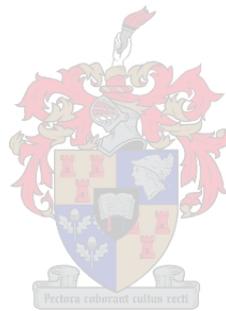


**Art and Conversion:  
An investigation of ritual,  
memory and  
healing in the process of making art**

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**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Fine Art at the University of Stellenbosch**

**Supervisor: Prof. K.H. Dietrich**

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**April 2006**

**Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

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Date:

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## Abstract

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This thesis investigates the concept of *conversion* which arose out of the process of making soap as medium for my body of sculptural works and signifying its material transformation with ‘cleaning’ and ‘conversion’ – terms encountered in research into chemical transformation (in alchemy) and further endorsed by my linking my sculptural forms, resembling fonts, to religious conversion. A line of theoretical research was thus traced into ritual as an embodied experience of recalling memory in the desire for redemption or healing.

Contemporary South Africa art, it seemed, was also going through a conversion process. The movement, from the domination of apartheid to the profound change of the ‘new South Africa’, necessitated a sense of tolerance in response to the reawakening of the diversity of cultures, rituals and memories. Thus present debate surrounding the concerns of reconciliation and restitution requires a re-evaluation of the importance of memory – to forget, to renew or to uphold – in the desire for healing. This has re-awakened an appreciation of multi-cultural rituals and invoked new self-consciousness and a reformulation of identity.

I was thus inspired to investigate transformation in terms of art theory, psychology and philosophy. By identifying Freud’s psychoanalytic concept of transference and of ‘working-through’ as a part of his ‘Theory of Conversion’, I arrived at this proposition: art initiates an awakening of self-consciousness. In arguing for the vitality of the mythopoetic imagination, as held within the unconscious, however, I claim that art, as an embodied process, draws from memory, and resonates within the context of a ritualised empathic interrelatedness of ourselves as humans in the environment.

In attempting to understand the South African transformation, which resembles the spirit of Renaissance Humanism, I examined how historical shifts influence both inter-human and environment/human relationships. Operating largely in terms of the transference of power and belief, these moved, in an ever-recurring cycle, through sixteenth century Renaissance Humanism, which tolerated diverse religious convictions, to Cartesian reason and the quest for certainty, manifesting in religious and politically motivated wars. This revolution, I believe, has occurred again from the modern to the postmodern era.

I believe, therefore, that art has a healing capacity. This flows from a *metanoia* – a turning around – effected in both artist and audience. Through this creative and aesthetic view of art, experienced in my practical making and substantiated in my theoretical research, art, I conclude, initiates inner conversion and thus healing.

## Opsomming

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Hierdie studie ondersoek die konsep van *bekering* wat gespruit het uit die proses van seepmaak as medium vir my reeks beeldhouwerke en dui op die materiële transformasie as *suiwering* en *bekering* – terme wat ek teengekom het in my navorsing oor chemiese transformasie (in alchemie), en wat verder bevestig is deur die skakeling van my beeldhouvorme, wat ooreenkomste toon met vonte, met religieuse bekering. 'n Teoretiese navorsingslyn is dus gevolg na ritueel as beliggaamde ervaring om geheue te herroep in die begeerte na verlossing of heling.

Ek het die waarneming gemaak dat die kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse kuns, skuinbaar, deur 'n veranderings proses gaan. Die beweging, vanaf die dominerende van apartheid na die diepgaande veranderinge van die 'nuwe Suid-Afrika', het teweeggebring 'n gevoel van verdraagsaamheid in beantwoording tot die herontwaking van die verskeidenheid kulture, rituele en herinneringe. Derhalwe vereis die huidige debat rondom die besorgdheid oor versoening en herstel die herevaluering van die belangrikheid van geheue – om te vergeet, te vernuwe of te handhaaf – in die soeke na heling. Dit het 'n waardering van multi-kulturele rituele laat herontwaak en 'n nuwe selfbewussyn en herformulering van identiteit tot gevolg gehad.

Ek het dus hierdie transformasie ondersoek ten opsigte van kunsteorie, sielkunde en filosofie. Deur die identifisering van Freud se psigoanalitiese konsep van projeksie en van 'deurwerk' as deel van sy 'Teorie van Bekering', kom ek tot hierdie bewering: kuns kan 'n ontwaking van die selfbewussyn inisieer. In my argumente oor vitaliteit van die mitopoëtiese verbeelding, soos in die onbewuste, glo ek egter dat kuns, as 'n beliggaamde proses, op die geheue staat maak en resoneer binne die konteks van 'n geritualiseerde, empatiese interafhanklikheid van onself as menslike wesens binne die omgewing.

In 'n poging om die Suid-Afrikaanse transformasie te verstaan, wat ooreenkomste toon met die gees van Renaissance Humanisme, het ek ondersoek ingestel hoe historiese skuiwe sowel inter-menslike as omgewings/menslike verhoudinge beïnvloed. Hierdie skuiwe figureer grootliks binne die konteks van die oordrag van mag en geloof en beweeg, in 'n altyd herhalende siklus, vanaf sestiende-eeuse Renaissance Humanisme, wat verdraagsaam was teenoor verskillende religieuse oortuigings, na Kartesiese rede en die vraag na sekerheid wat gemanifesteer word in godsdiens en politieke gemotiveerde oorloë. Ek is van mening hierdie revolusie het weer plaasgevind van die moderne tot die post-moderne tydperk.

Ek glo dus dat kuns 'n helende vermoë het. Dit vloei uit 'n *metanoia* – 'n omkeer – sowel in die kunstenaar as diegene wat dit beleef. Op grond van my praktiese en teoretiese navorsing, kom ek tot die gevolgtrekking, dat kuns, deur die kreatiewe en estetiese ervaring daarvan, innerlike transformasie en dus heling inisieer.

Preface	iii
List of Illustrations	viii
<b>Introduction</b>	
Aim	1
The Problem	1
General Orientation	2
Exposition of contents	3
<b>Chapter One: Ritual</b>	
Introduction	12
Ritual and Religion	14
Simulacrum: Objects of Ritual – Religion and Art	23
Ritual and the Realisation of the Self-conscious	27
Rite and Signification: A discussion on the work titled ‘Soapbread’	37
Conclusion	48
Endnotes	52
<b>Chapter Two: Memory</b>	
Introduction	57
Memory and History: Nora’s <i>Lieux de Mémoire</i>	60
<i>Mémoire Collective</i> and Post-Memory	63
Memory and History in ‘Mythological Time’	64
Residues as Memory: Benjamin’s <i>Passagen Project</i>	73

<i>Metanoia: Retrieval of Memory: a discussion on Hegel and Freud</i>	75
Hegel's <i>Erinnerung: Retrieval of Memory</i>	78
My Artworks as Personal Commemorative Monument in an Anti-Redemptory Age	84
<i>Heimat</i> and Memory: 'within a river of glass shards'	86
Monuments: Death in/of Art	93
Conclusion	100
Endnotes	104
<b>Chapter Three: Healing</b>	
Introduction	109
My Soap Sculptures and Alienation	111
Reductionism: Alienation and the Unconscious/ Conscious	118
Reductionism: The Body as the Topographical Site for the Mind	123
Embodied Mind: Transference, Empathy and Spirituality	129
Self-Consciousness and Identity	139
Melancholia: Self-Reflection as the Problem of Over-constructing Consciousness	143
Representation: The 'Hollow' and 'Chora' of Mythopoesis	154
Conclusion	167
Endnotes	172
<b>Final Conclusion</b>	176
Bibliography	181
Illustrations	195

**PREFACE**      **‘[Conversion is a] ... homecoming or a realisation of a truth  
about who and what we are.’ (Lamb 2000:15.)**

This thesis is an attempt to lead the reader through the thought processes, ideas and practical considerations that have informed the body of practical work undertaken by me in fulfilment of the practical part of this degree. The practical component comprises sculptures which were made with materials that contextualise the concept of cleaning and cleansing. These sculptural vessels that resemble baptismal fonts, were suggested by the memory of my maternal grandfather, who was a missionary with the Berlin Missionary Society in South Africa. Making these objects, after his passing and the experience of various other traumatic personal losses, gave me a form of emotional release. In formulating this thesis, the theoretical analysis brought further insight and depth to my actual physical work and substantiated the formulation of the thesis that integrates the idea and the realisation that my soap sculptures were physical manifestations of finding resolution from these recollections and memories recalled to the conscious.

The reasons for undertaking this research originated from the creation of soap sculptures, which necessitated my reading about the origins and traditions of soap making and the importance of soap in the survival of humans. During the process of making the soap from fat and lye in the ‘plein-air’ manner, and in a cast-iron pot, the concept of conversion arose. I began to look at alchemy, and how it utilised an association with religious symbols by their baptismal-like form, which gained significance from the concept of spiritual conversion from the soap itself. The font-like sculptures directed my discussion towards the signification of cleaning and cleansing, playing with secular and the religious concepts in these sculptures. The theoretical analysis of my sculptures, however, encouraged both self-analysis and the signification that the process of making art as a ritual, similar to religious ritual, and how this leads to working-through or healing in the context of a psychological conversion. This is brought about through the exploration of images, in relation to the unconscious, and deep memories that have the potential to afford some kind of redemption. My research directed me towards analysing experience, intuition and theory as processes informing my art. Thus in this thesis signification becomes a

*bricolage*\* that is informed by the phenomenology of art, ontology and psychoanalysis.

The scope and nature of this project initially focused on research surrounding the signification of the visual images in association with alchemy. Although this research has become mostly redundant to my thesis, it led me to the various theoretical fields that are relevant to the signification process of my own sculptures. This research extended to Jung's theories on archetypes, illustrated as primordial images. As a forerunner to the ideas of psychoanalysis, I investigate how the mind is theorised as storehouse or wax slab of the collective unconscious. This research is extended in discussing the mind as a verge of both the conscious (rational) and the unconscious (spontaneous) and as the source of mythopoetic imagination.

The scope of this research covers philosophical reading pertinent to the process of making art. Rereading philosophies from a Structuralist point of view and in the realm of semiotics brought the theories of Emile Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche to the fore, again causing the interpretation of my work to be influenced by theories on art history and theory concerning genealogy and the transcendental.

The strong influence of the sensuous material of soap, in the signification of my whole body of work, seemed to necessitate a phenomenological approach to the study which referred me to Merleau-Ponty, whose view on aesthetics points to the embodiment of the "preobjective experience" which underlies all perception of material existence as meaningful (Merleau-Ponty 1962:xiv). For Heidegger, phenomenology is the theme of ontology and takes its departure from the hermeneutic *Dasein* (Being) which, as an analysis of experience, questions our habitation of the world and the shape of his or her consciousness. This is relevant to my discussion on memory (Chapter Two), as Heidegger suggests that the aesthetic only occurs upon our forgetting past experiences and memories. My work, premised on Merleau-Ponty's view of phenomenological

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\* Kaden, M.J. 2002. Herinnering, geskiedenis, identiteit: 'n ondersoek na beeld en teks in mito-poësis (Memory, history, identity: an investigation of image and text in mythopoeisis). Unpublished MA.FA. thesis. University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch. In her thesis Kaden uses this term 'bricolage' as a concept of playing with existing fragments of meaning. It is borrowed from R. Kearney in *The wake of imagination: toward a postmodern culture*. (London: Routledge, 1994:13).

ontology, takes a similar stance, because his view does not comprise a deliberate position of perception, but rather holds that perception occurs in the context of a background from which all acts stand out and are presupposed by experience. The interpretation of my work as body of objects of identity, memory and the imagination, which are recalled from the unconscious, tends toward the theoretical stance of Julia Kristeva, whose psycho-linguistic theories are relevant in my context because of how she views the integration of the semiotic and the symbolic as a signifying *process*. Tori Moi, (1986:13) editor of *The Kristeva Reader*, maintains that:

The Kristevan subject is a subject in process (*sujet en procès*), but a subject nevertheless. We find her carrying out once again a difficult balancing act between a position which would deconstruct subjectivity and identity altogether, and one that would try to capture these entities in an essentialist or humanist mould.

Kristeva's theories on psycho-analysis engaged her in the task of healing and her search for identity as a means which would enable her patients to live in the world. This work she describes as a '*work in progress*' and she suggests that to overcome pain is to place the patient in a conducive space, where he/she can express him-/herself. Kristeva, however, warns against the confined, the restrictive subject of the 'self', and necessitates the use of the 'imagination'. Moi (1986:14) quotes Kristeva as stating: 'I think that in the imaginary, maternal continuity is what guarantees identity.' Kristeva's opinion formulates that, by the use of imaginary and the imagination, art is not only a means of finding one's identity, it is also a means of substitution.

The imaginary of the work of art, that is really the most extraordinary and the most unsettling imitation of the mother-child dependence. [it is] its substitution and its displacement towards a limit which is fascinating because inhuman. The work of art is independence conquered through inhumanity. The work of art cuts off natural filiation, it is patricide and matricide, it is superbly solitary. But go back-stage, as does the analyst, and you will find a dependence, a secret mother on whom this sublimation is constructed. (Moi 1986:14.)

In my quest to substantiate that art can initiate healing, I find an affinity with art's perpetual demand for self-analysis that connects with the theory of sublimation, which then, refers to the awareness of the self-conscious and the possible transformation of the self.

Kristeva, according to Moi (1986:15), argues that this realm of the imaginary holds within it the discourse of transference. She balances the concept of love against that of cure, as a structuring element within the imaginary chaos, which she formulates as the intervention of the ‘father of personal prehistory’, that occurs in the very first months of a child’s life. This psychoanalytic situation becomes a sublimation of ‘transference love’ and aids patients to erect some kind of subjectivity to endure his/her psychological troubles.

My sculptures are neither timeless, nor stable and are embedded with emotional baggage. Therefore, this is a thesis engaged with sublimation. I explore the symbolic and psychological aspects of my work, which are bound within a network of differences and constructed meanings that are enriched by the process of art making, thereby following a cyclic process of signification between the material transformation and the task of finding its significance.

### **Notes on Terminology and Usage**

For categorised eras such as *Postmodernism* and *Modernism*, I use upper-case. For ideas and trends, usually reactionary thoughts or movements to socio-political circumstances, like *post-religion*, *post-human* or *post-aesthetic*, I use lower case. For less specific periods of time, like *postmodern* or *modern*, I use lower case. I distinguish between *post-memory*, which is a reactionary trend or notion, and *Post-Memory* as a concept of inherited oral narrative from previous generations, with lower case and upper-case, respectively.

## **Acknowledgements**

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Maggie Laubser grant towards this research are hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not to be attributed to the National Research Foundation and/or the Maggie Laubser grant.

I am particularly thankful for my mother's support throughout my studies, as for her continuing patience and friendship. For my husband's loving support and the respect he afforded me in completing this work, I thank him. I would also like to thank Romaine Hill for giving me courage and for her diligence and insight in editing this thesis.

Keith Dietrich, my supervisor, I thank for approaching my practical work with critical regard and for interacting with my script.

- Fig. 1 (a & b) Mona Hatoum, *Present Tense* (1996).  
Soap and glass beads.  
45 x 299 x 241cm.  
Installation, Anadiël Gallery, Jerusalem.  
(Source: Archer, M. *et al.* 1997:28.)
- Fig. 2. Artist unknown, *Boerseep carved with floral designs* (made by men in concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War).  
Boerseep soap.  
Format unknown.  
(Source: Pretorius, J. C. 1992: no page no.)
- Fig. 3. Stephan Michelspacher, 4. ENDT. MVLTIPLICATION, last and forth illustration of the *Cabala, Spiegel der Kunst und Natur: in Alchymia ...* Augsburg (1615: Falttafel 4).  
Illustration (etching).  
No dimensions given.  
(Source: Ploss, E.E. *et al.* 1970:162.)
- Fig. 4. A miniature from splendour solis showing a stage in the alchemical process which draws on visual representations of the Baptism of Jesus.  
Illustration: BL, Harley MS 3469, f. 21v.  
(Source: Roberts, G. 1994: Plate XIV.)
- Fig. 5. Sonja Gruner, *Table Cloth* (2004-5).  
Unleavened bread and metal hooks and glass.  
2500 x 1200 cm.
- Fig. 6. Sonja Gruner, detail of crucifix embossed on unleavened bread used in *Table Cloth* (2004-5).  
Unleavened bread and metal hooks.  
2500 x 1200 cm.
- Fig. 7 (a & b) Sonja Gruner, detail of construction of cloth from 6200 unleavened bread rounds and metal hooks, *Table Cloth* (2004-5).  
Unleavened bread and meal hooks.  
2500 x 1200 cm.

- Fig. 8. Sonja Gruner, detail of links used to connect unleavened breads, *Table Cloth* (2004-5).  
Unleavened bread and metal hooks.  
2500 x 1200 cm.
- Fig. 9. Sonja Gruner, detail, view of exhibition with *Font II* in foreground (2000).  
Soap (boerseep) and wood (jelutong).  
Format diverse.
- Fig. 10a. Sonja Gruner, *Font I* (2000).  
Soap vessel (Boerseep).  
20 x 45 cm (height x diameter).
- Fig. 10b. Sonja Gruner, metamorphosis over five years of *Font I* (2000-5).  
Soap vessel (Boerseep).  
20 x 45 cm (height x diameter).
- Fig. 11 (a & b). Sonja Gruner, *Font III* (2001).  
Soap (boerseep).  
20 x 50 cm (height x diameter).
- Fig. 12 (a, b & c). Joseph Beuys, *Eurasia*, 34<sup>th</sup> Section of the Siberian Symphony (1966).  
Performed at Gallery 101 in Copenhagen, 14 and 15 October 1966.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:105-107.)
- Fig. 13a. Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965).  
Action performed in Schmela Gallery, Dusseldorf.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:102-103.)
- Fig. 13 (b & c). Joseph Beuys, detail, dead hare and foot tied to felt, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965).
- Fig. 14. *Saint Figure (Toni Malau)*, Kongo (Nineteenth Century).  
Wood (Picture credit: Photo, M.V. and Scheider-Schutz, W. # III C 32159; # III C 6286).  
Height 51 cm.  
Museum für Volkerkunde, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.  
(Source: Visonà, M. B. *et al.* 2001:370.)

- Fig. 15. *Minikisi Figures*, Boma, Congo (1902).  
Wood and nails.  
Picture credit: Michel, F.L., Torday, Emil and Hilton, M.W.  
Format unknown.  
Simpson Collection, R.A.I.# RA1 8013.  
(Source: Visonà, M.B. *et al.* 2001:376.)
- Fig. 16. *Power figure (nkisi) with plumed headdress* [Cat.II]  
Kongo People (Vili), Central Africa.  
Photograph of wooden sculpture.  
Dimensions unknown.  
Collection Marc Leo Felix.  
(Source: Sheldon, A. (eds.) 1995: colour plate 5.)
- Fig. 17. Sonja Gruner, *Font VI* (2002).  
Soap vessel (glycerine soap).  
10 x 20 cm (height and diameter).
- Fig. 18. Sonja Gruner, *Untitled (Blümeln)* (2001).  
Soap loaves (boerseep, roerseep and glycerine soap).  
800 x 1200 cm.
- Fig. 19. Sonja Gruner, detail, boerseep carved, *Blümeln* (2001).
- Fig. 20. Joseph Beuys, *Coyote, I love America and America loves me* (1974).  
(a,b & c). Action performed in Rene Block Gallery, New York in May 1974.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1974:230.)
- Fig. 21. Joseph Beuys, from “Image Head – Mover Head (Eurasiastaff), Parallel Process” (1968).  
Action performed at Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp.  
(Source: Adriani, G. *et al.* (eds.) 1979:171.)
- Fig. 22a. Joseph Beuys, Celtic (Kinch Rannoch) Scottish symphony (1970).  
Action.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1974:141.)
- Fig. 22. Joseph Beuys, from action “Celtic + ~~~,” Civil Defense Rooms, Basel (b & c). (1971).  
Action.  
(Source: Adriani, G. *et al.* (eds.) 1979:214, 218.)

- Fig. 23. View of work in exhibition space in the annex of the Stellenbosch University Gallery, including *Soapbread* (2003), *Font I* (2000-5) and *Font V* (2002).
- Fig. 24. Sonja Gruner, detail, view of exhibition (2005), including work *Soapbread* (*GibUns Heute Unser Taglich Brot*) (2003).
- Fig. 25. Sonja Gruner, *Soapbread* 'Heute Gib Uns Unser Täglich Brot' (2003).  
Soap (roerseep).  
500 x 1500 cm.
- Fig. 26 (a,b). Sonja Gruner, detail, 'Unser' and 'Täglich' from *Soapbread* (2003).  
Soap.  
500 x 1500 cm.
- Fig. 26 (c & d). Sonja Gruner, detail, of embossed words 'Brot' and 'Gib' from *Soapbread* (2003).  
Soap.  
500 x 1500 cm.
- Fig. 26 (e & f). Sonja Gruner, detail of *Soapbread* with words 'Uns' and 'Heute'. (2003).  
Soap.  
500 x 1500 cm.
- Fig. 27. View of gallery interior (previously a Lutheran Church) with soap sculptures exhibited and converting the space back into a spiritual place (2005).
- Fig. 28. Sonja Gruner, detail, roerseep, *Soap bread* 'Brot' (2003).
- Fig. 29. Sonja Gruner, detail, roerseep, *Soap bread* 'Heute' (2003).
- Fig. 30. Sonja Gruner, *Untitled* (*Passagen: beiffchen*) (2002).  
Ministers' collars framed.  
Each 20 x 12 cm.
- Fig. 31. Sonja Gruner, View of annex in Stellenbosch University Gallery, where the works *Untitled* (*Passagen: beiffchen*) (2003) and *Untitled* (*Pillows*) (2002) were exhibited.  
Ministers' collars framed and pillows with photographs.

- Fig. 32 Sonja Gruner, entropy of *Font I* over five years (2000-5).  
 (a & b). Soap vessel's spontaneous disintegration over five years (boerseep).  
 20 x 45 x 45 cm (height x diameter).
- Fig. 33. Sonja Gruner, detail, impressionable texture of roerseep, *Font VII* (2002).
- Fig. 34. Joseph Beuys, *Filter Corner of Fat or Corner of Fat with Filter* (1963).  
 Muslin, fat.  
 40 x 40 x 40 cm.  
 Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.  
 (Source: Adriani, G. *et al.* 1979:102.)
- Fig. 35. Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair* (1964).  
 Wooden chair, fat, wax, metal wire.  
 90 x 30 x 30 cm.  
 Stroher Collection, Hessisches Handesmuseum, Darmstadt.  
 (Source: Tisdall, C. 1979: 73-74 and Adriani, G. *et al.* fig.73, 1979:123.)
- Fig. 36. Sonja Gruner, *within a river of glass shards* (2003-5).  
 Glass shards, nuts and bolts, de-barbed wire and soap cast in the form of a  
 suitcase.  
 900 x 1500 cm.
- Fig. 37 (a & b). Sonja Gruner, detail of *within a river of glass shards* and *Table Cloth*  
 (2003-5).  
 Glass, barbed wire, soap, and nuts and bolts.  
 900 x 1500 cm.
- Fig. 37c. Sonja Gruner, *within a river of glass shards* (2003-5).  
 Glass shards, nuts and bolts, de-barbed wire and soap cast suitcase.  
 1500 x 900 cm.
- Fig. 38a. Joseph Beuys, detail of the pedestrian underpass in Munster from which the  
 cast for *Tallow* was made.  
 The inside of the cast for *Tallow* (1977).  
 (Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:249-252.)
- Fig. 38b. Joseph Beuys, detail of melting the fat for the tallow, *Tallow* (1977).  
 (Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:252.)

- Fig. 38c. Joseph Beuys, *Tallow* (1977).  
20 tons of tallow cut into 5 segments of which the largest is 200 x 200 x 300 cm.  
Collection Dr Erich Marx, Berlin.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:249-252.)
- Fig. 38d. Joseph Beuys, detail of fat sculpture, *Tallow* (1977).  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:249-252.)
- Fig.39 Joseph Beuys, detail, *Show your wound* (1976).  
(a,b & c). Environment Installation.  
Diverse format: underground pedestrian area between Maximillianstrasse and Altstadttring in Munich.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:214-216.)
- Fig. 40. Joseph Beuys, *Cologne* (1968/9).  
Postcard. Collection Dr Erich Marx, Berlin.  
No dimensions given.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:253.)
- Fig. 41. Joseph Beuys, *Cosmos and Damien* (1974).  
Postcard. Collection Dr Erich Marx, Berlin.  
No dimensions given.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:253.)
- Fig. 42. Photographer unknown, *photograph depicting the shadow of a church tower on the World Trade Center, in commemoration of September 11, 2001* (no date of photograph given).  
Photograph taken from the Internet.  
(Source: World Trade Center and Pentagon Memorial 2002:1 of 3 found on <http://www.worldtradecentermemorial.com/>).
- Fig. 43 Strijdom van der Merwe (c. 2004)  
(a & b). Top (a): *Reconciliation*. Sculpture for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Korean War, Pusan, Korea  
Bottom (b): *Slide 18*. Sand Spiral.  
Earth art.  
(Source: [www.strijdom.co.za](http://www.strijdom.co.za).)

- Fig. 44a. Hyacinth, Freiherr von Weisser (Heinrich Welz), *A man's circle of ideas projected onto the external world (Ideenkreis eines Mannes auf die Außenwelt projiziert)* (1912).  
Pencil, pen, on drawing paper.  
33.3 x 25.2 cm.  
Prinzhorn collection.  
(Source: Douglas, C et al. 1996: 182.)
- Fig. 44b. Josef Forster, *Untitled* (after 1916).  
(Diagnosis: schizophrenia)  
Mixed Media on cardboard.  
35.4 x 22.1 cm.  
Prinzhorn Collection.  
(Source: Douglas, C. et al. 1996:75.)
- Fig. 45. Franz Joseph Gall, *Phrenology Diagram* (no date c. 1807).  
No medium given.  
No dimensions given.  
(Source: Anker, S. & Nelkin, D. 2004:11.)
- Fig. 46. Charles le Brun, Top: *Etude de Taureau et de Boeuf*. Bottom: *Visage* (17<sup>th</sup> century).  
No medium given.  
No dimensions given.  
Courtesy of Paris Musée du Louvre, Department des artes Graphique.  
(Source: Anker, S. & Nelkin, D. 2004:12.)
- Fig. 47. Sonja Gruner, *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.
- Fig. 48. Louise Bourgeois, *Cell II* (1991).  
Mixed Media.  
210.8 x 152.4 x 152.4 cm.  
The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Heinz Family Acquisition Fund of The Carnegie Museum of Art.  
(Source: Kotik, C. et al. 1994:113.)
- Fig. 49. Sonja Gruner, *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.

- Fig. 50. Rembrandt, *Self-Portraits* (1630).  
Etching on paper.  
Dimensions unknown.  
(Source: Bal, M. 1991:348.)
- Fig. 51. Sonja Gruner, detail, of the various types and textures of the soap used in  
(a,b) *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.
- Fig. 52. Louise Bourgeois, *Precious Liquids* (detail) (1992).  
Installation. Wood and various materials.  
Height and diameter. 426.7 cm.  
Kassel, Documenta 9 (1992).  
(Source: Walther, I.F. (ed.) *et al.* 1998:560.)
- Fig. 53. Sonja Gruner, *Untitled (Pillows)* (2002).  
(a,b, Surgical material, milk filters and photographs.  
c & d). 32 pillows, each 50 x 50 cm.
- Fig. 54. Sonja Gruner, *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.
- Fig. 55. Sonja Gruner, detail, transparency, texture and colour of soap. The soap  
'sweats', like the body. *Sitzbath* (2002-05).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.
- Fig. 56. Sonja Gruner, view of *Sitzbath* and *Fonts* in the University of Stellenbosch  
(a & b). Gallery (previously a Lutheran Church) (2005).
- Fig. 57. Annulus Platonis (Siegel Salomens), *Alchemical Symbol*, *Kupferstich*  
(1723).  
Illustration (etching).  
No dimensions given.  
No collection given.  
(Source: Ploss, E.E. *et al.* 1970:23.)

Fig. 58. Antony Gomley, *Word made Flesh* (1989).  
Iron and air.  
65 x 62 x 53 cm.  
Collection: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.  
(Source: Hutchinson, J. *et al.* 2001:54.)

Fig. 59. Antony Gomley, *Fathers & Sons, Monuments & Toys, Gods & Artists*  
(1985/86).  
Lead, plaster, fibreglass and air.  
Large Figure 245 x 57.6 x 48 cm.  
Small Figure 108 x 24 x 22 cm.  
(Source: Hutchinson, J. *et al.* 2001: 29.)

### **Aim**

My aim in writing this thesis is to convey the insight gained through the process of making a series of sculptural installations that informed the theoretical component of research for the MA degree in Fine Arts.

In exploring the reasons for making these works, I searched for theoretical connections that discussed similar concerns and substantiated my process of signifying my sculptures with the concept of *conversion*. The theories brought insight into my use of materials and into the psychological process that occurred when I realised what my sculptures meant to me. My aim here is thus to convey the idea that the process of making an artwork may be an attempt to find the ritual that directs us towards both conscious and unconscious reasons for making it. This process of signification, whereby recollection occurs and healing takes place, gives an understanding of why we make art objects; it shows us that art is not practised in a paradigm of separation, detachment and autonomy.

The outline of the work presented below refers briefly to the main theoretical sources that influenced the formation of concepts surrounding my practical work and the designation of the three chapters of this thesis as Ritual, Memory and Healing.

### **The Problem**

The problem contained within the theoretical component of my research is two-fold. My first concern is how, through psychoanalysis and the making of art as a form of healing, can we try to locate a sublimation of human experience within the convention of monuments, in which resolution or redemption can in fact not occur? The second, parallel concern is how in the contemporary South African context to make art that does not weight every work with recollections of suffering and oppression? Both of these concerns question how to redeem an artwork's identity from the influences of

Apartheid and political causality, while possessing the knowledge that restitution and redemption come from recollection. What I propose is this. Since art is able to portray the injustices of the past, it can also facilitate healing through expression. Yet again, this thesis falls into a theoretical maze by asking whether any kind of conversion is at all possible in an age that is post-religion, post-history and post-human?

The action of making art is, I propose, a *ritualistic* transference between the body and the mind, deep memory and *recollection*, provoking an awareness of our own specific self-conscious that finds alliance with a social consciousness. By linking thought-images retrieved and expressed in art with broader social concerns, we make and project a material object with our own identity; and, by association with a similar social consciousness, we find, in my opinion, a form of *consolement*, a distancing and possibly a personal transformation. This *conversion*, moving through ritual, memory and healing, is part of the *process* of making art.

### **General Orientation**

This written component of my studies has become a means of self-articulation, of refining and defining my practical work in terms of art history and the philosophy of art. My sculptural work began as a personal search and process of self-realisation, while, in time, after being able to partly distance myself from the work, its other significance rose before me, expressing the broader concerns of humanity, such as nourishment and survival. Living in South Africa, I am influenced by free-ranging references to multicultural societies and the transcultural aesthetic that has been brought about by the migrant populations of Africa's people and the entrance and exit of colonialism. Transformation, social and political, has become an aspect of the life of every South African living in this new age of change. For me the public experience lay side-by-side with the change that occurred as a result of personal trauma and became the catalyst for my finding my own identity, which is embedded in the cultural codes of a German and an Afrikaans culture, both of which are riddled with racial issues and have experienced uprootment of their people. The importance of religion and the capacity for self-sustainability as a means of survival have provided the context of my

work. The underlying pattern of all cultural influences brought the idea of survival to the fore; and I discuss the use of religious symbols and depictions as revealing some kind of troubled 'universal' consciousness. In representations of myth and religion, these subjects become reflections of cyclic concerns within history. Art becomes a means of expression which supports the conscious and the unconscious actions, whether physical or mental, as a form of survival at the crux of human activity.

The special significance of exhibiting in the gallery of the University of Stellenbosch in Dorp Street (the 'Church Gallery') is that this building was converted from a Lutheran church into a gallery. By exhibiting my work (specifically the soap sculptures) within the exhibition space, its religious association called for a re-conversion, because the religious symbolism in the work evoked the church's former function of cleansing, redemption and spiritual healing. In referring to my work, I make a clear distinction between the works exhibited in the former church space and those placed in the annex of the gallery, in order to distinguish between the influences of the two sites.

My intention in making soap from natural materials (fat and lye) was to convey the idea that art enables the representation and signification of materials and that ritual becomes the metaphor for this movement between the physical and the mental, in a way similar to the religious use of symbolism. Nietzsche (cited in Degenaar 1986:5), in the context of the power of tragedy, states the following regarding the artist's ability to create symbols which illustrate a oneness with him-/herself and the world around:

... one has to lose oneself in order to find oneself: one loses oneself in ecstasy [in ritual, in memory and art making] in order to find oneself through images which function as symbols to reveal man to himself, not as isolated individual but as self who is deeply rooted in the ground of existence.

## **Exposition of Contents**

Conversion as the central theme of this thesis directed the investigation towards ritual and its function, thus *Ritual* is the title of Chapter One. This chapter deals with ritual,

as a tradition of soap making, then in religious ceremonies, in alchemy and, subsequently, in art. The first section, *Ritual and Religion*, directs the reader through the thought processes that inspired my soap sculptures and their connection with the religious and everyday rituals that structure our actions with significance. With this in mind, a short discussion on the making of soap and its material transformation introduces the concept of conversion that identifies similarities in religious and psychological transformation.

Ritual is discussed in terms of rite and ceremony, notions that present the structural guidelines for this chapter, since the following sections focus on their separate significance to the work. Finally, the subject of the use of religious imagery is discussed in terms of its relevance in contemporary art. This discussion explores the concept of a collective unconscious as that which finds expression through religious imagery and highlights broader social and psychological concerns. This leads the reader to the aspect of ceremony, where the mind and body cohere in an interactive process of signification.

The next section, titled *Simulacrum: Objects of Ritual, Religion and Art*, takes the parallel path of ceremony which is rite, and engages with my sculptures as soap objects, questioning how material and form represent and signify as works of art. The theoretical concepts that influenced my thinking on ritual were those of Michael Camille (1996:19-43). He substantiates his own ideas on simulacra with Gilles Deleuze's on the ontology of the object itself. Simulacra, such as my soap fonts, are neither copies of, nor physically resemble, baptismal fonts. As art objects, they are objects arising in the imagination that become objects of substitution. Here it is necessary to take into account that the term 'simulacrum' emphasises the relation between viewer and object. The process of making art and conceptualising it becomes an action of ritual. Ritual, as an architectural way of living and responding learnt from youth, is motivated by our identity, who we are culturally and spiritually. Therefore, art making, as ritual, projects our conscious and unconscious desires and signals our fears through the images and objects that are made.

The third section, *Ritual and the Realisation of the Self-Conscious*, includes both the mental and the physical aspects of rite and ceremony, concentrating on the mysterious

links that we are able to form between objects and signification. Ritual, as an action where self-analysis occurs, stimulates repetition and establishes contemplation, an internal dialogue between the self and the object. Paul Crowther (1993:46-47) refers to this reflective awareness and the self-consciousness of an 'embodied consciousness' as 'empathetic experience', comparing it to a religious experience. As an action of re-identifying oneself in an art object, Sigrid Weigel's (1996:4) *Body-and image-Space: Re-reading of Walter Benjamin* has brought insight into art objects as 'embodied in actu'. As part of the body- and image-space, Benjamin discusses objects that result from thinking and acting as mnemonic symbols (*Erinnerung-symbol*). As an example of this signification of objects with ritual, I discuss the work titled *Soapbreads*, with reference to Donald Preziosi's (1989:102-103) paper titled *Hoc est Corpus Meum*, in which the interplay between text and image is explored, forming the core of the final sub-section titled *Rite and Signification*. In Preziosi's comparative example of the 'problem of the Eucharist', he analyses the 'essential problem of signification' in the context of art. This, he remarks, is similar to the dispute surrounding the bread of the Eucharist: *Is it bread or is it the body of Christ?*

Therefore, symbol and metaphor form part of this discussion, which investigates the role of text, material, representation and signification in art. This clarifies the idea that ritual facilitates the signification process. The aim of this chapter is to substantiate my opinion that, by making art as ritual, we consciously and unconsciously express our identity through emotions and desires and become ourselves a part of the content of the artwork. The artwork's formation, as I understand it, was informed by the mind, the body, the emotions and the imagination, all part of an embodied ritualised experience of making and signifying the work. This contradicts the postmodern theory of French Sociologist Jean Baudrillard, who advanced that everything will become a simulacrum. From this perspective, ideas and images are sourced only from the mind, breaking down the distinction between representation and reality (sign and what they refer to).

In investigating the use of religious subjects and symbols in art, a psychological self-exploration is revealed and a way of connecting with the inexplicable emotions of personal trauma. This process that occurs within oneself is expressed in the context of a broader social sphere. This idea of commemorative consciousness (the autonomous

nature of memory and how it occupies a place which is ‘other’ to the subject as a process of substitution) is again taken up in the second chapter on memory.

From a messianic frame of reference, my soap *Fonts* embody the material symbolism of cleaning, emphasising the concept of ‘redemption’ on a psychological level. The problem that arises in this context is highlighted by Benjamin, who states, ‘only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments’ (cited in Weigel 1996:156). This would mean that redemption comes from gaining perspective on memories, thereby invoking a heightened awareness of the self-conscious and realising our connections to a storehouse of images as part of social consciousness.

By discussing the process of sculpture, I aim to show that the process of making art demands a devotional search of our internal emotions within the external environments in which we live and which inform our art.

In the Chapter Two titled *Memory*, the conversion of thoughts/images from the unconscious to the conscious mind is of critical importance. This chapter is premised on the idea that, as religious images recall ritual, rite and ceremony, art objects that utilise sensuous and empathetic experience are signs that act on memory. Benjamin calls these images *Denkbilder* or thought-images, while Sigrid Weigel (1996:51,58) formulates the theory that these images portray thoughts and theoretical reflections that, when placed in a meta-discourse with the concept of *Bearbeitung* (working-through – the Freudian term), reveal wish-images bound up as image-desire (*Bildbegehren*). In the context of my sculptures, traumatic memory reveals a psychological desire for healing or, rather, resolution from such memories. However, before a cognition of the significance of the work is gained by the artist, recollection occurs, through the shift of images/thoughts from the unconscious to the conscious mind, and retrieved partially in the form of memory-images (aside from the idea of the influence of the imagination). This realisation of the work’s significance is called by Benjamin the ‘Now of cognizability’, which reveals our moment of eureka-like insight and understanding gained from this act of recalling memories. Hegel, similarly, formulates this as a process of going into oneself. The validity of recollection is discussed in respect of two theories: Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de Mémoire* and Hegel’s *Erinnerung*, both of which debate the duality between the subjective

existence of history that rejects most memory, and memory that is structured and discarded by the particularly ordered chronology of history.

As an entrance into memory, I attempt to set out the discursive space between memory and history. In the first section I discuss Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire*, in which he holds the same premise of history as Benjamin and reiterates the idea that the found objects of *lieux* are relics left behind, after history has taken what is relevant to its purpose. Nora observes that these objects become traces of a time past, yet, as cornerstones, are static and dormant in the process of forgetting. The second section discusses briefly our own 'cornerstones' of memory, in terms of collective memory and 'Post-memory'. As objects forgotten and taken up as relics, the third section necessitates the location of a frame of reference in time and place. This contortion of memories from the past becomes a part of our own memories and, in the making and signifying of art objects, these are recalled from deep memory. In presenting itself to the mind, from the unconscious, memory locates itself in 'mythological time'. This discussion is relevant particularly to the use of religious imagery in contemporary art and further advances the idea that memory-images hint at something other than what is manifestly presented. This takes us from placing memory in time to locating it in space.

In the fourth section, I discuss Benjamin's *Passagen Project* which focuses on history as a formulation of experience. In the search for a collective memory, he emphasises, through the re-evaluation of junk, the importance of objects' existence in the form of mementos and relics as a site of forgotten memories discarded by history. The purpose of this discussion is to convey the problem that occurs between memory and history and the unreliability of each on its own. Even in this formulation, Benjamin's re-evaluation of a redeemed collective memory as an alternative monument, which transcends the historical continuum of oppression and suffering, seems to yield affinities with the idea of a remembered, individually redeemed life. It falls short, however, in its ontological quest, because it becomes re-lived only through the imagination, which, in the formation of this new history, is enwrought with the longing for immortality and inspires a recovery of the aesthetic, as in the process of making art.

Hegel's *Erinnerung* is relevant to this discussion, because his phenomenology is based on identity and avoids the debates on history. Therefore, the fifth section examines his theory exploring the physiological involvement in making memory-works. Hegel states that we identify ourselves by the recognition of the 'Spirit' that exists in a communal memory. This collective unconscious is a substratum of awareness, images and experiences that influence us. Similarly, David Krell (1990:218) speaks of a 'stockpile' of images that exist in the deep recesses of memory. I believe that, through the ritual of making art, through acting and being acted on by the sensuous materials (soap), for example, deep memory is stimulated towards re-memoration. Hegel calls this *Insichgehen* 'to go into oneself' (cited in Krell 1990:235). To understand one's own art involves a process of self-analysis and the signification of one's own work is therefore a dissection of the experience of memory, of emotions, of fear and of all that forms the identity.

The final two sections, *Heimat and Memory* and *Death in/of Art*, are discussions on art referring to the discursive structure in the previous sections, in order to illuminate how discarded objects are included or recede from the idea of history as part of their making; and how history is removed or partly dislocated from psychological aspects in making and understanding commemorative artworks. In the section titled *Heimat and Memory*, I specifically look at the re-creation of memory in art and discuss how art opts to draw from social consciousness that occurs within this 'mythological time' of appropriation. Therefore, as an example, personal memory and/or Post-Memory, although often dislocated from first-hand experience, find a renewed resonance in concepts that time does not dislodge. The concept, of exile, as a case in point can be seen in the work titled *within a river of glass shards* (Figure 42) and describes how our perceptions may change, but our understanding of conceptual boundaries, such as exile, are a part of a social consciousness that does not.

In the final section on memory, I discuss my sculptures as memory-works and convey the idea that the memorial consciousness in art induces self-re-identification or an emergence (*Entstehung*). This term, conceptualised by Nietzsche (cited in Weigel 1996:43-44), demonstrates the difference between the concept of origin (*Ursprung*) and the idea of historical being or, more appropriate to this discussion, a first identity. In my opinion, we define ourselves by the culture and customs learnt from our

forefathers. Therefore, I argue that artworks retain a type of *emergence* of the maker's identity, as a form of self-consciousness. While in the post-human era, the notion of monuments as depositories for memories became problematic, in this anti-redemptory age the notion is rejected. The idea that memory can be 'preserved' or 'kept' within a structure seems absurd. However, premised on Nietzsche's appropriation of the term *Entstehung* (emergence) as a 'residue' of Post-memory, identity can emerge as redemptory by gaining insight from the past.

Memory in the post-humanist era cannot be deferred or apathetic. I think that the social commentary that art brings to society interacts with it, bringing about acknowledgement of the voids in the collective memory that signify a loss of identity and therefore show us society's wounds. (For me, these voids are the inhumanities committed and our negligence towards nature.)

In Chapter Three titled *Healing*, the investigation concerns healing as a function of art. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of the mental and the causal, as signified in the ritual or process of making soap and casting my sculptures, I endeavour to investigate the alienation that I have observed between belief, local memory and everyday experiences. By exploring the Cartesian distinctions that theoretically separated humanity from nature, I refer to the contemporary South African context and the re-evaluation of the diversity of experiences, memories and rituals. The socio-politico transformation has required a renewed awareness, to the merits drawn from rationalism and humanism, and of ourselves within an adaptable ecology. As a process of healing through memory and ritual, as we have seen in the testimonies of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), I intend to investigate, how in art, its inherent openness of expression and relevance to many schools of thought and through its adaptable signification, artists and audiences, are invoked to bridge their frame of ideas. In my opinion, art, therefore, upholds the interdependence of emotion and reason, body and mind and soul. By creating this space of particular insight and tolerance, for me, art marks a sense of healing that it can facilitate in its viewers.

I refer to Freud's psychoanalytical paper titled *Conversion Theory* to support my claim that the body and mind are connected, and to foreground the idea that the ritual

of making art, similarly, presumes the psychological interchange of taking action and being acted upon. The identification of the self or the realisation of the work's readability demonstrates Benjamin's, 'Now of cognizability' (Weigel 1996:119). It acts together with Freud's concept of *Bearbeitung* or working-through, as the process between the body and mind which provokes from deep-memory images and symbols that lie dormant in the unconscious. These were first recognized by Carl Jung in his theories on psychoanalysis and termed by him 'archetypes'. Containing collective memory, personal experience, emotions, intellect and imagination, these images have come to be known as 'conceptual mythopoesis' (Angus Fletcher 1970:322).

The problem of discussing art that is a form of sublimation is explored, showing how it becomes a form of self-reflection, which, too, is a form of construction. Kofman (cited in Bal 1991:348) and Levine (1998:200) refer to this as 'melancholic mourning', in which the 'playful' imagination of pleasure is superimposed upon identity. Mieke Bal (1991:304) identifies a problem here, holding that this experience can become a source of 'primary narcissism'. However, I counter this view with the claim that the desire to release oneself from one's own memory-works, may, through this projection, result in self-annihilation through the poetic imagination and artistic play.

Freud (cited in Levine 1998:198), in *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, asserts that artists can escape from neurosis by delving into society's collective unconscious and transforming a 'reality of dissatisfaction into a fantasy of satisfaction' (Levine 1998:198). Self-examination, therefore, brings out a reality of deep fears, while through self-reflection the deepest desires are brought forward to engage with identity in a playful and pleasing manner. Crowler (1993:175) maintains that self-consciousness 'is triggered by survival needs'.

Yet, by recognising the readability of self-consciousness, the realisation – the 'Now of cognizability' – occurs in a retrospective projection so that the beginning of the self is exposed. In his critical paper *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (cited in Levine 1998:200) recognises the art process as facilitating healing by self-re-identification. I conclude that healing occurs within art because it recovers the individual self.

I believe that art can facilitate healing or redemption by the cognition of identity in the images that are recalled from the unconscious. By ‘*working-through*’ as Freud says, one’s concerns in art and re-defining one’s identity, the artist or viewer can distance him-/herself, once again becoming involved in the mythopoesis of the work. Johann Degenaar (1996:50) concurs with Jung in affirming that primordial images that return from deep memory ‘have a healing power because they enable man to discover the destiny of mankind by making it possible for him “to find his way back to the deepest springs of life”’.

With regard to Post-Memory, my own upbringing in South Africa and my heritage of a religious upbringing in a German culture have provoked the need to preserve activities and cultural objects unique to two influential cultures. This is also reflected in the work of Mona Hatoum like me she works with the theme of cultural heritage and, in *Present Tense* (1996) (Figure 1), uses soap to signify cultural identity and the importance of craft as a means of maintaining the memory of her Jewish culture.

Other artworks also support my theoretical research, presenting genres within which my work can be contextualised. Joseph Beuys, Louis Bourgeois and Anthony Gormley are contemporary artists who deal with similar concepts of process, embodiment of memory, significance of material and the need to make art as a form of ‘*working-through*’ dysfunctionality in their lives. They, too, use art as an expression of social commentary and *working-through*.

### Ritual

The importance of ritual as an agency of action, [is, Gluckman argues], that rituals “do things” as well as “say things”, as in resolving conflict or healing.

(Blier  
1996:192.)

### Introduction

In this chapter, my aim is to investigate how the theoretical concept of ritual supports the process of making art and how it has developed into an explanatory term in which the practical act and the process of signifying it through memory become parallel discoveries. Ritual illuminates our terms of reference, often as recollections, and, in the process of our making art objects, it induces a conversion in, and representation of, deep memories, through a connection with the unconscious and the sensuous quality of material. Artists use ritual as a means of returning to the source of creativity, the place where thought (*gefühl* – something felt) becomes image or sign.

Four aspects of ritual are discussed here: religion, simulacrum, realisation of the self-conscious and signification, the chapter division following the sequence that occurred in my working with soap. My decision to make sculpture out of soap was informed by personal memories which led to the religious content of my work. The influence of my late maternal grandfather, already referred to in the Preface, has been an underlying factor throughout my thesis and my works’ reference to ‘loss’ or ‘tragedy’ points to my sculptures as a process of dealing with his passing. This chapter explores how further signification grew from my research, with the four aspects of ritual forming the structure of significance for understanding the way physical interaction, as representation, converged with mental signification.

In the first section, on *Ritual and Religion*, I begin by charting the three main conceptual influences informing my sculptures: religious ritual; a cultural ritual; and the concept of material conversion. In dividing the conceptual fabric of ritual into liturgy (textual references and narrative) and rite (ceremony), my intention is to indicate the dual strands that have led towards signification of my work. The deductions I wish to make in this first section are that, by utilising religious imagery in art or by making reference to it, a deeper content is signified, such as in a psychological search or on a journey. An aspect of this ritual of making art provokes the recollection of memories.

In the second section, titled *Simulacrum: Objects of Ritual, Religion and Art*, the aim is to discuss the significance of site by examining the impact of exhibiting my works in the 'Church Gallery', and to investigate how, without the context of a religious space, material and sculptural form acquire the variety of traces that mark the works as ritual objects. The problem of imitation or copy, representation and real, raises questions about the identification process. This is investigated in the theoretical context of simulacrum, which is a simulation or substitution of 'signs of the real for the real itself' (Baudrillard, cited in Camille 1996:38).

Titled *Ritual and the Realisation of the Self-Conscious*, the third section leads to analysing the theoretical threads of ritual. How we signify our artworks reveals our identity, which in the context of this discussion becomes an investigation of the self-conscious. This psychological search forms a link with the unconscious, which bears within it a pattern for survival.

In the final section, titled *Rite and Signification*, the discussion brings together the previous ideas on the signification of religious objects and, similarly, artworks interwoven between material object, text (narrative) and idea, demonstrating how this all comes together in the works, or religious object, as liturgy. To portray these theoretical ideas clearly, by applying them to an artwork, my sculpture, *Soapbread* with the words '*Gib Uns Heute Unser Tägliches Brot*' embossed on its forms, is used as an example. This discussion follows philosophical formulations on how sign, as text or visual object, material or impression, fluctuates between signifier and signified

in objects of religious ritual; and how, in art, we read and understand a work's significance in the same way.

The observations made in this chapter are premised on the idea that signification occurs as a result of our frames of reference. Ritual in art is, I believe, a process of finding the structural links between the physical material and its transformation, the process of finding the form of expression, in sculpture particularly, and the process of signification that involves the connectedness of these associations with the mental picture of the concepts, illustrated as psychological structures in the unconscious.

In our daily lives we use ritual to give us a sense of order. We celebrate traditional and cultural commemorative events with ritualised activities and objects, which serve as reminders of important days and people on special occasions. In Suzanne Preston Blier's search to familiarise herself with foreign ritual prerogatives, she identifies many rituals, including the mundane, and examines the similarities between religious rituals of various cultures and traditions. In her paper titled *Ritual* (1996:187,190,191), she frequently uses the word 'architectural' to precede her discussion of a specific rite to indicate a supportive and structured foundation through which ritual forms meaning. Besides her understanding that '[r]itual is defined generally as any prescribed system of proceeding (in religion or other spheres)', Blier (1996:189), by using the word 'architectural', encourages us to think about our position within a ritual, either as spectator (outsider) or participant. What is important here is how signification is formed by artist and spectator and that this process is 'architectural', grounded in a multitude of subjects. Yet we cannot simply look at ritual as structured.

## **Ritual and Religion**

In art the reference to ritual or the use of ritual in the process of making art reflects insights about who we are in society, because of how and why we do things. It places

us within a specific system and orientation. The following short discussion on baptism and the eucharist is relevant to the polemics of ritual and how significance is achieved through the interchange of words, objects and gesture. The purpose of this is to show that the process of signification in religious ceremonies, in using ritual (rite) and liturgy (textual verification), is similar to that of granting significance to art objects.

The following baptismal prayer initiates the believer into the Christian faith and through this ceremony of baptism, redemption from sin is granted and the promise of everlasting life is given by the Holy Trinity:

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten thee again of Water and the Holy Ghost, and hath forgotten thee all thy sin, strengthen thee with his grace unto life everlasting. Amen. ...<sup>1</sup>

In the ceremony, the designated child or person wanting baptism seeks redemption from the sinful body and life, an outcome of the expulsion from Eden according to Christian doctrine. The ritual of washing the head or body is a symbolic gesture of the baptismal ritual promising spiritual resurrection and everlasting life. The final movement of the ritual is demonstrated by the believer receiving the sign of the holy cross on his forehead, as a token of belonging to the Christian community.<sup>2</sup>

In the communion ritual, the commemorated event is that of Jesus's final hours on earth before his crucifixion. He shared his last meal (the Last Supper) with his disciples, making the symbolic gesture of breaking bread and drinking wine as an illustration of his resurrection and the redemption from sin.<sup>3</sup>

Liturgy, as a formal, prescribed religious text, describes a ceremony and leads to the understanding of the event. 'Reading' art is similar to this experience: it is an attempt to find the liturgy or process of the work of art. A conceptual artwork draws in references from the materials used and the context in which they are used, such as social or personal activities, mundane rituals, cultural or religious ceremonies, and directs the spectator so he/she can grapple for pointers with which to identify.

In this section I review the references that have informed my work and thus become the means of finding my sculpture's theoretical liturgy. The ritualised act of soap making led me from the concept of emotional conversion, which highlighted the various facets of the activity, such as the transformation of chemicals (materials), through the change of cultural traditions (as seen in the passage below), to conversion as a symbol for change in alchemy, which utilised religious narratives and representations of the body to depict not only chemical changes, but also their embodied experience of the world.

The concept of conversion, and particularly the use of soap for my Master's exhibition, came from an initial investigation into the idea of survival, physical, mental and spiritual. Stories relating to the Voortrekkers convey their health, dependence on and livelihood from, and as result of, the various activities centred on hunting, which provided them with food, candles and soap. Gré van der Waal-Braaksma (1986:109-112) describes soap making as a necessity that required the utmost diligence and that was the outcome of many rituals, from hunting, to collecting the fat throughout the year, to making the soap and using it to wash daily.<sup>4</sup>

The mixture is watched all day because the boiling may not progress too fast or too slowly. The fire also has to burn steadily, because, if it is too fierce, the mixture will boil over. The process took several days, with lye being added continually to saponify the fat. In the evening the fire was extinguished and the soap cooked, so that it had to be trimmed the next morning to remove the deposit of dirt and the undigested parts. The tedious process of boiling ensured that the soap became clean and white. It could actually take a couple of weeks before the product finally was lovely and clear.

[Die brousel word heeldag opgepas, want die kooksel mag nie te vinnig of te stadig gaan nie. Die vuur moet ook gelykmatig wees want word dit groot, kook die brousel oor. Die proses het etlike dae geduur, terwyl voortdurend loog bygevoeg is om die vet te laat verseep. Saans is die vuur geblus en die seep afgekoel, sodat dit die volgende môre afgesny word, om die afgesakte vuil en onverteerde dele te verwyder. Die langdurige kookproses verseker dat die seep skoon en wit word. 'n Hele paar weke kon dit wel duur, voordat die produk uitendelik mooi en helder is. ...]

This ritual became a part of the 'Afrikaner' culture. The special care that the women took in making and finishing off their soap, becoming a demonstration of their

personal pride and thus these soap blocks mirrored their skill and pride in their culture.

After the pearls were wiped off, the large block was cut or sawn on a table into beautiful equal oblong bricks. Then the pieces were cleaned, planed smooth, all bubbles and grains removed and sharp edges smoothed with a knife. Some women made an art of it because their bricks were worked off smooth as butter and had such a beautiful lustre that they almost seemed edible.

[... Nadat die p rels afgevee is, word die groot blok op 'n tafel in mooi eweredig langwerpige stene gesny of gesaag. Daarna word die stukke skoongemaak, gladgeskaaf, alle blasies en korreltjies verwyder en die skerpe kante met 'n mes rondgekrap. Sommige vroue het 'n kuns daarvan gemaak want hulle stene is seepglad bewerk en het so 'n pragtige glans dat dit byna gelyk het of hulle eetbaar was.]

During the Anglo-Boer War, when the men were placed in concentration camps, their wives would send them blocks of soap. To keep themselves busy, the men carved these with fine details, and signed and dated them (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup> I see the soap, in its careful processing and use, as a symbol for the nurturing and protecting instinct of women.

Before the soap could be used, it had to be dried. It had to lie for a considerable time and took up to a year before it had dried well and become brick hard. To keep a record, the woman sometimes engraved the date on it while the soap was soft. Then the bricks were packed out on the fireproof ceiling and it is known that many people stored the soap in the coffin that always stood there in readiness. In this way the farmer's wife built up a supply of soap and it was not necessary to make it during the summer. Each time that washing needed to be done she cut off her bit of soap – the exact amount that was required.

[Voordat die seep gebruik kon word, moes dit eers uitdroog. Dit moet vir 'n geruimte tyd lê en duur soms tot 'n jaar voordat dit goed droog en kliphard geword het. Om dit te kontroleer het die vrou partymal wanneer die seep nog sag is, die datum daarop uitgraveer. Die stene is nou op die brandsolder uitgepak en dit is bekend dat baie mense die seep in die doodskis wat altyd daar klaar staan, bewaar het. So het die boervrou 'n hele voorraad seep vir haar opgebou en was dit nie nodig om dit in die somer te maak nie. Elke keer wanneer wasgoed gewas moes word, het sy haar "wassel" seep – die juiste hoeveelheid wat benodig is – afgesny.]

Particularly noteworthy is the close association of the soap with death, a fact learnt from the author's mentioning that the unused coffin was the place where the soap was preserved during the year. The soap placed in the coffin becomes a substitute for the body keeping death at bay and, thereby, suggesting the notion of preservation and

healing. This is similar to the religious ritual of Holy Communion (the eating of the bread), which symbolically renews the body (soul) of the sinner with the flesh and blood of Christ. By juxtaposing these two ritualised activities, one concerning bodily and the other spiritual survival, my aim is to demonstrate that the concept of ritual implies an outward sign of an inward meaning. Even the mundane rituals carry with them the duality of physical and mental survival.

The third and final direct conceptual link that influenced my work was alchemy, which came by way of my interest in the chemical change that occurs in making soap. This subject seemed to present the link between material conversion and religious depictions and explanations for conversion. The experiments conducted by alchemists were presented as symbolic associations between the bodies of holy deities and the basic elements of earth, fire, water and air (Figure 3). My soap fonts, already made and signified as baptismal vessels, strengthened my interest in alchemy because the explanations for chemical changes, similarly, utilised philosophical and religious symbols to convey the concept of transformation and conversion. The following description by pseudo-chemist, Roger Bacon (1992:45), describes the relationship between soap and the soul:

[I]t hath many properties and vertues, for it cureth bodies of their accidentall diseases, and preserveth sound substance, in such sort, that their appeareth in them no perturbations of contraries, nor breach of their bond and union. For this is the *soupe* of bodies, yea their spirit and *soule*, which when it is incorporate with them, dissolveth them without any losse. This is the life of the dead, and their resurrection, a medicine preserving bodies, and purging superfluities' [own italics].<sup>6</sup>

Although this process can be explained through chemistry, the involvement of the senses in the process of cooking soap and the associations between raw materials and the (ritualistic) process are what primarily interests me. The conversion of fat and lye to soap led me to an enquiry into purification and its religious connotations. The examination of symbols and meanings that were developed in alchemy suggested a particular relationship between mysticism and materials, similar to that which I had experienced in conceptual art and sculpture. In his discussion on alchemy, Arthur E. Waite (1970:6) claims that alchemy was, above all, concerned with 'the transformation of the human being himself' (Figure 4).

In my work, the medium of soap is used as an expression of the transformation of memory. The ritual of making the soap and carving it as a means of provoking recollection becomes a ritual for gaining power over feelings of loss. Here it seems necessary to discuss the basic process of making soap. The italicised words are the key indicators of this process.

