

## Doris Salcedo's Melancholy Objects

Vera Mackie, University of Melbourne

Doris Salcedo's work 'Atrabiliarios' (Defiant) (1992-2004) refers to the women who have been disappeared in her homeland of Colombia.<sup>1</sup> Over forty boxes are recessed in the walls of the gallery. Each box contains one or two shoes, sometimes a single shoe, sometimes a pair, sometimes a mismatched pair. Each recessed box is covered with a membrane, described as a layer of cow bladder, bordered with black stitches of surgical thread. The backlit cow bladder evokes human skin. The black, white, brown and ivory shoes are visible through the skin-like surface. On the floor of the gallery are stacked a series of empty boxes, made of the same cow bladder which covers the gallery niches. A version of this work, which Salcedo has developed over several years, is now held in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA).<sup>2</sup> This is where I encountered the work, and where I started to try to make sense of the power of these particular objects. After my visit to SFMOMA, shoes came to be a recurrent theme in my encounters in museums and art

---

<sup>1</sup> This article developed from a paper presented at the Conference 'Pain and Death: Politics, Aesthetics and Legalities,' Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University, December 2005. I am indebted to Carolyn Strange for comments on successive drafts and to the anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier version.

<sup>2</sup> See <[http://www.sfmoma.org/exhibitions/exhib\\_detail.asp?id=11](http://www.sfmoma.org/exhibitions/exhib_detail.asp?id=11)> accessed 8 September 2005. See also the interactive feature at <<http://www.sfmoma.org/msoma/artworks/8398.html>> accessed 10 October 2006. There are precursors to 'Atrabiliarios' in several of Salcedo's untitled works from the late 1980s. An earlier version of 'Atrabiliarios' was displayed at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in the exhibition 'Currents 92: The Absent Body' (Princenthal et al 2000: 15-16; 48-57). 'Atrabiliarios' was also installed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1997 as part of the exhibition 'Body.' See <<http://collection.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/results.do?view=detail&db=object&searchMode=advanced&id=29134>>, accessed 12 September 2007.

galleries, suggesting to me that there was an archetypal element to this display which was worthy of further exploration.

The shoes on display in 'Atrabiliarios' are all feminine in style—with heels, bows, ankle-straps. There are no androgynous sneakers or boots. The most poignant are the single shoes, suggesting someone so intent on escape that a shoe has been lost. These ladylike shoes evoke the vulnerability of women in public spaces. Shoes like these are not designed for physical exertion, except maybe for dancing. Someone wearing shoes like these would have a hard time running away from a dangerous situation.<sup>3</sup>

A well-worn shoe also invokes the individuality of the former wearer, as the shoe has been moulded to the shape of the foot. The shoes must bear traces of the body of the person who has disappeared, although we strain to see the details through the membrane which covers the shoes. We can imagine that the wearers' feet, too, would bear the traces of all the shoes worn in a lifetime. There would be calluses, corns, scars left after blistering, the odd shapes of toes which have been repeatedly pushed into pointed shoes.

The shoe is the classic fetishistic object (Steele 2005: *passim*; Steele 2006: 250-271). But this usually involves the shoe as a displacement, a disavowal of castration: with the shoe as a sheath for something else. Here, however, the shoe reminds us rather of the missing body of the woman who has been subjected to politicised violence. In such a situation, 'the absence of the body creates a profound crisis for mourners,' who are denied the opportunity to carry out the necessary rituals of mourning and commemoration (Tumarkin 2005: 71).

There is a chain of signification which links the leather of the shoes displayed in lighted boxes, the puce cow bladder which covers the boxes, and the melancholy remembrance of the bodies of the disappeared. There is an excess in the repetition of different kinds of skin: the leather of the shoes, the cow bladder which covers the niches which hold the shoes, and an inevitable association with the skin of the feet of the person who wore the shoes. The stitching around the display boxes is described as surgical thread. The jagged stitches evoke the suturing of wounds, possibly suggesting a process of healing. For this viewer, however,

---

<sup>3</sup> See photographer David Bailey's comments on high-heeled shoes: 'I like high heels ... I know it's chauvinistic. The girls can't run away from me.' Bailey's comments are quoted in Bayley (1991: 45) and cited in Steele (2005: 27).

the stiches were more reminiscent of the barbed wire of incarceration, provoking memories of other memorial sites.

