

Event, Eventing, Eventuality:
reflecting on the ‘fusion of horizons’ in works of art
by
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This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

[ABSTRACT]

The aim of this practice-based research project is an attempt to understand the perceptual space that occurs when a viewer encounters a work of art. More specifically, it reflects on the in-between space that occurs when viewers interact with artworks that draw on historical events to explore violent conflicts, death and commemorations. The thesis expands on contemporary notions of interpretations with a particular focus on the non-linguistic factors that may convene in the aesthetic experience. It has a dual outcome, consisting of creative and written components.

The creative component, *Shifting Horizons*, is a body of work that was inspired by ancient Chinese burial sites. The artworks are a meditation on cross-cultural burial practices with a particular focus on interaction with the natural environment. As such, they engage with the tension between human transiency and the endurance of the natural environment. By evoking remains of the dead in the landscape, the artworks highlight the notion that landscapes are infused with significant historical dimensions. In its particular way, this body of work is an intermixing of symbolic means employed to point out that in contrast to the surviving fragments of the relics unearthed in the burial pits, the natural world is not a dead world, and perhaps it is most essential to the survival of human life.

In making this body of work, I wish to suggest that works of art can act as a potentially transformative vehicle within a wide range of discourses. This is further explored in the written component - *Event, Eventing, Eventuality*. The text, which is concurrent to the creative component, applies the perspective of hermeneutical aesthetics to reflect on the determinants that may shape the encounter with a selected corpus of contemporary artworks. In addition to critically reflecting on these artworks, the writing draws on texts by a group of scholars – Heidegger, Gadamer, Benjamin, Serres, Deleuze and more - to examine relevant concepts that have been identified in the course of the research. Moreover, this thesis suggests that applying a hermeneutic approach in combination with other, perhaps incongruous, thinkers in the critical traditions, can enrich the processes of interpretations and understanding that are central to qualitative inquiry in general, and particularly so to the discipline of fine arts.

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[CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW]

This project consists of two parts: a creative component - *Shifting Horizons*: a body of works that draws on ancient Chinese burial sites for its inspiration, which was developed in the course of this research period. A written component - *Event, Eventing, Eventuality* - a textual reflection on the aesthetic experience as it is encountered in visual art, with a particular focus on artworks by Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, Susan Hiller, Heather Ellyard, Mona Hatoum, Doris Salcedo, Christian Boltanski and my own. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the perceptual, the non-linguistic interpretative space, which is formed when spectators encounter those artworks. In *the Range of Interpretation*, the German literary scholar Wolfgang Iser suggests that “all interpretations are translated from one context into another.” He posits that the space that is opened in the process creates “a liminal place, because it demarcates both the subject matter and the register from one another, as it does not belong to either but is opened by the interpretation itself.”¹ Working from joined perspectives of visual culture discourse and philosophy, this thesis uses the hermeneutic approach as a base from which to investigate this intermediary space and probes its relevance to contemporary fine arts discipline. In doing so, the thesis addresses the question how does an artwork, which engages with issues relating to violent conflicts, death and commemoration, reaches beyond its historical boundaries and offer the viewer a meaningful aesthetic experience?

The artworks that constitute *Shifting Horizons* were inspired by personal encounters in several Chinese imperial burial sites.² These works, which bring together archaeological artefacts and fragments of landscape, are guided by my conviction that the natural environment is crucial in shaping social/cultural practices. In addition to being moved by these traces of ancient traditions, the techniques and materials used by Chinese artists were instrumental in the choice of materials and presentation for both the two and three-dimensional artworks.

A series of rice paper scrolls, entitled ‘*cline*’ (fig.1), makes up the principal element of *Shifting Horizons*. The sequence, extending over 20 meters long, depicts images of

¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (Columbia University Press, 2000). P. 6

unearthed terracotta warriors marching from visibility to invisibility which takes the viewer on a journey across time, across cultures and landscapes. By juxtaposing images of ancient Chinese funerary artefacts with aspects of nature, the scrolls emphasise the immeasurable age of the natural world in contrast with the temporality of human perspective and offer the spectator a dialogical space in which to reflect on instances connected to natural processes of growth and decay.



[Fig.1]

Hanna Kay, 'Cline' (detail)

The two-dimensional scrolls are supplemented by objects that present a meditation on the transference of culture throughout history. Among them, as an analogy to the terracotta warriors, I have made an army of small blackened clay angels (fig. 2). Both clay armies – the warriors and the angels - in their in-between existence evoke a multiplicity of possible meanings and link together issues relating to burial and commemoration, to otherness, to trauma and suffering, and to the impact of the elements. As an agent of the imagination,

² See Appendix I – The Making of *Shifting Horizons*

the angel draws attention to the threshold between visibility and invisibility, between absence and substance and between order and disorder. In addition to effecting shifts between modes of existence, it symbolises the utter 'otherness' I have found China to be.



[Figure 2]

Hanna Kay, *Army of Angels*

This visual inquiry into ancient Chinese burial practices says something about cultural notions of 'otherness' for an occidental artist. The cross-cultural dialogue prompted by the imagery may bring to mind discourses relating to power relations. However, the intention behind *Shifting Horizons* is not prescriptive, but rather to allow an experience not restricted to a single culture, timeframe and ideology. When encountering the artworks that incorporate natural elements with Chinese archaeological relics may trigger, in some viewers, an experience that evokes aching memories of longing and resentment, while for

others it could be a confounding engagement with the peculiarity of a culture different than one's own.

The meanings of art objects arise out of a fluid process of interlinking appearances and disappearances, constantly playing off each other and are informed by the context and geography of each viewer in a given moment. Environment, culture and history are only a few of the changing contexts that influence the way in which an artwork is perceived, and subsequently, its meaning is perpetually in a state of flux. The purpose of the written component is to think through the selected artworks and examine how they rise above their historical boundaries and impact on viewers in their present-day situation. To this end, after situating the research within theoretical discourses, the discussion, which employs a hermeneutical aesthetics position, will focus on the complex chain of interactive relationships which is formed by the constellation anchored by the artwork.

Following the German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin,³ the term constellation is employed here to describe the merger of relationships that take place in the encounter with an artwork. A constellation is usually viewed as a fixed assemblage of ideas or objects. Yet, within the context of the aesthetic experience, it is a shifting configuration which changes according to a given perspective. Artist, artwork or spectator, each enters this system of relationships from a particular point of view, the totality of which forms the artwork's dialectics of perspectives and possibilities. It is, therefore, a mobile constellation that holds within its 'liminal space' a dynamic and complex dialogical process involving theoretical, conceptual and imagistic relationships, which Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics calls '*fusion of horizon*'.

For the title of the thesis - *Event, Eventing, Eventuality* – I have borrowed terms coined by Gadamer and Martin Heidegger. *Event* refers to Gadamer's claim that "all encounters with the language of art are an encounter with an unfinished *event*."⁴ Accordingly, a work of art can never exhaust its subject-matter. In this thesis, *Event* refers to the stimulus for the

³ Walter Benjamin, "The Arcades Project, Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin," *Cambridge, mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press* 372 (1999).

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, rev. ed. (London ; New York: Continuum, 2004).P. 99.

artwork and some of the issues it might conjure up. *Eventing* is a term Heidegger⁵ gave to the process by which an artwork evokes layers of connotations and implications, which would take viewers beyond themselves and the ‘horizon’ of their current historical position. For Gadamer ‘horizon’ is a person’s background understanding when experiencing a thing. *Fusion of horizons* occurs in a dialogue between an interpreter and the thing, primarily a ‘text’,⁶ which involves a reflection on that which is familiar and that which is different.

The discussion that follows develops in three parts: *Horizons*, *Fusion of Horizons*, and *Beyond Horizons*. The *Horizons* chapter outlines the discourses in which the thesis is positioned. Although theoretically much of this thesis can be placed within the tradition of hermeneutical aesthetics, as an interdisciplinary project, the two components of the thesis belong to the fine arts discourse. As such, the inquiry is engaged with topics relevant to the language of artworks,⁷ the language of the senses, to the relationship between words and artworks. The relation of images and words to thinking is one of the traditional concerns of philosophy from Plato and Aristotle through to Heidegger, Gadamer, Wittgenstein, Derrida, Giorgio Agamben and more.⁸ Some have suggested that to understand an artwork is a way of probing the limitation of language and questioning the assumption that words are the only means by which we think. Precisely this concern and the trust that the role of sensations and perceptions in thinking is yet to be appreciated is one of the primary drives of this thesis.⁹

An essential aspect of this thesis has been the intention that in the process of the writing itself ideas and thoughts would come to light. The following chapter - *Fusion of Horizons* – is meant to unfold as a journey of discovery for me as well as for the reader. This chapter is divided into three sections and constitutes the main discussion. The first section, *Event*,

⁵ Heidegger coined the term ‘eventing’ in the context of his philosophy of language, to express the way in which Being is revealed in the eventing of language. For him art offers an ‘eventing of Being’.

⁶ Throughout this discussion the term ‘text’ is used for both works of art and verbal publications.

⁷ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to represent adequately the thinking and the ample of literature that is available on this topic.

⁸ Dennis J Schmidt, *Between Word and Image: Heidegger, Klee, and Gadamer on Gesture and Genesis* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁹ For a long time the question *How do we think?* has been one of the thorniest questions in psychology. Recently scientists at Harvard University have found that visual thinking is deeply ingrained in the brain, suggesting that for humans, thinking in words and sentences is a relatively recent evolutionary development. Elinor et al. Amit, "An Asymmetrical Relationship between Verbal and Visual Thinking: ," *NeuroImage* 152 (2017).

identifies underlying impetus for the artwork and some of the issues it might conjure up. The second section, *Eventing* addresses issues relating to the materiality and the presentation of these artworks as they impact on viewers. The final section of the chapter, *Eventuality* is a reflection on the relationships held within the constellation mainly from the perspective of the viewer.

Cultural values, social attitudes, myths and customs have significant effects on the meaning a viewer distils out of the encounter with an object of art. Even though an individual's response is subjective, hermeneutical aesthetics focuses on interpretive incompleteness as part of the way viewers of artworks are in the world. A work of art is always experienced in the present from a particular, historical, point of view and its interpretation is the transmission of meanings across time. In this way, the artworks discussed in this thesis bear witness to particular historical events and allow for possible projections of those past events into the future. Contemporary life is permeated with a diversity of visual information. In such an atmosphere the hermeneutic approach provides a way of understanding the applications of the meaning we make of visual input. In light of it, the responsibility of both artist and viewer is among the issues discussed in the last part *Beyond Horizons*. Here the perspective moves to weave together the threads of ideas and concerns that have been identified in the '*Fusion of Horizons*' section and reflects on aspects that reverberate beyond the shifting possibilities within the constellation formed by a particular artwork.

In the studio, a visual artist transforms experiences, ideas, sensations and information gained from participation in everyday life into non-linguistic modes of expression. It is an intuitive-organic process of understandings and interpretations that result in the creation of an artwork. A process in which the thinking is visual. A process, which is organised by techniques and dialogues, in which the interpretations are always checked. By moving between restrictions and freedom, the artist creates a personal order, a complex whole which is then offered to the rest of the world. This method, which underscores the creative process, is a kind of hermeneutics which is not linguistically-based nor is it founded on common cognitive claims. It is an activity which at its core is a dialogue between intentions and material, between the part and the intended whole. As the process continues the artist's perspective gradually evolves from its initial pre-understanding which forms the base for a new pre-understanding and interpretation, and so on. It is mostly an instinctual

method in which the hand and eyes do most of the ‘thinking’ - receives information from the material and shapes the response. It is a ‘hermeneutic circle’ which takes place in material, and which is checked mostly by the senses.

The creation of an artwork is a complex combination of perceptions and struggles. By examining the process by which an artist makes art, this thesis offers the field of hermeneutics a non-verbal interpretation and thus proposes to broaden the hermeneutic approach to include, as much as possible, what artists have to say about their practice. Artists can also benefit from the hermeneutic approach. By reflecting on their process of art-making, artists may gain an additional, theoretical dimension by which to inform their practice. Consequently, this thesis offers a possibility of interaction between two levels of hermeneutic dialogue through which understanding is reached – artist and viewer.

In short, the concern of this thesis is with the liminal space that opens up in the encounter with an artwork. To do so, I have brought hermeneutical aesthetics into conversation with other, perhaps somewhat uneasy bedfellows. This kind of theoretical mixture does not mean that all points need to be aligned and agreed upon, but rather the aim is to respect and maintain differences while at the same time extending the boundaries of hermeneutics. This synthesis of seemingly unrelated thinkers is but one of the contributions this thesis makes to the visual arts discourse. By using key notions in hermeneutical aesthetics to meet challenges facing both visual art discourse and hermeneutics as they engage with cultural analysis, I offer an artist’s perspective on the subject.

This thesis proposes to broaden the traditional hermeneutic approach to include probing into the very process in which text/artwork comes into being. To support the argument, I demonstrate that the creative process itself is a hermeneutical dialogue, and that thinking through problems in a material is an interpretation that occurs in non-linguistic realms. Insisting on the existence of non-verbal interpretations and understanding, both in the production and perception of an artwork, is another contribution this thesis makes. This argument connects to an additional crucial point - the notion of the unsayable, and my suggestion that art, in its various modes, is the thing best placed to examine what is otherwise ‘unsayable’ and thus broadening the possibility of engaging with and expressing the inexpressible.

[CHAPTER TWO: HORIZONS]

This research project has been inspired and informed by an assortment of both visual and verbal texts, consistent with the spirit of an interdisciplinary approach. I have gravitated toward the hermeneutic approach since it offers a dialogical structure similar to that of a studio, in which an artist rummages through and examines multitudes of ideas and resources. This chapter provides a background to the subsequent main discussion in chapter 3, as well as an outline of some of the fields of inquiries in which the writing is embedded. Although primarily situated within fine arts discourse, when it comes to reading the encounter with artworks, this thesis supports a convergence with several other disciplines, with a particular focus on hermeneutical aesthetics. This is in line with voices suggesting¹⁰ that the studies of visual culture can only gain valuable insights by a broader perspective that could be attained from other fields of inquiries.

Various views of aesthetics are referred to here, yet this thesis is neither an account nor a historicocritical examination of the subject. Rather, it is about understanding the dynamics behind the web of associations that come to the fore in engagement with artworks, as they span across cultures and histories. For this, the discussion is drawing on Gadamer's Hermeneutic project, which he devised in an attempt to answer Heidegger's question in his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* "What is at work in the work?" In response, Gadamer asks "How do silent images address us?"¹¹ and thus shifts the concerns of aesthetics from traditional notions such as judgement, pleasure, and so forth, to questions concerning the understanding of an encounter with an artwork. He writes, "[t]he reality of the work of art and its expressive power cannot be restricted to its original historical horizon, in which the beholder was actually the contemporary of the creator. It seems instead to belong to the experience of art that the work of art always has its own present"¹² His main argument is that aesthetics is an inquiry into what objectively informs our subjective experience of art, and that the aesthetic experience is an interpretive dialogue in which the artwork is realised.

¹⁰ Mieke Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture," *Journal of visual Culture* 2, no. 1 (2003).

¹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (Northwestern University Press, 2007). *Aesthetics and Hermeneutics*, p. 123

¹² *Ibid.* P. 124

Many texts and studies have reflected on some or all the issues with which the thesis engages. Moreover, several philosophers have published studies of a particular artist or an artwork, among them Michel Foucault¹³ on Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹⁴ on Cézanne's paintings, Martin Heidegger¹⁵ on Van Gogh's painting *A Pair of Shoes*, Giorgio Agamben¹⁶ on Dürer's etching *Melancholia* and Gilles Deleuze¹⁷ on Francis Bacon's. These studies and others have served as a point of departure to articulate various philosophical arguments and position. Similarly, Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, has singled out the direct encounter with a work of art as an example of a way to acquire meaningful knowledge, which according to him, can be extended to any field of inquiry, from the humanities to science.

However, unlike the studies mentioned above in which the paintings under investigation are of a traditional nature, Gadamer¹⁸ has looked for a way to engage with the new aesthetics that had emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. The 'unintelligible' works of artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Arnold Schoenberg or Paul Celan have prompted him to wonder how can such 'hermetic' artworks "exert a claim upon us as powerful and as authoritative as that of the classical or traditional works."¹⁹ In the essay *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, he says that the arrival of enigmatic art forms, such as abstract and conceptual art, atonal music and hermetic poetry has been a "genuine revolution."²⁰ The insistent presence of such works of art has inspired him to ask "how it comes about that the work addresses us."²¹ Despite being confounded by so much of modern art, the hold these art forms had exerted on viewers has convinced him that they are indeed a communicative event of sorts. In a genuine, attentive, encounter with art, he suggests, something happens to the viewer. The object of art addresses the world in its absolute 'otherness'. For him, even when what

¹³ Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas," (2010).

¹⁴ Clive Cazeaux, "The Continental Aesthetics Reader," (Psychology Press, 2000).P. 451

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art in Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Cazeaux.P. 675

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (U of Minnesota Press, 2003).

¹⁸ In essays he wrote after the publication of *Truth and Method*.

¹⁹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer on Celan: "Who Am I and Who Are You?" And Other Essays* (SUNY Press, 1997). P. 1

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1986). P. 92

²¹ *Ibid.* P. 25

the artwork says is incomprehensible to viewers, it nevertheless insists on being understood. Such a perspective combined with the idea that an encounter with art is 'an unfinished event' is particularly appropriate for this discussion since the intention here is to offer insights and raise possibilities rather than to treat the issues exhaustively.

Gadamer's Hermeneutics stresses the importance of the immediate experience as the necessary condition for knowledge to emerge. It is concerned with articulating that which shapes individual experiences and places them within a broader historical context. Traditionally Hermeneutics was understood to be related to the interpretation of historical texts. In the 20th century Heidegger, Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Gianni Vattimo have differentiated themselves from previous philosophers by adding the recognition that the interpreter of text (including visual 'texts' such as artworks) is situated in history. Therefore any interpretation is always influenced by the culturally and historically constructed conjectures of the interpreter.

Gadamer agrees with Heidegger's claim that understanding, with its possibilities and limitations, is crucial in all aspects of our lives. He further develops the idea, and his seminal work *Truth and Method*, offers a shift from understanding as a method by which to engage with a text to understanding as a way of being in the world. Moreover, he argues that since understanding is an event that transpires not only in the process of interpreting texts, a hermeneutic approach should be employed for the myriad of ways in which we interact with the world around us. He contrasts empirical scientific knowledge with that of art and claims that the latter is the enduring mode of knowledge. This is so because an encounter with an object of art is a dynamic event of consciousness that transforms the ontological status of both the viewer and the object of inquiry – "... in an eminent sense [the hermeneutical idea] is fulfilled only by the experience of art. For the distinctive mark of the language of art is that the individual artwork gathers into itself and expresses the symbolic character that, hermeneutically regarded, belongs to all things. In comparison with all other linguistic and non-linguistic traditions, the work of art is the absolute present for each particular present, and at the same time it holds its word in readiness for every future."²²

²² Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings. Aesthetics and hermeneutics* p. 131

By establishing that understanding precedes any methodological research, he demonstrates how an experience of art may serve as the paragon of knowledge. Thus, for Gadamer, art, in all its modes, exemplifies the universality of Hermeneutics. More precisely, the account of the encounter with artworks, taken together with understanding and the vital place of language, sanctions, he argues, the universality of hermeneutics. Since understanding takes place as an event in each aspect of our lives, science, art and life in general, the scope of this approach is applied everywhere. Although an encounter with an artwork is a subjective, personal and culturally relative experience, Hermeneutics offers a way of engaging with the work which goes beyond the personal. It is a way of encountering that is 'other' to us, be it an artwork, an animal, a human being or the natural environment.

Underlying hermeneutical aesthetics is the assumption that there is a viewer who experiences the art; an experience which is contingent on the viewers' *horizons*, in particular, their aesthetic literacy and attentiveness. In such an encounter viewers enter a dialogical relationship with the artwork's horizon, in which 'prejudices', that are embedded in their horizons come forth. 'Prejudice' simply means 'a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined,'²³ and as such it initiates the movement of interpretations and understanding in, what Gadamer terms, *fusion of horizons*. This oscillation back and forth between prejudice, or pre-understanding, interpretation and understanding is what supports the entire process. It is that which produces an initial interpretation and the preliminary (pre-) understanding, and which will be revised as viewers grasp what each interpreted part means in relation to its context (the whole). Gradually, the viewer's perspective changes and with this a new pre-understanding evolves, which in turn forms a base for new and deeper interpretation and understanding. This is what is referred to by the term 'hermeneutic circle'.

The problem of the 'hermeneutic circle' has been a contentious issue, in particular its potential circularity.²⁴ However, whereas in earlier hermeneutics the circle is a way to describe textual understanding, for both Heidegger and Gadamer it becomes a principle by which an individual understands her nature and condition. Thus even though there is an apparent circle in the movement back and forth from the part to the whole, there is no

²³ *Truth and Method*. P. 273

²⁴ For more see appendix II – The Case for Hermeneutics

circularity when it comes to the understanding itself. Understanding is progressive, a process that, in this context, can be described as a spiral rather than a circle.

As mentioned previously, Gadamer's aesthetics, just like Heidegger before him, is not about traditional aesthetics issues. Instead of tackling the aesthetic question 'what is art?' he considers the artwork to be an 'object' and has turned to finding a way of dealing with the array of interpretations which emerges in the encounter with such an object. His main concern has been with the role of art in our experiences of the world, and to do so, he has focused on exploring the relationships that underpin the encounter with art. Since the viewer has no access to the original context, he has argued that the work of art is never fully known. Moreover, the artwork itself has its own presence (horizon), and viewers cannot exclusively condition their aesthetic experience on understanding the intentions of the artist and the context in which the work has been created. This does not mean that artworks do not have cultural and historical factors that are relevant to grasping what they say, rather that we should resist reducing the aesthetic experience to those factors.

The meaning of a given artwork is not something that can be fully comprehended either by the artist who has brought it to life or by the receiver. Moreover, hermeneutical aesthetic stresses that since human beings are creatures of language, any meaning that emerges out of the complex dialogical play between the nodes of the constellation is grounded in language. Gadamer follows Heidegger and gives language a central place in his philosophy, claiming that it is through language that we understand the world. Although in *Truth and Method* he acknowledges that language is not always the best means to articulate the aesthetic experience, in a later essay, *Language and Understanding*, he defends²⁵ the import he has placed on linguistic understanding. Although, he writes, "the claim that all understanding is linguistic in character is admittedly provocative...", even silent understanding rests on a network of previous understandings which rest in, and any meaning we fix emerges of "the fabric of a linguistic context."²⁶ The issue of language is one of the themes running throughout the thesis. Indeed, we certainly are creatures of language. Yet, the hermeneutic linguistic model emphasises meanings determined by cognitive faculties over other dimensions in our aesthetic experience.

²⁵ Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings. Language and Understanding*

²⁶ *Ibid. Language and Understanding* P. 89-107

It is in dialogue, Gadamer argues, that experience and language are most productive because “understanding comes... from the other who addresses me.”²⁷ It is the voice of the other, in this case the artwork’s address, that establishes the questions. Being committed to understanding, the Gadamerian model of conversation asks us to be open to the other, be it a person, nature, animal or an object of art. The parallel with a dialogue points out to a complicated process, which ascribes to art an ethical element. A dialogue may reveal the limitations of cultural expectations and initiates engagement with that which is different - with the ‘other’.²⁸

Ethics and the role of language are also on the mind of French philosopher Michel Serres when writing *Angels: a Modern Myth*²⁹, where he considers the ethical in terms of transmission and communication. In an interview regarding this book he compares the writer, and by extension all artists, to angels who deliver messages. “The reason why angels are invisible”, he says, “is because they are disappearing to let the message go through them.” For him the “the message itself is the ethics of the messenger.”³⁰ Following this line of thought, I consider the artwork itself as an ethical ‘message’ and will discuss it in detail in the last section of the thesis, *Beyond Horizons*. When reflecting on the network of communications, Serres focuses on the dominance of verbal language and the subsequent marginalisation of the senses by various philosophical systems. This primacy of words over the sensory has led Serres to reject phenomenological, structuralist and post-structuralist schools of thought which he finds “without sensations - everything via language,”³¹ and instead advocates a sensory-based philosophy.

²⁷ James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (SUNY Press, 1997). P. 208

²⁸ Perhaps the best known dialogue in western thinking is Plato’s, who has presented his philosophical ideas in a back-and-forth debate. Since then many scholars and thinkers have invited us to wonder and reflect on the dialogue as a space for examining issues and airing ideas. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, F.W.J. Hegel, the linguist Mikhail Bakhtin, the physicist David Bohm, and Gadamer are among those who have been committed to inquiry by means of a conversation of sorts, and the discussion will return to some of them later on

²⁹ Michel Serres, *Genesis* (G. James & J. Nielson, Trans.), Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (1995).

³⁰ Interview with Hari Kunzru, London 10th January 1995, transcript <http://www.harikunzru.com/michel-serres-interview-1995/>

³¹ Serres. P.131

Serres is not alone to challenge the primacy of verbal language in Western thinking. The role of the senses in human experiences has been the object of various scientific and philosophical studies, among them the psychologists J. J. Gibson³² and Rudolf Arnheim³³ who have formulated theories that are incompatible with a strict cultural-linguist interpretation. Arnheim, for instance, claims that the particular qualities of the experience created by a given painting “are only partly reducible to verbal description and explanation.”³⁴ Among recent publications on the subject, *Art and the Senses*³⁵ is a collection of essays by interdisciplinary scholars that explore how the senses interact to affect a meaningful experience. According to these and other studies, there has been recently a renewed interest in the role of sensory experience in everyday life. In his book, *The Inner Touch*,³⁶ Daniel Heller-Roazen explores this very notion by offering archaeology of sensations that outlines their journey from Aristotle’s idea of unity to being overtaken by questions of mind-body dualism.

Surely verbal language is crucial when interpreting and articulating our experiences. However, we need to acknowledge that our being is saturated with what goes on outside of language. Our life is inundated with sensory information that is crucial to these experiences. This thesis intends to focus and reflect on the factors that converge in aesthetic experiences before the viewer or the artist gives it a verbal interpretation.³⁷ This discussion does not entirely dispute the view that linguistic interpretation is a factor in the understanding of an artwork. What it does challenge is the pre-eminence of verbal language in understanding such experiences, or as W.J.T Mitchell³⁸ puts it the ‘linguistic imperialism’ that exists in several disciplines including Hermeneutics, Semiotics and Visual Culture studies.

³² J.J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception: Classic Edition* (Taylor & Francis, 2014).

³³ Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Univ of California Press, 1974).

³⁴ Ibid. P. 2

³⁵ F. Bacci and D. Melcher, *Art and the Senses* (OUP Oxford, 2011).

³⁶ D. Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation* (Zone Books, 2007).

³⁷ Cognitive theory explains, to a certain degree of satisfaction, the mental processes that occur when a person encounters, receives and responds to artworks. Unquestionably, biological processes are relevant. Thanks to common biological configurations humans share common cognitive and perceptual ability. Yet, by reducing the aesthetic experience to its ‘physicality’, we stripped it of a cohesive ‘event’ that reveals something that is unique to art.

³⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Conclusion

An aesthetic experience is a subjective, personal and culturally relative event. Yet, hermeneutical aesthetics offers a way of engaging with works of art which goes beyond the personal. It stresses that neither the artwork nor the viewer is the focus of the event. Rather it is a fusion which triggers a shift, a disruption of sorts, in the viewer's own 'horizon'.³⁹ It is a process in which viewers emerge from their personhood. In the encounter, they come out of the noise, out of what Serres calls the pure multiplicity that serves as a background to all we do, to build a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar. It is then that the 'otherness' of an artwork becomes a partner to the dialogue.

Gillian Rose, a visual culture theorist,⁴⁰ is one of the voices criticising analytical methods employed by her field's practices. She calls for a debate that would shift the discipline from its current engagement with visual encounters as a "static structure" to a visual event. She advocates a triangular paradigm of dynamic engagement with interpretation and meaning based on practices, audience's reception and context-sensitive hermeneutics. This thesis employs such a perspective to reflect on the horizons that merge within the constellation that is fixed by the artwork. The following chapter is, therefore, an attempt to understand the relationships that converge in the selected artworks. It examines the stimulus for the artworks and the way in which they highlight particular events and draw attention to a range of issues, among them concerns for the 'other', for the natural environment, and historical continuity.

³⁹ This idea of disruption, or to use Serres' term *clinamen*, is discussed in more detail later in relation to the impact the artwork has on a viewer.

⁴⁰ Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell, *The Handbook of Visual Culture* (Berg, 2014). The Question of Method p. 542

[CHAPTER THREE: FUSION OF HORIZONS]

"We do not listen closely enough to what painters have to say." Gilles Deleuze ⁴¹

In *The Truth in Painting* the French philosopher Jacques Derrida writes that "...the philosophical encloses art in its circle but its discourse on art is at once, by the same token, caught in a circle."⁴², and in the paragraph that follows he refers to the shape of a circle, as discussed by Hegel and Heidegger, to introduce ideas about aesthetics. He points out that although very different in aim and style "... these two discourses exclude-(that) which then comes to form, close and bound them from inside and outside alike." The circle and the idea of the cyclical are pivotal to both components of this research project and not only because it builds on a historical tradition of art discourse. As previously discussed, the notion of the circle is central to hermeneutic understanding. The 'hermeneutic circle' is the condition for the understanding of a 'text', which is achieved in an oscillating movement back and forth, between the whole and its parts. Such a process of non-linear development has been the journey through which both the writing and the creative parts of this research have come to be.

Essential to this research project has been the intention that clarity will emerge in the process of making the artworks and in the actual process of writing, and that both myself and the reader will participate in this journey of discovery. Sometimes our dependence on knowing, and being in control, keeps us from more authentic experiences. Artists, on their part, learn to sit in the midst of not-knowing, tolerating the murkiness of confusion and waiting for a certainty of sorts to emerge. The practice of the artist is a kind of 'play'. It is a play between sparks of insight and interpretations, intuitive yet controlled. It is a play between perceptions and concepts, between understanding the fragments in relation to the envisioned complex whole. It is a movement towards and away from experiences that generate shifts in the frames of reference, leading to moments of convictions as well as doubts, which might eventuate in a creative outpouring in the form of an artwork.

