

Within the context of memory studies, what is postmemory and how can art or artists help postmemory generations process atrocities and histories that are not their own doing? What role, if any, can 'affective' art play within the context of post-war Germany?

Angela Findlay, February 2010

## Table of contents

List of Illustrations	Page 3
Introduction	Pages 4 - 6
Chapter 1 The Roles of History, Memory, and Postmemory in Post-war Germany	Pages 7 – 10
Chapter 2 What Role does or could Art play within Postmemory	Pages 11 – 16
Chapter 3 Artists working with Affect, Postmemory, or both	Pages 17 - 22
Conclusion	Pages 23 - 24
Bibliography	Pages 25 – 27

## List of Illustrations

- Fig. 1 Hoheisel, Horst (1987) *Aschrottbrunnen*. Inverted fountain. Kassel. Taken from Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. [Online] Available from: <http://www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/memorials/hoheisel/fountain.html> [Accessed on 23 October 2009] ...12
- Fig. 2 Radermacher, Norbert: *Neukölln Memorial*. Projection. Berlin (1994). [Online] Available from: <http://imaginarymuseum.org/MHV/PZImhv/YoungHolocaust1994.html> [Accessed on 23 October 2009] ...12
- Fig. 3 Gerz, J & E. (1986-1993) *The Harburg Anti-Fascist Memorial*. Lead pillar. Hamburg. Taken from Struan Robertson's *Harburg Anti-Fascist Memorial*. [online] Available from: <http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/rz3a035//antifascist.html> [Accessed 04 November 2009] ...12
- Fig. 4 Demnig, Gunter. (2004) *Stolpersteine*. Brass plates. Cologne (2004) Angela Findlay's photo archive ...12
- Fig. 5 Family portrait. (1941) Angela Findlay's photo archive ...16
- Fig. 6 Square in Grosshamburger Strasse, Berlin. (2008) Angela Findlay archive ...18
- Fig. 7 Attie, Shimon. (1993) *Mulackstrasse 37*. Slide projection of Jewish residents ca. 1932. Berlin. [Online] Available from: <http://www.urban-projection.com/?p=184> [Accessed on 15 November 2009] ...19
- Fig. 8 Markiewicz, Lily. (1995) *Promise ii (detail)*. Mixed Media Installation. [Online] Available from: <http://www.land2.uwe.ac.uk/lilym/lmimg5.htm> [Accessed on 21 November 2009] ...20
- Fig. 9 Beuys, Joseph. (1983-85) *The End of the Twentieth Century*. Basalt, clay, felt. [Online] Available from: <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=19434> [Accessed on 21 November 2009] ...21
- Fig.10 Boltanski, Christian. (2001) *The Missing House*. Plaques on house. Berlin. Angela Findlay archive. ...22

**Within the context of memory studies, what is postmemory and how can art or artists help postmemory generations process atrocities and histories that are not their own doing? What role, if any, can 'affective' art play within the context of post-war Germany?**

## **Introduction**

Over the past few decades "memory" and "memory studies" have experienced a surge of growth in academic and cultural importance for a number of complex reasons. An increase in genocides and collective atrocities over the past century has called for a response and a need for processing. In particular the Second World War left a generation of traumatized people in its wake, burdened by memories that refused to be forgotten and yet incapable of giving voice to their experiences. Great postwar thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno were looking critically at the society that had allowed itself to be taken over by the irrational force of Nazism and strongly criticized the very basis of capitalism and the dumbing-down effect of popular culture on the individual's ability to think for him/herself. The severity of the atrocities, in particular the Holocaust, even left historians at a loss of how adequately to document what had happened. In the 1930s Walter Benjamin attempted to "capture the portrait of history in the most insignificant representations of reality, its scraps as it were" (Adorno, quoted in Arendt 1968, p.11), and later, in the 1960s, Fernand Braudel rejected the traditional event-based narrative drawn from historical sources that came from the wealthy or at least literate classes. Instead he focused on the daily lives of marginalised people and the contributions they made to the societies in which they lived. Much of postmodern thought was occupied with the questions of how to understand our relationship to the past, how

