit Rogoff (1995: 129-130) argues that it is imperative to think of the numerous heritages of trauma as a kind of global intertextuality, which functions at the level of psychoanalytically-conceived human subjectivities who experience these developments at the level of absence, loss and desire. In addition, at this time of decolonization taking place throughout the world, emergent cultures should be read across traditionally acknowledged cultures so as to realize the degree to which they are mutually implicated in one another. Mofokeng’s work echoes this longing to find ways in which to address the sense of loss and fascination felt on both sides of each of these traumatic disjunctures, so as to come to an understanding of the ways in which the absences which are felt on all sides. This is in the hope that one might then be able to discover the means to place oneself within an active and critical commemorative practice — rather than as mere spectators of historical rituals.

Situated between Kiefer’s burnt and Kentridge’s barren landscapes, Santu Mofokeng’s *Sad landscape* series (figure 51) presents bleak images of industrial wastelands with associations of

Holocaust concentration camps as well as those of the South African Anglo-Boer and Vietnam. But his images deny the spectacle of these spectacular events, presenting banal, institutionalised bleakness where hope seems devastatingly fragile. The denial of spectacle in his work points to what Hannah Arendt termed “the banality of evil”. Whilst he does not reference it directly, Mofokeng’s archive of banal landscape works against the spectacularization of events that occurred through the media during both apartheid and the TRC process. In addition to what was being collected, ordered and preserved in the TRC’s official archive, the vast archive of media images were meant to act as watchful visual record of the performances of individual witnesses (whether as victims or perpetrators) to acts of violence (Bester 1997). But in standing ‘witness’ to a process of witnessing, this photographic archive was instrumental in generating a public spectacle out of these performances³.

The moment of historical victimization, horror laden as it might be, is not a moment of closure and finality. Seeking the ‘truth’ means seeking after the expression of the trace memories of the past and their expression in a yet unstable sense of the present (Gilman). Thus his archives continue to grow, be open and hybrid. His photographs of landscapes (figure 2) do not act as monumental commemoration does, encouraging historical closure and shifting the responsibility from the viewer to the object. Rather, as with Kiefer’s *Shulamith* (figure 8) and Boltanski’s *The missing house* (figure 7), they act as counter-monuments: outwardly evidencing their failure to commemorate by showing the need to be activated by accompanying text, inwardly suggesting a

3. Such spectacularization of victimhood results in many negative effects, one of which counters the desire of the ‘heirs’ of such historical traumas as the Holocaust or apartheid to cease being positioned as victims, a position entirely devoid of agency, and to be recognized as living out their cultures in ways which accept trauma and dislocation as the point of departure for complex and altered cultural formations (Rogoff 1995: 129-130). Thus Mofokeng’s *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1950* (in progress) begins the work of excavating a photographic archive, not only for the past which would be an archival concept of the archive — but rather because of the Levitic injunction to remember for the future to come. Cf. Adorno’s critique of spectacle pp. 55-56.

sense of the specter that cannot be resurrected or represented. Thus his focus, as evidenced in Boltanski's *Shadows* (figure 23) and *Candles* (figure 27) works, is as much on the shadows as the subjects such as in *Chasing shadows* (1997) (figure 52) and *Concert Sewefontein* (1989) (figure 53) (Friedman 1997) and his photographs of landscape offer a tenuous emptiness where nature has effaced all but the barest traces of horror (Garnett 2000b). In this he emphasizes the ease of amnesia so as to sustain the desire to never forget, to commemorate at the level of desire. Even if, as Friedman (1997) writes, like for Sisyphus, it lies in the simple, compulsive act of rolling stones, where there is no closure but only repetition⁴ to keep the memory 'alive' and in the present.

i. a) Post-colonialism, nationalism and identity after apartheid

As South Africa emerges from the isolation of apartheid, new relationships within Africa have been initiated as part of an 'African Renaissance'. There is an argument though that the country itself needs to be decolonised. Africa stands in a complex relation with the West, caught as it is in a history of colonial dispossession which reshaped not only physical and social terrains but also human identities. Anti-colonial struggles have therefore had to create new and powerful identities for colonised peoples so as to challenge colonialism not only at a political or intellectual level, but also on an emotional plane (Loomba 1998:185-6). In this context, the concept of the Renaissance expresses the need to invert Africa's role as victim of history so as to have agency in writing and constructing its own histories. A powerful vehicle for harnessing anti-colonial energies at all these levels, is the idea of the nation.

4. Cf. Derrida on Freud and repetition pp. 48; 57; cf. melancholy and the death drive versus mourning and the life-drive pp. 230-231.

I am that posterity. I share here a deep-felt African agony and anxiety. I wish, we wish like all human beings, to be free. We shall do everything in our power to ensure this. If only simply because we are human we will be relentless in seeking our freedom. No human being will ever accept subjugation. Here, then, is a small voice, from a large continent of perhaps 600 million people. I wish here, humbly, to add to their liberated voice. That voice is five centuries old (Serote 1999: 17).

But as Enwezor (1997: 10) asks since the vast, complicated imaginary geography that carries the over-simplified term ‘Africa’ is not a nation, what is designated ‘African’ when this term is invoked? For the philosopher of Negritude, Leopold Senghor (qtd. Loomba 1998: 121) the experience of colonialism, for black people, is a racial experience that creates a “collective personality of the black people”, a community of blood.

All I know is that I’m called Africa, the name barely burned to ashes in the mass grave of the century’s end (Fernando Alvim qtd. Younge)⁵.

Without a doubt, Mofokeng’s work is imbued with that melancholic sense of loss, that so many claim is the African experience. But by choosing not only to deal with the colonialist archive in *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1950* (in progress) (figure 55), but also landscapes, graves and monuments from the Anglo-Boer War, Vietnam War and the Holocaust in the *Sad landscapes* series (figure 2), he extends this as the experience of loss of so many throughout history — melancholia in the face of the Benjaminian ‘wreckages’ of history⁶. He thus counters the isolated sense of ‘exclusive’ pain or victimization that might be harnessed into a collective for nationalist purposes. Within this is the warning that collective memories of suffering can be deployed to create more suffering for those whom Edward Said (qtd. Robins 1999: 136) refers to

5. This statement recalls Kiefer’s metonymic representation of Shulamith with ash, Kentridge’s use of charcoal and Boltanski’s mournful geometry and the grainy chiaroscuro of his ‘photographic portraits’.

6. Cf. melancholia in these artists’ works pp. 229-241.

as “the victims of the victims”. For where large numbers of people were treated as enemies of the state, nationalism for the time of the resistance has often proved so unifying and intoxicating that it has tempted leaders to continue the struggle even after victory (Giliomee & Gagiano 1990: 264).

Mofokeng’s work, specifically in the text of *Sad landscapes*, deals with this fragility of memory⁷ — discussing how the Jewish and Vietnamese experience is left out of the narrative given to tourists visiting the memorial sites, as well as how certain governments have selected and erased certain memories. This recalls how apartheid rhetoric reshaped history around the largely imagined national consciousness of the Afrikaner and was constrained to forget large tracts of the South African past⁸ and to suppress the key roles played by ‘outsiders’ (such as Krotoa, Emily Hobhouse) to what came to be construed as the master narrative (Brink 1999:36). As with Kiefer, Boltanski and Kentridge, Mofokeng’s work evidences a knowledge that nations are communities created not simply by forging certain bonds but by fracturing or disallowing others; not merely by invoking and remembering certain versions of the past, but making sure that others are forgotten or repressed (Loomba 1998:202).

7. In the context of utilizing traumatic events such as the apartheid or the Holocaust for nation-building, Andreas Huyssen (qtd Robins 1999: 124) draws attention to the instability of both personal and collective memory, which in time become ‘abused’ or compromised: “The ways we remember [d]efine us in the present. As readers of Freud and Nietzsche, however, we know how slippery and unreliable personal memory can be, always affected by forgetting and denial, repression and trauma, and more often than not, serving the need to rationalize and maintain power. But a society’s collective memory is no less contingent, no less unstable, its shape by no means permanent and always subject to subtle and not so subtle reconstruction.”

8. Brink (1999:36) lists some of these forgotten tracts: the shaping of the Afrikaans language in the mouths of slaves; slave revolts; the enslavement of indigenous people; the role of Coloured and black labourers in the service of Boers in the Great Trek; collaboration between black nations and Afrikaners on the Eastern Frontier during the nineteenth century; the part played by women in conserving certain standards of education and morality in the deep interior, or in the Great Trek etc. This suggests that it would also be possible for the emerging post-apartheid memory to forget or underplay other events and characters in the overall narrative, ranging from collaboration with the oppressor to atrocities in training camps in Angola and elsewhere — a possibility exacerbated by the TRC’s ‘blanket amnesty’.

The ANC government (qtd. Baines 1998) articulating its vision of the ‘imagined community’ of the South African nation, states that it seeks to “assert African hegemony in the context of a multi-cultural & non-racial society”. Many argue that, under the banner of ‘The Rainbow Nation’, the government has sought to mythologize a new broad consensus culture through a contrived exercise in nation building. In addition, the ‘fraternity’ which represents the nation does not explicitly include them as equals, for the power of nationalism lies precisely in its ability to successfully speak on behalf of all the people (Loomba 1998: 198). This raises important questions as to how the government and future generations of so-called coloured and black South Africans might make meaning of apartheid and the suffering experienced, without resorting to ‘new’ ethnic absolutisms and without silencing those deemed not to have the necessary biological, historical, and cultural background to legitimately speak about ‘black experience’ under apartheid (Robins 1999: 136). In many ways, specifically for the artist, such approaches has ensured that even to speak about ‘others’ — let alone speak *for* them — is to risk reproducing its repressive regimes. The same questions are posed by Mofokeng (2000b) about his photographs taken from places of loss and suffering in South Africa, Europe and Vietnam: “Who owns this memory?.. Who can be trusted with this memory?” — complicating the South African black/white equation⁹. Race and skin colour have functioned as one of the most powerful and yet fragile markers of human identity¹⁰. Just as one may speak of the colonial gaze,

9. Cf. Kentrige’s representation of Nandi in *Felix in exile* p. 157 n25 and Kiefer’s identification with Shulamith p. 91.

10. Colonialism deployed diverse strategies and methods of control and of representation. Aime Cesaire writes the colonial encounter as the equation ‘colonization = thingification’. This ‘thingification’, or the reduction of the colonised person into an object, was achieved not only by turning her or him into ‘an instrument of production’ but also by Western accounts of subject-formation (Loomba 1998: 133). The ‘othering’ of vast numbers of people and their construction as backward and inferior depends upon what Abdul JanMohamed calls the ‘Manichean allegory’, in which a binary and implacable discursive opposition between races is produced (Loomba 1998: 104). Such oppositions not only construct images of the outsider but also the insider — the usually white, European, heterosexual, male ‘self’. Therefore many anti-colonial and postcolonial critiques are preoccupied, as in Mofokeng and Kentrige’s work, with uncovering the way in which such oppositions work in colonialist representations. Facilitating the colonial expansion of the capitalist process, the ideology of racial superiority was translated into

so too there is an ‘apartheid gaze’ which produced its own field of ‘discriminations’, incorporating not only race (which monopolises this gaze) but also classicism, sexism and ethnic prejudice (Richards 1991: 101). But just as the colonial and apartheid gaze spawned a counter-culture, so too has the nationalistic project which pretends to speak for others.

In order to pose questions about the influence of colonialism and apartheid on black South African identity Mofokeng has relied on his role as artist-facilitator and has dug into the state archives (Blignaut 1997). “The black middle class,” notes Enwezor (qtd. Blignaut 1997), “is a highly charged subject, offering both ambivalence and paradox”. The subjects of Mofokeng’s archive seem to hanker for a certain European ideal, yet at the same time, they seem detached and somehow aware of how they might be perceived by the colonial gaze. But while Mofokeng (qtd. Blignaut) poses the quintessential post-colonial question: “Who is gazing?”, he probes further: “What was the occasion? Do these images serve to challenge prevailing Western perceptions of the African?”. It is argued that the post-colonial artist who continues to engage in the problematics of colonial discourse is still stuck inside the problematics of the colonial (Powell 1997: 54). This may be because the reactive perspectives which many post-colonialists have adopted, lock them into reductive positions whereby the colonial gaze is returned by mimicking its ideological imperatives and intellectual procedures. So whilst the questions Mofokeng initially poses are undoubtably necessary and important, he waits till his last question to take his work beyond the simplistic one-dimensional paradigm of external accusations based in the past — asking: “Are these images evidence of mental colonisation?”. Thus while he

class terms. Certain sections of people, ‘others’ to the ‘superior’ white race, were racially identified as the ‘natural’ working classes — bringing reality in line with representation in order to ensure the material objective of production (Loomba 1998: 124-126).

probes, questions and opens up the colonialist archive, his undecidability¹¹ and lack of judgement is evidenced in the reoccurring question marks which are left unanswered — perhaps because the answers that lie in the past may not be as urgent as the questions that are posed in the present.