The idea of an artwork as a kind of a play can be traced back to Kant who argues that an

⁴¹ Deleuze and Bacon. P. 99

⁴² Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). P. 23

artist is someone who "sets the mental powers into a play which is self-maintaining and which strengthens those powers".⁴³ This circular mental play is the activity of the imagination, and Gadamer⁴⁴ builds on Kant's notion to argue that the notion of play is a key to rethinking the aesthetic experience. Accordingly, in hermeneutical aesthetic an artwork exists as a triangular play between the object, the subject-matter and the context within which it is realised. Each angle in the triangle offers a framework for reflections, for constructive discussions and examinations. The artwork as a 'playful' activity exists not only in relation to the creative process of the artist, but also for those who view it. At the moment of encounter, viewers are invited to participate in a 'play'. An event takes place which is not reducible to the decoding of meaning. It is an expressive, communicative and reflective event that opens a dynamic space in which the viewer is addressed by the work whether or not its meaning is understood.

While emulating the intuitive 'play' of the artistic process, this discussion returns again and again to the question: how do artworks evoke experiences and shape meanings. The text wanders in and about the perceptual 'liminal' space that occurs when a viewer interacts with artworks that explore issues associated with past violent conflicts and commemoration, in particular, those works that draw on the landscape to examine these issues. The emphasis on nature and environmental aspects in artworks reflects my own belief that these aspects are essential in the shaping of a culture's distinctiveness. It links to what the French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu⁴⁵ defines as the "field of cultural production." According to him, nature is not just a setting in which human history unfolds, rather, the natural environment is deeply ingrained in the "cultural unconscious" because of its role in the formation of human societies. Likewise, W.J.T. Mitchell writes that landscape is a cultural medium. The landscape in art, he writes, "is a medium of cultural expression...it is a material means like language or paint embedded in a tradition of cultural

⁴³ Immanuel Kant and James Creed Meredith, *The Critique of Judgement*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). P. 175

⁴⁴ Play for Gadamer is a metaphor for the dynamic unfolding of the artwork's ontology in which its meaning is realised. Gadamer's understanding of play is similar to that of Schiller's in *The Aesthetic Education of Man*. Both use play to illustrate a relationship that structures the aesthetic experience. However, whereas for Schiller play is a drive that mediates between the senses and the forms, for Gadamer, it takes place in the viewer's realm of imagination and conceptual understanding.

signification and communication.”⁴⁶

The three sections of this chapter utilise several key characteristics in Hermeneutics to account for the dynamic ontology of an artwork and our aesthetic experience. Among these characteristics: 1. Identifying the conditions in which understanding takes place. 2. Acknowledging the vantage point of the interpreter, and the uniqueness of individual insight. 3. Recognising the complexity of the aesthetic experience, being open to possible ambiguities and resist authoritative readings and, 4. Viewing the inquiry itself as a dialogue.

Perhaps the essential dimension in Hermeneutics is the emphasis on the significance of language in the interpretive dialogical process. As the continental philosopher Brice Wachterhauser writes:

Hermeneutical thinkers can be characterized quite generally by their common concerns to resist the idea of human intellect as a wordless and timeless source of insight... Hermeneutical theories of understanding argue that all human understanding is never 'without words' and never 'outside of time'. On the contrary, what is distinctive about human understanding is that it is always in terms of some evolving linguistic framework that has been worked out over time in terms of some historically conditioned set of concerns and practices ⁴⁷

Thus in addition to the four characteristics listed above, the discussion will reflect on the role of verbal language in the aesthetic experience and challenge the contention that we never interpret or understand without words.

Attached to the wall above my desk are black and white prints of the selected artworks. They make up a specially curated exhibition with which I have set out to explore and understand my relationships to these works. Indeed, these printed copies are a sad alternative to the original works, yet in their black and white, sometimes foggy quality I find that previous knowledge, memory and imagination compensate for what is not in front of

⁴⁵ P. Bourdieu and R. Johnson, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). P. 14

⁴⁷ B.R. Wachterhauser, *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy* (State University of New York Press, 1986).

me. I see these artworks every day, sometimes only as a momentary glimpse. Despite the apparent disadvantages of home-printing, the images retain their ability to say something and be partners in the conversation. This collection of artworks constitutes multiple voices each with its own singular trajectory and style. In listening to the 'noise' emanating from this play of differences I envisage the writing as inspiring both an awareness of plurality, and offering the possibility, however tenuous, of commonality between them. This play conjures up multitudes of possible interpretations all of which are relevant, some of which are discussed in the following three sections.

As such the chapter offers a degustation menu of sorts; a smorgasbord of ideas, concepts, opinions and so forth that come together in the various configurations and relationships held within the triangular plays, or constellations, that are anchored by the selected artworks. This shifting configuration changes according to the position of either the artist or the viewer. Each approaches the encounter from a particular position, bringing an idiosyncratic point of view, all of which form the 'event' which is the artwork.

3.1 Event

According to hermeneutical aesthetics, an encounter with art is an unfinished event which brings about a fusion of the horizons of both artwork and viewer. The work is an event of 'disclosure'⁴⁸, addressing its audience as a "go-between" in a cultural/historical field; an event in which meaning is shaped and formulated. This section examines the visual impact of the selected artworks on the viewer with the intention of understanding the event it depicts.

An artwork's address is a "noisy" address, conveying numerous interconnecting messages which challenge its viewer. For Serres, noise is the background of multiplicity from which all our activities emerge. He outlines several modes but most relevant for this context are the audible noise and the noise in information. In his book *Genesis*, he writes that "Iconography

⁴⁸ Heidegger's terminology. P. 5

is the ensemble of possible profiles, the sum of horizons,”⁴⁹ explaining that “Iconography is not harmony, it is noise itself”⁵⁰, and that “noise is turbulence, it is order and disorder at the same time... ”⁵¹ He further argues that our world is made of multiple interconnected noisy systems that circulate through all areas of human and nonhuman activity. His book *Angels: A Modern Myth* demonstrates how angels as message-bearers move between those systems. With this portrayal of angelic connectedness, Serres illustrates his notion of time and how past, present and future are linked. In a conversation with the French anthropologists and philosopher Bruno Latour, he argues that “time does not flow according to a line, nor according to a plan but, rather, according to a complex mixture... a visible disorder.... ”⁵² For him, every historical moment is multi-temporal with multiple folds and pleats. Just like a folded handkerchief through which angels pass, making connections.

The angel is one of the components comprising the creative part - *Shifting Horizons* – which was inspired by archaeological findings excavated in the imperial burial sites of Xi’an, China. The relics are traces of burial practices and beliefs, which have been common throughout China no matter what era or dynasty.⁵³ The first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huangdi (259 - 210 BCE), following the practice of placing personal property in the tomb, constructed an immense mausoleum, a scaled reconstruction of his entire kingdom to house his body. The replica symbolizes the realm over which he had governed in life as well as all things he would need in the afterlife, including an army of over 8,000 clay warriors. As an analogy to the Chinese terracotta army (fig. 3), I have made an army of hundreds of small clay angels. The angel’s existence in liminality is not unlike a terracotta warrior that was placed in between the actual tomb and the outside world to protect the emperor’s soul from acts of vengeance in this world and the dangers of the next.

⁴⁹ Serres. P. 19

⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 21

⁵¹ Serres. P. 59

⁵² *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time* (University of Michigan Press, 1995). P. 59

⁵³ Mark Edward Lewis and Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*, vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, 2009); Joan K Parry and Angela Shen Ryan, "A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying, and Religion," (1995).



[Fig. 3] Emperor Qin terracotta army

Most individuals upon hearing the word ‘angel’ think of Christianity and its associated portrayal of angels. Many assume that only Christianity and Judaism believe in such creatures and that, since Jewish law prohibits such representations, mostly Christian artists have portrayed them. However, the idea of the ‘angel’ appears in most cultures and traditions - in classical myths from Japan through the Middle East to the Americas, in shamanic visions, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. The angel is older than the Jewish Bible, where it is first encountered by most Western people and is believed to be ‘invented’ by Zarathustra, going back to around 1500 BCE (about 500 years before the belief in the Jewish God). The biblical texts, the books of Daniel and Enoch, in which angels are widely featured, is believed to be written in Babylon and brought back to the hills of Judea with the returning exiled Jews.

Regardless of the origin of the concept, archaeological and anthropological findings indicate that angels were part of pre-historic belief systems. It seems that since the onset of human life, belief in such winged creatures was almost universal. As mentioned above, Serres sees angels as messengers who participate in the communication systems of the contemporary world. Also, for Bruno Latour angels have room in a flat ontology, since “there is no such thing as a “visible world” any more than there are invisible worlds.”⁵⁴ Both Serres and

⁵⁴ Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (Harvard University Press, 2013). P. 181

Latour are among an assortment of contemporary writers, philosophers and artists who have been inspired to engage with angels and their go-between position.⁵⁵

Arriving at the idea of an angel to be part of this research has been unexpected. My upbringing, as a secular individual, included neither God's angels nor the devil's demons. The angel's historical narratives have not cast a spell over my imagination, and I have considered angels to be an irrational invention of biblical stories, which in turn, inspired religious paintings. A certain sentiment in me had resisted this unanticipated investigation into angels. Yet intrigued, I have let this incongruous idea to become a constant presence throughout this research. Nestling within the speculation about the nature of angels is a repertoire of analytical frameworks and possibilities, which has served to highlight several issues relevant to the discussion, among them the communicative aspect of the artwork itself, and its ability to make connections just like an angel who passes through the 'folded handkerchief' of time. A similar analogy to the angel is suggested by the American scholar Paul Colilli, in his book *The Angel's Corpse*⁵⁶ where he argues that the idea of the 'angel' resides in a realm for which we are cognitively ignorant; a realm, which is located in the poetic sign and artistic expression. Following Serres' idea of folded time, which invites us to consider the co-existence of the ancient and the modern, myth with history, the angel is utilised throughout this text as a vector of in-betweenness from antiquity to present day – an agency of continuity across histories and cultures.

In 1940, Walter Benjamin interpreted Paul Klee's monoprint *Angelus Novus (New Angel)* (figure 4), as the 'angel of history'. He writes -

...There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is

⁵⁵ Angels have become objects of examination for many fields in the humanities (other than the study of religion), among the texts: philosophy (Massimo Cacciari's *L'angelo necessario*; Michel Serres' *The Troubadour of Knowledge and Angels, a Modern Myth*; Bruno Latour's *Angels without Wings*), aesthetics (Giorgio Agamben *The Melancholy Angel*; Paul Colilli's *The Angel's Corpse*), cultural studies (McLuhan and Powers' who dedicate a chapter from angels to robots: *The Global Village*, H. and Harold Bloom's *Omens of the Millenium*) to name a few. Moreover, the idea of the angel is explored by contemporary artist from different cultures, among them: Susan Hiller's *Witness 2000*, and Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North*, 1998 from the UK; Anselm Kiefer's *The Hierarchy of the Angels (Die Ordnung der Engel)*, 2000, and Gerhard Richter's *Angel's Head (Engelskopf)* (1963) from Germany; Heri Dono's *Flying angels* 2006, from Indonesia; Jin Feng's *Flying Angels* 2012, from China; and Khadim Ali's *On Angels and Devils* from Afghanistan/Australia.

⁵⁶ P. Colilli, *The Angel's Corpse* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 1999).

staring at... The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet... a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That, which we call progress, is *this* storm.⁵⁷



[Fig. 4]

Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*

In the above passage, Benjamin has turned the etching into a kind of a theatrical stage which involves not only himself and the angel, but also the viewer. After a short description of the image, he states that “the Angel of History must look just so.” The unequivocal ‘must’ creates a forceful connection between Klee’s figure and the general idea of ‘angelic’ history. After introducing tension between possibility and necessity, Benjamin expands the drama by interpreting the angel, who, while driven into the future by the storm of progress, looks back at the wreckage of history.

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, James Luther Adams, and Oldrich Prochazka, *On the Concept of History* (Classic Books)

Benjamin's meditation is a personal interpretation. The piles of rubble can only be seen by the angel, while the viewer has to imagine the catastrophic events guided by the text. Yet, this description of a petrified 'angel', unable to act given our historical debris, has a strong resonance and has inspired various artists, writers and musicians. Among them Anselm Kiefer who created a three-dimensional lead aircraft, *Poppy and Memory* (fig. 7), exhibited initially in Cologne as part of an exhibition entitled *The Angel of History*. This artwork links up with Kiefer's other petrified paintings *The Order of Angels* (fig. 5.) and *The Daughters of Lilith*, (fig. 6.) where against a background of cracked surfaces hang fossilised, ash-covered dresses in different sizes and small lead aeroplanes fly around.



Anselm Kiefer left: *The Order of Angels*, [Fig. 5]

right: *Lilith's daughters* [Fig. 6]

In *The Daughters of Lilith*, Kiefer draws on elements in Jewish mysticism – the Kabbalah. Lilith was the first wife of Adam and was created at the same time as he was. However, whereas Adam was created from dust, Lilith was created from soil. She had turned up to be an unsuccessful rebellious partner who refused Adam's sexual demands. She grew wings

and fled from the garden, mated with angels and mothered demons and fallen angels. According to the myth, Lilith returned to Eden as a serpent and caused the fall of Adam and Eve. Her name in Hebrew means 'woman of the night', and it also suggests she is both a mother goddess and a winged demon (sometimes linked to Isis, the winged Egyptian angel/goddess). She can be destructive, and she can be a symbol of sexual pleasure. Her characteristics vary according to the narrative of a given culture.

Through this dark, accursed figure of a woman, Kiefer is able to explore his own Germanic history from a different perspective. The ashen dresses are crude and simple as hospital or prison uniform. Together with the black hair they represent the dead in their absence and evoke the Jewish holocaust.⁵⁸ Likewise, the lead aeroplane has multiple levels of meaning. Lead is the foundation from which alchemists believed gold and silver could be created, and heavy lead turns the aeroplanes in both *Poppy and Memory* (fig. 7) and *The Daughters of Lilith* into a testimonial to history and memory.



[Fig. 7]

Anselm Kiefer, *Poppy and Memory*

Kiefer's artworks that draw on Kabbalistic interpretations of ancient Mediterranean mythologies might be impossible to read. And not only due to the artwork's illegibility but also to the illegibility of the historical references he uses. Yet, as Gadamer points out, the artworks' power is in its insistence to communicate. To draw into the enigmatic use of the mythological vocabulary of the Jewish people, who occupied a position as the Other within

⁵⁸ Hair shaved off heads of the victims and discarded items of clothing are some of the objects that have come to symbolise the holocaust. Other artists have used discarded items to express the horror of persecutions. Among them the American Phillip Guston and the French Christian Boltanski, (fig.16) both of Jewish descent who used such elements to reflect on the traumatic past.

his own German history, and thus offering a space for contemplation on particular historical events.

The notion of the Other is among various ideas raised by *Shifting Horizons* - the artworks I present as part of this research. The work is an exploration of cross-cultural boundaries and confrontations with alterity. It comprises of both two and three-dimensional artworks, and is inspired by a variety of clay warriors, animals and other ancient funerary relics found in burial pits in Xian. Given the persistent threats which these objects were exposed to - wars, fires and other natural and man-imposed calamities - it is a small miracle that they have survived at all. The fragments emerging out of trenches filled with sand and ash provide archaeologists and historians with scraps of information about history and memories, helping to construct a narrative that shed light about the past, however incomplete the information may be.

Shifting Horizons is a lens through which I have explored associations arising from the juxtaposition of images and ideas. They are personal remembered encounters and an attempt to highlight the tension between human transiency and the resilience of the natural environment. The elements that at any moment may impact upon a place are evidence in each of the artworks. The underlying concerns are environmental, and the focus is on the confluence of forces that affect the landscape. In ancient China, the subject of landscape was deeply imbued with philosophical and spiritual meaning. A combination of Taoist and Buddhist beliefs about the harmonious structure of the universe, and scholarly ideals of a retreat from the chaos of dynastic collapses and the political intrigues of the imperial court, played their part in ensuring the primacy of landscape painting during various Dynasties.⁵⁹ It is still important today in China when the subject of landscape sometimes becomes a lament in the face of pollution, environmental destruction and corruption. Likewise, *Shifting Horizons* references, among others, the consequences of human interventions in the landscape.

⁵⁹ L. Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou 1045–771 Bc* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).



[Fig. 8]

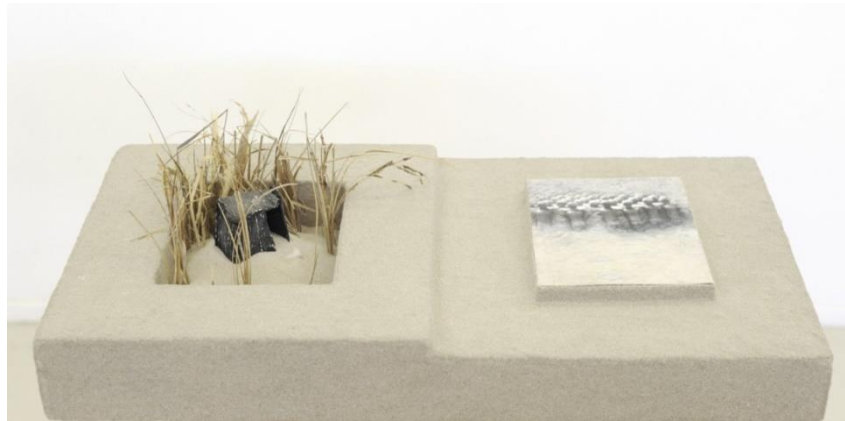
Hanna Kay, *Cline (detail)*

[Fig. 9]

Hanna Kay, *Cline (detail)*

A significant component of *Shifting Horizons* is the *Cline* series (fig. 8, and fig. 9). Comprising of 34 vertical compositions on delicate rice paper scrolls, the work depicts a juxtaposition of screen-printed images of terracotta armies with painted fragments of nature. Mist, dust and

desert dunes are contrasted with the entombed soldiers that have come to symbolise both mortality and the inevitable fall of kingdoms and rulers. The scrolls, which are layered with subtle marks of oil paint, evoke mourning and memory and can be seen as instances of cyclical transformation connected to natural processes of growth and decay. The art is focused on the liminal - between fluidity and solidity, between absence and substance, between order and disorder – and is a dialogue between cultures, between transience and permanence and between states of being.



[Fig. 10]

Hanna Kay, *Repository*

A series of three-dimensional works - *Repository* (fig. 10) – draw on the materials used by the craftsmen who had made the terracotta inhabitants of the imperial tombs. The repository boxes are reliquaries⁶⁰ and nestled within their hollowed form are tiny clay figures of animals and angels. An *Army of Angels* (fig. 11) constitutes the third component of *Shifting Horizons*. In a similar way to the terracotta warriors, the angel, in its in-between existence, indicates a host of meaning which is never fully available. Hundreds of small raku-clay angels make up this army. The figures, which are blackened in a Sagger firing technique, look as if they have come out of the fire of hell. Instead of evoking the angel as ephemerally gently passing through feathery clouds, or breezing through treetops, they emerge out of the sand, heftily negotiating dunes; cumbersome messengers and warriors impeded by the earthy material of which they are composed.

⁶⁰ A repository for relics, especially those who have religious connotations.



[Fig. 11]

Hanna Kay, *Army of Angels*

The angel, in its absolute 'otherness' is an agency for artistic imagination -

Who, if I screamed out, would hear me among the hierarchies
of angels? And if one suddenly did take
me to his heart: I would perish from his
stronger existence. For beauty is nothing
but the onset of terror we're still able to bear,
and we admire it so because it calmly disdains
to destroy us. Every angel is terrifying.

*Rilke's Duino Elegies*⁶¹

Evoking the angel's 'otherness' and its 'absence' seems to be at the root of Rilke's claim that every angel is terrifying. The angel, untraceable and impossible to chart in any recognizable scheme, yet, it has provided throughout the ages an aesthetic anchor for artists, writers, and philosophers.

⁶¹ G. Kinnell and H. Liebmann, *The Essential Rilke* (HarperCollins, 2000).



[Fig. 12] the *angel gunlinger*, 18th-century painting by an artist of the Cusco School - paintings of angels as celestial warriors bearing arms appear to be unique to Peru.

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben turns to Albrecht Durer's engraving *Melancholia* (fig13). In the essay *The Melancholy Angel* he describes the artwork as depicting 'the angel of art', who is as "if immersed in an atemporal dimension", looking at the "abandoned utensils of active life [that] lie on the ground". These objects, tools that are associated with mathematics and physics, seem to have lost their usefulness and "have become charged with a potential for alienation that transform them into the cipher for something endlessly elusive".⁶²



[Fig. 13]
Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia*

⁶² Cazeaux. P. 680

Dürer's angel is winged, yet it is unable to fly because it suffers from the black bile of melancholia, which affects artists and poets. The context is aesthetic, but according to Agamben, Durer's angel, as the angel of art, has lost its mobility and transmissibility. For Agamben, art is a realm where the old and the new meet and sort out conflicts. The loss of art's ability to allure is not just a problem for art's continuity but for the altogether survival of culture. Issues concerning the transmissibility of culture seem to be also behind Kiefer's series of *Melancholia* which is inspired by Durer's engraving. In the engraving, next to the angel rests a large polyhedron form. Kiefer has used the same strange polyhedron in several of his paintings, and in one artwork he has attached it to the wing of a leaden German fighter plane, to represent melancholia (fig. 14). This series of artworks not only allows him to pay homage to German art history, but also to express his anguish regarding the devastation of air raids in WWII.

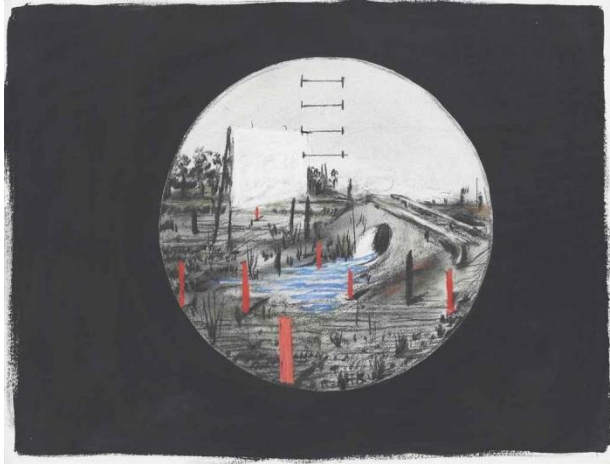


[Fig. 14]
Anselm Kiefer, *Melancholia*

In his artworks, Kiefer repeatedly returns to the German past as a point from which to engage with the complexities of the present. His exploration of melancholy recalls Benjamin's gloomy claim about culture's inability to triumph over barbarism - "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And, just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted."⁶³ Both, he, a German-Jewish scholar and Kiefer a contemporary German artist, who are haunted by with the perils of history, bear witness to the trauma that marks European history. War, violent conflicts, displacement, trauma, pain and suffering, can be

⁶³ W. Benjamin et al., *Selected Writings: 1938-1940* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). P.392

provoked by encounters with cultural Otherness. Meeting of different cultures can open up countless productive possibilities but can also inflict a sense of estrangement on both individuals and communities. The problem of alterity also occurs in seemingly homogeneous societies. The otherness from within can be even more dreadful than that from without.



[Fig. 15]

William Kentridge
from the film *Felix in Exile*

The trauma of war and violence, of racism and of colonialism has been represented in various modes of artistic expression. From Goya's etchings *Disasters of War*, through Picasso's *Guernica*, to William Kentridge's *Felix in Exile* (fig. 15), Christian Boltanski, *Storage Memory* (fig.16) and Mona Hatoum's *Present Tense* (fig. 33), artworks have highlighted the tragedies of violent conflicts and the suffering it inflicts upon individuals.



[Fig. 16]

Christian Boltanski, *Storage Memory*

Such is also the case with Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* (fig. 17). The artwork, a 167-metre long, deep fissure in the floor of the Tate Gallery's Turbine Hall, evokes the Biblical legend of slaughter of members of one tribe by their brothers in the aftermath of a battle. After their defeat by the Gileadites, the Ephraimites tried to escape across the Jordan River. Stationed next to the banks of the river, the Gileadites would ask each person attempting to cross to say 'shibboleth'. The Ephraimites, who were unable to enunciate the 'sh' sounds, would say 'sibboleth', and thus revealing their identity. The Gileadites massacred 42,000 members of the Ephraim tribe. Salcedo said of *Shibboleth* that "it represents borders, the experience of immigrants, the experience of segregation, the experience of racial hatred. It is the experience of a Third World person coming into the heart of Europe."⁶⁴



[Fig. 17]

Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*

Hostility and aggression toward the 'other' can occur due to many reasons, among them deliberate wilfulness, ignorance, ideological blindness, hatred, and more. Arguably, when such events are expressed in art, most often than not, they act as a reminder of the inherent failure of any mode of expressions to convey horrific events. Gerhard Richter's *September* (fig. 18) is a case in point. It is a small oil painting of horizontal smudges and smears colliding with two vertical structures against a blue sky. The size (approximately 52x72cm) renders it quite unremarkable and the reference to the 9/11 event in New York is oblique. The artwork implicitly questions whether an artist can depict such a catastrophic occurrence.

⁶⁴ https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doris_Salcedo.



[Fig. 18]

Gerhard Richter, *September*

No artistic mode of expression could ever contain the scope and meaning of such a cataclysmic event. Richter has rendered its enormity as a blurred and almost unrecognised image, expressing the impossibility of condensing such a subject into a work of art. He painted *September* five years after the destruction of New York's World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. By then his first-hand encounter of the event would have been mingled with mass-media images. As Susan Sontag points out in her book, *Regarding the Pain of Other*, "[a] catastrophe that is experienced will often seem easily like its representation."⁶⁵ Thus, even those who experienced violence firsthand mostly recalled their experience through mediated images.

There is another occasion in Richter's oeuvre where he has used his memory to deal with a collective traumatic experience. In 1988 he created a series 15 photo-based paintings entitled *October 18, 1977* (fig. 19) depicting the life and death of members of the Baader-Meinhoff group, a terrorist cell, associated with the Marxist Red Army Faction, which

⁶⁵ Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *New York Times Magazine* 23, no. 5 (2004). P. 21



[Fig. 19] **Gerhard Richter, *Man Shot Down 1, (October 18, 1977 - detail)***

operated in West Germany throughout the 1970s. The title of the paintings refers to the day when members of the gang were found dead in their prison cells. Based on press photographs, these black and white blurry paintings recall the murkiness of memory and the haziness of recollection. According to the American art critic and curator Robert Storr, the *October* cycle commemorates the failure of Germany's post-war generation to come to terms with the "wounds inflicted on them and the horrendous burden left behind by the generations of the Third Reich and Soviet-style Socialism."⁶⁶

Both *September* and *October* are artworks that initiate a reflective commemoration of the events to which they refer. Central to Richter's artistic practice has been an engagement with the inadequacies of art to represent the effects of destructive ideologies, be it political or environmental, as well as the effect of mass culture's propaganda. His assemblage of about 600 panels which include photographs, collages and sketches in *Atlas* (fig. 20-21) maps these concerns and ideas. The use of sketches and found photographs of families, of mountain ranges, of Hitler, of Munich, of landscapes, of New York, of Nuremberg, of Venice, of nightscapes, of Nazi concentration camps, of forests, of clouds, of seascapes and more, is a reflection on history, aesthetics and the artistic function of photography.

⁶⁶ Robert Storr, *September: A History Painting by Gerhard Richter* (Tate, 2010). P. 38



[Fig. 20] Gerhard Richter, *Atlas - Baader-Meinhof photographs (18 October 1977)*



[Fig. 21] Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* [clockwise from top left] *Cities; Hitler; Mountain Ranges; Newspaper photos;*

Atlas provides a multi-dimensional vista of mostly unidentified landscapes, which are juxtaposed with a range of other seemingly unconnected elements and offers a wealth of interpretations. Yet for this discussion, it is sufficient to suggest that Richter's use of photomontage explores the position of mass-produced imagery holds in the construction of historical memory with a particular emphasis on the environment, both built and natural.

The idea that cultural forms and practices exist in relation to the environment and are rooted in a social and historical context is also behind the artworks that accompanied this thesis. *Shifting Horizons'* body of work evokes an unforgiving Nature, which is oblivious to us and our cultural constructions. The imagery I have employed in this project places side by side nature-based elements with ancient Chinese funerary artefacts. Extending 25 meters long, the *Cline* series offers the viewer a journey to a foreign past and across generic aspects of the landscape. Desert, mountain ranges, forests, grasses, and clouds are juxtaposed with screen-printed images of terracotta armies that I had photographed on site. In some instances, the presence of the elements is hinted at, as in the ambiguity of panels depicting Aeolian processes, whereas in other panels, distinct parts of landscapes, such as mountains, dunes, grasses and forests are intercepted with the imagery of the terracotta army (fig. 22). There is no attempt to replicate a particular vista. Rather the parts of nature painted on the scrolls present personal remembered experiences in the landscape.

In the actual burial pits, body parts, animal bones, wagon wheels and other clay fragments were scattered around, protruding from the dust that covered everything. Desert dust is everywhere. It covers the monumental clay army, as well as the mausoleum and the city. In fact, the Chinese ancient empire grew from the loess dust that had blown from the Ordos desert, north of the first capital city, Xi'an. The drifted dust highlights the contrast between the permanence of the imperial monuments and the wandering of those who would have inhabited the region. The rulers immortalised in clay, jade, and bronze versus the nomads, carrying ideas and goods, who for centuries would have traversed the arid terrains between Xian and the west, leaving only fossilised footprints in the crusted soil. Ironically the rulers and their spectacular monuments have, by now, mostly turned to dust.



[Fig. 22]

Hanna Kay, *'Cline'* (detail)

There are many ways in which to view the desert. The mythologies of both Judaism and Islam are sprinkled with tales of wandering across the scorched wilderness of the Middle East. The Jewish people received their faith in the Sinai desert, whereas the Islamic creed began in the arid land of Arabia. A person who grew up in the Middle East may see the desert as a place where military campaigns left behind burned bodies, while someone else might see it as an isolated sanctuary – a place where only an eagle's cry might disturb the silence. Moreover, the interpretive sense of the desert may inspire different modes of artistic expression. For example, a desert might be a setting for a narrative that begins with a hopeful expedition and ends in a catastrophe. Alternatively, it can provide a setting for a visual portrayal of mythological figures and their heroic deeds.

Likewise, mountains, rocks and forests can prompt a wealth of meanings. In Chinese spiritual tradition mountains are places where one can observe the mystery of the spirit. And for a person from a Judo-Christian tradition the idea of a mountain may be associated with Moses and the Ten Commandments. A forest can be seen as a place of religious rituals, a sanctuary in war times or a place of leisure. Someone else might see a mountain covered

with trees as resources, whereas an environmentalist might see the woods within a narrative related to climate change or endangered species. The natural environment provides humans with much of their identity and shapes their activity within a given social and cultural context, a viewpoint that is advanced by the *Cline* series.



