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REPRESENTATIONS OF TRANSCENDENCE IN THE WORK OF ANSELM KIEFER AND ANISH KAPOOR.

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A thesis submitted to the Division of Fine Arts in the Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, in part fulfillment for the degree of Master of Fine Arts by Research.

Johannesburg, 2006.

ABSTRACT

In this research dissertation I argue that selected works of artists Anselm Kiefer (b.1945) and Anish Kapoor (b.1954) can best be understood as representations of transcendence. I begin by locating works selected for this research within the body of work each artist has produced. This is followed by the definition of my key terms: representation, transcendence and emptiness. An analysis of the relation between these terms forms the basis for my theoretical framework. I will then investigate the specific material and aesthetic qualities of the selected works, and work towards a metaphorical and conceptual understanding of the artworks with the aid of my theoretical framework. This is followed by an investigation of my own creative work. In the conclusion I consolidate my analysis of representations of transcendence and emptiness in the previous three chapters, which is followed by a recapitulation and consideration of my findings.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Art in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Stefanus Rademeyer

7th day of April, 2006.

I hereby acknowledge and appreciate support and continuous encouragement from the following people and institutions:

My parents, Fanie and Fransie Rademeyer, for their patience and faith in my pursuit,
Prof. Colin Richards, for his attention to detail and academic dexterity,
The National Research Foundation and Wits University for their financial assistance,
My sister Vasti, who gave me the wonderful opportunity to do research at the British Library,
Warren Siebrits and Lunetta Bartz who facilitated the exhibition of my practical work towards the Masters Degree.

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INTRODUCTION

I: CONTEXTUALIZATION

My initial motivation for writing this dissertation was a personal interest in notions of transcendence and emptiness. My artistic work is also characterized by an ongoing exploration of these notions. I approach transcendence as a subjective impulse and as a series of historical concepts. Somewhere between these two ways of relating to transcendence, one that is subjective, and another that is relatively objective, I hope to find new representations of transcendence and emptiness.

For the dissertation, the point of departure for the analysis of 'novel' representations of transcendence and emptiness would be the work of practicing artists. After considering a wide spectrum of 20th century artists, I decided that specific works of Anselm Kiefer and Anish Kapoor had the closest proximity to philosophical notions of transcendence and emptiness. Furthermore, I hoped my research would make a significant contribution to the writing available on the two artists, because, as I will briefly substantiate, the majority of key texts underestimated the critically philosophical and systematic approach that Anselm Kiefer have towards transcendence and Anish Kapoor towards emptiness.

I will now introduce a short overview of some of the major texts available on the two artists.

Anselm Kiefer was born in 1945 in Germany where he still resides. He had his first solo exhibition in 1969 and completed a staggering 40 one-man exhibitions by the late eighties. (Rosenthal 1987: 161-163) Popular texts emphasize his interest in 20th century Germanic history:

> Born in the very year that the war ended, Kiefer has been haunted by the moral dilemma of Germany's guilt for the actions of the Third Reich, including World War II and the Holocaust, events in which his generation played no part, reminding one of the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, which implicates all humanity in the disobedience of Adam and Eve. (Hartt 1993: 1051)

In a major book by Mark Rosenthal (1987), titled **Anselm Kiefer**, Rosenthal's analysis focusses exclusively on Kiefer's interest in Germany's past, or in Kiefer's own words: the "terror of history"(7) This line of argument is elaborated throughout the book, starting with one of Kiefer's first artist book's titled *Occupations* (1969), where Kiefer made explicit and aggressive commentary on German National Socialism. Rosenthal then provides an extensive analysis on Kiefer's interest in Germany's past and its relation to landscape, explored in his gigantic end expressive landscape paintings such as *Cockchafer Fly* (1974), *Painting=Burning* (1974), *The Red Sea* (1985). (32-33, 60-63, 126-127) References to German National Socialist architecture are explored in *To the unknown Painter* (1980) and *Interior* (1981). (106-111)

An extensive article in the Artforum magazine by Jean Fisher (1985-86) opens with the phrase: "The work of Anselm Kiefer is generally regarded as being in some way a commentary on German nationality." (Fisher 1985-86: 106) The article goes on to argue that Kiefer explores the crisis of German identity in relation to Nazism.

This is achieved by using mythological themes as critical analogies to Nazism's modus operandi. (Fisher 1985-86: 106-110) I would argue that it is evident that Kiefer's growing concern with mythology indicated his desire to contextualize specific historical events within a larger mythological metaphor. This interest in recognizing recurring existential motifs also suggests an interest in the possible transcendence of historicity.

It is important to note that claims have been made by authors for the use of mythological subject matter in works by Anselm Kiefer. There are not any credible references to mythologies in the work I have selected for my analysis, mainly because *Zweistromland* is mostly characterized by an absence of cultural and historical specificity. In specific instances, mythologies can be described as a form of secular transcendence.

Kiefer's work took a turn around the mid 1980's. His preoccupation with Germanic history diminished and his concerns seem to have shifted towards a more international awareness. It is this new period in Kiefer's oeuvre that interested me, and I was immediately fascinated by a large-scale installation titled *Zweistromland* (1986-89). Its complexity and scale motivated me to use this artwork as the only reference for my dissertation out of Kiefer's oeuvre. It is in *Zweistromland* that I discovered Kiefer's enormous capacity for creating a multi-dimensional philosophical and visual encyclopedia. In relation to this installation his previous works seem didactic and narrow in their concerns.

Zweistromland is in the permanent collection of the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Norway. Not having physically seen the work, I have had to rely on the accompanying photographic documentary titled **The High Priestess**, also regarded as a second title to the work. (Zweite 1989:8) The actual installation consists of 200 lead books, weighing up to 100 kilograms each. (Zweite 1989:105) The sheer weight and fragility of the books means that they are never opened or moved, except for documentation like the photographic documentary. The visual reference material used for this dissertation was based on the information supplied in the photographic documentary.

In the introduction of the photographic documentation, Armin Zweite refrains from giving a definite interpretation of the work, but leaves the reader with a few pointers or suggestions. She suggests that the work can be seen as an extension of Kiefer's interest in mythologies and a preoccupation with alchemy (84-101), a significant shift from the works that cited specific historical events. She does however indicate and acknowledge the value and potential scope of the work:

> Anselm Kiefer's lead book sculpture is an impressive, indeed monumental creation which uses forms and materials of great suggestive power to evoke a wide mental horizon …There can be no doubt that this is among the most important of his works to date. (Zweite 1989:101)

In the Chapter on *Zweistromland*, I will show that Kiefer confronts larger existential metaphors that explore the relation between temporality and eternity, fragments and unity, and in so doing articulate a process of transcendence.

Moving on to Anish Kapoor, I have found that the literature available is more sensitive to the manifestation of transcendence in his work. However, there is no analysis that systematically explores the parallels between philosophical systems that contains notions of transcendence and emptiness and Anish Kapoor's work.

In a pivotal text on Kapoor titled **Anish Kapoor**, Homi Bhabha (1998) gives a very poetic interpretation of the pervasive emptiness present in much of Kapoor's work: "It may be the most valuable insight into Anish Kapoor's work to suggest that the presence of an object can render a space more empty than mere vacancy could ever envisage." (12) However, Bhabha keeps his references to philosophical parallels at a bare minimum, and decides to stay close to the artist's statements and the material properties of the work. (11-41) In the chapter on Anish Kapoor I will show that this pervasive 'emptiness' that is experienced when one looks at one of Anish Kapoor's works is a visual articulation of a profound metaphysical paradox, the relation between being and nothingness, immanence and transcendence.

In another book, also titled **Anish Kapoor**, Germano Celant (1996) gives an elaborate analysis of Kapoor's work. His prime focus is in drawing parallels between Kapoor's work and mythologies. In this text, Celant sees the artist as a kind of mystic that has a privileged connection with the sacred. (XI-XXXVII)

> Moving between sign and symbol, the artist connects himself integrally to myth… The transformation of life into new images, the granting of force and energy to forms and material, takes place through ritual, the ritual of art, which qualitatively converts the formless whole into a scared whole. (Celant 1996:XI)

In contrast to Celant's analysis where Kapoor is defined as a shaman, participating in a spiritual mystical process, I will show that Kapoor's works show a rational exploration of philosophical notions of emptiness.

After studying both texts, and having had the privilege of physically encountering a few of Kapoor's works, I discovered that there was a remarkable parallel with notions of emptiness within his oeuvre. I decided to choose a range of works between 1988-1998 that would best support my argument.

In the following section, the theoretical framework that will assist in the analysis of the selected artworks by the artists will be introduced and established. The reader should note that no direct statements were made by Anselm Kiefer or Anish Kapoor with regard to the specific philosophical and theological systems that I have chosen as the interpretative framework.

The basis for my argument is established by an analysis of the physical and material qualities of the work, and with certain exceptions, statements by the artists where cited. This 'foundation' is then systematically related to the interpretative theoretical framework. They key concepts of this framework will now be introduced, and they will be further investigated and expanded in the main chapters and in the conclusion.

II: DEFINING TRANSCENDENCE AND EMPTINESS

Before we commence with individual analyses of the two key terms, *transcendence* and *emptiness*, it is important to briefly establish the relation between the two terms. Although the title of the dissertation only contains the word transcendence, the concept of emptiness is also substantially prevalent in the dissertation, especially concerning the work of Anish Kapoor. Transcendence is inextricably linked to emptiness and vice versa. The curious thing is that both terms can be interpreted negatively or positively, depending on your specific ideological or analytical framework. In the majority of theological discourses for instance, God has transcended and left the world with a profound emptiness, a fundamental asymmetry. (O' Brien 1979) In metaphysical thinking, Hegel's dialectic implies a strange contradiction. If being or God is said to contain everything, it must also contain its opposite, which is the absence of God, namely emptiness. (Korner 1984) For the existentialists the so called 'Death of God' proclaimed by Nietzsche creates an absence or emptiness in the world which is filled with meaning by humans and not received from a transcendental entity. (Blackham 1965) Paradoxically transcendence is now regarded as a human quality, the ability to overcome the limitations, restrictions and ideological confinements of the self. (1965) The reader will also be introduced to an oriental definition of emptiness through the writings of Keiji Nishitani, where emptiness is not associated with negativity, but is rather understood as the potential for existence itself. (Nishitani 1982) The reader will now be taken through a discrete analysis of each of the two terms.

