Remembering the Traumatic Past

By

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore my personal family history in relation to the difficulties and challenges raised when representing a trauma in the past. My focus was the Blaaukraantz Bridge railway disaster of 1911, where my great great grandfather, Paul Tarr, was among the 29 victims. The links between my personal family history and the disaster are explored in my art practice. In the mini thesis, I unpack theoretical concerns surrounding memory, loss, and representation of past trauma by examining selected works by Christian Boltanski, Rachel Whiteread and Doris Salcedo.

I do not endeavour to provide new insights about early twentieth-century history but instead to engage with different ways of forming narratives about the past. Memory as an alternative form of history writing is the key concept in this thesis in that personal memory and testimony provides an integral perception of the past and important details that would not appear in history texts or other factual forms of writing the past. In this thesis I unpack this issue in relation to my own art practice.

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete bibliographic references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at another university.

Amie Tarr   Wednesday 6th February 2013

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Introduction

On the 22nd of April 1911 a train was travelling from Port Alfred to Grahamstown, transporting five carts of stone, one cart of pineapples and four carriages containing 55 passengers. As the train rounded a corner en route for the Blaaukraantz Bridge the fourth stone truck derailed because of the heavy weight of the stones and the shift in weight of the pineapples. The rear of the train - carrying the four carriages of people along with one truck of pineapples and two of stone - plummeted to the bottom of the gorge where 29 of the 55 passengers died amongst the train wreckage, stone and pulped fruit. Among the victims of this tragedy was my great great grandfather, Paul Tarr, who had boarded the train in Port Alfred to check on the building work being done at his boarding house in Grahamstown. Also enormously affected by this event was my great great grandmother, Maud Tarr, who had intended to accompany him but had missed the train for unknown reasons.

Notions of memory and loss form the basis of this exploration where memory is explored as an alternative form of history writing. The difficulties in representing history are central to my argument because I have encountered such difficulties in trying to represent my family history, which is incomplete and mostly unrecorded (and therefore reliant on memory and testimony). I have had to rely on snippets of information taken from photographs and texts – which is much like a partial form of memory – in order to deduce details of various events. As Annette Kuhn (2002: 152) says in her text *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*, "Personal photographs … have a particular, and very special, place in the production of memories about our own lives". For this reason I would like to suggest that memory has a certain 'truth' value and is an important means of writing about the past.

In the first chapter I explore memory's 'truth' value in terms of the arguments of Roland Barthes. I then look at issues surrounding memory and the representation of trauma through brief consideration of how such issues have arisen in relation to the Holocaust and the way various artists and writers (Ernst van Alphen in particular) have explored them. Here I investigate how the past shapes who we are and informs how we think and what we remember as a result of trauma.[1] I show testimony as a valuable form of memory in that an individual's account provides details which history writing would not, and suggest that personal details might be added to history writing to give it more substance and in some

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[1] I am referring to the fact that trauma can block out or suppress certain details in one's memory.

ways additional 'truth'. In the second chapter I explore the work of Christian Boltanski, Rachel Whiteread and Doris Salcedo with reference to the themes they explore that are similar to my own exhibition. These themes include memory, loss, the unrepresentability of traumatic pasts and absence. Such links are crucial and form avenues into ways of interpreting my own work which is explored in Chapter Three.

Chapter One

A disaster can be defined as an occurrence which impacts negatively on a community or area. The extent of a disaster is characterised by how much destruction has occurred and the effect on the psyche of its victims. In this study I am interested primarily in the latter, and start by looking at this effect on the psyche in terms of experience and how that experience informs memories of disasters.

The impact from the trauma is likely to cause the victim to remember not only the event but also the place in which it happened. In his text *Space and place: the perspective of experience* (1977) Yi Fu Tuan writes that when an event occurs in a particular space it acquires meaning and therefore becomes a 'place'. For example, the disaster which occurred in 1911 has constructed the Blaaukraantz Bridge as a place of loss and trauma.

When examining trauma's effect on the psyche, the notion of experience is important as the extent of this effect can be determined by the individual's experience and therefore emotional response. The effect on the psyche is defined in proportion to the extent of loss or trauma which occurs. Experiences are what form memories, and it is one's knowledge of certain things which prompts memory of certain events. But trauma can have impact on the psyche and memories of even those who did not experience a disaster directly. Daniel Libeskind (2003: 43) notes in this regard:

> [Trauma] involves a moment of awareness of that which really cannot be communicated in any explicit experience – a gap which exists among those who are survivors, which includes everyone born after those times – a gap which in time becomes obliterated and which generates in itself an even greater emptiness in the posthistorical world.

Trauma and memory are therefore interconnected in that trauma is an example of an experience which prompts one to remember the past. And more importantly, even though the trauma may have occurred before one's lifetime, the impact is still there. Another such experience is loss. Inevitably disasters result in some form of loss, be it of loved ones or cherished possessions. In *Present past: modernity and the memory crisis* Richard Terdiman (1993:22) notes that "loss is what makes our memory of the past possible". The need to preserve and remember the lost person or object is what prompts memory.

It is important to note that although memory is prompted by these forms of experience, these recollections will not necessarily be clear and lucid. In this thesis and my practical work I will demonstrate that these intimate memories nevertheless hold potentially very great value because they are unique to one person.

Memory does not record the past in terms of a tidy chronological record but instead consists of loose recollections which are prompted, and bound together, by what I am terming 'memory triggers' – sensory elements, images, texts, testimony and objects. Here I will explore each of these 'memory triggers' with relation to the arguments of several theorists. The senses are possibly the strongest trigger for memory, and can be linked to images, texts and objects in various ways: seeing an image, touching or smelling an object and hearing a form of text/ testimony are all sensory processes which activate memory. This form of 'memory trigger' will be discussed in subsequent chapters in further detail with relation to my own art practice.

Despite the value of memories, they can never be fully re-told due to their unordered[2] nature and because gaps are formed where details are not remembered. But if gaps and absences in memory signify a loss of insight, they are also potentially meaningful. As Annette Kuhn (2002: 2) argues in her text *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination,* recollections or personal narratives are in fact "shaped as much by what is left out of the account – whether forgotten or repressed – as by what is actually told".

Kuhn introduces the concept of 'memory work' which is a process of investigating 'memory triggers' and working backwards to find a reconstruction of the past in order to gain understanding of both the past and the present. In this way memory allows for one to ponder about the past, and it is when these memories are combined with current knowledge and experience that new insights about histories and events can be found. This need for understanding of the past is not necessarily limited to those who were directly a part of the events. Kuhn (2002:127) writes: "What interests me more is how it is that images and sounds of 'the past' – from a past that precedes my own lifetime – can feel so familiar."[3] Therefore the product of 'memory work' is a reconstruction which brings to light details which, without the personal memories would not have been included. "Memory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered,

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[2] By 'unordered' I mean that they are not remembered as they would have occurred in time but rather as they are triggered.
[3] I can identify with this need to understand the past because of my attempt to uncover my family history and the disaster which affected it.

treating it not as 'truth' but as evidence", Kuhn (2002: 157) observes.[4] These 'memory triggers' which are used for the investigation of one's past act as evidence of the events as well as avenues for remembrance enabling a certain extent of reconstruction. Consequently even though memory is predominantly a thought process which occurs in the mind, in some cases evidence for the memories can be found in an image or text (or 'memory trigger').

Penny Siopis' artwork, *My Lovely Day* (Fig. 1)*,* can be helpful in understanding how memory can work. *My Lovely Day* includes a 21 minute video comprised of home-movie footage shot by the artist's mother in the 1950s and 1960s which has been overlaid with short statements made by her grandmother (which were derived from notes, letters and memories). The video is included in an installation which reconstructs (in reduced scale) the movie-theatre the artist's grandfather owned in Umtata. In her essay on the artwork, Siopis (2005:96) suggests that the film component of her installation, while not a diachronic record, is nevertheless "an ineluctable physical trace … of events which we take to have actually happened, of people … caught in a moment of life". *My Lovely Day* shows the disjointed quality of memory in its video comprised of home-movie footage shot by her mother with a parallel reality of the political events of the time which comes through in her grandmother's narration. The video is a perfect representation of how memory can be used to piece together history, and how various 'memory triggers' can be used as evidence of the past. In her text *Through the looking glass: representations of self by South African women artists* Brenda Schmahmann (2004: 26) says that 'by allowing personal experience to guide the construction of *My Lovely Day,* Siopis has represented a different kind of 'truth' to those official histories". This can be that of memories which have been combined to form an overall personal history.

