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## Preservationist Aesthetics: Memory, Trauma and the New Global Enclosures

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy  
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Preservationist Aesthetics: Memory, Trauma and the New Global Enclosures

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Kate Lawless

Graduate Program in Theory & Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
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London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

My dissertation is a comparative study of the role of memory in four intersecting spheres of contemporary cultural production: (memory) art, (war) photography, (trauma) literature and the (memory) museum. I am particularly interested in how the recent turn to memory as a site of resistance in culture and politics reflects the logic of enclosure intrinsic to capitalist accumulation and expansion. The sites of memory in this study—including museums of memory and human rights, the famous *Sonderkommando* photographs and experimental works in conceptual art and literature—are characterized by a preservationist aesthetic that emphasizes memory's property form in the post-crisis cultures of global capitalism. The phrase "preservationist aesthetic" here refers to the principle of preservation at the heart of both new practices of cultural resistance and new forms of political and economic enclosure. I argue that the rhetoric of recovery in these texts—from Robben Island Museum to Alfredo Jaar's *Real Pictures* to W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*—requires us to both recognize the relationship between cultural aesthetics and the ongoing process of primitive accumulation and rethink the politics of memory in relation to the most recent wave of global enclosures (signified by intersections of the global housing crisis with international occupation movements and museum politics).

The impetus for this project stems from a deep ambivalence about the ways in which theories of trauma, which emerged to address the lingering effects of historical violence, are guided by the liberal principles of empathy and identification. These same principles have become the cornerstone of memory movements worldwide. My argument is that an adequate understanding of resistance movements based on memory, witnessing and trauma requires a study of how these movements reflect the contemporary conditions of colonization and

enclosure within the context of global capitalism. Drawing on Marx, Freud, Debord and Krauss, as well as a number of contemporary thinkers of primitive accumulation, my project examines how movements to preserve the memories of historical violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflect the ways in which images of the past have become the ground of the new enclosures.

## Keywords

Preservationist Aesthetics, Memory Politics, Trauma Theory, Primitive Accumulation, Modern Museum, Installation Art, Photography, Marx, Freud, Sebald.

## Acknowledgments

I extend my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Mark F.N. Franke, who guided me patiently and skillfully through the dissertation process. In addition to reading each chapter with the utmost care and giving rigorous feedback, Mark supplies tremendous support as I develop as an academic. Mark's sustained enthusiasm for my project and intellectual capacities not only eased any potential anxieties but also created an optimistic atmosphere of scholarly possibility.

I would also like to thank the members of my examining committee, Dr. Eric Cazdyn, Dr. Regna Darnell, Dr. Nick Dyer-Witford and Dr. Mireya Folch-Serra for their incredibly attentive readings of my dissertation. Their insight and provocation made the defence an exciting experience. In addition, I am extremely grateful to Dr. Sharon Sliwinski, who helped to guide me through the early stages of this project and provided a foothold that served as the foundation for a very long and determined climb.

My sincere thanks to all of the friends who have supported my project in various ways, from editing and proofreading to engaging in long conversations about everything from grad school ambivalence to revolutionary pie. Special thanks goes to Will Samson, Dru Farro, Siobhan Watters, Nat Coward, Brent Bellamy, Norman Mack, Jeff Diamanti, Marija Cetinic, Amy De'Ath, Sean O'Brien, Jonathan Fardy, Chris Langlois, Jen Gartner, Lele Leonardi, Jason D'Aoust and especially Jessica Reilly, who provided endless amounts of intellectual, emotional and nutritional sustenance. An additional thanks to Melanie Caldwell, whose amazing organizational skills, generosity and friendship helped me to navigate the murky bureaucratic waters of academia and likely saved me from drowning on more than one occasion.

I would like to thank my daughters, Ayasha and Mehli, who have been as patient and supportive as children can be, especially when their mother's work remains a mystery to them. Their practical needs, questions and energy have provided a much-needed balance. Sincerest thanks to my parents, Anne and Howard Baer and Richard Lawless, for their unwavering belief in me despite my false starts and circuitous paths.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to David Janzen, who spent many long days and late nights directly by my side in editing madness in the weeks leading up to my final submission. Many of the ideas in this dissertation were developed in conversation with David, and his endless love and unflinching commitment to my ideas, my children and my life continues to enrich our intellectual, emotional and creative engagements. I'd like to extend this gratitude to David's family—Henry and Sandy, Robert and Kristina—who give me the same warm encouragement and support.

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Recovering the Commons: The Politics of Memory after Occupy

Midnight Notes Collective begins their revolutionary exposé ominously and boldly:

*“Glasnost, End of the Cold War, United Europe, We are the World, Save the Amazon*

*Rain Forest...* these are typical phrases of the day. They suggest an age of historic

openness, globalism, and the breakdown of political and economic barriers. In the midst

of this expansiveness, however, Midnight Notes poses the issue of ‘The New

Enclosures.’ For a corrosive secret is hidden in the gleaming idols of globalism, the end

of the blocs and the Gaian ecological consciousness: the last decade has seen the largest

Enclosure of the worldly Common in history” (Midnight Notes 1). Nigerians are

displaced in the name of structural adjustment; in America, epidemic homelessness is

attributed to any number of crises, from the farming crisis to the decline of real wages;

and the unabashed displacement of millions of Chinese citizens is simply an unfortunate

effect of the tumultuous transition to free market democracy after the fall of communism

(1-2). The collective explains that while these scenarios—“the debt crisis,”

“homelessness,” and “the collapse of socialism”—“are frequently treated as different

phenomena by both the media and left journalists,” they are, in fact, “aspects of a single

unified process [named] the New Enclosures” (2). Midnight Notes documents and

analyses these new enclosures of common land that comprise the ongoing process of

primitive accumulation in the current era. While for Marx primitive accumulation—

defined in basic terms as the separation of workers from the means of production—is first

and foremost an historical event that marks the beginning of capitalism, for Midnight Notes, and other contemporary thinkers of primitive accumulation, it is a continuous and repeating process, “a regular return on the path of accumulation” (Midnight Notes 1).

Midnight Notes identifies five main ways in which the New Enclosures operate: 1) “by ending communal control of the means of subsistence”; 2) by “seizing land for debt”; 3) by making “mobile and migrant labor the dominant form of labor”; 4) by forcing the “collapse of socialism”; and finally, 5) by taking control of human reproduction. There is, however, a sixth, more abstract and more recent aspect of the New Enclosures not explicitly identified by the collective: this is the enclosure of common knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Evident in the recent resurgence of museums as “political centers,”<sup>2</sup> these epistemic enclosures, which accompany and reinforce land enclosures, take place largely in the realm of the imaginary; specifically, in the case of memory, in images of the past.

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<sup>1</sup> In his article, “The Topicality of Prehistory,” Sandro Mezzadra claims, “[e]xamples of the contemporary conditions of primitive accumulation are abundant, including enclosures of heterogeneous ‘commons,’ *from land to knowledge*, from water to the abstract code of life (DNA)” (303-4; emphasis mine).

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the first chapter of *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art: The Politics of Artistic Display in France after 1968* titled “Museums as Political Centers,” Rebecca DeRoo argues that museums in the 1960s and 70s were highly contested centres of political activism. “My aim,” she states in the final sentence of this chapter, “is to render museums as they are today — sites of political struggle” (18).

Three recent struggles concretely exemplify this aspect of the New Enclosures:<sup>3</sup> the rebranding of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), the relocation of the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) and the emergence of Occupy Museums (OM) in the wake of the more general Occupy Movement (Occupy). The rebranding of the CMC by the Harper government is couched in terms of the preservation of a more authentically Canadian history for coming generations. The \$350-million relocation of the VAG is justified in terms of the preservation of its valuable art collection while the eviction of small artist run space and art houses along with other undesirables on Vancouver's Downtown East Side (DTES) remains largely invisible. By contrast, Occupy Museums appears as a specific response to the control of public space and funds by both the government and the cultural and financial elite. OM resists the privatization of history and

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<sup>3</sup> Recently, in various news stories, questions of Harper's engagements with cultural institutions have been framed in terms of "libracide" and "knowledge massacre." For example, two Huffington Post articles, "Why is the Harper Administration Throwing Away Entire Libraries" and "How the Harper Government committed a Knowledge Massacre," discuss the closure of seven of nine Fisheries and Oceans libraries in order to digitize the collections, most of which were actually "consigned to dumpsters, were burned or went to landfills" (Greene n. pag.). On January 4, 2014, Cory Doctorow wrote: "Unsurprisingly, given the Canadian Conservatives' war on the environment, the worst-faring archives were those that related to climate research." In a third article, biologist Jeff Hutchings states that these closures are clearly ideological, though the specific ideology is unclear. The article claims that "[m]any scientists, including Hutchings and world famous water ecologist David Schindler, compared the government's concerted attacks on environmental science to the rise of fascism and the total alignment of state and corporate interests in 1930s Europe" (Nikiforuk n. pag.).

seeks to reclaim museums as common rather than merely public spaces.<sup>4</sup> Thus, on the one hand, we have the conservative rhetoric of historical preservation driving the distribution and redistribution of public space and, on the other hand, we have the progressive imperative to reclaim the commons. Collectively, as I will demonstrate in the following section, these three cultural exemplars highlight the ways in which the museum, as a site of political struggle in the current era, participates in the ongoing enclosures of *both* public space and common knowledge.

Through observations concerning the relationship between the logics of preservation and enclosure, my project conducts a comparative study of the role of memory in four intersecting spheres of contemporary cultural production: (memory) art, (war) photography, (trauma) literature and the (memory) museum. Expanding on recent theories of primitive accumulation, I argue that the recent turn to memory as a site of cultural and political resistance reflects the logic of enclosure intrinsic to capitalist expansion. The New Enclosures documented by collectives like Midnight Notes and affirmed by the endless circulation of stories of rent and land struggles on various sites of

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<sup>4</sup> In the context of capitalism, “public” and “private” are not contrasting terms, but different degrees of the same phenomenon. In contrast to the commons, these terms represent the rise of private property through the enclosures of common land. The UK-based collective, Endnotes, explains that with the rise of capitalism, the sphere of the economic (the private) transcended the bounds of the household (its original sphere) and spread out over the “entire social landscape” (n. pag.). What formerly constituted public space (the political) was occluded by the generalization of the economic. After capitalization, the private and the public are both forms of private property controlled by the state and the capitalist respectively.

social media point to a reversal in the logic of primitive accumulation whereby enclosures of land follow rather than precede the enclosures of common knowledge. Indeed, the ground of enclosure has shifted: where enclosures of knowledge served to reinforce or fortify the outward thrust of capitalist expansion in the form of land enclosure they are now the primary medium in which processes of re-enclosure take place. My main argument is this: current global memory movements not only reflect the aesthetic and epistemic dimensions of primitive accumulation but at the same time demonstrate the ways in which the image of primitive accumulation reified in the ruins of historical violence and placed under the transcendental sign of Trauma are the primary ground for the redistribution of common space after globalization, in the age of real subsumption. The sites of memory in this study are characterized by what I call *the preservationist aesthetic*, which emphasizes memory's property form in the post-crisis cultures of global capitalism. Preservationist aesthetics, in this case, names the principle of preservation at the heart of new practices of cultural resistance and new forms of enclosure through which social, political and economic exploitation are reframed, as *aesthetic* problems, in terms of loss and erasure. As we will discover in the following examples, the New Enclosures are both facilitated and concealed (on the left and on the right!) by an imperative of preservation, which is manifest in multiple spheres of production, including cultural, historical and material.

## 1.1 Museum Politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the radical push to reclaim the commons gained renewed strength. While the self-proclaimed left proffered the language of occupation most assiduously, in the spirit of reclamation all manner of dissidents took to the streets

in droves. As protesters seized Zuccotti Park, artists took occupation from the Wall Street financial district into some of New York's most prestigious cultural institutions. On October 19, 2011, New York artist Noah Fischer's revision of the original Occupy Museums Manifesto claimed, "art and culture are the soul of the commons" and implored occupiers to "reclaim space for meaningful culture by and for the 99%" (Fischer n. pag.). Fischer's online manifesto sought to expose the continued elitism of America's cultural institutions; it argued against the "intense commercialization and co-optation" of the art world by philanthropic tycoons; and it chastised museums for their conspicuous affiliation with "corrupt ratings agencies or investment banking houses."

Fischer's proposed action provoked a variety of responses. Feminist artist Mira Schor's immediate ambivalence stimulated a six hour dialogue on Facebook in which interlocutors expressed a range of opinions: accusations that high entrance rates exclude blue collar workers from museum culture; claims that museums are merely the "symptom" while Wall Street is the "cause"; and assertions that "public institutions" should remain "accountable to a public" (Schor n. pag.). Fischer himself entered the dialogue only briefly in order to issue a reminder that the mandate of Occupy has always been "to *claim back the commons* from the 1%—from economic justice to public space, to art" (Fischer n. pag.; emphasis added).

Meanwhile, curator-critic and *ArtInfo* blogger Karen Archey expressed less ambivalence than outright disdain. In her original post for the now defunct blog "Image

Conscious,”<sup>5</sup> Archey asks, “Why would you occupy a non-profit institution over a for-profit one in the same sector?” and suggests that this desire to target museums is ultimately the result of a “misdirected bitterness” (Archey n. pag.). Two years later, Archey’s original post was re-published in *Red Hook Journal* under the sub-heading “Second Thoughts” as an annotated screen-shot in which her initial claims were amended using the “track changes” function.<sup>6</sup> In this version, Archey comments on her earlier decision to convey sarcasm through the use of scare-quotes around the word “occupy” in her discussion of the protestors’ supposed occupation of the train cars that would transport them to the more official sites of occupation. Her comment reads: “The words of Georgia Sagri fresh in my ear, ‘Occupy everything! Take what is already yours.’ I still don’t understand how one could think they ‘own’ public space, be it Occupy or a corporation” (n. pag.). In response to Archey’s question of why Occupy would protest museums instead of “super rich galleries and art fairs,” *Art Fag City* writer Will Brand

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<sup>5</sup> In her repost (cited below), Archey cites the lack of compensation by ARTINFO as the reason for discontinuing her affiliated blog “Image Conscious,” which (as with most unpaid internships) did not bring the hoped-for future compensation despite high levels of exposure.

<sup>6</sup> See Karen Archey’s “Why is Occupy Wall Street Protesting NYC Museums, and Not Super Rich Galleries and Art Fairs?” Second Thoughts. *Red Hook Journal*. CCS Bard, 8 Feb. 2013. Web. 28 Apr. 2014. <http://www.bard.edu/ccs/redhook/why-is-occupy-wall-street-protesting-nyc-museums-and-not-super-rich-galleries-and-art-fairs/>



not only calls out what he considers to be Archey's personal vendetta;<sup>7</sup> he also reminds us that *Adbuster's* original call was aimed at government and *not* private corporations. "For Occupy Museums to direct its criticism at state-funded, public-serving museums," he argues, "is in exact accordance with the methods of the Occupy movement as a whole" (Brand n. pag.). One of the central demands of Occupy was, in fact, for Obama to "ordain a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington" (n.pag.).

What is most striking about the general rhetoric of the Occupy Museums movement is not that it pits the museum's submission to corporate greed against its assumed symbolic value (which it does), but rather the degree to which resistance to corruption and the restoration of the "common good" is suffused with the language of ownership and private property. In Fischer's words: "We occupy big museums as both real ties to Wall Street fraud money and as symbols of a culture that's [sic] been *stolen* from the 99% by the elites" (Fischer n. pag.; emphasis added). More importantly, however, what the debates surrounding Occupy Museums' political legitimacy and efficacy reveal is that the left, in this case, seems to appropriate, for purposes of resistance and critique, the very logic of ownership central to the forms of economic domination it rivals.

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<sup>7</sup> Archey's so-called vendettas are clearly linked in Brand's mind to her previous internship at ARTINFO.

Despite the high level of disagreement about the precise relation of the museum industry to the Occupy movement, what Fischer's initial call suggests is that museums in the twenty-first century continue to operate, in the words of Rebecca DeRoo, as "political centers" (DeRoo 2006). The validity of this line of argument is affirmed by a series of recent developments in Canadian culture. For example, less than a year after Fischer announced the intention to Occupy Museums, Heritage Minister James Moore announced the plan to rebrand the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) as the Canadian Museum of History (CMH). Backed by \$25-million of government funding and a \$1-million partnership with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the revamped institution will focus more specifically on Canadian historical events, such as the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Moore's framing of the project in terms of a pressing need to tell and celebrate the stories of our country advocates a decidedly preservationist imperative; "our children," he says, "need to know more about Canada's past"<sup>8</sup> ("Civilization Museum's" n. pag.).

Opponents, however, recognize the limiting and exclusionary effects of this imperative. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), one of the project's most vociferous critics, argues that "such a 'great-man' approach to history leaves no opening for crucial processes that don't fit into a rigid time-line or political

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<sup>8</sup> See "Civilization museum's \$25M rebranding to focus on history: Opposition accuses Tories of turning museum into Conservative 'spin machine'." *CBC News: Ottawa*. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 16 Oct. 2012. Web. 28 Apr. 2014.  
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/civilization-museum-s-25m-rebranding-to-focus-on-history-1.1225802>

biography—for example, the colonization of First Nations, industrialization, gender relations, migration, and ethnic conflict, environmental change, and much more” (“New Museum” n. pag.). Subsumed under the preservationist imperative, history is reduced to a series of past events that affirm the existing order of things. Moreover, as CAUT notes, the reductive notion of history-as-heritage conceals a harmful political agenda: “the government’s high-profile announcement about transforming the CMC into the CMH fits into a pattern of politically motivated heritage politics” that “reflects a new use of history to support the government’s political agenda—that is, the evocation of particular features of our past as worthy of official endorsement and promotion”<sup>9</sup> (to the exclusion of others, one might add). The original mandate of the CMC was “to increase throughout Canada and internationally, interest in, knowledge and critical understanding of and appreciation and respect for human cultural achievements and human behaviour by establishing, maintaining and developing for research and posterity a collection of objects of historical or cultural interest, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, and by demonstrating those achievements and behaviour, the knowledge derived from them and the understanding they represent” (“Civilization Museum’s” n. pag.). By contrast, the new *Canadian Museum of History Act*, yet to be fully approved by the senate, not only advocates “events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada’s history and identity” rather than “human cultural achievements” but also strikes from the

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<sup>9</sup> See “New museum must preserve research and breadth of exhibitions.” *Retain Canada’s Museum of Civilization*. Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2012. Web. 28 Apr. 2014. <http://www.canadaspastmatters.ca/museum-of-civilization/preserve.aspx>

act altogether the mandate for “maintaining and developing for research and posterity a collection of objects of historical or cultural interest.” CAUT warns that these significant changes not only exhibit a “narrowing of focus” but, perhaps, more insidiously, “an end to the institution’s mandate as a knowledge-creating institution.”<sup>10</sup> (“New Museum” n. pag.).

While groups opposing the CMH transformation share some overlapping concerns—including, for example, the high cost of the transformation during a time of heavy cuts to federal social and cultural programs—criticisms of the transformation are far from unified. Victor Rabinovitch, former president of the CMC, claims that changes to the national icon are driven by the impulse to reject the Liberal vision of Canada as a center for diversity and cosmopolitanism (for which the CMC has served as a “symbolic temple”) and replace it with a vision of Canada as “a land of victorious armed forces, brawny resource extractors and compliant monarchists” (Butler n. pag.). The current president, however, sees things slightly differently. In his recent article “How Stephen Harper is rewriting history,” John Geddes accentuates Mark O’Neill’s dismay regarding the fact that the current exhibits do little to convey “actual historical events” (Geddes n. pag.).<sup>11</sup> Guiding Geddes through the displays, O’Neill remarks on the fact that the “intact

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<sup>10</sup> See “CAUT opposes the destruction of Museum of Civilization.” *Retain Canada’s Museum of Civilization*. Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2012. Web. 28 Apr. 2014. <http://www.canadaspastmatters.ca/museum-of-civilization/caut-opposes.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> See “How Stephen Harper is rewriting history: Starting with a \$25-million museum overhaul, the Conservatives want to change the way Canadians perceive their past.”

early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Ukrainian Catholic church” fails to tell us about the lives of Ukrainian internment; and he makes similar claims about the “mock-up of a square in 18<sup>th</sup>-century New France, the “lonely text panel...about Louis Riel’s rebellions,” and the “meticulously reconstructed...Chinese laundry” (n. pag.). For O’Neill, the government’s rebranding project signifies a missed opportunity, one that might have exposed the invisible social relations buried in the monuments of cultural heritage.

Despite the fact that critics of the project emphasize its Conservative celebration of the “great man of history” as opposed to the Liberal lauding of ordinary lives, Geddes argues that the CMC’s turn actually began under Liberal rule with Rabinovitch’s endorsement of the Canadian War Museum.<sup>12</sup> And contrary to opponents’ reservations, O’Neill maintains that Canada’s darker activities, such as the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, the October Crisis of 1970 and the “suspension of civil liberties in Quebec” (Geddes n. pag.) will be displayed alongside a long list of accomplishments—albeit excluding the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In part, O’Neill’s enthusiasm derives from the fact that, in his own words: “It will be the single

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*News. Macleans*, 29 Jul. 2013. Web. 28 Apr. 2014.

<http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/written-by-the-victors/>

<sup>12</sup> In the article itself “Liberal” seems to refer to both the Liberal Party and to liberalism or liberal ideology; it is the same for “Conservative.” This conflation threatens to obscure the political significance of ideological positions by subsuming political ideology, which has populist dimension, under the Party politics.

largest pan-Canadian narrative ever developed” (n. pag.). Geddes concludes with the hope that the transformation, which coincides with the country’s 150<sup>th</sup> birthday, means that O’Neill will no longer have to illuminate the history the CMC “fails to teach” (n. pag.). Amidst a dearth of contradictory views, junior researcher Amanda Watson argues that many critics are missing what she calls “the more harrowing insinuation: that the largest and most popular cultural institution in the country will succumb to the Harper Government’s militarization of Canadian national identity” (Watson n. pag.). The museum plan,” Watson continues, “is not a rearrangement of artifacts and a name change. It is a reorientation to Canadian history, one that promotes a master narrative in the hopes of recasting a unified Canadian citizen.”<sup>13</sup>

On the opposite side of the country, another significant debate surrounds the restructuring of the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG). In April of 2013, Vancouver mayor Gregor Robertson voiced his approval for the relocation of the Vancouver Art Gallery to an empty lot in Larwill Park, a move with a projected budget of approximately \$350-million. The move comes as a solution to real material problems with the gallery’s present condition. Since 1983, the VAG has occupied the former provincial courthouse—an iconic, stately neo-classical structure designed by Sir Francis Mawson Rattenbury in 1906—which has recently been burdened by a leaky membrane beneath the North Plaza fountain, a commissioned structure gracing the entrance grounds of the gallery that has

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<sup>13</sup> See “Civilization Museum to be history as Conservatives re-define Canada in their vision.” *IPolitics*, 21 Oct. 2012. Web. 28 Apr. 2014.

<http://www.ipolitics.ca/2012/10/21/amanda-watson-civilization-museum-to-be-history-as-conservatives-re-define-canada-in-their-vision/>

on more than one occasion been referred to as an obstruction to rather than facilitator of community events. Along with a lack of storage space and limited conservation resources, the threat of water damage prompted gallery director Kathleen Bartels along with the past and present chairs of the VAG Foundation, David Aisennstat and Michael Audain respectively, to approach the Vancouver Board of Trade with a proposal for a new building. While Audain claims that “much of the opposition to moving the gallery comes from many patrons’ nostalgic attachment to the current site” (Tinari n. pag.),<sup>14</sup> the loudest opposition comes not from nostalgic patrons but from wealthy art collector and real estate marketer Bob Rennie who touts the project as an “artistic Gallipoli, an expensive building that the city can’t afford and doesn’t need” (Bula n. pag.).<sup>15</sup> Partnering with Vancouver economist David Baxter and referring to Bartel’s plan as a reliance on “starchitecture” (n. pag.), Rennie has proposed an alternative plan for the VAG that would involve its dispersion throughout the city. Opposing the VAG director’s proposal for a monumental new building, Rennie suggests instead building a series of smaller venues (approximately seven) placed in various neighbourhoods around the city. While the “condo king”<sup>16</sup> speaks in terms of city-building, and his partner frames the decentralized gallery as “a real opportunity as we move into the Twitter age to ask what

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.boardoftrade.com/events/event-highlights/overview/2623493333.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> See “The Vancouver Art Gallery’s \$350 Million Plan.” *News & Features*. Vancouver Magazine, 1 Jun. 2010. Web. 28 Apr. 2014.

[http://www.vanmag.com/News\\_and\\_Features/Urban\\_Fix/The\\_Vancouver\\_Art\\_Gallerys\\_350\\_Million\\_Plan?page=0%2C0](http://www.vanmag.com/News_and_Features/Urban_Fix/The_Vancouver_Art_Gallerys_350_Million_Plan?page=0%2C0)

<sup>16</sup> In Vancouver, this is Rennie’s nickname.

are other ways that this collection could be presented,” Bartels presents the proposed changes as, on the one hand, a response to material crisis, and, on the other hand, an economic opportunity for the city of Vancouver (Tinari n. pag.).

Though passionate declarations of city building and decentralization may sound promising and perhaps even forward-thinking, Andrew Witt, a writer for the progressive online newspaper *The Mainlander*, argues that Rennie’s plan reads less like a radical Situationist redistribution than a “blatant urban renewal project”<sup>17</sup>; and that critiques of the real estate magnate in mainstream media have “only served to pathologize larger structural inequalities” (Witt n. pag.). In Part 1 of “The Vancouver Art Gallery and the Eviction of a Political Idea,” Witt maintains that media coverage of the debate, in which the “crisis” oscillates “between the anodyne and the banal,” has covered over more pressing issues. “Real political and social antagonisms between the city’s financial elite and its cultural producers” Witt argues, “were suspended or displaced, while concerns over the production and circulation of art in the city were reduced to apolitical transactions of real estate, finance and state support” (n. pag.).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, while the

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<sup>17</sup> Urban renewal in the United States began in the 1950s with the Housing Act of 1954. Jane Jacobs wrote her critique in 1961, which stimulated opposition movements, but not until after hundreds of historic buildings had been demolished; we now have ecological and cultural preservation projects that purport to strengthen communities by preserving public space, but these projects have just as vehemently displaced the poor as did the earlier renewal projects documented by Jacobs.

<sup>18</sup> <http://themainlander.com/2013/07/13/the-vancouver-art-gallery-and-the-eviction-of-a-political-idea-part-i/>



VAG's move has been largely framed as an emergency response, Witt reveals that the proposed move is accompanied by a series of evictions plaguing small artist-run spaces in Vancouver's Downtown East Side (DTES). In a follow-up to the original article, Witt demonstrates that these evictions, which rose sharply following the 2010 Olympics, are the result of "high rents, restructured state funding, profit-driven renovations [sic], and an apathetic city council"—in short: neoliberal gentrification.

Implicit in his comparative look at the relocation of the Vancouver Art Gallery and the series of art-house evictions are questions of the role of cultural memory in *The New Enclosures*. While his analysis of the VAG debates reveals the "developer logic" of the contemporary museum, his recognition of the relationship between this move and the simultaneous series of evictions gestures toward a more insidious capitalist logic—the logic of enclosure. In his attempt to answer the question of what the "new Vancouver Art Gallery represent[s] in this environment of eviction and displacement," Witt turns to cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen's analysis of the modern museum as a "mass medium" reflecting two dominant "cultural desires: the need to forget and the desire to remember." Arguing that despite his apt identification of competing desires Huyssen ultimately fails to recognize the "localized question" of the role of the city's elite in the museum's repurposing and redeployment (Witt n. pag.), Witt sets erasures of memory alongside the material conditions of eviction in Vancouver. His pointed reference to the exhibition of Audain's collection "Shore, Forest and Beyond" as a "shameless celebration" of the "master-collector" (one might even say, *the capitalist-auteur*) "amidst one of Vancouver's worst housing crises" is an indictment in itself. Yet he takes this indictment a step further by claiming that "[t]he folktales of official culture always omit the dark

violence that makes history possible in the first place.” This dark violence becomes visible in the airing of Audain’s dirty laundry; not only was his father Robert Dunsmuir apparently a “ruthless strikebreaker” but he was also a “founder of the first phase of primitive accumulation in British Columbia” (n. pag.). Such violence is concealed from the enthusiastic crowd of museum patrons. Beyond the public forgetting of these aspects of Audain’s personal history, Witt describes Vancouver’s project of gentrification more broadly as a kind of “conservative amnesia.” “Founded on forgetting,” he argues, “the city’s official image sets out to ruin any vestige of working-class culture and community. Erasure is almost total” (Witt n. pag.). The erasure of common knowledge in this case accompanies the redistribution of public space; and despite finding themselves on opposite sides of the politico-aesthetic fence, real estate tycoons like Audain and Rennie are equally culpable in the social-economic effects of this redistribution.

Not surprisingly, Witt concludes his article with a discussion of the 2011 occupation of the VAG grounds in solidarity with the Occupy movement, in which he relays Vancouver lawyer Ben Parkin’s concerns about the real material threat of the occupiers to the museum collection. The main concern was that occupiers’ trench digging might rupture the underground membrane protecting the gallery vaults from the external threat of rainwater. Making explicit the clear psychological element of this threat, Witt argues that, “condensed into little droplets of water, the occupation ate away at the Vancouver Art Gallery’s institutional edifice” (Witt n. pag.). The rhetoric of water damage reveals institutional ruin as the collateral damage of occupation; the threat of penetration assumes the form of rupture, a discourse that underlies the current scene of political struggle.

## 1.2 Forms of Rupture

Each of the preceding examples provides a brief snapshot of the present relationship between the late capitalist museum (Krauss) and The New Enclosures (Midnight Notes)—in particular, they demonstrate the ways in which the new enclosures not only conform to the logic of preservation proffered by the heritage industry but do so on aesthetic grounds.

Recently, however, the museum industry has been the site of another artistic and cultural counter-movement. In the decade or so preceding Occupy, museums of memory and human rights, both repurposed and purpose-built, emerged across the globe in conjunction with politically charged memory movements.<sup>19</sup> In these movements, the struggle to recover collective memories of historical violence merges with the transformation of former spaces of social exclusion into spaces for public collaboration. Commemorative buildings and structures are erected on public land, and previous sites of torture and suffering are transformed into sites of collective memorialization. Here, the aim is not primarily the reclamation of common space but, first and foremost, the reclamation of repressed knowledge. Significantly, these left-leaning movements have

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<sup>19</sup> Examples of these new museums include: the Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City (2010); the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada (2014); the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (1993); the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile (2010); the Museum of Memory in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2002); the Lugar de la Memoria in Lima, Peru (2010); and the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda (2004).

responded to oppressive state regimes through the recovery of historical memory,<sup>20</sup> which necessarily imbues memory, or images of the past, with emancipatory potential.

Inevitably, however, this potential is foreclosed not only by the fact that within a situation of global subsumption memory discourses are redirected for productive ends but equally by the fact that these movements tend to simply replace one particular image of the past (the history of the victors) with another (the memory of the repressed). This has three significant consequences: first, replacing one image with another enacts a reversal that remains within the logic of the existing system and does nothing to directly alter structures of inequality and exploitation; second, recovering and commemorating brutal histories of state violence does not in itself expose the capitalist dimension of these histories; and finally, relegating this violence to the past ultimately covers over the ongoing violence of primitive accumulation in the present, as well as the complicity of such recovered images with these existing conditions.

While the concept of rupture signifies a threat in the context of occupation, in contemporary memory projects it signifies emancipation. Indeed, the emancipatory potential of recovered memory is often modeled on a notion of traumatic rupture, which ostensibly provides an opening for the coming to consciousness, however belatedly, of a previously repressed experience. Recent theories of trauma (Caruth and Felman), postmemory (Hirsch and Landsberg) and other aspects of trauma and memory studies (such as Mark Seltzer's notion of wound culture or Arthur Frank's concept of the

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<sup>20</sup> The political significance of the recovery and reclamation of historical memory will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

wounded storyteller) locate emancipatory potential in repressed counter-narratives, which speak back to and against dominant historical narratives. Victims' stories of trauma and violence break open the opaque veil of history. The limitations of importing such a psychic model of traumatic rupture into the political sphere, however, rest on a fundamental assumption about history: it assumes that history proceeds chronologically according to the Newtonian laws of linear time.<sup>21</sup> Within this framework, the politics of memory is sutured to a temporal rupture in the smooth progression of history, one that is not only modeled on traumatic subjectivity but also does nothing to challenge the abstract, universal time of a politics structured by historical progress. What is recovered in the counter-narratives of memory politics is necessarily this or that repressed memory of this or that historical trauma. As a result, the recovery of historical content hitherto excluded from the discourse of official history is conceived analogously to the recovery of the analysand's repressed memory in the psychoanalytic context. What should strike us as significant in this regard, however, is not the recovery of a lost experiential content that might point us in the direction of some truer truth but rather the potential

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<sup>21</sup> In contemporary theories of primitive accumulation linear historical time is associated with the capitalist mode of production (See, for example, Tomba and Mezzadra). Before these, however, Walter Benjamin famously connected "homogenous, empty time" of history with the capitalist production of standardized, universal time. And in *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord argues that historical time has become the universalized form assumed by irreversible time within the capitalist mode of production. Specifically, he states: "With the development of capitalism, irreversible time has become globally unified" (43). I discuss the issue of historical time at length in chapter five.

revitalization of an alternate aesthetic form, one that has until now remained latent in the structure of the social relation.

