

# Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy

Timothy P Brown

*Is there a relation between crisis  
and the very enterprise of education?*

Shoshana Felman

As a graduate student in museum education, I considered this very question proposed by Shoshanna Felman. I began to ask myself: What is the pedagogical value of museums and their relationship to communities of trauma? Yet a problem arose when I began to consider the question: what constitutes a community of trauma? The twentieth century has encompassed an endless cycle of violence.<sup>1</sup> America still suffers from the legacy of slavery and systematic oppression of black people and genocide of first nations; it also suffers from the residual effects of global, imperialistic endeavours, as evident in the terrorist attacks on the United States. In this context, trauma is not just a condition that is specific to certain groups; trauma characterises life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, the effects of trauma can reverberate through a community to such a degree that the very notion of a national and cultural identity is kept in a perpetual state of crisis.

Much of what constitutes our relationship to cultural artefacts – museum objects or objects derived from popular culture – is centred on the binary of rupture and the longing for regeneration. Forces of domination persist in society that perpetuate these binary conditions separating unity and disunity, loss and recovery, past and present, subject and object. In short, violence has kept us in a perpetual state of crisis. This led me to pose a challenging question for institutions and their audiences. Can cultural institutions extend themselves to a participatory form of symbolic action that would enable education to embrace and work through the very notion of crisis?

The museum is an institution designed to preserve, collect, and interpret cultural histories. Its primary source of ‘evidence’ is the artefact. Despite the image of pure prestige that characterises the museum, a traumatic rupture essentially marks the artefact; it is the symbolic nexus of a societal wound. Not only has the artefact been violently transplanted from one context to another; identity has also been displaced and

1. Antonius C G M Robben and Marcelo M Suárez-Orozco, *Cultures under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2000, pp 1–2.

relocated, and even the very context of the ‘museum’ has been susceptible to the vicissitudes of historical change. The same problems of continuity and discontinuity are embodied in the work of art. The ‘original’ work of art derives its existence from a departure from the ‘subject’, and the possible or impossible link to future ‘subjects’. The modern episteme enables knowledge of the artefact to become, simultaneously, knowledge about people, ‘their histories, their lives, and their relationships’.<sup>2</sup> Rather than conceive of education in the museum as a universal means to structure a heterogeneous universe, I argue that the artefact is symbolic of a traumatic rupture, the same kind of dissociation that comprises communities of trauma. Institutions that rely on cultural phenomena to communicate and educate should therefore consider a theory of crisis and pedagogy that can address the forever wounded artefact – the individual and collective body.

The evolution of the modern museum is closely tied to imperialistic acquisition of cultural artefacts as the evidence of cultural life both affirmed and denied. Capitalism accelerated our orientation towards reifying objects of identification. This development had the effect of dispersing and splintering identity, while sustaining the illusions of identity under conditions of plenitude. Excess in the production and accumulation of cultural property could occur without imposed restrictions. The museum took on aspects of institutional surveillance. As Eileen Hooper-Greenhill writes:

... the gaze that surveyed an extended geographical space initially for military purposes surveyed that same space for cultural purposes. Material things, ‘works of art’ (*objets d’art*), were deployed in the same way as other strategic commodities.<sup>3</sup>

The founding of the modern museum took on the feature of the panopticon, the all-seeing source from which everything can be objectified. The ‘systematic’, ‘orderly’ museum classified information, and presented hierarchies of styles, themes, and linear progressions that converted fragments of the past into a new, albeit discontinuous, system of knowledge. As Hooper-Greenhill has noted, the opening of the Louvre, for example, along with subsequent regional museums, formed what she termed ‘the disciplinary museum’. The disciplinary museum:

... was constituted through the articulations of several elements: the great rupture of people and things at the time of the revolution in France; the emergence of a state that conceived the population as a resource; and the reworking of earlier models of princely positions, created and supported by collections of precious material things.<sup>4</sup>

The struggle to maintain notions of universality in the face of what was perceived as divisive particularities was characteristic of modernity. The museum was established as a self-contained institution of culture, which gave meaning and order to the otherwise scattered remains of history and culture. The museum was born out of the force of modernity itself, a period characterised as ‘a loss of wholeness, a shattering of connection, a destruction or disintegration of permanent value’.<sup>5</sup> Objects can never quite maintain this quality of resoluteness, just as communities never quite recover from the trauma of loss. It thus becomes a matter of ethics

2. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, p 198.