Salcedo herself has commented on some aspects of this work, created after she had researched the stories of the women who had disappeared. Early versions of 'Atrabiliarios' included shoes donated by the families of the disappeared women:

While researching specific cases of disappearance I discovered that the only feature common to all cases, which enabled the identity of the missing people discovered in a common grave to be determined, was each person's shoes. The shoes also represent traces of the trajectory that led the victim to such a tragic death. (Salcedo, in Princenthal, Basualdo and Huysen 2000: 17)

The shoes have been said to 'occupy a point somewhere between a relic and a fetish... As a relic they stand in for the remains of the deceased; as a fetish they become a substitute object of both identification and disavowal' (Merewether 1993: 42). In stimulating such potent psychological mechanisms, these objects are in some ways more powerful than a literal documentation would be, although documentation and testimony, of course, have a vital role in political campaigns.

Most renderings of the title 'Atrabiliarios' do not do justice to this dimension of the work. In English, the work is often known as 'Defiant.' This evokes the attitude of women who refuse to be intimidated, and the attitude of their relatives who refuse to forget. The adjective 'atrabiliarios' is derived from a word for 'black bile,' or in other words 'melancholy,' cognate with the rather archaic English adjective 'atrabiliious.' Grammatically, this is the form used to modify a plural noun, indicating a collective rather than an individual state of melancholy. Under the medieval system of humours, an excess of black bile was associated with fear, misanthropy, depression and madness, in a system where physical and mental states were not easily distinguished.<sup>4</sup> The colour black also has broader connotations of mourning in many cultures, in such practices as the wearing of black clothes.

---

<sup>4</sup> *OED*; For a discussion of the place of melancholy in the system of humoral psychology in early modern Europe, see Breitenberg (1996: 37-38); Eng and Kazanjian (2003: 7-8). See also Günter Grass's reflections on Albrecht Dürer's engraving, *Melencolia I*, which he links with the events of twentieth century German history (Grass 2002: 61-76). I am indebted to Paul Allatson for a detailed e-mail discussion on the connotations of 'Atrabiliarios' in the Spanish language.

By invoking the 'relic' and the 'fetish,' Salcedo is drawing on a complex cultural history. The history of the concept of fetishism includes the worship of magical objects attributed to 'uncivilised' societies under discourses of colonialism, the 'commodity fetishism' described in Marxist economic thought, and the psychoanalytic mechanism whereby an object, such as an item of clothing, a glove, or a shoe provides sexual satisfaction in place of genital sexual activity. In some cases of sexual fetishism, the body is invoked through the shape of the fetish or through the texture of skin, leather or fur (Marx 1930 [1867]: 43-58; Freud 1961 [1927]; Erwin 2002: 414-416; Wright 1992: 41-45, 113-120, 327-331).

In order to understand the relationship between fetishism, mourning and melancholia, I have found E.L. McCallum's re-reading of Freud to be most useful. She explains that '[l]ike fetishism, melancholia breaks down proper boundaries between subject and object; also like fetishism, melancholia emerges as a subject deals with loss...' (McCallum 1999: xxi). She elaborates further: 'both fetishism and melancholia involve a loss of a loved object (possibly at the level of the unconscious), a memorialisation of the loss, an ambivalence about knowing that loss, and a lack of shame in one's conduct in resolving that loss' (McCallum 1999: 116). In her use of objects—shoes—to evoke the powerful psychological mechanisms of fetishism, mourning and melancholia, Salcedo's work is thus also congruent with some recent preoccupations in cultural research, whereby melancholia has been taken out of the realm of individual psychology, and into more politicised realms of collective memory and mourning.

McCallum argues that we can see fetishism as a productive rather than a necessarily pathological state of mind. Some other recent writers have also explored melancholy as a productive state. Descriptions of the 'normal' processes of grieving and mourning set out a series of stages whereby an individual gradually comes to terms with loss (Freud 1957 [1917]: 243). In the case of politicised violence, however, there can be no simple process of coming to terms with loss. The state of melancholia, the refusal to come to terms with loss, may in fact be the most appropriate and productive response. The only way in which an individual can understand such loss is by placing it in its social, political and historical context, and by working with others to change that political reality.