In this context, many post-colonial critics are criticized for grappling with the ‘shades’ of the colonial past and neglecting the difficulties of the post-colonial present (Loomba 1998: 256). But while Mofokeng’s archives definitely grapple with the ‘shades’ of the past (in all senses — the shadows, traces, ancestors and spectres) and his intention and insistence is that the subject be seen as possessing a history, identity and desire — instead of re-drawing a positivist sketch, he attempts to tease out the elusive sense of black complexity in racialised discourse, with what Enwezor (1997: 31) calls “an ethical sense of African agency”. This is in order for black identity to be questioned in all its complexity in the present — as well as to warn of forces, such as the nationalist rhetoric which, perhaps unwittingly, threatens to mirror the homogenizing gaze of colonialism and apartheid. For the archive, as Derrida argues in *Archive fever* (1995), is involved with the representation of the past for the future: the future aspect of the archive is hope for a better future to come¹², the past aspect is the duty of memory to remember, to warn and to bear witness.

Mofokeng’s questions relate to a search central to the artist’s ‘quest’ and by implication the viewer’s, for personal identity and one’s relation to community and to larger society. As he (qtd. Friedman 1997) writes of *Chasing shadows* (1997): “[an] exploration of notions of personhood...

11. This undecidability is reflected in his titles, such as *Like shifting sand* (1990), *Rumours/ the Bloemhof portfolio* (1994). Cf. this undecidability in connection with Foucault’s ideas contra the collective ‘we’ p. 41.

my exploration and participation in the fictions we call relationships and community. And of environments, real or imagined". This is also seen in the title of his 1995 exhibition *Distorting mirrors / townships imagined*. For Mofokeng (qtd. Friedman 1997a) resists the idea that one can fully possess one's own identity:

We are so absorbed in the Kellogs Krispies post-modern language of globalism, racialism, multi-culturalism it makes me want to scream out: 'I am an individual'. I want to belong, but only by asserting my own terms of belonging... Growing up in the township during apartheid, I was forced to defer to authority, told not to ask questions, to suppress curiosity. But that became an encumbrance, because I wanted to go beyond words like European and non-European which define identity in terms of negation... Stereotypes are useful only as points of departure.

As he (qtd. <<http://www.nfi.v2.nl/int/expo/main.php?id=19>>) has written of *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1950*: "I explore my surroundings in an attempt to come to a better understanding of myself, and with that, my fears, hopes and fascinations". This differed quest for personhood has resulted in unashamedly compulsive repetition¹³ — evidenced in the duration of time (15 years for *Sad landscapes* and still (in progress) for *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1950*) he has spent with his works. Much like Kentridge's narrative and Boltanski's re-photographed portraits, they constitute a continually deferred, yet-to-be-completed investigation into the memory of the past.

12. Cf. Walter Benjamin and Adorno on the origin as future pp. 33; 71 n41.

13. "I think at times that I have been far too self-indulgent in my quest," he admits. Perhaps growing older has made me less self-absorbed" (Friedman 1997). Cf. repetition and melancholia in the works of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng p. 240 n15

ii. Mofokeng as artist

ii. a) The counter-archive

The path to knowing the South African past, like the present, divides and multiplies. Hystography is itself a *present* site of struggle (Richards 1991: 104).

At the Institute for Advanced Social Research of the University of Witwatersrand, Mofokeng works on a project which is geared toward collecting, documenting and conserving black family photographs under the title *Black photo album/look at me, 1890-1950* (work in progress) (figure 55). ‘Archive fever’, according to Derrida (1995: 90), is evidenced in both “detestable revisionism” as well as the “most legitimate, necessary and courageous re-writings of history”. For ‘archive fever’ does not only mean to suffer from sickness or trouble, but also to burn with passion — to never rest from searching for the archive right where it slips away. The problem of historiographical representation is compounded by the tendency of both official and popular accounts of collective suffering to often legitimize exclusivist and discriminatory nationalist agendas. In addition, as Lyotard has argued, such ‘reliable’ accounts either exclude the silenced, or by giving voice to the ‘other’ betray their experience. Despite or because of this, Adorno and Lyotard insist that one must continue to strive to do the im-possible and bear witness — giving an intimation of the sense of the immemorial. The classical notion of the archive is based on either presence or absence but all archives take into account the unconscious and virtual, for even repression is an archiving (Derrida 1995: 62). Thus the structure of the archive is spectral, neither present nor absent, neither visible nor invisible. As with Boltanski, Santu Mofokeng continues exploring and searching for what is elusive, as he (<<http://www.revuenoire.com/anglais/book/GrandsLivres/AnthoPhoto/GL-anthophoto6.html>>) writes: “I was searching for something which refused to be photographed. Perhaps I was chasing shadows”.

Derrida (1995: 22) tells us that the archive is both institution and tradition of the law. This is the archontic dimension without which one could not have the logic and semantics of the archive, of memory and memorial, commemoration and inscription which puts into reserve, accumulates, capitalises and stocks the quasi-infinity of layers of ‘archival strata’. Thus to read through this archival strata requires archeological excavation, as evidenced in Kiefer’s surfaces, Kentridge’s geological imagery and Boltanski and Mofokeng’s archival impulse. Psychoanalysis is the project which aspires to get to the silence of the archive — of everything that can happen to the economy of memory and to its substrates, traces, documents (Derrida 1995: 34). This archaeological project is mirrored in the *Black photo album: look at me, 1890 - 1950* where the searching is repetitive, obsessive and where closure is constantly deferred. Echoing Benjamin, Derrida (1995: 85) calls this the “impossible archeology of nostalgia”, the painful, anamnestic desire for a return to the authentic and singular enigma — the origin, the most archaic place of absolute commencement (Derrida 1995: 91). Indeed, except for restoring the images, Mofokeng has left the photographs as they are — instead of making aesthetic interventions on the images to prove a point as author he intervenes with the biographical information.

Mofokeng’s project is very different to the official archive of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As the commissioner Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1996) stated:

We are charged to unearth the truth about our dark past, to lay the ghosts of that past so that they will not return to haunt us. And [so] that we will thereby contribute to the healing of a traumatised and wounded people – for all of us in South Africa are wounded people – and in this manner to promote national unity and reconciliation.

Tutu’s wording epitomizes the language of closure characteristic of the nation-building/healing rhetoric. The task of the TRC was to delve into apartheid South Africa's past, where the records

of the hearings were to act as the *repository* of South African memory (Nuttal & Coetzee 1999: 1). As a 'repository' though, the responsibility of keeping the memories alive, of keeping vigilant in the present and of commemorating loss, shifts entirely to the state archives. In addition, the concern to document personal memories in the process of remaking collective memory of the past on a national scale, involves the TRC with a politics of memory in which the past is uncovered for the purposes of political reconciliation in the present. This official recording, though, was also intend to produce "counter-memories to the silence imposed by apartheid" (Minkley & Rassool 1999: 90). According to Ndebele (1999: 20), this movement from the repression of the past to the 'expression' in the hearings, can be seen to provide 'additional confirmation' of the emergence of a new national consciousness. But as has been argued by many theorists, such as Foucault, the ironic consequence of many previous attempts to place categories of people 'hidden from history' at the centre of historical studies was that these studies had deepened their marginalization and perpetuated their 'special' status (Minkley & Rassool 1999: 98-99). This historical practice "imposes as grammar the mathematics of history" which "makes things with words", and memory into a written layer (Jewsiewicki & Mudimbe qtd. Minkley & Rassool 1999: 99).

Perhaps this is why Mofokeng, like Boltanski, choses to make art that resonates principally on an emotional level. It is imbued with a sense of the unsaid, the unrepresentable "that defies grammar" (Friedman 1997).

Landscape is the mute witness to histories and narratives (Mofokeng 2000b)

It is on the thin line between reality and metaphor, memory and narrative that Mofokeng explores the landscape — not in the traditional sense, as the sublime or picturesque, but rather as a space somewhere between banal emptiness and evocative contemplation. With similar concerns as Kentridge and Kiefer, he points to the way that landscape erases historical events that should leave traces of trauma and loss. But contrary to Kentridge's works, Mofokeng shows that “landscape is a mute witness”¹⁴ by leaving the landscapes (figure 2) in his photographs unpopulated, reconstituting neither presence nor absence — but allowing a contemplative space, as with Boltanski's *Missing house*, for the ethical spectator to invoke the sense of the presence of absence.

Mofokeng adopts what Derrida (1995: 62) calls the “phantom of the analyst”. This is a spectral position which in its silence, leaves the ‘other’ to speak and never responds to that silence so as to allow a long enough time to interpret, to transfer and to work¹⁵. According to Derrida (1995: 70) this attempt “to let speak a photographic spectre”, whilst “a sign of respect before the future to come of the future to come”, causes the historian by this act to no longer be an historian — because there is no history or archive of the future to come. In addition, it is argued that the archive not only authenticates the truth claims of the photographs, but is also embedded in the photograph itself (Bester 1997). Yet Mofokeng's stark, moody yet banal images are dependant on text to activate knowledge¹⁶, such as in *Bishop J. G. Xaba* (figure 19). These ‘captions’ Mofokeng (2000b) terms ‘fictional autobiographies’: stories/journals with the characteristics of a

14. South African artist Moshekwa Langa also deals with the ‘silence’ of land. He entitled a work which dealt with the denial of land rights and the absence of entitlement (Dubow 1996) *No Title* — suggesting that somewhere between narrative and land, is muteness — the inability to put into words or to name.

15. This corresponds to the ethical silence Derrida writes of in the context of allegory p. 37.

16. Cf. Walter Benjamin's ideas on language and photography p. 104.

rough draft, evidencing hesitations and unanswerable questions which in their indeterminateness refute any certainty — much like Kentridge’s narratives and erasures and Kiefer’s quotation of many different styles. It is with these texts and the spectral position adopted with the photographs, that Mofokeng successfully shows the inadequacy of both the archive and the photographs to represent the unrepresentable.

This is perhaps why Mofokeng has been paired, as was the case in the *Translation/ seduction/ displacement* (2000) exhibition, with conceptual artist Willem Boshoff, who specializes in poetic text montages (Garnett 2000b). In such projects as *Kykaprikaans* (1977-80), Boshoff collects and dissects words with an etymological obsession which mirrors Mofokeng’s ‘archive fever’. Boshoff dissects the language of white nationalism into a poetic gibberish of doubtful meanings and dismantled potency (figure 54), suggesting both human ignorance as well as the limitations of language (Garnett 2000a) to say the unsayable.

Hauntedness is not only haunted by this or that ghost but, as Benjamin argues, by the specter of the ‘truth’¹⁷ which has been repressed and which is irreducible to explanation (Derrida 1995: 67). Thus Mofokeng plays with the notions of recording and documenting — re-photographing, re-inscribing the photographs with the accompanying texts as intuitive representations mingled with painstakingly-investigated factual information. Derrida (1995: 27-29) writes that impressions can be scriptural or typographic, inscriptive or recording, intuitive representations or graphic illustrations. The impression is the unique moment of archivization because it “produces as much as it records the event” while nonetheless being the condition of its potential repetition

17. Brett Murray’s *Language and land* consists of heads jammed with jars of earth, which signify memory or history and are half full or half empty. Another work, which presents large cutout profiles of heads with working extractor fans in place of each brain, similarly speaks of the lack of knowledge, with ironic associations to “hot-air” and “air-

(Prenowitz 1995: 110). Thus Mofokeng, who poses indeterminate questions as impressions without passing judgement, acts, like Benjamin and Boltanski, somewhere between the archeologist and the historian because he opens up the archive to analyze and let grow and change, not judge and close. Like the other artists of this thesis, his work evidences both covering and uncovering, revealing and concealing, exhuming and entombing. For his work is not intended as a judgement of those in the past nor to suggest a nostalgia for pre-colonial Africa, but to question present black identity and where it stands in relation to the West, Africa and South Africa in the present — that each viewer should ‘read’ themselves with the same criticality that they approach such images. And, more urgently, it is an attempt to cause a Benjaminian ‘awakening’ to such dangerous influences which could reoccur again in the present.

Thus Mofokeng, the archivist-archeologist, is always archiving, whilst the archive is always becoming, always remaining open. This opening is not only towards the future which is indeterminable and unknown, “the anticipation of a specific hope in the future” (Derrida 1995: 71), for with historicity comes the obligation of memory which is the Levitical “injunction to remember” (Derrida 1995: 75).

ii. b) Photography

Spectacle, as Guy Debord (qtd. Bester 1997) suggests, “is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images... All that was once directly lived has become mere representation”. In this sense, the memory that is the future of the archive can be blunted by the mediation of photographic images — witnessed in the South African context

with the media's 'unofficial' archive of the TRC, as well as with photojournalism and documentary photography produced during apartheid. The work of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng suggests that there is a need for vigilance against the spectacularization of violence of such media images, as Adorno would insist. In the recuperation of memories of violence (whether overt or covert) there is a precarious relationship between history, memory and representation, where a number of slippages occur between the original act, its embodiment in performance and its re-presentation in photographs (Bester 1997). As discussed in connection with documentary photography of Holocaust victims after WWII, these slippages eventually result in a neutralization of the trauma, where the viewer's sense of culpability, complicity and responsibility is lessened.