3. *Ibid*, p 167.

4. *Ibid*, p 188.

5. Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*, Thames & Hudson, London, New York, p 23.

for museums to consider how dangerous they can be if they are not attuned to their complicity in the use and abuse of culture, as Seeger notes:

One thinks of the vast ruined Temple of Angkor Wat inspiring the likes of Pol Pot in Cambodia to recapture for his people a 'mythic agrarian age of Khmer's national magnificence' with the subsequent genocidal implications treated as necessary 'collateral damage'. Yes, museums can be dangerous.<sup>6</sup>

Has the museum successfully integrated culture into our lives in ways that substantiate and validate identities linked to diverse and competing histories, or has it perpetuated, if not institutionalised, the crisis of witnessing?

Rather than focus on education in the context of the 'disciplinary museum', I suggest that museums reconsider their collections as objects linked to a history of cultural trauma. I challenge the notion that the artefact, accompanied by a heterogeneous ordering of statements and information, leads to an unproblematic plurality of voices and representations. The artefact and institutional discourse ought instead to be considered a crucial ground for negotiating the boundaries of identity and politics, as well as working through the dislocations that constitute historical trauma. I seek a 'pedagogy of hope' for museums and other cultural institutions surviving in what can be called an 'age of catastrophe'.

In general, trauma is defined as a shock or blow to the tissues of the body and/or mind that may trigger abrupt intrusive memories from the past. Since the 1980s, the American Psychiatric Association's definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) began to include responses to combat and natural disasters, as well as domestic abuse. According to Cathy Caruth, this definition has only complicated our understanding of what constitutes disease and pathology:

Indeed, the more we satisfactorily locate and classify the symptoms of PTSD, the more we seem to have dislocated the boundaries of our modes of understanding – so that psychoanalysis and medically oriented psychiatry, sociology, history, and even literature all seem to be called upon to explain, to cure, or to show why it is that we can no longer simply explain or simply cure. The phenomenon of trauma has seemed to become all-inclusive, but it has done so precisely because it brings us to the limits of our understanding: if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience.<sup>7</sup>

The 'disruption' that Caruth speaks of allows those of us who are educators and cultural workers to expand our conception of what it is that constitutes the originary site of injury and its symptoms. It is now possible to consider, beyond psychic and bodily injuries, the damage to the tissues of community. As Kai Erikson explains:

. . . one can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from traumatized persons. Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body . . . but

6. Martin Seeger, 'Introduction to "Toward a Museology of Reconciliation"', [available at: <http://maltwood.finearts.uvic.ca/tmr/segger.html>], 11 May 1998, online proceedings of ICTOP conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

7. Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed Cathy Caruth, Johns Hopkins University Press, Maryland, pp 3–4.

even when that does not happen, traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, ethos – a group culture, almost – that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension.<sup>8</sup>

As the study of trauma takes us from the tissues of the mind and body to community, we are compelled to re-examine the role of history in determining the vicissitudes of injury and society's response to those injuries. Judith Herman notes how the study of hysteria grew out of the 'anti-clerical political movement'; 'shell-shock' grew out of the anti-war movement, and 'domestic abuse' out of the feminist movement. Political movements have always been necessary to bring out a regime's 'truth' about trauma and disease:

To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered.<sup>9</sup>

The complex ways in which alliances are formed and severed, expanded and diminished, thus makes the field of culture an agonising field of struggle for acceptance and recognition.

