

THE PHENOMENON OF DISPLACEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND  
ITS MANIFESTATION IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART

by

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## **THE PHENOMENON OF DISPLACEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART**

Summary:

As an alternative to existing research which states that the phenomenon of displacement resists theorisation because of its complex nature, this study conducts a Phenomenological examination of the nature of displacement in which the interlinked losses in the key concepts of the consciousness of the displaced, namely Memory, Land and home and Identity, are navigated. It is shown that the current consciousness of society mimics these losses with the effect of displacement being experienced as a state of mind by contemporary society. By comparing selected artworks of artists Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker, it is established that although manifested in diverse ways, contemporary artworks reflect displacement according to a set of broadly defined visual signifiers. The visual documentation of a site of displacement in the North West Province of South Africa and subsequently produced artworks underline these findings and highlight the elusive attributes of loss inherent in the displacement phenomenon.

List key terms:

Art and society; Blue (colour); Blueprints; Contemporary art; Cyanotype; Development-induced displacement; Displacement; Eisenberg (Daniel); Environmental psychology; Found objects (art); Haptic visuality; Home; Home – Psychological aspects; Identity; Individuation; Installation art; Loss; Memory; Objects – meaning; Parker(Cornelia); Phenomenology; Photography; Place affiliation; Space and Time; Stiegler (Bernard); Time; Time and Art; Trauma; Whiteread (Rachel); Williamson (Sue).

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## PREFACE

A series of personal displacements sparked off an initial interest in the phenomenon. Exploratory and preliminary research of displacement proved that this contemporary phenomenon was everything that it intuitively had been sensed to be: relevant and widespread, with a range of far-reaching effects on the individual and collective psyche of contemporary society.

It was, however, the words of Schmidt, in particular, which ignited an in-depth enquiry into the nature of displacement: “A loss of home ... involves a loss of identity. It is an uprooted-ness that leaves one without parameters and guideposts” (1980:337). It was realised that if the experience of displacement (a loss of home) is of such profoundness that it can be instrumental to the loss of the self (identity), displacement must somehow be inextricably inter-linked with the consciousness of humankind. The quest of this study is therefore, to unravel and navigate these linkages and to reveal the intricate underlying relationships of relevant concepts in terms of displacement, theoretically as well as visually.

An overview of the phenomenon of physical displacement in Chapter 1 exposed that, although the knowledge field of displacement has developed and grown, outcomes of displacement have continued to be problematic and theoretical models on displacement have failed to provide solutions to the fact that resettlement of the displaced is often not successful. Rather than looking at the end construct of resettlement, this study thus proposes to look at displacement from the viewpoint of the experience of the displaced and the way this is expressed by artists today.

Three key concepts were identified as relevant actors in terms of the experience of displacement, namely Memory, Land and home, and



Identity. Due to the central notion of loss applicable to displacement, the nature of each concept was probed against the background of loss. This investigation is presented in Chapters 2 to 4. The intention was to map the links between the three concepts to determine whether a loss incurred in one of these concepts also is causal to a loss in the other concepts. The contention is that by describing the nature of displacement in this way, an understanding can be gained of the ripple effect of the phenomenon on contemporary consciousness. In addition, this methodology enables a testing of the premise that the contemporary experience of displacement has transformed into becoming a state of mind in contemporary society.

It was argued that due to the fact that the loss of a home causes trauma and marginalisation, Memory processes are affected in certain ways during the displacement event. The loss of Land and home can be understood by considering the meanings attached to the concept in the consciousness of the displaced. An investigation in the ways in which Identity is constructed revealed certain links with both Memory and Land and home. The specific relationships between the three concepts were traversed meticulously in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 6 the act of looking at displacement was extended to the products of looking, namely the artworks produced by contemporary artists. Artists, as meaning-makers of society, reflect the current consciousness of society in their artworks and thus manifest displacement in particular ways. This notion was explored by comparing the techniques, media and processes of two diverse artists employing displacement as content matter in their artworks, namely Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker. The outcomes of this exploration produced a list of broadly defined visual signifiers indicating ways in which contemporary artworks manifest displacement.

Following the theoretical research, the practical component of artworks interrogated a specific selected site of displacement as a prototype of the displacement phenomenon, extending the act of looking even further. The quest was to document the vestiges of displacement and to reconstruct some kind of narrative of the displacement event. A report on the field research conducted at the selected site is included in Addendum 1. It describes the findings of the field research, outlining the theoretical discourses pertaining to these findings and serves as background information to Chapter 7. The visual research methodology, materials, techniques, processes and subsequent artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition which took place during January and February 2010, are discussed in Chapter 7. A catalogue for the *Displacement* exhibition is included as Addendum 2, while a copy of the digital projections presented at the exhibition is included in Compact Disc format as Addendum 3.

The results of the visual investigation have brought the research study of the displacement phenomenon into full circle, underlining the findings of the theoretical component and highlighting the elusive attributes of loss and absence inherent in the displacement phenomenon. On a personal note, it also emphasised the role of art-making as an agent in allowing meaning to emerge from the traumatic experience of displacement, thus mediating towards the completion of the experience of displacement.

## ABBREVIATIONS

DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
<i>House</i>	<i>Untitled (House)</i>
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internal Displaced Person
INDR	International Network on Displacement and Resettlement
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WECAT	Western Cape Action Tour Project
Unisa	University of South Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study is to investigate the phenomenon of displacement in contemporary society by means of establishing the interrelationships of three concepts, namely: Land and home, Memory, and Identity<sup>1</sup>; by undertaking a comparative study of selected artworks of the contemporary artists Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker; and by conducting a visual exploration and documentation of a specific site of displacement in South Africa. The goal of these investigations is to test the premise that displacement has become a state of mind in contemporary consciousness and to compile a set of signifiers of how displacement is manifesting in contemporary visual art in order to analyse the nature of the contemporary phenomenon of displacement.

Displacement is a prevalent contemporary phenomenon. According to Oliver-Smith “more people were involuntarily displaced in the twentieth century than in any other in recorded history” (2009:3). The latest estimations indicated that the number of people “forcibly uprooted by conflict and persecution world-wide stood at 42 million” (<http://www.unhcr.org/4a2fd52412d.html>). Since the practical component of this study deals with a case study which could be categorised as development-induced displacement<sup>2</sup>, it is significant to note that development projects are the cause of the displacement of more than 15 million people per year world-wide and as populations expand, this figure is increasing (Oliver-Smith 2009:3).

Physical displacement has a long history in South Africa. Examples are the invasion of land by colonialists and the history of forced removals in

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the study these concepts will be designated with capitals to indicate their status as key concepts of displacement. Land and home will be considered a single spatial concept, denoting connotations of belonging and ownership attached to the concept of place. (See Chapter 2.)

<sup>2</sup> The case study for the practical component for this study is a site of displacement, the former township Bank near Carletonville, South Africa, where the residents lost their homes due to the danger of sinkholes caused by extensive mining activities. Mining is considered to be a development project, while sinkholes are the after-effects causing displacement.

the Apartheid era. Recent displacements include the xenophobic attacks of 2008, which caused the displacement of 46 000 foreigners in South Africa. South Africa is currently officially the largest recipient of asylum seekers in the world (<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c485aa6.html>).

The above statistics indicate that the number of occurrences of physical displacement is substantial. The prevalence of displacement in contemporary society is especially significant if the severity of the effects of displacement experienced by individuals and communities is considered. The focus of this study is on the nature of displacement as a phenomenon, how this is impacting on contemporary consciousness and how it manifests in contemporary art. It will be shown that physical displacement has profound psychological, cultural and sociological effects on people, that the experience of displacement has evolved to become a way of living, a state of mind in our current consciousness and that these notions are manifested in contemporary art in specific ways.

In terms of physical displacement, this study will concern itself with the typical case where a person had to leave his/her home involuntarily, which could include reasons such as political unrest, wars, pandemics, xenophobia or development projects. Although the findings of this study could be applied to all cases of displacement universally, specific attention will be paid to development-induced displacement (as defined in Chapter 1) since the choice of the selected site as case study for the practical component falls into this category of displacement.

In contemporary theory, displacement is convergent with the term Diaspora, which was initially used “to denote the dispersal of Jewish people” but is used in contemporary theory as a “widespread term”, applied to the “great variety of global migrations and exiles of the twentieth century” (Anderson 2007:272). More generally Diaspora is employed “to describe a non-essentialist identity or culture, which is ‘hybrid’, made up of

different ‘crossings’ and difficult to ‘locate’ in terms of territorial alignments” (Anderson 2007:272). Although the term Diaspora is certainly valid, it tends to describe the physical side of displacement and places emphasis on the political aspect in the process of loss of Land and home. In this study the term displacement is selected in order to conduct the investigation within a broader philosophical and psychological argument which has implications for human existence.

Research in physical displacement emerged after World War II, partly as a concern for the enormous number of refugees and displaced people in the post-war era (Oliver-Smith 2009:6). The pioneer document on displacement and resettlement was titled: *The governing of men: general principles and recommendations at a Japanese refugee camp* published in 1945 and authored by Alexander Leighton. In the 1950s the first research began on the long-term consequences and effects of displacement as a result of development projects<sup>3</sup>. Research on displacement has since included contributions from anthropologists, sociologists, environmental and human rights lawyers, psychologists and health experts. Several theoretical models and approaches have been formulated to clarify research areas related to displacement (as discussed in detail in Chapter 1). These focus mainly on the resettlement process of displacement and why it is often unsuccessful. In more recent research, the anthropologist Chris de Wet acknowledges that theoretical models have failed to clarify why the resettlement of the displaced is problematic. Moreover De Wet also admitted that the displacement process resists theorisation because of its complex nature (De Wet 2001:4639).

Although this study is not focused on the outcomes of the resettlement process as such, the research mentioned above is an indicator of the

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<sup>3</sup> One of the first long-term research projects on the social and ecological consequences of development projects began in 1952 by Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder, and was conducted on the resettlement of the Gwembe Tonga, who were relocated by the construction of the Kariba Dam in Zambia (Oliver-Smith 2009:6).



complexity of the phenomenon of displacement in general and above all, the fact that the existing research has not unravelled the specific multifaceted nature of displacement. It will be shown in Chapter 1 that the abovementioned research was mainly conducted from an outsider solution-orientated point of view. Instead, this study proposes that the research should be mapping the process of displacement from the inside out, by investigating the nature of displacement itself as a phenomenological experience from the viewpoint of the consciousness of the displaced. It also includes artworks as meaning-making practices flowing from the experience. From these vantage points the impact and effects of displacement on the collective consciousness can be traced. Only if this impact is understood can the true nature of displacement be revealed. It is not this study's pursuit to provide solutions to the process of resettlement but merely to suggest a new way of looking at displacement in order to gain new insights into the nature of the phenomenon.

The research question is thus: What is the nature of displacement and how is this contemporary phenomenon manifested in contemporary visual art?

This study investigates the nature of displacement by examining the impact of displacement on three identified key concepts, namely Memory, Land and home, and Identity. These concepts are key role-players in contemporary consciousness and are also significant factors in the experience of displacement as a contemporary phenomenon. In Chapters 2 to 4, each concept will be investigated in terms of its role in the phenomenon of displacement as well as its state of loss as experienced in current consciousness. It will be indicated that since displacement's inherent attribute is loss, the three key concepts are inter-linked by loss as a common factor in terms of displacement. The premise is that if loss is experienced in one of the key concepts, it is affecting loss as a ripple-effect in the other concepts as well. Through this line of reasoning the

pursuit will be to indicate in Chapter 5 that the phenomenon of displacement has evolved to be experienced by humankind as a state of mind, a *Zeitgeist*.

In addition, in Chapter 6 and 7, the nature of displacement will also be investigated by examining how displacement is manifested in contemporary visual art. In terms of the experience of displacement, artists reflect the prevalent issues of their time because they are perceptive about the current consciousness and the meanings connected to it<sup>4</sup>.

Chapter 6 will reflect on contemporary art in general, but will focus on a comparative study of selected artworks of the contemporary artists Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker specifically. These two artists both manifest displacement in their artworks but in diverse ways. The outcomes of the investigation of contemporary artists will be the compilation of a set of signifiers indicating how displacement is manifested in contemporary art.

Chapter 7 discusses a visual investigation of the nature displacement. For the practical component of this study a specific site of displacement has been identified, namely the former township *Bank* near Carletonville in the North West Province<sup>5</sup>. Here the residents lost their homes as a result of the risk of sinkholes caused by extensive mining activities. Because of the nature of the concept of displacement, the study will investigate the absence of humans. In visual art this constitutes a paradox in that the artworks will be about the body, without the body being present. It is thus

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<sup>4</sup> The role of visual art in terms of the experience of displacement ties in with the phenomenological research design of this study. Heidegger, as an exponent of the Phenomenological tradition, gave art a central role as a manifestation of human consciousness. Heidegger believed that "human existence is seen to depend ... on the capacity to let meaning emerge through the shaping of that which is given" (Knill *et al* 2005:31).

<sup>5</sup> Carletonville is situated on the border between the provinces of Gauteng and North West in South Africa and its governance has been shifted back and forth between the two provinces a few times since the start of this study. It has been a point of political and socio-economic controversy, causing big dissatisfaction amongst the local residents. For the sake of consistency, Carletonville will be considered as a town of North West Province in this study.

only what remains of the human presence that is investigated. Therefore a site of displacement was chosen as research material for the practical component. The entire visual investigation and the resulting artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition stem from this site of displacement.

The goals of the practical investigation are derived from the conclusions reached in each of the previous chapters of the theoretical research. They include the engagement with the physicality and localisation of space and place, the mapping of time, the commemoration of the displacement event and the pursuit to engage with personal and intimate memory processes as relevant modes of remembering. These objectives are employed as a methodology to re-assemble evidence of displacement and to re-construct some kind of narrative of the displacement event, in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of displacement.

A combination of relevant theoretical discourses is applied as basis for the development of the arguments in this study. The philosophical tradition of Phenomenology<sup>6</sup>, as a study of the structures of human experiences and consciousness and the meanings connected to these experiences (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2003. Sv “phenomenology”), could be considered as the dominant discourse. The research design is thus a phenomenological research design. This means that it is a study of human consciousness and the experience of human beings (being displaced). The data gathered will describe how humankind perceives its experience (displacement) and how it interprets and gives meaning to its lived experience and the meanings connected to it (via art works).

Other theoretical ideas and viewpoints include the psycho-analytic theory of Sigmund Freud as referenced by the contemporary theorist Cathy Caruth, the knowledge fields of Environmental Psychology, Sociology,

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<sup>6</sup> Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition launched in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The two main exponents were the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2003. Sv “phenomenology”).

Archaeology and Anthropology and the ideas of the contemporary French philosopher Bernard Stiegler.

The study is qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) in nature and thus the findings are not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or quantification. The study is executed in a deductive way, narrowing the investigation down from an overview on displacement in Chapter 1, to the investigation of key concepts and their interrelationships in Chapters 2 to 5, to eventually arrive at conclusions about the nature of displacement and how it is manifested in contemporary visual art in Chapters 6 and 7.

A literature research was executed to investigate the theoretical component of the study (Chapters 1 to 6). In the practical component, the following research methods were used:

- Purposive sampling is used to select the case study of a site where displacement occurred. The site was chosen because of the facts that it is accessible, relatively unknown (as opposed to for instance the well-known District Six<sup>7</sup> and Sophia Town<sup>8</sup>) and because of the specific cause of displacement.
- The site itself was investigated by gathering evidence using documentation methods such as photography, collecting old photographs related to the site, locating official documents and maps, collecting objects found at the site and conducting an unstructured interview with a former resident of Bank.
- The device of documentation was extended into the art-making processes as a technique and creative methodology employing mainly various photography techniques as well as sand casting,

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<sup>7</sup> District Six was a vibrant municipal district in Cape Town where people of mixed races resided. During the Apartheid era of South Africa, it was declared a white area under the Group Areas Act of 1950 which resulted in the forced removal of 60 000 people to barren outlying areas called the Cape Flats (<http://www.districtsix.co.za/frames.htm>).

<sup>8</sup> Sophia Town was a township in Johannesburg where forced removals of about 65 000 residents took place since 9 February 1955 under the Apartheid Government of South Africa, to make place for the white area called Triomf (Sindane 2005).

scanning, tracing, carbon paper drawings and museum-like presentations.

The first chapter, which follows hereafter, conducts a broad overview of the phenomenon of displacement, focusing mainly on the prevalence and effects of physical displacement as a pre-amble to the investigation of the three key concepts of displacement.

## CHAPTER 1

### **An overview of the phenomenon of displacement**

#### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the phenomenon of physical displacement will be investigated. To test the premise that the contemporary phenomenon of displacement does not only constitute a physical loss of a home but is also part of a current consciousness for humankind, it is necessary to investigate the notion of physical displacement as the initial condition in this argument. This chapter also serves as an introduction to identifying the three key concepts of this study, namely Memory, Land and home, and Identity as significant factors in the experience of displacement as a contemporary phenomenon.

#### **1.2. PHYSICAL DISPLACEMENT**

##### **1.2.1. Defining physical displacement**

At the most basic level, physical displacement takes place when the displaced person leaves his/her home involuntarily. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees distinguishes between two types of displaced people: those who are internally displaced (IDPs) and refugees. In contrast with refugees who have left their country of residence involuntarily, IDPs are:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border (Mooney 2005:11).

##### **1.2.2. Reasons for displacement**

The possible reasons why a person has to leave his/her house involuntarily are many and varied and can include: political turmoil; armed conflict; systematic violations of human rights; wars; xenophobia;

pandemics; development projects such as the building of dams and highways<sup>9</sup>; natural- and human-made disasters<sup>10</sup>; and even domestic violence and abuse<sup>11</sup>.

Several organisations deal with the plight of displaced people throughout the world, with slight differences in focus. The mandates of these organisations differ according to the reasons of displacement. The most important organisations are:

- (1) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), established in 1951 to provide international protection to refugees, seeks durable solutions to their plight and to furnish them with material assistance. The mandate of the UNHCR also includes internally displaced people (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/foreign/Multilateral/inter/unhcr.htm>).
- (2) The International Network on Displacement and Resettlement (INDR) is an organisation consisting of professionals in the field of displacement and resettlement, conducting research and developing theoretical models on their specific focus area: development-forced displacement and resettlement (<http://displacement.net/members/content/view/75/103/>).
- (3) The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council to monitor conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide (<http://www.internal-displacement.org>).

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<sup>9</sup> The artist Rachel Whiteread's artwork *Untitled (House)* (1993) (fig 15) commented on displacement due to development projects. Whiteread cast the negative spaces of an actual Victorian house which was due for demolition to make way for a park in London. See Chapter 6.

<sup>10</sup> In the case study for this research, displacement occurred due to a human-made natural disaster: sinkholes in the Carletonville area in the North West Province, South Africa, caused by mining activities (development projects), resulted in the displacement of the inhabitants of a township. See Chapter 7.

<sup>11</sup> The UNHCR reported the case of a 40 year old mother fleeing from Nicaragua to Mexico due to domestic violence, who "was granted refugee status in Mexico on the grounds that it would be dangerous to repatriate her" (<http://www.unhcr.org/4ab9d5556.html>).

### 1.2.3. Prevalence of displacement

According to Oliver-Smith “more people were involuntarily displaced in the twentieth century than in any other in recorded history” (2009:3). This is due not only to the many wars, political conflicts and natural disasters of the last hundred years but also to an ever-increasing acceleration of urbanisation, urban construction, development projects and globalisation.

The afore-mentioned organisations dealing with victims of displacement provide annual statistical data on the occurrence of displacement worldwide. Below is a summary of the relevant statistical data for this study<sup>12</sup>:

- (1) According to the UNHCR annual report released in June 2009 “the number of people forcibly uprooted by conflict and persecution worldwide stood at 42 million”. This total includes 16 million refugees and asylum seekers and 26 million internally displaced people uprooted within their own countries (<http://www.unhcr.org/4a2fd52412d.html>). According to the IDMC’s report *Internal displacement: global overview of trends and developments in 2008*, the continent that is most affected by internal displacement is Africa. Of the 26 million internally displaced people worldwide, 11.6 million are from Africa. Most forced internal displacements in the last decade were caused by internal armed conflicts rather than international conflicts (Jennings & Birkeland 2009:8).
- (2) South Africa is the largest single recipient of asylum seekers in the world, with 207 200 individual asylum claims registered officially in 2008. The majority of applications are from Zimbabwe followed by other African countries. The xenophobic events in South Africa in 2008 led to the further displacement of 46 000 foreigners (<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e485aa6>).

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<sup>12</sup> The statistical data is the most recent available at the time of writing this dissertation.



- (3) It is estimated that development projects are the cause of the displacement of more than 15 million people a year. This happens when farmlands, fishing grounds, forests and homes of communities are converted by large-scale, capital-intensive and high-technology development projects into dams, highways, mines, irrigation projects, urban renewal projects, industrial complexes, colonisation projects and tourist resorts (Oliver-Smith 2009:3).

These numbers reflect the official statistics of organisations dealing with physical displacement and it is an indication of the vastness of the phenomenon of displacement worldwide. Many cases of displacement, however, slip through the official measuring procedures due to reasons such as not falling under one of these organisations' jurisdictions. It is thus fair to state that the statistical figures are only the tip of the ice-berg. Displacement as a physical reality has truly become an extensive social phenomenon.

#### **1.2.4. Consequences and effects of displacement**

The main consequence of displacement is that the displaced experiences a loss of a home or land. A concept of a "shelter", a "dwelling" or a "home" is synonymous with security but also with a multitude of other connotations. The significance of the loss of a home or land can only be understood if the meanings attached to Land and home are investigated, which will be done in Chapter 3.

In certain cases of displacement, the experience has a ripple effect on the victims. De Wet argues that "[f]orced resettlement involves imposed spatial change" which has "cultural, social, political and economic implications". Victims of displacement may experience "serious social disruption, or "dislocation"" because social relationships "have a strong territorial component, and are ... to a considerable degree spatially based" (2006:183). In the process of involuntarily leaving their homes, victims of

displacement are often removed from their communities, separated from their support systems and sometimes disconnected from access to their usual economic activities or their capacity to earn a livelihood. This may lead to a lack of income, food and clothing, and to insecurity and poverty. Impoverishment is therefore a significant consequence of displacement which in turn is linked to the marginalisation of displaced communities (De Wet 2001:4639). According to Cernea & McDowell:

Forced displacement epitomizes social exclusion of certain groups of people. It cumulates physical exclusion from a geographic territory with economic and social exclusion out of a set of functioning social networks (2000:16).

The impact of marginalisation on notions of Memory, Land and home and Identity is considered in following chapters.

The ripple-effects of displacement are even more significant if the consequences and effects on host communities are considered. In the case of the displacement of big numbers of people, host communities are disrupted mainly because of an increase in the competition for economic resources. The xenophobic attacks in South Africa of 2008 which were aimed at the influx of residents from neighbouring countries, serve as an example.

These tangible effects of displacement are however, only the beginning. The psychological effects are immeasurable and varied. The victim of displacement often has to cope with considerable uncertainty which results in stress, disorientation and trauma (Oliver-Smith 2009:12). A model on the process of involuntary dislocation developed by Scudder and Colson maintained that three forms of stress result from involuntary relocation and resettlement, namely: physiological, psychological and socio-cultural, referred to as “multidimensional stress” (quoted in Oliver-Smith 2009:11). In a study on the effects of displacement on white and black displaced farmers in Zimbabwe, Knight has also used trauma as a basis for the

displacement experience, with the most common symptoms experienced by victims being those of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder<sup>13</sup>. In addition symptoms of depression were also experienced as well as negative effects on physical health such as headaches, dizziness, impaired concentration and memory, numbness and overall pain in the body, chest, abdominal and back pain as well as nausea (Knight 2006).

For the victims of displacement, resettlement is difficult and often not successful. They often find themselves “consigned to the margins of society and the economy” (Oliver-Smith 2009:4). Even if resettlement has not involved impoverishment, a prolonged longing and nostalgia for the previous home occurs. This fact underscores one of the well-known fallacies of resettlement, namely that “compensation is enough”, claiming that all moral and economic obligations are met when the displaced are paid compensation (Oliver-Smith 2009:21).

Researchers have tried over the years to devise theoretical models to address the problems related to involuntary resettlement. The various research models approach the problem from different angles. The Scudder-Colson model of the 1980s focused on the behaviour tendencies of resettlers, while Cernea’s Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model of the 1990s intends to identify the impoverishment risks intrinsic to forced resettlement (<http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo022/fmo022-4.htm>).