In the early stages of my research conducted for this dissertation I discovered that *transcendence* as a word is used in several disciplines and often has very different meanings. Throughout the chapters there are references to several different kinds of transcendence, which ultimately stem from the same etymological source. In order to proceed with the specific analysis of the artists and their relationships to transcendence it is crucial to investigate the complex network of ideas that are associated with transcendence. I will therefore commence to establish a framework that will create a reference and a basis for ideas to follow.

The Chambers dictionary provides us with the following basic definition: to transcend means "to rise above: to surmount: to surpass: to exceed: to pass or lie beyond the limit of."(Macdonald 1978:1430) The basis of the word, the Latin word 'trans', can be translated into the words "across, beyond, through." Furthermore, the Latin word 'trânscendendére' is closely related to 'scandére': 'to climb' or 'to ascend'. (1430)

Transcendence as a verb denotes the process of transcending. The transcendental as a noun is commonly used to describe the characteristics of an absolute, unchanging identity. (O'Brien 1979) To transcend is to transform: to move beyond a 'form', a pattern, a mode of being, a mode of arrangement or a system.

Looking at the basic definition it is evident that transcendence as a concept can be appropriated by any number of epistemological, religious or secular systems, and applied and articulated in very different ways. I will start with a short overview of a Christian theological understanding of transcendence, since this is one area where the notion is frequently encountered.

In theology, that is, the discourse or the science of 'God', (Macdonald 1978:1399) especially Christian theology, transcendence refers to those attributes of God that surpasses the limited form of existence. This transcendental mode of being is characterized as infinite, unchangeable, autonomous and independent. Subsequently, existence itself is regarded as finite, that which is changing, relational and dependent. The entire history of theology can be described as a series of definitions towards the complex relation between the transcendent God and existence. (O'Brien 1979:3555) O'Brien describes this duality in more detail:

> Transcendence is a condition attributed to divinity as beyond the limitations characterized by creatureliness and as beyond comprehension by any created mind. The term sums up the attributes of divine being; rules out the possibility of pantheism, i.e., the teaching that the divine becomes a component of creation; it rules out any limits from the divine goodness and perfection; it excludes divine perfectibility, failure, or defectibility; it rules out subjection to time, space or any other extrinsic measure. (O'Brien 1979:3555)

A logical response to this statement is to make the following enquiry: to what extent then, can transcendental attributes of a religious God be known at all? O'Brien goes further to state that the divine perfections of God can be known and affirmed as to what they are; they cannot be known in their proper mode of being and can be affirmed only in terms which fall short in their mode of signifying. (1997: 3555) According to O'Brien, through the ages this problem has been a central debate amongst Christian theologians, an endless process of trying to resolve contradictions. St.Thomas Aquinas, for example, claims that because 'being' as such is the proper effect of God alone and because 'essence' is the inmost reality of every being, God is said to be 'in' every creature. (1997: 3556) Whitehead tried to bring an end to this questioning by his 'process theology'.

He posited that God in his antecedent nature is absolutely transcendent and in his consequent nature is completely immanent. The divine 'antecedent' properties are developed through the evolving process of creatures, which is the sum of all reality. (1997: 3556)

This has also been a central debate in the world for religious signification or representational modes, most notably seen in the symbol, which Coleridge considered to be the only possible vehicle that can represent the transcendental. (Bell 1997:6)

At this point it is important to introduce my specific approach to transcendence that will be explored throughout this dissertation, namely the relationship between transcendence and representation. I will guide the reader briefly through the etymology, and then further explore Coleridge's understanding of transcendental representation, a traditional religious view which is important to grasp before one can move on to secular or philosophical definitions.

The Chambers dictionary suggests that to represent is "to exhibit the image of: to use, or serve, as a symbol for: to stand for…to correspond or be in some way equivalent or analogous."(Macdonald 1978:1146) Presentation, however, is described as the "act of presenting: mode of presenting: right of presenting: that which is presented: immediate cognition: a setting forth, as of a truth: representation."(Macdonald 1978:1061)

With regards to the subject of aesthetics, the term representation, in its most basic form, is used to denote 'imitation'. That is to say, works of art are understood to represent or imitate something in the world that is called representational, while autonomous or abstract work, especially in the modernist sense, is labeled nonrepresentational. Stephan Körner suggests that "every instance of a representation involves what may be called a representandum, i.e., something that is to be represented, a representans, i.e., something that represents the representandum, and the relation 'x represents y' which holds between them."(Körner 1984:33)

This brings us to the core of the debate, that is, the representation of the transcendental. This is a particularly complex form of representation, in that it is not a verifiable imitation of just any object in the world. In traditional notions of representation, especially those concerned with theology, the representation of the transcendental can only be found in the symbol. For Coleridge, the symbol

> … is characterized by the translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of the unity of which it is representative. (Bell 1997:6)

The symbolic is therefore a relationship between the immanent, temporal representans (x) and the transcendental, eternal representandum (y). Vance Bell describes this unique relationship between x and y as a synecdoche: the symbolic object and the greater totality precipitate in a hermeneutic circle. (1997)

The symbol refers to the transcendental as a noun, which is commonly used to describe the characteristics of an absolute, unchanging identity.

As religious thought became more secularized, the notion of the transcendent became a philosophical problem, and it is extensively explored by the metaphysical tradition. Metaphysics as a philosophical category is defined as "the science which investigates the first principles of nature and thought: ontology or the science of being." (Macdonald 1978:824) In metaphysics, the transcendent reality is generically defined as "reality as it exists independently of human experience and existence". The term 'transcendent philosophy', on the other hand, refers to "attempts at grasping the nature of this reality and at answering questions which cannot be answered without a grasp of it."(Körner 1984:48) In Scholastic thought certain transcendental attributes that could be applied to everything was considered "beyond the definition of genus and difference." (Reese 1980:585) Emmanuel Kant made the distinction between a legitimate and illegitimate use of the term 'transcendental'. The legitimate use of the term refers to "the *a priori* and necessary elements of experience. They go beyond experience in the sense that they are not derived from it empirically." (585) They cannot, however, give us insight into what he called the 'supra-temporal realm'. The illegitimate use of the term occurs when concepts derived from experience are extended beyond it.

The term 'transcendence' was used once again, albeit as a critique of the religious and metaphysical philosophies, by a group of diverse thinkers, including Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre, who are labeled 'existentialists'.

In this instance the theologians and metaphysicians are criticized for reducing the transcendental to an object. For the existentialists, the individual is constantly engaging in a process of self-transcendence.

> This nonempirical real self to which I withdraw is not an abstract self to be identified with reason, a thinking self, the self of the [metaphysical] philosophers; it is, rather, aspiration, invocation, response, a creative engagement of the self in relation to something other. This real self is pure possibility unless and until it realizes and establishes itself in decisions; it comes into existence only in coming to decisions. (Blackham 1971:6)

Existentialists claim that the self is constituted through the process of surpassing its limited form, by constantly transcending its horizons. This process unfolds when the self confronts and subsequently assimilates the other. Jaspers suggests that this encounter is a fundamental aspect of human experience, while Sartre and Nietzsche would advocate a confrontational encounter with the other. That is to say, one is required to actively seek out such experiences.

> The recognition that I am alone and totally responsible, 'condemned to be free' in Sartre's phrase, is accompanied by dread. The sheer incomprehensibility of our existence, its essential unknowability, shatters all rational security. (Blackham 1971:6)

Similarly, Nietzsche sharply criticizes the theological and metaphysical notions of the transcendent by claiming that 'God is dead.' This statement, however, should not be interpreted as a mere negation, but rather as similarly reflected by Sartre, a positive leap toward self-transcendence: "He [Nietzsche] is alternately thrilled and overcome with vertigo at the thought of man as pure possibility, totally responsible for all values, for his own essence."(Blackham 1971:11)

Within the framework of existentialism, and its notion of self-transcendence, representation once again gains a legitimate status. This is evident in Nietzsche's philosophy that is characterized by a preoccupation with aesthetics. Unlike the metaphysicians, his analysis of aesthetics is not limited to a subcategory of a system; rather it becomes the central theme of his writings. Nietzsche identified with the artist, with the creative impulse and energy. He advocated a heroic confrontation with existence, a self-transcendence that he called the Dionysian impulse. In his own words: "An aspect of this is the fantasy of participating sacrificially in the omnipotent universal life force whose meaning is 'purely aesthetic'."(Dollimore 1998:236) Here aesthetics is elevated to the level of ontology; the hierarchy of the metaphysical system is undermined and subverted.

Taking the existentialist's emphasis on subjectivity into account, can one define the representation of self-transcendence? For the existentialists, the pivot of representation is not the relationship between the representans (x) and the representandum (y), the signifier and the signified. The emphasis shifts towards the self. This subject or individual can be called (S). Any moment of self-transcendence, is characterized by the process of the self (S), expanding its boundaries through engagement with the world. Consequently, the pivot of representation would be the relation between (S) and the aesthetic object [(x) (y)]. A representation of self-transcendence would therefore have to include the dynamic relation between the transforming subject (S) and the aesthetic object [(x) (y)].

Within the post-modern context, especially in the field of literary criticism, there has been a resurgence of interest in the representation of the transcendence. In order to gain a better understanding of this post-modern critique advocated by Jacques Derrida, I have returned to the original dictionary definitions, carefully re-evaluating the notion of representation and what it means to present or to be present.

