



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Memorials of Suffering – The human trace in artefacts by Doris Salcedo

A stylistic and comparative study of figurative elements in the installations

Atrabiliarios, Untitled, La Casa Viuda and Plegaria Muda

A Master's Thesis for the Degree *Master of Arts* (Two Years) in Visual Culture

Christina Streiffert

Spring semester 2012

Grader:

Lund University

Abstract

Division of Art History and Visual Studies

Master of Arts in Visual Culture

The aim of this study has been to enable a depiction of humanness without having recourse to the human body and to make it conceivable to relate to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism. Four artworks from as many installations by the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo have made up a base for the investigation: *Atrabiliarios* (Defiant, Bitterness), *Untitled*, *La Casa Viuda* (The Widow House or The Widowed House) and *Plegaria Muda* (Silent Prayer or Silenced Prayer). These installations have been related to critics dealing with tropes, semiotics and anthropomorphism. Most critics relate their interpretations to literature, sometimes poetry, and the poet Paul Celan has been inserted as a subordinate subject matter. Human suffering turned into reminiscence of the individual victim are conspicuous themes in Salcedo's artistry as well as in Celan's poetry.

A concise overview of the four installations as a whole, and a more detailed presentation of the artefacts have been related to tropes of allegory, metaphor and metonymy, as well as to semiotics, and more briefly to phenomenology. The human trace, or non-trace, have further been related to the absent victim and to those left behind in grief, including some Celan stanzas in their context. The trace indicating embodiment and the void in the installations and artworks have then as far as possible been related to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism. The notion of presence in absence turns obvious in the artworks as a whole, as well as in Celan's poetry. This presence in absence - or absence in presence - have finally most concisely been related to metaphysics and surrealist points of view in order to find a way to relate the void to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism; a short discussion ending up in more of a starting point than of a conclusion.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	
<i>1.1 Objective and disposition</i>	3
<i>1.2 Empirical material</i>	5
<i>1.3 Method</i>	6
<i>1.4 Theoretical base</i>	7
<i>1.5 Tropes and anthropomorphism; previous research</i>	10
2. Composition, signs and tropes	
<i>2 Composition of Atrabiliarios, Untitled, La Casa Viuda and Plegaria Muda</i>	12
<i>3 Signs and tropes in the artefacts</i>	14
<i>3.1 Atrabiliarios; tropes of absence</i>	14
<i>3.2 The Untitled and La CasaViuda installations; cause and outcome</i>	17
<i>3.3 Plegaria Muda; plants methaphoring life</i>	19
3. Presence in absence	
<i>4 The absent victim / The human trace in Doris Salcedo's artistry and Paul Celan's poetry</i>	20
<i>5 Embodiment and the void in the installations and poems</i>	25
<i>5.1 Atrabiliarios; the void and the wound</i>	26
<i>5.2 The Untitled and La Casa Viuda installations; sites of the uncanny</i>	27
<i>5.3 Plegaria Muda; the absent presence in the installation and poems</i>	31
4. Conclusion	35
Illustrations	38
Bibliography	43

1. Introduction

The Colombian artist Doris Salcedo engages with the political violence in her native country. Salcedo's artistic creation is deeply inspired by long research visits to the interior of Colombia, where she spends time talking to families, whose loved ones have "disappeared", victims of thousands that have been subjected to regional violence, committed by soldiers and guerrillas, drug lords and local death squads; deadly violence that has been continued unchecked for decades. Her work is about those victims of atrocities, and to those individuals who have to cope with lives that have been disfigured by tragedy.

With the testimonies of these individual tragedies, Salcedo returns to her studio with the intention to rub the past into the present in artistic creations, as a figurative testimony of what happened. She usually begins a series not knowing what forms or materials she will put to use, and the outcome of the artistic activity takes a long time to form, often several years.¹ The aim of restoring the tragedy - or rather what remains after it - is focused on, throughout this working process.

Violence is addressed in its consequences; the sign of atrocities, as well as the theme of absence and mourning turn obvious in the installations. And this kind of theme is of course omnipresent, violence is universal. To quote Salcedo: "The Colombian situation is a capsule of condensed experience that is valuable to the rest of the world. Our horror is, in a way, a paradigmatic one".²

After having made acquaintance with the Salcedo artwork, I do not only find them highly impressive but also well suitable to insert within the aesthetics of anthropomorphism, a concept of great interest. The sign of human trace clearly stands out in most of the individually elaborated artefacts, and lends itself to a metaphoric/metonymic and allegoric reading; tropes as well articulated within poetry, that here will be represented by some stanzas of the Romanian poet Paul Celan.

1.1 *Objective and disposition*

Can art depict humanness without having recourse to the shape of the human body? What does dissolution or formation of the human shape mean in art? Or, what could it mean? Could the very absence of human form be read as an anthropomorphic sign? These questions will be

¹ Cameron, Dan, "Inconsolable", in: *Doris Salcedo*. Edited by: Tim Yohn. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art 1998, p.11.

² Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 35.

discussed, mainly in relation to Salcedo's sculpturally elaborated artwork. Rather than to serve as merely critical, her artefacts intervene in a silent, yet apparent way. The work of this artist seems to perform some kind of near-invisible presence of human form in a more or less veiled way. Far from representing violence, mute traces of it are manifest, and, as such, these pieces work as powerful metaphors/metonymies and allegories, and perhaps as embodiments of the aesthetics of anthropomorphism.

To enable a transfer of these silent traces embedded in the artworks to an anthropomorphic reading will be a main objective for this study. These traces are not to be linked to an animate object or an animal acting as a human being - the most obvious "signs" related to anthropomorphism. It will rather take an anthropomorphic imagination to be able to connect the signs in Salcedo's artworks to this kind of aesthetics; to attribute human embodiment to something non-human, here appearing as a modest trace. Just as Samuel R. Levin sums up his reasoning: "The construction of personification involves an opportunity to extend our conceptual range".³ To regard, say, a rock as animate, is to formulate a possibility that lies outside our ordinary experience.

From a more overall point of view, this study will include four art installations by Salcedo, each of them comprising several artefacts: half-transparent niches containing shoes, and sculpturally composed pieces of furniturelike items, in which their physical structure turns out in either heavily loaded compositions or more neatly elaborated objects; all of them heavily loaded as well with ambiguous meanings.

More specifically, the investigation will include three artefacts out of a number of installation objects, in which the human trace tends to stand out in different ways: one installation displays shoes bearing imprints of the foot, another, more sculpturally elaborated work exhibits a cupboard with pieces of clothes encrusted, "buried", in concrete, the third object is a furniturelike artwork with the shape of the human body as engraved in it, and a piece of clothing and bones added to it. A fourth installation, showing a mass of joined table tops, will be included in the study as well. Could even the very absence of a trace be able to relate to an anthropomorphic sign; no imprints of human body parts, no fragments of human belongings, no evidence of the human shape, but still a memorial of humanness. The bibliography will include titles that elaborate tropes of metaphor and allegory, where an anthropomorphic presence often tends to be evident. Rather than referring to plastic art, some critics mostly relate their interpretations to literature, often poetry, and, as a subordinate

³ Levin, Samuel R., "Allegorical Language", in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*. Edited by: Morton W. Bloomfield. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981, p. 31.

subject matter, I will insert Celan in this investigation. Just as Salcedo refers her art to human suffering, her favoured poet seems to do the same. Congeniality between these two artists of disparate art disciplines tends to be obvious. The Salcedo artworks are positioned in the realm of violence exhibiting what remains present after violence, genocide even. Belongings turned into reminiscence of the individual mute victim echoes themes in Celan's poetry.

The empirical material, concisely presented, includes the four artworks to be studied more in detail and related to their respective illustration. Since traces of violence and absence are of varied kinds in the installations at hand, the methodological approach will be twofold: a stylistic study in order to discern the inherent figurative tropes, as well as comparative one. The theoretical framework comprises titles that focus on the concept of tropes, as does the following chapter of previous research, that also more specifically relates metaphor/metonymy and allegory to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism.

An overview of the installations as a whole and, from a material point of view, a more detailed presentation of the artefacts at hand open chapter 1, followed by an analysis of the artworks, related to tropes of allegory, metaphor and metonymy. In chapter 2, significance attributed to the absent victim/the human trace will be investigated, including some Celan stanzas in their context. An interpretation of embodiment and the void in the installations and poems will conclude this chapter.

1.2 Empirical material

Accordingly, four individual artworks out of just as many installations will make up a base for this investigation. Two of them are housed at the Stockholm Modern Museum: *Atrabiliarios* (Defiant, Bitterness – according to Salcedo it is difficult to find an appropriate translation) from 1996, exhibiting shoes of missing persons in niches recessed in the gallery wall (fig. 1) and *Untitled* (1997), a wooden wardrobe inserted in a bedstead and filled with concrete, where fragment of fabric sticks out (fig. 2). To be included as well is an installation from the *La Casa Viuda* (The Widow House or The widowed House) series, dating from 1992-95, where the shape of the human body could be read in pieces of furniture (fig. 3a,b), and Salcedo's recently elaborated installation of sculptural units, *Plegaria Muda* (Silent Prayer or Silenced Prayer), table tops joined by soil and displaying blades of grass, exhibited last summer in the Malmö Museum of Modern Art; another memorial of the traumatic loss of human life but without more explicitly depicting traces of it (fig. 4). This last piece opens up

the questions whether even the very absence of a trace can be related to an anthropomorphic reading.

As the illustrations show, the trace of the absent victim in the four artworks turns out in various ways, a fact that inspires to an anthropomorphic reading from different points of view. Looking into the *Atrabiliarios* niches, in their almost self-effacing shape, the imprint of the foot still stands out of its frames, leaving a void, an emptiness of the missing content, that all the same could relate to humanness. The shoes, entombed in the niches, also make a theme of burial come forth. In the *Untitled* sculpturally elaborated armoire, remnants of human clothing points at a person once wearing the clothes. These pieces, encrusted in concrete as they are, turn out to be suffocated and buried. The *La Casa Viuda* creation, with part of a woman bodice and bones as forced into the doorlike sculpture, easily relate to violation of a missing person, or someone grieved by the widow left behind. The *Plegaria Muda* tables are presented in its installation as a whole, referring to the graveyard of anonymous victims. Tiny blades of grass seem to indicate the human trace. Could some kind of humanness at all be read in this installation?

The term “installation” is not specifically used in relation to the *Plegaria Muda* series, but for all of the artworks, whether grouped within the exhibition space, or singled out as individual art pieces; installation as a concept for an art form.

Documentation of the installations as a whole and interviews with Salcedo related to them are well elaborated by critics, as well as Celan’s oeuvre in its context.

1.3 Method

In the installations at hand composition and figures will be related to a material, plastic and iconic meaning, in accordance with the conception of Jan-Gunnar Sjölin.⁴ The title is an important verbal element as well, according to Sjölin,⁵ a fact that is going to be taken into consideration. Three of the installations have been studied at their location, as shown above: *Atrabiliarios*, *Untitled*, and *Plegaria Muda*. The fourth installation, *La Casa Viuda*, will be investigated through a close reading of the documentation of Salcedo’s artworks.