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<sup>13</sup> The twentieth century with its industrial accidents, World Wars, Genocides and Diasporas seemed to have exposed people to trauma more than ever before. The study of the effects of trauma on people received renewed interest in the last thirty years, to such an extent that the American Psychiatric Association acknowledged the effects of trauma on the individual as a mental disorder called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The symptoms of PTSD are published in the Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) which is widely used in the health and psychiatry fields to diagnose mental disorders and include shock, numbness and flashbacks of the traumatic event (Knight 2006; Caruth 1991:182; <http://www.psychiatric-disorders.com/articles/ptsd/causes-and-history/history-of-ptsd.php>).

Both these models aimed their research at development-induced displacement which is pertinent to this study. Yet, both these models failed to clarify why resettlement is often unsuccessful. This problem has been dealt with by Chris de Wet who suggested two approaches to development-induced displacement. The first approach is called the 'inadequate input' approach in which De Wet argues for better planning, policies and other external input into a resettlement programme (De Wet 2006:181). The second approach is a much more realistic approach but also more inconclusive as an outcome. It is called the 'inherent complexity' approach. In this approach De Wet acknowledges the complexity of involuntary resettlement and the fact that external input (correct policies and framework, planning, monitoring, et cetera) cannot address the myriad problems arising from resettlement caused by factors such as for instance the "imposed spatial change of resettlers" (De Wet 2006:183). De Wet also acknowledges that although the acquired knowledge about resettlement is improving through time, the outcomes of resettlement have not improved. He arrives at the conclusion that outcomes are determined by the complexities of the resettlement process itself and "by the way it unfolds", which in turn, relates to the nature of displacement (De Wet 2001:4639). In effect, De Wet acknowledges that the research thus far has not yet penetrated the nature of displacement.

Why is it that the effects of displacement are experienced so severely by victims? Why does resettlement often go wrong? Why is it, for instance, that compensation for the lost home is not enough? It seems that the severe effects of displacement and the resulting problems with resettlement are issues that resist clarification in theorisation. Theoretical models fail to explain the phenomenon of displacement while the 'inherent complexity' approach of De Wet is merely highlighting the problem rather than providing solutions.

Although it is not the goal of this study to provide solutions to these questions or even to construct a model for displacement and resettlement, it is the quest to investigate the nature of displacement in contemporary society. While the models for displacement and resettlement thus far have focused mainly on a solution for the problems experienced with resettlement, they have failed to reveal the processes of displacement as individual and collective experiences. What is really happening to a person and a community when displacement takes place? Perhaps if an understanding of these processes is gained, insight will also be gained about the reasons for the difficulties experienced in resettling.

### **1.3. DISPLACEMENT: THE KEY CONCEPTS**

Certain conclusions about the nature of displacement can now be deduced from the previous investigation: displacement is about loss of a home. The experience leads to marginalisation, severe stress, trauma and other psychological effects for the individual and a host of social effects on the community. The phenomenon is complex and resists theorisation.

As a study rooted in Phenomenology, investigating the structures of human experiences and consciousness and the meanings connected to these experiences, it is therefore necessary to highlight the experience of displacement from the meanings connected to it. Three key concepts have been identified to serve as guidelines for this task: Memory, Land and home, and Identity. An initial literature study has disclosed that the three key concepts are relevant in the discourse of displacement and that they interact in certain ways in terms of displacement. The intention is to investigate the nature of the interrelationship between these key concepts in order to determine the nature of displacement as an experience and the characteristics of displacement in contemporary society. The investigation will also test the argument that displacement is not just a physical event but becomes a way of being or a state of mind in contemporary society.

The approach to the investigation will be to firstly explore the relevant theoretical discourses applicable to each of the key concepts in order to examine their nature and role in contemporary society. This will be pursued against the background of the nature of displacement itself: the fact that displacement, in its character core, is about loss. Each of the key concepts will also be considered with reference to its state of loss. The interrelationship between the key concepts will then be mapped out by extending the argument of loss and investigating whether the loss of one of the key concepts necessarily leads to the loss of the others in the event of displacement. Against this background, it will be proposed that a loss suffered in relation to one or all of these key concepts constitute the phenomenon of displacement in contemporary society.

## CHAPTER 2.

### **Memory**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

Memory is the first of the three key concepts to be investigated in relation to the phenomenon of displacement. It has been indicated in Chapter 1 that the experience of displacement causes marginalisation and severe stress and trauma for the displaced. In terms of these findings, this chapter will examine the impact of these effects on Memory. The approach will be to consider the nature of Memory and thereafter to explore the relationship between Memory and displacement.

#### **2.2. THE NATURE OF MEMORY**

The last twenty years has seen an increase in the number of studies on Memory. This is indicative of an intensified interest in Memory itself. The reasons for this “memory boom” (Rossington & Whitehead 2007:5) are relevant to this study as they sketch the background against which ideas about Memory (including Memory’s interrelationship with Land and home, and Identity) operate in contemporary society:

- (1) Postmodernism raised the awareness of Memory studies by questioning the ability to retrieve the historical past because “the acceleration and commodification of history had resulted in amnesia”;
- (2) Technological developments led to a “sophisticated engagement with and theorisation of virtual memory” and at the same time many written and visual archives were being digitised and electronically stored;
- (3) The post Cold War era opened up archives and revealed memories not previously available to the public;
- (4) As the twentieth century drew close, society reflected on how best to deal with remembering traumatic experiences (including the two World Wars, Genocide, Diasporas and displacement) which

resulted for instance in the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions of South Africa, Guatemala and Chile;

- (5) Developments in the academic field and debates on Holocaust Studies and False Memory Syndrome resulted in the emergence of key publications in Memory studies which influenced other theorists (Rossington & Whitehead 2007:5).

The increased interest in Memory in contemporary society is linked to one of the functions of Memory, namely to serve as a connection between the past and the present “as a means of creating significance in the present” (Birth 2006:180). It seems that the age old yearning to make sense of past experiences and to put past events into context and give them meaning is especially pressing and relevant in a time preceded by extensive traumatic events as experienced in the twentieth century.

Most definitions of Memory focus on the role played by the brain in Memory processes such as in the following two examples:

- “The mental faculty of retaining and recalling past experience” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/memory>).
- “Cognitive reconstruction. The brain engages in a remarkable reshuffling process in an attempt to extract what is general and what is particular about each passing moment” (<http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=11642>).

In addition to the brain as a site of Memory, contemporary ideas about Memory acknowledge the complexity of Memory by including other sites as well. Trauma studies have investigated the notion that Memory can also be stored in the cells of the body which support the idea that remembering a traumatic experience is also a bodily re-experiencing of the trauma (Knight 2006). In her book *The skin of the film* (2000), Laura U. Marks argues that the site of memories lies in the senses and that cultural Memory is activated and informed by the senses. She claims that the sensorium (involving all the senses) is often the only place where cultural memories are preserved (2000:195-199), especially for people whose



experience is not represented within the dominant society, such as the displaced.

Moreover, in contemporary society, the virtual Memory functions of computers act in the same way as human experiential learning. Machines are increasingly being used as Memory devices and aids for humans, especially in cases where Memory loss has occurred (Rossington & Whitehead 2007:2). This study focuses on a phenomenon of human consciousness. It is therefore significant that the experience of Memory today includes a manufactured virtual environment (site) in which Memory devices are some of the main components.

### **2.3. MEMORY AS A TRACE**

There is one common denominator in the definitions of Memory, namely its link with past events. To remember is to recall in the present an event that happened in the past. Remembering constitutes a link between the present and the past<sup>14</sup>. The element of time is thus inherently linked to Memory.

Although a Memory reconstitutes a past event, it is not the real event itself. The real event cannot be experienced in the present because it belongs to the past. A Memory is thus only a reference to the past, a remnant of the past event.

Moreover, it is known that memories are mediated. By this it is meant that between the time of the actual event and the remembered event, memories pass through varying subjective interventions. Two people experiencing the same event always have different memories of that

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<sup>14</sup> The link between the past and the present through remembering constitutes a presence of the past in the present which is also influencing the present. K uchler (quoted in Birth 2006:180) explains this presence as the past's "immanence" in the present, while Bergson (quoted in Birth 2006:180) uses the metaphor: the past is "gnawing" into the present and the future. These terms describe the fact that the past, by its presence, is leaving a trace in the present and the future.

event. During the Memory process the original event is subjected to forgetting, changes, distortions, additions and suppressions.<sup>15</sup>

If Memory processes render the original event imperfect or changed through time, Memory could be considered a trace or fragment of the original event. As a reference of and pointer to the original event, it can be considered a trace of the irretrievable vanished past. As with Memory processes, a trace is also partially erased or distorted through time<sup>16</sup>.

It can be concluded that Memory, similar to traces, carries a loss of the facts or of the objective truth of the original event in itself.

By definition traces are insubstantial. Even when they have been found ... they tend to elude us. They fail to deliver the 'truth', and gravitate towards loss even as they carry loss within them (De Jager 2008:48).

## **2.4. MEMORY AND DISPLACEMENT**

If Memory is considered as one of the key concepts of displacement, the investigation of Memory could be narrowed down by looking at the core attributes of displacement itself. Since displacement constitutes experiences of marginalisation and trauma<sup>17</sup>, as indicated in Chapter 1, Memory will now be explored in terms of these experiences.

### **2.4.1. Marginalisation**

Marginalisation, as experienced by the displaced, is a process of exclusion (as indicated in Chapter 1). This exclusion is extended to the Memory processes of the displaced. Memories and narratives of the marginalised,

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<sup>15</sup> The peculiarities of memory processes are especially explored in the field of psychology. An example is the phenomenon called screen memories, theorised by the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, in which a memory is distorted or constructed in order to hide or substitute an event that the subject does not want to remember or face (Marlin-Curiel 2007:79).

<sup>16</sup> In the artworks for the practical component of this study, traces are used as metaphors of memory processes.

<sup>17</sup> It has been shown in Chapter 1 that the severe effects of trauma on the individual have been acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association with the classification of a mental disorder called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Caruth 1991:182; <http://www.psychiatric-disorders.com/articles/ptsd/causes-and-history/history-of-ptsd.php>).

such as minorities or the less powerful in societies, are often not included in the official master narratives that are inscribed in the public records of history. For instance, during the Apartheid era, the history handbooks used at schools excluded the memory and narratives of the indigenous peoples of South Africa.

The dominance of national memory over other memories thus not only excludes other contestants for control over the national identity but maintains the primacy of national over other kinds of identity for primary allegiance (Olick & Robbins 1998:127).

Thus the master narrative or official history of the dominant society often excludes the personal Memory processes of the displaced. This is exacerbated by the nature of Memory as indicated in the previous section: its trace-like character which evades the truth often renders it inconclusive and considered not worthy to be included as part of an official history. In this study the dominance of the official history as authentic and truthful will be contested through the visual investigation in the practical component discussed in Chapter 7.

#### **2.4.2. Trauma**

This section will investigate how Memory processes are influenced when trauma, indicative of displacement, is experienced.

The experience of trauma and its effects on the psyche were initially described and theorised by Sigmund Freud<sup>18</sup>. In her seminal work *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative and history* (1996), Cathy Caruth

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<sup>18</sup> Freud's theory of psychoanalysis revolved around the so-called Pleasure Principle, deducing that the main psychological drive for the human psyche is the principle of pleasure or the avoidance of "unpleasurable conflict" (Caruth 1996:59). In his study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud describes his observation of a psychic disorder that appears to manifest the unwanted reappearance of historical events in the psyche in the form of the repetitive recurrence of battlefield events in nightmares and flashbacks of World War I survivors. Since these painful flashbacks and nightmares could not be attributed to any subconscious wish linked to the pleasure principle, Freud concluded that in the case of traumatic experiences, the mind is unable to avoid an un-pleasurable event. This is because the event may be too severely traumatic for the psyche, preventing it from entering the site in the psyche where meaning-making processes of experiences take place. In this sense the event has not been experienced and it has not been given psychic meaning in any way (Caruth 1996:59).

investigates the meaning of traumatic experience in contemporary society by taking as a point of departure the text of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (as well as other texts of the same period). Caruth's contribution in this field lies in the mapping of how the traumatic experience is causing a distortion in the temporality of the survivor. She is of the opinion that the traumatic experience is not grasped or does not enter the conscious psyche at the time of its occurrence but returns in a repetitive manner after the event, to haunt the survivor in the form of flashbacks or nightmares, in order to be experienced (1996:7). Caruth states: "What returns to haunt the victim ... is not the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (1996:6).

The crisis of a survivor of a traumatic experience lies in the way that the traumatic event causes an incision in time and in consciousness<sup>19</sup>. Caruth describes the traumatic experience as a "belated experience" (1996:7). The effect of a traumatic experience on the individual's sense of time is also confirmed by Hernandez<sup>20</sup>: "the traumatized person will go on compulsively looking in the future for the past occurrence, since it has not yet been experienced" (1998:138). The result is that the survivor's sense of chronology is severely damaged and displaced. In the continuum of time, the survivor can place him/herself neither here (in the present) nor there (in the past or future). The past cannot be comprehended and the present is forever on hold in order to find a way to experience the past in the future. Caruth claims: "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from death, or its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (1996:7). Trauma study is thus inherently a study of the crisis of a

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<sup>19</sup> This aspect of the experience of displacement is employed as a visual metaphor in the artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition, notably in the *Timeline Series* (see Chapter 7).

<sup>20</sup> Max Hernandez discusses this phenomenon by looking at the theory of the psycho-analyst Winnicott and comes to the conclusion that, for the traumatised person, although the traumatic event is already in the past, it remains un-experienced. The traumatic experience keeps coming back to the survivor, haunting and disrupting the present. The survivor is not able to experience the present time fully, as the unfinished business in the psyche of the past needs to be dealt with (1998:134-141).

survival.<sup>21</sup> If, according to the definitions on Memory discussed before, Memory is inextricably linked to time then the traumatised person's loss of sequential time and chronology will have a remarked effect on the recollection of memories.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.5. CONCLUSION TO MEMORY

The effects of marginalisation and trauma experienced during displacement are far-reaching. The Memory processes of the displaced are often excluded from the dominant historical discourses while trauma is interfering with Memory processes to cause the loss of a sense of time and chronology.

If the function of Memory is considered to be a link between the past and present in order to create meaning, trauma has severe effects on the survivor's ability to construct meaning from his/her experiences. Since the survivor's sense of time and sequence is eroded through trauma, the survivor experiences a distorted temporality, confusing the past, present and future. It can be said that the survivor of a traumatic event is displaced on the continuum of time.

If physical displacement, for instance in the event of the loss of a home, is considered as a traumatic experience, then it follows that physical displacement could also constitute a *displacement of the experience of time* through Memory processes. In this sense physical displacement could lead to displacement as a way of being, as a state of mind.

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<sup>21</sup> This is attested in the way traumatic experiences are formulated in the words of those who remember the traumatic experiences. Often the experience will metaphorically be linked to death or an incurable disease. Speaking of her mother's displacement from Bank, the site of displacement investigated in this study, Sophie Willemse said: "Mother did not want to move: it was like death" (Willemse 2008). The Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo also described her traumatic experience in terms of death: "I died in Auschwitz, but no one knows it" (quoted by Langer 2007:193). Mourid Barghouti, a Palestinian refugee writes in his memoir that he was "struck by displacement" commenting that "a person gets 'displacement' as he gets asthma, and there is no cure for either" (quoted by Feldman 2006:10).

<sup>22</sup> This fact is confirmed by Langer who observed that Holocaust survivors were unable to reconstruct traumatic events in any kind of chronological order during testimony (2007:195).

## CHAPTER 3

### Land and home

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The concept Land and home is the second of the three key concepts being explored in terms of displacement. One of the assertions of this study is that displacement is experienced in contemporary society not only as a physical phenomenon (which was discussed in Chapter 1), but as a state of mind or a Zeitgeist. This chapter will pursue this line of thought in terms of Land and home.

Several pointers suggest that the loss of a home indicative of the displacement event is experienced by the displaced not only as a quantifiable physical or economic loss. The effects of displacement discussed in Chapter 1, such as marginalisation, severe stress and trauma which are experienced by the displaced, are examples. A further indication that displacement is more than just the physical loss of a home is derived from one of the four fallacies of the resettlement process identified by researchers of development-induced displacement. This fallacy of resettlement states that “compensation is enough”, asserting that “compensation payments meet all the moral and economic obligations due [to] displaced peoples” (Oliver-Smith 2009:21). The loss experienced by the displaced, apart from being a physical loss of a home, is also experienced as a “psycho-social-cultural impoverishment inflicted by involuntary displacement” (Oliver-Smith 2009:20) which cannot be quantified in monetary terms.

In this chapter the links between the physicality of Land and home and the “psycho-social-cultural” aspects of displacement will be explored. The line of reasoning will be that if the loss of a home constitutes not only a physical quantifiable loss, then a home (or place) must have meanings connected to it that constitute psychological, sociological and cultural

losses for the displaced. These meanings will be excavated to determine the nature of the concept Land and home in terms of displacement.

Firstly, the terminology concerning the use of the concept “Land and home” for this study will be clarified and motivated by consulting and comparing current theoretical discourses. The meanings attached to Land and home will be examined, serving as a preamble to the investigation of the loss of Land and home, which is considered the intrinsic attribute of displacement. By indicating how the experiences of Land and home have changed and evolved in contemporary society, it will be argued that displacement is much more than a loss of physical place but could be considered a state of mind of contemporary existence.

### **3.2. TERMINOLOGY**

Both the terms *land* and *home* used in this study are conceptually linked with other specific terms indicating a space where people exist, experience life and to which people attach certain meanings such as *dwelling*, *site* and *place*. In contrast with the aforementioned terms, *space* and *house* are more general and seem to express less meaning, for instance: a house could be a place in which to live, while a home is a house with connotations of belonging, warmth and security attached to it. Similarly *place* is more specific than space: “place is space endowed with meaning ...” (Low & Altman quoted by Lewicka 2008:211). Against the background of displacement, place is the collective term for Land and home and will be used as such to investigate notions of Land and home in theoretical discourses. However, the term Land and home will be considered one of the key concepts applicable to displacement, since the term Land is more specific and personal than place. Place could entail a public space, while Land has the connotation of belonging, of ownership and of nationhood. Land and home will be used as a singular concept, as a combined spatial term, indicating notions of belonging.

The sociologist Thomas F Gieryn defines place by assigning it three essential characteristics:

- (1) Place should have “geographic location”, meaning it should have “finitude” and one must be able to demarcate it;
- (2) Place should have “material form” and “physicality”;
- (3) Place is invested with “meaning and value”, meaning that by interacting with places, people name, narrate, interpret, perceive, imagine and understand a place (Gieryn 2000:464-465).

Gieryn’s definition of place is certainly valuable and gives a basic understanding of the mapping of place. However, place could also exist in cyberspace or even in our minds and therefore be without physicality. This study will therefore also look at the ways place which does not necessarily confine itself to Gieryn’s definition, is experienced in contemporary society. The intention is to explore the experience of “psychological space” as equal to a psychological experience of displacement.

### **3.3. THE ROLE AND MEANING OF LAND AND HOME**

Place has implications on our existence because we exist in space and time, as the philosopher Heidegger’s notions of being-in-the-world pointed out (Manzo 2003:49 and 2005:68). Because we exist in space, our interactions with place and our experiences connected to place endow place with sociological, cultural and political meaning. According to Gieryn, place can have an impact on the stability and durability of “social structural categories, differences and hierarchies” and can “arrange patterns of face-to-face interaction that constitute network-formation and collective action”. Importantly, Gieryn further states that place also has a role in embodying and securing “intangible cultural norms, identities and memories ...” (2000: 473). These are generated by the meanings that people attach to place.

The meanings attached to place are constructed in part by the physicality and functionality of the space and also by the interactions, events and



experiences connected to the place. These experiences and events could be historically significant but more often are mundane everyday events<sup>23</sup>. Feldman comes to the conclusion that a “sense of home is made in part in repetitive details of daily interaction and use of space” (2006:10).

Although the meanings attached to Land and home are certainly subjective and differ from person to person according to specific experiences, certain collective attributes to the concept exist. If a house is generally seen as a building where people live, then a home has connotations with social relationships and activities within the physical structure. Home is generally associated with family, security, stability, warmth and comfort, and key signifiers to meanings of home are shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode and paradise (Olufemi 2002:457). Symbolically, a home has been associated with the human body or human thought while psycho-analysis has likened subconscious manifestations of the home (for instance in dreams) to the self or the psyche (Cirlot 1971:153). The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung was known to engage in a long-term building of a house or home near Lake Zurich which he considered as a symbol of “building a self” (Craven [Sa]). The home as an association with the self has also been argued by the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who was of the opinion that a “dwelling or house is the primary attribute of our being – our essence in effect. We do not dwell because we have built, but we build because we dwell, because we are dwellers” (Heidegger quoted by Olufemi 2002:461). It is clear that the concept of home has a significant link with the concept of Identity.

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, in her study of displaced Palestinians, Feldman describes the lament of a victim who had to buy olive oil for the first time in his life where previously at home he picked the olives from his own land: “I exercised the first and serious humiliation when I put my hand in my pocket in a grocer’s shop and bought my first kilogram of olive oil. It was as though I confronted myself, then, with the fact that Deir Ghassanah had become distant” (Barghouti quoted by Feldman 2006:10). This study is interested in mundane experiences as place-making devices. In the practical component for this study these mundane experiences were venerated by including photographic documentation in a video of activities such as the washing of clothes at a site of displacement.

The important role that the concept of Land and home plays as a phenomenon in our existence is further reiterated by the way in which it is used as a metaphor, manifested in our everyday language. Spatial metaphors are used to articulate concepts about ourselves, other people and the world around us that are otherwise difficult to put into words (Manzo 2005:84). It is well-known that home is used as a spatial metaphor for a sense of belonging, safety and comfort (Manzo 2003:57) as in feeling-at-home.<sup>24</sup>

The bond that people develop with places is an important consideration for this study as the loss of place would mean that these bonds are severed. These bonds are mostly studied in the knowledge field of Environmental Psychology and specifically, in constructs such as place attachment, place identity, sense of place and place dependence. These interrelated fields investigate emotional, cognitive and behavioural bonds that people develop with places and how they play a role in constructing identities of place and people. Although there are differences of opinion as to the exact relations between these constructs, authors in the knowledge field agree on the positive value of developing emotional bonds with places. It is said that “development of emotional bonds with places is a pre-requisite of psychological balance and good adjustment” and that such a bond “helps to overcome identity crises and gives people the sense of stability they need in the ever changing world” (Lewicka 2008:211).

Attachment to place could also incorporate a spiritual or metaphysical aspect and could be embedded in the collective culture and reinforced in age-old narratives of a people. An example is found in the perceptions of the Western Apache people of America who believe that “places ... are

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<sup>24</sup> The meanings attached to a home could also be negative. For instance, the feminist Avtar Brah points out that: “home can simultaneously be a place of safety and terror” (2007:289). Home could be connected to memories of abuse, neglect, confinement or unhappiness. Manzo has argued that “the use of the metaphor of home to describe a sense of belonging, safety and comfort has complicated our understanding of the role of negative and ambivalent feelings towards this place as well as other places” (2003:57).

literally giving moral messages, are imploring people to live right” (Hindman 1996:63). Additionally, the early San people of South Africa experienced place and spirituality as two interlinked concepts that “penetrated each utterly” (Bennun 2004:125)<sup>25</sup>.

It is clear that Land and home has an important function in the way humankind interact with space and with each other as well as in the way humans make sense of the world. A sense of place incorporates more than a physical representation of space. Instead, experiences of Land and home have implications on the cultural, social, economic, political and spiritual existence of humankind.

### **3.4. LOSS OF LAND AND HOME**

If Land and home is important for human experience as argued above, it follows that the loss of Land and home must have devastating implications as far as psychological well-being is concerned. Moreover, the loss of Land and home has severe effects on individual and collective Memory, history, Identity and can even have an impact on the experience of spirituality of certain people. Research amongst homeless people has shown that the homeless described themselves as people with “no sense of belonging, no identity” (Olufemi 2002:461) while two studies on the effects of loss of Land and home as experienced by Zimbabwean farmers illustrate the overwhelming psychological effects of displacement with additional physical manifestations, symptomatic of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Knight 2006; Knight & Wallace 2004).

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<sup>25</sup> In the book: *The broken string: the last words of an extinct people* (2004), containing recordings of stories and narratives of the early San people of South Africa, as documented by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in the 1800's, author Neil Bennun describes how the early settlers' and the San's concepts of land differed. For the farmer settlers, land should be owned by working and building on it. Land had economic value. They considered the San not to have any concept of the value of land or religion. Instead, Bennun explains that the San's concept of the value of land and spirituality were sophisticated. He argues that the “settlers were seizing land that defined the spiritual, ritual and everyday practices of the people that first lived there... . It was an assault on a way of making sense of the world” (2004:125).