As I have suggested, the concept of rupture is not exclusive to theories of trauma; in recent years it has framed our understanding of politics as well, particularly in the structuralist theories of post-Althusserian philosophers like Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou. Rancière's theory of the "distribution of the sensible," for example, announces the ways in which the oppressed, or those excluded from the official count, can disrupt and radically reorganize the aesthetic categories (i.e. the modes of speaking, acting, doing, etc.) of the dominant distribution, which he names the police order. While Althusser associated the function of the police with the ideological interpellation of the subject—recall the officer's hailing call, "Hey, you there!"—Rancière argues on the contrary that the police are in fact on the side of preventing ruptures in the normative relations of alienated subjects—Althusser's hailing call becomes Rancière's marshaling imperative, "move along now, there's nothing to see here." Influenced by Lacan, Badiou's theory of the event similarly articulates a rupture in the normal structures of a situation: in his own words, the event is both a "rupture of the laws of the situation" and the "creation of a new possibility" (Badiou "Is the Word..."). Stimulated by the inherent contradictions of a given situation, like Lacan's eruption of the real in the realm of the symbolic, Badiou's event provides a glimpse of the invisible void around which the situation is structured. Post-structuralist political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe ground their idea of the political in what they call "points of rupture." Similar to Badiou and Rancière, these points of rupture are not related to the coming-to-consciousness of traumatic experience; rather, they are tied to a notion of political

antagonism, which operates as a disruption that appears at the limits of language (125). In each case, politics is not merely the struggle for recognition but the aesthetic presentation of the effects of a structure in which misrecognition is the norm. Put differently, politics takes shape as a mode of exposure that disrupts the smooth progression of *history as usual*.

For Slavoj Žižek the immediate consequence of such a temporal short circuit is the emergence of a new political subject he calls the “post-traumatic subject” (Žižek 2008). This detached, indifferent, affectless subject develops when the traumatized subject survives its own death; not simply as the survivor of an overwhelming experience of trauma (a train accident, a brain tumour, the death camps, and so on) but as a subject that reflects the alienating logic of capitalist accumulation. The post-traumatic subject diverges from Freud’s traumatized subject whose symptom takes the form of repetition in its abandon of traumatic truth. Following Catharine Malabou, however, Žižek argues that this Freudian model of trauma is highly Western-centric and cannot account for experiences of trauma that do not take the form of a sudden, unexpected event. In countries suffering from chronic civil war, for example, trauma is a permanent feature of everyday life and, indeed, of existence itself. Žižek maintains that Freud, when confronted with cases of chronic trauma, “is not ready to accept the direct destructive efficiency of external shocks—they destroy the psyche of the victim (or, at least, wound it in an unredeemable way) without resonating in any inner traumatic truth” (11). From this perspective the subjects of war-torn countries are surely not plagued by the same unconscious and libidinally infused anxieties as Freud’s traumatized subjects but by an absolute psychic destruction that leaves no concrete remainder. The detached post-

traumatic subject, however, does not simply replace the libidinal subject of Freudian trauma, it destroys it: “Malabou’s thesis here is very precise and radical: her point is not only to add to the Freudian libidinal unconscious another, cerebral, unconscious. The problem is that the Freudian unconscious only makes sense when (if) we refuse to admit — we erase the possibility of — the cerebral unconscious...which is the truly *material* unconscious” (18-19). With the birth of this new subject, rather, only form remains: pure death drive, a subject devoid of its meaningful content. In this sense, the post-traumatic subject is “the empty form deprived even of unconscious formations encapsulating a variety of libidinal investments” (27). The post-traumatic subject is the embodiment of pure form.

Demonstrating the limitations of Malabou’s theory, however, Žizek argues that this critique of traumatic repetition focuses too intensely on *content* rather than *form*. Traumatic shock, he suggests, should not be understood as a repetition of *substance*—that is, of this or that particular memory—but of the *very act of erasure*, of forgetting, of repression—rather, “the traumatic shock REPEATS the past, i.e. the past traumatic loss of substance which is constitutive of the very dimension of subjectivity” (emphasis in original). The crucial point is this: traumatic repetition is not the repetition of a specific historical event that forms the traumatic content of the repressed memory; it is the repetition of the *form of trauma* itself, “the very gesture of erasing all substantial content” (27).

Here we return to our claim that this new subject is not merely a survivor of historical violence condemned to eternal repetition but also an effect of the logic of enclosure central to the project of capitalist accumulation. In his concluding paragraphs



Zizek draws a connection between the rise of three contemporary figures of the Cartesian subject—the proletariat, the totally mediated subject, and the post-traumatic subject—and three respective modes of enclosure—the enclosure of common culture, of external nature and of internal nature. Each of these subject-enclosure dyads are further linked to an internal antagonism with enough potential force to prevent the indefinite reproduction of capitalism: ecological catastrophe, the failure of private property, and the ethics of new scientific technologies. (The fourth antagonism, the “new forms of apartheid” characterized by “Walls and slums,” is conspicuously bereft of a corresponding dyad.)

The main point we should take from Zizek’s discussion of the post-traumatic subject, and its connections to a particular mode of enclosure, is that the invention of trauma cannot be thought apart from the history of capitalist accumulation. Both are predicated on the logic of separation and violent erasure.<sup>22</sup> In this context, trauma describes the appearance of the pure form of primitive accumulation in the world of sense perception, which is not simply alienation from the products of one’s own labour but, more significantly,

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<sup>22</sup> This violent erasure is most certainly a gendered concept through which the victims of primitive accumulation are feminized. In her most recent book *Changing Difference*, Catherine Malabou argues that the female essence is one of violent erasure. In the introduction she states: “It may be that woman is only defined negatively with respect to the violence that is done to her and the attacks on her essence, but this negative definition nonetheless constitutes the resistant stock that distinguishes the finite from all the other types of fragility, from overexposure to exploitation and brutality” (2). We can draw an earlier connection between the erasure of subjectivity and the gendered and voiceless expression of traumatic experience in Freud’s studies of hysteria.

alienation from one's very existence in the world.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the discourse of trauma translates the pure form of primitive accumulation into the language of aesthetic experience.

### 1.3 Against the Grain

Given the eradicating dimension of primitive accumulation, it is no surprise that the politics of memory and trauma are inflected with the logic of preservation, which finds itself in conflict with the reclamation of the commons. Despite the fact that memory movements seem to be largely unrelated to Occupy movements in terms of both context and intentionality, linked by the logic of primitive accumulation these two socio-political counter-forces register the series of enclosures that have accompanied urban renewal and cultural heritage projects since the late 1980s. At the same time, they illustrate the contradictory aspects of these movements. On the one hand, previous sites of primitive accumulation (including concentration camps and political prisons) are re-absorbed into the capitalist system through their transformation into sites of cultural and historical preservation; on the other hand, the occupation of museums and other existing cultural spaces in the name of reclaiming common space. Accordingly, each of the opening vignettes—Occupy museums, the rebranding of the CMC and the relocation of the

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<sup>23</sup> In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt describes the concept of world alienation as a loss of intersubjectivity that has the negative effect of diminishing our sense of reality. I discuss this concept in further detail in chapter five with respect to the literature of W.G. Sebald.

VAG—illustrates fundamental tensions between current forms of cultural resistance in the form of memory politics and the pervasiveness of a preservationist aesthetic.

Each of the following chapters illustrates a particular manifestation of these tensions. In this vein, Chapter two, “The Paradox of Preservation: Museums of Memory and the New Enclosures,” takes a closer look at the ways in which preservationist impulses—from environmental and ecological to cultural and historical—participate in what I call the *epistemic enclosures* of late capitalism through the aestheticization of historical violence and the rhetoric of historical recovery. Against the hypothesis that memory politics emerge as a defence against obsolescence and forgetting in the age of global capitalism, I argue that the international proliferation of memorial and so-called post-memorial practices both anticipate and collaborate with the wave of New Enclosures currently sweeping the globe. Through an analysis of two early museums of memory and human rights (Robben Island and the ESMA), I suggest that current practices and institutions aimed at the preservation of historical memory and cultural heritage paradoxically form new sites of primitive accumulation. In fact, the preservationist aesthetic at work within these institutions not only responds to the erasures of historical memory within official national discourses but is also a critical element in the transformation of the residue of previous enclosures into raw material for the New Enclosures.

The third chapter, “Archives of Resistance: Memory Art and the Logic of Capital,” analyzes the work of three contemporary conceptual artists whose installations confront histories of state violence: Christian Boltanski (France), Marcelo Brodsky (Argentina) and Alfredo Jaar (Chile). Drawing on Rosalind Krauss’s analysis of the logic

of the late capitalist museum, I demonstrate the ways in which the post-minimalist installations of these three second-generation artists anticipate the next moment in the history of capital in which historical recovery becomes a ground for the new enclosures. Significantly, the absence of images of violence in these works, which at first looks very much like an affirmation of the unrepresentability of trauma, in fact presents the ways in which the logic of enclosure in the age of global capitalism is reinforced at the level of representation through the recovery and reification of images of the past. Whereas minimalism anticipated the merging of the art object with the space of exhibition that would lead to the experience-driven forms of contemporary art, the generalization of experiential art lead to the production of post-minimalist installation, which anticipated the intersection of memory archives with the logic of enclosure. Struggles over both material and conceptual property are reflected in struggles over how to recover, represent and preserve images of the past. Each of the artists discussed in this chapter elucidates one particular aspect of these struggles. Boltanski's work foregrounds the return of what Walter Benjamin famously called the "aura of the work of art," its centrality to current memory projects and its strong connections to an imaginary time before; Brodsky's work demonstrates the ways in which memory politics are coupled with the logic of commodity production through which the social relations of witnessing are reified in memorial objects; and Jaar's work reveals the ways in which the substitution of images of violence with the logic of archival accumulation is an inversion of the process of primitive accumulation through which images of violence are produced as the remains of this process. All three, I suggest serve as archives of primitive accumulation that

demonstrate the ways in which the New Enclosures take place largely in and through the production and circulation of images of the past.

Chapter four, “The Image in Crisis: The Controversial Case of Four Photographs from Auschwitz,” reframes the question of exhibiting and viewing photographs of violence in terms of the politics of enclosure rather than representation. In this reframing I am less concerned with the particularities of longstanding debates on the so-called unrepresentable and more concerned with the ways in which these debates intersect with the logic of capitalist production and reproduction. My point of departure for such an analysis is a relatively recent controversy regarding the inclusion of four famous *Sonderkommando* photos in the 2001 exhibition *Memoire des camps* curated by Clement Cheroux, the director of photography at Le Centre Pompidou. Documented in Georges Didi-Huberman’s monograph *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, the debate is framed by the concept of the unrepresentable and addresses the issue of whether certain events not only defy representation but also, in fact, ought not to be represented at all. I argue that this imperative of prohibition is not simply a symptom of resistance, psychic or political, but an indicator of the ways in which the discourse of the unrepresentable conceals the role that images play in the ongoing enclosures of global capitalism. Drawing on Tony C. Brown’s discussion of the two temporalities and corresponding levels of representation that characterize the process of globalization, I argue that the perceived separation of material enclosures from the development of a generalized photographic consciousness results in a failure to recognize the aesthetic dimensions of primitive accumulation, namely its pre-figural aspect. Re-reading the debate from this perspective reveals the ways in which the four photographs from

Auschwitz articulate the logic of primitive accumulation through contradictions between their material existence as relics of this process (whose re-entry into the realm of visual circulation highlights the cumulative logic of primitive accumulation) and their metaphorical existence as tombs of the dead (which seals the logic of primitive accumulation off into the past).

The final chapter, “Trauma in the Time of Capital: Allegories of Primitive Accumulation in the Literature of W.G. Sebald,” reads the contemporary trauma text not as a rupture in the official narrative of history but as an allegory of primitive accumulation that reflects the generalized sense of alienation characterizing modern experience. *Trauma text*, here, names the recent emergence of a new genre of art and literature that conveys the weight of historical violence through a blend of the more traditional genres of biography, memoir and travelogue with historical fiction. Following Dean Franco’s claim that trauma in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* should be understood as an expression of the loss of property rights, I argue that the notion of trauma cannot be conceived apart from the production of private property at the center of the capitalist economy. Accordingly, this chapter provides analyses of two novels by W.G. Sebald—*The Rings of Saturn* (1995) and *Austerlitz* (2001)—whose incorporation of photography has proffered them as testing grounds for theories of postmemory and traumatic rupture. Re-conceptualizing trauma as a placeholder for the experience of expropriation that characterizes the ongoing violence of enclosure (which Marx identified as the foundation for capitalist accumulation), I read these texts instead as allegories of primitive accumulation that situate the quest for historical recovery within the context of capitalist expansion.

The impetus for this project stems from a deep ambivalence with current theories of memory and trauma that, despite assertions of political resistance and radical intervention, remain guided largely by the liberal principles of empathy and identification. I argue that an adequate understanding of resistance based on trauma, witnessing and the recovery of memory requires a study of how such resistance reflects the contemporary material conditions of enclosure within the context of global capitalism. These forms of resistance, I contend, not only reflect the logic of enclosure but also anticipate the next moment in the history of capital through which the logic of enclosure merges with the imperative of preservation. Actualizing Debord's "society of the spectacle," the image of the past becomes the ground for the New Enclosures. My theoretical framework is informed by theories of memory, trauma and primitive accumulation as well as contemporary photography and art criticism; and the cultural objects in this study exemplify a new order of primitive accumulation which is neither the original accumulation signified by the separation of the worker from the means of production (and ultimately from the means of subsistence), nor the corresponding symbolic enclosures (of memory and knowledge) that maintain the original accumulation through the separation of the subject from the history of expropriation; rather this new order of primitive accumulation is characterized, paradoxically, by the very forms of material and historical preservation that articulate themselves as modes of resistance. Put differently, this new order of primitive accumulation is characterized by a general aesthetic of preservation through which the recuperation and recirculation of the alienated subjects and objects of historical enclosure has become a foundation for the redistribution of knowledge and space "after globalization" (Cazdyn & Szeman). Overall,

*Preservationist Aesthetics* seeks to read current theories of memory and trauma *against the grain* and in relation to the logic of primitive accumulation that characterizes the ongoing series of enclosures sweeping the globe today.



## Chapter 2

### 2 The Paradox of Preservation: Memory Museums and the New Enclosures

*Saving this historical memory is crucial if we are to find an alternative to capitalism.*

—*Silvia Federici*

We begin with a collection of scenes from the recent series of global memory movements: a mass of more than 4000 shoes belonging to those who perished in concentrations camps during the Second World War gathered and piled high in a room on the second floor of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, one of the first museums devoted to memories of Holocaust violence; reflecting this trope of the pile, in a temporary installation housed in the Park Avenue Armory in New York City, heaps of used clothing are arranged pyramid style while a giant crane distributes the articles from a towering central pile;<sup>24</sup> in a stark photographic image, scraps of film are scattered amid the rubble produced by the 1994 bombing of the AMIA, a Jewish community center in

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<sup>24</sup> The scene referred to here is a public art installation called “No Man’s Land,” designed by French artist Christian Boltanski.

Argentina.<sup>25</sup> These scenes diverge from the more traditional forms of memorialization that accompany catastrophic events in world history. Not only do they take shape in practices belonging to the world of post-minimalist or conceptual art, but they also transform the monument of violence into an archive of terror.

Renowned memory scholar Andreas Huyssen suggests that the rise of this new field of *global memory politics* reflects a “crisis of history”<sup>26</sup> linked to a shift in our experiences of time and space after globalization (Huyssen 1). Arguing that “too much of the contemporary memory discourse focuses on the personal—on testimony, memoir, subjectivity, traumatic memory—either in poststructuralist psychoanalytic perspective or in attempts to shore up a therapeutic popular sense of the authentic and experiential” (8),

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<sup>25</sup> This image is taken from Marcelo Brodsky’s second major project *Nexo*, a series of photographs and public installations that confront the lasting impact of the military dictatorship that governed Argentina for nearly a decade. Both Boltanski’s and Brodsky’s work is explored in more depth in Chapter Three, “Archives of Enclosure: Memory Art and the Logic of Late Capitalism.”

<sup>26</sup> Huyssen opens his book *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* with a discussion of the so-called crisis of history, which has all but replaced earlier discussions of the “end of history.” He begins with the claim, “Historical memory today is not what it used to be” (1), suggesting that the crisis of history is also a crisis of memory. Questions about historical crisis in the form of the “crisis of history” proliferate in contemporary culture, both in academic and popular discourse. See, for example, James Vernon’s “Thoughts on the present ‘crisis of history’ in Britain” (2001); Harvey J. Kaye’s *The Powers of the Past: Reflections on the Crisis and the Promise of History* (1991); Christophe Prochasson’s “Is there a ‘crisis’ of history in France?” (1998); and Robert Kluijver’s recent series of exhibitions in Amsterdam titled *Crisis of History*.

Huysen instead hypothesizes that “memory and musealization together are called upon to provide a bulwark against obsolescence and disappearance, to counter our deep anxiety about the speed of change and the ever-shrinking horizons of time and space” (23).

Huysen seeks a less subjective and more structural explanation for the proliferation of memory in the current era.

Other recent attempts to explain the memorial turn in art, literature and politics range from implicitly affirmative to outright pessimistic. In this regard, American historians Jay Winter and Kerwin Lee Klein represent diverging points of view: while Klein is deeply suspicious of this turn, attributing it to the revitalization of a certain form of mystical thinking that represents “memory as re-enchantment” (Klein 136),<sup>27</sup> Winter characterizes the recent “memory boom”<sup>28</sup> in more concrete terms as a generalized

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<sup>27</sup> In his polemic “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” Klein argues: “At the moment, there are two popular discursive modes of memory as re-enchantment. The first involves weak appropriations of Freudian language to vaporize sentimental autobiography. ... [The second] represents itself as an engagement with postmodernism and appeals to the ineffable—the excess, the unsayable, the blank darkness, or some other Absolute whose mysteries can be grasped only by the initiates armed with the secret code” (136-7).

<sup>28</sup> According to Winter, this seemingly sudden proliferation of memory in cultural and historical discourse was due to an important set of preconditions that emerged following World War One: the creation of identity politics, through which narrative counter-histories challenged the exclusion of certain social groups from official historical discourse; an increase in affluence and disposable income, which allowed for an increase

response to changes in social and economic conditions following the Second World War. Specifically, he argues: “In the West, one important precondition of the memory boom has been affluence. Rising real incomes and increased expenditure on education since the Second World War have helped to shift to the right the demand curve for cultural commodities” (57-8). While Winter admits that the causes of this trend are surely more complex than this, he nevertheless maintains that “[d]welling on memory is a matter of both disposable income and leisure time” (59). From this perspective the rise of memory discourses is a matter of class privilege rather than mystical fetishism.

A critical understanding of memory politics must include an analysis of the relationship between the expansion of capital and the emergence of cultures of trauma. While much of the current writing on memory politics addresses the roles of globalization and mass media in such movements, it often does so from the point of view of traumatic experience or the “crisis of history.” However, few address the role of capitalism directly in the emergence of memory movements worldwide, or the ways in which the past functions as a material resource for the reproduction and accumulation of capital in the present. Not surprisingly, the crisis of history and the development of trauma theory (extending to what would eventually become Holocaust studies) coincided with the economic recession that began in the late 1970s. These social phenomena were

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in public spending on cultural preservation; and new developments in information technologies that facilitated the material preservation of memory narratives.

accompanied by a turn to autobiography and family history (Klein; Winter), along with the widespread transition to neoliberal economic practices. Around this same time urban renewal projects,<sup>29</sup> beginning with the *Housing Act* of 1954, accelerated in major cities throughout the United States, suggesting that practices of preservation became materially grounded in the ideology of (sub)urbanization within which memory projects have flourished. Recalling that for Marx enclosures of the commons were at the heart of the transition to capitalism, I argue that it is not enough to simply recognize the capitalist context of global memory politics as if memory politics are merely an effect of changes in economic conditions. Rather, we must recognize and illuminate the ways in which memory itself is implicated in the ongoing expansion of capital *from the very beginning*. Accordingly, using the theory of primitive accumulation as a framework of analysis, I consider how new memorial practices anticipate, in Rosalind Krauss's words, "the next moment in the history of capital" (Krauss 10), in which, as Huyssen points out, "memory discourses themselves [paradoxically] partake in the detemporalizing processes that characterize a culture of consumption and obsolescence" (Huyssen 10). More specifically, I argue that what Pierre Nora has famously called "sites of memory" are also sites of primitive accumulation that both resist and collaborate with the New Enclosures in which memorial practices and institutions, such as "trauma tourism" and "memory museums," assume the grammar of cultural preservation and historical recovery, and ultimately foster what I am calling a preservationist aesthetic.

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<sup>29</sup> See Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961).

This chapter begins with a brief analysis of the birth of the memory museum, a new cultural institution located at the intersection of global memory politics (which emphasizes the role of memory in political resistance) and the heritage industry (which capitalizes on the preservation of historical memory and cultural heritage). The second section reconsiders the relationship between capitalism and memory through the lens of primitive accumulation in order to claim that what we might call *enclosures of memory* have been an essential aspect of capital accumulation from the outset. The remainder of this chapter focuses on two exemplary case studies—Robben Island Museum in South Africa and the Museum of Memory in Argentina—in order to demonstrate the ways in which the present drive to preserve memories of historical violence is a crucial aspect of the ongoing processes of primitive accumulation.

## 2.1 The Memory Museum

The past two decades or so have witnessed the emergence of a new institution related to global memory movements: the Memory Museum. Since the inauguration of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (instituted in 1993), museums of memory and human rights have emerged in a number of major cities across the globe. According to Silke Arnold-de Simine, “these ‘new museums’ try to tread a fine line between history and memory, between transnational and national memory cultures, but also between different memory media such as the memorial and the museum” (Arnold-de Simine 18). Broadly speaking, these spaces take one of two general forms: they are either newly constructed institutions built to house mementos of historical violence—what Laurie Beth Clark calls “purpose-built” (Clark 69)—or they are already existing spaces of social and political persecution that have been transformed into spaces of witnessing and

memorialization—in Clark’s words, “site-specific”(68). Notable institutions of the first variety include The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Jewish Museum in Berlin designed by Polish architect Daniel Libeskind (opened in 2001), the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago Chile (formed in 2010) and the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (set to open in 2014). Of the second variety,<sup>30</sup> we have institutions such as the Museum of Memory in Buenos Aires, Argentina (founded in 2002), housed in the former ESMA, a Navy Mechanical School that operated as a covert concentration camp during the seven-year military dictatorship, and the Robben Island Museum in South Africa (established in 1997). This new breed of museum, I argue, not only operates as a site of historical memory and memorialization but, as a protected zone of memory preservation, it also serves as a site of primitive accumulation.

In many senses, memory museums respond to early critiques of the modern museum advanced by artists such as Marcel Duchamp and reinvigorated in the wake of May ’68 by artists such as Christian Boltanski. As a forerunner of minimalism, Duchamp’s introduction of “readymades”—defined by Andre Breton as “manufactured objects raised to the dignity of works of art through the choice of the artist” (Breton 88)—into the space of the exhibition challenged the authority of the museum in defining

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<sup>30</sup> The earliest institutions of this sort were arguably the Auschwitz and Breendonk Memorials, both of which were WWII prison camps and sites of torture transformed into national memorials in 1947 through initiatives by the Polish and Belgian governments respectively.

what counts as art. Conceptual art movements that developed in relation to the political protests of 1968 extend Duchamp's initial critique into the realm of memory. According to art historian Rebecca DeRoo, artists like Christian Boltanski and Annette Messager have used everyday objects and personal memorabilia to call attention to the absolute failure of museums to respond adequately to critiques of elitism leveled by their predecessors. At the same time, work like Boltanski's, she insists, "typif[ies] a broader cultural move in the last two decades to open up art and its institutions not only to histories that had been marginalized and previously suppressed but also to new audiences, who it was thought were likely to be engaged by these new images and stories" (3). Contemporary installation artists, in other words, both extended avant-garde critiques and opened a space for the recovery and circulation of repressed histories.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The series of political movements now referred to as identity politics emerged from the civil rights movement and second wave feminism and attempted to recuperate those social experiences or subjects that have historically been erased or covered over by the dominant culture. These movements often rest on shared experiences of oppression. Accordingly, the memoir genre has been especially important in exposing these repressed histories. Joan Scott discusses the role of experience in the rise of identity-based social and political movements in her essay "The Evidence of Experience." Through an analysis of Samuel Delany's *The Motion of Light in Water*, Scott demonstrates the limitations of the recovery of experience through "metaphors of visibility" or otherwise, arguing that the evidence of experience underlying contemporary identity politics "reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems—those that assume that the facts of history speak for themselves" (Scott 778).



In the introduction to an edited collection on memory and museums, Susan A. Crane examines the museum's role in the preservation cultural memory in general. While scholars have rightly linked the transformation of "cabinets of curiosities" into public museums with the "creation of a bourgeois public sphere in Europe" (3), Crane argues further that "[t]he changing sensibilities of Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers who added historical value to economic, scientific, and aesthetic values in their consideration of objects prompted the construction of museums for the preservation of the past" (4). In the same collection, both Suzanne Marchand and Wolfgang Ernst link the development of the modern museum to struggles between text- and object-based claims to knowledge (Crane 11). Ernst in particular frames this as a transition from historical knowledge (whose primary medium is narrative or text) to archeological knowledge (whose formative medium is the museum) (Ernst 21). Accordingly, he argues:

The realm for information (represented by archival documents and archaeological inscriptions) confronts the icons of history (Clio, the statue of Cleopatra/Ariadne) through the (new) medium museum. An ideological confrontation charges this clash: whereas the symbols of history (as signs of the Roman Church) represent the possibility of an identity or identification with antiquity, claiming continuity of power, the archival and archaeological fragments (belonging to allegory) designate primarily a distance in relation to their own origin, and, renouncing nostalgia and the desire to coincide, establish a museal void of temporal difference (23).

From this vantage point, the museum serves as a "memory-producing machine" (27) that no longer operates as a mere "terminal" or receptacle in which so-called historical

memory is permanently deposited but as a “transformer” or processor through which historical memory is produced and transmitted (Ernst 25). Crane extends this argument, adding that in the “age of citation” (Crane 12) the museum itself operates as a metaphor for the operation of collective memory (5). She is nonetheless compelled to ask why history and memory in general and the preservation of the past in particular have become so influential in our current era (6).

Cultural theorist Jonathan Boyarin suggests that contemporary memory politics and its related institutions are organized around a universal need for common human identification (3). Within this framework, he argues, memory movements emerge at the intersection of two complementary forms of identification: the identification with distant contemporaries (which he links to “Foucault’s call for a spatialized struggle”) and the identification with “our ancestors who have died unjustly” (which he links to Benjamin’s articulation of the past as a field of political struggle) (Boyarin 11). The first mode of identification corresponds with the new wave of global memorialization practices, while the second is more closely aligned with the recent revival of cosmopolitan discourses, two areas of study whose intersection has resulted in the concept of “cosmopolitan memory,” introduced by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider to capture the role of memory in the shaping of an imagined global community. The articulation of memory politics with cosmopolitan discourses reflects a drive to reconcile the desire for common human identification with the continued violence of uneven economic globalization, however unsuccessfully. Accordingly, Levy and Sznaider suggest global memory cultures could play foundational role in the advancement universal human rights (88). While Andreas Huyssen agrees that human rights must be the foundation of the new globalized memory

politics, he questions the political efficacy of anchoring this in common human identification, a moral category in which empathy is the primary organizing principle. Huyssen voices two concerns in this regard: 1) the issue of globalizing Holocaust memory and using it as a touchstone for analyzing global memory projects and 2) the problem of conceptualizing history as trauma, which goes hand in hand with an ethic of identification and does little to elucidate the complex political dimensions of memory today even if it does represent its most common expression (9).

Suggesting instead that current discourses of memory coincide with our changing conceptions of time and space, he argues that the question of whether or not memory cultures can be read as a reaction to economic globalization should form the “terrain on which new comparative work on the mechanisms and tropes of historical trauma and national memory practices could be pursued” (16). In short, the political possibilities arising from this new trend might best understood by reading memory politics in relation to the material conditions of economic globalization rather than the abstract ideal of cosmopolitan ethics.

In any case, the imperative of identification has remained a central feature of contemporary memory discourses in which the image has played an essential role. In spite of Susan Sontag’s well-known condemnation of traumatic images, photography remains a vital aspect of collective identification across the distances of space, time and culture; and it has facilitated the production of new cultures and forms of memory. Marianne Hirsch argues that the promise of photography is to grant access to and transmit unimaginable events (108). She describes the photograph itself as both an archival inscription with an embodied dimension (117) and a “space of projection” that draws on a

storehouse of “pre-established forms” which resonate in the popular imagination. Photography has certainly been a willing accomplice in the desire to reproduce traumatic memory along experiential lines. Like Hirsch’s postmemory, Alison Landsberg’s “prosthetic memory” recognizes the turn to embodied knowledge and experience in contemporary memorial practices. Using the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a case in point, Landsberg explains that the “transferential space” of the memory museum might inaugurate what she calls a “radical politics of memory” by installing rather than uncovering symptoms “or prosthetic memories through which we didn’t actually live, but to which we now, after a museum experience or filmic experience, have a kind of experiential relationship” (Landsberg 82). Since this position is based on the logic of identity, Marco Abel argues, prosthetic memory may, in fact, “be one of the key symptoms of the very problem she addresses” in which the “mobile subjectivity embodied by prosthetic memory...is the mobility of capitalism itself” (395). In this sense, prosthetic memory does not succeed in instituting a radical new politics but as much as it reflects and indexes the very social relations vital to the continued success of the capitalist mode of production against which such a politics is aimed in the first place.

With this in mind, we can reconfigure the global scope and significance of memory museums by drawing on early critiques of the modern museum leveled by artists and groups such as Duchamp and the Situationist International whose work introduced the collapse of art and life. While museums were not precisely sites of occupation during earlier protest movements like May ’68, they nonetheless played a central role in the development of new forms of political resistance. Not only have artists since Duchamp continued to challenge the social and political authority of the modern museum, artists

have variously used occupation as a tactic for this resistance. Indeed, while the artists of the Paris uprising—most notably those belonging to the Situationist International—occupied the Sorbonne, students hosted sit-ins at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Debates regarding the political efficacy of Occupy Museums are situated in this trajectory of the politics of art, which stretches from earlier avant-garde and minimalist practices to relational and object-oriented modes of production. The recent condemnation of the museum institution by Occupy artists echoes earlier critiques, which rejected the traditional space of exhibition based on its elite bourgeois sensibility.

A recent exhibition highlights continued tensions concerning the status of the modern museum. dOCUMENTA(13), the world's largest contemporary art show, was hosted in four locations in as many countries; and in the Banff location a material collection was conspicuously absent. In his artist talk at the Banff Centre, exhibiting artist Pierre Huyghe used the language of presentness to think through this absence alongside questions of the exhibition-in-itself.<sup>32</sup> He describes an earlier project "The Host and the Cloud": In his retreat from the musealized space of exhibition, Huyghe explains, his search for a venue lead him purely by chance to the *Musee d'art et tradition populaire*, a museum of French folk culture designed by a student of Le Corbusier and erected atop a (human) zoo. One imagines a Situationist map of the artist's amblings and the wonder expressed when his journey stopped at the base of an abandoned museum, a cultural ruin ripe for reclamation. The artist describes the ways in which he occupies the museum and

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<sup>32</sup> See Pierre Huyghe's full lecture recorded at the Banff Centre through iTunes or on Youtube.com <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRC5iFlxfnU>

sets the conditions for the aesthetic experiment without knowing the outcome. The characters—a top model, a magician, a hypnotist—are lead not by the narrative, the re-enacted trial of the urban guerilla group Action Directe, or the image of their occupation, but by the structure of social relations that emerges within the experimental landscape.

Meanwhile, in absentia, the object-oriented curator<sup>33</sup> asks: “What does the meteorite want?” She recounts the story of El Chaco and the withdrawn proposal to transport the second heaviest meteorite in the world (and single the heaviest object to be transported by humans) from its long resting place in northern Argentina to the largest exhibition of contemporary art in Kassel, Germany. El Chaco, a 37-tonne fragment of the Campo del Cielo meteor, which fell to earth more than 4000 years ago, plays a sacred role in the cultural heritage of Moqoit First Nations. The ancient mass of iron emerged from its sacred slumber as the unwitting subject of political conflict, its potential sojourn abroad opposed by scientific and indigenous communities alike. The minister of trade

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<sup>33</sup> Caroline Christov-Bakargiev, curator of Documenta(13), was unexpectedly unable to attend *The Retreat* in person, and so delivered her talk as a video lecture instead. In this talk she relays the story of El Chaco, a story that foregrounds the importance of the new field of object-oriented ontologies (OOO) that inflected much of curatorial practice in Documenta(13). In this vein, the question of what objects desire was a prominent and highly controversial theme of *The Retreat*. For more information on the branch of philosophy known as Speculative Realism of which OOO is a sub-genre see the collection of essays edited by Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman called *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (2011). For a brief overview of the new trend of object-oriented curating in contemporary art see Kyle Chayka’s article in *Hyperallergic*, “Object-Oriented Curating Continues in 2013 Venice Biennale.”

ventured its brief retreat would encourage tourism, boosting the cultural capital of Argentina's poorest region, but the traditional custodians claimed a violation of rights. Argentinean heritage amassed in the dense object. The proposed retreat from its traditional resting place unearthed a buried image of colonial theft, which conflicted with new forms of social encounter proposed by the question of what the object wants. Ultimately, the plan for El Chaco to hitch a free ride with a Hamburg shipping company was aborted and the object remained unmoved.