[Fig. 23]

Hanna Kay, '*Cline*' (detail)

The physical structure of the *cline* series allows the viewer to proceed progressively, and follow a pictorial journey that unfolds in time. The aspects of nature and the metaphorical march of the terracotta army from visibility to invisibility, offer a temporal as well as a spatial voyage which conjures up various semaphoric pathways, including an engagement with otherness. Interaction with nature, with any landscapes, is, in fact, an interaction with the Other. Encounters with alterity do not always involve warfare, atrocities and trauma. Indeed, engagement with the Other is embedded in the journeys of our personal biographies. It is entrenched in the setting we grow up, locations we travel to, or places to which we migrate. For example, our experience of a forest may include traces of previous mythical, cultural and physical, remembered or imagined experiences of forests. In *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt argues that

Not sense perception, in which we experience things directly and close at hand, but imagination, coming after it, prepares the objects of our thought. Before we raise such questions as *What is happiness, what is justice, what is knowledge*, and so on, we must have seen happy and unhappy people, witnessed just and unjust deeds, experienced the desire to know and its fulfilment or frustration. Furthermore, we

must repeat the direct experience in our minds *after* leaving the scene where it took place. To say it again, every thought is an after-thought.⁶⁷

Despite having an agency, Nature does not have any inherent meaning. It is out there, existing regardless of our human-centric outlook.

Nevertheless, more often than not, we project attributes onto the landscape that are personal preferences and opinions. Whereas we need to acknowledge Nature's ontology, and perhaps its expressive attributes, we also need to acknowledge that it is impersonal; that it does not have intrinsic qualities like good, evil, threatening, gloomy, beautiful, ugly or sublime. Every thought we formulate, every value we attribute to the landscape is our own "after-thought", i.e. our projection, our cultural constructions. The idea that Nature is not merely a physical setting where human history unfolds, but rather a vital part in the production of culture can be found in positions held by Simon Schama, Pierre Bourdieu and W.J.T Mitchell among others.⁶⁸ As mentioned previously, for Bourdieu nature is entrenched in "cultural unconscious", and for Mitchell "landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound, silence, light and darkness) in which cultural meanings and values are encoded..."⁶⁹ In *Landscape and Memory*, Schama suggests that landscape is "the product of culture's craving and culture's framing... the very act of identifying the place presupposes our presence and along with us all the heavy cultural backpacks that we lag with us on the trail."⁷⁰

Art and literature present a vantage point from which to get a sense of cultural encounters with nature. The way artists, writers and poets see the landscape tell us something about the roles of journeys across geographies in the makeup of a culture. It is this merger of the imagination with personal and cultural memory that allows understanding of the natural world as it appears before the senses. Moreover, the ambiguous legacy of nature-based

⁶⁷ H. Arendt and M. McCarthy, *The Life of the Mind* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1981). P. 87

⁶⁸ In contrast to the view that the natural environment depends on social conventions for its meaning, there is the position that assumes nature as an independent object and that the experience of the observer does not affect the meaning of "nature". It is beyond the scope of this thesis to debate and mediate between the two views.

⁶⁹ Mitchell. P. 14

⁷⁰ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995). P. 7

myths requires us to recognise that landscapes are not always places that evoke pleasant memories.

In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti writes:

The crowd symbol of the Germans was the army. But the army was more than just the army; it was the marching forest. In no other modern country has the forest-feeling remained as alive as it has in Germany. The parallel rigidity of the upright trees and their density and number fill the heart of the German with a deep and mysterious delight. To this day he loves to go deep into the forest where his forefathers lived; he feels at one with the trees.⁷¹

In his artworks Kiefer has explored the above association of both forest and army in the German tradition. In many of his paintings he uses the forest motif to draw attention to its role in the formation of German national consciousness. In *Varus* (fig. 24.) he draws attention to a historical battle where Germanic tribes defeated the Roman forces, whereas, *March Heath* (fig. 25.) evokes the devastation of a historically significant forest destroyed in the aftermath of WWII's battles. The artwork depicts another reoccurring theme - a path in a desolated terrain, which here alludes to the Brandenburg March in Berlin in 1933, in support of Hitler.



[Fig. 24]

Anselm Kiefer, *Varus*

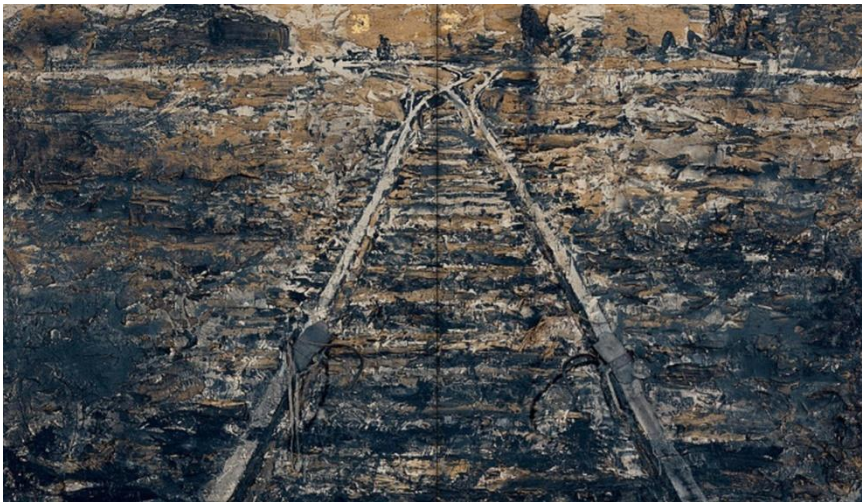
⁷¹ E. Canetti and C. Stewart, *Crowds and Power* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962). P.173



[Fig. 25]

Anselm Kiefer, *March Heath*

In other paintings, Kiefer uses variations of a bleak and dreary landscape to draw attention to historical events. Such a case is *Iron Path* (fig. 26.), an artwork which evokes images of rail tracks to Auschwitz. The painting depicts a parched landscape in which railway tracks lead to nowhere. It brings to mind a central image from Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), in which tracking shots of empty rails lead to various death camps. In the film, as in Kiefer's painting, empty rails are used to engage with the problems of representing the Holocaust without depicting the anguish of particular individuals.



[Fig. 26]

Anselm Kiefer, *Iron path*

Several hundred years after the Renaissance and the optimism of the Enlightenment, Europe and the rest of the world has been inundated by tragedies and catastrophes brought about by warfare and barbarism, devastating picturesque vistas. As the French philosopher

Paul Virilio, asks in his book *Art and Fear*, “Has not the universality of the extermination of bodies as well as of the environment, from Auschwitz to Chernobyl, succeeded in dehumanizing us from without by shattering our ethic and aesthetic bearings, our very perception of our surroundings?”⁷² For him the 20th century is “a pitiless and endlessly catastrophic century from the Titanic in 1912 to Chernobyl in 1986, via the crimes against humanity of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ...”⁷³ and thus insisting that the Holocaust, with Auschwitz-Birkenau as its ultimate symbol, was not a singular historical event.

Linking to this line of thinking is my series of three-dimensional artworks entitles ‘*Still life*’ in which I draw attention to the shattered environment. The objects, inspired by Han Dynasty funeral clay scenes, bring to mind ancient scrolls and their function in recording and transmitting information. ‘*Still life: Grove*’ (fig. 27) consists of a 60x90cm tray filled with sand in which scores of thinly rolled sheets of blackened clay are installed. In addition to commenting on the continuity or lack of cultural continuity, the arrangement of the clay scrolls suggests remains of a burnt forest in a barren ground and as such comments on the destruction of habitats and habits.



[Fig. 27]

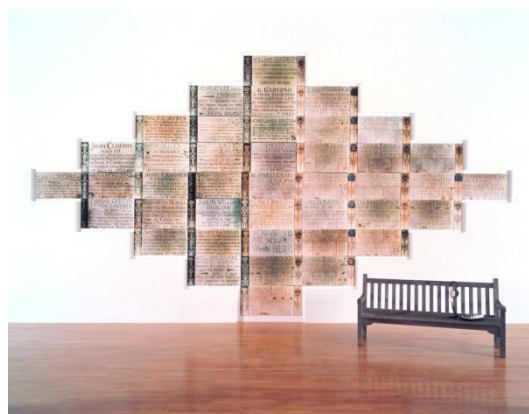
Hanna Kay, *Still life: grove*

⁷² P. Virilio, *Art and Fear* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010). P. 16

⁷³ *Ibid.* P. 30

The imagery in *Shifting Horizons*, which juxtaposes human-made artefacts with fragments of the landscape, highlights the existential tension between human transiency and the perpetuity of the natural environment. Burial sites, memorials and other forms of commemoration are carved out of the environment as markers of human impermanence. Death is an inevitable phenomenon of life. It is a social, cultural and historical event which shapes practices of remembering. In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt writes that “acting and speaking men need the help of homo faber in his highest capacity that is, the help of the artist, of poets... or writers, because without them the only product of human activity, the story they enact and tell will not survive at all.”⁷⁴ She suggests that the creation of art and the erection of monuments and memorial are essential for the survival of history and preserving memory. Public and private commemorations mark past events and provide points of contact between past and present. They exist between memory and history, between nature and the built environment.

Our relationship to death and the meaning of commemorations for us are issues that interest the artist Susan Hiller. By using artefacts and transforming them into contemporary works of art she highlights areas of transference of cultural experiences. The installation ‘*Monument*’ (fig. 28.) is a case in point. The arrangement of forty-one photographs of memorial plaques in London combined with a 20-minute soundtrack is a meditation on death, heroism, memory and commemoration. By questioning the relationship between death and memory the work reflects on a collective fear of extinction.



[Fig.28] Susan Hiller, *Monument*

⁷⁴ H. Arendt and M. Canovan, *The Human Condition: Second Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2013). P. 173

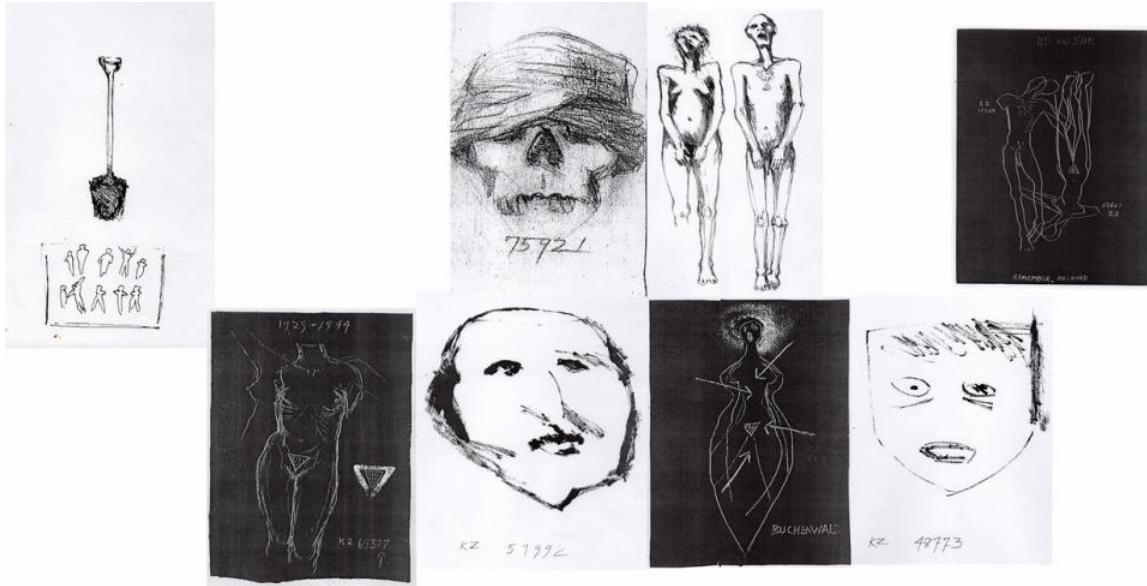
Remembering the dead is practised in many traditions. Commemoration is a ritual that shapes what and how society remembers or forgets. The tombs of Chinese emperors, the Egyptian pyramids, and Indian Taj Mahal are well-known examples of a desire to erect something that outlives the deceased. Likewise, more humble monuments, such as shrines, public cemeteries or roadside memorials, function as a community's historical record. Encounters with markers of burial grounds and monuments are encounters with archives and projections of meanings. They address the living from the past, and their focus is projecting continuation in the future.

Just like monuments that bring the past into the present, so do artworks that engage with historical moments project the past into the now. However, if such objects are merely a directive to remember a particular past event, viewers might question how can one remember what is not experienced? "Remember the Holocaust" has been a command since the end of WWII. Generations that were born after the event might be asking what exactly are they asked to remember? The victims? The perpetrators? Thus, it might be helpful to keep in mind that the materialisation of a past event, either as a monument, a narrative or an artwork, might cause unwelcomed friction between memory and history.

In *Memory History Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur writes "[w]e are indebted to those who have gone before us as part of what we are. The duty of memory is not restricted to preserving the material trace...of past events, but maintains the feeling of being obligated with respect to these others..."⁷⁵ In other words, duty is an act of respect and justice which is an attribute of the relationship with otherness. Arguably, art is best placed to engage with otherness in such an impossible traumatic world. An example is Heather Ellyard's installation *From Ash into Metaphor* (fig.29). Respect, empathy and a sense of duty to the past are among the sentiments that motivate this collection of artworks. Hundreds of rectangular small paintings, drawings and objects of various sizes explore "the balance between growth and unnatural destruction". The panels are a network of images of a symbolic language she has invented, where the vocabulary is based on, both ancient and contemporary, multi-cultural iconographies and texts. She writes: "the work is an effort to

⁷⁵ P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (University of Chicago Press, 2004). P. 89

remember, to transfigure the travesty, to honour the victims the survivors...¹⁷⁶ Moreover, Ellyard explains that she has used the Holocaust as a metaphor “because that terrible event in human history is the one closest to my own cultural roots.”



[Fig.29]

Heather Ellyard (detail)

The artworks discussed in this chapter are historical testimony and memory, both personal and collective. At the same time, they sanction a possible projection of those past events for the future. This in-between position makes the artwork a complex object to interpret and to critique its possible ideological and historical testaments. Unlike monuments, plaques, gravestone or other memorials, the language of an artwork is not as prescriptive. In addition to knowledge of the historical and cultural frameworks, an aesthetic literacy of sorts is required for the appreciation of artworks. Since an artwork is always experienced in the present from a current historical perspective, its interpretation is the transmission of meanings across time. Any encounter with such artworks must be open to its horizons; to the history, the tradition and the memory that the artwork evokes.

*

⁷⁶ <http://www.hse-art.com>

This chapter began with Serres' suggestions that time is a folded topography with interconnected systems where past, present future are linked. He further argues that messengers, akin to angels, move between those systems. This notion of angelic in-betweenness evokes a host of interpretive possibilities, and as such it links together issues relating to burial and commemoration, to otherness, to trauma and suffering and to the forces of nature, all of which were discussed above.

In *Margins of Philosophy* Jacques Derrida argues that “[e]very sign...can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely non-saturable fashion.”⁷⁷ This shift is especially pronounced when we are in front of an artwork and attempt to fix meanings. The viewer and the artwork meet in a space that embodies pushes and pulls, a spiralling process that affects an authentic experience of formulating meanings. In the pages that follow the discussion will focus on that very process, or in Heidegger's words, on the artwork's 'eventing', and will engage with Gadamer's question “How do silent images address us?”⁷⁸

3.2 Eventing

*The significance of art depends on the fact that it speaks to us, that it confronts man with himself in his morally determined existence...the products of art exist only in order to address us...*⁷⁹

For Gadamer, the experience of art is a “unique kind”.⁸⁰ It is an encounter with an unfinished event and is realised in a complex dialogical process in which the horizons of artist, artwork and spectator fuse together. He considers the 'eventing' of an artwork as “something sacred”⁸¹. Accordingly, the artwork's address presents something “more” than the mere visible object. Adorno too speaks of the “more” that defines the work of art.

⁷⁷ As quoted on page 450 in L. Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Northwestern University Press, 2007).

⁷⁸ *Aesthetics and Hermeneutics*, p. 123 Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*.

⁷⁹ *Truth and Method*. P. 24

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* P. 88

⁸¹ Dennis J Schmidt, *Between Word and Image: Heidegger, Klee, and Gadamer on Gesture and Genesis* (Indiana University Press, 2013). P. 118

“Artworks,” he writes, “become artworks in the production of this more,” as such “they produce their own transcendence.”⁸² The way this ‘more’ operates and how it is to be understood by the viewer that is situated outside the process has been one of Gadamer’s main interests and is guiding this thesis.

An artwork’s address is enigmatic. To be able to gain a meaningful experience the viewer needs to be able to listen to it. Indeed in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the precondition for comprehending is the ability to be open and listen to the text⁸³ one encounters. Likewise, Serres stresses that it is important to listen to the ‘noise’ of artworks. ‘Noise’, he claims, is the disorder that permits ‘ordered multiplicity’ in any form of thinking and matter; it is the ‘turbulence’ of multiplicity which is the force of change in all that is united and ordered.⁸⁴ To illustrate this idea of ‘turbulence’, Serres introduces two contrasting anecdotes. On the one hand, he offers Botticelli’s the *Birth of Venus* as an example of beauty born out of the waves of ‘turbulence’. Venus emerges fully formed, from the sea of disorder. As an antithesis, he introduces the painting ‘*La Belle Noiseuse*’ by Balzac’s fictional artist Frenhofer.⁸⁵ In this painting the beauty of ‘Venus’ is covered with a cacophony of brush strokes, “and a messy medley of colours”⁸⁶ which, for Serres, represents the beauty of the noise. With these anecdotes, he provides a theoretical point of reference by which to explore the artwork as ‘ordered multiplicity’ which enters the world out of a sea of ‘turbulence’. Whereas Serres’ thinking moves on to spheres that are beyond categories and logical order, this discussion turns to Martin Heidegger’s categories of ‘world’ and ‘earth’ as a model by which to sort out some of the noise resonating from an artwork’s address.

In “*The Origin of the Work of Art*” Heidegger⁸⁷ introduces the notions of ‘earth’ and ‘world’ as places of struggles in which artworks operate. Accordingly, the artwork exists on two different realms: ‘earth’ - the particular reality of the artwork’s material features that matter intrinsically, and ‘world’ - the context in which various relationships open a historical

⁸² Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997). P. 122

⁸³ As previously mentioned, this discussion considers an artwork as a ‘text’.

⁸⁴ Serres, *Genesis* (G. James & J. Nielson, Trans.). P. 100, 110

⁸⁵ The artist Frenhofer is a character in Honoré de Balzac’s novella *The Unknown Masterpiece*.

⁸⁶ Serres, *Genesis* (G. James & J. Nielson, Trans.). P. 11

⁸⁷ Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art in Off the Beaten Track*.

path to formulating meaning. Hence, the artwork's world-earth dialectics is that which establishes meaning: "world and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another. World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world."⁸⁸

Heidegger's concern is with the artwork's ability to reveal a meaningful understanding of our being-in-the-world. For him, the nature of this disclosure is ongoing, without defined boundaries. This unfolding, he argues is an evolving 'eventing' that requires paying attention to the aspects that form it.

Despite being productive, Heidegger's argument is found wanting with respect to the multiplicity of factors and phenomena that are pervasive as fields of causalities in the world. Electromagnetics energy is only one such instance. Another example is outlined by the phenomenologist Edward Casey in his essay *Mapping the Earth in Works of Art*. There he argues that Heidegger's earth/world notion "significantly failed to single out land in his emphasis of the polemical relationship between earth and the world."⁸⁹ He calls to deconstruct the duality by introducing the notion of 'land'. By relating to both aspects – 'earth' from below while 'world' is above – land is not just the crust of 'earth', but also the surface which makes possible the construction of things such as cities, cultures, languages and traditions.⁹⁰

Despite the dichotomy's limitations, I've employed the notion of earth/world to emphasise the significance of material, form and context in the formation of a meaningful aesthetic experience. By doing so, the discussion addresses one of the weak points in Gadamer's hermeneutics which was identified in chapter two: the emphasis on the importance of the subject matter in artwork and failing to recognise formal and material properties.

In the previous section, *Event*, the discussion focused on particular issues that had inspired the making of the various artworks. The following pages examine the 'earthiness' of the

⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 26

⁸⁹ B.V. Foltz and R. Frodean, *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Indiana University Press, 2004). P. 262

⁹⁰ In this context Casey introduces two concepts – 'earthscape' and 'worldscape' – two primary modalities. The first characterises stability and gravity and the other ever-expanding totality. One of the advantages in his model is that it accounts not only for traditional artworks but also newer art forms such as installations, performances or earthworks – Andy Goldsworthy, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer or Christo are but a few who come to mind.

artwork, as well as the way the artists utilise the material and conditions available to them. The notion of 'earth', as a place that nurtures meaning, has a particular resonance concerning my clay army of angels. Fundamentally earthy, clay is a material with which the evolution of human cultures can be charted. Artistic expressions of this muddy substance are closely tied to the natural elements – earth, water, fire and air. In this natural hands-on process of creating objects, artists grapple with the plasticity and the vulnerability of the material, which resists and yields at the same time, and carries within it multitudes of metaphorical cultural associations.

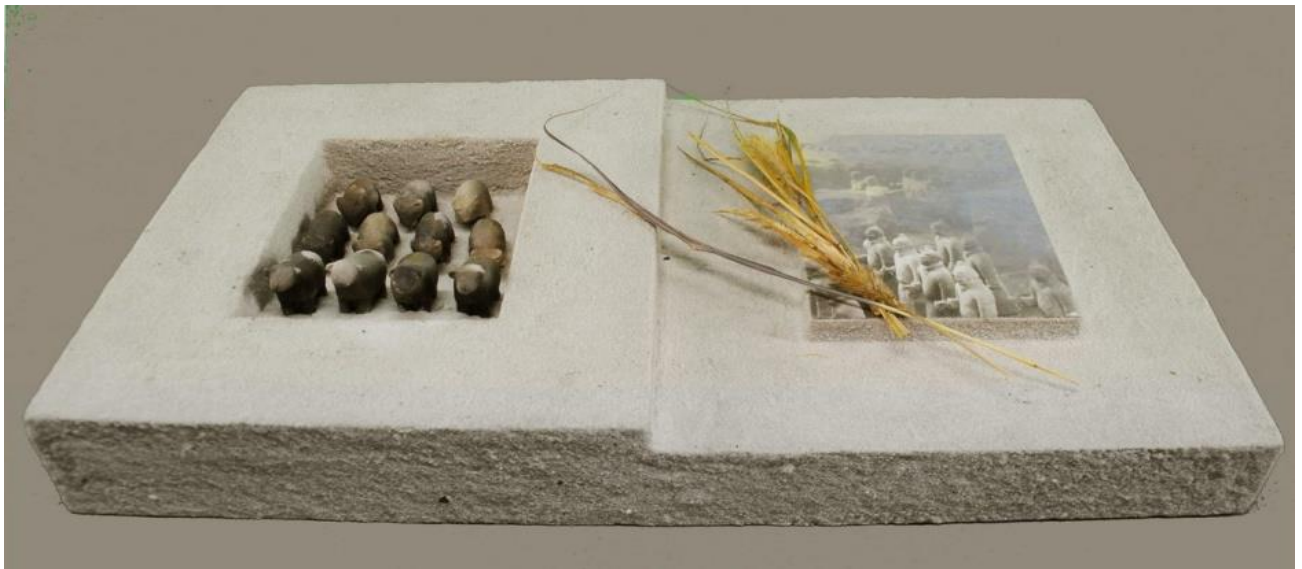
The clay's possibilities have been explored in the three-dimensional components of *Shifting Horizons* body of work. Inspired by ancient funerary objects, the angels, the 'repositories' and the 'still life' scenes, have opened a dialogue across disciplines and cultures by which to link between historical and contemporary practices. Moreover, the artworks have provided material metaphor through which ideas could articulate themselves. For example, the making of hundreds of clay angels, all of which are cast from two distinct moulds, take advantage of the transformative characteristics of the material and its ability to receive imprints and impressions. The subsequent Saggar firing process burns out the water and hardens the pliable white raku-clay figure to become an angel of blackening baked earth. These objects, while referring to the materials used to make funerary objects, portray the traditional ethereal angel incongruously - clumsy and dark.

The shape of the 'repositories' (fig. 31) was inspired by a particular chamber, which archaeologists have speculated to be the headquarter (fig. 30) of the terracotta army. I have made each of the nine repositories to resemble an open book, with a concave-convex dialectic between the two sides of the work. The texture of the object is made to look like the chamber's surface of packed earth. The cavity of each repository contains sand in which small clay objects relating to burial practices of other cultures were placed, while onto the convex side I have attached miniature two-dimensional mixed-media artworks depicting images from the Chinese burial pits.



[Fig.30]

Emperor Qin's headquarter



[Fig.30]

Hanna Kay, *Repository*

The *repository* series, with its blackened clay objects and images of warriors, make connections to archaeological findings, as well as draw attention to the widespread disregard to the natural world. The two sides of the '*repositories*' are linked to dichotomies that suggest complex relationships and separations, such as outside and inside, surface and depth and above and below. The ensuing meaning that the viewer creates is parallel to the process of layering by which these objects were made. An attentive engagement with the

works offers insights and transformations, not unlike the archaeological process it evokes. In such a process the earth is carefully brushed away in search of shards of information about the past. Fragments of clay objects found buried under layers of dust, soil and gravel, evoke the lost and the forgotten. A similar process is triggered in the viewer when fragments of personal and cultural memories are unveiled to converge in the encounter with these objects.

The *repositories* say something about the relationships that are formed by the two sides of the object. As is usually the case with relationships, connections are established, terminated and sometimes re-established. They mark us as a social and cultural being. Enhancing the connections that are formed by the dichotomies is the repeated figure of the angel. In addition to highlighting the separation between spirituality and materiality, it links to ideas about patterns of repetition in human life, such as natural cycles of generation and degeneration. Furthermore, the blackened clay, the fired earth itself, evokes notions concerning destruction and regrowth. The *Army of Angels* was first installed in a Sydney gallery (fig.11).⁹¹ White sand was spread on a section of the gallery floor, from where the mass of small clay angels and animals has emerged. In addition to suggesting that the angels are awkwardly negotiating dunes, the title *Army of Angels* suggests a sense of displacement and threats connected to wars. The installation created a situation where viewers could walk around it, enabling an experience from different positions. A complex dynamic occurs in the encounter between the horizontal position of the 'army' on the floor and the vertical body of the viewer. It has created an awareness of hovering from above and an urge to come closer to the distanced figures. The intention behind offering the spectator a bird's eye view of inelegant angels in a discordant setting has been to incite jarring feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. Although the spectator cannot march with the army, nor touch its components, the work has raised an imagined tactile experience. The viewer can envisage touching an angel and feeling its texture. A further sensory experience can be elicited by imagining how the clay is pressed into the moulds or the feel of sand sifting through the hand.

⁹¹ Janet Clayton Gallery, Sydney 2016.



[Fig.32]

Hanna Kay, *Army of Angels*

The relationship between the 'Army' and its original sandy setting has been changed when *Shifting Horizons* was installed in several public regional galleries in NSW. The angels have been placed on several white plinths between two moveable white walls (fig. 32) creating a situation where viewers could see the work from only two vantage points. A different dynamic occurs in this encounter, The angel's position gives the viewer closer proximity and more intimate experience. Conflicting associations have emerged from the elevated physical aspect of the angels, the phenomenology of the material and the constricted setting. On the one hand, it has linked the spectator to the pits of the Chinese burial and to feelings of apprehension and dread associated with death and wars. On the other hand, the

white surroundings as well as the angels' elevated position have conjured up feelings of certainty and equanimity and reinforced the idea of the angel as aloof and compassionate rather than quarrelsome.

Materiality and presentation of an artwork are among a confluence of factors that determine the quality of the encounter with the work. The place of viewing - a gallery, a museum, an artist studio, a living room, a reproduction in a book or an image on a computer screen – affects the appearance of an artwork, creating a dialectic of presenting and being presented that must be taken into account when considering the aesthetic experience. Mona Hatoum⁹² installed her work *Present Tense* (fig. 33) at a gallery in East Jerusalem in 1996. The work, consisting of thousands of pieces of olive oil soap has a partial map of the Palestinian territories drawn on it. The gallery's location in Jerusalem framed the meaning of the work. Jerusalem is a contested city, at the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a complex history and charged emotional biographies. Exhibiting the artwork there added a localised political dimension to its meaning, a significant relationship that was severed when the artwork was installed at the Tate gallery in 2003.



[Fig.33]

Mona Hatoum *Present Tense*

In either context, when encountering *Present Tense* the senses of the viewer are stimulated to explore implications for the Palestinian people. The prominent smell of soap activates in the viewer recollections and memories, the sorts which are culturally determined. For example, Palestinians may connect the smell of olive oil soap to cultural history linked to images of olive groves on the hills of Judea and Samaria. Other viewers might associate the

⁹² M. Archer et al., *Mona Hatoum* (Phaidon Press, 1997).

smell with cleaning which will bring about different memories and feelings. Furthermore, for a Jewish person soap may connect to World War II's concentration camps where soap was manufactured from victims' fat. Regardless of the associations the smell of the soap may trigger, it is another feature of the artwork that creates a meaningful interaction for its spectator.

Viewers' engagement with three-dimensional artworks is different to that of two-dimensional works. Objects may evoke in us different experiences and memories based on touch or by their spatial placement, whereas the two-dimensional work "stares back at us" (in Mitchell's words), addresses us (in Gadamer's words), from a wall. By drawing the two-dimensional map of the fragmented territories on the bars of soap, Hatoum introduces an additional aspect to the experience. The map stares at us, speechless, from the object. It asserts a presence which evokes notions of dislocation and otherness within the social and cultural dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Maps are associated with boundaries and in the past often served military purposes. In this instance, the map of the Oslo Accord, which is inscribed in the pieces of soap, is tied to the capture of Palestinian territories by Israel. Although the artwork does not make direct reference to the contentious political situation, it would have framed the experience of viewers in the gallery in Jerusalem, and most likely also in London. The nature of the material that supports the borders depicted by the map is transitory and may suggest the hope of the artist that the soap will dissolve and with it the disputed borders.

In *Representing Place* Casey writes that maps are just another form of landscape. They are a different way of grasping the spatial aspect of the lands. They convey alternative representations of the same region, and, he argues, the same factors operate in paintings and in the presentations of maps. He singles out a place of exhibition, surface and frame as the primary forms of "physical givenness"⁹³ that bear on the presentation of artwork. In Hatoum's artwork these factors act to support the experience prompted by the map since the cultural-political associations of the viewer would have been strongly connected to the

⁹³ E.S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002). P. 126

natural environment and landscapes where the conflict is played out.