The Chambers dictionary suggests that to represent is "to exhibit the image of: to use, or serve, as a symbol for: to stand for…to correspond or be in some way equivalent or analogous."(Macdonald 1978:1146) Presentation is described as the "act of presenting: mode of presenting: right of presenting: that which is presented: immediate cognition: a setting forth, as of a truth: representation."(Macdonald 1978:1061)

To present is "to set before one, introduce into presence or notice, cognizance." To be present is to be "in the place in question or implied – opposite to absent… now existing." while presence is a "fact or state of being present."(Macdonald 1978:1061)

It is vital to note that for the post-modernists, representation can be said to stand in for presence. From the abovementioned definitions one is given the impression that 'presence' or 'to present' is primary, while 'representation' is secondary. Yet, this disguises a fundamental ambivalence in the definition of presence, or what it means to be in the present. In order to be present, one has to signal, sign or figure that presence. This signification or figuring takes place through representation. Before one can present, or be in the present, one has to represent. According to Jacques Derrida, a post-modern literary critic and philosopher,

> The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, 'thing' here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being 'present' when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We give or take signals. We signal. The sign, in a sense, is deferred presence. (quote in Taylor 1984:9)

To be present is always already to re-present. There is no original or authentic presence before or outside of representation. Derrida refers to this re-presentation as the 'trace'. Furthermore, the constitution of the trace is not a mere substitute for presence; Derrida claims that the trace always refers beyond itself:

> …as the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace. (quote in Olson 1981:62)

The trace or simulacrum has profound implications for the relation between the transcendental and notions of presence. Any apprehension or representation of the transcendent will be suspended at the level of representation; the transcendental can never become the content of an authentic presence.

Transcendence therefore ceases to be a representandum; it is constituted as a metaphor within a flow of representans, signifiers that in turn refer to signifiers. It is this premise that lead Derrida to proclaim the impossibility of the transcendental signified.

Within the realm of visual art, this crisis of presence and representation becomes apparent if one looks at the notion of *mimesis*. Mimesis occurs when a representation stands in for presence.

An example would be a photograph representing a landscape. The image (a photograph) is assumed to be a transparent screen that reveals reality (the landscape). In post-modern terms, however, the photograph can be compared to a linguistic mechanism, which constructs the way that we see the landscape. The image becomes part of network of simulacra that constitutes reality. (Taylor 1984)

Apart from the theological and philosophical definitions of transcendence, the term is also used in another instance in the dissertation. In Chapter 1 part 1, there is brief encounter with geographical transcendence, denoting the qualities of spatiality.

I will briefly recapitulate the various definitions of transcendence. Firstly, I have discussed the etymological source of the term, which forms the basis of all definitions.

The first distinction is made between 'the transcendental' as a noun and 'transcendence' as a verb. The transcendental is mainly used in theological and metaphysical definitions of an objectified and unchanging reality. These will be referred to as 'theological transcendence' and 'metaphysical transcendence' respectively. It must be noted that these are only overarching terms and that there will be particular differences i.e. between different theological understandings of the attributes of a transcendental reality. Transcendence as a verb is mainly associated with the existentialists. This will be the 'existential self-transcendence' that I define as a process.

Then there is the deconstructivist 'critique of the transcendental' reality of the theologians and metaphysicians, and the materialist and phenomenological reality of the existentialists. The deconstructivists claim that such an unmediated experience of reality is impossible, and has to take the detour through language. (Taylor 1984)

This brings us to the second prominent theme in the dissertation, namely emptiness. This concept will play a significant role in the analysis of works by Anish Kapoor. In the following historical overview I will briefly define emptiness. Like transcendence, the word emptiness is also used in diverse contexts. Depending on the cultural context of the philosophies that considered this notion, it has been interpreted negatively and positively.

In the context of this dissertation, emptiness is firstly regarded in relation to transcendence. For theologians, the transcendence of God posed a dilemma that I have briefly discussed in the previous section; the relation that God has to the world itself. It has even been argued that the world is characterized by God's absence; in this sense the world is fundamentally empty. (O'Brien 1979) Vance Bell argues that the symbol fails in its attempt to signify the transcendental. It is ultimately an empty sign, which opens space for allegorical constructions. (1997) In metaphysical thinking, the negation of being which is defined variously as the other, absence, emptiness or nothingness has posed a dialectical challenge for centuries. If Being is considered to be the totality of existence, it has to contain its negation within itself. (Taylor 1987)

With the existentialists, the death of the theological and metaphysical absolute represented the abyss of nihility; the ground of existence was shown to be groundless. (Nishitani 1982) Martin Heidegger formulates a unique and inter-dependent relationship between being (existence) and non-being (the abyss) from an existentialist perspective. (Heidegger 1975)

For Nishitani, Buddhism promises a final answer to resolve the relationship between existence and emptiness. 'Sunyata' is a description of reality where existence and emptiness are regarded as two sides of the same coin; emptiness is not considered to be a transcendental absolute. (Nishitani 1982) This will be explained in detail later on.

In the contemporary context, Jacques Derrida challenges the notion of presence itself, and claims that "The sign represents the present in its absence." (quote in Taylor 1984:9) and goes further to argue that the sign itself is an empty sign that refers beyond itself. (1984)

According to Chamber's dictionary, emptiness means "having nothing within, without effect, unsatisfactory, meaningless" (Macdonald 1978:425) while the synonym 'nothingness' is described as "non-existence, state of being nothing, vacuity". (900)

Interestingly enough, this apparent 'meaningless' term has posed problems for philosophers and theologians for centuries. In a philosophical context, emptiness posed a problem when viewed in relation to 'being', which in its most basic terms can be defined as "existence, substance, essence, any person or thing existing". (117) In this context, emptiness is defined as Non-Being.

Historically, Parmenides was the first to posit a definitive concept of Being. Chandra Jha states that for Parmenides, Being was seen as the ultimate reality, which is eternal and unified. In this sense Being is associated with the verb 'to be' or that which 'is'. Being, or the absolutely real, is opposed to Non-Being, which is unreal. (1979) Jha explains the nature of Non-Being: "This non-being he identifies with becoming, with the world of shifting and changing things, the world which is known to us by the senses. The world of sense is unreal, illusory, a mere appearance." (1979:5)

It is interesting to see the parallel between this definition of being and the objective transcendental of the theologians and metaphysicians discussed in the definition of transcendence.

Heraclitus, who insisted that being should not be privileged over Non-Being, challenged the delimited categories that Parmenides established. For Heraclitus, they are both equally real, and they are in a sense identical. This identity is becoming, which

> …has only two forms, namely, the arising of things and their passing away, their beginning and their end, their origination and their decease. Origination is the passage of Non-Being into Being. Decease is the passage of Being into Non-Being. Becoming, then, has in it only the two factors of Being and Non-Being, and it means the passing of one into the other. …Being and Non-Being are in everything at one and the same time. Being is Non-Being. Being has Non-Being in it. (Jha 1979:8)

In this specific context emptiness is related to temporality. For Parmenides, being existed in an eternal realm, while non-being was synonymous with in the temporal world. Heraclitus denies the existence of this eternal realm, and proposes that Being and Non-Being are two elements that create the process of temporal becoming.

For Hegel, this contradiction between being and its opposite formed the foundation for his dialectic, which consisted of a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis. The synthesis is regarded as a transcendence of the thesis / antithesis duality. (Dollimore 1998):

> Experientially we lack ultimate reconciliation in the Absolute; we live stretched across a fierce dialectic in which identity is dependent upon otherness and difference - dependent, that is, upon which it is not. But, crucially, this otherness can never be kept other: to be dependent for my identity upon the other (part of what I *am* is that I am *not that*) means that this otherness is part of my identity. … The other is within the same; difference is integral to identity. (quote in Dollimore 1998:154)

Here we can see that the other, non-self or non-being plays a constitutive role in the construction of identity or being. Mark Taylor explains that the other can never be completely assimilated into the self: "…which, in its failure - in its gaps and fissures, its faults and lacks - inscribes an Other it cannot represent …for this Other is not merely outside but is 'inside' as an 'outside' that cannot be interiorized."(1992:303,319)

In this regard the other, or emptiness, is an intimate part of Being, and denies Being complete transcendence.

With the existentialists, Non-Being takes on a new identity. Not as the negation of being, but as an emptiness that was left after the 'death of the God', proclaimed by Nietzsche. ((Blackham 1971:11) This emptiness of a divine existence or presence is described as nihilism:

> …in modern nihilism, nihility has deepened into an abyss: the nihility that one becomes aware of extends all the way to the locus of the divine. Nihilism here makes the claim that only by taking a stance on nihility can humanity truly attain subjectivity and freedom. With its subjectivization of the abyss of nihility, a realm opened up at the ground of existence beyond the pale of the divine order hitherto considered to be essentially in control of the self, a realm that allows nothing to preside over it, not even God. (Nishitani 1983:95)

Here Nishitani described how the newly found nihilism opened up the scope of the subject who is now living in a world that is essentially empty and beyond morality. Transcendence has now moved from the realm of the divine to the self. True subjectivity and freedom can only be attained through a process of self-transcendence on the ground of nihility.

For Martin Heidegger, another existentialist thinker, the absence of an absolute means that nihility is an intimate part of Being. It is through this nothingness that being is constituted. (Blackham 1965) Heidegger describes existence as a suspension of Being in nothingness:

> Nothingness is that which makes the disclosure of being(s) as such possible for our human existence …Nothingness not merely designates the conceptual opposite of beings but is an integral part of their essence. Nothingness is neither a negative nor is it a goal or an endpoint; rather, it is the innermost trembling of being itself. (quoted in Dallmayr 1992:45)

Furthermore, Heidegger provides the possibility of representing emptiness or nothingness visually, and elevates aesthetic experience to the central core of his philosophy.

His analysis of 'seeing' ultimately holds an answer for the fundamental nature of existence: "Both are characterized by Heidegger's unique pattern of deep scission: visual scission allows the thing to stand forth in relationship with nothing; existential scission allows the person to stand forth in relationship to the nothingness of anxiety or death." (Glass 1995:21) This leads Heidegger to make the statement that "Nothingness belongs …to being present."(quote in 1995:22) It is through the self-transcendence of being against the screen of nothingness that presence is constituted.