I discovered that the hard kidney fat must go first through a process of boiling, yielding the tallow, and then through *filtration*, bringing about *purification*, after which lye is added. Throughout this ‘cooking’ process, the correct temperature must be maintained, and the fat and lye must gradually form an *emulsion*. This is then cast and stored in a warm place for a few weeks to completely *saponify*. During this process,<sup>7</sup> the material changes its chemical composition from an acid to an alkali. Due to this chemical reaction, heat is released which must be contained by keeping the soap in *warm* blankets, thereby preventing the process from proceeding too fast, a situation which could result in acidic soap that would be too brittle. For this process to be completed required patience, as it took at least two months. Much trial and error occurred before skill and a trained eye were established. What is interesting is that the alchemical symbols and reactions of water, air, earth and fire are similar, in the process of understanding soap, to those of the ingredients needed in baking bread, yeast (air), sugar and flour (earth), water and fire. (Interesting, too, and relevant to my work is that this entire process is very similar to the proving of yeast.)

The question I am grappling with here is how the use of the term ‘ritual’ and its two components, liturgy and ceremony, are significant in gaining an understanding of my work. Rite as ‘*stasis*’, according to Blier (1996:191), is ‘temporal, boundedness, structure [and] similitude’. It forms the theoretical structure complementing the ceremony, which lies in ‘*transitus*’ and is characterised by ‘change, movement [and] difference’. The signification of my work is therefore divided by the act which encompasses the material sensuousness, forming an object, carving and moulding it, and the interaction with memory. The formal procedure or theoretical structure that marks ritual is the liturgy that draws together the theoretical and philosophical through the use of language. These two components of ritual meet in their use of symbolism. In this thesis, the psychological aspect exists not only in the theoretical

structure of signification, but also in the erratic structures of memory and the self-conscious. Symbolism, however, also goes beyond human consciousness and this is why, in the process of my work, the concept of ritual is so important. Jacques Waardenburg states with regard to consciousness that ‘the important point is that it is necessary to use symbols in order to speak about [it]. In other words, symbols constitute a special way of expressing oneself about the experience of something which makes itself palpable as a particular kind of reality different from that of daily life subject to ordinary speech’ (Olson 1980:43). Ritual cannot occur or hold significance without a significant/signified object.

The similarity between the mechanisms used by art and those used by religion to express meaning is illustrated by Derrida’s use of the term ‘deferred’ in describing the process combining difference and deferral – ‘what it is’ and ‘what it is not’ (Appagnanesi 1995:80). The idea of the seen and unseen has a remarkable connection to the religious concept of faith already described in the rite of the Last Supper, when Jesus gave the bread to his disciples and said: ‘Take this, eat, this is my body’; and, offering the wine, said, ‘This is my blood’ (Lamb 1999:228).

Weigel, however, views literature as an ‘insensuous similitude’: words, in his opinion, cannot portray the evolution of a concept that includes the sensuous ‘memory’ contained in the visual object. This can be contested, of course, as it is the reader who brings ‘meaning’ to an object, while the history of things is created by humankind. Crowther (1993:1), in the same vein, asserts that language brings rational comprehension and he sees it as indicating ‘the evolution of a sense of personal identity’.

In my work *Table Cloth* (Figure 5), the inclusion of ritual as a process in the ‘allegorical’ understanding of the object is supported by the physical demonstration of piercing each bread-round, which connotes sacrifice, and the reconstruction of linking all of them again into a tablecloth, which signifies a re-union. In my opinion, this dualism between the physical and the ‘allegorical’ meaning creates an image that represents the relationship between the personal identity of the maker/artist and the subject matter. The word ‘image’, according to Fletcher (1970:179), can be understood to show text and visual representation as one.<sup>8</sup> Because ritual is usually

divided into material symbolism and literary allegory, the narrative is performed in the action, which relies on the cognitive understanding of symbolism and the demonstrative act involving and pressing on the senses. Fletcher (1970:179-180) comments that allegorical language is referred to as “‘paradeigma’, ‘figura’, ‘typos’, ‘schema’, all [having] strong visual connotations”. In religious ceremonies, as I have shown, we understand the necessity of both the rite (liturgy) and the ritual action in supporting each other. In art the use of visual ‘schema’ for the understanding of intended meaning is similar to the use of allegory in language.

In the work *Table Cloth* (Figure 6), the crucifix embossed on the unleavened bread speaks of sacrifice and so, from our interaction with it, resurrection. In art, by utilising the signs of religion, artists, in my opinion, tap into words (literature) and visual signs/conventions to convey semantic content that reaches out toward the broad social concerns for the need for transformation and preservation in society.

*Table Cloth* (Figures 7a & b & 8) is made of 6 200 unleavened communion bread rounds attached with metal s-links. Each bread-round is embossed with the crucifix and four holes were pierced in each, which was then carefully and obsessively joined with the others into a tablecloth. Because every single communion-bread was pierced four times, the embossed figure of Christ on this same work (Figure 7a & b) recalls more than the piercing of his body on the cross. The process becomes a transcendental experience in which the physically precise, controlled and careful action forces a cognitive stimulation of the unconscious, thus provoking memory and an uninhibited flow of ideas. Similar to the concept of stigmata in religious iconography, this piercing action, as if it were performed on one’s own unconscious, brings to the fore the idea that a repetitive process can provoke memory and the marking of each individual with his or her own unique mental scarring. Ritual therefore also becomes a means of preserving memory.<sup>9</sup> Fletcher (1970:180) affirms that the visual characteristics of allegory are reduced to a sort of diagrammatic form or impression (e.g. ‘emblema’, ‘impresa’). Similarly, the sign made on the child’s head during baptism illustrates the symbolic gesture of ‘marking’ the child, thereby giving him or her a unique identity of being sacrificed, and simultaneously resurrected, with holy water.

The work *Table Cloth* explores the narrative of the eucharist (Last Supper), but also embraces the everyday family table that symbolises re-union on a daily basis, while the cloth structure connotes a playful association with the building of puzzles. In the context of South Africa, the table has become symbolic of the conversation, conversion and transformation of cultural and political viewpoints. The significance of the image, the object and the material, bread, go far beyond mere symbolism. The degree and depth of the concept of nourishment in this work stretches further than the religious act of partaking of communion, reaching the reality of hunger and the necessity for learning (mental nourishment), for emotional well-being and for spirituality as the means of survival. The association with unleavened or unprocessed (unrisen) bread as an inert sign, or image, illustrates the creation and metamorphosis of significance as it is drawn from the static ‘word’ (rite) and then becomes associated with the ‘image’ (ceremony), and thus symbolic of the ceremony of the Last Supper. When this particular work was placed in the *Stellenbosch University Gallery* in Dorp Street, a former church, it fluctuated between being art object and a conceptual sign with religious intent, drawing on the site as a context of conversion. The site of this former church might be regarded as carrying a political stigma from the days when Church and State were one, but today, as a gallery, in the New South Africa, it reflects the redemption of political change and therefore transformation. The interaction between the reversal of the site into its previous use, through the intervention of my work, and the space in the current South African context of transformation created a dialogue between the object and its space, further alluding to preservation of space and memory, as the table became a symbol of the interaction. The action of placing my work in the church speaks of replacement (re-conciliation) and renewal (similar to the storing of soap in the ready coffin).

## **Simulacrum: Objects of Ritual - Religion and Art**

Although liturgy implores us to view religious beliefs with reason, a complete absence of symbolic objects and ceremonial acts of signification would result in misunderstanding. For example, during the ministry of John the Baptist the religious narrative of baptism was re-enacted and demonstrated physically by the washing of the head or body, and, in this instance, made clear by the use of signs, gestures and symbols, though these gestures are still grounded in ideology. Suzanne Preston Blier (1996:194-195) suggests that related contradictions between objects and symbols are confusing and contradictory subjects that inspire artists to re-create and unravel their contents.

Ritual serves to some extent as a means of both heightening the differences between the 'ordinary' and the 'strange' and helping to resolve inherent contradictions between the two. Related contradictions serve as an important impetus for artistic expression with artists seeking to create a sense of order (rationally and logically) out of conditions characterised more generally by features of confusion and contradiction.

In this section the theories surrounding the signification of art objects, the role of ritual and how the materials in art acquire significance are investigated. For example, my sculpted soap vessels titled *Fonts* (Figure 9) presume an identity of cleansing. The title directs signification towards the idea of the baptismal font. As objects that are not real (neither a real font nor one usable as a vessel), nor copies, I would like to propose that the sculptures titled *Font* are simulacra.

In a paper on simulacra, Michael Camille (1996:31) describes their formulation, rejection and re-formation from Plato<sup>10</sup> to Deleuze. He informs us of the threat posed by the simulacrum to the idea of representation in art history because 'it subverts the cherished dichotomy of model and copy, original and reproduction, image and likeness'. For, he explains:

While the mimetic image has been celebrated as an affirmation of the real, the simulacrum has been denigrated as its negation. As an image without a model. Lacking that crucial dependence upon resemblance or similitude, the simulacrum is a false claimant to being which calls into question the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented. (Camille 1996:31.)

In 1967, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze reinstated the term ‘simulacrum’, indicating that it does not have a claim on being a copy, nor does it contain resemblance.<sup>11</sup> Camille acknowledges Deleuze’s rejection of the catechism that inspired Platonism, stating his reason: ‘... God made man in his image and resemblance. Through sin, however, man lost his resemblance while maintaining the image. We have all become simulacra. We have forsaken moral existence in order to enter into aesthetic existence.’ (Deleuze 1990:257, cited in Camille 1996:33.)

Yet Deleuze’s subversion of the Platonic hierarchies failed to create aesthetics in which the unique, the ideal, and the numinous remained standing. Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulation (cited in Camille 1996:38) also returned to the Platonic dichotomy, only to reverse it. Artworks become simulations that project fantasy and desire. The dangerous aspect of this return to the Platonic dichotomy suggested that everything could be, as Baudrillard<sup>12</sup> states, ‘no longer a question of imitation, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real self. ... Illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible.’ (Cited in Camille 1996:38.)

My opinion, however, on this isolation of objects is that they are usually determined by their function and an object made or designed as ‘prototype’ today, in an era of production, is singled out as unique and every other is a copy or reproduction. Therefore, I do not agree that objects in their re-creation are simulacra. I find it is impossible in art to separate the liturgy (text) from the object itself. For example, the unleavened bread-rounds of the work titled *Table Cloth* (Figure 5) are reproduced in the thousands. However, in the signification process of the ceremonies, each individual piece (round) serves as a unique symbol of forgiveness. It is both the idea and the associated likeness that signifies the specific object as meaningful. In contrast, by placing art into an autonomous space, the idea behind the work as process (mimesis) is brought to the fore, without interference from the direct context of site.

In the exhibition space of the annex, as suggested earlier, the four works *Gib Uns Heute Unser Tägliches Brot*, *Blümeln*, *Font I* and *Font IV* are removed from the direct reference to the church space. These soap objects take on an identity of

wanting autonomy and their exclusive connotations to biblical symbols and signs could be seen as nihilistic. They could be identified as copies or casts of delineated, idealised shapes or forms. However, the material soap and the metamorphosis that occurs as the soap reacts to the environment over time (as we can see in comparing Figure 10a to Figure 10b (both *Font I*)) distinguishes these objects, for example, from precious, timeless, iconic sculptures and ceremonial objects usually made of stone and marble. This sculptural vessel *Font III* (Figure 11a & b), being real and identifiable by its form, cannot be distinguished as a copy. The font sculptures, as representations, assume an identity, by their materiality and their titles, even in their total re- or de-formation. *Font I*, for instance, through time and lack of human contact, divided itself, as if sliced with a knife, into three perfect sections.

In the process of making art, the term simulacrum emphasises the relation between the viewer and the object. This relation must be understood as ‘what an object is, materially’ and ‘what it may seem to be’. The latter indulges the formation of signification. Objects of art are, therefore, objects of the imagination, escaped from the real. They move between ‘introjection and projection, of desire as well as fear, liberating the object from any dependence upon the regimes of the eye or text’ (Camille 1996:41).

Camille (1996:43) holds that while ‘rewriting the history of art in simulacral terms seems dangerous, envisioning its future is even more problematic and perhaps best left for writers of science fiction to make into reality’ but we, as artists, will surely still continue to ‘grapple with things as well as ideas, materials and not only recycled images’. For this reason, I see the process of art as a ritual that in order to create and substantiate artworks with significance, moves within our reference of material existence and its association to memories.

The performance of making the soap fonts, cooking the fat and churning the emulsion, became, for me, the simulation of ritual between the body and the senses. It recalls a cultural tradition when the psychological being lived closer to nature and when change was more sensuously felt, physically and spiritually. This performance, therefore, became a felt experience, simulating not an illusion, but in Deleuze’s term, a ‘whole realm of “sensations”’ (cited in Camille 1996:41).

In conclusion, the title *Font* given to the soap vessels gains significance within the framework of structuralism, since its content and context refer to a science of cultural conventions and the language of ‘mark and sign, trace or omen’ (Appigananesi 1998:64), all of which are included in the sculptural technique of carving, scratching and scraping as metaphorical impressions that ‘scar’ our unconscious memory and are recalled as images or substitutions for emotions, intellect, experience and memory.<sup>13</sup>

In the two previous sections, I have tried to show that art, particularly sculpture, through ritual, foregrounds our spiritual nature as humans, lying as it does between the conscious human mind (reasoned and rational) and the mostly unconscious human nature (connected to the sensibility of the world). In discussing the process of signification of my sculptures, and comparing them with religious symbols and their liturgy, these objects gained meaning through the signification of the materials used, by association with our sensuous involvement with them. Moreover, the discussion of the concept of simulacrum, in the context of theorising about these works, led to questioning how signification occurs and how language supports the symbolic use of materials. Therefore, in the process of making art and simultaneously understanding one’s actions and signifying the work, this ritual becomes a unifying experience of creating meaning with the binary oppositions of acting out (a ceremony), or an unconscious expression, that which is changing and erratic (*transitus*), and building structures of theoretical meaning (boundedness and similitude). Through the ritualistic process of making art as a ritual, the interaction of the artist with his/her material and its symbolic and spiritual association places both artist and viewer in relation to his or her own memories and experiences, as well as to the objects released from the unconscious concerns that move us most.

Ritual, in furnishing the structural guidelines in our daily lives, becomes a specific trace of identity. Therefore, ritual, as a guide in art, functions to organise signification, passing between allegory and myth, where the mind substitutes memories of fantasy, longing and desire with memories and objects.

## Ritual and the Realisation of the Self-Conscious

This section explores how my work becomes a ritualistic performance through repetition of the action of making and carving soap. This process of soap making, once a part of the fabric of society, is today only a product that exists in the daily ritual of washing our own bodies (cleaning) or our garments. In the process of carving the fonts and using water to gradually smooth and shape their inner cavities, I was reminded of the ritual of washing the body before burial. The careful ‘washing’, and thereby carving, of the soap created an interaction between my body’s action and the vessel, which echoed the thought centring on the nurturing capabilities of women, who made soap to preserve and heal the body.

Deeply imbedded in the context of the material significance is my body’s assertion as a primary vehicle for expression, which substantiates the physical process of making as a part of the work’s immanent sense of transformation. It is less an attempt to relate significance to the form, than to designate this ritualistic act as a manner of bringing self-consciousness to the fore. My aim is to show that making art is a process of self-analysis and self-discovery. Art becomes a means of trying to understand our function and our connection with the world in which we live.<sup>14</sup>

Benjamin, according to Sigrid Weigel (1996:4) in *Body- Image Space: re-reading Walter Benjamin*, developed the ‘concept of action in which thoughts become embodied *in actu* -’. By this, he explains, that the body- and image-space, as thinking and acting, would combine and become one with the world as ‘universal and integral’. In the act of making art, the object demands time and contemplation. My sculptures represent the transition from an emotional state (as tragic art) to that which contains the exhilaration of relief.<sup>15</sup> The ‘font’ as wish-font (in which one throws coins for good luck) can be read as a mnemonic symbol (*Erinnerungs-symbol*), as Weigel (1996:11) calls it. In my work, the font as a metaphor for projected memory becomes an object of tragedy, yet one of exhilaration, as the ritual process of forming the shape of these vessels became a re-formation and re-recollection of my memories – a ‘resurrection’ in point. Weigel discusses Freud’s focus on ‘bodies, things, commodities, monuments, topography’, which Benjamin also saw as ‘wish-symbols’ and as the

materialisation of collective memory. The baptismal font is, without doubt, a wish-symbol and by making it from soap, I have tried to em-body its form (vessel) by using matter (soap) that holds the same central significance of cleansing and healing. Weigel (1996:11) maintains that, by ‘restoring matter to its central significance for psychoanalysis’, the ‘means of expression of a language of the unconscious’ is also restored.

To illustrate this point, for Joseph Beuys, ‘movement’ as a form of language or liturgy represented a symbol of mental and physical construction and, therefore, of art. Ritual, as encoded movement, contains the total understanding of the significance of the object, the body and the mind, which includes emotions and intuitions, unseen or seen only in ritual. Animals, for Beuys, were important: they represented true intuition, skill and a connection with the spirit of the natural world and were, therefore, untouched by civilisation and technology (Adriani 1979:36). For Beuys, the archetypal representation of such an animal was the hare, which became the principle image of movement and unity, because it burrows itself into the earth and becomes one with it. Beuys saw, as the principle motion that associated life and death, the dualism between nature (to hunt) and spirit (not to hunt) in the movement of hunting or being hunted. In the “*Euroasian*” story (Figure 12) and in *How to explain pictures to a dead hare* (Figure 13a, b & c), the hare, as a performative tool that signifies transformation through the eye of the beholder, becomes the image for wholeness.

In order to understand how the process of making art and signifying it creates a discursive space, I had to unbundle the distinctive features that form the theoretical framework of my art. In this process I realised the difficulty of identifying the works in terms of signifiers and signifieds, because every material transformation and action involved introduced a shift. I had to separate from and then reconnect with the rational influence and conceptualisation of an artwork (including technique) and the irrational felt experience (personal motivation), which often gives the greatest inspiration for making a work (mostly intuitive)<sup>16</sup>.

Merleau-Ponty (1974:238) writes about a separating and analysing evaluation and remarks on the difficulty of this kind of fragmentation, on the grounds that philosophical thought articulates as ontological reciprocity:

I started from unified experience and from that acquired in a secondary way consciousness of a unifying activity, when, taking up an analytical attitude, I break up perception into qualities and sensations, and when in order to recapture on the basis of these the object into which I was in the first place blindly thrown, I am obliged to suppose an act of synthesis, which is merely the counterpart of analysis.

The self-analysis that led me to question my choice of form and the intuitive decision-making involved indicated that the process of making soap, and so the process of making art, found a personal connection within the sphere of a larger social concern. The physical transformation of fat and lye into soap was narrated into a recipe (quoted above) that describes the process as a logical, progressive act. I realised my art was, similarly, telling me a story about my own memories and influences. The introduction of ritual whose purpose it is to unite the distinction between object (signified) and liturgy (signifier), is, in art, similar to that in religion. How this process of signification occurs in art is my principal interest here, taking us into the physiological realm that exists between the body and mind.

As an artist, one's concerns and social consciousness are integrated into one's artwork and are joined to the physiognomy of being by one's reactions to experience, which creates metaphors.<sup>17</sup> The connection of my sculptures to the human body also alludes to the questions of the similarities and distinctions between the concepts of nature and nurture. Therefore, the movement between the body and the mind in making sculpture is, symbolically, a process of working on oneself. In metaphorically linking my sculptures to the bearing and nurturing capacity of women, for instance, the font becomes a symbol for a woman's nature. She has within her the potential for change and can therefore be signified by the concept of conversion. This type of metaphor could be called anthropomorphic, in that a conflation/an exchange of the man/woman with the work of art, and its reverse, can occur. And it is this exchange that I want to address here. Just as the roles between 'nature' and 'nurture' cannot be divided into signifier and signified, since their relationship is intertwined, so, ideas and objects in

artworks inform one another and release some discovery of either the work or its maker or spectator.

Preziosi (1989:109) conveys this idea of the Vasarian framework which stated that ‘there was a conflation of the man-and-his-work with the-man-as-a-work (of art) and that the converse was implicated – the artwork was like a man. And like the man, the work was entelechal – containing a vital force; a temple of the Spirit.’ Paul Crowther (1993:170-171) also establishes this kind of relationship in the process of making art between the internal dialogue with oneself and the artefact.

Similarly, as in the religious experiences of baptism or the eucharist, purification of the self is attainable by being self-analytical. In my work, the action of soap making became an obsessive act. It brought to the fore a personal need for a certain redemption and highlighted the context of the communal search for restitution that we are all concerned with in South Africa. Crowther (1993:46-47) refers to this awareness of one’s context as forming a part of a reflective awareness of the nature of the human condition and as ‘[a] moving revelation and celebration of the enigma of embodied consciousness’, that he declares is an ‘empathic experience’. He states that this ‘marks the logical extreme of all human self-awareness, in that the only way beyond it is to invoke communion with a transcendental reality, [that is] religious experience’.

In this theoretical sequence, I have tried to mirror the sequence of soap making and my signification of it by discussing the interconnectedness between soap making, material, body, mind and consciousness. In my quest to find how physical and mental events are connected, I gained insight from Taine (cited in Preziosi 1989:89), whose philosophical theory asserts that the ‘mental component of thinking is composed of signs ...’. Taine argued ‘that these are not different events but rather a single event known under two different aspects’. He observed that ‘as soon as they are reduced to a single event with two aspects, it is clear that they are like the *verso* and *recto* of a surface, and that the presence or absence of one incontrovertibly entails that of the other ...’. This intuitive relationship with the signified object recalls the inner spirit that Crowther (1993:80) refers to as the ‘anonymous Other’. Similarly, with alchemy and its relationship to the embodiment of ‘Spirit’ (Hegel)<sup>18</sup>, this anonymous Other

was the manner in which the incomprehensible reactions were seen as mysterious, but understood as a process of conversion. They, therefore, related these sensuous materials to the symbols of religious conversion. Although we often fail to understand why rituals are performed, in our quest as existential persons, we try to find some kind of meaning that situates us in time and space and fills our activities with significance. The need to monumentalise an event also gives rise to the idea of re-memoration and redemption from memory as a form of ultimate experience, giving hope in the depths of loss and calamity. However, tactile materials surround us, impacting on us visually and reminding us of our own physical disintegration and of the ever-changing environment and the insignificance of humans. This may be why we create monuments.

Having seen that mind and object are two facets of the making and interpreting process, we can move into the shared signs that we understand as significant and as representing an awareness of social-consciousness and culture in art making.

The soap sculptures are, first and foremost, autonomous objects, after which we assign them visual metaphors drawn from objects (such as soap and vessels) used in everyday ritual. Then, these mimetic works, with the indication of their titles, serve as symbols for ritualistic purging. The soap mimics the natural processes of life and death, decay and renewal that are reflected in the opposing dualities that are highlighted in both form and reference to baptism, which promises eternal life for the baptised. The religious message of salvation through baptism is made clear by the addition of the title '*Font*'. My work attempts to bring about a catharsis of the emotions. Its allegorical 'message' communicates the need for some kind of redemption (spiritual, moral, personal and aesthetic). Degenaar (1986:14) observes that, when images of tragic art are related to appearances and they become symbols that can be directly drawn from reality, art 'builds a bridge between illusion and reality, between images and the meaning of life'.

The soap fonts represented as church vessels, can be construed as having a multiplicity of associations. By their title, their specific association with baptism creates a mental representation and physical reconnection (through the senses). The association with re-invention and re-possession recalls the similar role of social

commentary in art, which forms a semantic and syntactic code between memory and representation. Foucault, cited in Weigel (1996:39), remarks:

The world is covered with signs that must be deciphered, and those signs, which reveal resemblances and affinities, are, in themselves, no more than forms of similitude. To know must therefore be to interpret: to find a way from the visible mark to that which is being said by it and which, without that mark, would lie like *unspoken speech, dormant within things*.

The process of making art by drawing on religious ritual has, although specific to the Christian doctrine, opened my eyes to the rituals in other cultures that contain similar signification processes, as well as to the integration of many traditions, such as the carving depicting the Saint Figure (Toni Malau) (Figure 14). A sculpture such as that of Nkisi Nkondi (plural Minkisi) (Figure 15 & 16) of the Congo and the religious iconographic painting of St. Sebastain are both similar in their representation of stigmata. The sculpture, according to Robin Poyner (2001:366) in a discussion on the art of the western Congo Basin, informs us that these objects were used in ritual practices to provoke the ‘spirit’ of a guardian, whom they believed would protect the owner and family who housed it. John Mack, in his essay titled ‘Fetish? Magic Figures in Central Africa’, describes the belief that the ‘spirit’ was commemorated by a nail being driven, on a daily basis, into the sculpture’s body, thus ensuring the preservation of its memory. The ‘spirit’ would return this gesture by protecting the family (Sheldon 1995:60).

W.J.T. Mitchell, in *Iconology, Image, Text, Ideology* (1986:8), points to the iconographic ideals of religious and symbolic images as containing ‘ideological mystification’. This he maintains, we must consider as a form of language; the image we should see as a ‘sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation’<sup>19</sup>.

The process of finding what my works signify led me to reach an understanding of the ‘signs’ I was making, within a diverse cultural orientation, and then further into a process of self-analysis. The ritual of making the sculptural *fonts* served for me as a self-reflexive and re-inventive search for the re-creation of my own identity in terms

of remaking the vessels over and over, almost as if meditating on a fictional destiny and trying obsessively to re-create that which has been lost and could only be recalled through recollection. Blier's (1996:195) formulation of ritual asserts that it 'make[s] the irrational seem not only viable and operable, but also understandable'. Crowther (1993:153) claims that, in making artefacts of significance for rite and ritual, the focus on personal interests and social interchange 'involves a deepening of self-consciousness' and a 'functional significance'. My soap sculptures, as visual expressions of my search for identity, have, through the ritual of self-analysis, brought about a change in self-consciousness, which, it appears, is necessary for my survival in psychological terms.

The work *Font VI* (Figure 17), carved with a 'lip', represents the image of a mortar<sup>20</sup> which, as a symbol of medicine, becomes a metaphor for the self-conscious expression of healing. The 'lip', as an extension, acts as the 'outlet' that art initiates for me, both physically and psychologically.<sup>21</sup> In another of the soap sculptures (Figure 18), their forms evoke an immediate visual association with the form of a loaf of bread. In this process of synthesis and analysis, in finding the origin of these forms and in finding a reference to what they 'mean', their tactility and appeal to the sense of touch and smell emphasise the homemade aspects of both soap and bread. By contrast, the slightly rounded forms, with the intricately carved detail (Figure 19) of cultivated hybrid orchids, seem transported out of industrial production into an ethereal, fleetingness of nature and beauty.

The fragility of these flowers again brings the dichotomy of life and death to mind and forms links with the soap in its process of decay and disintegration. The German word *vergehen*, means to 'pass, slip away; elapse; vanish; disappear; be lost; waste; wear out; pass away; perish'. A characteristic of soap is its transience and the fact that its very nature requires it to dissolve into the larger cosmos, just like a flower, or even the physical body. The German words, *verblumen* and *verblühen*, seem to illustrate the irony of the ambiguity in the symbolic image of women being flowers (*blumen*), while the female body was traditionally required to be covered (*verblumen*) – hidden from view. The forms of flowers carved into the soap, like the vessel itself as a female form, illustrate the ability of women to become the 'hybrids' of their society. By this I mean that they have the ability to 'blossom' in all aspects of life.

The sculpted loaves (echoing the blocks carved in the concentration camps) are odes to mothers, nurses<sup>22</sup>, doctors, teachers and all who deal with the everlasting struggle of nurturing and healing. If our gaze centres on the flower (*blumen*) and the vessel as reproductive in function, the word *verblumen* means, in allegorical language, to veil, cover or disguise. These soap loaves emphasise neither life nor death, but what Dickhoff (2000:83) calls ‘life-death in one single thought, in one single image’.

According to Adriani (1979:213), Beuys used the rose to explain the relationship of evolution and revolution: ‘[t]he “rose is a revolution in reference to its genesis” and the blossom is a revolution in relation to the leaves and stem; although it grows in the organic transformation, the rose as a blossom is only possible through this organic evolution’. For Beuys, art has to go through an evolutionary process rather than a revolutionary upheaval. This supports the view of Germano Celant (cited in Stiles 1996:664), who holds that, ‘[t]o create art, then, one identifies with life and to exist takes on the meaning of re-inventing at every moment a new fantasy, pattern of behaviour, aestheticism, etc. of one’s own life’.

In his performances, *America likes me and I like America* (Figure 20a, b & c), *Eurasia* (Figure 21) and *Celtic* (Figure 22a, b & c), Beuys used visual movement to relate to the consciousness. He represented himself as a shaman who, in a mythical connection with animals, re-unites the intuitive praxis (magic/spirit) with our distorted human existence of cultural history, economics, sociology and politics. In using ritualistic actions, Beuys paralleled the processes of unifying a creative existence with the intellect, forms of sensitivity and intuition (Adriani 1979:163-169). Handke (Adriani 1979:195) explains that when the ‘result’ or immediate image, sound and experience of such a performance are removed from the audience, a *wish image*<sup>23</sup> is formed by the particular strength of the human or animal image. He further states that, in memory, this ‘after image’ is ‘burned’ into the spectator and then ‘works on oneself’,<sup>24</sup> provoking nostalgia and activating our own thoughts.

Ritual as an action serves to elicit change and, in art, becomes an indicator of mimesis as it tracks events, commenting on their impact on the world. However, in a similar way, it tracks the personal changes that inform our very identity. Such transformations are usually those which inspire us as artists so that our work becomes

enwrought with the inherent 'spirit' of mimesis. According to Hegel, this spirit of mimesis is self-consciousness that becomes unified through the interaction of the 'ostensibly Other' (Crowther 1993:120). Ritual, as Fletcher (1970:175) reiterates, is the continual battle of juxtapositions and conflicting elements and its function is to try to unify these in the process of making art. My obsession with soap became a way to deal with conflicting inner ideas about the validity of life and death, love and suffering. Fletcher (1970:175) holds that the rhythmic encoding<sup>25</sup> of the gesture – washing – can illustrate the allegorical intent. This motion of washing has hypnotic qualities through its repetitive, monotonous movement; it is similar to the trance one goes into when carving a soap object, such as a font (Figure 23a & b). This out-of-body thinking-time, when one's eyes look inward, strongly opposes the heightened awareness of the change in sensuous material. The duality of emotion and non-emotion again places the work in the mimetic field, where it is poised between thesis, antithesis and synthesis.<sup>26</sup>

By creating the fonts and making the soap from animal fat, I have touched on the idea of death and stagnation, through van der Waal-Braaksma's narrated account<sup>27</sup> of soap as a cultural and social ritual. The change, from an oral tradition to a written semiotic account of ritual, becomes a symbolic 'resurrection' of memory. In making the soap from scratch, the physical labour of stirring was also symbolic for re-creating this physical ritual and recalling its memory. The transformation of the lye and fat, therefore, became the sensuous manifold<sup>28</sup> of soap. This symbolic recollection of ritual and memory suggests the connection between mind and body.<sup>29</sup>

To sum up: I have tried to indicate that, by using symbolically significant forms in sculpture, the socio-historical, material, personal and cultural associations all become signs seminal to our understanding of why we make art objects and where these forms originate from. Ritual, as a process of making art, lays bare a multitude of patterns of signification. Moreover, it introduces the idea of signifier and signified in the dualities between work as artist/spectator or as spectator/artist, and reveals that the mental and physical aspects of signification become one event transferred by an anonymous 'Other' or 'Spirit', which includes memory. The movement or displacement of signification is one of change. Change as a function of art reveals the transformation in social and personal contexts. The baptismal connotation of the

vessel as ritual object elicits the concept of transformation, either on an emotional level or as a symbol of personal change. Fletcher and Crowler reinforce the notion of transference of significance as a unifying experience concerning object and gesture, as in ritual. Their theory has supported my argument here in substantiating the interaction of mind and body as constituting a deepening sense of self-consciousness. This process creates an awareness of broader social concerns that may be a reflection of our own.

I came to the realisation that the strangest subjects (images seemingly unrelated and ideas oddly juxtaposed) reveal new connections and new significations, uncovering deep reservations or concerns in a personal, psychological or social context. My sculptures and their progressive deconstruction of signification became a structured liturgy, in which sensuous material and gesture of the mimetic together form a semiotic relationship between reason and the numinous, or mysterious spirit as a part of the self-consciousness which exists within the metaphysics of making sense of the world.<sup>30</sup>

Though the formulation of this thesis came after I had made most of my sculptures, the realisation that I was working within the frame of recollection, re-invention and reconciliation with the self (myself) and memory (my own memories) pointed to the intrinsic relationship existing between the concept of conversion and material, body and mind and, thereby, to an awakening of self-consciousness. In the context of my work, the rational and irrational signification between object and subject in religion are utilised to find the similarities in the signification process in art. Ritual aided this process by allowing the distinction between rite and the action of signifying, and then, the reconnection between the two, to recreate a logical containment and understanding of how signification can occur.<sup>31</sup> I have touched on the physiological interaction with, and the literary signification of, the object and the action, objects and significance, body as work, work as body, signified and signifier. It is this interaction that I discuss further, with respect to the image-word relationship in signifying artworks.

## **Rite and Signification: A discussion on the work titled ‘Soapbread’ (Figure 24)**

In this final section of Chapter One I aim, in a discussion of the specific artwork titled *Soapbread*, to explore the signification that occurs between rite and liturgy to form a whole concept. This draws on a similar relationship that occurs in semiotics in which ‘Words [are] the sensible Marks of Ideas’ (Locke cited in Preziosi 1989:99).

This section explores how the process of ritual becomes the bearer of mysterious containment<sup>32</sup> and makes the connections between the sensuous material and the words used in my sculpture (similar to those in religious ritual, between rite and ceremony). This idea is premised on the awareness that ritual is a social construct of communication. Art, therefore, by using the concept of ritual, may also draw on these understood conventions.

When one is making art, the above process of analysis can bring about an awakening of one’s self-consciousness and can cause one to re-question or highlight why one finds so much security in ritual. The work *Soapbread* (Figure 24), for instance, comprises several soap loaves, on each of which is embossed a word of the Lord’s Prayer. My aim in focusing on this sculpture is to investigate conceptual and semiotic signs that appear to become interchangeable. This exchange highlights the main concept of conversion and stimulates a discussion on the conceptual idea of nourishment contained within the work, for example, that of ‘daily bread’ and the eucharist to which it refers.

Here I discuss Donald Preziosi’s paper titled, ‘A Coy Science’ which examines, from a historical perspective, the transformation of language in which material and sign were not distinguished from each other. In my work, this relationship becomes a symbolic synthesis. By discussing Preziosi’s view on signification and representations, and the theory he refers to as ‘the problem of the Eucharist’, my intention is to show how art is signified in a similar way. Signification functions as a communicative tool: for the artwork to mean and the spectator to come up with an

interpretation is, for the artist, to draw on signs that occur between the complexity of reading, association and recollection of memory.

This aim involves a discussion on the notions of signs and how the complex chain of intended meaning and art object coincide.<sup>33</sup> I look at how the material object, as sign, and the discourse on words simultaneously reassert the distinction of the sensible and the intelligible, but most importantly at the fact that signification between them is brought about through a corporeality that we infer from their concepts.

In the previous section I discussed the '*transitus*' of ritual as the movement between the process of making and the act of giving symbolic significance to the object made, as if summoning it to a self-consciousness or 'spirit', which is what occurs in religious ceremony. In this section, I attempt to show how the use of language (visual and of text), as in liturgy, is interchangeable and able to establish a 'mental', ordered synthesis of the symbolic sense data. Fletcher and Crowler, in their examination of material phenomena as an allegory for thought and memory impressions, have assisted me in formulating the idea of signification. Weigel substantiates the idea that, in writing, the lost mimetic gift is held as a 'flash' within symbolism. The final purpose here is to substantiate the idea that the transference of concepts and ideas from material to language, in ritual and rite, are an integral part of a simulation using memory images.

Here it is important for me to discuss my personal motivation for making the sculpted *Fonts* and *Soapbreads* (Figure 25). Besides my personal attraction to the vessel form, my recollection of holiday breakfasts brings to mind the image of my Grandfather offering his round wooden bread plate to each member of the family. On the edge was carved '*Gib Uns Heute Unser Täglichs Brot*' – 'Give Us Today Our Daily Bread'. This object, even after his death, still brings back the warm, secure feelings of these occasions. My Grandfather's 'aura' suggested someone who was grand, stately and secure – to me his very presence was nourishing. I always identified closely with him, thus it is perhaps self-evident that my sculpture is often inspired by his influence.

The bread-shaped sculptures titled *Soapbread* or *Seifenbrot* (Figure 26), with the words *Gib Uns Heute Unser Täglichses Brot* embossed on each loaf, the bread-form of the material as medium of expression (soap as bread) and the title or language (a shared signifier between the form of language and title ‘*Soapbread*’), fuse allegorically into the daily (*Täglichses*) act of saying the Lord’s Prayer (praying) as a secular and personal ritual, and are symbolic, too, of the daily act of washing oneself. The significance of this work refers also to the daily ritual of eating (taking in nourishment for both body and mind) within a family environment. For the devout Christian every meal has the potential to become a symbolic re-enactment of the Last Supper and of the memory of Christ’s promise<sup>34</sup>. The act of the eucharist, to which this alludes, is in itself a metaphor, through the construction of gesture (drawn from the visual world) and language (rite).

In the process of making and casting the soap for this work, these words became a visual part of the form, as they were embossed onto the side of the soapbreads (Figure 25). The rite or the text and the gesture become one image, therefore relating to each other physically through transformation, by both the chemical conversion and the meaning of the words themselves that indicate a spiritual conversion in faith. The forms of the soap loaves were cast in bread-baking trays,<sup>35</sup> in which the transformation from liquid emulsion to the form of a bread loaf took place. This action of ‘curing’ the soap points symbolically to the conversion of the sinful body into a clean or holy body as demonstrated in the title *Soapbread* and recalls again the ritual of the eucharist. This then reiterates the symbolic idea of the eucharist, in that the bread physically *becomes* the body of Christ. The words cast into the soap-breads have physically become a part of the functionality of the soap as cleaning agent and as a prayer, and symbolically a visual *recto verso* of these two signs. Preziosi (1989:85) declares that an artwork is an ‘individual *parole* [spoken language], and the disciplinary mission in its deepest sense [is] to uncover the essence of its underlying *langue*’. To place this investigation of representation and signification into context, I must shortly outline the philosophical discussion that has led to Preziosi’s use of the eucharist as a model for this investigation. But first it is necessary to refer to the exhibition of my art in the University Gallery, Dorp Street.

When I planned the layout of my art works for the exhibition, the fonts, in their autonomy as vessels, required the context of the ‘church’-space, whereas the *Soapbread* (Figure 24) forms were laid out on the floor of the annex. This distinction in space between the works titled *Font* and those titled *Soapbread* reflects the movement from the semantic environment of the church to the more secular space of the gallery, illuminating its religious content alone. In ‘reading’ or interpreting work, Preziosi (1989:83) states, we place it into a ‘discursive space as an essentially communicative token’. So, the very ‘placing’ of works furthers their significance.

In this reflection on the symbolic significance of showing and viewing my body of sculptures in the contextual space of the church, with its biblical connotations, the concept of conversion shifts these artworks into the study of semiotics. By symbolic signification, the artworks are transformed into an analogue, having a larger context. The liturgy that supports these objects acts as an informant, telling how this particular work presents or fulfils its function, entailing both gesture and literature that support the ritual. My interest here lies in how the ‘spiritual movement’ that I have discussed in the previous section, as ‘spirit’ or self-consciousness, is provoked by the gesture itself. In examining *Soapbread* (Figure 26), I wish to look at the diversification of significance embedded in text, cast form and material, and consider how this is ‘released’ for us to understand it as a symbolic message, as opposed to concrete functionalism or documentation. This section looks at how the creative process in art becomes a ritual of signification by juxtaposing images, materials and language (rite), all of which are used to create a narrative.

According to Preziosi (1989:96), debates during the seventeenth-century surrounded the problem of the origins of nature, man and of the human language and the relationship between words and things. This had obvious ramifications for the church and for royalty, since ‘human languages were construed as divinely inspired, rather than human or social conventions’.<sup>36</sup>

John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Preziosi (1989:97) states, voiced his opinion against this essentialist view that language was divinely inspired. He maintained ‘words are about ideas, not about things ...’ (cited in Preziosi 1989:97). How communication and understanding occurs between signs is what he

termed *semeiotike*. Locke (cited in Preziosi 1989:98) states ‘all claims to truth [should] be argued’ and this inherently negated ideas on essentialist and absolute ideas of religion and ideology, for example, and what we today understand as the *symbols* used by the church in its ceremonies. This introduces the idea of social consciousness and cultural sign systems<sup>37</sup>. The ‘mysterium’ of religious objects that maintains a certain divinity or infinity asks for acknowledgement in the form of signs which contain an ‘innerness’ beyond the meaning of words.

The meaning of physical material in ritual, such as unleavened bread, cannot exist apart from its linguistic support. As metaphors for each other, or as a linguistic sign, the concept of bread becomes composed as a ‘murky mental *signifié* (or signified)’. Preziosi (1989:89) continues by saying that the artwork is invariably linked to the significant (or signifier) which is the duality of the sculpted object as both ‘*recto* and the *verso*’, as if on either side of a surface or of the same object or word. The word *Brot* is therefore placed in direct relationship to the object’s form and material tactility. The image of action (between material object – unleavened bread – and the gesture of eating it in the ceremony) cannot be isolated from this thought. The concept of nourishment (of bread) integrally supports the function of the action, whether it is religious or, as in my work, a personal significance regarding the art making process. In rituals, the thought process must physically be supported by the action. The action is therefore a sign that is an important psychic entity in the ritual process. Here I look specifically at the verbal language (the role of liturgy) in my art; the relationship between the text as image and as sign, with reference to interpreting my work. Taine (cited in Preziosi 1989:90) lays accent on the notion that the ‘full significance of the artwork (like that of a word) involve[s] its functions in a system of cultural signs’.

The duality that exists in ritual, between gesture and rite, occurs similarly in language, as *langue* and *parole*. Preziosi (1989:90) points out that material must be studied in a given state, so that the ‘social, collective language is distinct, but yet an integral part with that of the individual manifestation ... [occurring] in the *parole*’. The representation of the mark left by the chisel’s carving, scratching and scraping on the soap sculptures, is an individual mark and similarly a metaphor for *parole* (an idea discussed further in Chapter Two on memory). Text and writing as sign and signature

also fall into the context of personal manifestation of the sign. Taine, according to Preziosi (1989:90), suggests that ‘changes in the cultural system or transformations of its underlying structure are initiated in the *parole*’. My fascination with soap as a cultural object revealed the change that has taken place in our own cultural activities: even this material object has been transformed in both chemical composition and production. Every era’s soap recalls a specific time, place and view of the world, its image remaining within its time of production (Figure 18).<sup>38</sup> In *Soapbreads* (Figure 26) the ‘loaves’ came alive with the carving, as ‘*glyphs*’ or carved text, embossed text that remained dormant until the individual breads were placed next to each other or read consecutively to form a narrative that highlighted the biblical prayer, which evoked the notion that words bear the ideas of something invisible. The relationship between these words and the material of the breads, and the communication that occurs between them, is the point of this discussion.

John Locke, according to Preziosi (1989:97), assumed that language was an inventory of the world of experience and suggests that ‘words’ were ‘about ideas, not about things’.<sup>39</sup> While I do not totally reject Locke’s notion, it seems that his theory ignores the sensuous interaction between thing and word. It is this very interaction that I propose to consider. And the material nature and the connections to ritual and the duality of re-preservation of memory, for example, from the symbolic creation of iconography, memorial sculptures, photographs and smells. Without the physical object that provokes memory through the senses, the past would become speculative and distorted by discussion. In my work, the nature of these distinctive ‘signs’, between the material, the form of the cast loaves and the words embossed on them, is important in understanding these works as a unified idea, re-represented. However, the innate meaning of the material and the appeal to the senses stirs in our consciousness and also influences the way we may (verbally or physically) relate to the work. Nor can the embossed words be separated from their appeal to the senses. As in Braille, reading goes beyond the visual sight and strengthens the use of the other senses, in this instance, the sense of touch.

Locke’s principle which states that language is a social construct asserts ‘that the meaning of a word has nothing to do with its sound and bears no innate relationship to things: “Words ... come to be made use of by Men as the Signs of their Ideas ...”’

(cited in Preziosi 1989: 99). He dismisses the thought that words contain the natural innate relationship to things. This negates any religious connotation or signification and the use of words as symbols in religion.<sup>40</sup> So, as an aspect of reason, Locke (Preziosi 1989:99) states that a '[w]ord is made arbitrarily the Mark of such as Idea'. Therefore, the sensible 'Mark of the Idea' is, as Preziosi (1989:99) formulates, 'proper and immediate Signification'. This, for me, supports the concept of symbolism and allegory, and the strong visual connotation, that entails the mark-making process, be it with pen, pencil, charcoal, by printing or carving, the sensibility of touch and the visual image that is created on the page – or in soap – is a personal mark, and is read as such.<sup>41</sup>

The word '*Brot*' embossed on the soap loaf (Figure 28) is, as an acoustic image, the signifier that carries the idea of nourishment and conversion of the visual form. In the context of religious symbolism, this word becomes the signified thought, referring therefore to the ritual object of the eucharist and the allegorical words – 'the word ... made flesh' – according to St John. As a ceremonial re-enactment, the physicality of the word, as flesh, seems absurd, even barbaric. Therefore the signified thought implores that the reason understand the meaning metaphorically. Blier (1996:194) illustrates the connection between the rational and irrational that occurs in religious ritual:

In rituals of the Eucharist prominent paradoxes ... are displayed. To some scholars, the operative feature of ritual acts is their heightened sense of the ordinary. The primacy of table bread in the celebration of the Mass is a case in point. To others a ritual's power lies in its underlying 'strangeness' (in the Mass, among other things, the potent cannibal trope of bodily consumption).

Appignanesi (1998:64) affirms that Sussure's structural linguistics as a science of signs of cultural conventions has given human actions the ability to signify meaning and therefore become signs.<sup>42</sup> The symbolic order of rite (liturgy), which communicates through 'order of movement and a sense of plan, of metric design, of formula' (Fletcher 1970:178), emphasises the pre-existence of a social order and dictates the distinction between rite, as linguistic reason, and gesture, as belonging to an unconscious level. These two systems are similar, in that rhythms, poems and song also belong to the unconscious level of chanting, repetition and structure. In support

of ritual, the containment of words relating to spiritual or Christian allegory asks for a more distinct investigation into the signification of the words in relation to the objects.

So what is the significance of the interrelationship between words as a part of liturgy and the use of words in art? Here we must look at how these separate entities become signs of the significant whole.

In Preziosi's paper (1989:102), *Hoc est Corpus Meum*, I made an important discovery concerning the relationship between word and thing as interchangeable. The discussion again uses the example of the eucharist. Louis Martin and Milad Doueïhi, according to Preziosi, argued that the 'problem of the Eucharist, from a Christian perspective, is the essential problem of signification in its most general sense'. The problem for Preziosi (1989:103) was thus:

[To] derive a formula that would capture God's Word in its material manifestation – one that would express and illustrate the presence of the Divine Word as the realization of the perfect exchange between Spirit and matter, between the world of the infinite and the world of material finitude. Such an exchange is both evoked and exemplified by the existence of the Eucharist.

This discussion illustrates the problem in the work *Soapbread*, where each word comprising the total expression '*Gib Uns Heute Unser Tägliches Brot*', is individually embossed on the side of a separate loaf, becoming an example of the relationship between the words and image (both considered as text) and the manner in which these support each other. In my work, the synchronisation of meaning (signifying nourishment) of the sign in the embossed text (words of the Lord's Prayer) and the material form of the soap sculptures (bread) are all similar to the problem of the exchange (endowment of meaning by signification) of 'spirit' and matter in the ritual of the eucharist.

Within the context of my work, (as has been noted) the material soap, by its function, signifies to clean or to purify. This idea of the pure does not go beyond the context of cleaning. Although, within the context of a religious environment, or in the form of bread loaves embossed with words of the Lord's Prayer, the secular and the religious do come together. The Lord's Prayer is said in the liturgy of the church as a means of

recalling the memory of Christ and, as a general act of intercession (*Fürbitte*) and confession, is read aloud as an entry symbol before the ceremony of the sacrament of the eucharist proceeds. The reference to the eucharist and the Lord's Prayer ('give us this day our daily bread') in my sculptures, re-represents, in the loaf-forms of the soapbreads, the idea of the symbolic holy body of Christ, while the pure soap, symbolising cleansing, substantiates the interjection of both ideas into the concept of conversion and cleansing. The difficulty with making a connection between the words, without a physical manifestation, is that a signifier is needed to articulate the signified. Thus the form of the signifiers as soap breads must be autonomous, as a simulacrum that does not hinder the signified, yet one that can also substitute it. The signifier, according to Preziosi, must also be 'invisible and immaterial in order not to obstruct the presence of the signified itself' (1989:103). It seems, therefore, that the words, as embossed signs, perform as an active, yet ideal signifier that has the ability to interchange the object 'soap'<sup>43</sup> for the word 'bread' or '*Brot*'.

With reference to the above, Jacques Waardenburg quotes Paul Ricoeur as stating that a 'symbol brings together a linguistic dimension and another dimension which is of a non-linguistic nature' (cited in Olson 1980:42). The soap breads, therefore, stand in for the 'unleavened bread' used in the ceremony of the eucharist, and link with the idea of the 'washing' that occurs in baptism. Waardenburg holds that symbolism goes beyond human consciousness and the use of symbols constitutes a unique way of sharing information about something or expressing an experience that is different from daily life and ordinary speech (Olson 1980:4).

The use of signs to indicate a different kind of reality, apart from our everyday lives, is particularly pertinent to religious ritual. The action may seem very mundane, but, as in the case of the eucharist, Preziosi pronounces that 'the object cannot merely be a symbol of the presence of the body of Christ or a palpable memory of the Hidden God: It must *be* Christ's body, not a simulacrum'. Therefore, this ritual 'must be absolute proof of the possibility of the transparent substitution and exchange between thing and word' (1989:103). The objects of bread and wine are therefore signs, but not *a sign*, being and yet not being the body of Christ. Reading and signifying art echo this process. Although an artwork is always understood to be made from a

specific material and to depict a specific subject or object, it is given a title to steer signification into a particular direction.

As an all-encompassing model for Preziosi (1989:104)<sup>44</sup>, the transformation from representation to signification in the example of the eucharist suggests that the conversion from material (word and eulogy) to spirit (signifier and signified) is considered as the movement from the ‘exterior to the semiotic system constituting language ... accommodated as an innerness’. Preziosi (1989:104), therefore, asserts that the semiotic system that reduces everything in language to signs must also be aware that what is on the exterior also has an interior innerness. This inner-outerness is the understanding reached through connectedness as a *mysterium*, or as he called it a ‘fleshed Spirit’ which is ‘both totally Other and totally within the here and now’ (Preziosi 1989:104). So, by a circular movement, the argument returns to the beginnings of this final section.

Preziosi (1989:104) pursues the idea of justifying a spiritual or material realm that hinges on a perspective of significance and semiosis. He suggests that if a sign occurs for the immaterial within the realm of the material, and goes beyond the metaphorical, then the sign of a religious order might be demonstrated. He (1989:110) suggests that we infer concepts through corporeality between the intelligible and the sensible.<sup>45</sup> Artworks therefore remain a medium onto which we project ‘concepts, intentions, meanings, or signifieds’. For art, this becomes an issue of cultural systems of aesthetic signification that ‘harbour a mystery [and are], simultaneously outside of culture and autonomous: both a part of the passing parade of cultural systems, social history, and ideologies and a spectator on the sidelines’ (Preziosi 1989:108).

This mystery that constitutes an artwork’s significance is, in my opinion, the constant change that occurs from the artist’s and spectator’s personal perspectives and the stance taken from the point of theoretical methodology, such as formalist, structuralist, or psychoanalytic. These ideas, as a projection of what is meant – as read and made by spectator and artist – onto the work are that which becomes ‘other’ or mysterious and goes beyond the construction of metaphor.

To sum up: the problem of representing an artwork with Other, spiritual, psychological or philosophical content, relies on the material connection to, and the physical process of signification for, what is being represented. Therefore, in discussing the separate divisions of ritual, the movement of the body as signifier, through the gesture of making the soap and cleaning, becomes the symbol. The title *Seifenbrot* or *Soapbread* and body are related, while both, as signifiers, signify and point to the innermost mystery of the sign and the life contained in the body of work. Making art becomes a creative process, which, in itself, has connotations of religious mystery. Preziosi (1989:104) suggests that this is the difference between mortality and immortality.

Benjamin's formulation of the 'lost mimetic gift' views the separation of material and spirit as manifested in language and writing, thereby creating for itself 'the most perfect archive of non-sensuous similitude [*unsinnliche Ähnlichkeiten*] (cited in Weigel 1996:72). Here Weigel maintains that the mimetic only reveals itself through transitory 'flashes' in language signs. However, the 'magic' can only be made visible through communication and this relies on the use of symbolism. Therefore, in the artwork *Soapbread*, embossed words, as a figurative language that belongs to a daily prayer learnt from memory, are visually 'pressed' and 'impressed' – 'embossed' into the soap's surface. Symbolically this becomes a 'memory impression'. The ritual ceremony itself, as a re-enactment of a memory, or a narrative, relies on the cognitive understanding of symbolism and the demonstrative act involving the 'pressing' on the senses. Therefore, the idea that a word makes an impression into the material is represented and returned as signified, and recalls the enactment of a daily prayer, such as the one on the *soapbread* (Figure 29). The signification that occurs as mysterious was seen by Louis Lambert, cited in Preziosi (1989:106), as a word "dyed with [an] idea". What he means is that, in the creative process, the object is derived from the soul; and the life and meaning of words and artworks represent their inward form in the 'daub of the brush or trace of the chisel'.

Finally, the visually embossed words become the visually integrated 'sign' that expresses both the significance of the sensuous material and the conceptual thought of conversion and purification, expressed through the words themselves. This, though situated within a social and a personal context, is 'marked' into the *soapbreads* by the

associations with the ritual concept, illuminating the inner and outer processes that constitute the making of an art object. Crowther (1993:5) quotes Hegel in indicating the unique aspects of art as being ‘a mode of understanding which is half-way between the concrete particularity of material phenomena, and the abstract generality of pure thought’.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to show how ritual, as a process of creating art, is a mode of making the connection to signs that bring significance. These are signs that can be demonstrated as a symbolic performance (private, physical and mental/metaphorical action) of re-representing a dialogue between the object (of rite) and the liturgy (text, narrative or theory).

It was the intention here to lead the reader through the conceptual and architectural structure of the signification of my artworks. After dividing ritual into rite (ceremony) and liturgy (text and narratives), it became evident, in the two subsequent sections on Simulacrum and Self-Consciousness, that neither aspect of ritual alone could fulfil the artist’s or viewer’s expectations of them. In the *first* section, I therefore introduced the spiritual aspect of human culture that encodes objects, as in religious ceremonies, and in art serve as witness to the concerns within society. This linked up with the *third* section, which questions how and why we process connections between our consciousness and our unconscious, often returning with mutual concerns, such as survival. The ability to work with sensuous material and cultural or religious objects brings about a self-consciousness that, for the art-maker, stimulates a re-looking/re-evaluation of one’s own identity as it changes (mimetically) through time.

In the *second section*, the object or the religious symbol is set within a purely semiotic structure through which the simulacrum theory moves displacing and deconstructing it, because signification as a projection of fantasy dislocates the object from time and place. Although I do not reject this theory entirely, or respond to it negatively, as I make clear in the next chapter on memory and ‘mythological time’, I do not, for example, believe that we can place every object in an autonomous space. Monuments, for example, are site specific. The exhibition site of the ‘Church Gallery’ in which my works were exhibited, as a former religious site, aids an understanding of the context of my work, in contrast to that placed in the annex of the gallery, where the autonomy of site allows a less specific signification. This theory, however, is difficult to apply, since objects also rely on a content and context of ideas, materials, emotions and other sensations that trace the significance of an artwork.

Finally, in the last section, my aim was to discuss the artwork *Soapbread* as a means of formulating the discursive signs in the process of signification and to investigate how this idea becomes complex when objects and subjects become interchangeable in language and in the significance of their material form. This is discussed in the context of the Lord’s Prayer, a more daily, elemental one than that associated with the eucharist. By dividing the material and the symbols into the divisions of rite and ceremony, as in the eucharist, I pose the perennial enduring question: what occurs between signifier and signified? What, therefore, signifies art objects? By evaluating how this division of ritual brings about signification, I have come to realise that the similarity in signifying art objects and religious objects exists in the process by which we read or create signs (material objects) and superimpose similar ideas on them. This creates a dialogue between signified and signifier. With regard to the thought (text on the art object) or spoken liturgy (of a ceremony) this re-enforces the signified object. Therefore, signification calls for individual intent that directly assumes cultural systems of signs and memory associations. It is only through all these inter-linkages that symmetry of understanding is reached.

The use of ritual in art becomes a viewing and an awareness of the self-conscious actions and tradition that have developed into the significance of the work. The reference made to liturgy and ceremony serves as symbolic signification, which forms an association with a similar or alternative view. Artworks that convey socio-

historical concerns, either agreeing or disagreeing, become wish-images for the transformation or preservation of memory. Artworks therefore express an aspect of consciousness that includes an experience beyond everyday life and speech, as an expression of the personal or social unconscious. Therefore, just as ritual in religious ceremonies reflects our spirituality and our ability to signify objects with ideological mystification as a means for resolution, so art becomes a similar medium of expression.

The aim of this final section on signification has been to discuss the way in which artworks mean or signify, by examining Preziosi's interpretation of the eucharist in order to identify the sign that constitutes the connection between representation and signification in artworks.

The conclusion may be drawn that a discursive space between the semiotic system of signs and the conceptual use of material, colour, form, texture and subject, in artworks, is that which makes art's signification shift and transform between the tactile visual encounter and the cognitive response. This becomes a ritual of perspective, where a whole system of culture, of which art and language are facets, is projected and construed in myriad ways.

This complex system of signification is not simply a reduction to metaphor, it is the transfer of ideas from the intelligible to the sensible through corporeality. In my work, this dialectical approach reflects the physiological interaction I have with the process, during and after its making. In reflecting on the previous section on self-consciousness, it seems, a work of art can bear the character of signs of personal and collective consciousness. Preziosi (1989:115) refers to the philosophical work of Jan Mukařovský, who in 1934 wrote in 'Art as Semiotic Fact':

... Only the semiotic point of view allows theorists to recognise the autonomous existence and essential dynamism of artistic structure and to understand [the] evolution of art as an immanent process but one in constant dialectical relationship with the evolution of other domains of culture.

It is by means of this self-conscious, semiotic discourse that this thesis moves into the sphere of memory. There the dialogue with the humanities of social science, and more

specifically that regarding the role of the unconscious in the psychology of making art with memory content, occurs. This self-analysis I understand as a search for identity in the context of the new South Africa. It recalls, too, the humanist concern in art that occurred in the early Renaissance.

To conclude this chapter, I rely on the spectator to place my work in the time frame of the first ten years of democracy in South Africa and to place the soap sculptures in the context of the ongoing pursuit for redemption from political and social injustice. The aim of this chapter on ritual has been to show that art is made and 'read' through cultural orientations, rituals of religious or mundane actions, religious convictions and traditional ceremonies and established customs. Reading artworks becomes a process of gaining new knowledge of different views and cultures and/or creates the opportunity to re-view subjects/subject matter in a new or different way. It is, however, only through the comparison to and recollection of memory that art with a social-consciousness can be made.

In the next chapter, my investigation leads to the subject of memory: how it is recalled from unconscious or deep memory; how it is transferred as Post-memory; and how it manifests itself in art objects.

### Chapter One

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<sup>1</sup> *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958:244). Authorised by the Lutheran Churches co-operating in The Commission on the Liturgy and Hymnal, Music Edition. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House.

<sup>2</sup> *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958:242). See full reference in previous footnote.

<sup>3</sup> The words within the doctrine called 'Words of Institution' express this as follows:  
Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread;  
and, When He had given thanks, He brake it and Gave it to His Disciples,  
saying, Take, Eat; This is My Body, which is given to you; This do in  
remembrance of Me.