Mofokeng emerged on the photographic scene during the 1980's and was appalled by photographers, local and foreign, who would 'day-hop' to areas such as Soweto in search of images that would shock and horrify: "the gut reaction of photographers is to record and report on the violence — careers are made in this way" (Mofokeng qtd Viviano 1998)¹⁸. Whether to activate response or to meet international expectations of a 'righteous' struggle, these photographs essentially maintained the clarity of black and white, in turn maintaining the distance between 'them' and 'us' (Viviano 1998), mirroring the apartheid gaze¹⁹. As Mofokeng

18. Used as an incisive critical tool, photography was particularly powerful during the years of National Party rule, playing an important part in increasing conscious resistance to the segregationist policy of apartheid. The photo-journalistic movement which emerged after a decade of violent repression and imprisonment, from the 1976 uprising through its various states of emergency, bred a generation of daring, frontline political photographers. Led by the 'Bang-Bang Club', they prided themselves in being unrivalled in their ability to captivate the "black and white realities of the revolution" (Blignaut 1997) - all the time aggravated by the state's tight control of information. These photographers wielded their cameras like guns (Webster 1997) in an era in South African photography obsessively devoted, as Jane Taylor (qtd. Blignaut 1997) states, to 'the event'. The camera was perceived as a weapon not only to be used against the apartheid system but also to highlight the growing resistance movement. This often resulted in a polarised photography where 'good' and 'bad' were divided into binary opposites.

19. As Colin Richards (qtd. Gaulle 1997) asserts: "In South Africa, the selectively blind Apartheid vision of culture and society, still very much with us, has been conditioned and regulated literally and metaphorically, by thinking in

(qtd. Viviano 1998) writes:

There are certain archetypal images of Soweto. Images bespeaking gloom, poverty, monotony, anguish, struggle.... In this vision the township's topography is reduced to a monotonous sea of uniform houses punctuated by beacon points of violence: the schools, the hostels, police stations.... Lurking in the landscape of fear is 'the youth', an object seen, feared, and endlessly spoken of but rarely heard.

The South African documentary tradition, a humanistic response to an increasingly desperate state of affairs, grew not only to express ideas related to the repressive political regime, but also out of a desire to record an exuberant and vital time (Webster 1997)²⁰. But with the segregation and destruction of free-flowing areas such as Sophiatown and District Six in the 1970's, documentary photography became far more critical — including studies on forced removals, internment without trial and the conditions under which migrant workers had to live and work. Photographers such as David Goldblatt, Peter Magubane, Omar Badsha and Santu Mofokeng used the camera as a tool for questioning and revealing as well as for protest²¹. These photographers' work stood as the antithesis to the growing number of hard news images. Their multi-layered studies could be 'read', requiring thought and attention more in the style of a novel

terms of black and white".

20. This is a tradition that had begun much earlier, in the mid-century, where owing to the breakdown of former tribal cultures and the demand from growth industries for labour, there was an influx of rural black South Africans to the urban centres. Photographers of this period from the late 1940's and in the 1950's, particularly those working for *Drum* magazine, were photographing what was becoming a new urban cultural 'Zeitgeist'. These images reflect an era of converging tastes and collapsing class distinctions, not unlike those seen in the United States during the Harlem Renaissance of the late 1910's to the early 1930's, or the Beat culture of the 1950's (Woods).

21. Photographs by Goldblatt from the publication *Some Afrikaners photographed* (1975) present the complex cultural practices and contradictions of this group. This work reveals the social and economic relationships which often determined the layers of interaction between the Afrikaner and 'others' — juxtaposing Afrikaans and black individuals to reveal certain dimensions of the social, political and economic life of South Africa in the 1960's (Gaulle 1997). But as much South African documentary photography involved the examination of discrete and circumscribed groups of people, such as *Soweto* (1978) by Peter Magubane, *In Boksburg* (1982) and *Some Afrikaners photographed* (1975) by David Goldblatt and *In search of the San* (1998) by Paul Weinberg, it could be argued that these works mapped the territory of the different races and groups, hardly ever showing areas of commonality and interaction (Gaulle 1997). No doubt, this too, was a reflection of the political segregation of these groups, but also often resulted in repeating the apartheid gaze.

than a news story (Webster 1997) — so as to work against confrontational photographs whose images, while at first disturbing, eventually cause neutralization.

During apartheid, Mofokeng strove in such portfolios as *Church trains* (c. 1985) to make his audience look beyond the horror to the strength of ordinary lives under terrible pressure (Viviano 1998). These are essays in poetic ordinariness, as opposed to the more sensational subjects that were fashionable and commercially lucrative at the time (Friedman 1997). This sense of the banality and beauty of life during traumatic times, ominously links the assassin and the suicide bombers, the woman in the mud and the Chechens, because “theirs is the protest of the irrational against the great deadening sameness²², and its moral logic is unassailable” (Viviano 1998).

What value do the righteous weapons of the past have in the present world? (Gillman)

As discussed previously, there was a general shift in art practice away from collective opposition to apartheid, to more inclusive areas of subjective experience and identity²³. Creative documentary photography has sought to move away from the populist news photograph which summarises and simplifies events in a single dramatic moment, to documentary studies which sought to do precisely that — study, probe, analyse and allow for the nuances of time (Webster 1997). These multi-layered, considered images concern themselves with individualistic and

22. Cf. Adorno on the ‘ever-same’ pp. 12-13; Benjamin on history as repetition p. 15; Nietzsche’s eternal recurrent Löwinth 1964: 214-222; and Kiefer’s statement which echoes these ideas p. 70.

23. Whilst it can be argued that South Africans had not fully accepted the camera as a tool, like a paintbrush, with which to create art, the 1990’s saw far more exhibitions of art photography. During the 1980’s, those few shows that were devoted to photography would have probably either comprised of slick, dangerous, Pulitzer Prize-winning news photographs or photographs vividly depicting the face of despair and poverty so commonly associated with the ‘dark continent’ (Blignaut 1997). In addition, as Van den Berg (1997: 7) argues, works produced during apartheid where often “an art of predictable reflex, an art of comfortable pain”, where “memory functioned as a vehicle for pain rather than productivity, for paralysis rather than action”. Cf. Sontag on this issue p. 112.

subjective humanistic²⁴ responses, much like Kentridge's narratives.

Mofokeng's work after 1992 breaks from the otherwise still strong tradition of South African documentary photography and photojournalism based on or oriented to political activism. Whilst he may present landscapes associated with spectacular events of horror, in their everyday banality they are devoid of spectacle. As with Kiefer, Boltanski and Kentridge, his political consciousness has extended to a self-reflexive consciousness of his chosen media and his place within it — creating a form of documentary photography that he (<http://www.nfi.v2.nl/int/expo/main.php?id=19>) terms 'fictional autobiography'. This work can be seen to occupy the liminal spaces between the documentation of 'reality' and the rendering of subjective, personal experiences — what Atkinson (1999a) describes as the "beautifully, maddeningly awkward space" that photography occupies, between otherness and the real, between the unconscious and the ego-based conscious, between art and documentary journalism²⁵.

Mofokeng has spent his career photographing "ordinary black South Africans going about the day-to-day business of living". An example is the poignant work, *Nkuna's puzzle* (1994), which depicts, in the style of a 17th century Dutch still life, an arrangement of earbuds and coins placed in an ashtray in the form of a poor man's talisman (Friedman 1997). As with Kiefer, Boltanski and Kentridge, Mofokeng engages with personal identity, his place within the community, as

24. As Mofokeng (qtd. Friedman 1997) states: "My work is about feeling. I cannot take photographs of things I don't care about. I try to grasp the moment I'm in even if I can't fully understand it, or visualize it beforehand. And I cannot separate the personal from the commercial. I guess this is in keeping with old cliché: 'You must look at my work and see me, and look at me and see my work'".

25. Cf. liminality and thresholds in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades project* Stoljar 1996: 91-112 and Rendell 1999: 168-191.

well as the social and personal meaning of the environment and landscape (<http://www.nfi.v2.nl/int/expo/main.php?id=19>). *Black photo album: look at me 1890-1950* (figure 55) also illustrates the shift towards subtler, more complex issues such as the body, the family, and one's understanding of history, so as to explore aspects of the present (Blignaut 1997). This work on family photographs, like Boltanski's album works, is an Adornian re-analysis of the deeper socio-political codes that shape society's understanding of history.

Mofokeng's exploration of these social practices has yielded up a poetic, almost spiritual photography, which shifts between the real and the surreal, between outer and inner worlds (Friedman 1997). The autobiographies he writes are also 'fictional' because of the medium of representation itself. As Boltanski explores, current visual theory acknowledges the inherent deceit in photographic representation: the ideological situation of all images, the deliberate frame, the allegorical slippage between the photograph as sign and an unstable, irrecuperable signified. Within this is the knowledge and the Adornian self-doubt that the testifier often falls short of the testified.

Mofokeng's grid-like installation of photographs is interspersed with light-boxes, transparencies and projections. As in Boltanski's installations, this plays with and counters the cold, scientific display of the anthropology museum's exhibition techniques. For the more objectified and distant the display of familiar or banal objects or images, the more the poignant, funerary aspects of memory are suggested. In addition, while both the lightboxes and projections (figure 29) suggest spectres²⁶, the projection also acknowledges how ideas are projected on the subject —

26. This recalls the haunting photographic projections of Shimon Attie, such as the 1992 project *The writing on the wall*, in which prewar Jewish residents 'returned', but only as an ephemeral play of light and shadow, on the crumbling facades of their former neighbourhood.

highlighting the relationship between the subject, the camera, and the person who stands behind it. This is not only about the ways photographs echo ideologies and the interests they serve, but also how both the subject and artist reveal and conceal themselves.

In a fragile, politically splintered world, we need to see each other clearly. Photography wields more power than ever before and carries heavier ethical burdens. Because the ethical issues are not inherent in the technology itself but derive from its uses, the impact of photography depends less on the camera than the person standing behind it (Banta & Hinsley qtd. Richards 1991: 113).

As with Kiefer's *Iron path* (1986) (figure 56), Mofokeng's *Where did the road lead when it lead nowhere* (c2000) (figure 57) presents deserted railway tracks disappearing into the distance. The image references photographs taken after WWII where just the tracks would signify deportation of the Jews and little knowledge was needed from the viewers — criticizing and in turn reconstituting such documentary photography. For this light box (itself a medium based on light and shadow) re-imbues the landscape with a sense of the presence of the absence and loss. Presented in one exhibition in a darkened room at MuseuMAfricA, the glowing presence of the outsized object worked as an evocative, spectral entity to the sense of loss experienced in countless circumstances, that cannot be captured or represented.

As Atkinson (1999) argues, deployed within a contemporary art idiom, photography can be the perfect vehicle for bearing witness. For Mofokeng, art is not about doing that “which has not been done before” but rather an epiphany, a sharing of the self with the other (Friedman 1997). His is an attempt to show the failures of photography, in a sense an ‘aphotographic’ exploration of that which is left out, omitted or cannot be photographed, the silence and liminality between ‘reality’ and ‘desire’. This is compounded in the relationship between the photograph as ‘document’ and his fictional texts which, much like Kiefer's inscriptions and Kentridge's written

words in his films, suggests that while both are ‘readable’ neither can represent the unrepresentable, write the unwriteable and in the context of naming, memorialize the immemorial. His stark, evocative landscapes and emphasized shadows speak of memory, desire, longing, as well as forgetting, loss and death.

iii. The counter-archive: *Black Photo Album: Look at me 1890-1950* (in progress)

The ghosts of what we see dying a bit at a time will continue to haunt us for generations to come (Es'kia Mphahlele qtd. Richards 1998: 73).

Santu Mofokeng’s *Black photo album: Look at me 1895-1950* (in progress) (figure 17) asks: What memories does the archive possess, and what knowledge does it yield in the present when prodded (Enwezor qtd. Becker 1998)? His project is much like Freud’s, who analyzed across the apparent absence of memory and the archive all kinds of symptoms, signs, metaphors, figures and traces that attest an archival documentation that the ‘ordinary historian’ would not identify (Derrida 1995: 64)²⁷. This is because the ‘archive of the virtual’ requires, as Benjamin and Adorno have argued, archeological excavation to find the traces that are left by repression and suppression on the main archive (Derrida 1995: 66). But when memory and knowledge are unyielding to this prodding, it becomes necessary to invent new stories, narratives and intentions — what Mofokeng calls ‘fictional autobiography’²⁸. As Enwezor (qtd. Becker 1998) notes, this process echoes what had occurred at the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, as well as the wider

27. In this context, Freud claimed that the murder of Moses left archives, documents, symptoms in the Jewish memory and the memory of humanity — only the texts of this archive are not readable according to paths of ‘ordinary history’, they need psychoanalysis (Derrida 1995: 64-65) .