The reader should note that I am aware of Heidegger's alleged political involvement with the German Nazi party (Farias, Mongolis, Rockmore 1989). Taken the critique into account, I have discovered that it does not have any direct bearing on the texts I have cited and the specific interpretations in this dissertation. Subsequently it does not represent an ideological or moral conflict with regards to the artist (Anish Kapoor) or the artworks.

On the other end of the spectrum of human enquiry, Buddhism also makes a significant contribution to the debate surrounding the nature of emptiness. I have decided to rely solely on the writings of Keiji Nishitani, who has a critical and philosophical approach to Buddhist thinking.

Like Heidegger, Nishitani considers emptiness to be the foundation of existence. The emptiness of Being is regarded as the emptiness of independent existence, everything in the field of existence is constituted in relation to everything else: "In the understanding of emptiness as co-dependent arising, there is no individual existence, or individual identity, but there is mutual existence or mutual identity."(Glass 1995:101) In Nishitani's own words:

> It is only on a field where the being of all things is a being at one with emptiness that it is possible for all things to gather into one, even while each retains its reality as an absolute and unique being. Here the being of all things, as well as the world as a system of being, become possible… Not a single thing comes into being without some relationship to every other thing… Figuratively speaking, its roots reach across into the ground of all other things and helps to hold them up and keep them standing. It serves as a constitutive element of their being so that they can be what they are… (Nishitani 1982:148)

The presence of the self is not determined by its relation to an Other or the absence of God, instead, being and emptiness are seen as different perspectives of the same world.

I have established a basic series of definitions of emptiness. Within the context of the analysis of the artworks, three kinds of emptiness will be applied. The first one is Heidegger's notion of Non-Being, a unique existentialist understanding of the fundamental relationship between emptiness and presence. The second kind of emptiness relates to the metaphysical notion of negation of being, or the Other. In line with the deconstructivists, especially Mark Taylor, this other is defined as a fissure, fault or blind-spot within the totality of Being. The third kind of emptiness is Nishitani's understanding of Nothingness, which seeks to find a solution for the paradoxical relation between existence and emptiness.

Models of representation established on the section of transcendence will also apply on the particular use of emptiness in every section.

The research project will contain all of the abovementioned definitions of transcendence and emptiness in the analysis of specific artworks or theoretical conclusions following the analyses. To avoid confusion related to the specific appropriation of the term, I will use adjectives with the term in the beginning of a discussion and make it clear when this definition of transcendence or emptiness is terminated and another begins.

Apart from the definitions of transcendence and emptiness within their various contexts, it will become evident in my research there are differences in the attitudes that the artists have towards these appropriated concepts. On the one hand some are considered as obsolete historical concepts, and criticized as such, on the other, some notions are sympathized with, and they are embraced as potential vehicles and methodologies to facilitate the representation of transcendence and emptiness.

III: CHAPTER OUTLINE

The dissertation will consist of three chapters, and each chapter is divided into sections devoted to a unique conceptual angle of analysis. Each of these sections will contain references to specific physical qualities of the work, which is then expanded interpretatively. My interpretations will then be consolidated and contextualized within the broader argument of the thesis.

The first chapter, dedicated to Anselm Kiefer, will be divided as follows:

'Transcending Time and Space' will be an in-depth description of the physical and formal qualities of the work, which develops into a metaphorical reading of the installation. Firstly, Kiefer's references to the duality of temporality and timelessness will be explored. Secondly, notions of spatiality will be considered and related to the idea of 'geographical transcendence'.

The section titled 'Existential Aesthetics' looks at very general characteristics and metaphors that Kiefer has used in the installation, and moves on towards a suggestion that Kiefer is engaging in a critique of traditional notions of transcendence, and in fact positing a more existentialist understanding of transcendence.

Finally, the section on 'Representations of Transcendence' is an exploration of traditional ways in which the transcendental has been represented, and addresses the way in which Kiefer redefines these notions within this installation.

The section will be concluded by looking at notions of the transcendental explored in selected areas of contemporary literary criticism, with specific references to Kiefer's use of books.

Chapter 2 will be dedicated to selected work of Anish Kapoor.

'Being and Non-Being' will be the first section, exploring stylistic qualities that are consistently found in Kapoor's work, and the fundamental ideas that are associated with these characteristics. I will also draw a parallel with selected writing by Martin Heidegger to inform my analysis.

'Surface Depth' examines specifically the highly reflective sculptures that Kapoor created. Theorists Rudolph Gasche and Homi Bhabha will be drawn on to shape my analysis. I will argue that Kapoor's use of reflection aligns with the self-reflective nature of consciousness, and ultimately undermines this symmetry of self-reflection.

'Being as Nothingness' is the last section of this chapter. Here I will look closely at Kapoor's use of empty space as a positive form. This will be related to especially Buddhist notions of emptiness, as articulated in the writings of Keiji Nishitani.

The 'representation of transcendence and emptiness' is a central theme of my artwork presented for the master's degree in fine art. The discussions in the first two chapters will provide an interpretive framework from which I can proceed with an analysis of a range of my own artworks.

Chapter 3 begins the analysis. My work ranges from sculpture, video art (created in three-dimensional animation) and installation art. Unlike the previous chapters where the sub-categories are structured in relation to theoretical discussions, this chapter will be sub-divided in sections that contain analysis of individual works. I have done this because my individual works often explore different themes or concepts, on a formal and a content level. Where there is a small series of works that have strong aesthetic and thematic links, they will be grouped together in a section.

'*Deferred Reconstructions'* (1998), was mainly created in my honors year, but it has been modified and exhibited publicly during my master's study. It articulates my first fascination with transcendence and consists of a re-studied gothic cathedral. Notions of dualism found in theological and metaphysical transcendence are initiated here.

'*Mimetic Reconstructions*' (2000-2001), presents basic ideas concerning the virtual and the real, and elaborates on possibilities in concrete poetry, the relation of image and text, and is also an in-depth exploration of notions of existentialist transcendence in relation to specific writings by Friedrich Nietzsche.

'*Vanishing Points* (2002), *Phase Shift*, *Gestalt*, *Plateau*' (2004); is a range of glass sculptures that creates complex prismatic effects. My main concern with these pieces was to find a way to dissolve the surface of tactile sculptures, thereby escaping the strong boundaries that a surface imposes on a sculpture. The result is a manipulation of space, which points to my interest in transcendence and emptiness.

'*Utopia*, *Fissure*, *Fracture* and *Tremor*' (2004) are very large-scale constructions out of treated wood, and here I returned to my interest in architectural forms. The pieces are also reminiscent of geographical and tectonic forms. These pieces attempt a critique of modernist abstraction and its complex relation to transcendence. There are also references to Heidegger's notion of being and non-being.

The chapter on my own work will be followed by the conclusion. The conclusion will consolidate all the various resolutions made within the three chapters. I will also elaborate on these resolutions of representations of transcendence and emptiness introduced earlier. Comparisons will be drawn between different ways in which transcendence could be represented. The work of the artists I have discussed will be contextualized within a broader theoretical framework, creating mutual reference points, parallels, contradictions and differences in addressing the notions of transcendence and emptiness that is the focus of this research.

CHAPTER 1: ANSELM KIEFER

1.1: TRANSCENDING TIME AND SPACE

Zweistromland, Anselm Kiefer's most ambitious work to date, is the culmination of extensive research and experimentation, and it saw the light of day in 1989. In the early eighties Kiefer's career reached its apex. His work was associated with a small group of young Germans, who was labeled the 'neo-expressionists'. Kiefer's work was characterized by a radical appropriation and critical investigation of German history - a trademark that earned him an ambivalent reputation. The gigantic scale and panoramic landscapes executed in thick impasto paint, often mixed with organic materials became synonymous with contemporary German art. (Rosenthal 1987:10)

As the viewer becomes more familiar with *Zweistromland* through my analysis, it will become evident that towards the end of the eighties Kiefer's interests moved away from German Nationalism towards a new internationalism. His work from this period was characterized by multiple references, providing a network of connections between an array of historical and contemporary cultures and cultural practices. In his own words: "To my mind, art is the only possibility of making a connection between disparate things and thus create meaning." (quote in Zweite 1989:98) This process of synthesis has temporal and spatial characteristics.

Because of its inaccessible nature, and astounding complexity, publications or analyses of *Zweistromland* remain scarce. After having spent some time looking at Kiefer's history and studying the subtle references in *Zweistromland*, I realized that there is no available text that does justice to the conceptual depth of *Zweistromland*. Furthermore, the multi-leveled quality of Kiefer's work provided me with a sufficient

platform to explore theoretical debates and philosophical implications in his work that are often overlooked. A substantial part of my dissertation is therefore dedicated to *Zweistromland*. This chapter will consist of an introduction to the formal qualities of the work, which will then be subsequently elaborated by a metaphorical reading. This reading will be shown to have significant parallels with theological and metaphysical transcendence.

The references in this dissertation to the visual characteristics of *Zweistromland* are largely reliant on a concise version published in traditional book form by Thames & Hudson, titled **The High Priestess** (1989). In this publication Kiefer selected various spreads in the lead books that were photographically reproduced to provide the viewer with an overview of the installation.

Zweistromland [figure 1] is currently a permanent installation in Oslo, Norway. "Physically the work consists of two vast steel bookcases, thirteen feet high, standing end to end at a slight angle to one another, like the pages of an open book. Each bookcase is filled with massive lead books…"(Zweite 1989:67) The installation is reminiscent of an arcane and archaic encyclopedia, it is intimidating in scale, but also in sheer weight; it takes four people to lift one book off the shelf. The average dimensions of the individual books are 800 x 500 x 100mm, which can be compared in weight to a block of lead of the same size.

The books in *Zweistromland* are completely devoid of text, everywhere the enormous pages are marked by the passage of time.