The practice of collecting by artists and connoisseurs has repeatedly been linked with melancholy. Salcedo's collection of shoes provokes a collective melancholy which may be linked to political consciousness. This is congruent with Anne Anling Cheng's discussion of a process whereby the mourner may 'go from being a subject of grief to being a subject of grievance' (Cheng 2000: 3). Similarly, Eng and Kazanjian argue for a 'politics of mourning that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary' (2003: 2; see also Gilroy [2005]).

There is a further set of cultural resonances which contribute to the power of these representations and evoke the magical connotations of the shoe as fetish: fairy tales such as 'Cinderella' and 'The Red Shoes' which have a wide currency in European cultures and beyond. The shoes which helped to identify the victims of violent purges seem like a perversion of the fairy stories of Cinderella, where the fitting of the slipper to the dainty foot of the orphan girl proves her identity, and assures her reunion with Prince Charming in a romantic happy ending. This is not to suggest that Salcedo herself intended such a connection, but rather that a viewer who has grown up in a culture which references European traditions is likely to make intertextual links between the shoes in 'Atrabiliarios' and a long series of cultural representations of shoes in myth and fairytale.

Although the popular image of the Cinderella stories is one of romance, the various versions of the story are shot through with mourning, melancholia, violence and mutilation. Cinderella is an orphan, mourning the loss of her mother. In different versions of the tale, the slipper may be made of glass, gold or fur. Cinderella's habitus is by the hearth, where she is forced to sort through the ashes—the source of her name (Brothers Grimm 1992 [1906]: 214-222; Warner 1994: 202-217; Bettelheim 1976: 236-277).<sup>5</sup> The combination of rags, cinders, ashes and ashen colours invokes associations of mourning. We do not know whether the original owners of the shoes in Salcedo's artwork are mothers, whose children will become orphans like Cinderella, or daughters, whose parents have experienced the tragedy of outliving their own children. In the

---

<sup>5</sup> The French version of her name refers to ashes rather than cinders, despite the apparent similarity between Perrault's 'Cendrillon' and 'Cinderella'/'Cinders.' The German version is 'Ashputtel' or 'Aschenputtel.'

Cinderella stories, the shoe becomes proof of identity, as it does for the remains of the disappeared women. For the disappeared women, however, there is no happy ending; no Prince to rescue them at the end of the story.

Salcedo's work also resonates with Hans Christian Andersen's story of 'The Red Shoes.' At the centre of this story is another orphaned girl, who becomes infatuated with a pair of red dancing shoes. The shoes take on a life of their own, taking over the body of the young woman and dancing her until she is close to death. In this story there is an opposition between the sensuality represented by the dancing red shoes and the restraint enjoined by the church. The original story is one of redemption, with the girl returning to the fold of the church, after her dangerous flirtation with sensual pleasures. This redemption, however, is at the price of a horrific mutilation, the removal of her feet with the red shoes and their replacement with wooden prostheses (Andersen 2002 [1865]: 207-213).

In Powell and Pressburger's sublime film of *The Red Shoes* (1948), the variations on the story are played out in the ballet-within-the-film, and the filmic narrative of a doomed romance. In the ballet, the dancer is danced to death and her red shoes are left behind. In the framing narrative, the ballerina plunges to her death and her erstwhile lover removes the red shoes from her bloodied legs. The filmic narrative then replays the ballet-within-the-film, this time restaged as a mourning ritual. The other dancers dance around the red shoes, in memory of the missing dancer. As in Salcedo's work, the shoes invoke the body and the memory of the missing loved one, in the film made all the more poignant by the contrast with the animation of the dancers.<sup>6</sup>

Marina Warner has traced the complexity of references and resonances in the Cinderella stories, reminding us that 'the earliest surviving tale of a wronged daughter dropping her shoe was set down in China in the ninth century when footbinding was practised' (Warner 1994: 128). As it happens, on the same day that I encountered Doris Salcedo's work in SFMOMA, I wandered into an antique shop called The Enchanted House on the edges of San Francisco's Chinatown. It was a wet day, where the colour of the sky, the sea, the clouds and the rain matched the metallic steel grey of the Bay Bridge. The shop