we remember and what is remembered as history and what role the image plays in mediating memory and history. Authors and thinkers such as Andreas Huyssen came to the conclusion that traditional forms of history with their dry, academic and largely archival methodologies could not provide an understanding of the past because they excluded the memories of the very people who had experienced it. Instead they embraced nontraditional, formerly de-legitimised forms such as autobiography, visual arts, poetry, personal and family photographs and historical comic books as compelling means to re-examine not only the ways in which the past is understood, represented and mediated, but to reconsider the past itself. The now numerous and often funded projects that gather personal testimonies and oral history, the renewed and ever-growing culture of monuments and memorials, the new museology and the sheer amount of artists working with the subject matter of recent atrocities all bear witness to the need for aesthetic and institutional structures that can contain and present the embodied knowledge so absent from the traditional historical archives.

Within the vast field of 'memory' is Marianne Hirsch's (2008) concept of postmemory, a particular form of secondary memory that has been constructed by the second generation rather than primary witnesses. In this essay I will focus on this aspect of inherited memory, and use post-second world war Germany as my historical frame of reference. However, while large numbers of works have been written by and created for Holocaust victims and their descendants, I will look at the dilemma that faces the German postmemory generation based on my own experience as the granddaughter of a German officer trying to come to terms with a sense of inherited culpability and shame. Having been inspired over the past few years to visit various significant places where my grandfather lived, fought, surrendered, was imprisoned and died, and having had several powerful experiences in such places of the past to which I am trying to connect, I am

particularly interested in the relationship of memory and history to place and the potential to heal the scars of postmemory by way of art.

I will base my investigations largely on the writings of Marianne Hirsch on postmemory, Jill Bennett on affect and empathy, and Joan Gibbons on contemporary art and remembrance. I will start by looking at the critical discourse surrounding history, memory and postmemory in post-war Germany and relating my own personal experiences to it. I will then look at the relationship of art to postmemory with a particular exploration of how affect and sensation can be used in art and how such subjective experiences are seen (and dismissed) by science and the 'masculine' within critical discourse. Finally I will explore a selection of works by artists Cornelia Parker, Joseph Beuys, Shimon Atti and Christian Boltanski, not as examples of art dealing directly with postmemory but more as affective pieces that encourage the viewers to *feel into* a place or an object related to a trauma from the past in order to gain access to the events or people that went before. Underlying the whole essay is the question whether atonement, self-healing or restitution can be at least partly achieved through such a practice?

## Chapter 1

### The Roles of History, Memory and Postmemory in post-war Germany

While memory has been a persistent theme of Western philosophy ever since the Greek philosophers, we now live in what Eva Hoffman in *After Such Knowledge* (2004) calls the “era of memory”. (Hoffman quoted in Hirsch 2008, p.104). Our obsession with memory could partly be seen as a reaction to modernism with its celebration of novelty and the new as the new utopia. Equally it could also be a reaction against the accelerating technical processes of modern life and our attempt to counter information-overload by recovering space for contemplation. According to Andreas Huyssen in his 1995 book *Twilight Memories* it can be seen as

“... our contemporary version of Nietzsche’s attack on archival history, a perhaps justified critique of an academic apparatus producing historical knowledge for its own sake but often having trouble maintaining its vital links with the surrounding culture.” (Huyssen, 1995, p.6)

In response to the increase in genocides, collective catastrophes and atrocities over the past century, a theoretical discussion of the workings of memory on trauma and intergenerational transference and the different means of formally remembering catastrophe has been evolving (Hirsch, 2008, p.105). Particularly with the Holocaust, even historians have felt that traditional methods of documenting and archiving are inadequate in capturing the scale of horror. Raul Hilberg, author of the thirteen hundred page book *The Destruction of the Jews* (1985) and initially dismissive of oral history and testimony as non-factual, came to the conclusion that story telling was the only way to relate such subject matter accurately (Hirsch, 2008, p.105). In other words, singular and linear narrative was replaced by a more postmodern focus on the competing micro-narratives of history.