They carry traces of deterioration and oxidization that is complemented with photographs that are equally affected by the manipulation of chemical processes (XXVI: Book 60) [figure 13]. Content and form, usually discrete in books, are here revealed as a continuum; sometimes the photographs have a tactile quality, while the oxidized and textured lead pages become allusions to illusionist renditions of landscapes (II: Book 56) [figure 3]. The subject matter of the photographs is reminiscent of global aspirations; they are high-altitude aerial photographs of large sections of the earth, not quite the scientific recordings of present-day satellites; rather images that show concerns with the chiaroscuro treatment of light, or the recognition of aesthetic qualities of massive geological formations, here and there pierced by enormous cities, floating like islands between uniform desserts (XXVII: Book 102) [figure 12]. Now and then the pilot takes a dive into the landscape, revealing crumbling ruins, discarded buildings and bridges, a post-apocalyptic wasteland, not a single human being in sight (XVII: Book 43) [figure 9], (XVIII: Book 46) [figure 10].

The labyrinths of buildings in the cities that once provided a structured network for the flow of bodies are now burnt out skeletons, remnants of a culture or a life-form long gone. The only reference to humans is found in scattered traces - inconspicuous fragments that almost blend in with the background. Locks of hair here (XIII: Book 97) [figure 7], torn pieces of photographed skin there: not alluding to any body part, but immediately recognizable as human (XXIII: Book 104).

The initial encounter with *Zweistromland* leaves one overwhelmed, and the first response is to look for generic characteristics, repetition and patterns that will reveal a procedure or an implicit formula that the artist used to create such a magnitude of complexity.

These searches lead me to define a conceptual basis of the work, which I discovered to be a 'dualistic' framework that is referenced throughout the volumes of books. Everywhere the material characteristics of the work reveal polarities.

The most explicit examples of this conceptual basis are articulated through the use of materials in a metaphorical way. In other words, the significance of the use of a given material or substance is not necessarily for pragmatic reasons, but rather implies metaphorical and allegorical readings and associations.

Zweistromland consists of massive lead books, which not only implies weight, but also durability. Lead is one of the heaviest metals, and it has some very interesting properties. It resists weathering better than most other metals. When put in contact with air and water, it acquires a protective coating of oxides and carbonates. Historically, this characteristic has been exploited through its use as an excellent insulator in coffins or the preservation of bodies through mummification. Present day uses have even increased the status of this ancient metal: it is one of the only materials that can sufficiently absorb and deflect lethal nuclear radiation. So here we have a material with remarkable properties. Kiefer creates an encyclopedia that will not only resist the onslaught of time, the weathering process, but also survive a nuclear explosion.

Such a catastrophe might very well exterminate all human traces and every living thing on this planet, leaving the lead library and its protected content as the last remnant of humanity. I would suggest that this represents one side of the metaphorical polarity: permanence, endurance and immortality.

The content of the books refers to the opposite:

> Each bookcase is filled with massive lead books, some of them empty, some containing images and substances recording the reality of our time. There are photographs - often taken from the air - of its continual flux, of its conurbations and communications, of its skyscrapers and villages, of bridges and factories and railways, often disused, decomposing, demolished. (Zweite 1989:67)

There are books devoted to meteorology and astronomy:

> …a range of celestial phenomena which recall galactic explosions or cosmic emissions. First there are cumulus clouds, viewed from a great altitude… banks of stratus cloud which snap off like ice floes; then following dazzling effects of light in a dark sky… finally a powerful, even light lends strong relief to the cloudscape far below. (Zweite 1989:170)

Here we have a meticulous documentation of the earth in a state of transformation: at times the impermanence of human creation is invoked with a dramatic use of the image of the ruin, reminiscent of German Romanticism. Then there is the earth itself: advancing desserts, crumbling mountains undergoing erosion (V: Book 54). From geological time to meteorological time: the photographs captures instants of massive global weather patterns, high-altitude renditions of dynamic cloud formations, light filled images that invokes celestial phenomena, fleeting instants of changes in atmospheric conditions (XXIV: Book 57).

All these vivid depictions of transience refer to the other side of the metaphorical polarity: impermanence, temporality and mortality.

The metaphorical juxtaposition between permanence and transience does not only define a striking contrast. It also initiates a dialogue. This implies that the conceptual basis of the work is not a discreet dualism, where the world consists of two radically independent and absolute elements: instead, Kiefer stages oppositions to create a reciprocal system. The parallels with theological transcendence are abundant. As the reader will recall, this transcendental mode of being is characterized as unchangeable and eternal, while the immanent denotes change and temporality. This distinction forms the foundation for the complex relation between God and humanity.

It is safe to say that the metaphorical dialogue refers to the qualities and definitions of time. Kiefer creates a visual metaphor for the most fundamental categories of time: the eternal and the historical. Kiefer's personal opinion is reflected in the following claim: "I see history as synchronous"(q. in Zweite 1989:98) Here Kiefer presents us with a seeming contradiction. History is conventionally regarded as a sequence in and of time, in other words, diachronic. Kiefer, however, is implying that historical events can be understood from another perspective, that they are related or synchronized over and above a diachronic temporal sequence. If a temporal sequence is regarded as contingent, a synchronized sequence might suggest a deeper symmetry, mysterious relations between events across time.

In other words, it is possible that Kiefer suggests that history is not entirely contingent and chaotic, but rather that it is regulated by a structured process: an a-historical governing principle.

Kiefer's earlier work show definite concerns with historical specificity: they revisit and invoke events in time, and force viewers to confront and reconsider those events. In the introduction I have also shown that they were culturally specific: they dealt with the German history. *Zweistromland* is a move away from this historical and geographical specificity. I would suggest that in this work, Kiefer moves from narrative to meta-narrative: he does not ask questions about specific historical events, rather, he asks questions about the making of history from an ontological perspective. If one, like Kiefer, believes that history is synchronous, that events and catastrophes are somehow governed by a meta-narrative, are those events avoidable? Is the history of humanity guided by a transcendental God whose will is manifest in the immanent world? Is *Zweistromland* an attempt at defining the synchronous patterns of divine will, or does *Zweistromland* contain enough evidence to overthrow such brutal determinism and acknowledge the freedom of will?

Another interpretation that also alludes to the relationship between determinism and free will, does not rely on the inclusion of theological transcendence at all, instead it poses this question in a more secular and immanent framework. *Zweistromland* continuously changes depth of focus: one moment we are looking at microscopic events: corrosion and oxidization (XXVI Book 60) [figure 13], which is followed by a documentation of a city in a state of ruin, resembling a post-apocalyptic wasteland (XVII Book 43) [figure 9], then our attention is drawn, in a flash, to large turbulent

cloud formations or violently exploding celestial phenomena (XVI: Book 40) [figure 8]. In the light of these observations I would argue that Kiefer wants to draw a parallel between natural and cultural processes. Kiefer encourages the viewer to ask fundamental questions regarding temporality: is it possible to view the entire course of human history as an inevitable cosmic phenomenon? How much agency does humanity have in the making of history, or are we embedded in a materialistic and evolutionary process of creation and catastrophe that transcends our mental horizon?

Zweistromland is open-ended enough not to resolve the abovementioned questions. I would suggest that Kiefer might be doing a balancing act on a tightrope. He does not deny history, or embrace a theological transcendental state of a-historicity. Neither does the work give us a final say on the potential role that evolutionary processes play in the governing of the immanent world. Metaphysical and existential questions regarding determinism and free will are left for what they are: remnants of philosophical history. They are questions that may potentially never be answered.

Imitating the art of the metaphysical philosopher, Kiefer's encyclopedia presents a body of knowledge. Everywhere it celebrates the desire to represent and contain existence as a whole. This would be the last say on the human condition, preserved once and for all. Nevertheless, Kiefer is a contemporary artist that looks retrospectively: the idealism of theological and metaphysical transcendence is now seen in relation to the two World Wars, massive industrialization and the exploitation of nature.

Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), a philosopher of the German metaphysical tradition, provides a pivotal definition of metaphysical transcendence.

Hegel's metaphysical project has explicit similarities with the notion of a universal encyclopedia. Hegel did not consider his writing to be a text amongst texts; his project would be the final exegesis of existence, the ultimate referent for all texts to come. His thinking would be described as the system of systems, an all-inclusive logic that bridges the gap between science and the humanities. (Taylor 1987)

For Hegel, underlying all the temporal fluctuations and transformations of historical time is an eternal governing principle that can be apprehended by and through abstract reasoning. In his own words: "the Absolute necessarily manifests itself in the natural processes and then in the gradual unfolding of history."(quote in Taylor 1992:39)

Hegel does not align his philosophy with a historical process that is concerned with specific events; his historical perspective aspires to be all encompassing: "we see that Hegel's history makes a much broader sweep across the events of human existence; in order to truly comprehend process and the Universal." (anon. 1995:3) I would argue that *Zweistromland* has a resemblance with Hegel's notion of historical perspective. A relevant and familiar analogy is used in the following statement:

> Historical perspective allows us to understand the 'larger' aspects of our existence. It's as if a cartographer, accustomed to making maps based on knowledge acquired from observing the ground at his feet, were suddenly taken up in an airplane; at a glance, he could comprehend the layout of the earth and the entire aim of his maps would become clear to him.
> (anon. 1995:3)

Armin Zweite comments on Kiefer's use of a celestial viewpoint in *Zweistromland* by citing Arthur Schopenhauer's synonym of philosophy (1811):

> …The world beneath him; its sandy desserts and morasses disappear; its irregularities smooth themselves out; its discords cannot be heard; its curvature reveals itself. He himself stands in pure, cool evening air and can already see the sun when dark night still lies below. (quote in Zweite 1989:86)

My first response to *Zweistromland* was that it has an astounding similarity with Hegel's idealism. The work reminded me of an encyclopedia of universal knowledge. Everywhere the dissolution of the specific into the generic is marked visually. This can be seen in the high altitude photographs which creates a collapse of visual depth. A photograph of cumulus clouds becomes indistinguishable from a page of oxidized lead, forming an intricate pattern of white patina (II: Book 56). Similarly, the treatment of subject matter invoked a sense of timelessness, quite similar to the work of Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840).