---

<sup>6</sup> On shoes in cinema, see Turim (2001: 58-90) and E. Mackie (2001: 233-247). In *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), shoes are the emblems of good and evil, of the good witch and the wicked witch.

was full of shades of brown and red, gleaming strings of pearls, necklaces of jade and ivory, the dull sheen of silken kimonos, the metallic gleam of Maoist kitsch. In one corner of a display cabinet were some embroidered silk shoes, single and in pairs: shoes for women with bound feet. The owner of the shop explained about the shoes, the significance of their size, and the attraction of these objects for some first world collectors who apparently compare their own freedom with their perceptions of the wretchedness of the women with bound feet. The antique shop, far from providing an exotic and colourful space to escape from the grey wetness outside, became inextricably linked with my attempts to come to terms with the emotions stirred up by Doris Salcedo's work on display in another part of town.

As I gazed at the silken embroidered shoes through the fog of jetlag, I was reminded of Dorothy Ko's research on shoes like these. The shoes she researched were artefacts which provided evidence of the practices of footbinding, a matter of social custom rather different from the politicised violence invoked by Salcedo. These silk shoes were stitched by the women themselves and thus bear traces of their handiwork. Because footbinding is no longer practiced, the only evidence we now have of the practice is the shoes. As Ko comments, 'Most of the bodies are gone. Only the shoes remain.' (Ko 2001: 7; see also Ko [2005] and Zamperini [2006]). When we encounter shoes like these in museums, galleries and antique shops, we are forced to consider the politics of looking, and the politics of display, a question which returns me to the experience of Salcedo's work in SFMOMA.

If Salcedo's installation is primarily seen as an artwork for passive contemplation, then it can be placed in a genealogy which would include van Gogh's 1886 oil painting 'A Pair of Boots,' Andy Warhol's 1980 series, 'Diamond Dust Shoes,'<sup>7</sup> Magritte's 1935 surrealist painting 'Le Modèle Rouge' where the feet and shoes are fused, and Meret Oppenheim's 1936 assemblage 'My Nurse,' which places a pair of high-heeled shoes on a silver plate, trussed like roasted meat. Fredric Jameson has considered the different representational practices, and indeed critical reading practices, associated with the

---

<sup>7</sup> It hardly bears repeating that shoes are a constantly recurring motif in Warhol's work, dating from his work as a commercial artist. See Warhol's whimsical portfolio, *A La Recherche du Shoe Perdu* (1955), its title invoking the melancholy of Proust's novel. Refer also to the cabinet of shoes displayed in 'Raid the Icebox I with Andy Warhol, 1969–1970,' a travelling exhibition of objects from the Rhode Island School of Design Museum (Allara 2002: 40–48). On shoes in art, see also West (2001: 41–57).

work of van Gogh, Magritte and Warhol, as part of a search for a critical artistic practice adequate to the conditions of late capitalism. In an almost throwaway comment, he alludes to the 'blood, torture, death and terror' which are the underside of culture in late capitalism (Jameson 1991: 5).<sup>8</sup>

With respect to Warhol's 'Diamond Dust Shoes,' Jameson refers to the 'deathly quality' and the 'glacé X-ray elegance' of the photographic negative which has been screenprinted and painted over. Warhol's shoes are the ghostly traces of commodity culture and advertising, several steps removed from contact with any actual wearers (1991: 9). Jameson refers to the viewer who confronts the work 'at the turning of a museum corridor or gallery with all the contingency of some inexplicable natural object' (1991: 8). He does not, however, pursue this tantalising hint of the embodied experience of museum-going, but returns to the notion of the fetish:

On the level of the content, we have to do with what are now far more clearly fetishes, in both the Freudian and Marxian senses ... Here, however, we have a random collection of dead objects hanging together on the canvas like so many turnips, as shorn of their earlier life world as the pile of shoes left over from Auschwitz or the remainders and tokens of some incomprehensible and tragic fire in a packed dance hall. (Jameson 1991: 8)