[Fig.34]

Gerhard Richter, *Clouds*

For the Palestinian people, olive trees, hills and stones constitute a vocabulary of resistance. For the artist, trees, hills, and stones are among a repertoire of motifs on which to draw and invite the viewer to experience the synergy of the landscape. Whether inspiring or threatening the working of nature's forces is inscribed on rocks, trees, hills and mountains. It is where nature provides a sounding board for the wind and the rain to whistle, blow, drum and beat. Attentive listening to nature in flux provides the artist with a breadth of possibilities onto which to inscribe ideas, philosophies and memories⁹⁴. Richter's *Atlas*⁹⁵ (fig. 34) with its assembly of photographs, is a memory project of sorts.⁹⁶ The collection of

⁹⁴ An example of ideas inspired by the cyclical forces of nature can be found in my artworks, in particular in the series *Circularity*. <https://vimeo.com/27364276>

⁹⁵ G. Richter and H. Friedel, *Gerhard Richter Atlas* (Thames & Hudson, 1997).

⁹⁶ In addition to being a personal archive of sorts, Richter's *Atlas* project participates in the 20th century debate about the role of the photograph in both the construction and destruction of historical memory. It has been discussed by Clement Greenberg, Rosalind Krauss and Jacques Derrida. However, as far as this discussion is concerned, the question of the photograph as a medium is briefly discussed when it is relevant to a given artwork.

mainly snapshots remains just that until it is presented in a series of grids. Ordinary holiday and landscape photographs had changed their meaning when they were placed alongside pictures of Holocaust atrocities and urban sprawling. In Richter's arrangements the relationships between the various pictures produce a comment on post-war Germany. The use of photography is central in Richter's artworks. He claims that he began painting from photographs, some of which he blurs intentionally, as a way of creating distance from the subject matters. He further says that by blurring the image "everything [is] equally important and equally unimportant."⁹⁷

A blurred photograph is usually understood as an unintentional outcome, while in painting, a blur is produced through intentional manual marks of the artist on the canvas. Richter's blurring emphasises the relationships and differences between painting and photography. In most of his landscape paintings⁹⁸ the obscure hazy feature of the image is used to empty the landscape of its romantic associations and ideological import and to distinguish the work from the object it represents. In contrast, in the series of paintings *October 18, 1977* (fig, 19, 21, 35) and in *September* (fig.18) the haze is used to place the events beyond the reach of the spectator. In fact, the blurry images confront the viewer with questions about the possibility of representing traumatic historical events in contemporary art.

The black and white oil-photo-paintings that constitute the *October 18, 1977* series are based on press clippings and police photographs. Despite the overall blurred quality of the painting, each image is quite decipherable. For example, the painting *Funeral* (fig, 35) is based on a press photograph which captured, from a distance, the burial of members of the Red Army Faction in Germany. At close up this large three-meter-wide painting looks like a collection of black, white and grey patches of horizontal smudges. Stepping back from the canvas, the viewer can distinguish a funeral procession framed by the trees at the cemetery's boundaries. The procession itself is legible despite the blur created by uniform horizontal brush strokes. In addition to creating blur and haze, the artist's use of the horizontal uniform marks generates movement in the canvas, which emphasise an event which is characterised, according to Richter, by two progressions – the progress of the

⁹⁷ Gerhard Richter et al., *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews, 1962-1993* (Thames and Hudson, 1995). P. 150

⁹⁸ Among them - *Apple Trees* (1987), *Landschaft (landscape)* (1992)

funeral party and the kind of parting “a leave-taking... as a general statement, death is leave-taking.”⁹⁹



[Fig.35]

Gerhard Richter, *Funeral (from October 18, 1977 cycle)*

In contrast, in the painting *September* the use of haze places the deadly event beyond the reach of the viewer. At first glance, it is easy to overlook what the painting is about - a canvas which combines a photograph and gestural marks of grey and blue paint. The photograph of the vertical towers is streaked with horizontal impasto layers. The layers of greys and flashes of cobalt blue and whites could be confused as one of Richter's monochromatic abstraction. The realistic image underneath is hardly noticeable. The likeness to the explosion of the World Trade Towers is faint and could be read as a band of clouds. Subsequently, the canvas could be interpreted in any number of ways. Yet, the very process of the artist's painting technique draws the viewer into the disintegration of the image and, with it to the destruction of the towers themselves. Both the painting's title and the abstracted image do not fully reference the event itself, but rather the work is a reflection on the liminal place the image occupies.

The interplay between painting and photography is also explored in *Shifting Horizons*. In the

⁹⁹ Richter et al. P. 213

scrolls constituting the '*Cline*' series (fig. 1, 9, 10, 22, 23) I have combined digital screen-prints of photographs of the terracotta army with painted aspects of nature. In some of the individual scrolls mist, dust, fog and smoke have been employed to create a hazy screen through which fragments of images of warriors can be viewed. In contrast with Richter's use of the haze, the blurring here is a depiction of natural phenomena which renders the landscape and the ancient relics almost invisible. The memory of the images underneath, visible through gaps in the haze, allow the imagination to make up what is absent. While engaging with the images depicted in the scrolls the viewer undergoes a process of unfolding; an experience similar to the one that the discoverer of the warriors went through. Just like the surface of the land that holds within its geological layers possible narratives of both, human and non-human activities, so thus the surface of the artworks pulls the viewer into a journey into memory and imagination uncovering in the layers of paint possible personal and collective narratives.

The complex relationship between the inherent characteristics of paintings and photographs is played out on the surface of these artworks. Some of the rice-paper scrolls are an investigation of the possibilities of bringing together the mechanical image of the photograph with painterly elements. These compositions show photographed warriors below layers of paint that has been applied in a rhythmic squiggly manner (Fig.36).



[Fig.36]

Hanna Kay, *Cline* (detail)

The textured materiality of the paint is contrasted with the smoothness of the printed photograph. The artwork's surface demonstrates the labour-intensive effort involved in painting, compared with the suggested automatic process when producing a photograph.

The photographs of the burial pits embedded in the artworks introduce additional dimension to the content of the artworks that a painterly response to the same subject would lack. Referencing the artefacts directly in their setting emphasizes the cultural distance between Eastern and Western traditions. The photographs act as quotations,¹⁰⁰ commenting on the cultural practices the artefacts convey. In addition to highlighting the different mediums, the quoted images remind us that the way in which people in the past saw the world is so very different from contemporary life. As such the surface of the scrolls steers the viewer towards a multitude of issues ranging from cross-media context to cross-cultural issues and their consequences to the natural environment.

In the *cline* scrolls, the painted aspects of the landscape have a likeness to the object they represent. This intended outcome has been to create an overall feel of uniformity and continuity between the printed photographs and the imagined environmental context. It is only upon close inspection that the incongruous composition is comprehended, and only when the viewer approaches the sequence of scrolls that the surface reveals the juxtaposition of the familiar, mundane, painted aspects of nature and the 'otherness' of the archaeological findings. The overlapping marks of paint carry the viewer beyond the conventional way of experiencing nature. Weather and light pass over the images and weave together the mixture of nature's elements and ancient artefacts to offer a continuum of coming and going.

By ignoring the difference between the 'other' and the 'familiar' the artworks open a space in which categories are blurred and boundaries are questioned. The somehow sombre images generate a site of signification around which to organise metaphors and ideas relating to past cultures, death and wars, and through which to channel a dialogue about cross-cultural values. Humans give meaning to things by the manner of their use, or by the

¹⁰⁰ The term 'quotation' is used here to indicate a repeated 'text' relating to a particular custom, rather than as form of appropriation of artworks from the past.

symbolic significance they are given. The array of meanings attached to things and phenomena in nature by different cultures shapes social interactions and provides a metaphoric means of exchange. In its particular way, *Shifting Horizons'* body of work is an intermixing of symbolic means employed to point out that in contrast to the surviving fragments of the terracotta army in the burial pits, the natural world is not a stagnate crumbling world, and is critical to the survival of human life.

In general terms, the composition of an artwork's scene is defined by the boundaries of the artworks and the particularity of its content. In the '*cline*' sequence clouds, trees, grasses, mountains and stones are placed tactically to create depth and allow the viewer to experience the synergy of the work. The arrangements of elements exhibit a coherence of sorts which corresponds to actual experiences in the landscape. In addition to the multidimensionality of depth, the artworks display several perspectives, all of which are key features in the artworks' ability to represent vast geographical expanse within the confines of the canvas. In some of the *cline's* scrolls, cloud-like formations expand the horizon of the picture, while at the same time they remind the viewer about the effects of weather systems and human actions that bring about fires and dust storms. In other scrolls, immobile rocks defy the force of gravity, while their disintegration indicates the circularity of nature (fig. 37).



[Fig.37]

Hanna Kay, '*Cline*' (detail)

Where paintings are concerned the frame is where the presentation ceases. The artwork's surface is separated from its surrounding architectures by its boundaries. The frame serves to exclude, and draw the viewer to the field of the pictorial representation. The customary shape of landscape paintings in the Western tradition draws on a particular body experience in the landscape. This has to do with constructing and keeping the basic arrangement of horizontal and vertical aspects. These aspects emulate human perceptions, in which the upright human body stands up in the landscape and looks out to the horizon. Casey points out that "the verticality of the body is perpendicular to the horizontality of the horizon, and the intersection at play, of a lived body and a perceived landscape relationship is material and dynamic."¹⁰¹

Such a dynamic relationship is formed between the viewer and the horizontal band of scrolls comprising the *Cline* series. The 34 hanging scrolls, which are reinforced vertically, form a rectangular format, which the viewer experiences by following the horizontal and vertical axes. The depicted landscape can be experienced sequentially in the diachronic manner that the horizontal aspect unfolds, while simultaneously grasping the depth of back and front in a vertical direction.¹⁰² The relationship between the viewer's body and the artwork's dimensions exists even when the horizon is not depicted in the actual composition of the painting. This lack of horizon, in turn, adds certain embodied sensations to the overall experience of the artwork. In some of the scrolls repetitive marks of paint overlay each other producing a weaving texture without a distinct structure, and with no obvious horizontal points of convergence. Although these particular abstract images serve as points of respite in the overall sequence, the unstructured 'noise' of gestures on the surface, can also 'undo' the viewer position that has been established in adjacent scrolls.

In the *Cline* series, repetitive processes are used to explore issues relating to the environment, histories and commemorations, and the repeated images of the warriors function as a dynamic means by which to establish a prospect of recurrence. In its entirety, the *Shifting Horizons* body of work employed the repeated figure of both the angel and the images of the terracotta warriors to evoke cyclical processes that reoccur in the natural

¹⁰¹ Casey. P. 110

¹⁰² In contrast to the horizontal aspect of landscape paintings in the Western tradition, in China the scroll and its vertical aspect have traditionally been the accepted mode of representing the landscape.

world. It also reinforces the actual 'mechanical' means of producing the various works: the photographic, the printing process and the 'cloning' formation of the clay figures out of moulds. These repetitions are an internal rhythm of the artwork, which unravels in the viewer's encounter and subsequent reflection.

The idea that repetitions can be employed as a theoretical framework to examine particular issues is also to be found in some of Kiefer's artworks. Whether depicting German or Jewish myths, a repeated system of myths and symbols runs through his work suggesting continuity with the past. By his belief that by looking back into the past one can progress into the future,¹⁰³ *Varus* (fig. 24) engages with the 9th century battle in the Teutoburger Forest. It is a painting of trees and snow, with a red bloodstained path, and some names from German history written on the canvas - poets, philosophers, and military leaders all of whom have played a role in forging German identity. The forest depicted in the painting draws attention to the military tradition in German history. The painted tree trunks with branches pointing upward allude to soldiers with swords or loaded gun ready for battle. Schama¹⁰⁴ writes that to investigate history Kiefer has turned his attention to the materiality of the paintings, and connected the painterly process with the subject matter. In *Varus* and other artworks that depict trees and forests, he creates the materiality of the tree itself. The spontaneous gestures that are apparent on the surface of the canvas tell of choices made in the actual act of painting.

Kiefer makes use of all the possibilities of the materials at his disposal, repeatedly incorporating photographs, straw, mud, lead, his handwriting and other objects into paintings. Again and again, he depicts aspects of German landscapes as settings for his investigation of historical events. *Iron Path*, (fig. 26) one of the repeated 'path' and 'scorched earth' artworks, is a painting of railroad tracks stretching across a desolated landscape. The association is of an unknown journey, and when it is read in the context of WW II German history, *Iron Path* represents a journey into death. The large painting draws the viewer into the anonymity of its heavily textured space. By focusing on the empty tracks, empty vista and a thin yellow glow on the horizon, Kiefer grapples with the problems of

¹⁰³ Lisa Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* (Cambridge University Press Cambridge/New York/Melbourne, 1999).

¹⁰⁴ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995). P. 127 – 129

depicting the victims of the Holocaust without trivialising them by using a more literal presentation. The bleak landscape, the horizon line and the perspective of the painted railroad tracks in *'Iron Path'* are constructed in a way that invites the audience to step into the canvas and feel something particular about a world external, an utter 'otherness', to themselves. The work does not prescribe a particular experience or ideology. The perspective provides a stage from which to view the tracks as both passengers and conductors, both of which ended up victims of a brutal event.

Artists deliberately choose particular visual features and materials for the creation of an artwork. Discernible features, such as composition, marks, form, scale, materials, surface, colour, are made to be intrinsically relevant. When the boundaries of the canvas are concerned, its actual size is a crucial feature. When looking at Kiefer's paintings, perhaps none of the features is as relevant to the work's impact as its gigantic dimensions. In contrast with the prevailing opinion that a small rendition of a colossal event undercuts its monumentality, Richter's *September* conveys the enormity of the moment despite its small dimensions. Moreover, in his essay *September: A History Painting by Gerhard Richter*, Robert Storr points out that the scale of the artwork "places it in the range of many of the media images people saw on television at the time of the attack and since, while also countering the tendency in history painting of representing major events in rhetorically big formats with melodramatic effect."¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the size of this particular piece suggests that no artwork, regardless of size, could contain the breadth of the event *September* attempts to convey.

Artists develop a visual language out of a range of possible available options. This visual code, or style, is a combination of invisible and visible gestures - how body movements are inscribed on the canvas, and how the genesis at the heart of the painting emerges out of the 'noise'. The ensuing marks of the hand are instrumental in affirming the urgency of the artist's voice, in particular in these days when life is saturated by an overload of images which do not question their own origin. The relationship between the artist and the artwork is complex. The source of inspiration is individual, and so is the process by which

¹⁰⁵ Storr. P. 47

each artist shapes the material to make art. Heather Ellyard's visual code is a combination of pictorial marks and handwritten linguistic text.



[Fig.38]

Heather Ellyard, *Unfinished Grid* (detail)

Upon approaching her *Unfinished Grid* (fig. 38), the viewer realises that the artist turns words into images. The artwork is a site where the visual relationship between words and images is examined. The installation of the 109 small wooden panels that constitute the artwork is essential to the discursive structure of meaning the artwork sets off. The arrangement as an unfinished grid seems to present the viewer with the process of its own formation. Identical in size, each unframed panel offers an image or words referencing personal and collective histories and cultures. Whereas “the gaps in the grid,” Ellyard says¹⁰⁶, “are the silent places of the unfinished murdered lives...”

This artwork is among several works that make up Ellyard's exhibition from *Ash to Metaphor* (1991), in which she has used the Holocaust as a metaphor to explore issues relating to suffering and remembering. Each panel in the artwork's grid displays its own specific and internal questioning along with the questions posed by the whole exhibition. Words seem to emerge from blank spaces, forming only in order to fade out. There is an image of what looks like a cloud of words emerging from an empty white space that fades into its own

formation. The immediate association is of barbed wire referencing enclosures of death camps and silence that are beyond the reach of any human's grief. The words in the artworks do not function only as a language, but also as images of a different sort. They are not calligraphy but rather an iconographic reminder of the lives and the values that war has erased.

Text is at play also in much of Kiefer's imagery. In *The Daughters of Lilith* (fig. 6), the only indication of the artwork's subject matter is the handwritten inscription sprawled across the top of the artwork. Likewise, *March Heath* (fig. 25) and *Varus* (fig. 24) are among his landscape paintings that are distinguished primarily by the titles that appear on the canvas, interfering with the image itself. Titles are just another means available to the artist through which to steer the viewer's interpretation of the artwork. In my sequence, '*cline*', partly due to the title - a term that possesses both biological and linguistic connotations of continuity - the interpretation is guided toward a continuum with an infinite number of connections between cultural practices and landscapes. This series of rice paper scrolls not only allows me to engage with unfamiliar cultural practices but, by using a technique derived from the old European masters I pay homage to Western art history. In Mona Hatoum's *Present Tense* (fig. 33) the title is based on a grammatical term, but it can also direct the interpretation towards political ideas and the present tensed situation in Palestine. And in Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* (fig. 17) the metaphor embedded in the artwork's title may bring to focus the somehow puzzling experience of the viewer upon approaching the artwork.¹⁰⁷

Titles do not always function as a simple identification tag and often provide the viewer with an additional source of meaning. They can prevent the viewer's mind from going off on a tangent. Words of the title may enter the painting, as in Kiefer's paintings, and words can be turned into an image, as in Ellyard's artworks. The relationship between word and images is multifaceted and many artists have engaged with this issue either in their artworks or in

¹⁰⁶ In conversation with the artist.

¹⁰⁷ Definition of *shibboleth* in addition to the Hebrew meaning 'ear of grain': 1. an old idea, opinion, or saying that is commonly believed and repeated but that may be seen as old-fashioned or untrue. 2 a word or way of speaking or behaving which shows that a person belongs to a particular group. www.merriam-webster.com

their writings. Thinking about the correlation between words and images has a long history also among philosophers. The contest between the word and the image concerning the notion of truth can be traced from Plato to Kant, Nietzsche and into present days. Gadamer, for instance, considers the way words and images structure text as one of the topics that define his hermeneutic project. Concerns regarding the relation between images and words and the ensuing problematic that are at play when an image is translated into words are among the issues addressed in the following section.

This place seems to be appropriate to point out that in this discussion an artwork is referred to as 'text' not in order to reduce it to language, but rather to evoke its Latin origin 'texus', which literally means 'a woven, structured or fabricated thing'. As such an artwork has a complex textured surface structured by the interwoven semantic units that unfold in the encounter with a viewer. It is not possible to discuss here thoroughly the multitude of ways in which the artwork's visible and invisible features affect the viewer. Things such as context, size, subject matter, materiality, surface, composition, gestures, form or colour are only a few of the aspects that matter and unfold in the artwork's 'eventing'. Although such characteristics are essential in appreciating how artworks of all kinds evoke meaning, yet, these are not required in appreciating that their distinctiveness matters intrinsically, and form the 'language' with which the artwork addresses its viewer.¹⁰⁸

3.3 Eventuality

*"...image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill..."*¹⁰⁹

It seems appropriate to focus in this section on the notion of 'constellation'. This is the section where the theoretical, conceptual, imagistic and physical configurations join the artwork and its viewer. It is a mobile constellation consisting of shifting dialectics,

¹⁰⁸ There are many texts engaging with the language of art and with the language of images, much beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin. P. 262

various viewpoints and a multitude of possible interpretations. Benjamin ends the paragraph from which the above quote is taken, saying that “[o]nly dialectical images are genuine images; and the place where one encounters them is language”. With this claim, he directs our attention to the presence of a dialogue and the role of language in our encounters with objects of art. Likewise, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer puts forward a Hegel-inspired dialogue as a model of understanding. Accordingly, a dialogue always occurs in language, and understanding is always negotiated linguistically. The conviction that we exist in language can be traced back to Heidegger notions’ of understanding and interpretation, where understanding is a mode of being.

While this primacy of conventional language does not exclude the possibility of other modes of understanding, for Gadamer language is not just a means which helps us to be-in-the-world, but rather “[i]t is from language as a medium that our whole experience of the world...unfolds”.¹¹⁰ Language is our second nature, and by extension, it has consequences for our understanding of art and culture. Indeed, language is an essential factor in forming who we are as humans in the world. However, our life is permeated with ‘noisy’ sensory information and it is a contested site of values mediated by multiple relationships. In such an atmosphere of invisible power struggles claiming that it is only through language that we understand the world is somewhat prosaic. Indeed, a language might deepen our experiences, yet the privileges attributed to human linguistic abilities fails to acknowledge the non-linguistic meaning we make of everyday sensory input. As discussed earlier in contrast to hermeneutics’ resistance to the idea of human intellect as wordless, this thesis stresses the existence of non-linguistic understanding, especially when the making of and engagement with an artwork are concerned.

Although this discussion is concerned with the space that is formed by the synergy between sensations and concepts before the aesthetic experience is translated into words, I turn to hermeneutical aesthetics for its focus on the determinants that shape our encounter with art. Despite the primacy given to verbal-language, the hermeneutic

¹¹⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. P. 453

approach is advanced here to account for the array of interpretations, some of which may be conflicting, which emerge in the encounter with an object of art. According to Gadamer, there is no fundamental difference between participating in a verbal conversation and experiencing what artworks reveal to us. Both are dialogical events that somehow disrupt the person's 'habitual' equilibrium. This minimal disruption, which causes ripples of change in a viewer's ordinary outlook, brings to mind the idea of 'clinamen'.

Lucretius coined the term 'clinamen' for the unpredictable swerve of atoms. It is a slight deviation which disturbs the movement of atoms and creates a new direction. It is understood to be the potential force that causes change and repetitions. As a process of becoming, clinamen is at the heart of creativity with its arbitrary intensities, with its random ebbs and flows. Deleuze refers to its several dynamics as they relate to his notion of time. In *Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation*¹¹¹ he extends the term to conjoin sensations and thoughts, which for him is a condition to the non-linguistic experience, prior to verbal interpretation. In contrast, Serres, in his notion of 'turbulence' uses the 'clinamen' as the instrument of change in a given order. For example, in his discussion of the painting *La Belle Noiseuse*,¹¹² a foot is detected in the pure 'noise' of marks and colours. The foot is the slight differentiation in the 'black multiplicity', which like the clinamen instigates turbulence that turns noise into order, which he names 'white multiplicity' - a state where all the possibilities are present.¹¹³

When the aesthetic experience is concerned, both perspectives of clinamen help thinking about that which is possible, not only in the construction of conceptual meaning but also when questions of sensory systems are concerned. As a notion, which is considered a generative process, it is a useful framework in the exploration of both, the artist's process of making art and the viewer's aesthetic experience. The clinamen which is the condition of possibilities in a given system creates a complex order by way

¹¹¹ Deleuze and Bacon. P. 82

¹¹² Serres, *Genesis* (G. James & J. Nielson, Trans.). P. 100, 110

¹¹³ In addition to Serres and Deleuze, the concept of clinamen has been used by Henri Bergson, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Harold Bloom, albeit with different interpretations.

of disorder. Thus, a displayed 'orderly' artwork carries within its address the noise of disorder. For Serres, a simple exchange of messages from one point to another is unattainable. Noise is an essential component of all communication. "To communicate", he writes, "is to risk losing meaning in noise. Communication is a sort of game played by two interlocutors considered as united against the phenomena of interference and confusion...These interlocutors . . . battle together against noise".¹¹⁴ As such, noise is part of the relationships between artist, artwork and viewer - each of which has a different attribute depending on one's position in the constellation. For the artist, noise may need to be overcome, whereas for the viewer it may have its own informational value.

When viewing some of Susan Hiller's artworks, listening to the 'noise' is an essential part of the work's address. In the case of *Monument* (fig. 28), the work is realised by a spectator who sits on a bench looking at the commemorative photographs and listening to the artist's voice playing through headphones. To understand what the work is about, a person must be prepared to listen to her comments on themes such as heroism, death and memory. Likewise, her installation *Witness* (fig 39) is an example of an artwork literally emerging out of 'noise'.



[Fig.39]

Susan Hiller, *Witness*

¹¹⁴ M. Serres, J.V. Harari, and D.F. Bell, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). P. 67

Upon entering the darkened space, the visitor is greeted by a cacophony of voices emanating from hundreds of small speakers that are suspended from the ceiling. The murmur fills the room with a soundscape of various personal accounts of a sighting of a UFO. “When you first walk in, all you hear are waves of whispers”, a spectator has recounted the experience, and “as you get closer it becomes clear that the voices speak in many languages and that each voice tells a true story of an encounter with an unexplained phenomenon. At times the cacophony dies down and a single voice fills the room...”¹¹⁵

The artwork’s process of becoming is complex. The starting point, the preferred materiality and the actual process of making are particular to each artist. Likewise, the patterns of imagination and conceptualisation are highly individual. The viewer does not have access to the confluence of causes, conditions and intentions behind an artwork’s process of becoming. Unlike the artist who may always go from the final work and trace the chain of transformations that underpin the artwork’s creation, the viewer can only imagine this gradual journey from disorder to order. The spectator’s experience of a work of art such as *Witness* is multi-sensory and could be disorienting, especially when not every person might recognise all of the recorded languages, let alone understand what they mean.

Whether intended or not, this dissonance of unintelligible voices may feel like stepping into a contemporary Tower of Babel. On her part, Hiller has said about this work: “Listening to these people whispering in your ears is like being a priest in a confessional. The whole piece is built upon the shape of the cross and the circle... The religious symbolism of the cross in the circle is crucial because the stories are examples of contemporary visionary experience. Only today people see UFOs where once they saw angels.”¹¹⁶ Upon encountering works such as *Witness*, my own *Army of Angel*, or Antony Gormley’s *Angel of the North* (fig. 40) a viewer may wonder why we should be interested in angels these days. Or ask: do they have any relevance in an era that prides itself on scientific rationality? Or does the use of the angel as a metaphor attempts to invest the artwork with a sense of the spiritual in our own ostensibly secular life?

¹¹⁵ Susan Hiller’s “Witness” by Ann Jones <https://mostlyfilm.com/2011/05/04/unexplained-lights-in-the-sky-susan-hillers-witness/>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/susan-hiller-witness-behind-scenes>

In an interview following the publication of *Angels: a Modern Myth*, Serres was asked similar questions. He replied that “[b]ecause our universe is organized around message-bearing systems, and because, as message-bearers angels are numerous, complex and sophisticated... Each Angel is a bearer of one or more relationships; today they exist in myriad forms, and every day we invent billions of new ones.” He continues by saying “I avoid the spiritual problems. I prefer to speak about logical problems or practical problems. The problem of good and evil, for instance, is very easy to explain when you see that the messenger or channel is neutral... the problem is not spiritual. The problem is to explain why with the same channel, the same messenger, you can get bad or good results.”¹¹⁷



[Fig.40]

Antony Gormley, *Angel of the North*

The angel is purported to occupy a world located somewhere between perceptions and concepts, in an infinite cognitive realm, and as such it presents an alternative mode of cognitive space. The angel signifies transient worlds that permit humans to make up and interpret

meaning. In a general sense, angels may signify the circular domains of birth and death and notions of transience and eternity. However, when taken out of the theological context the angel opens up un-imagined interpretive possibilities. Furthermore, when placed in the context of contemporary art the presence of an angel may encourage transcending

¹¹⁷ Interview with Hari Kunzru, London 10th January 1995, transcript <http://www.harikunzru.com/michel-serres-interview-1995/>

paradigms which are rooted in systems of beliefs.

In *Shifting Horizons*, the scorched clay angels provide a playground where the relationship between the real and the unreal is played out. They invite the viewer to contemplate a space where the impossible is possible and vice versa. Those in-between creatures offer us a realm where a thing is at once visible and invisible, and they signify the nature of ‘otherness’ possibly better than any other figure. On the one hand, they are part of a past we have put behind us; a past that no longer fits in the present-day world we have created. Yet they feature as a residuum, not necessarily of theological beliefs, but, perhaps, of utopian aspirations. These days angels seem to appeal to the imagination of audiences as well as remaining a topic of interest across many disciplines.

Several approaches illustrate the signifying possibilities offered by the angel. According to Maimonides¹¹⁸, ‘angel’ is the term used to identify the faculty of the imagination. More recently, Serres has argued that the angel, as a message-bearer is part of the contemporary world, acting to bring together science, ethics, religion and art to co-exist in a better understood natural environment. Likewise, Latour’s claim in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* that there is no distinction between visible and invisible worlds locates the angel in a present-day’s mode of being. Moreover, Colilli suggests that this kind of angelic cognitive space provides an alternative to Nietzsche’s problem of the eternal recurrence¹¹⁹. He writes “the New Angel’s gaze breaks the circle of the eternal return by opening the cognitive space that surrounds the unrepeatable instant. Among other things, this implies a total overcoming of any rationalistic paradigm rooted in the objective of anticipating...”¹²⁰

The idea that contemporary uses of the angel permit us to experience its signification anew is echoed in Massimo Cacciari’s book *The Necessary Angel* (fig. 4). In his reflection on Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, he writes: “This is how Klee imagines the New Angel: irrevocable only

¹¹⁸ Also known by the acronym Rambam (1135–1204) born in Spain, was a medieval Jewish philosopher, rabbi, astronomer and physician.

¹¹⁹ In brief, the eternal return, or recurrence, is a fundamental idea in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Briefly, the basic premise derives from the assumption that the amount of matter and energy in the universe is finite. The universe itself is dynamic, infinitely going through a succession of arrangements. Consequently the same event that has taken place in the past will recur again and again.

¹²⁰ Colilli. P. 35

in that it has been once, has sung for *an instant*. This instant produces Openness without closure, which cannot be filled or repeated—free from the cycles of rebirths. .. the New Angel is free.”¹²¹ By conjuring up the angel and giving it a form, contemporary artists give a secular voice to the need to bridge over the current gap between materiality and spirituality and highlight, among other issues, the struggle between rationality and the imagination, as well as our search for ways to communicate between societies and across Otherness.

Precisely because the angel is facilitated by our imagination and exists in a space located somewhere between here and there, it offers a myriad of interpretative possibilities. In his philosophical reflections, Cacciari argues that to enter this space and “[t]o entrust ourselves into the hands of the Angel would mean to be ravished into the pure unsayable.”¹²² In this context, acknowledging the angelic realm is to abandon the ordinariness of every day for the spiritual awe of that which cannot be said. The tradition of not naming God and Death is enshrined in religious practices, especially in the monotheistic traditions of Christian mysticism, Kabbalah and Sufism. The unsayable is marked by infinite deferrals, ambiguities and impossibilities, due to the conviction that depictions of both death and God are impossibility within the finite characteristic of human consciousness.

Briefly the ‘unsayable’ is to be understood as that which, for whatever conventional reasons, has been excluded by what is sayable. The predicament of the idea has been a topic of inquiry in philosophical and literary studies since Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets. Although commonly attributed to theological perspectives and metaphysical sublimations, the concept has evolved to include different registers. In the aftermath of WW2, the ‘unsayable’ has become a theme of philosophical inquiries by, among others, Theodor Adorno, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Gianni Vattimo and Maurice Blanchot¹²³. Consequently, the concept has become an avenue by which to examine ruptures in systems of communication which lead to the establishment of cultural conventions.