In the late 1980s Jan and Aleida Assmann elaborated on Maurice Halbwachs’s hugely influential 1920s notion of “collective memory” - memory as a social

phenomenon as opposed to just a personal one. They distinguished between two types of collective memory: “communicative memory” and “kulturelles Gedächtnis” or “cultural memory” (Assmann, 2006). Communicative memory is formed by the biographical recollections of individuals passed from generation to generation in informal, oral conversations. They are embodied memories with affective connections to events, usually having a lifespan of three to four generations, before disappearing. Cultural memory is the more formal archiving of such memories by which a collection of such references to the past are handed down through images, monuments, days of remembrance and other structures or institutions that together form a shared identity for a certain group. In 2006 Aleida Assmann distinguished four further categories: the individual memory and family / group memory fall within the concept of communicative memory, as opposed to national / political memory and cultural / archival memory (Hirsch, 2008, p.111). The former are inter-generational while the latter are trans-generational. In the case of trauma and catastrophe however, all systems of memory transmission get disrupted and broken. Direct links to the past get severed with the result that embodied connections that forge communities and societies are forfeited. Destroyed cultural archives, possessions, records and artifacts break the links between individual, family, community and cultural heritage with a resulting loss of identity and sense of belonging. To counter this fracturing of memory transfer, second and third generations seem to have naturally stepped in with postmemory work that strives to process the experience of the first generation and reactivate and mend these damaged memorial structures by ‘reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression’ (Hirsch, 2008, p.112).

Postmemory is not the same as memory in that it is “post” as opposed to indexical. The continuity between the present and the ‘having been thereness’ (Roland Barthes quoted in Gibbons, 2007, p.154) of the experienced event and memory is missing. Marianne Hirsch describes postmemory as

'... the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right' (Hirsch, 2008, p.107).

Similarly, Marita Sturken emphasizes the power of postmemory in her essay *Imaging postmemory / renegotiating history* (1999), distinguishing it from general memory by its generational distance, and from history by the deep personal connections. It characterises the experience of those who have grown up dominated by narratives of traumatic events that overwhelm and shape their own stories and yet can neither be understood nor recreated.

While I understand the concept of postmemory, I question whether the word 'memory' is fully accurate and applicable in all cases. Marianne Hirsch defends the use of the word with its inextricable relationship to inherited images and the way in which the experiences of those who came before are 'remembered' by means of their stories and their resulting behaviour. In Germany, however, it is not so much inherited personal traumas that haunt the ordinary German people - even though there was much suffering, displacement and death among the ordinary civilians as well - but instead an inherited sense of being 'bad'. For most second and third generation Germans, the story of the rise of Fascism, the subsequent war and the Holocaust is as inconceivable as it is to the rest of us. With the exception of active resisters, deserters and those who helped persecuted people directly, the primary generation have been increasingly seen as collaborators in the regime if only by their refusal, or inability, to act against it. This left the second generation, with many, many questions most of which were met with silence. It could therefore be said that while guilt and shame were experienced both by the victims and the perpetrators, it is less a case of postmemory for those on the perpetrator's side than an unavoidable sense of connection to what has subsequently been described as 'evil' and the overwhelming guilt, shame and even repulsion that that evokes. Hoffman also suggests that the term memory is not as accurate as "emanations" in "a chaos

of emotion” (Hoffman quoted in Hirsch, 2008, p.111). As a child I only knew as much about the war as any other English child and had very few images of it in my head, and yet I am aware that not only were guilt and shame two of my earliest and most familiar inner emotions, they also accompanied me and influenced me through my life to date. It has taken me a long time to understand that I inherited my mother’s sense of guilt and shame at being German, which she in turn inherited both from her father who was a professional German soldier, and her mother who lived in and through the Nazi period. My mother moved to England in 1962 when the word ‘Germans’ was synonymous with ‘baddies’, something she could only disagree with to a degree. There were several incidents of English people not speaking with her muttering ‘the only good German is a dead German’ or similar in their defence. I remember the renewed sense of disbelief and disgust that the showing of the 1979 TV series ‘Holocaust’ evoked, exposing some third generation German children, myself included, to the horror of their national inheritance for the first time. Even today visiting certain places can rekindle feelings of huge guilt in me, something that calls out to be worked through and released without in anyway diminishing the severity and pain of what happened.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What Role does or could Art play within Postmemory?**