28. This is much like Boltanski’s invention of stories of his own childhood or Beuys’s mythical biography p. 64 n29.

context of South Africa, which seems to be reinventing a different past to shape its future. As Derrida (1995: 36-37) writes in the spirit of Benjamin, the archive question is not in the past, but is rather a question of response, promise and responsibility of the present for “the future to come”, suspended in the conditional “if it is at all knowable”.

Mofokeng’s work confronts in both a concrete and elliptical manner the formidable and inscrutable terror of the archive in a country such as South Africa (Enwezor qtd. Becker 1998). As Derrida (1995: 78) writes, the law of the archive is the self-affirmation of the One and the Unique. But as soon as there is the One, there is violence, wounding and traumatism — so evident in the context of apartheid and fascism. But while the One guards against, protects and keeps score of the ‘other’, this ‘jealous violence’ also causes the One to compromise in itself the self-otherness, the difference within one self. Thus one may argue that this is well the case with the white South African archive, which because of this self-compromise became, in the Kristevian sense, a stranger to those facets of itself²⁹. Clive van den Berg deals with such self-estrangement in the South African archives of the past and present in his series *Memorials without facts* (figure 58). He (1998: 122) writes that while South African archives contain references to same sex activity, these are only a fragment of the story. The legal language of the state, as narratives of censure and complaint, confirms oppression and rarely gives insight to “the more slippery area of suppressed desire”.

Black photo album: look at me is of family photographs of working- and middle-class black people dressed in complete Victorian attire (figure 55). These unusual portraits are intercepted not only with partly-fictional information, but also with textual references to colonization as an

29. This is evidenced in Kentridge’s *Felix in exile*, in the transformation of Soho’s portrait into Felix’s and then Nandi’s p. 179 n61 as well as Kiefer’s *Shulamith/Margarete* series p. 91.

ideological activity. The project is a mediation on black desire and what it means to be black under colonialism (Enwezor 1997: 30). Thus one aspect of this project is to act as a counterweight to the stereotypical images of the black South African population and its history which have arisen on the basis of the colonial photographic tradition in Africa (<http://www.nfi.v2.nl/int/expo/main.php?id=19>). But his work is not a morality tale, rather there is a Benjaminian wide-awakeness in his probing of history (Enwezor qtd Becker 1998) — for he does not only deal with this imbalance but also tries to interpret and gather anew. For as Derrida (1995: 7) writes, the archive is both institutive and conservative, revolutionary and traditional³⁰.

If one is to study representations of black people in South Africa, one should begin with depictions that ran parallel to and influenced photography. With colonialism, ideologies of racial difference were intensified by their incorporation into the discourse of science. These scientific discussions on race, rather than challenging earlier negative stereotypes of savagery, barbarism, and excessive sexuality, extended and developed these (Loomba 1998: 115-117)³¹. This ethnographic perspective employed a system of rational thought over alternate transcendental ideas, such as religion or magic, assuming the right to judge so-called traditional societies and consequently renders them inferior. In this context, Barthes (qtd Perloff 1997: 35) sees photography as a form of ethnography that “points a finger at certain vis-a-vis, and cannot escape this pure deistic language”.

30. Cf. *Aufhebung* in Adorno p. 21, Benjamin’s negation and presentation p. 15 and Derrida on allegorical doubling pp. 37-38.

31. This is analysed and criticized by artist Candice Breitz. She creates montages with stereotypical images of bare-breasted black women from colonial depictions and naked white women from pornography magazines. Breitz brackets the ideals of the ‘Rainbow Nation’, the metaphor of post-apartheid South Africa, by representing ‘South African Woman’ as fragmented — the montage, as a failed effort to create a new unity out of diverse elements, suggests that this unity is artificial, constructed and ultimately only a mixture of conflicting elements (Van Alphen 1999: 273). Breitz juxtaposes ethnographic and pornographic representations as being both fetishistic constructions — the political point where feminist and postcolonial theory meet. Cf. Atkinson & Breitz’s *Grey areas* (1999) on the debate around the politics of representation in Breitz’s work, as mentioned on p. 19 n17.

But Nettleton (1998: 86) argues that the ethnographic portrait has a potential ambiguity in that it focuses on difference, not only of the racial ‘other’ or of ethnicities from each other, but also of individuals from each other. Studies of the portrait genre in Africa suggest that in many African societies where images are made to commemorate particular individuals, the reference is not to the unique physiognomy of the person, but rather to specific, visibly identifiable aspects of the individual’s social persona, his/her place within a known social structure (Nettleton 1998: 86). This discourse of identity is defined through social relations and it is in this context that Mofokeng’s *Black photo album* frames itself. For while the law of consignation (to sign or seal, to devote, to transfer, to entrust, to transmit) orders the archive, it is never without pressure of the impression, suppression and repression (Derrida 1995: 78). Mofokeng looks beyond the conventional ‘ordinary historians’ reading of the black archive to see what traces this pressure has left³². He plays with concealing and revealing the ‘truth’ of this archival strata, redeploing the archival images of black identity for the recovery of historical memory (Enwezor 1997: 30). For, as Derrida (1995: 35) writes, without the irrepressible, the only suppressible and repressible force and authority of transgenerational memory, there would no longer be any essential history of culture, no question of memory and the archive, patriarchive or matriarchive, no ‘uncanny’ fashion of speaking to and with the ancestors. Mofokeng’s interest lies very much in this transgenerational memory — the ‘shadows’, shades or phantoms in these photographs³³.

32. As Derrida (1995: 92-95) writes, the archontic (paternal and patriarchal) principle of the archive only posits itself to repeat itself and returns to re-posit itself only in the repressed, suppressed parricide in the name of the father as dead father. This parricide is evidenced by Mofokeng, both towards the post-colonialist interpretations, as well as the black artists who did these portraits. Without this death drive, there would be no possibility of his archive or of new interpretations.

33. Cf. Walter Benjamin and transgenerational memory p. 23; cf. Barthes’ idea of phantoms as they relate to photography p. 102. In such works such as *Chasing shadows* (figure 52), Mofokeng draws not only from the Western, generally negative, conceptions of shadows, but also from Sotho culture. The Sotho words for shadow (*seriti* or *is'thunzi*) have multiple meanings varying from ‘ancestral’ and ‘ritual’ through to ‘aura’ and ‘status’ (Friedman 1997) — which suggests that as he chases these elusive ‘shadows’, Mofokeng is interested in the traces

Nettleton (1998: 86-88) deconstructs representations from the same period. One of the primary focusses of post-colonial readings of these portrayals is of the subjects' seldom engaging eye-contact. The quintessential European interpretation of such images is of the 'other' as childlike or insolent, primitive and sometimes noble. But with indigenous African conventions of respect one does not engage another person, especially a social superior, through direct eye contact. Similarly while hairstyling was one of those fetishistic objects of inquiry that characterized European anthropological studies of African 'others', in indigenous African societies distinctive hairstyles were worn as definitive markers of social status³⁴. Ethnic, tribal and other community groupings are social constructions and identities that have served to both oppress and radicalize people (Loomba 1998: 122)³⁵. This ambiguity is evidenced in George Pemba's *Portrait of Mqhayi* (1938) which while it may be read as 'exotic' or noble, difference here is presented as positive and dignified and does not reinforce notions of European superiority. Mqhayi, a Xhosa

left by the artists which sought to express the social status of the subjects portrayed and how this status was evaluated through the years 1890 to 1950.

34. In addition, while images such as Bhengu's *Tsangoma* could be slotted into a paradigm of representation that defines the colonised subject for the colonizer — framed within colonial discourses in which 'magic' and 'sorcery', supposedly practiced by these persons, is cast as the arch-enemy of 'progress' — they can also be read as explorations of particular social relations within a Zulu-speaking community, through the representation of particular individuals who could be regarded as major power-brokers. The caption to the image of a female *Tsangoma* elucidates this: "The woman portrayed in this picture, apart from being an *Tsangoma* of some renown, is possessed of a remarkable sense of clairvoyance and is credited with the power to whistle the *imilazi*, or spirits, into her presence at will" (Savory qtd. Nettleton 1998: 86). Thus it can be argued that the image with the text, establishes the portrayal as a portrait that makes no appeal to notions of the 'primitive' or 'mysterious'. Mofokeng's text also serves to re-constitute the status and individuality of the sitters — but problematizes the possibility of doing this completely, by fictionalizing or imagining (in the sense of Brink's 'imagining's of history' as mentioned on p. 141) parts of the autobiographies.

35. Colonial regimes manipulated as well as created ethnic and racial identities — in South Africa, pre-colonial tribal groupings were transformed by white differentiation and the assignment of particular types of employment to different groups of people. The discourse of race has also been appropriated and inverted by anti-colonial and black resistance struggles, such as the Negritude and Black Power movements (Loomba 1998: 123). In *Long walk to freedom* Nelson Mandela describes how the hardest, most complex task for the ANC was to build solidarity across the racial and tribal divides that had been calcified and institutionalized by the apartheid state, divisions which some might argue are in the process of being recalcified and reinstitutionalized. For if, as Benjamin (qtd. Baudrillard 1990: 205) argues: "Fascism is made up of two things: fascism properly so-called and anti-fascism", then one can argue that there are two kinds of racism — racism properly so-called and anti-racism.

poet, poses in his ‘traditional’ costume and is rendered aloof but engaging with the viewer. Viewed from a low vantage point, the sitter is elevated, assuming a position superior to the viewer. Pemba here romanticizes his own tradition and background, participates in the construction of an African myth and takes on the white viewer’s gaze on apparently equal terms (Nettleton 1988: 86).

The supposedly impossible task of ‘washing black people white’ was rendered feasible by Christianity and education³⁶. In this context is a number of portraits of individuals of high standing in the black community, intended to underline their status and achievements in the new phase, to use Mofokeng’s term, of “mental colonialisation” — for in their very un-primitive appearance, they have become ‘almost white’. Thus portraits of black writers are presented as educated and esquiring individuals who have adopted Western conventions of dress and take the viewer on with their gaze, render ethnic othering impossible. But while the subject is not subjected, one can argue that it is not necessarily on his own terms. Similarly, Gerard Sekoto’s³⁷ *Young boy reading* (1940-42) presents a detached, impressionistic view of a black youth involved in an activity which itself challenges the notion of boy as ‘primitive’ and therefore ‘other’ than his white audience (Nettleton 1998: 88). But one can ask, did this not make the

36. In this context, Loomba (1998: 114) highlights the perception that if blackness could be washed white, whiteness could also be vulnerable to pollution. Thus terms such as Christians ‘going Turk’ or Europeans ‘going native’ abounded; in apartheid South Africa this is illustrated by the phrase ‘going kaffir’. This idea of pollution has been turned on its head in post-apartheid South Africa, but has nonetheless maintained such binary opposites — there are accusations of being ‘not black enough’, ‘coconut’ (black on the outside, white on the inside), as well as a recent television advert which asked the more nuanced question “What makes you black?... It’s your soul”.

37. Interestingly, Sekoto's interest in the Cape coloured people seems entrenched in a discourse of otherness (Nettleton 1998: 88). When he went to Cape Town in the 1940's, he executed anonymous portraits in a tempered expressionist style similar to that used by both Maggie Laubser and Irma Stern in their romanticized images of ‘Cape Malays’. Thus Sekoto's *Girl with an orange* (1940-43) is a nameless, curious subject of the artist’s gaze who is romanticized in an almost Gauguinesque exotic vision.

subject an ‘other’ to his ‘own’?³⁸ In Sekoto's *The proud father* (1947), a portrait of his brother-in-law and baby daughter, the intimacy of the gaze outweighs the generalizations implied by the identification of the sitters according to social relations.

During both colonialism and apartheid, white society was profoundly inimical to black photographers inverting social relationships by photographing whites, for the act of looking and photographing people was seen as the preserve of the white person (Gaulle 1997). This forged the ‘natural’ position of the white photographer, serving to reproduce and reinforce hegemonic values of white society. While keeping black people in the position of object of scrutiny, it simultaneously prevented the black person or ‘other’ from making examinations of whites. But the black photographer, like the black artist, was allowed to depict ‘his own’ — and this is essentially where Mofokeng's (qtd. Enwezor 1997: 30) interest lies:

These are images that urban black working and middle-class families in South Africa had commissioned, requested or tacitly sanctioned. They have been left behind by dead relatives, where they sometimes hang on obscure parlour walls in townships. In some families they are coveted as treasures, displacing totems in discursive narratives about identity, lineage and personality. And because, to some people, photographs contain the ‘shadow’ of the subject, they are carefully guarded from the ill-will of witches and enemies.... If the images are of unique, the individuals in them are... When we look at them, we believe them, for they tell us a little of how these people imagined themselves. We see these images in terms determined by the subjects themselves, for they have them as their own.