I would also, however, like to consider Salcedo's installation as a site, where the embodied experience of the observer is part of the power of the work. The artist has commented on the importance of spatiality in the work:

it was vital to construct the work in spatial terms, to act as a meeting point for those of us who had lived through such ordeals. The experience had to be taken to a collective space, away from the anonymity of private experience. (Salcedo, in Princenthal et al 2000: 16)

The installation at SFMOMA can then ultimately be connected with other sites of display. This process leads me through a series of idiosyncratic memories of other museums, galleries and sites. This is not simply to indulge in personal nostalgia about travel, tourism and artistic spectatorship, but to suggest that any individual's engagement with such a work or site will be mediated through a similar series of embodied memories and traces, as well as an academic journey through the relevant critical literature:

---

<sup>8</sup> Jameson's essay was originally published in *New Left Review* (1984), but was later incorporated into a book of the same title (1991). References hereafter are to the book version.



Deriving from internal codes particular to the individual, spectatorial interpretation and even possible productive mis-interpretation continually imbues Salcedo's sculptures with an inexhaustible fund of new meanings. (Wong 2001: 78)

The shoes displayed in 'Atrabiliarios' lead the spectator to try to imagine the scene of trauma and attempted escape, but there is no direct access to that experience, only its melancholy traces. It is hard to imagine what it would be like to be 'in her shoes.' In trying to move from the melancholy associations of the shoes on display, to imagine the individual woman and her trauma, a photograph from a different time and place comes to my mind. The photograph shows a woman. She has blonde hair and is dressed in a tailored suit, in stockings feet with only one high-heeled shoe. Two burly male guards grip her elbows. The whole scene takes place on an airport tarmac at night, illuminated by the airport floodlights. The woman is Evdokia Petrova, one of two diplomats from the Soviet Embassy in Canberra who defected to Australia in 1954.<sup>9</sup> In a struggle over whether she would return to the Soviet Union or remain in Australia she lost one of her shoes, a Russian Cinderella stranded in Australia.<sup>10</sup>

In this case, too, the shoe has proven to be a powerful signifier of trauma, and has taken its place in the Australian cultural imaginary. Evdokia Petrova's missing shoe provided the motif for a recent museum exhibition on the Petrovs.<sup>11</sup> The shoe as logo, as motif and as

---

<sup>9</sup> On the 'Petrov Affair,' see the exhibition catalogue, the archival website produced by Old Parliament House and the National Archives of Australia, various books, and the oral history interview with Evdokia Petrova held in the National Library of Australia. Old Parliament House (2004) <<http://www.oldparliamenthouse.gov.au/petrovwebquest/>>, accessed 30 September 2005; Petrova (1996); Petrov and Petrov (1956); Manne (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Petrova eventually decided to defect when the aeroplane stopped to refuel in Darwin. Mascot Airport is now known as Kingsford Smith International Airport. Photograph by William M. Carty, reproduced in Old Parliament House (2004: 3). See also Lim (2005). The Old Parliament House Museum in Canberra now sells a bookmark which bears the photograph of Evdokia Petrova at Mascot. The photograph is the one which shows her anguished expression in the melée at the airport. It is full-length, showing her one shod foot and one stockinged foot. The figures of the Soviet security guards have been cropped from either side. Photographs of the scene at Mascot are regularly reproduced, and the scene is used to open the television miniseries, *The Petrov Affair* (directed by Michael Carson, PBL Productions, 1986). Since I first presented the paper on which this article is based, there has been a novel for young people, *The Red Shoe*, which makes constant references to Evdokia Petrova's missing shoe, and a play with the title of *Mrs Petrov's Shoe*. Both are set in the 1950s, and use the story of the Petrovs to invoke the paranoia of the era. I would argue, however, that the focus on the shoe in both works suggests that there is a deep psychological resonance in the figure of the missing shoe. See Dubosarsky (2006) and Janaczewska (2006).