Tropes embedded in the iconic signs will then be related to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism. The main reason for my choosing these four artworks was the fact that the trace of absence differ from one artwork to another. The methodological approach will therefore be twofold: a stylistic study related to each object as well as a comparative one.

⁴ Sjölin, Jan-Gunnar, editor. *Att tolka bilder*. Lund: (Print on demand) 2008, pp. 80-91.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Does the very want of an obvious trace make it harder to relate to anthropomorphic features in the metaphoric/ metonymic and allegoric reading, or is it at all possible?

Analyses mostly relate to the sociopolitical situation in Colombia in the presentations dealing with Salcedo and her art. Imprints of the absent victim differ from one installation to another, obvious in the illustrations, and sometimes related to the critics' reasoning. Traces as a whole seem to be well inserted within the field of semiotics, but *why* they differ from one piece of art to another is less considered, or at all taken notice of. Is there an answer embedded in every single work that will show itself through a metaphoric/metonymic and allegoric reading, and perhaps enabled to be turned into the imagery of anthropomorphism?

As for the agency of anthropomorphism, it will take an anthropomorphic imagination to be able to relate the signs in Salcedo's artworks to this field of aesthetics. This kind of imagination seems enabled to connect to semiotic criticism, and there might be a good reason to include some phenomenological ideas in this study of the anthropomorphic sign as well. The way signs of embodiment turn out – or do not show at all - in the sculptures at hand seems apt to relate to the field of semiotics though, and it will perhaps take a challenge to form an anthropomorphic reading in the non-existing trace, since, from my point of view, no critic deals with such a phenomenon.

1.4 Theoretical base

As stated by Jonathan Culler, in the preface of *Framing the Sign*, context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretative strategies and the meaning of context is determined by events. Criticism deals with signs, forms with socially-constituted meanings, and the expression *framing the sign* has several advantages over context: it reminds us that framing is something we do.⁶ The aim of the study at hand is to frame the sign of violence and death, a production determined by events, and to turn it into a metaphoric and allegoric reading, in order to relate it to some kind of embodiment. Thus, referring to Culler, both context and framing the sign is considered.

In *The Pursuit of Signs* Culler deals with the “turns of metaphor”, hereby stating that metaphor today is the figure of figures. Metaphor is not just the proper name for a trope based on resemblance but as much a figure for figurality in general.⁷ The prominence Culler relates to this trope will be kept in mind.

⁶ Culler, Jonathan. *Framing the Sign*. Oxford and Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press 1988, p. xiv.

⁷ Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1983, p. 189.

Stephen Ullman distinguishes two types of imagery: the metaphorical, which is based on relationship of similarity, and the metonymical, which is based on an external relationship of contiguity; this interpretation in line with most other critics, as far as I have noticed.

Metonymies, Ullman argues, generally lack the originality and expressive power of metaphor, because instead of forging new links or uncovering new resemblances they are motivated by a relationship of spatial juxtaposition. Paul de Man, who stresses contiguity rather than similarity, considers metaphor as an effect of metonymy. It could even be argued, as does Culler, that de Man's strategy would be to reverse the privilege of metaphor by assimilating metaphors metonymically to metonymy.⁸

Although there are slightly different starting points in these critics dealing with the tropes of metaphor and metonymy, they seem to end up to similar conclusions. Considering this fact, when dealing with these tropes in the Salcedo artworks I could perhaps take a certain liberty in my interpreting the distinctions between these two tropes. The anthropomorphic imagery would then be able to relate to a metonymic as well as metaphoric reading: the 'cause' as metonymic and the 'outcome' as metaphoric.

W.J.T. Mitchell in *Iconology; Image, Text, Ideology* relates to the fields of semiotics and linguistics in order to create a more scientific understanding of the boundaries between painting and literature, and more specifically poetry. In support of his reasoning Mitchell relates to other theorists, notably Nelson Goodman, who suggests that language will provide a model for all symbolic systems, including the pictorial, that constitutes the arts, and Roland Barthes claims that this is the thrust of semiotics as a discipline and semiology is required to find language. Significance cannot exist independently of language.⁹

This most comprehensive passage is inserted to enable a formulation of semiotics transferred from literary to pictorial art. Dealing with tropes, like metaphor and allegory, most critics relate their discussions to the realm of literature, and when it comes to figurative significance within sculptural art, this has to be transferred from one art discipline to another.

According to Mitchell, the *icon* has proved to be the most difficult sign-type to assimilate into semiotics, as it is the complete opposite of the verbal sign, and Mitchell includes metaphors in the realm of icons. Umberto Eco, on the other hand, clearly brings it out that iconism is not a uniquely semiotic phenomenon,¹⁰ thus rendering the semiotic sign obvious within the realm of iconicity.

⁸ Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1983, p.p. 198-99.

⁹ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p.p. 54-56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.p. 56- 57.

Eco's interpretation seems far more apt to relate to the Salcedo artwork. In her installations, the icon forming a sign that depicts violence committed to someone is omnipresent. And, as for metaphors, I ask myself in what way these tropes resist to semiotics, or how a semiotic sign cannot be applied to metaphor.

For C.S. Peirce, the icon is any sign that may represent its object mainly by its similarity, and the world of signs is fully described by the trio of icon, symbol, and index-signs, that is, by resemblance or analogy, by convention (words), and by "causal" or "existential" connection, that is, a trace that signals its cause.¹¹ The idea has a double connection with the object it represents: it is a sign by resemblance, like a picture painted on the mind, and it is as well a sign by causation, an effect of the object that imprints it on the mind. These iconic and indexical signs then serve as the foundation for all further discourse;¹² and well applicable to the Salcedo artwork, as it seems.

Angus Fletcher in *Allegory; The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, first published in 1964, seems to have inspired other renowned critics by his foundation of allegorical tropes as personified abstractions. Allegory is usually said to be "abstract" because it uses "personified abstractions"¹³, and personified abstractions seem to be the most obvious allegorical agents. They may not actually create a personality before our eyes, rather do they create a semblance of personality.¹⁴ Yes, it goes without saying that personified agents are of course intended to represent ideas, not real people.

Fletcher states as well that the typical personified agent can "act" only in combination with other similar agents, a fact that limits each work to a given problem. To enable an anthropomorphic reading related to any kind of action in Salcedo's artworks seems absurd, though, at least at first sight.

Ritual is the characteristic allegorical way of showing the human response to ambivalence. By the "ritual" Fletcher hints at the compulsive ritual rather than repetition of figures.¹⁵ As for the Salcedo installations, I would rather say that repetition of allegoric reading tends to stand out, or is there a kind of compulsiveness as imprinted in her art?

Although my intention is not to more explicitly include the notion of surrealism in this study, Fletcher's overall review of this concept seems to be well related to Sacedo's sculptural artworks: unexpected, even chocking collocations of heterogeneous objects, and distortions of

¹¹ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p. 56.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹³ Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*.

Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press 1964, p. 29, note 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.p. 26-27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

perspective. Objects, quite “real” in themselves become “nonreal”, that is surreal, by their mutual interrelation when combined within single frames,¹⁶ or sculptures; surreality easily stands out in the Salcedo artworks, loading them with ambiguous meaning.

Accordingly, the theory of semiotics related to tropes could be applicable to this investigation. Although it sometimes differs, Culler’s and Mitchell’s thinking is well connected to some renowned predecessors, a fact that contributes to a solid formation of theory. Fletcher, as it seems, has most probably inspired other theorists and critics of today within the field of allegory.

1.5 Tropes and anthropomorphism; previous research

According to my research, most critics and theoreticians relate their work to the field of literature, and those figuring in *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, edited by Morton W. Bloomfield, are no exceptions. But, one or two of them could all the same be useful within the sphere of pictorial and sculptural art: Samuel R. Levin in his article “Allegorical Language” and Holly Wallace Boucher in “Metonymy in Typology and Allegory”.

Levin states that the staple of allegory is personification, and by definition personification is a metaphoric, hence mixed, mode. Allegory, based on personification, is a mixed mode as well. Rocks and trees, perhaps also beauty and mercy, are among those “things” that have a life into which we may try to see. An insight into that life can only be achieved, if we manage to free ourselves from the semantic and conceptual constraints that language imposes on us.¹⁷ A notion of anthropomorphic imagination to keep in mind: Levin’s concept of objects or abstract nouns turning personified, seems to be well applicable to the Salcedo artworks.

Wallace Boucher makes a close reading of Roman Jakobson, who has studied the phenomenon of figural expression from a linguistic perspective. In his article on metonymy and metaphor, Jakobson describes the two tropes as opposite mental processes. Metonymy is based on contiguity between words, metaphor on similarity between words.¹⁸ Realism, as opposed to symbolism, is particularly metonymic in its attempt to reproduce the observed continuities and relations of human experience. Jakobson asserts that while metonymy is the basis of prose, metaphor underlies poetry.¹⁹ Could a conveyance from one art discipline to

¹⁶ Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London 1964, p. 379.

¹⁷ Levin, Samuel R., “Allegorical Language”, in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*.

Edited by: Morton W. Bloomfield. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981, p.p. 30-31.

¹⁸ Boucher, Holly Wallace, “Metonymy in Typology and Allegory”, in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*.

Edited by: Morton W. Bloomfield. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981, p. 130.

¹⁹ Boucher, Holly Wallace, “Metonymy in Typology and Allegory”, in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*.

another be at place here: in its context, Salcedo's artistry relates to the concept of metonymy - to manifest the human experience of violence - while the artworks as such are impregnated with metaphoric signs?

Metaphors are a common component in allegorical representations, omnipresent even, according to the French linguist Patrick Bacry: "There is in fact always a metaphor, more or less explicitly pronounced, to be found at the bottom of personification and allegory. That is why these two figures could be considered as a special case of metaphor".²⁰ (Translation by the author).

Marco Frascari. *Monsters of Architecture*. Although dealing with embodiment within the realm of architecture, this title could in some way relate to creative activity within other fields of artistic elaboration. The role of radical anthropomorphism is to introduce another fertile procedure for the making of architecture, and the trope principally used in anthropomorphism is metonymy, a unity of contrasting elements that forms a conventional sequence through which sense is displaced or deferred.²¹ This statement of course refers to the outcome of a dynamic process within architecture, but could well relate to artistic creativity and its effect within pictorial and sculptural art, and here more specifically to the Salcedo installations.

In *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XLII Nancy Campi de Castro, in her essay "Allegory you are woman" deals with allegory inserted in contemporary artworks. Nowadays, this rhetorical figure shows itself through multiple faces. One of the most significant aspects of allegory in modern times is that it deals with the relationship between a work of art and how it is interpreted by the spectator.²² Yes, perception in allegoric reading of what is depicted makes the outcome of various meanings obvious, and the trope of allegory tends to relate well to a phenomenological figure; a fact that could be taken into consideration within this study. This critic indeed inspires to a phenomenological reading of the Salcedo artworks.

Steven Knapp, in his introduction to *Personification and the Sublime*, makes a more concise reasoning of allegory: what distinguishes a personification, at least in theory, from other fictional agents is the total saturation of its "personality" by the thematic idea it represents, and personification derives its appearance and behavior from iconographic

Edited by: Morton W. Bloomfield. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981, p. 131.