Both Benjamin and Agamben have voiced their opposition to the concept of the ‘unsayable’.

¹²¹ Ibid. P. 33

¹²² Ibid P. 14

¹²³ For more see S. Boos, *Speaking the Unspeakable in Postwar Germany: Toward a Public Discourse on the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

Benjamin writes of his wish to eliminate it from language all together so that doubts, uncertainties and enigmas will be removed from our world. Likewise, Agamben wishes to eliminate the unsayable in his quest to demystify the notion that something lies beyond the boundaries of language. By contrast, Ludwig Wittgenstein, upon his return from the war in 1919 has emphasised the importance of ‘the unsayable’ and admits “there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words.”¹²⁴ As discussed in chapter two, Gadamer has admitted that the claim that all understanding is linguistic may seem audacious, and he follows by including the ‘unsayable’ within language, arguing that a unified meaning “hold[s] what is said together with infinity of what is not said.”¹²⁵ For him, every word carries with it “an inner dimension of multiplication... Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning.”¹²⁶ As such he understands the unfolding of meaning to be held in the fluid characteristic of a living language, rather than residing in the statements themselves. Hence, the unsayable implies that language holds in its folds something that remains unarticulated. By affirming the capacity of language to hold within it the unsayable, Gadamer uses the concept to advance his aesthetic theory in which he argues that to understand a dialogue with a work of art is to hold together both the said and unsaid.

Along similar lines, Heidegger claims that “language is that which brings things into the world for the first time...it brings the unsayable as such into the world.”¹²⁷ Also Blanchot, who has seriously engaged with Heidegger’s writing on issues relating to art, reflects in *The Writing of the Disaster* on the significance of the unspeakable in both writing and speaking. He writes that “without language, nothing can be shown. And to be silent is still to speak. Silence is impossible.”¹²⁸ Indeed not speaking is difficult, yet the silence in the void that is left by the un-spoken can at times be deafening. Disasters and trauma may be rendered unspeakable not because thinking and reflecting on them is impossible, but rather because of the incapacity of verbal language itself.

¹²⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Taylor & Francis, 2013). P. 89

¹²⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. P. 485

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* P. 454

¹²⁷ Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art in Off the Beaten Track*. P. 46

¹²⁸ M. Blanchot and A. Smock, *The Writing of the Disaster* (University of Nebraska Press, 2015). Kindle edition location 319.

Following these arguments, it is safe to say that art in its various modes is the thing best placed to examine what is otherwise 'unsayable', and to give voice to the 'unthinkable'. In his book *The Idea of Prose*, Agamben quotes Paul Celan saying that "the language for which we have no words, which doesn't pretend like grammatical language... is the language of poetry."¹²⁹ The poetry of Celan, a Jewish poet, a concentration camp survivor, bears witness to the inhumanity of his (and our) time. His poem *Death Fugue*, written in 1945 is such an example:

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
 we drink you at noon death is a master from Germany
 we drink you at sundown and in the morning we drink and we drink you
 death is a master from Germany his eyes are blue
 he strikes you with leaden bullets his aim is true
 a man lives in the house your golden hair Margarete
 he sets his pack on to us he grants us a grave in the air
 he plays with the serpents and daydreams death is a master from Germany
 your golden hair Margarete
 your ashen hair Shulamith

*Death Fugue (detail), Paul Celan*¹³⁰

Celan's poetry is opaque, hermetic and aspires to silences.¹³¹ His verses are metaphors which contain various topographies, by which he transforms essence into linguistic patterns. He wishes the reader to enter a double-dialogue and engage with both the words and the

¹²⁹ G. Agamben, *Idea of Prose* (State University of New York Press, 1995). P. 20

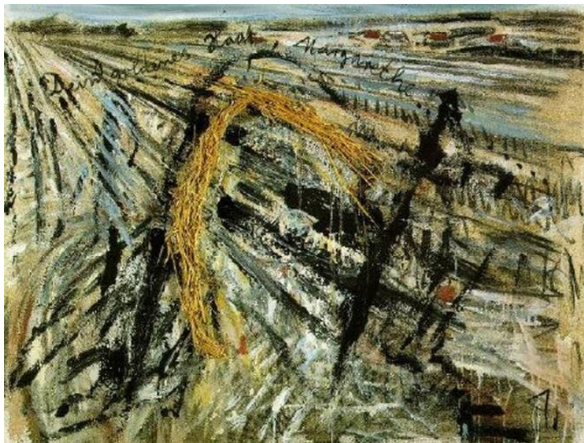
¹³⁰ P. Celan and M. Hamburger, *Paul Celan: Poems* (Persea Books, 1980). P. 51

¹³¹ Gadamer who knew Celan and admired him reads the poems as one who has no access for historical facts. He stressed that he reads the poems from the front of the text, as an outsider who is not privy to its secrets. He is interested in the 'intimate' encounter of the 'I' with the 'Other' which in this case is the encounter with a poem. This is in contrast with Derrida who argued that Celan's poetic language becomes comprehensible only in relation to a particular site or place. In this context the idea of 'supplement' is useful; a 'supplement' that according to Derrida expands the meaning and receives the future into its possibilities. Derrida begins *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan* by stating that "circumcision takes place only once". The *Shibboleth* may be understood also as a "circumcised word." He echoes Gadamer by saying that Celan's poetry outlives what it witnesses and its shibboleths -J. Derrida, *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan*.

deafening silences. Adorno, his contemporary, seems to have understood this, writing in his *Aesthetic Theory*: “this poetry is permeated with the shame of art in the light of the suffering that withdraws from both experience and sublimation. Celan’s poems wish to express an acute horror by remaining silent.”¹³² Indeed, the pain articulated in the poems is a reminder of the inherent failure of language to comprehend the unspeakable and unforgotten events.



[Fig.41] Heather Ellyard,
Black Milk (Schwartz Milch)



[Fig.42] Anselm Kiefer,
Your Golden Hair, Margarete

These verses, which capture the horror of the Holocaust in a succession of mythic images, are evoked in several of Ellyard’s (fig. 41) and Kiefer’s artworks. In the painting *Your Golden Hair, Margarete*, (fig. 42), which draws on the last two lines of the poem, Kiefer avoids any explicit representations of the violence and pain to which the verses refer. In the centre of a barren landscape, he has painted Shulamith’s hair black, whereas for Margarete’s golden

¹³² Adorno. P. 422

hair he has used straw. The painting's metaphoric protagonists are superimposed upon one another to create a conceptual texture that draws its tension from the contradictory layers of German mythological symbols and historical events.

Shulamith, whose ashen-black hair evokes her Semitic origins, perished in the Holocaust. In an attempt to articulate the unspeakable violent death, he brings her together with the blonde Aryan Margarete, the symbol of German womanhood created by Goethe. The title of the artwork, which is inscribed in black on the painting's surface, brings to mind the imprints of history on the landscape, as well as on our memory. The theme of remembering, forgetting and confronting the past is also at the centre of Kiefer's large lead sculpture, *Poppy and Memory* (fig. 7) whose title is also taken from Celan's poetry. It is a large leaden object resembling a stranded plane whose wings are weighed down with oversized lead books, and dry poppies inserted between their pages. The poppies, being the symbol of both forgetting and remembrance, are not only a homage to the poet,¹³³ but also articulate the artist's determination to confront his culture's dark past.

In his entire oeuvre, Kiefer has grappled with his country's past and has addressed 'unspeakable' issues from recent history. The art he makes operates within areas of experiences which remain uncomfortable for many of his audiences. In the realms of the 'unsayable', the Holocaust remains a shameful event for both the perpetrators and their victims. Within the general, and possibly the universal, the spectrum of the 'unspeakable', the shameful can range from the collective, such as in the cases of Germany or South Africa, to the most personal humiliation as in the case of young women and men who have been sexually abused or raped.

Like Kiefer, Richter has wrestled with Germanic nationhood-dilemmas. In his artworks and writings, he has reflected on the challenges that these issues present for the process of inheritability and transmissibility. Attempts to come to terms with the limited vocabulary available when encountering that which cannot be said are found in art forms of all kind,

¹³³ Paul Celan committed suicide when he was 48 by drowning in the Seine, Paris. His ending might suggest an unsuccessful struggle with the language of silence. He is buried in a cemetery on the outskirts

and a case in point is Kurtz's exclamation "'the horror, the horror'" in Joseph Conrad's fiction *Heart of Darkness*. Richter's ongoing struggle with the difficult task of expressing the unsayable is evident in his artwork *September* (fig. 18). The bombing of New York City's World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, has generated clusters of meaning which are beyond the capacity of any text to contain. As already discussed previously, all features of the artwork voice the 'unsayability' of the event, and point to the impossibility of articulating the feelings associated with this occurrence.

For some, the experience of the unsayable is a kind of a force propelling itself toward language and for some, whether from fear, or shame, or from the pressure of cultural norms it is not to be mentioned. While, in principle, the unsayable elicits silence, for writers and artists¹³⁴ it is an opportunity to challenge conventions, break boundaries and raise awareness. Exploring phases of silence that are implied by the inexpressible, offers artists a promise of a freed creativity and a swerve from the influence of past practices. This shift, or *clinamen*, is in line with Harold Bloom¹³⁵ who uses the term to describe the inclination of writers to break away from the influence of their predecessors. For Lucretius, the *clinamen* is unexpected, unpredictable and the basis for the freedom of beings. As such it is at the core of artworks in which the 'unsayable' and the constraints of silence are strategically used. This kind of freedom, Serres writes, "... breaks the chain of violence, interrupts the reign of the same, invents the new reason and the new law, *foedera naturae*, and engenders nature, as it really is..." The *clinamen*, he continues, produces "the first evolution towards something other than the same. It troubles the flow of the identical."¹³⁶ As such it is also a point of interruption that negates Nietzsche's eternal recurrence.

A viewer cannot predict in advance what will unfold in the encounter with an artwork that carries within it an unexpected rupture in the silence of the unsayable (this does not exclude such a rupture occurring when experiencing artworks that deal with other issues). In such

of Paris. His grey tombstone is covered in little stones. Jewish people leave a stone to mark their visit rather than flowers. Because flowers belong to life.

¹³⁴ For example, the art of Marcel Duchamp, the music of John Cage, the thinking behind Zen Buddhism and the poetry of Paul Celan.

¹³⁵ H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³⁶ M. Serres, *The Birth of Physics* (Clinamen Press, 2000). P. 110

cases, the viewer enters an aesthetic space where the intensity of the affect triggers momentary reactions, which are not associated with intellectual knowledge or meaning. The artwork's impact might involve a shift in viewers' usual way of 'being-in-the-world', which in turn opens them to perceive reality beyond their personal interests. In fact, this impact might be understood as a space where meaning would be the effect of affects.

In such a realm of signification, the individual achieves an understanding of the event based on fleeting perceptual combinations, which is juxtaposed with an accumulation of associations related to various encounters. It is a movement back and forth between states of meanings, where what is briefly unclear may later make sense, or what seems to be perfectly lucid, may turn out to be nonsensical. Gadamer is attuned to this performative quality of art, when he calls for listening to the address of an artwork, and encourages a kind of meditative 'hermeneutic circle' that opens the viewer to the experience of the event. He talks about art as a means by which viewers may go beyond the mundane. For him, dialogue with an artwork is a kind of play which takes the participants 'out' of themselves and past the everyday experiences.

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard writes "...the work is not merely a cultural object, although it is that too. It harbours within it an excess, rapture, a potential of associations that overflows all the determinations of its 'reception' and 'production'."¹³⁷ This 'excess' or enrapturing characteristic of an artwork alluded to in the quote is along the same lines as Gadamer's and Adorno's notion of 'more', which was discussed previously in connection with art's 'eventing'. This 'more' is what constitutes art's power to effect and prompt change, even momentarily, in our sense of ourselves and our world. As a created cultural object, art is simultaneously a part of the world and apart from it. Standing apart is that which establishes art's uniqueness and significance. Thus, arguably, this 'more' can be thought of as intrinsic to the aesthetic power of art, which can be approached through the notion of 'affect'.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Lyotard, J.-F. "Critical Reflections." *Artforum* 24.8 (1991): 92–93. [as quoted in Simon O'Sullivan, "The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation," *Angelaki: journal of theoretical humanities* 6, no. 3 (2001).]

¹³⁸ For the purpose of this discussion, it is not necessary to engage with the physical impact of an artwork on the viewer, or to decide the extent of affect in the construction of meaning. Briefly, affects, as

Gadamer's understanding of an artwork's ability to articulate materiality without dissolving it into pure ideas, while at the same time not reducing its content to pure material, brings to mind Hegel's lectures on Aesthetics where he states that "art is not yet pure thought, but despite its sensuousness, is no longer purely material existence."¹³⁹ Arguably, as aesthetics goes, Hegel's most significant legacy lies in the claims that the aesthetic experience is a matter of an artwork's presentation of both content and form. Gadamer follows Hegel by claiming that interacting with artworks is an experience in which the unique power of art allows the viewer to grasp the materiality of the object and ascribe to it ideas and concepts. Nicholas Davey observes that "if our perceptual sensibilities were unable to see bodies and objects as metaphoric carriers of abstract concepts, the artwork would be prevented from speaking to and of the world we know ourselves to be in."¹⁴⁰

An artwork's function is to impress upon its viewer, even momentarily, a broader world perspective. And for that moment the experience fractures, in Serres' words, the 'shell of language' in which we often encase ourselves. In his book *The Five Senses*,¹⁴¹ he maintains that our obsession is with the verbal account of experience rather than with experience itself. To illustrate this he describes a group of loud tourists, camera at hand who instead of seeing and experiencing the site were busy snapping pictures and voicing their thrills. He uses this example to demonstrate that the domination of language in our lives erects barriers between us and the environment we encounter. (The above example can also be used to represent the behaviour of visitors to galleries and museums.) Living in the world is a multi-layered experience, and the sensory systems are constantly actively shaping us and

moments of intensity, occur on a different signifying realm, or an a-signifying semiotic system, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's term. They've introduced the category in their search for a semiotic system which is not reduced to linguistics forms. From their perspective, this category is the basis for the world of meaning and its force precedes the connection we make between signifier and signified. In addition, the notion of Rhizome developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* is relevant to a discussion when a fusion of language systems is concerned. The authors write: "Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states." P. 23. For more on affect see M. Gregg and G.J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010).

¹³⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Clarendon Press, 1998). P. 38

¹⁴⁰ The Hermeneutics of Seeing in Sandywell and Heywood. P. 13

¹⁴¹ Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

our demeanour. Information from sense organs is converted into embodied sensation, and in turn, brings together a range of associations acquired from personal and cultural memory to make sense of the experience. It is the conviction of this research that this pre-linguistic state of making sense out of the senses impacts on the shaping of our feelings, thinking, meaning and action as well as the disposition toward art and culture.

Although the primary concern of this thesis is with visual art, it is guided by the opinion that vision or sight cannot be an isolated sensation. Serres believes that the body, where the senses are mingled, is the location of real, authentic knowledge. He emphasises the significance of the senses in human existence and describes the moment of embodied-sensual chaos as a place where a synesthetic event takes place. In such moments the five senses cannot be disentangled. The body, he claims, is a site of intermingled experienced elements that are reflected upon and eventually translated into thought. Thus this dynamic, sensual combination produces an in-between space linking that which is perceived by the senses and that which can be thought and translated into language.¹⁴² And according to Laura Marks art exacerbates this relationship. In her essay *Thinking Multisensory Culture*, she argues that the neglect of the senses in visual culture discourse derives from a tendency in Western thought to dismiss the sensual as inferior. “To include sense experiences in our cultural analysis,” she continues, “we need to revisit the sensory hierarchy.”¹⁴³

The dominance of vision has never been stronger than in the current culture of the technological expanding visual imagery. Nevertheless, when contemporary art is concerned, it is necessary to go beyond an exclusive concentration on the visible.¹⁴⁴ In an interview, Mona Hatoum stresses the importance of experiencing her artworks through the senses: “For me, she says, “the embodiment of an artwork is within the physical realm; the body is the axis of our perception, so how can art afford not [to] take that as a starting point? We relate to the world through our senses. You first experience an artwork physically. I like the

¹⁴² In this thesis, beside the spoken and written word, ‘language’ includes all forms of art, and any semiotic system from which information and meaning can be extracted

¹⁴³ Bacci and Melcher. P. 239

¹⁴⁴ In line with Serres’ claims, new scientific models indicate a major shift in the view of how the senses interact. “The idea of one sense dominating over the others has been suppressed in favour of more

work to operate on both sensual and intellectual levels. Meanings, connotations and associations come after the initial physical experience as your imagination, intellect, psyche are fired off by what you've seen."¹⁴⁵ Indeed, her work *Present Tense* (fig. 33) is an installation that has an immediate physical impact on the viewer, and it is the smell of soap that sets up the relationship between viewer and artwork. In the encounter viewers may connect their sensual response, be it smell or tactile-optical ('haptic' according to Deleuze), with metaphorical associations to make new links beyond those already laid down in memory, forming brand new connections and concepts.

Artworks such as Hatoum's *Present Tense*, Hiller's *Witness* and my own *Army of Angels* cannot be fully grasped unless the viewer walks around or inside them and gathers a multitude of impressions. As such they evoke bodily sensations that almost encourage touch. The texture of the burnt clay, the smooth surface of the soap, or the suspended speakers, each offers the spectator's eye an imagined-tactile experience in addition to other sensations. Moreover, it is entirely possible that the experiences of contemporary art cannot be adequately described by the traditional senses: taste, sight, touch, smell, and hearing.¹⁴⁶ The raw stimuli of the various senses are translated into sensory information which the viewer interprets to make sense of the senses. In such exchange, according to Serres, smell and taste are the least aesthetically appreciated because they cannot be reduced easily to language. Indeed there is a limited vocabulary for describing smells beyond comparison (it smells like...). In *Search of Lost Time*, it takes Proust several pages of self-examination to get to the origin of an unexpected pleasurable taste.¹⁴⁷ Like many artists, he is able to sort out the sensuous through his mental abilities and to offer the reader a tedious journey of unearthing the stimulus and the memories it contains. Deleuze, in his writings about Proust argues the novel is neither about memory nor about time.¹⁴⁸ He

accurate view that our perceptual system combines the information coming from different sensory modalities in one unified percept." Ibid. p. 135

¹⁴⁵ Archer et al. P. 27

¹⁴⁶ In addition to these traditional modes of perception, sensations such as lightness, horizontal and vertical movements, muscles' tension, among others, call for the interaction of the body with the imagination. Also, the experience of art does not take place in an abstracted detached world; it is encountered by our sense of being in a given space with particular features and qualities.

¹⁴⁷ M. Proust et al., *In Search of Lost Time Vol 1: Swann's Way* (Random House, 2010). P. 53-54

¹⁴⁸ In this respect he differs from other well-known commentaries on of the narrative.

agrees with Proust that memory, and “even involuntary memory, occupies a very restricted zone, which art exceeds on all sides”. For Deleuze, the impact of art is “to enlarge perception to the limits of the universe.” He acknowledges Bergson for the phrase ‘enlarged perception’, and writes that “such an enlarged perception is the finality of art”, yet, he qualifies, this “can be attained only if perception breaks with the identity to which memory rivets it.”¹⁴⁹ Deleuze insists that memory plays only a small part in art, adding ‘even and especially in Proust’.

In contrast, Hannah Arendt believes that

Memory, the mind’s power of having present what is irrevocably past and thus absent from the senses, has always been the most plausible paradigmatic example of the mind’s power to make invisibles present.¹⁵⁰

The past is present in the form of traces which are contained in both the viewer’s memory and in the object of art. Whether the memory is embedded in the senses like Bergson and Deleuze claim, or it is recalled by the power of the mind as Arendt contends, it is clear that the coexistence of sensations, memory and mental processes affords the essence of an aesthetic experience. Ordinarily, viewers cannot unpack the multiplicity of layers that converge in the aesthetic experience. Such an experience might include: sensual perceptions, physical engagement, internalising it as a symbol or a metaphor, bringing remembered associations into play and then constructing concepts and meaning. Likewise, most do not know the science behind the process of the blending together of embodied senses and the intellectual response.¹⁵¹ Yet, they can recognise how the input from different sensual stimuli quickly mingles and that sense is made of the multiple associations that emerge.

The senses are extensions of our bodies, and some¹⁵² consider all the sensory systems as

¹⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, “Boulez, Proust and Time: “Occupying without Counting”,” *Angelaki* 3, no. 2 (1998), p. 71

¹⁵⁰ Arendt and McCarthy. P. 12

¹⁵¹ Recently, the role of the senses in our existential experiences has been the object of various scientific and, philosophical studies. This discussion is not the place to embark on an in-depth study into the senses and their role in affording aesthetic experiences. For more on the issue see *Art and the Senses*, Bacci and Melcher; Heller-Roazen. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, 2002). Gibson, and Arnheim.

¹⁵² Bacci and Melcher. P. 590

features of skin tissues, and as such related to touch. The sense of touch and the skin are essential in Serres' philosophy of mingled bodies - "in the skin, through the skin, the world and the body touch, defining their common border... it is the place where the 'I' is decided."¹⁵³ Although he does not advocate hierarchy, in the chapter entitled *Veils* he considers touch as the dominant among the senses, since the skin encompasses all the senses. In this context Serres again refers to the painting *Belle Noiseuse* (in Balzac's novel), to argue that the chaotic canvas is the skin of the image and "could serve as a screen, or veil: a patterned curtain, a tattoo, like the skin."¹⁵⁴

Similarly, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes writes "Text means Tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning, we are now emphasising, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving..."¹⁵⁵ This quote can be applied to painting as well, particularly in light of preceding readings of the blurry artworks of Richter and my own *Cline* series, where the thinly painted surface, or skin, of the artworks, is utilised as a screen onto which viewers project their cultural imprints and memories. By being ambiguous and hazy, the artworks open up a space for interpretation and personal reflection. The fragile, almost transparent, rice paper, which is layered with thin cloudy layers of oil-paint, is deployed as a curtain through which to experience connections between the ancient and the contemporary. By drawing attention to the unearthed relics which are juxtaposed with elements from the natural environment viewers are urged, but not prescribed, to reflect on the question of what it means to survive in the landscape.

The eyes of the viewer move over the surface of the artworks 'touching the surface with the eyes'. In his book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze applies the concept of the 'haptic', a tactile-optical space "which allows the eye to function like the sense of touch,"¹⁵⁶ to analyse Bacon's paintings and to examine the relationship between hand and eye. He describes essential moments in Bacon's process of painting, in which the interplay between

¹⁵³ Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. P. 80

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* P. 32

¹⁵⁵ R. Barthes and R. Miller, *The Pleasure of the Text* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975). P. 64

¹⁵⁶ Deleuze and Bacon. P. 122

the eye and the hand brings together the ‘haptic’ and the notion of chance.¹⁵⁷ The action of the hand, he claims, is the cause for accidents and chance in the artwork: “It is in the manipulation, in the reaction of the manual marks on the visual whole, that chance becomes pictorial or integrated into the act of painting.”¹⁵⁸

It follows that chance and accident are essential elements in the relationship between artist and artwork. In my practice, the unplanned and the accidental have become welcome events in the process of making my art. They might not be evident in the final artworks, yet they contribute to the journey of exploration and unforeseen albeit productive turns and shifts in the creative process. This is in contrast with the artworks of Bacon, which display chance manipulation of material, and with Kiefer’s method of creating his paintings where accidents are incorporated into the physicality of the surface, and destruction turns into a visible stage in his creative process.

Such an exploration of the power of chance leads Kiefer to create petrified landscapes in whose surfaces he has incorporated elements relating to the German psyche and culture. Yet, the emphasis on stark empty space makes a claim on the viewer, for whom the traces of destruction, accidents and chance might be viewed as choices the artist had made. Although spectators may have no access to these references, or to the original conceptualisation and the intentions behind a given artwork, these ‘violated’ canvases evoke reflections on the aftermath of violent conflicts, including the destruction and violation of the ‘skin’ of our environment.

In *The Fold*, Deleuze discusses points of view in connection with Baroque texturology.¹⁵⁹ He speaks of the fold as the space that enfolds the viewer within the experience of the material and establishes the surface, or skin, as a site of multiple points of view. Such are the works of Kiefer, as well as the other artists discussed here. The ‘skin’ of their art gives texture to the idiosyncratic narrative and accentuates the presence of diverse viewpoints.

¹⁵⁷ By focusing on the ‘haptic’ in his theory of sensation, Deleuze appears to ignore the function of other systems of perceptions. This thesis emphasises the intermingling of the senses in our experience of an artwork..

¹⁵⁸ Deleuze and Bacon. P. 96

¹⁵⁹ In this book Deleuze uses ideas put forth by Leibniz in order to develop a philosophical and artistic conception of matter. It is an account of ‘texturology’ – the composition of the world’s matter, including ourselves. He refers to the baroque conception of a world as a material fabric, composed of smaller parts and their relationships. In this context he introduces the idea of the fold as a way in which to conceive matter as multiple and continuous.

Point of view is precisely what motivates the artist, and a point of view, or 'horizon', is what the viewer brings to the mobile constellation mentioned at the beginning of this section. Although a constellation may be imagined as a fixed pattern, the notion of a changeable constellation offers a space in which to reflect on the shifting points of view which are held within the configuration of a particular artwork. The parameters of the constellation are fluid and are shaped by the disposition of its components.

What we know and think about things shapes and influences how and what we see, and Gadamer insists many times that our prejudices and points of view must continuously be revised when confronted by the thing itself, in this case, the artwork. When we look at artworks we bring to it, in addition to general knowledge, our cultural and personal memory and history, and culturally specific aesthetics sensibility. In times of forced migrations and self-imposed exiles, people relocate and bring to their adopted homes different cultural and aesthetic traditions, which might be either appropriated or rejected. Multiple cultural and socio-political factors play a role in the formation of people's aesthetic practices. Thus the dialogue between viewer and an artwork will develop along the individual's understanding and interpretation of the metaphor. This, in turn, will involve translation of sensations, feelings, memory and knowledge into a particular way of thinking. For instance, as already discussed before, upon encountering Hatoum's artwork *Present Tense* the smell of soap made of olive oil will evoke nostalgic memories in Palestinians who grew up among violently uprooted olive trees, whereas for viewers with a different background the smell of the soap conjures other associations.

Among the several threads this thesis examines, how the landscape is employed to engage with historical events is pivotal. How people relate to, and hence experience the landscape is idiosyncratic. As already noted before, landscape is culturally constructed and is inherent in our memories and identities. When a depiction of landscape generates an "aesthetic tingle" (Richard Rorty¹⁶⁰ phrase), the viewer is pulled into a surge of recollections and involuntary memories of encounters in nature. Moreover, as

¹⁶⁰ R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). P. 152. In this context, Rorty presents an experience of art that creates "tingles, or aesthetic bliss" in which he seems to recognizing a non-linguistic sphere. P. 150

Schama points out, "[n]ot all cultures embrace nature and landscape myths with equal ardour and those that do, go through periods of greater and lesser enthusiasm."¹⁶¹

When embarking on the path of collective cultural memory, we might encounter landscapes that are not necessarily places of enjoyment. Instead, they might prompt memories of escape from horror and public tragedy.¹⁶²

Be it a forest portrayed in paint addressing a particular yearning for a lost paradise, or a poem seeking consolation in nature, what it means to an individual of Germanic background may be something utterly different to a refugee for whom the woods have presented a precarious sanctuary rather than a fortuitous refuge. Whether memories of nature are associated with pleasure and yearning as in Romanticism or are linked to loss, pain, and a sense of alienation as in some of the artworks discussed here, it requires an understanding that the legacy of nature-based-myths is ambiguous at best. The artworks of Kiefer, Richter and my own acknowledge the continuing poignancy of landscape motifs in art. Yet, none is an attempt to reproduce a direct experience of nature such as in the nineteenth-century art of Caspar David Friedrich. My art is an attempt to portray a landscape that is objectively and actively out there, and with Richter, I believe that nature does not have any intrinsic meaning. Thus any romantic associations attributed to these works are a fusion of a viewer's nostalgia and aesthetic preference. "Of course," Richter says, "my landscapes are not only beautiful or nostalgic, with a Romantic or classical suggestion of lost Paradises, but above all "untruthful" (even if I did not always find a way of showing it); and by "untruthful" I mean glorifying the way we look at Nature...Every beauty that we see in landscape is our projection; and we can switch it off at a moment's notice, to reveal only the appalling horror and ugliness..."¹⁶³

An artwork frames and distances the landscape through the eyes of the artist. In

¹⁶¹ Schama. P. 15

¹⁶² By way of example: the myth of a forest in Germany's cultural heritage is depicted in the desolated artworks of Kiefer, in the romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich and in the nostalgic poems of Friedrich Hölderlin, such as *Out For a Walk*. N. Wolf, *Caspar David Friedrich: 1774-1840 : The Painter of Stillness* (Taschen, 2003). F. Hölderlin and J. Mitchell, *Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin: The Fire of the Gods Drives Us to Set Forth by Day and by Night* (Ithuriel's Spear, 2004). P. 52

painting as in photography, an image of a given landscape stands in for the encounter in nature. However, the painted scrolls that make up the *Cline* series in *Shifting Horizons* are more than a substitute for an experience in the location, for the viewer they are a site of encounter in itself. No viewer of the works has direct access to the experiences that had inspired the artworks. Yet, each individual can create a personal narrative from the encounter. The artworks I have created in the course of this research are not only a meditation on the natural environment; they are also a contemplation on a sense of absence, on longing as well as on shifting points of view. Unlike the yearning expressed in Friedrich's paintings, the longing here is propelled by notions of alienation and separation; by the empathy that spring out of my personal history. The combination of landscapes motifs and artefacts from burial sites emphasises longing that may be associated with death, mourning and commemorations, be it for the loss of a loved person, the loss of an ideal, a country, a specific environment or freedom.

Events such as the Holocaust, Hiroshima and the 9/11 attacks in the USA, as well as environmental disasters such as the Exxon-Valdez oil spill and the Bhopal gas disaster, have redefined our attitude toward death as a mass technologized event. In the aftermath, memories which emanate from the environment in which such events took place are further actualised through relics, cultural rituals, inherited knowledge, and social practices. Art, by evoking the remains of the dead in the landscape, emphasises the historical dimension of the landscape, and *Shifting Horizons* is a case in point. Also the artworks draw attention to shifting principles that govern social and cultural practices, and the transformation in the way people relate to the past and its residue, with a particular focus on the complex and diverse methods of disposing of the dead. Meanings of the natural setting of memorials and commemorations have been shifting as well. Once, the funeral procession of the dead throughout the landscape was as a significant way of honouring the departed as the final burial ground, whereas Australian aborigines' burial rites would include cremation, burial in the ground, in trees, or placing the body in a rock shelter or in a desert cave.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Richter et al. P. 124

¹⁶⁴ J. Isaacs, *Australian Dreaming: 40,000 Years of Aboriginal History* (Lansdowne Press, 1980). Marion. Slany, *Australian Aboriginal Culture*, ed. Australian InFo International. (1989).