The study of trauma takes us full circle to the very substance of the museum's value: the cultural artefact. The artefact is an analogue for traumatic repetition; it is symbolic of trauma's *literal* return, which engenders and forestalls the materialisation or dissolution of symbolic and political power. It is the symbolic nexus of society's wounds and celebrations. The artefact should also be understood in relation to all cultural forms of mediation, which have the capacity to continuously screen out and further obfuscate a direct link to a history of trauma. As Ron Eyerman indicates:

Mass mediated experience always involves selective construction and representation, since what is seen is the result of the actions and decisions of professionals as to what is significant and how it should be presented. Thus, national or cultural trauma always engages a 'meaning struggle,' a grappling with an event that involves identifying the 'nature of pain, the nature of the victim and attribution of responsibility.'<sup>10</sup>

Material culture, as the vehicle for working through individual and collective traumas, takes us yet into another controversial area of study: collective memory. Collective memory takes into account the multiple forms that memory can take – the who–what–when–where–how of memory, as well as those things yet to be recognized or understood. The process of memorisation therefore involves a constellation of forces and activities that work collectively to counter the effects of trauma. Barbara Zelizer describes the complexity of collective memory this way:

By definition, collective memory ... presumes activities of sharing, discussion, negotiation, and, often, contestation. Remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having as much to do with identity

8. Kai Erikson, *Trauma: Explorations of in Memory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Maryland, 1995, p 185.

9. Judith M D Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Basic Books, New York, 1992, p 9.

10. Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001, p 3.

formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social interaction as with the simple act of recall. Its full understanding thus requires an appropriation of memory as social, cultural, and political action at its broadest level.<sup>11</sup>

Memory as a social activity therefore differs from the purely psychological or cognitive process. In the same way that 'traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, ethos – a group culture, almost – that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up',<sup>12</sup> collective memory can likewise serve a general need to reconstruct the world. Rather than recall an accurate moment from the past that attempts to re-establish what was lost, memory becomes a malleable substance that is continuously expanded and adjusted to the needs of the community as it attempts to reconstruct out of the fragments of the past a more sustainable future. The burden is no longer placed on the individual who suffers from a condition of repressed memories and feelings of melancholia: the community, out of a collective need to restore health and value to its members, integrates collective memory into the rituals of mourning and celebration. In this sense, memory is ushered in advance of history.

In distancing themselves from personal recall, collective memories help us fabricate, rearrange, or omit details from the past as we thought we knew it. Issues of historical accuracy and authenticity are pushed aside to accommodate other issues, such as those surrounding the establishment of social identity, authority, solidarity, political affiliation.<sup>13</sup>

Collective memory, then, as a response to cultural trauma relies on the cultural field as a form of mediation to reconstruct the present out of the past, and the past out of the present. Rather than remaining fixed to a particular place and time, it undergoes many different forms and mutations depending on the needs of any given community. However, there are some instances where groups of people and even nations have a difficult time working through a history of irreconcilable differences. The binary logic of race in America, for example, has compelled the country to remain forever wedded to the notion of homogeneity, the universal construction of whiteness as citizenship, without ever addressing the persisting reality of racial pain. This inability to work through what seems an interminable wound has led to the identification with other conditions of suffering that forestall the country's ability to face its own troubled history. This view is reflected in Tim Cole's *Selling the Holocaust*, which considers how the American appropriation of the Holocaust prevents it from addressing events pertaining to its own history:

It has been suggested that the popular fascination with the Holocaust may function as a 'screen memory' in the Freudian sense, covering up a traumatic event – another traumatic event – that cannot be approached directly. . . . The fascination with the Holocaust could be read as a kind of screen allegory behind/through traumata closer to home.<sup>14</sup>

On the level of our cultures, the objectification of meaning and value reflect a persistent need to construct forms of knowledge that otherwise

11. Barbara Zelizer, 'Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies', in *Critical Studies in Mass Communications*, 12:2, p 214.

12. Erikson, op cit, p 185.

13. Zelizer, op cit, p 217.

14. Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler*, Routledge, New York, 1999, p 157.

remain open wounds. Underpinning objectivity is the assumption of a unified self, coextensive with property and geographical boundaries. Yet no such entity exists without a *constant* struggle or what Gramsci has referred to as 'hegemony'. In the context of museums there are methods of objectification surrounding discourse and the objects they address that lead to the same kind of fabrication. As Sara Mills (reading through Foucault) would suggest, this allows 'fiction' to function as truth:

The possibility exists for fiction to function as truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or 'manufactures' something that does not exist, that is, 'fictions' it. One 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.<sup>15</sup>

Collective memory is a flexible, contingent, and highly contested social practice. How museums facilitate this process therefore requires a new conception of education that is more attuned to the traumas of our time.