²⁰ Bacry, Patrick. *Les Figures de Style*. Paris: Édition Belin 1998, p. 66

"On trouve de fait toujours une métaphore plus ou moins explicite à la base de la personnification et de l'allégorie. C'est pourquoi l'on peut considérer ces deux figures comme des cas particuliers de la métaphore."

²¹ Frascari, Marco. *Monsters of Architecture*. Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1991, p. 7.

²² Campi de Castro, Nancy, "Allegory, You are Woman", in: *Analecta Husserliana, Allegory Old and New*. Vol. XLII. Edited by: Marlies Krongerger & Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Boston, Mass.: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1994, p. 152.

emblems of its allegorical content.²³ Allegorized iconographic emblems are in fact overwhelming in the Salcedo installations to be studied here.

Although it shows just once or twice within what has been discussed above, most theorists and critics relate their interpretation of metaphor to resemblance and similarity. There is perhaps a semantic problem at hand in my translation of the nouns, but, with few exceptions, I find it hard to relate metaphor to the notion of resemblance and similarity. It would take a challenge to call these critics' point of view in question, but I think of doing it anyway, perhaps with some support of a couple of French critics.

2. Composition, signs and tropes

2 *Composition of Atrabiliarios, Untitled, La Casa Viuda and Plegaria Muda*

The Salcedo artworks, created from tattered domestic furniture and found objects, in their combinations clearly embed memory and pain of suffering, and they turn out as monuments of humans that have been silenced, but they refer as well to those left behind in grief. The sculptures and installations are elaborated in series, sometimes numerous and each including several art pieces. Thematically, an act of violence and memory is manifest in all of the installations, and these themes are reinforced by the spatial location of each object. Here, space serves as a holding environment for memory. Series of disparate, yet similar pieces of art need space in order to make them stand out as individual completions of a form, as well as to enable an articulation of a joint theme; to form space of violence, memory and individuality within the vast museum space. The outcome of Salcedo's artistic activity takes a long time to form. Slowness matters, in the act of creation as well as in acquaintance with the completed artefact. To quote the artist: "My sculptures try to bring people near to them and slow time down".²⁴ Yes, the way these installations are worked out makes the viewer really spend time to contemplate them.

Imprints of the absent human being are of varied kinds in all of the artefacts: iconographic signs of more physical, tangibly elaborated impressions, or traces where it takes some time to interpret plastic meaning, or, as in the vast installation of *Plegaria Muda*, where any sign related to embodiment turns out to be conspicuous by its very absence. Nevertheless, imprints of a human past tend to be more or less evident in the artworks at hand.

²³ Knapp, Steven. *Personification and the Sublime*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1985, p. 3.

²⁴ Doris Salcedo, "Memoirs from beyond the Grave", in: *Tate, The Art Magazine*, Issue 21, 2000, p. 84.

In *Atrabiliarios* the type of framework differs from one series to another and the niches are of different size, but the “topic” embedded in the artistic creation is the same: shoes of missing persons on display in half-concealed niches recessed in the gallery wall, cavities forming a negative space and covered by a half-transparent visceral skin, stitched flush to the wall. Shoes that have belonged to victims, men and women. The first series were created in 1991, and the installation to be studied took place at the Stockholm Modern Museum in 1996. Here, drywall forms the framework measuring 96,5 x 186 x 15 cm.

The *Untitled* series (1989-97) are worked out of wooden items: modified chairs and tables or cabinets, where a zipper or a button could be wedged in. Their surfaces, already damaged by the wear and tear of their ordinary lives, are further scraped and cut or partly varnished by dustlike colour. The surfaces are often strikingly detailed and meticulously finished. The cupboards are mostly filled with concrete, thereby depriving them of their original function. Instead, steel and fabric, or pieces of clothing are encrusted, like in the sculpture at hand, connected to a bedstead (198 x 122 x 188 cm), dated 1997 and housed in the Stockholm Modern Museum. The *La Casa Viuda* installations (1992-95) are numbered I -VI. Here, the shape of the human body could be read in these composite structures, consisting of door panels intersected by fragments of domestic furniture and shreds of decoration. These creations are often bearing the trace of corporeal inhabitation, etched in their surfaces and embedded within the frames of these more or less furniturelike items, as in the wooden sculpture from the IV-series of 1994 (257,5 x 46,5 x 33 cm), where a missing pane of glass is replaced by a piece of tattered curtain, and ends of wooden bed rails are attached as arms on either side of the “door”. Bones are forming a hanger for part of a woman’s delicate clothing.

The *Plegaria Muda* series are the most recently elaborated installations by Salcedo, lately exhibited in the Lisbon Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian museum, and, in a more moderate edition, at the Malmö Modern Museum last summer. Wooden table tops, one standing on the ground and the other placed on top of it, legs upwards, creating a vertically symmetrical structure. They are of slightly different size, shape and colour, joined by soil and displaying blades of growing grass, straining up through tiny holes of wooden materials. These units are closely related to each other in a monumental installation, filling up a vast exhibition area.

The sculptural compositions are worked out by numerous material components, mostly familiar to us in everyday life. The imprint of iconicity stands out clearly in the sculpturally elaborated installations, but, in their forming some kind of a disintegrated whole, turning harmony into disfiguration. The shoes are “buried” in half transparent niches, and the armoire, as well as the disfigured chair, are converted to some kind of illusory furniture objects,

thereby bringing out plastic significance in the installation. Here, I relate to Sjölin's conception.²⁵ Form and shape is still there, but the inherent contours of the once well functioning pieces of foot clothing or furniture have collapsed. A surrealistic sign could easily be read in this kind of unexpected combination or merging of disparate elements, but the notion of causality and analogy will rather be taken into consideration here. From a more overall point of view, disparity and disfiguration in these art objects could perhaps serve as an allegory for the impossibility to grasp the meaning of the uncanny whole.

3 *Signs and tropes in the artefacts*

In this chapter, signs as icons and indices will be discussed in relation to the four individually presented artworks. The meaning and discrepancy of tropes involved will as well be dealt with and related to the artefacts. Allegory often refers to a broader context, and metaphor, as well as metonymy, are natural constituents of this trope. As above mentioned, theorists and critics have certain difficulties in keeping metaphor and metonymy distinct from each other, a fact that turns obvious related to these installations as well. Metonymies are based on an external relationship of contiguity, a fact that hopefully will turn out in this chapter. Critics in general relate metaphors to similarity and resemblance. I would say that the notion of heterogeneity in relation to what is depicted is far more appropriate; an aspect I hope will be obvious in relation to the artworks below, and that most briefly will be summed up in the end of this chapter.

3.1 *Atrabiliarios; tropes of absence*

Looking at *Atrabiliarios* from a distance, the installation, in its self-effacing nature, appears as a kind of formal abstraction. From a more close up position readability gets obvious: first, the viewer is informed that the half-transparent cover of the niches is made of cow bladder and sewn into the gallery wall by surgical thread, then, when looking into the cavities, it becomes apparent that the half-covered shoes are *worn* shoes.

A visceral part and a surgical item artistically elaborated easily evoke a site of the uncanny, as I see it, and make the human trace imprinted in the shoes come forth as a powerful metaphor for a missing person. Furthermore, it is easy to look at these shoes as "buried" in the niche, a fact that reinforces metaphor for someone who no longer is. My interpretation is not in line with that of Bal, who considers metaphoricity negative in this

²⁵ Sjölin, Jan-Gunnar, editor. *Att tolka bilder*. Lund: (Print on demand) 2008, p.p. 82-83.

installation. Negative, because the shoes are neither commodities, nor are they easy to grasp visually, thereby depriving the viewer of his or her ordinary interpretive stock of metaphors.²⁶ This statement seems somewhat enigmatic, but perhaps makes sense, considering what Merewether sums up: monuments nowadays are entering the space of what could be called their negative condition - a kind of sitelessness or homelessness, an absolute loss of place. “It [the object] no longer seeks representation of an event or place, but rather the loss or absence of an absolute referent”.²⁷ And, as far as I can see, since the very act of violence is not able to depict, the act of metaphoring or allegorization is necessary in order to let it be meaningfully performed.

Easier to grasp is the Bal statement of a shock bound up with the impossibility of separating what she calls the negative metaphor from literality in scrutinizing the work of *Atrabiliarios*. “Behind the sheet of animal skin, that in itself draws abstract forms on the skin, a very concrete, figurative shape takes form”.²⁸ Literality could of course be read in the articles on display: a shoe or a pair of rather elegant shoes with imprints of use. But metaphoricity insists when context is considered. Relating to Culler, context is not given but produced; what forms part of context is determined by interpretation of signs that brings meaning to what is depicted. To frame the sign is something we do, and this activity has advantages over the notion of context²⁹ I would say that we frame the sign *within* its context. According to Paul Mattick, Jr., the autonomous artwork presents itself as definitive of its context. “The focus on context as determinant of meaning leads back therefore to close scrutiny of the work, seeking in its (“internal”) features the residues of intended action in the wider (“external”) world”.³⁰ The *Atrabiliarios* niches seem to be in close relation to this kind of reasoning.

In the *Atrabiliarios* installation we are viewing covered cavities, framed by stitches of surgical thread. These stitches most obviously denote violence, in a literal as well as metaphoric way. The cavity is turned into a niche, displaying worn shoes. The sign of metaphor could here be dealt with at least twice: the shoes worn by someone that no longer is, the foot imprint of this absent person, and the niche related to those used for the ashes of the

²⁶ Bal, Mieke. *of what one cannot speak*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2010, p. 51.

²⁷ Merewether, Charles. “To Bear Witness”, in: *Doris Salcedo*. Edited by: Tim Yohn. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art 1998, p.p. 16-17.

²⁸ Bal, Mieke. *of what one cannot speak*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2010, p. 52.

²⁹ Culler, Jonathan. *Framing the Sign*. Oxford and Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press 1988, p. xiv.

³⁰ Mattick, Paul, Jr., “Context”, in: *Critical Terms for Art History*. Edited by: Robert S. Nelson & Richard Shiff. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1992, p. 76.

cremated. Thus, the event of death is inscribed in the installation as a whole and presents itself in more than one way.

Culler gives prominence to the metaphor as being a figure for figurality in general,³¹ rendering an importance to this trope not always in line with other critics. This point of view enables the niche, in relation to those keeping the urns, to be read as a metaphor, instead of inserting it in the realm of metonymy, tropes based on external relationship of contiguity and juxtaposition, as states Ullman,³² to name one. While more or less insisting on a distinction between metaphor and metonymy, Ullman all the same states that interesting cases of metonymy can be assimilated to metaphor, even to a point that a discussion of imagery can be a discussion of metaphor alone. The sign of metonymy is of course applicable to the *Atrabiliarios* niche as well, since the shoes tend to turn out as relics in a part-to-whole relationship to a missing body.

In fact, it seems hard to distinguish the rhetoric of tropes of metaphor from that of metonymy in this artwork. A fact that turns even more obvious considering de Man's point of view: metonymies are assimilated to metaphors and closely associated to them. In his reasoning, the metaphorical perception of essence turns out to depend on metonymy, an accidental connection to which metaphor has been contrasted.³³ The essence of a striking metaphor would then depend on metonymic connections, and the intertwining of the two tropes in the figurative outcome of *Atrabiliarios* becomes evident.