38. Photographs of whites ‘soliciting’ a black herbalist (1958) by Peter Magubane, show an area of interaction in which the knowledge and expertise of the black man is sought out by whites, reversing in a sense the structures of power and domination that characterized South African life. It is argued that similarities in clothing — both are in shirt sleeves and ties — also militate against differences that might impart an unequal distribution of power and that while the herbalist may be seen to possess power and knowledge, he has not been rendered as ‘other’ by Magubane (Gaulle 1997). But one can argue that the herbalist has simply assimilated to the conventions of what was deemed ‘normal’ by the dominant white society — seen specifically in his Western dress. During the 1990's, Magubane produced *Vanishing cultures* (1998), after which he was accused of ‘othering’ the very people he as a black person ‘belongs’ to. But these arguments forget the fact that Magubane, by giving voice and documenting this culture, cannot but betray their voice and ‘other’ such people so vastly different to his urbanized self — who at the same time seem to pull him dangerously close to a pre-colonial nostalgia.

Viviano (1998) asks if this is a “word-portrait of the next century... rediscovering the commonality of being human”. But in his statement, Mofokeng echoes ideas of liberal historians throughout the 20th century. During the 1920s and 1930s, the South African historians MacMillan and de Kiewiet (qtd. Loomba 1998: 201) argued that history should speak of the everyday lives of ordinary folk in order to support their argument that “contemporary forms of racism were rooted in a preindustrial world and imperialism was a benign force”. This is not simply a commitment to unraveling colonialism but, as has been done by Nettleton and Mofokeng, tracing “how colonised peoples have been drawn into capitalist society and have resisted their incorporation, leaving their mark on the form taken by the ‘big’ categories of class, race and state” (Loomba 1998: 201).

The Victorian images³⁹ of *Black photo album* are even more striking compared to portraits of contemporary ‘ordinary’ people by Zwelethu Mthetwa (figure 59). In these working class portraits the backdrops are not brocade cloths, but familiar squatter pastings — even though their pop iconography makes them seem grander than the circumstances suggest. It has been argued that “the lingering sense of uneasy dignity... comes through the gaze of the subjects” (Blignaut 1997), despite “the sociological repercussions of their decrepitude” (Enwezor qtd. Blignaut 1997). Both artists seem drawn to the strength witnessed by those living under pressure, as Mofokeng had been during apartheid. In Mthetwa, Mofokeng and Kentridge’s works, there is a careful framing of social circumstance that digs beneath the surface of the political events that shape lives. By emphasizing the historicity of the subjects, Mofokeng has painstakingly searched out the often elusive biographies of the sitters and their families — restoring their names in a

39. Cf. Yinka Shonibare’s works which focus on the Victorian era — he inserts himself into history as a Victorian Dandy, playing on society, the interpretation of historical events and of stereotyping culture (<www.camouflage.org.za/exhibitions/exhibiton.htm>).

memorializing impulse much like Kiefer's inscription in *Shulamith* (figure 8) and Boltanski's name plaques at the *The missing house* (figure 7), to form part of the larger task in what these images suggest for future usage (Enwezor 1997: 30).

Mofokeng evidences many of the characteristics of Derrida's 'archive fever'. One of which is his desire to be the first archivist to discover the archive, to be both the archon⁴⁰ and the archeologist, instituting the archive as it should be and not only establishing it, but reading, interpreting, classing and exhibiting it. As Derrida (1995: 67) writes, the interpretation of the archive can illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, only by opening and enriching it — producing more and more archive. Much like Boltanski's re-photographing, this performative repetition is another form of enactment. This repetitive compulsion, according to Freud, is indissociable from the death drive⁴¹. The archive always works against itself, it exposes itself to destruction and introduces forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the "heart of the monument" (Derrida 1995: 12). But as with the Benjaminian destruction against destruction evidenced in the burning in Kiefer's paintings, the erasure in Kentridge's drawings and in the archiviolithic impulse in Boltanski and Mofokeng's work, it is argued that there would be no archive fever without the threat of the death drive — it is the infinite threat that sweeps away simple factual limits and abuses the spatio-temporal conditions of conservation (Derrida 1995: 19). This repetition, in relation to memory and the archive, is not a repetition of the past but the irreducible experience of the future to come — as in Benjamin and Adorno's notion of the origin in the

40. As Derrida (1995: 48) points out the 'archons', as guardians of the archive and the law, are traditionally male — the patriarchs of the patriarchive. Female artists such as Penny Siopis in such works as *Zombie* (2000), have attempted to reveal the matriarchive as 'intimate archives' — a way of re-writing or exposing the Adornian *Brüche* which have been concealed or repressed in the patriarchive. Cf. earlier mention on *Zombie* in the context of Boltanski's work p. 111 n13.

41. Freud's diabolical death/aggression/destruction drive is a drive of loss. This archiviolithic force not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory but it also incites radical effacement or eradication of the

present. Thus if this archiviolithic force did not exist, Mofokeng would firstly not have begun his archive, and in time his archive would be closed, with the illusion of completeness/wholeness that Adorno speaks so vehemently against — instead of being hybrid, ghostly and open to change.

The secret is the very ash of the archive (Derrida 1995: 100).

In his archiving, Freud did everything possible not to neglect the experience of haunting, spectrality, phantoms, ghosts (Derrida 1995: 85). This is evidenced in Boltanski's 'photographic portraits' which recognise the Barthesian haunting of the photograph. Similarly, in relation to Mofokeng's archive, Enwezor (qtd. Becker 1998) states: "that in the South African context soliciting answers from the archive is akin to talking to ghosts in a space haunted by spectres of violence and human violation". Mofokeng attempts the work of mourning — to resurrect — and the archival injunction to commemorate — re-photographing the photographs as well as returning the 'names' and autobiographical information to the pictured people. As discussed, this re-inscription is similarly attempted by Kiefer in *Shulamith*, as well as the wall plaques of Boltanski's *The missing house*. In addition, much like the photographs with text that line the walls of the District Six Museum or the commemorative plaques of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the countless images create a melancholy sense of the incomprehensibility of the numbers of people that experienced loss during apartheid and colonialism. But, as with Boltanski's work, he exposes this attempt as failed and futile — the images, as slide projections, are fleeting and insubstantial while the text is partly fictional. Thus the viewer, not the object,

must carry the responsibility to remember this past⁴². In addition, no working-through or closure is allowed, instead the archive continues to grow, the images continue to be shown and the memories, through this repetition, not only stay ‘alive’ but become hybrid and active in the present.

iv. Landscape: The *Sad landscapes* series

How do we historicise the event of the dehistoricised? (Homi Bhabha qtd. Kellner 1997: 31).

Santu Mofokeng’s *Sad Landscapes* (figure 2), much like Boltanski’s *The missing house* (figure 7), Kiefer’s *Icarus — march sand* (figure 5) and Kentridge’s landscape in *Felix in exile* (figure 4), deal with sites of spectacular history where the terrain over time, echoing the operations of memory, has erased the traces, leaving the landscape as common place and banal — even when monuments, memorial and gravestones have been erected. The empty, banal landscapes become strange, alien, psychic inscapes. Mofokeng’s works deal with the appropriation of memories of loss, the desire to forget, erase and bury, as well as to mourn, memorialize and commemorate loss.

Sad landscapes was made over fifteen years, constituting an historical archive as well as personal journal (Garnett 2000b). The black and white series are of sites where 20th-century tragedies have occurred, from the Anglo-Boer War, World War II and the Vietnam War — mute images that are also seen in Kiefer’s work, of deserted crossroads, stretches of woods alternating with images of cemeteries and memorials. Beside each work, the sites are listed and described

42. Cf. conclusion to ‘narrative’ in the section on Kentridge p. 168.

with quotes or pieces of text which narrate central themes for the groups. One can see the influence of David Goldblatt, whose starkly empty images of nondescript places rely heavily on text for descriptions of the momentous events that took place there (Cameron 1999: 49). The photographs are all of similar sizes and formats, framed identically and hung in groups, except for one large-scale photograph presented on a light box (figure 57). As discussed, similar to Boltanski's display, the cold presentation works evocatively with the spectral light of the light box.

It is argued that photographing places of war and destruction is “a tired form” and “far from original” (Weinberg). That the imagery of an apocalyptic landscape that Mofokeng, Kentridge and Kiefer draw from, becomes typical — simplifying experience and neutralizing the viewer's response. Countering this, many South African artists have begun to register other kinds of experience of the landscape, not to refute the ‘reality’ of that apocalypse, but rather to stretch that ‘reality’ and bring to it a richness of texture (Van den Berg 1997: 8)⁴³. Thus while Mofokeng's landscapes are of the icons of universal war they comment on the spectacularization of images, how such spectacle divorces the active engagement of memory, as well as how memory slowly erases/represses such spectacle.

In his text *Nightfall of the spirit* (2000b), Mofokeng comments on how these sites have become

43. An artist that depicted such apocalyptic landscapes during the apartheid years was Penny Siopis. She (1997: 85) writes that the catastrophic nature of South African history could only be dealt with through allegory, such as in *Piling wreckage upon wreckage* (1989). Referencing Walter Benjamin's *Angel of history* p.35, the baroque-style staged representation depicts a pile that extends to infinity. On top of, or behind the wreckage, stands a black girl who, as the angel of history, is presented in traditional European ‘Liberty leading the People’ imagery but is belittled by the vast expanse of cultural debris. This as well as the cloth she holds uncertainly and the reference to Benjamin, suggests a feeling of hopelessness and anxiety for the future of the country in the face of its past. As Siopis herself writes of the cloth, which by implication comments on the painting itself: “Is it a cover-up or an unveiling of history? Does it bear witness?”. But Siopis argues that even with recent South African history, although “miraculously changed”, only allegory may be appropriate to deal with or commemorate the past.

perversely appropriated for tourism, or simply forgotten — emphasizing how the *experience* of loss incurred there is sadly, frighteningly lacking⁴⁴. The only sparks of hope come from Drancy (a transit holding camp one train stop from Auschwitz) and Lodz, where some Jewish groupings and individuals work “to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive”. While Mofokeng’s photographs of these landscapes play on the banality of the images, the activation of these images by the accompanying text suggest a similar working to keep these memories alive — and the failure of these attempts.

Mofokeng (2000b) also writes that, ironically, “neo-Nazis keep the memory of the Holocaust alive when they try to raze the remaining death-camps in Germany in order to erase the Holocaust from memory”. As seen in Kiefer’s burning of the landscape in *Margarete* (figure 3), this echoes the processes of erosion and regrowth of the terrain which mirror the operations of memory. In this context, Mofokeng (2000b) writes: “Somebody once remarked that nature is indifferent to human suffering. Can we not learn anything from nature?” This seemingly strange question, as well as the banality of the pictured terrain, points to Hannah Arendt’s concept of ‘the banality of evil’ — that the senseless horrors of the 20th century’s catastrophes were committed by ‘ordinary’ people and therefore such actions are as possible in the present as they were in the past. In the manner of Adorno and Horkheimer, it also suggests, chillingly and perhaps bitterly, that the desire to forget, to bury, to be indifferent to the past so as to move on in the present, is a part of human ‘nature’.

44. In fact, Mofokeng mentions the word ‘experience’ often in the text — “You don’t get any information about the Vietnamese experience in that war. The Jewish experience in France... is little known” (Mofokeng 2000a). While some may argue that all Africans may share the common experience of loss, Mofokeng extends this experience to all of humanity. He describes how in the catacombs in Paris, the bones of the dead are aesthetically re-arranged and designed in order to attract tourists; that one can go on a “Schindler’s List tour” of the concentration camps of the Holocaust; how in Vietnam memory-tourists “do the DMZ tour to the sound of late sixties and early seventies American pop hits” while listening to the government’s anti-American propaganda.

Similarly, South African artist Clive van den Berg is interested in battle sites that have since become empty of all records or traces (figure 58). He (1998: 123) writes that what draws him to these spaces has “something to do with the emptiness of the space, its simultaneous lack of inscription and over inscription, its burdens of history and abandonment.. a kind of forlornness that came with a promise”. As discussed, William Kentridge (qtd. Perryer 1994) translated his concern with “the speed at which things disappear” in the landscape and in people’s memories, with *Felix in exile* (figure 4). Unlike Mofokeng and Kiefer who leave the landscape unpopulated, Kentridge found a vehicle for themes of loss, disappearance and forgetting in an ‘unexpected connection’ between figures and landscapes (Perryer 1994). Perhaps Mofokeng, feeling the burdens of historical belatedness even more with these historical events he has no direct experience of and cannot access, shows the landscape as it is in the present so as to leave the viewer to try to re-constitute the experience of such events in their memories.