After the same manner, also, He took the cup, when he had supped, and,  
when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying Drink Ye all of it;  
This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you, and  
for many, for the remission of sins; This do, as oft as Ye drink it, in  
remembrance of Me.

<sup>4</sup> An editor's translation of Gré van der Waal-Braaksma's description of soap making is supplied for each of the three extracts, followed by the original.

<sup>5</sup> These soap blocks became more than memorabilia: by carving these objects as a ritual action, the carving and marking become a sign of identification and a beckoning or recalling of memory that drew the prisoner mentally into the recollection of flowers, nature, his wife and family. My grandfather was confined in Koffiefontein for six years in the concentration camps and this narrative is similar to the 'Post-Memory' handed down to me by my grandparents.

<sup>6</sup> At this point, my soap fonts are discussed in terms of alchemical theory. The relationship of the *tria prima* is very similar in theory to the process of saponification. One of the three elements referred to by Paracelsus. Appropriate to the making of soap and a symbol of the feminine principle, is fat. Symbolised as Mercurius or phlegma, fat also represents sulphur, ash and salt, which are all 'earth' principles and transformed by the principle of 'fire' (Read 1939:27). The process of making soap can be interpreted in these alchemical terms. Mercury was believed to be an element of water that, with the addition of heat, became vapour. Made into a solution from ash and water, lye is slowly poured into melted lard or tallow. By adding salt to the molten emulsion, steam is released. The emulsion and the caustic solution cause a chemical reaction called saponification. The *tria prima* of Paracelsus was meant to produce the Philosophers' stone, holding the ability to transmute or tinge base metals with the purity of gold (Read 1947:6). Bacon was well aware of the chemical conversion that also occurs in soap.

In a discussion on alchemy, Hopkins compares the painter's palette, which utilised *wax*, as a base substance that is softened by gentle heating. Mercury, and previously tin, were considered the soft alloy or amalgam which permitted fusion. It was seen as the base or the 'wax' that would accept a conversion. Agathodemon, an author on alchemy, explains this idea of projection and change: 'Thus, to convert and transmute in these [old] authors, is to give a metallic body to the spiritual [volatile] substances ... but when the spiritual substances have taken on a bodily [metallic] form, the transmutation has taken place ... by the tincture into white or into yellow. In fact, this conversion is called transmutation.' (Hopkins 1967:75.)

<sup>7</sup> Celant, in the Introduction to *Art Povera* (Stiles 1996:663), states: 'The rediscovery of magic (of chemical composition and reaction), the inexorableness (of vegetable growth), the precariousness (of material), the falseness (of senses), the realness (of a natural desert, a forgotten lake, the sea, the snow,

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the forest) – the instability of a bio-physical reaction – thus become discovered as an instrument of consciousness in relation to a larger comprehensive acquisition of nature.’

<sup>8</sup> Signification of ideas in art is similar to the relationship between words, images and things in seventeenth century philosophical discussions. These were viewed as directly connected to the nature of man and explained from the point of view that ‘modern languages retained traces of some original language created by Adam, who, before the *Fall*, established a nomenclature for the animals in the world’. Preziosi (1989:96) says that human language is therefore still constituted as divinely inspired and that ‘scriptural revelation was held to ensure that language, at base, was a nomenclature and that all words ultimately named essences and species’.

<sup>9</sup> In Chapter Two, on memory, I refer to Freud’s ‘mystic writing pad’, which is a metaphor for the unconscious mind’s store of important information (Weigel 1996:158).

<sup>10</sup> Camille (1996:31) states ‘[t]he Latin term “simulacrum” has its crucial beginning in Plato’s Greek dialogues, where it appears as the term we would translate as “phantasm” or “semblance”. Plato sought to distinguish essence from appearance, intelligible from sensible, and idea from image.’ Camille claims that Plato saw a simulacrum as a ‘deviation and perversion of imitation itself – a false likeness’. This meant that he questioned the status of an image as being original and even went as far as saying it was a ‘false claimant to being’ (Camille 1996:32).

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Foucault searched for the ontology of the object itself, suggesting that original, resemblance and imitation (Foucault 1977:172) would not be related in terms of the copy and the model.

<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard elucidates: ‘Thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images: murderers of the real; murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity. To this murderous capacity is opposed the dialectical capacity of representations as a visible and intelligible mediation of the real. All of Western Faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representations: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could *exchange* for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange – God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference’ (cited in Camille 1996:38).

<sup>13</sup> Grisella Pollock (1999:109), in her essay ‘Trauma, Memory and the Relief of Redemption’, in *Differencing the Canon*, writes that relief from trauma can be ‘produced by restoring events to memory and thus delivering them into representation’.

<sup>14</sup> Preziosi (1990:121) writes that we need to reread Panofsky’s work from an anamorphic perspective to highlight the paths that we have theoretically taken. He also expresses the need to reread Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, in ‘the framework of purported protosemiotics’. From his own rereading, he states that we can take a cue from Karl Jaspers, who declares: ‘[Nietzsche’s] contradictions show us what he is driving at. Existence both provides and is a product of exegesis. It is regarded as a circle that renews itself constantly while seeming to annul itself. It is now objectivity and now subjectivity; it appears first as substance and then as constantly annulled substance; though unquestionably there, it is constantly questionable; it is both being and not-being, the real and the apparent.’ (Cited in Preziosi 1989:121.)

<sup>15</sup> The feeling of relief occurs when the pain and suffering have passed.

<sup>16</sup> According to Preziosi (1989:108), we must be warned that the idea of a method of art history is misleading.

<sup>17</sup> Because I am dealing with my own analysis of how the interplay of motifs in signification occurs, this discussion moves into the realm of the metaphor. Preziosi (1989:109) asserts ‘the modern discipline deals with metaphors “whose metaphoricity has been forgotten”’. However, Preziosi refers to the part falseness of his declaration above, saying it is ‘incorrect to conclude from that aphorism that

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metaphor stands in opposition to some literal or non-figurative set of circumstances'. After listing these metaphors, he concludes that '[n]o metaphor is innocent, least of all when metaphor presents itself as a tangled forest out of which we (metaphorically) might step'.

<sup>18</sup> The essential term in Hegel's philosophy is 'Spirit'. 'This does not simply mean "mind" or "thinking subject"; rather, it involves a relation between such a subject and something *other* than it'. Therefore, 'spirit' for Hegel is 'self-consciousness, progressively articulated and unified through concrete interaction with that which is ostensibly Other than it' (Crowther 1993:119-120).

<sup>19</sup> Tragic art, according to Degenaar (1986:9), enables humans to experience the terrible as something sublime.

<sup>20</sup> The mortar is also reminiscent of the time when alchemy involved the 'home industry' of medicines and the quest for immortality.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud's '*theory of conversion*' is discussed by Deutsch (1959) in: *On the mysterious leap from the mind to the body: a workshop study on the theory of conversion*. New York: International University Press.

<sup>22</sup> This work is titled, *ode to my Mother*.

<sup>23</sup> Associated with ruins or monuments (Weigel 1996:119).

<sup>24</sup> Later this term will be fully explained in terms of Hegel's statement '*Insich gehen, Erinnert werden*', in the chapter on Memory.

<sup>25</sup> Although Fletcher refers to it in allegorical terms and specifically in respect to narrative in a text, the rhythmic voice and tone can function as a gesture that imitates bodily movement. Benjamin claims that the act of deciphering should not be seen as de- or encoding, but rather as a reading of the topography of a collective memory, from which mnemonic symbols and traces reveal themselves, like dreams, out of the language of the unconscious (Sigrid Weigel 1996:119).

<sup>26</sup> Read Fletcher (1970:191) and Kleinbach (1995:25) on this triadic formula of Hegel, which claims to be one of the cornerstones of metaphysics.

<sup>27</sup> Suzanne Preston Blier (1999:187) states that 'ties between rites and passage and ideas of transition more generally, [point] up the imperative of liminality in human action and thought'. Ritual assumes a new identity in every re-enactment and the participants are re-defined.

<sup>28</sup> As we make objects in art that draw on various other objects, materials, textures and forms and various associated signs, the artwork gains a layered, symbolic and sensuous repertoire, a liturgy by which we 'read' the work. This can be related to the duality of the mimetic and the sensuous material in art, that which Crowther (1993:3) today calls the 'sensuous manifold'.

<sup>29</sup> Beuys, in conversation with Mennekes (1986:33), speaks about the foundation of Action Art situated within the expanded concept of art, which utilises elements of movement as representative of the 'purely spiritual form' set in opposition to a physical corpse located in a historical context. Mennekes describes this movement as holding the 'principles of resurrection, transforming the old structure, which dies or stagnates, into a vital, vibrant, life-enhancing, and soul- and spirit-promoting form'.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche says about tragic art, that it represents the highest task and the true metaphysical activity of this life (Degenaar 1986:14).

<sup>31</sup> Beuys explains further to Mennekes (Beuys 1986:31), that the 'metamorphosis of man' can only occur through 'self-determination': just as Christ for a moment lost his belief on the cross, so the human 'must also himself suffer the process of crucifixion and complete incarnation in the material world, working right through materialism, thereby, gaining self-knowledge'.

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<sup>32</sup> The word ‘containment’ is to be understood here not as a prescribed meaning held within an artwork, but similar to the idea of Mukařovský, who understood the individual art object as having the ‘autonomy of a lexical item in a sentence’. Preziosi, however, says ‘[t]his is a more relative autonomy than that of the Panofskian art object, in which the individual artwork is essentially irreducible, a “mysterious, individual whole”, to echo Kleinbauer’s definition. Panofsky’s analytical framework considers an ‘art object as a “bundle” of distinctive features or motifs, the task of the analyst [being] to match such motifs or figurative patterns to a class of similar patterns over time and space’ (Preziosi 1989:118).

<sup>33</sup> In the previous section I have found metaphor to be insufficient, as it suggests that an object (form, thing or body) is opposed to meaning or significance or its complement (Preziosi 1989:110).

<sup>34</sup> My choice, in using the words of the Lord’s Prayer on the bread forms rather than the words of the eucharist, is to locate my work in a broader secular sphere of everyday meaning.

<sup>35</sup> For us to understand ritual as a process of signification, we must explore the contrived ideas and convention ‘held’ by religious objects. To achieve the basic form of a vessel (Figure 22) or the loaves (Figure 23) in my sculptures, the soap is cast in moulds. Casting fuses the action into a restrictive, specified and delineated space and form. Most ritual objects in the Christian religion, for example, the cast statues of the Virgin Mary, Jesus and the Saints, are cast in an ideal form.<sup>35</sup> Their form is a symbolic shape that must hold certain iconographic ideal characteristics and contains that which Mitchell (1987:8) calls ‘ideological mystification’.

<sup>36</sup> According to Preziosi, during the seventeenth century, philosophical discussions on language were regarded as ‘divinely inspired’ and the scriptural revelation of language held it to be a ‘nomenclature’.<sup>36</sup> This essentialist view that served religious perspectives of knowledge and experience was the outcome of the ‘Adamic doctrine’. Language therefore held that ‘truth’ was seen as the ‘more secure pathway to the true knowledge of nature than mere observation of the world, dependent upon the imperfections of sensory perception and moral reasoning’. (Preziosi 1989:97.)

<sup>37</sup> Signification or finding what artworks mean is a process of wandering through the ‘cultural systems of aesthetic signification’. However, Preziosi (1989:108) holds this definition to include the mystery of an artwork that is ‘simultaneously outside of culture and autonomous: both a part of the passing parade of cultural systems, social history, and ideologies and a spectator on the sidelines’.

<sup>38</sup> Soap given to the Church bazaar was considered a great contribution because it was a commodity not commercially produced before the nineteenth century (Van der Waal-Braaksma 1986:114).

<sup>39</sup> Locke argued against language as being divinely inspired, but conceived of it as part of ‘a social institution reflecting the particular experiential world of a language community’ (cited in Preziosi 1989:97). Words, for him, were therefore ‘innate notions’ or ‘knots or bundles’ of ideas that together emphasised the importance of signs in human life and experience. For Locke and Saussure, and Humboldt who is cited here, words originated from the image that ‘is not a copy of the object itself, but of the images it creates in the mind... With objects man lives mainly according to the manner in which language brings them to him’ (Preziosi 1989:98).

<sup>40</sup> Preziosi (1989:90) describes Locke’s semiology as paving the way for the ‘banish[ment] of religion from the world’.

<sup>41</sup> According to Preziosi (1989:100), through Cousin’s efforts, Locke came to be seen as a “sensualist”, as characterised by “the negation of all the great truths which escape the senses, and which reason alone discovers”. During the Eighteenth century, science was becoming more revolutionary in that systematic principles of structure were developed. Science, observation, description and classification occurred in natural history and science, but speculation still allied itself with concepts of essentialism and final causes of language study and religious philosophy (Preziosi 1989:101). Language was central to these debates precisely because, according to the discussions of the time, it came closest to proving the great argument about firm boundaries between man and brute and about the divine origins of the order of things. Language study, comparative anatomy and scientific method, in general, joined forces to reassert the religious essentialism that eighteenth century

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philosophy had worked patiently to circumvent, also in the name of reason and science (Preziosi 1989:102).

<sup>42</sup> Saussure's idea of semiology was that 'the meaning of any sign or object may seem natural, but is always founded on shared conventions (a system)' (Appignanesi 1998:64). In terms of the eucharist ritual, the liturgy, as the symbolic description and explanation, is problematic in terms of Saussure's semiology because it alone cannot convey the emotional relationship (reaction) occurring between the embodied mind and the symbolic material which are so important in the 'spiritual' (emotional) transformation that ritual induces in ceremonies and in art. This problem is highlighted by Appignanesi (1998:64), who explains that this system of semiology also 'de-psychologizes' any deep reading, which points to 'origins, causes and curses'. This surface reading of liturgy, and then also of art, would remain within the realm of theoretical philosophy without the concern for the self-consciousness or the physical body, which is an essential part of ritual and of making and signifying art. Thus the pure structuralist reading of liturgy fails to show insight into ritual as a process of signification and rejects the theory of the flesh, which maintains that humans experience life and art through an embodied mind.

<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that I discuss soap as representing the body ('body' referring also to the body of Christ) in the last chapter, on healing.

<sup>44</sup> Preziosi (1989: 103-104) discusses this dilemma of presence by referring to the phrase: *Hoc est Corpus meum*. *Hoc* (this) is a gesture of indication: an index X. Yet in the case of the eucharist, *hoc* must more than indicate something absent: it signifies a palpable here and now, a concrete object. Hence it is more than merely a re-presentation, it is a presentation: a presence. This really *is* Christ's body (*corpus meum*). In effect, the object is assimilated to the signified; it does not really stand for, or stand in for, what is absent, as any ordinary sign in language does. Thus, that which cannot be represented because of its divinity and infinity is here presented by *hoc*.

<sup>45</sup> Preziosi (1989:110) asserts, '[s]imilarly, the significance of man rests in the nature and quality of spiritual essence, his soul'.

### Memory

The transformation of memory implies a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to remembrance. The total psychologization of contemporary memory entails a completely new economy of the identity of the self, the mechanics of memory, and the relevance of the past. (Nora 1989:15.)

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the role of memory in the process of making art, in a Postmodern era. I begin by looking specifically at memory as a reference in art and, in particular, at religious imagery in my own work and that of other artists to explore how the significance of these symbols has changed within the post-religious context. This transformation has dislocated the traditional significance of enlightenment theoretically contained in memorial structures and spiritual iconography and thus recalls the re-introduction of Humanism.

My aim in the first section is to map out the boundaries of time and place in relation to memory, which lies in the division between history and recollection (construction and conservation). In Pierre Nora's paper titled *lieux de Mémoire*, he points out the discrepancies between memory and history, at the same time identifying their separate functions and how they can consolidate objects into an embodiment of a collective consciousness.

Section two briefly introduces the concept of collective memories and 'Post-Memory' in terms of ritual as a form of recollection and re-enactment of memory. My aim here, in the section *Memory and History, within 'Mythological Time'*, is to find why memory as subject can be contained in art, and what it is that constitutes the re-use of religious imagery and symbols in art today? By introducing art or writing as 'thought-images' or '*Denkbilder*', as Benjamin calls them, which bring the past-'time'

into the present, together with the historical concept of theorist Patrick. H. Hutton and his concept of ‘mythological time’, I want to put forward the idea that religious images reside in a similar time to that of mythology, a timeless space, signifying ‘universal’ and transcendental concerns.

The fourth section follows the thread of objects dislocated by history and specifically looks at Walter Benjamin’s *Passagen Project*. My aim here is to discuss why one constructs objects of symbolic significance and how they are recalled to conscious memory as ‘distortions’ through the intervention of the imagination.

Hegel’s phenomenology on the process of *insich gehen – erinnert werden* ‘to go into oneself – become reminded’ is discussed in the fifth section, and is the final step in this argument towards locating art between memory and history. Hegel rejects the idea of history, because it alludes to the futile act of trying to retrieve both personal memories and the lost collective memory. The concept of conversion within the process of art making is explored here in terms of the psychological order or process, in which the unconscious is provoked, causing a shift of deep memory to conscious memory and its realisation. Here art resonates, becoming an emergence of a social consciousness.

Hegel maintained that concepts of intuition<sup>1</sup> and representation are contextualised as feelings and sensations and understood on the basis of experience and remembrance. Art, however, is still located in the discrepancies that exist between memory and history, and questions the idea of a memorial consciousness in art. Nora and Hegel, in their differing approaches, meet at the point of sensuous experience that promotes the investment of a collective consciousness of signification and calls on a collective reference to the world around us. In art, however, this requires a selective approach, drawing not only from history but also from memory, in order not to fall into the individual traps of either: history without memory; or memory in the flux of inundating every artwork with a memorial consciousness.

Finally, in the sixth section, these ideas come together within a discussion on my sculptures, specifically *within a river of glass shards*, where the ideas of Post-

Memory and collective memory become a form of that which Hegel called 'productive memory', being, as it is, the transition to conceptual thought itself.

In the last section, titled '*Monuments: Death in/of Art*', I discuss the ideology behind memorial structures, arguing that there is a difference between memorials existing in the context of history and politics and those personal monuments that commemorate personal memories. With the above in mind, the underlying idea throughout this chapter may be posed as a question: Can commemorative art still exist in the anti-redemptory age where notions of post-religion and post-history are pursued?

Resolution and redemption, as theoretical ideas of catharsis and dislocation in contemporary art, are often echoed in the monuments and artworks. Monuments, however, ironically subvert the concept of memory, while describing the very psychological and physiological mutilation caused by that political regime, which proclaims the propaganda that the function of monuments is one of resolution and redemption.

Art, for me, serves to resuscitate memories and prevent the fall into the oblivion of forgetting identified by Benjamin as a characteristic of memory. I intend to show that the making of memory-works includes a sensibility for materials, binding us into a synthesis with the changing world of the private and the public. Walter Benjamin (Weigel 1996:58) (as has been noted above) saw artworks as 'wish images', because they enable us to express past experiences in the present and in the non-synchronicity of 'reversal', or in this static time, where an opening occurs from which one can reach into the past or the present simultaneously. By relating these theoretical concepts to my work, I hope to show that artworks, employing and transmitting images (of objects) discarded by history and memory, become a *bricolage* of memories reconstructed and transformed, and then re-created by the imagination. Therefore, through this process, art grounds itself in the timeless space between memory and history, revealing the desire or neglect within society and its social consciousness. Art, again, bears witness to the infinite questions about existence, and often, similar to religious imagery, expresses the hope for redemption and healing from memories left in the wake of history.

## Memory and History:

### Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire*

Here, I aim to determine what the theoretical identity of an artwork is when it is situated between memory and history. The signification of artworks lies in visual recollection and is defined by the theoretical-historical location in time and place. However, the content of memory-works has the potential to revisit the past, unless history besieges their narrative. Artworks, therefore, become *lieux de mémoire*: they become static in time because their depiction takes place in historical time, yet mutant in their signification which is associated with subjective interpretation. As relics of past time, they also include a subjective point of view: the inclusion of personal memory. They exist, therefore, outside of the historical grandeur of history painting, for example. Only through the use of the imagination in their depiction do memory-work and history painting find an inherent association.

The purpose of discussing Nora's *lieux de mémoire* here is, firstly, to guide the argument into the theoretical frame of history and memory, and secondly, to question how art utilises memory and where memory finds itself in history. This area of the discussion has led me to an understanding of how narrative and concept in art reach into history, but being outside of it, can yet always be signified by memory. Nora's (1989:8) premise maintains that '[m]emory and history, [are] far from being synonymous, [and] appear now to be in fundamental opposition'. History *reconstructs* the past and is always problematic and incomplete,<sup>2</sup> whereas memory is in a continual state of transformation and evolution of remembering and forgetting, 'unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived'. Nora explains that memory 'nourishes recollections' by retrieving and holding the facts that suit it. He states that '[m]emory installs remembrance within the sacred', whereas 'history, always prosaic, releases it again'. This difference between memory and history is that, while the former distinguishes itself by taking root in the concrete, in spaces, gesture, images and objects, which exist in a 'specific; collective, plural, and yet individual' realm, 'history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities' and only

conceives of a relative universal authority, 'belonging to everyone and to no-one' (Nora 1989:9).

Nora (1989:9) points out that 'history is a cultural discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory'. It is 'perpetually suspicious of memory and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it'. Ironically, history needs memory to justify the existence of museums and monuments. In addition, for every historical revision, history must revert to a collective memory, to incorporate a wider scope of opinions, for example in the revision of the segregation that occurred in South African history. History must be re-written to include various cultural perspectives and memories previously excluded from historico-political status, such as those of people of colour or women.<sup>3</sup>

Nora (1989:12) suggests that, when the historical framework regains vitality after revision, the *lieux de mémoire* 'impress us only in their most spectacular symbols and as 'heritage consolidated'. He maintains that 'history's most elementary tools [and] the most symbolic objects of our memories' combine into 'libraries, dictionaries, and museums, as well as commemorations and celebrations'. Therefore, Nora's *lieux de mémoire* are fundamental 'remains' or are formulated by him as the 'ultimate embodiment of a memorial consciousness' (Nora 1989:12). He speaks of the historical transformation, in particular, of a country that re-builds and re-defines its cornerstones. It is within this framework that my works are significant. As objects recalled from repressed memories, the heritage of continual uprooting<sup>4</sup> and the transformation of identity, now located in the newly transformed South Africa, these sculptures are metaphoric repositories from memory. My sculptural *Fonts*, in their reference to my missionary grandfather, are commemorative of his life and work. However, as soap sculptures, they symbolise the preservation of personal memories and remind me of the suffering I have witnessed. These sculptures have become commemorative objects, existing between the preservation of memories from the past and the giving of meaning and shape to those I still care to retain.

The *lieux*, as Nora demonstrates, 'are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile'. As

objects remaining after the intervention of history, they become marks or traces, to ‘stop time’ from drawing them into the process of forgetting (Nora 1989:19).

Where my work is conceived without the recollection and the reference to my own genealogical influences, the fonts and the soap refer only to the concept of ‘cleaning’ and ‘cleansing’, becoming critical of concepts more closely linked to redemption. Until now these all refer to their site in memory. However, the concept of redemption may assume a connection with monuments or memorial work and would suggest a tangible object and place, within the environment where memory exists. Nora, therefore, formulates that *lieux de mémoire* exist in sites of memory and not in ‘*milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory’, which are no longer (Nora 1989:7).

Nora advances the argument of *lieux de mémoire* by explaining how ‘memory crystallizes and secretes itself’ at a certain time and in a specific way:

... at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of certain memory in sites where a sense of historical continuity persists (Nora 1989:7).

Similar to Hegel’s phenomenology of ‘Spirit’ that I refer to later, Nora’s (1989:23) ‘*lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs’. He explains this by saying that these objects are not without context, physical presence, or history, but what constitutes *lieux de mémoire* is that they escape from history. Nora (1989:12) explains that, if ‘history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*’. As history is torn away and returned, it leaves us with objects ‘like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded’.

Informed by Nora, whose work substantiates my practical discoveries, I regard artworks as ‘*lieux de mémoire*’, discarded, retrieved, re-gathered, re-collected, re-membered, re-created and re-examined in the site of memory.

## *Mémoire Collective* and **Post-Memory**

Marc Bloch,<sup>5</sup> a French historian, used the phrase *mémoire collective* to indicate that ‘peasant customs’, such as those learnt from the traditions of grandparents, were important in retaining a social memory (Butler 1989:98). Butler supports this history of social memory passed to us via schemata or, as Emile Durkheim (a student in the 1920s of the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs) refers to them, ‘collective representations’ of our own culture.<sup>6</sup> (Butler1989:99.)

Nora stresses the necessity of continuing to remember the collective memory that formed our society and was once deeply in tune with nature and the environment. He remarks that these traditions are in a continuation of our history and that we can only conserve our identity by remembering our personal history (Nora 1989:16).

Butler (1989:99) observes that historians are concerned with memory as an ‘historical source’, which has led to the questioning of the reliability of reminiscence as an historical phenomenon. Whether to substantiate a theory of memory, as an influence in the art making and art viewing process, is an ever-present concern. In identifying the principles of selecting memories, it is necessary to take into account that memories are subjective and transform over time. The influence of space and time, the person by whom memories are recollected and the one who describes them, all these affect the process of understanding how memory is recalled, how it manifests itself and how it is depicted.

I grew up with stories of traditional celebrations and tales of ordeals and hardship and had objects around me that told stories of a German culture, such as wooden figurines depicting the Christmas story and the wooden bread plate<sup>7</sup> with the text of the Lord’s Prayer meticulously carved on its edge. These objects spoke of a heritage other than my own in South Africa, and the collective memory, passed down from my German grandparents, has become an integral part of my identity. It is this wooden bread plate that inspired the work already discussed (in Chapter One) titled *Soapbread*. Similar is the tradition of soap making described earlier, as a ritual linked to an oral

tradition. According to Young (2000:2-3), this kind of memory transference, from the one generation to the next, is what Marianne Hirsch referred to as 'Post-Memory'.

### **Memory and History in 'Mythological Time'**

Nora (1989:12) claims that the images that remain once history has passed and memory receded become repressed into the unconscious, becoming autonomous and deritualised. It is only through continual re-representation of signs, such as text/image and image/ text, that the memories of cultural events and objects do not disappear.<sup>8</sup> Questioning the relationship between cultural treasures and memories, he distinguished the one from the other by their position within time (as was discussed above). In attempting to substantiate whether the use of memory is justified as influencing the signification process, a connection has been created between ritual, as structural support for the reversal of memory and the role of the imagination, and aesthetic judgement that enables art to bridge history and to subvert its context – the chronology of time.

Therefore, I must return to ritual briefly in order to find how, as a structural weaving of art making, it initiates links between unconscious memory and conscious thought. In the previous chapter, the religious relationship and the interiorising ability of making art repetitively were determined. The question relevant to this chapter on memory is when is art ritual. 'When' in this question, very pertinently answers itself, as ritual re-enacts something from the past. This question reaches the heart of the problem and distinguishes the concept of memory as the object of ritual, drawing the past into the present, similar to an artwork that remains in timelessness, as it waits for a re-process of re-signification over time.

But the object of time, we have noted, is divided into history and memory, according to Nora's *lieux de Mémoire* (1989:8), which makes the connection between the two. The German language, by contrast, marks *Historie*, as a 'reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete', memory as *Geschichte*, a 'perpetually actual

phenomenon'. In trying to answer the above question, I must bring in Nora's (1989:8) suggestion that:

If we were able to live within memory ... [e]ach gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as the ritual repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning. With the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history.

Art, therefore, is ritual in the formation of significance through memory, in the signification process of objects and in their identification as a primordial expression. In other words, the ability to connect with, or to signify, the viewers' associations and memories becomes a ritual. As an example, religious narratives and events (such as the Last Supper and baptism) have, through the recollection and re-creation of memory and ritual (rite and ceremony), brought forward ever-relevant narratives into that which Hutton (1993:xxi) calls 'mythological time', where they are 'conflated into ... archetypes or legend' (Hutton 1993:49).<sup>9</sup>

I now look at the relationship between religious imagery and memory within 'mythological time', questioning the validity of post-history and post-religion in this era. And, since the idea of history is under question, are these ideological theories not redundant and inappropriate to the ideas of humanism, which also seem to ignore the boundaries of time and of historical formation, such as did the Renaissance from where this idea was coined.

The use or re-use of religious images in contemporary art stimulates questions as to why these images are continually re-appearing (discussed in Chapter Two under *The Realisation of the Self-Conscious*). Yet, it has been noted how emphasis falls on the idea that some kind of similarity between religious images and their signified 'need' is one of a communal memory. The question then arises: have these images become partly absorbed into a global repertoire of images that artists can draw from, similar to Greek and Roman myths and religious narratives or Messianic rituals that constitute allegory and symbols within memory?<sup>10</sup>

Here again Nora's work elucidates the use of memory. He discloses that, because memory reveals itself as fragmented and as the trace of anxiety, the images are re-

presentations radically different from the original, old images, and are re-created and re-defined instead (Nora 1989:17). Here Blier's (1996:193) accentuation on the repetition of ritual as a performative role may be used to point to a similar tendency in memory: When 're-enacted, it is at once redefined, rediscovered, and created anew'.

Peter Burke (1989:101), a theorist on history, observes that these rituals 'shape memory' by imposing interpretations on the past. Because memory can never return, one does re-present it, rather than *reproduce* it, through recollecting the experience or event. Memory, urges Nora, cannot be resurrected, as this implies a hierarchy of memory, ordering the perspective of the past beneath the 'gaze of a static present ...' (Nora 1989:17).

Ritual in the post-modern era describes the re-appropriation of past events, images and/or theories into the present. Ritual, for me, indicates not only our perpetual return to rectify our theoretical ideals (that may, as a result of social and political changes, have moved towards their own nihilism), but also indicates the human 'meme', coined by Richard Dawkin, that structures or leads us by the ritual of our culture. Not simply defined by the 'Human Genome Project' and the scientific evolution begun by Darwin, it is a way culture resists global homogenisation, by *re*-turning to memory and *re-enacting* it (Appignanesi & Garret 2003:112-113; 186-187). In *Introducing Postmodernism*, Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garrett discuss and evaluate this term and the theories that have been explored within this historical construct and the time frame from the 'end' of Modernism till the present.

Appignanesi (2003:126) suggests that '[w]e are entering (have entered?) an amnesiac zone of "postmodernity" which should be called **hypermodernism**'. The technocracy and the surge towards the hyperreal influx of information, technology and simulated and processed images, focused on consumerism, recalls Baudrillard's radical conclusion that the border between art and reality have vanished and that both have collapsed into the universal simulacrum. In comparison to Modernism, Belting (1987:48) describes hyperreal Postmodernism as witness to a 'death ritual'. Appignanesi (2003:15;126;136;152) suggests that in the zone of hypermodernism, '[m]emory [l]oss of [r]eality', is attributed the to a reproduction and simulacra that

become objects of ‘consumer zero-consciousness [where] (a)cceleration **IS** the status quo’.<sup>11</sup>

The question arises whether in this overpowering globalisation a single hegemonic world order is not creating a panic within Postmodernism, by rejecting the fundamentalism of religion and its memory, culture and individuality?

If we were all to fall within the boundaries of hyper-reproduction, without the influence of culture, ritual, religion, memory and the imagination, art would have no purpose other than consumerism and would stagnate in simulacra; and ritual would assume no psychological function of recalling memory and would re-produce only a mechanical movement without any signification to a specific time. This type of reductionism is halted by the existentialist dictum of Jean-Paul Sartre: ‘What we call freedom is the irreducibility of the cultural order to the natural order.’ (Cited in Appignanesi 2003:188.)

In the idea that memory, occurring in time, becomes a process of forgetting, ritual and culture ‘re-surrect’ memory, therefore, holding it at the perpetual point of return, a standstill. Culture therefore also exists in this repetition. There are only three things in life that are certain: death, life and change. Change occurs as a constant repetition; only the nature of life and death are totally cyclic.

In my own work, the natural order or property of the soap is one of dissolving ‘*vergehen*’, yet, as an object of cleansing (or later healing), it signifies the transformation of thoughts and emotions as objects of return. It recalls Benjamin’s concept of ‘embod[ied] ideas in *actu*’ (cited in Weigel 1996:4). In the process of conceiving and making my soap sculptures, what I would like to call mytho-religious time seemed to arise, as image-space conjoined body-space, and personal and social memory found a connecting image/object, often seeming to reveal the deepest concerns of society. Manifested in a representative object, this social consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened and portrays a possibility (hope) or a need for psychological transformation. However, memory recalls the past and, in a way similar to religious subjects and myths, lies in the continuous understanding outside of the chronological time frame.

In the process of making my sculptures and questioning their origins and transformation through the imagination, as part of the unconscious, I recalled the memory of my grandfather. The realisation, that the objects that had evolved represented him, provoked a profound feeling of awe and further stimulated questions as to what my unconscious mind was concerned with and how it made the connection with soap and the vessel form. The symbolic connection of the soap fonts with him as a Lutheran minister and a missionary was obvious. But the use of religious symbols still provoked the question: Why would one use *religious* imagery in this age of post-religion?

According to Weigel (1996:51), in the Renaissance, pictorial representations became conceptualised with the advent of pictorial illusions that seemed true to life. 'This', Weigel conveys, 'meant that other types of image now came to be defined as mental or spiritual, and thus as secondary or metaphorical.'

Benjamin concentrated on the images actualised in the biblical or Judaic tradition 'in which the image figures as synonymous for likeness, resemblance, or similitude (*Ähnlichkeit*), and expressly for a non-material and non-sensuous similitude' (Weigel 1996:51). This was discussed earlier in *Rite of Signification* (Chapter One), where it was deduced that images are also understood as being readable; as being a form of writing.

Weigel (1996:51) writes of Benjamin's intellectual fascination with art and states that he saw some works as 'meditative images' that would 'preoccupy him over a long period of time'. His philosophical and theoretical preoccupation with art's representations led him to the concept of thought-images expressed in a two-fold view: 'as images in relation to which his thoughts and theoretical reflections unfold; and as images whose representations are translated into figures of thought (*Denkfiguren*)'. Benjamin's description of writers and artist's conversion of thoughts into images or thought-images, he describes as a 'generic turn'.

One of these discourses, comparing Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*, and his own '*Denkbild*' (thought-image), notes an 'historico-political "lesson"' between the

“progress” of ‘an *historical* movement through which history is finally and irreversibly separated from Paradise, and thus from a mythical place – [and] marks a situation in which Messianism and the philosophy of history cannot be made to tally with each other’ (Weigel 1996:58).

The ‘desire for healing’, as Weigel (1996:58) phrases it, or ‘to make whole what has been smashed’ to use Benjamin’s words, describes this inability to reconcile the profane or messianic with historical time. Benjamin therefore sees both art image and poetic image, as ‘wish-images’ (*Wunschbilder*). He evolves a thought-image that cannot be separated into a conceptual meta-discourse, but that arises from the integration of the imagination and embraces Freud’s concept of *Bearbeitung* or ‘working-through’ as a descriptive means of processing the signification of signs/images between the impossibility of reconciling history and a mythical place. Looking at Benjamin’s comparative concept of imagination and the identity of the ‘angel of history’ and Klee’s image (both thought-images), Weigel describes each as ‘wrenched from its paralysis as a metaphor of existence and set in motion of a kind that, in the representation of non-synchronicity, does not seek resolution in reconciliation’ (Weigel 1996:58-59).

With this argument in mind, the use of religious concepts in art may reveal our inability to describe our existence within time, and our present ‘history’ in a different, unique way, since neither exists in historical-time. In religious images or in the idea of messianism, we find reconciliation in the idea of our own redemption from history, with the ‘coming of the Messiah’.<sup>12</sup> Art, as wish-images, tries to reconcile our questions of existence and history.

Freud’s theory of *Bearbeitung* is very relevant to this discussion. It suggests the psychological process that moves memory from the unconscious to the conscious recollection, dislocating time and becoming a means of ‘working-through’ a difficult situation and therefore a form of reconciliation. The full weight of this concept will be discussed in Chapter Three, which deals with healing.

In retrospect, I understand my work as a process of grief intertwined with a process of self-restoration, through which memories found articulation in my sculptures. An

aspect of grief is the fear of losing one's memory of the person lost. The process of making a work/sculpture can become a 'concretisation' of that memory. Psychologically, this 'preserves' the memory and visually encourages the recollection, so that making art becomes a part of 'displaying' our concerns within this static time frame. I think, therefore, that religious concepts have the ability to represent primordial ideas, placing them and ourselves outside our own historical beginnings and endings of birth and death. It is as though art grants us immortality, outside the historical rejection of memories.

Stigmata and representations of such devotional images, Carruthers argues, were images understood in the temporal sense, in that, as 'signs [they made] something present to the mind by acting on memory' (cited in Bennett 2001:3)<sup>13</sup>. Bennett and Terdiman emphasised that these images, which recall memory, are not signs in virtue of imitating an object, but re-represent a past event or experience to which our sensuous memory can relate. This kind of image of non-synchronicity is similar to 'Freud's model of memory as set out in the allegory of the 'mystic writing-pad (*Wunderblock*)', described by Weigel (1996:59). This metonym or poetic image, as a surface of the unconscious, holds permanent traces which only reveal themselves as flashes of non-synchronicity, and correspond to Benjamin's 'Now of cognizability' (mentioned above), which contains the aspects of forgetting, of memory and also an aspect of distorted representation, but finally, an aspect of self-consciousness.

The 'distortion' of thought-images (of art) by the imagination and by the inability to reconcile with history and messianism (the possible answer to our existence), becomes, according to Weigel (1996:155), a forgotten origin or a 'lost access to writing [artmaking], the study of which holds out the promise of redemption'. Thus contemporary art, as a 'translation without an original' or a 'paraphrase' of 'the original through association', becomes for Benjamin a 'distortion' and 'also meant the remoteness from a lost and unreachable place towards which he turned in the figure of reversal' (Weigel 1996:155). Identifying 'reversal' as the return of memory and of images from the unconscious, Benjamin elucidates:

Reversal is the direction of study which transforms existence into writing [art]. Existence as writing [art] (and it has the reversal, the attitude of the

one recalling, to thank for its becoming this) – in the hope of redemption makes – the distortions cognizable.

In conclusion, I believe the religious environment is a space for enabling a unique state of mind in which we can re-identify ourselves. By introducing the notion of redemption, it gives us a sense of security about the validity of our existence. This idea is similarly illustrated by Blier (1996:189) in terms of ritual. She states, ‘It serve[s] as a means of making something one’s own.’ Halbwachs (1980:151) observes that, when entering a church, for example, we ‘recover a mental state’ and ‘re-establish a common thought and remembrance formed and maintained there through the ages’. He highlights the idea or concept of preservation that is associated with consecrated areas and confirms that it forms part of the ‘content of the religious collective memory’ (Halbwachs 1980:152). Re-memoration, as part of human nature and of human self-identification, consecrates empty spaces or voids with contemplation and re-collection that go back to Post-Memory.

I believe that the use of religious images recalls a sense of hope based on the promise of our redemption from time. Yet, in present postmodernist society, in the post-religious era that becomes reductionist, the idea of hope becomes deferred. Appignanesi (2003:189), however, suggests that ‘[r]elativism and fundamentalism might indeed be the complicit turns of postmodernity’. Therefore, messianism in art holds the ability to signify objects and images; and creates the idea that the artist and/or viewer can link up to the static time of re-collection. By bringing past memory forward and placing it, by means of art, into mythological time, messianism maintains not only a position in history and memory, but associates it with a collective memory that continuously recalls the promise of redemption and chooses it before life in deferral.

Walter Benjamin’s (Weigel 1996:26) ‘thought-images’ or ‘*Denkbilder*’ were, in my opinion, tied to the idea of ‘profane illumination’ and the awareness of self-consciousness in which understanding occurs. Sigrid Weigel (1996:23) describes Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* by going back to the original and literal sense of the word

through 'image' as 'image as likeness, similitude, or resemblance' (*Ahnlichkeit*), which, for Hegel, referred to mnemonic images (*Erinnerungsbilder*).

The aim here has been to substantiate the concepts of signification; in particular, to show that the use of religious symbols points to ritual and, therefore, to memory; and that, in this movement of recollection, memory is recreated and a moment of static time occurs, dislocated from history.

The theory surrounding Benjamin's term the 'Now of cognizability', describing the moment of realisation when understanding is reached, is pertinent in an endeavour to understand the use of religious images in contemporary art. He equates this moment with messianistic redemption through memory that corresponds with the insight gained after recollection occurs within the same reversal of time. Art, therefore, situated between history and memory, finds representation in a collective consciousness of mythological time.

Finally, *metanoia*, as the term meaning 'a turn around', portrays the reversal that Benjamin calls 'distortion'. My intention in this section is to convey the idea that memory-images or *Denkbilder* must revert to the unconscious for the origin of works or sculptures to be found. However, it is in this screening of messianism with the psychological re-remembrance, that this process again becomes a return to 'mythological time'. An attempt to articulate the encoding of images that used religious connotations or themes, in an era of post-religion and post-history, reveals that the former and their hybridisation recall moments of change in the artist or in society and these images are stored in a collective consciousness and collective memory. Memory, in art, therefore revitalises and restructures the human condition. This yields 'promise' that re-gathers the phenomenon of faith in a world of virtual and hyper-real nostalgia and the belief/disbelief in surviving the present day, without the specific safety net of religion or the existential belief in the past or the future. In making art as ritual, I found the repetition of making my sculptures became a form of commemoration. The function of religious images and concepts in art is not merely symbolic, but induces the capacity to recall memory as a sign of self-identity. By (re)making an artwork that re-calls the 'myths' of life and death, as in religious

stories, an artist's work becomes a similar pattern of tragedy and hope. As a blueprint of our shared existence, art objects witness our space in a collective memory.

### **Residues as Memory: Benjamin's *Passagen Project***

Nora (1989:19, 22) declares that, while memories are bound to places and spaces, history is connected to experience. Religion as part of a culture is directed towards a specific place, be it a mosque, a church or Golgotha. The aim of this section is to discuss how memories are represented by objects of our time and how their context or place creates a narrative surrounding the memory. However, objects of history, such as monuments and churches, often *represent* the conservative form of history, while sensuous materials, such as ruins or discarded junk, create a more comprehensive collection, *re-representing* of memories within history.

Benjamin embarked on what he named the *Passagen Project*, where he examined the Paris arcades as paradigms of a 'past become space' (*eine raumgewordene Vergangenheit*). He investigated the complex ideas of recollection and distortion within '*Denkbilder*' or 'thought-images' contextualised in a model for reading topographical representations, including traces and images of history as theoretical reflections. Weigel (1996:110) states:

Within this model, the reading of the traces and images of history is located in the scene (*Schauplatz*) of individual and collective memory (which are regarded as being analogous in structure) and understood as a perceptual activity on the threshold between receptivity and action, between revelation and historiography, between dreaming and philosophising.

Therefore, the paradigm shift from a 'topographical-spatial model of memory' to a 'scripto-topographical concept of memory' occurs, 'bearing the imprint of psychoanalytical thinking' (Weigel 1996:110). Weigel (1996:110) confirms that Benjamin emphasised the importance of place (*Ort und Stelle*) as an archaeological site, where things that have 'significant bearing on their readability or on the relationship between traces (*Spuren*) and remains (*Reste*)' are recovered or found.

My work titled 'passagen' (Figure 30a, b & c), which includes the Minister's collar or 'beffchen', is exhibited as a collage of found objects, precious objects, objects from nature and memorabilia that recall mementos or 'ruins', as they are described in Benjamin's project. I see these works as discarded objects, reframed as retrieved images that contain a wider memory than my own, but depicting my psychological condition, which is torn between re-creation of memory (by commemoration) and the need to forget. 'Mementos' for Freud 'were signposts to a past we might hope to revisit'; for Foucault, who saw them as 'lost in oblivion' they were 'remains' (Hutton 1993:71). In relation to memory and its place in the unconscious mind, Freud states that 'only the unconscious domain of the psyche comprehends reality without distortions, even if its dynamics are hidden from view'. Hutton (1993:63), by contrast, places more influence on the imagination of consciousness, which suggests that memory is mostly 'clouded by its illusions'.

Helen C. Chapman (1987:50), in *Memory in Perspective*, argues that the reason that 'memories must be preserved is not because of a nostalgic need to retain the past [but] as a dead object of curatorial value'.<sup>14</sup> Benjamin (Weigel 1996:17), however, stresses that the illumination or understanding of concepts and memories (recollection) takes place after 'materialistic, anthropological inspiration' occurs. The work, *beffchen* (Figure 31)<sup>15</sup>, and the soap sculptures, exhibited in the annex (Figure 23 & 27) of the 'Church Gallery', represent mundane material objects, discarded by society. The work titled Font I (Figure 32a & b), also exhibited in the annex, was a vessel that broke into pieces and would, in the ordinary course of events, have been thrown away. However, this work became a metaphor for the forgotten memories and objects discarded by history. In the era of post-history and post-religion, this signification cannot take place and, consequently, the stories and memories associated with such objects are discarded with the objects. My work, a soap vessel, relies on a spectator who can associate or share a memory with such a form. By placing this work on a mirror, I tried to introduce the idea of reflection: in gazing 'into' the broken font, one finds one's own reflection between the fractured soap pieces.

In conclusion, as *ars memoria* or objects that have been retrieved from memory (the bread plate, for example, that inspired the work titled *Soapbread* (Figure 25) and the

*beffchen* (Figure 31)) can be seen as similar to the corsets, feather dusters, and rubble that Benjamin collected in his famous *Passagen* work. His concern with the vigilance for the past occurs in his 'brushing history against the grain' to find its unconventional residues. Benjamin, according to Chapman (1987:61), explored old Paris streets and collected 'found' objects as an imaginative recreation of memories and narrative. He endeavoured to re-value these objects since 'elements of experience' are of value to the future. By comparison, Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, located 'relics' in the site of memory. Nora sees these 'remains' or relics not only as retaining their memories, but also as becoming new cornerstones in revising the past and creating an 'updated' history. Revision is, as we have seen in the South African context, also, in part, a psychological change. With this in mind, in the next section on Hegel and Freud, I discuss the psychological 'return' of memories, also as relics.

My aim here has been to suggest that we make art within the context of memories not from a nostalgic desire to retain the past, but because artworks, as objects, represent the consciousness of the specific time, within a continuum of changing perceptions.

### ***Metanoia: Retrieval of Memory: a discussion on Hegel and Freud***

The difficulty involved in locating my sculptures in the postmodern genre is due to the revival and acknowledgement of memory and culture in the present era in South Africa. South African art is often contains an underlying concern with empathy for people and environment, and does not show the symptomatic deritualisation and post-religious trends of the western movement of Postmodernism, which, one must admit, does influence our art. While we are heirs to the teachings of Foucault and his belief in the end of Man and the end of History, formulated in *The order of things* (Foucault 1970), the South African environment of protest and resistance, residing in the recollection of memories, has advanced into the present environment of restitution and transformation. It is in this environment of theory and reality that the discourse on art is divided between the post-human inhumanity of terrorism, genocide and

cultural destruction and the foresight of a post-humanism that encourages a re-assessment of history and memory as relocators of ourselves in this world.

The postmodernist may argue, according to Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (1996:303), in *On a history of philosophy*, that ‘there is “really” no subject, no consciousness, no freedom, just an “interplay of forces” and our “selves”, nothing but the tentative junction of these forces’. It is in this vein that the relationship between memory and history must be explored. If history does not exist, then memory becomes dislocated from all the parameters that form the supposed continuum of history. Within this context, the next few sections discuss related theories of memory, showing how art is a creative process of signification occurring through the theoretical construction<sup>16</sup> of concept and context, which is drawn from ‘Post-Memory’ and from the unconscious and is re-created into subjects and objects recalled from memory.

The following discussion on Hegel’s *Erinnerung* describes the shift of memory from the unconscious to recollection as a physiological occurrence, taking place outside of the realm of history. As a process of recollection, in which the past is relocated into the present time, it becomes dislocated. Art, bearing as it does the trace of memory, also makes a shift, dislodging itself from the concept of history and from time. History, however, as a human construct concerned with documentation and its function of representing a time and a place, also structures the ‘movements’ of art. Art, therefore, cannot be entirely isolated from history. Max Dvořák, a historian, warns us against the ‘comfortable fiction of an eternal art: for in fact the very concept of art ... was subject to historical change’ (cited in Belting 1987:37). We do not make art in a vacuum; therefore structure of place and time are required, while one of art’s functions is documentation and commentating. This formation, as has been said, ‘lies in history’. Here the paradox is in the word itself: one disagrees with its artificial construction; however, one needs it to order and structure our lives. The point of this discourse on Hegel’s *Erinnerung* is to demonstrate how his phenomenology avoids the debates on history by concentrating on the ‘Spirit’, by which we define ourselves through recognition and the roles we play in relation to each other. Hegel calls this ‘a moral community’, advancing the idea that we identify ourselves and recall one

another from a communal memory by ‘our conceptions of the world through religion’ (cited in Solomon 1996:219).

The concept of messianism, as it is referred to by both Benjamin and Hegel, occurs (as I have previously shown) in that there is ‘no progress towards redemption in history’. Messianic redemption, which foresees the end of History, is thus an image of non-synchronicity, while Benjamin’s historico-theoretical ‘thought-image’ – his ‘angel’ – remains fixed in the position of ‘turning back’ (*Umkehr*), yet keeping always the momentary perspective open and allowing insight and recollection to occur in art and to keep alive the potential for our questions about existence. The concept of Postmodernism in art is diagnostic of change (in the reversal of cultural constructs and retrieval of ideas). Ironically, however, its de-evaluation of sensuous and emotionally-bound objects seems mostly to recoil on itself, because it is caught within a communal memory, which asserts the necessity for individual religions and cultures.

Weigel (1996:59) states that the ‘formulation’ of a ‘chain of events’ could possibly be traced back to Freud’s essay ‘On Screen Memories (*Über Deckerinnerungen*)’ of 1899. Freud formulated that children before the age of six or seven do not have the ability to recollect, or place themselves in the stance of reversal. This ‘reproduction of life as a connected chain of events’ and as a form of re-remembering, Freud states, is an awareness of repetition, and of ‘non-synchronicity [that] only becomes visible via the topos of the turn back or reversal (*Umkehr*)’ (Weigel 1996:59).

The *metanoia* (turning back) has become an idea central to this thesis, as it supports the theme of my own work on *conversion*.<sup>17</sup> Yet the *metanoia* of memory does not imply a complete reversal. In this case, distortion of images occurs through the recollection of memory from the unconsciousness and through the imagination, keeping open its ability to stay appropriate for all time.

Weigel (1996:59) eloquently describes this stance taken by art, a stance between history and memory:

The turn back organises a form of perception which – positioned in the flow of time, but adopting a stance opposed to it – directs the gaze towards what has disappeared in that flow, towards what has been destroyed by history,

the elements that have been used – and consumed – in the process of artistic production, in short, towards ‘what passes away in the becoming’ (*das im Werden Vergehende*).

According to this view, my work was first made and then, after an initial realisation of the concept of memory and then of conversion, the idea of ‘becoming’ as a form of continual interaction (of process), developed into the signs of self-transformation and identity. Here I choose to use the words of Kristeva, artist and woman, to further my own purpose: Women [art] as such does not exist. / She [art] is in the process of becoming (cited in Appignanesi 2003:101).

### **Hegel’s *Erinnerung*: Retrieval of Memory**

Here I intend to discuss the conversion that occurs in the unconscious, where ‘hidden’ memory is brought to the fore of consciousness. The aim is to show how the retrieval of memory, which is a physiological process – where the moment of ‘cognizability’ becomes realisation of self – indicates the ritual of self-analysis in art. The discussion on Georg W.F. Hegel’s phenomenological view of *Erinnerung* is relevant to art as a process of finding how memory-images reveal themselves to us and how we then learn to decipher them as objects recalled by memory. Hegel formulates memory-images as the interiorised remembrance (*Erinnerung*), stating that they cannot reside in the thinking memory (*Gedächtnis*) (Krell 1990:166).<sup>18</sup> This stimulated my interest in consciously exploring the psychology of the consciousness and the philosophy surrounding memory.

*Erinnerung* (Recollection) or *Er-Innerung* (Re-recollection), as Hegel occasionally wrote it, suggests that recollection involves a ‘spiritual’ awareness of the influences and occurrences around us. This includes the factors of reason, will, memory, imagination, judgement, governing sense, emotion and nourishment.<sup>19</sup> It controls the fact that, through the process of interiorisation we find the substratum of significant links to images and symbols, which only the unconscious can connect. As a fundamental connection between inherited collective memory and imagination, the

image produced in art reveals the formation of identity. Krell (1990:205) affirms that each of these objects is:

metonymic- mnemonic of the whole; each is on the verge of *being* the whole. Yet, if that is so, the movement of interiorization must come full circle, *and thus must turn outward*, without absolute beginning or end.

This movement from deep, almost forgotten memory, to the conscious remembrance needs stimulation for it to surface as recollection.

The realisation that I was sculpting a symbol concerned with promised redemption and a recollection of the memory of my grandfather became what Hegel called ‘absolute knowing’ (Krell 1990:235). For Krell, it was this move from internalising that would have brought out the unconscious, deep recesses of the mind, which revealed the image as ‘unconsciously preserved’ (*bewusstlos aufbewahrt*). The unconscious, Krell states, is a preserved icon – ‘a book as yet unopened’ (Krell 1990:215). It is here that we can connect with the concept of signifying art and a collective consciousness that finds connections in what both Hegel and Freud formulated as the ‘*Vorrat*’ or ‘stockpile’ of images that exists in the deep recesses of memory (Krell 1990:218). Every artwork in the process of making and signification goes through the movement of interiorisation, remembrance, imagination and memory. Krell says that we remember only by the interiority of intelligence itself and not by images, since they have been set free. This is what Krell (1990:224, 226) calls ‘the inner heartland of thought’, where *Gefühl* (emotion) is represented as a ‘stable content of something felt’.

Freud, as a psychoanalyst, mainly investigated psychological disturbances which, he believed, lay dormant in past memory in the unconscious mind. Hutton (1993:61) observes that psychoanalysis was essentially a technique for retrieving lost memories and that Freud saw the images of dreams as hidden realms of reality in the psyche. He believed that ‘humans [have] moulded the psyche though their efforts to deal with life’s challenges since prehistoric times’ (Hutton 1993:61).<sup>20</sup>

Freud’s theory on the repression of memory, according to Hutton, suggests that the mind also stores away intolerable memories in the unconscious, leaving behind only

‘clues’ to how these memories can be retrieved. Through introspection, we are able to recover a lost heritage that, since it yields knowledge of our past lives, makes us more equipped to deal with the future. Through introspection, we recover secrets of our identity (Hutton 1993:61).<sup>21</sup>

Thomas Butler, thinking about culture as memory, was convinced by reading Jung that we do not come into this world with our minds as ‘*tabula rasa*, but rather equipped with an inventory of archetypal patterns of thought and relationships that express themselves in common myths and folk tales’. He supports the idea that we are born ‘with some dim distillation of the experience, thought and spiritual achievements of our ancestors’. Butler explains that he ‘conceive[s] of man’s “history” as a spiritual evolution in which generically transmitted archetypes were a primary means of intergenerational communication and growth’ (Butler 1989:3).

The realisation and understanding that my work was about retrieving my own memory and making a symbol for spectators/readers to retrieve their personal memories, brought insight into my own motivation for continuing to make soap and carve it. Hegel calls this *Erkennen* and *Begriff*, to recognise and to understand, portraying clearly this moment of eureka-like cognition as that in which the ‘speculative or absolute idea (the third division in which the concept and logic as a whole culminate) thus depends on an interiorizing remembrance that is not purely theoretical but also practical’. He defines it further, stating, ‘If the dialectical method in logic is not to be mere extrinsic form, it must be interiorized as “the soul and the very grasp [*begriff*] of the content”’ (Krell 1990:207).

By interiorising the moment of *begriff*<sup>22</sup> or realisation, Krell maintains, the ‘psyche’ or ‘soul’, which is linked to the archetypes and collective consciousness, becomes a part of ‘*innerlich machen; erinnert werden*’ (interiorising remembrance) (Krell 1990:210; 227-228).<sup>23</sup> Between the sensation of making the art object and realising it – the actual moulding and impressing and hollowing of the soap (Figure 33) into a receptacle, for instance – I have come to understand that art is a part of ‘reading’ and ‘copying’ the impressions made on the soul’s surface, and that of the conscious and unconscious mind, only by thinking and finding and recognising (*erkennen*) the

relationship of the work to the self, do we understand the spirit or the *Gestalt* within our work.<sup>24</sup>

This connection to deep images opens up the psychology of Jung, who, with the imagination and images of dreams, opens a 'pit', as Hegel calls it, where images and icons emerge from the mind. Here I again recall the idea of my sculptures' function of containment, in the form of the font, and my signification of the object as 'holding' memories. This is more part of a 'productive memory', than 'productive imagination'. *Das produktive Gedächtnis* or 'the productive memory' Hegel formulates as the transition to conceptual thought (Krell 1990:221). Later in the discussion, I again refer to exile as a process of signification of productive memory, in which direct memory does not play as great a part as the imagination; memory and Post-Memory, however, become re-representation by drawing on a collective memory. 'Spirit', Hegel claims, 'in the form of intuition remains caught up in a fabric of inarticulate feelings and sensations.' For this he aptly comes up with the term, the spirit's 'muffled weaving' (*sein dumpfes Weben*) (Krell 1990:212).

This notion is illustrated in the concept of Beuys' collection of works titled *Felt*, which emphasise precisely Hegel's anthropological use of the word sensation<sup>25</sup>. Felt is not woven as linen is, in a structured grid weave, but rather is a compression of fibres where no pattern exists. The German word, *Stoff*,<sup>26</sup> Krell says, 'reminds us of even earlier stages of [the] spirit's development' (Krell 1990:212-213). Beuys' use of felt and fat are directed at the sensations felt by the body. His emphasis on warmth and insulation in many of his works has led to a series of Warmth Sculptures, amongst which are *Felt Corners* (Figure 34) and *Fat chair* (1968) (Figure 35). Caroline Tisdall (1979:72; 74) emphasises the body-mind relationship of structure versus the chaotic weave of the mind and emotions. Beuys works with the 'spirit' of natural things, that which characterises them as a part of the natural world and its function and association. Similar to felt, fat<sup>27</sup> also insulates heat. This is a 'spirit' or Gestalt, rather than a descriptive characteristic.

By going into a self-reflective trance while making soap, the ritual I was engaged in brought the realisation of where my inspiration came from, through this process of *Insichgehen* (going into oneself). Hegel writes that this absolute knowing internalised

as ‘the identity of substance and subject’ – ‘is the configuration in which content and form coalesce and perdure as *Begriff*, the actual grasp of the concept’ (cited in Krell 1990:234). Absolute knowing through *Erinnerung* is a process of ‘going into itself [*Insichgehen*], in which spirit abandons its existence and commits its shape [*Gestalt*] to remembrance’ (Krell 1990:235).

In conclusion, this discussion focuses on the interpretation of remembrance, rather than the ritual of *Insichgehen*. While discussing Platonic anamnesis in his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel appeals to the pristine sense of *Erinnerung* as *Sich-innerlich-machen*, ‘to make oneself interior’, whereas in my previous discussion I focused on *Insichgehen*, the word that appears in the final stages of Hegel’s Phenomenology, ‘to go into oneself’. Together this process becomes an interiorisation between the ritual of understanding the self and attaining ‘cognition’ of oneself and one’s work; and the memory as recollection or remembrance, the ‘profoundly thoughtful sense of the word, “inasmuch as it locates the universality that cognition seeks with a conscious spiritual interior”’ (Krell 1990:235-236). This section, therefore, serves as an interlinking chain connecting the physiological shift involved, first, in ritual, now in memory, and, introducing next, the psychological aspect of healing.

The objective of this discussion on memory and *Erinnerung* has been to investigate how memory reveals itself in art. By analysing oneself or by interiorisation, the artist delves into his/her psyche and enters into conscious remembrance from deep memory. This provokes emotions and recollection of the unconscious. These redeemed images from the unconscious, the *Denkbilder* or ‘thought-images’ in writing and in art that Benjamin refers to, find an outward manifestation in a ‘form’ understood by the collective memory, which is a symbol for a concern that exists in the archetypal patterns originally formulated by Jung. In finding and realising our art objects to be some aspect of archetypal patterns in the collective consciousness, we become aware of our own identity. This brings an awareness of the gestalt of one’s work, which exists in the continuum of time.