The rows of niches, with the shoes "buried" in them could as well be read as an allegory for the columbaria keeping the ashes of the cremated, I would say. Here, the metaphoric reading tends to orient meaning to an allegoric interpretation as well, and, referring to Bacry, there is always a metaphor to be found at the bottom of an allegory.³⁴ To state that shoes are buried is to make a powerful metaphor come forth.

For Peirce, icons are signs that have some features in common with the thing or concept it relates to, that is, the icon is any sign that represents its object mainly by resemblance or analogy, like a footprint, leaving the imprint of the shoe. The sign may also work as an index, a trace that signals its cause.³⁵ Unlike icons, indices have no resemblance to their objects, which nevertheless directly caused them. In *Atrabiliarios*, indices of the shoes are closely related to the outcome of their use. Thus, the shoes, in themselves iconic, are here transformed

³¹ Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1983, p. 189.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.p. 194-95.

³⁴ Bacry, Patrick. *Les Figures de Style*. Paris: Édition Belin 1998, p. 66.

³⁵ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p. 56.

to an index, pointing at a person once wearing them, and, reverting to Culler, inserted in its context - the niche - we are able to frame the sign of a person that no longer is.

3.2 *The Untitled and La CasaViuda installations; cause and outcome*

The trace indicating its cause turns out to be as evident in the *Untitled* and *La Casa Viuda* series. Although both of these series consist of pieces of used furniture, the apparent differences between the two installations do not tend to affect the way they insert references to representation. These installations consist of utterly concrete, recognizable forms, such as household furniture, thereby relating them to the Peirce icon as a sign of resemblance, like a picture painted on the mind.³⁶ Iconicity related to semiotics, in contrast to Mitchell's point of view, but in line with that of Eco.³⁷

According to Bal, these works are what they look like; they are actual pieces of furniture and do not represent them.³⁸ In accordance with Goodman,³⁹ I would say that these forms represent, or denote, pieces of furniture, since they are not what they look like. They are rather disfigured creations turned into dysfunctional items, where incongruous parts of furniture pieces still are recognizable. These pieces could well relate to Culler's conception of metaphor: "a description of certain interpretive operations, performed by readers when confronted by a textual incongruity;"⁴⁰ the textual incongruity here transferred to its visual equivalence.

These sculptures could as well relate to what Maurice Merleau-Ponty states: The icons have lost their efficiency. However lively an etching may "represent" forests, towns, storms to us, the impression obtained does not resemble them. A figure flattened down onto a plane surface hardly retains the forms of things, rather is it deformed. And this figure *must* be deformed [---] *in order to* represent the object.⁴¹ (Translation by the author). This Merleau-Ponty formulation could well be applied to the disfigured furniture, although these pieces are not depicted on a plane surface.

Furthermore, it takes an allegoric reading, as I see it, to regard the site of the uncanny, that tends to reside in forms that have "given up" their original function, and, speaking with

³⁶ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p. 60.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.p. 56-57.

³⁸ Bal, Mieke. *of what one cannot speak*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2010, p. 87.

³⁹ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 2002, p. 232.

⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *L'Œil et l'Esprit*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard 1964, p. 39.

Il n'y a plus de puissance des icons. Si vivement qu'elle " nous représente " les forêts, les villes, les tempêtes, la taille-douce ne leur ressemble pas. A peine retient-elle des choses leur figure, une figure aplatie sur un seul plan, déformée, et qui *doit* être déformée [---] *pour* représenter l'objet.

Peirce, the effect of causality is most obviously imprinted on our mind.⁴² Although iconicity stands out in every recognizable individual piece embedded in the creations, disfiguration of form and shape are now signalling more of plastic than iconic meaning. This interpretation is perhaps in contrast to Mitchell, who inscribes metaphors in strictly iconic representations.⁴³

As states Fletcher, objects quite real in themselves become “nonreal”, that is surreal, by their interrelation.⁴⁴ In the *Untitled* and *La Casa Viuda* installations, there is hardly any kind of boundary between the inherent composite elements in order to maintain their previous status; one element is more or less merged into the other. In these sculptures, almost ritually exposed and repeated, the power of the artistic outcome rather seems to reside in the transformations of material and spatial traces, even to the point of being involved in a continuing process, loading them with ambiguous meaning.

Moreover, an armoire filled up with concrete could serve as an index for suffocation, as I see it, and an unseatable chair, shaped as a human being and with bones engraved in it makes a missing person come forth in a metaphoric reading. But, relating to the Jakobson statement of reference and association,⁴⁵ these artworks would appear as objects of a metonymic reading. Indeed, by acting as a material signifier of that which is absent, the installations tend as well to refer to a metonymic displacement, as an external relationship of contiguity; a prerequisite of metonymic interpretation, according to Ullman.⁴⁶

From an architectural point of view, Frascari turns it this way: horns, hairs and the decoration of capitals are used to serve as powerful tropes, through which the bodies of the victims of wars or sacrifices are transubstantiated into the building element. In the metaphor, the “substitution” is done by a visual similarity, whereas in metonymy, the transfer of meaning is achieved by “causality” or “congruency”, between representation and function.⁴⁷ For once, metaphor related to similarity seems adequate here. Without any further connections between the figurative outcome in archaic buildings and the Salcedo sculptures, the bodily traces seem to relate to tropes in similar ways. The anthropomorphic imagery would then be able to relate to a metonymic as well as metaphoric reading: the “cause” as metonymic and the “outcome” as metaphoric. And, from my point of view, the remnants of clothes and bodily fragments inserted in, or added to, the Salcedo objects, in their originality

⁴² Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p. 60.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁴ Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1964, p. 379.

⁴⁵ Boucher, Holly Wallace, “Metonymy in Typology and Allegory” in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*. Edited by: Morton W. Bloomfield. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981, p. 130.

⁴⁶ Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1983, p. 190.

⁴⁷ Frascari, Marco. *Monsters of Architecture*. Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1991, p. 120.

most obviously reinforce metaphoricity of death and disappearance. We are back in framing the sign within the indices of its context.

3.3 Plegaria Muda; *plants metaphoring life*

In *Plegaria Muda* the numerous combined table-tops easily evoke the mass grave of anonymous victims, de-humanized in their absence since violence was denied. In a paradoxical way, the vast installation area could as well be related to a void; a mute witness of what once was alive and no longer is. The anonymous mass graves hidden in verdure, are here turned out as tiny blades of growing grass that strive to come forth from soil and slabs into life. As they grow they transform time into space, and their growth above and below ground metaphorically could evoke their insistence on life. The striving blades could as well serve as a trace indicating its cause: through an allegoric reading, these blades tend to insist on remembrance of the once living human being. Here, the metaphor seems to orient meaning to an allegoric interpretation. As states Bacry, there is always a metaphor to be found in the bottom of an allegory,⁴⁸ and in this installation it turns obvious.

In discussion with Culler, metaphoricity could here literally be applied to the imagery as a whole, and, in its figurative outcome, to metonymies.⁴⁹ By a spatial juxtaposition, this “performance” of growing grass could well relate to the missing victim as a metonymic sign. Again, metaphor turns out as an effect of metonymy, relating to de Man’s point of view.⁵⁰ Or, as Gérard Genette puts it: metaphor and metonymy support each other and interpenetrate one another in a relation of “coexistence” at the very heart of the relation of analogy: the role of metonymy *in metaphor*.⁵¹ Any trope found in this installation seems to bridge the gap between life and death, between the growing plants and the anonymous deceased.

Relating to Fletcher, ritual is the characteristic allegorical way of showing the human response to ambivalence. Fletcher hints at ritual as compulsive rather than repetitive. Repetition is obvious in the numerous artefacts composing the *Untitled* and *La Casa Viuda* series, as well as in the vast installation of *Plegaria Muda*, but the trace of compulsiveness seems to be inherent as well. This my point of view, considering what forms background in the Salcedo artwork: to over and over again untiringly invoke the multitude of victims in order to safeguard their presence from disappearance.

⁴⁸ Bacry, Patrick. *Les Figures de Style*. Paris: Édition Belin 1998, p. 66.

⁴⁹ Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1983, p. 191.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

In Salcedo's work, the notion of memory is ambiguous, since, as she states, memory must work between the figure of the absent victim and the life disfigured by death. "As a result, I would say that the only way in which I confront memory is to begin with the failure of memory".⁵² Ritual as an allegory of human response to ambivalence seems to be at place here.

To end this chapter: Nanine Charbonnel states that it takes an association between heterogeneous realities to make a metaphorical reading,⁵³ and Irène Tamba-Mecs, another French linguist, relates metaphoricity to phenomenons of heterogeneous meaning that end up in creating amazement.⁵⁴ I most briefly sum up these critics' point view in relation to what I was hinting at in the introduction: similarity and resemblance, characteristics that most critics refer to the sign of metaphor, are not sufficient - or even justified - constituents of the metaphoric sign. The clash of heterogeneous entities is far more preponderate, as I see it.

3. Presence in absence

4 *The absent victim / The human trace in Doris Salcedo's artistry and Paul Celan's poetry*

Salcedo describes her role as an artist to "delay death and to ritualize life".⁵⁵ This kind of collision between the past and the present, seems to open up her work to the subject of incorporation, in which signs replace the absence of the once living body. As stated above, the trace of absence tends to be embedded in all of these installation series: the absent victim, individually represented by a worn shoe, by part of clothing, hair, or even bone - probably rather "as of" a human being - by household furnishings turned into dysfunctional pieces of furniture, which in their hybridity seem to evoke violence in the very heart of the sheltered home. Or, could even the total want of impression be manifest by the absent victim, encapsulated in the grave and memorized in the cemetery, where vegetation in shape of growing grass still reminds of life. Citing Salcedo: "To place the invisible experience of marginal people in space is to find a place for them in our mind. I think of space in terms of place".⁵⁶

⁵² Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 140.

⁵³ Charbonnel, Nanine, "Métaphore et philosophie moderne" in: *La métaphore entre philosophie et rhétorique*. Edited by: Nanine Charbonnel & Georges Kleiber. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1999, p. 33.

⁵⁴ Tamba-Mecz, Irène, "Le sens figuré" in: *La métaphore entre philosophie et rhétorique*.

Edited by: Nanine Charbonnel & Georges Kleiber. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1999, p. 222.

⁵⁵ Salcedo, Doris, "Memoirs from Beyond the Grave", in: Tate, the Art Magazine, Issue 21, 2000, p. 84.

⁵⁶ Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 17.

At first sight, the *Atrabiliarios* installation appears unthreatening in its “organic” outcome, and then the connection between the shoes and their absent owners turns obvious. These shoes evidently give form to the memory of a missing person; the imprint of the foot stands out, once the viewers’ eyes have accustomed to the opacity of the niche. Looking into the “tomb”, the installation clearly conveys a sense of loss. The experience easily becomes one of living in the presence of the absent body, and the feeling of “it could have been me” easily occurs. The position of a “secondary witness” of the victim is emphasized, and furthermore, as states Merewether, enables an empathetic relation to those who underwent the trauma of grieving a beloved person.⁵⁷ As Salcedo has remarked in an interview: “I have come to meet people that have had the generosity of sharing with me their pain”.⁵⁸

Emptied shoes most obviously could work as indices of missing persons, and heaps of them point to the devastating cause, as in the Nazi concentration camps. Christian Boltanski, to name another renowned artist dealing with genocide, has used both found photographs and heaps of discarded clothing, to evoke the enormity of loss caused by the Nazi genocide.⁵⁹ Although Salcedo conceptually shares this kind of approach, her niches rather transcend the mute and near-invisible trace of the absent victim. In *Atrabiliarios*, the shoes are performed as singular, most directly pointing at the individual victim.