The issue of memory has not only become an increasingly important analytical category for historians, sociologists, and cultural theorists. It has become pervasive in popular culture as well with artists being called upon to create visual and conceptual languages that can transmit or process the experiences and memories of their predecessors. Hugely important questions arise out of the conflicting needs to remember and learn and the desire to forget and heal. So how do we best carry forward the painful and traumatic stories of living victims and their families? What can we do with the stories that implicate us in the crimes? Can we transform the memory of genocide into action or redemption? Of all the traumatic events of the past century, the Holocaust stands out for the sheer scale and degree of horror inflicted on its victims. Germany's unique position as perpetrators and potential collaborators in Hitler's deadly Nazi regime has created an even more urgent need for appropriate methods of remembering to avoid history repeating itself. It goes beyond the limits of this particular essay, but it is important to mention at this point the now widespread culture of counter-memorials, a term coined by the American English and Judaic Studies scholar, James Young, in the 1990s, that has spread across German towns and beyond. Through absent or disappearing forms designed to resist the very essence of monumentality, counter-monuments seek to avoid the dangers of us feeling ourselves relieved of the obligation to remember through the presence of a monument. Instead they aim to keep memories alive in the psyche of the people, refusing to become old, irrelevant or part of the history they are trying to remember. Artists such as Horst Hoheisel, Norbert Radermacher, Jochen and Esther Gerz and Gunter Demnig have been some of the leading proponents responding to the debate of the memories and history of the perpetrators as opposed to the victims. (See Figs 1-4)



Fig. 1 Horst Hoheisel, 1987. *Aschrott Fountain*, Kassel.



Fig. 2 Norbert Radermacher, 1989-1994. Neukolln District, Berlin.



Fig. 3 Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz. *Harburg Anti-Fascist Memorial*. 1986-93. Hamburg.



Fig. 4 Gunter Demnig. *Stolpersteine*, Cologne. 2007.

Equally important to mention at this point are some of the many other German artists who struggled in the post-war years to take up their new rights to freely express themselves while trying to come to terms with the aftermath of the war. Otto Dix and Horst Strepel practiced a form of realism to deal with the suffering. Gerhard Altenbourg's *Ecce Homo I, II and III* tried to make visible the devastated condition of the soul. Later, in the 1960s Gerhard Richter challenged the Fascist fathers of both East and West Germany while realizing that the evil was too complex really to know whom to blame. Anselm Kiefer's work is so huge, valuable and controversial - in scale, psychological and mythological depth and variety - that he has been acknowledged internationally as a key player in the working through of Germany's past. Together with the counter-memorialists he offers possibly the most

direct approach to Germany's national sense of guilt. However, for the purposes of this dissertation I am going to explore ideas, artists and artworks that are working with affect, trace and place in ways that seem to me to offer a real potential for the healing of postmemory and trauma.

In her description of second generation art, fiction and testimony, Marianne Hirsch outlines how the pieces

“... are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma. They are shaped by the child's confusion and responsibility, by the desire to repair, and by the consciousness that the child's own existence may well be a form of compensation for unspeakable loss. Loss of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world “bleed” from one generation to the next...” (Hirsch, 2008, p.113)

This ‘bleeding’ can be very destructive within the family unit, existing long after the memories and images of the trauma have faded and influencing the affected people's behaviour and sense of themselves in a way that is hard to reconcile with their own personal experiences. There are plenty of effective models for Art Therapists working with trauma based on making psychological processes visible, and therefore conscious, both to the therapist and the patient. But what role can artists play in this process?

In her book *Empathic Vision on Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, Jill Bennett refers to the role of art, not as a therapy or exorcism, neither of trauma, nor as a ‘faithful translation of testimony’. Rather art is called upon ‘to exploit its own unique capacities to contribute actively’ (Bennett, 2005, p.3) to the politics of testimony. In other words art is not trying to take the place of testimony but to enhance testimony through engendering affective responses that ‘are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work’ (Bennett, 2005, p.7). What does this mean? I would assert that we have all had experiences of this ‘empathic vision’ particularly

in response to places, objects or art works. I remember the sensation of standing in one of the former Auschwitz gas chambers in 1990, and being overcome by the sensation of screaming. This was a physical experience that tangibly conveyed the horror of the situation in the 1940s far more acutely than any historical narrative, image or even the personal testimonies in Claude Lanzmann's films "*Shoah*" could ever have done. Similarly the sense of total awe I felt stumbling across the actual palette of my long-standing hero, William Turner, in the Clore Gallery was also a physical experience that came over me involuntarily. But how can feeling and sensation be a catalyst for healing and understanding? In his early work *Proust and Signs* (1964), Gilles Deleuze coins the term *encountered sign* to describe the sign that is felt, rather than recognized or perceived through cognition. His argument is not that sensation is an end in itself but 'feeling is a catalyst for critical inquiry or deep thought ...because of the way in which it grasps us, forcing us to engage involuntarily.' (Deleuze quoted in Bennett, 2005, p.7). In Proust's own words:

"The truths which intelligence grasps directly in the open light of day have something less profound, less *necessary* about them than those which life has communicated to us *in spite of ourselves* in an impression, a material impression because it has reached us through our senses."  
(Proust quoted in Bennett, 2005, p.7)

What makes sense memory valuable is that it resists historicization and remains in the realm of an affective experience. Yet for many people the idea of 'feeling' as an investigative tool has no place in critical enquiry, or in the assimilation of facts for the history books. One could ask why we haven't told 'affective' histories so far when so many people will have had experiences of them? I believe that this is partly due to the patriarchal notions of memory deconstruction and the only recent postmodern development of history as no longer being a linear and chronological series of wars, victories, politics and rulers, but a moveable feast of smaller, anecdotal stories making up a bigger picture. In my opinion it is also due to the critically devalued notion of spirituality and intuition. Historically intuition has been perceived as the realm of the 'feminine' and largely seen as something to be feared, ridiculed, dismissed or at worst punished. Even today it is usually negated as being

non-fact-based, unscientific or unreliable. To quote the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray:

“In the language of science, there is no I, no you, no we. The subjective is prohibited, except in the more or less secondary sciences, the human sciences, and we cannot seem to decide whether they are indeed sciences or substitutes for science or literature, or poetry? ... ‘Our subjective experiences and our feelings or convictions can never justify any statement,’ affirms the epistemologist of the sciences. It should be added that discoveries must be expressed in a formal language, a language that makes sense.” (Irigaray, 1982, p.58)

With intuition being seen as nonscientific it often gets dumped into the polar opposite category of religion, also largely dismissed by contemporary thinking as being fictional and naive. But is that simply because it is a belief system that was created by men for men? To quote Luce Irigaray again:

“The only diabolical thing about women is their lack of a God and the fact that, deprived of God, they are forced to comply with models that do not match them, that exile, double, mask them, cut them off from themselves and from one another, stripping away their ability to move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfillment.” (Irigaray, 1993)

Even within the largely ‘feminine’ realm of Art History, James Elkins exposes the keen avoidance of tears and strong emotions as legitimate responses to pictures by art historians who want to be taken seriously as intellectuals and academics. In his book *Pictures and Tears* (2001) he concludes that weeping is too subjective and unreliable as a criteria for looking at and evaluating work. However, the notion of empathy and affect in relation to art objects or places is gradually emerging as important in critical discourse with some postmemory artists trying to induce affective responses or experiences in the viewers (Bennett, 2005 p.59).

Photographs have featured prominently in many of the artistic representations (Mikael Levin - *War story* 1995, Susan Silas, Jeffrey Wolin) because they offer a material, indexical medium through which one might literally recall, and make present, a lost past. Yet their two-dimensionality and flatness, their limiting frames, their black and whiteness signal their detachment from both the past and the present rendering them as unreality. While they initially open doors to the past, they

tend to bar access to it, revealing the lure and the frustration of visual remembrance.

Luce Irigaray agrees:

"... more than other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations ... the moment dominates, the look dominates, the body loses its materiality." (Irigaray, [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7804.Luce\\_Irigaray](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7804.Luce_Irigaray))

In my own research of my grandfather I have many a time tried to will photographs to life to reveal more clues into people, places and the times in general. One photograph, however, had a very different quality. It was a slightly tattered but familiar family portrait of my grandmother, my mother and her three siblings taken around 1941. (See Fig. 5) My aunt had copies and so she gave it to me. It turned out to be the actual photograph my grandfather had carried with him in his pocket throughout the war. The physical affect of being in the presence of an object that had been to the Russian Front, stored against the chest of my grandfather, (who I had never met but now knew so much about) was extremely powerful and



Fig. 5 Family Potrait 1941.

emotional. It served as a bigger bridge to the past than any visual representation of the past could have. But why? So while there is much that has been written about the use of photography and postmemory, my

questions are: What trace of that 'having been there' remains within such an object? How is affect produced within and through a work? And which artists are using the power of affect in their work?