In “search of answers to some of these questions”, Mofokeng (2000b) undertook a journey through South Africa, Europe and Asia. These photographs show neglected, desecrated or chillingly absent gravestones — which traditionally commemorate the loss of the dead as small monuments to each individual. But as has been discussed, it is arguable as to whether monuments “invite remembrance or through a kind of containment, forgetting?”(Mofokeng 2000b). In addition, monuments are often erected and utilized, on the backs of the memories of loss and suffering, for political expediency, as Kentridge suggests with *Monument* (figure 30). The legacy of splicing of collective accounts of suffering onto dangerous ethnic nationalisms, forces one to question how these traumatic events can be remembered while still resisting the totalizing tendencies of nationalist rhetoric⁴⁵. Some of the works show sites where people were

45. Mofokeng (2000b) points out that the Jewish experience is lacking at French memorial sites dedicated to WWII

buried en mass but where the dead have remain unnamed and the graves unmarked. In a sense, these photographs reflect on the exhuming of bodies for the TRC hearings, where sites of torture, death and burial were identified but showed no ostensible signs of what had occurred. In this context, van den Berg (1998: 122) writes: “No matter what we know, no matter what we hear at the TRC or find in the archives, there are always questions unasked and unanswered, things not told, motivations unspoken, places unrecorded, graves unmarked or unmarkable”⁴⁶. By photographing these sites, Mofokeng attempts to commemorate these deaths — much like Kiefer’s inscriptions (figures 8 & 11) and Boltanski’s name plaques in the *The missing house* (figure 7), this creates ‘a place’ and ‘a name’ (*Yad Vashem*) for those lost.

As questions of space and identity are specifically acute to post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa, territories and boundaries are once again the site of negation, along with renewed questions of personal and collective identity (Delmont & Dubow 1997: 10). The texts that form part of *Sad landscapes* question the nature of landscape and of land itself as constructs of empirical and cultural knowledge. Imperial scenes of the empty landscape imply an assumption of authority, a visual ideology, a documentary power. The empty landscape in this sense plays

because of the selective amnesia of a government choosing to extol the virtues of the French Resistance Movement. Pointing indirectly to the current appropriation of memories of suffering to build the South African nation, particularly evidenced with the TRC, he comments on Afrikaner nationalistic rhetoric after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 that not only used the suffering of their women and children, but excluded the fact that many black people also suffered in labour camps in that war. Thus he (2000b) asks: “Was it the Anglo-Boer War or the South African War?” In this context, it is argued that the appropriation by so called ‘coloured’ nationalists of the San genocide and suffering to produce narratives of national redemption and destiny is in a sense no different to Afrikaner nationalist appropriations of the suffering of Afrikaner women and children in British concentration camps during the South African War or Zionist appropriations of Holocaust public memory (Robins 1999: 136).

46. Both the intangibility of such horrifying events as well as such unmemorialized deaths form part of the legacy of the Benjaminian ‘wreckages’ of the twentieth century. As is evidenced by the many lists still found at Holocaust concentration camps to help the living find the dead, as well as the pleas of the TRC families for information from the perpetrators, there is a need to know where a loved one has been killed and buried and the fate of the body. For, as Mofokeng (2000a) writes, at the centre of the relationship with the land lies “the desire to create community, to derive strength in order to negotiate and withstand the vicissitudes, absurdities of life and the desire for the beautiful funeral, a decent burial and a peaceful rest — the promised land”.

out the trope of European pre-eminence: the colony as *tabula rasa*, a virgin space waiting and willing to admit fantasies of domination (Delmont & Dubow 1997: 12). It is empty precisely because to extract indigenous communities out of history is to absent them from representation.

But whilst the colonial landscape is implicated in the logic and vision of European expansion, Delmont & Dubow (1997: 11) argue that this kind of interpretation settles too cleanly into a reconciled polemic, reading everything as signposts of power and reducing the complexities of representation to a direct set of ideological strategies that bypasses the nuance of ambiguity. For one can argue that colonization, as the experience of the 'new', the unfamiliar, involves a struggle with a space not yet made over for a transported identity. This contested terrain refers not only to ownership disputes but also the process of translating alien territory into a space for the self. For the frontier is a precarious allegorical and psychic space. It acts as a Benjaminian threshold, where the experience of being and becoming, of thinking oneself through a space, is imbued with anxiety and uncertainty (Delmont & Dubow 1997: 12).

The empty landscape registers failure as much as the imaginary mastery of space. Because of its lack of a certain cognitive value and psychic appeal, it appears in the coloniser's eye as a landscape emptier than it actually is. Thus works such as Thomas Baines' *Shooting Wildebeest near Brabdt Spuit* (1848) depicts a barren, desolate, unyielding South African landscape that offers no possibility of identification. Images of settlement, though, employ a different vantage point from that of the boundless landscape. In Thomas Bowers' *Fort Beaufort* (1849) the objective place is made a site of subjective emplacement, a scene capable of picturesque description. For as David Punter (qtd. Delmont & Dubow 1997: 13) suggests, the Picturesque "represents the movement of enclosure [and] control, the ego's certainty about the world it can

hold and manage”. For to control involves as much taking over as it does remaking. This ‘making over’ is very much the approach of Afrikaner nationalist landscapes. Here the land is presented as a geopolitical site, exclusively defined and restricted, for the invention and imaging of ‘blood and soil’ mythology. In contrast to colonial images, Pierneef’s *Golden Gate* (1951) is not about the subject in alien surrounds but is rather about the staging of a spectacle of entitlement which was fatefully ordained⁴⁷. This empty landscape, inherently meaningful, is already and always prepared for settlement. Emptiness here is the very legitimization of occupation, echoing a silence born of awe and reverence (Delmont & Dubow 1997: 15).

Mofokeng does not rival or invert these depictions by reverting back to mythological or nostalgic images of pre-colonial Africa⁴⁸. Instead his empty landscapes, functioning metaphorically and psychically, are imbued with a sense of estrangement, alienation, the sublime uncanny⁴⁹. In a similar manner, Jo Ratcliffe’s *Diana* (1999), even without the apocalyptic shadow of her previous work, suggests the alien quality of the banal landscape (Atkinson 1999). As with Kentridge’s landscapes, the sense of estrangement from the land Mofokeng pictures is not solely due to the experience of the city-dweller in a post-colonial context but rather to those parts of

47. In Roger van Wyk’s *South Africa landscape tradition* (1991), paintings by Pierneef are reproduced over found objects such as landmines. As Van Wyk (1997: 92) writes; “the subliminal three-dimensional shapes of the explosive devices beneath the paintings talk of the violent revolutionary opposition to the apparently ordered (and divinely sanctioned) colonial landscape”.

48. Many post-colonial critics caution against the idea that pre-colonial cultures are something that can be easily recovered, warning that “a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism” (Spivak qtd. Loomba 1998: 17). While such caution is necessary, it is argued that it can also lead to a reverse simplification, whereby the ‘Third World’ becomes defined entirely by its relation to colonialism — causing its histories to be flattened and making colonialism the defining feature, instead of a significant part in long, complex histories (Loomba 1998: 18-19). Cf. the German historians’ debate on this issue of the uniqueness of certain historical occurrences pp. 62-63.

49. Derrida (1995: 46) notes that whenever the word *unheimlich* appears in Freud’s text one can locate an uncomfortable undecidability. This ties in to the sense of the uncanny in both Boltanski’s spaces and portraits and Mofokeng’s *Sad landscapes* and suggests both their undecidability and indeterminacy which are perhaps more outwardly evident in Kiefer’s and Kentridge’s process of fature, as well as their quotation of different art styles.

oneself that one is a stranger to, that because of trauma one has split apart or walled in — identity rooted in disjuncture (Delmont & Dubow 1997: 13). For consciousness and experience are not only bound by historical events, but are actively produced by the spaces in which one thinks, the spaces through which one moves, the shifting network of sites, boundaries and partitions which mark the social environment (Delmont & Dubow 1997: 10).

While lived experiences may act as markers or Benjaminian ‘sparks’ with which to rephrase and fracture the homogeneity of the grand narratives of history, allowing for newer, less familiar narratives of revisionist histories in the present, and as much as he may stress such ‘experience’ in his text, Mofokeng’s landscapes remain empty and ungraspable. He does not use, as Kentridge does, bodies as vehicles of the experience of loss. Instead the picturing of his landscapes are born of the muteness of the immemorial and the incommunicability and incomprehensibility of loss. This work enacts the stance that constitutes not a reconciliation but a dialectical intertwining of a Hebraic ethics of unrepresentability and a Hebraic ethics of bearing witness. For these are not landscapes that are depicted as empty because they are ‘new’ to the colonizer’s eye. These are layered sites of death, carnage, pain and loss — where only traces, erased, discovered or imagined, can provide a space for commemoration. Like Walter Benjamin’s notion of weak messianic power⁵⁰, these traces provide a weak firmament for the injunction of memory to warn for the future to come.

Mofokeng well knows that in the absence of tangible relics so much is invested in one’s gaze on

50. In this context, even J. M. Coetzee’s (qtd. Jamal 1996: 14) lines seem too hopeful: “Let me tell you, when I walk upon this land, this South Africa, I have a gathering feeling of walking upon black faces. They are dead but their spirit has not left them. They lie there heavy and obdurate, waiting for my feet to pass, waiting for me to go, waiting to be raised up again.”

the land. Thus in his works, the act of looking, finding or imagining becomes a stimulant⁵¹ to activate the viewer's memory in the present. The viewer is compelled to submit to images and text which in their failure to grasp or commemorate loss, act as sites for projection. For Mofokeng does not create visible counter-monuments. Rather, furthering such works as *The missing house* (figure 7), the physicality of present absence is further complicated in his works. Learning from the landscape, he uses it as it is — a warning to the very 'realness' and probability of amnesia, of the indifference or lack of desire to take responsibility or to commemorate the dead. But since land absorbs history, one can argue that this horror and loss is imbued throughout it, however intangible (van den Berg 1998: 122) — in a similar vein to the Kabbalist notion of good and evil being loosed on the earth after the 'breaking of the vessels'⁵². For his landscapes are not entirely empty, neither totally bland nor totally focussed on the void, neither what is seen nor what is omitted — but rather existing somewhere in the threshold between these, Mofokeng attempts to suggest what cannot be represented. Thus within his works, is a fragile sense of spectralness which attempts, in the Lyotardian sense, to commemorate the immemorial. Constructing from the traces in these intangible landscapes and hesitant, uncertain narratives, the ethical viewer is compelled to add and embed their own layers to the invisible palimpsest of histories that mark these landscapes — bringing memories from the past actively and critically into the present.

51. Cf. Boltanski's quote on his art as stimulation p. 122.

52. In this context, Clive van den Berg's (1998: 123) intentions in *Memorials without facts* (figure 58) relate intricately: "It was precisely there, walking amongst the whitewashed, fading down cairns, along the tops of shallow mounds that demarcated a trench, mass grave, or both — there, beside, between and on the tokens meant to memorialise the verities of state and family that I felt the presence of their opposite, the suppressed and tabooed. It was there that I sensed that there was another way, and it was thrilling, this smell of the opposite. In the presence of all these boundaries, the lines of territory, strictures imposed on the body, limits of desire... it was there that I felt their inverse."

Conclusion

Melancholia in the context of commemoration in the works of Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski, William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng

It is certain that the cloak of silence in which, for political reasons, Nazism was enshrouded after 1945 has made it impossible, to ask what will come of it in the minds, the hearts, the bodies of the Germans. Something had to come of it, and one wondered with some trepidation in what shape the repressed past would emerge at the other side of the tunnel: as what myth, what history, what wound? (Foucault qtd. Saltzman 1999: 75)

In postwar Germany, the ‘economic miracle’ served as a pretext for evasion of the past, where it is at times unclear whether the object of the melancholy accompanying the manic economic activity, was the victims of the Holocaust or the lost glories of the *Hitlerzeit*, as the Mitscherlich’s 1967 study *The inability to mourn* contends (LaCapra 1998: 10). In the context of South Africa, Nelson Mandela (qtd. Richards 1998: 74) states:

Through the destructive and violent legacy of apartheid, where the sanctity of life has no meaning, we have inherited the culture of death and destruction, principle weapons used to keep it in power. Dispossession and displacement, grief and anger have become the accepted hallmarks of our existence.