Our sense of place is certainly eroded by the displacement event. However, the way that we live in our contemporary world has also contributed to this erosion. The developments of the industrial age, such as trains, aeroplanes and other modes of transport “had the effect on popular imagination of causing geographical space to shrink” (Burgin 2007:277) while technological developments have changed place from a geographical entity to a “space of time” (Burgin 2007:278). No longer is physical contact necessary for communities to exist because new advanced technological communication methods have made cyberspace communities possible.

In contrast with the pre-industrial era where a sense of place was connected to community interaction and the norms and values imbedded in the community, our sense of place has gradually been eroded by an interrelated process of the influence of power politics and the changing of our physical surroundings. Arefi argues that “pre-modern communities” used to construct their meanings of place based on religious and mythical thought which is called “centeredness”. Centeredness has been replaced by “standardized landscapes” signifying the “power of capital” (1999:185). In his article: *Non-place and placelessness as narratives of loss: rethinking the notion of place* (1999), Arefi traces, from an urban designer’s point of view, the gradual process of how modernism disrupted the “emotional attachment to place”: from a natural and secure rootedness, to a self-conscious sense of place typically manifested in historic preservation projects, and eventually to the third stage where the environment is “manufactured” and “accessibility has become superior to proximity” (1999:180-4). The third stage is manifested in an environment indicative of non-place or placelessness where place is characterised by an increasing number of so-called urban renewal projects and the building of big highways and fly-overs. The void that is left by the demolishing of community place-making is quickly lapped up by the “proliferation of inauthentic” or “invented” places (Arefi 1999:185). Examples of these kinds

of places are theme parks and themed shopping malls where the experience of a feeling of community and sense of authentic place is re-invented and staged. A sense of place is recreated as a commodity and dished up for the consumer, ready-made to be experienced and consumed.

### **3.5. CONCLUSION TO LAND AND HOME**

The loss of Land and home as experienced by the displaced constitutes not only a physical loss but also a loss on a psychological, sociological and cultural level. These losses can be determined by investigating the meanings people assign to Land and home and the bonds people develop with places which are part of the way people make sense of the world in which they live. A sense of place has implications on Memory, culture, social relations, history and Identity.

Loss of place can entail a physical loss of place but it could also involve the loss of a sense of place brought about by traumatic experiences and through globalisation. Industrialisation and technology have transformed our experience of place from proximity to accessibility and eroded our sense of physicality of place to become a virtual experience of space which result in the commodification of place, the creation of non-places and placelessness and the inauthentic experience of place. The way that we experience place and space in contemporary society is thus mimicking the experience of displacement: the loss of Land and home has become the way that we live and perceive the world today: as a loss of the meaning of Land and home.

## CHAPTER 4

### Identity

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is the third of the three key concepts. In this section a theoretical underpinning for the concept of Identity will be explored to determine the preconditions for further arguments in which the interrelationship of Identity, Land and home, and Memory will be investigated.

The investigation will firstly explore a working definition of Identity and secondly investigate ways in which Identity is constructed and how this manifests in the nature of contemporary Identity. This is relevant in order to establish how a loss of Identity is linked with the phenomenon of displacement. In terms of this study, the concept of Identity has a very significant character and seems to illuminate and map the links between all three key concepts of this study. It is impossible to investigate Identity in terms of displacement without encountering these links and therefore the links will be acknowledged in preparation of the next section dealing with the interrelationship of the three key concepts.

#### 4.2. WHAT IDENTITY IS

According to the online Oxford Dictionary, Identity is:

- **noun** (pl. **identities**) **1** the fact of being who or what a person or thing is;
  - 2** the characteristics determining this
- (*Compact Oxford English dictionary of current English* 2008. Sv “identity”).

A working definition has been forged to deal with this concept in terms of this study:

Identity constitutes the sum total of whom and what a person is: the personality, sense of self, behaviour, emotional, mental and bodily

attributes as well as the individual's sense of belonging, social interactions and groups, belief and value systems, activities and history.

This definition of Identity contains two distinct indicators of the nature of Identity, namely the personal (behaviour, personality, emotional attributes, et cetera) and the collective (sense of belonging, social interactions and group affiliation, belief and value systems, history, et cetera).<sup>26</sup> These two interrelated<sup>27</sup> aspects of the concept of Identity also manifest in the nature of the phenomenon of displacement: displacement is a social phenomenon (collective) and it has psychological effects on an individual (personal).

### 4.3. CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

A review of the literature revealed that Identity is constructed in the following ways:

- (1) Identity can be constructed on a **social basis** by our affiliation with certain groups of people such as ethnic, sexual, gender, class, age or (dis)ability groups (Howard 2000:374-381). When Identity is constructed in this way it describes a collective classification but could have influences on a personal sense of the self and Identity construction. For instance: a member of a minority group, who experiences discrimination, may have a more inferior sense of the self. If Identity is constructed through social bases, it sometimes manifests in politicised action, activism and conflict as marginalisation, power and fear of "the other" come into play. In terms of displacement, the case of forceful removals of Black South Africans from their homes during the Apartheid era is an example. The xenophobic attacks which were rife in 2008 in South Africa are examples of how negative connotations attributed to "the other" led

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<sup>26</sup> Howard classifies these two aspects as "social" and "personal" and according to the "central tenet of social theory", "social and personal identities are thought to lie at opposite ends of a continuum" (2000:369).

<sup>27</sup> In this study the two aspects of identity are considered to be in an interrelationship and not as two opposites.

to displacement of non-South Africans, people not belonging to a certain group. It can be concluded that displacement due to political reasons could be seen as an attack on the collective Identity of a certain social group.

- (2) Identity can be constructed through **Memory**. In her article: *Surviving a distant past; a case study of the cultural construction of trauma descendant identity*, Kidron describes how, through a support group, memory is used to construct the Identities of the descendants of Holocaust survivors (2003:513-544).<sup>28</sup>

In terms of this study's aim to investigate loss in the key concepts, the question can now be raised whether a loss of Memory leads to a loss of Identity as in the case of for instance Alzheimer's<sup>29</sup> patients? In a study on patients and caregivers of Alzheimer's, sociologist Celia J. Orona has found that the loss of memory amongst these patients is coupled with a loss of temporality and Identity (1990:1247-1256).

In her article: *Identity and Trauma*, Eyal concluded that: "memory is the guarantor of Identity and maintains it through time" (2004:7). If the working definition in the beginning of this section is taken into account and it is assumed that Identity is also a person's sense of self and that constructing this self is a life-long process which is formed, maintained and altered in time, then it can be said that loss of Memory (as in Alzheimer's) leads to a loss of the sense of self.

The above argument establishes a link between the loss of Identity and the loss of Memory and may be extended to other cases of Memory loss. An example is the loss of Memory due to suppressed memories after trauma (as was discussed in the section on

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<sup>28</sup> Mnemonic practices, such as remembering the past experience through the narrative act, can be used as a healing agent for a traumatic past. In her article, Kidron shows how descendants of Holocaust survivors "narratively reemplot their life stories as having been personally constituted by the distant past." This is done in a facilitated support group of second and third generation descendant Holocaust survivors. The facilitator of the support group uses the "discursive frame of intergenerational transmission of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)" as a "mnemonic bridge to the past and a mechanism of identity making" (Kidron 2003:513).

<sup>29</sup> The degenerative disease of the brain, dementia of the Alzheimer's type leads to personality change, loss of memory and cognition and eventual death (Orona 1990:1247).



Memory). Sometimes this type of Memory loss is also associated with the social phenomenon of collective amnesia, as for instance described by Kidron (2003:513-544) in her study of trauma descendents of the Holocaust.

- (3) Identity can be constructed through our **interaction with the world** in which we live, namely by the symbolic values and meanings that we attach to ourselves, objects, other people and how we develop and transmit these meanings through interaction (Howard 2000:372). Interaction could take place through language and other kinds of communications such as visual imagery. The decorative objects with which we surround ourselves in our homes or dwellings and the way that we dress and adorn ourselves are all examples of this kind of Identity construction.

In terms of displacement, it follows that if a loss of an object endowed with symbolic value and meaning occurs, it can be detrimental to Identity construction.

- (4) Identity can be constructed through **place**. An individual's sense of place, a sense of being at home, place affiliation and place attachment can define Identity (Howard 2000:382). This aspect has been dealt with in detail in the section on Land and home.

The above survey of the literature provided a list of elements through which Identity can be constructed. It is noticed that the research resulted in identifying Memory and Land and home (which are the other two key concepts of this study) as elements through which Identity can be constructed. In this sense a link is already established between Identity and the other two concepts. This link will be developed in the arguments to follow and brought to fruition in the next section dealing with the interrelationship of the three key concepts.

Since displacement renders psychological effects, it is necessary to also consider how Identity is constructed in the psyche. How do the above

elements present themselves in the psyche in terms of Identity? Is there some kind of Identity structure or construction in the psyche and how do the above elements fit into this?

The problem of how Identity is constructed in the psyche was dealt with by the psycho-analytic movement masterminded by Sigmund Freud. Freud's main contribution was the introduction of the unconscious as that section of the psyche of which we are not aware and in which suppressed and repressed memories are stored. These memories are "reawakened into consciousness by the medium of the dream, or its waking equivalent, free association" (Cooper 1974:130).

Carl Gustav Jung diverted from Freud's ideas by developing the idea that a person's main drive is to become the Self. He believed that the unconscious is striving towards a unified being through a process called individuation in which the Ego (our conscious concept of the Self) has to be integrated with the "Shadow" (our dark side) and the Animus or Anima (the female persona in men or the male persona in females). Jung's individuation process is divided into steps, each step nearer to becoming the Self. It can be said that Jung's individuation process is the process of becoming a person, the process of acquiring an Identity. Jung also contributed to this field by introducing the notion of the collective unconscious, a source of symbols and knowledge (which he called archetypes) that all humankind collectively shares with each other (discussed in Von Franz 1964:157-254).

The problem in terms of the study of displacement with both Freud and Jung's models of construction of an Identity, is that the process is entirely an *inside* process without considering aspects such as social bases or/and our interaction with the world or place which were identified above. To a large extent the *outside* elements through which Identity can be constructed are not in the equation of these models.

In Heidegger's phenomenological philosophy it is humankind's existence, or *being in this world*<sup>30</sup> that constitutes Identity. Criticising Freud, Heidegger believed that the guide or direction of human life is not "a mythological libido" which is situated in the psyche but is rather "something which is impending, a task in which I am involved, or something which lays claim to me" (quoted by Dallmayr 1993:239). In this way Heidegger acknowledges a social or collective influence in the process of the construction of Identity of the individual. Heidegger's model implies that the process of the construction of Identity is not just an *inside* process but that the *outside* influences are also important. These influences include everything that our existence in the world implies: other people, time, place and our tasks.

The contemporary French philosopher, Bernard Stiegler<sup>31</sup>, combines the personal and the collective in his philosophy of the Identity construction processes. Stiegler also uses the term *individuation* for this process like Jung had done but Stiegler's process of constructing an Identity differs from those before him in the sense that he proposes "a process of triple psychic, collective, and techno-logical individuation" (Stiegler 2004). Stiegler thus combines three layers of processes in individuation: the *I* process which he calls the "psychic individual"; the *we* process or the process of "collective individuation"; and the techno-logical process. Stiegler describes techno-logical individuation as:

That which links the individuations of the *I* and the *we* is a pre-individual milieu possessing positive conditions of effectiveness, belonging to what I have called retentional apparatuses. These retentional apparatuses arise from a technical milieu which is the condition of the encounter of the *I* and the *we*: the individuation of the *I* and the *we* is in this respect also the individuation of the technical system (Stiegler 2004).

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<sup>30</sup> Heidegger's term for being in this world is the German word *Dasein*.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Stiegler was a student of and has been influenced by Jacques Derrida, the post-modern philosopher who is known for using the idea of deconstruction.

Stiegler's third process of individuation is a complex system of three layers of "retentions" which could be described as assisting consciousness in its "symbolic sharing".<sup>32</sup> These retentions "condition individuation as symbolic sharing and distinction, made possible by the exteriorisation of individual experience in traces as transmission" (Stiegler 2004).

Stiegler's individuation process thus acknowledges these objects and processes, previously thought to be external to the individual, to be inherent to the process of constructing Identity. In fact, Stiegler discards the use of the terms exterior and interior.<sup>33</sup> For Stiegler, our experiences, memory processes, language and other "retentional apparatuses" such as objects of technology are not exterior influences on the interior of the psyche but are part of the process of constructing Identity. This notion of Identity construction is a major shift from the traditional idea of Identity in which elements 'outside' of humankind such as language, land and environmental factors, were considered to be mere influences on Identity construction. From this it follows that some of the elements through which Identity can be constructed as discussed in the literature survey above, namely experiences, memory, interaction, and symbolic values, are now a part of the individuation process. It follows that any change, peculiarity or specific characteristic of any of these elements necessarily have an impact on Identity construction.

Stiegler's model for Identity construction will be used as a basis for further arguments in this study since it resonates with the complexity of the life world of contemporary humankind.

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<sup>32</sup> Stiegler (2004) describes these retentions in his talk delivered at the Tate Modern, entitled: *Desire and knowledge: the dead seize the living*. According to him the primary retention is our consciousness, that which we experience. The secondary retention is the process when our consciousness makes certain selections of our experience through a filtering process such as the memory. The tertiary retentions are "objects as supports of memory and mnemo-techniques, which enable traces to be spatially, materially and technically recorded" like the alphabet, language, books and the web which also enable us access "to the preindividual stock of all psychic and collective individuation" (Stiegler 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Stiegler criticised Freud on the use of the concepts 'exterior' and 'interior' (as in the exterior Ego and the interior unconscious) in his talk delivered at the Tate Modern (2004).

#### 4.4. THE CRISES OF CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY

What are the characteristic peculiarities of Identity in this day and age? A literature reading concluded that the concept of Identity in pre-modern and modern times was generally stable, “specifiable, measurable, ordered, and, in some sense, rational” while the postmodern concept of Identity tends to be “multiple, processual, relational, unstable, possibly political” (Howard 2000:387). There is a tremendous speed of change and transition prevalent in the environment and social networks of individuals. Combined with factors such as globalisation and technological developments, a sense of flux and impermanence of identities are experienced.

Technology is described by Stiegler as a part of our individuation process. But what does the explosion of technological developments mean for the Identity process? By considering technology as a “retention apparatus” being part of the individuation process, Stiegler acknowledges the time in which we live and its *imprint* (note: not its *influence*) on our Identity. This is reflected in Stiegler’s writings where he indicates the role played by technological development and consumerism in the individuation process. Stiegler criticises consumerism, pointing out that it may lead to a “disindividuation” (2006) and also notes that a “technicisation of all domains” leads to “countless problems” such as “isolation, the distancing of people from one another [and] the extenuation of identity” (quoted by Gere 2004:3).

The findings on the nature of contemporary Identity and the crises that it permeates is relevant for establishing the concept of displacement not only as a physical event but as way of living (the *Zeitgeist*) of contemporary humankind. This argument will be dealt with in the next section.

## CHAPTER 5

### The interrelationship between Memory, Land and home, and Identity

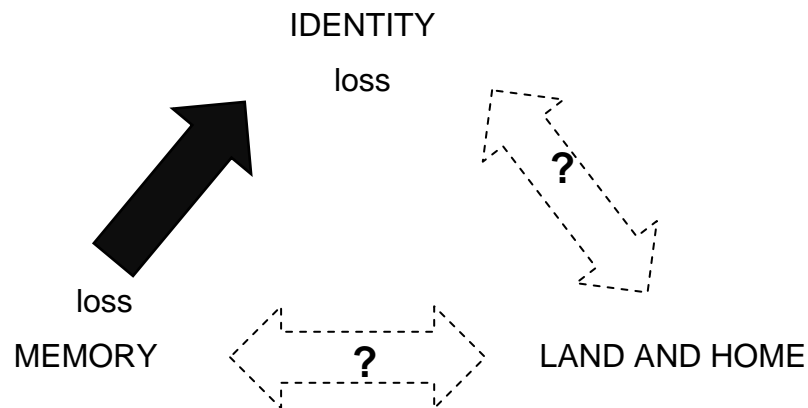
#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this section the interrelationship between the three key concepts of this study will be investigated in terms of displacement. How do the key concepts overlap or intersect, if at all, in the manifestation of displacement? What are the mutual influences on each other? Since the nature of displacement is about loss, does it necessarily mean that a loss occurring in one of the key concepts constitutes a loss in the other two concepts? And if so, how does this happen?

To answer these questions, the provisional interrelationships between the three previously established key concepts; Identity, Land and home, and Memory, should be highlighted. It has been established that:

- (1) Memory is not just an element *through* which Identity is constructed but, according to Stiegler, Memory is *part of the process* of constructing Identity. Moreover, loss of Memory constitutes a loss of Identity.
- (2) Land is one of the elements *through* which Identity is constructed. Stiegler does not incorporate land, space or place *as a part of* his individuation model. The relationship between Land and home and Identity thus needs further clarification.

The process of establishing links and relationships between the three key concepts could now be illustrated as follows:



The relationship between Memory and Identity has been illuminated subsequently the following relationships between the key concepts need to be clarified:

- (1) The specific relationship between Land and home, and Memory
- (2) The specific interrelationship between Land and home, and Identity.

## 5.2. LAND AND HOME, MEMORY

In this section it will be reasoned that the relationship between Land and home, and Memory is reciprocal: on the one side humankind remembers *through* place and on the other side, Memory as a trace renders physical evidence on Land and home.

Humankind's tendency to remember through place is demonstrated in the practice of erecting places of Memory, museums, monuments and other places of commemoration which serve as devices for remembering a past event or era. In post apartheid South Africa, museums such as the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, the District Six Museum in Cape Town, Freedom Park in Pretoria and Robben Island are examples of how traumatic past events (which included physical displacement) are collectively remembered through place. These public places of commemoration serve as a protector and preserver of collective memory and certainly play an important role in society and the narrative constituting this Memory could be collectively framed and institutionalized.

Ironically it disowns the individual his “place” in accessing the healing qualities of collective mnemonic devices. Huysen is of the opinion that:

Monuments articulate official memory and their fate is to be toppled or to become invisible. Lived memory, on the other hand, is always located in individual bodies, their experience and their pain, even when it involves collective, political or generational memory (1998:31).

For the individual, the symbolic meaning of place and especially the home as a symbol of the self, is crucial. Remembering takes place through our bodily and psychological interaction with place and the symbolic meanings that are generated by this. To omit place from the equation of remembering is experienced as dismembering. This statement could be illustrated by Grunebaum-Ralph’s comparison of the Memory practices of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and an initiative called the Western Cape Action Tour Project (WECAT) (2001:198-212). Although acknowledging the enormous value of the TRC, Grunebaum-Ralph points out that the process was driven by a framing of a narrative “to reconcile”, rendering “legitimate responses to past brutality” such as “inconsolability, and the refusal to reconcile” as “improper” (2001:202). Grunebaum-Ralph is of the opinion that:

The grounding of official memory narratives ... through the TRC process is premised on stories and the places of stories being split off from the bodies, the lives, and the everyday comings and goings of the very nation in whose name and whose identity they are called upon to establish and represent. ... In displacing the real bodies of the nation in order for the imaginary one of the unified nation to take their places, the official custodians of memory reduce life stories and testimonies to a pre-inscribed archive (2001:208).

In contrast, Grunebaum-Ralph describes the memorial practices of the Western Cape Action Tour Project. This group takes people through and across the townships of the Cape Flats, linking narratives of loss with place, which “open up the possibility of recovering, recognising, and honouring the memories, bodies and lives immured in oblivion and



loathing. They open up the possibility of hope and humanity against despair and forgetting” (Grunebaum-Ralph 2001:203&208).

Why is place so important in the Memory process? What is it in the nature of place that makes remembering meaningful? The reason is that place has physicality, can be geographically located and can be observed with our senses. This is in contrast with Memory which is intangible and unstable, often becoming less and less clear through time. The events in our lives that are stacked through time to render Memory are inscribed in place, in Land and home. These physical evidences of events that shaped our lives are recognisable everywhere: footprints are left in sand, a foot path in a public park displays the walking of many feet, peeling paint reveals the layers of colour preferences of previous home owners.



For instance, the site of displacement<sup>34</sup> investigated for this study yielded many remnants of foundations of former homes (fig 1), which, through remembering, could have connotations to the reconstruction of the meaningful events that took place in those demarcated spaces.

Fig 1. Remnant of a foundation of a house, former township, Bank, near Carletonville. Photo Emma Willemse.

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<sup>34</sup> Research on this site of displacement is discussed in Chapter 7 and Addendum1.

In terms of the phenomenon of displacement, the importance of Land and home in the memory process is even more significant. Since “memory ... is ... located in individual bodies ...” (Huysen 1998:31) and displacement renders a space devoid of the presence of bodies, the only tangible evidence of the body’s presence and the only available Memory aid, is what is left in the space that the body once occupied. In this sense, Land and home is a link to the body in the absence of the body. The traces that were left behind by the body in Land and home serve as devices to aid the Memory process.

Moreover, if displacement is considered as a trauma and trauma leads to the severing of Memory processes which may lead to loss of temporality and to loss of Memory as a meaning-making process, the link between the loss of Land and home and the loss of Memory is verified.

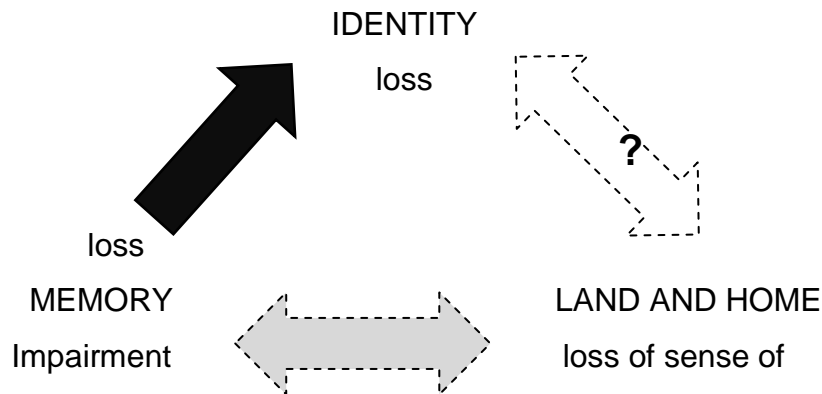
It is thus clear that the loss of Land and home has a significant impact on Memory and the process of Memory construction. The effect is less severe when the displaced person can go back afterwards to the site of displacement, even though it was affected by destruction, to locate traces of a life lived. The impact on Memory is worse when the displaced person is not able to return to the site of displacement, such as in some cases of political displacement.<sup>35</sup> In these situations the individual is denied the opportunity to locate physical traces to assist in the memory processes.

It can be concluded that although the loss of Land and home does not directly lead to the loss of Memory, it has an impact on the construction of Memory which may render Memory less complete.

The progress in the investigation of the relationship between the three key concepts can now be diagrammatically explained as follows:

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<sup>35</sup> Contemporary examples are the Palestinian Refugees and displaced farmers in Zimbabwe. In these cases it is considered too dangerous to return to the previously owned land.



The nature of the relationship between Land and home and Identity now needs to be clarified.

### 5.3. LAND AND HOME, IDENTITY

It has provisionally been established that Identity is constructed *through* Land and home. According to Stiegler's model of the construction of Identity, place is not a *part of* the Identity process in the same way that Memory is part of the Identity process. One way of clarifying the relationship between Land and home and Identity is to reconsider the phenomenon of displacement and ask the question: Does a loss of Land and home lead to a loss of Identity? Schmidt is of the opinion that it does:

A loss of home ... involves a loss of identity. It is an uprooted-ness that leaves one without parameters and guideposts (1980:337).

Since Land and home is not inherently part of the Identity process, how is this possible? The notion that the loss of Land and home leads to a loss of Identity can be explained in terms of Land and home's links with two other concepts through which Identity is constructed, namely: social bases and symbolic interactions.

When displacement occurs, the individual does not only experience a loss of a physical home but often also a loss of the community or social group to which he/she belongs, which was delineated by the space and place in

which the community existed. The community coherence is broken up by the loss of Land and home, leading to a dispersal of people, described in terms such as: exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés (Burgin 2007: 277) which are descriptions for *being foreign, out of place, or not of this place*. Since Identity is constructed through social bases collectively and individually as was indicated in the section on Identity, the loss of the social base will have a severe impact on the construction of Identity.