A cave was the most common way to bury the dead in ancient times. An example is the Cave of Machpelah (also known as the Cave of the Patriarchs and the Ibrahim Mosque), that since biblical times, has been revered as a burial site for three religions – Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Located in the city of Hebron, the sovereign authority over the cave has changed hands from faith to faith many times through the centuries. The cave has served in turn as a Synagogue, a Mosque, and a Church.¹⁶⁵ Today, political and religious turmoils are still ongoing, and the Cave of the Patriarchs is one of the focal points in the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. In response Well aware that the cave resonates with historical events, American artists Steve Reich (composer) and Beryl Korot (video artist) have created a multimedia piece featuring recorded interviews set to music entitled *The Cave*¹⁶⁶, in which Palestinians, Israelis, and Americans are questioned about the significance of Abraham’s legacy from their standpoints.

The artists have purposely¹⁶⁷ chosen the well-known *Cave of Machpelah* to bring Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*¹⁶⁸ into the conversation. The cave where Abraham is supposed to be buried takes on further significance via some of the oral traditions. The legend tells that while searching of food for three angels who had come to visit him, he entered a cave, where, just like in Plato’s cave, he sees shadows cast on the wall. However, whereas for Plato the cave serves as a metaphor for the human condition which is enslaved to sensory perceptions, the shadows Abraham sees symbolise the play between the visible and invisible. In other words, the shadows represent that which is seen, such as the many gods that were part of the world into which Abraham was born. At the same time, they are understood as evidence of that which is invisible, like the monotheistic God. The implication in both allegories is that what is not seen is more real and more permanent than the visible which are like shadows at the mercy of their source.

¹⁶⁵ Personal knowledge. Also see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave_of_the_Patriarchs

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.bitforms.com/korot/the-cave-installation>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLoc8VTg_Y&feature=youtu.be

¹⁶⁷ In a personal conversation with the artists.

¹⁶⁸ Plato, *The Republic* (Издательство Aegitas, 2016).

Reich and Korot have chosen to focus on the legend of Abraham as told in biblical and Koranic texts. What has emerged is a woven tapestry of voices describing the same story from different perspectives. Yet, indirectly, through this examination of remembering and forgetting, political and social issues have emerged as a dialogue between the invisible ancient past and the visible present. *The Cave* invites viewers to listen to recollections and, to watch images of the burial ground and speakers, with the intention to provide an opportunity to reflect on a possible common ground. The materialisation of a past event, either as a monument, a narrative or an artwork bears witness to more than its aesthetic attributions. Both Hiller's work *Monument* (fig. 28) and *The Cave* presents us with a space in which to reconcile possible conflicts between memory and historical perspectives.

The meaning of objects is unstable; changing and shifting over time and in different contexts. Artists can explore this by giving objects a different context and a different identity. Hiller gives the habitual use of commemorative ritual an unexpected context, and thus calls attention to acts of heroism in daily life. These themes are also central to the French artist Christian Boltanski who has been working across a variety of modes including sculpture, photography, and installation. By tracing the lives of the lost and forgotten, he examines the transitory shift between life and death. Boltanski's work inspires journeys that might begin with indifference and lead to a meditation on what it is to be a human being.



[Fig.43]

Christian Boltanski, *The Whispers*

For instance, *The Whispers* (fig. 43) - a sound installation that embodies questions relating to death, memory, and loss. Strategically located in the landscape overlooking the English Channel toward France, four concrete speakers play recordings of letters written by soldiers from WWI. The work poses a question whether it is possible to recover an individual's life by things left behind. Boltanski has been engaged with issues relating to absence, to traces left behind and the anonymity of death, themes that also permeate the writings of the German author W. G. Sebald. In *The Rings of Saturn*, he travels through the landscape collecting images and stories in which he explores his stimulated memory. While describing different landscapes at different times in the history of modernity, he recounts, fragment by fragment, a world which surpasses personal memory. He moves through an eroding, disappearing landscape wounded by the horrors of history and by human's capability for destruction. The spaces and times invoked in Sebald's work suggest numerous possible interpretative paths. But above all, he wishes to force us to face the consequences of disregard of nature and our ingenuity in destroying ourselves and others. He writes

Our spread over the earth was fuelled by reducing the higher species of vegetation to charcoal, by incessantly burning whatever would burn.

Combustion is the hidden principle behind every artefact we create... Like our

bodies and like our desires, the machines we have devised are possessed of a heart which is slowly reduced to embers.¹⁶⁹

The central metaphor of burning and oblivion is a reminder of WWII, a presence which persistently hovers over the book. The writing, which explores how history is interpreted, is a process of synchronising various historical events, geographical spaces and fragments of memory. Yet, with Deleuze he seems to suggest that memory plays only a small part the process of writing, saying that “in reality, memory fails us”.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, a memory may interpret signs creatively and perhaps inaccurately, yet, combined with other factors such as cultural conventions, politics, ideologies and so forth, and it is what affords us a particular aesthetic experience.

Both artist and viewer piece together a range of associations evoked by the artwork - fragments of perceptual evidence, personal and collective memories, and general knowledge - consciously or unconsciously translating them to create a meaningful experience. This generative process echoes Benjamin’s description of the translator whose task is to piece together “fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together, and must match, although they need not be like one another.”¹⁷¹ The metaphor of the vessel draws on the cabbalistic concept of *Tikkun*. In its core there is an aesthetic quest – a search for the shards of a vessel which was shattered in the first act of creation, perhaps, the legend said, because it had not been aesthetically pleasing to its maker. These fragments must be brought together and the vessel reconstructed - a task much like the restorative act the *Angel of History* has to undertake to put the world back together. However, whereas the task of the translator, according to Benjamin, is to find the intended effect and translate it in a way that echoes the original, the original does not exist for the ones who attempt to restore God’s vessel or for Klee’s angel. Likewise, the viewer does not have access to the particular relationship between the artist and the work. Instead, in the appreciation of any artwork each interpretation, each meaningful consideration, is incorporated within the original mode of signification, thus

¹⁶⁹ W.G. Sebald and M. Hulse, *The Rings of Saturn* (Random House, 2013). P. 170

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. P. 127

¹⁷¹ Walter Benjamin, "Illuminations. Ed. And with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt," *Trans. by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books* (1969). P. 78

making both the original and interpretation fragments of the greater text, just as fragments are part of the complete vessel.

Angels appear throughout the writings of Walter Benjamin, and their allegorical descriptions evoke mostly the devastation of history. Yet in addition to horror and melancholy, for the writer, the gaze of the angel seems to encompass hope. Hope is also what motivates Serres when writing his book about angels. He tries “to put a short circuit between the very ancient tradition of angels in monotheistic or polytheistic traditions and new current communication systems.” In other words, he employs angels as a metaphor for the media whose job is to receive, translate and send messages in the hope that he would “obtain sparkles and these sparkles give light to the traditions and our jobs as journalists and writers.”¹⁷² The role of the messenger, Serres argues, is as important today as it was in Biblical times, perhaps even more so in light of the new phase of human development prompted by information technology. In the centre of this reflection, Serres puts the figure of Hermes, who is, possibly, the most important precursors of the modern-day notion of the angel-as-messenger.

Like all angels, Hermes is the very essence of in-betweenness. He is the messenger archetype, god of the boundaries and of the imagination, of communication, of interpretive insights and, is, etymologically, the source of hermeneutics.¹⁷³ To deliver the gods’ messages, Hermes had to be able to understand their language and to interpret it so that mortals could understand. He is the messenger representing interpretation, journalism or communication. His mythological dilemmas represent all who work with imagination, with insight, with intuition and with expression, which in turn is translated into various forms which allow others to understand them.

However questionable the etymological connection between Hermes and hermeneutics, the term clearly invokes Hermes, and is concerned with a process of

¹⁷² Interview with Hari Kunzru, London 10th January 1995, transcript <http://www.harikunzru.com/michel-serres-interview-1995/>

¹⁷³ At least that is what Heidegger playfully claims, writing that the Greek words for interpreting and interpretation—*hermeneuein*, *hermeneia*--can be traced back to the god Hermes. See M. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (HarperCollins, 1982).

interpretation, which reveals something hidden from ordinary understanding. Indeed, it is in a similar realm of the in-between, that Gadamer established his hermeneutics project, in which one of its foremost concepts, the 'fusion of horizons,' is a discursive exchange with other times, with other languages, with other cultures, with anything other to the interpreter.

Among the various disciplines, there is not much resistance to the Nietzschean notion that "[f]acts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations."¹⁷⁴ When art is concerned, Arthur Danto argues that aesthetic experience can be meaningful only when interpreted. For him "...an object is an artwork *at all* only in relation to interpretation... interpretations are what constitute works... The interpretation is not something outside the work; work and interpretation arise together in the aesthetic experience."¹⁷⁵

In contrast, Susan Sontag in her book *Against Interpretation* contests the views that all artistic understanding is interpretive. Instead, she argues that the sensuous in the aesthetic experience should be acknowledged more. Interpretation she insists "is the revenge of the intellect upon art. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world."¹⁷⁶ Rather than opening us up to the power of sensuous experiences of works of art, "interpretation amounts to the philistines refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable and comfortable."¹⁷⁷

Despite sharing Sontag's insistence for greater recognition of the role of the senses in the experience or artwork, this discussion does not contest the view that interpretation is an essential factor in the understanding of an artwork. What is contested here is the privilege given to linguistic interpretation, or to use Mitchell's words¹⁷⁸, to the 'linguistic imperialism' that prevails in several disciplines including Hermeneutics, semiotics and

¹⁷⁴ F.W. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Read Books, 2008). P. 481

¹⁷⁵ A.C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (Columbia University Press, 2005). P. 44-45

¹⁷⁶ S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (Penguin Books Limited, 2013). P. 4

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* P. 5

visual culture studies concerning interpretations. More precisely this thesis rejects¹⁷⁹ Gadamer's claims in *Truth and Method* that "... all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words..."¹⁸⁰ Instead, it supports voices calling for the legitimacy of non-linguistic modes when knowledge is produced. Not unlike Sontag, Serres asserts that not only do we "suppress all objects in favour of words," but we also "suppress the word itself and meaning."¹⁸¹ It is not language per se that is the culprit, he emphasises, but rather the analytical discourse in the Platonic tradition for which language is used, which demands we divorce ourselves from experience itself and focus instead on semiotic codes.

At one point in *Truth and Method* Gadamer acknowledges that "[l]anguage often seems ill-suited to express what we feel. In the face of the overwhelming presence of works of art, the task of expressing in words what they say to us seems like an infinite and hopeless undertaking..."¹⁸² For him, it is not because of the limitation of the language but rather our limited ability to grasp the entire scope of our perceptions. For whatever reason, he seems to acknowledge here the predicaments of verbal language, and that understanding relies on a pre-linguistic sensuous awareness, of sorts. However, further on in the book he concludes that understanding is always linguistically mediated.

Moreover, Gadamer seems to argue that whatever can be said to exist, or even thought to exist must be linguistic, which is similar to Rorty's claim that there is no meaning outside the text. Although Rorty does promote an authentic experience in which he comes close to recognising the value of a non-linguistic realm, as when he writes that in the experience of art "truths are the skeletons which remain after the capacity to arouse the senses - to cause tingles - has been rubbed off..."¹⁸³ However, he remains faithful to the hermeneutic tradition by asserting that the human experience is equal to a linguistic experience, that "women and man are nothing more than sentential

¹⁷⁸ Mitchell.

¹⁷⁹ However, as Serres concedes in the *Five Senses*, talks of non-linguistic experiences and knowledge are unfortunately self-refuting since they have to be expressed in linguistics means.

¹⁸⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. P. 407

¹⁸¹ Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. P. 188

¹⁸² Ibid. P. 401

¹⁸³ Rorty. P. 152

attitudes - nothing more than the presence or absence of dispositions toward the use of sentences phrased in some historically conditioned vocabulary.”¹⁸⁴

The intention that guides this thesis is to reflect on the non-linguistics aspects of the aesthetic experience. It is guided by the conviction that both understanding and interpretations can occur in non-verbal ‘thinking’. As previously discussed, the impact of the artworks examined here draws the viewers to an aesthetic space where the intensity of the affect triggers non-linear cognitive reactions which are not necessarily intellectual.¹⁸⁵ In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein meditates on the limits of language, and admits that there are things that we cannot express verbally. Likewise, for Agamben, the limitation of language is central to his philosophical concerns. In *The Idea of Prose*, Agamben writes that reaching the outer limits of language, that “decisive experience, so difficult to talk about, is not even an experience.”¹⁸⁶ The extreme limits of verbal articulation, he argues, is the threshold that opens the realm that is free from representations. This brings to mind Paul Celan’s suggestion to artists to “go with your art into your most particular narrowness. And set yourself free.”¹⁸⁷ Agamben refers to Celan’s poetry as an instance of articulation of that “for which we have no words.”¹⁸⁸ Poems are amongst the various modes of artistic expressions that may examine the realm where language stops. These art forms are both voices and voiceless at the same time.

A poem, as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the—not always greatly hopeful—belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps.

Poems in this sense, too, are under way: they are making toward something.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. P. 88

¹⁸⁵ Psychology and psychoanalysis distinguish between two functions of the human mind: the intellectual, which has to do with reasoning, judging, associating etc., and a non-intellectual which has to do with emotions and the unconscious.

¹⁸⁶ Agamben. P. 37

¹⁸⁷ P. Celan et al., *The Meridian: Final Version--Drafts--Materials* (Stanford University Press, 2011). P. 41

¹⁸⁸ Agamben.P. 48

The artwork is an 'eventing' – a process in search of a reality which is gained when it encounters the viewer, the Other. For the artist, this relation might be unsettling because the artwork's address welcomes the peculiarity of the Other and its specific time. For the viewer, the recipient of the 'message in a bottle', the artwork lives in the struggle to translate the rich enigmatic space it opens. Celan had wished that the reader of his poems would engage with both the words and the threatening silences. However, he was disappointed that the philosophers who engaged with his texts turned them into a philosophical issue rather than 'listened' to them and to the historical event that caused them to be.¹⁹⁰

Against Celan's wish, Gadamer,¹⁹¹ who knew him, has read the poems as one who has no access to the historical events that have been their impetus, stressing that he read the poems as an outsider who is not privy to their secrets. In the forward to *Who Am I and Who Are You*, Gadamer describes himself as a recipient of Celan's bottle, and his interpretive commentary as "attempts at deciphering" almost indecipherable signs. Like with all artworks, such a task requires persistence and empathetic consideration to the otherness of the text. The challenge for the recipient is not to expect to attain complete transparency but rather to supplement what can be perceived in the artwork from their own experience. For Gadamer, this is the only way in which to understand an artwork.¹⁹²

Kiefer, who has been inspired by Celan's poetry, poses similar challenges to viewers of his artworks. Whether in paintings or sculptures, the inserted inscriptions in some of his artworks attempt to guide the interpretations towards historical and cultural references. Yet, the resultant meaning can be either too obvious or just as opaque and hermetic as Celan's poems. The landscape paintings, for example, can be seen as visual actualisations of Benjamin's allegorical description of "history as a petrified and

¹⁸⁹ Paul Celan as quoted in J. Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (Yale University Press, 2001). P. 115

¹⁹⁰ The likes of Adorno, Gadamer, Heidegger, Derrida and Benjamin whose texts Celan was aware of.

¹⁹¹ Gadamer.

¹⁹² This is in contrast with Derrida who, in *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan*, argues that Celan's poetic language becomes comprehensible only in relation to a particular place or time. In 1981 Derrida and Gadamer

primordial landscape".¹⁹³ By investing the landscapes with explicit references, Kiefer seems to be asking for interpretations that decode the artworks' ambiguities through his intentions, which might weaken the integrity of the dialogue between the viewer and the artwork. In contrast, Richter's works seem to strip nature-based iconographies of their conventional significance and in doing so challenges our aesthetic appreciation of nature. *Atlas*, for instance, derives its effective dialectic quality from the contextual concurrence of assorted imagery. Seemingly arbitrary selections of sceneries serve as stimuli to memory, without many clues from the artist to direct the interpretation.

After engaging with the poetry of Celan (and perhaps in light of Derrida's criticism to which I referred in the preceding page), a subtle shift has occurred in Gadamer's position. Thus whereas in *Truth and Method* a lack of background transparency should not hinder the wish to enter a dialogue, in later writings he writes that "the artist's own comments about what is said in one or another of his works may certainly be of possible interest too."¹⁹⁴ Hence, the task of hermeneutics is to enter a dialogue with the artwork and to reach an understanding by shifting between transparency and non-transparency.¹⁹⁵

Do an artist's words open up the experience of an artwork or confine it? Alternatively, does an experience induced by a supplement of words generate different possible meanings of a given artwork? Such questions about the complex relations between words and images and their capacity to undermine each other are beyond the scope of this particular discussion.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, philosophers such as Benjamin, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, Deleuze, Gadamer and Adorno have made quite significant contributions to the understanding of the relationship between thinking and artworks. The concern here is with the ephemeral space that opens up for the viewer and which

debated the issue, which has been well documented and discussed. (For an account of the encounter see Michelfelder and Palmer).

¹⁹³ W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (Verso, 2003).

¹⁹⁴ Aesthetics and Hermeneutics in Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. P. 130

¹⁹⁵ Possibly as a result his reading of Celan, Gadamer has reinstated the relevance of the artist's intentions for interpretation. Indeed, artworks are an outcome of particular actions, and understanding how and why it is made in generally relevant to the understanding of the object.

¹⁹⁶ For more see Schmidt.

engenders the thinking and the articulation; that perceptual aesthetic space which is triggered by what Nicholas Davey calls a “friction between the sensuous and the intellectual.”¹⁹⁷

Davey also stresses that “hermeneutic reflection articulates and inhabits the space between meaning and utterance.”¹⁹⁸ He further explains that although Hermeneutics’ main concern is with language, this does not mean that in the aesthetic experience words are considered superior to images. Rather that Hermeneutical Aesthetics uses linguistic tools to understand how the understanding of an artwork is a result of complex dialogue. The analogy to the linguistic model helps to understand the nature of the encounter with an artwork, yet, at the same time, it raises some uncomfortable questions. It might imply that an orderly exchange of sorts is taking place in the encounter with an artwork. Although a conversation between human interlocutors may include unexpected interjections, it is not as ‘chaotic’ and ‘noisy’ as a dialogue between a viewer and an artwork. The encounter with an artwork does not follow conventions similar to a verbal conversation. Rather the viewer is immersed in a deluge of significations emanating from the artwork and its surroundings, which needs to be decoded and understood before the exchange could continue. Furthermore, a linguistic model might be understood as a suggestion, similar to that of Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art*, that artworks can be systematically studied as notational systems consisting of grammatical rules.¹⁹⁹

The notion that artworks constitute a grammatical system is problematic at best, and Goodman himself has admitted that the “routes” of a reference can be multiple and varied, and symbols could be combined in “chains of reference” and lead to more complex symbols. In a similar vein Serres, when discussing the fictional painting *La Belle Noiseuse*, offers an alternative model by which to think about the emergence of a

¹⁹⁷ Nicholas Davey, “Aesthetic Friction: The Conflicts of Visual Experience,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 4, no. 2 (2005).

¹⁹⁸ Original italics. *The Hermeneutics of Seeing* in Sandywell and Heywood. P. 10

¹⁹⁹ Various attempts have been made to develop a systemic grammar by which to read artworks. Among them R. Hodge, R.I.V. Hodge, and G.R. Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Cornell University Press, 1988). G.R. Kress and T. van

new experience, whether aesthetic or scientific. Since causes and effects are intermingled in the experience, he argues, they cannot directly be associated with the affect they have induced. He compares this to an upstream journey from the estuary of a river to its origin:

The downstream course, the worn-out path, the slope, the chreod, run, from upstream confluences to downstream confluences, toward synthesis and the unitary. The upstream course, double doubt wavering to begin with, multiplies its bifurcations like a seven-armed candelabrum, like a full bouquet, a bush, an arborescence, an head of hair, a refined network of veins and fibrils, an endless network of doubts, anxieties.²⁰⁰

In other words, when tracing and re-tracing the ‘confluence of flows’ that converge in the encounter with the artwork, we find that the aesthetic experience is the result of a network of multiple tributaries that are brought together. In nature, the further upstream we move it becomes clear that the river is a confusion of cross-cutting streams. Likewise, the origin of the aesthetic experience is in an object in which multiple tributaries converge. The lesson from Serres is that for both, artist and viewer, such a journey is about understanding that order is made out of the gradual linking of a series of disordered perceptions. Despite the reservation discussed above concerning its linguistic nature, the hermeneutic dialogue is useful in the account of the discursive journey which is the interaction with an artwork. As Gadamer points out, his model of a dialogue is not necessarily a method by which a complete understanding is achieved; instead, it is an authentic approach of engaging with art that effectively leads to new insights. In this kind of a dialogue, he claims, the participants are never in complete control over the exchange; rather it is determined by the multiple tributaries rushing toward the viewer.

Similar to Heidegger’s claim that “Language is the house of being”²⁰¹, Gadamer holds the

Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Routledge, 1996). M. O’Toole, *The Language of Displayed Art* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994).

²⁰⁰ Serres, *Genesis* (G. James & J. Nielson, Trans.). P. 17

²⁰¹ M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Letter on Humanism p. 239

position that “Being that can be understood is language,”²⁰² thus he seems to be suggesting that everything that can be understood about us is because of language and that everything we do and are conscious of is linguistically mediated. The above phrase, which has prompted many scholarly debates,²⁰³ seems to challenge us to produce an instant of understanding that cannot be spoken of in a language. Indeed, this claim emphasises the social and civilised side of language.

This thesis rejects the suggestion that everything we do is through language and that we cannot formulate thinking about anything without resorting to verbal expressions. Along with other voices,²⁰⁴ I argue that there are forms of human understanding and interpretations that are non-linguistic in their nature. For example, the olfactory and gustatory systems confound verbal language completely – try describing with words the taste of an apple or the smell of garlic. As Fernando Pessoa writes in *the Book of Disquiet* “The sense of smell is like a strange kind of seeing, it evokes sentimental landscapes out of mere sketch in our subconscious minds.”²⁰⁵ The American philosopher Richard Shusterman²⁰⁶ argues that when we dance, we do not need to resort to linguistic terminology to understand the body’s movement. Likewise, performing habitual tasks such as riding a bicycle, walking and driving, or even more basic experiences, such as body posture, the direction of a gaze, painful sensations, or recognising the transition of day into night, are among those non-linguistic understanding without which our being-in-the-world would be impossible. Unquestionably, once we need to speak about something we must use a linguistic system. Yet, in times when we do not need to communicate with other humans, we can have meaningful experiences which do not occur in language. A case in point is the personal experiences of art, music and even poetry which afford kinds of intimate reflection

²⁰² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. P. 474

²⁰³ The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo has offered a different reading of this phrase by adding commas - Being, that can be understood, is language. For more see D.E. Di Cesare and N. Keane, *Utopia of Understanding: Between Babel and Auschwitz* (State University of New York Press, 2012). S. Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo* (MQUP, 2006).

²⁰⁴ Among these, the American philosopher Charles Peirce offers another perspective by saying that meaning is a product of the effect of things on the senses, and “if we fancy that we have any other we deceive ourselves.” *How to Make Our Ideas Clear* <http://www.peirce.org/writings/p119.html>. Paul Grice also talks about the non-linguistic features of a conversation, as well as of the meaning associated with nature, such as direction of the wind and clouds bearing rain. Grice, H.P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*.

²⁰⁵ F. Pessoa, W. Boyd, and M.J. Costa, *The Book of Disquiet* (Profile Books, 2010). 105[149]

and understanding that leave verbal language behind.

Our days are full with information, much of which is non-linguistic, such as images (static and moving), sounds, smells etc., all of which provide artists, directly and indirectly, material for their art. They gather, organise, and then create a meaningful personal order which is offered to the rest of the world in the form of an artwork. I suggest that this discursive method by which an artist composes order out of disorder is a hermeneutic dialogue of sorts, which does not take place in a verbal language, nor is it founded on conventional cognitive claims. Making art is a hermeneutical process which at its core is an intuitive movement between understanding and interpretations of urges, perceptions and ideas, and its outcome is organised elements presented as 'text'. Yet the thinking involved in making art, the visual thinking, is distinct from linguistic thinking because it takes place in mediums such as ink, paint, stone, plaster, clay, film, and digital images. It is a complex synthesis of perception and problem solving, which occurs in structures, forms, and materials with their particular conventions, possibilities, and limitations. Unlike linguistic thinking and articulation, which must follow specific characteristics and rules, more often than not, visual thinking may bend the rules and challenge conventions.

In the context of this discussion, the term 'visual thinking' refers to all modes of creative thinking which does not involve words, some of which might not have sight and vision as its predominant mode of expression. For instance, in the act of sculpting touch is vital in the exchange of information. It is a process in which the hand is engaged in a dialogue with the material. For Serres, the sense of touch (together with the skin) is pivotal in acquiring knowledge, since, unlike sight, it conveys a way of being in the midst of the world rather than external to it. He thinks of knowledge as a woven fabric, a result of a haptic exploration amongst veils. In a chapter dedicated to *Veils*, he offers Bonnard's painted canvases as an example -

Before the eye sees, there is the texture of the canvas...In the beginning, touch; at the origin, the medium ...The painter, with the tips of his fingers, caresses or attacks the canvas, the writer scarifies or marks the paper, leans on it, presses it, prints on it.

²⁰⁶ R. Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

There is a moment when seeing becomes impossible, when the nose is touching, sight is cancelled by contact...The artist or artisan, through his brush, hammer or pen, grapples at the decisive moment with skin against skin.²⁰⁷

Consider, for example, working with clay - an illustration of both, Serres' 'skin against skin' and Gadamer's 'hermeneutic circle' in action. The artist's hands receive information from the material, and with the help of acquired information and knowledge from past dealings with the medium, the movement of the hands is adjusted. Despite being undeveloped, this pre-understanding produces an initial interpretation. With an idea of an intended whole in mind, it will lead to a preliminary understanding which will be revised as the hands continue to knead the mud and come to grip with the particular characteristics of the matter at hand. As the form emerges from the raw material, more discoveries are made concerning the outcome, the whole, which in turn sheds light back on the part and vice versa. This oscillating movement back and forth between the parts and the intended whole influences the artist's perspective which gradually changes and with it a new pre-understanding evolves which, in turn, forms a base for new and deeper understanding and interpretation. It is mostly an instinctual method in which the hand does most of the 'thinking' - receives information from the material and shapes the response. It is a hermeneutic exchange of interpretation and understanding which takes place in material, mostly through the sense of touch.

This mainly haptic hermeneutic process of making art can be extended to all sensory processes that are involved in the creative process. It is an intuitive and fluid process of negotiating and interpreting a variety of resources which leads to the production of artworks. The oscillations between the whole and the parts and the growth of understanding would, in turn, influence the thinking of the artist and subsequent artworks. Artistic interpretation produces a non-linguistic text. Likewise, the viewer's initial encounter with an artwork has a perceptual rather than a linguistic nature. Both artist and viewer are engaged in a non-linguistic hermeneutic exchange of interpretation and understanding. It is a two way street between a linguistic and non-linguistic setting; a double hermeneutics according to Gadamer, "in which self-understanding of each party is moderated by a subtle

²⁰⁷ Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. P. 35

exchange: the process of becoming different to oneself by learning to think about oneself in the language of the other."²⁰⁸

The use of words might deepen the aesthetic experience, but, in principle, it is not a necessary condition. The eventual perceptual space is inherently private, and can be understood by the viewer who is the only one who can make sense of the sensations the artwork invoke. This dynamic sensual combination produces an in-between space linking that which is perceived with that which can be thought and then translated into a common language. Whether our aesthetic experience begins with sensations and perceptions that lead to meaningful cognitive understanding or that such sequential differentiation is a distortion of the experience is not the concern of this thesis. It is enough to argue that a meaningful aesthetic experience is embedded in the viewer's perceptions which can be interpreted in a non-linguistic way.

Conclusion

*"...the language of art means the excess of meaning that is present in the work."*²⁰⁹

For Gadamer language is not only how we communicate and understand but also the language of things, artworks in this context. Thus an artwork's language²¹⁰ is a "noisy" on-going address challenging its viewer in its revelatory manner. It is not the case that an attentive look is enough to understand what the artwork 'says'. Rather, according to hermeneutical aesthetics, a dialogue is required, in which a 'fusion' occurs between the horizon of the viewer and that of the artwork. In such a dialogue we perceive more than the artwork's visible properties, and viewers are taken out of the comfort of their 'horizon' and

²⁰⁸ Nicholas Davey, Christopher Watkin, and Gerald Moore, *Unfinished Worlds: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics and Gadamer* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013). P. 7

²⁰⁹ Aesthetics and Hermeneutics in Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. P. 130

²¹⁰ Throughout the discussion the term language is used in a broader sense of a mode of communication. When the 'language of art' is concerned, it is a language not because artworks can be read in a methodological fashion, as a text that includes syntax and grammar. But rather, thanks to the relationships between the various semantic aspects that come together in the style of the work.

are asked to consider the artwork's 'horizon', which can transform, disrupt, unsettle, or raise significant issues.

As in the case with any dialogue, the reading of the selected artworks was approached with a wish to understand and contextualise them in a broader political/cultural discourse. After identifying the corpus of artworks, their earth/world struggle was addressed. Given the artwork's dynamic presence and my own finite position, the dialogue and the resultant aesthetic experience were expected to have an unfinished character. In other words, in general terms, no individual interpretation will exhaust the meanings that may emerge from any given work of art. Thus, in the engagement a viewer may gain a better understanding of these artworks, yet, it does not mean that he has a complete grasp of their subject matter.

Thus the artworks are viewed as a performative movement that gives birth to something that is more than the physicality of the object. The discussion is a reflection on some of the aspects converging in the 'fusion of horizons' within the mobile constellation that is anchored by each artwork. The conditions and the issues that have motivated the making of the artwork have been identified in the first section - *Event*. It begins by establishing Serres' notions of time as a 'fold' and 'noise' as ways of relating to the multiplicity of factors in the aesthetic experience. Where 'noise' is the background from which all things and activities emerge to become part of a folded topography where past, present future are connected. In this context the notion of angelic in-betweenness has been introduced as a vector that moves throughout the thesis, linking together issues relating to historical continuity, burial and commemoration, to the otherness of other cultures, to the 'unsayable' and to the forces of nature.