This narration – taken from various postcards and remembered phrases her grandmother used to say – is disjointed and does not directly relate to what is happening in the video. Siopis (2005: 94) terms her grandmother's words as *mémoire trouvée* which is "Henri Raczymow's neologism [defined] as 'memory shot through with holes'". Raczymow's type of remembering is elusive in nature and is therefore filled with slippages in detail. Siopis refers to the process of a person choosing what they remember and what they leave out as "selective memory". I propose that selective memory can be conscious or unconscious because, when trauma occurs (and depending on the severity of the unfolding

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[4] Kuhn suggests that memory should be seen as evidence and that it should not be treated as 'truth', I tend to see these two concepts as one in the same in that evidence is a form of truth, even proof that an event took place.

events), the victim or witness can either choose to remember or unconsciously forget events which are very harrowing. In the text *Memory, trauma and world politics: reflections on the relationship between past and present,* Duncan Bell (2006: 145) takes note of "Freud's distinction between mourning – memory work that enables reconciliation with loss – and melancholia, where the loss is continually revisited, [and] is vital, intrusive and persistent". When traumatic events occur and death is the result, that detail of the event will be suppressed, therefore leaving a gap in the memory. For Freud, the suppression is subsequently dealt with either through mourning – where the memories are recalled and resolved/understood, or through melancholia where the person is unable to move forward as a possible symptom of repression. The way in which traumas of the past are dealt with becomes important when attempting to represent the past, because it has an impact on how the memories are re-interpreted.

When family histories are told they exist in one's memory, and it is therefore probably accurate to say that these account are constructed into a series of memories held by the writer of the narrative. "This idea of memory as a constructed reality is pervasive. The harsh editing of a disparate jumble of family images seems to hint at the viewer's own inner selective processing that also edits memory and creates history in retrospect" (Gurney 2003). Family photographs, texts and testimonies serve as 'memory triggers' – that is, prompts from which memories can be produced. But the capacity of the 'memory trigger' to enable factually accurate accounts of the past depends on what is being investigated. The photograph is to a certain extent factually reliable because its details are unavoidable (the people, places or objects can be identified). Yet the photograph is also a construction made at the time by the photographer, framing a certain scene with its subjects carrying out a certain activity. Can the photograph then be trusted as proof of events and occurrences in the past? My answer is yes, but only to a certain extent. The photograph's components and subject are undeniable, for example; they can be identified and therefore used as proof that a certain person was at a certain place at a certain time. In *Camera lucida* (1981) Roland Barthes argues that, although photographs in a sense *construct* accounts rather than being neutral reflections of reality, they nevertheless have a certain 'truth' value and act as proof of an event. Barthes (1981:10) argues that photographed scenes or people are to some extent "posed"[5], and describes "posing" as an active process of "transforming [oneself] in advance into an image". Given this, I would say that the 'truth' of photographs can be found

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[5] Barthes theory is that when the target is aware he/she is being photographed, "posing" takes place.

in what is seen and not in what is interpreted through the actions or poses in the image by the viewer. Nevertheless, a difficulty arises here because it is often unknown what took place before and after the photograph was taken, unless there is text or testimony accompanying the image.[6] When the 'memory triggers' intersect in this way they form a narrative of the past by prompting the person into recalling and understanding that narrative. Barthes (1981: 28) supplements my assertion that text adds context to the photograph: "since the photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else (it is always *something* that is represented) – contrary to the text which … can shift a sentence from description to reflection – it immediately yields up those 'details' which constitute the very raw material of [historical] knowledge".

The core issue in my argument is the difficulties in representing the past and, more specifically, the traumatic past. Looking at issues surrounding memory and loss provides an entry point into the unrepresentability of the past; by doing so I have shown that memory is a valuable means to understanding and writing about the past even though it does not provide a full account of the past. However, these gaps are acceptable because memory provides an invaluable personal account and details which conventional historical accounts do not normally provide. The underlying reason for this is that to remember is to experience and in order to understand this concept I will now look at the difficulties in representing the Holocaust as an example.[7]

In *Caught by history: Holocaust effects in contemporary art, literature, and theory*, Ernst van Alphen (1997: 45) says:

> I identify four basic representational problems, two of which concern the survivor's position as subject and two of which concern the narrative frames used to tell about the Holocaust … (1) ambiguous actantial position: one is neither subject nor object of the events, *or* one is both at the same time; (2) total negation of any actantial position or subjectivity; (3) lack of a plot or narrative frame by means of which the events can be given meaningful coherence; (4) the plots or narrative frames that are available (or are inflicted) are unacceptable because they do not do justice to one's role in the events.

In terms of van Alphen's first representational problem, the subject is defined as one who does not make any conscious choices when put into a situation. Therefore the person who

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[6] This text can be verbal or written, verbal being testimony.
[7] It is important to note that I make this comparison not in magnitude but in terms of the theoretical aspects surrounding the difficulties in representing the un-representable.

experienced the trauma refuses to take a position within the trauma or, depending on the impact on the psyche, the person feels guilt or some other emotion towards the trauma. Similarly the second problem is a total rejection of the event. The third problem is in the fact that the person does not have anything with which to compare the trauma in order to understand it and come to terms with it. In the same way, the final problem is where the 'narrative frames' cannot compare to the events the person experienced. This last point is the most compelling in that it is a double-edged sword: the narrative to which the current *victim* is trying to compare their experience could also not have been fully described and represented.

Van Alphen (1997: 48) says "these people had to endure situations that would normally, in the society from which they came, require that one take action and assert oneself", however when they were in the actual situation they would have been confronted with the conscious issue of being active or passive (or subject or object in van Alphen's words). It is when faced with this dilemma that often memories can be suppressed if the person feels embarrassed or saddened by the event. This was the case in many Holocaust survivor testimonies where horrific events were witnessed and, out of fear, people were forced to do nothing, becoming thus placed in an object position. Van Alphen (1997:4) argues "that the problem of the unrepresentability of the Holocaust arose *during* the Holocaust itself, and not afterward when survivors tried to provide testimonies of it, whether literary/ artistic or otherwise". The problem the survivors faced was that images or text were insufficient in expressing the magnitude of what they had been through: "the situation was defined by the *lack* of choice. One had no option but to follow humiliating impulses that killed one's subjectivity but safeguarded one's life" (Van Alphen 1997: 49). In relation to past trauma, testimony is crucial when re-writing the past because of the details and uncut experiences the person can provide. However, the same cannot be said for conventional history writing where one would simply get facts, dates and information. Furthermore, conventional historical writings may depend on records which have in fact been censored by authorities. This was certainly the case with records of the Holocaust. After democracy had ended in Germany and a one-party dictatorship took over, the Nazis coordinated a massive propaganda campaign in which they omitted horrific details of their atrocities. Consequently, it was only after the Nazi rule was obliterated that a number of details surfaced.

This is why testimony is an appropriate form of re-constructing the past; it is only ever based on personal experience and is therefore a witness' direct account. Once again experience is of utmost importance because essentially it is the person's experiences which they are giving a testimony about. The difficulty comes in when the person to whom they are giving the testimony cannot fully understand the trauma unless they were also a part of it. Here, testimony can be seen as a type of 'memory text' and as a potential vehicle for remembering. Van Alphen (1997: 149) describes testimony as a valuable form of memory in that "testimony, though coloured by personal experience, is favoured by Holocaust scholars because of the historical information it provides. It is generally seen as one of the most effective means by which we, who did not witness the events ourselves, can get an impression of what happened". Whereas history would give the viewer dates and figures, personal testimony provides a story and thus has the potential to evoke emotion in the viewer.