The struggle to preserve memories and to make manifest political realities inevitably extends the museum's domain into the public sphere. In this sense, museums can better understand their collections by exploring their relationship to public memorial sites, which involve both the physical and psychological dimensions of competing groups and interests. This has been most evident in the case of the Vietnam memorial and the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Marita Sturken in *Tangled Memories* notes how each event becomes, as a matter of public interest, an artefact in which the process of memory and forgetting converge. Sturken acknowledges a need to shift the focus from personal memory to cultural memory. Cultural memory becomes 'a field of contested meanings in which Americans interact with cultural elements to produce concepts of the nation, particularly in events of trauma, where both the structures and the fractures of a culture are exposed'.<sup>16</sup> She considers how the walls of the Vietnam memorial serve as a projection of memory and history, as well as a screen that blocks access to the past. The memorial, designed by Maya Lin, is constructed out of black granite with 58,196 names of the men and women who died in the war inscribed into the surface. Those who died in the war seem to achieve historical presence through the inscription of their names, and yet such inscription falls short of representing the 'actual' body, a life whose remains have become displaced by the effects of technological warfare. As Judith Butler asks: 'Do these names really signify for us the fullness of the lives that were lost or are they so many tokens of what we cannot know, enigmas, inscrutable and silent?'<sup>17</sup>

This introduces the problem of how language coincides with historical events, how it is to effectively account for 'the body in pain'. Elaine Scarry provides an analysis of pain that can also serve as a definition of trauma. According to Scarry, 'whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language'.<sup>18</sup> Here is a clear indication of how inscriptions and the memorial itself serve the dual function of

15. Sara Mills, *Discourse*, Routledge, New York and London, 1997, p 61. Mills provides a broad definition of discourse, which includes discourse and ideology, discursive structure, and feminist and postcolonial theory.

16. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, 1997, p 3.

17. *Ibid*, p 61.

18. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1985 p 4.

representation and non-representation, the possible and impossible, when attempting to account for the displaced, traumatic *body in pain*. The need to find closure to the war is not only prevented by an irretrievable painful past; it also remains an 'open wound' in American history, particularly for families, friends, and survivors of the war who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. The enduring feature of the Vietnam memorial is that it allows families and communities to bear witness and share stories, as well as bring to the surface what continuously threatens to remain latent and become far removed from history.

In 'Conversations with the Dead', Sturken also considers how the Names project AIDS Memorial Quilt serves as the primary locus where different communities converge to construct meaning and identity. She illustrates how the AIDS Memorial Quilt lies at the intersection of competing discourses, where populations sharing a sense of loss become divided over issues of sexuality, race, class, nation, and politics. For example, while some communities emphasise the therapeutic role of the quilt, other members focus on the political dimension. Cleve Jones, one of the organisers for the memorial, who intended the quilt to be apolitical, modified his view later when considering its social impact: 'It is very much an accusation, bringing evidence of the disaster to the doorstep of the people responsible for it. We have never depoliticised it to that extent. We want to move them to act.'<sup>19</sup> However, some find it difficult to reconcile the political with the apolitical. Members of the activist gay community, for example, 'see mourning and memorializing as opposed to organizing and protesting. Hence, the quilt is sometimes read as taking attention away from the anger of the living.'<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, when the issue is brought to inner-city communities, anger is replaced with 'rage' and 'despair'. Conflict occurs when AIDS is constructed primarily as a gay disease, while communities of colour are neglected and denied access to resources and information. As Sturken recognises, the need to make AIDS an issue for any given community ultimately requires resources and the power to make your voice heard. 'Is the AIDS quilt the product of only one part of the community of AIDS in the United States – that is the people that have the time and resources for "spiritual growth" and mourning?'<sup>21</sup> While the AIDS Memorial Quilt has become a means by which communities realised their shared loss, it also becomes a vehicle for constructing memory and forging a politics of identity.