Identity is also constructed through our symbolic interactions with the world around us, as was indicated in the section on Identity. Moreover, the section on Land and home indicated that home has a wide range of strong symbolic and metaphorical connotations. Home is used as a spatial metaphor for “a way of being in the world” (Manzo 2003:49) home is a symbol of the human body or human thought (Cirlot 1971:153), and home could be a symbol of the self (Cooper 1974:130-139). It now follows that in the case of displacement when a physical loss of a home occurs the loss is experienced by the individual on a much deeper psychological level. It is experienced as a loss of a specific symbolic interaction with the world, as a loss of those symbols that constituted the individual’s way of being in the world, the body and the self. Since this symbolic interaction is one of the aspects through which Identity is constructed, it follows that the loss of a home could have a severe negative effect on the construction of Identity.

#### **5.4. INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THREE KEY CONCEPTS**

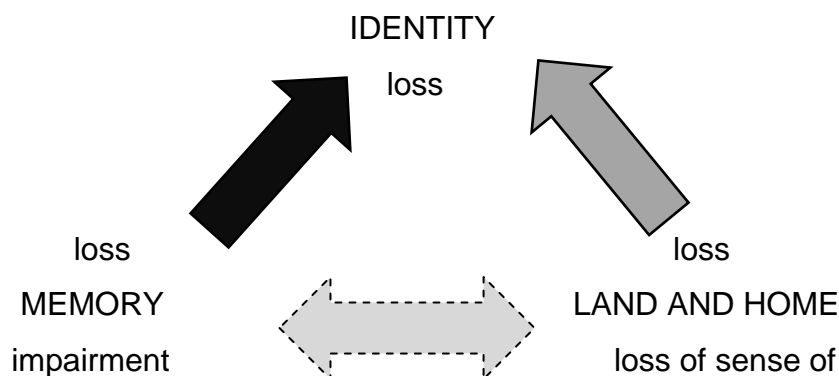
If the above arguments are taken into account, the interrelationship between the three key concepts can be described in the following way:

- (1) The links between the concepts are specific and different from each other and determined by elements contained in Identity construction models, such as the individuation process of the contemporary philosopher Bernard Stiegler.
- (2) Following Stiegler, the interrelationship between Memory and Identity is a direct link, since Memory is an inherent part of the

Identity construction process. Loss of Memory constitutes a loss of Identity.

- (3) The link between Memory and Land and home is reciprocal and is determined by the fact that Memory is constructed through the physicality of Land and home as well as the fact that Memory is inscribed in Land and home as traces. The loss of Memory leads to a loss of a sense of place while the loss of Land and home may render Memory less complete.
- (4) The link between Identity and Land and home is determined by the link between Land and home and two aspects through which Identity is constructed, namely social bases and symbolic interaction. The loss of Land and home leads to the loss of Identity.

The interrelationship between the key concepts can now be illustrated diagrammatically as follows:



### 5.5. DISPLACEMENT AS A STATE OF MIND

It will be argued that the nature of contemporary society has propelled displacement into a new experience, with similarities to physical displacement but more intense. In contemporary society, displacement or the loss of Land and home is not just a physical phenomenon but could be considered as a state of mind, a Zeitgeist. Due to the peculiarities of the times in which we live, contemporary displacement exists on a level far

more profound than just the physical and it surpasses the emotional effects of physical displacement.

It was indicated in previous chapters that contemporary society can be described in terms of globalisation, technological developments and trauma, which lead to:

- (1) “an acceleration and commodification of history” (Rossington & Whitehead 2007:5), a loss of temporality, a loss of Memory as a meaning-making process and amnesia;
- (2) a loss of sense of place;
- (3) a crisis in contemporary Identity construction, changing the Identity construction process from individuation to “disindividuation” (Stiegler 2006).

If physical displacement constitutes the loss of Land and home, and the loss of Land and home leads to an impairment of Memory and a loss of Identity, how are the interrelationships between the three concepts reflected in contemporary society?

The psychological effects generated by physical displacement and the successive effects on Memory and Identity are instigated by a loss of Land and home. Loss of Land and home could be described as the first in a ripple effect of losses occurring when displacement manifests. In contemporary displacement successive losses are also instigated by the loss of Land and home as experienced in physical displacement. Contemporary loss of Land and home is, however, experienced on another level, as is described by Miller:

As this epochal cultural displacement from the book age to the hypertext age has accelerated we have been ushered ever more rapidly into a threatening living space. This new electronic space, ... has profoundly altered the economies of the self, the home, the workplace, the university, and the nation-state’s politics. These were traditionally ordered around the firm boundaries of an inside-outside dichotomy, ... . The global village is not out there, but in

here, or a clear distinction between inside and out no longer operates. The new technologies ... are a frightening threat to traditional ideas of the self as unified and as properly rooted in one clear particular culture-bound place, participating in a single national culture, firmly protected from any alien otherness (quoted by Gere 2004:2).

The process of losses occurred in contemporary displacement can now be described as follows:

As virtual reality displaces real space, the loss of Land and home experienced in contemporary displacement is a loss of the *physicality* of place, it is an erosion of the concept of place as it has been known to humankind. Since it is the physicality of place that assists in Memory processes, this loss constitutes an impairment of Memory. This first step in the process of loss experienced in contemporary displacement is aggravated by the change of temporality in the contemporary life-world:

Both personal and social memory today are affected by an emerging new structure of temporality generated by the quickening pace of material life on the one hand and by acceleration of media images and information on the other. Speed destroys space, and it erases temporal distance (Huysen quoted by Gere 2004:5).

If the proposed model for interrelationships between the three key concepts is kept in mind, it follows that Identity will be impacted by the above loss of Memory and of Land and home. It is no wonder that contemporary humankind experience a crises of Identity as described in the section on Identity. It is the contention that, due to the loss of the physicality of place, a process of losses is instigated which results in the loss of Identity. This loss is experienced on another level as the loss instigated by the mere loss of a physical Land and home. It is a loss instigated by the loss of the boundaries mapping the *concept* of Land and home. The loss of Identity experienced in this way is a loss of the indicators mapping Identity. The contemporary individual becomes displaced from the self and displacement becomes a way of being, a state of mind, a phenomenon of the time that we live in, a Zeitgeist.

[I]t would appear, almost by definition, that to “be” in the postmodern sense is somehow to be an Other: displaced (Bammer 1994:xii).



## CHAPTER 6

### Displacement and contemporary visual art

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

When the conclusion of the previous chapter is considered, namely that displacement has become a state of mind of contemporary consciousness and that contemporary humankind is displaced from the self, the question may arise as to what the role of the artist is in this scenario?

If displacement is imbedded so deeply into the consciousness of society, it is inevitable that contemporary artists will reflect this in some way. One of art's functions is to provide society with a tool to reflect on itself:

Art often serves an observational, analytical and interpretational purpose [sic]. Both art's mimetic function and its imaginative aspect provide powerful means by which any society can introspect, investigate and visualize itself as a capsule of the socio-cultural and political status quo (Dreyer 2009:6).

In terms of the phenomenon of displacement which often resonates in the political sphere, some artists take on the role of activists. Their intention is to create an awareness of displacement and its effects on society by referencing the moral and ethical aspects of physical displacement in their artworks. There is, however, another role that the artist can adopt which can be described against the background of Phenomenology<sup>36</sup>. Martin Heidegger, one of the main exponents of Phenomenology, gave art a central role in his later writings. Heidegger believed that "human existence is seen to depend ... on the capacity to let meaning emerge through the shaping of that which is given" (Knill *et al* 2005:31). The role of the artist is thus to allow meaning to emerge through the act of art-making (shaping that which is given).

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<sup>36</sup> As shown in the Introduction to this study, Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition launched in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The two main exponents were the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Phenomenology studies the structures of human experiences and consciousness and the meanings connected to these experiences (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2003. Sv "phenomenology").

Based on the above, the contention is that an experience is not completed before it has been lived and given shape of some kind. Several methods exist to give shape to a lived experience, of which the creation of artworks is but one. To create an artwork is thus part of the process of the completion of an experience thereby allowing meaning to emerge. In this sense, the contemporary artist could be deemed as the shape-maker of society, a collective meaning-maker and a funnel for completing an experience.

This argument is extended by the contemporary philosopher, Bernard Stiegler. As discussed in Chapter 4, Stiegler's model for Identity construction (which he calls individuation) allows for the objects manufactured by humankind to be part of the individuation process, thus part of the process of Identity. Stiegler considers objects such as the alphabet, language, books and the web to be "supports of memory and mnemo-techniques, which enable traces to be spatially, materially and technically recorded" and which also enable us access "to the preindividual stock of all psychic and collective individuation" (2004). The assertion in this study is that artworks could also be included in the set of objects that Stiegler mentions since artworks dealing with displacement are objects that record the traces of displacement spatially, materially and technically. Thus, through art-making, the artist is creating objects which can be supports of memory and mnemo-techniques which will enable future societies to access the psychic and collective individuation of contemporary society. Following Stiegler, these objects (artworks) exist not outside the individuation process but are part of the individuation process. It can be deduced therefore, that the artist is participating in the process of individuation not only as and for the individual but also collectively. The artist can serve as an agent in the Identity process of society.

## 6.2. CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS MANIFESTING DISPLACEMENT

This section will provide a broad overview of the prevalence of artworks concerned with the concept of displacement in contemporary society. It will serve as a pre-amble for the comparison of the works of Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker.

Displacement is a pressing phenomenon in contemporary society both as a physical occurrence and as a state of mind. Many contemporary group exhibitions reflect this notion as a theme such as the 1998 group exhibition *Displacements* at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, the 2007 touring exhibition, *Africa Remix*<sup>37</sup> and the 2009 touring exhibition, *Dystopia*<sup>38</sup>. Artists featured in these exhibitions such as Miroslaw Balka<sup>39</sup> and Doris Salcedo<sup>40</sup>, reference the physical displacement prevalent in their own countries while photographers Otobong Nkanga, Pascale Marthine Tayou and David Goldblatt explore the traces of displacement visible in the rural and urban landscapes of Africa. The series of photographic artworks titled, *I am*, by artist Dale Yudelman in the *Dystopia* exhibition (fig 2), presents handwritten notes by job seekers found in supermarkets throughout South Africa juxtaposed with photographic images of these individuals (Dreyer & Lebeko 2009:44).

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<sup>37</sup> The *Africa Remix* exhibition was curated by Simon Njami and consisted of artworks by contemporary artists of African origin. It toured major centres throughout the world, such as Johannesburg, Düsseldorf, Paris, Stockholm, London and Tokyo (Njami 2007:3).

<sup>38</sup> *Dystopia* was curated by Elfriede Dreyer and Jacob Lebeko. The exhibition toured three major centres in South Africa, namely the Unisa Art Gallery in Pretoria, Museum Africa in Johannesburg and the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Mangaung, as well as the Jan Colle Gallerij in Ghent, Belgium (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=22064> ).

<sup>39</sup> "Balka's works are "sculptural testaments born of the Soviet occupation and Solidarity movement in Poland" (Bradley & Huyssen 1998:13).

<sup>40</sup> Salcedo comes from the torn strife and repressed Columbia "where violence abounds on the scale of civil war and where the denial of commemoration is a condition of cultural forgetting" (Bradley 1998:19).

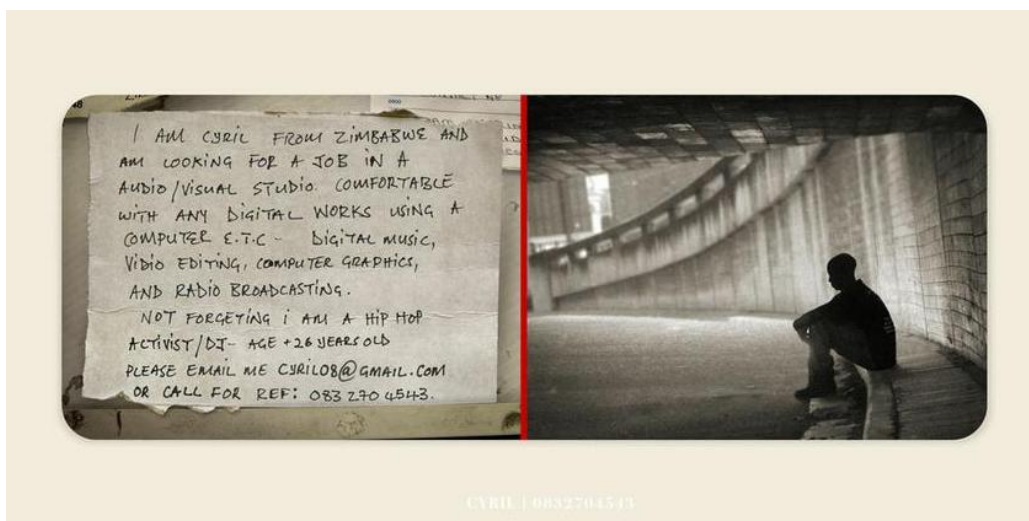


Fig 2. Dale Yudelman, *Cyril from I am...* (2008).

Many of these individuals had left their families and homes in rural areas to seek an income in the city. The series of works record displacement in terms of place as well as Identity and reflect on the experiences of hope and disillusionment of these job seekers.

South African artist, Sue Williamson who calls herself an “archivist”, uses politically displaced people in Southern Africa as the context for most of her artworks. As a socially and politically conscious artist, she works in a diverse range of media to record her “stories about people in the community” (Guerny [Sa]). In *Messages from the moat* (1997) (fig 4)<sup>41</sup>, Williamson addresses the legacy of slavery “exposing what haunts the conscience of the contemporary world – the labour and lives of generations of Africans and Asians wrenched from their homes and sold in chains” (Bedford 2004:410). In the installation, a huge fishing net, overflowing with bottles each of which has been engraved with the researched details of a slave transaction, serves as a metaphor for slavery. This work brings a powerful message of disempowerment and displacement.

<sup>41</sup> *Messages from the moat* (1997) was installed in 2004 at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town as “part of *A decade of Democracy: Contemporary South African Art from the Permanent Collection of Iziko South African National Gallery*” (Bedford 2004:410).

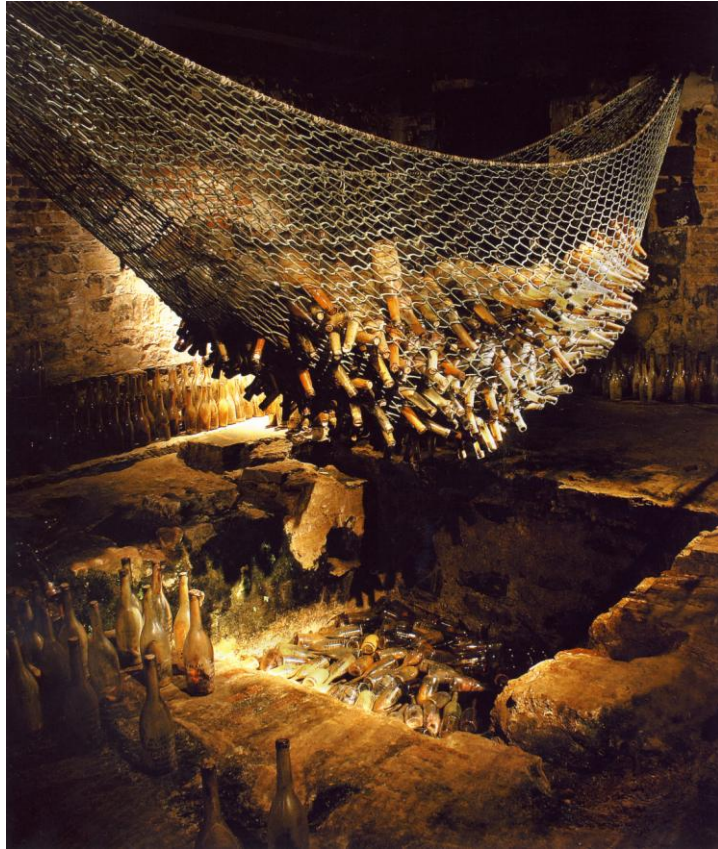


Fig 3. Sue Williamson, *Messages from the moat* (1997).



Fig 4. Sue Williamson, *Better lives: Albert and Isabelle Ngandu* (2003).

The experiences of displaced people is also the subject matter in Williamson's *Better Lives* (2003) (fig 4), a series of filmed portraits of people who came to Cape Town from other parts of Africa to secure new lives for themselves and their families. Their moving accounts of their journeys and the hardships they endured are pre-recorded and played back while they are filmed listening to their own voices (Bedford 2004:410).

The above examples of exhibitions dealing with, and artists interested in displacement as a thematic concern, are by no means complete but serve

as indications of how displacement is manifested in contemporary artworks and exhibitions. This study is concerned with displacement as universal, social and psychological phenomena which have become part of contemporary life, of today's Zeitgeist. It is specifically these notions that will receive attention in the comparison of artworks by the artists Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker.

### **6.3. DISPLACEMENT AS CONTENT IN THE ARTWORKS OF RACHEL WHITEREAD AND CORNELIA PARKER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

#### **6.3.1. Introduction**

The artists Cornelia Parker and Rachel Whiteread have been selected for this study because the concept of displacement, the focus of this study, is manifested in various ways in their artworks. Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker have similar backgrounds, living and working in the United Kingdom and both emanating from the post-war generation that lived through the Thatcher years and the influence on the economic and social life of people in Britain<sup>42</sup>. The interrelationship of the three key concepts identified in this research for displacement, namely Land and home, Memory and Identity, will be a core construct for the comparative discussion.

#### **6.3.2. Memory**

In the discussion that follows, it will be shown that both Parker and Whiteread employ various methods, especially their distinct art-making processes, to reference Memory and comment on the loss of Memory. One of the art-making methodologies used by both Parker and Whiteread is recording. Recording refers to the act of documenting a past event or existence, invoking a history and thereby recovering, revealing, retaining

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<sup>42</sup> Whiteread has acknowledged the influence of the Thatcher era in an interview with Blazwick: "I've lived in London virtually all my life and having grown up through the Thatcher's years, seeing the deprivation, and seeing more and more homeless people everywhere, I feel sad about what's happening there, about the state of Britain" (1992-93:14).



or even celebrating Memory. If Memory could be considered a trace, as shown in Chapter 2, then the recording of traces left by humans as employed by Parker and Whiteread, could be considered as a metaphor for the recording of Memory.

The significance of this methodology is evident in Parker's series of works presented at the Brontë Parsonage<sup>43</sup> titled *Brontëan Abstracts* (2006). Parker recorded the traces of human interference on the surfaces of objects belonging to the famous Brontë sisters by investigating them under an electron microscope, such as in *Brontëan Abstract (pin hole in Charlotte Brontë's pincushion)* (2006) (fig 5) and *Brontëan Abstract (Emily Brontë's quill pen nib)* (2006) (fig 6).

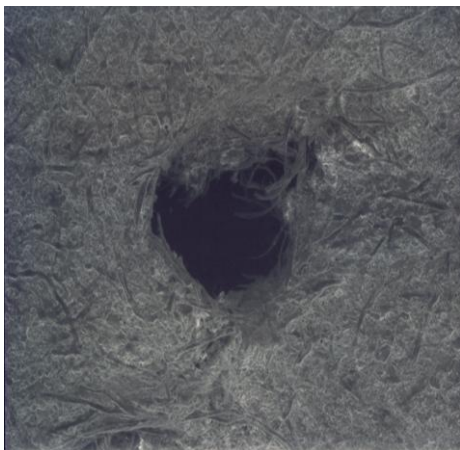


Fig 5. Cornelia Parker, *Brontëan Abstract (pin hole in Charlotte Brontë's pincushion)* (2006).

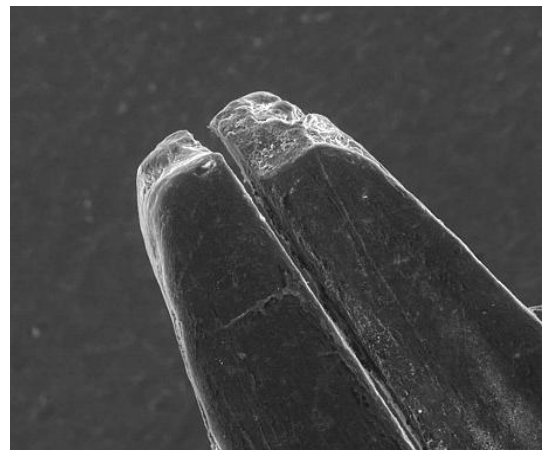


Fig 6. Cornelia Parker, *Brontëan Abstract (Emily Brontë's quill pen nib)* (2006).

Like a forensic investigator, Parker scrutinises the physical matter of history by hunting down traces of the personal handling or use of these “overlooked objects” (Parker quoted by Levy 2006:9) to find signs of

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<sup>43</sup> The Brontë Parsonage Museum is a historic house commemorating the lives of the famous three authors, the Brontë' sisters, and their brother, as well as the “radical nature of their writing” (McCarthy 2006:4). As the former home of the Brontë's, the Parsonage is endowed with a rich history and significance. It is the place where these sisters wrote productively and also the place where Charlotte Brontë witnessed the death of her two sisters and only brother within a short span of time (Levy 2006:7).

evidence that “evoke their owners as persons, but also speak of the relation between person and things” (Lajer-Burcharth 2001:78).

Some of these traces also include ink blots or finger prints, smudges or marks such as in *Brontëan Abstracts (marks made in the margins of Emily Brontë’s lined paper)* (2006) (fig 7), that Parker considers to be “traces of [the] unconscious” (quoted by Levy 2006:9).

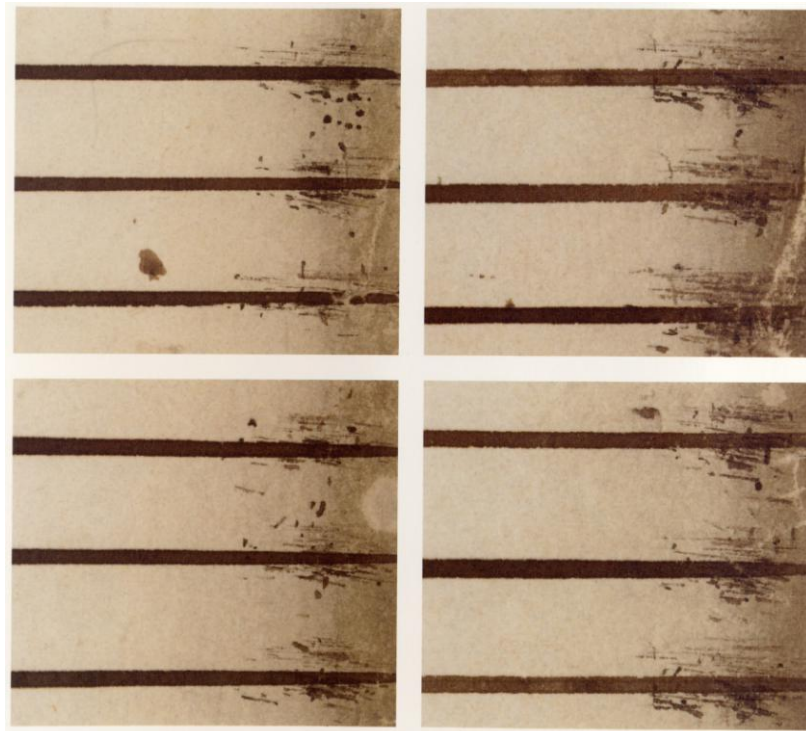


Fig 7. Cornelia Parker, *Brontëan Abstracts (marks made in the margins of Emily Brontë’s lined paper)* (2006).

It is clear that Parker is interested in the history of mundane objects because they reveal evidence, through traces, of their deceased owners’ psyche or frame of mind. However, these objects do not only refer to their owners but have memories of their own<sup>44</sup>. By exposing these objects to magnification, Parker is excavating the memories of the objects to reveal

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<sup>44</sup> Marks is of the opinion that “Objects ... have a life independent of the human relations they encode” (2000:120) and that they “tell stories and describe trajectories” (2000:80). Please see Chapter 7: The life of objects, for a detailed discussion of these qualities of objects in terms of displacement.



aspects of trauma and loss. In the images of both the pincushion and the quill pen nib it is clear that the magnification of these objects exposed their damaged states, like wounds in flesh. These “wounds” have indexical qualities: the viewer can construct a narrative of how these forlorn broken objects arrived at their current state.

It can now be concluded that Parker’s engagement with Memory includes the collection and recording of objects of history as well as providing these objects with a new narrative through art-making (Levy 2006:9).