It is with this background that I would like to present memory as an alternative form of history writing. Despite its flaws, memory holds a great amount of value within the discourse of history writing because it is a record of the personal experiences of individuals who were a part of the event in question. Even though there are slippages in detail, personal accounts are irreplaceable in terms of their value as records of history. When the trauma exists in one's family a need arises to understand the trauma. Here, testimonies, text and images are relied upon to gain that understanding. 'Memory triggers' are also important because they prompt recollections and thus allow an access point into history which is otherwise impossible.

Chapter Two

In 1997 Doris Salcedo produced a work titled *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (Fig. 10) which is her interpretation of the story of an orphan girl who saw her mother being murdered. The word "Unland" refers to a place where there is no belonging, no people and no place to land in order to gain closure. The result is that the sufferer is continuously propelled back into the moment of trauma. In *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* 'un-land' is an embodiment of the feelings of the orphan girl in the account. In expression of this feeling created by a violent act, Salcedo grafted two dining tables together, and, using a combination of human hair and silk, covered the join as if bandaging a wound.

The works that I will discuss all explore this unrepresentability of trauma in ways that relate to my exploration of it in my own works – that is, through the use of found objects and interventions to them. These artists do not directly portray trauma:[8] it is always a metaphorical exploration, and this too is intrinsic in my own work. This discussion will begin with the work of Christian Boltanski who makes strong references to the Holocaust. Rachel Whiteread's Holocaust memorial has similar points of reference, it has additional resonance to me because of her exploration of the void as a metaphor for absence. Doris Salcedo's work is also relevant to me because she represents trauma in an ambiguous way, creating allusions to ordeals through the materiality of her work and conveying a tension between the stunningly enigmatic and the crude. Thus each of these artists produces works which are pertinent to my own engagement with trauma, memory and absence. When such similarities occur I will make brief but necessary links to my work but these will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

The central motif in Christian Boltanski's work is memory in relation to childhood and death. Even though this theme does not relate directly to my work, the manner in which Boltanski explores the unrepresentability of trauma is important. In his work he attempts to re-enact the traumatic past by using traces and signifiers rather than direct representation. One such trauma Boltanski deals with is that of the Holocaust, but, because of its unrepresentability, Boltanski's work is not *about* the Holocaust. Instead, it refers to the fundamental problem surrounding the Holocaust - the process in which the Holocaust turned

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[8] Photographs directly from the event for example

its victims from subjects into objects. He achieves this by re-photographing 'found' portraits of people and by enlarging the images to the point where the faces become blurred and unrecognizable. The effect which this creates – termed by van Alphen (1997: 106) the "Holocaust-effect" – is produced by two factors: there is, firstly, "the sheer number of similar portraits, which transforms the sense of individuality – typically evoked by that genre into one of anonymity"[9] and, secondly, there is "the fact that the photographs have been dramatically enlarged [causing] individual features to be obscured".

In *Monument: the Purim Holiday* (Fig. 2) Boltanski uses archival references in such a way that the result is this so-called "Holocaust-effect". Boltanski has taken images of people, enlarged them to the point where they have become blurred and displayed them above tin boxes and under desk lamps. The people in the photographs are Jewish students from the time of the Holocaust, but it is unclear whether or not they survived the Holocaust. The work offers a direct comment on the Holocaust – but is not actually *about* the Holocaust, as such. A distinction needs to be made here between an artwork which represents a trauma, and an artwork which reflects on the impossibility of this representation. In his text *The longest shadow: In the aftermath of the Holocaust*, Geoffrey Hartman (1996) makes reference to "The Yale Project" where he and Dori Laub were the first to archive "Holocaust video testimony in the United States at the Yale University Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Video Testimonies in 1982 … [It] is a methodology developed and refined by … Laub and Hartman [who] represent the pioneering generation of intellectuals who took up the task of archiving first-person testimony for the purpose of educating those who did not experience the Holocaust directly".   Laub and Hartman found that survivors who took part in their video testimonies could recall the Holocaust events with clarity. Hartman (1996:154) explains this in terms of "what Charlotte Delbo names 'deep memory' … which is retained side by side with ordinary consciousness".

For these reasons video testimony can be seen as a direct representation of the Holocaust:

> The video testimonies retrieve 'deep memory' as well as specific, informative details of the terror and the suffering. Traumatic incidents are described, often in unforgettable fashion; their remembering is recall and reflection rather than compulsive flashback. …it is *voice* as well as *memory* that is recovered from moments of silence and powerlessness (1996:155).

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[9] This mass reproduction relates to my work where I cast objects and reproduce them, displaying them as multiples.

Another form of direct representation could be the numerous photographs taken within the Holocaust concentration camps during the Holocaust of the emaciated victims and piles of dead bodies after mass killings. An example of an artwork which reflects on the impossibility of representing the Holocaust appropriately is Boltanski's *Monument: the Purim Holiday* (Fig. 2). A crucial allusion to the Holocaust is the enlarged, blurred faces which resemble the hollow, thin faces of the victims of the camps. The obscurity of their faces further emphasizes my point that Boltanski's work does not represent the Holocaust directly but rather represents the impossibility of its representation in that there are no details given about the people in each photograph; making it unclear what came to be of them. By using students' faces Boltanski puts the students in the position of the victims, and once the viewer realises this they are forced to imagine their own face in the work. The desk lamps and tin boxes also emphasize the works' archival reference by making the viewer relate the items to an office where such categorization is most likely to take place. The lamps bring an overpowering effect into the work as well: because the lamps cover the centre of the photographs, the faces become more obscured and the dominating presence of the lamps makes reference to interrogation. The last archival reference is the portrait in itself. This is society's way of identifying individuals, such as through identity documents. Boltanski subverts this quality of portraiture in two ways. Firstly he challenges the authenticity of portraiture by not photographing the people personally but instead re-photographing found portraits of unknown people, and secondly he obscures individual identity and therefore makes all the people look the same.

Canada (Fig. 3) is also an archival work, but in this work the portraits are not presented in traditional form: here the portraits are in fact garments. An item of clothing is unique to the person who wore it and carries traces of that individual. Van Alphen (1997: 115) comments on the "shift from icon to index … The indexical works … claim no particular presence: they simply show someone's belongings, not the person herself. And strangely enough, they seem to succeed in referring to the person to whom they allegedly belonged". The clothes used in *Canada* (Fig. 3) are second-hand and therefore emphasize that trace. The title refers to the name the Nazis gave the warehouses where the Holocaust victims' clothes were stored during their captivity and eventual murder. In the work the second-hand clothing is displayed as excess on all four walls of the gallery space, resembling the overflow of victims who died during the Holocaust.

Boltanski also represents trauma in a childlike (yet sinister) way in *Shadows* (Fig. 4) and *Candles* (Fig. 5). These works have qualities relevant to my work entitled *Stone* (Fig. 11), where 30 stones hang ominously above the viewer's head, creating ominous shadows which result in a sinister presence in the room. In *Shadows* and *Candles* Boltanski constructed puppet-like figurines out of various found objects and wire. With the use of various lighting devices he created ominous shadows, thereby enlarging the childlike puppets to the point of near distortion and thus giving them a threatening presence. Viewers of the exhibition were not allowed into the space and the exhibition was rather to be viewed through peepholes or doorways, thus enhancing the work's sinister quality. Appearing theatre-like at first, this foreboding presence is only felt after a period of time once the viewer has noticed the features of the puppets which represent death: the puppets are all "hanged" by the neck and amongst them appears the figure of death. The puppets are not the final products; instead their shadows are the artwork. This is how Boltanski represents memories of childhood and death: "it is through the lens of memory – how we remember childhood and how we memorialise the dead – that Boltanski explores these two momentous markers for mortal existence: the beginning and the end" (Gumbert & Jacob, 1988: 51). In *Candles* similar puppets have been made from copper sheets and been mounted on a small shelf with a candle at the far end, therefore creating a dancing shadow on the wall (Fig. 5 Detail). Again the figure of death appears amongst the human-like puppets emphasizing the ultimate end of life and the flickering quality of memory. It is as if the figurines are dancing in the light of the candle, waiting for it to burn out and ultimately for death. Lighting is thus clearly an important quality in Boltanski's works, as it is through this element that desired moods are created – ominous, exciting, nervous, and so on. The deployment of lighting as a mechanism for invoking mood is a characteristic of my own work as well.