<sup>11</sup> The original shoe has been lost, but its image was reproduced on the exhibition website and catalogue, and on T-shirts commemorating the exhibition. In the catalogue, a logo appears at the beginning of each paragraph: the black silhouette of a high-heeled shoe on a white page. On the cover of the catalogue, the shoe appears in shades of grey against a black, white and red background. Brooches in the shape of the shoe are still being sold in the museum shop as souvenirs. See the discussion of the connotations of this object in Mackie (2005: 22-26).

souvenir mediates between the object's particular significance in the life of an individual, and its connotations in the culture at large, as a signifier of femininity.<sup>12</sup> It is tempting to speculate that only a woman's shoe could have the dense range of associations explored in these museum and gallery displays. McCallum's comments on the cultural significance of the high-heeled shoe are suggestive:

Although all objects are imbued with meaning, some may be more public, such as those objects that designate cultural categories of identity (the way a high-heeled shoe embodies femininity). (McCallum 1999: 74)

A shoe with a lost pair is a recurrent aftermath of a traumatic experience, a sign of an attempt to escape. The sight of Evdokia Petrova limping across the tarmac, having lost one shoe, now takes on an archetypal quality, reminding us of the single shoes in Doris Salcedo's work, remnants of other women's futile attempts to escape. One could easily protest that this is a long way from the kinds of violence evoked by Salcedo. Petrova, after all, survived to old age in an Australian suburb. The photograph, however, captures the moment when an individual feels terror at the power of the state. No reassurance of her eventual safety can cancel out the power of that photograph.

Petrova's story brings an individual dimension to the use of the shoe as the trace of a traumatic experience. Anyone who encounters shoes in a museum or other display can not help but be reminded of the glass cases in the museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, which hold piles of the former possessions of those who died there. One might also be reminded of all of the artistic responses to that pile of shoes (Jones 2001: 197-232). My mind goes back to one huge glass case which held so many shoes that the scale was numbing. It was difficult to focus on individual shoes; difficult to gain any sense of the age, class or gender of the individuals who had worn them.<sup>13</sup> My memories of the museum of Auschwitz are now mediated through my experience of looking at Salcedo's work, the spiky black stitches of 'Atrabiliarios' and the barbed wire of the concentration camp becoming sutured in my mind. The distinctive shoes in Salcedo's display uncannily invoke the individual characters of their wearers. Somehow it seems imperative to perform a similar act of imagination when faced with the anonymous shoes in the Auschwitz museum display, to try to move from the

---

<sup>12</sup> Or, as Davidson has commented: 'Shoes retain the imprint of the wearer's foot, and their hollow shape can indicate a vessel for identity, a substitute for the self' (2006: 273).

<sup>13</sup> The meaning of these shoes is described by photographer Alan Jacobs: 'Taken inside a huge glass case in the Auschwitz Museum. This represents one day's collection at the peak of the gassings, about twenty five thousand pairs.' <<http://www.remember.org/jacobs/ShoeHeap.html>>, accessed 14 August 2005.

long-shot of the uncountable pile of shoes to a close-up of individual shoes, each one a relic of the life of an individual, 'shorn of their earlier life world' (Jameson 1991: 8).

Griselda Pollock has discussed the politics of looking in places like Auschwitz, and has described her own refusal to visit that place. In remembering all of the people who could not choose to leave Auschwitz, she considers it inappropriate to visit there with the knowledge that one can leave at will, unlike those memorialised there, referring to 'the utter perversity of arriving at Auschwitz by cab, as if the place belonged in the realm of ordinary travel, of arrival and departure' (2003). Unlike Pollock, Maria Tumarkin is willing to allow that even those who travel as 'tourists' may be transformed by their encounter with sites which evoke a traumatic history, places which she calls 'traumascapes' (Tumarkin 2005: 52).

This prompts us to think through the possible positions from which we might look at the art works of Doris Salcedo or the museum exhibits in a place like Auschwitz. In both cases, a simple process of grieving and mourning is denied to the viewer. Accounting for the deaths alluded to is still unfinished business. The appropriate response is melancholic, but a melancholia which is placed in a social, political and historical context, where we consider our own imbrication in the world which has been produced through these past events. As Charles Merewether has explained:

The relations between violence and the law of the State drives collective memory from the public into the private sphere of the individual or the family, And yet, for this reason, the relation to the dead, our dead, becomes a critical factor in popular culture because it is the contested site of identity which threatens military and state power. (Merewether 1993: 35)