The importance of the concept of *metanoia*, or turning back, reaches beyond the Renaissance revival of thought and learning and into the debate on Postmodernism

and the theories that support or place this term into disrepute. By relocating oneself as both figure and mind engaged in *metanoia*, the idea of memory as a means of locating oneself in time and in history is affirmed. This discussion is informed by Benjamin, Freud and Hegel. Each of these establishes the site of relics, both in places and spaces, and in the movement of memory from the unconscious to the consciousness. Within this chapter, the concern with conversion is discussed in terms of the shift in memory from the deep memory of recollection, where art objects as ‘distortions’, as a result of this shift and in conjunction with the imagination, yield up objects discarded in history and thus remain static in time, avoiding synchronicity and, therefore, remaining always open to the past and the future for signification. The resulting recollection and re-creation in art are forms of transformation. Thus memory highlights our physiological involvement, including our emotions and sensations. By becoming aware of how art can change our perceptions or how it can show us patterns, such as the concepts of ‘poverty’ and ‘exile’, it is to be hoped that art can possibly encourage and create awareness of the knowledge that we should have gained from the past. Appignanesi (2003:125) emphasises this thought: ‘The opposite of knowledge is not ignorance but deceit and fraud.’

Art, as fragile traces of salvation in opposition to the unredeemed life of history and historical re-remembrance, is the recipient of a redemptive mode of criticism from Benjamin, who attributes his understanding to Kant’s *Third Critique*, in which the aesthetic judgement becomes a ‘mediatory link between the spheres of theoretical and practical reason’ (Wolin 1982:42).

## **My Artworks as Personal Commemorative Monuments in an Anti-Redemptory Age**

In this section, I consider the act of making objects from memory and question the validity of their memorial content in an ‘anti-redemptory age’, when scepticism surrounding the creation and erection of monuments as commemorative structures is prevalent. In monuments do we commemorate the ‘heroes’ or are we commemorating the inhumanities committed? Perceived of as having a redemptory function, monuments mark, as James E. Young in *At Memory’s Edge*, explains, the act of ‘burying’ the memory, instead of bringing forward the recollection of the individuals. He discusses monuments and artworks that deal with the memory of the Holocaust. Disputing the traditional redemptory function of art, which he rejects, he questions the possibility of creating anything aesthetic in the wake of such horror (Young 2000:2). Yet, here I must restate the importance of re-calling and re-telling memory, which finds support in Marianne Hirsch’s term ‘Post-Memory’. Young (2000:2-3) declares that memory is an integral part of historical research that, narrated from previous generations, helps to shape the inner lives of the ‘listeners’. My aim in these two last sections of this chapter is, consequently, to investigate whether any action of commemoration is justifiable.

In questioning myself about both the context of the ‘Church’ gallery for the purpose of exhibiting my sculptures and the religious symbolism that continually crops up in my work, I discovered a strange monumentalism in this sculpture – a result of the archetypal symbols used, such as the vessel and its conceptual identity of preservation and conversion. These two concepts are specifically relevant to monuments. In my work the context of the uprootment of people in South Africa by the colonialists and the Apartheid regime, and the earlier uprootment that displaced my own family to South Africa during the Second World War, become an issue of memory and the displacement of ‘exile’. These are in direct opposition to the need to preserve Post-Memory, but to presume a conversion of thoughts that does not engage every object with the injustices of the past. There is the necessity for every individual to recall his/her particular memory, however, to gain resolution and/or seek forgiveness. Here

this is seen in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that facilitated the process of recalling memory, placing specific individual memories into the construction of history and, therefore, creating the idea that the act of injustice was heard and selectively made important, so that the idea of 'worth' was gained for the lost life or struggle of the freedom fighter. This process, however, similar and di(s)-similar to the function of monuments, was set up in the hope of restitution and redemption for each party concerned. Based on the notion that one party seeks restitution and the other redemption, however, this further questions the validity of monuments for other generations.

The problem with restitution and redemption lies also in the issues of identity, for example, my generation's identity, which is determined by both colonising and being colonised. The contradictory dynamics of building a monument to gain redemption lie in the process of confession and forgiveness that occurs through society's transformation or conversion, which is meant to bring about a greater cultural understanding. What is ironic here is that the ideas of forgiveness and redemption cannot be made a part of the political field. The difficulty is that a monument, being a political tool, cannot stand for personal grief, reparation, forgiveness or redemption. As seen in the discussion on ritual and simulacra (Chapter One), these objects can only be symbols. However, even an object's symbolic sincerity and function are questionable. It is my opinion that only personal monuments can effectively deal with the past, not statues representing an encompassing generality of suffering.

The discussion that follows explains and substantiates why my works are contextualised as personal monuments and how, because of my need to remember, they exist as commemorative pieces. To introduce my concern at the growing disillusion regarding monuments and at the rejection of the idea of restitution, here are the current dynamics that are involved in this thought-process.

In the wake of the threat of war between the United States of America and the Middle East, after the attacks on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, (this unprecedented act in history earned the epitaph '9/11'), memories of our family narrative told by my Grandparents about the recollection of the bombings in East Germany at the end of World War II resurfaced. These recollections of Post-Memory

were provoked by the continuous influx of news and the media headlines on the ‘Terror Attack’ and the counter attack as ‘Restitution’, in the name of those who had died on 9/11. Although the political dynamics contain a different complexity in America, in comparison to the subject of the history of Nazi Germany (which the present-day German people would prefer to avoid), the need for redemption from these memories remains in suspension, together with the need for restitution to be made to the Jewish nation. In direct contrast to this sense of suspended resolution, making art in the context of South Africa has, for me, revealed a conceptual connection to the idea of conversion by means of political transformation and change, thus inducing further signification for re-conciliation. It is clear, however, that redemption, resolution, restitution and reconciliation are such seminal ideas on conversion that they inevitably become issues concerned with the self, and only then can they be reflected within a broader social concern. Through this exploration of resolution and redemption of personal memories, my transformation within has brought about the realisation that my own inner-conversion reflects this trend in our society.

I intend now to discuss how the work *within a river of glass shards* became instilled with Post-Memory; and how the conceptual idea (archetypal pattern) or symbol that appears to be connected to the collective memory, as a thought-image concerned with ‘exile’, was not only relevant in the South African context, but also as an ‘inherited memory’ – a ‘Post-Memory’ – told me by my grandparents.

#### *Heimat* and **Memory**: ‘within a river of glass shards’

The narratives of the eviction of the people of District Six, the Griquas, the Khoisan, and even of the missionaries in South Africa who were placed in concentration camps<sup>28</sup> during the Second World War, are only now being revised into history. The process here, similar to that which occurred after the Holocaust<sup>29</sup> and the death and exile of so many Jews, tells of uprootment from both culture and *Heimat*. This destruction of the places and environment of one’s *Heimat* forces one to a reassessment and re-identification of oneself.

In discussing the specific work titled *within a river of glass shards* (Figure 36), what I wish to convey is that this work was conceptualised from a commemorative consciousness and endeavoured to depict the ‘*Ursprung*’ or origin of personal memory that is the context of dislocation, physically and in terms of history. In discussing the work and the narratives that have formed my own memories and have become subjective stories, I am addressing the question of how an artwork positions itself as signifying re-recollection when it is riddled with distortion. Because of the difference between history and memory, I maintain that art objects appear as emergence (*Entstehung*) of ‘thought-images’, as personal ‘*lieux*’ recalled from deep memory and become relics of history, revealing to us our identity in relation to the significance of this object. Without a direct line to history, however, memory allows the imaginative play of intuition and ritual to become part of this process. This is, above all, a process of expressing oneself, and, therefore, a process of describing Hegel’s ‘*innerlich machen, erinnert werden*’.<sup>30</sup>

As an example of these relics of history, various objects were made in concentration camps, many of them gifts made by prisoners and sent to their wives or children. (The soap blocks carved by the boers<sup>31</sup> during the Anglo-Boer War have already been mentioned (see Figure 2).) Such objects, crafted with flowers and filigree, recalled memories of home and created a sense of hope and promise, fused with the desire to give the object to a loved one. Today these objects are culturally significant. This introduces again the idea in art of the very heuristic functionality of re-representing significance through memory. Joseph Margolis, in discussing the ontology of art (1978:178), terms the association of an experience or emotion with an object as ‘correspondence’, which he describes as follows:

... we think of an object as expressive of a certain condition because, when we are in that condition, it seems to us to match, or correspond with, what we experience inwardly: and perhaps when the condition passes, the object is also good for reminding us of it in some special poignant way, or for reviving it for us (Margolis 1978:178).

The installation of the work titled *within a river of glass shards* (Figure 37a, b, c & d) is a hanging web of interlinking diamond-shaped wire frames, with glass shards

bolted through each link. The initial idea was to place this work on the floor. However, the glass dictated its being hung for the exhibition. The glass, resembling the colours of water in the sun, flickers like memories. This 'river' was vertically suspended, as if in motion, like a waterfall. Initially the work represented a river filled with glass shards and was inspired by and 'narrated' the story of exile told by my family.<sup>32</sup> Originally to be exhibited on the floor as a path or bed, the work, by its very luminosity urged me to suspend it, so that it descended like a flow of memories, with the imagination illuminating it and drawing one's eye towards the suitcase, standing upright, below. This visual narrative utilises the suitcase as a *lieux* object (a sacrificial object, signifying the leaving of one's *Herkunft* and *Heimat*) and represents the memory saved and the fragment of identity retained.

The soap suitcase in the work is a metaphor for the relationship between the inner and outer body. Signifying the storage of clothes and personal treasures (memories), it is an expression of the physical body and the psyche. Margolis (1978:179) makes a similar connection between the condition of the body (either the human or the object representing it) and the psychological state, when he writes: '[W]e tend to see it corporeally: that is, we tend to credit it [the object] with a particular look which bears a marked analogy to some look that the human body wears and that is constantly conjoined with an inner state'.

Although soap and glass shards are totally opposite in material structure and may visually seem disjointed by texture, they are very similar in their formation, in that both go through a process of heating and melting and thus, crystallization. Both soap and glass in their history of being treasured, and now easily discarded, bring about an awareness of today's necessity for recycling. This formulates the cyclic movement of the historical construction, which selectively discards and takes up again forgotten and repressed memories. Like the cobblestones in Europe's old cities, the glass and the soap, as they become worn with time, suggest a history far removed from our own. Memories, like watermarks, recede into our minds and return again in the correct context, where they may be recalled. Freud suggests that, as with certain forms of repetition (such as washing or water continuously flowing over glass, making it smooth) so repetition and recurrence place the art process in a continuum, with no real beginning or end (being smoothed) – much like time that 'gobbles-up'

memories, displacing them and sending them into oblivion (Shapiro 1997:61). In contrast, Freud (cited in Levine 1998:200) remarks that, through repetition, the repeated use of the same structures or forms, for example, an entropic effect (recalling his idea that all life and activity tend toward the condition of death) occurs with the passing of time, causing the particular meanings of a monument to be forgotten.

By hanging this work in the doorway of the gallery, I intended to make the viewers aware of their individuality from the way in which they looked at their social and historical environment, and was suggesting that we all look through the eyes of our own experiences and memories. The interlinking network of wire and glass is, for me, a celebration of the process of remembering and re-representing my own view of inherited memories. The glass shards are bolted onto an interlinking network of frames made of squares from de-barbed wire. The disintegrating nature of the soap suitcase below the 'waterfall' is symbolic of the weathering that occurs over time, (as when water flows over cobblestones). Therefore, the shards are significant of changing perspectives; the suitcase of our disintegrating memories.

Friedländer points out that, after the act of 'redemptory anti-semitism' in Germany, public art took on the connotation of compensating for mass murder with beauty. He suggests, too, that somehow memorials might be seen to function as redemption from this past through the instrumentalisation of its memory. It is Young's (2000:6) opinion that the Holocaust haunts the post-war generation of memory artists and has challenged the traditional redemptory premise of art itself.

The story behind my work, *within a river of glass shards*, can be seen as a part of my history. My artwork is a commemorative piece or a personal monument, because of my direct association with the narrative and my strong need to remember my origins. Thus this inquiry has provided an enlightening discovery concerning my own past and its place in history, combined here with the investigation into my family's memories and how they have been passed down to us. This work, however, does not share the same personal concern with resolution as do other works, like the soap fonts, tablecloth and *Sitzbath*.

The 'legacy' of uprootment or 'exile' from Germany and the past injustices revealed through cases that have come before the TRC in South Africa show similarities through stories and the 'rising up' of the hidden past in the act of oral recollection. There is no doubt that this concerns the formation of identity, first as individuals, and then, as a social group or nation in the process of restitution and resolution. In researching the conceptual links, social concerns, political-historical construction and memory in the process of locating our specific concerns in making art, the work becomes a 'memory-history-revision and retelling', while moving back and forth between the recollected past, the history told to us and the influence of the media's presence on the hour. The art that is produced exists in a flux of time, between the real and the embroidered (*Geschite*), including memory and story in historical terms (*Historie* which is open to criticism). This work, *within a river of glass shards* signifies, for me, a grid of association concerning what exile means for us as humans in history and in the collective memory. Friedländer points out that 'even if new forms of historical narrative were to develop or new modes of repression ... the opaqueness of some "deep memory" would probably not be dispelled' (Young 2000:12). These he differentiated from everyday ones, claiming that they are repressed, unresolved events of trauma that lie in the unconscious (Hutton 1993:72). Young (2000:12) quotes Maurice Blanchot who suggests that this signifies 'to keep over absent meaning'. In art, therefore, we connect with an understanding of certain issues, like exile, that is a part of myth and the social unconscious.

Exile, Kristeva states, is a form of *dissidence*, as it involves 'uprooting oneself from a family, a country or a language'. She continues, describing it as:

[A]n irreligious act that cuts all ties, for religion is nothing more than membership of a real or symbolic community, which may or may not be transcendental, but which always constitutes a link, a homology, an understanding. The exile cuts all links, including those that bind him to the belief that the thing called life has A Meaning guaranteed by the dead father. For if meaning exists in the state of exile, it nevertheless finds no incarnation, and is ceaselessly produced and destroyed in geographical or discursive transformations.

The concept of exile, however, owes its existence to the necessity for keeping the recollections safe, away from the corruption of history's recollection and forgetting.

Kristeva continues:

Exile is a way of surviving in the face of the *dead father*, of gambling with death, which is the meaning of life, of stubbornly refusing to give in to the law of death. (Kristeva 1986:298.)

The suitcase, in the glass sculpture, representing the 'sole object' taken from East Germany by my grandparents, signifies the uprootment of their lives. How does one carry one's life's work and one's history, one's home, in a suitcase? This object sculpted in soap (as a visual and tactile link with home and as an example of a culturally informed labour) becomes a metaphor for the desperation of remembering their *Heimat* and, simultaneously, the desperation of being able to forget the injustice. Yet, after going through such an ordeal, how does one explain the hardship, how does one explain one's '*herkunft*'<sup>33</sup> – one's origin? The soap 'suitcase' becomes a symbol for the 'residue' of memory that is passed on to the next generation and separated by perception. This memory-object or *Denkbilder* in time disintegrates, like soap under water, representing the process of forgetting.

The original representation of *within a river of glass shards* as a path alluded to the interactive motion that occurs between the body and mind, when one walks and in the process finds a solution for a problem. By turning and soldering the barbed wire into squares and carefully bolting each glass shard, this *re-creation* from fragments became symbolic of re-connecting and re-creating my grandparent's memories and making them my own, thereby referring this work to the South African context of exile and the shared social consciousness of the concept. Similar to the idea of Richard Long's *Brushed Paths* (Rapaport 1994:151-167) as re-representing memories, these works become what Young (2000:66) calls "acts of remembrance" – retaining the resonance of actions, staged acts, actors, and acting out'. The work, *within a river of glass shards*, together with all the soap sculptures that formed part of my installation, signifies the process of recollection and the process of coming to cognition; the origin of the artwork and how it forms a part of the formation of identity. Peter Burke (1989:101), in his essay *History as Social Memory*, tells us that 'actions transmit memories as they transmit skills'.

In the essay *Brushed Path, Slate Line, Stone Circle*, in which Herman Rapaport describes Richard Long's work *Brushed Paths* as an arts' re-appropriation of significance during its physical, yet metaphorical representative move through defamiliarisation, that emphasises how 'art of the avant-garde has struggled to create new languages in order to change the ways we comprehend the world ...'. This concretisation of memory in art, yields the fear of loss, and thereby defies not only the continuum of decay and forgetting, but also history and its selectiveness. Rapaport expresses the view of both Heidegger and Long, of which, Heidegger suggest that 'Saying is not essentially tied to the production of new and unfamiliar representations. In fact, Saying may be most radical when it chooses not to take the path of defamiliarization but, instead, reappropriates something familiar that has temporarily been put aside.' (Cited in Rappaport 1994:156.)

Similar to Benjamin and Freud's concern with 'reversal' that occurs in art and holds open the view of the past to the present for reappropriation, Rapaport (1994:156) confirms that between the *act* of making and the artworks themselves, reappropriation 'is not to return, in our context, to the very aesthetic one has left, but to take up that aesthetic in a way that puts its identity and difference with respect to itself in question'.

In conclusion, I wish to maintain that while art can be commemorative, its reliance on memory always highlights the difficulty of history and questions whether restitution can be attained. I believe restitution is a part of recollection, yet never totally, because personal recollection and resolution occur outside of history, although they do co-exist. The aim in this section has been to explore the significance of the work *within a river of glass shards* as a metaphor for dislocation, between Post-Memory, as a form of heritage and the finding of a separate identity, where these specific memories have no more direct need for restitution or resolution, but resonate, for example, in the current experience and memory of exile in South Africa.

Concepts such as these have become a part of a social unconscious and collective memory that we understand as a recurring concept in the continuum of time. The idea

of exile in my work is less about my *Herkunft* or descendants, and more about the concept to which we in South Africa relate. As an idea, this concept emerges (*Entstehung*) from Post-Memories and an association with our collective memory. Through the intervention of placing these objects, as mementos from the past, in the entrance of the gallery, almost within the doorway, individual viewers were made aware of their own perspective. Each glass, each different colour distorting the light and the view to the inside or outside, signified that everyone's approach and memories are different. In making art with a memorial consciousness, this work has become an expression of self-re-identification, or in my view, an emergence (*Entstehung*) of a Post-Memory in which we find consolation and re-assurance.

The debate concerned with the construction of monuments to uphold memory has, in a similar way, to deal with the problem of subjective memory, questioning how this memory is maintained. This concern is taken up in the next section.

### **Monuments: Death in/of Art**

The climate of forgiveness and reconciliation in South Africa brings to the fore various questions. Who is accountable for the injustice? Do we, as heirs to the sins of previous generations, have to carry the guilt and shame of our ancestors? Do we in every work of art have to acknowledge the destruction that our subject matter may hold within it? As individuals and artists, do we simply bypass this or do we recover a new identity by working-through the past? Are art, monuments and history not all constructs which we can manipulate? Shapiro (1995:35) observes that the 'history of art itself begins to emerge as a story of self-consciousness'. History, he urges, requires artists to become self-conscious as they must 'perform their own narrativizations of the history of art and so become practitioners of parody and pastiche ...'.

My art, and its significance for the conservation of memory through the concept of ritual as an unconscious discovery of influences in my life also, however, reflects the idea that only through re-creation, physically, or through mental revisiting, do we hold the entropy of forgetting at bay. Art, therefore, acts not only as a restraint against the dissipation of memories, but becomes also a form of commemoration through the artist's mind, which calls upon the unconscious to bring forth images and symbols that signify the artist's concerns or desire. Through this interaction between forgetting and retrieving, art is a celebration of living, parallel to the conscious construction of history, which, however, walks straight into the deadlock of the 'post'-era.

My aim in this section is to look at the creation of monuments within the post-human era and to follow the survival of memorial art through sentimentism<sup>34</sup> and its rejection, within a Postmodernist framework. My investigation has led to my findings that healing, as a function of art, is in conflict with the anti-redemptory age of Postmodernism, because art can neither exist without memory, nor can it survive theoretically the 'death' of history.

In the context of memorial structures, the significance of both site and material arises out of the need to 'preserve' memory. The historico-political and religious consequences of preserving memory through large monuments provokes the question of how to 'keep' a memory within a monument, without subverting or contesting the meaning of the structure. Young (2000:19) reiterates that monuments have become the sites of cultural conflicts rather than of shared natural values and ideals. Monuments as objects of commemoration, as I understand them, can only be 'upheld' and remembered in the individual and personal desire to repair, in other words to re-fill the name or idea (statue or monument) with the memory-knowledge of a specific event, group or person commemorated. Young (2000:144) quotes Irit Rogoff, a cultural historian, who claims:

If the task of commemoration is in part one of attaining redemption then its language is one of resolution. There is an entire vocabulary which stands in for our desire for such resolution: to heal, to make amends, to work through, to commemorate, to pay respects, to lay to rest.

Her point is that for every need for resolution there should be forgiveness, but this reductive unity cannot be substituted as a monolithic whole. Society's view here is two-fold, the need of the political society responsible for the injustice is to erect a monument, while that of the victims is to speak their individual traumas. The question is: Who is the Monument for?

Such scepticism as Rogoff (cited in Young 2000:144) holds is well founded: a historical review of monuments needs to ask whether monuments merely 'bury' the memory in a hermetically 'sealed' vault, or whether the structure 'preserves' the memory.

The difficulty with monuments and commemorative artworks is not the architectural buildings or the images themselves, but rather the complex situation of the cultural economy of postmodernity, which maintains records of brute reality, but signifies ideological concepts and enlightenment ideals in its design. The use of religious symbolism often recalls romantic and high-minded ideas of death, but the indigestibility of these ideals also suggests an uncomfortable aura of some kind of moral justification. Therefore, the difference between memorial works, such as monuments, and artworks embedded with commemorative ideas emerges through the questions that each poses. In other words, each makes us question our motives as viewers and our identity and position in relation to memory, in an anti-redemptory age that has formulated the view of Post-Memory and post-religion.

In the following discussion on works by Joseph Beuys, the role of memory, of sensuous memory, the memory of disgust, the memory of seclusion, the memory of pain and the memory of violation, all of these recall a humanism<sup>35</sup> that does not dwell on the nihilistic. Beuys questions the role of memory in the formation of our identity, as he utilises our environment as a symbol for our individual consciousness. In the work *Tallow*, he questions the 'marks' or signs that society leaves behind as a formation of its identity on the environment, with monuments, buildings or arbitrary objects. These become, for Beuys, the 'wounds' of history, as opposed to 'relics', left in its wake. To bridge the destructiveness of the historical formation, Beuys 'restores' both relics and 'wounds'. He advocates a concept of healing which forgoes the

redundant pathos that perpetuates a sense of hopelessness that occurs in political monuments.

In 1977 Joseph Beuys was invited to exhibit in Münster as part of a collaborative open-air exhibition. Tisdall (1979:248) points to the brief's expectations as 'conventional expectations: art to embellish the environment, without posing any questions about the factors that conditioned it'. Beuys accepted the invitation and produced the work titled *Tallow* (Figure 38a, b, c & d). Although this was not a conventional outdoor sculpture — Beuys did not believe that one could embellish nature — his aim in making it 'was to question the underlying motives behind the urban planning which produces concrete deserts, and the restricted understanding of art which condones it' (Tisdall 1979:248).

Beuys chose the site of a concrete underpass, which led to the new auditorium of the university. This site revealed the 'architectural folly, a socio-political metaphor', according to Tisdall (1979:248) that directly opposed traditional standards. This dead corner, a deep wedge-shaped acute angle under the access ramp, was Beuys' choice for expressing the 'wound' of the environment. He used a similar space in the work *Show your wound* (Figure 39a, b & c), which refers to a theme dating back to the Auschwitz monument and to shamanistic drawings of the 1950s (Tisdall 1979:214).

The sculptures *Tallow* and *Show your Wound*, both emphasise a collective sickness as a metaphor for the alienation of the contemporary human condition. The pedestrian underground is the result of a kind of death of social and environmental consciousness. Beuys emphasised this space's 'death' by treating it as a mortuary in *Show your Wound*.

According to Tisdall, he assembled paired objects, creating the illusion of the reflection existing between physical reality and its shadow. The two agricultural 'forks' and hoes that are included become, metaphorically, human cadavers by the removal of prongs and by red tags being tied to their handles. Mounted on blackboards on which are drawn incomplete circles, the work speaks of life and death, with only the latter complete. The Italian political newspaper *Lotta continua*, painted brown and framed, emphasises the juxtaposition of warmth and insulation, but also

the destruction of the political arena. These elements all direct our attention to the ‘mortuary’ environment, where the theme of life and decay is visually contained in an attempt to preserve and heal this environment of its tragic alienation from the rest of society. Two mortuary tables from a pathology laboratory are symmetrically placed under zinc-covered light boxes covered with translucent fat, like spiritual ‘heads’ reflecting, as an X-ray would, the physical condition of decay and disease (Tisdall 1979:214). For me, this signifies the marks of destruction left on society and the environment by the two modes of history and memory. In Beuys’ use of, and specifically his reference to the human body, he seems to suggest that resolution occurs ‘per body’ and not in society as a whole and, ultimately, not in a political space, but in the depths of the soul, as if within the underground.

One jar is placed under the reticulation (draining) holes under each table. The jars are covered with filters. The adjacent boxes are filled with fat, holding the bodily residue, filtered for purity, preserved and controlled by an inserted thermometer. This distillation process suggests Beuys’ continuing concern with decay and healing, and is represented by a test tube, connected to a thrush’s skull, which serves as a symbol of movement. Lazlo Gloser describes this work as affecting the physic process. The viewer goes into shock, after which the after-effects inform the transformation and connection (of all the objects), which narrate a process through the extended meaning of the individual objects and the potential psychic intensity of its effect on the mind (Tisdall 1979:216).

*Tallow*<sup>36</sup>, similar to the previous work, points to the wound of social failure or ignorance. Beuys had this space re-constructed as a mould, rather than filling it with fat *in situ*. Tisdall quotes Beuys in discussing the effect of making an exact cast of this space as saying it was, ‘Like extracting a tooth to show its state of decay’ (Tisdall 1979:248). As with the filter and boxes below the pathology tables in *Show your Wound*, Beuys tried to demonstrate a healing process by transforming this negative space into a positive form, a sculpture.<sup>37</sup> Tisdall (1979:248; 253) describes the solidification process as a challenge to physicists, because the progression from a chaotic (a fluid) state to a solid state is not constant, and necessitates the element of warmth. To keep a sick body warm is to instigate healing.

On the bought postcard (Figure 40) depicting the *Cathedral of Cologne 1968/9*, Beuys painted the negative form of the *Tallow* sculpture *over* the image of the cathedral, thereby focussing on the similarity of the architectural structures, such as a church and the *Tallow* (underground) space, both of which serve as symbols for healing the psychic and physical wounds suffered by society. The huge architectural structures, or (blocks) of fat used in the work *Tallow*, represent, for me, Walter Benjamin's idea of a 'wish-image' that becomes representative of survival; of batteries of warm energy, like a human reserve of fat. It might be that Beuys is questioning the ideology behind the erection of buildings whose spires and magnificence are a sign of 'promised' spiritual redemption and enlightenment that will be gained by entering the specific space of the church. By juxtaposing his sculptures as healing objects, he possibly pleads for an awareness of art as a means of showing the psychic and physical wounds endured by society and the environment simultaneously trying to 'heal' them, by making them into positive, 'warm'<sup>38</sup> sculptures and thus inspiring them with life.

In his critique of society's soulless attitude towards the environment, Beuys has, by his handling of the space *Tallow* and, similarly, in the design of the *Cologne* postcard and the *Cosmos and Damian* postcard (Figure 41), endowed each with the licence for healing. The postcard titled *Cosmos and Damien* was designed in 1968/9 and ironically foretold the 'wound' that would be left after the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York were destroyed. By giving these Towers this title, he signified them as the itinerant healers, Cosmos and Damian, who became patron saints of medicine on account of their miraculous limb transplants. Similarly, the cast forms of the *Tallow* sculptures, superimposed on the postcard of the *Cologne Cathedral*, require us to think about our role in society and our impact on the environment. In my opinion, Beuys also requires our return to a 'rebirth of thought' and to humanism<sup>39</sup>, by his act of making and signifying positive sculptural objects (as opposed to negative space); objects that could make a positive contribution to the psyche and to the environment. Ironically, this space has, as with Ground Zero, become a memorial site since the events of 9/11, when two jet liners flew into these buildings and killed more than five thousand people.

The significance I attach to the sensuous use of material in my work, is similar to that afforded by Beuys. His use of natural material is a metaphor for healing the clinical, post-human world in which we live. The shamanistic role Beuys takes on, results in a ritualistic creation of a living monument, not only showing the symptomatic collective alienation of the individual from contemporary society, but also, by metaphorically giving it a 'spirit' of life through the natural material, overcoming the death of art in an alternative view of what a monument might be. In the same way I reject the idea of the static monument. My own commemorative works thus not only convey through soap the idea of healing the individual, from the effect of a post-human world, but also in their interactive significance of conversion, by the fat into soap and by its significance of cleansing. Memories, in making art, come to the fore as a 'returning' to' or 'delving into the unconscious' where memory is re-commemorated as part of a ritual of conserving one's memories.

In conclusion, the purpose of icons and ritual objects was a way of familiarising and diffusing the disturbing symbols of religious events. Monuments and images, such as those depicted in the photograph taken from the internet (Figure 42)<sup>40</sup>, which present an interesting correlation with Beuys' postcards, contain a modern strategy for expressing such events of horror. They allude to a higher reason in order to hold onto a sense of survival in a dehumanised age perpetuated throughout the modern and postmodern periods, where ironically, contemporary technology and consumerism have rejected the spiritual in life and in art.<sup>41</sup> The architectural form of a church tower throws its shadow onto the Twin Towers, pointing to the process of spiritual healing and the site of the memorial space, which holds a collective memory. However, in art that recalls the memory of death and destruction, such as the monuments and images of colonialism, terrorism or war, the barbarism of an event is recalled, pin-pointing the very turning point of change in that era. Monuments that are erected by the political society, ironically, signify not the proposed ideology, but the moment of inhumanity. In the post-humanist era, this contradiction jolts against and recoils from that which civilisation maintains is humanism.<sup>42</sup> I must recall Walter Benjamin's statement that 'There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (cited in Wollin 1982:120).

The subject of commemoration is problematic because monuments are situated between history and memory, the former of which is sifted in compliance with history's hierarchised formulations and categorisation that discards personal memory. Art within a context of memory will certainly be critically subjected to aesthetic structures, as well as being subjected to posthumanist sentimentism, because the posthuman vantage point speaks not of 'after'. In other words, the nihilism of historical monuments that include the concepts of confession and reconciliation becomes redundant pathos that only perpetuates hopelessness.

However, artworks within the context of personal memory re-evaluate the identity of the artist and that of society's consciousness by re-evaluating the 'relics' of memories left after history has taken what it deems necessary. It is hoped that my work, in its iconographic narrative, permits memories of redemption, reinforcing my view that to make sense of the *Now*, one must straddle the tight-rope between the 'death' of history and the beliefs of a post-humanism, if only to recall the idea of humanism that shares the positive voices of religious memory and, in this way, to avoid the death of Art.

## **Conclusion**

My aim in this chapter on memory has been to investigate how, in a process of making art as ritual between the physical and the cognitive interactive process, memories are brought forward from the unconscious to the conscious mind. These recollections are either from our own deep memory or from a tradition of Post-Memory inherited from previous generations. To signify art is to draw on these memories and the influences around us. However, the question that arises in this chapter is: How can memory, signified in an artwork, bring any kind of resolution or redemption?

I have questioned the validity of memory in art and have come to the conclusion that both memory and art remain in a frame of reference outside of time, because forgotten

or suppressed memory relocated into recollection becomes a resurrection of memory. This is why art remains relevant throughout the changing eras. Art reveals itself as a witness to society. In making art, one utilises the collective unconscious as a ‘storehouse’ of images that reflects the religious and symbolic concepts that signify our human quest for making sense and meaning of the world around us.

The connection between religious imagery and memory in art can be seen as mythological commentary about social or moral dislocation and/or acts as a warning from the past to the postmodernist human who is aware of humanity’s inability to learn from previous mistakes. Memory in artworks questions the viewer, both as to his/her intellectual standpoint and as to his/her apathetic role in a post-human era.

I have looked, moreover, specifically at monuments which ideologically ‘hold’ within them the concept and ideas of memory and restitution. This accepted historico-political ‘inherentness’ is questioned and rejected by the theoretical ideas of our anti-redemptory era, which has, therefore, led to further discussion on how art situates itself in history. This human construction rejects personal memories and objects as relics discarded by history’s selectiveness and thus becomes the context for the discussions of Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* and Benjamin’s *Passagen Project*, which, yet again, place art outside of the historical frame. Similar to Benjamin, Nora found that objects become relics as time passes and history absorbs what is relevant to it. These objects become a part of memories, aiding in their recollection.

The aim of this discussion on the theories of Benjamin and Nora has been to look at objects, specifically art objects that contain a memorial consciousness. The division between monuments built by politicians and commemorative work by artists questions the public and personal ideas of resolution and redemption. ‘Redemption’ Benjamin advanced as a messianic process of recognition – the ‘Now of cognizability’ – where understanding is reached when memories are retrieved from the unconscious. Through our ability to ‘work-through’ the memories, these objects once again become relics and we can retreat from them, mentally and spatially. The question, whether monuments and art objects can embody reconciliation and resolution is debated and I conclude that art neither exists in history, nor is it totally separate from it. Art lives through history and through memory. It cannot be

commemorative only, but becomes an object through which people are able to recall their own memories and re-appropriate signs within art to understand their present concerns.

So, if art and memory exists neither within time nor history, then both, I have argued, reveal themselves as psychological processes of creating images that stimulate deep memory and Post-Memory. Both become an interactive process and formulation between the unconscious and conscious processes of creating thought-images. This movement is discussed in terms of Hegel's *Erinnerung*, in which he suggests this process is a 'return into oneself – a retrospective move – re-evaluating one's own memories and creations as objects that come from deep, forgotten memory. Hegel's theory on *Erinnerung* recalls that of Crowler and Fletcher outlined in the previous chapter. They show realisation as a process that occurs out of the growing awareness of self-consciousness and between history and memory.

That signification of memory can never be read as prescriptive, was the insight gained through my work. However, it does draw on a referential cyclic gesture of personal and social collective memory. The reference to religious imagery and its significance is never merely innocent and no objectification is possible, as artists are all squeezed between the duality of working in a context of deconstructive posthumanism and the hope for a new Humanism. Therefore, my soap sculptures, together with their main concept of *conversion*, recall the *re-* of the Renaissance, which signifies the re-connection and the re-birth of ideas. Thus these works lie uncomfortably between being art objects that signify a commemorative consciousness and autonomous art objects. Soap, a material with symbolic reference to fat and the body, was in comparison to the permanence of materials used in monuments, to signal my shift in making from the state of its debased, banal manifestation of the rat-race of post-humanism and its vague architectural monuments to a return to the concerns of Humanism, that re-investigate the individual and the hardships of the repressed groups in society. The South African focus on the concerns of everyday people, with their struggle against poverty, aids and education, is the reason that Thabo Mbeki, the State President of South Africa, has called this era of change 'The African Renaissance'.

Art, as a barometer of society, constantly reminds us that we may never forget the existential pathos involved in making art, which involves who and what we are. Humanity must exist, even in the dislocation and disruption of our age, in which, as Foucault argues, we live. Without the memory and the narrative of our existence, present and past, everything would be senseless. The extent to which this resolves identity and cultural problems, is also the extent to which we do not live in a void. Therefore, as much as memory may be deemed to be a trivial, or senseless component in art, it does offer us insight into the formation of the collective unconscious and indicates to us the violations wrought by humans on their surroundings and on themselves. Memory permits a sense of humanism in the anti-redemptory age, which is why I think religious imagery still has appeal. Ritual and memory, provoking together a search for a sense of self and place and drawing on the deep memory, have evolved, for me, a conscious means of finding my own identity and my own individuality in society. Moreover, memory also celebrates difference and diversity. Therefore, forgetting, as a part of memory, is like dying without reference; recalling memory from the unconscious is a form of preserving and re-identifying oneself within a continuous chain of life and death.

The question, whether memory can bring any kind of resolution or redemption, has been set into the field of the individual psyche, not within the object alone. Within the process of art making, symbolic images can encourage a direction of thought, yet what I now propose is that artists utilise images, such as religious or archetypal images, which being particularly pertinent to the concerns of society, not only create a self-realisation in the artist, but also initiate some form of healing amongst viewers.

In my sculptures, I engage with the idea that the conversion of materials in the act of making soap brought forward a means of re-appropriating Post-Memory and stimulating dormant, forgotten and suppressed memory in the unconscious. This signifying act that seems to allow us, as artists, to retrieve and re-appropriate memories, objects and patterns within the continuum of time and history, creates the hope that any symbols, personal monuments, objects or images not only depict the change occurring in society, but also inspire the re-appropriation of memories to induce a conversion of thought. This would free us from the artificial constructs of the mind that divide and segregate people, cultural groups, nations and cultures.

### Chapter Two

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I lay accent on intuition as an integral part of the unconscious in the process of making art. As Hegel states: ‘Intelligence, as this concrete unity of the two moments [i.e., its attentiveness or inner alertness and its feeling of being outside itself], indeed, remembered immediately in itself within the fabric that is outside, and in its interiorizing remembrance in itself being plugged in being-outside-itself, is intuition.’ (Cited in Krell 1990:213.)

<sup>2</sup> Foucault (1977:153-4) states that history is a systematic development and must be discarded because it has ‘introduced discontinuity into our very being – as it divides our body and sets it against itself’. This becomes an important point in Chapter Three on the embodiedness (or embodiment) of making art and its possible function of healing.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Nora explains the subversion that occurs in memory-history and the unsettling anxiety that occurs when history is re-written (see *Between Memory and History* 1989:10-11). This point is pertinent to the contemporary South African environment and its re-examination of the past.

<sup>4</sup> Both my paternal grandparents were forced to leave the Eastern Bloc of Prussia and Dessau, Germany at the end of the war for fear of Russian repatriation of the men for their skills. The loss of their *Heimat* (their homes and their social and the natural environment) they described as traumatic.

<sup>5</sup> March Bloch, according to Butler (1989:98), ‘pointed out the danger of borrowing terms from individual psychology and simply adding the adjective ‘collective’ (as in the cases of *représentations collectives, mentalités collectives, conscience collective, as well as mémoire collective*)’.

<sup>6</sup> I must refer again to Gré van der Waal-Braaksma, who explains the process of soap making that was handed down from mother to daughter. Soap making is not a simple product from a recipe. The maker has to undergo much trial and error.

<sup>7</sup> These objects were brought from Harz, in Germany, renowned for the inhabitants’ skill in woodcarving, and were replicated by the men in concentration camps, reflecting a memory of home.

<sup>8</sup> The ideological notion of placing the colonial past under erasure results in the absorption of tradition and history. In the fundamental process of making art, this would result in obliteration of the individual. This absorption of tradition and history, Nora (1989:7) claims, results in the displacement, under pressure, of a fundamentally historical sensibility. The religious conversion of people in this country has brought a change in tradition, yet the custom often remains as a remnant. For example, the conversion to Christianity of many indigenous cultures has integrated traditions. These we can see in many carvings that clearly show Christian influence, such as *Saint Figure* (Toni Malau) (Figure 14). However, the resistance to political change was evidence of a cultural uprootment and can be seen in the Nkisi (plural, Minkisi) sculptures (Figure 15 & 16) of the Congo.

Robin Poyner (2001:366), discussing the art of the western Congo Basin, maintains that during the colonial period these *minkisi* sculptures ‘played important roles in resisting foreign ways impos[ed] from without’. Ritual sculptures housing spiritually-charged objects or relics infused with the powers of the dead, they work as healers, diviners and mediators, defending the living against witchcraft (Poyner 2001:376). The European missionaries considered them as pagan, destroying them or sending them to Europe as evidence of idolatry (Poyner, 2001:366). Used in ritual practices they provoked the ‘spirit’ of a guardian, whom they believed would protect their owner and his family. This ‘spirit’ was commemorated by a nail being driven into the sculpture, daily, thus preserving the memory of the spirit who in turn protected the family (Mack in Sheldon 1995:60).

<sup>9</sup> Liturgical manuscripts contributed to the exteriorisation of the collective memory. In both script and memory time stands still, as opposed to the dynamic fluid expression of oral repetition. Hutton (1993:xxi) states that ‘past rendered in script becomes the places of memory’ – a ‘static simulacra’.

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<sup>10</sup> Refer to Addendum Two for a discussion on the use of religious images in South African art.

<sup>11</sup> Appignanesi discusses the term 'Postmodernism'. He suggests 'Modern is a **panic** term. It swept into history with a sense that a catastrophic change had overtaken tradition. **Modernism** was defined by a set of innovative artistic practices which became confused with the much wider cultural and historical implications of **modernity**. Avant-garde artists seemed to be the gauge registering the shock waves of something catastrophic in history, a **present time** of high-speed stimulation **without foreseeable end**.' (Appignanesi 2003:152.)

<sup>12</sup> It is part of the concept of redemption and is related to the coming of the Messiah at the end of history, but will result in the dislocation of time and history. Weigel declares that the structure of now-time will be 'blasted out of continuum' into the unredeemed world. This image of non-synchronicity, he (1996:157) states, is an 'angel of history'. This 'divine immediacy' or moment of each day in which history is absent is what Benjamin terms the 'Now of cognizability'. Thus 'now-time' (Jetztzeit) reveals the readability of the moment and is related to the moment of redemption. However, Weigel demonstrates that the claim to worldliness, on the one hand, and the absence of any transition between the unredeemed world of history and that of Messianic redemption, on the other, 'produced an aporetic constellation'; the problem for the individual in this context is 'living in hope' becomes 'life in deferral' (Weigel 1996:156-157).

<sup>13</sup> Weigel (1996:115) says that '[i]n semiotic terms, it is these characteristics – the figuration "in place of" in the relationship between the consciousness and permanent traces; the readability bound to the momentary flickering-up or *Aufleuchten*; and the phenomenon of distorted representation in the visible or readable signs of the memory trace, which marks the specificity of Freud's concept of memory'.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, however, stresses in 'Theses V and VI of the Theses on the Philosophy of History' that 'recollection is not so much a case of assessing the past from the perspective of the present; it is understanding that the past enters into the present at 'moments of danger' (cited in Chapman 1987:50). Weigel (1996:119) states that Benjamin suggests that the historical index of images only arrives at readability at a specific time and that this arrival 'constitutes a specific central point of the movement contained within them'. If this is not recognised, Chapman (1987:51) asserts, this image is likely to disappear irretrievably. She explains 'to seize hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger', as Benjamin suggests, affects the content as it recedes because it is subjected to distortions. Weigel and Chapman (1987:51) warn that this can become a tool for the ruling class.

<sup>15</sup> John Dewey, in *Art and Experience*, applied an instrumentalist structure to aesthetic experience. He wrote that during the inner period of gestation, where idea becomes form, or the movement from the dormant memory of the unconscious to the conscious mind takes place, 'the inner material of emotion and idea is as much transformed through acting and being acted upon by objective material as the latter undergoes modification when it becomes a medium of expression' (Dewey 1980:75).

Dewey says that, as grief '[matures] beyond the need of weeping and wailing for relief', it will move into 'imaginative material'. The movement of my emotions into a ritualistic process of making soap, a product for cleaning, becomes symbolic. This brings to mind what Hegel calls 'absolute knowing', and emphasises that it 'comes to exist at the point where experience itself becomes the proper object of and for consciousness; that is, the point where experience is recognized as substance and substance is understood as spirit's becoming what it is in itself. Substance, recognized as the experience of spirit's coming to be, is "the circle that goes back into itself, presupposing its beginning and attaining it only in the end".' (Cited in Krell 1990:235.)

<sup>16</sup>It is important to acknowledge that concerning memory in art, this debate affords it an identity of construction. Although I also believe it to be a form of conservation, the issues that arise submit memory to the questioning of truth versus fact and show that the 'real' narrative is metaphorical and performative. The authenticity of reconstructing Post-Memory or oral recollections becomes a debate on authorship. Art, in its appropriation of memory, is, I believe, the transformation of individual memory to collective memory, giving it its place of testimony, through performance and thus, through this ritual, evoking healing.

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<sup>17</sup> Similar to Benjamin's 'Angel of History', Hölderlin, according to Weigel (1996:59), identified the tradition of Greek tragedy as formulated by this moment of reversal (*metanoia*) 'of all kinds of ideas and forms' (*Umkehr aller Vorstellungsarten und Formen*), but not a complete reversal, for '[a] complete reversal in these is, as is complete reversal generally, where nothing is left to hold onto [*ohne allen Halt*], not permitted to the human being as a creature of intellect [*erkennendem Wesen*]' (Hölderlin 1992:II, 375).

<sup>18</sup> Krell (1990:168) warns us that the 'field' in question is the verge on which we must distinguish activity (such as reminiscing) from pure pathos (such as involuntary remembering).

<sup>19</sup> In the Graeco-Roman period the division between the body and mind in 'medical terms' was described as a holistic collectiveness of 'humours'. The word 'spirit' was used to emphasise 'animal spirits' as superfine fluids mediating between the body and the mind. Ray Porter (2000:92), a medical historicist, says that various types of 'souls' were postulated in governing the bodily functions: '– "a vegetable soul", directing nourishment and growth (that is, autonomic processes and metabolic regulation); an 'animal soul', governing sense, feeling and motion (similar, in our terms, to the sensory/motor system); and an "intellectual soul", regulating the mental powers (that is, what Renaissance theorists of human nature later designated as reason, will, memory, imagination, and judgement). In short, the human animal was presented as a complex, differentiated integrated whole. The humours formed one facet, and their balance was reflected in the "complexion" (or outward appearance) and the "temperament" or, as we might say, personality type.'

<sup>20</sup> This again motivates the idea of religious images that still maintain images and stories, as myths did, to explain the transcendental changes or difficulties that we may go through.

<sup>21</sup> I recall this idea in the *Preface*, when referring to Julia Kristeva.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin (cited in Weigel 1996:156-157) terms this moment, the 'Now of cognizability' (*Jetztzeit*).

<sup>23</sup> Krell (1990:226) elucidates on Hegel's transition from feeling or intuition to that of 'intelligence', which he states is revealed in the function of representation and is marked by three moments: 'interiorizing remembrance, imagination, and memory' which grants 'Gefühl' (emotion) to an object, 'transforming fleeting feeling into the stable content of something felt'.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche claims that artists have the ability to appreciate appearance more than reality. James J. Winchester (1994:85-86) states that Nietzsche avoids systematic thinkers because wisdom and generalisations fence knowledge; viewing the limitations of reason, he says that, perceiving the world, we must take seriously the evidence provided by our senses. Winchester asserts '[n]ot all systematic knowledge is rejected, but rather Nietzsche is claiming that overly formal systems do not adequately portray reality. Concepts such as "unity, identity, continuity, substance, cause, and being" lead us, in some sense (*gewissenmassen*) into error, and speech is error's constant defender.' (Winchester 1994:85.)

Winchester (1994:85-86) says that Nietzsche and Deleuze similarly say that the artist intuitively 'knows how to select, reinforce, and correct reality'. The distinction between Deleuze and Nietzsche lies in their view on values. According to Winchester, Deleuze believes in the possibility of deriving values from an ever-changing world. Nietzsche however, suggests that individuals create values and impose them on the environment, which is otherwise devoid of them (Winchester 1994:86). Nietzsche views the role of artists as improving upon the given, rather than simply work through unstable theoretical creations.

<sup>25</sup> Camille (1996:41) conveys Deleuze's critical term "sensation" in his statement: 'The ubiquity of installations rather than painting environments rather than sculptures, and performances rather than paintings in artistic production of the past decades is related to this turn away from external representation towards the realm of felt experience, simulating not an illusion of the real but affirming the whole realm of "sensations".'

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<sup>26</sup> The word *Stoff* in German means material and is a suffix that collectively refers to the periodic table of metal elements.

<sup>27</sup> Artists often intuitively choose materials with which they can associate feelings and intellectual content. It is as though the memory stores associations to and characteristics of material, which can be given the significance of symbolic value. Hegel says that feeling appears to be immediate and thus ‘the most present [*präsenteste*] form, as it were, in which the subject comports itself toward a given content’ (Krell 1990:213). Krell explains the fact that intuition is a ‘determination of embodiment or abstract immediacy’. He then states that ‘[a]lthough feeling appears to be immediate and thus “the most present [*präsensteste*] form, as it were, in which the subject comports itself toward a given content”, such presence proves to be limited to isolated particularity, to the stuff of embodied existence. Yet, even in primitive sensation, muffled and inarticulate as it may be, spirit sets off in the interiorizing direction it will continue to follow until it finds itself weaving the forms.’ (Krell 1990:213.) Freud, according to Krell, considers this processes to be a normal part of the psyche in ‘active remembrance’ (Krell 1990:213). Sensuous characteristics of objects are preserved in our memories by their connection to emotional associations and are often held thus within our unconscious.

<sup>28</sup> Refer to *Addendum Two* on the direct narratives that inform this work.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Holocaust’ is from the Greek word meaning ‘sacrifice by fire’. Soap making for me becomes a symbolic sacrificial act of ‘working-through’ my own memories and laying them bare to myself (as I purify the fat). The selectiveness of art, and maybe even that of history, is a way of sifting life’s images until one ends with only the most basic of concepts, for example, exile.

<sup>30</sup> The shift from memory, from the unconscious to the conscious, is reflected in the process of self-realisation which, then, becomes a stronger awareness of the self-conscious.

<sup>31</sup> This is the Afrikaans for ‘farmer’. The word also describes the collective group of people from the Afrikaner culture, for example, in the war between the British and the Afrikaners in 1899-1902 called the Anglo-Boer war. However, it has political connotations from the Apartheid era which are derogatory.

<sup>32</sup> After the Russians had moved into the east of Germany, the German men were repatriated as workers by Russia, so my father’s family fled to the west. My grandfather-Gruner fled with the two oldest children through the Berlin border, while my maternal grandfather and the three youngest fled directly from the east to west Germany. This narrative, represented in my work, reflects their journey from their *Heimat*. My grandmother, with my father, aged five, and his two sisters, had to walk for many days to cross many rivers, but these Russians had filled those with broken glass to prevent refugees crossing and my aunt’s foot was cut. This narrative cannot begin to suggest the hardship and desperation of fleeing with young children and a suitcase filled with their most important belongings.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault in his essay, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy and History’, focuses on ‘Nietzsche’s approach to the concept of origin (*Ursprung*) in order to demonstrate his distance from the idea of historical beginning or a first identity, and to differentiate between the two aspects of descent (*Herkunft*) and emergence (*Entstehung*)’.

The suitcase is an object linked directly to the body, in turn connecting the body to the domain of *Herkunft* (descent) by its connotations of movement and as container of precious objects for covering the body, and of particular objects that retain the identity of relics – symbols of home. Sigrid Weigel relates the concept of *Herkunft* in relation to the body: ‘The body – and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil – is the domain of the *Herkunft*. The body manifests the stigmata of the past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable conflict.’ (Weigel 1996:43.)

As an object given to me as a piece of ‘memorabilia’ of my inherited *herkunft*, the suitcase has become a part of my genealogy.

<sup>34</sup> Read Ashraf Jamal’s *The Rat in Art: Conrad Botes, Pop and the Posthuman*.

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<sup>35</sup> Humanism in the Renaissance was provoked by the outburst of independence and originality that was awakened with the advent of the destruction of the domination by authority. This caused a 'rebirth of learning' for ordinary people and 'scientists' alike and brought the issues of the individual person to the fore. With the development of medicine, body and mind were reformulated as two separate, yet interlinking, entities, evidenced in the word 'disease' that previously was termed 'dis-ease' (Porter 2000:82).

<sup>36</sup> 'Making this sculpture was a massive undertaking. ... Twenty tons of mutton fat granules, mixed with a few drums of beef fat for extra firmness, were melted down over four days and nights at a concrete factory outside Münster. Vat after vat was poured into the reinforced plywood mould some 5 meters or 16 feet high, which was buttressed with beams after it burst under the pressure of the molten liquid. The scene resembled a giant's kitchen or the preparation of a monstrous Trojan horse' (Tisdall 1979:248).

<sup>37</sup> Healing is not per se possible, but the awareness, the working-through of a problem, initiates inner change. This will be discussed in the final chapter.

<sup>38</sup> After returning home from the war, he needed the intimacy, safety and warmth of a parental home, which he had not, as a child, receive from his parents. Donald Kuspit (1993:200) relays Beuys' story of how the Tartars taught him to make his own warmth and intimacy. In the 1945 Kleve exhibition *Ausstellung von Kalte*, Beuys expressed the isolation of returning to a dead home and a dead society. The *Kleve warme Ausstellung* in 1946, suggested the transformation, through which he learnt to warm himself by making art.

<sup>39</sup> Informed by Toulmin (1990:24-25, 160-161) whose theory substantiates my sense of 'Humanism'.

<sup>40</sup> Image taken from website: <http://www.worldtradecentrememorial.com/>. All the names of the victims and more personal and detailed descriptions of the days surrounding the attack are depicted in an array of photographs, poems, comments, discussion boards and detailed memorial epitaphs that fill this site.

<sup>41</sup> At this time of reclamation and re-distribution of land to people who were forcefully removed from their inherited or traditional land, we South Africans are experiencing some kind of redemption in the political arena. For victims, this retrieval represents reparation or re-remembering of their memories and their heritage. The memorial site has been given a completely new dimension through the Internet: the site *Wall of Americans.com* has, for example, become an on-line interactive site. Therefore land, traditionally used as a memorial site, has been made almost redundant by the 'living' – moving – changing and interactive memorial site on the web.

Therefore, in the anti-redemptory age, in which land is an economic factor, as in the case of Ground Zero, the major debate focuses on the idea of economic space and scepticism concerning erecting memorial sites, which are considered as static (a stasis) rather than a creation of a 'living' memory. The question that arises here centres on the social need for an area of physical land specifically for commemorating, rather than an immaterial site on the web. Why do we feel the need to go to a commemorative place? And what, if any, is our physical connection to such a site?

<sup>42</sup> In the final chapter, I define how I understand humanism in the Postmodernist era. It resembles the humanism that Toulmin (1990:161) describes as the 'humane and liberal standpoint of the late Renaissance', which, he claims, was, by the 1950s, based on Rachel Carson's view that 'nature and humanity are ecologically interdependent'.

### Healing

Your body is not, and could not be, a mere vessel for a disembodied mind. The concept of a mind separate from the body is a metaphorical concept.  
(Lakoff and Johnson 1999:563)

The artist converts his repressed emotions into something fanciful.

(Portnoy 1962:59)

### Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to investigate healing as a function of art and to pursue the idea that conscious construction and the move away from nature have caused alienation from the unconscious and the body. This is discussed in the first section, *Alienation and Soap Sculptures*. The shift from the unconscious to the conscious in the process of making art by means of the imagination creates, for me, a syncretising capacity to understand a structure of self in the world. This I intend to demonstrate here. In the present 'post-'era context, the cynicism that invaded art following Nietzsche's mantra 'God is dead', has come to disregard the integration of art and practical philosophy. I believe the pervasive Cartesian dualism rejects the connection between subjective thought and the objective, outer and inner world and continuously undermines the intentions of contemporary thought. Art in a rational, scientific mode depicts an analysis of methodological thinking; it does not hold within it the capacity for change, insight or healing, or for bearing witness to the state of society's unconscious. Yet, it is my opinion that art facilitates healing by tapping into the unconscious. Only by re-connecting the conscious/unconscious, body/mind and body/soul split, are we able continually to find, and thus heal, ourselves in the imbalance of society's anxiety about identity.

The following two sections, *Reductionism: Alienation and the Unconscious/Conscious Split* and *Reductionism: The Body as the Topographical Site for the Mind*, discuss this split, the result of a shift from an integrated mythical view, such as the alchemic way of thinking, to the theoretical division that resulted in the

separation of the humanities and scientific “rationality”. Steven Toulmin, a philosopher, in his study *Cosmopolis*, discusses the shifts recurring within Modernity and the ‘post’-era between rational structures of thinking and the validity of experience in informing philosophic and scientific thought. In this recurring split, the mind and the body were separated from the soul, whose responsibility to heal was, at the beginning of Modernity and its second phase of rationalism and scientific inquiry, designated to medicine and the church, respectively, denigrating the body and the unconscious. The historical premise of the advent of Modernity and the move from humanist to rationalist, Toulmin sets against the background of the Thirty Year War, between Catholicism and Protestantism that began in 1618 and was caused in part by the death of King Henry IV of France.<sup>1</sup> This crisis of consciousness led, Toulmin (1990:80-82) states, to the ‘Quest for Certainty’ and rationalism of which Descartes was the main proponent. His claim to the superiority of the mind over the body resulted in the body being seen only as a topographical vehicle for the mind which, through rationalisation, could be fixed like a machine. With regard to the insignificance afforded the body, I also discuss briefly the concept of transference between the mind and the body, referring to Freud’s *Conversion Theory* and the concept of *Bearbeitung* (working-through) to illustrate the necessity for all disciplines to take the body into account.

In the fourth section, *Embodied Mind: Transference, Empathy and Spirituality*, I intend to show that the body is not only the means by which we experience the everyday, but also how we recall memory. The body enables us to internalise an event and, therefore, to understand it, by inducing and experiencing through empathic transcendence. It is this faculty of empathy the artist is able to connect with his/her audience. I hope to bring to the fore the idea that art facilitates *self-consciousness* and that, through self-analysis, how one achieves self-knowledge and healing.

The fifth section, titled *Melancholia: The Problem of Conscious Construction and Self-Reflection*, describes Mieke Bal’s view on self-reflection and how this process is, in itself, a ‘melancholic mourning’ a phrase attributed to Sarah Kofman. Here I question the validity of concentrating on and internalising the self, which is fraught with self-construction. In the sixth section *Representation: The ‘Hollow’ and ‘Chora’ of Mythopoesis*, I discuss mythopoetic imagination. The source from which artists

draw images of which the power of memories and experiences become an integral part, similar to what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'hollow' and, Kristeva the 'chora'. My intention in this section is to refer to our mode of signification that, in this rational age, has alienated the symbolic connectivity that previously occurred in myths. By reacknowledging poiesis<sup>2</sup> as a fundamental process of image-making, I suggest that art images recover the embodiedness<sup>3</sup> of body/mind and body/soul, as a force of the unconscious and conscious mind which results in insight.

In the description or expression referring to the mind and the body, involved together in an act of ritual or art making, I use the word 'embodiedness', since it describes, for me, inner-reflection of the process, whereas 'embodiment' refers to a philosophic description.

## **Soap Sculptures and Alienation**

My investigation into soap, with its initial ingredient of animal fat, for my sculptures, developed from thoughts concerning the close connectedness of this substance to nature and how humans have, throughout time, used natural products for protection against disease. In this line of thought, the connection between the human body and nature led me to research the alienation and the disconnection of the body that many doctrines (religious, political and cultural) uphold. I found these to be in contradiction to my embodied experience of making art. This led to my inquiry into the separation between the body, demeaned by association with being sinful and fallible, and the conscious mind which was rationalised as the pinnacle in the hierarchy of 'pure' thought and conceptualisation. A brief discussion seems necessary here to outline the course of western-oriented society's alienation from the corporeality of the body and to investigate the concept of the unconscious as the source of spontaneity and uncertainty, as experienced in my own work.

My concern here is first to explore the underlying threat of alienation that is a relic of seventeenth century thought, and particularly that of Descartes, whose

epistemological distinction separated the mind, as 'rational' (moral and intellectual distinction in the human world of thought and action), from the *causal necessity* of mechanical processes in the material world of physical phenomena.