As in Boltanski's art, the human trace is central to Rachel Whiteread's work where she represents the absence of the body. The reference to the absent body is made in two ways – first, by making solid the space our bodies occupy (the underside of a table for example) and, second, by Whiteread keeping the negative casts of these objects to human-scale. Absence is central to my work, with relation to the space of the Railway station which is the embodiment of absence because of its derelict and empty presence. Space is also important in Whiteread's work because she turns ignored spaces into tangible objects and confronts the viewer with these now important 'negative' forms. By working with the railway station as a found space I am not intervening with it in any way – I am only adding

the works and text – but at the same time (because it is an abandoned space that doesn't get visited any longer) I am urging the viewer to enter the space and be confronted with its vast sense of absence.[10] In *Untitled (Twenty Five Spaces)* (Fig. 6), for example, Whiteread cast the underside of a table in resin twenty five times and then displayed these casts in grid format (comparable to the display of my *Stone* [Fig. 11] work). This repetition of the form dominates the space and intrigues the viewer because firstly it is a familiar object made unfamiliar, and secondly the material it is cast in does not assist the viewer in the object's identification. In *Shedding Life* Bartomeu Maris (1996: 61) indicates that "Whiteread does not cast objects but the space they occupy, the space inside them, or the space they leave behind them as a trace". Her work is therefore reliant on the viewer's memory of the object where the viewer has to mentally slot the legs of the table into the hollow grooves of the cast.

This process of solidifying spaces is taken further by the cast being in a material that is often in contrast with that of the original object and which therefore shifts the original object's properties. Such materials include resin, plaster, rubber and concrete. The object has been de-familiarised on two levels - first by being cast in the negative and in a different material, but also, secondly, because the objects have a human presence and therefore act as a metaphor for the human body. Whiteread envisages that viewers will replace the spaces their own bodies would occupy when using the objects with the negative cast in front of them. My methods are similar in that I mould found objects, then de-familiarize them with the material I use to cast them in, for example the pineapples made of red clay. In *Design does not equal art* (Bloemink, 2004: 139) Whiteread is quoted as saying "the first table I made … was to do with exchanging one's personal space with that of the table". The negative spaces also hold memory and some of the objects she casts in fact remind her of people who are significant to her. For example she describes how a table she cast reminded her of one owned by her grandmother. She sustained the reference to a human presence by including in the final cast remnants from the original, thereby leaving a trace of the person who owned it and occupied it. Another link to memory in Whiteread's sculptures is the viewer's memory (and knowledge) of what the sculpture is cast from, i.e.: table, chair etc. In *Image and remembrance : representation and the Holocaust* Rebecca Comay (2003: 255) notes that "by imprinting the ignored, occult spaces around and within everyday objects

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[10] This feeling will partly be conveyed through the reference to the station as the place where the train and its occupants were headed when the disaster occurred.

which were themselves frequently in the abject position of cast-off detritus … her work had seemed to point simultaneously to the persistence of memory and to its ultimate limit".

An additional interpretation of the negative casts is to see them as absences or voids. This is fitting when representing memory and trauma which is to some degree incomplete, and it is how I chose to work with the representation of trauma. In this sense, one might see Whiteread's sculptures as the embodiment of memory. This connection to memory is especially meaningful in a work she made for the city of Vienna respectfully called the *Holocaust Memorial* (Fig. 7.1).[11] The memorial takes the form of an inverted library, once again subverting the traditional and filling the space usually occupied by people. The negative door handles of the library render it inaccessible, the books along the four walls have been turned around so their spines face inward, making them unreadable and unidentifiable. Therefore the inverted books resemble the murdered Jews as the title suggests. Because the pages appear concretized (Fig. 7.2) the enormity of loss is emphasized further: now no identity can be found, no details will be known. Set in concrete the individual books disappear into the shelves and will never leave that place – just as the murdered Jews will never have their identities returned or leave the places of their murder. Comay (2003: 261) describes the books as "doubly illegible – stripped of title and irretrievably sealed – the books announce the opacity of an archive impenetrable in its own self-display … Opaque in their exposure, the books … announce the endlessness of mourning without term".

The void is equally important in Doris Salcedo's work about the traumatic past; her exploration is the most like my own. These notions are explored in various interviews and essays on Salcedo's work in *Doris Salcedo* by Carlos Basualdo (2000). *Atrabiliarios* (Fig. 8) is a work about the people in Columbia who go missing[12] *Atrabiliarios* shows the loss of those who went missing as well as the experience of the families who mourn them. The work is an installation of female victims' shoes "presented in wood-framed box-like niches, which are inserted into windows cut directly into [the] walls" (Basualdo, 2000: 49). These niches are made impermeable with transparent, yellowed animal fibre which has been stretched to cover the opening and stitched parallel with the wall, using surgical thread. In

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[11] "In January 1996, following an international competition initiated two years earlier by Simon Wiesenthal, Rachel Whiteread's project for a Holocaust memorial was commissioned by the city of Vienna to be erected on the Judenplatz" (Hornstein & Jacobowitz, 2003).

[12] It is unclear how these people go missing, Salcedo travels around the Columbian countryside interviewing families who have experienced loved ones disappearing. She then collects personal items of the missing people such as shoes and makes an artwork from them – for example the shoes in *Atrabiliarios* (Fig. 8) and the tunic in *Unland: the orphan's tunic* (Fig. 10)

this work Salcedo's exploration of the void and absence is the most apparent: this is her way of representing the traumatic past. Salcedo achieves this void by creating a skin-like barrier between the viewer and the shoes, thus prompting a language of loss. This void is also created by the owners of the shoes not being there or being represented. In *Absence*, the void surrounds the viewer because of the strong desolation of the space, the cracks in the *Stones* (Fig. 11) and the six solitary *Sleepers* (Fig. 12), which together emphasize a loss that the viewer is unsure of until further inspection of the exhibition.

Atrabiliarios (Fig. 8) is closely related to space because "when a loved person disappears, everything becomes impregnated with that person's presence. Every … object [and] every space is a reminder of his or her absence, as if absence were stronger than presence" (Basualdo, 2000:16). In terms of memory's function in the work, the semi-transparent tinted windows serve as the epitome of the opaqueness of memory. These windows are a strong "connection to the dimness associated with remembering trauma" (Basualdo, 2000:55). The crudeness of the window through which one has to look to see the beauty of the shoes creates an intense contrast. The animal fibres are a reference to the human body and make the viewer imagine their own skin being stitched with the uneven sutures which are grafting the skin to the wall. When walking away from this hauntingly beautiful image the after-effect remains with the viewer long after leaving the exhibition. This reference to the body is carried through to Salcedo's next series of works, *La Casa Viuda* (Fig. 9.1). Basualdo (2000: 57) describes the work as follows: "The screened memories of *Atrabiliarios* have a kind of counterpart of the installations of *La Casa Viuda ...* The title invokes a lonely woman, bereavement, grief, but that is inexact, because Salcedo doesn't name the house of a widow … but a physical structure that has itself lost a caretaker and a mate, a loss by which it will henceforth be identified." The house is therefore a metaphor for the 'lonely woman', making the structure of the house important and the emptiness of the house is therefore emphasized. *La Casa Viuda* is made up of wooden doors combined with other items of worn-out furniture which have been placed in unusual combinations. One such example is *La Casa Viuda I* (Fig. 9.2) where a solid wood door and chair have been grafted together with very delicate material covering most of the chair. This material is falling apart to the point where the fibres are visible, resembling flesh and referencing the body, and therefore making the fabric incredibly uncomfortable to look at. My cement *Sleepers* (Fig. 12) refer to people in various ways – first, through their fragility

and scale and, second, in that each *Sleeper* is essentially a portrait for the six generations of fathers in my family. These

> evocations of the human through garments, with their closeness and likeness to skin … are made to seem like inert, foreign elements in the living bodies of wooden furniture. The lace, the buttons and the bone mark sites where the skin of chairs and chests of drawers is rubbed raw; in effect these elements become, despite their obvious frailty the instruments by which those wounds are inflicted (Basualdo, 2000: 60).