Parker’s engagement with Memory can also be detected in her “preoccupation with monuments”<sup>45</sup> (McCarthy 2006:4). The Brontë Parsonage, which could be considered a monument commemorating the Brontës and their writing, provided Parker with a source of historical objects. In the same way Parker also collected remnants and traces from other monumental sites. In *Subconscious of a monument* (2003) (fig 8), Parker collected the excavated soil which was removed from beneath the Leaning Tower of Pisa<sup>46</sup> in order to prevent its collapse. The authenticity of the recording of a historical architectural structure’s displacement is underlined by the fact that these fragments are the actual collected samples of the soil removed from beneath the tower, referencing this site’s history of becoming displaced and tracing its transition. Parker used these lumps of dry soil to create an installation in a London Gallery. By suspending these remnants and by the subtle play of light, Parker endows them with an ethereal quality as if they are not based on earth but exist in another realm. The clue to this realm lies in the title of the work, namely in the word *subconscious*. The subconscious is the place where memories are stored and from where they are retrieved and unearthed again.

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<sup>45</sup> A monument is a site that links the concept of place with the concept of Memory since it is usually a structure of some kind that is built in memory of someone or to commemorate something.

<sup>46</sup> The Leaning Tower of Pisa is part of a National Heritage Site in the city of Pisa, Italy. The bell tower’s construction started in 1173 and almost immediately leant towards the South because of the inadequate depth of its foundation in clay soil. During 1990 to 2001 the tower underwent major structural work to reduce its lean which included the removal of soil from underneath the foundations (Barker 2001).



Fig 8. Cornelia Parker, *Subconscious of a monument* (2003).

Parker's art-making process and devices (collecting found fragments of an actual displacement; and suspension and light as installation devices) are metaphors for memory processes. The fact that the particles are presented as fragments with spaces in-between could imply that memory processes are imperfect and that loss of Memory takes place.



Fig 9. Cornelia Parker, *Mass (Colder Darker Matter)* (1997).

In *Mass (Colder Darker Matter)* (1997) (fig 9), Parker employed suspension as a presentation device to allude to Memory loss. Parker collected the burnt fragments of a wooden church struck by lightning to construct this work. If a church could be considered as representing a spiritual home, then the event of the church's destruction by fire references the loss of this home and constituted a site of spiritual displacement. Parker suspended these charcoal fragments in a manner which intensifies the allusion to Memory loss: closer to each other in the middle and then further apart at the edges, giving the impression of density and mass that fades at the edges – an equivalent to the loss of Memory as a gradual process.

In some of Parker's works, interference with matter has an important significance. She has spoken of this interference in the following way: "I resurrect things that have been killed off. ... My work is all about the potential of materials – even when it looks like they've lost all possibilities"

([www.artseensoho.com/Art/DEITCH/parker98/parker2](http://www.artseensoho.com/Art/DEITCH/parker98/parker2)). Parker's methodology has also been described as "un-doing" (Lajer-Burchardt 2001:78), referring to her interference with the matter with which she is working. This is aptly illustrated in the installation, *Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view* (1991) (fig 10), in which a previously assembled garden shed<sup>47</sup> and its contents were deliberately blown up and the fragments suspended and illuminated by an ordinary household light bulb. The finished artwork reminds us of the shed and its contents but at the same time, of the interference (explosion).



Fig 10. Cornelia Parker, *Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view* (1991).

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<sup>47</sup> Watkins explains the significance of the garden shed in this regard: "[It is] a sort of half-way house, an overflow for such objects which, for whatever reason, aren't as wanted or needed as they once were. It is like the attic or the space underneath a staircase. ... a place of refuge, a safe place, a place for secrets and fantasy. By blowing up the shed Parker is taking away such a place, throwing doubt on all it represents. ... We are being asked to confront some cold dark matter which equally could be a factor in a universal equation or some unnerving psychological state" (1996:30).



Levy said of the work: “This is an artwork made from verbs; the shed falls, flies, flings, bangs, crashes, collides. Although the spectator retains their [sic] associations with the past life of the shed, it is a past that has been shattered and rearranged” (2006:6).

Parker has frozen the violent event of explosion and all its sequential time frames in one work. Levy is of the opinion that Parker “has managed to suspend time” (2001:6), referring also to the way in which the work has been presented. If Parker’s works could be considered metaphors for the processes of Memory loss (as indicated previously), this work could refer to the incomplete recollection of the sequence of events associated with a traumatic event, as alluded to by the explosion. Memories of traumatic events are often fragmented, incomplete and sometimes even unrelated to the original event<sup>48</sup>, just as the artwork’s fragments in the installation are left with open spaces in-between. Traumatic events are sometimes recalled by supplementing them with personal associations that were not part of the original events, just as the intangible shadows of the fragments in the artwork supplement the real fragments. The fragments of the shed cannot be rebuilt where it had existed; instead, the remains are displaced and rearranged in a gallery, suspended in time, not grounded but part of an ethereal reality. This notion resonates metaphorically with the trauma associated with the displacement event (as shown in Chapter 2) which can never be relived but instead, is displaced and rearranged (partially remembered or forgotten) in the minds and memories of the displaced.

By resurrecting previously overlooked mundane found objects in a specific way in the gallery space, Parker is achieving several things: while documenting displacement and thus referring to a past event, she also endows these objects with a new narrative and history. Through artistic

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<sup>48</sup> In a study on the role of visual images and their relation to Memory in the eye-witness testimonies of Holocaust survivors, Van Alphen found that the link between seeing and comprehension has been radically disrupted in the experiences of Holocaust victims (2002: 205). An in-depth study of the effects of trauma on the processing of Memory is presented in Chapter 2.

intervention Parker metaphorically reveals the constructs of Memory processes and bestows on these objects the function of visual commemoration.

In contrast, Whiteread records the past by the art-making process of casting. This technique is primarily used to capture the void or to cast the negative, empty spaces surrounding mundane everyday objects such as the space surrounding a bath or the spaces underneath chairs (fig 11), staircases (fig 12) or floors (fig 13).



Fig 11. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (One hundred spaces)* (detail) (1995).

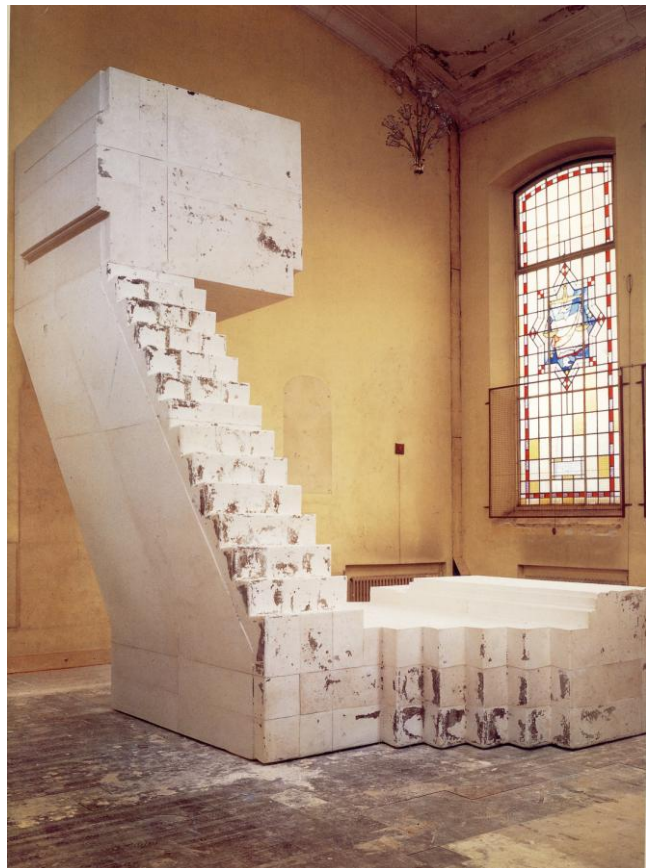


Fig 12. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Upstairs)* (2000-1).

In an article on Whiteread, Cicelyn states that:

The cast is a technique for reproducing the lost original, a tangible memory of what no longer exists. In one way or another, the cast has something to do with the question of what came before and

what is not finished, but also of what is forever lost and finished and yet returns (2007:158).

With casting, Whiteread is able to record the precise and accurate details of objects and therefore her works could be considered a documentation and evidence of the spaces surrounding the original objects. The viewer can observe the history of handmade alterations and repairs on the floor pieces, as in the plaster floor *Untitled (Floor)* (1992) (fig 13), and traces of soot in the negative space of the fireplace in *GHOST* (1990) (fig 14). In this way Whiteread has documented human interference on surfaces, the traces left behind, referring to the history of the object which was brought about by human agency.



Fig 13. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Floor)* (1992).

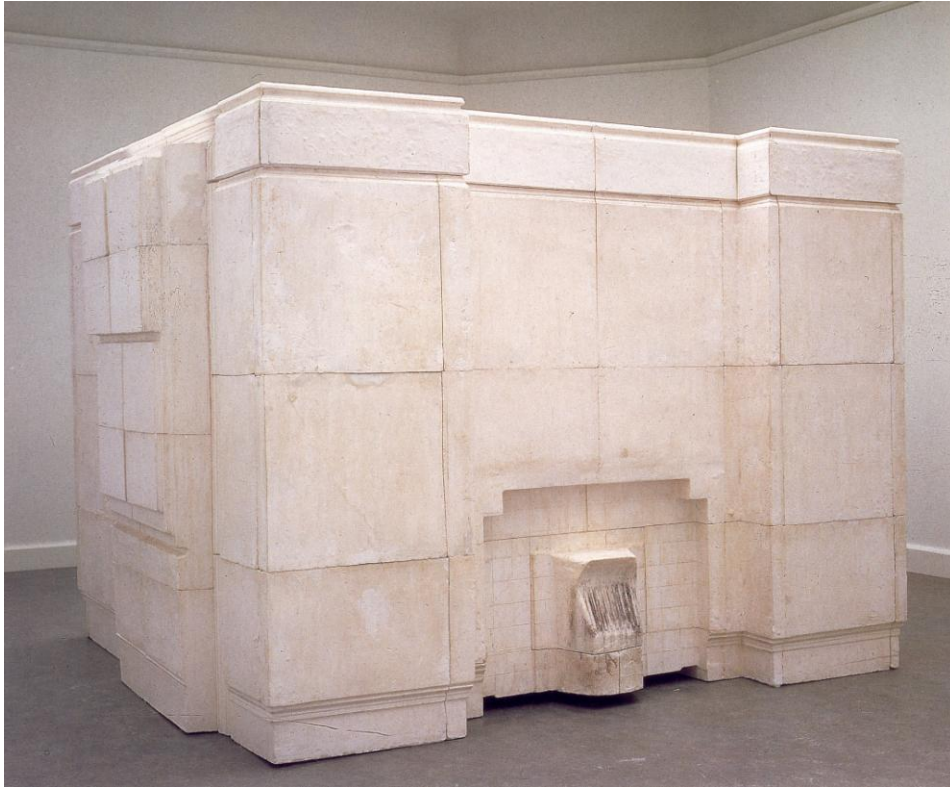


Fig 14. Rachel Whiteread, *GHOST* (1990).

Whiteread's selection of specific spaces for casting such as rooms (as in the work *GHOST* (1990) in which the empty space inside a room was cast (fig 14)), chairs and baths, references the human body since they are directly associated with people or the spaces that human bodies occupied before. Casting the absence, the void, as in *Untitled (One hundred spaces)* (1995) (fig 11), is thus a way of giving embodiment to the unseen and making absence visible, thereby documenting it, making it a solid entity, giving it a tangible existence which can be observed. Through her process, Whiteread is reversing absence. However, the presence that she puts in front of us is not the presence of the real object but its inverse, a document of its void which emphasises its loss. Whiteread's works are alluding to the nature of loss and attempt to retrieve memories of a previous presence, traces of the relived event. Noble explains it in this way:

Emptiness is a paradoxical concept. ... by casting empty space, Whiteread gives form to an equally paradoxical idea, which is that



empty spaces can contain histories. ... emptiness activates memory, or anyway the attempt to imagine what the memories of a space might be (2005:66-7).

For the purposes of this study, loss of Memory is considered one of the key elements or constructs for displacement. Whiteread's casts of open spaces could be considered as repeated metaphorical attempts to prevent forgetting, methods of retaining Memory and subtle means of reminding society of its amnesia.

Parker and Whiteread reveal loss of Memory in their works through their respective art-making processes. While Parker's process involves the resurrecting or un-doing of found matter or material thereby referring to their past existence, Whiteread casts the negative spaces of household objects and architectural spaces. Parker suspends time, capturing a whole series of events in one installation. Whiteread solidifies space and documents the traces of a past existence in the surfaces of the casts. By using suspension and the play of light in her installations, Parker is commenting on the incomplete process of retaining and recalling Memory from the subconscious realm after a traumatic event. By repeatedly casting empty spaces, Whiteread reminds us of the original object's absence and thereby emphasises society's tendency to forget.

### **6.3.3. Land and home; Identity**

In this section specific artworks by Parker and Whiteread, in which the home is used as subject matter, will be compared. It will be argued that the two artists utilise their respective techniques, processes and formal elements in different ways to produce diverse statements about the loss of a home and therefore implicate the loss of Identity<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> The interrelationships between the three key concepts of this study were mapped out in Chapter 5, which concluded that in the displacement experience, a loss incurred in one of the concepts also produces a loss in the other two concepts. This conclusion is reiterated in the words of Schmidt: "A loss of home ... involves a loss of identity. It is an uprooted-ness that leaves one without parameters and guideposts" (1980:337).



Fig 15. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (HOUSE)* (1993).

In her well-known work, *Untitled (House)* (1993) (fig 15)<sup>50</sup>, Whiteread replicated the inside of a semi-derelict house due for demolition. The empty space inside the old house was solidified in cement through the casting technique, picking up the traces of a 100 years of domestic use.

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<sup>50</sup> The original terraced Victorian house was situated in a London street that was to be cleared to make way for a park. The tenant who lived there, refused to move out even after the surrounding houses had been demolished. When he eventually vacated the property, the local Council granted Whiteread rights to create a temporary sculpture. *House* only existed from 25 October 1993 to 12 January 1994, when it was demolished (Mullins 2004:50).



Fig 16. Cornelia Parker, *Transitional object I, II and III* (2008).

In contrast, Parker alluded to temporary dwellings or shelters in her exhibition *Cornelia Parker* in 2008<sup>51</sup>. The installation, *Transitional Object I, II and III* (2008) (fig 16) resembling black tent-like structures and constructed from net, hooks, thread and bags of lead, was suspended from the gallery ceiling. A series of *Bullet Drawings*<sup>52</sup> (2008) (fig 17), together with a series of mantra drawings<sup>53</sup> (fig 19) and photographic works depicting crumpled or discarded newspapers (fig 18), complemented the shelters and completed the exhibition.

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<sup>51</sup> This exhibition was presented at the Frith Street Gallery, London, in March/April 2008.

<sup>52</sup> The Bullet Drawings were made by tracing the inside spaces of wire fencing with the lead of bullets.

<sup>53</sup> The mantras were constructed by means of a surrealist game, called 'Latent news', whereby words and phrases are cut from newspaper articles and then are "rapidly reassembled to make some other kind of sense" (Frith Street Gallery 2008). The mantras were copied and re-written by Parker's 6-year old daughter in a notebook, which then became the artworks.

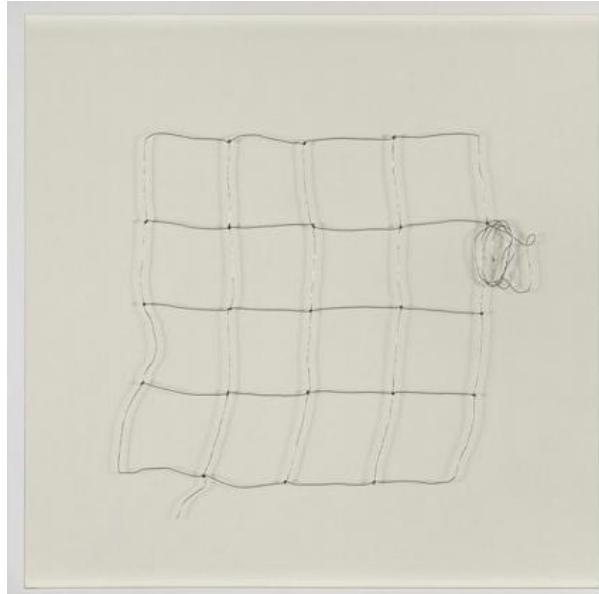


Fig 17. Cornelia Parker, *Bullet drawing* (2008).



Fig 18. Cornelia Parker, *Latent news* (2008).



Fig 19. Cornelia Parker, *Catastrophe is always elsewhere* (2008).

On a denotative level, Parker's and Whiteread's depictions of houses or homes could not be more different from each other. Where Parker's tent-like structures are black, semi-transparent and floating, Whiteread's *House* is light-coloured, opaque, solid and grounded. To reveal the connotative meanings attached to these works, Whiteread's *House* should be read against its historical background and Parker's objects should be read together with the drawings and photographs in her exhibition.

If the previous existence and history of Whiteread's *House* is considered, it is clear that *House* is about a loss of a home<sup>54</sup> and can be likened to the loss of a body<sup>55</sup> and therefore, can be considered as a metaphor for the loss of the self, of Identity.

Alluding to tents, the work *Transitional object I, II and III* (2008)<sup>56</sup> refers either to a home in transition or as existing in the subconscious realm. These dwellings could hardly provide shelter, even of a temporary kind. The netting endows the work with fragility, the colour black could have connotations of foreboding or even death and disaster and, with the suspension of these artworks, the reference is 'not of this world'. They exist in the subconscious realm.

If *Transitional object I, II and III* is considered within the context of the other exhibits which also speak of an ominous time and place, the interpretation becomes clearer. While the use of bullets as drawing material in the *Bullet Drawings* (fig 17) speaks of violence, the use of wire fencing refers to boundaries, encampment and enclosures. The text of the mantras, created out of the news of the day, are concerned with a sense of catastrophe (such as in *Catastrophe is Always Elsewhere* (2008)<sup>57</sup> (fig

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<sup>54</sup> The house as a home has symbolic references to a human body. Moreover, the psychoanalytic view is that the image of a house is employed in dreams as a "representation of the different layers of the psyche" (Cirlot 1971:153).

<sup>55</sup> Jean Paul Sartre has described this aptly in his work, *Being and Nothingness* in 1943: "the bomb which destroys my house also damages my body in so far as the house was already an indication of my body" (quoted by Mullins 2004:49). More-over, Whiteread also referred to this notion in describing the art-making process of *House*: "It was like exploring the inside of a body, removing its vital organs. ... as if we were embalming a body" (quoted by Mullins 2004:52).

<sup>56</sup> The term 'transitional object' was coined in 1951 by the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. His interest was in the child's "the first not me" possession to which infants attributed primordial significance. This object may be conceived as "a defense against separation anxiety" (<http://www.answers.com/topic/transitional-object-psychoanalysis?cat=health>) and a support "to compensate and comfort for ... [a] ... sense of loss" ([http://changingminds.org/disciplines/psychoanalysis/concepts/transition\\_object.htm](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/psychoanalysis/concepts/transition_object.htm)). By referencing Winnicott's term in the titles of her works, Parker is suggesting that her tent-like structures should be read as metaphors for the psyche. It will be shown that Parker's works are subverting the original connotations of comfort and safety attributed to transitional objects, as intended by Winnicott.

<sup>57</sup> In an interview, Parker mentioned this work as part of the series of mantras on the exhibition that deal with how, in contemporary times, we are "all bombarded with this weird concrete poetry ... either in the papers or in email spam" ([http://www.timeout.com/london/art/features/4366/Cornelia\\_Parker-interview.html](http://www.timeout.com/london/art/features/4366/Cornelia_Parker-interview.html)).

19)). These works increase the sense of discomfort and foreboding which was evident in the formal qualities of *Transitional object I, II and III*.

Whiteread's *House* can be considered as a metaphor for the loss of the self and Identity. If a home could be considered a metaphor of the psyche, then Parker's tent-like structures are metaphors for the psyche as sites of displacement. Moreover, when the tent-like structures are read with the other works on exhibition, they reveal the state of mind of contemporary society, that of a constant displacement in the psyche, a Zeitgeist in which even the self/Identity is lost.

#### **6.3.4. Conclusion**

Both Parker and Whiteread work with the theme of displacement which includes the concepts of absence, loss, time, Memory, Land and home and by implication, Identity.

Parker's displacement of matter is a metaphor for the displacement phenomenon. By the specific use of suspension as an installation device and by referencing psycho-analytical terms in the titles of her works, Parker suggests that the site of displacement is the psyche and that Memory processes in the psyche are imperfect. Loss of Identity is implicated through the loss of a psychic state. The concept of time is employed in the works in terms of the past, present and future, indicated by the use of collected fragments representing the past, with the installation being in the present and the resultant effects of light and suspension seeming to refer to the unknown future. In this sense Parker's *Transitional object I, II and III* is a futuristic comment on a universal tendency towards displacement in society and the effects thereof on the psyche.

The technique and process of casting empty spaces of objects that have connotations to the body, as employed by Whiteread, speak of absence



and loss. Whiteread's reference to time is to a history in the past indicated by the recording of traces of human interference on the surfaces of the objects that she casts, alluding to an attempt to retrieve memory. Whiteread's *House* is a direct reference to the loss of a home and displacement. In Whiteread's works loss of Identity is implicated by the interrelationship between the loss of a home and the loss of Identity, as concluded in Chapter 5.

## **6.4. VISUAL SIGNIFIERS OF DISPLACEMENT**

### **6.4.1. Introduction**

The comparison between the artworks of Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker demonstrated that contemporary artists dealing with the notion of displacement manifest it in different and diverse ways. Since the works of these two artists are formally so dissimilar from each other, the question now arises as to whether a communal visual language exists for manifesting the concept of displacement.

The following set of collective visual signifiers which was derived from the study is a broad outline of visual devices used in artworks concerned with displacement as a phenomenon and includes not only formal qualities but also aspects of the processes, techniques, devices and materials. The set of signifiers is interrelated and some overlaps occur but each specific signifier nevertheless needs to be mentioned. The list should not be considered as conclusive but rather as the launching of an initial guideline in an ongoing debate.

### **6.4.2. List of visual signifiers**

#### **(1) Recording and documenting.**

Recording and documenting as processes and techniques of art-making are used extensively by artists dealing with displacement. Rachel Whiteread documents the traces of a previously lived life; Sue Williamson

records the stories of displaced people; and Cornelia Parker documents the microscopic traces on personal objects.

## **(2) Found objects**

Artists working with the notion of displacement often use found objects that serve as metaphors for the human condition applicable to displacement. While Whiteread uses objects as a first step in her art-making process, resulting in a cast of the negative spaces, Doris Salcedo transforms manufactured household objects and Cornelia Parker uses the actual found manufactured objects.

## **(3) Traces**

To refer to loss and absence as attributes of displacement, artists use traces as formal elements or as part of their art-making process. The attributes of traces are especially apt to manifest loss and absence because of the incompleteness of their visual evidence. Whiteread records stains left on surfaces, while Parker uses the actual remnants from a site.

## **(4) About the body without the body**

Artworks manifesting displacement and its effects on people are concerned with the human body since they allude to trauma which is experienced on a physical as well as on psychological level. However, the inherent nature of loss and absence in displacement constitutes a paradox in this concern. Therefore, although the works are about a bodily experience, artists often do not use the human body as a visual element in artworks. Artists would suggest or refer to the body through traces of bodies or human intervention/activities.

## **(5) Paradoxes**

To manifest the experience of loss and absence as is prevalent in displacement, artists often create a simultaneous impression of familiarity and otherness in their works. The artworks manifesting displacement are



rooted in the familiar, they use objects that we know and that we use: chairs, furniture, houses and clothing. However, the way in which these objects have been transformed or presented add a sense of something that is out of order. In Whiteread's *House*, the empty lived-in spaces of a home are solidified which renders the spaces inside inaccessible, physically as well as visually. Parker's suspended installations render familiar objects dangling in-between earth and heaven, as if they exist neither on this earth nor in this reality.

#### **(6) "Slowing things down"**

Artworks dealing with displacement often deal with the element of time. It was shown in previous discussions that the sense of temporality is distorted through displacement and that the contemporary experience of speeded-up time inherent to globalisation is causal to the loss of Identity. Artists often react to this aspect by their choice of a deliberate time-consuming handmade art-making process (as opposed to artworks using a technological process). This is prevalent in both Whiteread's casting process and Parker's labour intensive suspension processes.

The words of the 2005 Turner Prize winner, Simon Starling, confirm this notion. Starling said that his winning work, called *Shedboatshed*<sup>58</sup> (fig 20), was about "slowing things down, about trying to retard this incredible speed at which we live" ([www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4501798.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4501798.stm)).