A Talmudic saying tells us that "[e]very blade of grass has an angel that bends over it and whispers, Grow! Grow!"²¹¹ Thus suggesting that one of the forces that angels carry is the urge to grow - to develop, improve, and evolve, and that just like light, gravity, and electromagnetism, growth is a ubiquitous force of nature. In the oldest traditions, angels do not necessarily take on human appearance and have been associated with the forces of

²¹¹ From the collection of Jewish moral and ethical debate based on commentaries of the sacred texts, Midrash Breishit Rabba 10:6.

nature. They may pass by in a breeze, or in the ruffling of the water, in fluxes and in the movement of the forces that make up our earth.

The selected artworks express, explicitly or implicitly, a similar concern for the issues mentioned above. How they have concretised them in various modes of expression is the subject of the second part - *Eventing*. This section examines the impact of the artwork's presence, and how motifs, themes and presentation create an arena of possible meanings which exceeds the materiality of the object. Alternatively, in Adorno's words, how do artworks "produce their own transcendence."?²¹²

Heidegger's notion of earth and world is used to emphasise the significance of materiality and context in the formation of a meaningful aesthetic experience. By stressing this point, the thesis addresses one of the complaints against Gadamer's hermeneutics that it emphasises the subject matter over the form. The concept of the 'fold' returns here as a suggestion that all matter is folded into each other in, what Deleuze refers to, a continuous 'texturology'. Both his and Serres' idea of the 'fold' emphasises the existence of multiple points of view, which is what drives both components of this research project. Following this idea of texturology, and Deleuze's statement that "matter is a buoyant surface..."²¹³ the materiality of the artworks is seen as a visual text composed of semantic units of sorts that have their own logical development.

Artworks are made in a way that these units make a difference and are meant to make a difference. They take viewers across the threshold of verbal language, through its surfaces and style, toward a zone of perceptions and sensations. Following Gadamer's and Serres' insistence on an attentive 'listening' to the address of the artworks and sounding 'their noise', this thesis is guided by the conviction that sight cannot be an isolated sensation. The third section – *eventuality* – is a reflection on the fusion of sensations, perceptions and interpretations that has eventuated in the experience.

The artworks discussed in this thesis render visible various unsettling issues. Whether environmental or political, whether examining displacement or residue of violent conflicts, they present the viewer with a complex interaction of sensory stimuli, memories and

²¹² Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997). P. 122

cultural symbols. This disruption of the viewer's equilibrium is compared here to Serres' notion of 'clinamen', which together with the idea of 'noise' are useful in understanding the work's impact on the viewer and the ensuing aesthetic experience.

Despite the primacy given to verbal-language, the hermeneutic approach is useful for its focus on the determinants that shape our aesthetic experience. By viewing the encounter with the works and the interpretive process as a dialogue and by establishing the creative process to be analogous to the 'hermeneutic circle' two hermeneutic features have been adopted. However, unlike most available hermeneutical texts that focus on the receiver's experience, I have incorporated the artist's point of view. The artwork emerges out of the 'noise' in a gradual journey of understanding and interpretations. It is a dialogue between artist, data and material all of which is negotiated in a back and forth movement between the parts and the intended whole. It is a spiralling hermeneutic process that takes place mostly in non-linguistic realms.

The aesthetic experience is multi-layered, and to understand it within the idiosyncrasies of the embodied world, just like the angel Hermes, viewers must translate the perceivable instances and at the same time bind together a range of triggered and remembered associations. The tendency to neglect the input of the senses has long underpinned Western thinking. The mistrust of ordinary perceptions in Western intellectual culture can be traced back to Plato's ideas. Ironically, in his allegory of the cave,²¹⁴ he uses the metaphor of visual perception to argue against the viability of perceptual knowledge. What illuminates Plato's argument is not necessarily the image of people enclosed in a subterranean area; instead it is the light of the fire and the blinding light of the sun.

There are plenty of philosophical inquiries²¹⁵ into how the West has become obsessed with visual primacy. Both Heidegger and Rorty have voiced their hostility to ocularcentrism, while Gadamer offers an alternative by declaring that the "the primacy of hearing is the basis of the hermeneutical phenomenon..." he explains that "when you look at something you can

²¹³ G. Deleuze and T. Conley, *The Fold* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006). P. 131

²¹⁴ Plato.

²¹⁵ Among the ones not mentioned here in this context are: Bergson, Foucault, Sartre, Lyotard, Levinas, and Blanchot. Also see Martin Jay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism," *Poetics Today* 9, no. 2 (1988).

also look away... but you cannot 'hear away' ..."²¹⁶(M: 478) Yet, by indicating respect for sound over sight, he is humbling one sense in favour of another.

The idea that sight, sound, or any other one sense dominates over the others has been challenged by scientific studies and by an ever-growing group of philosophers and psychologists, and this thesis joins the voices that emphasise the mingled aspect of the sensory system in our experiences of the world. Furthermore, it questions the privilege given to linguistic articulation and establishes that artistic understanding and interpretations are performed in non-linguistic modes. The problem of language, and with it the 'unsayable', is but one of several points the chapter raises. The next chapter shifts perspective to focus beyond the fusion of horizons and attempts to weave together the various threads of this discussion, as they relate to the particular issues the artworks have evoked.



²¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. P. 478

[CHAPTER FOUR: BEYOND HORIZONS]

*It is the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before'*²¹⁷

In the paragraph from which the above quote is taken, Hanna Arendt reflects on people's ability to bring about something new into the world. Being a political theorist whose interest has been in looking at 'beginnings of sorts', be it the initial stages of totalitarianism or the causes of revolutions, she claims that a creative new situation is an expression of human's freedom and individuality. With respect to this thesis, a new situation, or a constellation is created with each encounter with a work of art. Likewise, a fresh dialogue begins, which is an event that opens up countless new possibilities for either its maker or its audience. Although a work of art is the result of an artist's intentions and a multitude of conscious and intuitive actions, when it leaves the studio, its presentation says something to both the viewer and the artist who created it. Often when artists make art, they struggle against that which is known to discover the unknown. Thus when the artwork is out of the studio and on view in a different context, the artist too becomes a viewer. However, unlike the viewer for whom the dialogue with the artwork is an entirely new beginning, for the artists, it is a combination of familiarity, newness and perhaps even unexpected perplexity.

The 'unexpected' has been a thread woven throughout this thesis. It has been discussed under the notions of the 'clinamen' and the 'unsayable', and has also been a constant companion in both the creative and the written components. The writing is a textual wandering amongst ideas some of which are antagonistic to each other. However, a close reading of those arguments has revealed that some of the declared opposition is mostly only skin deep. In the aim of broadening the discussion beyond conventional categorisation, this thesis utilises arguments from a variety of sources, which might otherwise be considered strange bedfellows. Furthermore, the writing itself has been a journey of examining my own and others' prejudices, scrutinising arguments and assumptions, in

²¹⁷ Arendt and Canovan. P. 177

accordance to both, the ‘hermeneutic circle’ as well as with Serres’ notion of ‘voyaging’.²¹⁸

Serres compares writers and artists to peasants who stitch rags from ploughed patches. “They dwell for a considerable time on the page, or patch of land, works at the limits, sometimes meditate... no artwork exists without singular accidents or events which spread their influence through the canton...” These unexpected accidents, he writes, are “difficult to relate to... It takes work and time to trace the byways separating or linking, linking together or mingling these neighbourhood accidents.” Works of art partially integrate these circumstances creating a whole in which “both unexpected and expected percolates along the whole length of the navigation route or ramble... a knot in the volume of space, with repetitions, rediscoveries, novelties and sudden grandiose visions.”²¹⁹ Without such unexpected and accidental conjunctions, he claims, the artwork is dead.

Likewise, Deleuze holds that the unexpected, accidents and chance play an essential role in the making of an artwork. Indeed, in my experience as a practising artist, accidents and the unexpected are an inherent part of working in the studio. There is a certain affirmative perspective in not resisting these instances of chance in the actual process of making art. By considering a ‘wrong’ mark or gesture as a necessary occurrence, they are viewed as spilling over some boundaries I had arbitrarily set. By following through these apparent ‘calamities’, and by re-evaluating the intended objective, more often than not, the path that opens leads to new insights. Gadamer too claims that the unexpected is fundamental to the experience of an artwork. However, whereas Deleuze’s discussion relates to the production of the artwork and its meaning from the artist’s perspective, Gadamer is mostly interested in the unexpected from the spectator’s experience. In the essay *The Play of Art* he argues that “the play of art is a mirror... in which we catch sight of ourselves in a way that is often unexpected or unfamiliar...”²²⁰ Such unexpected instances cause shifts in viewers’ horizons, which in turn may challenge and expand their way of seeing the world. Both Gadamer and Serres speak of a journey which might have begun with a designated objective, yet, in the

²¹⁸ In the chapter entitled *visit* Serres reflects on the sense of vision as ‘going to see’ or visiting.

²¹⁹ Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. P. 237-238

²²⁰ H.G. Gadamer and R. Bernasconi, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1986). P. 130

movement toward it, the unexpected presents itself, prompting a re-evaluation of what might have been previously understood as the intended outcome.

By stressing the open-ended dialogical-play structure, hermeneutical aesthetics affirms its commitment to differences and a genuine engagement with alterity. It is a dynamic event which requires listening to the plurality of patterns voiced by the artwork while keeping in mind what Iser says, that "one text is potentially capable of several different realisations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential..."²²¹ As with any play, the artwork draws the participants into its orbit. The 'game' itself is not reducible to the subjective experiences of the players, or members of the audience. Rather, "the game analogy implies that the act of spectatorship contributes to bringing what is at play within the artwork into fuller being. The spectator just as much as the artist performs a role in realising the subject-matters art brings into play."²²²

In general, for a dialogue to flourish, openness to the voice of the other is required, as well as an ability to listen and accept differences. When a dialogue with an artwork is concerned, aesthetic attentiveness is an essential ingredient in achieving a meaningful experience. It allows the complexities of the aesthetic experience to emerge and actively facilitates the fusion of the horizons of the spectator and that of the artwork. An aesthetic encounter is a subjective, culturally relative and context-based event. Yet hermeneutical aesthetics calls for a way of engaging with the work which goes beyond the personal. Gadamer insists that embracing a sense of proportion and distance when our private purposes are concerned, allows an authentic engagement with otherness.²²³ For him, it is a way of engaging with anything we encounter in the world that is an 'other' to us, be it an object, an animal, the natural environment or a human being. It follows that the artwork's own ontological position is seen as an 'other', and together with the issues it raises, it presents a double instantiation of 'otherness' through which narratives unfold.

Engagement with 'otherness' has been one of the driving forces behind the body of work developed for this project - *Shifting Horizons*. This examination of Chinese ancient burial

²²¹ W. Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). P. 280

²²² Davey, Watkin, and Moore. P. 48

²²³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. P. 16

practices says something about cultural and environmental notions of otherness from the perspective of an artist from the West looking at China. The interacting images of landscape elements with archaeological relics depict a journey back in time, across cultures and across landscapes. Cross-cultural is a term that may bring to mind notions relating to political and social power relations, such as colonialism, slavery, refugees, migrations, exiled, and multiculturalism. However, in this particular project, the term sets its net wider to emphasise the condition of being of a culture different to one's own, as well as to encompass the experience of not being restricted to a single timeframe.

Traces of cultures are etched into the land, whereas changing boundaries may assimilate or separate cultural practices. The landscape changes not just physically but also culturally and with it our relationship to it. The juxtaposition of images presented in *Shifting Horizons* may initiate in some viewers a recollection of painful memories of alienation and displacement, whereas for others, the experience may simply be an encounter with a combination of unfamiliar cultural practices and familiar aspects of the natural world. These artworks are a lens through which to view alternative, and at times conflicting perspectives encountered on the journey along a temporal and spatial trajectory. The recognisable fragments of landscape in the artworks present the viewer with a global vantage point from which to engage with conceptions of the 'otherness' in cultural systems and the natural environment, as they permeate political and social discourses.

Elements of the landscape constitute a repertoire of images which has inspired both Western and Chinese artists throughout the ages. Casey writes that the main difference between the artists, in particular early landscape artists, is their views of nature. "Put in the crudest terms," he writes, for Western artists "nature is without: it is something external to conquer. Subdue and Shape. The natural world is first of all something to take over in its material otherness." In contrast, in Chinese thinking there is no implication of a struggle with an external Nature, rather there is the view that "we are in nature and nature is in us."²²⁴ In China, this way of thinking is shared by everybody, artists, philosophers, government officials and farmers. It was conceived in early civilisation and has continued to

²²⁴ Casey.P. 95

influence life and arts in modern times.²²⁵ Chinese thought originates from one cosmological source, which ascribes to all things and occurrences a state of flux. According to the criteria of most religions, China is, and has always been, an ungodly, impious country.²²⁶ To the extent that early Chinese thought can be considered religious at all, it was based on the natural order of the world. While there have been beliefs in supreme deities of sorts, their role would not have been a moral figurehead. The absence of a supreme moral authority allows a cosmic order to be established which adopts its metaphors from the natural world.²²⁷

Chinese thinking sees creation itself as an outcome of a marriage between two forces that oppose and complement each other. The science writer Philip Ball²²⁸ claims that this aspect of the yin/ yang dialectic runs through Chinese artistic expression. To these days, Chinese artists believe that by studying nature, they could understand the forces that help form their societies. The sinologist Simon Ley writes that throughout the ages Chinese aesthetic has produced plenty of philosophical and critical texts in which the concept of beauty is dispensed altogether. Rather, “the supreme beauty of a piece...results from its natural appropriateness to authenticity, original purity, absolute naturalness...it is not the pleasing that is difficult; what is difficult is not seeking to please.”²²⁹ In view of that, when the notion of beauty does arise, it is more often than not in a critical sense. Since, traditionally, for a Chinese artist to aspire for beauty has been seen as a vulgar and dishonest attempt to lure the viewer. The aesthetic standards by which an artwork has been judged follows mainly functional and ethical criteria. Essential to traditional Chinese aesthetics is the notion that an artwork should reflect the ethical qualities of the artist who has created it. This moral imperative may also be found in the west, but here it is the exception rather than the rule.²³⁰

²²⁵ Simon Leys, *The Hall of Uselessness: Collected Essays*, Kindle ed. (New York Review of Books Classics, 2013).

²²⁶ Feng.

²²⁷ For more see Casey, chapter 6, as well as P. Ball, *The Water Kingdom: A Secret History of China*, kindle ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2017). And Leys.

²²⁸ Ball.

²²⁹ Leys. Location 5755

²³⁰ Ley recounts an episode involving the New Zealand artist Colin McCahon, who for an exhibition’s catalogue at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam wrote: ‘The next lot [of artworks] has to be better, and I just don’t feel capable of being better yet ... I have the awful problem now of being a better person before I can paint better.’

Indeed, each artist is responsible for bringing into the world a particular object as well as the meanings it generates. Artists respond to urges and ideas that declare themselves fleetingly and tickle their imaginations. Acting in response to these pulls and pushes is a matter of options, alternatives and choices at a given moment. Responding to these idiosyncratic urges and persisting despite doubts, is a matter of the individual's choice.

Artists sway between the bliss of making their art and the abyss of doubts. In the process, they may create a particular mechanism to guard against crippling questions and may employ various means to chart the turbulent process. One such way is expressing, either in writing or orally, the internal dialogue that facilitates understanding of the progression the artist follows from the initial urge, through concept to the final artwork. Thus a dialogue is an essential part of the meaning-making journey for the artist as well as for the views. The meanings that emerge in these internal conversations form a fluid constellation in which, in Umberto Eco words, a 'continuously open process allows one to discover ever-changing profiles and possibilities in a single form.'²³¹ The movement between the nodes of the artwork's constellation reveals a diversity of point of views and relationships. The dynamic movement that is contained within its configuration reflects the way we are in the world. As such, the aesthetic encounter is an ideal space in which to examine and understand differences without wishing to iron them out. Moreover, alternative perspectives which emerge in the experience open ways to understanding the close relationship art has to ethical awareness.

To create a meaningful object, artists draw on a reserve of conceptual frameworks which in turn would be interpreted and transcended by viewers. It is precisely this forging of possible meanings that requires integrity of each artist and, while, at the same time, acknowledging the artwork's historical contingency. An additional challenge is to own unforeseen aspects and interpretations and to remain open to the horizons of others. For example, in a lecture in East Jerusalem Mona Hatoum was asked whether, when making

Murray Bail who quoted the statement in the catalogue essay "could not hide his puzzlement: can one imagine Michelangelo or Rubens, Ingres or Delacroix, Matisse or Picasso making such an extraordinary statement? For traditional Chinese aesthetes, on the other hand, such a notion goes without saying, and McCahon was doing little more than repeating a truth which, in their eyes, should be obvious to any serious" [location 5666]

²³¹ U. Eco, *Opera Aperta* (Harvard University Press, 1989). P. 74

Present Tense, she knew that soap was linked to the Holocaust, as it was manufactured from the fat of victims. In response she said: 'This couldn't have been further from my thoughts.'²³² For her the characteristic of soap 'holds the promise that it will dissolve one day and with it all these ridiculous borders.'²³³ Moreover, by activating the olfactory organ of the spectator she hoped for an interplay between the political content of the work and the horizon of the viewer. The symbolism of the soap, or any other aspects of an artwork, is wider than the context in which it is installed. Artists and their viewers need to be aware that in a dialogue with an artwork there are neither prearranged outcomes nor a consensus to be achieved. It is a dynamic and fluid 'eventing' that brings about new situations and understanding that, arguably, are a matter of ethics. In other words, ethical values are among the key elements that make up a successful conversation. Often these values would shape the pre-understanding or prejudices in the participant's horizon from which the dialogue begins, this holds also for the engagement with art, for both artists and their viewers.

A conceptual framework, belief systems, conventions and social factors govern and often inhibit our perceptions which in turn dictate the way we relate to the world. The physicist David Bohm writes that a "thing has more in it than can ever be implied by the content of our thought about it, as can always be revealed by further observations," and suggests that to a certain degree our expectations shape our perceptions, yet: "our thought is not in general completely correct, so that the real thing may be expected ultimately to show behaviour or properties contradicting some of the implications of our thought about it."²³⁴

Bohm's preoccupation with problems of communications has led him to put forward the 'dialogue' as a solution for conflict-ridden human activities. Known as the "Bohm Dialogue" it is a space in which various points of view flow freely, uninhibited by agendas and judgements. Similar to Gadamer's notion of a dialogical-play, Bohm's exchange has no prescribed objective and it requires of participants to give themselves to the movement of thinking and meaning that would circulate in the 'free space', while at the same time, exploring preconceptions and the thinking process itself. In *Science, Order and Creativity* he

²³² Archer et al. P. 27

²³³ Lecture by Hatoum: *Mona Hatoum: Mappings*, , <http://vimeo.com/24541176>

²³⁴ D. Bohm and L. Nichol, *On Dialogue* (Routledge, 2004). P. 69

writes that a “dialogue may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crisis which faces society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness today. Moreover, it may turn out that such a form of free exchange of ideas and information is of fundamental relevance for transforming culture and freeing it of destructive misinformation so that creativity can be liberated.”²³⁵ Dialogue serves both Gadamer and Bohm as a model for exploring diversities, and as such advocates ethical engagement. For Bohm, such an exchange is aimed at paying attention and amending the way we think, whereas for Gadamer the dialogue is a more open event that brings about an opportunity to connect that which is familiar with the unfamiliar.

Upon entering a dialogue with an artwork, viewers allow their viewpoints and perceptions to be challenged. By establishing a space in which to grasp the limitations of cultural conventions and expectations, both models of dialogue ascribe art an ethical dimension. It provides a framework that introduces the viewer to the habit of engaging with that which is different. To successfully participate in a dialogue, it is necessary to contextualise meaning and incorporate otherness into the acquired understanding. In such a process, which Gadamer compares to playing a game, differences are valued rather than discarded. The notion of a game brings to mind equality, cooperation and mutual exchange. To stay in the game participants must adhere to its rules and surrender their subjectivity and their freedom to the game. To participate in a game requires humility to accept our own finitude and limitations. In today’s world of a globalised multiplicity of differences, the metaphor of a dialogical-play can offer a vital avenue through which to explore ethical concerns.

However, in the aesthetic encounter, the relationship in the conversation is asymmetrical since as a partner the artwork challenges the notion of mutuality. Yet for Gadamer, it is precisely where engagement with the other begins. This non-reciprocal nature of the exchange rests on that which viewers encounter and prompts them to become aware of their entrenched positions. In the contemporary climate of competing principles, beliefs and theories, an encounter with otherness is commonplace. All choices and interpretations individuals make are within a limited horizon of knowledge and are circumscribed by social and cultural contexts as well as personal and collective historical narratives. Through the use

²³⁵ D. Bohm and F.D. Peat, *Science, Order and Creativity* (Taylor & Francis, 2010).p. 270

of a dialogue, the hermeneutic approach helps interlocutors to acknowledge new insights and accept diversity.²³⁶ Ian Heywood writes that “the moral significance of cultural forms like art rests on the efforts they contain and articulate to set out new moral insights...”²³⁷ Art forms are a result of a complex deliberation and intuitive interplay between concepts, perceptions, values and material. As discussed above, artists should assume responsibility for the quality of the particular form they have made and the insights it realises. Given the arbitrary and intuitive nature of the choices artists make which can instigate in the viewer a new way of seeing aspects of the world, it is quite a sobering responsibility.

What is ethical has always been a difficult question to answer, and this thesis is not the place to pursue the subject to the extent that it deserves. The change that occurs in a spectators’ worldview following an aesthetic experience is a slight shift, a ‘clinamen’, in their orientation toward the world. Although there is no imperative to act, this small shift produces the first movement towards something other than the same. It changes the viewer’s relation to the world in a basic way, as the American philosopher Dennis Schmidt puts it, it is “a change in one’s ethos.” Ethics, he argues, is a word that “no longer carries with it a sense of the great task and difficulty of human being; being open to the movement of life, to the gesture that can be inscribed and repeated as the peculiar text that is the work of art, is only one way, to answer this task and the challenges of ethical life.”²³⁸

The model of dialogue as conceived by Plato, Bakhtin, Bohm, and Gadamer among others, call on us to reflect and engage empathetically with the other, be it a person, nature or an object. Plato utilises the form of a dialogue to probe ideas, whereas for Bakhtin a dialogue is a means for seeking possibilities. Bohm, on his part, stresses deep dialogical inquiry as a way to explore differences. In his model, he writes, “we create an empty space where we don't have an object, we don't have an agenda or a program. We just talk with each other, and we are not committed to accomplishing anything. Nobody has to agree to anything. We simply listen to all the opinions. And if nothing seems to get done we don't care, because the process of dialogue is going to affect us at a much deeper level if we can create an empty

²³⁶ Unfortunately, the ideas of reciprocity and mutual respect call attention to their absence in our life, especially in the treatment of indigenous and minority groups by dominating cultures. Thus providing a space to explore ethical orientations is an urgent necessity, and perhaps a dialogue, which both Gadamer and Bohm promote, is the appropriate method by which to seek understanding of the ‘other’.

²³⁷ Sandywell and Heywood. P. 210

space. Listening to all the opinions.”²³⁹ And for Gadamer the dialogical play is an agency of understanding, which makes it most appropriate for a reflection on the dynamics that determine the aesthetic encounter. This approach offers a space, ‘free space’ in Gadamer’s words, in which both artwork and spectator may ‘interrogate’ each other. Davey argues that unlike more common analysis in visual studies, where “the visual object is subjected to the interrogation of the spectator,” in a hermeneutic contemplation “the spectator is subject to the interrogative address of the artwork”.²⁴⁰ Such a process recognises that the artwork is not a detached object for critical analysis but rather an equal participant in a reciprocal event.

Similar to Bohm’s ‘empty space’ in the dialogue, which has no hierarchy, Gadamer’s ‘free space’ is unregulated by experts or forces of authorities and institutions. They both argue that in the modern bureaucratized world, a person’s life is managed and regulated by social and political forces over which the individual has no or very little control. Gadamer extends this argument to maintain that the space that is formed by the encounter with art is capable of challenging conventional expectations “because of the surplus of meaning attached to visual signs and symbols as well as to the images of literature and poetry.”²⁴¹

Every aspect of our contemporary life is permeated with the visual. The visual world is a noisy, multidimensional diversity, which for Barry Sandywell is a “contested site of values mediated and mandated by power relationships.” Art forms just like any other aspects of everyday life are subject to the forces of dominant forms and trends that bring “perceived excess, extremes and threatening alterity to some norm of delimited order. *What* can be seen, *how* it is seen and by *whom* are subject to social control imperatives.”²⁴² In such an atmosphere of invisible social and political forces, hermeneutical aesthetics, as a reflexive and inclusive approach, offers a way of appreciating the cultural and social significance of visual input and its meaning within a given political and historical structure.

²³⁸ Schmidt. P. 150

²³⁹ Bohm and Nichol. P. 49

²⁴⁰ Heywood and Sandywell. P. 147

²⁴¹ Davey, Watkin, and Moore. P. 2

²⁴² Heywood and Sandywell. P. 655

Conclusion

*Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line.*

Lamia John Keats²⁴³

Keats' poem *Lamia* narrates the story of *Lamia*²⁴⁴ who was metamorphosed from a serpent into a beautiful woman. The poet uses the mythical legend to demonstrate the difficulties in interpreting the empirical world and relates what seem to be two distinct modes of interpretations – the sensual and the philosophical. He seems to be fascinated by the different ways in which people 'see' the world. For him, an artist perceives the world differently from how a philosopher perceives it. This long ambiguous poem is like a maze sprinkled with ironical twists and turns. It is circular, repetitive, conflict-ridden, and the narrative ends without an apparent resolution. As such the poem itself is kind of a *Lamia*. Just like its heroine who escapes the scrutiny of the scholar, the poem's narrative itself evades rationality. The many paths of the labyrinth, as well as its circular nature, resist and interrupt traditional linear interpretations.

Likewise, this thesis is a non-linear meandering in a labyrinth of discourses. It is a wandering among selected artworks as well as texts of an eclectic group of interdisciplinary thinkers. As indicated earlier, this inquiry has endeavoured to come into itself in the actual process of writing it, and has invited the reader to participate in the journey of discovery and reflections. By leaving a linear approach behind, the process of writing has emulated the way in which I make art. In other words, in both instances, in the making of the artworks and in the writing of the text, an interpretive dialogue has been an essential part of the outcome. Both components of this project, the creative and written, have emerged out of the 'noise' of gathered data in a dialogical-play between intuition and reason.

The allegorical meaning of Keats' poem aims to remind us of the pitfalls of divorcing sensuous and emotional life from the life of reason. As an artist who dabbles in philosophy

²⁴³ J. Keats, *The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats: Lamia, Isabella, and Other Poems, 1820* (Phaeton Press, 1970).

²⁴⁴ In ancient Greek mythology *Lamia* was a she-demon who preyed on human beings, and who allegedly sucked the blood of children. Her characteristics are similar to those of *Lilith* who was discussed briefly in chapter 3 in context of Kiefer's artworks.

my intention for this research project has been to avoid such sharp separation and to address the guiding question of the thesis with this danger in mind.

The central aim has been to examine non-linguistic factors that eventuate in the encounter with a selected corpus of contemporary artworks, including the artworks made especially for this project. The aim has been to attempt and understand the perceptual space, or what Iser calls the 'liminal space', that is formed when a viewer interacts with a work of art. The focus has been on probing the confluence of factors that converge in the encounter with artworks that have been inspired by historical events and draw attention to violent conflicts. The purpose has been to explore the ephemeral aesthetic space that is formed by the coming together of concepts and perception, and which, in turn, engenders in the viewer understanding and a linguistic articulation. This liminal, in-between space is aptly represented here by the figure of the angel, a hiatus of sorts, which has allowed the discussion to develop along some contingent aspects of the experience. The clay *Army of Angels* I have made in the course of this research brings forth a fertile semaphoric realm, of which the discussion has caught but few glimpses. Nevertheless, conjuring up encounters with angels has opened up a realm of significations by which to examine notions seminal for this discussion such as 'otherness', presence and absence, ambiguity, language and the 'unsayable'.

The angel is but a single instance in a plurality of artworks discussed here that draw out the unspeakable, the unimaginable and the inexpressible. The unsayable implies that, for some particular reasons, language holds in its realm something that cannot be articulated. Building on the thinking of Gadamer, Benjamin, Agamben and Blanchot regarding the 'unsayable', this thesis suggests that in certain circumstances, disasters and trauma are rendered unspeakable not because thinking and reflecting on them is impossible, but rather because of the incapacity of verbal language itself. Thus it argues that various art modes are best placed to examine what is otherwise 'unsayable', and thus broadening language itself to include non-linguistic expressions.

Having started from the premise that hermeneutical aesthetics can probe ambiguities and possibilities held within the experience of art, this thesis has sought, on the one hand, to demonstrate this claim, and, on the other, to understand the particularities which are

brought together in the process. For this purpose, the artworks I made in the course of this research period is situated within a corpus of several visual artists, poets and writers whose art engages with issues related to this inquiry. The writing reflects on the factors that allow these artworks to convey historical continuity and emphasise issues significant to contemporary life. The thesis is a collage of ideas and arguments from different disciplines, which are not always sympathetic to each other. This smorgasbord of ideas, concepts, and opinions has been possible, partly because hermeneutical aesthetics facilitates encounters with other approaches to aesthetics,²⁴⁵ and partly because the intention has been for the discussion to demonstrate the complexity in aesthetic experiences, and to draw attention to the ambiguities that are implicit in the multitude contained in such complexity. The motivation for the making of an artwork, the struggle between content and forms, the relevance of environmental context, sensory responses and tacit knowledge are but a few among the multiplicity of determinants that make up the aesthetic experience, some of which are difficult to narrow down to that of causality.