## Chapter 3

### Artists working with Affect, Postmemory, or both

In much of her work the artist Cornelia Parker explores the themes of trace and indexicality by presenting objects that retain something of the existential of that which is signified to evoke an affective response. "Stolen Thunder" (1997-98), shown at her 2007 exhibition *Never Endings* at the Ikon Gallery, was made up of smudged marks on handkerchiefs that had been rubbed against the tarnished metallic belongings of various historical figures – Charles Dickens' knife, Horatio Nelson's candlestick, the inside of a suit of armor belonging to Henry VIII, Darwin's sextant, and Guy Fawkes' lantern. These black and brown smudges have been related to such sacred traces as those left on the Turin shroud (Princenthal, 2000) and subsequently dismissed by some critics such as Tim Adams in the *Observer*:

"The desire to touch what they have touched becomes a version of celebrity fixation. It also establishes the overriding sense of a reliquary that informs much of Parker's work; she is a deeply Catholic artist or, at least, the tarnish of a Catholic childhood is still rubbing off. Once again though, the objects themselves don't bear much looking; it's not the Turin shroud. The hankies are part of an ongoing series, but one you hardly hold your breath for." (Adams, 2007)

Similarly in the Ikon Gallery Exhibition Guide:

"Just as the perception of a religious artefact is transformed by belief in its reality, Parker's treatment of the objects she selects often plays off the possibility of cliché that characterizes cultural memorabilia." (Ikon Gallery, 2007)

But I found myself excited and intrigued. It's fascinating that, on the one hand, the idea that an object or a place can have an affect on people has not been taken very seriously, and yet on the other hand we probably all have experiences of investing huge emotional, and indeed monetary value, in objects - photographs, mementos, rocks etc - and places because of their tangible connection to events or people from the past. Is this pure sentimentality or could such objects or places hold what are often the invisible trace or indices of stories within their physical material?

Edward Casey talks about how “the body is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being in place” (Casey, 1998, pp.59-60). Walking unknowingly around the much-changed former Jewish Quarter in Berlin, I had the experience of gradually being filled, from the pavement up, with a sense of huge grief and discomfort that didn’t feel as if it was my own. I then noticed I was standing in the square in which thousands of Jewish families would have been rounded up in 1942 to be deported. (See Fig. 6) With that realization I was filled with what are to me the more familiar feelings of guilt and shame, not my own but those I have inherited from my German side. This might be what Edward Casey means in *Getting back to Place* (1998) when he says “trauma is not just a psychological or inner phenomenon but has a physical extension into the world” and “traumatic memory folds into space in a way that leaves manifest traces ...” (Casey quoted in Bennett, 2005, p.70).



Fig. 6 Square in Grosshamburger Strasse, Berlin 2008.

The American photographer Shimon Attie makes visible what I, and no doubt many others, can feel in such places. In *The Writing on the Wall: Projections in Berlin’s Jewish Quarter* Attie projected historical photographs of Berlin’s Scheunenviertel (Jewish Quarter) taken in the 1920s and 30s onto the precise locations (mostly, but not always) where they were originally taken, thus rebuilding the ruined world on the site of its ruin and exploiting photography’s capacity to evoke absence as well as presence, loss as well as forgetting. (See Fig. 7)



Fig.7 Shimon Attie. Mulackstrasse 37. Slide projection of Jewish residents (ca. 1932) 1993. Berlin.