While such language of presentness and anthropomorphization is reminiscent of the logic of minimalism rejected by Michael Fried in the 1960s for its so-called theatricality, it is also the language of the movement that, for Rosalind Krauss, anticipated the "next moment in the history of capitalism" (Krauss 11). Fried explains that the "death of art" resulting from this new theatricality was announced through Tony Smith's experience on the unfinished New Jersey turnpike,<sup>34</sup> in which the experience of

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<sup>34</sup> This experience of avant-garde artist and architect Tony Smith to which Fried refers was initially described in a now-famous interview with Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr. for *Artforum* in December 1966, an excerpt of which was included in Fried's collection of essays *Art and Objecthood*. In describing his experience, Smith says: "When I was first teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get onto the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or should markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, funds, and coloured lights. The drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art."

duration, or timelessness, saturated the pictorial field that previously belonged to painting. In contrast to painting, Minimalism sought an object whose immense scale would saturate the spectator's field of sensation, producing its own objecthood as an aesthetic Gestalt.<sup>35</sup> For Fried, then, the problem was one of presence; the intensity of experience effaced the object of art altogether. In "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," Rosalind Krauss refers to a second turnpike experience of the same era. She describes Tom Krens' encounter with a series of factory-museums scattered alongside the Autobahn. These newly transformed industrial sites, Krauss argues, announced the end of the "encyclopedic nature of the museum" (9). She elaborates: "The synchronic museum—if we can call it that—would forego history in the name of a kind of intensity of experience, an aesthetic charge that is not so much temporal (historical) as it is now radically spatial, the model for which, in Krens' own account, was, in fact, Minimalism." This fulfilled the desire for "a cumulative, serial crescendo toward the intensity of experience" (7). The experience of the turnpike is doubled: it is, on the one

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On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done before. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art" (qtd. in Fried 157).

<sup>35</sup> We are reminded here of the "limitless, unbounded" feeling, the "sensation of eternity" that Freud refers to in *Civilization and its Discontents* as "oceanic" and uses to describe the "ego-feeling" of infancy and religious experience alike.



hand, the reduction of all art to aesthetic experience and, on the other hand, the full identification of the art object with the space of exhibition.

Borrowing from Fredric Jameson's observations on the cultural logic of late capitalism, Krauss argues convincingly that the minimalist movements of the late 60s and early 70s anticipated a further development in capitalist history, one in which the museum itself, "as a space from which the collection has withdrawn" (Krauss 4), would become the object of our aesthetic experience, the pure presence of empty space. In its pursuit of the "intensity of experience (7), minimalism reproduces the "serializing, stereotyping, and banalizing [logic] of commodity production" (8). It is in this sense that minimalism reproduced the alienating logic of capital (which it sought to resist) in a purer form in which the language and modes of industrialization came to saturate the field of representation, setting the stage for what would eventually become relational art.<sup>36</sup> The capitalist market, argues Krauss, simply exploited the logic of seriality inherent to minimalism. Thus, the withdrawal of the collection from the space of exhibition announces not only the so-called death of art but also the next moment in the history of

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<sup>36</sup> French curator Nicolas Bourriaud defines relational aesthetics as "a set of practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than and in depended and private space" (Bourriaud 113). In his review of his work, Christopher Mooney claims that Huyghe is, in fact, "a founding member of the relational art movement," a movement which has since been the centre of a significant debate in the world of contemporary art criticism. For a seminal critique of this movement see Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" (2004); cf. Janzen (2014).

capital in which the pure presence of empty space is synonymous with the new object of art. Krauss describes this phenomenon as a paradox of modern capitalism:

it could be said to be of the very nature of modernist art's relation to capital, a relation in which, in its very resistance to a particular manifestation of capital...the artist produces an alternative to that phenomenon which can also be read as a function of it, another version, although possibly more ideated or rarified, of the very thing against which he or she was reacting. (11)

Extending this cultural logic of resistance in anticipation to the functioning of the contemporary memory museum, we can argue that the so-called transferential space of these museums is, in fact, reflective of the next moment in the history of capital.

Anticipated by global memory movements, the space of exhibition is transformed into a space of witnessing in the name of resisting the very thing that provided its foundation: a culture of obsolescence and forgetting. And it does so under the guise of cultural preservation. Within the current climate of memory politics, memory museums therefore operate not only as spaces for the production and preservation of historical memory but also as spaces in which the logic of primitive accumulation is reproduced in the name of historical recovery on an ever-expanding scale.

## 2.2 Primitive Accumulation

The history of global capitalism, as we know, is not only the history of class struggle but also the history of primitive accumulation. In the well-known chapter of *Capital* titled "So-called Primitive Accumulation," Karl Marx demonstrates the need to presume an original accumulation in order to escape the tautological circularity of capitalist

accumulation wherein accumulation presupposes a surplus and surplus value or capital presupposes an initial accumulation. Accordingly, Marx argues we must assume “an accumulation which is not a result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure” (873). Adapting Adam Smith’s un-dialectical understanding of a “previous” accumulation,<sup>37</sup> Marx argues that “this primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology” (Marx 873). With his tongue firmly in his cheek, he writes:

Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote of the past. In times long gone by there were two sorts of people; one, diligent, intelligent, and, above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of the theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there is a people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort

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<sup>37</sup> In the introduction to *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith describes this “previous accumulation” as the “accumulation of stock” that must precede the division of labour that constitutes the capitalism mode of production. In this sense, the concept of a previous accumulation demonstrates the transition between the logic of hoarding and the logic of accumulation.

accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins. (873)

According to the analogy of original sin, the split between the wealthy and the poor is a result of a moral weakness whereby the underdog excessively squanders while the privileged accumulate wealth through hard work and perseverance, a story that continues to be one of the founding myths of American culture. In his analysis of this passage, Sandro Mezzadra claims that the ironic reference to original sin signals the ways in which, for Marx, primitive accumulation serves as a critique of classical political economy in which it appears only as an original accumulation. By contrast, Marx understood primitive accumulation not only as a historical event in which an original accumulation is amassed and set into circulation, but also as a form of extra-economic violence that is “nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” (Marx 874-5). In other words, as Mezzadra states, “[f]or Marx, primitive accumulation is *not* a concept” (Mezzadra 306) but rather the emergence of the conditions of possibility for the capitalist relations of production, namely the separation of the workers from the means of production through “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder” (Marx 874).

Despite the fact that primitive accumulation in Marx’s political economy appears as both an historical event that marks the transition to capitalism and the condition for its reproduction, contemporary theorists have overwhelmingly emphasized its continuous rather than historical nature. Massimiliano Tomba refers to this as the “*permanence of primitive accumulation*” (Tomba 55), while Mezzadra articulates it in terms of a “repetition of *transition*” (Mezzadra 314). Drawing on observations by Rosa

Luxemburg<sup>38</sup>—a vanguard of the “inherent-continuous” approach (Bonefeld 4)—Werner Bonefeld argues that “the extra-economic prerequisite to capitalist production—what we shall call primitive accumulation—is an inherent and continuous element of modern societies and its range of action extends to the entire world” (3). Marx himself alludes to the perpetual nature of primitive accumulation when he states that the capitalist relation “not only maintains this [initial] separation [of the worker and the means of production], but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale” (Marx 874). From the perspective of its structural permanence, we are pressed to consider the ways in which the logic of primitive accumulation operative in the present moment has initiated a series of New Enclosures referred to by the Marxist collective Midnight Notes as the “large-scale reorganization of the accumulation process which has been underway since the mid-1970s” (Midnight Notes 3). According to Mezzadra, this large-scale reorganization involves the continuous “redrawing [of] geographical coordinates” which makes “migrant labor the dominant form of labor” (Mezzadra 303). Importantly, these large-

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<sup>38</sup> Luxemburg discusses the idea of a continuous process of primitive accumulation in Section III of *The Accumulation of Capital*. Already in 1913 she writes: “At the time of primitive accumulation, i.e. at the end of the Middle Ages, when the history of capitalism in Europe began, and right into the nineteenth century, dispossessing the peasants in England and on the Continent was the most striking weapon in the large-scale transformation of means of production and labour power into capital. Yet capital in power performs the same task even to-day, and on an even more important scale—by modern colonial policy. It is an illusion to hope that capitalism will ever be content with the means of production which it can acquire by way of commodity exchange. ...[With the systematic annihilation of all non-capitalist social units] we have passed beyond the stage of primitive accumulation; this process is still going on” (350).

scale reorganizations involve not only enclosures of *common space* but enclosures of *common knowledge* or *historical memory* as well.<sup>39</sup>

Massimiliano Tomba's claim that the "primary violence of accumulation must be repeated ever anew" emphasizes the centrality of time to the accumulation process (Tomba 60). In "The Topicality of Prehistory," Mezzadra refers to the new enclosures of global capitalism in terms of a "temporal short circuit" through which a "whole set of 'real abstractions' becomes for the first time in history 'embodied' as real powers" (Mezzadra 305). Citing Dipesh Chakrabarty, he explains that "the short circuit between the abstract and the concrete *must* repeat itself every day in order for the capitalist mode of production to continue to exist and reproduce itself" (305). Anchoring this claim in a discussion of formal and real subsumption under capital, Mezzadra argues that from the perspective of an original accumulation these forms of subsumption appear as distinct stages of production "destined to succeed one another in a linear way" (313). However, despite the fact that the process of primitive accumulation is dominated by formal subsumption through which old "pre-capitalist" forms of production are assimilated to the capitalist agenda of extracting surplus value, these prior modes of production are not, as many argue, replaced by new modes of production but continue to exist alongside them. For Marx, Mezzadra argues, formal subsumption is not a less developed stage in the history of capital but the "*general* form of any capitalist production process" (Marx qtd. in Mezzadra 314). Indeed, "progressivism and historicism are actually and materially

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<sup>39</sup> See Mezzadra on the enclosure of the commons "from land to knowledge" (304) in "The Topicality of Prehistory" (2011).

inscribed in the temporal code of capital (and critics must take this into account), though only constituting *one* vector—literally and deeply *Utopian*—that is always interrupted by the violent (*catastrophic*) reopening of the problem of the *origin*” (314). As a consequence, primitive accumulation should not be read within the closed time of historical progress as a founding moment, but rather as the emergence of a process whose logic is circular rather than linear (305).<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, in “Historical Temporalities of Capital,” Tomba focuses on the temporalities that characterize the landscape of global capitalism in order to show that the postmodern image of plurality fails to make connections between disparate temporalities and, as a result, creates the “false image of an ‘ahistorical’ present” (44). The connections between different temporalities, he argues, are implicit in Marx’s thought regarding absolute and relative surplus value (increase in labour versus increase in value produced by the same labour). Through a discussion of the concept of value and its relationship to labour, Tomba suggests that the best image for representing the temporalities of global capital is neither the historicist progression from one mode of production to another nor the ahistorical topography of postmodern plurality but the anti-historicist montage of a

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<sup>40</sup> The trope of the line and the circle is a familiar one in discussions of the time and history of capitalism. In his article “The Time of Globalization: Re-thinking Primitive Accumulation,” Tony C. Brown discusses the “articulation of the line and the circle” (582) in relation to figurative logic of primitive accumulation, which I discuss in more detail in chapter four. Guy Debord made similar observations regarding the cyclical time of the agrarian mode of production versus the linear time of the capitalist mode of production, which I examine further in chapter five.

“plurality of historical temporalities synchronised by the temporality of socially-necessary labour” (44). Accordingly, Tomba provides a critique of the historicist tendency to view the development of the capitalist mode of production as the progression to more advanced forms of capitalism, such as immaterial labour, in which the “survival” of earlier modes of production is an indication of “backwardness” or primitiveness.<sup>41</sup> Referencing Benjamin’s critique of historical progress, Tomba states: “If we want to think politics differently, we have to learn to think history differently” (45), which means resisting the historicist tendency to see certain forms of production and exploitation as anachronistic. Our task, according to Tomba, is to “retrace Marx’s movement *from the abstract to the concrete*” in order to “re-articulate [the subjective insurgencies] on new foundations” (46).

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<sup>41</sup> This idea that the survival of earlier modes of production is somehow backward or primitive fails to recognize the ways in which old modes of production serve as both the ground and the content of the new modes of production. Marshall McLuhan’s observations regarding the relationship between old and new media is relevant here. In his well-known essay, “The Medium is the Message,” McLuhan argues that “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph” (McLuhan 23). Just as a “new medium is never an addition to an old one” (23), a new mode of production is never an addition to an old mode of production, a fact which is evident in the incorporation of the logic of hoarding into the processes of accumulation. This, of course, did nothing to eliminate earlier practices of hoarding, but rather made them the ground for a whole new mode of production.



Contemporary memory politics and theories of primitive accumulation intersect with respect to their emphasis on nonlinear temporalities or temporal ruptures, which, as I suggested in the introductory chapter, is also one of the foundational concepts in trauma theory.<sup>42</sup> Within the field of trauma studies, ruptures in time are understood to wield emancipatory potential based on their capacity to expose previously marginalized experiences or repressed histories. This focus on personal experience has led thinkers such as Jonathan Boyarin, Jay Winter and Andreas Huyssen to conceive memory movements as an extension of identity politics. Winter, in particular, argues that “[t]he creation and dissemination of narratives about the past arise out of and express identity politics” (Winter 54). In fact, he even suggests that memory has supplanted previous categories of political struggle, such as class, race and gender, to become “the central organizing concept of historical study” (52). Citing a number of cases in which the rituals of commemoration center on the “tragic history of persecuted minorities,” Winter asserts that “the hyphen of identity is strengthened by commemoration” (55). On the contrary, Huyssen contends that despite their shared theoretical roots there is nevertheless a distinction between the politics of memory and its identity-based predecessors; specifically, he argues that the former departs from the latter with respect to its orientation to time. Whereas identity-based political movements challenged the canonical tradition of History writ large through forms of representation and re-signification, memory-based movements pose this challenge as a temporal disruption. In this sense,

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<sup>42</sup> In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth emphasizes the logic of rupture not only in her references to trauma’s belated representation but also to its appearance as a “break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 61).

global memory movements appear to be responding to what Huyssen calls the “crisis of history,” in which the pastness of the past is no longer guaranteed, by indexing shifts in the experience of time and space in the era of globalization. Taking history (or representations of the past) as the site of contestation, these perspectives grant the recovery of historical memory tremendous potential for liberation from oppression, exploitation and violence. By contrast, in his analysis of the time of globalization Tony C. Brown argues that, from the perspective of a continuous primitive accumulation, the act of historical recovery is inadequate since Marx stressed a particular understanding of primitive accumulation that does not seal its violence “off into the past” (Brown 578).

The relationship between primitive accumulation and contemporary memory politics, however, is not simply one of homologous structures and a shared temporality. Although Marx illuminated the workings of primitive accumulation predominantly in terms of land enclosures using 16<sup>th</sup> century England as a case in point, he nevertheless gestured toward the repression of memory in these early enclosures when he states: “By the nineteenth century, the very memory of the connection between the agricultural labourer and communal property had, of course, vanished” (889). Silvia Federici makes a similar observation in her discussion of the European witch-hunts in which she argues that the genocidal attacks on women that characterized the mass persecution of so-called witches beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century destroyed an entire body of reproductive knowledge whose eventual institutionalization by the state as codified medical expertise ensured the control of women’s bodies in the reproduction of the labour force. In the preface to *Caliban and the Witch*, she remarks: “Saving this historical memory is crucial if we are to find an alternative to capitalism” (Federici 10). Of course, Federici is not talking about

memories of the enclosure of common land, but rather memories of the enclosure of women's bodies. It is important to note here not only the immediate relationship established between genocide and the destruction of particular *bodies of knowledge* but also the delayed or mediated repression of cultural memory that ensures the continued effacement of any connection between state violence and capitalist accumulation. What this reveals is the fact that primitive accumulation has both material and symbolic dimensions in which the enclosures of land that separate the worker from the means of production are accompanied by enclosures of knowledge and memory in which workers and other disenfranchised social groups *are separated from the very history of their own expropriation*. It is in this context of both material and symbolic enclosures that we must consider the rise of new memorial practices comprising the field of global memory politics: specifically, the invention of the memory museum.

### 2.3 The Cases of Robben Island and the ESMA

Two recent memory museums—The Space for Memory and the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights<sup>43</sup> in Argentina and the Robben Island Museum in South Africa—provide relevant case studies for considering the relationship between the ongoing process of primitive accumulation and the global proliferation of memory discourses. Situated on Libertador Avenue in the heart of Buenos Aires, one of the most cosmopolitan urban centers in Latin America, the *Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA), a Navy Mechanics School that served as the largest illegal

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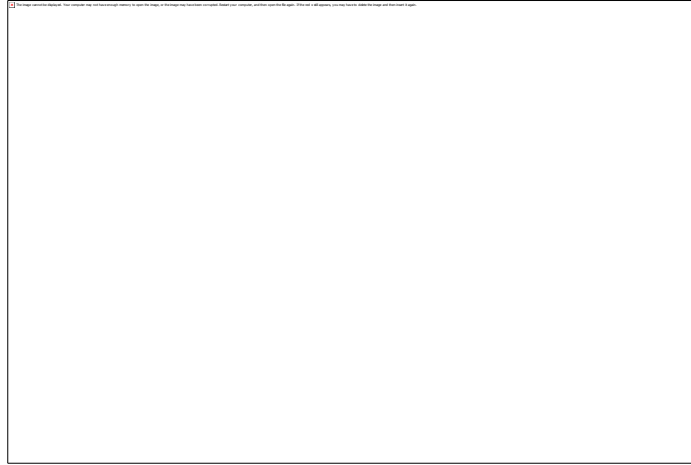
<sup>43</sup> This institution is often referred to simply as the Museum of Memory, which is how I will refer to it henceforth.

detention center during the so-called National Reorganization Process (more commonly known as “the Dirty War”), which lasted from 1976 until 1983, Argentina’s Museum of Memory operates as a site of knowledge transmission that attempts to keep alive memories of the military repression. Like Robben Island, this icon of “state-sanctioned terrorism” (Parsons 83) became a site of symbolic struggle over national memory, and its proposed transformation into a museum of memory and human rights was hotly contested.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, President Menem’s decree in 1998 that the school be transferred to Puerto Belgrano and the building be torn down and replaced by a park for reconciliation was met with public outrage. On the other hand, the call by human rights organizations, including the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, to transform it into a “museum of terror” (Huysen) fuelled intense military opposition. Despite the fact that the museum doors were officially opened in 2004, the premises were not fully evacuated by military personnel until 2007. In her exploration of the museum’s development, Emily Parsons reveals that before vacating the premises soldiers destroyed several of the buildings, a gesture that not only participated in attempts to “erase this memory from national consciousness” but also displayed a “logic that paralleled tactics used in the dirty war” (86); after the failed Falklands War, she explains, the military attempted to erase the evidence of their crimes, and “many years later, [this] attempt to

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<sup>44</sup> For further elaboration of these debates, see: Fran Lisa Buntman’s book *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (2003); Seelan Naidoo’s contribution to *History Matters: Promoting citizenship and democracy in South Africa*, “The meanings of Robben Island” (2009); and Rick Lyman’s article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “S. Africa Debates and Island Prison’s Future” (1992).

destroy the buildings at ESMA appears to be an extension of this intent to eliminate physical evidence in order to discourage memory of the experience” (86).



**Figure 1: Banner commemorating the Disappeared in front of the ESMA  
(photograph by Marcelo Brodsky)**



**Figure 2: Silhouette commemorating the Disappeared, many of whose bodies were  
dumped into the Rio de la Plata (photograph by Marcelo Brodsky)**

Around the same time, similar debates were taking place concerning the creation of *El Parque de la Memoria*, a purpose-built monument dedicated to the more than 30 000 *desaparecidos*—those forcibly disappeared by the military during the seven-year terror. The Memory Park, which was inaugurated in 2001, is located between the ESMA and the *Rio de la Plata*, the river into which the bodies of the disappeared were routinely discarded. Debates concerning this park were not only linked to the broader history of activism in Argentina, in which the Mothers of the Disappeared have been the most active and ongoing presence, but also to the difficulties of how to adequately represent histories of violence without aestheticizing them. Huyssen indicates that some opponents objected to the park because they wanted the ESMA to serve as a museum of terror, while others maintained that the park was too close to the ESMA or that these projects would diminish “the active political struggle still being waged by the Mothers” (100).

Despite the local context of these debates, what is particularly striking about memory sites in Argentina is the degree to which the Holocaust serves as a universal backdrop. In fact, Parsons suggests that many of the tactics utilized by the military junta in Argentina borrowed tactics from the SS, such as the “Night and Fog Decree.” While Huyssen agrees that the Holocaust shadows the Argentinean context, he is reluctant to compare it with the German situation. He insists that despite the long history of anti-Semitism in Argentina, the disproportionately high number of Argentinean-Jews among the disappeared, and the fact that Argentina was a refuge for known Nazi criminals, such as Eichmann and Mengele, the most useful way to understand the relationship of the Holocaust to memory struggles in Argentina is through the “productive inscription of certain tropes and images, ethical and political evaluations” (98). In other words, the

memory movement in Argentina draws strength from Holocaust discourse, which, according to Huyssen operates as an “international prism that helps focus the local discourse about the *desaparecidos* in both its legal and commemorative aspects.” (98). Holocaust commemoration, in this sense, operates “like a motor energizing the discourse of memory elsewhere” (98-99).

One particularly striking example of the global influence of Holocaust commemoration is in the widespread deployment of the rhetoric of “never again,” which Laurie Beth Clark argues has become a primary missive of memory sites since World War II (Clark 71). It is not surprising that *Nunca Mas* (Never Again) is the name of the first collection of official testimony regarding human rights violations in Argentina (Huyssen 99). Clark argues that in this discourse the preventative value of the preservation of the past is overdetermined and memory sites are established in full awareness of its impending failure. Elaborating, she claims, “if World War I was ubiquitously named ‘the war to end all wars,’ then post-World War II memorial culture was built in full knowledge of the impossibility of the project of ‘never again’” (71). Elizabeth Jelin makes a similar observation: In her analysis of the human rights movement in Argentina, Jelin explains that the movement emerged during the dictatorship at which time its mission was to “break the silence about the nature and scope of the violations”; but after the institution of democracy in 1983 the tasks of the movement were “extended to include the vindication of the historical and collective memory struggling against oblivion” (39). Echoing Theodor Adorno’s argument in “Education After Auschwitz,” the main idea behind the movement now is that “only through remembering can avoidance of such violations be ensured—as if ‘never again’

could only be guaranteed by the constant remembrance of the terror experienced during the dictatorship” (39).

Questioning the political expediency of such rhetoric, Jelin asks pointedly: “Is memory the key to deterrence?” (39). Perhaps more importantly, however, she poses the question of the precise relationship between memory and politics: “Is it that, by their very nature, the tasks of ‘not forgetting’ are incompatible with political rationality?” In contrast to the discourse of “never again” from which the human rights movement derives its imperative to remember, “the demands of politics...imply the prohibition of recalling misfortunes and the promise (or the vow) not to remember them—a pledge to ‘forget not only the malice of others but also one’s own rage, so that the life-sustaining bonds of the city can be reestablished’” (52). Many of the paradoxes and contradictions facing the movement, argues Jelin, come from the fact that the trauma of Argentina has not been adequately symbolized. There is a danger, she cautions, that those who have suffered acquire a “monopoly” on meaning, which prevents the transmission of memory to new generations. She flags to the “double danger” of such a monopoly: “oblivion and void fostered by politics and its complement, ritualized repetition of the traumatic and sinister story, of tragedy reappearing constantly without the chance for new subjectivities to emerge” (53). Despite the fact that politics and memory appear at odds, both consign the misfortunes of history to the past and leave little room for the genuinely new.

Arguing that the politics of memory continue to play out in a national framework through which the “geographical boundaries of memory” (Boyarin 19) are produced and maintained, Jonathan Boyarin argues that they can nevertheless “offer us new escape routes from the treadmill of accumulation and control—*not through the liberating force*



*of some putative self-directed “History,” but through different paradigms of identity and relation that can overcome our fearful resistance to change”* (13; emphasis in original).

Despite the fact that national memory is policed through the symbolic expulsion and the “mnemonic marking” of non-conforming social identities and bodies (18-22), the relationship between memory and materialism is reflected in our sense of time and space as an “economics of memory” driven by profit (12).

Accordingly, one of the primary risks of this “memorial impulse” is the production of a new industry Clark calls “trauma tourism”—that is, “the global practices of visiting memory sites,” which are “sites so marked by trauma that they cannot be fully recuperated for normal quotidian use” (65-66). For Boyarin, this commodification of memory is facilitated through the “spreading [of] time out in space,” a reification of the past that occurs through the production of “tourist landscapes” (19). He elaborates: “when it is possible to contemplate the transformation of Hiroshima into a theme park of amnesiac ‘peace’ for postmodern tourists, such lingering trust in the safe pastness of death certainly must be shaken” (11). This shaking up of the pastness of the past, of the death of space, argues Boyarin, is a fundamental aspect of the politics of memory, through which “memory erupts into and shapes ‘public space’” (20). In her analysis of a number of trauma sites around the globe—from concentration camps in Germany and Poland and former slave forts in Ghana and Senegal to nuclear testing grounds in Japan and former prisons in Cambodia and South Africa—Clark maintains that these sites reflect two dimensions of the psychoanalytic concept of repetition compulsion: first, “the return to the actual site of trauma by survivors of that particular atrocity in search of some form of healing” and second, that “as a culture we will endlessly be drawn back, again

and again, to the sites of trauma until the underlying [social/political] issue is resolved” (66). What is particularly important to recognize in this case is that both dimensions of repetition involve the potential for some form of historical recovery in the sense of both (psychic) recuperation and (material) repossession.

In the case of ESMA, as with many other trauma sites, the fantasy of historical recovery is articulated in terms of the reclamation of human rights through the practices of memorialization. Despite the emphasis on rights, we should recognize that many of the current struggles concerning national and historical memory are, at the same time, struggles over public space. Parsons, for example, talks about the transformation of the ESMA from a “symbol of state power” to a “public space” in terms of the “reclamation of this contested space” (84). Comparing the creation of The Memory Park” in Argentina to the Jewish Museum in Berlin, Huyssen argues: “Many of the most compelling projects to nurture and secure public memory involve interventions in urban space” (101). In her analysis of the work of Argentinean artist Marcelo Brodsky, Nerea Arruti follows observations by Rowe and Schelling, identifying the erasures of memory that plague post-dictatorial situations not with fear or lack of knowledge, but with a lack of place for memory due to its elimination from the practices of everyday life. Beyond specific references to the Argentinean situation, memory theorists such as Marianne Hirsch and Alison Landsberg use spatial metaphors in their analyses of memory: Hirsch refers to photographs as “spaces of projection” and Landsberg refers to contemporary sites of memory such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as “transferential spaces” or places in which “new symptoms, new ‘prosthetic’ memories, are incorporated into the body” (82). The notion of public space also provides a foundation for Pierre

Nora's inaugural concept of "les lieux de memoire" and Mark Seltzer's conceptualization of "wound culture." Crucially, these discourses of memory and public space are often inflected with the language of recovery and reclamation: Nora refers to sites of memory as the recovery of buried pasts (14) while Hirsch discusses the trope of the "lost mother and the fantasy of her *recovery*" in *Maus* and *Austerlitz* (Hirsch 121; emphasis added) and Landsberg reads *Maus* in terms of its capacity for "recollection" and "recounting" (Landsberg 71). This drive for the recovery and repossession of the past indicates the degree to which struggles over memory are inflected with the logic of property relations in which (images of) the past assume the property form through metaphors of spatiality.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from David Harvey's *Cosmopolitanism and the Banalities of Geographical Evil*. In this essay, Harvey argues that the geographical dimension of cosmopolitanism or world citizenship has been lost as a result of the domination of historical and anthropological discourses, which privilege the temporality and subjectivity (over spatiality and materiality) and transform the "banal problematics of material geographies" into "metaphors of spatiality" (Harvey 120). Specifically, Harvey demonstrates the fact that Kant's geography, which is rife with geographical prejudice, cannot be reconciled with his cosmopolitan vision, which is grounded in the moral imperative of hospitality across borders. In fact, he suggests they are directly opposed: the cosmopolitan ethos designed to mediate geographical conflict through the establishment of a well-ordered cosmopolitan community in which all humans are regarded as fellow citizens actually negates it. A close examination of Kant's cosmopolitan philosophy further reveals the deeply imperialist nature of the project in which hospitable relations across borders would establish the conditions for freer circulation and global trade through what Harvey refers to as the flattening out of geographical difference. The resulting metaphors of spatiality reduce real geographical

The situation of the ESMA illuminates a number of key points of contact between memory politics and the logic of primitive accumulation. As I've suggested, it demonstrates the ways in which the present drive to preserve memories of historical violence takes shape through struggles over the production of public space. More importantly, it links the production of memory itself (both national and cosmopolitan) to the transformation of previous sites of primitive accumulation (concentration camps or torture sites) into sites for processing the material remains of primitive accumulation (heritage sites or memory museums). In other words, it reveals the ways in which enclosures of memory as forms of both erasure and preservation are central to the ongoing processes of primitive accumulation in which the repossession of the past has become a primary site for expansion of capitalism.

The case of Robben Island helps us to more clearly outline the relationship between memory and primitive accumulation. Since Dutch settlement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the island (which is located approximately 12 km from Cape Town, the second largest city in South Africa) has served mainly as a prison for political dissidents, though at various times it has also served as a hospital for leprosy patients, an asylum for the mentally ill and a training facility during the Second World War. It is particularly notorious for its role in the detainment of anti-apartheid leaders in the latter half of the

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struggles to symbolic modes of resistance. In this context, the cosmopolitan ideals of global unity and world citizenship flatten out material sites of struggle through the circulation of symbolic cultural forms, including memory.

20th century. Following the closures of its last operational prison in 1996, the island has become a major tourist attraction and was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1999. Prior to the opening of the Robben Island Museum in 1997, however, the fate of the island was highly contested. According to Steven Hoelscher and Derek Alderman in their introduction to a special issue of *Social & Cultural Geography*, during the 1970s “resort planners sought to deflect growing criticism of the National Party government by publicly remembering the island’s ‘natural’ environment, a remembering that allowed for public forgetting of its political role” (347). Among others, proposals that sought to transform Robben Island into a nature preserve were still on the table until at least 1994.

These particular debates draw our attention to a conservative impulse in which the preservation of both natural and cultural heritage becomes the ground for a new set of enclosures that transform memories of historical violence into cultural commodities by recirculating the material remains of primitive accumulation as vehicles for both individual and historical recovery. Nature preserves and memory museums alike belong to this new wave of conservation practices that Alice B. Kelly identifies as a contemporary form of primitive accumulation. Defining primitive accumulation broadly as “the act of enclosure of a commons, whether that be the enclosure of land, bodies, social structures, or ideas” (685), Kelly argues that the creation of protected natural areas not only displaces local residents but also severs them from previous forms of sustenance and forces them to sell their labour for the common good; in this case, the common good of ecological preservation. The creation of these protected areas produces both new markets such as ecotourism and new displaced populations. In contrast to the land enclosures Marx determined as a precursor to private property, new enclosures in the

form of protected natural areas, Kelly argues, produce so-called public spaces that are “ostensibly for the public good rather than individual gain” (687).

As “storehouses of cultural heritage” (Crane 4), memory museums conform to this same logic. Just as nature preserves create protected natural areas, memory museums such as Robben Island and the ESMA create what we might call protected zones of memory. The transformation of Robben Island into a memory museum returns the site of extra-economic violence to the realm of productive labour while concealing its original role in the expansion of capital by re-articulating the violence of primitive accumulation in terms of historical recovery, which has the dual sense of both recuperating repressed histories and working through or processing historical trauma. Both configurations of historical recovery relegate the violence of primitive accumulation to the past, an effect that covers over (literally, *re-covers*) what contemporary thinkers of primitive accumulation such as Sandro Mezzadra, Jim Glassman, Massimiliano Tomba and Jason Read have identified as its continuous nature. In his analysis of the time of globalization, Tony C. Brown notes that for Marx this tendency to “stress a temporality of historical violence that...seal[s] primitive accumulation off into the past” (578) is precisely why an act of historical recovery in the sense of describing the “marks of capitalist accumulation historically” is not enough. Thus, spaces of exile through which the violence of primitive accumulation is rendered external to the smooth functioning of the capitalist economy are transformed into newly productive spaces in which the remains of this historical violence are directed toward the expansion of capital. Narratives of historical recovery in this context complement those conservation practices that contribute to the new enclosures that have been underway since the 1970s and rest on the recuperation of both natural and

cultural spaces for the so-called common good. Historical memory in its property form functions as a central site for the expansion of capitalism after globalization.

## 2.4 Conclusion

If the opening scenes place the new politics of memory within the history of conceptual art and the logic of late capitalism, subsequent analysis attempts to reposition these scenes within the broader dialectics of preservation and enclosure. While the heaps of clothing, piles of rubble and mountains of shoes that seem to operate as storehouses for traumatic memory surely resist, as Huyssen suggests, the cultures of obsolescence and forgetting that characterize the era of global capitalism, they also embody the serial composition and intensity of experience Rosalind Krauss attributes to the commodity logic reflected in the late capitalist museum. And yet these analyses are limited in their focus on one particular aspect of late capitalism: commodity logic. Memory museums, on the other hand, register another dimension of capitalist logic that is not immediately evident in Huyssen or Krauss's observations: that is (as I've suggested) the logic of primitive accumulation. Although Krauss's analysis of the late capitalist museum aptly demonstrates the ways in which minimalist practices reflect the serial logic of commodity production that perpetuates capitalist accumulation, it doesn't effectively capture the fraught relationship the preservationist aesthetic of the memory museum and the material enclosures such an aesthetic reinforces despite its agenda of resistance. The memory museum registers the logic of primitive accumulation and anticipates the next moment in the history of capital in which the new series of global enclosures repeats the transition not by claiming by *re-claiming*, *re-purposing*, *re-covering* and *re-cycling* the cultural remains of the first wave of enclosures.

In the age of real subsumption, memory museums reflect a shift in the logic of late capitalism. Recall Luxemburg's argument: the exchange of commodities is not enough to maintain the rapid growth of capitalism; for this we require the concomitant processes of primitive accumulation through which the system is replenished with an influx of raw material via the apprehension of new territories. However, as Mezzadra points out "[w]hile in other phases of capitalist development real and formal subsumption tended to be distributed in different spaces...today they exist in every area of capitalism" (315). Thus, whereas earlier phases of capitalism were characterized by the enclosures of land, which required simultaneous enclosures of memory, the current phase is characterized by a reversal in this relation. The new enclosures require the production rather than enclosure of memory, which not only "partake in the detemporalizing processes that characterize a culture of consumption and obsolescence," as Huyssen has pointed out, but also partake in the new series of enclosures. In our current era, discourses of preservation drive the global enclosures whose foundation is the image of the past.