Although, according to Salcedo, it is hard to find an appropriate translation of *Atrabiliarios*, the very title tends to evoke the defiant victims, who were courageous and dared to resist oppression, as well as the bitterness of those left behind in grief. Furthermore, the title is composed by the Latin words *atratus* (wearing mourning) and *bilis* (wrath), and these two terms significantly sum up what this installation is dealing with.

In the *Untitled* series the fragments of clothes clearly evoke the absence of a human being, and for the viewer violence and death are constantly related to, since these remaining articles appear as “buried” in concrete or as forced into a wooden surface; remnants of the anonymous victim. Salcedo compels the viewer to listen to the silenced victims, to attend to the traumatic nature of the remnants of violence. This is perhaps particularly forceful in her work stuffed with concrete, like in the *Untitled* armoire, where the heavy weight of the silenced furniture “crushes things into moments”, to use Salcedo’s words. As she states: “Suspended moments

⁵⁷ Merewether, Charles, “To Bear Witness”, in: *Doris Salcedo*. Edited by Tim Yohn. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art 1998, p. 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press 1997, p. 117.

are registered, time is simultaneously arrested and accelerated, as the past and the present violently collide”.⁶⁰

These sculptures in themselves allude to violence in the manner a zipper or a bone has been squeezed into the wooden surface, or in the way a bedstead has been rammed through the cupboard, like in the armoire at hand. The artefacts themselves, in their shape turn out to be violated. The signs of atrocities seem to be engraved in these series of untitled objects, denoting the anonymous victims who were not entitled to life, and those left behind in grief. Salcedo does not reveal the body of the other. Her aim is rather to let the memory work between the figure of the one who has died and the life disfigured by the death, and it is in this gap that the artwork tends to have its function and to give meaning.

Several of the furniturelike sculptures composing the *La Casa Viuda* installations literally as well as figuratively could refer to the threshold of a house, once being the shelter for those who lived there. In viewing this “homely milieu”, the sense of an event that may have occurred, but of which no trace is to be found, is easily evoked. A bureau or a chair, with imprints of the wear and tear of everyday life, stand as visceral reminders of those once living there. The very title further evokes the absence of a family member, a husband who has left the widow in grief. This title could as well be read as “the widowed house”, the house in itself turned into widowhood. In the object at hand the shape of the human body allusively turns out; a fact reinforced by the bones engraved in the wooden surface and the remnant of a woman bodice. Thus, a trace of both absence and presence of the human turns obvious in the installation as a whole, and the absent – or present – victim of atrocities seems embodied in the sculpture. As Salcedo quotes it: “...the work involves a process of deterioration. I’ve always liked using the words ‘creatures’ to describe the sculptures – I learned that from Paul Celan. As creatures we all deteriorate and go into decline. [---] The fragility is an essential aspect of the sculptures”.⁶¹

Although constituting some kind of an oxymoron, even the complete vacuum of any trace of humanity could perhaps in the end be read as an embodiment. In *Plegaria Muda* the numerous combined tabletops easily evoke coffins or the mass grave of anonymous victims. Victims de-humanized in their absence, even depriving the bereaved of mourning and grief since violence was denied, leaving them in silent prayer. The title clearly refers to silence, but the Spanish word *muda* also signifies the incapacity to speak at all. We could then interpret

⁶⁰ Viso, Olga M., “Doris Salcedo: The Dynamic of Violence”,
in: *Distemper, Dissonant Themes in the Art of the 1990s*.

Edited by: Neal Benezra & Olga M. Viso. Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum 1996, p. 94

⁶¹ Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 32.

the title as the prayer of the silenced victims, and the title clearly conveys the meaning of presence in absence.

Thus, embodiment in all of these installations could be read in more than one way: the human trace in belongings more or less obviously pointing at the absent victim, the sign of embodiment as engraved in the sculptures or entombed and completely out of sight, or the artworks themselves bearing traces of violence, thereby reinforcing the anthropomorphic imagery. Salcedo clearly recounts atrocities in showing a gesture of violent subjection, performed on the object itself. The artist herself puts it this way: The pieces of furniture often remain dismantled. To some extent they occupy the same space and are part of the same object, but each one remains individual. Celan's poetry involves piecing together from ruptures and dissociations, rather than association and union.⁶² Celan seems to be an inspiring source in Salcedo's artistic creativity.

After genocide, what remain present are heaps of shoes, devastating, because these shoes testify to the quantities of victims. For each pair of shoes, one person died. Shoes, especially in large quantities, carry out what has been called a "holocaust effect". As Bal states, Salcedo, in her choice of shoes for *Atrabiliarios*, places her art in that lineage, a legacy of great value, as her "artist's choice" of poems by Paul Celan also demonstrates.⁶³ Salcedo, though, individualizes the shoes by burying each one, or the pair of them, in a separate niche, covered by the half-transparent visceral skin. In scrutinizing these shoes in their affective "holding environment" the anonymous victim comes forth as an individual.

Like in pictorial art the materiality of language has less to do with the word than with spaces. Forms in art come toward us in poetry as the materiality of language; the sounds of shattered or fractured words, as Eric Kligerman turns it.⁶⁴ He relates to Emmanuel Lévinas, who considers Celan and his "pre-syntactic" language as a model for the ethics of alterity. Lévinas' concern is about the interplay between visual art and poetry. Ethical proximity, the disruption of the senses, and the dissolution of both mimesis and the image are integral components in Celan's poetics and in pictorial art, here exemplified by Cubism,⁶⁵ and I am not the only one to connect this kind of inherent characteristics to the Salcedo artworks: Andreas Huyssen relates Celan's oeuvre to *The Orphan's Tunic*, another installation of Salcedo, where he emphasizes the memory of violent acts. It is about memory of violent acts

⁶² Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 26.

⁶³ Bal, Mieke. *of what one cannot speak*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2010, p. 17.

⁶⁴ Kligerman, Eric. *Sites of the Uncanny. Paul Celan, Specularity and the Visual Art*.

Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2007, p. 65.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

in the literal sense, and about memory in a spatial sense, compelling the viewer to perceive something that remains elusive, absent.⁶⁶ The absent victim and the human trace, signs in the four installations that conspicuously come forth in their different shapes, are here represented by four stanzas of Celan, selected from the *Artist's Choice*.⁶⁷

A strange lostness was
palpably present, almost
you would
have lived

From: Niemandrose

The morning's plumb lead, gilded,
affixes itself to your co-
vowing, co-
writing
heel

From: Selected Poems

To stand in the shadow
of the scar up in the air.

To stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
for you
alone.

With all there is room for in that,
even without
language.

From: Atemwende

Little night: when you
take me inside, take me
up there,
three pain-inches above the
floor:

all those shroud coats of sand,
all those can't helps,
all that still
laughs
with the tongue –

From: Zeitgehöft

In an interview with Carlos Basualdo, Salcedo emphasizes the dialogue with victims of atrocities. To try to relate to the experience of those left behind is crucial, and to insert it in her artistic elaborations is her fervent ambition; “as far as an encounter with the Other in the the field of sculpture is possible”.⁶⁸ This experience of the Other - the silenced other or the bereaved - obviously comes forth in the Celan poetry.

In a speech, held by Celan in 1960 he argues that the poem of today embeds a strong tendency towards silence. It has withdrawn within its own margins, since its preconditions are endangered: is someone still listening, responding? But the poem constantly pulls itself back into a “still-here”, and this “still-here” means speaking. And this “still-here” can only be found in the work of poets who do not forget that they speak from an angle of reflection that

⁶⁶ Princenthal, Nancy *et al. Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 101.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.p. 111-13. Poems translated by Michael Hamburger.

⁶⁸ Princenthal, Nancy *et al. Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 13.

is their own existence.⁶⁹ Celan seems to say that the poem is not autonomous, but the language of a single person who is trying to communicate. I most briefly sum up part of an excerpt of this speech, since it well relates to Salcedo's artistry. Just as Celan's poetry reflects his own existence, Salcedo's artwork obviously does the same. As she says: "In a country like Colombia reality is intrusive, and life imposes on you the awareness of the Other".⁷⁰ As an "insider", she speaks from her own angle of reflection, and the silenced victims most conspicuously come forth in her installations; they are "still-here", I would say.

Daniel Libeskind claims that we are witness to the events in which the architecture of presence turns into the architecture of absence, and through engagement with architectural voids, the visitor is confronted with the traces of historical erasure. Celan's *Atemwende* returns in the anxiety-provoking voids of the museum. These voids are positioned between the two lines extending through the museum; one a zigzag and the other a disrupted straight line that intersects the museum's body.⁷¹ Libeskind's interior and Celan's poetry most obviously demonstrate the impossibility of entering into the catastrophic spaces of history: we are facing the impossible task to read a void, I would say. And, relating to Kligerman, Libeskind enters the topos of Celan's poetry and translate his abstractions into visual forms of representation. In the space of the void, whether linguistic or architectural, "we have reached the interpretive and perceptual limits of reading, seeing, and going into the Holocaust's non-site".⁷²

5 *Embodiment and the void in the installations and poems*

It will take an anthropomorphic imagination to relate the Salcedo installations to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism, as discussed above. In Salcedo's artworks this kind of agency does not appear as a sign of humanity through an action normally attributed to humans. There are no human characteristics to be found, rather do these modest traces serve as signifiers of the absent victim, and in their "performance" they tend to work as small but insistent anthropomorphic signs. Salcedo's sculptures rather imply than represent human presence, serving as indices for their presence in absence, where the sign of anthropomorphism is alluded.

These traces turn out as either remnants of personal belongings, or as presence of an embodied shape within the frames of the sculpturally elaborated artefact, as dealt with above.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.p. 118-19.

⁷⁰ Salcedo, Doris. "Memoirs from Beyond the Grave", in: Tate, the Art Magazine, Issue 21, 2000, p.84.

⁷¹ Kligerman, Eric. *Sites of the Uncanny. Paul Celan, Specularity and the Visual Art*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2007, p. 242.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 304.

Or, as in *Plegaria Muda*, where the void of an obvious sign in the end perhaps could be transferred to anthropomorphic features in the metaphoric and allegoric reading. As mute victims, all of the traces – or non-traces – then could act not only as indices of violence but also serve as personified abstractions.

5.1 *Atrabiliarios; the void and the wound*

The *Atrabiliarios* installation is not explicitly hinting at a scene or object of violence, it rather gives a visual form to the memory of a traumatic event, as earlier discussed. In both its artistic outcome and in the viewer's interpretation of it, the installation stands as an index of trauma. The worn shoes, in their emptiness of a content, a part of the body, leave the imprint of a void, signifying the victim who once wore those shoes; an index that signals its cause, relating to Peirce,⁷³ and, like indices in general, it has no content, only a void that points to a content in the past. The experience becomes one of living in the presence of the absent body. The imprint left behind by this absent human body tends to work like a photographic negative, since the shoe bears a literal, physical imprint of the foot.