Perhaps the most important of Saledo's works, *Unland: the orphan's tunic* (Fig. 10.1) references all the major issues of fragility, loss and representation of trauma. Andreas Huyssen terms *Unland: the orphan's tunic* (Fig. 10.1) a "memory sculpture", which is the embodiment of personal memory, conveying the past as present and offering the viewer a hint of the past, therefore prompting contemplation of the memories that the sculpture is addressing. Huyssen (2003: 120) describes "memory sculpture" as follows: "Apart from the invariably specific histories, localities, and corporeal memories that the works ask the beholder to trace, as a medium by itself memory sculpture asserts the need for a slowdown, and it demands recognition of the basic matter of everyday life". This is seen in the work of both Salcedo and Whiteread (and as I will propose in my own work) where the viewer has to spend time looking at the sculpture, contemplating it and noticing the details which hold the impactive quality that makes the works significant to the viewer. In *Unland: the orphan's tunic* (Fig. 10.1) the haunting effect is only found as a consequence of the viewer's closer inspection of the work, at first the work appears to be two kitchen tables, which are two different colours and different sizes, that have both been cut off on one end and fused together. It is only when the viewer steps closer that the detail of the join can be seen, the two tables are joined by intricately woven, almost sutured, human hair and silk (Fig. 10.2). The hair has been threaded through tiny holes that have been drilled into the wood, layer upon layer almost as if covering a wound, thus anthropomorphising the tables. The silk appears fragile, dissapearing into the hair and wood, protectively covering the places where the legs have been severed and tables have been joined.

This work is one of three in the "Unland" series and its title *The orphan's tunic* refers to a realistic way of seeing the world, and issues of displacement. The "tunic" in the title refers to the dress her mother made for her shortly before her death, which the girl then wore every day "as a marker of memory and a sign of trauma" (Huyssen, 2003: 116). The work is an embodiment of these two themes. The violence in the severing of the table legs

and part of their surfaces represents the girl who was forced to witness the violent death her mother suffered. Just as the tables have no voice, the girl was forced to watch the murder of her mother and not cry out for help, therefore, the table is representative of her. The tunic is her comfort, covering the void left by her mother's death. In the work the silk is representative of the tunic. The grafted join can be seen as a large gaping crack, suggesting the void and the absence of the table legs we are subconsciously aware of: upon closer inspection gaps can be seen through the hair and silk. In Salcedo's work materiality is important, because of her use of objects and materials that are already loaded with meaning. The solid wood tables represent family, a family can be imagined sitting around them at mealtimes, conveying strength and stability. The tables are however heavily used, when looked at closely the scratches from heavy use can be seen. The place where they have been severed and joined is at a point of imbalance: if there was anything placed on the tables it looks as if they would detach – thus emphasizing fragility. Huyssen (2003: 119) writes: "the work addresses the individual spectator, inscribes its complex message, and leaves the spectator moved by the memory of a powerful image … Salcedo's sculpture moves the spectator to the edge of an abyss only thinly veiled by the beauty of the piece itself".

These artists have been discussed because of the similarity between their work and my own. The central motif being the exploration of past trauma and attempt at representing it and continuous presence of the void or absence in this representation. I would like to introduce the possibilty of my work falling under Huyssen's category of "memory sculpture" and will investigate this theory further in Chapter Three.

<u>Chapter Three</u>

The haunting image of a train plunging down a 180ft gorge played over in my mind when I first learned that my great great grandfather, Paul Tarr, was one of the 29 passengers who did not survive the Blaaukraantz railway disaster of April 1911. It was this recurring image which prompted my further investigation of my family history, which proved to be to no avail. General facts could be found, but details were lost, and these created gaps and slippages in my constructed memory. It is here where the idea of *Absence* - the title of my exhibition - is key in my work. It refers to absent facts, absent records and absent people - people whose perceptions and recollections are never to be found because the event I am examining preceded my own lifetime. Even though the events were before my lifetime and do not affect me directly, the effect remained and, as in Siopis' *My Lovely Day* (Fig. 1), the need to conduct an investigation to find 'memory triggers' was born. The result is an exhibition of objects directly related to the disaster and linked to my family history.

I learned of this disaster when I encountered a newspaper article published in the *The Eastern Cape Today* on the 18ᵗʰ February 2011, written by Bev Young. But at that stage I was not aware that Paul Tarr had been a victim and nor that he was related to me. But the article nevertheless sparked my interest and I went to the Cory Library at Rhodes University to investigate it further. In the library I came across Ben Bezuidenhout's book *The 10.20 to Grahamstown: Blaauwkrantz bridge railway disaster 22 April 1911* and learned that one of the passengers was a certain Paul Tarr. An investigation into my family's heraldry showed me that Paul was my great great grandfather, and this provided me with a link between my personal family history and the disaster. Links began to emerge, and my curiosity grew.

However my investigation was not easy as the one person who could have provided me with the details I wanted was my grandmother who, sadly, passed away in 2010 – before I had learned of the disaster. Even though I had access to the Tarr family book *The Tarrs of Rokewood : a story of Thomas and Ann Tarr, 1820 settlers from Nottingham, England, and their descendants* by Dennis Adams and Moira Tarr, finding details was difficult. The Tarr book contains a detailed family tree starting with 1820 Settlers, Thomas and Ann Tarr, and tracing five generations until about the 1950s. Relying upon the testimonies of this fifth generation, Dennis Adams and Moira Tarr are unable to provide details about all descendants. Thus, for example, the date of birth and death of my grandfather, Noel Tarr, is

not given, it is not indicated that he married and his children (my father and his siblings) are not mentioned at all. The book also contains some inaccuracies. Noel's inscription in the list of Tarrs reads as follows: "E1 Noel Tarr shot a buck and, in carrying it on his shoulder, burst a blood vessel and died" (Adams 1991:58). But according to my father, Noel died as a result of a burst blood vessel because he had an enlarged heart; my grandfather was in hospital, in fact, and my father was nine years of age.

The inscription in the Tarr book was upsetting for my father because of its glib assumption and lack of attention to detail or authenticity. It also prompted a realisation in me about my own emotions and fears. There are six generations of Tarr men in South Africa from whom I am descended, and four of these men died before their wives. Learning of these losses affected me greatly because of my fear of losing my father: I could only imagine the pain my own father went through when losing Noel, and the pain Paul's wife and children must have experienced after his sudden death. I wanted to produce a work that would symbolize these six fathers as strong, counteracting their early and tragic deaths, representing them as pillars of their families. This resulted in the six *Sleepers* (Fig. 12) where a father's name is engraved into each *Sleeper*. A link between my family history and the Blaauwkrantz disaster was made in this work because there were 50 rotten sleepers on the railway which contributed to the disaster. More links were found with the cart of pineapples in that all the generations of Tarr men before and including Paul lived in the Bathurst area and farmed pineapples and various other fruits. The pineapples that were on the train came from Bathurst, where pineapple farming continues to this day (my father's sister lived on a pineapple farm not far from Bathurst for many years as well). The last direct link to my family history in *Absence* is the stones: the stone was needed for the building construction of the nave of the Grahamstown Cathedral and had been loaded onto the train at the Bathurst quarry. Paul Tarr's reason for making the journey to Grahamstown that fateful day was to check on the construction work being done at his boarding house on Market Square. The link here is building work, resulting in the use of cement to construct the *Sleepers*.

While seeing elements and motifs I have included in my work as imbued with allusions to my family history, I envisage them simultaneously making direct reference to aspects of the Blaaukraantz Bridge disaster. For example, while *Pineapples* (Fig. 13) alludes to farming activities undertaken by the Tarr family, it also indicates something about the character of the tragedy. As the train rounded the bend before the bridge, the heavy weight

of the pineapples it was carrying shifted – and this contributed to the train's derailment. The survivors and rescuers noted the overwhelming smell of the pulped pineapples at the site of the disaster, and it was for this reason that I included the aroma of pineapples as a sensory element in the work. The *Stones* (Fig. 11) also hold a crucial link to the disaster because their combined weight in the five trucks on the train were in fact the main cause of the derailment. But sandstone also points to a correlation between the reason for the disaster as well as Paul Tarr's presence on the train – namely, the building industry as well as developments in Grahamstown in the early twentieth century. Concluding the direct associations between *Absense* and the disaster are the *Sleepers*: it was found that about 50 sleepers on the stretch of railway leading to the bridge were rotten and therefore not strong enough to hold the weight of the sandstone.