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<sup>58</sup> Starling's art-making process for this work consisted of dismantling a shed and turning it into a boat. The boat was loaded with the remains of the shed and paddled down the Rhine to a museum in Basel, dismantled and re-made into a shed.



Fig 20. Simon Starling, *Shedboatshed (Mobile architecture no. 2)* (2005).

Commenting on a sense of disconnectedness experienced as a result of globalisation, Starling said: “Because things are manufactured in multiple countries by large corporations... you lose the sense of connection with the things you kind of dealing with every day”

([www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2005/transcript\\_simonstarling.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2005/transcript_simonstarling.htm)).

### **(7) Public versus intimate**

The significant contrast, relevant for this study, between art in the public versus the personal/intimate domain, is aptly stated in one of the seminal works used for this study:

In recent years there has been the surprising emergence in Post-Minimalist art of what I would tentatively call memory sculpture: a kind of sculpture that is not centered on spatial configuration alone, but that powerfully inscribes a dimension of localizable, even corporeal memory into the work. This is an artistic practice that remains clearly distinct from the monument or the memorial. Its place is in the museum or the gallery rather than in public space. Its addressee is in the individual beholder rather than the nation or the community. In its handling of materials and concepts, its references to a specific tradition of installation art, and in its

emphatic reliance on an emphatic experiential dimension, it is much less confined by generic conventions than either the monument or memorial would be. Monuments articulate official memory, and their fate is to be toppled or to become invisible. Lived memory, on the other hand, is always located in individual bodies, their experience and their pain, even when it involves collective, political or generational memory. Anticipating Freud, Nietzsche acknowledged that simple fact when he wrote: “Only that which does not cease to hurt remains in memory” (Huysen 1998:31).

The personal and intimate are manifested in the works of Whiteread and Parker in the choice of objects employed in the artworks. In the case of Whiteread they are: the inside space of a home, the space underneath stairs, mundane forgotten spaces surrounding the objects used by the body: a chair, a bath, a mattress. In the case of Parker they are the humble charcoal fragments of a wooden church struck by lightning, the mere clumps of soil excavated from underneath the leaning tower of Pisa, the private objects used by the Brontë sisters like combs and pens. These materials speak of the mundane, the everyday, the easily overlooked objects that we use every day and that bear traces of our existence.

The investigation of the manifestation of displacement in contemporary art serves as a preamble for a discussion of the artworks produced for the practical component of this study, which will receive attention in the next section.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Manifesting displacement**

#### **7.1. INTRODUCTION: FINDINGS AND INTENTIONS**

The previous chapters of this study dealt with the notion of displacement as a state of mind and how and why humankind is displaced from the self. The following is a summary of the reasons why humankind experience displacement as a state of mind:

- Globalisation: humankind's experience of space and place has shifted from proximity to accessibility (as discussed in Chapter 3).
- Distorted sense of temporality: the ever faster speed of time and change (as discussed in Chapter 5).
- Virtual space versus physical space: the erosion of the physicality of space has implications on community, identity and place experience (as discussed in Chapter 5).
- Age of amnesia: due to severe traumatic periods in the recent past, memory processes have been distorted and fragmented (as discussed in Chapter 2).
- Due to the marginalisation of the victims of displacement (as described in Chapter 1), Memory of the displaced is inscribed publicly and officially in history whereas the personal intimate memory processes are not considered relevant (as indicated in Chapter 2 and 6).

Moreover, the nature of displacement has been investigated in terms of the interrelatedness of the theoretical concepts of Memory, Land and home, and Identity. It has been shown that the nature of displacement as a state of mind involves an interconnected occurrence of loss experienced within the three key concepts.

In view of the findings in the theoretical component, the approach to be adopted in respect of the practical component (covering the entire process from the collection of data to the art-making process) is therefore:

- (1) To localise and contextualise these findings against a specific site in South Africa
- (2) To map time
- (3) To engage with the physicality of space and place
- (4) To commemorate the displacement event
- (5) To engage with personal and intimate memory processes of the displaced as relevant modes of remembering, seeking the legitimisation of personal Memory through art-making.

These methodologies will serve as tools to investigate the phenomenon of physical displacement as a metaphor for displacement as a state of mind. It is the contention that by documenting and dissecting the remaining traces of physical displacement at a specific site of displacement, an inventory can be compiled that becomes a metaphorical record of the losses incurred within the phenomena of space, time, Memory and Identity. Ultimately, the intention is to re-construct some kind of visual narrative of the physical displacement event as an access point to gain additional knowledge about the nature of displacement as a phenomenon generally and as a state of mind.

I am not alone in this approach to displacement, as indicated by the artists discussed in Chapter 6. The visual signifiers that have been identified as a result of the investigation of artists in Chapter 6 serve as a framework for the investigation executed in the practical component. References to these signifiers are woven into the text that follows, in order to highlight the specific ways that this grid has been used in the research.

## 7.2. THE CASE OF THE DEMOLISHED TOWNSHIP CALLED *BANK*

### 7.2.1. Background

The practical component of this study was contextualised by selecting a specific site of displacement in South Africa as a case study, thereby honouring the intentions to localise and to engage with the physicality of space and place (as mentioned above).

The site is a former township situated about four kilometres from the town Carletonville in the North West Province, South Africa, known as “Bank”. In the early seventies the residents of the town lost their homes due to the risk of sinkholes<sup>59</sup> (for a detailed description of the site see Addendum 1).

This site was selected as a case study due to its relative anonymity as a site of displacement which means that it contains untold narratives of the ordinary person who lived there. The choice of this site thus holds true to the goal of this study, that of investigating the intimate rather than the public nature of displacement<sup>60</sup>. The site was also chosen because of the unusual cause for displacement. Sinkholes could be considered as a human-made “natural” disaster: the human activity of mining, due to the impact on geological processes, causes the earth to collapse or implode forming huge holes (Winde & Stoch 2010:71). Not only do sinkholes cause the physical displacement of humans, they are also scars bearing witness to the interference of humans in nature. Their physical appearance resembles a wound in the earth. These scars are metaphors for the bodily and psychological aspects of displacement. In this way, displacement becomes a phenomenon not only experienced by humans but also by the

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<sup>59</sup> Several incidents of sinkholes causing loss of lives occurred in the Carletonville area, notably the overnight disappearance of the home of the Oosthuizen family on 3 August 1964, burying the family and their domestic worker alive [http://www.geocaching.com/seek/cache\\_details.aspx?guid=944c744d-7866-40de-9620-ca240961f92d](http://www.geocaching.com/seek/cache_details.aspx?guid=944c744d-7866-40de-9620-ca240961f92d)). This incident in the vicinity of Bank must still have been vivid in the collective consciousness at the time of the Bank evacuation.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 6: Public versus intimate.

natural environment, of which sinkholes are the documents and evidence<sup>61</sup>.

### **7.2.2. Research methodology**

In order to implement the intentions stated in the beginning of this Chapter, the roles adopted in the execution of this study were those of a forensic investigator and an archaeologist.

As an investigator, the tasks were to track down clues that reference displacement and to collect physical and psychological evidence of the event. The search for evidence of displacement included the interviewing of a former resident and the sourcing of official documents such as the township plan, contracts of the purchase of land and old building plans of houses. The site of displacement was also scrutinised for verification. The clues found at a site of displacement are never whole/pristine or encompassing but are always in the form of a trace (partly because of the time lapse between the event of displacement and the time of investigation). Traces reveal only a section of the narrative and leave us with more unanswered questions/openings/negative spaces than conclusions.

As an archaeologist, the task was to trace and document the remnants of buildings on the site such as the fragments of foundations and walls. Objects or fragments of objects remaining on site were collected, examined and documented and extensive photographic documentation taken. The physical investigation was a metaphor for the process of excavating Memory in order to trace confluences between Memory, Identity and Land and home.

Documentation was used as the main methodological device throughout the visual research and extended to the art-making process for the

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<sup>61</sup> See Addendum 1 for a detailed discussion of these reasons.

*Displacement* exhibition because it resonates with the process of recording a history of a site of displacement and with the assumed roles of forensic investigator and archaeologist. The discourse on the relevancy of certain documents in this study of displacement will be dealt with in the next section.

### **7.2.3. Evidential documents**

#### (1) Narrative re-calling (interview)

An informal and non-directive interview was conducted with a former resident of Bank, Sophie Willemse, telling the story of how her parents lost their home in Bank due to the threat of sinkholes. (See Addendum 1 for a report on the interview). The role of the interview in this study is significant, since it confirms the extent of trauma associated with displacement, even though compensation for the lost house was received.

#### (2) The memory of photographs

A series of old photographs from the family album of Sophie Willemse forms part of the evidence used for this study (See Addendum 1 for a description and discussion of the meanings generated by these photographs). The photographs chronicle the different stages of the family home at Bank and also give an account of the daily activities performed in and around the house that contribute to the experiences contained within a home and that play a role in the meanings attached to a home as described in Chapter 3. Due to their ability to serve as nodes in the Memory of a past life and as an aid in recalling and assisting Memory, these photographs have been used in the artwork *Re-locate* (video, 3,5min) in which they appear and disappear in overlaid video-footage of the site (figs 43 and 45). The video is discussed in the section **Memory, Land and home, Identity** below.



### (3) The authority of the site

It is the contention that the prime source of evidence in this investigation was the site of displacement itself and what it yielded. Although the official documents and interview provided background information to the event and the old photographs presented valuable links to the memory of a past life at the site, it is the site itself that had the authority<sup>62</sup> to embody the experience of displacement because it was a witness to all the events of the past:

landscape and site are concrete remnants of the past that continue to exist in the present. Thus, they have the capacity to be powerful visual surrogates for the time that no longer exists. The landscape, therefore, is a marker of the temporal past and, as such, can be a place to encounter history (Wasserman 2007:165).

This notion ties in with one of the visual signifiers of displacement discussed in the previous chapter: the paradoxical nature of displacement implies loss and absence and artworks dealing with displacement often deal with the body as subject matter but through the absence of the body image<sup>63</sup>. In the case of the former township Bank, the site with its deserted landscape, devoid of humans but impregnated with traces of previous human existence, was a mute but nevertheless revealing physical remainder and reminder of the displacement event and a metaphor for the loss of the self. It provided a first-hand access point to the memories of those who had lived there. (For a detailed discussion of the site, see Addendum 1).

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<sup>62</sup> The term 'Authority of the site' is attributed to the artist Daniel Eisenberg who visited and recorded the sites of his parents' trauma as Holocaust survivors in Europe and produced a film called *Cooperation of parts* (1987). By using the site as evidence of the historical event, Eisenberg's experience of the site "connect [ed] his 'memory without experience' to some form of lived experience" (Wasserman 2007:166). As a result of the making of this film, Eisenberg presented a paper to the Chicago Film Seminar at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago in November 1996, which was titled *The Authority of the Site/The Site of Authority: Cinematic Observation and the Discourse of Documents* (Wasserman 2007:171). Due to its unpublished status, this paper could only be obtained from the author himself. Daniel Eisenberg kindly provided, via electronic mail on 18 May 2010, a reworked version of this paper as reference for this study.

<sup>63</sup> This point was dealt with extensively in Chapter 6.

The close scrutiny of the overall site revealed numerous details, elements and small items which became the impetus/incentive for the artworks (grids, fragments, linear traces, overlays, fading colours, etc.) Photographic documentation of the site featured in various transformations in several artworks on the *Displacement* exhibition, such as the *Inventory tables* (fig 35), *Timeline I* (fig 28) and the video, *Re-locate* (fig 43). These works are discussed in the section **Memory, Land and home, Identity** below.

#### (4) The life of objects

The site also yielded a wide variety of small manufactured objects or fragments of objects left behind during the displacement event (for a detailed discussion of these objects and the theoretical discourses pertaining to them, see Addendum 1). The significance of these objects lies in their ability to serve as metaphors for the human condition relating to displacement as well as in how objects can be employed to decode aspects of trauma, time and memory that they contain and that are indicative of displacement. In this respect, the objects found at Bank served as visual sources of information and evidence of displacement and were used as in that capacity for the *Displacement* exhibition.

### 7.3. ARTWORKS

#### 7.3.1. Creative methodology

The evidence resulting from the research of the site Bank discussed above was transformed through various documenting techniques and processes thus adding an additional layer of documentation. Documenting and duplicating processes included scanning, sand-casting and drawing with carbon paper. The dominant creative methodology employed, however, was photographic<sup>64</sup> since photography's attributes could be applied as an

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<sup>64</sup> The term photography is used in its broadest sense to incorporate a range of techniques which could be considered to be related to or derived from photographic processes including the appropriation of old historical photographs, the use of digital photography, video, stop-frame animation and cyanotypes.

analogy for various features imbedded in the site of displacement and inherent in the phenomenon of displacement.

Photography concerns itself with “that which has been” (Barthes quoted by Carabell 2002:177), recording and capturing the past and therefore linked to Memory, which underscores its trace-like elusive qualities. Moreover, it is photography’s relationship to both presence and absence that renders photography a suitable device to document displacement<sup>65</sup> which resonates with one of the visual signifiers identified in Chapter 6, namely to investigate the body without the body being present.

The camera, as a human-made device using film and light and thereafter, chemicals to produce an image, resonates with the research methodology of the site Bank. In this process human-made structures and manufactured objects are documented and consequently the effects of weathering and decay on these objects and the environment that produce chemical processes, such as rust, are recorded.

One of the photographic techniques used extensively is the cyanotype<sup>66</sup> or blueprint which was employed primarily to record found objects. The meanings generated by the cyanotype art-making process in terms of

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<sup>65</sup> Photography’s ability to be an authentic historical document and to attest to the truth, namely the presence of objects, people or events, has been a distinct discourse in the theory on photography. Two of the main theoretical exponents writing on photography, Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, were of contradictory opinions about this matter. According to Barthes: “Every photograph is a certificate of presence” (1981:87). For Sontag, however, photography’s link with temporality, the fact that it freezes time in small units without context is causing it to have “multiple meanings” and to not being able to “explain anything [by itself]”. She describes photographs as *memento mori* (photographs remind us of our own mortality) since “all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” and states that a photograph is thus “a token of absence” (Sontag quoted by Keilbach 2009:57). It will be shown that it is exactly the dichotomy of these opposing views that are being played out in the techniques and processes used for the practical component for this study and that the artworks underline and embrace this inherent dichotomy of photography.

<sup>66</sup> The cyanotype method of fixing an image on paper through a chemical process was discovered by the British astronomer chemist John Hirschell in 1842, who regarded it as a failure as a photographic method since the technique only produced a negative image (Keats 2009:90). Cyanotypes are produced by covering a surface with a mixture of two chemicals (ferrocyanate and ammonium ferric citrate) which renders the surface light-sensitive. An image is obtained by placing an object or any opaque surface on the light-sensitive surface and exposing it to the sun. The exposed areas are activated by the sun and turn into a strong cyan to Prussian blue. The process is fixed with water rinsing.

displacement are multi-layered. The cyanotype technique is a historical process, one of the first experiments in the discovery of photography. The analogy between the cyanotype technique and displacement research is the process of looking back in time. The analogy is extended by taking the chemical processes of weathering and decay into a process of light exposure and its subsequent reaction to chemical substances.

It is in its references to absence and presence that the cyanotype process manifests its metaphorical significance for displacement. The process records not the actual objects but the negative spaces around the objects, the nothingness that shares a reciprocal edge with the object much in the same way that the casting process used by Rachel Whiteread (as described in Chapter 6), captured the negative spaces of tables, chairs and rooms. It is by defining the nothingness surrounding the objects that the images of the objects themselves appear 'out of the blue'. Although the process is meant to document presence, the resulting image defines the loss of a presence and it traces the evidence of a previous existence. If the nature of displacement is linked to loss and absence as experienced in the key concepts of Memory, Land and home, and Identity (as shown in the theoretical section of this study), then the cyanotype process could be a metaphor for the documentation of displacement.

The cyanotype process is also significant due to the connotations of the word 'blueprint'. The term blueprint has a layered meaning. Apart from being the physical print of white lines on a blue background, it can also mean "pilot scheme" (*Collins paperback thesaurus* 1993. Sv "blueprint"), or "a model or prototype" (*Little Oxford dictionary* 2006. Sv "blueprint"). An obvious interpretation could be that the cyanotypes of the objects found at Bank could be considered as the prototypes of displacement. If the objects speak of loss and displacement, if they map the events of displacement and thus construct a history of displacement (as indicated in **The life of objects** above and in Addendum 1), then the blueprints of the objects

could be considered schematic renderings of this history and of displacement generally.

Moreover, the word 'blueprint' alludes to an official document: a plan done in blueprint is an authorised legitimate document of that plan. The cyanotypes thus are pursuits to legitimise the previously overlooked, mundane objects as prototypes of displacement as the official documents of the personal memory processes and the intimate narrative re-calling of displacement. This pursuit brings to fruition the task set and described in the Introduction to this Chapter, namely to "engage with personal and intimate memory processes as relevant modes of remembering, seeking the legitimisation of personal memory through art-making."

### **7.3.2. The significance of blue**

It is evident in the *Displacement* exhibition that the colour blue produced by the cyanotype process is a dominant element present in many of the artworks (see figs 21 to 27). The use of the colour blue in these works has significance in terms of two aspects that are interconnected. The first is that the colour blue is related to the way that we see and the second is that, although it is generally considered to be a symbol of infiniteness and thus absence, it can also be employed to highlight the dichotomies of absence and presence.

The wavelength of the colour blue is one of the shortest of all the colours visible to the human eye. "Because the blue wavelengths are shorter in the visible spectrum, they are scattered more efficiently by the molecules in the atmosphere. This causes the sky to appear blue" (NASA Langley Atmospheric Science Data Center [Sa]). This physical attribute of the colour blue causes it to be distinguished as a symbol of the infinite and ethereal. The American painter, Yves Klein used the colour blue in his

artworks to describe “the Void”<sup>67</sup> (Carabell 2002:183), thus a spatial dimension of infinity, of the non-representational and the abstract, of dematerialisation and of nothingness (Hallas 2007:48)<sup>68</sup>. Blue is referred to as representative of an experience of space as intangible, not physical and therefore, to a notion of absence rather than presence of physical space. Influenced by Klein, the filmmaker Derek Jarman used the colour blue, as a symbol of absence in his film *Blue* (1993)<sup>69</sup> paradoxically to implicate embodiment, presence and an experience of proximity of space<sup>70</sup> (Hallas 2007:45). These aspects relate to the theoretical discourse of the loss of presence and the loss of the experience of space and place inherent in displacement as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

While the colour blue, as used by Jarman, denotes a transformative process of absence and distance progressing into the implication of presence and proximity, the use of the colour blue in the artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition is achieving the opposite.

The chemical process of the cyanotypes was intended as a documentation process to decode the memories and narratives that these objects contain

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<sup>67</sup> “The Void” refers to Klein’s earlier work *Leap into the void* (1960) in which he published a photograph of a performance where he jumped from a building into “the void” (Morisset 2007). Klein also produced a series of monochrome paintings using a luminous pigment in a bright ultramarine blue, which is manufactured by suspending pigment in polymer resin. Klein patented this colour as I.K.B. (International Klein Blue) (Hallas 2007:39).

<sup>68</sup> According to Hallas, Klein often quoted the French critic Gaston Bachelard’s words in describing his notion about the colour blue: “First there is nothing, then there is deep nothing, then there is blue depth” (quoted by Hallas 2007:40).

<sup>69</sup> *Blue* (1993) is the final feature film by director Derek Jarman, an AIDS victim, made one year before his death when he was already partially blind due to AIDS complications (Jim’s Reviews Sv “Jarman”). The entire film consists of a single shot of saturated blue colour filling the screen for the entire 76-minute duration against a background of the soundtrack which consists of narrations of Jarman’s daily bodily sufferings as a victim of AIDS (Carabell 2002:183).

<sup>70</sup> In an article on Jarman Roger Hallas carefully builds a case to show how Jarman’s film invokes embodiment and presence by the phenomenological experience of the film by the viewer. Hallas argues that by staring at the blue screen of *Blue* (1993) while the narration takes place, the viewer experiences a confrontation with the surface of the screen and engages in a haptic visualisation process rather than an optical mode of seeing. If this experience is combined with the confrontation with the narration which include the graphic descriptions of bodily endurance of a victim of AIDS, then the effect is to “implicate the body of its spectator in the act of bearing witness to AIDS” (Hallas 2007:39). In the absence of the embodied witness as an image on the screen, “*Blue* reverses the visual attention of the spectacle of AIDS from the body with AIDS out *there* back on to the spectator’s own body right *here* before the blue screen” (Hallas 2007:45).

about displacement. Could the memories of these objects be excavated by exposing them to direct sunlight and “developing’ the stories they retain” (Marks 2000:107), almost as an act ‘of seeing’ them better?

The process proved to disclose less than the expected. My attempt to “engage with the physicality of space and place” (as stated as intention at the beginning of this Chapter) through engaging with the materiality of the observers and witnesses of displacement (the objects found at Bank), was frustrated since the process rendered the objects and their surroundings in shades of blue, in a colour that is indicative of a void, of nothingness. In addition, the recorded objects revealed less than what was expected: through the cyanotype documentation process they have lost clarity and became blurred and vague, mere traces of their original presence. Their elusive and ghost-like appearance failed to disclose their identity. My attempt to document the presence of the physical objects as witnesses of displacement through the blueprint process rendered the loss of physicality and of presence.

What are the meanings, then, generated by the (initially disappointingly) faint and obscure images rendered by the process? In essence, the cyanotype method mimics the process of displacement in which the loss of the experience of the physicality of space and place leads to the loss of Identity. It is the sheer blueness of the void/spaces between the objects that transforms them, almost in an alchemical way, into intangible, indistinct traces, much in the same way that time changes Memory into ever-fading traces of the real event. In this sense, the cyanotype process predicts the inevitable destruction of the objects through decay after the event of displacement which will leave them without physicality, without place, without Identity. It is thus, in an unexpected way, that the cyanotype process, by revealing less information about the objects, revealed more about the essence of the displacement process: that Memory, Land and

home, and Identity are inter-linked and that the loss of one constitutes the loss of the other.

### 7.3.3. Memory, Land and home, Identity

The cyanotype technique, as an analogy for the losses experienced in the three key concepts of displacement, Memory, Land and home, and Identity, was used in a range of artworks in the *Displacement* exhibition. In the *Re-collection Series*<sup>71</sup> (figs 21 to 24), the results of the process produced several 'documents' of decayed objects, showing barely discernable and blurred empty spaces free-floating in a non-defined blue space. The objects, as carriers of the Memory of the displacement event, have lost their clarity, their link to physical space and their Identity.



Fig 21. Emma Willemse, *Re-collection I* (2009)

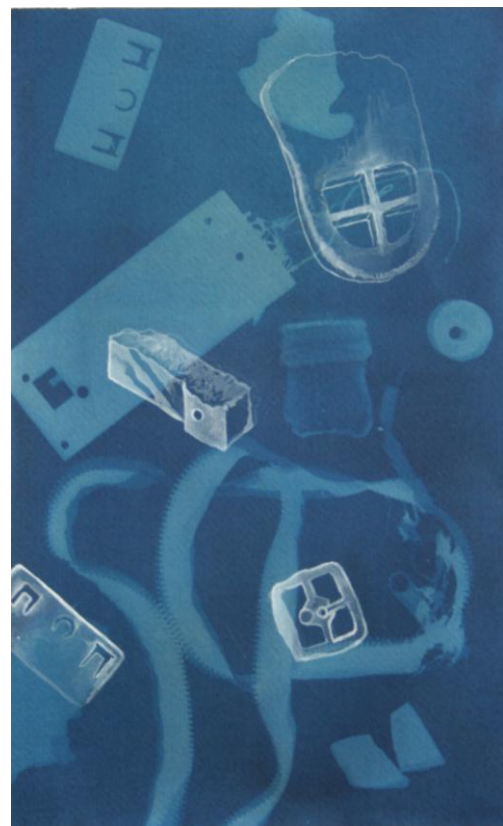


Fig 22. Emma Willemse, *Re-collection II* (2009)

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<sup>71</sup> The titles of these works refer the act of collecting as well as the act of remembering: the objects, as carriers of the Memory of displacement, have been collected from the site of displacement and are now scrutinised to reveal their memories. The *Re-collection series* consists of eight works, only four works are illustrated.





Fig 23. Emma Willemse, *Re-collection IV* (2009).



Fig 24. Emma Willemse, *Re-collection V* (2009).