Merewether relates the *Atrabiliarios* shoes to a relic and a fetish; as a relic they stand in for the remains of the deceased, and as a fetish they become a substitute object of both identification and disavowal.⁷⁴ Related to Merewether's point of view, it seems adequate to relate the niches, that in their half-transparency make the installation appear as in old blurry photographs, where a beloved one, perhaps since long deceased, could leave his or her imprint as Barthes' *punctum*, or wound. And, in its almost invisible shape, the trace of the foot all the same tends to stand out of its frames - the shoe, the niche – thereby functioning like the Barthes *punctum*; the very trace is empowered to signal the missing person and to deny the loss at the same time.

As states Princenthal, photography could transmit resurrection of the living being, and in this way the photograph maintains an aspect of the *Atrabiliarios* power of healing and redemption along with the evidence of loss.⁷⁵ Like in images the niche, the shoes replace the body's absence in their iconic presence. From my point of view, this kind of presence still maintains a body's absence, but transmits it into what could be called an invisible presence. Although Hans Belting most probably relates to more evident figures in images, this critic turns it this way: Images live from the paradox that they perform the *presence of an absence*

⁷³ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p. 56.

⁷⁴ Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

or vice versa: images *are* present in their media, but they *perform* and absence, which they make visible.⁷⁶ Although the shoe is completely “emptied” of its content, the trace of it could all the same relate it to an invisible presence, and, in support of the anthropomorphic imagination, transfer it to a sign of humanity.

5.2 *The Untitled and La Casa Viuda installations; sites of the uncanny*

The *Untitled* and *La Casa Viuda* series comprise pieces of furniture once being part of the homely interior and now installed in galleries; hence, displaced and disfigured into pieces of art. The home as a shelter for those living there has been violated and deeply affected its inhabitants, and the private realm of a home has somehow been violated. These displaced furniture, now displayed in their hybridity, indicate that an act of violation has taken place. In an interview Salcedo has said: “*La Casa Viuda* makes use of what Robert Smithson has called a non-place, that is a place of passage, where it is impossible to live”.⁷⁷ Salcedo seems to create an environment that lacks its site, that recalls the Smithson notion of a “nonsite”; something of great value has been removed from the scene. Objects are now isolated from one another, as if marginalized or displaced. Something has happened in the past, and the house grieves, when its inhabitants are displaced, vanished even, and the devastated house is in itself turned into widowhood; “the widowed house” is subjected to personification. Furthermore, the very house is vanished as well, as I see it, when it is no longer needed for care and protection; there is no physical presence of it, related to the title for it.

Michel Foucault refers to Maurice Blanchot, who, in dealing with the abyss of the void, turns it this way: “the fullness of the void, something one cannot silence, occupying all of space”. This kind of symmetrical conversion is required of language of fiction, Foucault states, and it must no longer be a power that tirelessly produces images, but instead one that undoes them. The Blanchot fictions are, rather than the images themselves, their transformation and displacement. Fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible. Thus, it bears a profound relation to space. This is the role that houses and rooms play in almost all of Blanchot’s narratives: placeless places, beckoning thresholds.⁷⁸ A specific meaning in fiction could here be

⁷⁶ Belting, Hans, “Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology”, in: *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Winter 2005). The University of Chicago 2005, p. 312.

⁷⁷ Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 57.

⁷⁸ Foucault, Michel, “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside”, in: *Foucault/Blanchot*. Transl. by: Jeffrey Mehiman and Brian Massumi. New York: Zone Books 1987, p.p. 23-24.

conveyed to pictorial art: the fictional invisibility related to the invisibility in sculptural depiction by Salcedo.

“The widowed house” nevertheless seems to form a “ground” for semiotic meaning, where the anthropomorphic imagination is enabled to develop. Again, related to Peirce, it is a sign by causation, an effect of the object that imprints it on the mind.⁷⁹ We are here most likely dealing with a special type of metaphoricity, where a complete want of human trace perhaps in the end could be turned into anthropomorphism. Embodiment that resides in something we cannot see; absence turned into personification. This my interpretation could perhaps find its support in what Charbonnel sums up: the rhetoric of metaphor is a figure of discourse, that is, a figure of thought and distinct from any logical reason.⁸⁰ The anthropomorphic imagination could well be applicable to this way of interpreting metaphoricity.

The *Untitled* and *La Casa Viuda* installations consist of recognizable pieces of used furniture, where cracks and crevices have left their traces. In both installations, disfiguration evokes atrocities committed to the objects themselves. The heavy *Untitled* cupboard seems suffocated in overwhelming concrete, and with the bedstead incongruously rammed into it. The tiny, tattered door with broken panes of glass, once perhaps being part of a closet, is now turned into the hybrid *La Casa Viuda* creation. Both pieces look like wounded surfaces, and, as states Merewether: “We may say that the furniture appears wounded, both physically and psychically. Bearing traces of violence, the objects are mute witnesses and testimony to the past”.⁸¹ Again, these artefacts come forth in the gap between the absent victim and the one left behind.

Moreover, objective or subjective complements, such as enforced, rammed, suffocated, used to describe what has been added to, or has happened to, these wounded objects reinforce violence committed to the objects themselves, hereby making them even more conceivable for relation to signs of anthropomorphism, as I see it. It is as if some form of repetition of violence has been inevitable in order to productively make the victims come forth. Campi de Castro considers allegory as a rhetorical figure that deals with the relationship between a work of art and how it is interpreted by the spectator.⁸² And perception in allegoric

⁷⁹ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology ; Image, Text, Ideology*.

Chicago and London: The University of Chicago press 1986, p. 60.

⁸⁰ Charbonnel, Nanine, “Métaphore et philosophie moderne”, in: *La métaphore entre philosophie et rhétorique*. Edited by: Nanine Charbonnel & Georges Kleiber. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1999, p. 33.

⁸¹ Merewether, Charles, “To Bear Witness”, in: *Doris Salcedo*. Edited by: Tim Yohn. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art 1998, p. 21.

⁸² Campi de Castro, Nancy, “Allegory, You are Woman”, in: *Analecta Husserliana, Allegory Old and New*.

reading of what is depicted here makes the outcome of various meanings obvious. From a phenomenological point of view, disfiguration imprinted in these household furniture could be read in more than one way:

Violence as causal, imprinted in the deformity of the furniture; the armoire, heavily loaded with concrete and part of a bedstead rammed into it, and bones forced into the disabled chair serving as a hanger for the tattered bodice. The enigmatic combination of heterogeneous objects, quite “real” in themselves, turn into “nonreal”, that is surreal compositions when combined within a single work of art. Violence caused to the very objects, where the act of violation imprinted in traces and contours leads to an anthropomorphic reading of the sculptures. Related to Fletcher, we are here most obviously dealing with the sort of “personified abstractions” that turn out in an allegoric reading.⁸³

Another, perhaps more daring, interpretation - and hardly in line with Salcedo’s intention to bear witness of the casualties - is to look at these installations from an even more surrealist point of view, where deformity turns out in analogy to what has happened, that in turn leads to an explicit reading of anthropomorphism. By giving up their previous status as well functioning furniture, these artworks are turned into a state of empathic grief of the victims, or, as being part of the family circle, left in grief with the widow, or the house itself turned into grieving widowhood. Seen this way, the sign of anthropomorphism most conspicuously comes forth in the allegoric reading.

According to Fletcher, the typical personified agent can “act” only in combination with other similar agents, a fact that limits each work to a given problem.⁸⁴ It takes an action of these artefacts to give up their previous status, and the predicate normally associated with humans is now related to a noun that designates something nonhuman, the furniturelike hybrids. This kind of personified construction involves an opportunity to extend our conceptual range, and personification then represents a move beyond our normal thinking, according to Levin.⁸⁵ Indeed, inspired by Levin, to regard these artworks as animate is to embrace a possibility that lies outside our usual experience, and, approached this way personification would represent a move beyond our habitual thinking.

Vol. XLII. Edited by: Marlies Kronegger & Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka.
Boston, Mass. and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1994, p. 153.

⁸³ Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*.
Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1964, p. 29; note 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 32.

⁸⁵ Levin, Samuel R., “Allegorical Language” in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*. Edited by Morton W. Bloomfield.,
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981, p. 31.

This kind of theme – objects empathically taking part in the course of events - is well elaborated within the field of literature, and seems applicable to pictorial/sculptural art as well. Although - I am eager to state it - this interpretation has nothing to do with Salcedo's fervent ambition, but could perhaps in the end be applicable to her art. My way of interpreting the works here, might as well find its support in what Campi de Castro states: It is necessary to introduce an innovative inquietude into allegory, thereby showing itself as a renewed and expressive form. In other words, it is essential to reach the other side of the mirror, to go beyond the specularity which itself constitutes a work of art.⁸⁶

The remnants of clothing, “buried” in the *Untitled* armoire concrete, most obviously serve as an index for an absent victim; this my interpretation related to the Peirce “causal” connection, a trace indicating its cause.⁸⁷ Violence has been caused to someone, who once wore those clothes. Would it be able to relate these pieces that serve as synecdoches - parts from the whole they come from, and to which they point as traces - to an anthropomorphic reading? The clothing signals a person, a victim of atrocities considering the context; “burial” easily comes to mind in regarding the armoire stuffed with concrete.

To quote Merleau-Ponty: “Things have an internal equivalence in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence. Why shouldn't these correspondences in turn give rise to some tracing rendered visible again. [---] Thus there appears a “visible” to the second power, a carnal essence or icon of the first”.⁸⁸ The *Untitled* object could well relate to this discussion of Merleau-Ponty, I think; cause and effect of violence in connection to these slivers of human presence that make them stand out as some kind of embodied elements. And the trace as index most obviously inspires the anthropomorphic imagination.

Culler's reasoning of metaphors is well applicable here: most theories of metaphor depend on an overt and covert assumption of referentiality. The metaphorical power is measured through comparison with a referent.⁸⁹ The vehicle of “burial” here transfers a mood of mourning onto what would otherwise just be remnants of garments. Thus, the absent victim is mourned by means of the clothes, and, with an overt assumption of referentiality enabled to relate to an anthropomorphic sign. According to Princenthal, the bedstead, the “emptied” bed, both stands for the absence of the body and at the same time anthropomorphically represents

⁸⁶ Campi de Castro, Nancy, “Allegory you are woman”,
in: *Analecta Husserliana. Allegory Old and New*. Vol. XLII, p. 153.

⁸⁷ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1986, p. 56.

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, “Eye and Mind”, in: *The Primacy of Perception*.
Edited by: James M. Edie. Translated by: Carleton Dallery.
Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 2002, p. 232.

that missing body.⁹⁰ There are no signs to be found, and, as in the non-existing “widowed house”, absence is here related to the anthropomorphic imagination through a covert assumption of referentiality.

The *La Casa Viuda* sculpture is composed of disparate elements that materialize the physical change of state. These inherent objects could be read as iconic as well as indexical, that enable a semiotic base for interpretation, as I see it, perhaps in contrast to Mitchell’s thinking. As stated above, Mitchell considers the icon difficult to assimilate into semiotics, as it is the complete opposite of the verbal sign.⁹¹ The sculpture is composed of paired ends of wooden bedrails, attached on either side of the door, forming an enclosure, even an embrace. The sign of embodiment is emphasized if we read those objects as clumsy arms and, in their function of legs, as support of the “body”. There is no natural boundary between these elements to make their previous status unchanged. Rather seems the power of the objects to reside in their transformation, turning embodiment obvious. The bones enforced into the glass panel and remains of the woman bodice, iconic elements in the hybrid creation, make an anthropomorphic reading even more obvious.