This move towards 'rational methods' is explained by Toulmin (1990: 45-56) against the background of European history. As a result of the assassination of Henry IV (of Navarre), whose scepticism about the dogmas and certainty of religious and cultural ideology, had caused him to espouse a policy of religious toleration, disbelief in the humanitarian values of the Renaissance arose and European society sought certainty and rational methods, distinct from the 'humanists' readiness to live with uncertainty, ambiguity, and differences of opinion' (Toulmin 1990:55).

After Descartes, the body/mind dichotomy was extended to Newton's theory, which stated that '... "Matter is in itself inert: it cannot set itself in motion, and it can generate physical effects, only if set in motion by a higher agency"' (Toulmin 1990:121). Thus, all natural material, including nature in its proposed inertia, could only be moved by 'higher' forces, either by man or god.<sup>4</sup> During this time man was considered to be the centre of the universe. This 'stage' of thought was set within the socio-political construction of 'hierarchy' and 'stability', where monarchy and religious leaders were elevated to the apex of socio-political standing. The Divine power of God, as the 'final source of activity in the world', was situated within the same frame, with political and socio-ideological standing resembling a cosmological digression in status, class, race and sex (Toulmin 1990:113). This cosmological ideology further led to the alienation between nature and the theoretical and political concerns of the human being and the 'reason and causes' running through rational thinking, according to Toulmin (1990:108), 'turned into an outright divorce'.

In seventeenth century theoretical self-alienation from nature, humans were thought not to be able to alter the face of it. The extent of destruction possible then had not yet realised the necessity for ecological or environmental concerns in science, morality or philosophy. Nature was seen merely as a background or 'stage setting' and it was felt that 'there was little room for the collective activities of humanity to have major effect on the large-scale structure of nature' (Toulmin 1990:108-9). Nature during this time, therefore, remained theoretically in a *causal* mode of history

of 'mechanical, repetitive and unchanging patterns' regarded as being set 'down by God at the Creation' (Toulmin 1990:110).

The 'passivity' of nature and material bodies designated them to a lower position in the construed 'hierarchy', whereas the mind was considered to be 'active' and equated to a 'higher' force. However, within these distinctions between rational (mind) and causal (body), humanity was also split into rational and emotional. Human beings were erroneously subjected to the ideology that: 'humans live mixed lives, part rational and part causal: as creatures of Reason, their lives are intellectual or spiritual, as creatures of Emotion, they are bodily or carnal'. It is within this context of theoretical dislocation, I believe, that alienation in the world is caused by the presumption that nature, the emotions and thus also the unconscious are debased and alien to the westernised cultural ideology of status.

These rationalised divisions categorised the mind alone as the 'respectable', 'stable' and 'rational' entity. Freud's investigations aspired to, and then rejected, this theoretical isolation: he and others uncovered the vitality of the unconscious and the interdependence of the body and mind.

Toulmin describes the complacency in general of European society: the "more confident" about "subordination and authority" in Nature, the less anxious one need accordingly be about social inequalities. Likewise with the "rationality" of Emotion: if subjects ordered their lives indiscreetly, this gave rise to social disturbances'. (Toulmin 1990:128.) Erroneous equations were made concerning emotions and the body – so "base" and "material". The power of emotions, and especially in religious doctrine, has been acknowledged, because of their capacity to overpower rationality. This spontaneous and uncertain enthusiasm – or envy – won the distrust of theologians and 'respectable people in both Europe and America' late into the twentieth century. As Toulmin states, this 'reinforc[ed] the Cartesian, or *calculative* idea of "rationality"' (Toulmin 1990:115,133).<sup>5</sup> The clear alienation that this division caused is seen in the ignorance about culture and race (discussed above), and also the alienation of women, particularly in the public sphere because, in part, they were considered to embody the unacceptable sentiment or impulsiveness which was considered a distraction from clear-headed deliberation.

Toulmin (1990:135) describes the ‘fear’ of sexuality as being a class-based taboo in the seventeenth century, which created the misconception that the lower class, was generally presumed to be ‘more libidinous than the middle class’. “[E]motion”, he (1990:134) states, ‘became a code word for sex.’ Toulmin (1990:41-42) observed:

The early 17<sup>th</sup> century thus saw a narrowing of scope from freedom of discussion and imagination that operated on a social plane, with the onset of a new insistence on ‘respectability’ in thought and behavior, and also on a personal plane. There, it took the form of an alienation quite familiar to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, which expressed itself as *solipsism* in intellectual matters, and as *narcissism* in emotional life.

The nineteenth century South African example of such discrimination is Saartjie Baartman, a young Khoikhoi [or San] woman, who was taken to Europe by a French entrepreneur to be put on display because of her enlarged genitalia. This affliction, known as steatopygia (an enlargement of the buttocks due to accumulation of fats), was erroneously construed as ‘beastly’ and a sign of being ‘oversexed’ (Hassan 1997:4). The sexuality of Black women was considered exotic and led to their abuse under the guise of scientific objectivity.

Early in the humanist period (late fifteenth and sixteenth century), Michel de Montaigne had argued for the suspension of judgement ‘about matters of general theory, and ... concentra[tion] on accumulating a rich perspective, both on the natural world and on human affairs, as we encounter them in our actual experience’ (Toulmin 1990:27). ‘This respect for the rational possibilities of human experience was one chief merit of the Renaissance humanists, but they also had a delicate feeling for the *limits* of human experience.’ The humanists declared that, ‘to those whose trust in experience gives courage to observe and reflect on the variety of conduct and motive, “Nothing human is foreign”’ (Toulmin 1990:27). He notes that this view was portrayed in the political analysis of Machiavelli and the dramatic works of Shakespeare (Toulmin 1990:27).

Humanists, such as Montaigne and Francis Bacon, were of the opinion that theoretical consensus about nature could not be reached and that natural philosophy could only stand as a ‘result of human presumptions or self-deception’ (Toulmin 1990:29). Like,

Socrates, Toulmin (1990:28) states, the humanists were driven to adopt attitudes of scepticism, which were not to deny general philosophy its expression of opinion, but neither to assert its quest, which occurred in a limited framework removed from human experience.

This shift from humanist to rationalist, although in reverse, I found to my initial surprise to have recurred in South Africa in the conversion from the dogma of race, class and sex, inherited from our history, and from the apartheid era in particular, to our newly recovered humanist concerns.

Within South Africa, such politico-theological doctrines, or rather dogmas, have been an integral part of our society. We have witnessed class and race distinction and alienation, which also had its origins within the cosmopolitical patterns of discrimination. Toulmin (1990: 134) describes how racism, from the seventeenth century on, was given ‘a new respectability’ by the absurd idea that it was ‘an expression of the God-given subordination of the colonised “inferiors” to their colonising “betters”’.

The testimonies of the TRC, which recovered humanist concerns with the oral, local, transient and particular aspects of life, culture, memory and language, which are to a greater extent imbued with emotion, are particularly concerned with human experience. In comparison, we can clearly see the alienation that ‘pure’ rational argument, general ideas and abstract principles, would dislodge ritual and memory from culture and history. According to Toulmin (1990:36-37), Montaigne’s humanist philosophy in the essay *Apology of Raimond Sebond*, makes a strong case for human experience, memory and testimony as a ‘way to escape a presumptuous dogmatism’ and a ‘cool, non-judgemental tone that makes them congenial to us’.

This rift between body/mind, body/soul and rational/emotion notions has caused these divisive theories. Modernised society’s relationship with the sensuous objects of memory and ritual are still in the beginning of twenty-first century, subjected to “pure” rationalisation, signs of which are often still seen in archives and museums.

Animals, being instinctual and bodied held a lower rank, which was what I first noted in making artworks that involved physical and tactile work with animal fat. The reserved and even uncomfortable reaction from spectators, when they saw or heard how I made blocks of soap out of hundreds of kilograms of animal fat, stimulated my interest in the emotional reactions to dead animal imagery. This seemed to me linked in some way to peoples' fascination with immortality and portrayed in imagery relating to the human relation to dead animals – a shift which I pursued with interest. Slain animals, as part of the still-life genre, depict the cosmological status, or in contrast, the humanist relationship to death within these macabre images. The disappearance of this tradition over centuries began my inquiry into the 'civilizing process' that brought us to the understanding of an ecological equilibrium, in direct contrast to the previous hierarchies between nature and humanity that were construed mainly to keep the political status *quo* in place.

In our commercial society, (driven not only by politics), the violent aspects of death are 'neutralised'. Nathaniel Wollock (1999:705-726), in an essay titled *Dead Animals and the Beast-Machine, seventeenth century Netherlandish paintings of dead animals as anti-Cartesian statements*, describes the reaction to animal paintings and the proliferation of sympathy they excite, in a society distancing itself from nature. Today, the violence, argues Wollock (1999:720), is considered a 'negative thing, not so much because of its impact on the animals, as for the "shock" and discomfiture it might cause in people'. In farming, production has become a commodity stock and ignores our Post-Memory of man being bound to nature, and the fact that our survival is dependant on it. Suzi Gablik (1991:55), referring to modern alienation, states that it is a fundamental condition of a vision of separateness. Artist's depictions of nature, such as those of earth-artist, Richard Long and South African, Strijdom van der Merwe (Figure 43a & b), often convey the significance of nature's fragility. Art, I believe, still contains the appeal of capturing the momentariness of nature's continuous adaptation for survival.

My motivation for making soap from animal fat lies as I have said, in a desire to recover my connection to nature. The fat, as a symbol of warmth and insulation, metaphorically signifies the recovery from the psychological shock in which westernised society finds itself. The alienation is what Wollock refers to as

‘psychological self-fear’. I intend to place it into the perspective of the loss of identity that would then point to our being neither instinctual animal nor human. There is a marked dichotomy in the fact that we, as humans, are both embodied and spiritual beings (and concerned always with immortality). Our anaesthetisation to, and sublimated alienation from, our physical bodies and their association with dying is, in my opinion, what makes the traumatic event of any death, be it of family, friend or animal, even worse. It is a reminder of our own mortality.

This move towards ‘rational methods’ and religious dogma that demeaned and segregated the body from the soul as sinful and fallible, is still often in contemporary society upheld as part of an inherited collective memory.

In my own work I have explored the recovery of the instinctual (animal and unconscious) by overcoming the alienation of modernised society’s approach towards nature, through investigating the rational constructions that disconnect the body from the mind; and the importance of memory in re-locating our individuality once again in the world. In making my soap sculptures, I felt embodied and interconnected with nature. However, this emotional response was in conflict with many ideologies and dogmas learnt growing up in an apartheid era, where church and state, I observed, upheld seventeenth century rationalism.

I signify my soap fonts, not only as objects of redemption and cleansing from these dogmatic assumptions, but signifying my view that my art, in its embodiedness with the materiality of its nature, conveys a sense of removing alienation from life.

In this section, I have pin-pointed the division between the body/mind, body/soul and conscious (rational)/unconscious (emotional) as the theoretical relics that still cause alienation in westernised society. My emotional and instinctual response to my work instigated the exploration of the unconscious as having similar characteristics to the spontaneity and vitality of nature, both of which are still considered to be *unstable* and *uncertain* in a rational westernised world. This concern is dealt with in the next section.

## **Reductionism: Alienation and the Unconscious/Conscious**

I found in discussing how this unconscious/conscious originated, the premise of the mind as a uniform entity, quite separate from the body and emotion, was that of a school of thought, prevalent during the seventeenth century. I intend here to explore how this reductionism affected, and still does, the attitude to artists and to art in westernised society and how in demeaning the unconscious as a source of art, it rejects art as a source of healing, I begin with Hegel and Schopenhauer.

The distinctions made by these philosophers, on metaphysical art and how it is situated in (according to Hegel), or as part of, nature (according to Schopenhauer), is a debate taken up by Kant and Nietzsche who place nature above and below the realm of art, respectively. Pothen (2002:63) states that Hegel proposed, however, that ‘art proceeds from “the Absolute Idea”; its end is the “sensuous representation of the Absolute Idea”, while for Schopenhauer “the object of art ... is an Idea in Plato’s sense, and absolutely nothing else”.’ My intention here is not to weigh each view on its merits, but to explore the idea that art inherently contains both views and that it grapples with the same notion as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (cited in Toulmin 1990:142) raised, ‘How can reason be educated to handle the life of the emotions?’

The struggle between the unconscious and conscious that led to neurosis, Porter (1996:298) asserts, entailed a reworking of the old Platonic doctrine of the tripartite soul divided against itself, but one that took a particularly frightening form. Whereas Plato had erroneously, albeit optimistically, concluded that harmony would reign when reason ruled the passions, it is this very struggle between the rational and emotional (seemingly non-rational) nature, whence artists gain their images that necessitates the use of both. Thus pure reason becomes a struggle against the self, illustration of which is seen in Freud’s initial attempt to analyse the psyche as a disembodied entity in a case study titled *Rat Man*, as discussed in a later section.

In the book, *Beyond Reason: Art and Psychosis, Works from the Prinzhorn Collection*, Caroline Douglas discusses the art made by the residents of various asylums during the nineteenth century (Figure 44a & b). Douglas (1996:39) suggests

that the movement of humans from a traditional rural community, in which a social and moral framework were self-regulated, to urban life, has caused social anxiety. She quotes German sociologist, Georg Simmel who, in 1902, considered the alienation that this move would have on the modern human:

The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the techniques of life. The fight with nature which primitive man has to wage for his *bodily* existence attains in this modern form its latest transformation. (Cited in Douglas 1996:39.)

Roy Porter, professor in the history of medicine, discusses how the mentally ill were categorised as non-rational and inferior to society. In the later elevation of reason lay the logic that, by juxtaposing and countering the (dis)reason of the non-rational with the rational within reality, the human being would be seen as morally superior to instinctual animal drives. Porter (1996:279), however, points out that the strength of the non-rational content of reality must then have been more intimidating and powerful: '[T]he store [Greek philosophers] set by reason attests the dangerous power they ascribed to passions and the mysterious forces of fate, just as they were also fascinated by the transcendental "fire" that consumed geniuses and artists'. It is important to note that 'Plato and his followers', according to Porter,

... defined the irrational as the energy of human dignity and freedom; but, the polarity between the rational and the irrational, as with supremacy of mind over matter, became cardinal to Classical moral and medical values, remaining influential down to the present day. (Porter 1996:279.)<sup>6</sup>

The distinction between rational and non-rational then placed artists, not directed by a patron, and the insane outside the reasoned atmosphere of society's control. This secularisation began with the redefinition of religious madness during the seventeenth century (Porter 1996:284). The reasoned-norm of society distanced itself from the unreasoned, criminals, vagrants and the religious 'lunatic fringe'. Porter (1996:286) further suggests that '[f]inding such outsiders disturbing it was easy to label them disturbed. Madness thus became a term of opprobrium.' So, confinement of the insane began in the fifteenth century, though one of the first asylums in London was established as early as 1247. This exile from society was documented in 1961 by French intellectual, Michel Foucault who, according to Porter (1996:287), 'argued in

*La Folie et la Dérison* that the rise of absolutism, symbolized by Louis XIV (1638-1715), inaugurated a Europe-wide “great confinement” in which anybody identified by society with “unreason” would be locked away.<sup>7</sup> Foucault argued that this confinement amounted to far more than physical alienation:

It represented a degeneration of the status of madness. Hitherto, by dint of peculiarity, the mad person had possessed fascinating powers: holy fools, geniuses, and jesters had uttered deep if obscure truths. Madness had spoken and society had listened. Once institutionalized, however, madness was robbed of all such allure, eerie dignity and truth. It was reduced from a positive state (‘madness’) to a negative condition (‘unreason’). Locked up in madhouses, lunatics resembled wild beasts caged in a zoo. It was easy to view them not as sick people but as animals. (Porter 1996:287.)

Even though Porter (1996:287) suggests Foucault may have overstated the magnitude of such confinement, the cause of alienation was described by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), when he writes ‘the pressures of modern civilization alienated man from his soul, creating a divided self’ (Porter 1996:291).

Archard (1984:14), in his discussion on the concept of the unconscious, conveys Lancelot Whyte’s opinion that the ‘notion of “the unconscious” had become a commonplace of European thought in the decade *before* that of Freud’s first published writings’. He states, ‘[i]t is curious ... that Freud should have thought the idea of an ‘unconscious’ to be the main obstacle to public acceptance of his theories’. Archard expresses his concern about viewing Freud as being anti-Cartesian because he made the unconscious a distinct feature of psychoanalytic science and therefore only of the neurological entity. Archard suggests that the expression ‘Cartesian’ was introduced within quotations marks ‘as an indication that the doctrine over-simplifies the actual work of Descartes. Nevertheless, it is conventional to understand the Cartesian philosophy of mind ... interrelated but essentially distinct in kind, the former being irreducibly mental and the latter irreducibly physical.’ (Archard 1984:15.) Archard’s plea is that one should not look at Cartesianism as consisting of a single doctrine; rather, he suggests, one should accuse Freud of this simplified reductionism of the theory of the mind. In his notorious phrase Freud announced:

[O]ur psychical topography has for the present nothing to do with anatomy; it has reference not to anatomical localities, but to regions in the mental apparatus wherever they may be situated in the body. (Cited in Archard 1984:30.)

His intention, as far as it seemed plausible to him, was to evolve a theory separating the conscious and unconscious from the body (sense and experience), so that his inquiry was based only on the 'human mind as a purely psychic entity'. This quest has, however, according to Archard, mounted sustained criticism (Archard 1984:31-32).

The distinction of the disembodied mind and the superiority of the theoretical investigation of the conscious mind occurs not only in Freud's theoretical quest in the field of psychology, referred to above, but also in Descartes' 'rationalist conviction that the individual can, totally and sufficiently, know and express all that is, in principle, knowable about him-/herself and the external world' (Archard 1984: 15). In the realm of art, however, this is problematic. The question pertinent to art and its function of healing is not whether the unconscious mental process exists, but whether it exists dualistically within the rational and emotional nature of humans.

In the 'representation' that constitutes the process of making art, Freud's idea that the psychic is continuous may be considered as 'comprising both conscious and unconscious' (Archard 1984:20). Archard further suggests that 'Freud thought it legitimate to extend such descriptions to unconscious psychic processes. Thus one can talk of unconscious memories, wishes, ideas, etc.' He elucidates that '[t]his is to be understood as meaning that such and such a psychic event, though unconscious, would appear in the form of a wish, memory or whatever, were it to have the additional attribute of consciousness'. (Archard 1984:20-21.)<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, he warns against a reductionist view of our experiences and behaviour, such as was described previously by linking the conscious and unconscious so restrictively to wishes, a matter discussed in Chapter Two, in which Benjamin's formulating of wish-images into thought-images (*Bildbegehren*) was exposed. Archard states his reservation about the structure of the unconscious:

We cannot know, or be certainly aware of, the sense of our utterances and actions, since we cannot, by definition, be aware of the unconscious processes which cause us to say and do certain things, and in any case we cannot, by means of logic of conscious ratiocination, adequately grasp the dislogic of unconscious desire. (Archard 1984:36.)

Freud found more significance in his study when he formulated the idea of the 'talking cure', where repressed wishes sought expression by transference with the help of an analyst (Archard 1984:18). Here he became aware of the role the body has in releasing its anxiety and from which the mind draws the memory of its experiences.

Archard (1984:25) refers to Freud's psychological premise stating 'the impulse seeks discharge and by the most direct route possible'. Archard explains thus:

[T]he mental apparatus functions so as to reduce tension, experiencing an accumulation of tension as pain, and a reduction of tension, or discharge, as pleasure. While the idea, or presentation, of a wish may remain excluded from consciousness, its energy charge will flow from this idea to other associated ideas until access to consciousness, and discharge, is secured. (Archard 1984:25-26.)

However, without the help of transference by an analyst, Freud's formulation of the *Conversion Theory* (Deutsch 1959:27-48,59-97) concentrated on the distorted expressions through the body, which then became affected with illness. The psychological burden that could not be expressed and thus presented itself through the body, as illness, was described by Freud as 'conversion'. Similarly, Archard (1984:26) suggests that 'eventual fulfilment of the wishful impulse, if this is repressed, is thus a disguised or distorted one. It is the associative derivatives of the original repressed presentation that seek entry into consciousness'. In psychological terms this is called transference and is instigated through discussion. Porter (1996:298), however, notes that Freud failed to acknowledge the possibility of counter-transference that would render the analysis as useless and manipulated. In a later section, I will discuss the problematic construction of self-reflection.

In psychoanalytic terms, Kuspit (2004:15) claims that transference is the analysand's transfer of 'often intense, even painful feelings he experienced in his childhood relationships into his[her] relationship with the analyst'. Moreover, he states that transference is '[t]he first creative step' for making 'the material into a medium, which is what transference accomplishes. In other words, the material medium replaces the analyst, so that creating a work of art becomes a kind of self-analyst for the artist.' (Kuspit 2004:15.) In art, however, we can see the similarity between the conversion of material and the artist's change of view or re-creation of his/her view.

Making art is a process of conversion, physically and mentally. Kuspit elucidates that '[e]ach particular work of art represents self-experiences and re-orders his [the artist's] feelings through the medium of his material. The studio becomes a clinic in which the artist pursues self-cure, although all that he may end up with is self-expression – self-mirroring (self-mimicking?) in artistic disguises.' (Kuspit 2004:15.)<sup>9</sup>

Despite the split between conscious and unconscious, each is an integral part of the other, and within the notion of conversion from one to another, the body is the mediator. I have, in the chapters on ritual and memory, examined the importance of the body. Even in discussing the understanding of religious-psychology, I have shown the necessity for the body and the vitality of its senses for re-awakening our causal and intellectual impression of being alive.

### **Reductionism: The Body as Topographical Site for the Mind**

The objective from this point onwards is to explore the theoretical view of the body that erroneously was subjected to alienation from the mind by 'rationalised' moral and religious orthodoxy. In this reductionism which separated reason from emotion, thinking from feeling, the "mentality" of the unconscious would then also have been calculated as formal rationality. As the abstract "half" of the mind, the unconscious would have been held as being of little consequence to the conscious mind. Individuality, I believe, would then have been lost. The question here is: what happens in this disembodied view to ritual, memory and creativity?

Descartes, according to Krell (1990:59), formulated the idea of the body as a machine, a topographical site for 'holding the mind'. In line with this, Porter (1996:283) conveys that the 'Scientific Revolution attacked humoral medicine as part of its all-out assault on the theories of Aristotle and his followers'. With the in-depth research into anatomy, the view of the body as a machine promoted research into the cardiovascular and the nervous systems of pipes and 'circuitry wires coordinating the limbs, spinal cord, and cortex, and began exploring the role of the nervous system in

governing sensations and motion'. The mechanical model of the body held within it 'confused thoughts, feelings, and behaviour [that] became attributed to some defect of the sense organs (eyes, ears, etc.) and their nervous networks'. Suggesting that it was the eighteenth-century doctors who 'popularized the term "nerves" and coined the word "neurosis"', Porter continues, '[f]or long, "neurosis" denoted a physical lesion of the nervous system; only during the nineteenth century did "neurosis" come to mean a mild, non-specific anxious state, as distinct from "psychosis"' (Porter 1996:283).

Anker and Nelkin, artist and sociologist, respectively, in their book *The Molecular Gaze: Art in the Genetic Age*, discuss the German anatomist Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828), who published his phrenological concept of behavioral characteristics and psychological attributes to the physical geography and physiology of the brain (Figure 45). These examples seem to resemble Descartes' topographical model of the brain. The authors observe that the '[b]umps and depressions on the surface of a skull ... were indicators of inherent behavioral characteristics' and 'causally connects [sic] specific regions of the brain to specify talents and dispositions'(Anker & Nelkin 2004:10-11). They assume that this flawed idea 'had precedence in the early science of physiognomy and in its representation in Charles le Brun's seventeenth century drawings'. As an example, le Brun's work *Visage* (Figure 46) depicts side-by-side and frontal drawings of a bull, juxtaposed with a 'wide-eyed creature [with] extended ears, elongated muzzle, and diminished forehead, the very physical characteristics anatomically present in a bull'. Anker and Nelkin further suggest that le Brun, in doing so, linked the bull's emotions to the physical features of this man's bodily characteristics, which portrayed him as 'an instinctual brute, but a sentient being' (Anker & Nelkin 2004:10-12).

The social text of genocide throughout the world, and, in particular, the idea of the perfect race in Nazi Germany, presupposed bodily features combined with mental capabilities and moral virtue, a view similar to that of le Brun, who paralleled characteristic types with virtuous features that could be decoded. Modernist painting, which depicted expressionist use of colour, especially in portraiture, was rejected by Nazi Germany as not conforming to this perception of how the body 'should' look (Anker & Nelkin 2004:16-17).

The body has always been the site of controversy, because physical degeneration provokes inner fear of one's own immortality and sparks a concomitant fear of mental distortion. The unconscious, as an unknown factor in society and clearly seen in the acts of the insane, places westernised society's high regard for conscious rationale at dis-ease. Appignanesi (2003:150) recognises reductionism as resulting from the intensity of the force of technology and the media on our lives. He describes this postmodern consequence as a 'zero-consciousness' that is symptomatic of society's 'impatience without depth'. He further elucidates that '[t]he traditional richness and subtlety of nature, art and religion have faded away before our eyes and we are left with a "recession of reality"'.

The extent of the influence the unconscious and the body have on how we make art is undetermined, yet this realisation of the connectedness, is, I believe, where healing occurs. In South Africa, we are still confronted with traditional healers and Sangomas, whose conception of illness is regarded as the outcome of personal, social and religious beliefs, involving kin and community. Although their procedures differ from Western traditions, where white coats and placebo pills are administered, similar rituals and ceremonies by Sangomas and Nyangas are 'enacted' to cleanse the body from diseases, ghosts and immortal pollutants. Both traditional healing and scientific medicine utilise and are informed by acts of ritual, such as incantation and sacrifice, which are inseparable from healing. Porter (1996:83) claims that 'tribal medicine "makes sense" no less – and, in some ways, far more – than Western medicine'. The approach to body and mind as one entity is its strength.

It is this 'spiritual' or unconscious language that engages and inspires us with passion, sensations and feeling (through the body) that were seldom permitted as contributions to the reasoned world of the Newtonian doctrine of "inert matter", but in which we find the reconnection between what we see and what we feel and which is now reflected in quantum mechanics' acknowledgement of the force of consciousness (Toulmin 1990:121,147). Knowing occurs, I believe, only after this interaction. Kuspit expresses Winnicott's opinion that 'if we accept and love the unconscious in all its seeming abnormality it will become a creative cornucopia of healthy fruit'.

Kuspit elucidates, '[i]t looks like a beast, but if we dare kiss [it], it will change into beautiful art' (Kuspit 2004:113).

Often artist's interest in child art and the art of the insane is a desperate cry to keep the link between the body and mind. It is this spirit of spontaneity and the seemingly uninhibited way of finding 'new', fresh and alive representations, in my opinion, that shows the creativeness of the unconscious (or that creativity is found in the unconscious). It is the overcoming by the artist of the bifurcation of the body and spirit that encourages creative reconstruction. Kuspit (2004:118) conveys that there is:

No sound mind in a sound body for them, but rather an unsound mind in an unsound body – perhaps the difference between the traditional tendency to glorify and sanctify life (holding it in awe whatever its shortcomings) and the modern tendency to pathologize and profane life (in unconscious horror of it).<sup>10</sup>

The body may be cured through medical and chemical intervention, but the troubled conscious and unconscious mind cannot. It is, however, in their reconnection, I suggest, that art will invoke emotion and reason and, therefore, healing from the alienation inherited from the distinction one often feels between what we experience and "feel" and the mind's moral, religious and ethical ideas preconceived; and, that art, in its ability to re-awaken this connection and question these divisions, is a form of healing, even if it is simply by the vitality it leaves within us.

To know ourselves is to continually re-trace ourselves – retrace our footprints in the direction from which we have come, but equally re-create a 'new' pattern by moving forward again in time. This suggests that, in a state of continuous change, the only subject in which we can identify a constant is our body. The act of retracing identity and personal growth through the body is also an act of revisiting memory through an embodied ritual. It is not the topographical 'retrieval' of the mind, such as is conveyed by Descartes' theory of 'memory traces', but it points rather to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perceptual behaviour and also the phenomenology of memory. The problem, similar to that of Descartes, as stated by Straus is 'the *presence* in memory of the *past*'. Sartre, according to Krell (1990:91-92), maintains that 'these presuppositions concerning the being of the past' have obscured memory and temporality. Sartre elucidates:

Thus all is present: the body, the present perceptions, and the past as a trace present in the body. All is *in act*, inasmuch as the trace does not have virtual existence *qua* memory [*souvenir*], but is altogether an *actual* trace. If the memory [*le souvenir*] is reborn, it is in the present, in consequence of a present process, namely, the rupture of protoplasmic equilibrium in the cell group under consideration. Psychophysiological parallelism, which is instantaneous and extratemporal, is there in order to explain how this physiological process is correlative to a strictly psychic yet equally present phenomenon: the appearance of the memory image in consciousness. The more recent notion of the *engram* adds nothing to this, but only adorns this theory with pseudo-scientific terminology. Yet if all is present, how explain the *pastness* [*passivité*] of remembering; that is to say, the fact that in its intention a consciousness that reminisces [*se remémore*] transcends the present in order to aim at the event back there where it *was*. (Cited in Krell 1990:92.)

Plato's view of the body, as the 'rescuer' and 'preserver' of the soul and as the medium through which the soul can signal its existence, re-emerges, according to Krell (1990:95), in Merleau-Ponty's "secret guardian" [of the] ... "depth" in the hollow (*creux*) that both limits and guarantees our being in-the-world'.

Merleau-Ponty indicates the paradoxes of the hyper-dialectic of memory, which is both forgotten and preserved, and claims that only 'through the body do we have access to the past'. He elucidates the role the body plays:

One can actualize the past, but one cannot realize it. Thus the body assumes the role of mediator in memory. Time is read off from the body because time incorporates itself in the body, is sedimented there: the body appears as temporality, sedimentation, temporalizing, corporeal mediation between me and the past. (cited in Krell 1990:101.)

In my own work, I have tried to overcome the persistent division between the "rationality" of human thought and the "causality" of how the body is viewed as distinct from the mental (conscious and unconscious) faculties in human survival.<sup>11</sup> By using natural materials, I have tried to portray this re-union and thereby signify healing. The soap bath, titled *Sitzbath* (Figure 47), is particularly demonstrative of this idea, by indulging in my unconscious connection with the body through the sensuousness of the object, thereby drawing on memory and ritual and creating a constructed emotional signification. De-ritualised art, in my opinion, without that which binds the nature-of-being as an integral part of both body and mind, becomes

soulless. Genealogy and memory, which form part of our individual identity, are also ruled out by de-ritualised art. Art, without this spiritual connectedness between the unconscious and the body, would reduce everything in life to a simulacrum. The *Sitzbath*, a life-size cast, reminds us that art, in its material form, is like a body. It re-awakens the sensuous experience in the mind. Making art is, for me, a ritualistic act of re-creating the connectedness between mind and body, like when bathing. The necessity of making art is also a private performance of inner cleansing.

For art to be any kind of resolution or redemption – which is my claim – its healing function must be taken into account, particularly in the light of how we re-encounter our memories through the mind’s connection to the body. In making art, do we encounter ‘the idea’ without our body’s relationship to the physical objects? Does healing occur by re-constructing the idea? Or does it occur by creating a representation of it, as part of the body, in an act of manipulating and taking power over the mental trauma experienced?

To answer any questions on the healing function of art, I can only speak about what my art facilitates for me. Freud suggested that artists are able to access the unconscious (Levine 1998:201). Just as when playing games, children give their toys identities and souls; similarly, so do artists engage in a playful discourse between their own identities and those of their work, which is an extension of their unconscious identities and wish/thought-images. Soap making for me became a ritualistic searching of deep memory. Although painful, it also became almost a ‘child’s game’; playing, searching, acting – acting out a past I had only imagined, but also recalling my past memories that had become my heritage. It became an imaginative game: like a child playing with its dolls and endowing each object with a spirit or soul with which I could converse, each sculpture gained an identity, a character, with which I would communicate. Moreover, Toulmin describes Hume’s ‘insistence on the indispensability of feelings as springs of human action’, when he declared “‘The Reason is, *and ought to be*, a slave of the passions””.

Kuspit (2004:121) conveys the thoughts of Gauguin and Baudelaire, both of whom considered the similarity between artists and children who are tapped into the sanctuary of the unconscious, claiming that ‘... Gauguin confirms Baudelaire’s idea’

and states ‘that “genius is nothing more nor less than *childhood* recovered at will – a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood’s capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw materials which it has involuntarily accumulated”. Kuspit, still referring to Gauguin, writes:

He further adds: “It is by this deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new,” noting that “the child sees everything in a state of newness; he [/she] is always *drunk*,” and thus mad.’ (Cited in Kuspit 2004:122.)

In this contemporary period, artists with their unique abilities are situated between the rational world of business and economics and the non-rational world in which people live with spontaneous emotional and sensuous experiences. The ability of the artist is not only to draw on the unconscious and the conscious, but also the body, to express his-/herself and to convey his/her own cognitive experiences to his/her audience.<sup>12</sup> Toulmin (1990:143) suggests, however, a positive turn: ‘[t]he ecological reinsertion of human beings into the world of natural processes is ... quite a recent feature of thought’, within which the reunion of reason and emotions, humanity and nature, salvation and survival re-unite.

I will now investigate how, the artist ‘speaks’ to his/her audience and how the audience ‘reads’ a work of art. In this process, I aim to show that healing can occur by the artist’s awakening of his/her viewer’s sense of empathy, by an inner conversion or transcendence.

## **Embodied Mind: Transcendence, Empathy and Spirituality**

As religious ritualistic experiences, our daily rituals are embodied acts (a fact established in Chapter One). The problem for art is the hard-line distinction between the ‘rationality’ of human thought, and the ‘causality’ of human emotions and the unconscious. In art, these fail to project the diversity and adaptability of the human concerns which, more often than not, art depicts. Within the realm of ritual, memory and the experience that defines our identity, the problem, therefore, lies not only in

the concept of the religious doctrine regarding the sinful body, but also in the Platonic dis-embodiment that does not merge the relation of diverse and changing human experiences and the ideals of reason and rationality. In this section, I aim to discuss how signification in art occurs through the embodied mind. I believe art's function of healing is located in the transcendence it enables. Fear, being ultimately the loss of identity, reawakens one's sense of nature's cyclic self-revival; this becomes an empathic experience which draws us away from melancholic self-reflection (which is the downfall of self-over-investment). I hope thus to establish the synthesis between art and spirituality, exploring their connection with empathic transcendence.

Perception, in making and viewing art, is the prime act. Seeing, as a bodily function, engages in both conscious and unconscious mind, in which both interact with emotions, preconceived concepts, constructs of our living in society, and the tactile senses that are connected to memory (what one 'thinks' one sees), as well as engaging with light and colour, form and texture. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999:561) so succinctly state: 'Your body is not, and could not be, a mere vessel for a disembodied mind. The concept of a mind separate from the body is a metaphorical concept.'

In making art, the artist often struggles with clarity of depicting insight because he/she has a metaphoric system that conceptualises his/her mind as disembodied. Therefore, accuracy of perception becomes the awareness of what one *really* sees (opposed to what one thinks one sees) and the use of one's conceptual faculty to transform perspective onto a flat surface or a down-or-up scale in a sculpture, to create a 'realistic' illusion. Yet, here, as cognitive science shows us, one's mind cannot be disembodied, because preconceived ideas of the mind alone hinder the way we look. The mind, however, can overcome this through analysis and by engaging with the object through the body and mind.

In revealing the structure of experience of my work and its process, which aligns itself with phenomenological discourse, I have understood that viewing art relies on the recognition of the cognitive unconscious. My conviction is based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1999:5) theoretical premise that '[r]eason, arising from the body, doesn't transcend the body. What universal aspects of reason there are arise from the commonalities of our bodies and brains and the environment we inhabit.'<sup>13</sup>

Lakoff and Johnson (1999:563) refer to the body/mind split (discussed above), as the ‘metaphorical Subject-Self split’. In a discussion on the origin of such thought, they suggest that its emergence world wide can be put down to the body/Spirit or Soul distinction in spiritual traditions. They describe the reasoned consciousness as an aspect of spiritual traditions, where ‘the Soul is conceptualized as the locus of consciousness, subjective experience, moral judgement, reason, will, and, most important, one’s essence, that which makes a person who he or she is’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:563).

We can see this evidenced in Christianity, for example, where in the ‘distant-God Christian tradition, morality is tied to the disembodiment of Soul’. Lakoff and Johnson (1999:564) further illuminate this:

Christians are supposed to live a holy life focused on transcending all the things of this world – bodily desire, material possessions, fame, worldly success, and long life. This disembodied, otherworldly conception of spirituality and transcendence downplays one’s relation to the world, the natural environment, and all other aspects of embodied existence.

However, the discrepancy lies in how churches used art (painting and sculpture, particularly) as a form or reconnecting spirituality (belief) with the body, so that non-literate people could find resonance within their own feelings (passions), within their own bodily reactions.

Art looks to society for its concepts and often reacts to it.<sup>14</sup> As an example, Futurism, as a dislodgment of Impressionism and as a modern movement, appropriated war machines and production plants. These artists exhaled ‘progress’ and technology, appropriating it as their subject. In these works today we see influences of social and political propaganda. Most movements in Modernism drifted towards entropy and, as a result of newly evolving concerns, found ‘new life’ and revival in the next perspective on social life. Each pursued the idea of originality, which was a re-awakening – a vitality that insight brings with it. It was an embodied reaction to the world. The postmodern perspective states that there cannot be anything new or original; we continually re-appropriate. Yet this attitude has in itself appropriated the social *status quo* of emotional-zero-consciousness that perpetuates today’s contemporary life as described by Appignanesi and discussed in Memory. It is ironic

that this nihilist view, declared in Nietzsche's anti-/post-religious announcement, has appropriated the very idealism that religion's fallible attitude towards the body had declared. Both of these philosophical theories, Toulmin (1990:140) states, suggest complete indifference to human sensations in their need for philosophy to remain 'both mathematically and metaphysically "provable"'. In support, Nietzsche's view was reactionary to the Enlightenment and political system. He appropriated rather a Newtonian, systematic hierarchical order, using the rational system and assuming a conscious vehicle of atheism and materialism that would rise against the non-rational dogma that the monarchy and the orthodox church together enforced.

Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, foresaw the nihilism of pure consciousness. According to Pothen (2002:58), he describes the consequences of the 'Unhappy Consciousness', stating that '[t]he loss of "essential being" in this "certainty of itself", indeed the lack of awareness that this is so, leads both to the "loss ... of the Self" as well as to the "hard saying 'God is dead'"... [t]he death of God is thus a consequence of the growing crisis of subjectivity.' Pothen (2002:58) describes Hegel's 'Unhappy Consciousness', formulated as the result of post-religion:

The unhappy consciousness, as the instantiation of this overall yet alienated subjectivity, already posits the death of God. As with Nietzsche, this death is a fundamentally historical notion: the myths that sustained the belief in God are now no longer sufficient to support that system of belief. The death of God is, then, first and foremost an event in history.

In respect of art, this would nullify any mythopoetic content and would indicate the psychological alienation from society, ignore representation and even waive the necessity of healing, salvation and resolution.

Hegel, according to Pothen, suggests that '[t]he deaths of God and of art are closely linked'. The former writes:

The statues are now only stones from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone .... The works of the Muse now lack the power of the Spirit, for the Spirit has gained its certainty of itself from the crushing of gods and men .... So Fate does not restore their world to us along with the works of antique Art, it gives not the spring and the summer of the ethical life in which they blossomed and ripened, but only the veiled recollection of that actual world. Our active enjoyment of them is therefore not an act of divine worship through which our consciousness might come to its perfect truth and fulfilment; it is an external activity. (Cited in Pothen 2002:58-59.)

Here Pothen (2002:59) shows Hegel's deep awareness 'that we cannot have the death of art without the death of God, and that, therefore, for him the one is as unthinkable as the other'.

For Hegel, the subject's withdrawal into itself would result in an 'all consuming subjectivity' and '[p]rosaic reality', jeopardising the 'Spirit's sensuous embodiment' (cited in Pothen 2002:59). Hegel, according to Pothen, cannot allow art to perish. He holds that art still has importance through:

... the aspect of the individual talent which can remain faithful both to the manifestations of spirit and also to the inherently substantial life of nature, even in the extreme limits of the contingency which that life reaches ... in addition there is the subjective vivacity with which the artist with his spirit and heart breathes life entirely into the existence of such topics ... (Pothen 2002:60).

Is this 'spirit' then, the vitality of the unconscious and conscious mind, communicated through the expressions of the body? As an expression and balance between these, could art in the embodied sense ascribe to some higher goal as its function? Could transcendence be a form of healing arising from the realisation that the embodied mind holds strength within its unity?

Art, as an 'imitation' of life and as a medium of spirituality (sharing insight into the experiences of life) and also as a conceptual metaphor, in its use of material objects around us, shows a similarity to religion, which is often referred to as the spiritual aspect of art. Lakoff and Johnson (1999:565) distinguish the separateness and conjoining of both body and mind and the metaphorical creation that can occur between them, stating that '[o]ur body is intimately tied to what we walk on, sit on, touch, taste, smell, see, breathe, and move within. Our corporeality is part of the corporeality of the world.' They continue:

The mind is not merely corporeal but also passionate, desiring, and social. It has a culture and cannot exist culture-free. It has a history, it has developed and grown, and it can grow further. It has an unconscious aspect, hidden from our direct view and knowable only indirectly. Its conscious aspect characterizes what it cannot even conceptualize, much less understand. But its conceptual system is expandable: It can form revelatory new understandings. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:565.)

Thus, we transfer sensations to the mind, where the mind interprets them as thoughts or feelings. This imitation, as Lakoff and Johnson (1999:565) convey, is '[a] major function of the embodied mind [and] is empathic'. They describe our capacity to imitate others as a 'vital cognitive faculty', stating that it is '[e]xperientially, a form of "transcendence". Through it, one can experience something akin to "getting out of our bodies" – yet it is very much a bodily capacity.' Furthermore, they describe the experience of dreaming as a 'cognitive simulation' that is the connection between the brain and the visual system. This 'vivid' experience occurs while the muscles are inhibited, which results in the 'feel' of movement without moving. This, Lakoff and Johnson (1999:565) claim, is a 'form of empathic projection .... It is what we do when we imitate. Yet this most common of experiences is a form of "transcendence", a form of *being in the other*.' Such imaginative empathic projection is recorded in stigmata cases. This meditative tradition has developed over millennia and is, Lakoff and Johnson (1999:565) claim, a major part of what has always been called 'spiritual experience'. People in many eastern cultures have developed and trained themselves to enhance their sense of being-in-the-world.

In art I think that we can call aesthetic osmosis an act of engaging with material to transform 'inert matter' into a form/image of empathic projection. Kuspit (2004:13) states that 'aesthetic experience leads to the realization that social identity is not ingrained – not destiny – not the be-all and end-all of existence'. He further reveals how aesthetic experience transcends the everyday, finding the core of the self in the world:

It is not the source of individuality, but rather precludes individuality. Aesthetic experience allows one to recover the sense of individuality and authenticity lost to 'obligatory behavior' – no doubt necessary for social survival – because it allows one to live in society with a measure of what can only be described as sublime if unrealistic happiness while, paradoxically, spearheading 'the critical testing of [social] reality'. This is no doubt a heroic idea of the human potential of aesthetic experience, but the heroism is entirely private, for it involves insight into the needs of what Winnicott<sup>15</sup> calls the incommunicado core of the self. (Kuspit 2004:13.)

An interesting aspect of empathic projection is that, according to Lakoff and Johnson, it forms a part of 'Nurturant Parent morality'. As I understand it, the term 'empathy', operating far more on an emotional level, is the 'focused, imaginative experience of

the other'. They further elucidate that '[e]mpathy links moral values to spiritual experience'(Lakoff & Johnson 1999:566).

As an example, we can recall Joseph Beuys taking on the role of a shaman when he identified himself with a coyote in *America likes me and I like America* (Figure 20a, b & c) and *Conversations with a dead hare* (Figure 15a, b & c). Lakoff and Johnson describe empathic projection as occurring when people share/feel towards animals and stress the importance of owning a pet for the development of empathy in children. They write:

Shamans in aboriginal cultures around the world observe animals closely by empathically "becoming" the animals, and ritual practices in a wide range of aboriginal religions employ the movements of animals to achieve an ecstatic experience, an experience of being in the body of a very different kind of being. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:566.)

In my opinion, aesthetic experience is a continual search and re-discovery of myself within different environments. It is a playful theatre of changing roles in order to come to know ourselves in these situations, and to get to know the environment of which we are a part. Empathic projection is, therefore, a re-discovery of one's self-consciousness and identity. This ritual, as I have discussed earlier, between the body, the mind and sensuous material or nature, can also be seen as finding our own nature within ourselves. This ability to find an all-encompassing whole of ourselves (mind and body) in the world around us, Lakoff and Johnson (1999:566) describe as '[a] mindful embodied spirituality [which] is thus an ecological spirituality'.<sup>16</sup>

In their conclusion, the two authors (1999:567) state the connection of an embodied spirituality as requiring 'an aesthetic attitude to the world that is central to self-nurturance, to the nurturance of others, and to the nurturance of the world itself'.

They also affirm that:

Embodied spirituality requires an understanding that nature is not inanimate and less than human, but animated and more than human. It requires pleasure, joy in the bodily connection with earth and air, sea and sky, plants and animals – and the recognition that they are all more than human, more than any human beings could ever achieve. Embodied spirituality is more than spiritual experience. It is an ethical relationship to the physical world. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:566.)

It was my intention that my work, made in the context of the South African transformation – of resolution, restitution and redemption – would be understood or signified within this context. In making it, I found that it had a ‘healing effect’ through the process of working-through memory. I do not claim the same for the spectator. Yet one could argue that, by redeeming one’s own self-consciousness as an artist, one’s viewers would, similarly, redeem their own embodied identity and their own humanity. Although I know that in a social realm art’s power can be diminished and merely become a critical aid to propaganda, for example, in posters (and in monuments), it does, however, ideologically and controversially, continue to portray the human tragedy. While art may lose its function of giving an alternative insight and only appropriate that which artists have endeavoured to view critically, Kuspit recalls the idea of timelessness in art prior to what he terms ‘postart’<sup>17</sup> and affirms that since it has lost its idealism (such as its visions of hope and change) and empathy, its concerns have become short-lived. But Kuspit calls for the revival of these qualities:

For art’s ability to eternalize human beings who live and die in time – to eternalize the sensation of life, as Umberto Boccioni put it – thus creating the illusion that they are immortal, that is, endure in the present in the form of art, is an extension and expression of its empathy for humanity. One immortalized the mortal out of poignant love for it. (Kuspit 2004:148.)

However, in the era of post-religion, in which Nietzsche declared his nihilistic mantra, the idea of immortality, timelessness and Otto Rank’s belief that the goal of art is to immortalise the mortal, is regarded as conceptually passé (cited in Kuspit 2004:157-159). Thus in this nihilist view, the concepts of memory and ritual, along with aesthetics and passion, it seems, are, no longer relevant. Yet this would render a healing function of art impossible. In the hope of disproving this, I will, therefore, review opinions on the various functions of art?

Portnoy (1962:58-59) describes the ‘origin’ of artworks as often being engaged in ‘conflict and repressions of which the artist is not even consciously aware’, although he [/she] ‘converts his repressed emotions into something fanciful’. He lists various analytic psychologists and their ideas on the function of art, conveying Rank’s opinion ‘that the artist strives for immortal recognition by creating something that will live after him’. Portnoy also quotes, Adler, as being of the conviction that ‘creating

art is a means of compensating for organic deficiencies'. Freud, as we have seen, maintains that 'creating art is a sublimating process for realizing unfulfilled desires in the form of fantasy'. Jung agrees with Freud's view on why artists create; however, he makes this distinction: '[T]he creation of art is more than personal wish fulfilment ... it is an expression of the collective unconscious, a symbol of eternity expressed in modern form' (cited in Portnoy 1962:58). Stating his own opinion, Portnoy writes:

Artistic creation is the expression of the unconscious life of man which originates from conflicts and repressions. Artists may create for different reasons but they draw their strength from one source, the unconscious, and then follow a similar mental course in the process of nurturing and expressing their ideas. (Portnoy 1962:58.)

Jaques Barzun, in *The Rise of Art as Religion*, suggests that art in the nineteenth century replaced religion as a 'gateway to the realm of the spirit' (Kuspit 2004:161). Kuspit further quotes Barzun, who states why he endows art with spirituality: 'The spirituality of art can [be] demonstrated, ... [by the fact that] in art the force and quality of the effect are out of all proportion to the cause, [which proves] the inadequacy of all material explanations [of art].' (Cited in Kuspit 2004:162)

In my opinion, artists, through the medium of art, have the potential to heal, transform and convert, whatever has been destroyed or 'wounded' in the world around them. One could even argue that through artists' seeing the wounds left by society (such as is the case in the work of Joseph Beuys discussed above, *Cologne* (Figure 40) and *Cosmos and Damien* (Figure 41)), and by drawing the audience into their aesthetic view, art becomes a healing tool, like a healing ritual of transcendence performed in medieval times (in vision and/or in conceptual idea). Art, as a form of empathic transcendence, functions not only as a self-conscious re-awakening, but also as a mode of locating oneself-in-the-world. Transcendence is a means of distancing oneself from complete self-reflection, which is always melancholic. This I will elucidate on in the section on self-reflection.

Here a series of urgent questions arises. Is that which we call aesthetics not possibly the spiritual unconscious and its reflection in the consciousness and judgement which show and recover humanity, recalling memory, acknowledging it through ritual and enabling us to re-identifying ourselves through this embodied view of our own self-

consciousness? Could 'aesthetic' not also imply the showing of the artist's position between rationality and humanity? Is it a sign-post of how we identify ourselves in the world from which we are set apart? And could it, by this means, become a form of healing?

In Nietzsche's destruction of God, he gives art a last reprieve saying: 'One could give up art, but would not thereby relinquish the capacity one has learned from it: just as one has given up religion but not the enhancement of feeling and exaltations one has acquired from it' (cited in Pothen 2002:67). In these last breaths of art, we find Nietzsche's empathy, arising out of his Nurturant Parent morality, which is based on the empathy with all things, like pantheism and the Kabbalah, in which everything and anything, even a stone, is seen as divine. Lakoff and Johnson (1999:567) conclude that 'anything or anyone is in contact with God', through this empathic projection onto nature which is, in itself, a metaphorical projection of being passionate and therefore spiritual. They elucidate:

It is this empathic dimension of spiritual experience that links the spiritual to the moral via nurturance – to the responsibility to care for that with which we empathise. It is thus an activist moral attitude not just toward individuals, but toward society and the world. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:567.)

My soap sculptures have allowed me to play with nature's materials, to return to memory, to explore ritual and find deep integratedness with the environment around me. Deciding that the sensuous material of soap, and the physical making of sculptures was just as important as the conceptual idea, I directed my concern to the negative social realm in which art presently finds itself. This has led to the insight that making art in South Africa, where we still live relatively close to nature, results in a vibrancy of one's art. The focus on identity and memory, particularly in the last ten years of democracy, has revived ideas on empathy. South African art, thankfully, upholds the notion of embodied spirituality.

In this next section, I will endeavour to discuss how self-consciousness in art making evokes an expression of one's deep inner self.

## Self-Consciousness and Identity

Here I pursue the ideas that identity is not static, but a continual re-awakening of the self-conscious and that the latter is an enigmatic awareness of one's own body and consciousness that has the ability to appeal to empathic transcendence. I will refer to Freud's theory of *Remembering, Repeating and Working-through* (1914) (Levine 1998:201). He identifies self-consciousness as a redemptive medium for re-finding, in memory or semantic content, representation that reminds one of one's humanity and identity.

Transcendence (as discussed above) is articulated by Paul Crowler as the 'embodiment' of art and he stresses the necessity of self-consciousness in art. He states that the

... symbolic formation is more directly realized as an artefact in those cases where sensible material is invested with symbolic content through being articulated on the basis of some semantic convention, such as shaping a piece of clay so that it resembles some other kind of thing in terms of shape, mass, and proportion. The convention involved can be tightly organized around resemblance, or it can be looser – drawing on a cultural stock of analogies of associations between sensible configurations and states of mind or qualities of bodily gesture (for example, in music or abstract visual art-forms) (Crowler 1993:169-170).

Sublimation, as deep inner desires not yet surfaced as self-consciousness, can be described as a suppressed need turbulent in identity's desire to show its deep inner concerns. However, Mieke Bal warns against sublimation as a concept used to define art psychoanalytically. This 'vague concept' she describes as containing the 'capacity for interdisciplinary illumination of a specific work of art and the visual specificity it conserves in its very discursivity' (Bal 1991:330). She affirms that these tensions must remain unresolved and claims that sublimation should stay an analysis. An analysis of this concept, notes Bal, 'shows that it rests on two tensions in the artist's mind, one between *force* (force of the drives) and *meaning* (its sublimated aim), the other between *symbol* (the disguise of the repressed) and *meaning* (the repressed)'. Bal elucidates that movement towards resolution would result in 'reductive tendencies of the hypothesis'. It should, therefore, not be resolved. However, she conveys that these aggressive drives can be countered, specifically through a semiotic perspective in which 'meanings are figuratively signified; metaphor subsumes metonymy' (Bal 1991:330-331).<sup>18</sup>

The term 'healing' assumes an ideological stance and alludes to a corrective approach. Therefore, Freud's term '*Bearbeitung*' (working-through) seems more applicable, as it is suggestive of the process that leads to the eventual understanding of why we do things and why they are so important to us that we must express ourselves through art. Here he observes how the artist enables others to 'derive consolation and deviation from their own sources of pleasure in their unconscious which have become inaccessible to them ...'(cited in Levine 1998:201). However, because the term 'healing' covers a broad range of notions, having ideological and theoretical aspects, such as medicine, psychology and religion, all of which find resonance in the idea of resolution and redemption, I shall continue to use this term.

My sculpted *Fonts* refer to the biblical ideology that separates the body from the soul. By using soap (as a metaphor for the body) instead of, for example, marble, the semantic content of the narrative of cleansing and healing the body is signified as re-uniting the soul. The material, as 'embodied' meaning, refers to the re-awakening of the self-consciousness through the process of working continuously with the soap and one's response to it via one's body. Crowler (1993:170) emphasises that: '[E]ven the most crude and functional forms of artifice can *qua* [by being an] aesthetic object answer the need of continuously re-awakening the self-consciousness. Hence, the origin of art can be found in such things as the exemplary utensil or ritual performance.'<sup>19</sup>

In a South African context, my soap fonts may signify the transformation that occurs in the conscious and unconscious of each individual who has expressed his/her hope or fear. The handling of fat awakened a self-consciousness of my inner being concerning my removed sense of my own inner nature and, by making the fat into soap, a transformation was initiated, shifting me from discomfort to an inner overcoming – a healing – of the division that haunts us in a world where self-consciousness is ridiculed as emotionally driven and, therefore, passé. In my opinion, in art, personal wishes and hopes find articulation as broader social issues and often reveal the deepest desires of humanity. Being humanistic is, in my opinion, simultaneously the conscious decision to pursue emotional (animal nature or sense, as Duchamp called it) and conscious reasoning. When seeing an animal or human suffer, for instance, we react either with nature, in which suffering is met with the

alleviation through death (euthanasia), or nurture, care and healing. For me, this synthesis between nature and nurture is what it means to be human. Therefore, art, as a response to the environment and as a reaction which is both emotional and rational, draws out our humanity. Merleau-Ponty states that ‘the artist “carves out relief” in things’. Crowler puts it thus:

Hence, just as the experiential present stylizes and appropriates its objects, so in art the artist’s experiential present is made into stylized object. The dimension of style around which perception and projection constellate is made accessible at an objective level. We can encounter the very flesh of self-consciousness, as an item *for* self-consciousness. This is a total experience: for whilst one can articulate the basis of self-consciousness in abstract terms at a theoretical level, the artworks reflect this in a way that engages us in the fullest sense, namely at a level wherein sensibility and reason are inseparably bonded. (Crowler 1993:172.)

The phenomenal tactility of both the fat and the soap is paramount in reading these artworks. The sensibility with which one approaches the connotation of fat and soap, as decadence or excess, or the conversion to purity and cleansing, shows the changing self-consciousness with which the viewer approaches art. The significance of our private associations, our experiences and emotions, cultural traditions, religious orientation, as well as our appropriation of these, all form our individual identity; and the conversion we undergo when looking at another artist’s work and understanding his/her individuality arises from our empathic humanism.<sup>20</sup>

The way we experience art, initially, is less through our mind than through our emotional response. As the philosophers Lakoff and Johnson state: ‘Emotion, which is not methodical and predictable, is not modeled in this way, nor is the unpredictable aspect of imagination.’ They reject, too, the Folk Theory of Perception and Reason and elucidate that ‘reason and emotion go hand in hand, with reason possible only if emotion is present’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:414).<sup>21</sup>

Artworks represent a mental change in both artist and spectator – and thus within their own vessel, spiritual unconscious – and the material is representative of the conversion of ideas and mythopoetic representation they form. Crowler (1993:174) shows us that ‘self-consciousness involves a dialectic of stability and change in the circumstances of life .... Aesthetic form *is* only energized if it adds in some way to our general experience of such forms.’ The symbolic baptismal font, through its

mutation as an art object, and its broader signification, allows a wide range of people to associate with the concept of conversion, not only in a religious sense, but as a self-conscious transformation.

The question about the healing one gains by becoming self-conscious in artmaking once again opens up the debate as to why we make art. Crowler (1993:175) suggests that self-consciousness 'is doubtless triggered by survival needs', but he also warns us against over-interpretation. The connection, I believe, is our collective faculty of myth or religion as humans, which balances the flux of reason and emotions in human experience. Crowler continues to say that, if we see self-consciousness as having some kind of goal, then 'it could only be on the basis of an *overcoming* of its essential finitude. This overcoming, however, is not some escape into timelessness; rather, it is a modal overcoming that is immanent in art's reciprocity with the world' (Crowler 1993:175). He, however, suggests that making art is a form of establishing a '... continuum and immortal'. Viewers, he claims, 'inhabit' the work with their existential problems and, by engaging with the artwork, are drawn away from their everyday experiences. Crowler (1993:177) calls this release, a 'secular immortality, and redemption'.

To sum up, self-consciousness determines the way we experience the world around us. It is based upon our emotional, religious, moral or ethical points of view. The justification for making art in which memory and ritual are its content is that it re-emerges as a self-conscious identity. Through self-consciousness in art, we come to the understanding of the artist's concern, albeit through sublimation. Self-consciousness in art is a continual search for, and re-creation of identity. Within the poesis of the imagination, and thus in art, identity cannot be totally rationalised and defined, because humans are not only conscious, but also unconscious and often act from the sub-conscious. Therefore, an anxiety about identity or an over-emphasis on either conscious rationality or emotional unconscious, ultimately brings about the loss of all these. Healing in art occurs by preserving identity. In contrast, the unfortunate aspect of monuments is that their form represents a vision of a time when the realisation of some injustice occurred, and the fixed idealised form that remains standing thereafter, neither transmutes nor speaks with the same concern as during the making. The problem of appropriating a monument as a living/continual concern is

that it also appropriates the memory of its cause and the loss of self-consciousness that led to its building. The vitality and 'life' in artworks – that which allows them to exist as vibrant representations of the spectators' and artists' self-conscious individuality – is the continual appeal to the unconscious, the body and the self-conscious. Only through self-consciousness can we re-construct Post-Memory as deep-memory, as a part of our own identity. Only by being self-conscious can we restore a function of healing (redemption) in art, by expressing a deep inner empathy towards society and the environment in which we live. I will now discuss the problem of over-construction and over-investment of the self in the work of art.

Just as the vitality of life is gained through spontaneous, unconscious showings and realisations (the insights gained in the 'Now of cognizability'), so the vitality of art and its ability to facilitate healing are, I believe, located in these moments of pleasure gained through the unreserved and spontaneous self-illumination that we, as artists and spectators, experience when making and viewing art. Art reflects our identity and our humanity and in this mirroring we find self-conscious individuation and thus healing.