The public memorial helps us to anticipate the problems that museums face when addressing the subject of trauma, memory, and the politics of identity. This becomes especially evident when the museum artefact is no longer perceived as a self-contained object but as a present 'situation' that is used to negotiate the boundaries between past events and future possibilities. Perry and Paynter, for example, in 'Artefacts, Ethnicity and the Archaeology of African Americans',<sup>22</sup> begin with the stated position that methodologies used to determine demographic changes, intercultural exchange, and individual activity are not stable models for processing information, but unstable and contested boundaries. If identity entails the process of negotiation, how does one acquire the essential qualities of the artefact as one's own? What constitutes, for African-Americans, an Africanist presence in the artefact? The cultural

19. Sturken, *op cit*, p 195.

20. *Ibid*, p 200.

21. *Ibid*, p 209.

22. Warren Perry and Robert Paynter, 'Artefacts, Ethnicity and the Archaeology of African Americans', in *I Too, Am America: Archaeological Studies of African American Life*, ed Theresa A Singleton, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1999, pp 299–310.

artefact thus becomes central to reviving a past that is crucial to the formation of present and future identities. As Eyerman argues:

... the past is not only recollected, and thus represented through language, it is also recalled, imagined, through association with artefacts, some of which have been arranged and designated for that purpose. If narrative, the 'power of telling,' is intimately intertwined with language, with capacity and more importantly perhaps, with the possibility to speak, representation can be called 'the power of looking' (Hale 1998: 8) and associated with the capacity to see and the possibility to make visible.<sup>23</sup>

Since identification through the artefact concerns the character of culture rather than people, Perry and Paynter find it necessary to explore 'the intricacies of cultural construction under the conditions of economic and political domination.'<sup>24</sup> Since cultural property is given significance through agency, cultural artefacts (cowrie shells, colonoware pots, etc) for African-Americans can be seen as objects of redemption, or a means to recapture a lost heritage. But this cannot occur without political mobilisation and organisation in order to gain access to power and knowledge. The stress is on the interdependency of culture and politics as an active process of forging an identity that cannot be realised without a struggle. By recognising this process as unstable rather than stable they resist 'playing by the rules of white racism'.<sup>25</sup> Cultural memory is part of a dynamic process that involves active engagement with cultural objects in order to engender possible actions for the future – or what Perry and Paynter call 'ethnogenesis'.

The value that cultural artefacts have to make visible what is invisible introduces the paradox of confronting a traumatic past. The desire to bring forth 'positive' forms of identification (heroic memory) can occur at the expense of working through a painful and difficult past. Rinaldo Walcott, in 'Pedagogy and Trauma', addresses the trauma of the Middle Passage and its lingering effects on the black community. Walcott's analysis is based on a study of black undergraduate students and their response to the history of slavery. The study became the groundwork for developing what he calls a 'creolized' pedagogy for the working through of the trauma of slavery.

Traumatic creolization . . . brings with it a necessity to think about both pleasure and pain: that we think of slavery as a past connection to Africa, a violent break with that continent, *and* a difficult condition of new possibilities. In this respect, creolization can offer us a way not only beyond the victim/hero binary, but also beyond the limits of shame and defeat.<sup>26</sup>

Walcott suggests a twofold process whereby African-Americans can bear witness to an incomprehensible and painful past, while preparing for future possibilities. Walcott's view is greatly influenced by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*,<sup>27</sup> in which the Middle Passage signals a violent departure or rupture from Africa to the new creolised domain of the Americas. According to Walcott, the embrace of heroic narratives reinforces the perpetuation of a binary structure, which offers no alternative to the trauma's *literal* return and intrusion into black life.

23. Eyerman, p 9.

24. Perry and Paynter, op cit, p 301.

25. Ibid, p 302.

26. Rinaldo Walcott, 'Pedagogy and Trauma: The Middle Passage, Slavery, and the Problem of Creolization', in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, eds Roger I Simon et al, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2000, p 139.

27. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, London, 1993.