The process which I undertook when making the *Pineapples*, *Stones* and *Sleepers* was that of silicone mould-making. In each case I used the found object (a 'real' pineapple for example) to make a two piece silicone-rubber mould. I then chose materials which would invest them with very different properties and qualities to the objects they were representing but which could in one way or another allude metaphorically to trauma and issues around its representation. Difficulties arose with the pineapples where the clay began to tear when I took the casts out of the silicone mould. Because this happened more and more frequently, I decided to work with the material and let it 'communicate' with this tearing the fragility of the clay. This type of 'small disaster' in the casting and drying process became my own obstacle and a personal way in which I had to grapple with the disaster and my family history. A similar problem occurred when making the porcelain *Stones*: these began to crack in the drying process. But here too I felt I could use the cracks to invoke a sense of fragility and loss. The combination of the material and 'small disasters' with which I was presented resulted in a lengthy process in which I would endeavour to fix the cracks but would fail – almost as if the material had acquired agency and 'wanted' me to allow it to crack and rupture, and thus enable the works to look different from how I had envisaged them.

The *Sleepers* however presented me with a major obstacle. The making of a two meter long mould was a mammoth undertaking not only because its length required two people to work on it but also because it necessarily had weak-spots. Inexperienced with cement as a medium, I had to endure the failure of countless attempts in which casts would break, crack or simply emerge in crumbles from the mould. I did not know how to grapple

with this disaster – the biggest one I encountered with my work – and simply had to keep producing until I had made all six casts. Because of their extreme fragility, the *Sleepers* had to be handled with utmost care when working with them and needed the most problem-solving. It occurred to me that it was somehow apt that these works, which represented my forefathers, were the ones which made me struggle, pushing me to my limit. Perhaps a sense of endurance might be understood to refer to a father striving to be a pillar of strength within a family or to invoke some sense of the experiences of a family who have lost their father.

The *Pineapples* (Fig. 13) are made out of earthenware clay, thus alluding to the earth, yet because they are hollow and almost bursting open they also speak of fragility. Further, the shift of materiality from a fruit (which is impermanent) to fired clay (which is permanent) is important because it potentially speaks of an attempt to preserve memories and memorialize the past, and is therefore bound up with an attempt to show the impossibility of representing trauma. One cannot preserve the actual fruit (the original moment in history) and this is revealed by the necessity of the clay as medium to preserve the 'memory' of the pineapple.

This idea is pursued further through the use of porcelain clay to create the *Stones* (Fig. 11). Porcelain clay invokes particularly strongly the idea of fragility (one thinks of porcelain dolls and china sets, for example). The stones have also cracked and burst during the drying and firing processes, and these ruptures and fissures evoke a sense of the wounding effect of trauma on the psyche as well as the lack of coherent memory that trauma incurs. These ruptures invoke loss, their presence creating a sense that there was once something there which is now lost. The original stone represented strength and stability, and it could be used for building perhaps. But these porcelain *Stones* have been rendered useless and only emulate their original purpose.

The *Sleepers* (Fig.12) are similarly hollow and, although cast in grey cement, are exceptionally fragile. A signifier of building work, the use of cement as the material for the *Sleepers* serves as metaphor for not only the construction of the Cathedral but also my own family history (via the reference to Paul Tarr's building work on Market Square). Because of a direct link between the disaster and my family history, the six *Sleepers* (which were not strong enough to hold the weight of the train) each, for me, represent a generation of Tarr men including my own father who is still alive. This inclusion symbolizes my need to preserve my father's life, and my fear that his fate will be similar to his forefathers.

The *Sleepers* connect to a key idea in *Absence* - namely, a desire to preserve verses inevitable transience or impermanence. The *Sleepers* are imbued with my effort to concretise the memory of the lost Tarr men as well as my father. The engraved names of the six fathers in each *Sleeper* are an attempt to preserve their memory, lying down they become submissive, almost as if surrendering to their fates. Another reference to attempts at preservation is evident in the *Pineapples* where the fruit have been made permanent and their inevitable decay avoided through the earthenware clay. The idea of impermanance is conveyed also in a *Passenger list* (Fig. 14) of the 55 passengers which is stencilled onto the floor using raw porcelain clay slip.[13] Due to the death of 29 of the passengers, these names are faint, barely legible and impermanant: this list will wash away, leaving no traces. Such connotations are reinforced within the site of the exhibition. The railway station[14] has been left derelict, and the old engine train seen upon entrance to the station yard alludes palpably to decay and lost memories of the past. In a similar way the *Railway map* (Fig. 15),[15] illustrating the railway line between Port Alfred and Grahamstown in porcelain clay slip, is drawn on the concrete platform floor – highlighting the space where the families of the victims would have been waiting unknowingly for their arrival on the fateful day of the disaster (see Appendix A for the map from which this drawing was obtained). This work refers to a fragment of time, fleeting in that the line appears to dissolve into the grey concrete of the platform floor, emphasizing again the absence of the 29 passengers.

The passage of time versus time frozen is another key idea explored in *Absence*. The abandoned and neglected railway station alludes to a forgotten past and therefore the core concept of my work – the unrepresentability of the traumatic past. This unrepresentability comes through in two key ways: first, inevitable changes that occur in time mean that one cannot see exactly how the station might have looked in the past, and one can only rely on reconstructions by looking at photographs or reading the testimonies of people who were in one way or another witness to the disaster. But, secondly, because of the extent of dereliction there is an overwhelming feeling that one cannot actually reconstruct the past . However the Station is being re-animated in the present, and this evokes a sense of the way in which traumatic memories continue to reinsert themselves in present spaces. There is an attempt to capture the moment in time when the carriages, people, stones and pineapples

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[13] Clay slip is made by taking raw (unfired) clay, drying it out, then adding a small amount of water to it to create a 'paint' which is then painted onto the floor and can be washed off. Clay slip can be made with any colour or type of clay.
[14] The Grahamstown Railway station was established on the 3rd of September 1879, and the first train travelled from Port Alfred to Grahamstown on the 27th of August 1884. The station is now abandoned and disused.
[15] See also Appendix A for the map from which this drawing was obtained

went hurtling over the bridge: the *Stones* (Fig. 11) hang in the center of a Station room as if tumbling in mid air, never landing and never breaking. They represent a frozen moment of time, as if captured by a photograph, and thus actually forcing the viewer to replay that moment of trauma. If trauma upsets the order in which events are remembered, then this work suggests that idea of perpetual falling and can be seen as the moment when one continuously tries to relive a traumatic event. In this a link can be made to the title of Doris Salcedo's work *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (Fig. 10) where the inability to land on one's feet is evoked. It is therefore as if the disaster is forever recurring, not allowing for ultimate closure – much like the inability to fully represent traumatic events and remember events in their entirety.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Through the exploration of the void in my exhibition *Absence* I have illustrated the inconclusive nature of memory with the use of cracks, faint text and found objects all symbolizing things and histories that were once there but are now lost or forgotten. Doris Salcedo and Rachel Whiteread both investigate the void and absence, and offer metaphorical ways of exploring trauma, resulting in found objects they deploy in their works being altered to the point that they become poignant. The importance of memory as a form of evidence has been the central issue here, in that the testimonies – and therefore evidence – it provides is unique to the person giving the account and is for that reason invaluable when writing about history and trauma.