### **Melancholia: Self-Reflection as the Problem of Over Constructing Consciousness**

Making art, we have discussed, is a process of awakening self-consciousness. With the realisation that a fair amount of individuation is contained within one's work, the problem may arise of an over-investment (or what is termed in psychology as counter-transference). However, by gaining insight into oneself and the workings of one's conscious and unconscious mind's reception of influence, this temporal retrospective view, I believe is a means to distance oneself from one's deep inner wishes and anxieties. It too, is a process of working-through.

Self-reflection, as a rationalised analysis of the mind's relation to the past is, it can be argued, a form of self-mourning. But, because retrospective reflection can fall into over-interpretation and false construction, self-reflection can also be a form of false mourning. Self-reflection as a construed and, therefore, disembodied self-analysis is problematic, because in contradiction to what religion and psychology suggest, one should 'never' be able to retreat from one's body or one's mind (Freud cited in Archard 1984:30). In this section, I intend to show that art itself must remain on the verge – as embodied witness to individual experience and time.

Reflecting on art, I believe, we first 'sense' and 'feel' what we see, before we reason on it. Hume, similarly, states that memories are the repetition 'of our impressions [that have] become extremely vivid and clear from our "sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance of the soul"' (cited in Krell 1990:83).<sup>22</sup>

The self-consciousness with which we make art is, I believe, linked to a deep-seated memory and the ability of artists to connect with the unconscious, monitoring psychological states as an individual within the changing social and ecological world. Our unconsciousness is thus linked to the circumstances of living and survival. Art can be a reflective awareness of the nature of the human condition. Crowler (1993:46-47) formulates this reflectiveness as a 'moving revelation and celebration of the enigma of embodied consciousness', calling it the '*empathic* experience'.

Self-reflection, as a conscious search for our inner-reality, brings us to the inadequacy of finding our function in the world. It is difficult to pin-point the psychological route of healing as a function of art, because our 'true' inner reality, which mostly occurs in the unconscious and reveals itself spontaneously, is clouded by the human quest to categorise, explain and re-construct our intellectual credibility. Self-reflection is a construction. Although it enables the re-awakening of the self-consciousness that re-establishes and reminds us who we are, self-reflection is, however, not the clear reflection of ourselves, such as we might see in a mirror, but it is as though we are approaching a pane of frosted glass, cracked, broken and re-constructed again to fit in the delineations of conscious reasoning.

In her study, *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, Mieke Bal (1991:291-292), warns us of the problems of the use of psychoanalysis in interpreting paintings. She emphasises that theories remain speculative, as they cannot be proven or have certainty about what paintings signify, without the creator's input. Another problem that Bal highlights occurs in 'reading' artworks that contain a metaphorical premise and that overlap with ideological views of family relations. The mind, separate from the body, is, as we have seen, a constructed metaphorical concept. Often personal issues carry within them inherited moral values that restrict the interpretation of artworks. Bal (1991:293), therefore, stresses that we must be aware that the methodological framework of psychoanalysis is flawed, and that we must either accept a shortcoming or reject psychology altogether. In art, the interpretation is extended by the artist's conversion of memory and rituals into art that, in itself, is metaphorical. Although, the 'unknown' factor of the unconscious brings with it the vitality and spontaneity that make art exist beyond mere description, making art is a subjective process. Therefore, the framework of metaphor must allow for extended leverage, regarding the personal and emotional factors that are included in the process.

Artworks, however, in their portrayal of memories or identity become 'playful' in their new-found objecthood and move between reality and fantasy. Thus by exposing one's identity through art, the art object becomes consolidated with the mythopoetic imagination that finds expression in the collective consciousness of images or symbols. Mieke Bal (1991:329-330) calls the process 'sublimation'.

The French artist Louise Bourgeois explores the theme of loss in her work, where she plays intellectual and symbolic games with the personal fears anchored in her psyche. In the work *Cells* (Figure 48), she depicts specific memories, often using the mirror as a means of self-reflection. The mirror, it seems, often provides a view or reminder of the past and of change. One's relationship to one's family is fixed in the genealogical features of one's face. The face also carries the scars, marks and wrinkles of trauma and distress. Kotik (1994:41) describes the use of the mirror as a 'central metaphor for loss (signifying the finding of the self and the separation from the mother)'. He (1994:41) continues to discuss this signification referring to Freudian thought on the subject of the mirror as 'an unconscious attempt to gain control of an uncontrollable

situation, to recast “the experience of life (which one endures passively)” into an active mastery’. However, Bourgeois replies defiantly that Freud’s theories on memory and dreams in psychosis are of ‘no use to the creative artist’ (Kotik 1994: 44). Using a mirror, however, is, in my opinion, the first step towards self-portraiture, self-criticism and self-investigation. Seeing oneself from the ‘outside’ (one’s reflection and that which we present to the world) takes courage and places one in the unusual position of self-objectification, but also often, unknowingly, induces and introduces a search of the unconscious arenas of memory.

In my own work, the significance of the sculptural forms and the reflective water they are able to hold as vessels, fonts, baths or fountains, create a dialogue of wish-images that inspire internalising and self-analysis, as Hegel stated in ‘*Sich-innerlich-machen*’ – ‘*Insichgehen*’, not forgetting the power of ‘*Einbildungskraft*’ (the power of the imagination), consisting, according to him, of both imagination and memory (cited in Krell 1990:228,235-6). My work, signifying deep memories and the slow transformation towards their healing, I signify through the conversion of the soap’s materials over a long period of time. Symbolically, the hollow of my soap sculptures represents a place of preservation and also a space of conversion. In these opposing ideas within my work, I find a relationship with Bourgeois’ exploration of working-through and dealing with one’s past, both to preserve one’s inner being, and to find release from deep, scourging memories.

Bourgeois’ created spaces are reflections of the memories and emotive meaning that specific objects evoke within her. The space, objects and the atmosphere that she creates provide the medium through which she re-experiences events and memories that previously she repressed. Kotik (1994:44) sees artists who tend to repeat themselves as reflecting a continual form of self-investigation and a continual form of healing. Self-representation, for me, is more than a conscious creative process of description; it is a self-reflection and reformulation of one’s identity in the conscious and unconscious. Although Bourgeois does not agree fully with Freud’s theories, her creation and repetition of spaces and objects centre on her body. Her consciousness of space and objects from recollected memory in relation to her body are a portrayal of the chamber of her mind that is full of distressing memories and fearful emotions. Her use of body parts depicts her rage, hysteria, pain and fear (Kotik 1994:44). The

application of Freud's *Conversion Theory* is entirely apt in viewing Bourgeois' work, in which she uses the diseased or ill-formed body to represent the inaccessible, unconscious mind with which the body is burdened. In this respect, I agree with Bourgeois, who points to art as a 'release' from internal struggles within the unconscious. I have always found that the necessity of 'working-through' difficult situations occurs, often by repetition and the awakening of the self-conscious, within the process of making art.

In my sculpture, the soap vessel as a symbol of cleaning is, for me, a moment of separation from my traumatic memories, but is also a moment of pain. The obsessiveness with which I made these sculptures became a search. This is revealed in the title *Font*, which suggests a vessel relating to one's inner search. For me, this signified a new origin, a new moment,<sup>23</sup> after the unconscious struggle of re-identifying myself. Mieke Bal, however, claims primary narcissism to be a 'retrospective projection, a hallucination of what the beginning of the self must have been'. She also states Kristeva's (1982) view that '[t]he tension that arises when the subject fantasizes a need to liberate itself from this imaginary state of confusion is considered ... the most archaic form of narcissism capable of being the force of art.' (Bal 1991:304.) Yet, given my experience, the question is raised as to why this self-reflective look should be nihilistic?

The paradox lies in the work itself. The metaphor of soap as a cleansing object drives the emotive expression and the force behind it as a redemptory symbol. However, my objective, albeit retrospective, in finding why these works were so important was self-reflection, not self-exposure. After all, a work of art only leaves traces of one's chosen (playful) identity, not an image of oneself. Artworks may contain contortions of one's inner wishes. Bal (1991:306) emphasises that the creation of the self occurs simultaneously with the obliteration of the self. What remains is the creation of a represented object, an image containing the awakening of the self-consciousness and not a total self-knowing. The repetitive action of making the soap, of carving it and the imaginary thoughts of repetitive cleaning grew into an emotional 'undressing' and 're-dressing'. The 'playful' manner of externalising the internal is located somewhere between pleasure and pain. In the critical paper *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (cited in Levine 1998:200), Freud 'recognizes in children's play and in "artistic play and

artistic imitation carried out by adults” ... a principle of repetition, even a compulsion to repeat, that joins to the pursuit of pleasure the instantiation of pain’. Levine continues to say that this ‘[e]xperience [is inward]...[as in] mourning and melancholia, this principle beyond pleasure is the self-annihilation of the death drive; projected outward, it is manifest as aggression, as in works of art that “do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and as yet [are] felt by them as highly enjoyable”’. This, for me, is the point of deferral, where I find some kind of redemption. The self-realisation allows one to become manipulative, self-destructive and – by means of the imagination – to experience a form of self-annihilation and, even at this stage, to find a path to self-re-discovery.

Viewed as an example of the search for one’s own image, Rembrandt’s series of self-portraits (Figure 49 & 50) portrays not only a re-production of a self-reflection, but the variety of facial representations reveals the discomfort of the laughing, sad, clownish, or angry expressions of the artist himself, as subject. Bal (1991:305) suggests that the uneasiness with which we relate to these images was a means by which Rembrandt recovered ‘that primal experience of emerging selfhood by representing the self as other, by making art’. In a self-reflective play of expressions, the body is an original image of memory and, therefore, one of being within human nature, one that laughs, cries and frowns and nurtures. Similarly, in the process of making my soap sculptures, the discomfort I felt in melting and sieving the fat became a process of self-dissection, of my alienation from nature, and self-reflection, through exposing myself to these discomforting elements of chopping and melting fat. Bal (1991:314) expresses her opinion that ‘[a]lthough as psychoanalysis teaches us, insight alone is insufficient because the repressed experiences have to be wholly worked through<sup>24</sup>, insight into psychoanalysis can certainly help a little bit’.

Sarah Kofman (1984), in the same vein, suggests the inability of psychoanalysis to heal. According to Bal (1991:347), she formulates the hypothesis that ‘the process of art is melancholic mourning’. Bal further declares that ‘[m]elancholia is, in Freud’s definition, failed mourning’. The hypothesis, however, is structured as follows:

Melancholia is related to loss; if there were no losses to suffer, there would be no need to mourn, and if all mourning were successful, there would be no melancholia. But primary narcissism is the model of mourning that

includes its failure; so there will always be melancholia. In case of a loss, the process of detachment from the lost love object may be hampered by the overwhelming force of the identification of the subject with the object. As a result, the subject cannot free him- or herself from the object, nor can he or she invest other objects; there is no space left. This is the shadow that primary narcissism casts over the subject, as a primary *grammè* that cannot be written away (Bal 1991:347).

Bal (1991:347) describes this hypothesis as ‘paradoxical from the outset’. She states that, ‘[g]iven the powerlessness that results from melancholia’ the investment is not objective ‘because it relates the creation or investment of an object with the incapacity to relate to objects’, and so compels the viewer to ‘to relate to the object and suffer from the melancholic inability to relate by which the work contaminates him or her’.<sup>25</sup>

The melancholic aesthetic, according to Bal (1991:348), ‘is modeled upon the initial experience of melancholia that results from primary narcissism and the lack that the subject knows, but fails to *see*’. The insight gained through working with and contemplating on my soap fonts revealed the memories I had repressed. I realised that I was working on a vessel that was representative of the duality of my grandfather’s and father’s image, as the former was the man who baptised me and with whom I share deep-memories, who was washed by me, in a reversal of roles, during the illness that caused his death. Although I had never realised the implication of the vessel’s water, mirroring the image of both these men and myself during the rite of baptism, I had always felt that placing water into the vessels for the exhibition (or at any time for that matter) would induce an over-investment, a false construction of my own identity and experience. Kofman, according to Bal (1991:348), ‘describes Aristotle’s double conception of mimesis as both copying and supplying significance but, in any case, displacing reality, and dates it to the fascination with and fear of resemblance’.

Exhibited in the public space of a gallery, these works no longer signify self-containment or self-reflection. They stand alone, in silence, waiting for identity through use. The soap signifies the loss of identity sourced from the artist’s mind and reflects on a process of making and a process of coming to terms with that which motivated their making. The viewers became new owners, with various new insights

that bring other ideas, memories and experiences and readings into the vessels' significance.

Bal relates art to Kofman's theory of an 'annihilation and sacrifice'. She asserts '[i]t is in this sense that Kofman can equate the sacrifice of the subject who loses him- or herself in an over-investment in the lost object, and the loss of that object which triggers melancholia. Resemblance creates a loss of identity similar to that caused by over-investment in the lost object by the melancholic subject who in the process sacrifices him- or herself' (Bal 1991:348).

The paradox of narcissism, in relation to my work and in relation to this hypothesis, occurs through the artist's 'release' or independence from the object, just as Benjamin picked up discarded and lost objects in the *Passagen Project* to recreate history through memory. The artist unties, makes loose and 'discards' the objects of his making to move with the continuum of history and change, to document and comment on its transformation. As objects that were retrieved from deep memory and endowed with mourning and melancholic meaning, the fonts become 'vehicles' that aided me in my sorrow. But, through the process of their making and the writing of this thesis, these objects have gained independence as art objects awaiting other signification and memory. I feel that this process of working-through has enabled my work to gain its own identity, free from my direct narrative. My loss has reverted to melancholia (Figure 51a & b). By this I mean that, by making art, first, with the awareness and insight that reveal that memory can bring depth of significance, I have found the inner reality of sorrow that lies in my unconscious. It is this 'mad' search and the consequent sublimation, which have led me to find resolution within myself, and have inspired expression in these soap vessels.

As an example, Louise Bourgeois' artworks, collectively called *Lairs* and *Cells*, are articulated architectural structures through which we can look in a restricted way or into which we enter and in which displaced organic and biomorphic shapes are viewed. These 'caves' are sanctuary-like places, a challenge to the viewer to enter her space on her terms. In the *Cells*, she combines found objects with references to the physical body, which are described as 'metaphoric repositories of memory' (Kotik, Suttan & Leigh 1994: 41).

Most of Bourgeois' work, according to Kotik (1994:17), is informed by, or filled with, autobiographical and emotional references to uprootment, particularly after leaving her home at the beginning of the Second World War. She illustrated her emotional state through her 1949 *Installation of Wooden Totems* in New York's Pendol Gallery. She describes her art as a form of re-creation of emotions that occur at life's most difficult or most memorable moments, which she then uses to gain a kind of 'healing' by placing them in a new perspective. Bourgeois has said that "[m]y sculpture allows me to re-experience the fear, to give it a physicality so I am able to hack away at it. Fear becomes a manageable reality. Sculpture allows me to re-experience the past, to see the past in its objective, realistic proportion" (cited in Kotik 1994:18). Kotik (1994:18) suggests that such visual expressions of traumatic events were Bourgeois' attempt to 'exorcise' her disturbing emotions and memories. I take issue with this, believing that Bourgeois gains objectivity through transforming her fears into objects. By converting them into something she can manipulate, she transfers these emotions into an object that she can distance herself from physically and mentally.

Her work is an expression of an internal struggle represented by a physical external object which transfers us into her past. But, for her, it brings her past into the present. To gain perspective about oneself, expression furthers a self-distancing, an unpreciousness and thus a form of resolution is gained.

This is how I understand Bourgeois' work, particularly the works titled *Precious Liquids* (Figure 52) and *Cell II* (Figure 48). The use of marble, glass and wood waiver between fragility, tenderness and a hard coldness in these recreated inner atmospheres. Her avenues portray the re-creations of her past, a past she constantly re-frames to restate and to vanquish what could not be successfully addressed within the immediate context of life. Going through the progression of her works, Bourgeois seems to be on a journey to redeem herself from her past. These 'unconscious landscapes' transform into expressions of neuroses and hysteria derived from her childhood experiences. Barbara Catoir describes the work titled *Precious Liquids* as 'an alchemy of memory sealed in vessels, barrels and cages, in minds and skulls' (Walter 1998:560).

In *Cell II* (1991) (Figure 48), the use of perfume bottles and the allusion to fragrances creates an in-road into our memories and we, as viewers, are given clues to Bourgeois' traumatic past, which reflects the notion of trace-memory. In this work she proclaims that the sense of smell possesses 'the great power of evocation and healing' (Kotik 1994:47). Bourgeois suggests that re-creating and re-experiencing the pain, and so relieving herself from the struggle, may be a form of empowerment. Leigh (in Kotik 1994:65) suggests, that by recreating her environment with her sculptures, Bourgeois implies a self-reflective transformation of the self, 'one "cell" at a time'.<sup>26</sup>

In my discussion on memory (Chapter Two) I have referred to the fear of forgetting, suggesting that it is also a fear of losing one's identity. I have realised that one's articulation, through art, forces a head-on confrontation and process of working-through one's own self-consciousness and one's identity. Identity is the basis of all our memories, our heritage and traditions on which our individuality stands. Individuality is not autonomy, it is how we represent ourselves to the world.

Reflection is the return path of the structured sense of the unconscious. It is constructed memory constituting a conscious recreation and imaginative formation of narrative, by linking the opaque images from memory. It is what Krell calls the 'straits between mechanism and intellectualism' (Krell 1990:98).

The problem, when formulating art theory as a retrospective 'rational' and philosophical structure, is that the process of art making is placed within the scheme of constructed epistemology (grounds of knowledge) and narrative. The dualism of the conservation and construction of ritual, memory – and now healing – which are of the forces in making art, projects the same difficulties as Merleau-Ponty wished to understand when elaborating on the "ontology of the perceived world", beyond the realm of "sensuous nature". His question was: '[H]ow [can] consciousness ... be "inspired by a past that apparently escapes it" and how can it "finally reopen an access to the past"?' (Cited in Krell 1990:99.) In being a 'construction', memory becomes an integral part of art making, which often invokes a wishful access to memory, or a coaxing from it, of a recollection or thread that re-draws a reconstruction of one's consciousness and, therefore, oneself. To recall memory is to

walk; retracing – as a form of working-through – a path where consciousness finds the gap to access repressed or forgotten memories and thus for one to find one's own 'field of existence'. Re-locating ourselves in this labyrinth of change, which is part of westernised society, the conscious cannot reverse time. Only through the spontaneity of the unconscious do we recall deep or repressed memories. Self-reflection becomes more than a moment of return, it places us beyond the verge – in the field of dream and unconscious, which is not accessible simply via the conscious mind. Consciousness is on the 'outside' of this field of the unconscious. Krell quotes Merleau-Ponty as pronouncing: '[L]iving is not primarily "giving a meaning" to things and "imposing significations" on events. It is rather a "vortex of experience that is formed with our birth at the point of contact between 'outside' and the one who is called upon to live it".' (Cited in Krell 1990:99.)

In conclusion, Freud's theory of conversion and *Bearbeitung*, in the context of making art, not only supports art as a psychological self-examination that occurs between the mind and body, but also expresses the idea of artists as being able to access expression from the unconscious. Retrieving images from the unconscious, through the psychic process of working-through, brings forth recognition of the deep memory recalled and allows the artist to create a mythopoetic representation between fantasy and reality. Through art that reconnects the body/mind and body/soul, and conscious and unconscious, a self-conscious search for one's own individually is allowed. Freud's theories encourage the artist to delve into reality, even if it causes pain. This process induces a sort of healing, for both the artist and the spectator.

In art, therefore, the process of working-through a traumatic event, such as losing a loved one, and the re-construction of the self through art – through self-reflection and through ritual – leave only the imagination to compensate for emotional expression. Bal (1991:375) suggests that art is 'theatricality, an "absorptive"<sup>27</sup> experience [where] fear – is offered for contemplation'. This is why art is not temporal; it is a continual search. The artist is continually re-formulating what he/she sees in the world and re-creating his/her own individuality.

I will now bring together this discussion relating to how I experience making art through the unconscious, and find healing through my own work.

## Representation: The ‘Hollow’ and ‘Chora’ of Mythopoesis

Having established the split between the body and mind, and having located ourselves within nature and the spirituality of the unconscious, I have also found art’s turn towards empathetic transference as a means of communication. By exploring the unconscious vitality, in this section, I aim to explore engrammatological expression as the place where the conscious mind finds access to the unconscious mind by consulting the work of Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva. Believing that artists have the ability to tap into the unconscious, I discuss the images that ‘appear’ directly from this source as part of our mythopoetic imagination.

The objective of this discussion is to formulate a concept that describes the inner emotions which reveal themselves as images and symbols that the artist converts from living in a body, which is a part of the collective memory and is understood through the conscious construction and unconscious conservation of its memories.

An important premise on which I base my own practical work is Freud’s *Theory of Conversion*, which acknowledges the connection between the body and the mind. The body is the topographical and engrammatological site of the mind’s ability to convert its concerns, opening them into its field of presences, of experience, memory and emotions. Just as Freud saw bodily symptoms as traces of an inner turmoil, so I see art having the ability to act as the trace of the unconscious and the concerns that move us most. The image of the labyrinth comes to mind, in that through every act of re-formulating or solving problems or ideas, we trace memory, suggesting, as Straus concluded and Krell affirms, that ‘the reading of traces presupposes memory’ (cited in Krell 1990:91).

How can we describe the unconscious? Is it a place of ‘pastness’ or ‘memory’? Or is it a source to which we as artists can return to find an ‘original self’ that would help us to survive or heal? According to Krell (1990:93), Merleau-Ponty describes this space as a “‘*creux*” [or] “‘hollow” ... the site of transcendence, a site caught forever in brute immanence, [which] has everything to do with memory ... [and] is on the verge

of a very different kind of thinking'. Krell (1990:93) maintains that Merleau-Ponty uses the word '*creux*' in *The Visible and the Invisible* and in his *Phenomenology of Perception*

... to indicate a pit or hollow that opens of itself in the otherwise too solid flesh of the world, a concavity that allows there to be visibility; he also uses the word to designate "a certain interiority, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing" in the otherwise too crystalline flesh of ideas.

In art making, this would indicate the place where the artist gains his/her images, and which has already absorbed the subtleties and influences of ongoing life and, unconsciously, and often later consciously, forms the significance in one's work. In this instinctual mode, usually quite suddenly, memories show themselves. The artist continues, usually with passionate creativity, as a result of this realisation, from where he/she moves with a strong understanding of his/her creation. The process is one of continual conversion from an inner reality to an outer expression. This 'digestion' of the conscious and unconscious mind reminds one of Kristeva's 'chora', which suggests the idea of a rhythmic flow or pulsations gathered in the chora of experiences and desires and being at one and the same time, 'dichotomous (life/death, expulsion/introjection) and heterogeneous' (Moi 1986:12-13). I understand this metaphor as the continual absorption of experiences by the unconscious that show themselves as memories or concerns, revealed spontaneously, often in art.

Spontaneously, the unconscious is called upon through the sensation of our body, which is linked to the memory of an object, like the smell of soap or the taste of food; its '[f]rangrances and taste are not facts sought out by intelligence', says Krell, who reiterates Proust, when he 'compares them to Celtic burial grounds of moments once lived'. Krell expands on this:

It is not intelligence or even sense that calculates their pastness. Rather, the emotional incandescence of the emergent memories themselves, pulsing on a wave of *jouissance*, yields whatever "read presence" the past may yield up; and the sheer *hasard* of our crossing those burial grounds again, that is, of our encountering the objects, odors, noises, and cracked pavements where they hide, determines whether or not this "resurrection" prophesied by a "magical pact" will in fact occur. (Krell 1990:96.)

He elucidates that 'it is intelligence itself that must confirm its own inferiority and attest to the eminence of "instinct" or "sensitivity"'. Memory is opaque and returns as a result of its 'own' constraints of time and place. The 'verge', as Krell calls it, could

be compared with the scent of soap or, appropriately, resembles the soap fonts that mystically arose from my memories of my grandfather. Merleau-Ponty's hollow, as Krell states, is the 'rim of the verge [that] marks ... the cohesion of a life – or at least the cohesion of a work of art' and '[t]he hollow in being where time and space are made is formed by dehiscence and explosion. The "now" of time is no more than a synthesis of transition, and time itself is as much ecstasis as coherence.' (Krell 1990:97.) This brings us once more to Benjamin and the 'Now of cognizability' and connects with Merleau-Ponty's 'field of presence', though the latter centres the experience on the body, whereas Benjamin concentrated on constructed memory and the imagination, facilitated through the body. Benjamin's concept of thought-images here becomes mythopoetic images. 'The "field of presence", Krell continues, 'in which alone, according to Merleau-Ponty, I can find my way back to a past time, is not monolithic'. He explains further:

A crack or fissure [*une fêlure interne*], reminiscent of what Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art* called *der Riss*, invariably marks that field. Time is (ambiguously) both the cycles of the body's organic functions and the surge and thrust of my personal existence. My lived body is both centre and diffusion, both personal existence and "double anonymity", that is to say, an anonymity arising from the "generality" of a shared intercorporeal world but also from the very "individuality" of my existence. (Cited in Krell 1990:97.)

Memory, Krell (1990:98) states, re-emerges through passivity rather than activity. In other words, memory shows itself spontaneously rather than as retrieved, as if merely called upon or summoned. Passivity and the unknown realm of the unconscious are the problem of modern metaphysical reflection, and memory, therefore, falls in with the subjects of sleep, dream-life, 'all of which', Krell maintains, 'testify to the *acquired* spontaneity of existence'. Moreover, we can deduce that, on the verge, on the rim of the hollow, memory finds unexpected expression through the fissure, where the origin of a work is realised by this '*Erschinnung*' or 'Now of cognizability', where conscious gives expression to the unconscious depth.

Erwin Straus states that '[t]races must be read' and, amidst the uncertainty of a phenomenological approach, he concludes with these words: 'Should we ever regain the clearing in this forest of problems, then we will have returned from our long wandering not with a new answer but with a new kind of questioning.' (Cited in Krell

1990:91.) These traces Merleau-Ponty elucidates are held within ‘the past that “has never been present,” the past of a radically irrecoverable pastness and passivity’ (cited in Krell 1990:7).

What then is the inconsistency, the difference between trace and memory and why are trace and memory so important for reading art? Can they offer some form of working-through and healing? Merleau-Ponty states that inasmuch as ‘memory is “idling”, in neutral gear’, it is also ‘the fundamental aporia of “conservation” versus “construction”’ (cited in Krell 1990:99). Krell elucidates: ‘Memory seems to be construction insofar as we can read or scan only those “representations” that consciousness has put there’. However, he also states that ‘memory seems equally to be conservation, inasmuch as the icon is read or scanned *hōs allou*, with a view to something else, something that *was*’ (cited in Krell 1990:99).

Memory approaches us spontaneously and without warning. Deep memory returning quite suddenly, as I have described it with reference to my sculptural forms, was not purely conservation nor, initially, a construction of the conscious mind, not until I had established that I was creating significant symbols that referred to my memories. Krell, still drawing on Merleau-Ponty, further illuminates:

Thus even if memory were construction, ... there would have to be another memory behind the constructivist one, measuring the value or verisimilitude of its constructions; constructivist memory would have to have access to “a past freely given and in inverse proportion to our voluntary memory, which is perhaps what the “immense Memory of the World” was to have granted. (Krell 1990:99.)

For Merleau-Ponty, the problem is that construction and conservation of memory, both based on representation which relies on the tradition of typography, iconography and engrammatology, would call for its schematic end, because the dialectic passivity (unconscious) and activity (conscious) cannot reconcile into new traces and marks. He suggests, therefore, that even the word *memory* in this dialectic rationale must fall away (cited in Krell 1990:98-99).

The problem of the theoretical ‘construction’ of memory, as constructivist, is that it brings forth only the explainable realm of consciousness and its ‘application’ for the

reasoned, rational, engrammatological explanation of its existence, which can also be seen in its constructed or delineated iconography and topographical views. The phenomenological view, therefore, falls short in its explanations of the subconscious and the unconscious influences of memory, though it does suggest that a creative act always occurs through the body and that reading becomes an embodied act. Art, both consciously and unconsciously, actively and passively draws on memory which, for me, is the reason that art has the function of witnessing and commenting on society and locates itself in open signification. Memory is, therefore, neither pure construction nor pure conservation, nor simply both. Not only concerned with consciousness, it is also a fundamental part of the subconscious and the unconscious, which can only be expressed through the body. Merleau-Ponty, cited (in Krell 1990:101) explains: 'For it is through the body that we have access to the past.'

These findings could be called 'trace-memory', because they reveal themselves not as directly constructed or preserved, conserved images; yet they disclose themselves within a broader repertoire of images termed by Descartes as 'local memory', which is not limited by the present perspectives of conscious, but to which our memories constantly appeal (Krell 1990:94). Since I have discussed Freud's mythic writing-pad as a topographical site for storing memories, Descartes' site, alternatively called 'memory-traces' and related to physical traces left on a waxen surface, must also be acknowledged (cited in Krell 1990:59, 87). Therefore, these images that come from the 'hollow' or 'chora' as 'trace-memory', which would include Post-Memory, deep-memory and local-memory, together form symbolic images, retrieving not the memory of the past, but a *trace* of how we vaguely recall an image and how we felt in our body at that time. These memory traces also seem to track and contain a broad spectrum of relevance, which one could equate with myths and religious parables that remain relevant today.

Thus, as a means to tap into and draw on memory (stimulate it by working with materials and images), art engages in a playful 'discourse' between these traces and the artist's social and 'poetic' concerns. As mythopoesis, these conceptual images pass between allegory and myth, signifying a net of associations that, simultaneously, express the horrors of reality, while denouncing them by transforming the discomfort they hold, into a fantasy of satisfaction or aesthetics. This aspect of art, according to

Freud, becomes a means of one's avoiding neurosis, by sharing a sense of a common humanity. In a mechanised and commodified world, corporeality tends toward being irrelevant. This goes against the aesthetic (post-aesthetic) and the individual (post-human), and also becomes a de-psychologising action. Kuspit (2004:41) states 'post-aesthetic art's ideological message does not come with any mythopoetic sugarcoating'. Even Plato, Kuspit writes, utilised myth as a hyperbolic narrative to create the belief that the mass of people were in possession of the truth. Yet now, claims Kuspit:

[I]t is topical and newsworthy, not necessarily the whole truth and nothing but the disinterested truth. It must be swallowed raw – in post-aesthetic art the idea is raw and intellectually and emotionally undigested, and there is little or no art. (Kuspit 2004:41-42.)

As Kuspit suggests, the presence of the unconscious is ignored, as are aesthetics; and emotions are left raw. How, without converting or digesting their emotions and views into poetic language or art, can artists describe rage, *angst*, mania, etcetera? This conscious outburst could then only come about through brute force.<sup>28</sup>

In his paper on *Art and the Meaning of Life*, Degenaar (1986:34-36) discusses the archetype<sup>29</sup> as an image that is created within the unconscious.<sup>30</sup> In the process of making art, artists often work with images and symbols that instinctively interest and fascinate them. In a retrospective view of my own work, I realised that my vessel forms were retrieved from the unconscious memory that Jung conceived of as archetypes of a collective memory. Degenaar (1986:35) states that these archetypes are often called 'fields of force' or 'self-portraits of the instincts', which illustrate the complex nature of these symbols or images and their connection to the individual's 'archaic heritage'.<sup>31</sup> As I have already mentioned, traces are bound to the memory and to the body and mark an embodied empathic humanism. These traces we utilise to read and awaken within us the possible significance of artworks in how they reflect on our own lives. They become an altered form of archetype which describes and locates our existence in time. Individuality, I believe, is not the illusion of being progressive or cutting-edged in the way a postmodern-society demands. It is the awareness of re-constructing, preserving and locating ourselves through memory and

trace-memory (our heritage, tradition, culture and experience) in the world. This marks identity for every generation, those gone before as well as our own.

The concept of mythopoesis as described by Angus Fletcher (1965:322), is a 'poetry of unmediated vision ... found in that borderland where one passes from allegory into myth'. It, therefore, constitutes the occurrence of the rational and intellectual, as well as the imagination and sensuous experience. In the process of making art, the concept of mythopoesis facilitates a conceptual framework that supports both the literary (sign/word) and the symbolic (image) as a trace (documentation) of our heritage.

Kristeva, according to Appignanesi (2003:98), 'refute[s] the Freudian and Lacanian accounts of identity which place the feminine outside the process of self-constitution'. She believes that the '[u]nconscious is the biological preliminary to meaning ... which always remains present as a force that can disrupt signification'. Constructed meaning is, therefore, never totally separated from the unconscious, nor is identity. As Kuspit (2004:49) elucidates, 'there is no thinking without feeling and sensing'. Identity is both conscious construction and sense. Often, for instance, the obsession of women to clean is not only a nurturant drive, but also a psychological 'working-through' of events that bother them. Their instinctual self-conscious reaction and their nurturant empathic transcendence lead them first to internalise a problem. The 'mental digestion (chora)', their predisposition as family-'preserver', occurs while cleaning.

The use of soap, in my own work, although seemingly figurative of cleaning, also conveys the spiritual and psychological need for restoring equilibrium between the soul and mind. The form of my sculptures (vessel and container – 'hollow' or 'chora'), alludes to the mind's ability to contain and deal with traumatic experiences. Thus my soap sculptures are an expression of the unconscious conversion and 'healing' process that art facilitates, by reawakening the interaction of the senses, an occurrence which 'awakens' us to the very aliveness of our existence. Expression through art shows the vitality of being creative and, therefore, finding resolution in the re-creation of our perplexing experiences and our identity. The works have become a way of acknowledging the existential trauma I experienced and recovering a sense of self in this process of reflection.

Art, as a ritual, allows the artist to magnify him-/herself or to explore the intensity of his/her conviction. Shorter (1929:72-73) discusses ritual in the context of the collective unconscious and discloses his opinion that ‘rituals reveal at their deepest level ... [and that] men [and women] express in ritual what moves them most’. The work *Untitled* (2002) (Figure 53a, b, c & d), made out of surgical material, consists of thirty-one pillows representing my direct heritage and the source of my deep-memory. Most of the pillows have selected photographs of the images I remember of my father and mother, grandfathers and grandmothers. There are also ‘cut-outs’ of South African landscapes with windmills, signifying my environmental identity. These montages of portraits are covered with milk filters, making the images opaque and unclear, as deep-memory often seems to be by day, when one is preoccupied with physical survival. Some pillows are devoid of images. As a work exploring the topography of memory and self-reflection, self-awakening and of dreaming, this work signifies a retreat, a place of ‘passivity’, and also a place of freedom. Night is a time for recharging minds and bodies, finding a ‘wholeness’ within oneself. The darkness of the night seems to allow one to re-connect with the unknown space of the unconscious.

The ideas contained in the pillow work were further developed in the *Sitzbath* (Figure 54), where the alchemic conversion of fat into soap signifies hereditary genes. Bathing signifies a taking-up and discarding of memories to form my own individual identity. The material (soap) becomes an expression for the ‘removal’ or deferral of traumatic memories from my own psyche. The sculpture *Sitzbath* (Figure 55), highlights the relationship between the mind and the body, and the body and soul, and thus, in a ritual like bathing, memories return spontaneously and often hold within them a resolution of concerns, and thus also invoke possible physical and psychological healing.<sup>32</sup>

In the soap fonts (Figure 56a & b), the transformation of the material from a caustic to an alkali also signals a mental conversion, as the transformation occurs from a material that burns the skin, to one which protects it. In alchemy, the process of change was described as the regression into the darkness of ‘*nigredo*’,<sup>33</sup> as the route to rebirth, which occurred in the enclosed vessel. Marie-Louise von Franz<sup>34</sup> wrote on

interpreting alchemical ideas from a psychological perspective. She deals particularly with Jung and suggests the sealed vessel is ‘comparable to the state of introversion that acts as a container for the transmutation of attitudes and emotions’ (Hutchinson 2001:55).

The relationship of my sculpture to the body is described in the title *Sitzbath*. In the act of sitting or bathing, contemplation occurs and a process of self-nurturing takes place. The clinician Melanie Klein, on the subject of psychology, refers to nurturing between the bodies of mothers and children as a phenomenon called ‘psychodynamic’ (cited in Harris 2001:140). Observing the aesthetic in sculptures of the body, she views them as imbedded within the ‘embodiedness’ of the human mind, which communicates with our own body, because we share a common physical condition (cited in Harris 2001:140-141). This I have described as an empathic experience. Harris refers also to Peter Fuller, who said that aesthetic experience occurs in sharing a common humanity (Harris 2001:141). Here I recall Freud’s term ‘*Bearbeitung*’ as the conscious reasoning of deep emotional questioning.

Images depicting alchemic transformation (Figure 3 & 4) included both religious and mythical themes and described the view of the mind and the body as being integral to each other. The alchemists’ concern with immortality – chemically and spiritually – seemed to express deep concerns within the unconscious mind and to depict both a quest for reasoning and an awareness of unconscious spirituality. As an example of images that portray similar ‘mythopoetic’ expressions, the *Ouroboros* symbol (Figure 57) in alchemy is utilised to depict the cycle in which everything evolves in a continuum. Depicted as a snake swallowing its own tail, the religious counterpart is the symbol of resurrection. Anthony Gormley, in his sculpture *Word Made Flesh* (1989) (Figure 58), demonstrates the harmony in which the body, mind and nature become unified with an unusual twist. This image and the disturbing reaction that it elicits, however, illustrate precisely the disharmony that Gormley points to. For me, the title *Word Made Flesh*, points to a disturbed society in which pain and fear are not given the freedom of expression through which we could return both to harmony and the philosophy of the flesh, which he argues is an embodied experience. Here, I think, Freud’s (cited in Levine 1998:197-212) paper titled *Formulations on the Two*

*Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911), illuminates Gormley's work as a bodily and sculptural manifestation of inherent inner turmoil.

For me, Gormley pursues the externalisation of inner expression with reference to the semantic dialectic between the image/word relationship. This is similar to the transference occurring in Freud's *Rat Man*, where confusion between image and word occurs and the word is understood before the image (Archard 1984:26-27). In the context of Postmodernism's apathetic extension of the theoretical construct of simulacra as a symptom of indifference, Ashraf Jamal (2004:1-15), refers to this elevation of popular signs over the evoking of empathic images as the 'rat in art'.<sup>35</sup> I believe that he is referring to art in this postmodernist period as transferring its own anxiety and loss of identity – turning away – and seeing it as a condition merely of society and not as extending to individuation itself. Art, too, having suppressed its connection to its unconscious, its consciousness, is stranded. It is watching the rat eating away at society's own unconscious, not realising its own forthcoming demise. Identity in art, therefore, is in a state of flux and only reveals itself in a sublimated form. Representation, as I argue, resembles the self and only in the artistic re-creation of one's concerns can one extract oneself from this demise and re-create a new image. The re-creation (wish-image) of oneself as individual lies in locating oneself in the mythical patterns of life's continuum; it is not an indifference to identity or the world.

In a similar way, art cannot be indifferent, because it then loses its identity. Indifference, in my opinion, is the denial of individuality, and the denial of empathy. But, though we might construct our own individuality, the medium of equilibrium between fantasy (imagination) and memory is where individuality can be formed. It is where mythopoetic representation becomes patterns of our sense of empathy and humanism. Gormley, in *Word Made Flesh*, simultaneously depicts the 'restrictions or reservations'<sup>36</sup> between art and society and the idea of a denatured categorisation of art history and artistic expression that calls for a return of humanism. Freud (cited in Levine 1998:198-199), describes the situation of the artist as a 'peculiar' sort of reconciliation between the unfettered pursuit of pleasure and the resigned acceptance of the constraints of reality.<sup>37</sup>

An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it first

demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality.

Art, for Freud, becomes a means of distraction from reality and of showing it in a different light. It is the result of the ability that artists have to delve into society's unconscious. By this means, Freud claims the artist becomes the 'hero, the king, the creator, or the favourite he desired to be'. Yet he/she can only achieve this for a specific reason:

... because other men feel the same dissatisfaction as he[she] does with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because that dissatisfaction, which results from the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself part of reality. (Freud cited in Levine 1998:198-199.)

Anthony Gormley's work *Fathers and Sons, Monuments and Toys, Gods and Artists* (1985-1986) (Figure 59), is an installation containing two sculptural figures. One is a figure of a man and the other a child. Both stand at attention in a dark underground passage. The man is centred in the progression of lights, as if in time; the child seems slightly removed from the flow of adult-life and is looking up and at a right angle to the perspectival view of the adult. The materials of concrete and steel wonderfully illustrate the idea that humans construct monuments to try to create a sense of immortality through the cycle of narrative (memory) and myth. However, it is within the unconscious mind of children, their playful creation of souls in toys, as in making art, that one finds one's identity. Gormley's self-identification as a child relates his belief in the artist's necessity for 'play' and challenges the constructed collective consciousness of the world.

Degenaar quotes Jacobi and affirms that the 'inner order' of the unconscious directs one as a 'helper amid the upheavals and accidents of life, provided that we know how to deal with it' (Jacobi 1962:42, cited in Degenaar 1986:36).<sup>38</sup> Degenaar (1986:36) maintains that the relevance of archetypes are that they concern themselves with 'acceptance' and that they '[foster] healing while neglect causes suffering'.<sup>39</sup> I refer again to Freud's clinical paper 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' (1914), in which he insists that artists cannot, through their work, only recontextualise their own repressed wishes, but must also give aesthetic pleasure to their spectators (Levine 1998:201). Similarly, according to Degenaar, Jung sets down that archetypes

play the role of ‘bringers of protection and salvation’. He explains this by referring to a belief in a primordial pattern of the psyche that balances personal tribulations with the external force of the outside world: ‘[S]alvation means the re-instatement of that inner order’ (cited in Degenaar 1986:36). He formulates this insight as follows: ‘[T]hat which heals is also that which hurts and that which hurts is also that which heals’ (Degenaar 1986:36).

According to Degenaar (1986:36-37), Jung states that, ‘the same “unconscious images which fatally confuse the mental patient” also constitute “the matrix of a mythopoetic imagination which has vanished from our rational age” but without which no healing is possible’. In finding the mythopoetic faculty of the unconscious, healing – through attaining an equilibrium between the external and the internal – becomes a process of achieving personhood; this, according to Degenaar (1986:37), ‘leads to a balance in the psyche and a discovery of selfhood’. He quotes Jacobi, who elucidates that this ‘journey towards selfhood is called the process of individuation, which refers to “the centralising process in the unconscious that go [sic] to form the personality”’. Bani Shorter (1989:65-67) suggests that dreams, like myths, can be regarded as conceptual narratives in the collective unconscious. He points to Jung’s belief that the collective unconscious contains a healing potential in that an archetypal image demands expression by the psyche. Healing, therefore, occurs because of the movement from the personal theme to a mythic one. Art, I believe, has the ability to place the subject in larger universal perspective.<sup>40</sup>

The awareness that my sculptures were made in the South African context of searching for redemption and healing gave me a broader perspective in which to juxtapose the personal motivation with the social concern. Degenaar (1986:49) advances the notion that a necessity in the process of art is its transformation of objectivity, provided by the intervention of the archetype that directs the similarities of significance towards each other. Subjectivity turns towards objectivity and structures the affected reactions and emotions. Shorter (1989:68) asserts that we affirm the reality of our concerns within human existence by re-creating an archetypal gesture. Jung, he states, recognised myth ‘as the supreme interlocking model of the remembered imagery of humanity, a model to which one is unconsciously turned and returned by the necessity to explain and heal oneself’ (Shorter 1989:68).

As an artist, I am always surprised that the process of making art physically and mentally often demands the subordination of the artist. The artist and his/her psychology become the medium that informs the inner nature of the work and reveals itself as a well-constructed link between the conscious and the unconscious. Jung (1984:77, cited in Degenaar 1986:48) states that the artist uses his/her faculty of the 'collective unconscious',<sup>41</sup> which includes mythological images handed to us from primordial times. However, these images are not inborn ideas, but 'inborn possibilities of ideas' that 'release all the hidden forces of instinct that are inaccessible to the conscious will'.

In conclusion, in the act of creating my soap sculptures, the relationship between the sensuous and the conceptual cognitive contents of the material and form created the awareness that the body (the sensuous and tactile response) and mind (memory and the imagination) come together in a ritual process. The involved process of the physical labour brought about an awareness of the ritual of making art and of how signification draws on the symbolic associations of the mythopoetic imagination. Artworks reflect our experience in terms of a variety of philosophic approaches that create significant debates on the meaning of life and why we make art. My soap sculptures have, for me, become the embodiment of my subjective belief, memory, emotion, association, senses, material, personal history and representation – a complex realisation of the/my- self-in-the-world.

I have established that art images can be sourced from the mythopoetic imagination and shown that, under this premise of memory and trace, we have access to the re-creation of the individual self and that, in making art, healing can occur. Art facilitates the poetic fantasy and possibility of re-creating the self, and, therefore, finding healing as a process of working-through one's inner desires. Within the possibility of empathic transcendence, viewers of art can find critical questioning and, simultaneously, inquire into particularities while showing toleration for difference. In the hope of and desire of mending, in its role as witness, the conflicts between different beliefs or philosophical approaches, art invokes the imagination and expresses both individual and universal in a shared sense of being human.

## Conclusion

The religious yet personal content of my work, for the practical component of this thesis provoked research into concepts that conflicted with ideas prevalent in the dogmas of apartheid South Africa. This led to further research into the paradoxical divisions between the spiritual and the physical that are learnt from one's religious and/or moral upbringing. Because I argue for the importance of preserving memory and the embodiedness of ritual, I found myself in direct opposition to notions such as the reductionist view of the body and mind.

In the context of a new democracy in South Africa, the renewed debate on memory and ritual, and the possibility of healing, led to research into philosophical ideas on humanism. This research illuminated its historical premise of powers shifting from monarchy and the church, later to nation-states. This shift in the balance of power was accompanied always by a radical shift in ideas, born of the necessity for stability, such as occurs before and after war, and resulted in changing approaches in philosophy and science. From this account of the shift of ideas described in Toulmin's study *Cosmopolis*, he constructs and then deconstructs the cyclic rise and dissipation of Modernity and the socio-political shifts that fluctuated between humanism and rationalism from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

This research brought me back with greater philosophical insight to contemporary South Africa, emerging from its own history of dogmatic and orthodox ideas, such as those supporting a nationalist, racial hierarchy, and embracing its conversion as the 'new' South Africa. I believe that South African society in the main has moved to a renewed sense of humanism in its quest for tolerance and reasonableness, characteristics described by Toulmin as those of Renaissance humanism.

In my work, the soap sculptures, as religious symbols promising salvation and inner conversion, signify for me the present transformation and healing that is slowly occurring in South Africa. The soap's fragility signifies – in the ingredient of fat – nature's own fragility. By making vessels (that hold and preserve) from nature's

material, I have tried to convey the necessity for a change, a shift of mind in respect to how we situate ourselves, as humans within nature.

Art, I believe, is able to recover insights into differences and invokes tolerance towards the diversity of culture. Because art is made, initially, with intimate concerns and from personal experience, its healing ability lies in part in its audience's empathic connection with their own individual concerns. Art, too, in connecting to and drawing on many schools of thought, can heal the divisions that the concepts of rationality and humanity have left in history. Art traces how we find, understand, construct and see ourselves in the world, balancing particular experiences, memories and rituals. It does all this without force, teaching us to understand other cultures and, through displaying their interest and 'beauty', invoking tolerance.

The healing ability of art, I believe, inheres also in its materialness, because its non-subjection to absolute meaning or definition (verbal, philosophical or scientific analysis) remains as a witness to change – good or bad.

Art, not only often foresees trouble in the politico-social realm, it also celebrates and looks into views lost or forgotten. Art, I believe, functions as a catalyst, reviving the interdependence of nature and humanity. Art holds within it records of the past. As the continual creation of a bricolage of introspection and retrospection, it allows, and even instigates, the dialogue of reason, method and philosophical signification, but also confronts us, initiating a process of internalising, so that we may question our own consciousness in our time.

In recovering the idea of empathic transference by means of an embodied mind recalling conserved memory, I hope to convey that art can invoke a change of mind – a conversion – from an indifferent westernised society to one that recovers a sense of its own self-conscious which is embedded in the unconscious and the traces that we, as humans, all share.

Drawing on the ideas of ritual and memory as integral processes of making art, I have here investigated the source whence art finds its vitality, where it not only draws on the anxieties of contemporary society, but also transforms these into fanciful objects

and images. The unconscious, as this source, is described in terms of the 'hollow' or 'chora', metaphoric images that resonate in my soap fonts, whose symbolic significance reflects redemption and salvation.

I have explored the unconscious as the place where we store our trace-memories and from whence we retrieve them. Since this is the faculty that also contains the collective unconscious, I refer to it as holding within it the mythopoetic imagination. Art, and the finding of expression within this 'vessel' or 'cell', becomes not only a place of constant flux – between conservation and construction – it becomes a place where working-through traumatic events brings consolation and resolution. For me, the unconscious is thus a place of conversion and, therefore, of healing.

As a trace of our identity, art can alter consciousness by appealing to the unconscious. In the artist and in his/her audience, art evokes a search for self-consciousness, drawing out and creating an embodied reconnection with the world; through engaging in a dialogue of possible conversion, art can evoke a process of healing.

Art, I believe, contains – in most instances – the vividness that makes life enjoyable and gives it, notwithstanding all its difficulties, a sense of worth. Art, for me, fires up an inner emotion. It is as though the aesthetic (of the artwork, of nature) show us more than mere colour and form, it signifies an inner disposition of empathy, a certain 'truth' that is only minimally bound to the conceptual external world of the artist. Kuspit (2004:42) asserts that:

[T]he collapse of the sense of what it is to be human, more pointedly, of all feeling for what it is like to be inside another human being – an empathic, humanistic goal of modern art since romanticism (Goethe, echoing Terence, and echoed by Hegel in the *Aesthetics*, famously declared "*Nihil humani a me alienum puto*" [nothing human is alien to me] – goes hand in hand with the collapse of creative imagination. If the aesthetic reconciles reason and sense (form and subject matter or message) – in the material work of art, as Pater, Greenberg, and Hegel argue – then modern art is an aesthetic failure, for the split between an art of reason and an art of sense grows greater and greater, each finally purifying itself in complete indifference to another.

Art in South Africa has not gone through the de-humanising 'post'-era crisis described above. This is because it has always had, of necessity, to stand fast in the face of national and cultural differences and resistance to the apartheid regime. Now, in the post-apartheid era, the issue of identity appears before us. Art in South Africa

has moved from resistance to the segregated political agenda to the focus on tolerance and mutual respect for diversity. This has evolved into a re-emphasis, a turning towards memory and culture. Art, by its enduring goal to uphold and speak for individuality and the suppressed identities of South Africa, has been able to maintain a humanistic character through showing and ‘celebrating’ what the apartheid regime tried to suppress. South African art, by depicting the ‘beauty’ of the diverse cultures and the environment, has maintained its aesthetic function.

The aesthetic that belongs to art, for me, gives us another view, a hopeful view of the outer reality which, seen through the artist’s eyes, becomes an inner reality expressing the artist’s beliefs. I believe that art is about mastering many forms of aesthetics. The return of the belief that art has a function, to re-unite the self as body, mind and soul, is a confirmation that our passions and our inherent empathy for humans still exist. Belief in art is strong and important, as I believe religion to be. It is, moreover, in this belief that we find connection with our audience. Though art may confirm one’s own anxieties, it still inspires a turning of one’s repressed hopefulness, based not entirely on reason, but also emotion. It is through this passive, aesthetic empathy that art makes a difference in the world. Kuspit (2004:165) claims that art holds ‘the same “advanced” consciousness that once gave [it] spiritual originality’. As detached witness to society, art with its aesthetic perception of the entropic effects – the ‘wounds’ – inflicted on society becomes a defiant act. It creates a temporarily uplifting effect, a kind of healing, by placing another perspective in the spectator’s way. Art, in its aesthetic guise ‘fills’ these ‘wounds’, offering the spectator, by invoking him/her to use his/her own poetic unconscious, the possibility of change.

If healing is to be a function of art, then it must be about ‘explor[ing] the wound’ psychologically, as James Hillman states. He asserts, however, that healing *per se* is not possible and that it merely affirms a certain stigma towards bourgeois capitalism (Gablik 1995:183, 185-201).<sup>42</sup> However to make a claim for art as a ‘healing agent’, is not to anaesthetise ourselves against that which provokes our anxiety (hurt/harm), but about re-sensitising ourselves to the *anima mundi* (sensibility or spirit of the world). Art, as an extension of the self, is not only a record of our life, but emphasises the interconnectedness of our art and ourselves in service of something other than capitalism (Gablik 1995:185-201).<sup>43</sup>

Levine (1998:199) observes that both the artist and the viewer of art gain some kind of relief from artworks, possibly because, as Klein states, artworks make it possible to associate with the frustrations and desires of humanity. Levine (1998:201), however, formulates that both analyst and artist 'engage in an act of transference whereby repressed wishes and effects are redirected from their lost and unavailing content to artistic construction'. He adds that 'Freud calls this capacity of effectual redirection sublimation<sup>44</sup>; and through its rather mysterious workings the artist, unlike the neurotic daydreamer, "finds a path back to reality".' But Levine (1998:201) goes further, stating that the 'true artist has more at his disposal'; and he elucidates thus:

In the first place, he understands how to work over his daydreams in such a way as to make them lose what is too personal about them and repels strangers, and to make it possible for others to share in the enjoyment of them. He understands, too, how to tone them down so that they do not easily betray their origin from proscribed sources.

Artworks reveal themselves as containing the potential for conversion through the conscious, rooted in the unconscious realm, of which memory and ritual are a part. These visual images are the action and interaction between trace-memory and consciousness. Levine continues:

Furthermore, he [the artist] possesses the mysterious power of shaping some particular material until it has become a faithful image of his phantasy; and he knows, moreover, how to link so large a yield of pleasure to his representation of his unconscious phantasy<sup>45</sup> that, for the time being at least, representations are outweighed and lifted by it. (Levine 1998:201.)

In conclusion, art can reflect 'the wounds' of our environment and our human nature, re-capturing the beauty they hold. For example, in South African art, the expression of our serious social problems exhibits none the less the aesthetic as a celebration of living in a colourful multitude of traditions and diversity of cultures. Nietzsche declares that 'one has to lose oneself in ecstasy in order to find oneself through images which function as symbols to reveal man to himself, not as isolated individual but as self who is deeply rooted in the ground of existence' (cited in Degenaar 1986:5). For 'ecstasy' here, I would read in 'ritual, memory and in the process of making art' – the offering of a deep inner conversion.

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**Chapter Three**

<sup>1</sup> The move towards rationality in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, resulted in the structure of modern thinking. Toulmin (1990:107-1116) describes the various ‘presuppositions’ that separated humanity from nature. He states that within this modern framework, many of these ideas remained underlying through to the twentieth century, such as ‘Newton’s ambition ... to build a comprehensive system of natural philosophy on a mathematical basis’. Toulmin (1990:116) states this ‘modern framework was suggestive, not directive’.

<sup>2</sup> In his doctoral thesis, Timo Smuts (1995:196) defines how ‘*poiesis*’ as ‘[a] postmodern imagination responsive to the ethical dimension of things would be *critical* and also *poetical*. The term poetical is used in the broad sense of “inventive” making and creating.’

<sup>3</sup> Embodiment is described by Lakoff and Johnson (1999:102-104) as containing three levels which consist of a ‘neutral level, phenomenological conscious experience, and the cognitive unconscious’. This concept describes how we, in a body and with an embodied mind, refer to a ‘conceptual system [that] makes use of important parts of sensorimotor system that impose crucial conceptual structure’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:39).

<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, through Schrödinger’s wave mechanics, after 1900, and Heisenberg’s quantum mechanism in 1927, inertia of matter was found to be far more unpredictable and unstable than previously theorised.

<sup>5</sup> Toulmin (1990:115). further states that ‘[p]raise of reason and scorn for emotion were not only texts for 200 years of sermons: they were also the basis for a whole approach to moral education and social order’.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, according to Portnoy (1962:56-57), enhanced Homer’s fable that artist’s were divinely inspired and that ‘[i]rrational poets rather than rational temple priests [were] the favorite mortals of the gods’; he believed that the ‘gods take away the minds of poets and imbue them with a divine frenzy so that when they are in a state of ecstasy they are capable of prophecy and supernatural wisdom’.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Paupers, the aged and ill, ne’er-do-wells, petty criminals, prostitutes and vagabonds formed the bulk of this horde of “unreason”.’ (Porter 1996:287.)

<sup>8</sup> Archard, however, warns that we must not be misled by believing ‘that the unconscious mental processes share those attributes indicated to us as defining the consciously mental’. He suggests that ‘[t]he unconscious differs from the consciousness in far more than a mere absence of consciousness. Moreover, the character of conscious processes is determined by that of these inferred unconscious processes.’ (Archard 1984:35-36.)

<sup>9</sup> Later, in the section titled *Self-Reflection*, I discuss the problem of self-reflection as a form of melancholia.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche opposed the tradition which has ‘seen in the idea [of ‘genius’] a means of reconciling the individual and the exceptional with the basic presuppositions of universality that for the German philosophical tradition the unity of reason, nature and man had grounded’. For Kant, on the other hand, who placed the nature of contemplation above art, the genius, in his opinion, was ‘the innate mental predisposition through which nature gives the rule to art’. His etymological account of the word ‘genius’, according to Pothen, is ‘the guardian and guiding spirit that each person is given as his own at birth’ (cited in Pothen 2002:45).

<sup>11</sup> Toulmin (1990:182) states that in contemporary life, ‘people understand that “nature” is not just a source of neutral resources, to be exploited for our benefit: quite as much, it is *our terrestrial home*. In political and social debate, therefore, questions about “ecology” – the Greek roots of this word mean “the science of household management” – have irreversibly moved to the center of the practical stage.’

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<sup>12</sup> Lakoff and Johnson (1999:117) detail what properties the cognitive unconscious is composed of: ‘In short, the cognitive unconscious is thoroughly efficacious: intentional, representational, propositional, truth characterizing, inference generating, imaginative, and causal. The fact that it is efficacious indicates that it is real. The mode of its efficaciousness indicates that it has real conceptual structure – structure at the level of intentionality, representation, propositions, truth and inference – and not just structure at the neutral level.’

<sup>13</sup> Lakoff and Johnson (1999:5) elucidate on universals stating: ‘The existence of these universals does not imply that reason transcends the body. Moreover, since conceptual systems vary significantly, reason is not entirely universal.’

<sup>14</sup> The chaos embodied in the Thirty Year War created the need for certainty and projects such as those of Descartes and his successors fulfilled a social need that ‘opened up for people in his generation a real hope of *reasoning* their way out of political and theological chaos, at a time when no one else saw anything to do but continue fighting an interminable war’ (Toulmin 1990:70-1). The reaction to a *status quo* in society often demands the pursuit of reason. However, an event such as the Second World War causes a reactionary disillusionment to the irrationality it holds. In my opinion, we fluctuate between the polarities of the rational and the humanist. Each becomes an over-reaction to the other, as a result of shifts in political power.

<sup>15</sup> In the context of aesthetics experience, Kuspit (2004:11) quotes D.W. Winnicott and states that ‘It is a delicious, if brief, taste of critical freedom not unlike what D.W. Winnicott called an “ego orgasm” – a eureka-like experience of restorative “creative apperception” involving the conscious feeling of being intensely alive. It transforms alienation into freedom and adversariness into criticality.’

<sup>16</sup> Read Toulmin (1990: 109 & 113) with respect to collective human action (body and mind) and nature, and the spontaneous interaction which was held as separate. Yet, he claims that the protagonists of rationality, such as Descartes, Leibniz and Newton, never ‘doubted that the final source of activity in the world is God: the highest, most powerful, “self-moving” Agent in Nature.’

<sup>17</sup> Read Kuspit’s book titled *Death of Art*. In his support of modernisms, he refers to dadaism as the beginning of the post-era.

<sup>18</sup> Read Bal’s *Samson and Sublimation* (1991:331-333).

<sup>19</sup> Religious art in medieval times ‘protected’ the memory of the religious story by including self-consciousness through images that induced a sense of fear or hope. For example, the reliefs and sculptures of gargoyles and demons on church pillars and the stained-glass windows illuminating the parables of the bible. The light through these windows makes one feel as if a new discovery of one’s inner self has been made, as if this parable of light awakens metaphorically, within oneself, something similar. The body, as the medium through which self-consciousness is awakened and made visible as expression or symptom, is similar to the interaction that Freud called ‘conversion’ and as a route connecting the mind and the body. Experiencing art, we utilise our empathic transcendence to understand the significance of an artwork.