## Chapter 3

### 3 Archives of Resistance: Memory Art and the Logic of Capital

*By high-lighting and foregrounding the ways in which the processes of capitalism can be perceived to operate across time and space, these resistant archives act to reproduce and disseminate the narrative of capitalist domination, which they seek to challenge.*

—Nicolas Holm

War artists and photographers of the twentieth century such as Kathe Kollowitz and Margaret Bourke-White sought to represent the horrors of atrocity both accurately and directly. By contrast, in contemporary art that deals with histories of state oppression there is a tendency to withdraw images of direct violence, instead substituting more intimate images and objects such as family photos and personal memorabilia. Christian Boltanski's *No Man's Land* (2012), for example, contains no images of violence despite the fact that its title is a well-known war term; instead, it is composed of a 9-metre-high pile of used clothing onto which a giant crane continuously deposits additional articles. Marcelo Brodsky's *Buena Memoria* (1997) contains no images of violence despite the fact that it documents the fate of Argentina's *desaparecidos*; instead, it exhibits a recovered photograph of the class of '67, enlarged and installed in the front hall of the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires. Alfredo Jaar's *Lament of the Images* (2002) contains

no images of violence despite the fact that it documents the violence of Apartheid and democratization; instead, it presents three back-lit panels narrating Nelson Mandela's release from Robben Island prison, the purchase of over 65 million historical photographs by Bill Gates, and the United States Defense department's purchase of exclusive rights to satellite images of Afghanistan. These are just a few of the many installations exemplifying a more general international trend which moves away from a documentary tradition that confronts historical violence explicitly through direct representation—a tradition that includes iconic images such as the one of Phan Thj Kim Phúc, a young girl running naked down the street taken in 1972 by AP photographer Nick Ut during a Napalm attack in Vietnam, or Margaret Bourke-White's "survivors-at-the-wire" taken after the liberation of Nazi concentration camps in 1945 and published by Life magazine.

The aforementioned contemporary artists belong to a new genre of installation Andreas Huyssen calls "memory art": defined as "an artistic practice that crosses boundaries between installation, photography, monument and memorial," which "draws increasingly on the long-standing complex tradition of the art of memory itself—its mixture of script and image, rhetoric and writing" (Huyssen 9-11). While Huyssen reads this trend as an effect of economic globalization in which a culture of "obsolescence and disappearance" characterizes the contemporary landscape of consumer capitalism, others are more inclined to interpret it as the collective "working through of a painful past" (Arruti 104). Drawing on theories of photography and traumatic repression, Nerea Arruti suggests, for example, that Brodsky's aim in projects like *Good Memory* and *Nexus* is to represent the memory archives of contemporary Argentina using "the frozen photographic image to unlock memories" (103), which in turn might operate as a mode of

“political resistance against oblivion” (115). David William Foster argues similarly that Brodsky’s work is “an exercise in the recovery of memory” that provides the ground for political intervention in the form of historical recovery and preservation. In a similar fashion, drawing on Jill Bennett’s concept of “sense-memory,” Silvia Tandeciarz argues that the political potential of Brodsky’s work lies in its ability to expose the limitations of historical memory through the staging of affective experience.

On the one hand, we might attribute the conspicuous absence of violent images in the works of these artists to the long-standing indictment of such images for their tendency to aestheticize violence or trivialize suffering. Such a position is epitomized by Susan Sontag’s well-known claim that “images anesthetize” (Sontag 19). For Sontag, photographs of violence not only cause a traumatic shock in the viewer but, in their proximity to reality, can do little more than pander to the excesses of emotion or unreason, ultimately foreclosing the possibility of producing any meaningful ethical or political knowledge. On the other hand, we might interpret their absence as an effect of traumatic repression, particularly for artists who suffered at the hands of oppressive regimes. Since Freud, the consensus is that traumatic memory cannot be represented directly; it necessarily takes the form of a screen memory or a composite image. Indeed, for trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, who argue that trauma can only be represented belatedly and that this belated representation is always indirect, this absence can be thought of as a reflection of the unrepresentability of traumatic experience. For thinkers of postmemory, the absence of violent images points to the possibility of recovery through the intergenerational transmission of embodied memory (what Jill Bennett calls “sense-memory”) as opposed to historical or national memory.

Departing from the explicitly affective or psychic dimensions of memory art, this chapter argues that far from being a mere reflection of traumatic experience memory art indexes the commodity logic of global capitalism and anticipates the “next moment in the history of capital” (Krauss 8). Just as minimalism anticipated the emergence of the fragmented and disembodied subject of postmodernity in which the pure presence of empty space would become the primary object of aesthetic contemplation, memory art anticipated the emergence of the post-traumatic subject in which resistance takes shape through collective witnessing and distant identification. According to Krauss, in resisting the “serializing, stereotyping, and banalizing [logic] of commodity production,” minimalism reproduced the alienating logic of capitalism in a purer form in which the language and modes of industrialization saturated the social relations of artistic production (Krauss 8).<sup>46</sup> Similarly, through the cultural preservation of “survivor objects” (Landsberg), memory art simultaneously resists the alienating logic of capitalism in which the abstract narrative of history excludes forms of knowledge grounded in experience, sensibility and affect, and at the same time reproduces the logic in which the experience economy saturates the social relations of production. In its promise to recover the past, memory art contributes to a fantasy of immediacy in which the mediating object

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<sup>46</sup> In the previous chapter, drawing on Rosalind Krauss, I explained the ways in which minimalism anticipated the next moment in the history of capital in which, under the influence of the prior collapse between art and life, the museum itself becomes the object of our aesthetic experience. The subject of this aesthetic experience is neither the Cartesian nor the biographical subject, but a “radically contingent,” “derealized subject” (Krauss 8) that anticipates the fragmented, disembodied subject of late capitalism—what Žižek calls the post-traumatic subject.

is effaced and direct experience is no longer limited to the present. Images of the past collide with the aesthetics of presentness, the immediacy of experience.

In this chapter, I argue that installations by memory artists such as Boltanski, Brodsky and Jaar operate as archives of primitive accumulation that illuminate three primary aspects of the relationship between the politics of memory and the ongoing enclosures of both knowledge and space required for the expansion and reproduction of capitalism: the return of the aura, the reification of memory and the enclosure of images. In the first section, through an examination of Boltanski's work, I demonstrate how the relationship between what Kerwin Lee Klein calls the "re-enchantment of memory" and the revitalization of what Walter Benjamin refers to as the "aura of the work of art" is conditioned by the forces of capitalism. In the second section, I take a critical look at Marcelo Brodsky's installations *Buena Memoria (Good Memory)* and *Nexo (Nexus)* in order to show that the rebirth of the aura of the work of art is accompanied by the objectification of memory or the reification of the social relations of witnessing in the auratic object. In the final section, I conduct an analysis of Alfredo Jaar's installations—*Lament of the Images*, *Real Pictures* and *The Sound of Silence*—in order to illuminate tensions between the social relations of witnessing and the production and circulation of images. Ultimately, I argue that memory art's attempts to negate the cultures of forgetting and commodification that accompany contemporary capitalism (through the preservation of memory and the reproduction of the auratic object) reverse the hierarchical relation between history and memory without fundamentally changing the capitalist foundation of such a historical movement. I conclude by suggesting that in their attempt to resist the violent institutions of capitalist accumulation through the preservation of historical

memory these “resistant archives” (Holm) of memory art register a shift in the relationship between art and capital, one that is reflected in debates concerning the ameliorative and fetishistic aspects of relational and object oriented aesthetics.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.1 The Auratic Returns of Christian Boltanski

The practices of memory artists descend from conceptual art and minimalist techniques of the 1960s. Like earlier avant-garde movements, these artists use interactive multimedia platforms and a montage of found objects, both autobiographical and ethnographic, in order to critique the dominant institutions of art as well as the broader socio-political context informing the practices of these institutions. In memory art, everyday objects are used to recover memories of unprecedented historical violence. Using a combination of found materials, from newspaper clippings and photographs to used clothing and biscuit tins, the artists attempt to illuminate what Boltanski calls “small memory,” described in his own words as “an emotional memory, an everyday knowledge, the contrary of Memory with a capital M that is preserved in history books” (Boltanski). As a kind of lived or immediate memory, small memory opposes dead or reified memory, the kind preserved by cultural institutions. In the wake of May ’68, during which art institutions became sites of struggle, the practices and sentiments exhibited by Boltanski, arguably one of the first artists working explicitly with memory, “were heralded by critics as making the museum more accessible and inclusive; by calling on viewers’ memories with

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<sup>47</sup> For an understanding of the roots of object oriented movements see the collection of essays in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, Eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman, (UK: Re.Press, 2011). Print.

such objects, critics argued, the work opened space in the museum for the uniqueness of personal experience, providing new ways for viewers to access and identify with previously unrepresented experiences, while making the museum a collective site of identification” (DeRoo 221). In contrast to the general understanding of Boltanski’s work as a vehicle for historical recovery that “allow[s] easy identification and opening space in the museum for previously unrepresented histories” (237), DeRoo argues instead that it “critiques the role of the museum as a reservoir of cultural memory by showing its inability to preserve and communicate private memories” (236). His images, she claims, even work against his own attempts to facilitate “universal identification” through the telling of stories that are “common to all” (Boltanski qtd. in DeRoo 237). Despite the ongoing critique of the institutions of art and politics among conceptual artists since 1968, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, museums continue to serve as a primary site for collective identification, particularly in the context of historical violence.

In memory art, collective identification is accompanied by what Kerwin Lee Klein calls the promise of auratic returns, a promise that derives from “its traditional association with religious contexts and meanings” (Klein 129). Highly critical of the memorial turn in historical discourse, Klein argues that the sudden rise of memory is at least partially attributable to its promise to “let us have our essentialism and deconstruct it, too” (144).<sup>48</sup> Figuring memory as a “therapeutic alternative to historical discourse,” the

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<sup>48</sup> Susannah Radstone makes a similar claim with reference to trauma theory. According to Radstone, the promise of trauma theory lies in its capacity to navigate the murky waters of post-structuralist epistemology. “To put things at their simplest,” she explains,

historian maintains that memory as re-enchantment is the result of two intersecting frameworks: therapy and the avant-garde, both of which laude memory for its emancipatory potential. Authentic memory, in this context, is linked with “otherness”—that is, with a traumatic exclusion from History as such. Its emancipatory potential takes shape as a kind of return of the repressed. In this sense, according to Klein: “First, the sudden appearance of memory in academic and popular discourse is to be understood in metahistorical terms as a return of the repressed: Memory is the belated response to the great trauma of modernity, the *Shoah*. Second, ‘trauma’ provides a criterion of authenticity for both the Real and its postmodern negation” (139). (Certainly, it is no coincidence that sites of memory are almost always sites of trauma as well.) Memory’s promise of re-enchantment is founded in part on the idea “that its traditional religious contexts and meanings [are] so much older and heavier than the comparatively recent effort of the early professional historians to define memorial practice as a vestigial prehistory” (129-130). Linking the rise of memory discourses with the deconstructive turn that fashioned contemporary identity politics, Klein argues further that “the new memory work displaces the old hermeneutics of suspicion with a therapeutic discourse whose quasi-religious gestures link it with memory’s deep semantic past” (141-2). He

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“trauma theory appears to help the Humanities move beyond the impasses and crises in knowledge posed by these [poststructuralist] theories, without abandoning their insights” (11). In short, trauma theory allows us to reconstruct a universal subject without abandoning the insights of poststructuralism. Diverging from the desiring subject of psychoanalytic theory, this sovereign subject of trauma theory is what Catherine Malabou calls the autistic subject.



concludes: “the clustering of quasi-religious terms around *memory* suggests some conclusions about the effects of our new key word. [...] Memory can come to the fore in an age of historiographic crisis *precisely because* it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse” (Klein 145; emphasis added). In short, as a discourse of emancipation, memory deconstructs the modern narrative of history that underwrites the rise of Fascism while preserving the structures of authenticity that that have always granted History its narrative authority.

Klein’s observations concerning “auratic returns” in historical discourse can be extended to the field of contemporary art, particularly those concerning the quasi-religious elements of memory’s re-enchantment. Boltanski’s work provides an apt example. The artist’s early work can be understood as a form of deconstruction, of both individual identity and historical truth—the complementary arms of post-modern ideology. However, sometime around 1984, Boltanski’s self-conscious deconstruction of historical truth and identity turns away from auto-ethnographic meditations introduced by installations like *Ten Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski* in which the artist falsely claims to document his own development over a period of 18 years (only one of the photos is of Boltanski himself). At this point, his work takes on decidedly mystical overtones. His surrealist-inspired shadow theatre installations invoke traces of haunting childhood fables. His eerie shrine-like arrangements of found images and objects adorned with electrical cords and halos of light bear an overtly ritualistic or ceremonial quality. Departing from the purely deconstructive methodology of *Ten Photographic Portraits*, installations like *Altar to the Chases High School* instead contain religious elements that appear to conceal an underlying trauma. For instance, in one version of this installation

seven images of students from the graduating class of 1931 are extracted from a class photo taken at a Jewish high school in Vienna. Six of the enlarged portraits are arranged in candelabra formation around an even larger central photo. Each smiling, slightly out of focus subject is set above its own pedestal created by two stacked biscuit tins. The entire arrangement is undergirded by a horizontal mantle similarly constructed using twelve of the same tins. Each smiling image is illuminated by a single lamp placed forebodingly in the center of the subject's forehead, which, as one reviewer suggests, looks from a distance like bullet holes. Wires suspended from each lamp converge below the mantle and give the installation a vaguely clinical feel. The effect is both comforting and unsettling, as the initial deconstructive impulse seems to give way to a return of the repressed.

The artist uses similar techniques in his installation series *The Dead Swiss*. In 1989, this installation appears as a wall of photographs taken from the obituary section of a Swiss newspaper, enlarged, and separated by a fissure leading to an inlaid memorial structure. In 1991, it takes the form of vertical archives in which pillars composed of single tins stacked one on top of the other, each adorned with a lone photo, are arranged like a forest of commemorative obelisks. In 1995, 585 of the same tins tucked into a recess in the wall resemble a uniform cabinet of files. As Catherine Grenier observes in her contribution to the exhibition catalog, in these later works “two distinctive traits come through: one is a religious dimension wedded to the idea of the celebration of the human, while the other is the question of death and of commemoration, which very quickly will be accompanied by the memory of the Shoah” (55). These two dimensions—the celebration of the human and questions of death and commemoration—are key aspects of

contemporary memory movements, which, as Klein's observations suggest, respond to the "great trauma of modernity," a crisis in both historicity and representation that soothes itself with the promise of auratic returns.

A reading of Boltanski's work from the perspective of trauma theory, which was birthed around the same time as the *Dead Swiss*, in which traumatic experience re-emerges as repressed memory, seems to affirm Klein's observations regarding the role of the Shoah in the re-enchantment of memory—that "[m]emory is the belated response to the great trauma of modernity" and that such a trauma provides the measure of "authentic" memory. Certainly, this would be the consensus among memory theorists and critics of second generation art, such as Marianne Hirsch and Alison Landsberg, who privilege the so-called embodied or affective knowledge of memory in contrast to the abstract or objective knowledge of history. Indeed, like Boltanski's "small memory," Hirsch's "postmemory" and Landsberg's "prosthetic memory" offer embodied, emotional or living memory as a more authentic alternative to historical memory. Landsberg argues that, faced with a dwindling survivor population and the waning impact of Holocaust memory, in the age of mass culture new "technologies of memory" allow for the production of new modes of living memory and experiential knowledge. Authentic memory becomes the purview of the marginalized, the excluded, the other.

Both Hirsch and Landsberg turn to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* to support their claims regarding the authenticity of living memory. Reading it alongside *Austerlitz*, Hirsch argues that *Maus* uses the "trope of the lost mother" as a mode of resistance against the imperative to forget. Specifically, she argues that this trope is one of what Aby Warburg calls "pre-established forms" through which "gender becomes a powerful idiom of

remembrance in the face of detachment and forgetting” (Hirsch 124). Not surprisingly, the mother is associated with the emotional and the *other*, which makes it a particularly useful trope for resisting the objective and alienating narrative of official history. In a similar comparison between *Maus* and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Landsberg emphasizes the importance of indirect or prosthetic memory, which wields an affective force that renders inherited memories an alternative form of knowledge that resists the culture of forgetting (Landsberg 65). Landsberg takes two primary examples from *Maus* that emphasize the protagonist’s propensity for trash collecting and his “relationship to the mundane objects of everyday life” (70). In the first example, Landsberg recounts a moment in the narrative in which Vladek, a Holocaust survivor, retrieves a section of old wire during a walk with his son Artie. Incensed by his scavenging, Artie admonishes his father and questions his resistance to buying new wire, to which Vladek responds by explaining that the little wires are useful and hard to find. The second example recalls a scene in which Artie interrupts Vladek’s pill counting, resulting in a mass of spilled pills accompanied by a frantic re-counting. Artie offers assistance but Vladek chastises him, saying “you don’t KNOW counting pills” (qtd. in Landsberg 70). Landsberg suggests the first scene demonstrates the ways in which the text itself functions as an allegory of the recirculation of Holocaust memory in which waste is recycled for “productive ends” (68). Drawing a connection between the two meanings of “recount,” Landsberg argues the second scene reveals the ways in which Holocaust memory is mediated by everyday objects. These interpretations contribute to a framework in which the production of second-generation art is understood as a form of

traumatic repetition in which repressed memories can be both retrieved and transmitted to the next generation.

In his response to Landsberg's prescription for a "radical politics of empathy," which is based on a reversal of the Freudian paradigm, Marco Abel emphasizes its covert relationship to the capitalist mode of production. Specifically, he argues that her theory of prosthetic memory, in which the symptoms of traumatic repression are actively produced in non-traumatized subjects, may in fact be nothing more than a "key symptom of the very problem she addresses" (Abel 380); that is, her theory itself repeats the very logic by which capitalism is maintained and reproduced by covering over the relationship between historical violence and the capitalist mode of production. From this perspective, Vladek's trash collecting and recounting of pills should be understood not only (or even primarily) in terms of the transmission of Holocaust memory, but as the reproduction of a particular mode of knowledge production that masquerades as an alternative to the existing mode. Vladek's behaviours are not only repetitions of a previous trauma, they illuminate the ways in which traumatic repetition intersects with the impulse to archive, recycle and preserve the everyday, making it inseparable from the reproduction of capital. The conjunction of the everyday, the archive and capital is noted by Nicolas Holm, who claims that "not only can the everyday now be considered an ever-present archive of capitalism, but that those actual archives which seek to catalogue the everyday for political or artistic purposes can be considered as extension of this process" (6). Boltanski's incorporation and reincorporation of cultural waste can be viewed similarly. On a purely representational level, Boltanski's piles clothing, which are said to recall the iconic Holocaust image of piled corpses, also reflect the mass poverty of ghettoized

communities or the immense collections of waste that accompany industrial globalization; his biscuit tins, which recall the boxes in which survivors might have buried evidence of the massacre, also serve as material reminders of a bygone era in which these empty containers for factory-born confections recall the nostalgia of bourgeois hospitality and suburban expansion; and his anonymous portraits, which represent the unknown dead, affirm the centrality of photographic rituals, such as the photo album and the obituary notice, to the reproduction of the family, one of capitalism's most treasured institutions.

Artworks such as Boltanski's and theories such as Landsberg's (in which embodied memory is offered as an alternative to historical discourse) reflect a larger cultural movement toward the re-valuing of repressed or forgotten histories; they simultaneously tend to overlook the ways in which this movement simply shifts the terms of evaluation from one site of cultural production to another. As Diedrich Diederichsen explains in his analysis of the movement of intensity and experience from the margins to the center in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism:

[t]hese diagnoses rarely account for how such transformations are framed in the experiences of those they concern, which are also the diagnoses these people use to make sense of these experiences. And in fact, these diagnoses often reveal how the structural transformations they describe have not truly entailed a migration of the old subversive lifestyles from the margins and the bottom of society to its center and to the top; rather, they often describe cases in which intensity and experience are at stake in name only, in which the values have actually been

shifted only from one place to another—in order not to preserve them but to betray them, to use them as pure decoration. (20)

In this sense, theories of memory—which accompany the transition from the modern to the so-called postmodern—are used to expose the tyranny of history while at the same time using the tyranny of history to explain the experiences of repression that lead to what Klein calls memory's re-enchantment. Despite this necessary critique of the memorial response to the so-called crisis of history, what a Kleinian position alone fails to recognize is not only the specifically capitalist context of memory's "auratic returns" but also the ways in which these memory movements may, in fact, reproduce the logic of capital in a purer form through the very terms they use to resist it.

### 3.2 Marcelo Brodsky and the Contradictions of Material Remains

A second artist working in the Argentinean context uses many of the same techniques as Boltanski in his work to confront the lasting effects of the military dictatorship that spanned the late 70s and early 80s. Marcelo Brodsky is a self-identified human rights activist who lived twenty-two years in exile and a descendent of Jewish immigrants to Argentina. His brother Fernando was one of the more 30 000 Argentinean citizens disappeared by the state during the prolonged period of state terrorism that overthrew Peron and headed the infamous Dirty War. Brodsky has given public talks on human rights violations alongside similar artists, including Boltanski and Jaar. Many of his installations take the form of commemorative ceremonies whose aim is to create a sense of connectedness and unity across generations and between cultures. Most of his projects, the later ones in particular, use Holocaust references as a backdrop against which the

historical memories of state terror in Argentina emerge in relief. It is Brodsky's work in particular that lead Andreas Huyssen to coin the phrase "memory art" to describe the general movement within contemporary art that conceives an emancipatory politics through the collective reconciliation of the past. Art critics and theorists routinely read Brodsky's work from the perspectives of psychoanalysis and trauma theory: for the most part it is understood as the subjective working through of a painful past. Latin American scholars such as David William Foster and Nerea Arruti in particular concur that the aim of this working through is twofold: to recover lost memories and to restore the individual subjectivity of the victims.

The multi-media installation *Good Memory* was Brodsky's first project upon returning to Argentina after his lengthy exile in Spain. Like Boltanski's *Ten Photographic Images*, *Good Memory* was a self-professed attempt by the artist to renegotiate his identity; and like Boltanski's *Chases*, the project is constructed around a single document: an old class photograph, which also served as the centerpiece for a class reunion arranged by Brodsky to gather and photograph the surviving members of his grade 8 class. The photo, which was taken in 1967 at the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, one of Argentina's most prestigious educational institutions, was later enlarged to six times its original size and installed in the front hall of the school where, along with portraits of surviving classmates, it was meant to serve as a "bridge" (in Brodsky's words) between two generations of Argentinean students. Adorned with grease-pencil hieroglyphics and fragments of text, this class photo documents the effects of state terrorism in Argentina by identifying members of the class who less than ten years later would become members of the *desaparecidos* along with thousands of other so-called



subversives and undesirables. Initially appearing as a public installation, this piece was later transformed into an art exhibition and a book-length photo essay. The class photo served as a backdrop for a series of portraits of surviving members taken by Brodsky, which were exhibited alongside the original in the hallway of the Colegio.



**Figure 3: Class photograph from *Good Memory* (1997)**

Unlike the anonymous portraits in the *Dead Swiss*, Brodsky's subjects are clearly identified. Countenances ranging from smiling to pensive are accompanied by explanatory text that strongly situates them within the contemporary discourse of trauma: "Jorge says that madness is the strongest form of suffering"; "Carlos is guarded and reserved, but when the time comes, he tells all"; "[Gustavo] lives with his cat"; "El Colo (Red) was a political prisoner"; [Ana] is concerned about Israeli politics...Argentine

politics, on the other hand, do not interest her.” Many of these statements seem out of sync with the mood of the photograph; rather, their dissonance seems to express a potential return of the repressed. Unlike Boltanski, however, Brodsky makes explicit reference to the Holocaust, which, operating as an “international prism” (Huysen 98), provides a backdrop for his condemnation of state violence in Argentina. If, however, Boltanski seeks to *obfuscate* historical truth by blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, Brodsky seeks to *uncover* historical truth by subjecting national memory to relentless archival excavation.

Brodsky’s second series of installations, *Nexo (Nexus)*, was created shortly following *Good Memory*. Consolidating photographs taken between the years of 1978 and 2001, this project departs from an earlier focus on personal memories and implements a less intimate tone. According to Nerea Arruti, as with *Good Memory*, the overall aim with *Nexus*, “is to bond, unite and offer bridges between fragmented realities” (Arruti 110). Despite this attribution of unity, *Nexus* demonstrates a much more explicit tension between subjective experience and material history than *Good Memory*. For example, in the series of installations titled *Ex*, the experience of exile is depicted in eight stark images of architectural fragments; connecting distinct geographical and historical situations, *The Camps II*, a temporary memorial installed in front of the former Navy school in Argentina, echoes *The Camps I*, a permanent monument in Berlin listing the camps in operation during the Holocaust; *Remains* preserves the remnants produced by the bombing of the AMIA, a Jewish community center in Argentina, which were repurposed as landfill for the site that would eventually become the controversial prisoners were routinely discarded; recalling book-burnings in Nazi Germany, *The*

*Condemned of the Earth* presents a series of photographs documenting the excavation of The Memory Park connecting the ESMA<sup>49</sup> and Rio de la Plata into which the bodies of dead black-listed books (such as Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*), which were burned and buried by a previous generation. Each of these installations favours material remains over subjective experience. Overall, the installations in *Nexus* seek to preserve not only the memory of historical violence but also its historical remains and to set these two aspects of preservation in the service of political resistance.



**Figure 4: Celluloid Serpent, photograph of rubble following the bombing of the AMIA (2002)**

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<sup>49</sup> I conduct a more detailed discussion of the transformation of the ESMA into a museum of memory in chapter one, which Brodsky documents in his book-length photo essay *Memory Under Construction* (2008). For a more detailed discussion of the development of the Memory Park and its relationship to the ESMA, see Andreas Huyssen's *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003).

Memory art like Brodsky's transforms political engagement into an act of recovery, both individual and historical. As we discovered, for Hirsch and Landsberg photography plays a central role in this regard. For Arruti, the photographs in Brodsky's work enable a release of memories, which can serve a mode of "political resistance against oblivion" (115). Silvia Tandeciarz compares Brodsky's use of photographs to that of the Mothers of the Disappeared, and suggests that their political potential lies in the ability to stage affective experience. Resisting the reduction of history to the past, the photographs function as a present "spectacle of mourning" (Tandeciarz 136).<sup>50</sup> Indeed, for Tandeciarz memory art does not simply analyze the symptom represented by the photograph or theorize the link between traumatic memory and originary memory; rather, in registering affective experience memory art foregrounds the limitations of narrative or historical representation. In both cases, the photographs serve as a bridge between past, present and future as well as a medium of political resistance and historical recovery.

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<sup>50</sup> While Tandeciarz is using the notion of spectacle in the colloquial sense of a striking visual display, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the relationship between this "spectacle of mourning" and Guy Debord's notion of the spectacle, which is an inversion of life itself that assumes the commodity form. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord emphasizes the "spectacle is not a collection of images" but rather "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord 1). From this perspective, a spectacle of mourning is a social relationship between people mediated by the image of the past. Referencing Marc Auge, in his manifesto on the revolutionary act of forgetting Nicolas Holm claims that "the present [is] a site *overloaded* with history and historical consciousness" (3).

David William Foster conceives Brodsky's project in general as an exercise in the recovery of memory.

All three critics not only emphasize the therapeutic dimension of Brodsky's art but also the ways in which historical objects in this work attempt to substitute for a lost or missing social relation. For instance, Foster draws attention to what he considers to be the restoration of "social subjectivity" to the disappeared, avoiding their "double disappearance" (95) in the form of both material and symbolic erasure.<sup>51</sup> Arruti and Tandeciarz make similar claims about the restoration of identity and personhood respectively. Despite differences in terminology, all three advocate the restoration of some form of humanity to the disappeared. This impossible re-humanization is sought through a series of substitutions centered on the photograph: it is a substitute for the absent referent for which it retains a material trace; it is a substitute for the missing body of the disappeared whose image is preserved in the solution of silver salts; and it is also a substitution for and a reification of lost memory. The image of the past reified in the

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<sup>51</sup> Jacques Lacan's division between symbolic and material deaths is relevant here. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan describes Antigone's fate as being suspended between two deaths, her symbolic death (which occurs with her incarceration within the sepulchre in which she will eventually starve to death) and her actual death (which will forever remain invisible and for which there will be no material remains). Antigone's symbolic death denies her an actual material death. She will never be properly mourned or buried. She will forever remain an image of sublime beauty. Paradoxically, this is her desire made manifest.

photograph substitutes for and attempts to recuperate the social bond severed by state violence.

Immediately, this reified aspect of the photographic should conjure notions of fetishization in both Freudian and Marxian senses. In Freudian terms, the photograph-as-fetish replaces the missing body; in Marxian terms, the photograph-as-fetish transforms the social relations of historical violence into the object of memory, which mediates the social relations of witnessing. In his comparative analysis of Marxian and Freudian fetishism via Benjamin and Adorno, Donovan Mioyasaki argues that in either case “false relations substitute for authentic ones” (Mioyasaki 430). The fetishistic quality of the photograph can be explained in relation to Benjamin’s aura.<sup>52</sup> Drawing a connection between the aura and the Freudian fetish, Mioyasaki claims that the aura of the work of art “corresponds to the substitute social relation of the fetish, and not to Marxian

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<sup>52</sup> Benjamin’s conceptualization of the aura remains somewhat inconsistent, sometimes referring to the authenticity of the work of art, which is linked to ritual tradition, and other times referring to the experience of time and space it invokes; at the same time, he also uses it to refer to the presence of the live actor. Despite his various conceptualizations, what becomes clear is the ways in which the aura is related to an unmediated experience of presence that recalls Freud’s “oceanic” feeling and the later “turnpike” experiences of Minimalist art. Anticipating Minimalist claims, he grants the decay of the aura a revolutionary potential related to the serial capacities of photography and film. While the concept of “aura” is most recognizable in relation to “The Work of Art” essay, he began conceptualizing it in an earlier essay titled “The Little History of Photography” (1931) in *Selected Writings 2*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 507-530.

commodity alienation” (430-1). For Mioyasaki, the aura is defined by its capacity to replace the subject in the social relation, its ability to restore the broken social bond, which is one of the aims of memory projects such as Brodsky’s and Boltanski’s as well as the cultural analysis they inspire.

Walter Benjamin famously described the aura as a strange tissue of time and space determined by its social and historical context, particularly its embeddedness in ritual tradition (Benjamin “Work of Art” 24). As a metonym for authenticity, the aura resembles a kind of ideological phantasm that generates what Benjamin names “cult value” (25). Under the siege of new technologies of mass production, which tipped the scales in favour of exhibition value, the aura finds its last refuge (according to Benjamin) in the photographic portrait, which shores up the now ubiquitous “cult of remembrance” (27). Famously, the German critic attributed the decay of the aura to the rise of mechanical reproduction exemplified by photography (and film) whose “transitoriness and repeatability” along with the capacity to “‘get closer’ to things” (23) destroyed the permanence and duration tied to auratic art, whose forms are generally static. This process of demystification initiated by the formal particularities of photography is tied to the opening of the “optical unconscious” through which we encounter the previously “hidden details of familiar objects” (37).<sup>53</sup> The photograph in this sense operates as a

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<sup>53</sup> Influenced by developments in psychoanalysis and deconstruction, Rosalind Krauss borrows this phrase in the title of her book by the same name in order to talk about the “unconscious” of the modernist vision, represented by the disruptions caused by the emergence of “anti-form” in the 1920s. One of the primary differences between Krauss’s

prosthetic eye, revealing these hidden details through the dual processes of slowing down and getting closer, which contributed to the production of a new mode of thought we might call a photographic consciousness.

Historicizing Benjamin's notion of the aura, Andreas Huyssen suggests that it is a particular effect of modernization. He argues that the aura comes into being as an effect of industrial advances upon which it is contingent despite the fact that industrialization simultaneously initiates its decay. In other words, the attribution of aura to a work of art is necessarily retrospective and can only emerge in relation to shifts in the mode of production. In the current era of mass digitization, for example, we witness a reversal in the relationship between the photograph and the aura; the aura is revived in the context of photography. Huyssen uses Bill Gates' purchase of the largest collection of original photographs to explain this revival.<sup>54</sup> He states:

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and Benjamin's use of the phrase is that she wants to emphasize the non-visual aspects of modernist art, its desirous underbelly, whereas her predecessor is concerned precisely with the visual, particularly the ways in which new visual technologies like photography can reveal a kind of material truth. While Krauss acknowledges Benjamin as the inaugural theorist of the optical unconscious, as her reviewer Terry Smith notes, she fails to further "explore Benjamin's political purposes." Instead she uses the concept to frame her critique of modernist art, namely its "pure opticality" and overemphasis on the visual.

<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, this connection to Bill Gates's purchase resurfaces in Alfredo Jaar's installation *Lament of the Images*, which is discussed below.



In the move from the photograph to its digital recycling, Walter Benjamin's art of mechanical reproduction (photography) has regained an aura of originality. Which goes to show that Benjamin's famous argument about the loss or decay of the aura in modernity was always only half the story; it forgot that modernization itself created the auratic effect to begin with. Today, digitization makes the 'original' photograph auratic. (Huysen 20)

In other words, in the age of digital technology the material photograph is invested with the auratic essence once reserved for pre-modern forms of art such as the painting and the monument.<sup>55</sup> As new technologies emerge, old technologies are invested with an aura of authenticity that is retrospectively attributed to the object in its original context. Thus, whereas the religious fetish or ritual art attained an aura that became visible only in relation to technologies of industrialization like photography and film, in the age of digitization film photography becomes an auratic fetish. Bill Gates' purchase reflects the auratic quality of the material photograph—namely, its newfound originality as a material object—in the age of digitization.