Rather than working through the difficulty of trauma by embracing both pleasure and pain, knowledge and the pain of not knowing remain strangers to one another. Trauma in its very literality remains suspended:

It is this literality and its insistent return which thus constitutes trauma and points toward its enigmatic core: the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely true to the event.<sup>28</sup>

Traumatic repetition, thus, develops an enigmatic quality whereby the traumatized become haunted by the *literal* return of an event that is continuously screened out by the embrace of heroic narratives. Instead, it is believed 'that knowledge of the past will set one free and prevent future forms of racism and genocide'.<sup>29</sup>

While Walcott does not address the subject of artefacts directly, he does refer to neo-slave narratives or what he also calls 'critical fictions' in order to understand the object of history as a contested one. While Walcott is less concerned with politics from a historical materialist perspective, he suggests that the 'counternovel' can offer 'a different politicisation of history. This is a politicization not structured on the basis of right and wrong, but on the tensions of what is possible to tell.'<sup>30</sup> He refers specifically to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*<sup>31</sup> and Paule Marshall's *Praise Song for the Widow*,<sup>32</sup> in which slavery is re-membered to accommodate multiple conceptions of a new self.

Unfortunately, Walcott's incessant need to distinguish his theory from Afrocentrism (which he argues 'violently' opposes Eurocentrism, and thereby reinscribes the binary structure of thought) with what he proposes as a creolised space is a position that is ironically oppositional. What is very apparent in this essay is the ideological struggle within the black intellectual community itself, a struggle that invests again in the same binary structure of 'us and them'. (It is the same conflict that separated Henry Louis Gates Jr from Manning Marable in 'A Debate on Activism in Black Studies').<sup>33</sup> Both views must be understood in terms of their psychological, social, and political value. Trauma for African-Americans has involved not only the difficulty in confronting the Middle Passage but also the persistence of racism in America. For example, Orlando Patterson, in *Rituals of Blood*,<sup>34</sup> argues that the black community has undergone a systematic process of disintegration, which is linked to two and a half centuries of slavery and its aftermath. Walcott's use of 'critical fictions', however, does provide a useful analogy for understanding the artefact as no longer self-contained but entangled in a history that must be re-imagined, re-membered, and retold in the interest of future possibilities.

The pedagogy of trauma is part of a generalised discourse that includes not only description and narration but also artefacts and exhibit spaces that bear witness to the unrepresentable. Andrea Liss, in 'Artefactual Testimonies and the Stagings of Holocaust Memory', addresses the inevitable paradox that arises when the artefact intended to provide historical evidence of a traumatic past simultaneously negates that past. The artefact symbolises a rupture with history, its original moorings, only to be reconstituted as an 'artefact' in some other place

28. Caruth, op cit, p 5.

29. Walcott, op cit, p 135.

30. Ibid, p 141-2.

31. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1988.

32. Paule Marshall, *Praise Song for the Widow*, E P Dutton, New York, 1984.

33. Henry Louis Gates Jr and Manning Marable, 'A Debate on Activism in Black Studies', in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience*, ed Manning Marable, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000.

34. Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*, Basic Civitas, New York, 1999.

and time. What makes it so tragic and incomprehensible is that it provides the only evidence through which to identify and empathise with communities that have lost their lives to catastrophic violence. Yet, as Liss suggests, this staging of unknowability is fraught with difficulties:

Despite the artefacts' reference to actual human lives and previous ownership – as in the case of personal objects like toothbrushes, shoes, and eyeglasses – they are strangely devoid of the bodily presence indexed through their metonymic traces. Perhaps in part because artefacts are often denuded in this way, they gesture differently than photographs do toward the fragile and necessary possibilities of closing one's eyes to create empathic bridges through the imaginative projection of one's eyes into the experiences of another. . . . However we must ask whether artefacts function as barriers to the events, despite the opportunities they offer to close one's eyes to be open to another's experiences.<sup>35</sup>

The metonymic traces that Liss speaks of recalls Butler's observations regarding the inscriptions on the Vietnam Memorial: do they signify the fullness of life or are they inscrutable and silent? In this case the site is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and Liss refers specifically to the freight car on the third floor of the permanent collection. The car is a fifteen-ton Karlsruhe model, one of several types used to transport people to the Treblinka death camp. She describes the ambiguity of bearing witness when the imagination of the past is thwarted by the 'shock' of the present:

After a few moments, I closed my eyes. Darkness. More darkness. Then bodies. Real people crammed next to each other. Women dressed in fine suits clinging to their children, their parents, or utter strangers. People smothering each other. People trampling each other for a shard of food, a lick of water. The bestiality. The defecation. The humanness. I opened my eyes, embarrassed by my trespass. I was set up.<sup>36</sup>