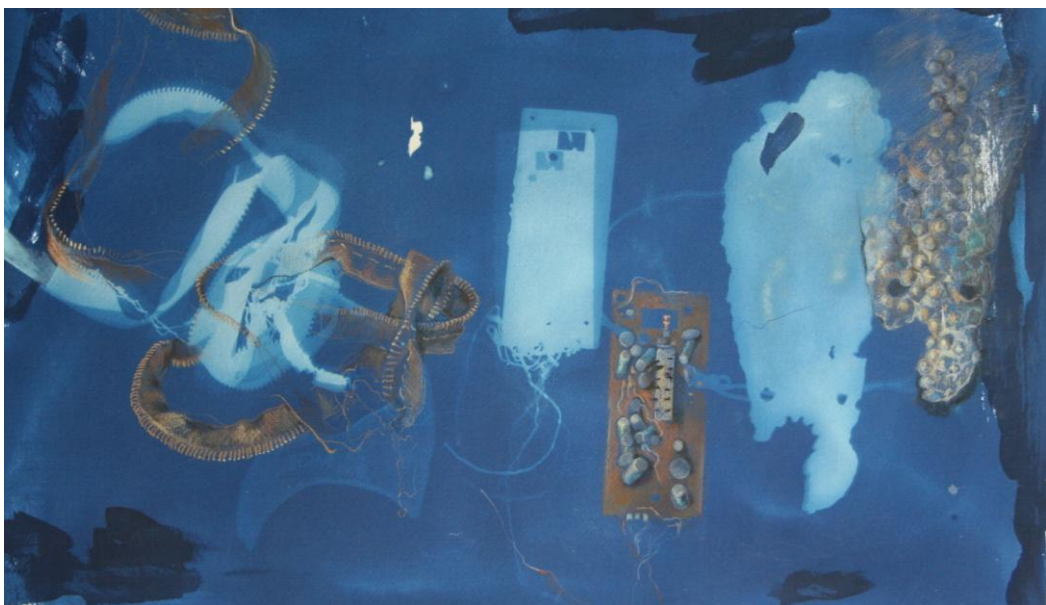


Fig 25. Emma Willemse, *Retrieve* (2009).

White line contour drawings and semi-transparent gouache paintings of the objects executed as a super-imposed layer on the cyanotype prints of the *Re-collection Series*, are a further attempt to engage with the physical presence of these objects, to locate them and to excavate their Identity. In the work *Retrieve* (fig 25), the documented objects have been partially drawn with soft pastel to re-instate their presence. The cyanotype technique was used in similar ways in *Timeline II* (fig 26), *Re-surface* (fig 27) and in the stop-frame animation *Remind* (fig 44).

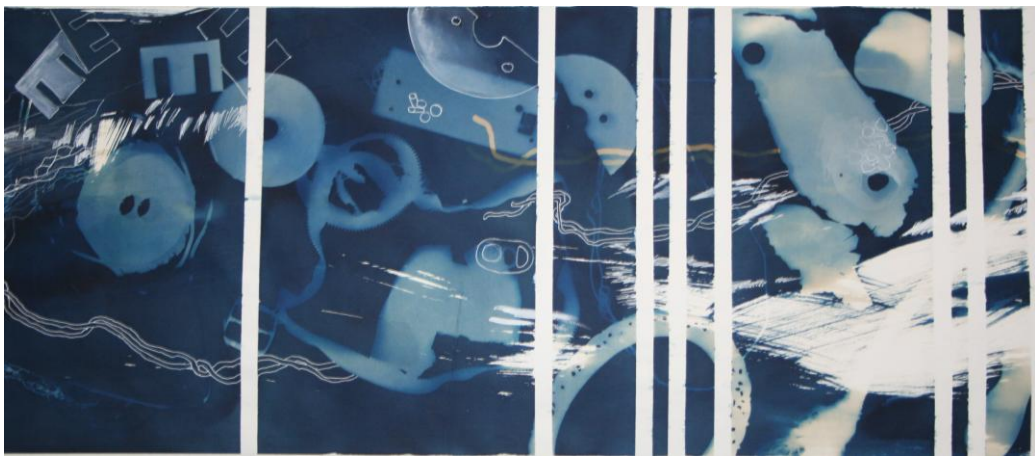


Fig 26. Emma Willemse, *Timeline II* (detail) (2010).



Fig 27. Emma Willemse, *Re-surface* (detail) (2010).



The *Timeline Series* consists of three works which progressively change in appearance - from recognisable realistic photography in the first work to a faded and ephemeral appearance in the last work. This alludes to a progression of Memory loss. In *Timeline I* (fig 28), photographic documents of the site of displacement have been transformed and segmented into slices of events with the intention to reconstruct some kind of history of the site and its experience of displacement. The segments of images become indicators of fragments of time. The uneven fragmentary division of time invokes the fragmentary Memory processes indicative of trauma-related experiences such as in displacement. In *Timeline II* (fig 29), objects found at the sight have been recreated in 2-dimension using the cyanotype blueprint process. The imprints of the negative spaces between the objects documented the objects' absence while the superimposed drawings and paintings in white pen and gouache acted like an extended excavation to regain the lost identity of the objects.

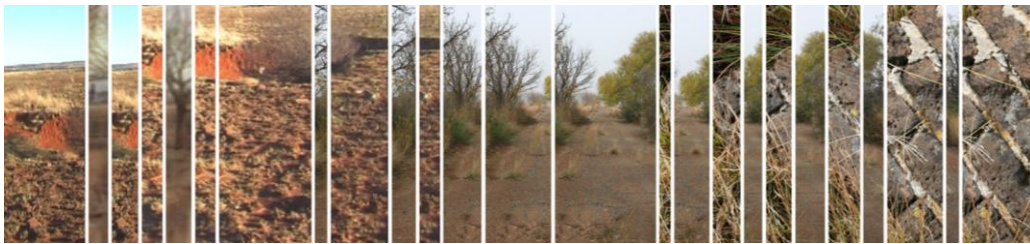


Fig 28. Emma Willemse, *Timeline I* (2009) (detail).



Fig 29. Emma Willemse, *Timeline II* and *Timeline III* (2010) (Installation view).



Fig 30. Emma Willemse, *Timeline III* (2010) (detail). White pen and chalk on grey wall.

In *Timeline III* (figs 29 and 30), the found objects have been recorded through white contour drawings on a grey-coloured wall. As a drawing on the gallery wall which will be destroyed after the exhibition, *Timeline III* is the most transient of the three works in the Timeline Series and becomes a direct expression of temporality and displacement.

An epitaph is the text on a headstone of a grave. The words written on the headstone are usually a testament in memory of the deceased. Since the victims of displacement use metaphorical references to death in their attempt to describe the experience of loss indicative of displacement<sup>72</sup>, the concept of death is used as an analogy of displacement in the *Epitaph Series* (fig 31)<sup>73</sup>. The 'text' in each epitaph is a visual statement of loss: each epitaph consists of a long narrow vertical format which contains various documentations of the objects found at Bank, with the effect of being dispersed from the top of the format, free-falling downwards, leading the eye of the viewer to the materiality of the tomb-like structures and objects situated at the base of each epitaph (fig 32).

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<sup>72</sup> See the report on the interview with Sophie Willemse in Addendum 1. See also the footnote on page 24.

<sup>73</sup> The Epitaph Series consists of three works (from left to right in fig 31): *Re-trospect* (2009), *Re-surface* (2010) and *Re-trace* (2010).



Fig 31. Emma Willemse, *Epitaph Series* (2009 - 2010) (Installation view).

Techniques and processes such as scanning of objects, cyanotype blueprints, sand casting and drawing with carbon paper were chosen to enhance notions of documentation, evidence and the tracing of absence.

While the process of sand casting (fig 34) has references to excavation and the land, drawing with carbon paper (fig 33) alludes to an official process of duplication. Paradoxically, clarity of image is lost through these documentation techniques and processes, further alluding to the experience of loss. The three works in the *Epitaph* series could be described as lamenting the losses occurred during displacement and an attempt to commemorate the displacement event.



Fig 32. Emma Willemse, *Re-surface* (detail) (2010).



Fig 33. Emma Willemse, *Re-trace* (detail) (2010).



Fig 34. Emma Willemse, *Re-trace* (detail) (2010).



One of the ways in which the phenomenon of displacement has been invoked in the exhibition, is through the documentation of the objects found at Bank, as metaphors for displacement. In the absence of the bodies involved in the displacement event, the objects speak of the losses incurred during displacement. In the work, *Inventory tables I, II and III* (fig 35)<sup>74</sup>, the actual objects found at Bank<sup>75</sup> have been presented in a museum-like display suspended on transparent Perspex tables, casting shadows of the objects on the gallery floor. These tables have been coupled with suspended Perspex boards which impart information, via photographs, of the actual site where these objects were found.



Fig 35. Emma Willemse, *Inventory tables I, II and III*. (2010).

<sup>74</sup> The meaning of the word “inventory” is intended here as a document which consists of the results of a process of systematic collection and listing of evidential data. “Inventories offer data that can be mapped, charted, and compared in space as well as time” (Hockings 1995:242). In this sense the *Inventory tables* ‘list’ the remains of displacement.

<sup>75</sup> The decayed and weathered physical appearance of these objects imparts information about their status as carriers of Memory of the displacement event. By displaying the works in a way which refers to scientific archaeological finds and museum-like information boards, the viewer is coaxed to interpret the information as evidence of an excavation into the phenomenon of displacement.



Fig 36. Emma Willemse, *Inventory table II* (detail) (2010).

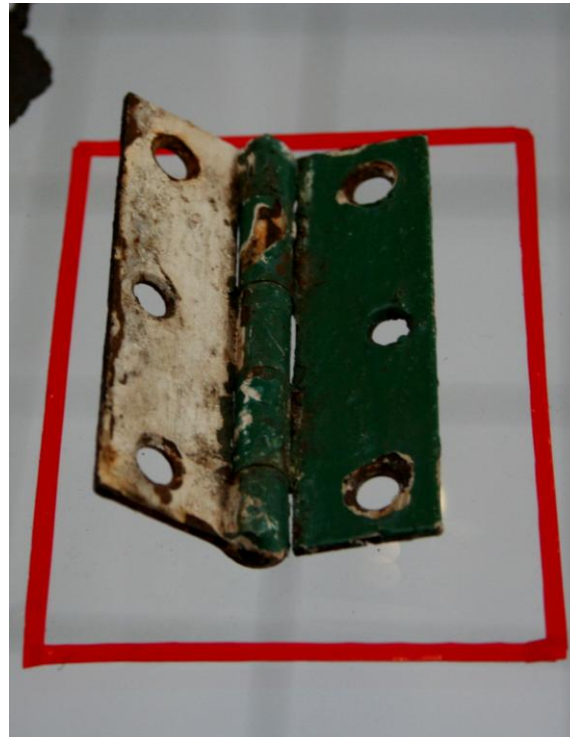


Fig 37. Emma Willemse, *Inventory table I* (detail) (2010).

The significance of the transparency evident in the photographs and the suspended surfaces of the tables, coupled with the fragmentary, decayed objects (fig 36 and 37), as if evidential from an archaeological site, allude to the ephemeral qualities and fading of Memory processes manifesting as traces in a site of displacement. These objects, displaced from the actual site, exist only in a suspended state without being grounded which alludes to the site of displacement as a state of mind. They have lost their link to physical space and are now only linked to the site through faded transparent photographs, metaphorically suspended in time. The series of artworks *Inventory tables I, II and III* thus become a direct reference to the loss of Land and home.

The *Lest-I-forget-series: Memory Boxes* (fig 38) is a repetitive documentation of selected objects found at Bank including a glass fragment of a milk bottle (fig 41), a wall segment (fig 39), a porcelain remnant (fig 40) and a weathered lid of a bottle. These objects are



documented using various techniques and presented in a sequence consisting of the actual mounted object, a photo-realistic painting in gouache, a colour and black and white scan, a carbon paper drawing, a rubbing and lastly a hand embossing. The sequence progresses from left to right, gradually changing from the physical three-dimensional object, to a realistic two-dimensional representation and advances towards a gradual loss of its referential manifestation to become trace-like until only the white shadow of the embossing is left.



Fig 38. Emma Willemse, *Lest-I-forget-series: Memory boxes I-IV* (2006).



Fig 39. Emma Willemse, *Memory box II* (detail) (2006).



Fig 40. Emma Willemse, *Memory box III* (detail) (2006).



Fig 41. Emma Willemse, *Memory box I* (detail) (2006).

If it is considered that these objects “remember and attest to events that people have forgotten” (Marks 2000:107), the transformation of these objects evident in the *Memory boxes*, maps the displacement event experienced by these objects. It predicts their eventual and inevitable destruction (and loss of Identity) due to decay in spite of their repetitive documentation and is a metaphor of how we overlook, discard and eventually forget the personal mundane narratives as documents and evidence of displacement. Moreover these works mimic the process of displacement in which the loss of Memory is interlinked with the loss of Identity.

The mixed media installation *Untitled* (2010) (figs 42 and 43), consists of a video, namely *Re-locate* and a stop-frame animation, *Remind*, using similar soundtracks which run consecutively in a loop. Thus, although the images of the two digital presentations differ, the single soundtrack binds them together back to back as an analogy, highlighting two layers of the same content or two sides of the same story. In the discussion that follows, it will be deliberated on how the video and stop-frame animation in the *Displacement* exhibition identify the site of displacement as both a physical site as well as a psychological site, referring to the discourse on displacement as a state of mind or the loss of Identity, as argued in Chapter 5.

The videos are projected onto the white tiles of the gallery floor which visually interferes with the images thus providing a transparent grid-like layer underneath the images almost like the measured lay-out of an archaeological site (fig 42). Framing the video image on two sides is an installation of the actual soil excavated from Bank in a format alluding to a foundation of a house (fig 43). The digital installation site thus becomes a metaphor for the excavation of the site(s) of displacement.

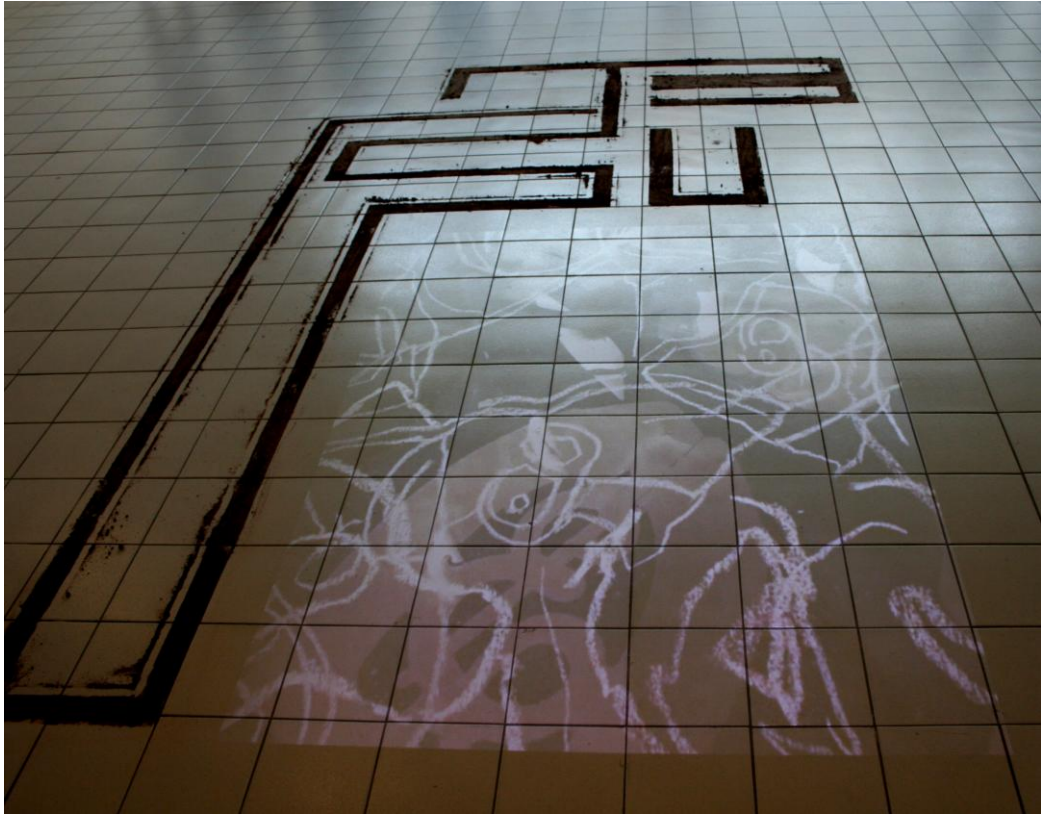


Fig 42. Emma Willemse, *Untitled* (2010). (Installation view).



Fig 43. Emma Willemse, *Untitled* (2010). (Installation view).





Fig 44. Emma Willemse, *Re-locate* (2010). (Video stills).

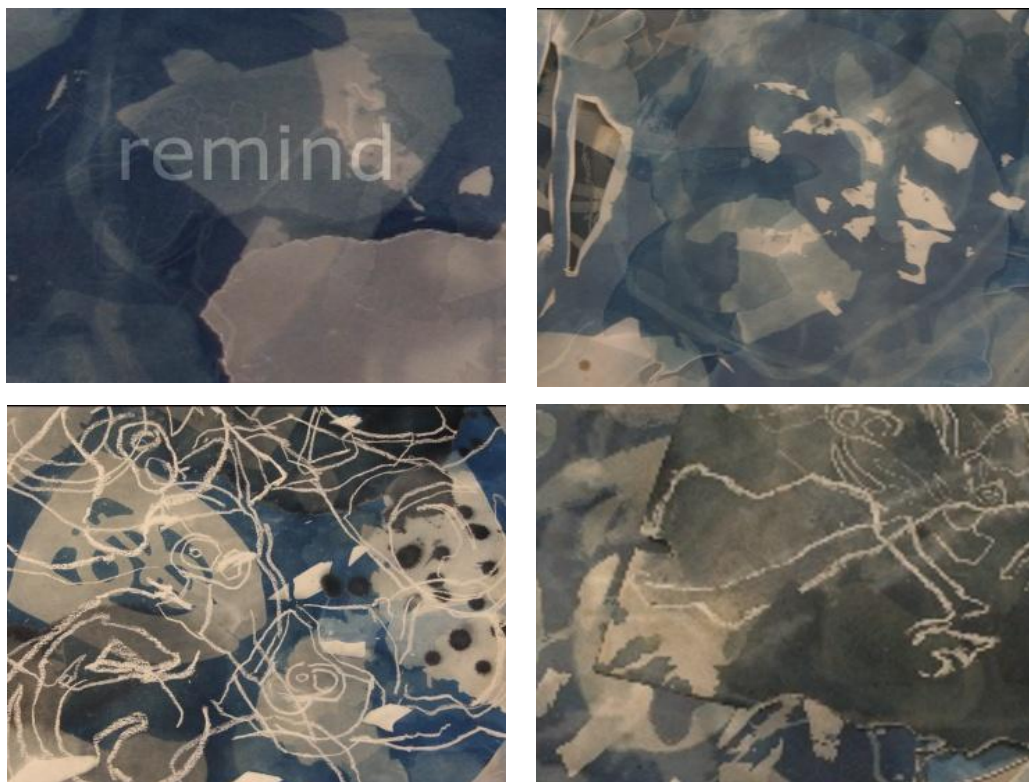


Fig 45. Emma Willemse. *Remind* (2010). (Video stills).

In *Re-locate*, video footage of the displacement site as well as old photographs of Bank have been layered and transformed into a meditative journey (fig 44). *Re-locate* is a direct reference to the site Bank and the memories of displacement it contains. *Remind* (fig 45) is a stop-frame animation of cyanotype prints of the objects found at Bank combined with white chalk drawings of the objects. The ephemeral blueness of images and the evasive sequences of mostly blurred and ghostlike abstract images are intended as metaphors for the intangible nature of the psyche as a site of displacement. The word *remind* has references to the notion of displacement as a state of mind, as discussed in previous chapters.

As documentaries, the digital projections strive to engage with the witnesses of the displacement event<sup>76</sup>. In the absence of human bodies bearing witness and also because the nature of displacement calls for the body *no longer being at the site*, *Re-locate* and *Remind* use other means to bear witness. The sites of displacement (namely the physical and psychological sites) are now the prime witnesses in the displacement event (see: **Authority of the site**) and they take on animated presences bearing witness through their re-connection to Memory. The sites become the “talking heads” addressing the viewer directly. In doing so, the presence of the human body is implicated but is never present as a visual image.

The videos employ various devices to implicate the presence of bodies without the body being present. Firstly, the image projected onto the gallery floor, causes the space between the viewer and image to be in

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<sup>76</sup> In the act of bearing witness and to be considered truthful, “you must have the body” meaning that the “witness must be present at the site and the moment of testimony’s enunciation” (Hallas 2007:37). In documentary filmmaking, one of the principle techniques used to “enhance the impression of a witness’s presence before the viewer” is the “convention of the talking head” (Hallas 2007:38) in which the allusion is created that the witness is directly addressing the viewer.

close proximity<sup>77</sup>. Looking down at the projection (fig 46), the viewer is drawn into the footage of the slow-motion movement of *Re-locate*<sup>78</sup> that was generated by a handheld camera scanning the surface of the site, as if the camera is being held by the viewer. Likewise, the viewer is thereafter drawn into the movement of blueprints and chalk drawings in *Remind* as if the infinite blueness of the overlaid images is describing an intangible space in the mind of the viewer. The schematic drawing made from soil adjacent to the projections echoes the formats of the fragments of foundations traced by the camera in *Re-locate* and extends the experience of proximity of space.



Fig 46. Emma Willemse, *Untitled* (2010) (Installation view).

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<sup>77</sup> By impelling the viewer to view the videos in this way, the artist employs the notions of space as mentioned in the beginning of this Chapter, namely that of physical space and proximity. It coerces the viewer to experience space as a physical bodily experience, in proximity of the video. The viewer becomes the witness.

<sup>78</sup> The title of the video is alluding to the physical relocation of the viewer (from a sitting position watching the video projected on a vertical surface, to a standing position observing the video on the horizontal gallery floor), the relocation experienced during displacement (since the video footage for *Re-locate* engages also with the physical site of displacement), and the relocation of a way of seeing.

Secondly, the videos use haptic images that implicate a bodily presence and invoke a haptic visuality<sup>79</sup> and therefore, a bodily experience by the viewer. The statement by Marks, “In haptic visuality the eyes themselves function as organs of touch” (2000:162), seems fitting for several sequences of film in both videos. For instance, in *Re-locate* the camera moves over the decayed surfaces of a tar road, zooming into the detailed textured grains of the surface as if our eyes touch the surface and then blends into an old photograph taken at the site (fig 47), linking the sequence with Memory.



Fig 47. Emma Willemse, *Re-locate* (2010). (Video still).

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<sup>79</sup> Laura U Marks distinguishes between haptic and optic visuality in her book , *The skin of the film: intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses* (2000). Speaking about the attributes of films, she describes haptic visuality as suggesting “the way vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one’s eyes...” (2000:xi). Marks defines haptic perception as “the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside of our bodies” (2000:162). While optic visuality is the way we usually think about our observation of the world, namely to rely on “a separation between the viewing subject and the world, thus allowing the former to distinguish the latter as distinct objective forms in deep space” haptic visuality “posits a relationship of proximity and contact (rather than distance) between the viewing subject and the world ...” (Hallas 2007:46).





Fig 48. Emma Willemse, *Remind* (2010). (Video still).

Like-wise, in *Remind* the camera hovers on the surface qualities of the cyanotypes, areas where the chemical reaction of the light sensitive paper and sun caused imperfections and where the chalk drawings caused a grainy effect (fig 48). When these haptic images are perceived as if they are imbedding a sense of touch in our eyes, the experience of viewing these videos become a bodily experience.

The soundtrack is an important agent for implying the presence of a body when viewing the installation. The sounds were mainly derived from the voice of the artist “narrating” the experience of displacement not in words but in breathing, barely discernible muttered whispers and soft chanting. This is combined with background sounds such as the wind blowing, ticking and scratching against the surfaces of wood, stone and glass, and the arbitrary notes of a harmonica, echoing the chanting of the voice. The human voice implicates the presence of a human body and enhances the animated effect of the projections. The sites of displacement are empowered with a voice: to witness and testify both in image and in sound thereby constituting a presence. If it is considered that presence is needed to make the testimony truthful and believable, to render it legitimate, then the testimonies delivered by the sites of displacement are relevant documents to verify the event of displacement.