I have paid attention to Holocaust theory in terms of the unrepresentability of the traumatic past, making reference to the works of Christian Boltanski. Although my discussion about the Holocaust was brief, it was crucial in pointing out the various difficulties one may encounter when attempting its re-representation. Ernst van Alphen's four representational problems formed a crucial entry point because it forms the fundamentals for theorists who have also written about this problem.[16] Van Alphen notes that the problems with this representation are not found in the present day, but that it started when the trauma occurred and with decisions the affected individuals made (taking the position of the subject or object). This decision would inform how they remember the event: if in the object position,[17] a person would remember it exclusively as a victim and the trauma is likely to be suppressed but if the individual recalls the event from the perspective of a subject,[18] he or she would likely have greater recall either because he or she was able to cope (to a certain extent) with the events as they were unfolding or because he or she was in fact a perpetrator. Because of this, testimony is valuable when the subject/object is first identified. Testimony is also valuable because it is based exclusively on personal experience and with the use of 'memory triggers' (as I have introduced), and certain details can thus be triggered and therefore added to the account – something that no history text can do. Also important to note is that many historical accounts are constrained through political

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[16] I say this confidently because in all the readings I have done on the unrepresentability of the Holocaust (and of trauma) each text relates to another one I have read. So therefore these theorists do use each other's theories.
[17] The person receiving the action
[18] The person doing the action

prohibitions: for example, the Nazis propaganda campaign meant that truly horrifying details of Nazi acts were omitted from public release. It was only after the fall of Hitler that survivors (both those who assumed subject and object positions) gave their personal testimonies and provided horrifying yet crucial details which the general public needed in order to begin to understand the true impact of the Holocaust. For these reasons memory is an invaluable form of history writing, one in which new details continuously emerge and are brought forward through the use of 'memory triggers' such as photographs, texts and objects.

By accessing personal memory and adding such testimonies to written history, the realms of individual recall can be instrumental in contributing to accounts of the past. Thus, using my own family history which is filled with gaps in details, and combining it with the written facts found in books and evidence found in images, I have tried to represent the traumatic past in my own way. I have combined snippets of 'memory triggers' which I found, replicating the process of memory which is scattered, unordered and prompted by certain things. This is realised in *Absence* through my use of sound recordings of elderly people reading extracts from various articles and from my own family history. There are five different sound pieces, all scattered in cabinets around the *Passenger List* (Fig. 14) and each telling a story about either the disaster or my family history. The sixth sound piece is found in the room where the *Sleepers* (Fig. 12) lie: my father tells the story of the Tarr family, his voice echoing through the room. These 'memory triggers' are not ordered or coherent and are just sufficient for the viewer to make connections to the objects I have produced, further emphasizing their significance. It is therefore possible for the viewers to relate themselves to the texts and images and arrive at their own conclusions and thus add their own meaning to the exhibition.

I have used properties in materials to invoke reference to the use of memory to recall trauma. The cracks in the *Pineapples* (Fig. 13) and *Stones* (Fig. 11) represent the void that is central to memory as well as gaps in memory. The theory behind these cracks links to the disappearing and impermanent nature of the clay slip in the *Passenger list* (Fig. 14) and *Railway map* (Fig. 15). Fragility of memory is represented in the use of materials like clay and porcelain clay, and the hollow nature of the *Pineapples* (Fig. 13)*, Stones* (Fig. 11)*,* and *Sleepers* (Fig.12)*.* Similar to the ways in which Doris Salcedo and Rachel Whiteread represent trauma, I have taken found objects related directly to the Blaaukraantz bridge disaster (a stone, a pineapple and a railway sleeper), moulded them and cast them in

materials which render them useless and change their everyday meanings. I have then given these objects layered meanings, much like Andreas Huyssen's (2003) "Memory sculpture", prompting the viewer to look closer and think much deeper to find an underlying meaning of the work. This exhibition requires the viewer to mentally participate in the work, because even though some clues are given it is still up to the viewer to deduce meaning and make the necessary connections.

Huyssen (2003:111) provides an observation which might be seen to sum up the essence of my exhibition even though he was not in fact speaking about my submission: "In these works, the material object is never just installation or sculpture in the traditional sense, but it is worked in such a way that it articulates memory as a displacing of past into present, offering a trace of a past that can be experienced and read by the viewer".

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Illustrations

Fig. 1.1. Penny Siopis, *My Lovely Day* (1997), Digital video, sound, installation components (cinema seats, curtains) Installation view, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale. Johannesburg: Stevenson Gallery *(*Photo: Werner Maschmann http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/traderoutes/siopis_cinema.html)

Fig. 1.2. Penny Siopis, *My Lovely Day* (1997), Digital video, sound, installation components (cinema seats, curtains) Installation view, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale. Johannesburg: Stevenson Gallery *(*Photo: Werner Maschmann http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/traderoutes/siopis_cinema.html)

Fig. 2. Christian Boltanski, *Monument: the Purim Holiday* (1989), black and white photographs, photomechanical prints, metal lamps, tin boxes, and wire. Approximately 97 x 212 x 23cm. (Source taken from: Semin , D., 1997. *Christian Boltanski*. London: Phaidon.)

Fig. 3. Christian Boltanski, *Canada* (1988), Second-hand clothing, dimensions variable. (Source taken from: http://www.123people.com/s/christian+boltansky)

Fig. 4. Christian Boltanski, *Shadows* 1984) Wire, cork, lights, dimensions variable. (Source taken from: http://www.armoryonpark.org/index.php/photo_gallery/slideshow/boltanski)
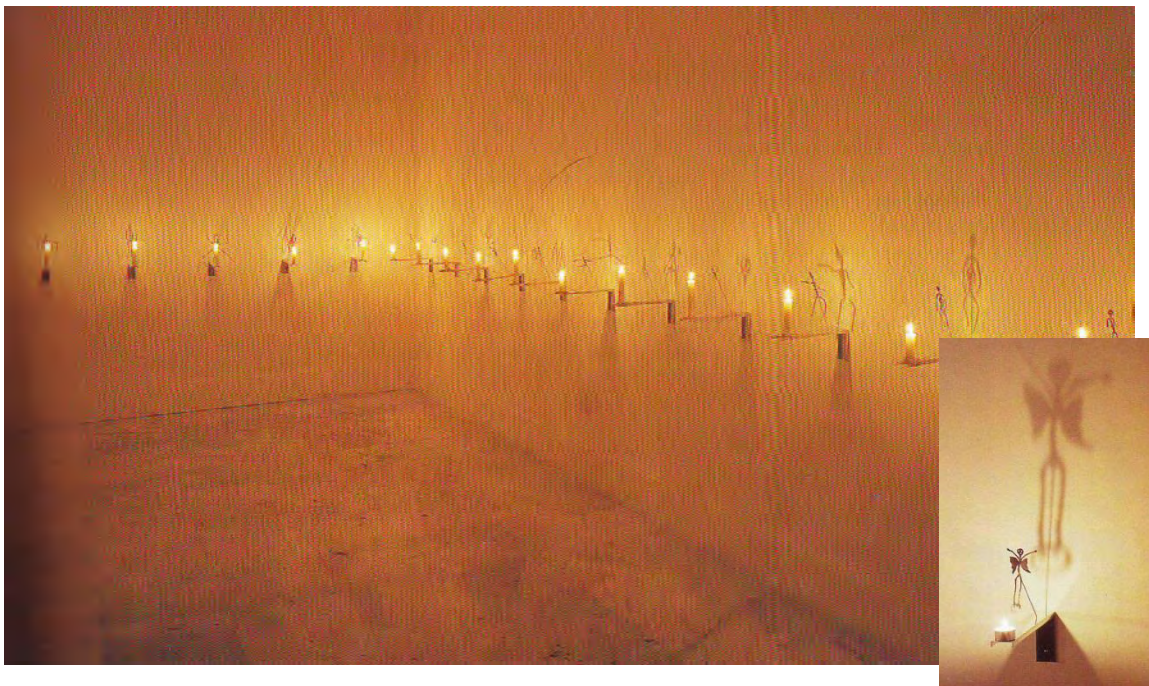

Fig. 5. Christian Boltanski, *Candles* (1987), Copper, shelves, candles. Dimensions variable. (Source taken from: Semin , D., 1997. Christian Boltanski. London: Phaidon.)