One aspect of the work that remains haunting is Kiefer's depiction of apparently tragic subject matter. Surfaces are covered with locks of black hair, which might suggest the shaving of hair in concentration camps (XIII: Book 97) [figure 7]. Torn photographs evoking scattered pieces of flesh (XXIII: Book 104). Cities are demolished and deserted, without a single human being in sight (XVII: Book 43) [figure 9]. Photographic documentations of blinding light reminds one of nuclear explosions (XVI: Book 40) [figure8]. Kiefer manages to render these images with an acute awareness of aesthetic sensibilities. On first encounter, one may be completely oblivious of the apparent morbid undertones in these depictions.

Kiefer's attention to the formal characteristics of the surface is superb: one page flows effortlessly into the next; his overall monochromatic and minimal treatment of material unifies his diverse subject matter.

I would suggest that Kiefer sets up a significant ambivalence. Can one attain a metaphysical transcendental viewpoint of history where the 'irregularities smooth themselves out'? Is the search for such a Universal process merely an aesthetic exercise, whether it is abstract or concrete? Is the epiphany of the eternal governing principle an aesthetic revelation at the expense of historical specificity?

This questioning process is awakened in the viewer upon closer inspection of the installation. The work shows definite transcendental aspirations. On the one hand, a study of the books shows that we are dealing with a profound cryptic puzzle, where a variety of cultural and natural processes are potentially connected to reveal a grand a-historical meta-narrative. On the other hand, the viewers realize their own involvement in the creation of the artwork; meaning and associations between disparate historical events are constructed through the process of interpretation.

In order to make sense of Kiefer's radical departure from his previous works that dealt with historical specificity, Armin Zweite suggests that Kiefer might be in the process of abolishing history in order to define an understanding of existence in spatial terms:

> The constant exponential growth of new knowledge since the eighteenth century has been absorbed only by visualizing it in terms of a temporal model: i.e. by picturing lines of evolution. The spatial arrangement of natural history as previously understood has gradually given way to a temporal, successive organization. Kiefer, with his theoretically endless bookshelves, seems to forswear the spirit of subordination that rules all rational systems of knowledge, and to range his facts equally, side by side. It is as if he were trying to abolish history altogether. (Zweite 1989:87)

History is produced; it is written in retrospect and it is synonymous with a linear and successive conception of time. Armin Zweite suggests that history itself might be a culturally-specific activity; furthermore that this cultural specific activity is bound up with a specific conception of time.

Kiefer's 'encyclopedia' is a radical subversion of any temporal sequence. His subject matter ranges from ultra-modern cityscapes (XIX: Book 35) [figure 11] and (XXVI: Book 102) [figure 12], to crumbling ruins and step-pyramids that dates back to the Roman and Assyrian empires (III: Book 65) [figure 4]. Nowhere is there an indication of a diachronic sequence, everything gives the impression of being synchronous, juxtaposed and even incongruent.

Armin Zweite suggests that *Zweistromland* is an act of abolishing history, that Kiefer's installation marks the transition into the age of posthistoire (1989:98). This is, at any rate, not something unusual if one considers the post-modern ethos. Michel Foucault states the following:

> The great obsession of the nineteenth century was history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of ever accumulating past… The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the near and the far, of side-by-side, of the dispersed. (quote in Soja 1989:10)

Foucault elegantly describes a transition from an emphasis on historical time to synchronous space. Indeed, *Zweistromland* reveals a world that unfolds in space, the aerial photographs indicates a spatial sequence rather than a temporal sequence. For Edward Soja, the shift towards spatiality is synonymous with an emphasis on geography. He argues that geography is slowly replacing history, a process that he describes in the following way: "A distinctly postmodern and critical human geography is taking shape, reasserting the interpretative significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary critical thought."(Soja 1989:11)

I would argue that Kiefer's treatment of spatiality in *Zweistromland* does not, however, correlate with notions of site-specificity or culturally specific space; the work seems to be closer to notions of non-locality. In Kiefer's earlier work, especially in *Occupations* (1969), there is a definite preoccupation with site-specificity; in this work Kiefer critically reenacts the expansion of the Nazi's during the world wars, and it comments on the relentless aspirations to subject other European cultures to the Nazi ideology. Kiefer assumed the identity of a conquering National Socialist and posed in a military stance at an array of recognizable European architectural landmarks. In the fashion of Conceptual Art, he made a series of 'manipulated' images; that is, he photographed staged events rather than preexistent situations. (Rosenthal 1987:14,15)

It has been shown that *Zweistromland* is an eclipse of Kiefer's earlier obsessions with German territorialization; the installation hints towards a homogenous space, the deterritorialized space of globalization.

The subject matter in the photographs is treated in a very generic manner: nowhere is there an indication of a specific place or a recognizable landmark. The diverse subject matter, e.g. urban constructions, geological formations and weather patterns all gives the impression of being part of an undifferentiated whole. Can one assume that Kiefer is proposing a geographical model that treats the world as a spatial unity?

The notion of conceiving the world as a global spatial totality is not, however, a contemporary idea. David Harvey notes that the first tendencies towards a spatialized geography can be found in Renaissance thinking. He goes on to suggest that the initial conception of spatial geography is synonymous with geometric notions of perspective formulated in the 1400's by the painters Brunelleschi and Alberti in Florance. The fixed viewpoint of perspective paintings and maps "is elevated and distant, completely out of plastic and sensory reach. It generates a coldly geometrical and systematic sense of space." (Harvey 1989:244) Harvey goes further to suggest that this aim to design a grid in which one could locate places were prefigured by a desire to imagine the globe as a whole, to view it from the outside. One could then "see the globe as a knowable totality" (Harvey 1989:246)

This is a desire for geographical transcendence: to assimilate the world as a whole and then to assume a position over-and-above the totality of the world.

I would argue that *Zweistromland* is not a model of a global spatial totality. On the contrary, the installation is homage to the impossibility of conceiving the world as a whole. This is marked visually in the books.

Some books are only filled with photographs on a few pages (XVIII: Book 46) [figure 10]; the rest of the book is page upon page of empty lead sheets. The photographs themselves often hint toward the impossibility of capturing the subject matter; sublime aerial views are sharply cut at the edges to imply space beyond the visible scope or horizon, e.g. (XXVIII: Book 32), (XXVII: Book 102) [figure 12] and (XXVI: Book 60) [figure 13]. In this way *Zweistromland* gives the impression of being an unfinished project, an exploration of geographical space that will never reach a point of completion.

It can also be argued that Kiefer's use of geography is a metaphor in itself, after all, the artwork does not claim to be a legitimate world atlas, it is more likely to be a map of the artist's inner world. Bernard Tschumi draws an interesting parallel between geography and consciousness through the image of the labyrinth:

> Let us first examine the Labyrinth. In the course of this argument, it has been implied that the Labyrinth shows itself as a slow history of space, but that the total revelation of the Labyrinth is historically impossible because no point of transcendence in time is available. One can participate and share the fundamentals of the Labyrinth, but one's perception is only a part of the labyrinth as it manifests itself. One can never see the totality, nor can one express it. One is condemned to it and cannot go outside and see the whole. (Tschumi 1996)

We have seen that Kiefer proposes another potential transcendence of historical time, but not in the realm of the eternal, rather in the realm of space. This transcendental spatiality or geographical transcendence shows its own series of limitations. A true spatial totality of the world or of consciousness will always elude us; a complete transcendence is impossible because we are part of the world that we are trying to transcend.

The existentialist thinkers might suggest a different understanding of transcendence, where it is not necessary to conceive of the totality of the world, but participate in the becoming of the world through self-transcendence.

1.2: EXISTENTIAL AESTHETICS

Throughout *Zweistromland* Kiefer shows concerns with processes of transformation. The surface of the planet earth is shown in a dynamic state of transformation. Photographs and surface treatment of the pages reveal elemental processes and forces at play; one gets the sense that this is a visual treatise on energy.

Certain photographs depict life-giving ecosystems with weather formations and vegetation (I: Book 36) [figure 2], while others dwell on more sinister subject matter such as mass-extinction and catastrophic explosions (VIII: Book 88) [figure 5] and (XVI: Book 40) [figure 8].

This is not, by all means, an objective scientific study: again, one can see that Kiefer's concern lies elsewhere. Metaphorical connections are made between disparate things, and the photographs show utmost attention to aesthetic qualities.

Almost every photograph used in *Zweistromland* is characterized by a strange use of chiaroscuro, with a blinding light flooding in from the side (I: Book 36) [figure 2], (II: Book 56) [figure 3], (III: Book 65) [figure 4], (V: Book 54) etc. There are also several images of deserts, which are almost blinded beyond recognition by sunlight. Photographs are, after all, created by an exposure to light. Here, the process and the content is unified; the physical chemical processes involved in photography reveals an image through the exposure to light, the subject matter re-articulates this process by thematizing 'light' as content.

In a sense then, on the first level of interpretation, the images in *Zweistromland* can be described as physical traces of exposure to light. On the second level, this process is articulated as subject matter through the use of chiaroscuro in the compositions or in the emphasis on sunlit landscapes. On the third level, Kiefer invites a metaphorical reading of light as pure creative energy, or as a necessary presence without which nothing can be seen, represented or investigated. These observations suggests that Kiefer treats the sun as an ambiguous force; it is at once the source of all energy responsible for life on earth, but it can also be mercilessly destructive, searing the landscape into a lifeless and arid desert.

I would suggest that this ambiguous character of energy is a recurring motif in *Zweistromland*, and it can be described as one of the central allegories in the work.

In the photographic introduction to *Zweistromland*, published in a book called **The High Priestess**, Kiefer presents us with an enigmatic image. This image is again extensively explored in the lead books themselves (X: Book 73) [figure 6] and (XV: Book 112). It consists of a water tank containing fourteen vertical pipes, "representing nuclear fuel rods."(Zweite 1986:80) Kiefer's interest in Nuclear Energy is no secret; the image was also used in a previous artist's book called *Spaltung (Fission) I & II*, in 1987. Nuclear Fission is a process that is defined in the following way: "A nuclear reaction in which a heavy atomic nucleus (e.g. uranium) splits into two approximately equal parts, at the same time emitting neutrons and releasing very large amounts of nuclear energy." (Uvarov & Chapman 1971:264) Furthermore, the image of nuclear fuel rods alludes to control rods used in a nuclear reactor, which directly affects the rate of reaction therein, by absorbing the excess neutrons.