In Mioyasaki's account, both the fetish and the aura create distance between individuals while disguising this distance as "the unique presence and authenticity of the object" (Mioyasaki 431). At the same time, the subject "in the presence of auratic artwork believes she has entered into a relation with lost social human experience" (431). This is

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<sup>55</sup> Recalling Marshall McLuhan's claim that the old medium becomes the content of the new, it appears here that the material photograph (the old medium) becomes the content of the archive (the new medium) in the era of serialization.

precisely the experience Landsberg describes in entering the room of “survivor shoes” at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In *Prosthetic Memory*, she relays the affective experience of this encounter. Following her transportation on one of the infamous boxcars used to transport Jews, the spectator enters “the world of the death camps” in which she is bombarded with “piles of personal belongings,” including a “jumbled sea” of “survivor shoes” (Landsberg 79). Turning to Fredric Jameson’s comparison of Van Gogh’s peasant shoes with Warhol’s Diamond Dust Shoes, Landsberg argues that the survivor shoes resist the logic of the commodity and instead invoke a politics of empathy. Via Jameson, Landsberg explains that Warhol’s postmodern Diamond Dust shoes “embody the logic of the commodity,” whereas Van Gogh’s modernist shoes (like the survivor shoes at the Holocaust museum) retain a sense of “lived individuality” (80); each shoe “bears a trace of the absent body” that inhabited it, the aura of its owner. While Warhol’s shoes are as “shorn of their earlier life world as the pile of shoes left over from Auschwitz,” she maintains, Van Gogh’s shoes recreate the “whole missing object world” (79-80). Landsberg draws the conclusion that for this reason Van Gogh’s shoes speak and Warhol’s shoes do not.

Similarly, Brodsky’s “survivor objects”—including photographs of the disappeared, fragments of the AMIA and unearthed books—seem to retain an aura of their missing referent that allows them to serve as substitutes for the subject in the social relation. And yet, they do much more than invoke a politics of empathy, which, as Marco Abel claims, is nothing but a symptom of the broader structure rather than its undoing. Rather, this fetishistic aspect of Brodsky’s installations highlight productive tensions between the cosmopolitan ideal of universal human rights and the material archives of

historical violence by demonstrating how the recovery of material history remains out of sync with the so-called politics of empathy.

Overall, Brodsky's work illuminates the ways in which the social relations of witnessing that accompany globally pervasive rights discourses are reified in the remains of historical violence whose archivization reflects the convergence of commodity logic and memory politics.

### 3.3 Alfredo Jaar and the Dialectics of Witnessing

Like the work of Boltanski and Brodsky, Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar's installations contain no images of violence. However, unlike his contemporaries, his work emphasizes the structural rather than subjective dimensions of historical violence and its relationship to the political economy of representation using news media as his primary focus.

Relying on a set of conceptual practices similar to the previous two artists, Jaar incorporates photography and archival techniques to pose questions about the relationship between collective memory, historical violence and mediation. In Jaar's work, black photo archive boxes remind us of Boltanski's rusted biscuit tins; postcards and magazine covers recall Brodsky's family snapshots and personal portraits; piles of clothing become piles of slides; halogen lamps become light boxes. Despite these similarities, Jaar's installations do not compel us to begin with the notion of trauma. Rather, they approach the problem from the side of the mediating structure, encouraging the critical reception of the ways in which the repression of images in contemporary media exemplifies a particular mode of enclosures based on a *new optic* specific to new cultures of memory, an optic whose "gaze [h]as increasingly turned to the victim" (Winter 30). As we discovered with Brodsky and Boltanski, within the framework of this new optic the

viewer of the work of art becomes a spectator-witness. In this section, I argue that Jaar's emphasis on the absence of images of violence and suffering in mainstream news media illuminates tensions between the political economy of representation and the aesthetic economy of memory cultures; in other words, between enclosures of the image and the recovery of repressed memory.

Jaar's installations do not seek to preserve and transmit memories of violence. Instead, they expose what Jacques Rancière calls a "massive phenomenon of removal" (Rancière 8). Elaborating, Rancière argues that we are not deceived or blinded by the Master's barrage of images; rather, the power of images is exercised not through inundation but by withholding. He claims further that, contrary to popular belief, we encounter very few images of violence in the news; "what we see mainly are the faces of those who 'make' the news, the authorized speakers" (9). For Jaar, he concludes, "it is not a question of getting rid of the excess of images, but of drawing attention to their absence, the absence of certain images in the selection of what those in charge of the distribution of images consider to be interesting to show" (8). In other words, the aim in concealing images is to give material presence to their public absence.

Two installations are particularly compelling in this regard. *Lament of the Images* (2002) does away with images altogether and instead presents three backlit panels narrating three seeming unrelated news stories. The first panel narrates the release of Nelson Mandela from Robben Island prison in 1990. According to the panel, news coverage of the event reveals "a man squinting into the light as if blinded." What this coverage does not show is the blinding effect of the sun reflecting on the eyes of prisoners like Mandela, who were not only forced to labour in the lime quarry but were

consistently denied the protection of sunglasses despite repeated requests. In his commentary, Jaar remarks further on the absence of any photographs of Mandela weeping at his release. He attributes this lack not to the fact that such images do not exist but to Mandela's physical incapacity to produce tears: "there is no picture of Mandela weeping with joy at his liberation, because after being subjected to twenty-seven years of forced labor in quarries, his eyes could no longer shed tears" (Rancière 7). The second panel documents the preservation of millions of photographs purchased by Bill Gates from historical archives, including the Bettmann and the United International Press, to be buried in an old limestone mine: "it will take more than 400 years for them all to be restored to the public in digital form" (8). The final panel recounts the purchase of exclusive rights to all satellite images of Afghanistan and the surrounding area by the U.S. Defence department following the post-9/11 invasion in 2001.

The absence of images in this triptych indexes the ways in which the same forces of violent separation and erasure that accompany primitive accumulation operate within a political economy of representation. The repression of images in the work of art reflects a series of epistemic enclosures in the broader situation that contribute to the ongoing privatization of the commons. Each of the panels registers a particular set of material contradictions inherent in the economy of images. The first panel illustrates contradictions between *the image economy* in which images of violence are missing or repressed and *the political economy* in which political dissidents such as Nelson Mandela are not only excluded from participation in normative social relations but transformed into slave labourers whose uncompensated labour provides a foundation for the expansion of capital, a ground for primitive accumulation. This panel indicates the ways

in which the material remains of primitive accumulation become grounds for the new enclosures. Nelson Mandela's invisible tears, for example, the result of forced labour in exile, cannot appear in the public images of his re-assimilation into the dominant relations of production. The second panel demonstrates the ways in which the ruins of capital—in this case, the limestone mine—are reincorporated into the capitalist marketplace through their utility as sites of enclosure where public images become private property. The mine—once the raw material for the production of capital, now the remains of historical violence—becomes repurposed a site of enclosure in which original photographs are amassed. Publicly circulated images are now enclosed within the previous space of exploitation in which primitive accumulation took the form of the separation of the worker from the means of production, a generalized dimension of capitalism that becomes most pronounced in the context of imprisonment and forced labour. Similarly, the final panel highlights the centrality of the photograph to new enclosures by the state. Together, the individual panels reflect the ways in which the image itself has become a symbolic foundation for the ongoing forces of primitive accumulation. In this way, the triptych functions as an allegory of enclosure.

Another series of installations, *Real Pictures* (1995), exhibits none of Jaar's photographs of the Rwandan genocide, which were taken by the artist himself over a six-year period. One of the twenty-one installations in this series is a selection of covers from Newsweek magazine, which show none of the violence in Rwanda, accompanied by unrelated statements that read like news flashes describing the horrific events Newsweek failed to report. In one version, a cover bearing the face of Jackie Onassis is accompanied by the statement "May 26, 1994: Deployment of the mainly African UN force is delayed

due to a dispute over who will provide equipment and cover the cost for the operation. 400,000 deaths.” Another cover depicting OJ Simpson’s vacant gaze alongside his graven-looking lawyer is accompanied by the news flash “July 8, 1994: As the Rwandan Patriotic Front advances westward, the influx of displaced persons into the so-called ‘safe zone’ increases from 500,000 to 1 million within a few days. 900,000 deaths,” while the actual headlines read “The Case Against O.J. How strong?” and in smaller print above the header “Bill Gates: Why the tech king worries.” The contrast is striking. *Real Pictures* reveals that the lack of images and headlines referring to the Rwandan genocide has less to do with the unrepresentability of trauma and more to do with the ways in which the circulation and management of information operates within a climate of social and political exploitation.

In another version of *Real Pictures*, one hundred black photo storage boxes are stacked in various configurations. Each conceals a single image of the genocide. Each is embossed with white text describing the photograph within. None of the photographs are visible at any point in time. In his analysis, Rancière argues that the enclosure of the photographs requires that we first acknowledge the names and stories of the victims, whose silent bodies must speak: it is no longer a “question of removal, but of redistributing the way we count” (Rancière 11). In *Real Pictures*, Jaar devises way of counting that not only conceals those images already not visible in mainstream media but also draws attention to this absence. This is why, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau claims, that the purpose of the work is not to provide evidence of the massacres, “but to spark in the viewer a personal interrogation of one’s place *in relation* to the genocide of which we had knowledge” (Solomon-Godeau 40; emphasis in original). Indeed, the point is not to

expose the violence of which we already had knowledge, but to expose its enclosure within the material structures through which information and knowledge circulate. Thus, for neither Rancière nor Solomon-Godeau is the aim of the work to provide evidence. However, it is also not to simply spark a *personal interrogation*. The point, rather, is to amplify the contradiction between the social relations of witnessing which demand the production and dissemination of photographs of violence and the material conditions under which such images are produced and circulated, or not. Jaar's installations expose the broader social structures in which the knowledge of the genocide is reduced to something that happened over there. They point to the ways in which, unlike the consumer of news media, the spectator of art is not a witness to the horrors of mass violence but to the mass phenomenon of removal that constitutes the new enclosures. Witnessing in this sense is not meant simply to motivate outrage toward the obvious violations of human rights, but to make visible the epistemic enclosures that underlie these violations.

While *Lament of the Images* and *Real Pictures* situate photographs within the context of the new enclosures that have been underway since the 1970s, *The Sound of Silence* reconsiders more forcefully the antagonistic relationship between the production of images and the social relations of witnessing. This powerful installation is both a *memorial* for South African journalist Kevin Carter whose photograph of a starving Sudanese girl was publicly condemned and an *allegory of primitive accumulation* in which the role of photography in the production of universal human rights is both paradoxical and ambivalent.



*The Sound of Silence* takes place in a small cubic room illuminated with fluorescent lights, in an atmosphere that has been described as vaguely penal. A short 8-minute film narrates Carter's story through a series of visual fragments punctuated by a blinding flash of light and the split-second appearance of Carter's prize-winning photograph, a small girl with a distended belly crawling toward a feeding station as a vulture lurks in the background. The negative reception of this image likened Carter to the vulture in his photograph and condemned him for failing to intervene: "Why didn't he help the little girl, they asked." As we discovered with Brodsky's work, there is a metaphoric logic of substitution at work here: first, the image of Kevin Carter substitutes for both the witness and the production of capital through which material structures of inequality are personified; second, as with Brodsky's photographs the image stands in the place of the absent victim. The indictment of the photographer-witness in this case is leveled on the basis of a failed recognition of and identification with the other's humanity. Rather than intervene, the photographer captured on camera the grounds for his own indictment—on a material level, his own failed intervention.<sup>56</sup> In the words of David Levi Strauss: "We put him in front of that starving child, and then accused him of moral detachment for making the image we wanted him to make" (Levi Strauss 16.). The photographer, in this sense, is a foil or straw man that allows for the creation of an ethical

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<sup>56</sup> In her book-length polemic, *On Photography*, Susan Sontag points to the moral and political dilemmas arising from photography's dual aspects of aestheticization and anesthetization, from the violation of individuals and the invasion of their worlds to the promotion of non-intervention and the incitement to remain at a distance.

subject whose morality is based on the production and circulation of images. We demand the image but condemn the image-maker.

This particular situation demonstrates the continuously fraught relationship between photography and witnessing. Historically, witnessing was primarily a juridical category deriving from the Latin root *wit*, meaning to know. While witnessing in the modern world has combined the direct possession of knowledge with the performative act of testifying, French researcher Andrea Frisch argues that in pre-modern times the role of the witness was not to provide evidence but to profess a specific kind of belief. Testimony was based on faith rather than knowledge: that is, on an ethic of solidarity rather than authority. The shift to a notion of witnessing based on first-hand experiential knowledge began what Frisch calls the “epistemic paradigm of witnessing,” initiated by the invention of the Cartesian subject. Michal Givoni extends these observations into the current era, arguing that in the postmodern age witnessing no longer takes place primarily in real time as the witnessing of an event. Rather, it requires a reconstruction of the past; it is necessarily retrospective. According to Givoni, this new form of “humanitarian witnessing,” which highlights the importance of psychological rather than empirical fact, has become the predominant form of witnessing in the age of globalization (Givoni 162).

In her book *Human Rights in Camera*, Sharon Sliwinski places photography at the center of this new global consciousness of witnessing. Locating the historical roots of universal human rights in the “picture trail” rather than the “paper trail,” she traces their inception back to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 (as opposed to the American Declaration of 1776 or the French Declaration of 1789). Images of the quake, she argues, had a “startling effect”: not only did they “initiate a lively, international debate about the nature

of the human subject and its place in the world, but they also brought into consciousness a global empathy with the sufferings of distant strangers, a kind of *tele-pathos* derived in large part from the aesthetic encounter with the catastrophic event” (Sliwinski 19). This aesthetic encounter of tele-pathos is one grounded in a distant social relation mediated by the image. In this sense, the early mass circulation of images of disaster encouraged the development of a new consciousness grounded in empathic identification, a new optic whose gaze was directed toward the victim and a corresponding global subject we might call the spectator-witness or the post-traumatic subject.

Within this new paradigm the role of the witness is no longer to simply provide first-hand knowledge but to acknowledge and empathize with second-hand accounts. However, in her critique of postmemory, Elke Heckner points out that the risk of empathic identification is the appropriation of experience and the substitution of the spectator for the victim. According to Olivier Chow, Jaar avoids these “banal trappings of empathy” by trapping the viewer within the “historical nature of the ‘document’” (3-4), where the document is defined by the “contextualization and integration of image and event beyond and against the politics of global information” (1). The politics of empathy contrasts with the historicity of the document. The evidence provided by the historical document in Jaar’s re-presentation is not that there is a child starving in Sudan, or that masses are being murdered in Rwanda. The evidence provided by Jaar’s installation is of a different order: it is that social injustice and the production of photographs are structured by the same capitalist social relations. The photograph effaces its own material existence by presenting itself as a direct reflection of unequal social relations; as a result, it conceals its conditions of production and instead transforms them into the social

relations of witnessing for which it acts as a window. In other words, images of violence and suffering hide their own participation in the violence they claim to transparently represent. In more concrete terms, Kevin Carter's photograph of the young girl starving in Sudan effaces its own participation in the process of primitive accumulation within which both the starving child and her image appear to be external to logic of capitalist expansion. Photography, however, registers the forces of primitive accumulation. Through photography, these forces are converted from a material relation concerning property into a scopic relation between distant individuals named "witness" and "victim," who occupy vastly uneven subject positions within the temporal and spatial coordinates of the capitalist landscape.

In the context of memory politics, Jaar's work extends the impulse of his contemporaries by demonstrating the ways in which traditional hierarchical relations (between history and memory, for example) are not simply reversed, but also register through this reversal a shift in the logic of primitive accumulation. Whereas both Brodsky and Boltanski create archives of this reversal through the recovery of historical memory, Jaar exposes the ways in which this movement of memory from the margins to the center necessarily participates in the very logic it resists. By drawing our attention to the image as both a reflection of the social relations of exploitation and a product of these same relations, Jaar forces us to acknowledge the ways in which the exploitative relations of the capitalist and the worker are re-presented in the image economy as an ethical relation between victim and witness. Recalling Diedrichsen, the "migration of the old subversive [terms] from the margins and the bottom of society to its center and to the top" (20) simply reflects a shifting of values from one locus of signification to another rather than

an overturning of the logic that enabled such a shift. Jaar forces the viewer to confront the contradiction between the photographer's position as a labourer in the information economy and the photographer's position as a witness to the effects of capitalist exploitation, which are historically simply placed under the sign of catastrophe or atrocity or disaster.

Ultimately, Jaar's work demonstrates that those attempts to negate cultures of forgetting through the reification of historical memory not only potentially elevate the objects of memory to the status of fetishes but also inevitably participate expansion of capital.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Memory art is generally understood by art critics and cultural theorists in one of two ways: on the one hand, it is conceived as a means for collectively working through historical traumas; on the other hand, it is understood as a response to the cultures of obsolescence and disappearance that characterize global capitalism. In both cases, memory art appears to serve as a mode of resistance to the cultures of forgetting that maintain hierarchies between those who possess knowledge and power and those who do not. On the contrary, I have argued that the installations of memory artists Christian Boltanski, Marcelo Brodsky and Alfredo Jaar are archives of primitive accumulation that expose the ways in which memory art is complicit with the logic of capital. Put differently, these resistant archives, the words of Nicolas Holm, "[are] conceived of as a means to *retrieve* the *lost* histories of capitalism and exploitation" (6) while, at the same time, they "act to reproduce and disseminate the narratives of capitalist domination, which they seek to challenge" (7). I have used the work of each of these three artists in

order to illuminate the ways in which, in resisting the globalized culture of forgetting and obsolescence, memory archives work to reproduce and disseminate the narrative of historical recovery, which is both a response to and a reproduction of the so-called crisis of capitalism. Through their work I have illuminated three aspects of this dynamic: the rebirth of the auratic fetish, the reification of lost memory and the enclosure of images in mass culture.

Boltanski's installations most readily illuminate the ways in which the revitalization of the aura accompanies the preservation of authentic or everyday memory and the deconstruction of historical truth and its institutions. Brodsky's installations serve the socio-therapeutic function of restoring the social bond while, at the same time, resisting the repressive and alienating narratives of national history. However, his work also begins to complicate the straightforward relationship between the abstract ideals of human rights and the material remains of historical violence. The shift in focus between *Good Memory* and *Nexus* toward a more explicit materiality further highlights tensions between the role of photography as a fetishistic substitute for missing social relations *and* as the material remains of historical violence. For both artists, the revitalization of the aura—which takes shape through the deconstruction of history and the reification of lost memory, respectively—is partly an effect of the incorporation of old technologies and modes of production into the content of the work, and partly an effect of the metaphoric logic of photography through which it serves as a substitute for the lost social relation.

Of the three, Jaar's installations are the most inherently dialectical, enacting tensions between the production, circulation and enclosure of images and the emergence of the new subject position of the spectator-witness who has become the paradigmatic

subject of global capitalism.<sup>57</sup> Jaar's withholding of images of violence in installations like *Lament of the Images* and *Real Pictures* echo the absence of these kinds of images in mainstream news media and popular culture, while his exhibition of Kevin Carter's controversial photograph illuminates the paradoxical position of the photographer in the often opposing roles of labourer and witness. In his work the original is transformed into its opposite: the enclosure of images becomes an exposure of their absence; the exhibition of suffering becomes a critique of the discourse of witnessing. In doing so, Jaar demonstrates the ways in which the absence of images of violence and suffering in contemporary culture accompanied by the collapse of spectatorship (a relationship between object and subject) with the social relations of witnessing (a relationship between subjects mediated by objects) reflects a shift in the logic of capitalist accumulation in which the image becomes the ground for the new enclosures.

In memory art, the aura is renewed through the dual processes of reification and identification. Spectators of memory art are absorbed by the work, which has the fetishistic quality of becoming human.<sup>58</sup> The result is that the remains of historical

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<sup>57</sup> In some ways, this "spectator-witness" is the progeny of the "citizen of the world" that emerged in the mid-18th century, also a detached observer in a foreign world.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Fried anticipates this in his critique of minimalism, a movement he associates with objecthood, or the new theatricality of the object. For Fried, objecthood is from the beginning in conflict with the nature of art. Valorizing the condition of non-art, "the literalist [Minimalist] espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing more than a plea for a new genre of theater; and theater is now the negation of art." Opposing the structure of painting, whose part-by-part construction undermines its potential for wholeness,

violence (the remnants of primitive accumulation) that stand in the place of the missing victims are mistaken for the social relation. At the same time, the spectator assumes the position of Benjamin's expert and, through the discourse of witnessing, comes to manage the "shock effects" of primitive accumulation in a state of distraction that obscures the "fetishistic substitutes" by which shock is domesticated. As a result, memory art contains an internal contradiction that repeats the contradictions of capital. Its contribution to the re-enchantment of memory, which merges the intensity of experience with the return of the repressed, conflicts with its participation in a culture of auratic fetishism whose decline, which Benjamin associated with advancements in commodity production, has produced an "authentically Marxian form of alienation" (Mioyasaki 432). Ultimately, in resisting the fetishization, aestheticization and trivialization of historical violence, memory art participates in the reproduction of capitalist alienation in a purer form in which the logic of speculation<sup>59</sup> (which comes from the Latin root *specula*, literally,

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Minimalism sought a new object whose immense scale (shape as such) would saturate the spectator's field of sensation. In this sense, the new theatricality of the object, associated with the quest for presence and duration signified by the experience of the turnpike (discussed by both Fried and Krauss), had precisely the opposite effect. Instead of achieving the purity of objecthood, Minimalist art's theatricality (and anthropomorphic tendencies) effaced the object of the work of art altogether (which Krauss links to the "intensity of experience" characterizing minimalist art).

<sup>59</sup> This is not only the logic of finance capitalism, but also new movements in philosophy like speculative realism.



“watchtower,” or *specere*, meaning “to look”) has saturated the entire realm of social relations.

## Chapter 4

### 4 The Image in Crisis: The Controversial Case of Four Photographs from Auschwitz

Four photographs included in the Paris exhibition *Memoire des camps* in 2001 became the site of sudden controversy amongst a handful of French intellectuals. Taken by the Jewish *Sonderkommando*—prisoners employed by the SS to assist with extermination—the four photographs in question transmit a rare insider’s perspective on the excessive violence of the camps. The controversy was sparked by French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman’s contribution to the exhibition catalogue in which he comments extensively on the remarkable existence of these images “in spite of all.” His commentary provoked immediate, negative responses from Gerard Wajcman and Elizabeth Pagnoux whose scathing critiques were published shortly thereafter in *Les temps modernes*,<sup>60</sup> a prominent French journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre and currently edited by Claude Lanzmann, the producer of the monumental 9-hour film *Shoah* that documents testimonies of Holocaust survivors. This particular debate between Wajcman and Pagnoux and Didi-Huberman is part of a longer standing debate on the so-called

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<sup>60</sup> These articles, which appeared in the same issue, were respectively titled “De la croyance photographique” and “Reporter photographe à Auschwitz.”

unrepresentability of the Holocaust;<sup>61</sup> Moreover, as Didi-Huberman suggests, it also tells us something significant about the “*thought of images* today,” which he argues “comes to a great extent from the political field itself” (Didi-Huberman 57; emphasis in original). While the specificity of phrases like “thought of images” and “political field” is left conspicuously undetermined, Didi-Huberman’s statement nevertheless provides a point of departure for considering the iconoclastic impulse of critics such as Wajcman and Pagnoux as the effect of a particular structure in which atrocities such as the Holocaust are rendered *unrepresentable*. Departing from the discourse of the unrepresentable as the ineffable or unspeakable, in this chapter, I offer a treatment of the debate that reads the repression of images as a *mode of enclosure* that registers the ongoing process of primitive accumulation. Reversing Didi-Huberman’s observation, I argue that *the thought of politics today comes to a great extent from the visual field*. In doing so, I maintain that the iconoclastic gesture of Didi-Huberman’s critics (and their predecessors) both negates and reproduces the logic of enclosure at the heart of capitalism in which the four photographs are embedded from the outset.

Following a brief summary of the debate, I reconsider Didi-Huberman’s claim that these famous photographs are a “symptom of *psychic resistance*” (64) by exploring the historical relationship between the photograph and the symptom. The concept of the symptom, I argue, which has come to feature prominently in contemporary discourses on both politics and trauma, is inextricable from the development of a new mode of thought

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<sup>61</sup> For a good overview of this debate, see Sylvie Lindeperg’s essay “*Night and Fog: Inventing a Perspective*.”

corresponding roughly with (yet ultimately preceding) the invention of photography. This photographic mode of thought or consciousness, characterized by notions of rupture and exposure, underlies the birth of trauma theory and the current social relations of witnessing that characterize contemporary memory movements. In the next section, I discuss the modern museum as a site for processing the remains of historical violence, a fact supported by the emergence of what Susan Sontag calls “atrocities exhibition” (Sontag 19), in which documents of horror are introduced into the space of art. Finally, I turn to Tony C. Brown’s discussion of the time of globalization in order to think through the ways in which the photographic image operates as both a metaphor of enclosure and an allegory of primitive accumulation. Brown describes the two models of presentation found in Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation: entombment and prefigural.

Associating the four photographs with the second model and the iconoclastic impulse with the first, I argue that as the residue of primitive accumulation the four photographs function allegorically to rupture or expose the logic of entombment represented by the broader institution of the museum exhibition and enforced by the iconoclastic gesture of Didi-Huberman’s critics. Ultimately, I argue that the photographs’ inherent violence calls attention to the paradoxical existence of photographs as both historical documents and aesthetic objects, a consequence of what Svetlana Alpers names “the museum effect”—that is, a way of seeing according to which cultural artifacts are transformed into works of art. Accordingly, I suggest that the photographs’ dialectical intervention (which Didi-Huberman attempts to elucidate in the second half of his book) is constituted by the contradictions they illuminate between opposing modes and spaces of representation. In this context both the fetishization and the prohibition of the four photographs reflect a

contradiction internal to a structure in which repressive and reifying impulses are effects of the structure, which is itself unnamable in its entirety and so assumes the name of the unrepresentable.

## 4.1 The Debate

The photographic sequence that appeared in *Memoire des camps* amid the now-iconic photographs of concentration camps taken both during and after the liberation by well-known photographers such as Lee Miller and Margaret Bourke-White is composed of two distinct pairings: one depicting the scene just prior to the moment of gassing and another depicting the scene immediately following.<sup>62</sup> The first pairing begins with a slightly blurred image of the incineration pits at Auschwitz crematorium V (figure 14), which was shot from the protective cover of the gas chamber, the paradoxical darkroom (Didi-Huberman 11). Through what appears to be a door or a window, we encounter masses of

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<sup>62</sup> In a chapter entitled “Archive-Image or Appearance-Image,” Didi-Huberman problematizes this apparently straightforward chronology of the sequence, where he refers to a “margin of indetermination” contained by the fact that the remains of one image (the stand of birches with the convoy of women) can be detected along the edge of another image (the first shot of the incineration pits). These remains suggest that the sequence of the images must be reversed. However, Didi-Huberman points out that their rearrangement would contest the chronology presented in the testimony of David Szmulewski. Maintaining Szmulewski’s chronology he suggests that the “original” document (a contact sheet for which the negatives were lost) may already be a reversal, in which case the chronology of the photographs would match the narrative of Szmulewski simply by reversing the images themselves and not their sequential arrangement. In this article, I maintain the sequential mapping assumed by Didi-Huberman, which was the same mapping presented in the exhibition *Mémoire des camps*.

bodies, piled high, being systematically transferred by the *Sonderkommando* from chamber to pit. A plume of whitish-grey smoke rises in the background and a stand of trees is visible in the distance. The second image (figure 15) is similar to the first, only it is slightly closer and somewhat clearer: “[e]mboldened, [the photographer] changes direction and advances” (12). Through the opening we see the gravelly texture of the path leading once more to the incineration pits, we witness the “everyday work” of the *Sonderkommando*, the familiar “gestures of the living” which relate the weight of the dead (13-14). The first image in the second pairing captures a stand of birch (figure 16). At first glance, the convoy of women is barely noticeable in the bottom left-hand corner. Upon closer inspection, however, we see the harried caravan at the base of the immense stand, “already undressed, ready to enter the gas chamber” (16). The fourth and final image (figure 17) is somewhat abstract, shot upward, gazing into the silhouetted branches of a birch “dazzled by the sun” (16).

The ensuing controversy, which would become the basis for Didi-Huberman’s book *Images in Spite of All*, centers on his reference to the photographs as “survivors” (46). Incensed by this claim, Wajcman and Pagnoux charge Didi-Huberman with simultaneously fetishizing and deifying the images—in short, the perverse worship of false idols. According to his critics, he not only commits the crime of “elevat[ing]...the image to the status of a relic” (52), but in referring to the images as survivors he both overrides and trivializes the verbal testimonies of the true (human) survivors. Didi-Huberman’s response to these charges establishes a compelling link between two forms of resistance. As I indicated at the outset, he claims that while the production of these photographs in late summer of 1944 was clearly “an act of political resistance,” the



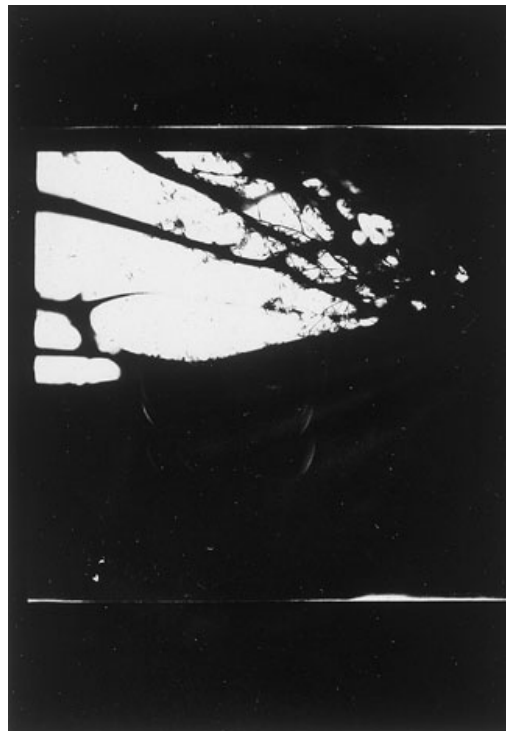
**Figure 5: Sonderkommando Photo #1**



**Figure 6: Sonderkommando Photo #2**



**Figure 7: Sonderkommando Photo #3**



**Figure 8: Sonderkommando Photo #4**



hostile reception of these images more than fifty years later is surely “a symptom of *psychic resistance*” (64; emphasis in original). This angle begs us to consider the ways in which the historical violence depicted by the photographic image articulates with and produces the language of traumatic experience. Indeed, it forces us to confront the modes by which the field of political resistance is conditioned by the production of violent images that help to establish the grammar of trauma.

Didi-Huberman opens his initial treatise with an appeal: “Let us not invoke the unimaginable” (3). His central theoretical axiom is this: *we must imagine and images help us do this*. In the case of these particular images, Didi-Huberman argues that we must recognize four vital facts: 1) against all odds, the images appeared; 2) their appearance is a refutation of the Nazi program of total annihilation; 3) the images embody a dialectical space of contradiction; 4) they are “survivors” in the sense that they maintain the image of humanity by invoking the “*similar, the fellow human*” (27; emphasis in original). Didi-Huberman issues the imperative to imagine as a direct critique of the discourse of the unimaginable or the unrepresentable, which re-inscribes the fact that the “forgetting of the extermination is part of the extermination” (22). The iconoclastic impulse of his critics reinforces this forgetting, he argues, through two polarized modes of historical engagement: through an aestheticism that “fails to recognize history in its concrete singularities” and through a historicism that “fails to recognize the image in its formal specificities” (26). Accordingly, he argues that the production of these photographs *in spite of* the absolute ban on photography that would ensure the forgetting of the extermination not only resists the program of total

annihilation but also, echoing one of the axioms of contemporary trauma theory, demonstrates the ways in which images appear where words seem to fail.

There can be no doubt about Didi-Huberman's fetishization of the images. His description of them as survivors invoking the fellow human assumes that the formal qualities of the image approximate the human form in such a way that the presence of the image, which carries traces of its lost reference, the fellow human, captures something essential about humanity. The image of the fellow human incites the imagination, which counteracts the inevitable tendency to forget. For Didi-Huberman, imagining is the dialectical companion to forgetting, where forgetting reinforces the abstraction of history, its relegation to the past, and eclipses the formal properties of the image, subordinating it to historical content. For Didi-Huberman's critics, the image must correspond to the totality of the situation; however, it is a less than adequate representation that fails to represent the totality.

Reversing his detractors' charges of fetishism, Didi-Huberman argues that their totalizing position exemplified by the statement "There are no images of the Shoah" operates as a "discursive fetish" (103). His critics' assertion echoes the earlier position of Claude Lanzmann who, in his debate with avant-garde filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard said: "if I had found an existing film...made by an SS that showed how three thousand Jews...died together in a gas chamber...I would have destroyed it" (qtd in Didi-

Huberman 95).<sup>63</sup> In response, Didi-Huberman remarks: “It is significant that the film strip imagined by Lanzmann in order to establish the authority of his own work...seems like an abstract link, a phantasm that has been tossed between the two photographic sequences of August 1944, that is, between the images of the ‘before’ (the women being led to the gas chamber) and those of the ‘after’ (the incineration pits)” (97). This imaginary fragment enacts a double substitution. On the one hand, it claims to represent the unrepresentable moment of death, standing in for the millions of Jews that died anonymously in the gas chamber. On the other hand, as a representation of the absent moment of death—the missed encounter—it stands in for *all* images of the Shoah, the missing Image, and thus for its total and utter unimaginability. Operating both metaphorically (as an image of the dead) and metonymically (as an image of the Shoah), Lanzmann’s snippet of film signifies a fetishization of the “all-image” achieved through the absolute negation of images in general. The phantasm, a negative presence, stands for the missing dead, the anonymous collective, the impossible totality. The negative presence stands in for the all-image; and yet the totality of missing images is always out of sync with the totality of missing bodies.