One of the self-imposed intentions in the art-making is “to re-construct some kind of narrative of the displacement event, in order to gain more knowledge of the nature of displacement” (as stated in the beginning of this chapter). The question now arises whether a narrative has actually been constructed and if so, what it revealed about the nature of displacement. It is clear when observing the video and stop-frame animation that the attributes of the narratives can be described as fragmentary, inconclusive and open-ended. The meditative ponderings of the camera on the surfaces and textures seem to be constructed from the one disappearing image after the next, sometimes fading slowly and sometimes with abruptness into another image and yet another, without constructing a linear narrative. The unusual qualities of the narrative are caused by the fact that the “haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative” (Marks 2000:163). By allowing the viewer’s contribution of personal memories and associations to overlap and interweave with those invoked by the images and sounds in the videos, the projected narratives are neither prescriptive nor didactic. As Daniel Eisenberg attests:

As a filmmaker lacking images, the archive becomes an important site of memory, and the landscape, separate from the sites of acquired knowledge, a space where memory solidifies. What we bring to these places, to animate and give them significance, depends on our own experience and the ways in which our thoughts and associations are either given free play or blocked, directed, or “put in their place” ([Sa]).

In this sense the attributes of the narratives extend the pursuit of the artist to engage with personal memory processes as relevant modes of remembering. Finally, the unconventional narratives as digital formats mimic the nature of displacement, its elusive, trace-like character due to notions of loss and absence.

#### **7.3.4. Whiteread, Parker and Willemse**

The quest will now be to trace comparative lines between the artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition and those of Cornelia Parker and Rachel Whiteread who likewise deal with the phenomenon of displacement.

Both Parker and Whiteread employ documentation as an art-making process. One of the ways in which Parker employs documentation is by using actual found objects in suspended installations while Whiteread documents objects and structures mainly through the casting process. The *Displacement* artworks use documentation in the art-making process by mainly focusing on various photography techniques. Techniques such as scanning, sand-casting and drawing with carbon paper also allude to documentation, while the presentation device of suspended transparent tables used in Inventory tables I, II and III (fig 33) suggests the documentary approach employed in archaeological displays.

It has been shown in Chapter 6 that Cornelia Parker employs suspension and light (the casting of shadows) as installation devices in some of her artworks, referencing a suspension of time that can include the past, present and future, while Whiteread's reference to time is to a history in the past indicated by the recording of traces of human interference on the surfaces of the objects that she casts. In the artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition, the notion of time is considered to be fragmented and transient as indicated by the segmentation of images in the *Timeline Series* (figs 28 to 30), the use of the colour blue and the blurring of images in the cyanotypes. The use of techniques and processes such as photography, cyanotypes, sand-casting and drawing on the gallery wall also refer to notions of temporality while the time frames, movement and sound elements of the digital projections, strongly reference cyclical, sequential and linear time including fragmented concepts of time.

Absence and loss in Parker's work are implicated by exhibiting objects that speak of loss (for instance the charred remains of a wooden church struck by lightning) and by installing these objects in specific ways (for instance by suspending them with specific spaces in-between each object). The technique and process of casting the negative spaces of objects employed by Whiteread, also speak of absence and loss. In the *Displacement* works, the notions of absence and loss are invoked by techniques and processes such as sand-casting and drawing with carbon paper. Photography and specifically the cyanotype technique are powerful references to absence and loss. In the Timeline series, metaphors of the loss of Memory, Land and home, and Identity are summoned through the progression from clarity to fadedness in the appearance of the series as a set of works. This is also evident in two other sets of serial works, the *Lest-I-forget-series: Memory Boxes* (fig 38) and the *Epitaph Series* (fig 31).

The artworks of the *Displacement* exhibition refer to Memory processes as deficient and flawed in terms of the phenomenon of displacement. As argued in Chapter 6, Cornelia Parker is of the same opinion and creates a suitable metaphor by suspending fragments of objects with spaces in-between. While Whiteread attempts to retrieve Memory through her casting process, the works in the *Displacement* exhibition attempt to retrieve and reconstruct Memory through the repetitive documentation of the found objects.

In the digital installation for the *Displacement* exhibition, the sites of displacement are defined as both physical (such as played out in the *Relocate* video) and as the psyche (as alluded to in the *Remind* stop-frame animation). This viewpoint is combining the notions about the location of the site of displacement of both Cornelia Parker (using suspension and shadows as indicators of the site of displacement and as a site in the psyche) and Rachel Whiteread (using casting of actual sites and objects of displacement as an indicator of the site as a physical space).

#### **7.4. CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 7**

By traversing the discourses surrounding the phenomenon of displacement identified in the theoretical component of this study, the artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition repetitively seek to unearth and excavate the nature of and the meanings attached to the phenomenon of displacement. By employing documentation as a tool in the art-making process, it is attempted to “pin down” the attributes of displacement, to reconstruct some kind of narrative of the displacement event and to “officialise” or “legitimise” the personal, mundane narrative and memory processes as relevant modes of remembering. Paradoxically, the various techniques of documentation (especially the various photography techniques and the cyanotype printmaking technique) produced inconclusive, fragmentary traces of evidence, drew attention to the dispersive de-construction of convergent narratives that overlap and diffuse clarity and highlighted the ephemeral, elusive qualities of the phenomenon of displacement. The outcome of the research re-instated the notions of loss and absence experienced during the displacement event. In addition to assembling a series of visual documents of a specific event of displacement, the *Displacement* exhibition thus also documented the elusive nature of displacement in a visual way.

## CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this study, the research question was stated as: What is the nature of contemporary displacement and how is it manifested in contemporary visual art? It was also stated that the purpose of this study is “to suggest a new way of looking at displacement in order to gain new insights in the nature of the phenomenon” (Introduction, page 5). In order to do this, this study concerned itself with the investigation of how displacement is experienced by the displaced, looking at the phenomenon not from an outsider’s view<sup>80</sup> but from the inside out. Thus, the interrelationships of the relevant concepts of the consciousness of the displaced, namely Memory, Land and home, and Identity were scrutinised. The act of looking was further extended to the products of looking, namely contemporary artworks manifesting displacement as well as a visual investigation of a site of displacement which resulted in an exhibition for the practical component of this study.

It was shown that physical displacement is a common contemporary phenomenon worldwide. Apart from constituting the physical loss of a home or property, the traumatic experience of displacement could render a wide range of severe physical and psychological effects such as the marginalisation of the displaced and the condition of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Due to this fact and because previous research in displacement has shown that compensating the displaced for his/her lost home is not enough to ensure successful resettlement, it was concluded that displacement constituted more than just a quantifiable physical experience. This premise was investigated by examining the three key concepts of displacement and their inter-relationships in terms of the loss experienced during the displacement event.

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<sup>80</sup> Chapter 1 has shown that existing research on displacement has merely looked at behavioural aspects of the displaced and factors which determine the outcomes of resettlement. It has not investigated factors of the consciousness of the displaced.

It was shown that the nature of Memory renders it a trace and that trauma, such as experienced during displacement, could constitute loss of Memory and a distorted sense of temporality. The meanings and connotations attached to Land and home such as a place of safety, security, a source of income, community interaction and its symbolic relations to bodies and Identity, render the loss of Land and home to be a loss of these meanings and connotations for the displaced. Identity can be constructed through social bases (our affiliations with certain groups of people), through Memory, through our interaction with the world we live in and through place. The contemporary French philosopher Bernard Stiegler's model for Identity construction which he calls individuation, proposes that Memory and technology are part of the process of Identity construction and not merely concepts through which Identity construction takes place.

The investigation of the interrelationships between the three key concepts in terms of displacement has shown that the link between Memory and Identity is a direct link and that loss of Memory constitutes a loss of Identity. The link between Memory and Land and home is reciprocal and is determined by the fact that Memory is constructed through the physicality of Land and home as well as the notion that Memory is inscribed in Land and home as traces. The loss of Memory leads to a loss of a sense of place and the loss of Land and home may render Memory less complete. The link between Identity and Land and home is determined by the link between Land and home and two aspects through which Identity is constructed, namely social bases and symbolic interaction. The loss of Land and home could have a severe negative effect on the construction of Identity.

Due to a range of factors prevalent in contemporary society such as globalisation, a distorted sense of temporality, loss of the physical experience of space, loss of Memory as a meaning-making experience and subsequent amnesia, contemporary society experiences a crisis in

contemporary Identity construction, changing the Identity construction process from individuation to “disindividuation” (Stiegler 2006). The prevalent consciousness in contemporary society thus mimics the nature and effects of physical displacement and it can be concluded that displacement is currently experienced as a state of mind, as a Zeitgeist.

The contemporary crisis in Identity construction is reflected in the artworks of contemporary artists. A comparative study between selected works of the artists Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker has shown that although artists may use diverse methods, techniques and materials to manifest displacement in their works, a universal set of broadly defined visual signifiers can be derived from this comparison which indicates an outline of visual devices used in artworks concerned with displacement. The visual signifiers include the use of documentation as a technique and process of art-making, the use of found manufactured objects in some stage of the art-making process, the use of traces as a formal element or as part of the art-making process, creating artworks about the body without using the body as a visual element in artworks, creating a simultaneous impression of familiarity and otherness in artworks, selecting a deliberate time-consuming handmade art-making process and engaging in art-making that bears evidence of the personal and intimate as opposed to art-making in the public sphere.

The visual investigation of a site of displacement and subsequent production of artworks for the *Displacement* exhibition, engaged in the act of looking at the phenomenon of displacement in an even more intense way in order to determine its inherent nature. Paradoxically, the various techniques of documentation employed as research methods and as art-making techniques and processes (especially the various photography techniques and the cyanotype printmaking technique) produced inconclusive, fragmentary traces of evidence, drew attention to the dispersive de-construction of convergent narratives that overlap and

diffuse clarity, and highlighted the ephemeral, elusive qualities of the phenomenon of displacement. The outcome of the visual research imitated the experience of displacement by re-instating the notions of loss and absence.

To summarise: the nature of displacement as a contemporary phenomenon is inscribed by a high prevalence of physical displacement which produces a wide range of physical, sociological and psychological effects. These effects are best described by the interrelationships of consequential losses experienced in the key concepts of Memory, Land and home, and Identity in the consciousness of the displaced. The current consciousness of society mimics these losses of physical displacement with the effect that displacement is experienced as a state of mind by contemporary society. These are reflected in contemporary artworks according to a set of broadly defined visual signifiers. The visual documentation of a site of displacement and subsequently produced artworks underline these findings and highlight the elusive attributes of loss and absence inherent in the displacement phenomenon.

Although existing research states that the phenomenon of displacement resists theorisation because of its complex nature (De Wet 2001:4639), it is concluded that by looking at displacement from a Phenomenological viewpoint in terms of the experience of the displaced, its nature could be illuminated by navigating the interlinked losses in the concepts of Memory, Land and home, and Identity. The complex nature of displacement could be attributed to the fact that the loss of a home activates losses in the experience of Memory and Identity of the displaced. As tools to reflect on society and as agents in the individual and collective Identity construction process, contemporary artworks manifesting displacement are reflecting these losses in a physical way, thus allowing meaning to emerge from this traumatic experience and mediating towards the completion of the experience of displacement.



## ADDENDUM 1

### **Report : Field research of a site of displacement: Bank, North West Province, South Africa**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to describe the findings of the field research done for the practical component of this study and to delineate the relevant theoretical discourses pertaining to them.

#### **1.2 THE SITE BANK**

The site is a former township situated about four kilometres from the town Carletonville in the North West Province, which was colloquially known as “Bank” due to the train station situated nearby known as “Bank”. In the early seventies the residents of the town<sup>1</sup> lost their homes due to the risk of sinkholes.<sup>2</sup> Several incidents of sinkholes causing loss of lives occurred in the Carletonville area, notably the overnight disappearance of the home of the Oosthuizen family on 3 August 1964, burying the family and their domestic worker alive ([http://www.geocaching.com/seek/cache\\_details.aspx?guid=944c744d-7866-40de-9620-ca240961f92d](http://www.geocaching.com/seek/cache_details.aspx?guid=944c744d-7866-40de-9620-ca240961f92d)). This incident in the vicinity of Bank must still have been vivid in the collective consciousness at the time of the Bank evacuation.

This site was selected as case study due to two reasons. Firstly, it is a relatively unknown site of displacement, containing narratives that are untold, almost forgotten and of a personal nature, in contrast with the

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<sup>1</sup> Bank was technically proclaimed as “West Wits” Township in 1936 and was situated on the remaining extent of portion 83 on the farm Wonderfontein, no 34 in the district of Oberholzer (General Plan of the West Wits Township). When the risk of sinkholes became apparent, all the buildings were evacuated. As part of a formal evaluation process, the life of this township ended in 1970 when the houses were evacuated and acquired by the Far West Rand Dolomitic Water Association thereby compensating the residents for their lost homes (Winde & Stoch 2010:71).

<sup>2</sup> Sinkholes are caused by extensive mining activities. When mines, like the gold mines in the Carletonville district, pump out vast areas of underground water for their mining purposes, the underground water table is lowered causing the Dolomite rock formation to dry out, erode and eventually implode (Winde & Stoch 2010:71).

numerous well-known and highly publicised cases of displacement in South Africa. The site reveals the histories and memories of the ordinary person who lived there. The choice of this site thus holds true to the goal of this study, that of investigating the intimate rather than the public nature of displacement<sup>3</sup>.

Secondly, the site was chosen because mining activities are examples of the typical development projects mentioned in the physical displacement literature<sup>4</sup>. However, mining differs from the building of dams or highways where displacement occurs mostly as a pre-requisite. In the case of Bank, displacement was an unexpected after-effect, a disaster in the form of sinkholes. Sinkholes could be considered as a human-made “natural” disaster: the human activity of mining, due to the impact on geological processes, causes the earth to collapse or implode forming huge holes. Not only do sinkholes cause the physical displacement of humans, they are also scars bearing witness to the interference of humans in nature. Their physical appearance resembles a wound in the earth. These scars are metaphors for the bodily and psychological aspects of displacement. In this way, displacement becomes a phenomenon not only experienced by humans but also by the natural environment, of which sinkholes are the documents and evidence.

Several visits were undertaken to the site, each at a different time of the year. The site is a flat area about three kilometres in diameter with no indication (a sign or signboard) on the main road adjacent to it, that the township had existed. It seems that the site’s identity and existence have been completely negated or forgotten throughout the years following its destruction. On the far horizon to the south, the silhouettes of mining structures still in operation today, are a reminder of the cause of displacement, the cause of the loss which was endured (see fig 54).

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 6: Public versus intimate.

<sup>4</sup> The literature on physical displacement has been discussed in Chapter 1 of this study.

Overgrown tar and gravel roads, sections of foundations, fractured drainpipes, walls, and tiles and fragments of electricity conductors are the only evidence to the township's previous existence (fig 49 to 54). In combination, the desolation and the fragments alluded to the trace-like qualities of Memory as discussed in Chapter 3. These corroded remnants nevertheless mapped a grid of organised space, now lost, which became mute witnesses to displacement. Contradictory to the traces that indicated abandonment, a well-worn footpath led to a sinkhole that evidenced the existence of a recently erected temporary shelter still in use (fig 55 to 57). Paradoxically, this discovery revealed that the site Bank carries the phenomenon of displacement in many layers designated by time.



Fig 49. Bank photograph 1 (2009).



Fig 50. Bank video footage still 1 (2007).





Fig 51. Bank Photograph 2 (2006).



Fig 52. Bank video footage still 2.



Fig 53. Bank photograph 3 (2009).



Fig 54. Bank photograph 4 (2007).



Fig 55. Bank video footage still 3 (2006).



Fig 56. Bank video footage still 4 (2006).



Fig 57. Bank video footage still 5 (2006).



### 1.3 OBJECTS FOUND AT BANK

In addition to the corroded structures described above, the site also yielded a wide variety of small manufactured objects or fragments of objects left behind during the displacement event, such as shards of old milk bottles, rusted portions of tins, household objects, construction fixtures and machine components, and moulded and wind-torn sections of clothing and fabric (fig 58 and 59)<sup>5</sup>.

Manufactured, used and discarded by humans, these objects refer to bodies in the absence of bodies and their physical characteristics become metaphors for the losses experienced by the displaced. The trace-like qualities of erasure and elusiveness inherent in these objects allude to the imperfect memory processes linked with trauma prevalent during displacement.



Fig 58. Emma Willemse, *Remains II* (2009). (detail).

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<sup>5</sup> The *Remains series* (2009) consists of seven artworks which were not selected for the *Displacement* exhibition. Two of the works are used here to illustrate the range of objects found at Bank.



Fig 59. Emma Willemse, *Remains IV* (2009).

However, the significance of these objects is extended beyond being mere documents, traces or metaphors for displacement as they have a life of their own. According to Marks objects “encode both the discursive shifts and the material conditions of displacement [and we can attempt to decode] the displacements, and the social relations, that objects carry with them [by] connecting them to memory” (2000:79 & 81)<sup>6</sup>. For instance, the glass fragments of milk bottles collected at the Bank site (fig 60 and 61) “remember and attest to events that people have forgotten” (Marks 2000:107) through their *being fragments of milk bottles*: the delivery of milk in glass bottles is part of a specific dated social and consumer custom which is no longer practised in contemporary society. The glass fragments therefore speak of a previous social order irrespective of the displaced family under discussion. In this way, the glass fragments “are not inert and mute but they tell stories and describe trajectories” (2000:120). Furthermore, these glass fragments could “be seen as social actors” (Gosden and Marshall 1999:173)<sup>7</sup> of the past in the way that they, as milk bottles, promoted certain human actions and negated others (putting the empty milk bottle out at the front door every night, no need to drive into town to buy milk). They “construct[ed] and influence[d] the field of social action in ways which would not occur if they did not exist” (Gosden and Marshall 1999:173) by impacting on the experience of human movement, travel and space, underlining the dichotomy of the principles of proximity (the daily milk is delivered to me, at my home, in my community) as opposed to accessibility (I have to go and get it).

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<sup>6</sup> Marks assigns an animated role to objects in which the meaning and significance of objects reside in their physicality, their materiality and their tactility in the same way “as habit stores memory in the body” (2000:121).

<sup>7</sup> Gosden and Marshall have argued that until recently the theory surrounding objects in the knowledge field of Archaeology has concentrated on the functionality of objects. They propose a new way of thinking and theorising about objects that address “the way social interactions involving people and objects create meaning” (1999:169). They further emphasise the independent meaning-making capabilities of objects: “Material things are not external supports or measures of an internal life, but rather people and things have mutual biographies which unfold in culturally specific ways” and that “objects can be seen as social actors, in that they construct and influence the field of social action in ways which would not occur if they did not exist” (1999:173).





Fig 60. Emma Willemse, Memory box I (2006). (detail).



Fig 61. Emma Willemse, Inventory table II (2010). (detail).

The glass fragments maintain their role as social actors after the displacement event since they continue to encode information and influence interpretation therefore retaining a past history. Displacement can be decoded at the site of Bank where these fragments were found by “connecting [them] to memory” according to Marks’ theory (2000:81). The materiality and tactility of the glass fragments reveal the memories of a past life: their partial inscriptions provide a source of information on their original roles as social actors while their destroyed and soiled state attests to the time-line of their biography. These traces reveal the time-lapse between the event of displacement and the investigation. Thus, a history of the events connected to displacement can be constructed. The above line of thought is also applicable and can be extended to the other objects found at Bank.

#### **1.4 INTERVIEW**

An informal and non-directive interview was conducted with a former resident of Bank, Sophie Willemse. The interview took the format of a narrative re-calling of events.

Sophie Willemse is now 76 years old. When she was 15 years old, her family moved to Bank when the township was still developing. Her father, a self-taught builder, bought a plot of land and the family lived firstly in tents and then in the out-buildings while the house was being built. It was built after normal working hours and during weekends over a period of time. Later Sophie married Nic Willemse and they moved into another small house in Bank. Sophie and her husband eventually moved away from Bank due to his work responsibilities while her father and mother stayed on in Bank.

Sophie recalls the events surrounding the loss of houses due the risk of sinkholes by repeatedly stressing the trauma that the event had caused her mother. She stated that although the compensation for the house, paid out by the Far West Rand Dolomitic Board, was ample and her father could therefore afford to buy a beautiful house in another small town, her mother was heart-broken and resisted the move from the home that the couple had lovingly created over years. The words that Sophie used to describe this trauma are significant, "Mother did not want to move away, it was like death" (Willemse 2008, translated). Sophie's narrative ends when she tells of her mother's death from cancer only four months after the move.

When this narrative of the experience of displacement due to a man-made natural disaster caused by mining, is considered, it resonates with and confirms some points of information in the theoretical discourse of development induced displacement. According to research, one of the fallacies of development induced displacement is that "Compensation is

enough”<sup>8</sup>. Sophie Willemse’s parents were compensated amply for their lost home but it could not prevent the trauma of displacement.

### **1.5 OLD FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS**

A series of old photographs from the family album of Sophie Willemse forms part of the evidence used for this study. (A selection of these photographs is illustrated below in fig 62 to 70.) The photographs were taken during a time-span that coincided with the building of the family house (fig 62, 64 and 68) and continued when alterations or improvements to the house were made (fig 66 and 67). Some photos documented daily activities around the home such as the washing of clothes (fig 65).

As “index[es] of time, space, form [and] identity” and “supporting witness[es]” (Frizot 1998:729) these photographs give an account of and bear witness to the daily activities performed in an around the house that contribute to the experiences contained within a home and that play a role in the meanings attached to a home as described in Chapter 3. Additionally, the photographs chronicle the different stages of the life of a home that was built by the inhabitants themselves, recording the changes and transformations of the home through time in an indexical way.

However, these photographs are incomplete evidential documents. To describe the elusive qualities of photographs, words and phrases such as “fluid and precarious” and “at once image, illustration, ...document, trace and imprint” (Frizot 1998:728) have been used in literature, which refer to the attribute of photography to only reveal a partial reality. The photographs of Sophie Willemse’s family album do not reveal all the

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of why resettlement often goes wrong has been an area of inconclusive research in studying cases of development induced displacement. The aftermaths of mining activities are considered to be an example of development induced displacement. Researchers are puzzled by the fact that even though compensation is paid out in many cases, it does not necessarily mean that resettlement will be successful. (See Chapter 1).

information of the life of the home and the experiences surrounding it but, as slices in time, they convey segments of this information as it was at that specific time in space, excluding other segments of the continuous narrative. Moreover, the photographs can never take the place of the real event since the real event exists only in the fluid realm of memory. In their insubstantial referencing of the past, the photographs could be considered mere remnants or traces of the real event, elusively revealing only a partial narrative.

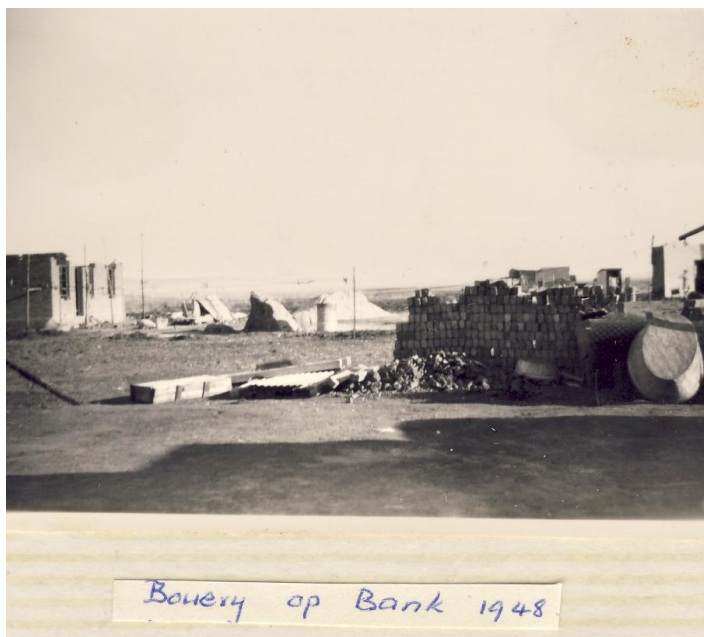


Fig 62. Old photograph, Bank, no 1.



Fig 63. Old photograph, Bank, no 2.





Buitegeboue op Bank.  
bly terwyl huis  
gebou word.  
1948

Fig 64.



Mammie + Tannie Pop  
Was wasgoed.

Fig 65.



Pappie, Gert Barnard, Oom Chris  
werk aan waterpype op Bank

Fig 66.



Pappie + Neef Nicolaas  
werk aan Ouma  
se huis

Fig 67.



Pappie bou aan  
huis op Bank

Fig 68.



Sophie by Bank  
se huis.

Fig 69.



Kersfees 1969 op Bank

Fig 70.

Fig 64 to 70. Old photographs, Bank, no 3 to 9.

## **1.6 CONCLUSION**

The findings of the field study listed and described above and the subsequent theoretical connotations mapped out in this report are relevant background information for the visual research and artworks discussed in Chapter 7 of the dissertation.

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