If there is not a sufficient amount of control rods, or if their rate of absorption is too slow, the excess neutrons in turn split atomic nuclei, creating a dangerous and catastrophic chain reaction.

I am interested in drawing a parallel, or reading the process in metaphorical terms. I would suggest that firstly, and most explicitly, the lead books themselves give one a clue to the metaphorical reading. Lead is one of the only materials that can effectively absorb nuclear radiation, a characteristic that it shares with the control rods. Does Kiefer present us with a fictional aftermath of an imminent nuclear catastrophe in *Zweistromland*? Can this work be described as a visionary warning against the so-called 'nuclear-arms race' between the super-powers of the world? Again, Nuclear Energy can be described as a double-edged sword, providing safe and efficient energy for millions on earth or destroying life in the blink of an eye. By using the image of the nuclear fuel rods, does Kiefer suggest that an enormous and potentially dangerous energy force should be contained?

The sun itself produces massive amounts of energy through a similar 'thermonuclear' process. I would suggest that Kiefer's references to sunlight and nuclear energy are intimately related. For George Bataille, the excess of energy is the prime characteristic of life. Jonathan Dollimore describes Bataille's morbid fascination with the sun in the following way:

> For Bataille, the supreme insistence of life as expenditure is the sun. The very source of life, it dispenses its energy without any return, which means of course that ultimately it must expend itself and completely burn out. And, just as the sun will do so violently, so all life is rooted in the destruction of life, of itself: 'the ground we live on is little other than multiple destructions'. (Dollimore 1998:249)

Here Bataille describes rather dramatically the fate of life on earth, by emphatically declaring that solar energy is the source and destruction of life. In Bataille's own words:

> The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy can be used for the growth of a system, if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically. (quote in Pattison 1996: 155)

I would suggest that Bataille's attitude matches Nietzsche's celebration of the Dionysian impulse. Life is first and foremost characterized by excess, and it is up to humanity to negotiate that excess. In *Zweistromland* the surface of the earth reveals traces of life, and the 'play of energy' results in vast cities (XIX: Book 35) [figure 11] and catastrophic wars (Armin Zweite suggests that *Zweistromland* could refer to the region surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and consequently might make an allusion to the Gulf War) (1989: 93). Does Kiefer, like the existentialists, proclaim that the only vantage point from which the contradictions of existence can be resolved is by viewing it as a grand aesthetic process?

Furthermore, is this aesthetic process, as the existentialists proclaimed, a transcendental process? In Nietzsche's own words:

> An aspect of this fantasy is participating sacrificially in the omnipotent universal life-force whose meaning is 'purely aesthetic'; God the creator is imagined as 'the supreme artist, amoral, recklessly creating and destroying, realizing himself indifferently in whatever he does or undoes, ridding himself by his acts of embarrassment of his riches and the strain of his eternal contradictions'. (quote in Dollimore 1998:236)

Nietzsche encourages us as individuals to identify with the 'omnipotent universal life-force' and participate in its aesthetic process. He goes further to reject any morality associated with the transcendental. It is clear that although Kiefer refers to potentially destructive processes like nuclear energy, *Zweistromland* does not take a moral stance. Instead it presents us with a visual assemblage that contains both life-affirming and life-threatening energies as necessary components of existence. Furthermore, Kiefer's representation of the activity on the surface of the earth is aesthetic. Here the artist's creative mind becomes a microcosmic lens through which the entire macrocosmic world is seen. The transcendence of the world is reflected in the transcendence of the individual.

Considering the observations made in this section, I would argue that *Zweistromland* invites an existential understanding of transcendence, which is firmly rooted in the experience of the self. An a-moral materialistic process of self-transcendence, where the will and power of the individual is acted out at the expense of others, replaces the objective and moral transcendental of the theologians and metaphysicians.

Traditionally the representation of the transcendental has been locked into very specific cultural representations. In the next section the reader will see how Kiefer systematically undermined the status of the symbol by introducing a metaphor of its destruction.

1.3: REPRESENTATIONS OF TRANSCENDENCE

The theological symbol can be described as a synecdoche: a sign that represents the whole in a part. This 'whole' can be referred to as the transcendent totality. For Coleridge, the symbol reveals the eternal through the temporal; it renders this eternal reality intelligible. (Bell 1997:6) Furthermore, the symbol is a point or a locus where the immanent signifier and the transcendental signified is locked in a fixed relationship. The symbol provides a figure for the transcendental.

In opposition to the symbol, and the cause of its inevitable dissolution, is Walter Benjamin's notion of the allegory. This understanding of the allegorical challenges the unity of the symbol; it marks the break between the form and the content, the immanent signifier and the transcendental signified. After this the symbol cannot partake in the timeless or the eternal

> …because it attempts to point beyond itself to something else (the transcendent, God, 'totality') it allows for a gap into which the wedge of temporality can be driven. As a result of its material existence the symbol remains within the ebb and flow of time - immanent historical. (Bell 1997:9)

After this transition:

> The temporal aspect of this experience manifests itself in the irresistible decomposition of the natural object, which is mirrored by the historical transformations of the creations of man. What remains in the aftermath of this process is the emblematic character of the ruin. (Bell 1997:10)

Walter Benjamin describes the notion of the ruin in the following way: “Allegories are, in the realms of thoughts, what ruins are in the realms of things.”(Benjamin 1977:178) This notion of the allegorical articulated as the figure of the ruin had a profound influence on post-modern definitions of allegory, and marks a break with pre-modern understandings of the allegorical as a vehicle for religious ideology.

I would argue that Benjamin’s ruin is articulated in spatial and temporal terms: the fragmentation of the spatial unity of existence, and the impermanence and historical transience of temporality.

If one can describe *Zweistromland* in one word, it would probably be the word ruin. This is particularly visible in his treatment of architectural subject matter. Armin Zweite, commenting on volume (XVII: Book 43) [figure 9], describes it in the following words: “This whole volume centers on ruins, dilapidated buildings, expanses of gravel and ballast, waste heaps and quarries… Whatever the location, we see nothing but destruction and decay.”(Zweite 1989) This is not only displayed in the photographs, it is also evident in the materiality of the books themselves. Kiefer treated the lead sheets before transforming them into books; most of the sheets where exposed to various chemical processes that caused oxidation, producing fragmented monochromatic color shifts over the surfaces. In other areas the books are covered with red-brown and black earth. (IV Book 11) [figure 14] In some places the surfaces are enhanced into relief with cast lead, or indented to reveal a rugged, uneven and damaged surface.

The world that Kiefer portrays is not the efficient communication systems of globalization, or the harmonious continuum between humanity and the environment. Everywhere the impact of overpopulation is felt on the surface of the globe, contrasted by large wastelands of arid land that is uninhabitable. Railways and bridges, the prime metaphors for geographical connections, interactions and unifications, are all deserted in a state of ruin (XVIII Book 46) [figure 10]. The books reveal a world undergoing a process of chaotic fragmentation.

In *Zweistromland*, Kiefer articulates the ruin on three levels. Firstly, it is marked visually as a decaying or oxidizing process in the form (the books themselves), and a second time in the content (the photographs). On the third level, the ruin as an allegory implies a process of fragmentation that is a fall from a prior state of unification, perfection or completion.

For Coleridge, the viewer or reader is responsible for the narrative constructed in an allegory, the objects or forms that are presented are often discontinuous, while the likeness is constructed in the mind. This process of drawing connections is done in such a manner that "the parts combine to form a consistent whole". (Bell 1997:6) This 'whole' however, is not the totality that is invoked by the symbolic; it is merely an arbitrary whole built up from fragments, a possible set of correspondences. Furthermore, the subject or interpreter ascribes the meaning of a given allegory.

There is a fundamental shift that takes place from the symbolic to the allegorical: the allegorical is delimited, its unifying structure is not the universal totality of the symbol; the allegory is rather characterized by a distributive or systematic wholeness.

Furthermore, Benjamin suggests: “The distinction between the two modes is therefore sought in the momentariness which the allegory lacks… There [in the symbol] we have momentary totality; here [in the allegory] we have progression of a series of moments.” (1977:165)

Zweistromland aligns itself with the allegorical in that it is gradual exploration, in sections and fragments, of the natural history of the earth, and the cultural history of humanity. Its theme is transience, temporality and history, and it leaves us at the point of interpreters, or agents of meaning. Meaning is conferred, not symbolically interpreted. It is in this sense that it remains allegorical, that it is always under construction. Any global or universal whole conceived of in *Zweistromland* will always be a unity that is a possible set of correspondences, and not a transcendental totality.

Kiefer challenged the traditional authority of the symbol, by embracing the allegorical image of the ruin. The unique relationship between the symbolic signifier and the transcendental signified is broken. Kiefer retraces this process on another level, this time challenging the authority associated with an all-embracing encyclopedia, the ‘divine opus’. By challenging the status of the symbol, which I have shown in the introduction to be the sole vehicle for the representation of the theological transcendental, Kiefer is in effect undermining the possibility of *Zweistromland* to facilitate such a signification.

It has repeatedly occurred to me that Kiefer's literal use of books in *Zweistromland* [figure 1] is not only a formalistic decision, but that he is interested in the convoluted relationship between the visual arts and writing. It is also quite interesting that the books are devoid of text, but that writing is somehow invoked by the physical form of the books, and by the textual use of images.

Indeed, one can view *Zweistromland* [figure 1] as a visual encyclopedia, but it can be frustrating; as we have seen in the beginning of this chapter, there is no indication of a didactic method of interpretation that would lead one to a singular 'meaning' of the work. It is in this regard that *Zweistromland* seems to have striking similarities with post-modernism, more specifically, deconstructivism.