The shape of the human figure is not explicitly to be seen of course, rather is it more allusively on display, where the relation to anthropomorphism takes place in the imagination. Even in its mute appearance and in the shape of a “still life”, this sculpture could well relate to personification. My interpretation seems to find its support in what Knapp argues: personification derives its appearance and behaviour from iconographic emblems of its allegorical content, where “personality” is turned into a total saturation by the thematic idea it represents,⁹² and from my point of view well implicated in this sculpturally elaborated piece of art. Behaviour is suppressed of course, unless not related to the act of giving up its previous status, as proposed above.

5.3 Plegaria Muda; *the absent presence in the installation and poems*

Salcedo’s work easily relates to stillness, but is as well able to overcome the formal opposition between “still” and “moving” images, where the gap between an object and its affective charge is made visible, and where the aspect of vision has to be taken into consideration. We are not enabled to see the totality of the *Plegaria Muda* installation - the placing of the numerous table tops, the slight differences embedded in them, the tiny blades of

⁹⁰ Princenthal, Nancy *et al.*, *Doris Salcedo*. London: Phaidon Press 2000, p. 77.

⁹¹ Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago press 1986, p. 56.

⁹² Knapp, Steven. *Personification and the Sublime*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1985, p. 3.

grass of different shape and vitality – since vision is restricted. We must move around, looking at a distance and looking up close, to grasp the installation as a whole. A reference to Merleau-Ponty seems to be at place here, in his discussion of the third dimension. “There is, at first glance, something paradoxical about it [the third dimension]. I see objects that hide each other and that consequently I do not see; each one stands behind the other. I see depth and yet it is not visible”.⁹³ Merleau-Ponty obviously speaks about the picture, “the flat thing that contrives to give us what we would see in the presence of ‘diversely positioned’ things”, but these diversely positioned objects are as well forming the composition of the *Plegaria Muda* installation.

The artwork of Salcedo could in a way be seen as a paradox; absence as the register of human presence that has been removed from the scene. The Salcedo artefacts often convey feelings of loss, as we have seen, and the *Plegaria Muda* installation most evidently makes absence come forth. An aura of funeral comes to mind in contemplating this vast installation, and it goes without saying that a singled out piece of these units would not be able to transmit and affect the feeling of an enormous loss. Related to *Unland*, an earlier installation of hers, Salcedo states that she is not using tables as a metaphor, it is rather about metamorphosis; tables become independent creatures.⁹⁴ If she still adheres to this kind of idea, the combined tables in the *Plegaria Muda* installation, then indisputably could be translated to coffins enveloping the anonymous victims, reinforced by the fact that she not only uses the approximate dimensions of coffins but also the wooden material.

At first sight, these sculptures do not explicitly refer to violence at all. Then, contemplating these numerous units of almost identical objects in the vast installation area, mass graves come to mind. As an enormous cemetery, consisting of more graves than the eye can take in, it refers to those innumerable victims in Colombia, that Salcedo untiringly evokes in her installations, in order to safeguard their presence from disappearance.

Although there is no trace that more conspicuously indicates its cause, as in the preceding artworks, the notion of “presence in absence” turns as obvious in this installation. As Olga M. Viso sees it: bringing the ritual to her work, Salcedo reenacts and invoke the dead and disappeared in a secular setting, where loss is acknowledged and observed.⁹⁵ In the *Plegaria*

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, “Eye and Mind”, in: *The Primacy of Perception*.

Edited by: James M. Edie. Translated by: Carleton Dallery.

Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Salcedo, Doris, “Memoirs from Beyond the Grave” in: *Tate, the Art Magazine*, Issue 21, 2000, p. 84.

⁹⁵ Viso, Olga M., “Doris Salcedo: The Dynamic of Violence”

in: *Distemper; Dissonant Themes in the Art of the 1990s*.

Edited by: Neal Benezra & Olga M. Viso. Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum 1996, p. 95.

Muda installation, the more than one hundred table-tops bring out the setting into coffins in a ritual way, and here with religious rather than secular overtones. As in the previous artworks, we are here most evidently dealing with that special kind of covert metaphor, where a complete absence in an allegoric reading perhaps could be turned into personification. The kind of metaphor that hints at anthropomorphism; to turn the agency of anthropomorphism into a semiotic tool for affective communication.

In the *Plegaria Muda* installation the tiny blades of grass that force their way through the cavities of the table-tops, give hope that life will prevail. Salcedo has again successfully attained her object: to provide a visual language to abstract feelings of traumatic loss, and to restore the anonymous victims in our mind. But is the anthropomorphic imagination here a sufficient “tool” in order to refer this non existing victim to the notion of anthropomorphism?

It would perhaps take a metaphysical point of view as well to relate the non-existing traces of human presence into the aesthetics of anthropomorphism. In contrast to what can be perceived by our senses, the notion of metaphysics and even mysticism could perhaps here be taken into consideration; some kind of external conditions that make us perceive non-existing things. Mysticism does not adhere to humanities as a scientific discipline of course, but many artists strive towards a completion of it in their artistic elaboration. In this respect the surrealists come to mind, like Max Ernst, in his role as a pictorial artist, and Gunnar Ekelöf as a representative of surrealist affiliation in writing, to name just two. These artists endeavour to grasp the particularity of mysticism, and does Salcedo strive to do the same, I ask myself.

There are in fact a lot of surrealistic features in this artist’s sculptural artworks: enigmatic combinations of materials in discontinuous and unnatural groupings that seem to characterize surreal art. Doors are common elements in the Salcedo installations, not only in the *La Casa Viuda* sculpture more specifically related to here. They tend to hold a prominent position in the majority of the *La Casa Viuda* series. Has someone passed through the door, or is it able to reach behind the door, and what is to be found there? These are my speculations, in trying to grasp the sign of humanity in the non-existing trace. To look at the Salcedo installations from a metaphysic and more specifically surrealistic point of view would well serve as a subject for further investigation. Here, this brief discussion ends up in more of a starting point than of a conclusion. A more thorough investigation of metaphysics and mysticism related to the notion of surrealism could well serve as a tool to be developed in relation to extended findings of embodiment, in the non-existing trace.

As far as I have understood, the concept of mysticism is an inherent strain in the Central European Jewish tenet, and that seems to enable a relation to Celan. From a mystic point of view a link could then be formed between Salcedo's installations and the Celan poetry. And the opening stanza of *Engführung* and the closing one from *Radix, Matrix* tend to have their pictorial correspondence in the *Plegaria Muda* installation:

<p>Taken off into the terrain with the unmistakable trace: Grass, written asunder. The stones, white with the grassblades' shadows Read no more – look! Look no more – go</p> <p>From: <i>Engführung</i></p>	<p>this fertile soil too gapes this going down is one of the crests growing wild.</p> <p>From: <i>Niemandrose</i></p>
--	---

The landscape depicted within these stanzas tends to work as something textual with its traces: grass written asunder, the white stone, and the crest growing wild. But at the same time the “pictorial” feature seems to dissolve. Peter Szondi states about Celan's *Engführung*, that poetry no longer describes “reality”, but rather itself becomes reality. When mimesis and representation dissolve, poetry turns out to do the same. In *Engführung* the dead are not returning, but the readers turn toward them;⁹⁶ as do the viewers contemplating the *Plegaria Muda* installation. In the poem, approaching the white stone, a possible gravestone, we are facing the impossibility to read a void, as it seems; how is it able to read a blank? At a first glance there is no trace of the absent victim in *Plegaria Muda*, and the graves certainly have no gravestones, rather do they turn out as cavities, where the soil gapes; a chasm signifying the body's absence, I would say.

In contrast to art's association with a definite place, the visible, and the construction of images, Celan's poetry seems to be marked by the loss of place, the disruption of the senses, and the dissolution of both mimesis and the image.⁹⁷ These characteristics, related to Celan's poetic outcome, could find its equivalence in all of the installations that have been studied here: *Atrabiliarios*, *Untitled*, *La Casa Viuda* and *Plegaria Muda*. Celan's poetry as well as Salcedo's artwork deal with disintegration and the dislocation of perception. When the readers or viewers take part of these artists' poems or installations, they may see themselves as a secondary witness to genocide - at first sight. Both artists seem to undermine this position

⁹⁶ Kligerman, Eric. *Sites of the Uncanny*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2007, p. 244.

Poems translated by Michael Hamburger.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

though, in their troubling the senses by a missing line of the poem or by a trace of absence in the artefact.

Salcedo, as well as Celan, have successfully attained their object: to provide a visual or poetic language to abstract feelings of traumatic loss, and to restore the anonymous victims in our mind.

3. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to enable a depiction of humanness without having recourse to the human body, and to make it conceivable to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism. Four artworks from as many installations by the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo have made up a base for this investigation. The conception of Salcedo's installations tends to have a clear political approach, where the theme of violence and absence is conspicuous. Fatal mass violence with political overtones and more randomly carried out executions in Salcedo's native country Colombia form the background to her installations; mass assassinations turned into individualized acts of memorial, where silent traces of the single victim insist on our attention. These traces of the absent victim, or of those left behind, turn out in different ways in her artworks; a fact that has been taken into consideration in my choice of singular art pieces.

Accordingly, four artefacts have made up a base for this study: *Atrabiliarios* (1996), where worn shoes of absent victims are inserted in niches covered by a half-transparent visceral skin, stitched flush to the wall. The title is composed by the Latin words *atratus* (wearing mourning) and *bilis* (wrath), and it could further relate to the defiant victim and to bitterness of those left behind. (Fig. 1) From the *Untitled* series (1997), I have singled out an armoire, connected to a bedstead and filled up with concrete, where parts of clothings are encrusted. These "buried" remnants point at the anonymous victim who was not entitled to life. (Fig. 2) The sculpture that makes part of the *La Casa Viuda* IV-series (1994) is composed by furniturelike items and bones. These bones are serving as a hanger for a woman bodice, and the installation tends to inscribe embodiment. "The widow house" or "The widowed house" significantly sums up what we are dealing with here. (Fig 3a,b) The *Plegaria Muda* installation, where numerous table-tops are placed in a vast setting within the museum area, is Salcedo's most recently elaborated installation, exhibited last year in Stockholm and Lisbon. Like graves with tiny blades of grass, these rows of tables asymmetrically dispersed, recall the innumerable absent victims. There are no traces of human sign to be found here, but the title

clearly evokes humanity: the “Silent Prayer” by the bereaved, or the “Silenced Prayer”, the mute anonymous victim. (Fig. 4) The term “installation” has not been specifically used in relation to the *Plegaria Muda* series, but for all of the artworks, whether grouped within the exhibition space, or singled out as individual art pieces; installation as a concept for an art form.