<sup>20</sup> Toulmin (1990:200-1) divides Modernity (which he defines as the origin of modern philosophical thinking as a rational enquiry) into the ‘the quest for rationality’ and ‘humanized Modernity’. He discusses its ‘third phase’ as being the ‘distinctive “post-modern” phase, which ‘obliges us to reappropriate values from Renaissance humanism that were lost in the heyday of Modernity’.

<sup>21</sup> Read Lakoff and Johnson (1999:410-414).

<sup>22</sup> Krell writes that Hume, is aware that ‘memory repeats our impressions’ in such a way that the resulting object is ‘somewhat intermediate betwixt an impression and an idea’; if an idea, then one that is considerably more ‘lively and strong’ than any idea of the imagination. The former states: ‘When we remember a past event, the idea of it flows in upon the mind in a forcible manner; whereas in the imagination the perception is faint and languid, and cannot without difficulty be preserv’d by the mind steady and uniform for any considerable time. A second difference is, of course, that memory “is in a manner ty’d down” to the *order* of the original perceptions in a way that imagination is not. Indeed

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Hume calls it the “chief exercise of the memory” to preserve the “order and position” of the simple ideas.’ (Krell 1990:83.)

<sup>23</sup> Bal (1991:304) suggests that ‘[t]his moment of separation is not without a profound effect upon the generation of signs, of meaning: it is based upon both similitude as its metaphor, and of contiguity as its condition. But *it is not itself a meaning.*’ Bal continues: ‘It is no wonder that labor, the work of birthing, comes to mind as the metaphorical, but also metonymical sign representing this moment. Between state and process, between subject and object, between destruction of the bond with the mother and creation of the self, this moment figures as the founding sign for art an endeavor for which words like “difficult” and “ambitious” now sound hilariously repressive.’ (Bal 1991:305.)

<sup>24</sup> This is the term that Freud uses in his clinical paper *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* (1914).

<sup>25</sup> See Bal (1991:348) for Kofman’s (1984:22) central thesis in *Mélancolie de l’art*, in which she portrays melancholia as an aesthetic theory: ‘Greuze’s *Girl Weeping Over Her Dead Bird* is not about a girl mourning her dead bird. ‘It is about mourning beauty. Making or otherwise relating to beauty is an attempt to escape from the elusiveness of all things, which, according to this argument, is what we spend our time mourning. But while seeking consolation in beauty, we discover that beauty itself is elusive. We create art in order to create a beautiful object that gives us simultaneously the illusion of eternity, the awareness of elusiveness, and the mournfulness of that clash. Art, then, mourns itself. And Greuze’s girl does not mourn anything concrete, for she *is* the mournfulness that gives us occasion for mourning.’ (Bal 1991:348.)

<sup>26</sup> Here I would again like to recall Walter Benjamin’s notion of ‘working-through’ as discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>27</sup> Mieke Bal (1991:375) says Scarry defined ritual ‘as the turning outside of the inside .... Historically, the theater may have emerged from ritual, and so ritual would be theater’s “purest” form. Systematically, ritual is the most extreme form of role playing, of signifying in the elusive ways of symbolism, of exchanging subjectivities.’ Bal, however, says that in art where no eye contact is made, the works remain utterly ‘absorptive’.

<sup>28</sup> In the process of finding how significant expression was in healing both body and mind, Carl Jung researched the images of dreams in order to recognise symbols that relate to the collective unconscious. These images were thought to contain mythic parallels and disguise ritual sequences of a ‘collective *a priori*’, which served the psyche. He emphasised that these symbols were active in grouping and re-grouping the contents within the movement between the consciousness and the unconscious (Shorter 1989:64). The groupings, argues Shorter (1989:64), were hypothesised to manifest in collective groups or images called archetypes. Jung’s descriptions of these were related to the images of alchemy and religion, to which he intended to connect similar psychological needs. Shorter (1989:64-65) remarks that, although this method is not used in psychotherapy today, the technique of approaching the psyche, comprises analysing dreams and innate rituals. The images of dreams are seen as ‘the body’s use of likeness that it can trust. This becomes the mind’s system to deal with issues and crises.’

<sup>29</sup> I acknowledge the differences that Freud and Jung had on the subject of psychoanalysis, however, I find reconciliation between their theories, where both acknowledge the body as an integral part of the unconscious and the conscious mind, through which deep inner desires or anxieties are expressed, namely, Freud’s *Conversion Theory* and Jung’s archetypal symbolic images.

<sup>30</sup> Storr (1983:42) refers to this predisposition as the mythopoeic substratum of the being of humans.

<sup>31</sup> Degenaar (1986:35) states that Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious is similar to archetypes: ‘The form of the world into which we are born is already inborn in us.’ Merleau-Ponty describes this similarly, as the ‘field of *presence*’.

<sup>32</sup> The official name of this type of bath is *Sitzbath* (combination of the German word *Sitz*, meaning *to sit*, and bath). This type of bath is used for the sick, the elderly and the physically and mentally challenged.

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<sup>33</sup> Described by Marie-Louise von Franz (1980:98) as a symbolic route into darkness and change in which transformation takes place, a cocoon, or the stage before ‘resurrection’ or realisation occurs.

<sup>34</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemy*, Inner City Books, Toronto, 1980.

<sup>35</sup> This is Appignanesi’s (2004:133) statement in respect of Braulliard’s famous remark ‘that there **couldn’t** be a war’.

<sup>36</sup> These restrictions are the morals and value judgements that art is often subjected to.

<sup>37</sup> Refer to Mieke Bal’s (1991:304) primary narcissism in her Sublimation Theory.

<sup>38</sup> Degenaar (1986:36) quotes Jacobi (1962:49) with reference to Jung’s support of the fact that organic systems and organs are thus dysfunctional because of neurotic and psychotic disorders.

<sup>39</sup> See Felix Deutsch, M.D. (ed.) *On the Mysterious Leap from the Mind to the Body: A workshop study on the Conversion Theory* (1959:27-48,59-97).

<sup>40</sup> According to Shorter (1929:68), Eliade wrote that mythology ‘provides a matrix of “ontological conception” since “an object or an act becomes real only in so far as it imitates or repeats an archetype ...; everything which lacks an exemplary model is meaningless’.

<sup>41</sup> See *Memory, History, Culture and the Mind*, edited by Thomas Butler 1929, in which Bani Shorter (1929:62-64) describes Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious: “I discovered remains of ... the world of primitive man within myself – a world, which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness .... It was my first inkling’, he says, “of a collective a priori beneath the personal psyche.” (Shorter 1929:63.)

<sup>42</sup> Generally only the rich can afford to go to psychologists and psychiatrists and the word ‘healing’ suggests medicines, sleeping tablets and sedatives as treatment, which, in the case of neurosis, can only subdue the symptoms and not ‘heal’ the cause.

<sup>43</sup> Kuspit (2004:91) conveys to us that unless the ‘profound influence of the unconscious on modern art is understood, one cannot begin to understand the depth and credibility art in general lost when it forsook the unconscious, falling into the banality that Baudelaire feared’. He states that Postart looks to ideology and theory, for a foundation and significance and reduces the unconscious to an ideology, a phenomenon of bourgeois society. He continues: ‘The Marxist art critic Benjamin Buchloh thinks only the bourgeois are paranoid and depressed, not the proletariat. Dreams are trivialized and feelings dismissed – subjectivity as a whole is demeaned.’

<sup>44</sup> In the sublimation hypothesis, this tension between force and meaning is dialectic as well as irreducible. Bal (1991:331) explains this, saying: ‘When an unavowable desire is repressed, it leaves traces of its instinctual background ... Through the indices these traces constitute, the force becomes meaning: This is Freud’s representation *avant la lettre* of Derridean writing. The meaning conveyed in the process of sublimation cannot but carry the force that is their signifier; the meaning *is* force. It is perhaps for this reason that the ambiguity inherent in any semiosis seems to be so vital in works of art. Ambiguity implies that what is conveyed by the ambiguous sign has been condensed. Lacan (1966a) and many others equate condensation with metaphor: the cluster of one sign and many meanings.’ Ricoeur (1979) says that the semiotic theories of metaphor are always slightly inconsistent because the operation (condensation=metaphor) is valid. Bal says that ‘if condensation in semiotic analysis has this metaphoric aspect, its psychoanalytic background implies it must also possess, in the form of traces of the instinctual force, a metonymic (metamnemonic) aspect as well. In addition, condensation is not a single sign but a cluster of signs passed off as single.’

<sup>45</sup> See Toril Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader* (1986:12-19) on the ethics of psychoanalysis and the construction of imaginary fantasies (or works of art) that produce a new language. She also refers to the ethics of love as the parallel concept of fundamental psychoanalysis and faith, concluding with the atheism of psychoanalysis.

The word conversion is from the Latin *convertere*, which means 'to revolve, turn around' or 'head in a different direction'. Two Greek words from the New Testament that are also associated with conversion by the overtones of regret and repentance are *metamelomai* (to be anxious, regretful), which describes the emotional state of the person, and *metanoia* (change of mind), the positive state of mind of someone who has undergone the process of conversion.

(Frank K. Flinn (Lamb (ed.), 1999:52.)

In tracing the main theme of conversion throughout this thesis, I have tried to motivate the process of making art as a process of working-through personal trauma and to show that artists have the ability to delve into the unconscious and to retrace their own identity and those of broader problems within society, and to express these in their art. Freud's paper *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* (1914; cited in Levine 1998:201), in which he refers to 'working-through' as a recontextualisation of repressed wishes, has been particularly relevant to this discussion. He holds that the artist has the ability to give aesthetic pleasure to his/her spectators. This, he reiterates, provides 'consolation and deviation from their own source of pleasure in their unconscious which has become inaccessible to them. ...'

My aim in discussing the process of working with soap has been to communicate that the ritual of working with the material object and its symbolic interaction with the body and mind, equally brings about self-consciousness and self-transformation. In a religious context, repetition of ritual or the re-enactment through the recitation of the liturgy allows the subject to assume a new or converted identity. Here, ritual, memory and healing, as an integrated process of art, are problematic because, as Paul Mattick Jr. (Nelson & Shiff 1996:71) states in his essay 'Context', in 'the context of "art" there is no longer the context of "life"'. The rift between the pursuit of rationality, on the one hand, and the reactionary humanitarian quest, on the other, has affected the embodiedness of making art. This is epitomised by Nietzsche's nihilistic

mantra which questions the existence of creativity, in an era that is post-aesthetic, post-religion and post-human. Raymond Williams, cited in an essay, 'Impure Mimesis or the Ends of Aesthetics', by D.N. Rodowick (1994:96), observes that 'aesthetics' in the modern sense has systematically retreated to a philosophy of 'understanding the social and historical meaning of representational practices'. The dilemma of aesthetics as a healing function of art is also questioned in this anti-redemptory age. I have advanced the idea that art's shift from the distinct socio-historical context of religious narrative or the narrative genre into an open autonomous action has brought to the fore the significance of memory (constructed and conserved) and trace-memory, held within the unconscious creativity that draws on mythopoetic imagination. In my opinion, ritual is recoverable as aesthetic or as what James Hillman (Gablik 1995:188) calls *aesthesis* (noticing the world), because significance will always be created through a desire for renewal and self-identification. Making aesthetic art has, however, become problematic, because such art can never recover or describe the violation of society. Theodor Adorno questioned the validity of making art within a society that has experienced traumatic and violent disasters, such as the Holocaust, stating: '... to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric; it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature ...'. 'Yet', he writes, and this is the operative point:

[T]his suffering ... demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it ... . The aesthetic principle of stylization ... makes an unthinkable fate appear to have some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed ... . Even the sound of despair pays a tribute to a hideous affirmation. (Arato & Gebhardt 1978:312,313.)

Making art that is centred on personal experiences and brings about an awareness of self-consciousness, requires the search for trace-memory and heritage, for the re-formulation of identity. The problematic in the post-human era relates also to the pursuit of autonomy, which balances precariously on the edge of self-reflection. However, through reading on the subject of healing, I have come to realise that my concern for re-identification as a form of reconciliation was adjacent to concerns within South Africa. Again, we are confronted by a problem. While the idea of resolution or redemption may not become a fixed theme of art, the problem of healing as a function of art is acknowledged in the act of building monuments, although

neither redemption nor memory can be held in the constructed monument itself. However, in the unconscious, described as the ‘hollow’ or ‘chora’, as a source of creativity, often directly seen in the spontaneity and art of children and the insane, experiences and memories convert into mythopoeic images that hold within them our identity and the concerns that we sense are troubling our society. The unconscious, as the site for inner-transformation and creativity, is the source of healing.

The psychologist James Hillman, in conversation with Suzi Gablik (1995:188), maintains that art notices the world (has sensibility of the world, the *anima mundi*) and uses its ability to pick up discarded materials as traces of human activity (*Dasein*), making these into an ‘*objet trouvé*’. Hillman points out, however, that art in this genre cannot function as therapy, because it does not take into account the psychological crisis that occurs in a commercially and impersonally driven society. Andreas Huyssen (1989:45) speaks of his scepticism concerning the concept of art providing healing through expression: ‘Redemption through painting is no longer possible, mythic vision itself is fundamentally contaminated, polluted, [and] violated by history.’ Heidegger, however, according to Derrida, carefully chooses to put persecution aside in his metaphysics. Rapaport (1994:164) acknowledges Heidegger as formulating the thought thus: one ‘remember[s] Being and prefers to forget being[s], which, Derrida [states] raises certain problems in the context of German history – particularly, as Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe explains in *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, when Heidegger opts to forget the dead’.

If art neglects memory, which is a vital part of psychotherapy and healing, then art cannot facilitate any transformation. But, in our ‘long preparatory walk’ to find consolation or healing from the past and in our phenomenological search of experience, Straus suggests, ‘[s]hould we ever regain a clearing in this forest of problems, then we will have returned from our long wandering not with a new answer but with a new kind of questioning’ (cited in Krell 1990:91). From this I deduce that the possibility of art’s facilitating some form of healing has not disappeared, but, in a continual search for identity, it can reveal itself only as a sublimated aim in postmodern art.

Within the context of healing, my work initiated for me a process of self-analysis which is projected in both the conversion of the material significance of cleansing and the vessel, as Merleau-Ponty's 'hollow' or Kristeva's 'chora', which signify a site of deep inner drives or concerns, from where one can exhume repressed memory of traumatic experiences. The concept of trauma may not simply be laid aside, as Heidegger might seem to suggest, although it appropriates even the horrors of the holocaust, the Burundi genocide and 9/11. Even though one feels, as an artist, terrifyingly overwhelmed by such tragedies and unable to do artistic justice to such horror, one's personal loss should not be diminished in comparison. The important point here is, I feel, that art should not only become a memorial *in its final form*, least every piece of art be locked into a prescribed history of tragedy and sublimation, due to its loss of aesthetic pleasure and healing. It becomes a question of choice and insight beyond the conserved and/or constructed memory. Appropriating ritual and memory to re-create one's own identity is an aesthetic look at oneself in the world.

Yet James Young and Theodor Adorno, in *At Memory's Edge* (2000:5), warn us that art must not become purely aesthetic, if it is to function as a redemptory object. They call the postmodern era the 'anti-redemptory age' and declare that, with all the tragedy lying in our path, redemption is no longer possible. But, we have also seen that in its 'pure' conscious construction, without aesthetics, art no longer exists. The idea of *mythopoesis*, as the forms we create in art and the images that appear from the unconscious, is similar to Walter Benjamin's concept of *Jetztzeit* (*Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*) or the 'Now of cognizability', as a means of taking an extremely personal and traumatic experience and signifying it in art, as an expression of oneself, and as part of the past, present and the future in which personal and collective unconsciousness connect and where the 'individual and the universal cross paths'. This moment of serendipity, coincidence, synchronicity or eureka is the moment of conversion within oneself as maker or viewer of art. By investigating the idea of ritual as a devotional action of art, through which one can re-locate memory and identity as an embodied self-consciousness, one's inner humanity that shows one the significance in art is also re-awakened. In the light of Johnson and Lakoff's embodied concept of the mind, the significance of making art objects, where ritual becomes the signifier for the embodiment of the trace of human activity, informed by memory, allows the aesthetic experience to incorporate, and yet transcend, the

disasters of the world by 'working-through' (and I refer once again to Freud). This has been the direction of thought taken in my thesis. However, art is not only a process of working-through, but also a celebration of life lived in a process of formation and transformation.

In art, it is in the underlying structures of the unconscious that we find a connection with human nature and in which we find objects and subjects, even though sublimated, to which we can relate our deepest concerns. It is also in these 'springs of life' that we find and redefine our identity by relating to memory to find connections that allow us to make sense of the world in which we live. In my art, the theme of conversion has become a metaphor for the resolution or redemption that I have experienced in the cathartic and enlightening process of creating a body of soap sculptures.

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Fig. 1a. Mona Hatoum, *Present Tense* (1996).  
Soap and glass beads.  
4.5 x 299 x 241 cm.  
Installation, Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem.  
(Source : Archer, M. *et al.* 1997:28.)

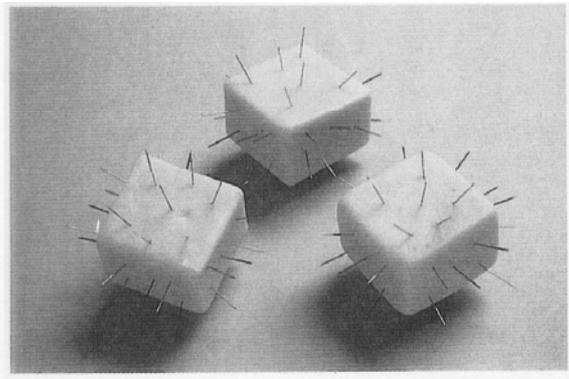
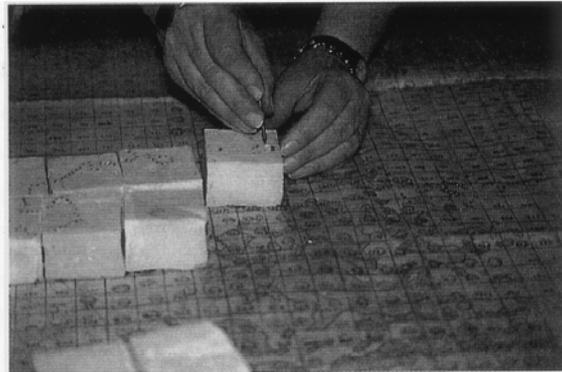


Fig. 1b. Mona Hatoum, detail of process, *Present Tense* (1996).  
(Source: Archer, M. *et al.* 1997:27.)



Fig. 2. Artist unknown, *Boerseep carved with floral designs* (made by men in concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War).  
Boerseep soap.  
Format unknown.  
(Source: Pretorius, J. C. 1992: no page number.)

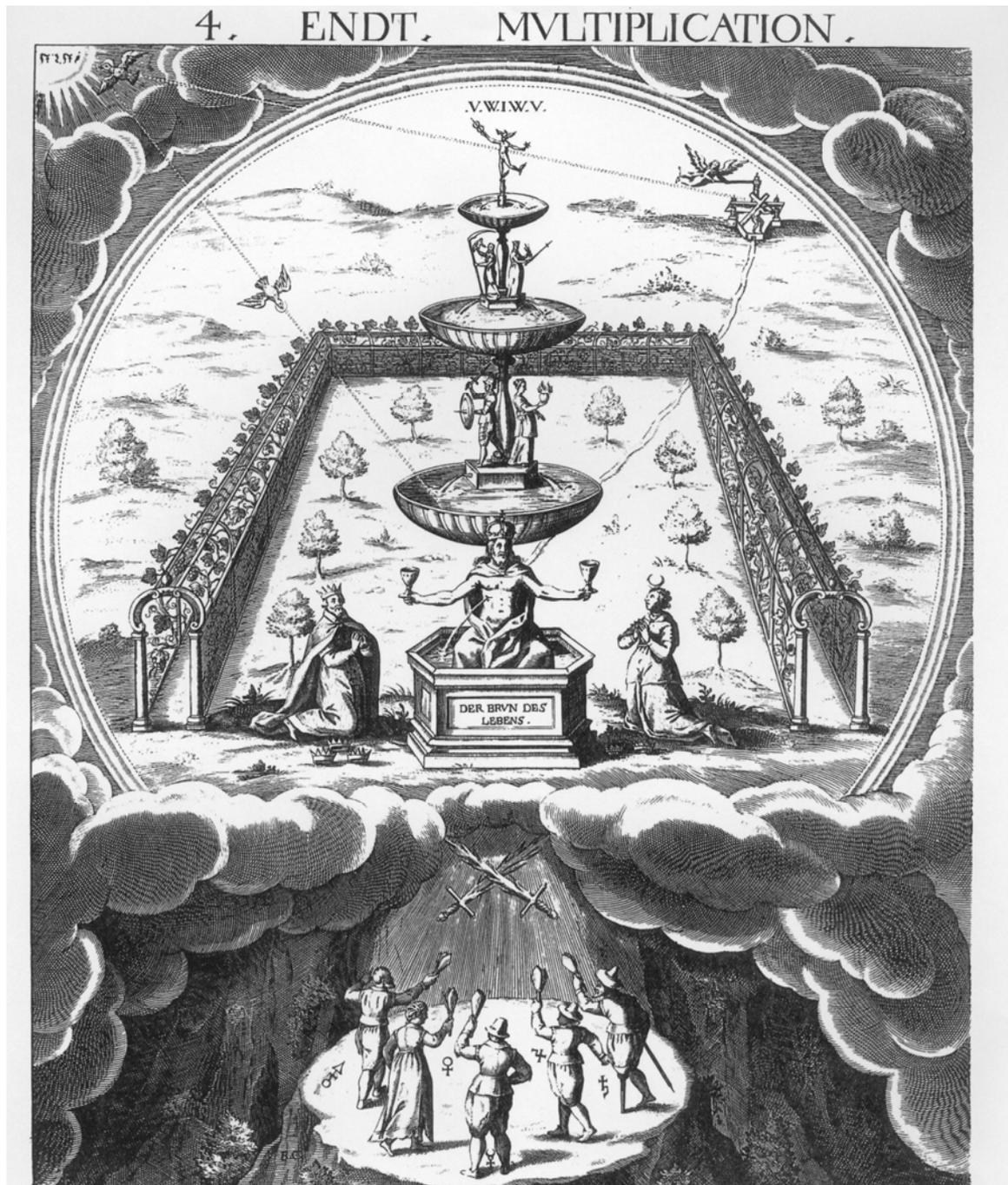


Fig. 3. Stephan Michelspacher, 4. ENDT. MVLTIPPLICATION, last and forth illustration of the *Cabala*, *Spiegel der Kunst und Natur: in Alchymia ...* Augsburg (1615: Falttafel 4). Illustration (etching). No dimensions given. Source: Ploss, E.E. *et al.* 1970:162.)



Fig. 4. *A miniature from splendor solis showing a stage in the alchemical process which draws on visual representations of the Baptism of Jesus.*  
Illustration: BL, Harley MS 3469, f. 21v.  
(Source: Roberts, G. *et al.* 1994: Plate XIV.)



Fig. 5. Sonja Gruner, *Table Cloth* (2004-5)  
Unleavened bread, metal hooks and glass.  
2500 x 1200 cm.



Fig. 6. Sonja Gruner, detail of crucifix embossed on unleavened bread used in Table Cloth (2004-5).

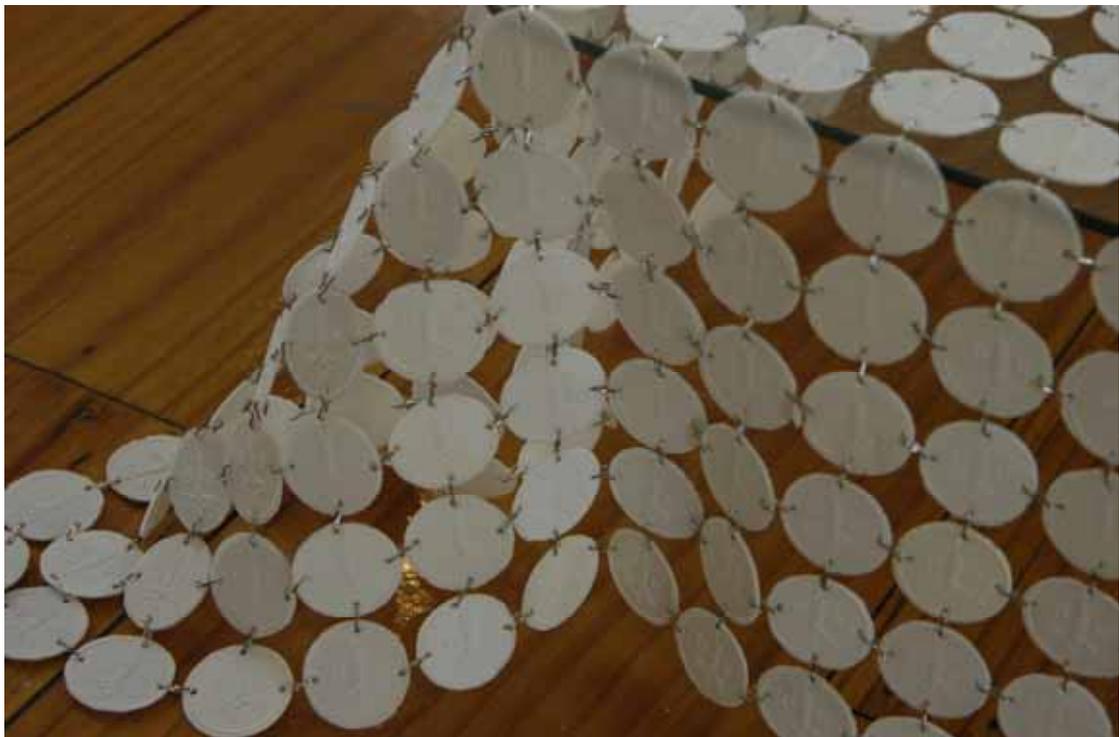
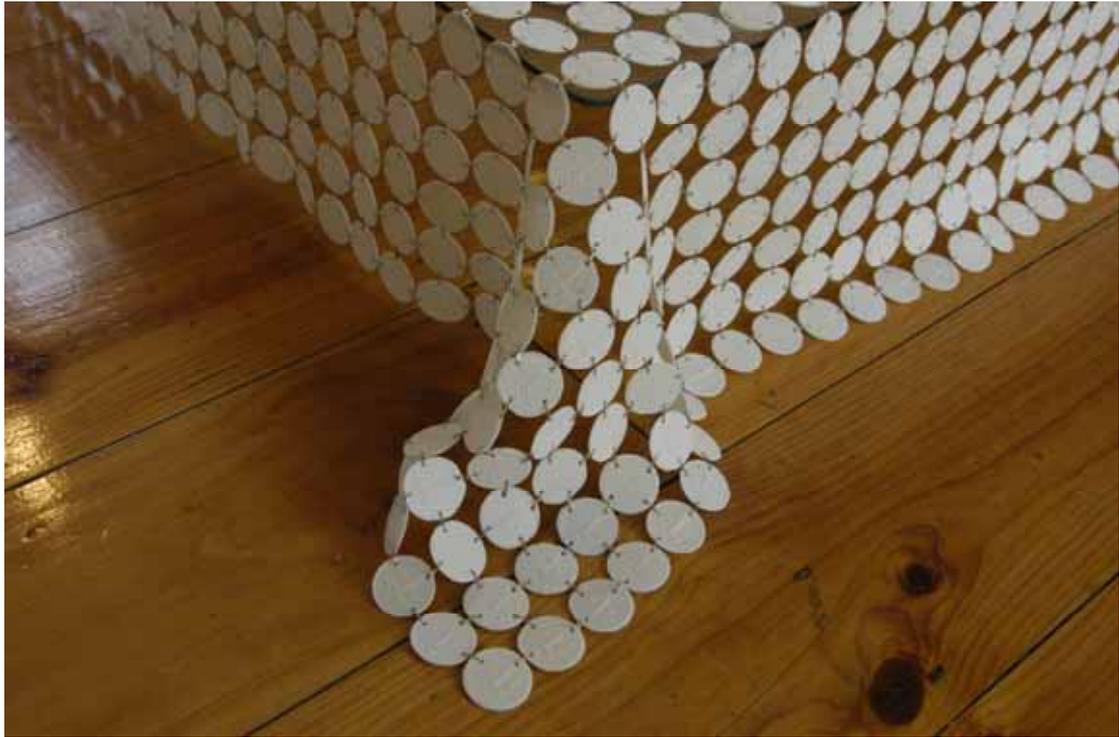


Fig. 7 Sonja Gruner, detail of construction of cloth from 6200 unleavened bread  
(a & b) rounds and metal hooks, *Table Cloth* (2004-5).  
Unleavened bread and metal hooks.  
2500 x 1200 cm.

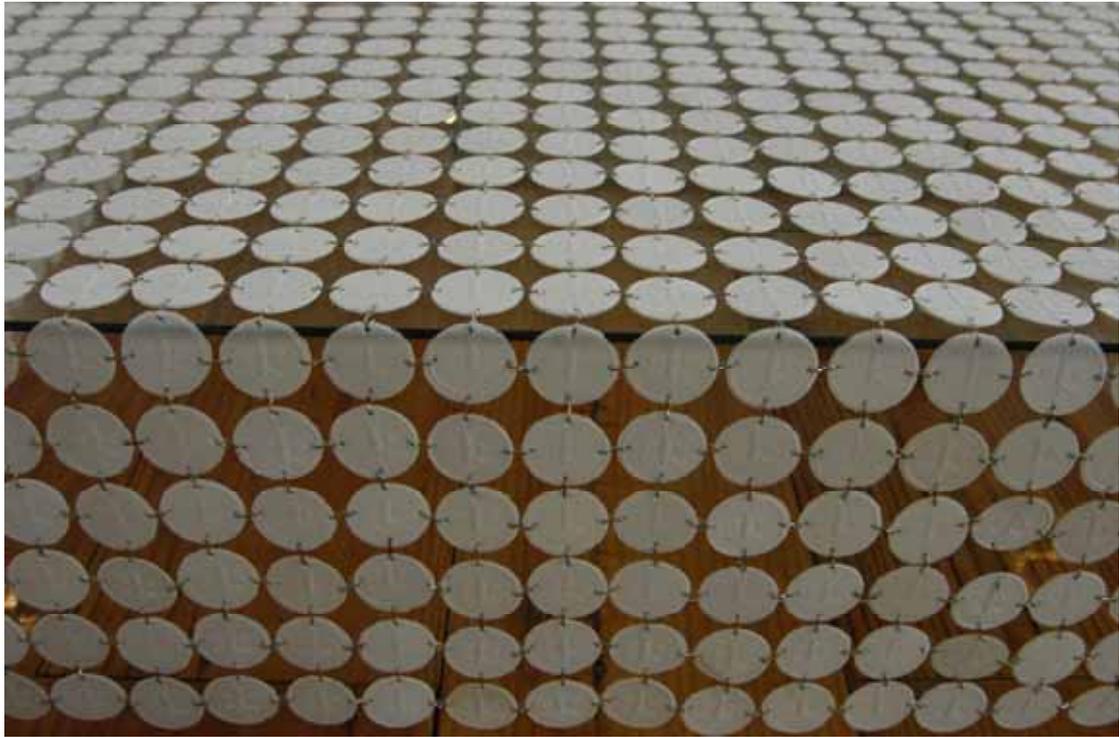


Fig. 8. Sonja Gruner, detail of links used to connect unleavened breads, *Table Cloth* (2004-5).  
Unleavened bread and metal hooks.  
2500 x 1200 cm.



Fig. 9. Sonja Gruner, detail, view of exhibition with *Font II* in foreground (2000). Soap (boerseep) and wood (jelutong). Installation.



Fig. 10a. Sonja Gruner, *Font I* (2000).  
Soap (Boerseep)  
20 x 45 cm



Fig. 10b. Sonja Gruner, metamorphosis over five years of *Font I* (2000-5).  
Soap vessel (Boerseep).  
20 x 45 cm.



Fig. 11 Sonja Gruner, *Font III* (2001).  
(a & b). Soap (boerseep).  
20 x 50 cm.



Fig. 12a. Joseph Beuys, *Eurasia*, 34<sup>th</sup> Section of the Siberian Symphony (1966).  
Performed at Gallery 101 in Copenhagen, 14 and 15 October 1966.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979: 105-107.)



Fig. 12 Joseph Beuys, details of performance, *Eurasia 34<sup>th</sup>* Section of the Siberian Symphony (1966).  
(b & c).

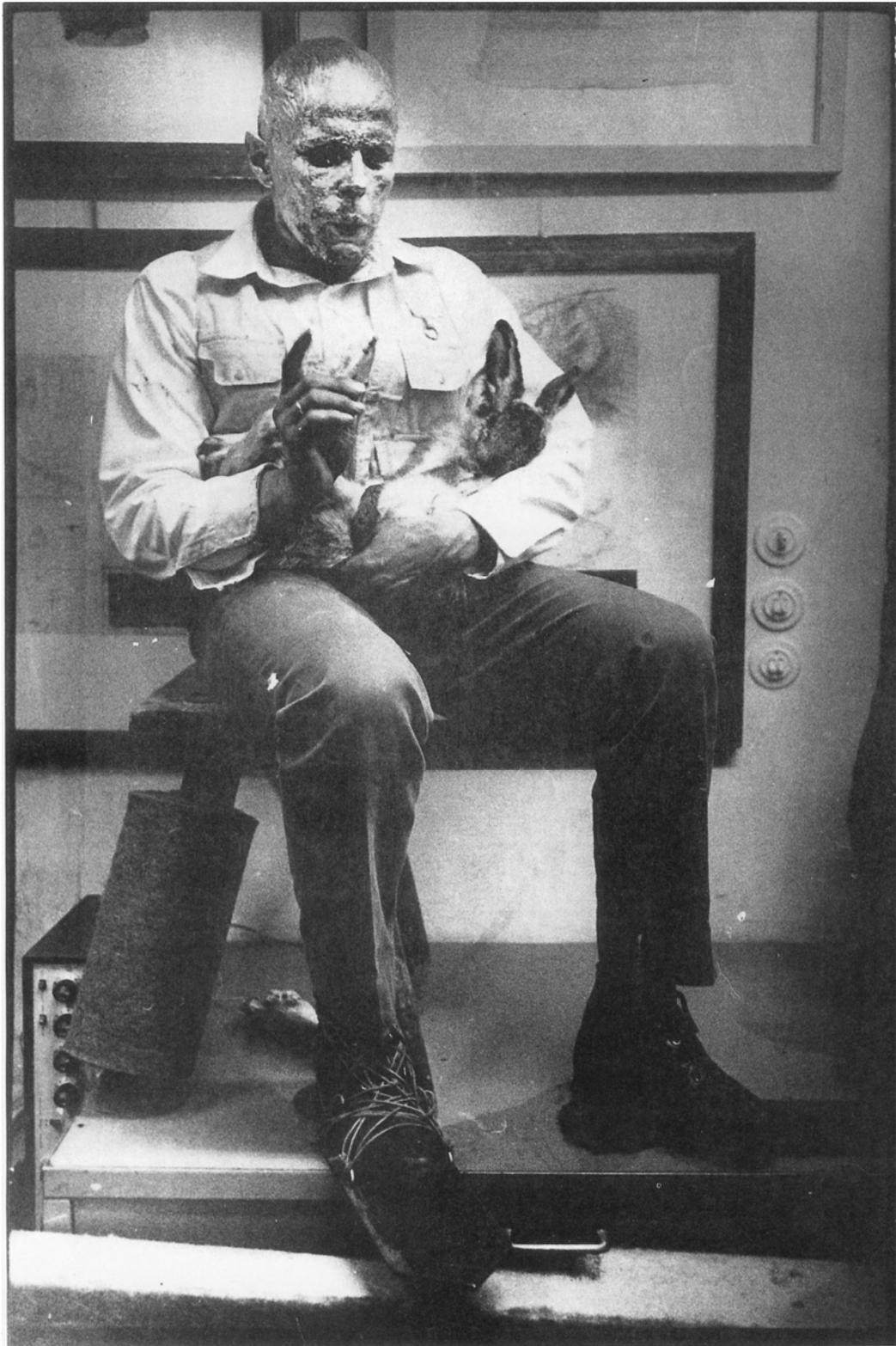


Fig. 13a. Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965).  
Action, performed in Schmela Gallery, Dusseldorf.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979: 102-103.)

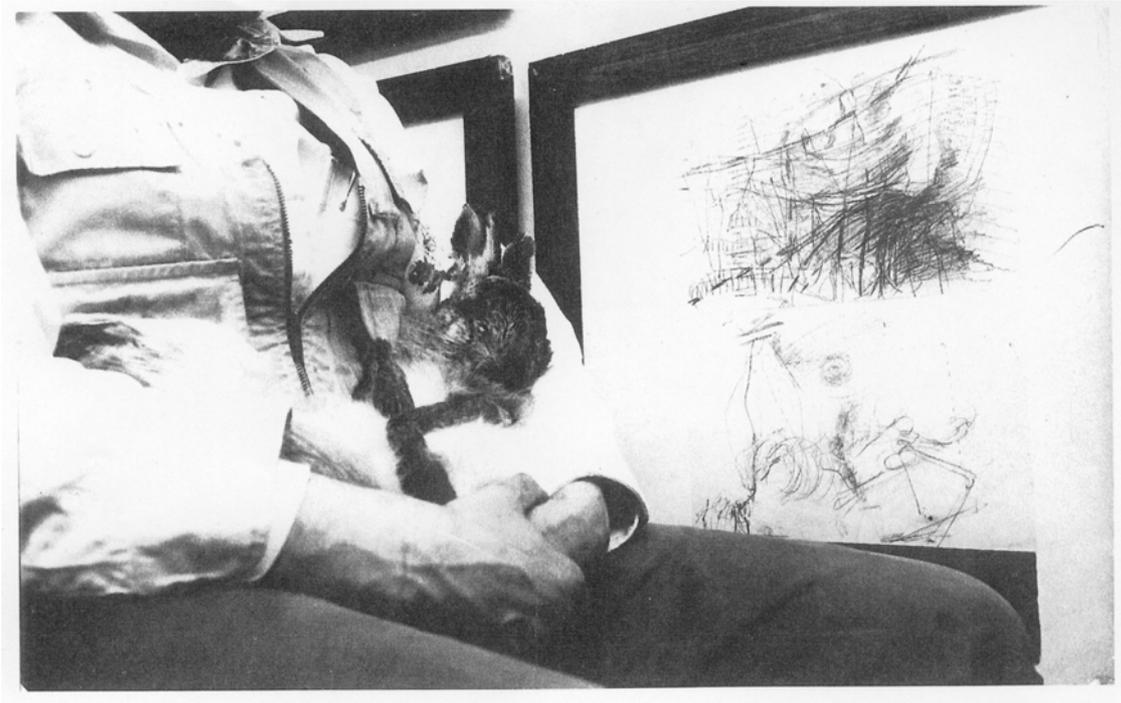


Fig.13 Joseph Beuys, detail, dead hare and foot tied to felt, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (a & b). (1965).



Fig. 14. *Saint Figure (Toni Malau)*, Kongo (Nineteenth Century).  
Wood (Picture credit: Photo, M.V. and Scheider-Schutz, W. # III C 32159;  
# III C 6286).  
Height 51 cm.  
Museum für Volkerkunde, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.  
(Source: Visonà, M. B. *et al.* 2001:370.)

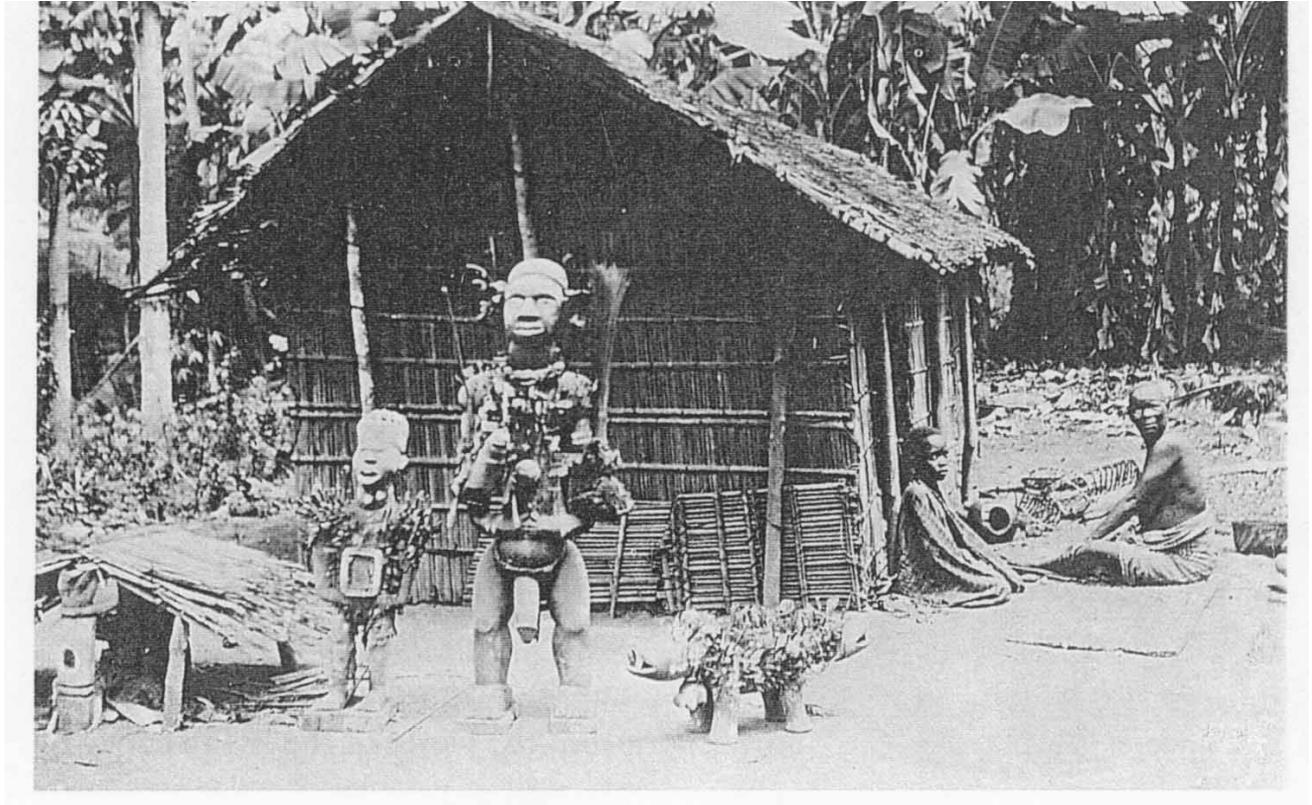


Fig. 15. *Minikisi Figures*, Boma, Congo (1902).  
Wood and nails.  
Picture credit: Michel, F.L., Torday, Emil and Hilton, M.W.  
Format unknown.  
Simpson Collection, R.A.I.# RA1 8013.  
(Source: Visonà, M.B. *et al.* 2001:376.)



Fig. 16. *Power figure (nkisi) with plumed headdress* [Cat.II]  
Kongo People (Vili), Central Africa.  
Photograph of wooden sculpture.  
Dimensions unknown.  
Collection Marc Leo Felix.  
(Source: Sheldon, A. (eds.) 1995: colour plate 5.)



Fig. 17. Sonja Gruner, *Font VI* (2002).  
Soap vessel (boerseep) made with glycerine and white spirits.  
20 x 50 cm.



Fig. 18. Sonja Gruner, *Untitled (Blümeln)* (2001).  
Soap loaves (boerseep, roerseep and glycerine soap).  
800 x 1200 cm.



Fig. 19. Sonja Gruner, detail, boerseeep carved, *Blumen* (2001).

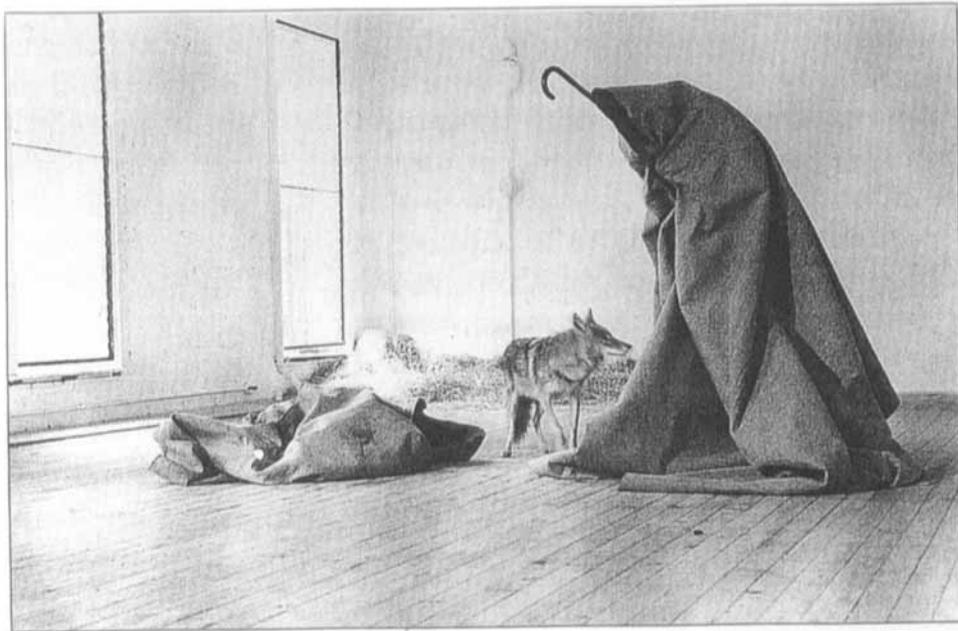


Fig. 20a. Joseph Beuys, *Coyote, I love America and America loves me* (1974).  
Action, performed in Rene Block Gallery in New York in May 1974.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1974:230.)

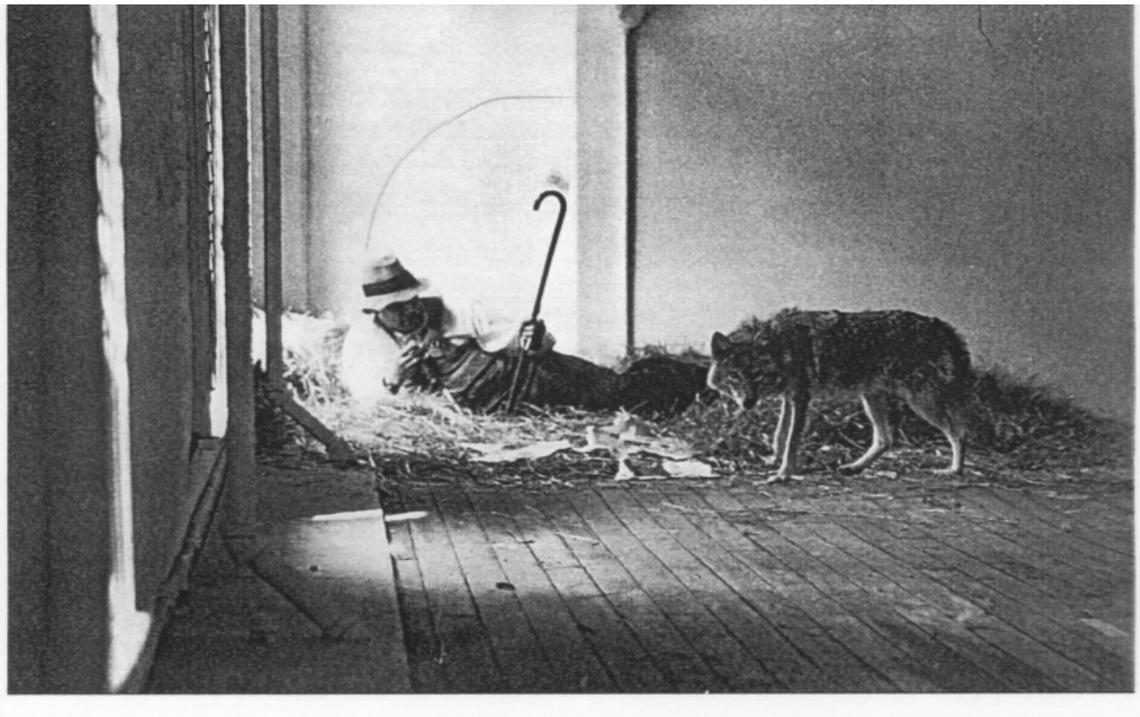
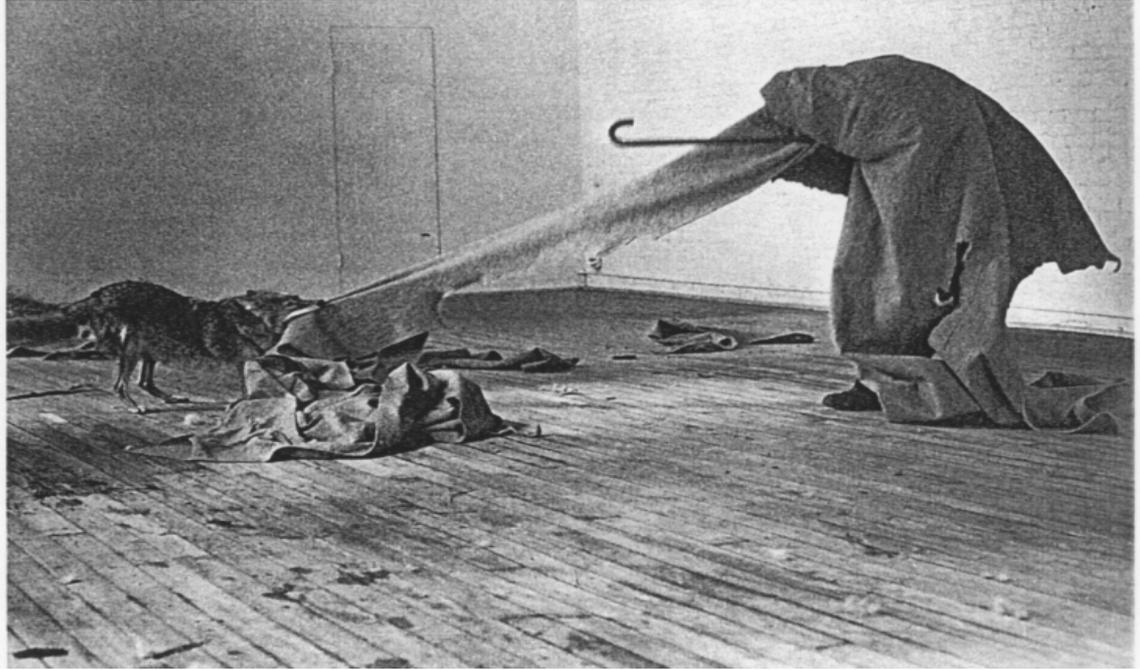


Fig. 20 Joseph Beuys, *Coyote, I love America and America loves me* (1974).  
(b & c) Action, performed in Rene Block Gallery in New York in May 1974.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1974:230.)

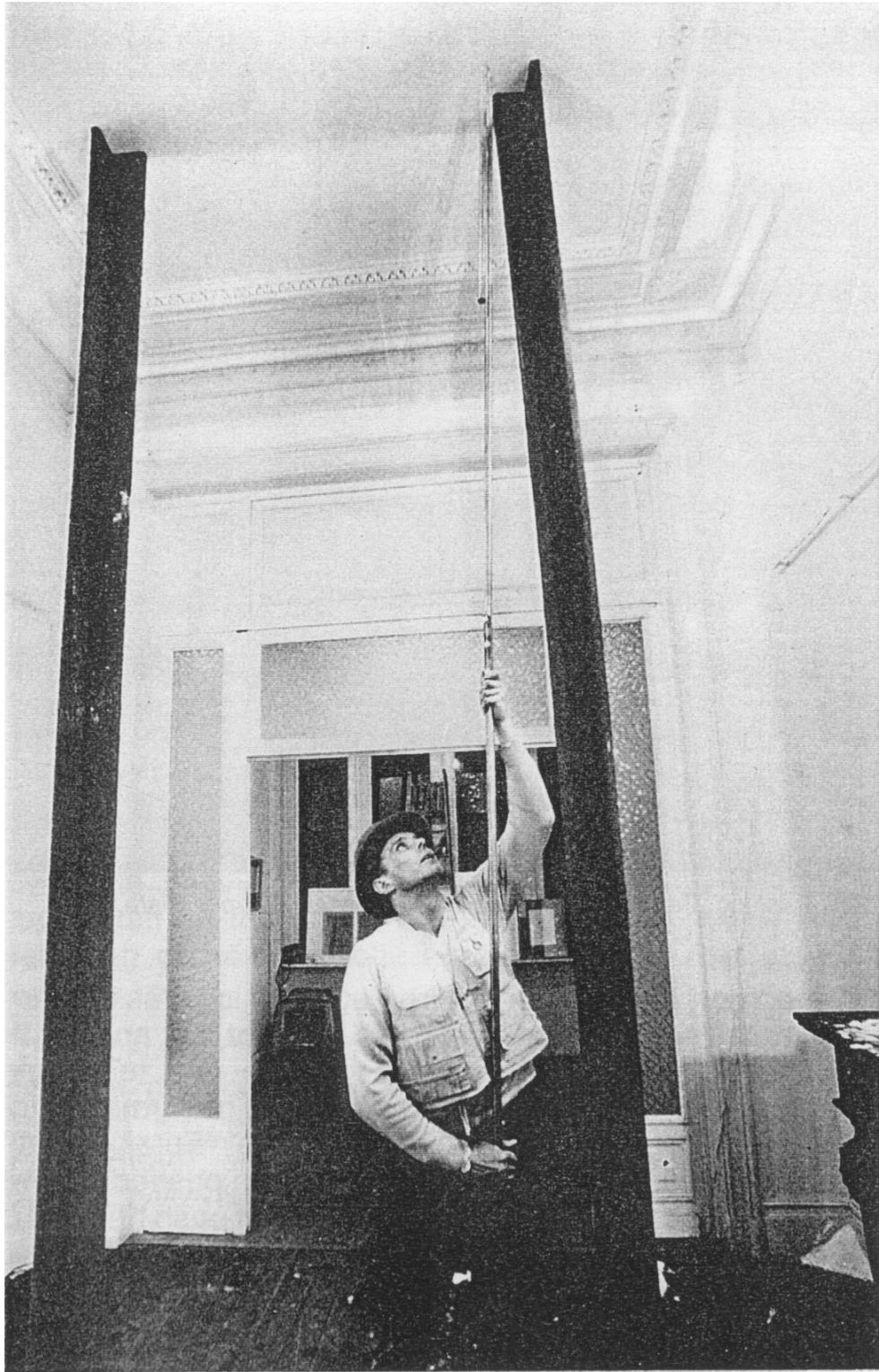


Fig. 21a. Joseph Beuys, from "Image Head – Mover Head (Eurasiastaff), Parallel Process" (1968).  
Action performed at Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp.  
(Source: Adriani, G. *et al.* (eds.) 1979:171.)

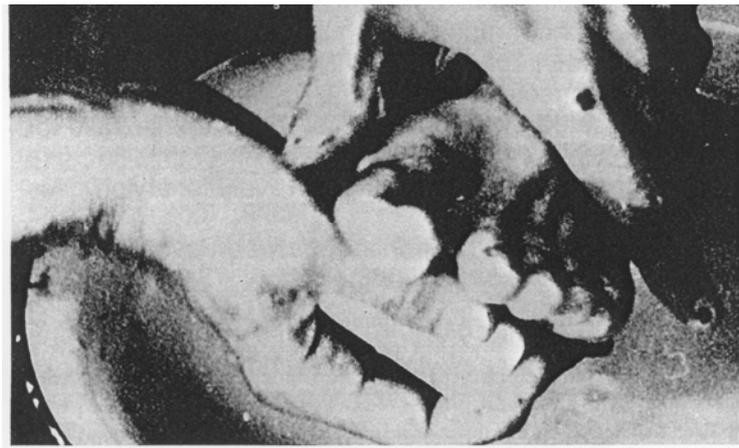


Fig. 22 Joseph Beuys, From the action *Celtic + ~~~*, *Civil Defense Rooms, Basel* (1971).  
(b & c) Performance of the gelatine sequence.  
(Source: Adriani, G. (ed.) *et al.* 1979: 214, 218.)



Fig. 23. Sonja Gruner, View of work exhibited in annex of the Stellenbosch University Gallery, including *Soapbread* (2003), *Font I* and *Font V* (2002).



Fig. 24. Sonja Gruner, *Soapbread 'Unser Tägliches Brot Gib Uns Heute'* (2003).  
Soap (roerseep). Various sizes.



Fig. 25. Sonja Gruner, *Soapbread 'Heute Gib Uns Unser Täglich Brot'* (2003).  
Soap (roerseep).  
500x1500cm.



Fig. 26 Sonja Gruner, detail, 'Unser' and 'Täglich' from *Soapbread* (2003).  
(a & b). Soap.  
500 x 1500 cm.

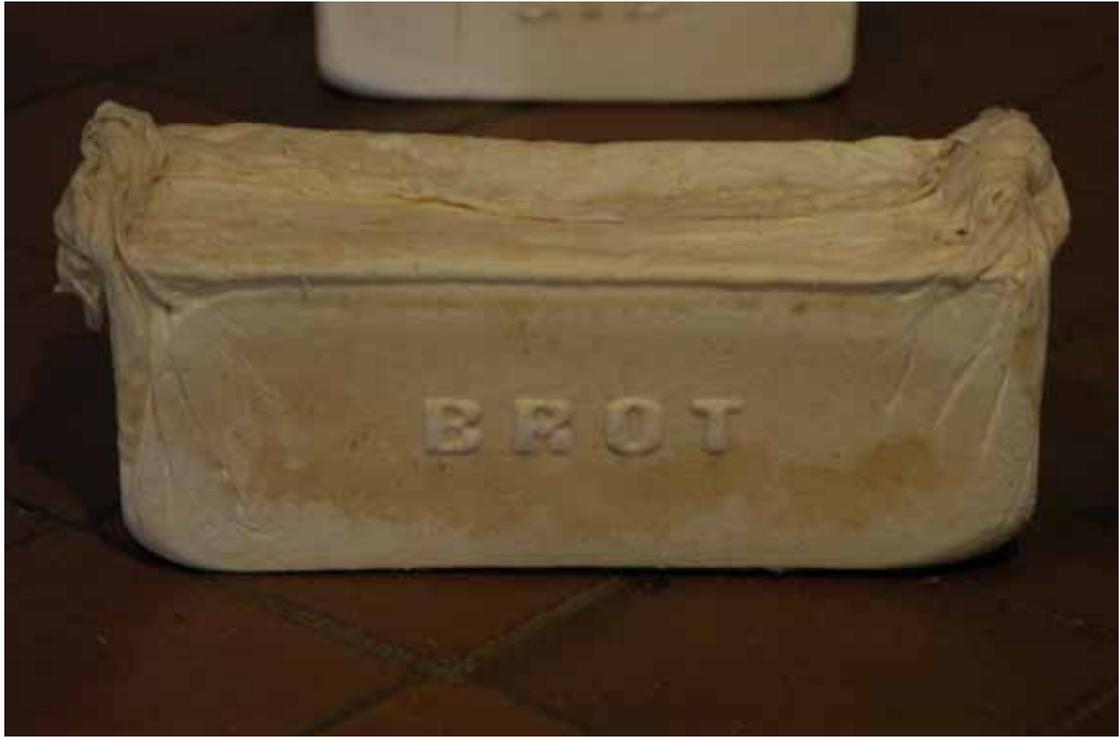


Fig. 26 Sonja Gruner, detail, of embossed words 'Brot' and 'Gib' from *Soapbread* (c & d). (2003).  
Soap.  
500 x 1500 cm.



Fig. 26 Sonja Gruner, detail of *Soapbread* with words 'Uns' and 'Heute'. (2003).  
(e & f). Soap.  
500 x 1500 cm.



Fig. 27. View of gallery interior (previously a Lutheran Church) with soap sculptures exhibited and converting the space back into a spiritual place (2005).



Fig. 28. Sonja Gruner, detail, roerseep, *Soap bread 'Brot'* (2003).