In the ‘new’ South Africa, enthusiasm at having supposedly attained the ‘land of milk and honey’, the ‘Rainbow Nation’, has also served as a pretext for not only evading the complexities of the past but has also opened up the possibility of the re-writing of history by the ‘victors’. But as Freud argues, that which is denied or repressed in a lapse of memory does not disappear — it

returns in a transformed, at times disfigured and disguised manner¹. The issue in face of traumatic history is whether art such as that of Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski, William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng, can perform the work of mourning or should it remain melancholic in the sense of a Benjaminian petrified object or a Derridean allegorical fragment whose meaning and resolution is delayed or deferred in an endless chain of signification.

As evidenced in both German and South African politics, memory can become politically divisionary and sometimes self-indulgent. Critique serves as a reminder that another kind of memory is more desirable, memory requiring the kind of archeological excavation that Benjamin and Adorno found hope in and that Freud related to ‘working-through’ the past. Memory in this sense exists not only in the past but as Benjamin and Adorno argue, in the present and future tenses and relates an acknowledgment and immanent critique to deal with the past that is not total. ‘Critically tested memory’ appears as the necessary starting point for all allegorical activity, even though it is continually threatened by lapses, holes, and distortions (Adornian *Brüche*). With historical ‘catastrophes’ the challenge is not to dwell obsessively on trauma as an unclaimed experience that occasions the paradoxical ‘witnessing of the breakdown of witnessing’ but rather to analytically question the relation between memory and reconstruction - that keeps one sensitive to the problematics of trauma (LaCapra 1998: 182-184).

For Freud, melancholia is a state in which one, possessed by the phantasmically invested past,

1. Repression occurs in the quest for self-knowledge, when a barrier of the self-imposed injunction not to see causes the “blindness of the seeing eye” (Rudnytsky 1987: 21). Adorno argues that the German case was the result of a wide-awake consciousness” that knew all too well what it chose to repress — as Kentridge suggests in the South African context pp. 182-186. The memory lapses of trauma are conjoined with the tendency compulsively to repeat, relive, be possessed by, or act out traumatic scenes of the past, whether in more or less controlled artistic procedures or in uncontrolled existential experiences of hallucination, dream, and re-traumatizing breakdown triggered by incidents that more or less obliquely recall the past (LaCapra 1998: 10). For Freud’s uncanny is the return of the repressed.

compulsively and narcissistically identifies with a lost object of love² — such as the German in Celan's *Todesfugue* or Soho's relation to his lost wife in Kentridge's films. It is an isolating experience allowing for speculation that walls in the self. But melancholia is necessary to register loss, including its lasting 'wounds', and it is also a prerequisite for or a component of mourning. Clinical melancholia is ambivalent though — it is a precondition to mourning which may also block processes of mourning if it becomes excessive or fixates on the lost object. But it may also allow for insights that bear witness to crisis-ridden or even traumatic conditions and have broader critical potential (LaCapra 1998: 183-184), as Walter Benjamin's melancholic investigations into the past testify.

The work of mourning can be defined as the structures of human subjectivity that desire closure or resolution: to heal, to make amends, to commemorate, to pay respects, to lay to rest (Rogoff 1995: 129). The work of mourning begins when it counteracts the melancholic-manic cycle and allows for the recognition of the other as other, enabling a dissolution of the narcissistic identification that is prominent in melancholy. In mourning, one recognizes loss as loss yet in time is able to take partial leave of it. But the Freudian conception of mourning, much like melancholia, is a continual process of remembering and repeating. For repression is a 'differed action': it neither repels, forgets nor excludes external forces but it contains an interior representation (Derrida 1978: 196). Thus the possibility of triumphantly completing the work of mourning — of *Vergangengheitsbewältigung* (the post-war German term for 'mastering the past') or 'reconciliation' in terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission — is a resolution

2. In his classic 1917 study, *Mourning and melancholia*, Freud (qtd. Rogoff 1995: 136) writes: "The loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition — it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis".

that remains unattainable or in a state of perpetual deferral, as the artworks of Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng testify.

Melancholia can be seen as a form of ‘acting-out’ and mourning as a component of ‘working-through’ problems. In his study, LaCapra (1994: 193) suggests another sense of ‘working-through’ which combines criticism and self-criticism in an attempt to resist redemptive totalisation. This sense of theory may be related to what Derrida calls ‘generalised displacement’, which must accompany the reversal of hierarchically arranged binary opposites if one is to remain entirely within the frame of reference — as seen in Kiefer’s identification with *Shulamith/Margarete*, Boltanski’s identification with both victim and victimiser in his photo albums and Kentridge’s characters which are neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’. In this sense, the irreducibility of loss or the role of paradox and aporia is not denied — but instead of becoming compulsively fixated on or symptomatically reinforcing impasses, a process of mourning is engaged that attempts, however self-questioningly and haltingly, to specify, its haunting objects and (even if only metaphorically) to give them a ‘proper’ burial³.

In Kiefer's paintings, Boltanski and Mofokeng’s ‘photographic portraits’ and Kentridge’s films, history and its deferred or belated aesthetic confrontation and articulation are shown to be deeply painful social and cultural processes. In their engagement with history, myth and identity, these artists’ works are fundamentally melancholic in their thematics, moods and allegorical operations. Indeed, allegory is a ‘melancholic science’ for Benjamin⁴, a vision of the world which experiences the pain of history, transience and death because it requires the progression of

3. Cf. this issue of burial and memorializing in Mofokeng’s *Sad landscapes* p. 224.

4. Benjamin (qtd. Buck-Morss 1997: 56) contends that the seventeenth-century allegorists had "a notion of nature as

thought through time, thus a temporal delay (Handelman 1991: 126). Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng deal with the Derridean doubleness of the meaning of trauma, or ‘wound’⁵, which originally was seen as an injury of the body and only later, in Freud, understood as a wounding of the psyche (Saltzman 1999: 83-84). But whereas the physical wound heals leaving a trace, the psychic wound may never heal. Specifically in the process of facture in Kiefer and Kentridge’s work, the surfaces bear the trace of a physical wounding whilst the references of post-Holocaust Europe and post-apartheid South Africa situate them in a psychic sphere as well — concretised as an always open wound or Lurianic ‘broken vessel’.

But these artists enact less the paralytic state of the Freudian melancholic than the active creative achievements of the humanist artist-genius (Saltzman 1999: 76). As articulated by Freud, the psychoanalytic concept constructs melancholia as a crippling state of blocked mourning. In Kiefer’s early works such as *Occupations* (figure 1) as well as Kentridge’s identification with Soho modelled after his paternal grandfather, the impossibility of continued paternal identification is ironically articulated as a loss which impoverishes the artists’ own ego and identity (as son, artist and German/white South African)⁶. Here what is belatedly carried out can be seen as the work of mourning but not beyond the narrow confines of their own impoverished sense of identity. The mourner thus becomes the melancholic — consuming the possibility for a

eternal passing in which alone the saturnine gaze of that generation recognized history”.

5. In this the artists are linked to Joseph Beuys, who was also interested in the wound as the physical manifestation of trauma. In works such as *Coyote* (also titled *I like America, America likes me*), Beuys’s was a performance that referenced America’s own repressed history of trauma and guilt (involving American-Indians) rather than Germany’s or his own. Saltzman (1999:84-85) argues that if the emphatically imperative *Show your wound* suggests a call for an end to repression, to lay bare and acknowledge the visible signs of one’s traumatic past, it signals more directly an invitation to *self*-memorialization — an invitation to take up an emphatically melancholic subject position.

6. Cf. Freud’s ‘Oedipus complex’ which is about the ambivalence inherent in the son’s feelings towards the father — the existence of conscious love and reverence, with unconscious hate and the desire for the father’s death (Rudnytsky 1987: 22). This results in guilt and melancholy when the father dies.

positive or future identity by the repetitive operations of an artist unable or unwilling to ‘work-through’ repressed history and memory⁷.

But in their works these artists seem to enact a conception of melancholia that transcends, if not negates, its twentieth century psychoanalytic inscriptions and embodies instead that privileged state within a humanist conception of the artist, the state which is the condition for creativity and genius. This concept of the melancholic allows for a more complicated, if not conflicted, semiotics of mourning, melancholy and trauma. As is written of Kiefer’s work:

Kiefer’s painting— in its forms, its materials, and its subject matter — is emphatically about memory, not about forgetting, and if flight is one of its organizing pictorial metaphors, it is not the flight of the Phoenix, but the doomed flight of Icarus and the melancholy flight of the mutilated and murderously vengeful Wayland, the master smith of the classic book of Norse myth, the Edda. Kiefer’s wings, after all are made of lead (Huysen 1998: 26)

Perhaps the quintessential melancholic, Walter Benjamin (qtd. Sontag 1996: 111) rejected modern psychological labels and invoked astrological ones: “I came into the world under the sign of Saturn — the star of slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays”. For Benjamin, mental acts of trying to gain access to the ‘forbidden’ or the repressed are similar to the physical act of entering a labyrinth — the past is seen as spaces to be mapped which are surveyed from the ‘distant’ time of memory. Similarly, Mofokeng’s texts are described as “exquisite accounts or journeys through an internal labyrinth” (Friedman 1997). The melancholic evokes feelings and behaviour for intimations of future passions and failures contained in them

7. Such approaches also relate to the melancholic as often ironic and self-aware, which comes from his asocial solitude and inwardness (Sontag 1996: 133) — the ‘proverbial outsider’ as Mofokeng is called (Friedman 1997). For the melancholic, as Boltanski and Mofokeng investigate in their work on family photo-albums, the natural in the form of familial or national ties, introduces the falsely subjective or the sentimental, which is often seen as a drain on one’s freedom (Sontag 1996: 128).

— thus Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng evoke the events for the reaction to the event; evoke places for the emotions one has deposited in those places; evoke other people to encounter themselves (Sontag 1996: 113-115)⁸.

Integral to the Saturnian temperament is ‘faithlessness’ in man, which Benjamin believes to correspond to a deeper faith in material emblems (Sontag 1996: 126), as evidenced in Soho’s interaction with a stone in Kentridge’s *WEIGHING... AND WANTING* (figure 43). Thus the melancholic has the pathological tendency to project his inner torpor outward — such as Benjamin’s (qtd. Sontag 1996: 120) view and these artists’ invocations of ideas and experiences as ruins: “Allegories are, in the realm of thought, what ruins are in the realm of things”. The ruin⁹, lifeless and empty of meaning, is the quintessential allegorical object that can be seen to become enlivened under the gaze of melancholy — as one sees in Kiefer’s *Shulamith* (figure 8), Boltanski’s *The missing house* (figure 7), Kentridge’s landscapes with ruins of mining detritus (figure 24) and Mofokeng’s ruined tombstones in *Sad landscapes*. This is an archeological process whereby other objects may be seen or read and perhaps in the end history may be witnessed and confronted — if only through the Lyotardian and Derridean acknowledgment of its ultimate inaccessibility (Saltzman 1999: 87)¹⁰. Ruins and fragments are collected so that one can learn from these quotations and excerpts. Thus Kiefer appropriates art styles and myth,

8. Cf. Kiefer’s confrontation with his Germanness pp. 73-74 and Kentridge with his white South Africanness pp. 152-153; 157.

9. Scholem (qtd. Rabinbach 1989: xiii) writes that messianism is always nourished by its dark vision of the absolute negativity of the existing order of things, it is “not directed to what history will bring forth, but that which will arise in its ruins”.

10. The melancholic figure yearns for but never quite achieves the heights of his ambition. Thus a mark of his temperament is the self-conscious and unforgiving relation to self. The self becomes a text to be deciphered, or a project that has to be built — which Sontag (1996: 117) suggests is an apt temperament for artists or martyrs who court the “purity and beauty of failure” as Benjamin said of Kafka. Aby Warburg (qtd. Gombrich 1986: 258) believed the artist or historian to be most sensitive to the unseen influence of the past, as: “The ability to feel the limits of his own mission, perhaps even too poignantly, but at any rate not to transcend them since his mental poise

Kentridge utilizes outdated cinematic techniques and Boltanski and Mofokeng collect and re-collect in their archival works. For Benjamin, one can only understand history because it is fetishized in the physical object, for to understand something it is conserved into its typography. The traces and sedimentations in their works function, as Benjamin (qtd. Saltzman 1999: 88) writes of the *Trauerspiel* ('the *mourning play*'), as "the transposition of the originally temporal data into a figurative spatial form".