The intention, which stemmed from Attie's belief in the power of the visual image to heal and teach, was in part to create layered images that served as sites of memorial and commemoration for viewers to invest their nostalgic and elegiac needs. However, the literalness of Attie's work caused a very mixed reaction. While being undoubtedly powerful interventions of place, the directness of the images fifty years after the event was taken by some as the pointing of an accusatory finger evoking defensiveness in the people who had already spent decades dealing with the guilt of their nation's past. (Greene, 1995)

It is interesting that Parker's approach evokes a degree of ridicule and indifference to the past while Attie's provokes defensiveness and anger. Both then block real access to history and the potential healing of memories or places. There seem to me to be two conflicting ideas on working with memory and postmemory of World War II and the Holocaust. One is progressive, and has to do with the working-through of the past towards a future but that working-through, whatever its quality, must entail forgetting. The other involves an ongoing and repeated confrontation

with the past, the effort to undo erasure and forgetting by reopening past wounds. It would seem to me that in making work that is both affective and healing, artists have to use subtle, indirect means and employ trace and indexicality as tools rather than relying on purely visual material.

Lily Markiewicz, the German-born child of Holocaust survivors, seems to strike a balance employing photography and sound to create a total environment. (See Fig.8) Using fragments of images and her own voice she is exploring, in her own words:

‘an aftermath, of a past which has become a present, of the absence of a traceable reality, which has become the presence of memory. I am not concerned with the Holocaust directly, the event, its causes, reasons and details. I am concerned with the ripples, the ramifications, the consequences and our perceptions of it - our place “in it” (Bohm-Duchen, 199? p.231).



Fig. 8 Lily Markiewicz. *Promise ii (detail)* Mixed Media Installation. 1995

Markiewicz, like Tatana Kellner and many others, are working successfully with diaspora, personal history and postmemory from the point of view of the victims of atrocity. But which artists and artworks are exploring Germany's uneasiness with and responsibility for its Nazi past? In my opinion, one of the most successful, and also one of the first, was Joseph Beuys. As the thoroughly contentious figure he is, I am deliberately going to avoid discussing what has been written about him and look at the 1983-5 work *The End of the Twentieth Century* in the context of index and affect. Shown at Tate Modern in 2004 it consists of large roughly hewn pieces of basalt out of which a cone has been cut and the cavity filled with felt and clay (see

Fig. 9). These materials were considered to 'suggest the possibility of new life emerging at the end of a dark century' (Tate display caption, 2004).



Fig 9. Joseph Beuys. The End of the Twentieth Century. Basalt, clay, felt. 1983 – 85.

Standing in front of them however, the caption seemed massively to underestimate the healing potential of the work. Using a material from the very depth of Germany's physical foundations and cutting into it, Beuys was re-enacting the wounding of Germany's core by Hitler's World War II. By feeling into the solidity of the stone, the "Boden" (ground) on which Germany is founded, a strong sense of place is evoked. Beuys's own experience of being wrapped in and subsequently healed by felt is echoed in his use of felt to line the wounds, the scars of which can never fully heal. They are too deep. Germany will always bear these scars but without finger-pointing and blame, without sentimentality or excuses, Beuys's work is an action that, when experienced through the body in the intuitive way which we looked at before, clearly performs a deep healing. Is it possible that at the same time the paradoxical vulnerability of these bare stones lying on their sides like fallen soldiers exposing their wounds, offers the viewer a chance to feel empathy or compassion?

In total contrast to the monumentality and physicality of Beuys's piece, but in no way less evocative is the delicate, easily overlooked work by Christian Boltanski a little further down the road from the aforementioned square in the Jewish Quarter in Berlin. 'The Missing House' consists of a series of plaques mounted onto the walls of what once were the homes of Jewish inhabitants who were later among those deported. (See Fig.10) The evocation of their names and their former occupations