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<sup>63</sup> This statement was originally published in the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* on March 3, 1944. In her book *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust*, Libby Saxton relates the full quotation in English: “If I had found an existing film—a secret film because it was strictly prohibited—shot by an SS man showing how 3,000 Jews, men, women, and children, died together, asphyxiated in the gas chamber of Crematorium II at Auschwitz; if I had found that, not only would I have not shown it, I would have destroyed it. I am not capable of saying why. It goes without saying” (Saxton 128).

The debate regarding the four photographs taken by the *Sonderkommando* is framed by the notion of the unrepresentable, which contains an implicit assumption: that certain events or experiences fall outside of traditional modes of representation. This assumption takes the event or experience itself as a starting point for imagining possible modes of ethical and political engagement. As a result, the position taken by Didi-Huberman's critics, which is framed by the rhetoric of authenticity, adheres to a notion of unrepresentability that *preserves* narrative as the only mode of representation appropriate to the degree of historical violence exemplified by the Holocaust, as the only form of mediation that can approximate the unrepresentable elements of the situation. Together, the discourse of the unrepresentable and the fantasy of historical recovery advocated by Lanzmann, Wajcman and Pagnoux is based on a faulty commitment to an older logic that corresponds with a previous mode of production and a prior mode of social organization in which the (spoken) word reflects experience more directly, more *immediately* than the image.

## 4.2 The Symptom

In his analysis of the "violence of the controversy," Didi-Huberman presents the four photographs as symptoms, writing: "they are a *historical symptom* capable of disrupting, and reconfiguring, the relation habitually maintained by the historian of images with his or her own objects of study" and "a *theoretical symptom*, which precisely because disputed, clearly shows that it has shaken *all of us* throughout our common history" (57; emphasis in original). As a historical symptom the photographs disrupt the usual relationship between the subjects and objects of History; as a theoretical symptom the photographs produce a contradiction between the abstract body of historical knowledge

and the material remainders of this abstraction at its most fundamental and destructive level. While Didi-Huberman considers the appearance of these particular images as both theoretical and historical symptoms, historically, the photograph played an instrumental role in the conceptualization of the psychic symptom. Within contemporary trauma theory the symptom and the photograph share a common genealogy that informs classical psychoanalysis. Freud's early work on hysteria led him to draw explicit parallels between the (dream) image and the (hysterical) symptom. Both, he discovered, are the result of repression: of a latent desire or wish in the case of dreaming and a pathogenic idea in the case of hysteria.<sup>64</sup> Since Freud, the idea that images point toward the latent content of a repressed memory has become a founding principle of trauma theory. From this perspective, as a theoretical and historical symptom, the (four) photograph(s) would seem to emerge as a metaphorical "return of the repressed"<sup>65</sup> in which repressed memories (of historical violence) stored in the collective unconscious enter social consciousness in distorted form. As symptoms, the four photographs are distortions, or lie-images (in Didi-Huberman's words) that necessarily lead us astray (according to Wajcman and Pagnoux), confusing and perverting our understanding of the gravity of the violence that took place.

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<sup>64</sup> These observations are illuminated in two of Freud's primary texts: *Interpreting Dreams* (1899) and *Studies in Hysteria* (1895).

<sup>65</sup> In Freudian terms, the return of the repressed refers to the ways in which repressed sexual impulses return in the form of jokes, slips of the tongue (famously known as Freudian slips) and dream images.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth interprets the symptom, which in classical psychoanalysis takes the form of a dream image, as an attempt to master what was not consciously experienced at the moment of impact (Caruth 62). Adapting Freud's concept of traumatic repetition to the study of literature, Caruth illuminates a rupture in consciousness that characterizes the overwhelming experience of trauma. In psychoanalytic terms, she explains, consciousness is conceived as "a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects the organism by placing stimulation within an ordered system of time" (61). Accordingly, "what causes trauma is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (61). The symptom is that particular sign which points toward the traumatic experience that remains as yet latent, brewing beneath the surface, spoken by the body in the form of tics, slips and jokes. Transferring the language of psychic experience (in which the symptom is inscribed on the body as text) to narrative representation, Caruth argues that what I will call the "trauma text" constitutes a symptom of belated experience. The trauma text in this form is "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available," a wound that "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (4). Highlighting the disjuncture between sight and knowledge, she argues that, as a consequence, the "most direct seeing" of historical violence necessarily produces an "absolute inability to know it," which "paradoxically [must] take the form of belatedness" (92). Here, trauma appears as transhistorical, existing equally at all times and places in the very same way, as fundamental aspect of the human psyche.

Drawing on Caruth's theory of belatedness, cultural theorist Ulrich Baer announces trauma as a "disorder of memory and time" (Baer 9). A disruption of the proper ordering of experience according to the hegemony of linear time, the traumatic symptom did indeed appear at the very moment when time itself was being standardized. Baer further identifies explicit structural homologies between photography and trauma; most significantly, both register a disjuncture between seeing and knowing that arises from the incapacity for an event to be immediately or adequately integrated into a "coherent mental, textual, or historical context" (10). In contrast to the commonly held idea that photographs forever preserve a "frozen moment" from the past (2), Baer insists, rather, that they resemble what Walter Benjamin conceives as a sudden shock or rupture. While the preservationist vision of the photograph, argues Baer, is based on the historicist or "Heraclitean" model of "history-as-narrative" (2), "the countermodel of the explosive event," which he terms the "Democritean" model, is grounded in a "notion of history that imagines time, in a striking image, as an invisible *event*" (4; emphasis in original). (This Democritean model falls within an epistemology of rupture that characterizes not only psychoanalytic but political discourse as well.) Not surprisingly, "[t]he emergence of this countermodel of the 'sudden event'," he argues, "can be traced back to a particular moment in modernity that roughly coincides with the invention of photography" (4). In this sense, photographs not only have the capacity to "capture the shrapnel of traumatic time" but, in contrast to Barthes' claim that photographs block memory (Barthes 91), Baer argues that they can actually "provide special access to experiences that have remained unremembered yet cannot be forgotten" (Baer 7).

Baer argues that the temporal link between photography and trauma is what led Freud to (however briefly) employ the “metaphor of the camera [which he eventually dismissed] to explain the unconscious as the place where bits of memory are stored until they are developed, like prints from black-and white negatives, into consciously accessible recollections” (Baer 9). Despite Freud’s ultimate dissatisfaction with the camera metaphor, Baer argues that it nevertheless points to important structural parallels between trauma and photography that involve not only the disruption of historical time, but also the blocked transformation of an event or experience into a memory (9). Freud’s use of the camera metaphor reflects the development of a particular consciousness expressed in terms of psychic experience that corresponds with certain technological advancements in visual culture. Thus, while the language of fetishism and the symptom undoubtedly invite us to interpret the iconoclastic gesture of Didi-Huberman’s critics as a symptom of psychic resistance, this reduction of the structures of repression to the individual psyche wields the unfortunate potential to overlook the important ways in which our understanding of the psyche has itself been conditioned by changes in the modes and forces of production. Resisting, as it were, the urge to read the disavowal of the image exclusively in terms of the psychic response of individual actors, we must instead consider the ways in which this new mode of thought implicit in concepts like Walter Benjamin’s optical unconscious and Jacques Rancière’s aesthetic unconscious, illuminates the historical specificity of the iconoclastic impulse of our current era.<sup>66</sup> For

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<sup>66</sup> The idea of iconoclasm is not new; however, my argument here is that it does take on a new significance after the Holocaust. Historically, iconoclasm has referred to the



this reason, we must recognize the production of the symptom as a historical rather than ontological fact.

The development of what Benjamin calls the optical unconscious, which coincided roughly with the invention of photography, transposed the language of psychoanalysis into the realm of aesthetics and politics. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” Benjamin links the production of the optical unconscious to the decay of the aura of the work of art.<sup>67</sup> Whereas the optical unconscious is an effect of photography’s capacity to get closer to things and to slow things down, the aura of the work of art, he argues, is a “strange tissue of space and time”

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destruction from within of religious images, symbols and doctrines. It is often linked to extreme resistance and conservative impulses, which accompany periods of drastic social change. The conservative impulse during and after the Holocaust has taken the form of an absolute prohibition of all images within the context of violence and suffering. This secularized rendition of the iconoclasm is in many senses consistent with Benjamin’s observations regarding the decay of the aura, which reflects the movement of the art object from the sphere of ritual tradition or the religious to the sphere of mass reproduction or the political.

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin’s conceptualization of the aura, which he first introduced in an earlier essay by the name of “The Little History of Photography” (1931), is somewhat elusive and inconsistent. At times, it refers directly to the work of art and its historical embeddedness within the realm of ritual tradition; at other times, it refers to the particular presence of the live actor in the age of mass mediation. Despite his various conceptualizations, what becomes clear throughout his articulations is the ways in which the aura is related to an unmediated experience of presence that recalls Freud’s “oceanic” feeling.

(Benjamin “Work of Art” 23) determined by the artwork’s social and historical context. In other words, the aura in art is produced by its “embeddedness in the context of tradition” in which its “auratic mode of existence” is an effect of its “ritual function” (24). Echoing the Marxian categories of use and exchange value, Benjamin suggests that the aura of the work of art is analogous to “cult value,” while its decay is the aesthetic equivalent of a newly prominent “exhibition value” connected to the mass reproducibility of the photographic image. Accordingly, the uniqueness and permanence of traditional art is replaced by the ephemeral and transitory nature of mass art. As a result, “technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual” and grants it a potentially political existence (24). Accordingly, Benjamin conceives the “politicization of art” to be a response to the fascist “aestheticization of politics,” which is exemplified by the nostalgic return to classical art launched by the Nazis along with their corresponding condemnation of so-called progressive or degenerate art.<sup>68</sup> Despite the looming threat of capitalist exploitation and commodity fetishism, which Adorno deemed intrinsic to “the culture industry,” for Benjamin the capacity for the new technologies of photography and film to bring to masses closer to the work of art, to reveal the hidden details of everyday life through the democratization of the optical unconscious, harboured immense revolutionary potential.

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<sup>68</sup> Degenerate art was a term applied by the Nazi regime to most modernist art, including the artworks of Picasso and Matisse. It was also the name of an exhibition held in Munich in 1937 designed to denounce art that did not represent the ideals of German purity exalted by the phrase “blood and soil.” Artists whose work was labeled degenerate were harshly persecuted and often exiled.

While the revolutionary potential of Benjamin's optical unconscious appears to be the progeny of the psychic unconscious—"the camera introduces to us unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (Benjamin 37)—Jacques Rancière argues for a historical reversal. He insists that the Freudian unconscious was, in fact, only made possible through a prior revolution in the realm of aesthetics, which is "the revolution that moves the domain of the arts from the reign of poetics to that of aesthetics" (Rancière 7) and marks "the end of an ordered set of relations between what can be seen and what can be said, knowledge and action, activity and passivity" (21). This aesthetic revolution is based on the notion that there is "thought that does not think," which Rancière refers to as "mute speech" (31). The Freudian unconscious, argues Rancière, corresponds to one particular form of mute speech, "the model of the trace that is made to speak, in which the sedimented inscription of a history can be read" (62). The second form (which Rancière alleges Freud wanted nothing to do with) is carried on by art historians such as Didi-Huberman (who Rancière identifies as exemplary in this regard) and presents a "model, which no longer sees the 'insignificant' detail as a trace that allows a process to be reconstituted, but as the direct mark of an *inarticulatable truth* whose imprint on the surface of the work undoes the logic of a well-arranged story and a rational composition of elements" (63; emphasis added). This second model is, of course, the model informing Benjamin's dialectical image, which Didi-Huberman deploys in defense of his original claim when he maintains that the image is both truth and obscurity, icon and document, fact and fetish, the "dialectic stirring together [of] *the veil with its rip*" (Didi-Huberman 80; emphasis in original)—or, perhaps, the aura with its image.

As I suggested at the outset, we can reverse Didi-Huberman's claim that "the thought of images today comes to a great extent from the political field itself" to read: the thought of politics today comes to a great extent from the visual field itself. This reversal emphasizes the ways in which the production of a new photographic consciousness arising from changes in the forces and conditions of production illuminates corresponding shifts in the field of social and political struggle. Indeed, it is consistent with Benjamin's observation: "*Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception.* The way in which human perception is organized—the medium in which it occurs—is conditioned not only by nature but by history" (Benjamin 23; emphasis in original). In this sense, the current social relations of witnessing so prevalent within the contemporary landscape of aesthetics and politics cannot be thought apart from the development of this mode of thought within which the notion of the unconscious has played a central role. In any case, Didi-Huberman's constitution of the image-as-symptom creates a necessary isomorphism between the political and the psychic that hinges on a conception of rupture, an aesthetic form grounded in the structural homologies Baer discovers in photography and trauma.

What the discourse of rupture demonstrates in the context of the four photographs is the ways in which the symptom is itself organized by the new photographic zeitgeist that emphasizes the sudden exposure of that which was previously hidden to which the repression of the image provides an immediate response. Accordingly, we might argue that the discourse of the unrepresentable and the corresponding iconoclastic impulse are the concrete effects of a photographic logic through which historical violence is re-articulated as a grammar of the unconscious that structures the fields of trauma studies

and memory politics today. In this sense, the debate between Didi-Huberman and his critics highlights the ways in which the social relations of witnessing made possible by the new photographic consciousness play out in the political economy of representation as a conflict between the *mediated* and the *immediate*.

### 4.3 Exhibiting Primitive Accumulation

The museum exhibition is a space in which the material remains of cultural and historical knowledge are preserved. However, in the wake of avant-garde critiques, the space of this modern institution has (in the last fifty years or so) become a supremely ambivalent one. At least since the Holocaust, the place of the photograph within traditional spaces of exhibition has become equally fraught. Questions concerning the institutional authority and ideological function of the exhibition surfaced explicitly within the art world in the early part of the twentieth century through avant-garde movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism. Marcel Duchamp's introduction of everyday objects or "readymades" into the space of the exhibition, for example, was meant to challenge the authority of the museum in determining which objects are eligible for inclusion in the exhibition space and which objects ultimately become classified as works of art.<sup>69</sup> This institutional critique was reinvigorated following the protests of May '68, when conceptual artists such as Christian Boltanski and Annette Messager used personal and everyday objects in order to expose the museum's continued failure to adequately address activist concerns

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<sup>69</sup> Duchamp's readymades anticipated the widespread movement toward the collapse of art and life that would become the hallmark of the avant-garde and, eventually, "postmodern" art forms, such as performance, installation, etc.

regarding the elitism of this modern institution (DeRoo). These critiques have historically been directly related to broader critiques of social and political inequality, particularly in terms of division of labour and access to education. Under pressure from artists and activists alike, “[s]ince the 1980s,” Rebecca DeRoo argues, “international museums have felt challenged to be politically engaged” (3). The controversial debate surrounding the four photographs is inextricable from these broader cultural politics of the museum that continue to bubble beneath the surface of contemporary social and political movements. While artists like Boltanski appear, for some, to have provided a commendable solution to the problem of the unrepresentable, the controversy surrounding the *Sonderkommando* photos suggests that the problem of the unrepresentable, which implicates the space of exhibition, appears to be alive and well.

Despite Benjamin’s lauding of photography’s revolutionary potential, its inclusion in the contemporary museum remains fraught. The modern exhibition, which in fact preceded the invention of photography, is the original medium proper to the new photographic consciousness. While Benjamin associates the shift from cult value to exhibition value with the advent of technological reproducibility, it is important to recognize that mass reproduction did not create but rather *exposed* the material conditions of this shift. The exhibition itself not only played an important role in the tipping of the scales in favour of exhibition value, but it in fact anticipated the modern museum as one of the primary sites for processing the violence of primitive accumulation. It is certainly no coincidence that the cultural practices of exhibition, from the birth of the salon in 17<sup>th</sup> century France to the institution of the modern museum in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, emerged alongside the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The space of exhibition was

implicitly, from the outset, a mechanism for processing social and political contradiction, but its institutionalization within the space of the modern museum established the role it would come to play in processing the material remains of historical violence, from the cultural relics of colonized populations to photographs of atrocity. In this sense, the inclusion of the four photographs in the space of exhibition exposes the museum as a technology for processing the residue of primitive accumulation and foreshadows the proliferation of what are now called “memory museums” in the late twentieth century.

The name of the exhibition—*Memoire des camps*—suggests that we should understand the controversy regarding the four photographs in relation to the new field of memory politics to which the figure of the photograph remains central.<sup>70</sup> Closely related to the economies of trauma and testimony, memory politics are driven not only by claims for universal human rights but also by the desire “to save the dead from oblivion” (Beiner 431; cf. Arruti).<sup>71</sup> Within the field of memory politics, photographs often serves as a

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<sup>70</sup> The photographic image has been central to most social and political movements concerning memory. One particularly notable example is the public protests staged by the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (the Mothers of the Disappeared) in Argentina.

<sup>71</sup> In his analysis of Benjamin’s philosophy of history Ronald Beiner asserts: “To the question ‘Why does a revolutionary write history?’ Benjamin is able, on the basis of the ‘Theses,’ to answer: ‘To save the dead from oblivion’” (431). We hear echoes of this in Sontag’s passionate assertion that “[m]emory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead,” (115), Nerea Arruti’s intimation that photographs enact a “political resistance against oblivion” (115), David William Foster’s claim that images in contemporary art seek to “restore [the victims’] social subjectivity” (97).

metaphors of enclosure whose subsequent censorship reproduces the enclosures of memory (as common knowledge) that coincide with enclosures of common land—which, of course, for Marx established the ground of primitive accumulation. Historically, enclosures of memory required the absolute destruction of cultural knowledge, including the knowledge of ritual tradition condemned by Benjamin, through the violent annihilation of persecuted social groups. Italian autonomist Silvia Federici illuminates this primary or *immediate* mode of enclosure in her discussion of the European witch-hunts as a form of primitive accumulation. She demonstrates the ways in which the mass murder of vast numbers of women, midwives and widows in particular, destroyed a body of reproductive knowledge whose eventual institutionalization by the state ensured the control of women’s bodies for the reproduction of the labour force. Enclosures of memory through the destruction of traditional bodies of knowledge, a type of knowledge Michael Taussig calls “implicit social knowledge” (87), create a disenfranchised population whose social alienation is accompanied by their separation from the means of production through the enclosures of common land.

The entry of photography into the space of exhibition has produced a series of contradictions that arise from a profound tension between the photograph’s documentary and aesthetic functions. This is particularly pronounced with photographs of atrocity, which document the history of enclosure by exposing scenes of state violence; at the same time, these photographs appear as the material remains of this violence that represent, directly or not, the absence of the bodies of the dead. In contrast to the immediate enclosures of cultural memory through “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder” (Marx 874), disavowals of the photographic image operate as a secondary or



*mediated* mode of enclosure whereby the memory of destruction is enclosed through the privatization or eradication of material remains.

Responses to these forms of enclosure constitute the new field of postmemory, which Marianne Hirsch defines as “a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” (106). Not surprisingly, photography is an instrumental vehicle for postmemorial transmission: “Photography’s promise to offer an access to the event itself, and its easy assumption of iconic and symbolic power, makes it a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable” (108). Hirsch’s language echoes Didi-Huberman’s as well as some of the central ideas in trauma theory regarding the belated representation of the unimaginable. For Hirsch, photographs assist in the production of postmemorial forms through their capacity to *reembody* distant social relations. The new practices of postmemory, which often assume a ritual archival form, register the violent enclosures of memory through the return to embodied, if archaic, modes of knowledge transmission that reflect a previous mode of production in which memory was not primarily an image of the past but a set of practices that resonated in the forms of social relationality that structured everyday life.

As we will discover, in their existence as remnants of enclosure, the four photographs possess a figural content that depicts scenes of unprecedented violence whose materiality or pre-figural content is preserved in the silver halides transformed by exposure into the residue of primitive accumulation. In absolute defiance of the ban on photography, the photographs appeared as the *matter* of historical violence and the *substance* of political resistance. The materiality of the images is transformed into

symbolic value as they enter the political economy of representation, even as their material existence persists. Contradictions between the materiality of the photographs, their literal quality of *being exposed*, and their figurative dimension, their so-called capacity *to expose*, become particularly visible within the space of exhibition.

#### 4.4 Formal Contradictions

In order to more fully explicate the contradictions between the mediated and the immediate in the context of memory politics, I turn briefly to Tony C. Brown's discussion of the time of globalization, which emphasizes the relationship between the contradictory temporalities of primitive accumulation and the totalizing image of globalization, an image that (like Wajcman and Pagnoux's "all-image") ultimately "obscures the specific force of global capitalism's violence" (Brown 572). Brown begins with the assertion that the idea of globalization is misleading. He argues that, despite the fact that the concept of globalization highlights what Paul de Man called a "temporal predicament," it problematically advances a totalizing image or *gestalt*—the globe—as the ground for its unfolding. Paradoxically, the image of the globe<sup>72</sup> which characterizes globalization as an ever-increasing mode of "spatial completion" (573) is simultaneously foreclosed by the fact that the process of globalization, like capitalism, is constituted by

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<sup>72</sup> The image of the globe is, not surprisingly, also the foundation of Kant's cosmopolitanism, which provided aspects of the concept of universal human rights. For a full discussion of the relationship between the idea of a fully saturated globe and the development of cosmopolitan hospitality, see Seyla Benhabib's discussion of "Perpetual Peace" (1795) and "The Metaphysics of Morals" (1797) in her essay "On Hospitality: rereading Kant's cosmopolitan right" (2004).

its “own necessary incompleteness” (574). Accordingly, drawing on Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation, Brown explains that “Marx addresses a repression of time much like that which orients the notion of globalization-as-already-global: the positing of a circular condition that obscures the constitutive violence of capitalism’s self-extension and hence happening of time” (576).

Emphasizing the continuous violence of the separations and enclosures at the heart of primitive accumulation, Brown states that, as with globalization, “one ought not think that the violence entailed in these ‘previous’ acts ends with capitalism’s full flowering” (577). Accordingly, he continues:

For Marx it becomes the task of capitalism’s critic to track down and decipher in the present the violent marks of primitive accumulation—the marks of history one must suppose here and now. But if the marks of capitalism exist as they do, though a capitalist ideology wants to obscure them, why not simply describe them historically? Why is an act of *historical recovery* simply not enough, or even appropriate for Marx? (Brown 578; emphasis added).

For Brown the answer is simple: because Marx proffers a dialectical understanding of primitive accumulation, one that “stress[es] a certain temporality of historical violence that does not seal primitive accumulation off into the past” (578). One, in other words, that does not narrate the enclosures of memory as an historical condition but exposes their persistent repetition within the current state of global capitalism. While Brown’s discussion of primitive accumulation focuses on the politics of time inherent to the processes of globalization, his discussion of the spatial image of the globe as a totalizing

force that constitutes the “missing time of globalization” (573) can be used to illuminate the role the “all-image” in the enclosures of memory that constitute the “missing time” of traumatic experience.

Brown presents “two models of presentation” he discovers in Marx’s attempt to account for the residue of primitive accumulation that further reveal the relationship between representation and historical violence: the entombment model and the prefigural model. The first model corresponds to what I call the time of representation, which comprises the historicist element of Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation by which the violence of capitalism is sealed off into the past. In this model, argues Brown, capitalism’s exploitative drive “‘grows on the...tomb’ of the producer’s own labour” (Marx qtd in Brown 580). Here the tomb, which “becomes the vehicle that at once names its tenor (the violence that results in the remains of primitive accumulation) and hides it on the way to producing meaning (in this case capitalist accumulation)” (581), is a “substitute for the remains themselves” (580). This model indicates the ways in which enclosures of historical memory are structured by the time of representation in which the violence of capitalism is re-articulated as the story of an unrepresentable experience belonging to the past.

In the context of the four photographs, the entombment model illuminates the ways in which the photographs are conceived as substitutes for the remains of historical violence, the bodies of the dead themselves. The photograph is in this sense a metaphorical tomb that both contains the images of the dead and operates as a substitute in their absence. This metaphoric aspect of the photographic image as both the container and the surrogate is highlighted on both sides of the debate, in Didi-Huberman’s

allegedly fetishistic substitution of the photographs for the survivors as much as in Wajcman and Pagnoux's rejection of the photographs based on this substitution. The four photographs are dismissed according to the idea of the original; that is, that they are identified as inauthentic representatives or substitutes for a more authentic original event or experience. Their rejection not only resists but actually affirms the metaphoric logic of entombment not only by sealing the violence itself into the past, but also by concealing the memory of this violence through the repression of its material remains.

The second model illuminated by Brown corresponds to the time of terror and Marx's well-known claim that the history of class struggle is "written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (Marx qtd. in Brown 581). Brown refers to this model as the "non- or pre-figural model" in which the residue of primitive accumulation is "the matter of violence itself" (581). Revealing its dialectical dimension, the author explains that this model "highlights how capitalism can cognize its origins only by recourse to a figural [representational] language that obscures the material violence of those origins" (581). Noting the difficulty Marx had in finding the appropriate "conceptual tools" to "acknowledge the material [prefigural]" (581), Brown uses Marx's "optical analogy" (in which Marx analogizes the objectification of social relations with the objectification of the "subjective excitation of the optic nerve")<sup>73</sup> to demonstrate how

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<sup>73</sup> Marx deploys this analogy in the fourth section of Chapter One of *Capital*, entitled "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in order to illuminate the ways in which the value of commodities is perceived as an objective quality of the product of labour rather than a social relation between labourers. The optical analogy demonstrates

the prefigural is articulated through the figural in such a way that it draws attention to its “figural condition” while preserving its material dimension. The hieroglyph, argues Brown, is the form of representation proper to the prefigural. Referencing Marx, he states: “While for Marx a hieroglyph is figurative and obscure and thus something whose supposed meaning always demands deciphering, it is also a written mark that presents itself as a material impression on something as well as on the eye” (582). The residue of primitive accumulation (or *the matter of historical violence*) as “that which both enables and exceeds capitalism—becomes a principle of *disarticulation* through its *articulation* of capitalism with what it (capitalism) cannot take fully into (its own) account” (580; emphasis added). The residue of primitive accumulation becomes, in other words, a point of contradiction or rupture in the otherwise smooth functioning of global capitalism.

Brown’s discussion of the time of globalization, then, provides an alternative framework for analyzing the debate concerning the four photographs, one that emphasizes the ways in which both the debate and the existing frameworks of interpretation (psychoanalysis, trauma theory, memory politics) are themselves structured

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the ways in which the light emanating from an object, which excites the optic nerve, is perceived as an objective quality of the object rather than a mediator of the relation between the object and the eye. Ultimately, Marx finds the optical analogy inadequate, however, because in the production of commodities the direct relation between physical things is not present in the same way as with the excitation of the optic nerve. There is no relation, says Marx, between the “physical properties” of commodities and their “material effects.” For this reason, Marx seeks a more apt analogy, which he finds in the concept of religious fetishism.

by the logic of capitalism. Within Brown's reading of primitive accumulation, the four photographs can be understood as social hieroglyphs, which have both figurative and material dimensions. Indeed, they possess a representational content that depicts scenes of unprecedented violence whose materiality is preserved in a suspension of silver that materializes the abstract forces of primitive accumulation. In this sense, the four photographs are literally the "matter of violence itself." It is this prefigural condition of the photograph (which, for Brown, wields the potential to "derail" signification) that establishes its symptomatic constitution. The iconoclastic response adheres to the logic of enclosure that reduces the photographic image to its figural content and reflects the "ideological detachments that separate the working classes from any sense of historical causality" (576).

From this perspective Wajcman and Pagnoux's resistance to the four photographs extends the metaphorical logic of entombment through which the violence of primitive accumulation is sealed off into the past. The material remains of this violence—namely, the four photographs—are replaced by what Didi-Huberman calls the "all-image," the absent image of the Shoah that metonymically stands for its totality, which attempts to conceal the relations of production that constitute the memory of capitalism's violence. Didi-Huberman's alleged fetishization of the four photographs is no less reflective of the logic of enclosure; his anthropomorphic gesture in which he refers to the photographs as survivors equally conceals the social relations of production. However, unlike Wajcman and Pagnoux's absolute negation, Didi-Huberman's fetishization does not reduce them to their symbolic content but rather points to their material condition as the residue of historical violence. In his reference to their simultaneously figural and prefigural

dimensions, Didi-Huberman emphasizes their dialectical nature, their constitution as social hieroglyphs, or allegories of primitive accumulation, which mediate the current social relations of witnessing.

## 4.5 Conclusion

While the debate between Didi-Huberman and his critics is couched in the rhetoric of the unrepresentable, the persistence of the debate itself points to a more fundamental problem I call the problem of articulation, which has less to do with the idea that certain experiences exceed the possibility of representation and more to do with the apparent incompatibility of intersecting modes or spaces of representation as old logics articulate with new ones. The problem of articulation is broached in Brown's analysis of globalization when he argues that the dialectics of primitive accumulation proceed from "the articulation of line and circle," where the circle represents the figurative logic of enclosure and the line represents line represents the prefigural mark of exposure. Thus, the "tangential *articulation* that Marx isolates also proves a force of *disarticulation*. It holds off the attainment of unification in sublation or metaphor" (Brown 582). Primitive accumulation is the point at which the line and the circle meet, producing a rupture or a "disarticulating articulation," which Brown refers to as the production of time itself.

From the perspective of a disarticulating articulation, the four photographs highlight the clash of opposing modes of representation in two primary ways: as historical documents appearing in the traditional space of the art exhibition, and as eyewitness photos appearing alongside images produced by secondary witnesses. As a consequence of the museum effect, the four photographs are transformed from historical documents depicting scenes of extreme violence into objects of an aesthetic gaze.



Famously, Sontag cautions us to gaze warily upon photographs of atrocity such as these, which not only “anesthetize” but “transform history into spectacle” (Sontag 110). Indeed, the spectator’s gaze does nothing to reveal the ways in which the residue of primitive accumulation, *the matter of historical violence* itself, is converted within the space of exhibition into a spectacle in Debord’s sense of the term, where the “spectacle is not a collection of images” but a “social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord 1).

At the same time that it encourages the social relations of witnessing, the space of exhibition diminishes important differences concerning the conditions of production of individual images. From this perspective, the sensuous products of human labour attain an abstract exhibition value in much the same way that commodities attain an abstract exchange value in the space of the marketplace: “It is only by being exchanged that the products of labour acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values, which is distinct from their sensuously varied objectivity as articles of utility” (Marx 166). Disparate objects with varying social and historical contexts assume a universal value as aesthetic objects, which is distinct from their original value as historical documents. Photographs of violence snatched in the most harrowing of circumstances are displayed in the same sanitized space as early court paintings commissioned by noblemen, elaborate Elizabethan costumes preserved behind glass, aboriginal hunting tools both plundered and excavated and Duchamp’s readymade Bicycle Wheel. What remains invisible in this context is not the original experience of suffering, but the social relations of production whose invisibility is articulated as and articulates with the overwhelming experience of individual trauma.

Didi-Huberman attempts to capture the material significance of the four photographs in his imaginative re-constitution of their conditions of production. Drawing on both archival material and survivor testimony (rejecting the either-or position advocated by Pagnoux and Wajcman), he describes how a group of *Sonderkommando* produced the photographs under conditions of extreme duress; how the camera with which the photos were taken was likely smuggled into the camp in the bottom of a soup pot; how it “probably contained only a small piece of blank film” (Didi-Huberman 11); how the deliberately damaged roof of Crematorium V provided a way for one member of the group to keep watch under the auspices of productive labour while another snapped photos from the protective cover of the gas chamber; how the precious strip of film escaped from the camp “in a tube of toothpaste,” finally falling into the hands of the Polish resistance via the code name Tell (16). What this carefully reconstructive vision establishes is not an accurate historical picture of their production but rather what Walter Benjamin might call the “social fact” of their political existence (Benjamin, “The Little History” 520). Not only does their very existence violate the ban on photography, but it also reveals a particular set of social relations that characterizes a form of historical violence constituted by the particular conditions of primitive accumulation in the context of so-called globalization.

In the staging of a contradiction between their figurative and material dimensions, the four photographs disclose the problem of articulating historical violence through the exhibition, which reproduces the images as equivalent forms. However, the four photographs also operate as “social hieroglyphs” (Marx 167) whose material conditions are not only preserved in the exposed and transformed silver salts but in the everyday

gestures of the *Sonderkommando* that constitute the “material relations between persons” (166) that underlies the images’ fetishization and subsequent exhibition value. Efforts to repress the images through discourses of the unrepresentable reveal a disjuncture between old modes of representation and new relations of production characterized by a social economy of witnessing. The iconoclastic impulse, in this sense, corresponds to an outdated logic that frames the images’ violent content in terms of unrepresentability, a gesture that ignores the prefigural dimension of the photographs whose material existence reflects the particular relations of production in which the photographic image is itself the material residue of primitive accumulation.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Trauma in the Time of Capital: Allegories of Primitive Accumulation in the Literature of W.G. Sebald

*It takes just one awful second, I often think, and an entire epoch passes.*

—*W.G. Sebald*

W.G. Sebald concludes the first of a series of conversations between the protagonist and the narrator of his final novel *Austerlitz* with a striking metaphor. Tracing the history of Antwerp's fortifications, from Floriana to Breendonk—the latter of which was eventually transformed, says the narrator, into a “reception and penal camp” only to later become a “national memorial and museum of Belgian resistance following the Second World War—Austerlitz explains:

as architectural plans for fortifications became increasingly complex, the time it took to build them increased as well, and with it the probability that as soon as they were finished, if not before, they would have been overtaken by further developments, both in artillery and in strategic planning, which took account of the growing realization that everything was decided in movement, not in a state of rest (16).