By viewing Doris Salcedo's work in a public art gallery, or viewing the relics of Auschwitz in a public museum, these traces and memories are necessarily brought out of the realm of private contemplation and into a space of public spectatorship.<sup>14</sup> This may also potentially become a site of public discussion. A site such as Auschwitz does more, however, than simply affect visitors through their experience of gazing at objects and reflecting on their meaning. The scale of the actual site can only be appreciated through the embodied experience of being there. No text, film or photograph can prepare us for the experience of trudging through that vast space, past those rows and rows of barracks, blinking at the

---

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion of shared emotional experiences of spectatorship as an aspect of publicness in Donald and Donald (2000) and Wong (2001: 55-85).

contrast between the dim barracks and the sunlight outside, straining to focus on individual shoes in that glass case.<sup>15</sup>

Doris Salcedo's work 'Atrabiliarios' triggers an imaginative process whereby we try to imagine ourselves 'in the shoes' of the victim of trauma and the mourners left behind. Salcedo has commented on the significance of the 'skinlike membrane,' which 'evokes the body and slightly obscures the objects within' so that 'we see them as if through the remove of memory.'<sup>16</sup> This, too, is an embodied process. We walk round the gallery; we strain to discern the details of the shoes through the semi-transparent membrane; the after-image of the display stays with us in other journeys and encounters; and becomes part of our own memories, reflections and political commitments. Paradoxically, the embodied experience of walking through the museum or art gallery invokes an imaginative process of searching for the traces of those missing bodies. Salcedo's work is akin to the power of fairy tales as described by Marina Warner, 'on the one hand charting perennial drives and terrors, both conscious and unconscious, and on the other mapping actual volatile experience' (Warner 1994: xxi).

There is no such thing as an innocent or blameless viewing position for tourists, travellers, scholars, or spectators in museums. We are all implicated in multiple matrices of power, and need to choose an ethical position from which to approach such sites. For some, the ethical decision may be to refuse to be a spectator. For others, the ethical decision may well be to look, and to engage with the complexities of the viewing position one is placed in, possibly by linking this site with other sites which evoke memories of trauma. The museum now functions as a space for memorialisation, where the evocation of the powerful psychological mechanisms of fetishism, mourning and melancholia leads to reflections on the politics of memory.

---

<sup>15</sup> This experience is akin to what Chakrabarty (2002: 8) has referred to in his discussion of the museum as an institution which 'increasingly opens itself up to the embodied and the lived' Chakrabarty links this discussion with a distinction between 'performative' and 'pedagogical' models of citizenship, adapted from Homi Bhabha (1994: 139-170). The connection between museums and citizenship is certainly useful for theorising the national dimensions of the museum as an institution. Further consideration, however, is necessary to place the museum in the contact of transnational tourism, where there is no simple relationship between the national history invoked in the display and the personal history of a viewer whose citizenship and nationality might be elsewhere.

<sup>16</sup> Doris Salcedo, caption to 'Atrabiliarios,' San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