These installations have then been related to the theories of Jonathan Culler, W.J.T. Mitchell and Angus Fletcher, as well as to critics dealing with tropes and anthropomorphism. Since most critics relate their interpretations to literature, sometimes poetry, I have inserted Salcedo’s favoured poet Paul Celan as a subordinate subject matter. Human suffering turned into reminiscence of the individual victim echoes themes in Celan’s poetry. Some critics are well familiar with the Salcedo artistry, as well as Celan’s poetry, and their interpretations have been taken into consideration. I have of course related to Salcedo’s own points of view as well.

A concise overview of the four installations as a whole, and a more detailed presentation of the above artworks, open chapter 2. The art pieces are here related to a material, as well as iconic and plastic significance, according to Jan-Gunnar Sjölin’s conception. Traces of embodiment, or the complete vacuum, in the four artefacts have then been focused on, in relation to signs and tropes of allegory, metaphor and metonymy, as well as to semiotics, and most briefly to phenomenology. The notion of representation has also been considered. In chapter 3 the artefacts have been subjected to an investigation of the human trace and shape – or non-trace - relating to the absent victim or to those disfigured by death. These traces are of various kinds, as above mentioned: an imprint of the foot, belongings “buried” in concrete, or transformed into disabled furniture, where the shape of the human body seems to be inscribed, or as in a vast installation, where no traces are to be found. The title of the work in itself has a role in the interpretation of what we are dealing with in these artworks, a fact that has been related to in my interpreting the signs of absence and traces. In this chapter, a transfer from the notion of absence in the Salcedo artwork to the Celan poetry has been well motivated, and four stanzas of this poet have here been included, related to their context.

In the latter, and most extensive, part of chapter 3, I have dealt with embodiment and the void in relation to the aesthetics of anthropomorphism. It takes an anthropomorphic imagination that alludes to embodiment, in order to be able to relate these differing traces, or non-traces, to the concept of anthropomorphism. The human trace, leaving its imprint as a void in the *Atrabiliarios* shoes, “buried” in the niche, most conspicuously points at the absent victim. Parts of once well-functioning pieces of furniture are now merged into dysfunctional

items of the *Untitled* and *La Casa Viuda* series, where icons and indices of various kinds hints at embodiment, or where embodiment alludes to the presence in absence of a trace. The paradox of presence in absence turns even more obvious in the vast *Plegaria Muda* installation, where no traces of a once human being are to be found, at least not at first sight. In this part of the chapter the Celan poetry, has formed a natural connection, I would say. It has been a challenge to try to relate this non- existing trace to embodiment in *Plegaria Muda*, and I have not only referred to theorists and critics dealt with above, but also, in a cursory way, to metaphysics and surrealist points of view, to enable some kind of embodiment to be connected with the aesthetics of anthropomorphism; a short discussion ending up in more of a starting point than of a conclusion. A more thorough investigation of metaphysics and mysticism related to the notion of surrealism could well serve as a tool to be developed in relation to extended findings of embodiment in the non-existing trace.

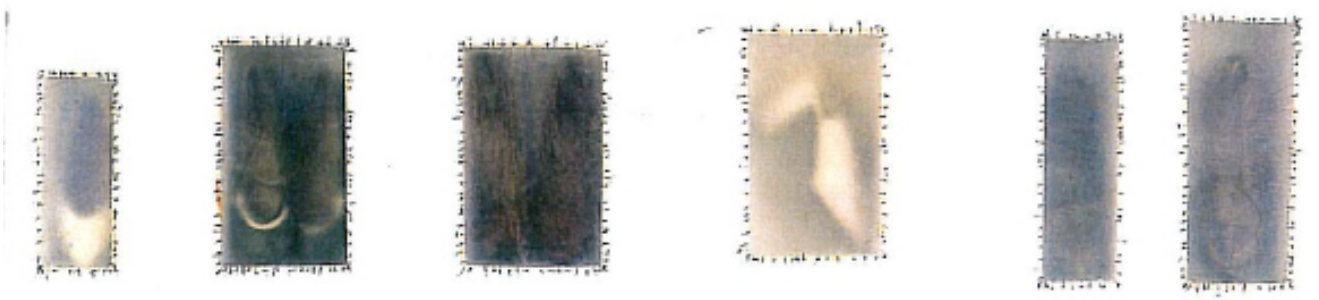


Fig. 1 *Atrabiliaris*



Fig. 2 *Untitled*



Fig. 3a *La Casa Viuda*

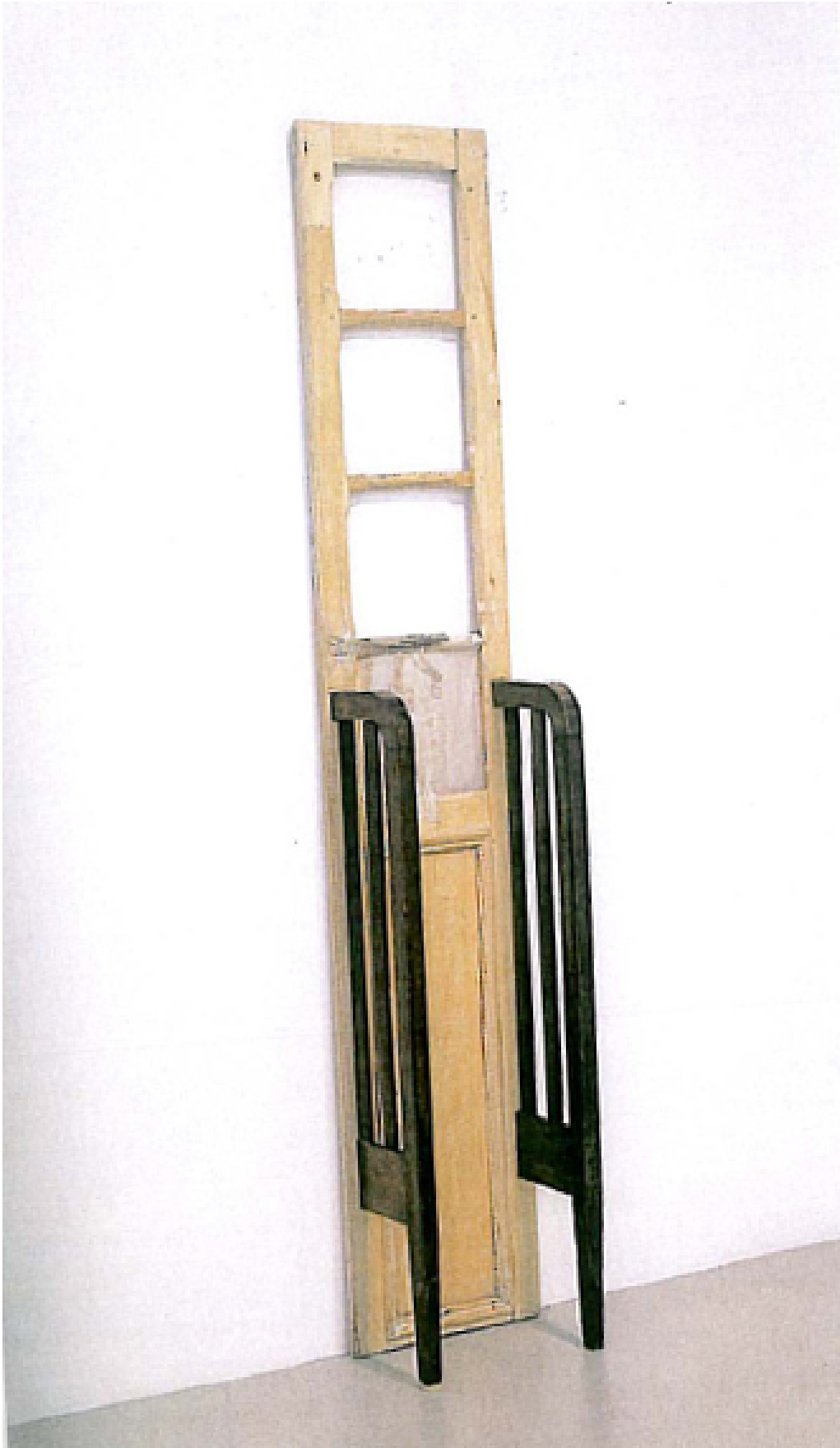


Fig. 3b *La Casa Viuda*



Fig. 4 *Plegaria Muda*

Bibliography

van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History*. Stanford University Press 1997.

Bacry, Patrick. *Les Figures de Style*. Paris: Édition Belin 1998.

Bal, Mieke. *of what one cannot speak*.
Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2010.

Belting, Hans, “Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology”,
in: *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Winter 2005). The University of Chicago 2005.

Bloomfield, Morton W., *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981.

Boucher, Holly Wallace, “Metonymi in Typology and Allegory”,
in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*. Edited by: Morton W. Bloomfield.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981.

Cameron, Dan, “Inconsolable”, in: *Doris Salcedo*.
New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art 1998.

Cameron, Dan, “Inconsolable”, in: *Doris Salcedo*.
New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art 1998.

Campi de Castro, Nancy, “Allegory, You are Woman”,
in: *Analecta Husserliana. Allegory Old and New*. Vol. XLII.
Edited by: Marlies Kronegger & Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka.
Boston, Mass. and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1994.

Charbonnel, Nanine, “Métaphore et philosophie moderne”,
in: *La métaphore entre philosophie et rhétorique*.
Edited by: Nanine Charbonnel & Georges Kleiber.
Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1999.

Culler, Jonathan. *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions*.
Oxford and Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press 1988.

Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*.
Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1983 and 2002.

Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*.
Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1964.

Foucault, Michel, “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside”.
New York: Zone Books 1987.

Frascari, Marco. *Monsters of Architecture*.
Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1991.

Kligerman, Eric. *Sites of the Uncanny. Paul Celan, Speclarity and the Visual Art.* Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2007.

Knapp, Steven. *Personification and the Sublime.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1985.

Kronegger, Marlies & Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. *Analecta Husserliana, Allegory Old and New.* Vol. XLII. Boston, Mass.: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1994.

Levin, Samuel R., "Allegorical Language", in: *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol.* Edited by: Morton W. Bloomfield. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981.

Mattick, Paul, Jr., "Context", in *Critical Terms for Art History.* Edited by: Robert S. Nelson & Richard Shiff. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1992.

Merewether, Charles, "To Bear Witness", in: *Doris Salcedo.* New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art 1998.

Merleau-Ponty. *L'Œil et l'Esprit.* Paris: Éditions Gallimard 1964.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, "Eye and Mind", in: *The Primacy of Perception.* Transl. by: Carleton Dallery. Edited by: James M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology ; Image, Text, Ideology.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago press 1986.

Princenthal, Nancy *et al.* *Doris Salcedo.* London: Phaidon Press 2000.

Salcedo, Doris, "Memoirs from Beyond the Grave"
in: *Tate, the Art Magazine*, Issue 21, 2000, p. 84.

Sjölin, Jan-Gunnar, editor. *Att tolka bilder.* Lund: (Print on demand) 2008.

Tamba-Mecz, Irène, "Le sens figuré" in: *La métaphore entre philosophie et rhétorique.* Edited by: Nanine Charbonnel & Georges Kleiber. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1999.

Viso, Olga M., "Doris Salcedo: The Dynamic of Violence"
in: *Distemper; Dissonant Themes in the Art of the 1990s.* Edited by: Neal Benezra & Olga M. Viso. Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum 1996.