Fig. 6. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Twenty Five Spaces)* (1995), installation at the Hagia Eireni Museum, Istanbul Bienali 1995, resin. (Source taken from: Whiteread, R., 1997. *Rachel Whiteread: British pavilion, XLVII Venice Biennale.* London: British Council.)

Fig. 7.1. Rachel Whiteread, *Holocaust Memorial* (2000), Creamy grey Concrete. 13 x 23 feet, Judenplatz Vienna. (Source taken from: http://www.flickr.com/photos/14545665@N04/4450466532)

Fig. 7.2. Rachel Whiteread, *Holocaust Memorial* (2000) (Detail of books), Creamy grey Concrete. 13 x 23 feet, Judenplatz Vienna. (Source taken from: http://yorkshiresoul.blogspot.com/2012/06/judenplatz-holocaust-memorial-vienna.html)
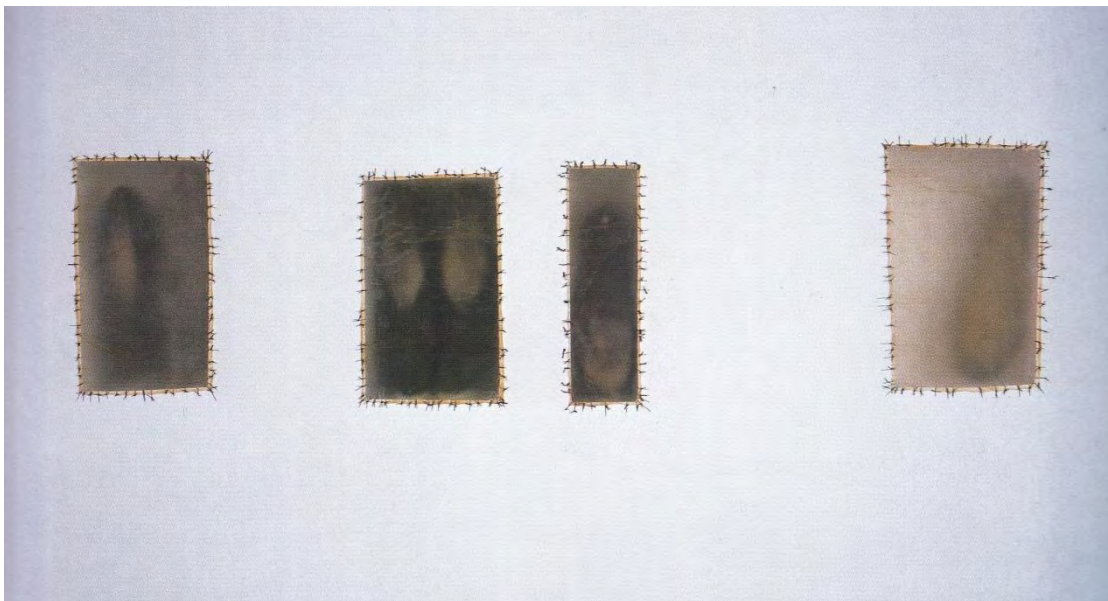

Fig.8. Doris Salcedo, *Atrabiliarios* (1993), Wall niches, shoes, animal fibre, surgical thread. Dimensions variable. (Source taken from: Basualdo, C., 2000. *Doris Salcedo.* London: Phaidon)

Fig. 9.1. Doris Salcedo *La Casa Viuda* (1992-1994), wood, fabric. 258 x 39 x 60 cm. (Source taken from: Basualdo, C., 2000. *Doris Salcedo.* London: Phaidon)

Fig. 9.2. Doris Salcedo *La Casa Viuda* (1992-1994) (Detail), wood, fabric. 258 x 39 x 60 cm. (Source taken from: Basualdo, C., 2000. *Doris Salcedo.* London: Phaidon)

Fig. 10.1. Doris Salcedo *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (1997), wood, cloth, hair. 80 x 245 x 90 cm. (Source taken from: Basualdo, C., 2000. *Doris Salcedo.* London: Phaidon)

Fig. 10.2. Doris Salcedo *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (1997) (Detail), wood, cloth, hair. 80 x 245 x 90 cm. (Source taken from: http://blog.art21.org/2009/07/07/new-flash-points-topic-compassion)
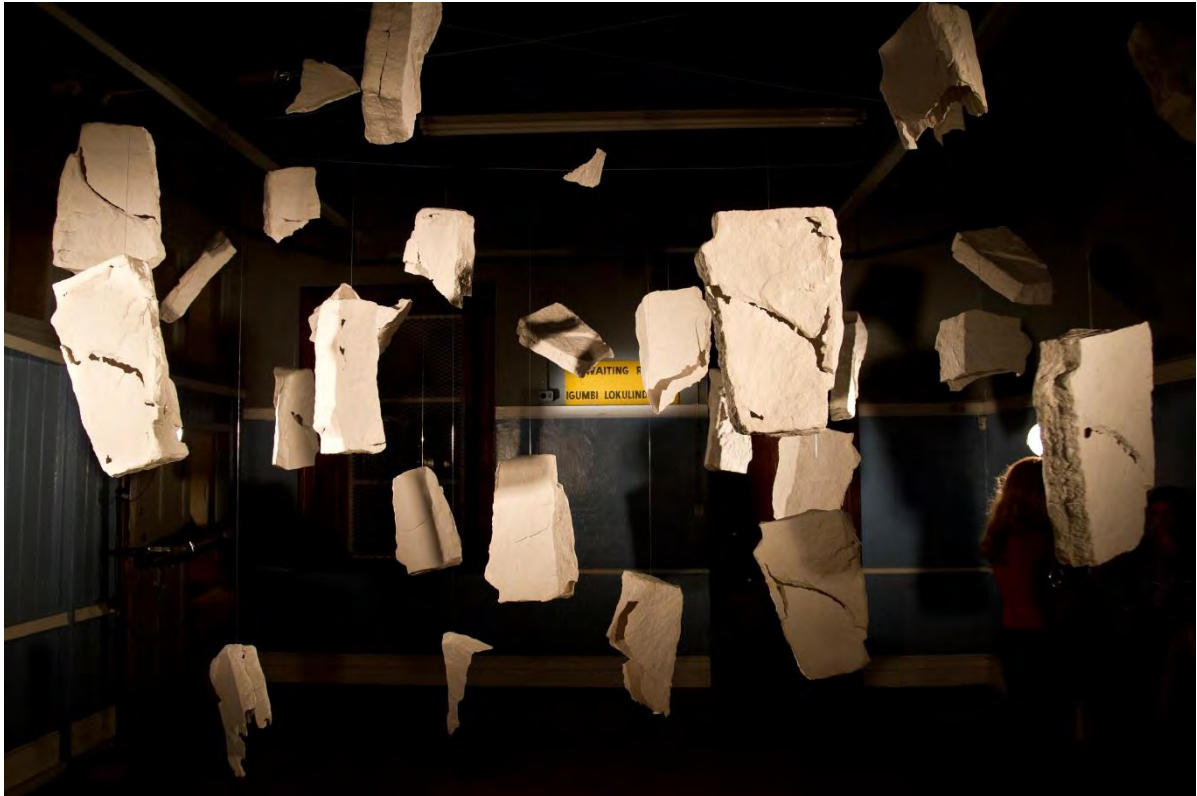
Fig. 11. Amie Tarr *Stones*, Porcelain clay. Dimensions variable. (Photograph taken by Paul Greenway/3P Photography)

Fig. 12. Amie Tarr *Sleepers*, Cement. 25 x 14 x 208cm. (Photograph taken by Paul Greenway/3P Photography)

Fig. 13. Amie Tarr *Pineapples*, Earthenware clay. Dimensions variable. (Photograph taken by Paul Greenway/3P Photography)

Fig. 14. Amie Tarr *Passenger List*, Porcelain clay slip. Dimensions variable (Photograph taken by Paul Greenway/3P Photography)

Fig. 15. Amie Tarr *Railway map.* Dimensions variable (Photograph taken by Paul Greenway/3P Photography)

Appendix A

Grahamstown and Port Alfred Railway: Centenary Excursion, Souvenir Programme. (30 September 1884). Drawing by J.M. English, illustrating the line between Grahamstown and Port Alfred.