To experience a work of art is to journey across an intricate landscape of disclosures and concealments – a dynamic, ongoing interaction between ‘earth’ and ‘world’ as Heidegger would have put it. Guided by Gadamer’s claim that a dialogue is an inevitable aspect of an artwork’s realisation, this discussion has utilised this approach to reflect on the artworks’ address as well as on some of the relationships that converge in the artist’s practice. In the studio, an artist is engaged in an on-going hermeneutical dialogue, which takes place between perceptions, ideas, intentions and their realisation in a material. It is a necessary interplay between the activity of thinking and the actual doing in which each aspect may withdraw or come forwards bringing into focus ideas, sometimes new, sometimes unpredictable, sometimes accidental, yet always welcome. On the viewer’s part, a dialogue with the artwork takes place on several levels. Unlike the artist who may physically interact with the work and for whom its production is mostly transparent, for the viewer, a presented artwork exists in a particular physical space that implies distance and separation. The physical gap between the viewer and the object of art can be full of evocative possibilities. Thus when combined with the opacity of the creative process, this gap offers

²⁴⁵ As has been recorded in dialogues with critical theory (Habermas), deconstruction (Derrida) philosophy (Wittgenstein and Richard Rorty), and in hermeneutic approaches in earlier thinkers such as Nietzsche,

viewers with a synergy between the visible and the invisible for which subsequent interpretations must draw on personal knowledge.

As is the case with any dialogical encounter, one must approach the artwork with a spirit of openness, which implies not only that one ‘listens’ attentively, but also that one approaches the other, which in this case is the work of art, with respect and trust. Given that a viewer’s presumptions may be challenged, entering a hermeneutic dialogue requires a willingness to take risks. The complex ‘otherness’ of the artwork requires the viewer to dwell on the work and to engage with the interpretative tensions and equivocality that may arise. If one had to isolate one issue that is highlighted by this thesis, perhaps the notion of ‘otherness’ and its ethical dimension, is most relevant to the question that has guided this research – an attempt at understanding how do artworks transcend their historical context and offer viewers an experience relevant to their own historical perspective. The art forms discussed here engage with issues relating to violent conflicts, death and commemoration that had emerged out of relationships with alterity. Through these works of art, artists have reflected on how their communities have related to ‘otherness’. Even though more often than not, this notion is linked to conflicts and traumas, the natural environment presents another vantage point with which to encounter that is an ‘other’ to us. With this in mind, the selected artworks have offered ways of engaging with a temporal and spatial ‘geography of otherness’²⁴⁶ in which questions of cultural diversity, political conflicts, linguistic vulnerabilities and more may be examined. Otherness has its own voice in art, literature and historical documentation, all of which depends on a given point of view. Even if we do not partake in shifts across geographical borders, ‘otherness’ is a part of our journey from childhood to old age. It is rooted in the personal dimension and has a wider context as highlighted by the dystopian fiction of George Orwell²⁴⁷

The thesis’ primary intention has been to explore how the artworks in focus “produce their own transcendence” (in Adorno’s words). To reflect on this question the focus has been on ‘listening’ to what they say and ‘sounding’ the ‘noise’ in the constellation they have formed.

Benjamin, Adorno and Merleau-Ponty among others.

²⁴⁶ Jonathan Hart has coined the term to discuss contours of otherness as an imaginary global space, where he can draw attention to the vulnerability of the English language as well as to issues relating to East and West - *The Poetics of Otherness*.

²⁴⁷ Such as - *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The discussion has followed three aspects in the encounter with art: the *'event'* that inspired the making of a given artwork; the *'eventing'*, the process by which the artwork's presentation affects the viewer; and finally, *'eventuality'* - the eventuated non-linguistic 'liminal space' that leads to a meaningful experience.

By focusing on Serres' idea of 'sounding' the noise from which artworks emerge, I have emphasised the conviction that it is essential to acknowledge and to understand the role of the mingled senses in the encounter with objects of art. In his recently published book *The Inner Touch*, Daniel Heller-Roazen explores this very notion by tracing the history of a 'common sensation'²⁴⁸ to Aristotle. He suggests that "the "thinking thing" of modernity conceals a past still to be uncovered, in which the relations between cogitation and perception, thought and feeling, were not what they became, and in which sensation, the primary power of the tactile being, held the keys to the life of all beasts, no less the two-legged one who would raise himself above those around him."²⁴⁹ His archaeological investigation examines the relationship between sensations and consciousness from antiquity until it has been hijacked by the mind-body dualism. He extends his questioning to the relationship between aesthesia,²⁵⁰ aesthetics, and ethics and writes: "Any ethics worthy of the name must confront the promise and the threat contained in the sensation that today we may no longer, or may not yet, sense anything at all."²⁵¹

The aesthetic experience is a complex encounter and requires that we sort out the pre-linguistic sensuous instances through our mental abilities. For Iser, all interpretations are acts of translation designed to transpose something into something else. However, the space that is opened up by interpretation always depends on what it seeks to translate. When artworks are the object of translation the challenge is that verbal descriptions cannot stand for the work. To describe an object of art in words might expand the aesthetic experience for the viewer or the artist, but, in principle, it is impossible to translate it into an ordinary language. Voices in hermeneutical aesthetics [among them Gadamer and Davey]

²⁴⁸ That which is mediated by a unity of all the senses.

²⁴⁹ Heller-Roazen. P. 40

²⁵⁰ The concept stands for perception with all the senses, as well as the impression that the perceived leaves on the body.

²⁵¹ Heller-Roazen. P. 289-90

are sympathetic to the claim that the aesthetic experience is beyond linguistic articulation, and that verbal descriptions lack the address of the original artwork. Nevertheless, they privilege linguistic understanding to the extent that it is tempting to think that only things that leave their mark in human languages exist in the world.

Admittedly, it is through verbal language that this thesis has been realised. To repeat Serres' concession in the *Five Senses* - talks of non-linguistic experiences and knowledge are unfortunately self-refuting since they do have to be expressed in linguistics means. Indeed, it is through a written language that my understanding of the artworks under scrutiny has received an additional depth. The commentaries on the artworks are limited to my own vocabulary which is enormously smaller than the work's repertoire, a problem best expressed by Paul Celan. Upon receiving the Brehmen Prize for Literature, he said: "Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darkneses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, 'enriched' by it all."²⁵²

Despite its 'linguistic imperialism', hermeneutical aesthetic offers a focus on the determinants that shape our encounter with objects of art, in which meaning is not immediately accessible to us and interpretive attention is required. It is a progressive approach that is open to encounters with the unexpected in which both artist and viewers become aware of the possibilities of different points of views. Precisely because Hermeneutics' position is that understanding is never completed, it offers both, artist and viewer, a journey that changes over time as their position adjusts according to what is grasped in the encounter.

When artists make a work of art they are not going straight from a known starting point to a known final destination. They invent the last point, creating something new that must make space for itself. In the process of creating that space, the object of art and its maker engage in an intimate exchange. Upon reaching the endpoint the object of art would change the

²⁵² P. Celan and R. Waldrop, *Collected Prose* (Routledge, 2003). P. 34

world, however small this change might be. In the production of *shifting horizons*, I applied the hermeneutic model to appreciate such a process; to better understand the interaction of material and ideas, as well as to look into, and better understand the role of non-measurable dimensions such as intuition, chance, perceptions, and urges. Complexity, ambiguity, and resisting authoritative readings have been among the concepts that have guided the 'conversation' that took place between my position and the array of resources that have been negotiated in the production the artworks. A similar approach has been applied to researching the interdisciplinary discourses in which the artworks are situated. It has afforded me a holistic perspective of the two phases of this research project while adding a deeper appreciation of the fluidity and dynamics of the creative process.

The key characteristic of the 'hermeneutic circle' is the returning, again and again, to the object of the inquiry. It is an evolving process of interpretations, corrections and revised interpretations that opens up new recognition. Such an approach has its practical use. In addition to the ethical dimension discussed above, the hermeneutic approach is an essential component in art education and research. By applying a hermeneutic approach artists and scholars may better understand the visual thinking that makes possible the making of art. Moreover, once we acknowledge that understanding is as important as an explanation, that interpretation is a matter of a viewpoint, that inquiry can be viewed as a conversation, and that ambiguity is inevitable, we cannot help but recognise hermeneutics as an implicit philosophical underpinning in any qualitative inquiry. For Gadamer, the experience of an artwork fulfils the hermeneutical idea "For the distinctive mark of the language of art is that the individual artwork gathers into itself and expresses the symbolic character that, hermeneutically regarded, belongs to all things. In comparison with all other linguistic and nonlinguistic traditions, the work of art is the absolute present for each particular present, and at the same time it holds its word in readiness for every future."²⁵³ In other words, he suggests that understanding the encounter with an artwork is a way to understand the world at large.

²⁵³ Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. Aesthetics and hermeneutics p. 131

In short, the aim of this thesis has been an attempt to understand the movement of perceptions, associations and reflections within the space that is formed in the encounter with a selected group of artworks. The focus has been a reflection on the ephemeral, perceptual aesthetic space that opens up for the viewer that encourages the thinking and the linguistic articulation. Key notions in Gadamer's hermeneutics were used as a theoretical basis for reading the various artworks. To address some of the anti-hermeneutic challenges that were identified in chapter two, this thesis brings hermeneutical aesthetics into a conversation with somewhat incongruous scholars. This synthesis of seemingly incompatible thinkers is but one of the contributions this thesis makes to the visual arts discourse. To further extend the boundaries of hermeneutics, it suggests including in the discourse a probing into the very process in which text/artwork comes into being and has established that genuine hermeneutical dialogue is responsible for the creation of art. Demonstrating that 'visual thinking' is a creative interpretive process that takes place in non-linguistic realms supports the argument against the privilege given by hermeneutics to linguistic interpretation. Establishing that in the encounter with artworks non-verbal interpretations and understanding are essential in producing and perceiving an artwork, connects to another crucial point this thesis raises – the suggestion that artworks are best placed to examine what is otherwise 'unsayable' and thus broadening the possibility of language itself.

The discussion is akin to a textured 'shatnez'²⁵⁴ fabric, woven out of multiple positions and their relationships, each of which offers a thread or two in the fabric which is this thesis. Passing through the folds and turns of this fabric are angels who, in addition to signifying the communicative aspect of the artwork itself, circulate throughout the text making connections and linking ideas. It has been my wish that by visiting and repeating ideas and texts, and by entering a conversation with artworks that engage with conflict-ridden historical events, the resultant discussion may offer a *climamen*, a point of interruption that possibly neutralises the eternal recurrence of ever the same.

²⁵⁴ A fabric which contains both wool and linen, which the Torah (the orthodox Jewish book of law) prohibits wearing.

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LIST OF ARTWORKS PRESENTED FOR EXAMINATION]

1. *Cline* 2015-16, mixed media on rice paper 34 panels @ 140x70cm (each)
2. *Army of Angels* 2015-17, 500 Saggar fired raku clay figures.
3. *Repository #1, #2, #3, #4* 2015-16, mixed media 40x70x10cm (each)
4. *Still life: grove* 2016, clay, sand, wooden tray 45x60cm h-10cm



APPENDIX I

The making of *Shifting Horizons*

As part of the feedback I received from the examiners who read the thesis and viewed the accompanying exhibition, was a request to add reflections on the making of the artworks and its inspiration. The consensus was that my biography was important to the way I interpreted the works of the artists discussed in the text. Moreover, they felt that since key experiences in my life have informed my art making, they should be accounted for in the text. Before proceeding with tracing the process by which the artworks came to be, I would like to point out that, as discussed in the thesis, all interpretations of artworks are informed by the personal experiences of the viewer. Likewise, the artist's biography and significant experiences inform the making of the artwork. Furthermore, we are all a product of our time and I do not believe that my biography, as interesting and as unique as it might be, should be included in the body of the thesis. My experiences are superfluous to the arguments put forward in the textual discussion and do not determine its outcome.

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My life has been marked by significant journeys. I left my native Israel to study in Vienna, spent a decade living and working in New York, another decade in Sydney, and now I work from my studio in the Upper Hunter Valley. Having grown up in one environment and then migrated to live in several others before ending up in rural Australia, my artworks are informed mainly by encounters with the natural world. Transience and permanence are the poles between which my practice has been suspended. As such my art tends to emphasise the liminal: the state of being between liquidity and solidity, between absence and substance, between order and disorder. Interacting with the landscape has been my way of making sense of a place, and I have come to believe that it is the natural environment that is the single most crucial factor in shaping a given society and its culture. The artworks I make are maps of memories and experiences, exploring the landscape and its symbiotic relationship with culture, with a particular focus on natural processes of growth and degeneration.

This exploration took on a new depth after several trips to China.

On my first visit to China, in 2012, the encounter with the entombed terracotta army in Xi'an, triggered a sequence of reflections on the trajectory of my life. Terracotta warriors and horses, sculptured body fragments, animal bones and wagon wheels were emerging from sand, ash and dust. Desert dust was everywhere. It covers the monumental clay army, as well as the mausoleum and the city. In fact the Chinese empire grew out of the loess dust that had blown from the Ordos desert, north of the first capital city, Xi'an. The drifted dust highlights the contrast between the permanence of the imperial monuments and the wandering of those who would have inhabited the region. The rulers immortalised in clay, jade, and bronze, versus the nomads who for centuries would have wandered in the arid terrains between Xi'an and the west, leaving behind only fossilized footprints.

A desert landscape looms high in my personal and cultural memories. On the one hand, violent campaigns and tribal feuds were fought over an expanse of an arid terrain in which I was born. On the other hand - a serene place of meditation and contemplation. In the dusty Chinese burial pits, filled with ancient warriors ready to fight, images of my own experiences of wars were rekindled. My life in Israel was saturated with aggression, wars, death mingled with expectations, ambition and optimism. In June 1967 I participated in the six days war as a soldier on active duty in the Sinai front. It was a sublime experience— an experience that took us out of personal selfhood to become part of a group; an experience of highs and lows, of exhilarations and deep sorrows. This followed by a grim awakening. The dunes of the Sinai desert were covered with dead bodies. Body part emerging out of the sand, stinking, providing fodder for ants, flies and eagles. What a hollow euphoria it was. There are no victors in war. I left ideology buried in the sand next to unclaimed burned bodies of hopeful soldiers.

While looking at fragments of an ancient empire protruding out of sandy pits, I reflected on those past desert experiences that were crucial to my decision to become an artist, and have shaped my subsequent thinking and the choices I have made. Back in the studio I set out to make a body of work that will offer a contemplative space in which to reflect on wars and its aftermath.

In line with my interest in natural forces, I made artworks that draw on the landscape and engage with ancient burial practices. Often burial sites, memorials and other forms of commemoration are carved out of the environment as markers of human transiency. The artworks, as a commemorative lament of sorts, highlight the existential tension between human transiency and the immutability of the natural environment.

The exhibition's overall title – *Shifting Horizons* - encapsulates many of the ideas and themes that are investigated in the artworks. It highlights the notion that meaning of objects, including artworks, is unstable. It shifts over time, in different contexts and according to individual points of view. In addition to the conceptual framework, the Chinese journeys have motivated me to employ materials used by Chinese crafts-person throughout the ages, such as rice-paper and clay. The exhibition's main component is a sequence of rice paper scrolls entitled *Cline*, which is supplemented by 3D objects - *Repository* boxes and an army of clay angels - all of which are an aesthetic response to experiencing the interrelationship between Chinese ancient cultural practices and environmental context from a Western point of view.

In ancient China the subject of landscape was deeply imbued with philosophical and spiritual meaning. Taoist and Buddhist beliefs about the harmonious structure of the universe, and scholarly ideals of a retreat from the chaos of dynastic collapse and the political machinations of the imperial court, each played their part in ensuring the primacy of landscape painting during several Dynasties. It is still important today in China, when the subject of landscape sometimes becomes a lament in the face of pollution, environmental destruction and corruption. By combining both traditional Chinese materials and subject matters in a Western context and technique, the artworks draw attention to the global disregard of the environment, and the consequences of climate change and human interventions in the landscape.

The '*cline*' series, comprising of 34 vertical compositions on delicate rice paper scrolls, juxtaposes screen-printed images of Emperor Qin's terracotta army, which I had photographed on site, with painted fragments of nature. Extending over 25 meters long, the scrolls offer the viewer a journey across time and across generic aspects of the landscape. It

is a pictorial journey that unfolds with the march of the terracotta warriors from visibility to invisibility across an unforgiving Nature. The term 'cline' possesses both biological and linguistic connotations - it refers to a continuum with numerous gradations from one extreme to the other. The intention is to draw attention to historical continuities, and, in the context of this particular piece, to emphasize the link between the ancient landscapes of China and those of my own experiences of the natural environment. In some of the scrolls, the presence of natural forces is hinted at, as in the ambiguity presented in scrolls depicting dust, fog and smoke that render the landscape and the ancient relics almost indiscernible. In other instances, panels showing images of terracotta army emerges from behind tall grasses, as if they have been transposed across time and space to a neighbouring paddock. The faint images visible through gaps in the painted sections, allow the imagination to make up for what is absent. Just like the surface of the land that encloses in its layers possible narratives of activities, both human and non-human, so the painted surface of the artworks takes the viewer on a journey into memory and imagination uncovering possible personal and collective narratives.

To make my art I draw on the techniques used by European renaissance artists, which I studied in Vienna. It is a nod to art history and a node on its continuum. The artwork's surface is an outcome of layering of oil paint and tempera washes, splattering and rhythmic squiggly brush strokes that are visible traces of labour-intensive painting activity. This is contrasted with the smoothness of the screen-printed photograph. By bringing together the mechanically reproduced image of the photograph with the gestural marks of the painting process, the scrolls provide a space in which to explore the complex relationship between the innate characteristics of these two processes. As such the artworks steer the viewer towards a multitude of issues ranging from highlighting the difference between the two mediums, to cross-cultural issues, and to the consequences of human activities in and on the natural environment.

By evoking remains of the dead in the landscape the artworks highlight the notion that landscapes are infused with memories, and therefore have a historical dimension. This, in turn, can be actualized through relics, cultural rituals, inherited knowledge, and social practices. In addition *Shifting Horizons* draws attention to shifting principles that govern different social and cultural practices, with a particular focus on the complexity and diversity

of burial rites and methods of disposing of the dead. The meanings of the natural setting of memorials and commemorations have been shifting as well. For example, unlike most western contemporary burial practices, in the past the funeral procession of the dead throughout the landscape was as a significant means of honouring the departed as was the final burial.

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The Chinese journeys have inspired me to expand my practice and make objects as part of this research project. Referencing Emperor Qin's burial site, the *Repositories* series was inspired by a particular chamber, which archaeologists speculate was the headquarters of the terracotta army. Each of the 9 repositories is shaped to resemble an open book, with a concave-convex dialectic between the two sides of the work. As historical reliquaries these artworks offer the viewer a space in which to reflect on issues relating to mourning and memory. Their two-sided structure welcomes a dialogue about the customs of burials and commemorations in different cultures, with a particular focus on the complexity and diversity of disposing of the dead. The texture of each of the repository-boxes was made to look like the packed earth of the chamber's surface. Nestled within their hollowed side are tiny clay figures and objects. They recall the Han Dynasty sculptural tomb pottery pieces that symbolize items the deceased person would need in the afterlife. Yet, the small clay objects I placed in the sand-filled cavity of each box draw on burial practices of other cultures, whilst onto the convex side I attached two-dimensional mixed-media artworks depicting images from the Chinese tradition. Another object, *Still Life: Grove*, which references scaled-down Han clay sceneries, consists of a wooden tray filled with sand in which I arranged scores of thinly rolled sheets of blackened clay. The piece recalls ancient scrolls and their function in recording and transmitting information. The arrangement of the clay scrolls in the sand suggests remains of a burnt forest in a barren ground and offers a multitude of semaphoric pathways. Mainly it is a contemplation on the transference of culture throughout history and on environments, both of which have been disrupted and devastated by wars and atrocities.

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As an analogy to the emperor's clay army, I made a clay *army of angels*. Both armies - warriors and angels - evoke a multiplicity of analytical frameworks and connect to issues discussed in the thesis. Hundreds of clay angels, all of which are cast from two distinct moulds, exploit the transformative characteristics of the material and its ability to receive imprints and impressions. The subsequent Saggar firing process burns the water out and hardens the pliable white raku-clay figure to become an angel of black baked earth. I used the material and the blackening process as a metaphor through which to articulate my intentions. Instead of portraying angels as a creature of light gently passing through feathery clouds, they are dark and cumbersome impeded by the earthy material of which they are composed. The blackened clay; the fired earth itself evokes notions concerning destruction and regeneration. As such they are an expression of the angst I have carried with me as an Israeli and a Jew, whose most relations perished in the Holocaust.

Arriving at the idea of an angel to be part of this project has been unexpected. My upbringing, as a secular Jewish individual, included neither God's angels nor the devil's demons. The angel's historical narratives have not cast a spell over my imagination, and I have considered angels to be an irrational invention of biblical stories, which in turn, inspired religious paintings. A certain sentiment in me had resisted this unanticipated urge to make angels. Yet intrigued, I let this incongruous winged ethereal creature become a propelling vector throughout the research and development of *Shifting Horizons*.

As an agency of the imagination the angel draws attention to the threshold between visibility and invisibility, between absence and substance, between order and disorder. In addition to effecting shifts between modes of existence, for me the angel symbolizes the utter 'otherness' I found China to be.

The repeated figure of the angel enhances the idea of the dichotomies introduced by the repositories boxes. In addition to the separation between spirituality and materiality, it connects to ideas about patterns of repetition in human life. This is also articulated in the *cline* series. The use of the repetitive process of photography and screen printing of repetitive images of warriors combined with repetitive paint marks and repetition of nature-based motifs allows movement between panels. In addition, it serves to defer closure as well as to establish the prospect of recurrence. The repeated figure of the angel and the

images of the terracotta army are used to evoke processes that occur in the natural world, as well as to reinforce their actual 'mechanical' means of production: the photographic and printing processes and the 'cloning' formation of the clay figures out of moulds. These repetitions are an internal rhythm that unravels in a process of the spectator's reflection and remembering.

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The artworks can be seen as instances of cyclical transformation connected to natural processes of growth and decay. In its particular way, this body of work is an intermixing of symbolic means employed to point out that, in contrast to the surviving fragments of the terracotta army in the burial pits, the natural world is not a dead world and perhaps it is most essential to the survival of human life. *Shifting Horizons* is guided by the idea that cultural practices exist in relation to the environment and are rooted in a social and historical context. By evoking remains of the dead in the landscape, the artworks highlight the notion that landscapes are infused with mourning and memories and as such have a significant historical dimension. The artworks, inspired by the archaeological finding in the burial grounds of Xi'an, take the viewer on a journey across cultures, across time zones and across a landscape which is oblivious to us and our cultural constructions. By juxtaposing images of Chinese ancient funerary artefacts with aspects of nature, the works emphasise the immeasurable age of the natural world in relation to the temporality of human perspective, and offer the viewer a space in which to reflect on instances connected to cyclical natural processes.

APPENDIX II

The case for hermeneutics

According to hermeneutical aesthetics, an artwork's power lies in its ability to convey a myriad of un-articulated ideas and meanings and to speak to each viewer directly and personally. It celebrates the visual experience for its generative capacity to enhance reality which arises from the synthesis of ideas, perceptions and their unique presentation conveyed by works of art. Accordingly, such a merger is the very factor that singles out an encounter with art. Thus hermeneutical aesthetics, as far as this thesis is concerned, can offer a tool by which to inquire into the perceptual space that occurs when encountering a work of art; to understand the fusion between the artist output and the viewer's perception. In this context, Gadamer's primary assertion was that aesthetics is an inquiry into what objectively informs our subjective experience of art. He did not discuss traditional aesthetics issues, neither was he concerned with the problems of beauty, pleasure or taste. His main concern was with the role of art in our experience of the world. His method is hermeneutical – a tool for understanding meanings and relationships that underpin our experience of art.

The aesthetic experience is an interpretive process in which the artwork is realised. The subsequent 'fusion of horizons' that occurs involves a dialogue between viewer and 'text'; a dialogue between that which is familiar and that which is different. This dialogical approach consists of movement between pre-understanding, understanding, and interpretation, which supports the entire hermeneutic process. It produces an initial interpretation and the preliminary (pre-) understanding, which will be revised as viewers grasp what each interpreted part means in relation to its whole. As we progress we oscillate between the interpreted part and the whole, where the latter sheds light on its parts and vice versa. Our perspective changes gradually and with this, a new pre-understanding evolves which in turn forms a base for new and deeper understanding and interpretation. This is what is referred to by the term 'hermeneutic circle'.

For some scholars, the hermeneutic circle is a vicious one. For them, there is no certainty that such a process of negotiating interpretation will lead to a better understanding. For

those critics by using pre-understanding, or what Gadamer calls 'prejudice', there is always a danger of a closed understanding. One confirms the other. New information may be interpreted to agree with older understanding, and contradicting data might be rejected. Others, like Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, see in the process no real issue of circularity²⁵⁵. The main contention and its paradox were identified by Heidegger. He realised that whereas a complete text or an artwork cannot be understood without fully understanding its parts, without understanding the whole the parts cannot be understood. However, he argues that the hermeneutic circle is not about going back and forth between the parts and the whole text, but rather it is a basic principle of human understanding and inquiry. What is clear to him is that "the circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of *Dasein*." ²⁵⁶ Gadamer agrees with this reorientation of the hermeneutical circle. Whereas in earlier hermeneutics the circle is a way to describe the understanding of a text, for both Heidegger and Gadamer it "becomes a fundamental principle of man's understanding of his own nature and situation".²⁵⁷ Thus even though there is an apparent circle in the movement back and forth from the part to the whole and vice versus, there is no apparent circularity when it comes to an understanding itself which is a progressive process that.

Criticisms of the hermeneutics project have come from various directions, mainly for the reason that it is centred on meaning-making. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas and Bruno Latour (to name a few) criticised Hermeneutics mainly for prioritising meaning and content, and for focusing on tradition and historicity. Foucault, a major critic of Hermeneutics, has argued in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*²⁵⁸ that there is nothing to understand beyond the text and that no additional meaning is hidden beneath the exterior. Both he and Latour have argued against the attention given to meaning and suggested that a structure of sorts should provide a focus instead. Derrida, who, like Gadamer, was inspired by Heidegger and believes in the historical nature of all discourse, rejected Hermeneutics. By claiming that there was no subject matter, no truth as such, only multiple perspectives

²⁵⁵ For more see D.C. Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature, History, and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (University of California Press, 1982).

²⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (London: SCM Press, 1962). P. 195

²⁵⁷ Hoy. P. vii

²⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge, Trans. Am Sheridan Smith* (London: Tavistock, 1972).

and deferrals, he attacked Gadamer's insistence that understanding requires a subject matter (*die Sache*).

Although Habermas has supported the element of understanding in Gadamer's Hermeneutics, he has opposed to what he believes to be its conservative nature and its failure to critique tradition. He has argued that the focus on tradition and the claim to universality blind Gadamer to the ideological operation of power. To this Gadamer answered that to deny hermeneutics' universality is to affirm the 'dogmatic stance' of modernity that argues that the subject can free itself from the past.²⁵⁹ Like Habermas, Paul Ricoeur²⁶⁰ has criticised Gadamer for failing to reflect critically on tradition. However, his commitment to the hermeneutic approach has led him to examine key weak points in earlier hermeneutics that had brought about the criticism, and to argue that interpretation is a process that must make detours employing structural models that will help scrutinise the initial understanding. In this way, the hermeneutic circle is not abandoned but transformed into a spiral of sorts that oscillates between interpretation, explanation and understanding. While Ricoeur is biased toward literature, his model may be extended to other modes, such as visual artworks. According to him, art is about communicability - a play between imagination, exploration and understanding is communicated across historicity. Thus in the encounter with a viewer art escapes its temporality, and receives a dimension of trans-historicity.

Following Foucault, who has wished to apply discourse analysis that does not engage with the subjective meaning of things, Bruno Latour, makes exteriority the main principle in his thinking. He aims to "leave hermeneutics aside and go back to the object – or rather to the thing."²⁶¹ His Actor-Network Theory (ANT) gives agency to all things equally. Thus, he argues, in the material world there is no hierarchy, and therefore no place for a subject matter or a semiotic system of signs and subject. Indeed, the claims against Hermeneutics are valid, yet the challenges they pose can be addressed. For instance, Gadamer's emphasis on the subject matter in artwork and thus neglecting the work's formal and material

²⁵⁹ Teodor Negru, "Gadamer-Habermas Debate and Universality of Hermeneutics," *Cultura International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 4, no. 1 (2007).

²⁶⁰ P. Ricoeur and D. Ihde, *The Epz Conflict of Interpretations* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2005).

²⁶¹ B Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* Clarendon (Oxford, 2005). P.

properties is a weak point in his version of hermeneutical aesthetics. An aesthetic experience does include perceptions of both formal attributes and interpretations of content. The focus, therefore, may be shifted to include the interaction between subject matter and materiality instead of substituting one for the other (as some have suggested²⁶²), a point Ricoeur attends to by offering an amended foundation from which to engage with artworks.

In his article Post-Anti Hermeneutics, Johan Fornäs²⁶³ argues that critics such as Foucault and Latour do not offer an alternative to interpretation, rather they propose different concepts as to how we engage with the world. Although Foucault's discourse analysis and Latour's ANT do not look for meaning inside or behind artistic works, their work involved interpretations, and can be considered as a kind of critical hermeneutics in line with Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.²⁶⁴ A hermeneutic approach can embrace aspects such as discourse analysis and ANT theory and thus adding a contemporary perspective to its process. For example, Latour's argument that all things and objects have agency can be incorporated into the 'fusion of horizons' where everything has a level playing field. I believe that by re-addressing some of the identified issues anti-hermeneutics challenges can be overcome, and thus reinvigorating and broadening the hermeneutic framework.

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In the hermeneutic process meanings and their contexts are understood primarily through linguistic interpretation. Throughout the thesis, I argue against the primacy given to verbal language and advance arguments to include non-linguistic interpretations.

Artists draw their inspiration from participation in everyday life, which is laden with information. They gather phenomena, organise and create in turn a personal order which is then offered to the rest of the world. Art is less an object and more a process of exploration, which relies on a hermeneutical exchange. It is a dialogue between the artist and the

²⁶² For more see Paul Crowther, "The Experience of Art: Some Problems and Possibilities of Hermeneutical Analysis," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1983). 347-62. doi:10.2307/2107342.

²⁶³ For a concise account of criticism directed at hermeneutics, and suggestions for revisions see Johan Fornäs, "Post-Anti-Hermeneutics," (2012).

²⁶⁴ "Hermeneutics of suspicion" is a phrase Ricoeur coined to describe the writings of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. In spite of their differences, he argued that these thinkers constitute a "school of suspicion." Meaning they share a commitment to disclose "the lies and illusions of consciousness."

material which is not linguistically based nor is it founded on general cognitive claims. By looking at the process by which artists create artworks, the field of hermeneutics can gain an added perspective of a non-language-based way of acquiring knowledge and understanding, as well as shift the inquiry to look into non-measurable dimensions such as intuition and creative sparks. Furthermore, the creative process reaffirms the productivity of the 'hermeneutic circle', albeit in non-linguistic modes of interpretation, as a process vital for the pursuit of knowledge.