The process of closing and opening the eyes that Liss describes is representative of how a dark and incomprehensible past becomes not the intrusion of a repressed memory but the literal return of the event in symbolic form reminiscent of an unbearable silence. The visitor must grapple with a presence that cannot be denied but which is mute and says nothing. As Liss writes: 'I wanted to touch the car's wood. To caress it. Or better still, to gouge my fingers into its cruel silences.'<sup>37</sup> The museum's ability to generate a discourse about painful events of the past and the cultures linked to them is hampered by the difficulty of speaking the unspeakable. This ethical dilemma cannot be underestimated. As I will consider shortly, the materiality of artefacts, whether they appear in the guise of god, nation-states, museum displays, or 'official' discourses, is implicated in the perpetuation of violence. As Scarry has suggested, unless they are 'tools' capable of remaking the world in the form of future possibilities, they become 'tools' or instruments that deny human sentience.

As Liss indicates, the pedagogical means for addressing the subject of trauma is established not merely through discourse but through the enunciation of the exhibition space. This can even be ascertained in a seemingly mundane space. In 'The Art of Memory', Annie Coombes

35. Andrea Liss, 'Artefactual Testimonies and the Stagings of Holocaust Memory', in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, eds Roger I Simon, et al, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2000, p 121.

36. *Ibid*, p 123.

considers how prisoners surviving the horror of death camps work through the effects of trauma by ‘marking time’ in a space of oblivion. Coombes refers, specifically, to an exhibition entitled ‘Art in Detention/ Camp de Khaim/Sud Liban’ held at the Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt in Paris. The camps were originally located on the South Lebanon border in the Israeli occupied territories. The cells were exhibited in a room similar to any domestic or commercial space. In the centre of the exhibition floor were two reconstructed isolation cells whose specifications were detailed by Soha Bechara, a detainee of ten years. ‘The paradox that Bechara invokes is that, in a place like Khaim, fear destroys any sense of order, routine or discipline and consequently any clear sense of time. Chaos not order is the reigning emotion.’<sup>38</sup> While the gallery takes on political issues that suggest a kind of ‘pedagogic moralising’, it foregrounds ‘praxis and progress’. The exhibition consists of works by ex-prisoners of the detention camps at Khaim (1985–95). Judging from the photographs, the cell appears as a mute presence whose interiority is the encapsulation of the torture Bechara endured as a prisoner. It signals once again the paradox of offering a form of identification that simultaneously negates the ‘body in pain’. Or as Scarry suggests: ‘the human attempt to reverse the de-objectifying work of pain by forcing pain itself into avenues of objectification is a project laden with practical and ethical consequence’.<sup>39</sup> The exhibit also includes along the wall of the gallery clothes sewn from needles made out of fish bones and objects constructed from the paper of food packages. As Coombes observes, the transposition of containment – detention cell to exhibition space – reproduces the very silence that constitutes the condition of being in pain.

In fact, in many ways the structure of the exhibition space itself could be understood as a metonymic representation of traumatic memory. In other words our experience of the space and the display is primarily physical and profoundly disruptive. The threatening implausibility of the relative spatial registers of both cells and objects shakes our confidence in our own judgement.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike the objects and descriptions typically found in a gallery or museum, the objects have no intrinsic value and resist didacticism. Instead, each object is symbolic of the isolation that permits violence to destroy our symbol-making capacity. The presence of artefacts that transmit such an inscrutable silence also speaks to a wider isolation:

The meaning of trauma’s address beyond itself concerns, indeed, not only individual isolation but a wider historical isolation that in our time is communicated on the level of our cultures.<sup>41</sup>

37. Ibid.

38. Annie Coombes, ‘The Art of Memory’, *Third Text*, no 52, Autumn 2000, p 50.

39. Scarry, op cit, p 6.

40. Coombes, op cit, p 49.

41. Caruth, op cit, p 11.

In other words, cultural artefacts are analogous to our general sense of historic isolation, a lack or absence of social cohesiveness and mutual understanding that is perpetuated by violence. This violence leaves behind in its wake fragments of modernity and postmodernity, individual and collective bodies, strewn and reorganised between possible and impossible worlds.