## Reference List

- Allara, P. 2002, 'Please Touch, Warhol's Collection as Alternative Museum,' in J. W. Smith (ed.) *Possession Obsession: Andy Warhol and Collecting*, Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, 40-48.
- Andersen, H.C. 2002 [1865], 'The Red Shoes,' in *Stories and Tales*, trans. by H. W. Dulcken, Routledge, London, 207-213.
- Bayley, S. 1991, *Taste: The Secret Meaning of Things*, Faber and Faber, London.
- Bettelheim, B. 1976, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 236-277.
- Bhabha, H. 1994, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,' in *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 139-170.
- Carson, M. (dir.) 1986, *The Petrov Affair*, PBL Productions.
- Chakrabarty, D. 2002, 'Museums in Late Democracy,' *Humanities Research*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1-12.
- Cheng, A. A. 2000, *The Melancholy of Race*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Davidson, H. 2006, 'Sex and Sin: The Magic of Red Shoes,' in G. Riello, and P. McNeil (eds) *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 272-289.
- Donald, J. and Donald, S. 2000, 'The Publicness of Cinema,' in C. Gledhill and L. Williams (eds) *Re-Inventing Film Studies*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Dubosarsky, U. 2006, *The Red Shoe*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Eng, D. L. and Kazanjian, D. (eds) 2003. 'Introduction: Mourning Remains,' in D. A. Eng and D. Kazanjian (eds) *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1-25.
- Erwin, E. (ed.) *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy and Culture*, Routledge, New York.
- Fleming, V. (dir.) 1939, *The Wizard of Oz*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
- Freud, S. 1957 [1917] 'Mourning and Melancholia,' in J. Strachey (ed./trans.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, The Hogarth Press, London, vol. 14, 237-258.
- Freud, S. 1961 [1927], 'Fetishism,' in J. Strachey (ed./trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, The Hogarth Press, London, vol. 21, 152-159.
- Gilroy, P. 2005, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Grass, G. 2002, 'On Stasis in Progress: Variations on Albrecht Dürer's Engraving *Melencolia I*,' in *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy: The Legacy of a Graphic Artist*, by G. Bartram with contributions by G. Grass, J. L. Koerner and U. Kuhlemann, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 61-76.
- Jameson, F. 1984, 'Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,' *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August), 59-92.
- Jameson, F. 1991, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- Janaczewska, N. 2006, *Mrs Petrov's Shoe*, performed at fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne, May 2006.
- Jones, E. C. 2001, 'Empty Shoes,' in S. Benstock and S. Ferriss (eds) *Footnotes: On Shoes*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2001, 197-232.
- Ko, D. 2001, *Every Step a Lotus*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Ko, D. 2005. *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Lim, A. 2005, 'Time Capsule: Vladimir Petrov Defects,' *Weekend Australian*, April 2-3, 2005.
- Mackie, E. 2001, 'Red Shoes and Bloody Stumps,' S. Benstock and S. Ferriss (eds) *Footnotes: On Shoes*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2001, 233-251.
- Mackie, V. 2005, 'Evdokia Petrova's Shoe,' *Lilith*, no. 14, 22-26.
- Manne, R. 2004, *The Petrov Affair*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, revised edition.
- McCallum, E. L. 1999, *Object Lessons: How to Do Things with Fetishism*, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Marx, K. 1930 [1867]. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Dent, London, Everyman's Library No 848, trans. by E. & C. Paul, vol. 1.
- Merewether, C. 1993, 'Naming Violence in the Work of Doris Salcedo,' *Third Text*, no. 24, 35-44.
- Old Parliament House, 2004, *The Petrov Affair*, Department of Communications, Information, Technology and the Arts, Canberra.
- Petrov, V. and Petrov E. 1956, *Empire of Fear*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York.
- Petrova, E. A. 1996, Interview conducted by Robert Manne, Oral History Section, National Library of Australia.
- Pollock, G. 2003, 'Holocaust Tourism: Being There, Looking Back and the Ethics of Spatial Memory,' in D. Crouch and N. Lübbren (eds) *Visual Culture and Tourism*, Berg, Oxford, 175-189.
- Powell, M. and Pressburger, E. (dir.), 1948, *The Red Shoes*, Eagle Lion Films.
- Steele, V. 2005 [1998], *Shoes: A Lexicon of Style*, London: Scriptum Editions, miniature edition.

- Steele, V. 2006, 'Shoes and the Erotic Imagination,' in G. Riello and P. McNeil (eds) *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 250-271.
- Turim, M. 2001. 'High Angles on Shoes: Cinema, Gender and Footwear,' in S. Benstock and S. Ferriss (eds) *Footnotes: On Shoes*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2001, 41-57.
- The Brothers Grimm, 1992 [1906] 'Ashputtel,' in *The Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, Everyman's Library Children's Classics, 214-222.
- Warner, M. 1994, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York.
- Warhol, A. 1955, *A La Recherche du Shoe Perdu*, Collection of the Andy Warhol Museum.
- West, J. 'The Shoe in Art, the Shoe as Art,' in S. Benstock and S. Ferriss (eds) *Footnotes: On Shoes*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2001, 41-57.
- Wright, E. 1992, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Wong, E. 2001. 'The Afterlife of Loss: Situating Memory in the Sculptural Art of Doris Salcedo,' *Critical Sense*, Winter, 55-85.
- Zamperini, P. 2006. 'A Dream of Butterflies? Shoes in Chinese Culture,' in G. Riello and P. McNeil (eds) *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 196-205.