From a certain angle, the metaphor of fortification echoes the operations of psychic defence. In a parallel metaphor, Freud famously articulated the operations of psyche in terms of defence mechanisms, or modes of neural fortification, and he conceived the

repressive apparatus as one such mechanism that protects the psyche from an overwhelming shock; but, of course, in Freud's account, repressed memory inevitably returns in the guise of a symptom which forms the basis of traumatic repetition.<sup>74</sup> It seems the logic of fortification is itself overwhelmed by the return of the repressed, haunted as it is by the threat of traumatic memory. However, assuming an anamorphic glance, the fortification becomes, perhaps more aptly, a metaphor not for psychic defence but for the irresolvable tensions between the enthusiasm of historical progress and the violence of capital accumulation, a reading supported by Austerlitz's claim that "somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins" (19). We recall that in the dialectic of history, capitalism, as Marx allegedly prophesied, contains the seeds of its own destruction. The duality of the metaphor, which marks the transition to a new master narrative—in which the rational institution of capital replaces the old institutions based on superstition and divine providence—and situates traumatic subjectivity squarely in the context of a new mode of production. Accordingly, we might read the metaphor of fortification as an articulation of the "blind violence" (Sebald 21) (of primitive accumulation) incarnate in our "mightiest projects" (14) (of capitalist production). I make a simple claim: Sebald's metaphor of

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<sup>74</sup> Repression, for Freud, is one of the central defence mechanisms by which the psyche prevents pathological desires from entering conscious thought and forces traumatic memories back into the unconscious. The repressive impulse is linked to what Freud calls the reality principle, which modifies the pleasure principle in the service of self-preservation. See Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

fortification urges us to depart from a notion of trauma grounded in the a-histories of traumatic repetition by relocating the production of traumatic memory within the broader history of capitalist accumulation.

At least since the early 80s, the notion of trauma as an overwhelming experience of violence that exceeds all forms of representation has become axiomatic. Beginning with Cathy Caruth's inaugural study of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) and Shoshana Felman's equally seminal work on testimony and witnessing, literary theorists have since conceptualized trauma nearly unanimously as a temporal rupture or "missed encounter" (Caruth 6) whose belated return assumes the form of a symptom, psychic or otherwise. However, as Susannah Radstone notes disapprovingly, in this perversion of the Freudian paradigm, traumatic experience is wholly identified with the so-called unrepresentable as opposed to an unconscious desire or fantasy and accordingly comes to serve (however erroneously) as a "general theory of representation" (Radstone 12). Through the effacement of trauma's pathological dimension—those fantastical associations through which the subject interprets the traumatic event—the former's historical dimension is lost. Trauma (capital-T) becomes a kind of "master signifier" through which the violence of history is articulated as a representation of subjective experience whose legitimate expression must adopt one of two poetic forms: testimony or allegory. Despite the realist and surrealist affinities, both constitute trauma as a historical rupture that leads to the relativistic insertion of opposing perspectives, in literal and figurative sense—literally, through its so-called belated representation in the testimonial form, and figuratively, through its pronounced reification (or personification) in the allegorical form. Often, in the trauma text, these distinct forms are entwined.

In the current paradigm of trauma, temporal rupture (belatedness or repetition) is a central aspect of traumatic experience. The temporality of trauma was already present in Freud, who granted the concept a psychic dimension. Deriving from the Greek for “wound,” trauma under the Freudian gaze was both revived and transformed into the symptomatic expression of repressed memory, which assumes the shape of traumatic repetition (whose homologous relation to the seriality of commodity production is most certainly not incidental). This new understanding of trauma was, in part, made possible by advances in modern technology; it is well known that Freud’s theories of the psyche were highly influenced by technological advances of the time, such as photography and railway travel, which would inform his theories of condensation and displacement.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Lacan makes the equation of condensation and displacement with metaphor and metonymy explicit in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud.” This transposition of terms corresponds to his reformulation of the unconscious in terms of language. Influenced by Saussure, Lacan generalizes the unconscious in this lecture by claiming that it is structured like a language. Under this new formulation, the particular psychic processes of condensation and displacement are transformed into their linguistic analogons; metaphor, with its property of substitution, corresponds to condensation, and metonymy, with its tendency for slippage, corresponds to displacement. In *Lacan and the Political*, Yannis Stavrakakis explains that “[Lacan’s] argument is that what Freud describes as formations of the unconscious...are produced through these mechanisms [metonymy and metaphor]” (Stavrakakis 58). The stakes of this transposition are specifically political. Stavrakakis answers the question “What is the relevance of metaphoric and metonymic production of meaning for the analysis of political reality?” by turning to Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* “where the construction of political spaces is revealed as governed by the principles of

Nearly a century later, under the influence of deconstruction, the concept underwent a further transmutation. Building on Freud's theory of traumatic repetition, Cathy Caruth, a pioneer in the field of what would eventually become trauma studies, defined trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). Trauma now is the effect of a temporal disruption that derives from the ultimate failure of representation, a rupture in the experience of time. Ulrich Baer attributes this temporal rupture to the lack of a "coherent mental, textual, or historical context" (Baer 10)—reflecting the sense, perhaps, of conceptual or mental displacement that gives rise to a feeling of anxiety. The initial temporal rupture is followed by a belated representation that appears in the visual register as a traumatic memory. It is for this reason photography and not railway travel has remained the contemporary exemplar of the temporality of traumatic experience, despite the devastating effects of high-speed collisions.

The main problem with the idea of trauma as belated representation and historical rupture is that it relies on a model of history in which the temporality of trauma

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equivalence and difference" (76). Metaphor is equated with logic of equivalence, which results in the "simplification of political spaces" (76) by reducing political struggle to the opposition of inverse terms that Laclau and Mouffe call the paradigmatic pole. Metonymy, on the other hand, corresponds to the logic of difference, which entails the "expansion of the syntagmatic pole of meaning, of the number of positions entering into a relation of combination" (77).



corresponds precisely to the unfolding of history, a model that Walter Benjamin (among others) has criticized for its association with a strictly ahistorical, “homogenous, empty time” (Benjamin 261). In this model, the traumatic rupture produces a break in time that is ultimately sutured by the belated process of working through, or *re-presenting*.

Historical time is redeemed; the progression of history is restored through the recovery of missing experience. In this model, history is the point of departure. The excess produced by the *violence of history* returns in the form of a traumatic or ghostly repetition whose disruptive potential is neutralized through narratives of closure and healing, or historical recovery. Social equilibrium is reinstated and the progression of history resumes, unaffected. Underlying material inequalities remain intact.

Here the recovery of memory is imagined as an antidote to traumatic repetition, on both subjective and historical scales. We encounter the current obsession with memory in all walks of cultural production, from site-specific museums to literature and art. On the side of the historical, this recovery of (collective) memory serves as a site of political resistance; on the side of the subjective, this recovery of (individual) memory is form of psychic healing. In both cases, the potential for recovery is placed under the sign of the therapeutic, collective or otherwise. Not surprisingly, literary representations of trauma are often read as catalysts for the recovery of memory, both social and psychic; but this language of recovery should point us, from the outset, to the relationship between historical memory and the property form. In the age of global capitalism, history has itself become an object of possession and repossession, revealing its capitalist recoding as both a form of property and an image of the social relations that constitute its property form. In other words, history has been commodified such that historical memory now

represents an authentic representation of the past. By recognizing history in the contemporary era as inseparable from the same capitalist mode of production that created the institution of private property, we can see history—or the specialized knowledge of the past—as a complicit with the logic of enclosure that separates or divorces the subject of historical violence from the violent structures of history.

We turn for a moment to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, a novel that bears all the markings of a trauma text, from the historical violence of slavery to the symptomatic expressions of individual characters. Through the language of trauma and historical recovery, it has been variously described as a “trope for recovered history” (Spargo 2002), the “ghostly return” of memory (Bhabha 1994), an invitation for ethical engagement (Brogan 1998), and a “truth claim” regarding the nature of historical violence (LaCapra 2001). Each of these descriptions assumes a revelatory logic in which the hidden meaning of traumatic experience is unearthed through the patient excavation of history and its narrative reproductions against which the ethical injunction of postmemory operates. However, in subscribing to this methodology of excavation-revelation, these interpretations maintain a mistaken fidelity to the emancipatory promise of historical recovery. The recovery of historical memory seems to hold a possibility for emancipation in the rendering of a universal truth obscured by traumatic repression, where the psychic operations of traumatic repression are mapped onto the social body in such a way that history is fully identified with the subjective experience.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> In her remarks on Cathy Caruth’s analysis, Shoshana Felman suggests that Freud was responsible for the transformation of all history into trauma: “In an exemplary analysis of

English literature and Latin American scholar Dean Franco provides an alternative reading of *Beloved* that situates it in direct relation to capitalism. His interpretation transcends the paradigm of historical recovery and reconstitutes trauma as an expression of the loss of property rights, in which property is precisely “where trauma and material possession meet” (Franco 425). Providing examples from the narrative, like the theft of Sethe’s milk, which overshadows the trauma of her preceding beating, Franco argues that the “relationship between bodily trauma and the body as property, mediated by the language of ‘rights’ and ‘claiming,’ points out the flexibility of concepts like injury and redress that constitute the broader field within which trauma occurs” (426). In other words, the language of property mediates a tension between embodied or lived experiences of violence and the rational structures within which this violent and

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Freud’s as yet uncharted legacy of trauma in his last work *Moses and Monotheism*, Caruth remarkably, paradigmatically, shows how the book itself—Freud’s testament on *history as trauma*—is the site of an inscription of a historical trauma: that of Freud’s dramatic departure from Vienna, then invaded and annexed by Hitler’s Germany” (Felman 174). Indeed, though Caruth doesn’t pen this phrase exactly (history as trauma), in her reading of Freud she asks: “What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma?” (Caruth 15). Her answer to this question is: “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (18). She concludes with the claim that “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (24). History, in Caruth’s analysis undergoes an essential transformation; the history of trauma in particular is transformed into history as trauma in general.

alienating experience takes place. Trauma becomes a placeholder for the experience of expropriation.

In Morrison's novel the relationship between capitalism and trauma is a product of the history of slavery, which is, not incidentally, deeply entwined with the history of capitalist expansion. In fact, in Marx's account of the birth of capitalism slavery is one of the five forms of extra-economic violence through which the processes of primitive accumulation take place, the others being conquest, robbery, murder and land enclosure (Marx 874). While the last provides an exemplary model for Marx's account of primitive accumulation, all five are essential to the production of private property and the transition to capitalism. From this perspective, *Beloved* can be read as an allegory of primitive accumulation in which the characters are personifications of the process itself and traumatic ruptures betray the colonial violence of capitalist accumulation. The privileging of property relations over psychic experience allows Franco to pose a fundamental question that remains otherwise buried: "is a psychoanalytically conceived effort of working-through adequate to the task when the experience of loss is mediated by the discourse of property?" (Franco 427). Understanding historical violence and its so-called traumatic effects as the products of a capitalist logic we might reformulate the question more generally, asking: how does narrative closure in the form of historical recovery, or as the repossession of an image of the past, endorse the very logic of enclosure upon which the capitalist mode of production is founded?

Following these observations, this chapter conducts readings of *Austerlitz* (2001) and *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), which place the politics of memory in the context of capitalist expansion and reproduction. The first section identifies two common

approaches to Sebald's work, which I call the affective and the poetic; the former derives from the perspectives of trauma theory and postmemory and their relationship to photography and time, and the latter considers the formal elements of the text and their relationship to world systems and natural history. The second section provides readings of *Austerlitz* and *The Rings of Saturn* that elucidate the dialectic between what I call telescopic and topographic modes of perception and their relationship to both capitalist expansion and the natural history of destruction. Specifically, through the dialectic of the telescopic (a "zooming out" that highlights the abstract space in which time accelerates) and the topographic (a "zooming in" that highlights the sensuous experience of built space in which time decelerates), these novels reframe the trauma text as an allegory of primitive accumulation in which the experience of alienation is reified in material sites of memory. Instead of serving as a form of "resistance against oblivion" (Arruti 115), memory in Sebald's work serves as a poetic medium that registers the generalized experience of alienation intrinsic to modern capitalism. I argue that *Austerlitz* in particular positions the rise of trauma (and its theorization) within a particular history of perception that is inseparable from the technological developments and forms of production that accompany the transition to capitalism. I conclude with a reading of Sebald's photographs in relation to this new allegorical framework, arguing that the photographs are not primarily signifiers of rupture but rather serve to further reify the profound sense of alienation that the recovery of lost memory is meant to redress.

## 5.1 The Critics' Perspectives

W.G. Sebald's writing has spawned an abundance of secondary literature. Stylistically very similar, his four novels seem to compose a single narrative. In each case, the story is

relayed by an unnamed narrator whose travels abroad invoke impressions of Goldsmith's "citizen of the world" and Baudelaire's famous "flaneur";<sup>77</sup> in each case, the text is interspersed with unlabeled black-and-white photographs and contains explicit references to time and memory. According to Mary Cosgrove, "Sebald is often described as a writer who endorses the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a historical event." However, signaling a mischaracterization, she notes that despite this attribution the "Holocaust is notably absent from the account of history's atrocities in the book" (Cosgrove 110).<sup>78</sup> Despite this

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<sup>77</sup> The trope of the itinerant world citizen contained in these historical figures of the modern cosmopolitan subject is, as Marx pointed out, deeply entwined with the production of bourgeois capitalism. While the siren call of communism "workers of the world, unite!" appears to have a specifically cosmopolitan character, in *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels claim that "[t]he bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country" (6). Cosmopolitanism, for Marx and Engels, is decidedly dialectical, associated on the one hand with the rise of bourgeois capitalism, and on the other hand with the transition to full communism.

<sup>78</sup> This observation echoes interpretations of Christian Boltanski's installation art. In a footnote in her chapter, "Museums as Political Centers," she documents two interviews in which Boltanski claims that his art is not about the Holocaust. In an interview with Georgia Marsh in 1997, Boltanski states: "My work is really not about the Holocaust, it's about death in general, about all of our deaths"; in an interview with Tamar Garb that same year, he reiterates: "My work is about the fact of dying, but it's not about the Holocaust itself...I don't think [my work] is about Jewish history. I often get this kind of misunderstanding with my work" (qtd in DeRoo, 219; fn. 17). In her introduction to a print collection on Boltanski, Catherine Grenier claims that his work will nevertheless "very quickly be accompanied by the memory of the Shoah" (55). Marianne Hirsch

absence, the spectre of the Holocaust looms large in Sebald's work, as it does in many memory-related struggles.

Critics generally approach the author's work from one two perspectives. Informed by developments in the relatively new field of trauma studies, the first uses concepts like postmemory and traumatic rupture to consider the ways in which Sebald's novels contribute to the study of collective memory and witnessing. As thinkers such as Ulrich Baer have demonstrated,<sup>79</sup> the history of photography intersects sharply with the history of trauma, and many critics have emphasized this intersection in Sebald's work. Both Maya Barzilai and Samuel Pane, for example, associate the photographs in his work with traumatic rupture. The former argues that not only do they "prompt the retrieval of memory or verify certain recollections" (206) but they also function as analogons of traumatic memory that allow "readers to gain, experientially, a sense of the disruptive effect of the belated return of the past" (207), while the latter argues simply "Sebaldian photographs disturb" and thus serve as a "locus of trauma" (Pane 38). This disruptive capacity of the photograph is a common theme in trauma theory. Such claims inevitably lead us to read the photograph as a symptom whose deciphering will reveal some transcendental truth. Marianne Hirsch uses *Austerlitz* to exemplify her concept

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would argue that this spectre of the Holocaust in second generation art and literature has to do with the ways in which it pervades the collective unconscious.

<sup>79</sup> I conducted a more in-depth discussion of Ulrich Baer's observations regarding the trauma of photography in chapter three, "The Image in Crisis."

postmemory, for which photography is a fundamental medium of transmission through which traumatic knowledge is inherited by the second generation. Concerned with the appropriation of victims' memories, Richard Crownshaw uses Sebald's photographs to amend rather than extend this concept of postmemory. For him, the mode of identification endemic to postmemory contains a "colonizing impulse" (Crownshaw 238). Accordingly, he argues unconvincingly that the photographs in *Austerlitz* should be read not as an "ethical relation to the oppressed or persecuted" but rather as an "ethical intervention in the work of postmemory" that reframes the photographs as "bequeathed" rather than appropriated. In either case, the photographs maintain their property form. M.G. Wilson and J.J. Long have separately rejected the photographs' postmemorial function outright, arguing that Sebald's images exceed both the "rhetoric of trauma" (Wilson 50) and the "question of memory" (Long 5). Wilson goes so far as to suggest that this rhetoric of "temporal shock" which emphasizes the photographs' "mnemonic properties" actually trivializes Sebald's "radical reconfiguring of time" (Wilson 50).

What are Sebald's photographs doing if not reflecting the logic of traumatic rupture? In the previous chapter, I argued that photographs operate both metaphorically (as a substitute for the lost object) and allegorically (as a reification of the logic of enclosure), functions that become particularly visible in relation to histories of violence. Their metaphorical dimension is what compels us to imagine them as mirroring the logic of trauma. Such an understanding fails to recognize the historical specificity of both the invention of photography and the generation of trauma. In other words, it is largely ahistorical. The allegorical dimension is what allows us to read the photograph dialectically, not by simply reversing the metaphorical aspect but by recognizing its dual



nature. In reading the photograph as an allegory of primitive accumulation rather than a metaphor of traumatic rupture, though, it would be too easy to simply replace the repressed memory of trauma with the repressed memory of an original accumulation, however tempting it might be to substitute the lost mother with the forgotten origins of capitalism. Rather, such a reconceptualization requires us to read the logic of trauma in relation to the logic of enclosure—or rather, as dialectical reversal of this logic. In both cases, the photograph is necessarily organized by the principle of the missing original. Reading photographs as traumatic analogies presents the notion of temporal rupture as ahistorical—the compulsion to recall and recognize repressed trauma is naturalized; but reading the photograph allegorically links the production of traumatic experience to the particular historical epoch in which the violence of enclosure prevails. In either case, the idea of the original is, as Rebecca Comay argues, a fetish.

The presence of photographs in Sebald's novels compels a traumatic reading that is enhanced by the novels' melancholic tendencies. Freud understood melancholia—that generalized affect of detachment and indifference—as a pathological form of mourning. While mourning involves a conscious attempt to assimilate the lost object, for the melancholic the loss is unconscious (Freud 127). The melancholic responds to the unknown loss by attempting to repossess the missing object that was never hers to begin with. Photography intersects with the processes of mourning in its capacity to represent the lost object. For political dissidents like the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina, this capacity of photography has served as a powerful tool for transforming individual mourning into collective political resistance. For subsequent generations, however, photography represents a lost object belonging to another time and place. The transfer of

historical grief to the second generation through photography and conceptual art contributes to a generalized disposition of melancholia that serves as a foundation for recent theories of postmemory and traumatic inheritance. What such an observation reveals is the degree to which this melancholic disposition represents an even more generalized sense of dispossession that emerges at the intersection of the histories of photography and capitalist expansion. In this vein, Comay refers to melancholia as “a way of *staging a dispossession* of that which was never one’s own to lose in the first place — and thus, precisely by occluding structural lack as determinate loss, would exemplify the strictly perverse effort to assert a relation with the non-relational” (89; emphasis added). In the case of historical violence this staging often refers to the dispossessions of history and memory. However, we could equally argue for its application to the history of dispossession itself in which the image of dispossession takes the form of traumatic experience.

The second approach not only focuses more closely on the formal elements of the text but also recuperates its dialectical constitution. The unrepresentable singularity of trauma is replaced with the dialectics of natural history. Mary Cosgrove, for example, argues that Sebald’s prose illuminates the “natural history of capitalism” through melancholic images, which transcend individual subjectivity and instead present a picture of “world history as a spatio-temporal whole” (Cosgrove 96). She provides a compelling analysis of the writer’s penultimate novel, *The Rings of Saturn*, in which melancholia is not an individual characteristic but a “basic problem of knowledge and understanding” (94), “a psychological theory founded on epistemology” (108). Despite the fact that melancholia appears as an individual characteristic, the narrator—himself one a number

of “melancholic intellectuals” (94)—attempts to “weave together an epistemological framework that would somehow capture the interconnectedness of persons, regions and events across space and time that would explain — more profoundly and truthfully than chronological historical narrative — the place of mankind in the late twentieth century” (94). Departing from the traditional perspectives of trauma theory in which melancholia is linked to “history as repeated catastrophe” (92), Cosgrove argues:

Melancholia in his work is not just a matter for the belatedly born, post-memorial leftover of the second generation. On the contrary, it exceeds the downbeat mindset of his various narrative figures, transcending the individual subject to represent a historically informed and challenging discussion on topics as varied, contemporary and interconnected as global capitalism, the planet’s weather systems and also genocide. (92)

In *The Rings of Saturn*, melancholia is thus part of what Cosgrove calls “the new ethical epistemology” in which the relationship between the natural environment (expressed through the pulsing of global weather patterns) and the history of war sets the “political struggle for more land, territory, *Lebensraum*...hand in hand with the perpetration of genocide” (110).

Max Pensky also employs the concept of “natural history” in his analysis of *Austerlitz*, which to his mind presents a “version of the natural history of ruin” that disrupts the “stability of the distinction between memory and forgetting” (Pensky 83). Paraphrasing Adorno, Pensky elaborates the idea of natural history as

a construction of concepts which like a chemical elective affinity become volatile in one another's presence and can, under suitable theoretical conditions, reverse polarity, such that nature, developed to the point of its most extreme significance, appears as the saturation of time—that is, as fully timely, hence historical being—where humanity as a historical phenomenon in turn appears under the sign of the historical repetition of catastrophe, and therefore as mythically recursive and static, that is, as nature. (Pensky 66)<sup>80</sup>

Like Cosgrove, through Sebald Pensky elaborates a spatio-temporal whole in which the antimony between nature and history is both amplified and subdued. This natural history performs a “reverse alchemy” by returning the product of capitalism to its primitive origins.

Neither account directly considers the role of photography in this dialectical transformation of natural history. And yet, Sebald's mobilization of the image seems far from incidental. Jessica Dubow's comparative study of the “case form” in the works of W.G. Sebald and Walter Benjamin lends some insight. Departing from the notion of photography as a “locus of trauma,” she considers how Sebald's images might contribute to a “different understanding of historical and temporal process” (Dubow 822). Like Benjamin's case studies of the Arcades, Sebald's case studies of people (the Ashbury's,

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<sup>80</sup> Note the similarity between Pensky's reference to the “historical repetition of catastrophe” and Cosgrove's “history as repeated catastrophe.” For Jacques Ranciere, this idea of history and/as catastrophe is profoundly anti-political. For his critique, see *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2007) and *The Future of the Image* (2009).

Casement and Conrad, FitzGerald) and places (Lowen) operate as dialectical images which drive the “the lure of empathic identification...out of the center of any form” (825). By “breach[ing] the temporal conditions for remembrance,” she argues, they demonstrate the “immediate co-presence of politics and time” (833). In “The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism,” Comay revisits Benjamin’s notion of the dialectical image, which echoes the traumatic antithesis between loss and restitution and anticipates the “entwined destinies of melancholia and fetishism” (92) that inform time’s “peculiar shattering” (95). The dialectical image, says Comay, “betrays utopia precisely by anticipating or imagining it, and in this flagrant violation of the theological ban on graven images would fetishistically disavow the alterity it would thereby acknowledge” (97). The image of totality that ends in redemption obscures the possibility for a patient excavation of the actual totality that the former obscures. Comay calls this the “commitment to imaginary unities — the phantasm of the revolutionary collective, of the golden age, of history itself as the site of specular condensation” (98). The dialectical image falls short of a natural history in that it necessarily succumbs to the illusion of a totality that reduces the totalizing system to a condensation of images amalgamated by a telescopic vision in which the details of the present are reduced to an always already and a perpetual not-yet—a past on the brink of arrival and a future that has not yet arrived. This, Comay maintains, accounts for the “peculiar temporality of Benjamin’s messianism” (101), a messianism that transforms the baser violence of history into the spectacular image of historical violence.

Benjamin’s dialectical image is a critique of both Hegelian dialectics, in which the unfolding of Spirit as the progression of historical time is reduced under the

conditions of capitalism to the spectacular image of mythic time, and the photographic image, in which historical time is reified; “the dialectical image [is] a radically new *method* for the conduct of a new mode of critical materialist historiography, on the one hand, and the dialectical image as a part of the description of a radically alternative conception of *time* and of historical experience, on the other” (Pensky 179). Benjamin’s invention of the dialectical image is closely related to his study of allegory. In *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* Benjamin argues that allegory in seventeenth century baroque aesthetics was wrongly equated with the symbol. Transforming the synchronic nature of the symbol into the dialectical temporality of allegory, he states: “Whereas in the symbol, with the transformation of the deceased the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the *facies hippocratica* of history lies before the eyes of the observer as a stiffened, primal landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed as a face—or rather in a death’s head” (Benjamin, *Origins* 166). Reifications of the symbolic become dynamically animate in the allegory, which responds to the very liquidation of tradition that initiates the decline of the aura in the era of commodity production. As novelty in the nineteenth century replaces allegory in the canon of dialectical images (*Arcades* 11), the commodity takes the place of “the allegorical mode of apprehension” (*Selected* 188). The commodity inverts allegory, reduces dialectics to the symbolic, mythologizes historical time.

## 5.2 The Dialectics of Time and Space

A number of critics have noted the significance of time in Sebald’s narratives and its relationship to textual poetics. Ben Hutchinson describes Sebald’s prose as a “poetics of

slowing down” (Hutchinson qtd. in Simine 26), which Amir Eshel identifies as the “poetic deceleration” that structures Sebald’s “polemic against time” (Eshel 94). Sebald’s work is remarkable, Eshel claims, precisely “because of the ways in which the narrative organizes and reconceives temporality” (90). While the question of time is broached in each of Sebald’s novels, it is addressed most explicitly in the author’s final novel. Thus, we begin with an analysis of the dialectic of time in *Austerlitz* (2001), which is, in many ways, the most explicit and perfected version of what Jens Brockmeier calls the author’s “modernist experimentation with memory and time” (347). Distinguishing between “story time” and “discourse time” (357), Brockmeier identifies Sebald’s treatment of time as one of the three reasons *Austerlitz* perplexes: “It not only rejects the ideas that our minds can reliably distinguish what is past and what is present...It also defies notions of chronology, sequentiality, and linearity...[and] dissolves the Newtonian idea of time altogether” (348). For Dubow, the interruptions of ordinary—one might say, historical—time allow for the illumination of what she calls the “materialities of history” (824).

*Austerlitz* is the haunting and enchanting tale of Jacques Austerlitz as told by an anonymous narrator who befriends the architectural scholar and fellow ambler over a number of years through a series of chance encounters abroad. The story begins with the narrator’s account of his visits to Belgium during which he first encounters Austerlitz in Antwerp Centraal Station clad in “heavy walking boots and workman’s trousers” but set apart from other travellers in his preoccupation with “making notes and sketches” (Sebald 7). Already, Austerlitz portrays a non-synchronous temporality with respect to the mindless bustle of the train station. Curious, our narrator approaches with a query about the historian’s interest in the building, and Austerlitz answers (we are told) “without

hesitation” (8). This would be the first in their series of “Antwerp conversations,” which continue to articulate the topographic temporality of what Lefebvre (among others) has termed “the everyday” with the telescopic logic of historical time. The scene illuminates the conflicting temporalities of concrete and abstract time. A woman “whose peroxide-blond hair was piled high into a sort of bird’s nest” and whom Austerlitz refers to as the “goddess of time past,” passes beneath a “mighty clock” (8), the station beacon, which, as Austerlitz explains, represents the standardized time that assumed its throne in the mid-nineteenth century and to whose demands weary travellers continue to oblige. At the same time, our narrator remarks on the eternal time experienced in the intermittent silences of their conversation, which contrasts starkly with the rapidly condensed temporality of Antwerp station’s history as relayed by Austerlitz—its relation to Belgium’s colonial expansion under King Leopold, the Roman inspiration of its image as a “cathedral consecrated to traffic and trade” (10), and its capitalist symbolism, whose apex is “the heraldic motif of the beehive,” a symbol standing not for the socialist ideals of a serviceable nature, or labour as social good, but for the very “principle of capital accumulation” (12). This initial scene encapsulates the ensuing tensions between (historical) progression and (capital) accumulation that constitute the structure of the remaining narrative.

Beyond Austerlitz’s initial allusions to the standardization of time in nineteenth-century railway travel, specific points are often set in relation to the technologies of observation. One reference stands out in particular: as narrator and protagonist gaze through telescopes atop the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park, Austerlitz initiates an extended meditation on the nature of time, which begins:



Time . . . was by far the most artificial of all our inventions, and in being bound to the planet turning on its own axis was no less arbitrary than would, say, a calculation based on the growth of trees, or the duration required for a piece of limestone to disintegrate, quite apart from the fact that the solar day which we take as our guideline does not provide any precise measurement, so that in order to reckon time we have to devise an imaginary, average sun which has an invariable speed of movement and does not incline towards the equator in its orbit. (Sebald 100)

In this passage, Austerlitz reveals even the cyclical time of nature is contrived, supposedly grounded in an immaterial invention anchored in the most abstract elements of mathematics and astronomy. The new capacity to create precise measurements of the passage of time was in many senses an effect of the telescopic vision of time that had been “spreading out over everything” since the invention of the telescope in the early 1600s. Austerlitz points out the potential fallaciousness of this view of time, asking: “[c]ould we not claim . . . that time itself has been nonconcurrent over the centuries and millennia?” (100). Remarking on the continued unevenness of historical time in the age of global capital, he queries further: “Is not human life in many parts of the earth governed to this day less by time than by the weather, and thus by an unquantifiable dimension which disregards linear regularity, does not progress constantly forward but moves in eddies, is marked by episodes of congestion and irruption, recurs in ever-changing form, and evolves in no one knows what direction?” (100-01)

Cosgrove’s reading of *The Rings of Saturn* points toward a tension between the telescopic and the topographic. In her analysis, she argues that “historical understanding

is also continually presented as a problem of visual perspective” (Cosgrove 107). To be sure, the problem of perspective looms large in this novel. We begin with a famous painting by Durer: *The Anatomy Lesson*, accompanied by an image of the narrator’s memory of Janine, a fellow melancholic, amidst her piles of disorderly papers. Janine, he recalls, “resembled the angel of Durer’s *Melancholia*, steadfast among the instruments of destruction” (Sebald *RS* 9). Janine, we are told, had introduced him to Sir Thomas Browne, a 17<sup>th</sup> century doctor “who saw our world as a shadow image of another one far beyond” who looked on things with “the eye of an outsider” (18). Born the son of a silk merchant in 1605, Browne was present alongside Rene Descartes at this dissection of a petty thief, “which Rembrandt depicted in his painting of the Guild of Surgeons” (12). This anatomy lesson has a literal twist. As our narrator observes, the incised arm, which he calls “the offending hand,” is “anatomically the wrong way round” (16). This is not the mistake of an amateur; rather, “what we are faced with is a transposition taken from the anatomical atlas, evidently without further reflection, that turns this otherwise true-to-life painting (if one may so express it) into a crass misrepresentation at the exact center point of its meaning, where the incisions are made” (16-7). We are faced with a “deliberate flaw” that reveals the painter’s identification with the victim. Cosgrove conceives this “empathy with the criminal” (as it is conveyed by Sebald) rather as a defiance of Cartesian rationality—as a problem of the relationship between seeing and knowing.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> This problem of the relationship of seeing and knowing is central to trauma theory as well. For both Caruth and Baer, the failure to see in time corresponds with a belated

The antagonism between vision and knowledge intensifies in his penultimate novel. *The Rings of Saturn* begins with a view from the hospital window, a perspective from which the “familiar city” becomes an “utterly alien place,” “as if I were looking down [remarks the narrator] from a cliff upon a sea of stone or a field of rubble (Sebald *RS* 5). Later, compelled by the fate of the sand martins, who seem to vanish beneath his feet, our narrator follows their descent to the edge a cliff from which vantage point he encounters a disturbing vision: below him a naked couple appears from a distance to be “some great [misshapen] mollusc washed ashore...a many-limbed, two-headed monster that had drifted in from far out at sea” (68). At another point, observing Ruisdael’s paintings, he remarks, “[t]he truth is of course that Ruisdael did not take up a position on the dunes in order to paint; his vantage point was an imaginary position some distance above the earth” (83). As in *Austerlitz*, these heightened vantage points are often accompanied by a number of blind spots that seem to follow from a history of destruction—the account of his view from the hospital, for example, is preceded by the description of a “single, blind, insensate spot” that follows a “confront[ation] with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past” (3); the German-born writer Michael Hamburger’s reflections on his lost homeland as a “darkened background with a grey smudge in it” are interpreted by our travelling narrator as a “blind spot...a vestigial of the ruins through which [he] wandered in 1947 when [he] returned to [his] native city

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representation or knowledge of the traumatic event. In Caruth’s words, “the most direct seeing” produces an “absolute inability to know” which must paradoxically “take the form of belatedness” (Caruth 92).

for the first time to search for traces of the life [he] had lost” (178). Condensing the anxiety of these blind spots, the narrator concludes with a meditation on flight, stating that from the air we can see the things we have made but not the people who made and inhabit them (91): “If we view ourselves from a great height, it is frightening to realize how little we know about our species” (92).

Cosgrove elaborates Sebald’s skillful rendering of the “particular temporal quality of capitalism,” the ways in which “‘capitalist time’ operates in terms of trends and cycles which ebb and flow, contract and expand” (Cosgrove 103). For this reason, she argues, Sebald’s descriptions of the ruins of nineteenth-century capitalism, “while melancholy in tone, should be read as an informed, if poetically rendered critique of the capitalist world system, not just as it was in the past, but as it continues in the present” (103). Time, in this context, is represented as “a natural history of capitalism which has its roots in the early sixteenth century and which continues to expand in the present” (103). Such claims are resonant with contemporary theories of primitive accumulation,<sup>82</sup> which emphasize the continuous nature of what Karl Marx defined as the particular mode of extra-economic violence that separates the worker from the means of production through genocidal and annihilating actions. Despite the fact that primitive accumulation is, for Marx, a historical event that identifies the “original” accumulation necessary to establish the capitalist mode of production, Marxist theorists at least since Rosa Luxemburg have

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<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Werner Bonefeld’s “The Permanence of Primitive Accumulation” (2001); Massimiliano Tomba’s “Historical Temporalities of Capitalism” (2009); and Sandro Mezzadra’s “The Topicality of Prehistory” (2011).

referred to its qualities of permanence and repetition. Marx himself alludes to the perpetual nature of primitive accumulation when he states that the capitalist relation “not only maintains this [initial] separation [of the worker and the means of production], but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale” (Marx 874). The initial separation of the worker from the means of production is maintained through the invention of standardized time through which the time of production that characterizes abstract historical time is divorced from the time of survival, which is dictated by the natural rhythms and cycles of everyday existence.