The semantic relationship between objects, the exhibition space, and discourse operates surreptitiously in the perpetuation of violence. As

Walcott implied in his use of ‘critical fictions’, there may very well be a need for the rhetorical basis for education. Schwartzman in, ‘“Telogology” as a Rhetorical Basis for Holocaust Education’, examines the relationship between language and violent outcomes. Schwartzman’s creation of the neologism ‘telogology’ comprises Kenneth Burke’s concepts of *telos* and *logology* to illustrate how ‘patterns of language’, unlike the logical sequence of events, contribute at least in part to violent outcomes. Burke, for example, understood how the ideology of Nazism tended toward the direction of *perfectibility*. *Telos* thus comes to represent an *ideal*, an entelechial progression in accordance with its own nature. Yet, since language does not follow the course of historical events, ‘logology involves the investigation of how language makes some options for acting more “thinkable” and therefore more likely to be enacted than others’.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, even the discourse on Holocaust education can suffer from a ‘rhetorical blind spot’, which is why Schwartzman suggests a more inventive use of language:

Developing memory alone, while encouraging historical accuracy, does little to combat indoctrination. If understanding should be distinguished from acceptance, then inventive capacity should be encouraged as an antidote to overdoses of memory.<sup>43</sup>

Schwartzman suggests that language as a pedagogical medium is used as a form of ‘metaphoric redirection’. Rather than attempting to unify a public through the stable use of a unitary monolithic language, ‘metaphoric redirection’ opens up the possibility of cooperation. As a result, attention to the ‘rhetorical telos’ can be used to encourage ‘other’ historical possibilities, rather than the teleology of language and violent outcomes.

These combined insights suggest that there is a need, but also a limit, to how we produce and process the truth. They demand that we think of education as interdisciplinary and cross-cultural. It is also necessary that museum educators see themselves ‘as facilitators for learning rather than dispensers of knowledge’.<sup>44</sup> Arguably, the conditions of fragmentation and displacement require not only a new educational imperative on the part of museums; these conditions require also a social commitment to a more just society. This will require accepting the notion that our reconstructed histories are ‘fictions’. While museum discourse is intended to have the effect of truth, its role in understanding cultural trauma may require that we consider the profundity of what is ‘absent’ in our ‘present’ field of representations. This will enable us to be more susceptible to the needs of community whose link to a history of trauma is often difficult to comprehend or ascertain. We must recognise trauma as a form of knowledge prior to discourse, and recognise in the artefact a muteness that carries with it its own historical truths. As Caruth states: ‘to be able to listen to the impossible . . . is also to have been “chosen” by it, before the possibility of mastering it with knowledge’.<sup>45</sup>

The mastery of knowledge that characterises museum practice can be potentially dangerous, precisely because history shaped by traumatic violence becomes not a history that is recorded, explained, and resolved for all time but a history that is essentially not over. As Felman writes:

42. Roy Schwartzman, ‘“Telogology” as a Rhetorical Basis for Holocaust Education’, (Reports – Evaluative (142) – Speeches/Meeting Papers 150), Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL (ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED 413 617), 1997, p 7.

43. *Ibid*, p 4.

44. Hooper-Greenhill, *op cit*, p 200.

45. Caruth, p 10.

46. Cited in Caruth, *op cit*, p 11. Felman also has a very interesting article on this subject that is worth reading separately, titled 'Education and Crisis or the Vicissitudes of Teaching', in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, eds Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub, Routledge, New York, 1992.

47. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans Myra Bergman Ramos, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972.

48. Scarry, *op cit*.

We must look at a history which is essentially 'not over', a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively 'evolving' . . . in today's political, historical, cultural and artistic scene.<sup>46</sup>

Without the aid of discourse to safely record and explain history, educators must be willing to practise a 'pedagogy of hope'<sup>47</sup> that will require faith in mankind never to lose sight of the other's humanity so that, in the case of the artefact, one group's 'tool' is not another group's 'weapon'.<sup>48</sup> Rather than depend on rational calculations to dispel the persistence of human loss and suffering, museum educators must be willing to confront the fissures of history that resist explanation. If history is not over, then what we do as educators will continue to have social and ethical consequences.