Thus in the quest for concentrated states, the melancholic may cultivate phantasmagorical states such as dream. Kiefer, Kentridge and Mofokeng's landscapes embody the allegorical conception of "history as a petrified, primordial landscape" (Benjamin qtd. Saltzman 1999: 88). Kiefer's architecture in *Shulamith* (figure 8) as well as Boltanski's installation spaces (figures 26 & 28) and *The missing house* (figure 7), not unlike the surrealist city, are metaphysical spaces in whose dreamlike spaces people have a "brief, shadowy experience" (Benjamin qtd. Sontag 1996: 116). These works lead into the architectural spaces of the tainted past, the recesses of collective memory. In Kiefer's metaphorical movement into the depths of the German psyche, in his progression from the rendering of wooden attic spaces, to the rendering of insistently dark, sombre, windowless, monumental chambers of *Shulamith*, he moves into the historically specific architecture of Nazism. Boltanski's installation in a dungeon in Germany, transforms the space of the 'keepers of the prison' into a cathedral or shrine. In these works, the artist as the authorial subject is consumed by a deferred confrontation with history and its legacy — reduced to the inward looking gaze of melancholia. As Andreas Huyssen (1998: 38-39) asks, how else but through obsessive quotation could Kiefer conjure up the lure of what once enthralled Germany ('fascinating fascism') and has not been acknowledged, let alone properly worked through?

restrains him".

Perhaps these artists — Kiefer through ‘fascinating fascism’, Kentridge through the splitting of his subjects (figure 34) and his process of erasure, Boltanski and Mofokeng through re-objectifying their ‘photographic portraits’ (figures 17 & 25) — can only confront the blockages in the contemporary psyche of their ‘present’ through aesthetic melancholy and nightmarish evocations.

Although Kiefer invokes Benjamin in his titles, presenting himself and his work as ‘the angel of history’, Saltzman (1999: 88) argues that his may not ultimately be the historical repetition or reincarnation of the angelic Klee figure who inspires Benjamin's theses of history¹¹. For although these artists’ works has been received as ‘archeological’, excavating layers of history and revealing its ‘buried’ secrets, in the end, their work, aesthetically and thematically, enacts the archeological process in reverse — by layering, sedimentation and repeated covering (Saltzman 1999: 90). In this way, one can argue that fragmentation and allegorical procedure of these artists’ works anticipate (make themselves complicit) in the forgetting that they are meant to counteract (Huyssen 1992: 90). For the densely layered surfaces of Kiefer's landscapes (figures 3, 5 & 14), architectural interiors (figure 8 & 11) and their inscriptions (figure 8 & 11) as well as the lighting in Boltanski’s *Monuments* (figure 28), *Shadows* (figure 23) and *Candles* (figure 27) works and Mofokeng’s slides in *Black photo album etc* (figure 29) and a lightbox in *Where does*

11. Kiefer’s *Mohn und Gedachtnis* 1989 (‘Poppy and memory’) (figure 60) can be seen as an emblem of time and forgetting and the impossible desire to fly with the burden of knowledge. In the work, the airplane’s wings are weighted down with oversize lead books. From the pages dried poppy flowers fall in the direction of flight, suggesting that the future has already been forgotten (Huyssen 1992: 94). The rumpled and bumpy lead surfaces of the plane display a supernatural white shine, as if the material were in the alchemic process of turning into silver. Exhibited in a show entitled *The angel of history*, it places the artist in reference to Benjamin's angel, who looks backward at the ever-growing ruins of the past as he is helplessly propelled into the future by a storm from paradise caught in his wings. Here the trajectory from the banal materiality of the lead object to the spirituality of a montage of allusions is rendered visual, maintaining the tension between the massive gravity of history and the spirituality of Benjamin's allegory or Celan's poetic language. Whilst Kiefer’s aeroplane refers to alchemic transformation, it is also a metaphoric literalization “if not [of] the psychic state of melancholia, then the constricted and repressed social state of melancholia” (Schoeman 2001).

the road lead etc (figure 57) suggest a degree of burial, not only of exhuming but of entombing.

This reminds or warns that:

You have to spike the self incessantly, you have to probe and to prod the numbness, you must pickle the heart, you have to resist, you have to fight the levelling or the burying and the forgetting brought about by commonplaces (Breytenbach qtd Ollman 1999).

One must, to quote Walter Benjamin, ‘rub against the grain’ of history and forces which encourage closure, forgetting or naturalisation, so as to be constantly aware of the dangers that may re-manifest themselves in the present. This dialectical impulse of uncovering and covering, remembering and forgetting, renders these artists’ aesthetic and thematic enactments more complex than those of the posited archeologist or allegorist and may suggest a dialectical wedding of the two (Saltzman 1999: 91)¹².

Thus, in relation to everything beautiful, the idea of unveiling turns into that of the impossibility of being unveiled. This is the ideal of the critique of art (Benjamin qtd. Menninghaus 1993: 171).

In this context, a paradigm of these artists’ enactment of melancholic artistic subjectivity may be found in Julia Kristeva’s *Black sun*¹³: *depression and melancholia*. Her conception of

12. This is evidenced, for example, by distinguishing Kiefer’s *Melancholia* (1988) (figure 61) from Albrecht Dürer’s *Melancholia I* (1514) (figure 71), the work which epitomizes the melancholic artist-genius. In Dürer’s work, the rays of the sun, of reason rise above the polyhedron, bathing it in a glow of Enlightened illumination. Even within this though, one should note that the outstretched wings of the bat contradicts the sun (Schoeman 2001). Kiefer’s polyhedron is pictorially overwhelmed by an immense looming cloud of fire — the fires of history and post-Enlightenment doubt and skepticism that threaten to consume the polyhedron and its attendant humanist subjectivity. The fire signals not only a melancholic subjectivity but an aesthetic practice that is at essence deeply melancholic — while Kiefer creates images of fire (the painterly flames that emanate from Nero’s palette or from the tips of Margarete’s straw-based hair), he also creates images with fire. The exteriority of his early performances give way to the interiority, the inwardness, of symbolic embodiment when he started burning and charring his surfaces, as in *The cauterisation of the rural district of Buchen* (figure 15). It is particularly in Kiefer’s use of lead, the base material of alchemical transformation that is also the attribute of Saturn, that his historical dilemma becomes evident. For the leaden elements in his work appear only after they have been subjected to the extreme heat of a fire. Thus, lead as conceived in the postwar present, takes on the metaphorical capacity to describe not only the psychic state of melancholia, but its constricted and repressed social state (Saltzman 1999: 82).

13. The notion of the ‘black sun’ has many associations. Edmond Burke speaks of a light which by its very excess is

melancholia situates the psychoanalytic concept within a broader humanist tradition (Saltzman 1999: 93-94). For Kristeva, melancholia is not simply an act of denial nor an inability or unwillingness to acknowledge or process loss, but following Lacan's argument that trauma is the missed encounter with the real, it is a detachment from the symbolic, the field of representation, an act of denial — but this time a denial not just of loss but of representation itself. For whereas Derridian difference insists on the signifiers' multiple meanings in all their affirmation, Kristeva perceives the sorrow or melancholia that a destabilized meaning can bestow and expresses sympathy for the subject adrift in the vast expanse of conventional, hollowed-out meanings (Caputi 2000). The arbitrary signifier delivers a crushing blow for the subject now in search of a lost union. Kristeva's melancholic is one who perpetually tries to come to terms with the loss of that thing, the Lacanian real, which perpetually defies the possibility of signification. But these artists' idea of the nature of loss, as the traumatic loss, is that unsymbolizable wound inscribed within post-Holocaust/post-apartheid subjectivity — another order to Kristeva's loss of the mother. That loss is the unassimilable trauma that is the catastrophic Benjaminian history of the twentieth century.

“Our wounds are desperately open eyes,” wrote Reb Manora, “They pierce our roads” (Jabes 1977: 90)

In these artists's work, the problem of painting's continued existence in the aftermath of its presumed death is situated firmly in the particularity of its historical present. For there, the question of the death of painting, painting as mourning/melancholic repetition/wound, moves

converted to a species of darkness. In this context, one can argue that Van Gogh's sun/sunflowers represents the Platonic Idea with a black centre (cf. Schoeman 2001), as Kiefer's sunflowers in *Let a thousand flower's bloom* are painted “as if a deep little night were enshrouded in each dark seed” (McEvelley 2000: 9). Derrida's (1987: 86) writings also evidence the textual interpolations of light and dark: “but did not the Platonic sun already enlighten the visible sun, and did not the excedence play upon the meta-phor of these two suns? The light of the light beyond light. The heart of light is black, as has often been noticed” — also Derrida (1987: 181) “the black hole of my birth” which enlivens and engenders. This recalls the gnostic oxymoron of a dark light, the alchemists speaking of a black

beyond the insularity of the modernist paradigm and opens out into the field of history. In addition, while Kiefer (and to a lesser extent Kentridge) deals with the loss of paternal signifiers (figure 1) and the ability to unselfconsciously articulate and embody a German identity, he also grapples with the loss of Nazism's victims (Saltzman 1999: 93-94). It is these catastrophic losses of history that are insistently present, if only as a sense of the presence of absence, in Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng's works. These are the losses, the traumas, that impoverish Kiefer and Boltanski's identity as postwar European subjects, and Kentridge and Mofokeng's identity as South African subjects — but at the same time can be seen to enrich their art. Thus if they are indeed melancholic it is not simply because the historical project of modernist painting has played itself out, nor because of being born under the proverbial sign of Saturn, but because as the children of history they were born under the sign of Lilith, of historical catastrophe (Saltzman 1999: 93)¹⁴. Thus one can argue that they were not simply born under the metaphorical sign of Saturn, father of melancholia, but the sign of Lilith, mother of melancholia — a melancholia which, as the Kabbalists contend, is always insistently of and in history.

The possibility of representation in these artists' works is always inscribed within a Lyotardian metaphoric of im-possibility — where no aesthetic object will ever be commensurate with or appropriate to the historic trauma that it takes as its grounding subject. In this respect, their work is necessarily melancholic, displaying in the Benjaminian evocations of ruins and cryptlike spaces and the reliance on processes of destruction, sedimentation and decay, the inevitable

sun, and Bataille's rotten sun (cf. Schoeman 2001). Cf. light and darkness in Boltanski's work pp. 128-129.

14. Lilith is not only the mistress of darkness but is also the mother of melancholy, the kabbalistic female Saturn and all those of a melancholy disposition are her children. Gershom Scholem's reading of Kabbalah asserts it's relation to historical catastrophe, in whose aftermath Lilith stands as both mystical personification and aesthetic progenitor (Saltzman 1999: 95). In other words, if Saturn may be seen to have "released his children from history", to have set artistic creation in an ahistorical flight from reality, it is Lilith who grounds her children, her sons, in history, for all of her identity as a mythic and mythical figure, Lilith unlike Saturn, embodies a melancholia that is insistently of and

failure of their aesthetic projects¹⁵. So while Kiefer's technique creates a painterly surface with a dense materiality, the fragility of the materials employed hovers on the brink of disintegration and decay (figure 3). Similarly, the fragility of the paper on which Boltanski prints his 'photographic portraits' and the rust on his biscuits tins also point to loss and transience (figure 25). Mofokeng's slide works also hover on the brink of disappearance, instead of suggesting a 'revisionist history' without doubt (figure 37). While Kentridge's works are perhaps 'concretised' onto film, they too retain within them the ephemeral nature of the ashen charcoal that has been drawn and erased (figure 54). For 'counter-monuments' (to borrow Young's term) should resist the redemptive totalization of mourning — even if, perhaps particularly because, the desire for closure and resolution is what has partly animated such practices as Holocaust commemoration in Germany (Rogoff 1995: 136). Counter-monuments, such as Kiefer's *Shulamith* (figure 8), Boltanski's *The missing house* (figure 7), Kentridge's film series and Mofokeng's *Sad landscapes* (figure 2), should resist the desire for wholeness, completion and resolution and instead sustain it as desire. They turn the tables on the mourning-melancholia problematic, revealing to the viewer that it is his/her desire (which by definition cannot be satisfied) which is the subject of the activity of commemoration. In such works, what was historically concealed remains, as Lyotard insists, invisible and immemorial whilst what becomes apparent is an object of desire when it takes the place of (represents) what, by its very nature, remains concealed from the subject, the object of loss. Perhaps 'true' commemoration involves revisiting the site of memory without resolution, to take part in the work of mourning —

in history. Hence the dialectics of history, myth and imagination in these artists' works.

15. But as is evidenced in these artists' projects, the knowledge of this failure or im-possibility does not lessen the call to attempt to commemorate, to strive to do the im-possible. The compulsion to work is also an undertow of the inwardness of the melancholic, and so these artists continue to work and to produce, and if not to mourn then at least to confront through acts of repetition, deferred and traumatic history (Sontag 1996: 126). Thus Kiefer painted countless series on the issue of the Holocaust, Boltanski photographs and re-photographs the faces compulsively, Kentridge's narratives are still yet-to-be-completed, and Mofokeng's archival project remains open, constantly

what can be seen as a component of the melancholia ascribed to Kiefer, Boltanski, Kentridge and Mofokeng. Perhaps what is at issue in these artists' works is the effort to sustain the memories at the level of desire, to live out the dislocations with some semblance of reflexivity and to present archeologically layered im-possibilities.

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