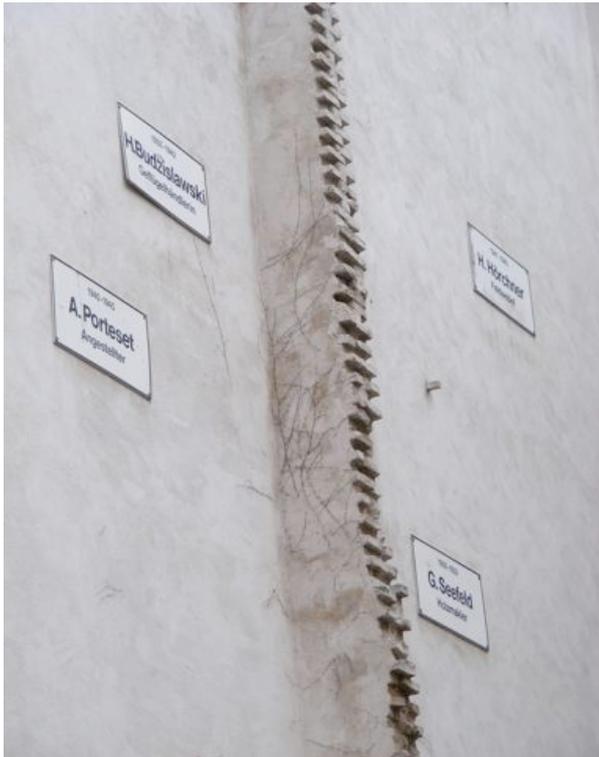


Fig. 10 Christian Boltanski. The Missing House. 2001. Berlin.

lend a focus to the feelings of loss, not by presenting haunting photographs of them as victims but by personalizing the more numerical statistics presented coldly in the square while somehow offering back a sense of humanity to the victims. In this physical place of trauma, and in the presence of Boltanski's art I was able to experience a mixture of the positive aspects of both Shimon Atti's and Cornelia Parker's approaches. The affect these names, these people had on me, the granddaughter of a

General who had been an instrument in Hitler's war machine and of his wife who, by doing nothing, had inadvertently collaborated in the horrors being perpetrated in their name, did nothing to stop them, was to move me to say 'sorry'. And in saying sorry for something that I was no direct part of but nonetheless linked to by association and blood, I could feel a small break in the cycle of guilt and shame. And looking back at all the places I have traveled to in my pursuit of the truth of my grandfather's story, that is what I have done in each one. Maybe therefore the role of art for postmemory trauma is about asking for and offering a space for some sort of forgiveness.

## Conclusion

The list of artists working with loss, atrocity and postmemory from the position of the victims is long and the work is as diverse as it is powerful, personal or moving. There are fewer artists working from the position of the perpetrators but in my opinion Joseph Beuys is one of the few whose work is both effective and affective. As we have seen, postmemory generations experience a severance with their familial and cultural inheritance accompanied by emotions that have been handed down to them rather than evoked by their own personal life experiences. Therapy is one route that has obviously had both successes and failures. Art is another with its capacity to give expression to the shared feelings of distress and horror inflicted by traumatic events. It seems to me that giving voice to, or making visible, what was inexpressible is an essential part of the healing process for all generations of victims. Being seen and heard in the wake of having been abandoned to such horror must offer a chance to let it go. For those like myself, however, who have wanted to disassociate themselves from the deeds of their grandparents yet recognized that they are descended from and linked to them, the path forward is not so much expressive as confessional or apologetic. Anger and blame are natural responses to the incomprehensible deeds of ones' forefathers, but long-term and left unresolved they create problems of their own.

Places of remembrance, former battlefields, memorials and counter-memorials offer powerful, affective experiences, which cannot be denied by even the most cynical. For many people, the indexical relationship to the past (that particular places and objects such as cemeteries and photographs have) creates a channel of inner communication with the past. In the same way that being seen and heard can offer relief to victims, apology offers the chance of peace and the possibility of closure, and for postmemory generations of perpetrators, such closure is necessary in order to break the power of inherited shame and guilt. Counter-memorials are usually

situated in such significant sites and serve vital roles in the process of acknowledging guilt and preventing forgetting. But how long can such remembering be demanded without the possibility of redemption? My original question of the role art can play for German, postmemory generations is therefore only partly answered by counter-memorials. I would assert that what is now needed are art works that, despite the widespread and predominantly 'masculine' need for scientific proof, call on precisely those un-provable 'feminine' qualities of intuition and sensory or bodily experiences. Such art avoids evoking the responses of reproach or ridicule as we saw in the work of Cornelia Parker and Shimon Attie, and gently allows feelings of guilt, anger and shame to arise and be felt while simultaneously demonstrating the humility of non-judgment and ultimately the chance of forgiveness. The apologies that arose spontaneously in me as a result of being affected by certain places and indexical objects such as Boltanski's plaques of commemoration have proved to be key in my gradual release from my own postmemories. In this way, affective experiences of art works that invite an apology on behalf of those who are no longer there, could be essential to combat the sense of helplessness felt in the face of past atrocities and reconnect the family or culture from which one had been separated.

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