Fig. 29. Sonja Gruner, detail, roerseep, *Soupbread 'Heute'* (2002).



Fig. 30. Sonja Gruner, *Untitled (Passagen: beiffchen)* (2002).  
Ministers' collars framed.  
Each 20 x 12 cm.



Fig. 31. Sonja Gruner, View of annex in Stellenbosch University Gallery, were the works *Untitled (Passagen: beiffchen)* (2003) and *Untitled (Pillows)* (2002) were exhibited. Ministers' collars framed and pillows with photographs.



Fig. 32 Sonja Gruner, entropy of *Font I* over five years (2000-5).  
(a & b). Soap vessel's spontaneous disintegration over five years (boerseep).  
20 x 45 x 45 cm.



Fig. 33. Sonja Gruner, detail, impressionable texture of roerseeep, *Font VII* (2002).

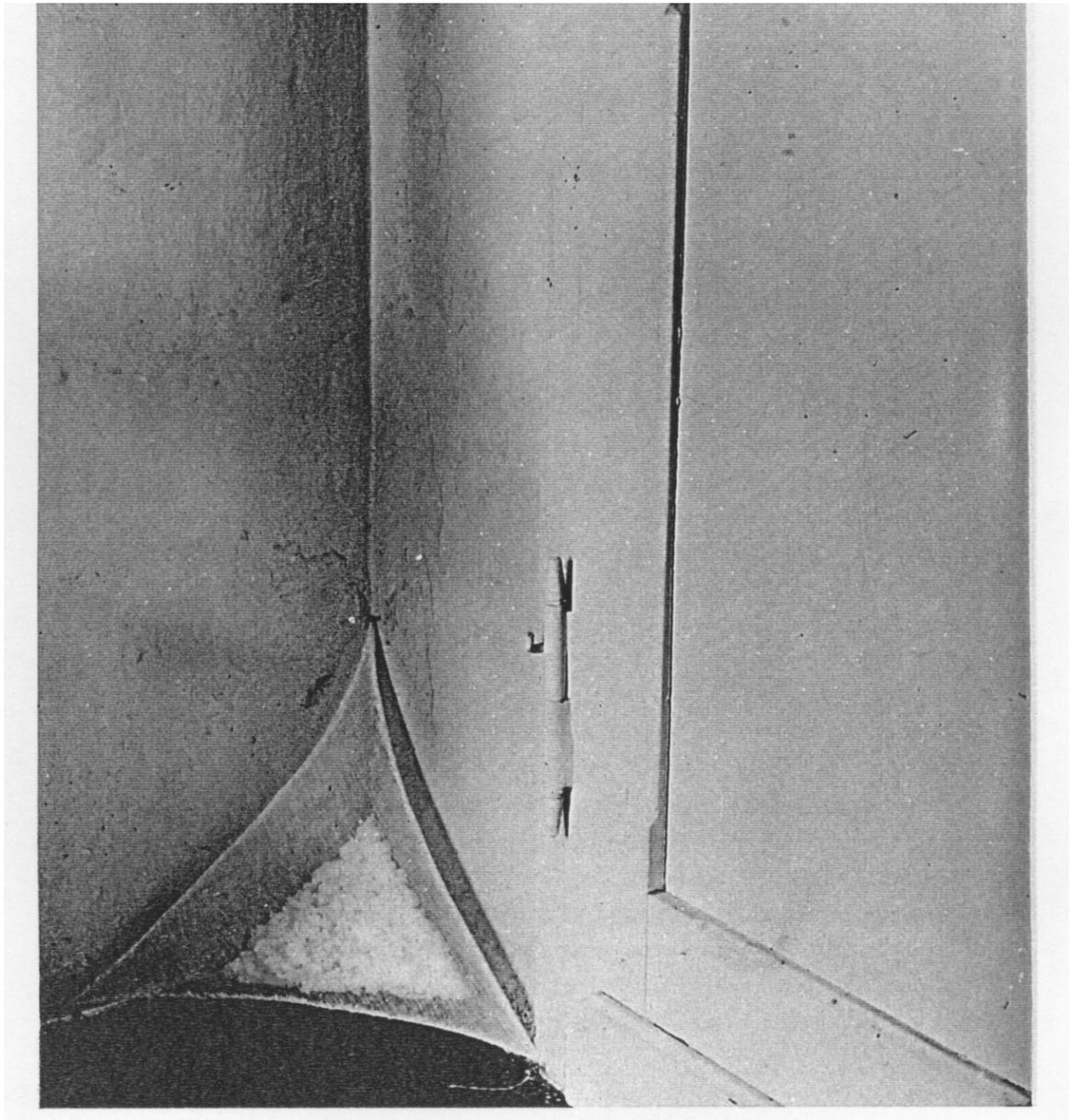


Fig. 34. Joseph Beuys, *Filter Corner of Fat or Corner of Fat with Filter* (1963).  
Muslin, fat.  
40 x 40 x 40 cm.  
Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.  
(Source: Adriani, G. *et al.* 1979:102.)



Fig. 35. Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair* (1964).  
Wooden chair, fat, wax, metal wire.  
90 x 30 x 30 cm.  
Stroher Collection, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979: 73-74 and Adriani, G. *et al.* fig.73, 1979:123.)



Fig. 36. Sonja Gruner, *within a river of glass shards* (2003-5).  
Glass shards, nuts and bolts, de-barbed wire and soap cast in the form of a  
suitcase.  
900 x 1500 cm.

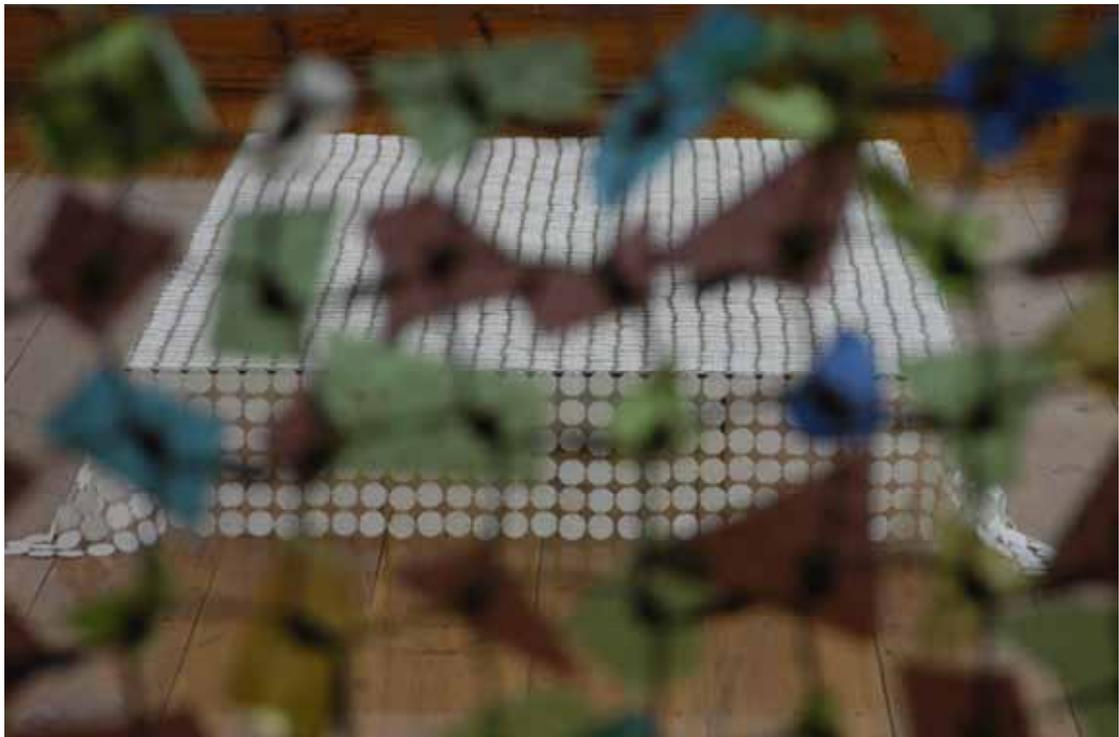
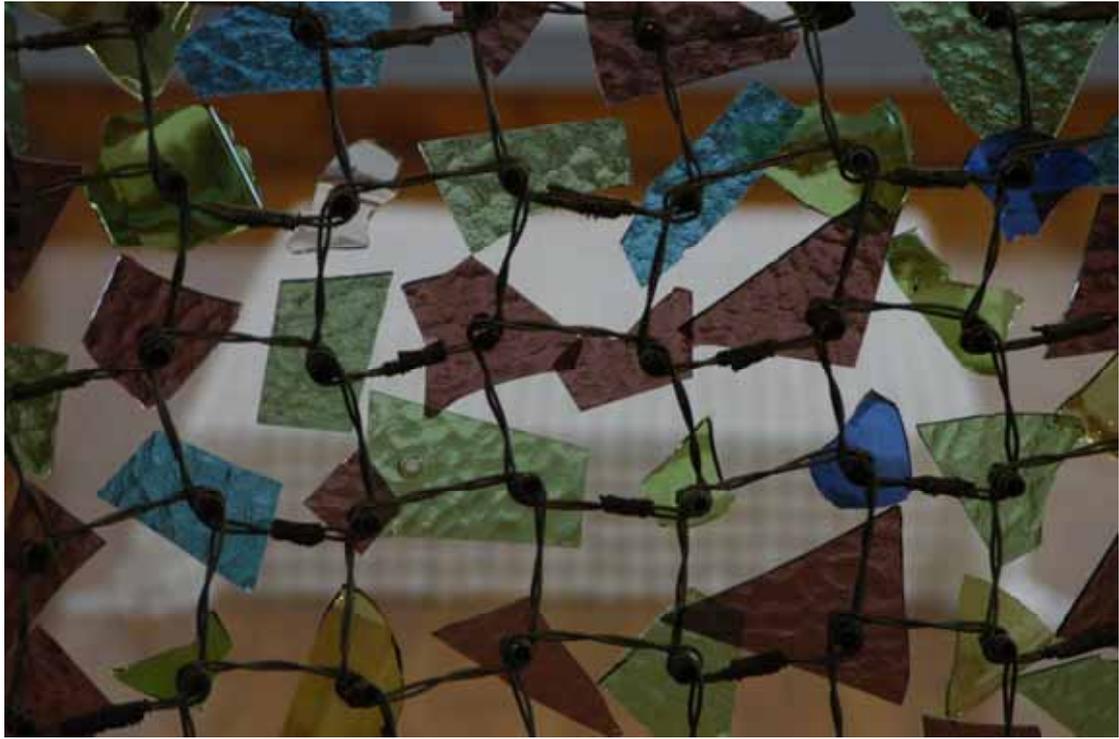


Fig. 37 Sonja Gruner, detail of *within a river of glass shards* and *Table Cloth* (a & b). (2003-5).  
Glass, barbed wire, soap, and nuts and bolts.  
900 x 1500 cm.

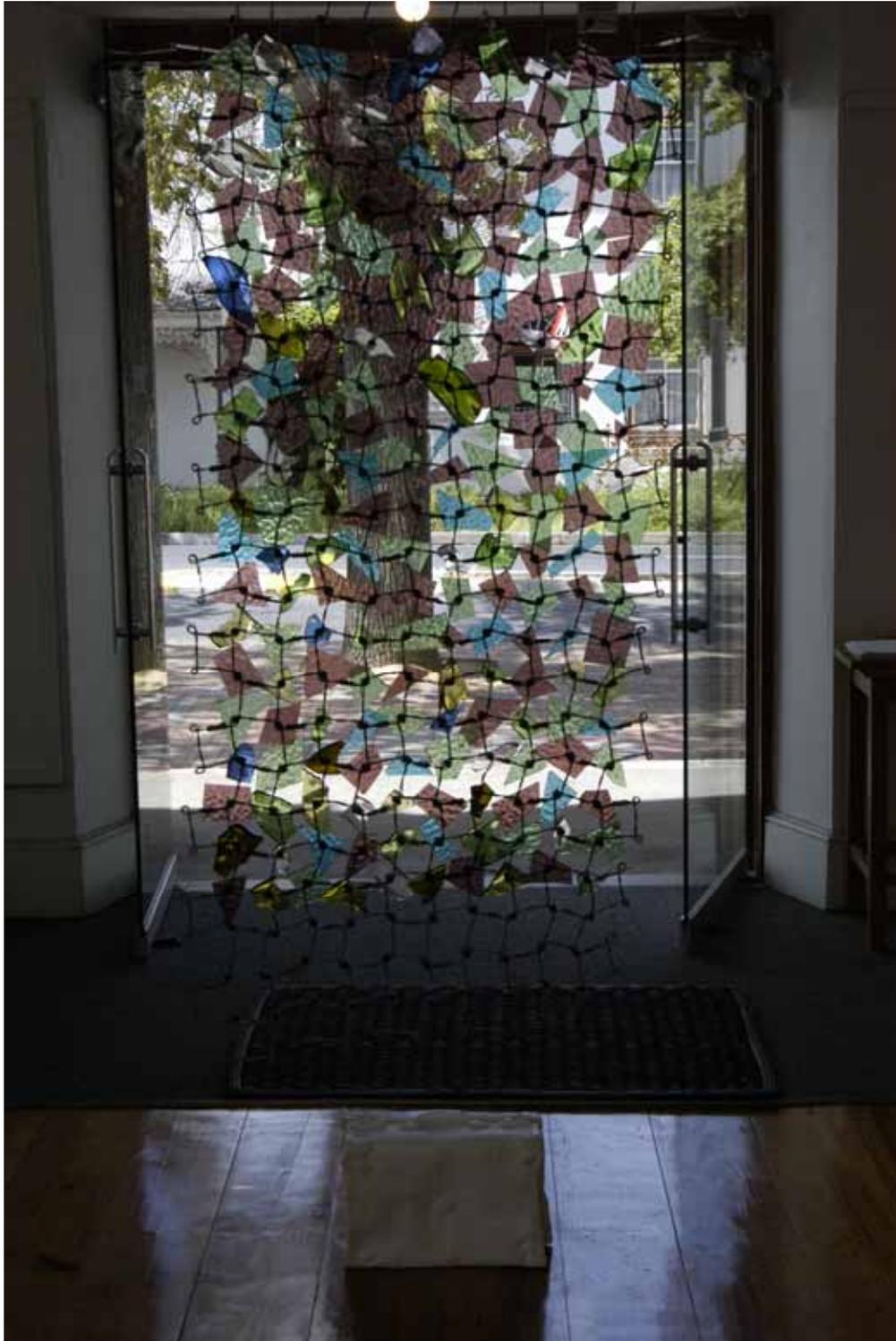


Fig. 37 c. Sonja Gruner, *within a river of glass shards* (2003-5).  
Glass shards, nuts and bolts, de-barbed wire and soap cast suitcase.  
1500 x 900 cm.

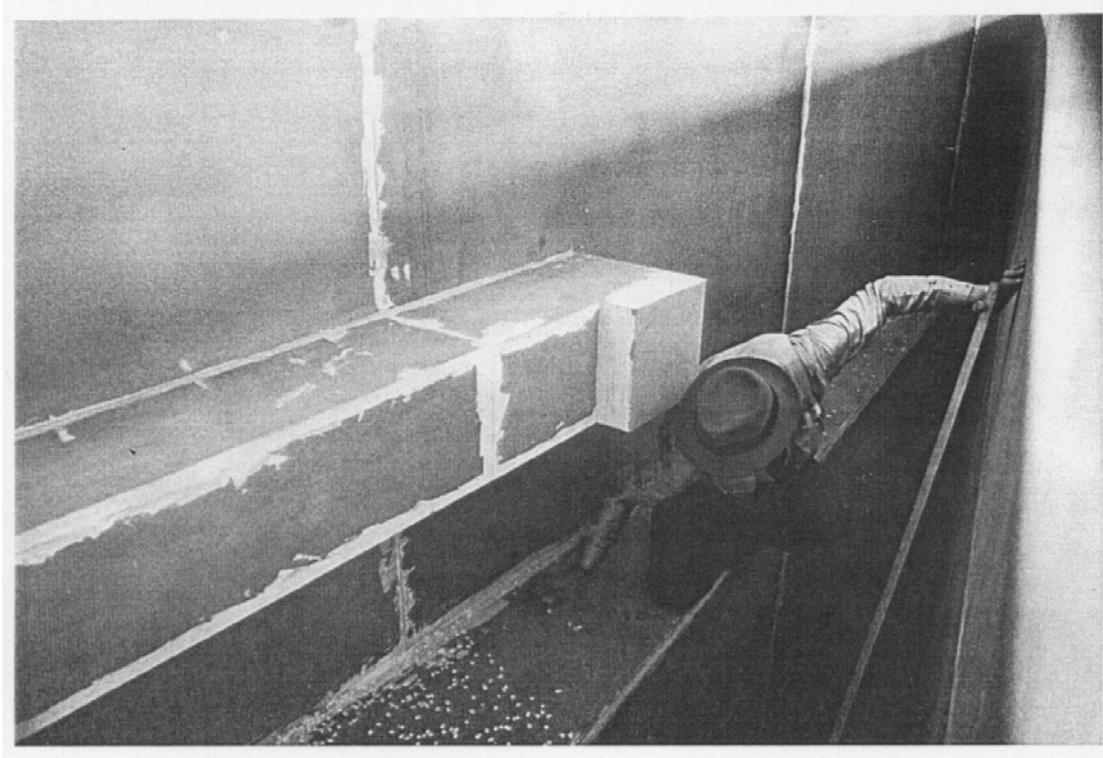
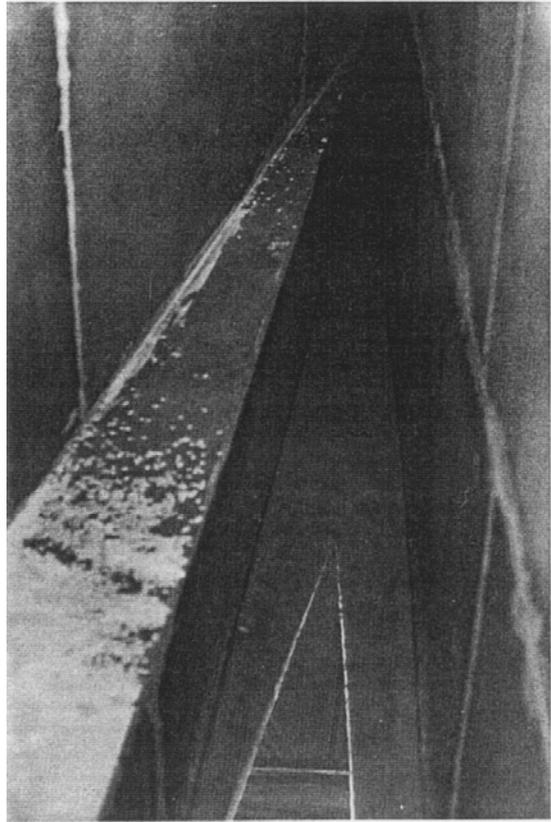
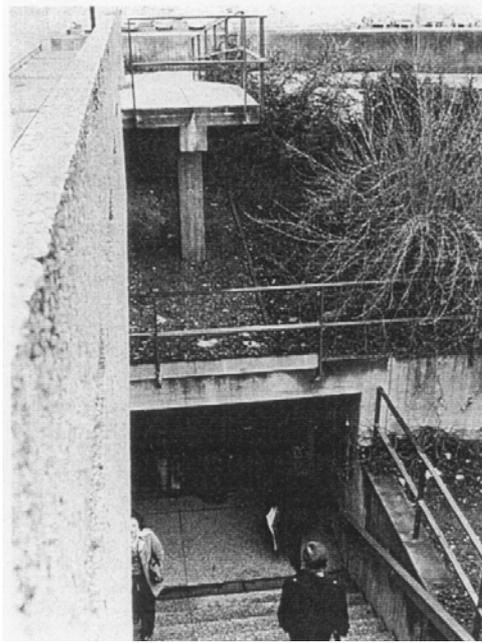


Fig. 38a. Joseph Beuys, detail of the pedestrian underpass in Munster from which the cast for *Tallow* was made.  
The inside of the cast for *Tallow* (1977).  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:249-252.)



438-41 Melting the fat for Tallow

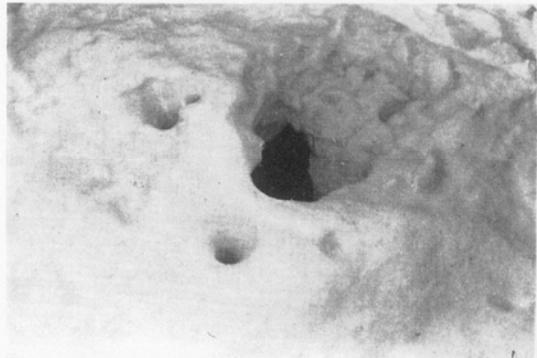


Fig. 38b. Joseph Beuys, detail of melting the fat for the tallow, Tallow (1977).  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:252.)



Fig. 38c. Joseph Beuys, *Tallow* (1977).  
20 tons of tallow cut into 5 segments of which the largest is 200 x 200 x 300 cm.  
Collection Dr Erich Marx, Berlin.  
(Source : Tisdall, C. 1979: 249-252.)



Fig. 38d. Joseph Beuys, detail of fat sculpture, *Tallow* (1977).  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:249-252.)

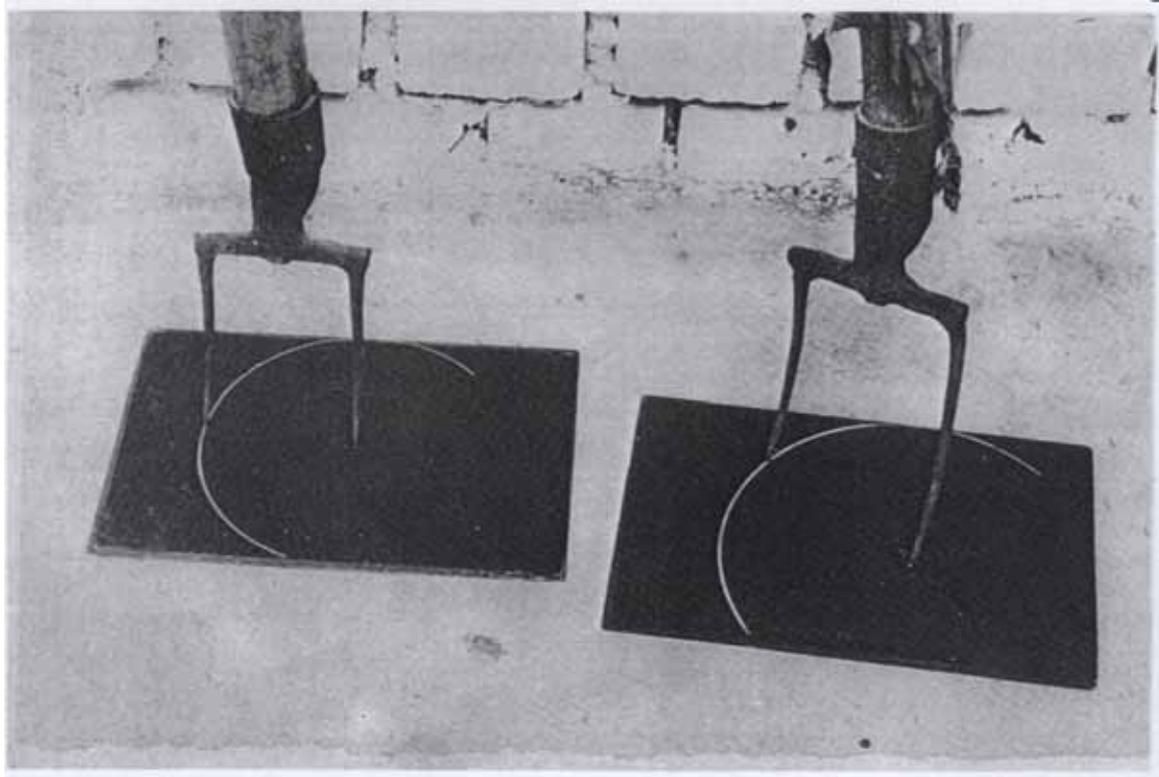


Fig. 39a. Joseph Beuys, detail, *Show your wound* (1976).  
Environment Installation.  
Diverse format: underground pedestrian area between Maximilianstrasse and Altstadttring in Munich.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979: 214-216.)

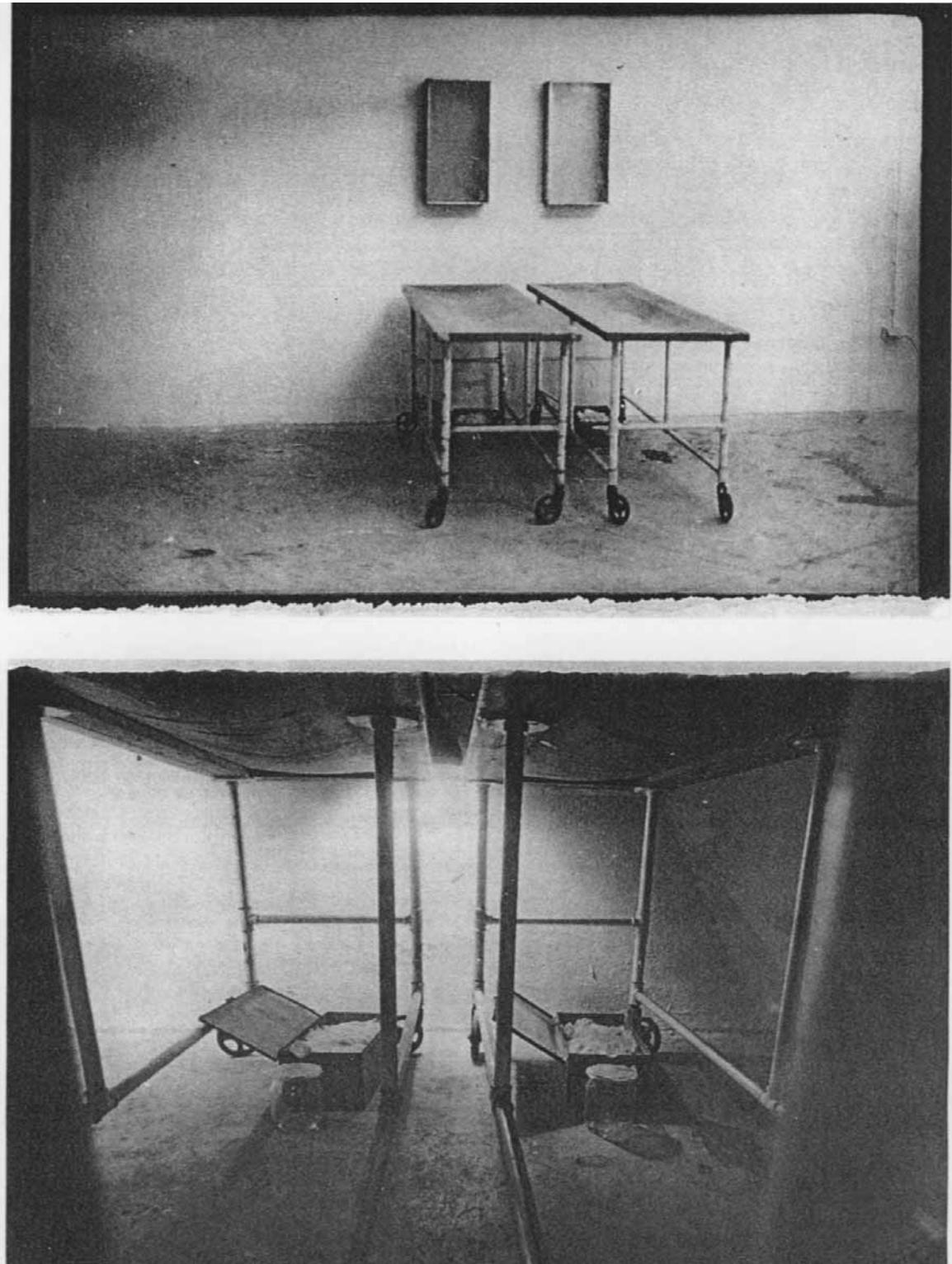


Fig. 39b. Joseph Beuys, detail, *Show your wound* (1976).  
Environment Installation.  
Diverse format: underground pedestrian area between Maximilianstrasse and Altstadttring in Munich.  
(Source: Tisdall, C.1979: 214-216.)

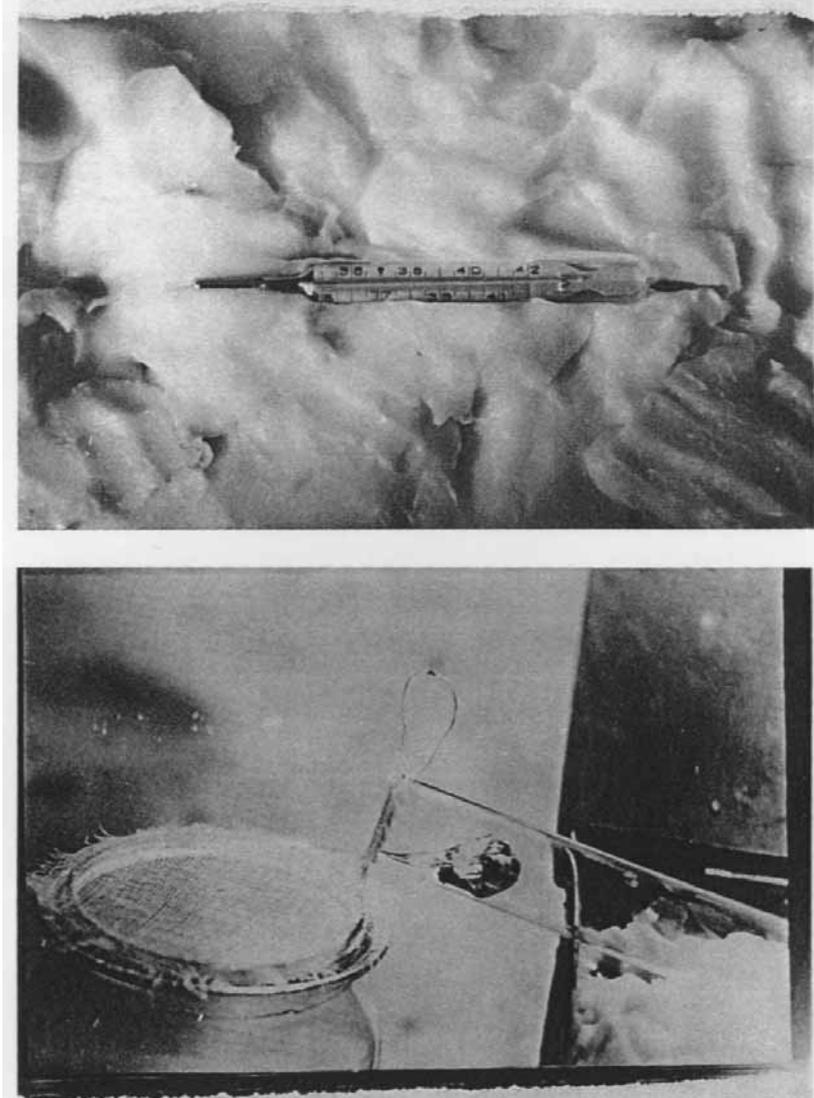


Fig. 39c. Joseph Beuys, detail, *Show your wound* (1976).  
Environment Installation.  
Diverse format: underground pedestrian area between Maximilianstrasse and  
Altstadtring in Munich.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979: 214-216.)

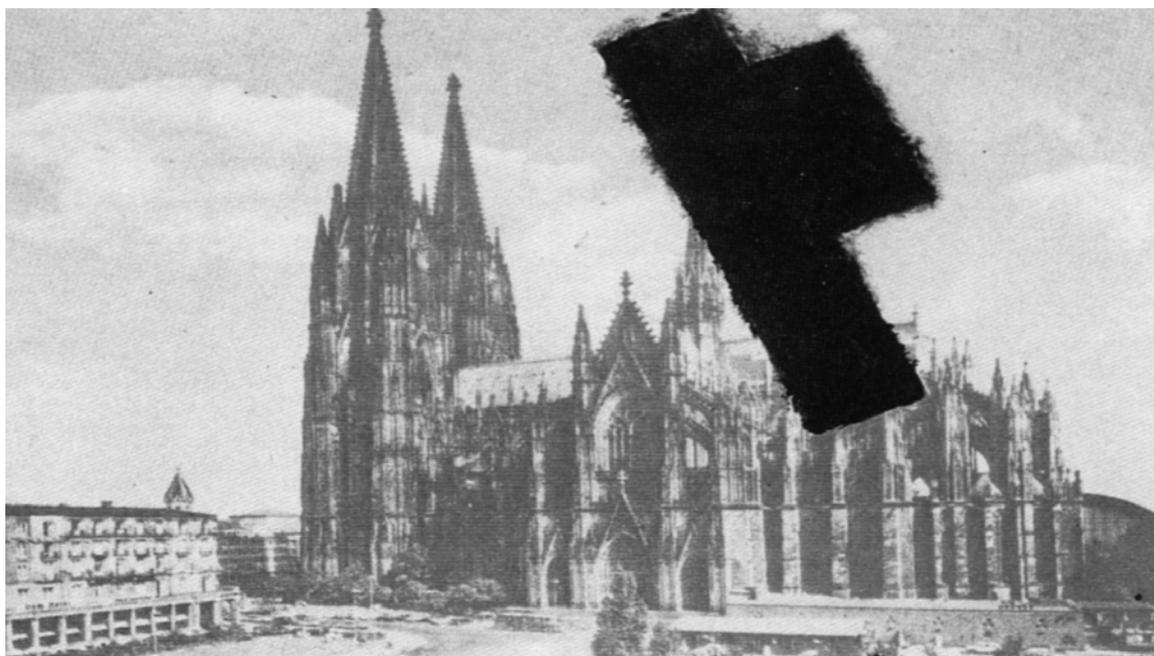


Fig. 40. Joseph Beuys, *Cologne* (1968/9).  
Postcard. Collection Dr Erich Marx, Berlin.  
No dimensions given.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:253.)

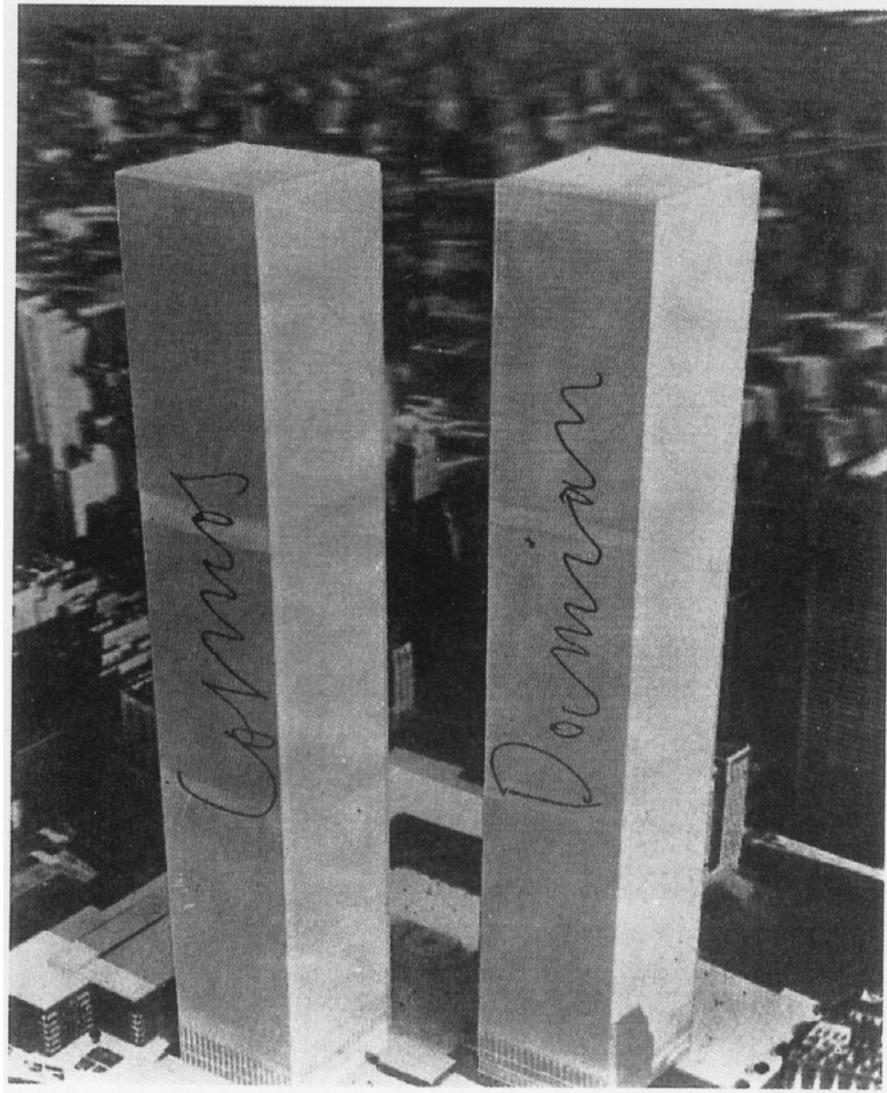


Fig. 41. Joseph Beuys, *Cosmos and Damian* (1974).  
Postcard. Collection Dr Erich Marx, Berlin.  
No dimension given.  
(Source: Tisdall, C. 1979:253.)

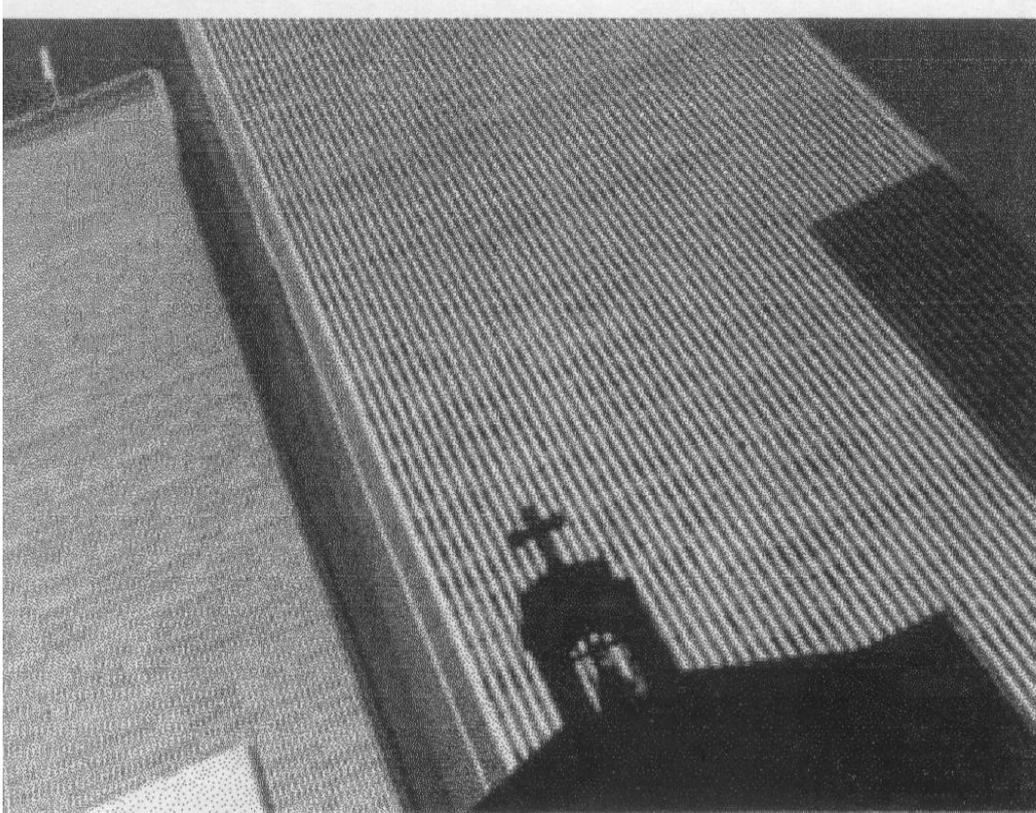


Fig. 42. Photographer unknown, *photograph depicting the shadow of a church tower on the World Trade Center, in commemoration of September 11, 2001* (no date to photograph given).

Photograph taken from the Internet.

(Source: World Trade Center and Pentagon Memorial 2002:1 of 3 found on <http://www.worldtradecentermemorial.com/>).



Figure 43 (a & b).

Strijdom van der Merwe (c. 2004)  
Top: *Reconciliation*.  
Sculpture for the 50<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary of the  
Korean War. Pusan,  
Korea.  
Bottom: *Slide 18*.  
Sand Spiral.  
Earth art.  
(Source:  
[www.strijdom.co.za](http://www.strijdom.co.za).)



Fig. 44a. Hycinth, Freiherr von Weisser (Heinrich Welz), *A man's circle of ideas projected onto the external world* (*Ideenkreis eines Mannes auf die Außenwelt projiziert*). (c.1912). (Diagnosis: dementia praecox (schizophrenia) Pencil, pen, on drawing paper. 33.3 x 25.2 cm. Prinzhorn collection. (Source: Douglas, C et al. 1996: 182.)



Fig. 44b. Josef Forster, *Untitled* (after 1916). (Diagnosis: schizophrenia) Mixed Media on cardboard. 35.4 x 22.1 cm. Prinzhorn Collection. (Source: Douglas, C. et al. 1996:75.)



Fig. 45. Franz Joseph Gall, Phrenology Diagram (no date c.1907).  
 No medium given.  
 No dimensions given.  
 (Source: Anker, S. & Nelkin, D. 2004:11.)



Fig. 46. Charles le Brun, (17<sup>th</sup> century)  
 Top: *Etrude de Taureau et de Boeuf*.  
 Bottom: *Visage*.  
 No medium given.  
 No dimensions given.  
 Courtesy of Paris Musée du Louvre,  
 Department des artes Graphique.  
 (Source: Anker, S. & Nelkin, D.  
 2004:12.)

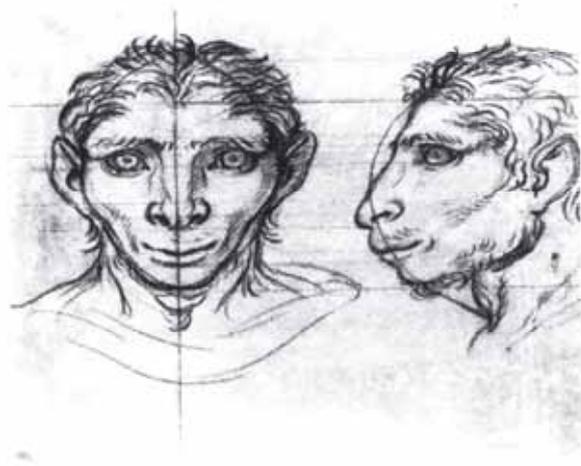




Fig. 47. Sonja Gruner, *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.

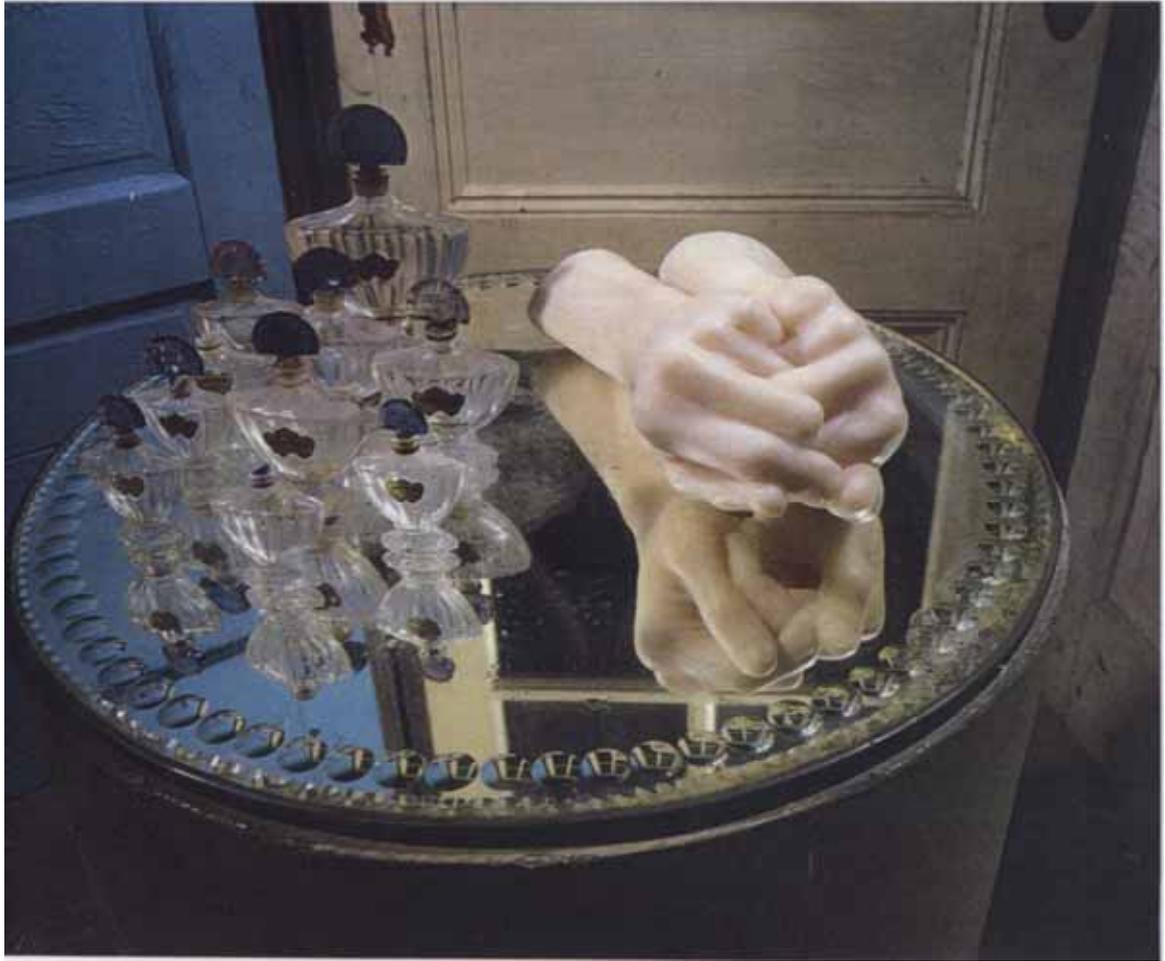


Fig.48. Louis Bourgeois, *Cell II* (1991).  
Mixed Media.  
210.8 x 152.4 x 152.4 cm.  
The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Heinz Family Acquisition Fund of The  
Carnegie Museum of Art.  
(Source: Kotik, C. *et al.* 1994:113.)



Fig. 49. Sonja Gruner, *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.



Fig. 50. Rembrandt, *Self Portraits* (1630).  
Etchings on paper.  
Dimensions unknown.  
(Source: Bal, M. 1991: 348.)



Fig. 51. Sonja Gruner, detail, of the various types and textures of the soap used in (a & b) *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.

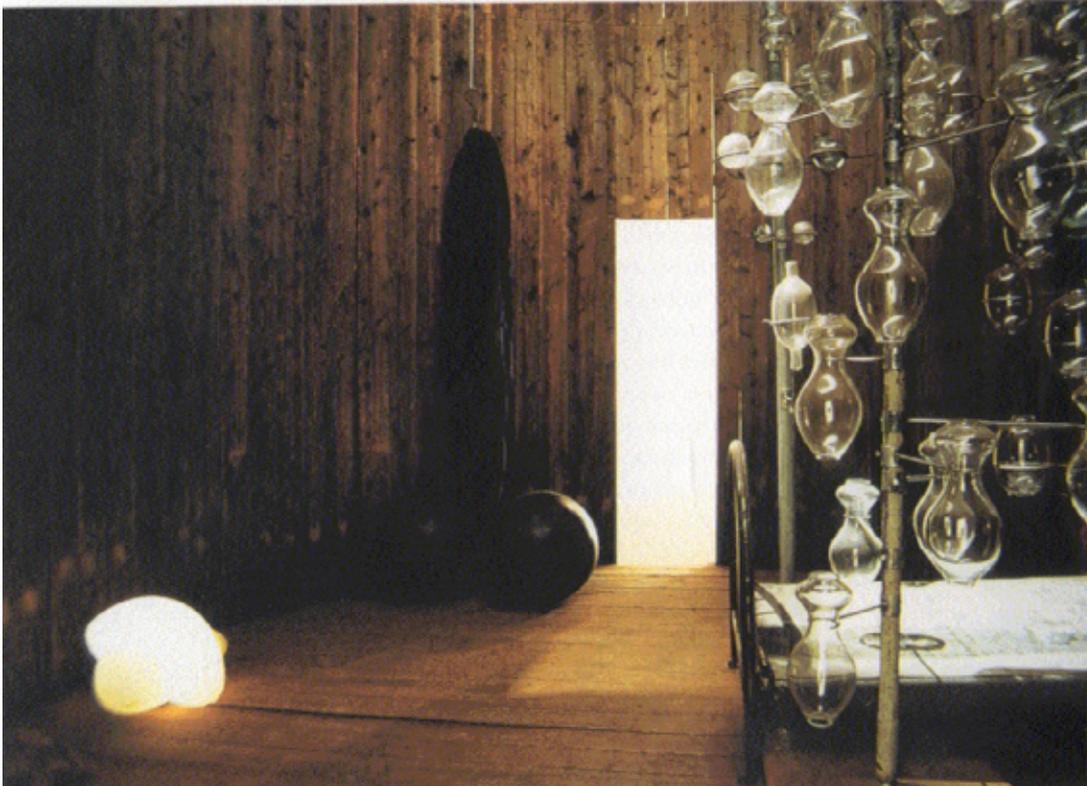


Fig. 52. Louise Bourgeois, *Precious Liquids*, detail. (1992).  
Installation. Wood and various materials.  
Height and diameter: 426.7cm.  
Kassel, Documenta 9 (1992).  
(Source: Walter, I.F. (ed.) 1998:560.)



Fig. 53a. Sonja Gruner, *Untitled (Pillows)* (2002).  
Surgical material, milk filters and photographs.  
32 pillows, each 50 x 50 cm.



Fig. 53(b & c). Sonja Gruner, detail of *Untitled (Pillows)* with photographs under milk filters (2002).





Fig. 53(d & e). Sonja Gruner, detail of portrait oval cut into the pillow case and covered with milk filter *Untitled (Pillows)* (2002).

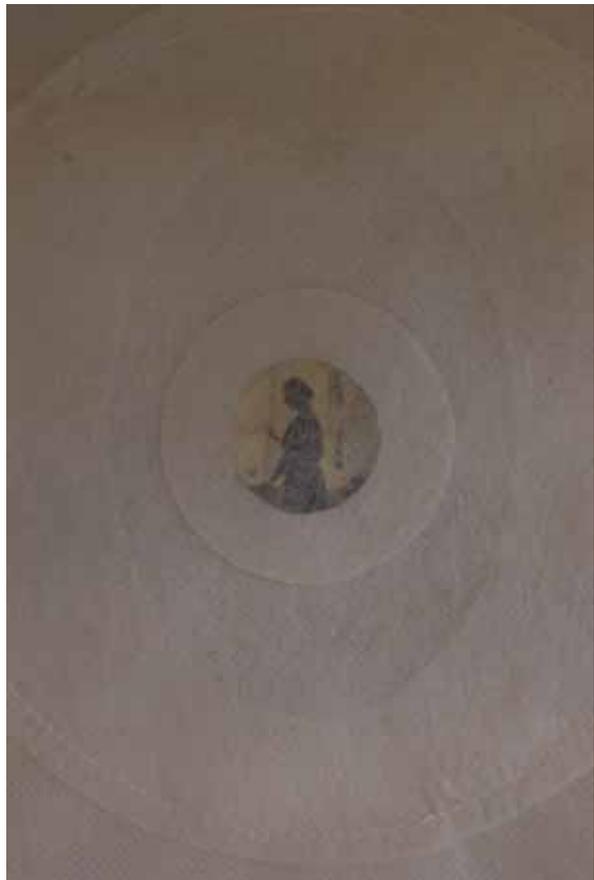




Fig. 54. Sonja Gruner, *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.



Fig. 55. Sonja Gruner, detail, transparency, texture and colour of soap. The soap 'sweats', like the body. *Sitzbath* (2002-5).  
Bath made from soap.  
670 x 550 x 900 cm.

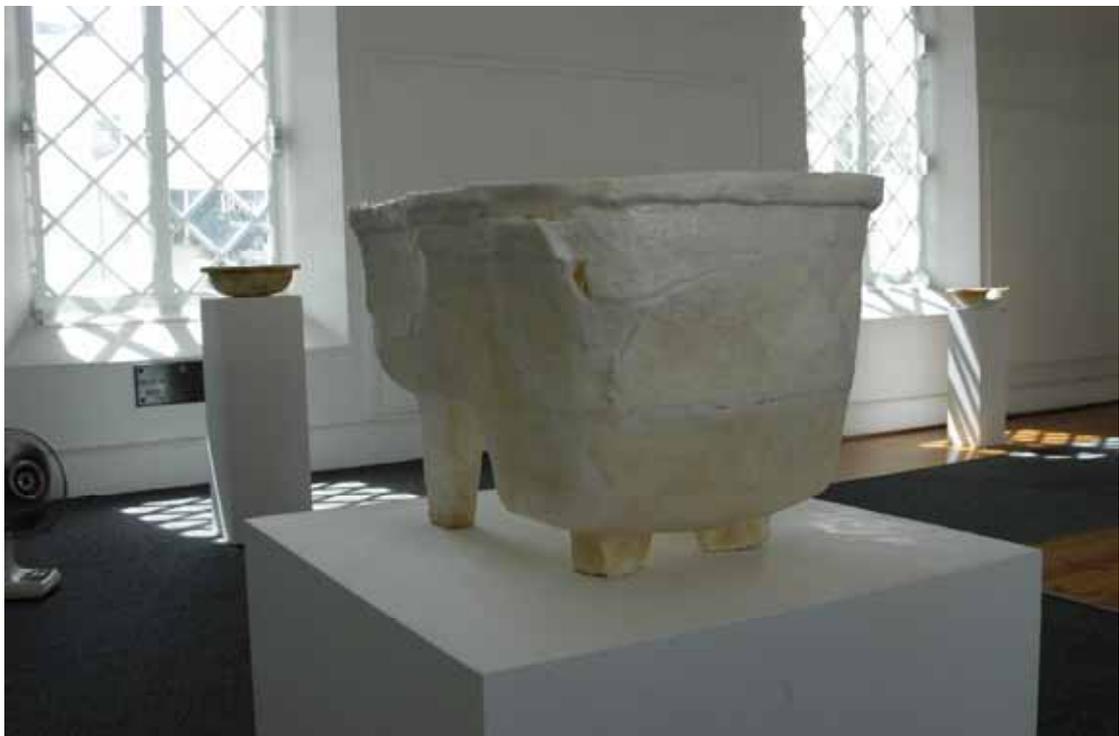
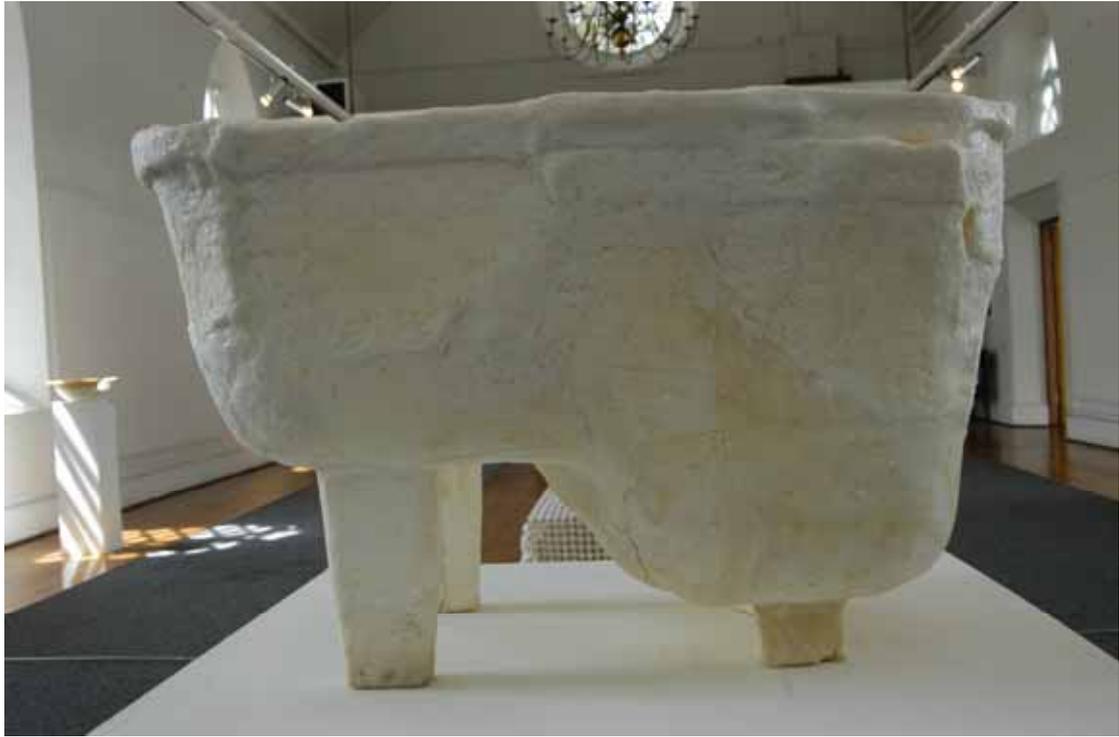


Fig. 56 Sonja Gruner, view of *Sitzbath* and *Fonts* in the University of Stellenbosch (a & b). Gallery (previously a Lutheran Church) (2005).

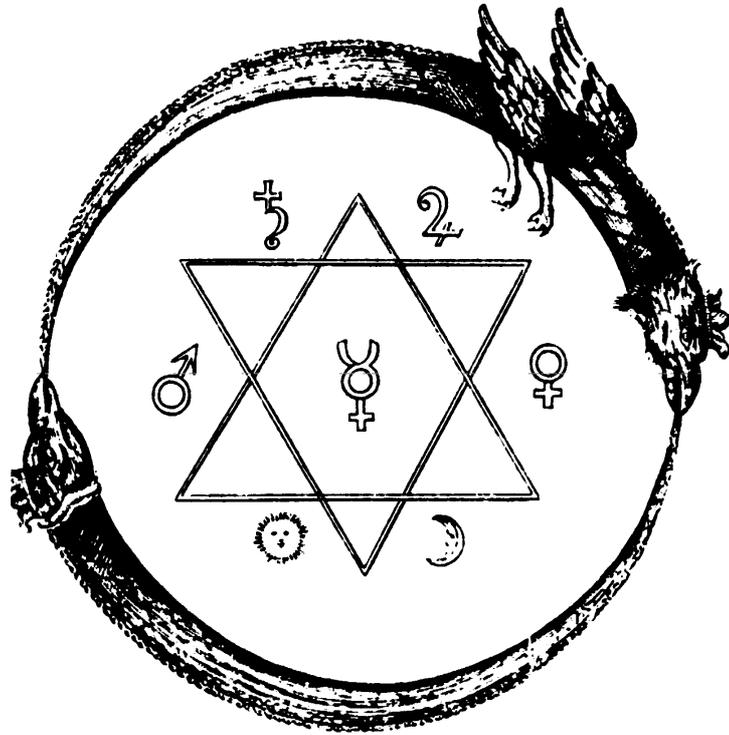


Fig. 57. Annulus Platonis (Siegel Salomens), *Alchemical Symbol*, Kupferstich (1723).

Illustration (etching).

No dimensions given.

No collection given.

(Source: Ploss, E.E. *et al.* 1970:23.)



Fig. 58. Antony Gormley, *Word made Flesh* (1989).  
Iron and air.  
65 x 62 x 53 cm.  
Collection: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.  
(Source: Hutchinson, J. *et al.* 2001: 54.)



Fig. 59. Antony Gormley, *Fathers and Sons, Monuments and Toys, Gods and Artists* (1985-86).  
Lead, plaster, fibreglass and air.  
Large Figure 245 x 57.6 x 48 cm.  
Small Figure 108 x 24 x 22 cm.  
(Source: Hutchinson, J. 2001: 29.)