We are reminded here of Guy Debord’s analysis of the time of capitalism in *Society of the Spectacle*. “With the development of capitalism,” he argues, “irreversible time has become globally unified.” The production of historical time, says Debord, is the “victory of the bourgeoisie,” whose liberation of labour time from the cyclical time of the agrarian mode of production contributed to a new form of historical life in which “irreversible time”—that is, the time of those who rule—was transformed into the never-ending pursuit of knowledge. Historical time has become the universalized form assumed by irreversible time within the capitalist mode of production. This marked the end of the old order in which knowledge was “carried on only by the living” and the death of the ritual practices and living traditions associated with cyclical time. The hegemony of historical time eliminates lived time through the production of spectacular time: the time spent consuming images (television) and the image of the consumption of time (tourism). In the Situationist model, “Cyclical time was the really lived time of unchanging illusions. Spectacular time is the illusory lived time of a constantly changing reality” (Debord 51). Here the commodity form of the spectacle—the inversion of life itself—

merges with the reign of historical time in which “life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles” (1). The realm of social relations becomes indistinguishable from the realm of appearances.

In Debord’s account, the transformation of time enjoys a specific relation to the life of the image. In *Austerlitz* this relationship is depicted as a traumatic turn. During this second unexpected encounter in 1996, in which the first signs of trauma begin to surface, questions of sight and blindness are inlaid within the historical progression of time. Shortly following the narrator’s brief encounter with chorioretinopathy—in which a “bubble suffused by clear liquid formed on the macula” causing a “gray area” that partially obscured the field of vision, leaving only the periphery in focus, a condition he initially mistook for “merely hysterical weakness”—he rediscovers Austerlitz at “the edge of an agitated crowd” of gold miners at the Great Eastern Hotel on Liverpool Street (Sebald A 35-38). Despite a twenty-year hiatus, the conversation resumes as if no time had passed; Austerlitz continues where he left off, the narrator tells us, “without wasting any words on the coincidence of our meeting again after all this time” (41). For the next 85 pages or so, visual motifs articulate lengthy taxonomic descriptions of the contents of various architectural landmarks: the Great Eastern Hotel with its “cool labyrinth for the storage of Rhine wines” and elaborate “fish section, where perch, pike, plaice, sole, and eels lay heaped on black slate slabs” (43); Stower Grange private school for boys with its “curious collection of oddities, most of them over sixty or suffering from some affliction” (59); and Andromeda Lodge, whose transformation “into a kind of natural history museum had begun in 1869, when Gerald’s parrot-collecting ancestor made the acquaintance of Charles Darwin” (83). Meanwhile, questions of the visual arise in the

story of Evan the cobbler who had a “reputation for seeing ghosts” (53), old photographs which resemble “shadows of reality” that emerge “as memories do in the middle of the night” (77), and a tale concerning the main resident of Iver Grove estate, “who suffered from insomnia and withdrew into the observatory he had built at the top of the house to devote himself to various astronomical studies” (Cosgrove 104). Even *The Rings of Saturn* harbours a number of “blind spots” (108).

At this point, we encounter a shift in the narrative, both conceptual and temporal. If the first half elaborates the protagonist’s accumulation of architectural knowledge, the second is marked by the return of traumatic memory. Like the “philanthropic entrepreneurs,” whose “vision of model towns for workers . . . had inadvertently changed into the practice of accommodating them in barracks,” Austerlitz’s “best-laid plans . . . turn into the exact opposite when they are put into practice” (Sebald A 28). Taxonomic descriptions are replaced with photographic observations. Rational observation is displaced by “nocturnal apparition” (165). His initially pedantic tone attains a more harried and anxious quality. Linking the onset of his decline to the accidental death of a close schoolmate named Gerald, whose passion for flying led him not only to study astronomy but to perish in an unfortunate but not altogether surprising plane crash, Austerlitz begins to convey more personal details of his past in his telling of the search for his lost origins. Before this point, he explains, it had “never occurred to [him] to wonder about [his] true origins” (125), despite the fact that as a young student he had discovered his birth name was not Dafydd Elias but Jacques Austerlitz. The recovery of lost memory becomes an obsession replacing the perpetual accumulation of architectural knowledge, which, he explains, “served as a substitute for compensatory memory” (140).

At first glance, this turn to traumatic memory seems to endorse the disruptive temporality of trauma that marks ours as a culture of catastrophe and crisis. However, despite the fact that *Austerlitz* has all the markings of a traditional trauma text, including photographic interruptions, railway symbolism and ghostly returns, it departs from contemporary theories of trauma that conceptualize it primarily in terms of temporal rupture. Rather, traumatic memory in *Austerlitz* serves as a poetic device that signals a shift in the field of modern subjectivity from the melancholic subject of the modern era to the traumatized subject of so-called postmodern times. Accordingly, Sebald presents an image of historical progress that is out of sync with the material forces of capitalism which yield historical atrocity; he exposes a tension between the uneven temporality of capitalist accumulation and the abstract progression of history, a tension represented by the contrast between the technologies of observation responsible for the compression of space and extension of time, and technologies of transportation responsible for the extension of space and the compression of time. These opposing branches of technological advancement represent the opposing axes of capitalist accumulation—which I am calling the telescopic and the topographic—whose disarticulation further represents the alienating experience reflected in the temporal ruptures and visual aporias that characterize the contemporary landscape of trauma.

Austerlitz's eventual breakdown in 1992 is preceded by the loss of his capacity for language, a common symptom of traumatic repression. Austerlitz explains: "But now I found writing such hard going that it often took me a whole day to compose a single sentence" (Sebald A 122), which in the end only comes to resemble a city whose confusing urban sprawl disorients returning travellers (124). In a Lacanian sense, the



withdrawal from language signals a retreat from the discourse of mastery. However, the retreat from language is accompanied by a new impulse, the recovery of the mother.

Not surprisingly, Marianne Hirsch interprets Austerlitz's search for his mother's image through the lens of traumatic memory, arguing that the fantasy of the mother's recovery operates as a screen memory that highlights the roles of photography and family in postmemorial work. These two mediums converge in the figure of the lost mother. This image serves a "space of projection" that draws on a storehouse of what Aby Warburg has called "pre-established forms," which resonate in the popular imagination. For Hirsch, the figure of the lost mother is one such pre-established form through which "gender becomes a powerful idiom of remembrance in the face of detachment and forgetting" (124). In this model, the image of the lost mother becomes a screen for the remembrance of historical trauma, and familial images act as protective covers that "reinforce the *living* connection between past and present" (125). These claims rest on a number of assumptions implicit in Hirsch's argument. First, the desire to maintain a "sense of living connection" is taken for granted and thus not critically interrogated; second, Hirsch assumes that the recovery of traumatic memory is what is covered over by the search for the lost mother, which fails to address the broader structures driving the recovery of memory in general.

The notion of the screen memory itself remains within the field of the imaginary with one image ostensibly substituting for another more accurate image. If we remind ourselves, however, that Marx identified genocidal violence with the processes of primitive accumulation, then we must immediately acknowledge the fact that our current obsession with the recovery of memory has something to do with the capitalist mode of

production. Austerlitz recounts his history instructor's assertion that "[o]ur concern with history . . . is a concern with preformed images already imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, as yet undiscovered" (Sebald *A* 72). Read along this claim, the image of the mother and the trope of recovered memory equally operate as "preformed images" that correspond to the historical time of capital. From this perspective, the image of the mother must be interpreted as a mode of reification that conceals, not a truer or more authentic memory, but the forces of alienation that correspond to the historical time of primitive accumulation. This becomes particularly explicit when we consider the role of time in Austerlitz's search for his mother's image. Austerlitz commissions a slow-motion copy of a film fragment in which he hopes to discover his mother (246), while, at the same time, he experiences the "current of time slowing down in the gravitational field of oblivion" (257) during his nocturnal wanderings. This new experience of time, and not the recovery of lost memory, is what Austerlitz discovers in the search for his mother's image. The recovery of memory itself does little to change the violent material forces that contributed to Austerlitz's sense of alienation, which is placed under the sign of traumatic memory. Indeed, he states:

It was obviously of little use that I had discovered the sources of my distress and, looking back over all the past years, could now see myself with the utmost clarity as that child suddenly cast out of his familiar surroundings: reason was powerless against the sense of rejection and annihilation which I had always suppressed, and which was now breaking through the walls of its confinement. (228)

A feeling of alienation underlies Austerlitz's distress and threatens, but does not quite succeed, in rupturing his erudite exterior.

The Antwerp conversations in *Austerlitz*, we might say, expose or make visible a specific historical period we might call the epoch of trauma. Indeed, it is not insignificant that our narrator first encounters Austerlitz in Antwerp Central Station in 1967, the very same year Michel Fried issued his critique of Minimalism, Roland Barthes proclaimed the "death of the author," and Guy Debord published his manifesto *Society of the Spectacle*. It is equally significant that these conversations end in 1996, the same year Cathy Caruth published *Unclaimed Experience*. This period, from 1967 to 1996, corresponds precisely to the time that elapsed between the emergence of two types of subject. The first, emerging in 1967, is the Minimalist subject of art, which Rosalind Krauss argues anticipates the disembodied, fragmented, postmodern subject. The second, emerging in 1996, is the traumatized subject of the aesthetic turn, which, according to Radstone, attempts to reclaim the autonomy of the subject that was dissolved by poststructuralism by reasserting what Ruth Leys calls the "sovereign, if passive" subject (Radstone 14).

Recall the initial conversation in 1967, which takes us on a swift journey through the sweeping history of Antwerp station, situating it within the crumbling façades of nineteenth-century architecture, with Austerlitz moving deftly between broad historical contexts, general architectural trends and particular biographical details (Sebald A 7-12). The narrator comments on the astuteness of Austerlitz's communications, marveling at his ability to form "perfectly balanced sentences out of whatever occurred to him, so to speak, and the way in which, in his mind, the passing on of his knowledge seemed to

become a gradual approach to a kind of historical metaphysic, bringing remembered events back to life” (13). In this informal architectural lecture, Austerlitz not only speaks of the relationship between capitalist accumulation and the standardization of time, but of the “marks of pain which...trace countless fine lines through history” (14). Crownshaw argues: “In 1967, [Austerlitz’s] sense of history replicates the very monumentalism (or forgetfulness) of the buildings he studies” (Crownshaw, n. pag.). Already, the Antwerp conversations draw an implicit connection between the fantasy of historical progress and the emergent subject of trauma. The Austerlitz of 1967 is a mouthpiece for historical progress and accumulated knowledge. From the perspective of trauma theory, his architectural knowledge is a screen that covers over or represses the memory of a historical trauma that he will eventually discover as the source of his discontent. However, from the perspective of capitalist accumulation, Austerlitz’s historical knowledge represents the utopian image of a complete historical archive that drives the narrative of historical progress made possible with the invention of standardized time. From this perspective, Austerlitz’s eventual breakdown and the ensuing search for his own origins allegorize the experience of alienation particular to the temporality of capitalist accumulation.

Beginning with the fact of global capitalism, *Austerlitz* provides a vehicle for re-conceptualizing trauma as the reification of alienation under the sign of historical time. Such a reading reconfigures the trauma text as an allegory of primitive accumulation through which the most extreme forms of alienation take shape in dialectic between the telescopic and the topographic, the linear and the cyclic, the metaphoric and the metonymic, the allegory and the narrative. In retreating from the common conception of

trauma as primarily a rupture in time that reveals the hegemony of “homogenous, empty time” and drives the quest for the search for lost origins and the recovery of memory, the view provided by *Austerlitz* captures the ways in which trauma is a normative element of capitalist subjectivity that cannot be consigned to the past, but which must be continuously reproduced in the present moment on an ever-expanding scale. In this sense, traumatic memory is not only a reflection of historical trauma (primitive accumulation as historical event) but also, more importantly, a permanent aspect of the forces of capitalist production (primitive accumulation as permanent process). In “Historical Temporalities of Capital,” Massimiliano Tomba argues: “To understand the permanence of primitive accumulation we need a kind of ‘historiography of the present’ that would allow us to understand the current combination of temporalities in the attempt to synchronize them through the intervention of extra-economic violence” (Tomba 56). *Austerlitz* responds to just such a call.

### 5.3 Conclusion

In his novels, Sebald presents the ongoing violence of capitalist accumulation as a problem of perspective. In doing so, he traces the inception of a new order in which the relics of a previous order become the raw material for capital’s ongoing engulfment of new territory. This tension is already present in the metaphor of fortification, which depicts the disjuncture between a certain vision of progress and its material execution. Telescopic vision is overdetermined; and yet, bird’s-eye-views abound. The content always outruns its form. The problem of perspective is emphasized not only through the failures of fortification, however, or the uncomfortable encounter with Durer’s offending hand, but also through a series of Archimedean perspectives that might have been

impossible without the invention of the telescope, and eventually flight. Paradoxically, the obverse of this heightened vision is a contracted knowledge. Hannah Arendt recognized this when she granted extraordinary weight to the invention of the telescope, which accompanied the discovery of America and the Reformation in ushering in the modern age yet went largely unrecognized in the series of “great events” (Arendt 248-9);

however, if we could measure the momentum of history as we measure natural processes, we might find that what originally had the least noticeable impact, man’s first tentative steps toward the discovery of the universe, has constantly increased in momentousness as well as speed until it has eclipsed not only the enlargement of the earth’s surface, which found its final limitation only in the limitations of the globe itself, but also the still apparently limitless economic accumulation process. (250)

Not only did it usher in a prolonged era of Cartesian doubt established by the internalization of the Archimedean point (284), it singlehandedly “set the stage for an entirely new world and determined the course of other events” (258), not the least of which was the ensuing series of expropriations that “did not simply result in new property or lead to a new redistribution of wealth, but were fed back into the process to generate further expropriations, greater productivity, and more appropriation” (255). Despite her materialist account of historical change—“It was not reason but a man-made instrument, the telescope, which actually changed the physical world view” (274)—Arendt was compelled to claim (however problematically) that this is why “[w]orld-alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age” (254).

What becomes increasingly clear at this point is the degree to which the phenomenon of distance induced by the technological discovery of an *actually existing* Archimedean point (anticipated by the invention of linear perspective that allowed for the painter's "imaginary position some distance above the earth" almost two centuries prior) contributes to the paradoxical enclosures of knowledge that accompany its very expansion. It is well known that Benjamin named this phenomenon of sublime distance "the aura," and linked it to the invention of photography whose combined qualities of scope and seriality anticipated the very "shrinkage [of the earth] which comes about through the surveying capacity of the human mind, whose use of numbers, symbols, and models can condense and scale earthly physical distance down to the size of the human body's natural sense and understanding...was the consequence of the invention of the airplane, that is, [of the capacity to leave] the surface of the earth altogether" (Arendt 251). However, while the invention of the telescope had the effect of concretizing the previously imaginary Archimedean point by inserting a vision of the universe into individual subjects, photography was responsible for its mobilization and transformation into the cosmopolitan ideal of empathic identification. Through the illusion of transparency, the photograph masquerades as the authentic image of a new order, one that claims to escape the painterly desire to misrepresent the offending hand by representing things as they "actually were." This photographic fallacy is what leads to its misrepresentation as a harbinger of traumatic rupture. It is also precisely what hides the fact that the decline of the aura is not only an effect of its production but is linked to the false perception that the problem of distance (both geographical and temporal) that structures traumatic loss can be overcome by photographic circulation of memory, which

carries an ethical potential to overcome our conditions of alienation by re-establishing the broken social bond.

Photographs in Sebald's work should be read not as signifiers of traumatic rupture or repressed memory but as material extensions of the text's allegorical frame. In his analysis of the revival of allegory in relation to site-specific art, Craig Owens argues that the mythical content of site-specific work is preserved in photographs, which not only reveals the preservationist essence of the photographic form but also "suggests the allegorical potential of photography" (71). Thus, it is the desire for preservation itself and not the represented content that is the subject of all photographic images. At the same time, Owens detects an "allegorical motive in photomontage" (72), a practice common to not only site-specific art but various forms of contemporary literature, including the novels of W.G. Sebald. Despite its clear presence in the work of Kafka and Borges and, even earlier, Courbet and Baudelaire, allegory has been construed as antithetical to not only art in particular (67) but modernity in general (76). On either side of the modernist project, its metaphorical nature has reduced it to Romanticist fantasy and its meta-textual aspect to a postmodern utopia. Not surprisingly, photography and allegory share a similar impulse, "to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear" (68). Both allegory and photography, it seems, have much in common with the outsize buildings created with an eye for their eventual destruction. The preservationist impulse contained within these monumental structures is at once the knowledge of their inevitable ruin.

In the novels of W.G. Sebald (and other so-called postmemorial works), what threatens to disappear is a particularly idealized image of the past based on the fantasy of a lost social bond reified in the figure of the mother. Thus, while memory scholars



conceive memory as a contemporary site of resistance to social amnesia and capitalist oblivion, Sebald's writing situates memory within a poetic structure that reveals its normative function in the production of modern subjectivity. Paradoxically, memory (and photography) simultaneously resists the destruction of historical knowledge while reproducing the preservationist impulse underlying the history of enclosure. Thus, the re-appropriation of material sites of historical violence that has become a central strategy of resistant memory movements, exemplified by the global proliferation of site-specific memory museums, has inevitably contributed to the rise of atrocity or trauma tourism<sup>83</sup>. The commodification of memory inherent in this process is further facilitated by the spreading out of time in space and the attendant reification of the past through the production of "tourist landscapes" (Boyarin 19). Reading Sebald's novels allegorically allows us to see the ways in which the politics of memory both resists and reflects the series of violent material and epistemic separations endemic to the ongoing expansion of capitalism. Under the guise of historical recovery, images of the past reified in the ruins of historical violence catalyze their transformation into contemporary sites of primitive accumulation.

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<sup>83</sup> Laurie Beth Clark defines "trauma tourism" as "the global practices of visiting memory sites," which are "sites so marked by trauma that they cannot be fully recuperated for normal quotidian use" (65-66).

## Postscript

### Beyond Recovery: Preservationist Aesthetics and the Logic of Gender

*Forgetting the old is a necessary aspect of any revolutionary transformation.*

—*Nicolas Holm*

New cultures of memory exemplify the promotion and naturalization of the ideology of preservation through specific aesthetic avenues and practices; I name this overall process the preservationist aesthetic. This aesthetic has a dual function: on the one hand, it recovers and preserves those aspects of cultural heritage and history that have been threatened with erasure by the innovations of capitalist production; on the other hand, it produces new spheres of enclosure by colonizing those spheres previously excluded from the production of capital. We are faced, then, with a paradox: in defending against the threat of erasure or obsolescence, preservationist aesthetics contribute to the creation of new spheres of colonization and enclosure. Within the realm of memory politics this is expressed as an impasse between the call to remember (which resists the capitalist drive toward obsolescence) and the call to forget (which recognizes the conservative aspect of memory in the capitalist context).

The impasse between these two imperatives is exemplified by the following two accounts. On the one hand, thinkers like Nicolas Holm argue against the widespread veneration of memory as a vehicle for political resistance that we must renew the revolutionary aspects of forgetting. In his analysis of contemporary “archives of

resistance” (such as Brodsky’s and Jaar’s), Holm explains that contrary to popular belief remembering does not ensure that history will not repeat itself (as Adorno had hoped). According to Holm, resistant (memory) archives reproduce the logic of capitalism, while forgetting “offers a way to think through the current impasse of capitalism as the horizon of all thought” (2). On the other hand, we have both historical and contemporary thinkers who argue precisely the opposite. Theodor Adorno famously equated forgetting with commodification and, more recently, Andreas Huyssen has argued that “the call to forget memory just reproduces the industry’s own fast-paced mechanism of declaring obsolescence. And it fails to give us a plausible explanation for the obsession with memory itself as a significant symptom of our cultural present” (Huyssen 3). The tension between memory and forgetting is present in Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” which Boyarin points out “attempted to articulate memory as a resources for political action” (Boyarin 26). Asserting that “the past was a material resource—in Marxist terms, perhaps ‘the means of imagination’—control of which was a key aspect of class struggle” (26), not surprisingly Benjamin advocated a temporally-based “politics of ‘amnesic solidarity’” (Boyarin 26). And yet contemporary writers such as Andrew Witt maintain that urban gentrification projects must be understood as a kind of “conservative amnesia.”

Jay Winter answers Andreas Huyssen’s question of why memory cultures are such a significant aspect of our current social and political landscape with the claim that their proliferation is a result of an increase in disposable income and leisure time following WWII. Memory, in this sense, is not a response to trauma as much as it is a cultural commodity among many designed to stave off middle-class ennui. Klein’s

account of the rise and fall of memory in the twentieth century, however, seems to contradict this claim and even posit the opposite. He explains that following the publication of Frederick Bartlett's *Remembering* in 1932 "[m]emory grew increasingly marginal, [and] in 1964 *The Dictionary of the Social Sciences* claimed the word verged on extinction" (131); by 1976 it was entirely absent from Raymond Williams' *Keywords* only to resurface in full force nearly a decade later. This re-birth in the late 80s and early 90s marked its transformation into a "structural rather than individual phenomenon" (131). As we know, the current economic downturn, which peaked with the global financial crisis of 2008, began with the oil crisis of 1973 (the same year as Pinochet's coup) and the subsequent neoliberalization of the global economy in the 1980s (beginning, arguably, with Pinochet's economic reforms). Cultures of memory seem to develop in the wake of economic recession. Without presupposing a purely economic foundation, it is nevertheless clear that memory's rise to prominence at this particular historical moment is not unrelated to shifts in the global marketplace.

Recognizing a link between economic flux and the rise of memory, *Preservationist Aesthetics* has explored the relationship between the call to remember and the expansion of capitalism from the perspective of primitive accumulation, arguing that memory movements reflect a series of new enclosures that have been underway since the 1970s. Contemporary Marxists have demonstrated the ongoing nature of primitive accumulation; its relationship to debt, homelessness and socialist collapse; and its current operation in five main spheres (noted above)—to which I added a sixth: the enclosures of common knowledge. The persistence of the museum as a site of political struggle exemplifies the relationship between epistemic (knowledge-based) and material (land-

based) enclosures. Memory museums in particular reveal the ways in which the call to remember is inflected with the very logic of preservation guiding current forms of environmental activism and ecological preservation, as well as the large-scale urban renewal projects that have been underway since the 1950s. Accordingly, in my dissertation I argued that global memory movements are complicit with the new global enclosures signified by the recent housing and debt crises. Given the fact that Marxist feminists such as Silvia Federici have placed the expropriation of women's bodies (homologous to the expropriation of nature) at the center the ongoing processes of primitive accumulation, making the logic of capital accumulation inseparable from forms of gendered repression and exploitation, we would be wise, in closing, to reconsider the relationship between preservationist aesthetics and the logic of gender beginning with the relationship between memory and primitive accumulation. Ultimately, this final analysis will lead to a closing proposition regarding the use of the commons as a testing ground for a feminist politics of the twenty-first century. Accordingly, we must ask: Can the idea of the commons serve as a cosmopolitan ideal with a material existence? Can it serve as a framework for a dialectical ecofeminism that resists the conflation and fetishization of Woman and Nature? Most importantly, can the commons serve as a unifying principle and theoretical framework for a materialist feminist politics today?

In the first chapter, entitled "The Paradox of Preservation," I discussed Federici's analysis of the European witch-hunts in which she reframes the mass slaughter of women explicitly in terms of the expropriation of women's bodies and implicitly in terms of the erasure of women's specialized body of reproductive knowledge. This reconceptualization highlights two aspects of the relationship between gender and

primitive accumulation central to both feminist and memory politics: the alienation of the body and the subjugation of knowledge. Memory theorists' responses to the repression of historical trauma indirectly address these forms of enclosure with reversals of the dominant logic in the form of embodiment and the recuperation of repressed knowledge. In her theory of postmemory, for example, Marianne Hirsch argues that second generation representations of historical trauma strive to "*reactivate and reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with individual forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (111). Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory similarly privileges embodied transmission, arguing that the installation of traumatic memory in those at a generational remove creates living memories based on embodied transference that might lead to a "radical politics of empathy," which "recognizes the alterity of identification" (82). Embodiment in both of these cases is linked to the recuperation of repressed knowledge, forms of knowledge ostensibly stored in the body and transmitted in symptomatic terms.

Influenced by Freud's discovery of traumatic repression, a discovery that emphasized the symptomatic and embodied constitution of repressed memory (first conceived through the observation of female hysterics), these theories of memory contain an implicit gender dimension, one that after the deconstructive turn severed feminist politics from its material history. As a result, the concepts of post- and prosthetic memory rest on three interrelated assumptions: 1) embodied knowledge bears greater authenticity and has greater access to truth than "disembodied" historical knowledge; 2) a "sense of living connection" (Hirsch) or living memory (Landsberg) provides an ethical and political foundation based on affective identification; and 3) the "'guardianship' of a

traumatic personal and generational past” is not only desirable but paramount. Gender in this context operates as a medium of deconstruction rather than a material foundation through which specific forms of exploitation are legitimated. In her analysis of *Austerlitz*, for instance, Hirsch argues that the “trope of the lost mother” is a preformed image within the social imagination that demonstrates the relevance of gender and family to questions of traumatic memory. This focus on the trope of the lost mother indicates the degree to which a gender analysis takes place in the realm of representation. Paired with the trope of the lost mother, family becomes an important site through which questions of gender and memory are filtered. Accordingly, Hirsch claims further: “Familial and, indeed, feminine tropes rebuild and reembody a connection that is disappearing, and thus gender becomes a powerful idiom of remembrance in the face of detachment and forgetting” (124). However, as Marco Abel argues of Landsberg, Hirsch’s analysis of gender seems to be a symptom of the problem it addresses. The feminized domains of embodied knowledge and traumatic memory become panaceas for historical repression and exploitation. Gender serves as therapeutic hermeneutic in which embodied knowledge redresses historical violence. We might call the effect of this form of therapy the feminization of history, which, not unlike the feminization of labour, results from the deconstruction of gendered spheres of production and the movement of women into the traditionally male-dominated domains of work and history.

On the contrary, Federici’s call to save the historical memory of primitive accumulation’s gender dimension is neither therapeutic nor hermeneutic. Rather, by attending to the material history of gendered exploitation, Federici makes an important distinction between historical repression and the logic of gender that calls for the

preservation of both the specialized knowledge of a prior social order and the memory of its enclosure: women's reproductive knowledge. Embodied knowledge from this perspective does not refer to a form of affective or empathetic identification based on the traumatic experience of exploitation, but rather a specialized body of knowledge (reproductive, in this case) grounded in a previous mode of production, which Jacques Lacan has referred to as "know-how," or that practical knowledge uniquely possessed by the slave and coveted by the master. From Federici's materialist perspective we can make a further distinction between conceptions of embodied knowledge and repressed knowledge, which refers to the enclosures of knowledge that transform embodied knowledge into the raw material for capitalist accumulation as opposed to those experiences of exploitation excluded from the official narrative of history. While embodied knowledge is distinguished from repressed knowledge, forms of gendered exploitation are inseparable from the enclosures of historical knowledge that transform the embodied knowledge of the slave into the repressed knowledge of the master.

Federici's observations suggest that gender is not merely one framework among many through which capitalist exploitation can be reinterpreted from the perspective of the oppressed; like the enclosures of common land and knowledge, gender is a material condition of capitalist accumulation that is embedded within its mode of production from the outset. As Marx claimed: "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx n.pag.). Accordingly, in this final analysis we begin with the assumption that new enclosures and their preservationist aesthetic are structured by the logic of gender and not the other way around.



In general, memory is associated primarily with the sphere of the personal or the private and history with the public or the state. We begin then with the dichotomy history/memory, where, in popular parlance, history refers to an official public record of the past and memory refers to the individual recollection of a past event. According to historians like Klein, the “emergence of memory in historical discourse” has caused a troubling collapse between the two terms, a collapse many artists and theorists of memory would celebrate. The recent collapse of history and memory echoes the parallel collapse between public (the institutional) and private (the everyday) inspired by avant-garde artists in the 1920s. As feminist theorists have long pointed out, this division between public and private is a gendered one: historically, women have been relegated to the domestic sphere and men to the realm of public affairs.

Radical feminists in the 60s and 70s sought to undermine this dichotomy by politicizing the personal through the advent of consciousness raising groups. In a piece that coined the second wave rallying slogan “The Personal is Political,” Carol Hanisch discusses the ways in which this idea was misinterpreted as a form of therapy—that is “personal therapy,” a concept she ultimately replaces with “political therapy.” In order to understand the stakes of such a claim, we can express this in the form of an equation: the personal + the political = political therapy, where therapy is traditionally associated with the personal or the private and the political with the public. The concept of political therapy is meant both to introduce the idea that group discussions centering on the personal aspects of women’s lives have political foundations and effects *and* to undermine the idea that these groups are primarily therapeutic in the sense that they are meant to cure women of their individual ailments. Political therapy bestows collective

responsibility for the material conditions of women divulged through individual and personal grievances.

The concept of therapy is intrinsic to contemporary memory movements, suggesting that discourses of memory belong to this same logic of personalizing the political. In Klein's words, memory in "an age of historiographic crisis" serves as a "therapeutic alternative to historical discourse" (145). These therapeutic aspects of memory culture are precisely what lead Huyssen to distinguish memory from trauma, claiming that "too much of the contemporary memory discourse focuses on the personal—on testimony, memoir, subjectivity, traumatic memory—either in poststructuralist psychoanalytic perspective or attempts to shore up a therapeutic popular sense of the authentic and experiential" (8). Like earlier politicizations of the personal, memory politics are based on the entry of repressed or excluded knowledge into public discourse. In contemporary memory theory, this excluded knowledge is given material expression in two forms: the archive and the body (represented by the institutions of the museum and the family). With respect to the body, repressed knowledge is also understood as embodied knowledge. As I have suggested, this form of knowledge is essential to two leading theories regarding the transmission of historical trauma: postmemory and prosthetic memory, both of which attempt to bridge the gap between the material and the virtual.

While radical feminists resisted the public/private divide by politicizing the personal, Marxist feminists have demonstrated the ways in which this particular dichotomy is related to the capitalist division of labour. Against the binary terms used by Marxist feminists to characterize the "gendered forms of domination under capitalism"—

including public/private—the UK collective Endnotes attempts to “propose categories which will give us a better grasp of the transformation of the gender relation since the 70s and, more importantly, since the recent crisis.” They begin with the definition of gender as a “separation between spheres,” an assumption that allows them to re-conceptualize the relationship between public and private as the generalization of the economic. While Endnotes affirms the Marxist feminist mapping of public and private onto home and state, they emphasize, “contrary to most feminist accounts, it was *only* within the context of pre-modern relations—prior to the separation of the political and the economic under capitalism—that the private sphere constituted the household. By contrast, in the modern capitalist era, the scope of private exploitation spans the entire social landscape” (Endnotes n.pag.). In Marxian terms, they continue, the public is simply an abstraction called the state; based on the logic of formal equality, it is “an abstract ‘community’ of ‘equal citizens’” through which individuals “appear as equals on the market” (n.pag.). This market, however, is a “sex-blind” market within all individuals are formally granted equal capacity to engage in market activities, but women as potential child-bearers are punished for “having a sex, even though that ‘sexual difference’ is produced by capitalist social relations, and absolutely necessary to the reproduction of capitalism itself” (n.pag.).

Given the ongoing enclosures of common land and knowledge in the realms of both culture and nature, the question of the relationship between preservationist aesthetics and the logic of gender is central to the question of what constitutes a feminist politics for the twenty-first century. Despite the persistence of a feminist essentialism in certain brands of environmental activism, this has nothing to do with the second-wave

celebration of the innate majesty and reverence for both “Mother Earth” or women’s special reproductive capacities. Nor has it anything to do with the very real and pressing scientific evidence that our current state of environmental degradation is entirely unsustainable. Rather, it has precisely to do with Marxist feminist insights into the relationship between the expansion of capital and the exploitation of both natural resources and women’s bodies (Mies 1986; Federici 2004). The equation of Woman and nature, which has been problematized by postmodern anti-essentialists but is endorsed by both radical and socialist ecofeminists, suggests that the relationship between preservationist aesthetics and the logic of gender is relevant not only to enclosures of common knowledge in the context of memory but also to questions of ecological preservation and environmental activism. While Federici rightly situates the expropriation of women’s bodies at the inception of the capitalist mode of production, the desire for a pre-capitalist Eden signified by the commons contains more than a hint of nostalgia and utopian longing for a time when class inequality was rife but women’s work was equal. The mythical Medieval Eden serves as the point of departure for both Federici’s critique of capitalism and much current ecofeminist theory. However, Federici argues that “[w]e must be very careful, then, not to craft the discourse on the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the environmental guardian of the planet” (Federici, “Feminism” n. pag.)

Preservationist aesthetics drive the redistribution of public space and signify a shift in the logic of primitive accumulation whereby the enclosures of common knowledge precede the enclosures of common land. The relationship between preservationist aesthetics and gender implies that questions of violent erasure symbolized

by the recent feminization of history and housed under the sign of Trauma (as the erasure of all substantial content, a violent hollowing out that describes the appearance of the pure form of primitive accumulation) are central to the question of feminism's contemporary relevance. Given the conservative nature of preservation and its relationship to the production of trauma, the feminization of history and the new enclosures, the question remains of whether or not the idea of the commons can serve as the foundation for a material feminist politics today. The answer to this question can only be discovered through the collective *production* of the commons, and not through their *recovery* from the ruins of history.

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2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010

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