Radical claims are made about the work; Armin Zweite suggests that: "Everything comes together in the lead library, from whence, if one could only open the books, it might all emerge again." (1989:97)

The word encyclopedia refers to "the circle of learning or a general course" and, secondly, "a literary work containing extensive information on all branches of knowledge."(Macdonald 1978: 428) It is also in this regard that the encyclopedia has a close connotation with the philosophical system. The encyclopedia can be described in the metaphor of the circle, or the encircling of the totality of the world and of human knowledge. For Friedrich Hegel, "the whole of philosophy in this way resembles the circle of circles" in that it contains all the subcategories of epistemology. (Taylor 1984:79)

Derrida describes this encyclopedia as a Book of books, where

> All finite books would become opuscules modeled after the great divine opus, so many arrested speculations, and so many tiny mirrors catching a single grand image. The ideal form of this would be a book of total science, a book of absolute knowledge that digested, recited, and substantially ordered all books, going through the whole cycle of knowledge. (Taylor 1984:78)

This 'Book' would therefore also hold the status of the original or the authentic; all books or representations would be mere intertextual references to the divine opus. Furthermore, very importantly, this divine opus would not consist of a random sequence of information; it would be modeled in the fashion of an integrated system. The 'Book' would be an all-embracing framework that holds together the diverse realms of humanities and sciences.

Does Kiefer share these aspirations in his conceptual framework of *Zweistromland*? Externally the work consists of two bookshelves placed at a slight angle to suggest an open book. Is it Kiefer's intent to imply that all the volumes make up one grand unified 'Book'? In making the books virtually indestructible, in durable lead, does Kiefer suggest that his opus will survive the onslaught of time and preserve its status as the ultimate referent for all other 'texts'?

In the light of analysis done in the previous sections, I would argue that *Zweistromland* is not a unified text, on the contrary, it is internally fractured, producing multiple and even contradictory readings. Secondly, it is already intertextual, which means that it always refers to something beyond itself, hence undermining its potential status as an ultimate referent.

This is clearly an indication that *Zweistromland* does not parade as a divine opus; on the contrary, I would define it as a systematic critique of the notion of an authentic book or an original text.

Taylor argues that historically, books are believed to be transparent representations of the world, in that they do not enter into the 'construction' of a text or of representation. Similarly, in art, mimesis refers to an adequate or naturalistic representation of the world. Hence, the book or the painting is said to represent 'the way things really are' and not an arbitrary construct. (1984)

Novalis suggests that "The book is nature", or conversely that nature is a book. (quote in Taylor 1984: 80) By implication, reason, or truth, is somehow inherent in the world; and the book is merely a transparent medium for the inherent truth in nature or the world. Kiefer, however, makes us painfully aware that the 'book' or any authentic presentation is always already a construct, that it is articulated within sets of cultural codes, whether we are conscious of that or not. Kiefer reveals this by marking the process visually.

This is done by gradually substituting and effacing representations that are traditionally believed to be transparent or neutral images, e.g. photographs.

Mark Taylor suggest that the primary characteristic of the relation between the 'original' representation and the copies is the notion of mimesis:

> Mimesis involves signified and signifier in a relationship of presentation and re-presentation. The purpose of the book is to render the discourse of the world by bringing about the absolute proximity or perfect transparency of the object to subject. Though not always obvious, this aim implies the self-negation of the book. In the course of approximating this goal, the book inscribes a paradoxical "progression" towards its own effacement. Perfect mimesis is no longer mimesis. If imitation were to realize itself completely, it would negate itself by actually becoming the thing imitated. Mimesis, therefore, bears witness to its own failure. Representation, it turns out, is not presentation. Instead of preserving presence, mimesis testifies to absence by tracing and retracing the elusive presence. (Taylor 1984:82)

I would suggest that Kiefer pays a considerable amount of attention to the notion of mimesis in *Zweistromland*. Rather ambivalently, Kiefer continuously moves from the signified to the signifier, from the presentation to the representation in his books. The most explicit example of this can be found in volume (XX: Book 99). In a series of enigmatic images, Kiefer explores the relation between the physical lead book and the photographs. Folded lead pages are partly covered with photographs of lead, creating an ambivalent reading: the 'physical' lead surface is interchangeable with the photographic documentations of lead. In this mimetic process, where the copy stands in for the original, Kiefer undermines the hierarchy that privileges presentation. Instead, the surface can now only be seen as a process of representation, a field of simulacrum where interpretation is arrested at the point of the signifier.

The same technique is used in volumes (IV: Book 11) and (IX: Book 21). Here Kiefer rubbed red soil into the surfaces of the books, sometimes overlapping photographs of arid landscapes where this soil is to be found. Again, there is a tension between the original (the soil) and the copy (the photographs of the soil). Ironically enough, the use of real soil does not serve as a replacement for the photographs.

The soil itself does not somehow signal an authenticity; it is easily read as a visual 'text', or a representation. To emphasize matters even further, the use of physical soil is not a new phenomenon in Kiefer's work; it has been extensively used in his earlier works, most notably in an artist's book called *Fission (Spaltung) I & II*. The textured and soiled surface in *Zweistromland* is therefore an example of Kiefer using real 'soil' as an inter-text. It does not refer to its own physical presence, but rather functions as visual intertextuality.

This brings me to the conclusion that Kiefer's conceptual framework is indeed congruent with the deconstructivist critique of the transcendental. The books do not claim to be an authentic or transparent representation of presence, or the totality of knowledge or the world. Everywhere the constructive process of representation is highlighted and physically inscribed in his visual texts. The implications are profound: presence is articulated through a sign or a re-presentation; authentic presence gives way to simulacrum.

Zweistromland ceases to be a transcendental signified.

CHAPTER 2: ANISH KAPOOR

2.1: BEING AND NON-BEING

Anish Kapoor was born in 1954 in Bombay, India. He now resides in London, where he also received his art training. His first works produced in the early seventies are characterized by the vivid use of colour, not unlike the powders and dyes used in Hindu shrines and rituals. In these earlier pieces Kapoor's interest in the use of surfaces and optical effects is already visible, and his exhibitions where often arranged in such a manner as to encourage a ritualistic experience of the works (Celant 1996). I would suggest that all of his work shows an exceptional concern with form, and he is clearly influenced by the modernist tradition, especially the color-field painters and the minimalists. However, upon closer inspection it is evident that Kapoor is a completely unique artist who ingeniously hybridizes elements from his Indian background with modernist abstraction, creating a novel expression.

The works that I have chosen as examples for this analysis were all made in a ten-year period between 1988 and 1998. I have found that Kapoor explored a range of works within this time that had thematic parallels. It will also become evident that this period of works is most suitable for my specific analysis, which seeks to identify representations of transcendence and emptiness.

To contextualize his work, I will briefly introduce some earlier sculptures. The early seventies to the mid eighties can be seen as his early stage. Although some of the ideas embodied in later works are hinted at here, the majority of these works belong to a very specific stylistic and conceptual group. During this time Kapoor had a strong interest in colour, in fact, he saw himself as a painter who is a sculptor (Celant 1996).

Kapoor created symmetrical organic objects covered in very bright colored powders. Central works during this time was *1000 Names* (1979-80) and *Mother as a Mountain* (1985). In *Mother as a Mountain* Kapoor articulates an idea that was to inform many of his future works. This specific work consisted of a towering shape placed onto the floor, covered in bright red pigment. The very tip of this conical shape is left open, and the gaping cavity suggests a hollow inside. This is even more strongly articulated in three works: *Here and There*, *I* (1987) and *Wound* (1988). Here the emphasis is placed on this juxtaposition between exterior in interior. The exterior with its bright pigment and clearly defined geometric shape is sharply contrasted by the perfectly round hole in the surface, opening into a hollow interior.

Adam [figure 15] created in 1988-89 is the first in a range of works that I have chosen to discuss in this analysis. This sculpture consists of a sandstone rock, approximately a meter deep and a meter wide, and stands upright just over two meters high. The exterior of the stone is kept in its natural form, very few alterations seem to have been made, except for a relatively level surface on the front face and the surface standing on the floor. The stone is rugged, irregular and speaks of its age. The natural color of the stone ranges from a light mustard to a light brown hue that shows the signs of weathering. The physicality and presence of the stone is very real, it does not disappear in gigantism. Instead it relates closely to the human body, the front face being slightly smaller than the size of an average door.

Kapoor eclipses the exterior form by creating an incision into the front face of the stone. A large part of the interior is hollowed out into a cavity that opens up to the exterior surface in the shape of a perfect rectangle, in a vertical format and approximately 500 x 300 mm. The interior cavity is heavily covered in a pitch-black pigment. The visual effect is dramatic and mesmerizing. The rectangle appears so dark that it defies its depth and seems to float on the stone. The visual contrast between the light stone surface and the black rectangle perpetuates this illusion; instead of receding towards the background, the rectangle jumps forward and creates a hovering effect with the limestone in the near background.

I would argue that Kapoor's articulation of negative space within the stone is the result of an intervention that goes beyond the exploration of mere formal properties. In his own words:

> Binary oppositions are the fundamental elements of the human condition. Capturing the Void in matter is one way of creating drama, of placing the scene in a physically and psychological clear language, in the sense that every form is either concave or convex. (Celant 1996: XXIV)

Here Kapoor gives us a unique insight into the basis of his modus operandi. Every form has for the artist a metaphorical dimension, where its displacement of space becomes a powerful articulation of a 'binary opposition'. The intimate relation between a form and an anti-form, or a shape and its mould, mirrors the relationship between matter and the 'Void', 'Being' and 'Non-Being'. For Kapoor these polarities become meaningful through a phenomenological experience. The viewer's interaction with the work sets the drama into motion.

The ‘human condition’ is central to Kapoor’s concerns that motivate the creation of his work. In my analysis it will become evident that his sculptures resonate with the viewer, amplifying subtle qualities that constitute human nature.

These concerns and binary dimensions in Anish Kapoor’s work led me to justify a parallel between his sculptures and the existentialist writings of Martin Heidegger. In the introduction I have briefly outlined Heidegger’s unique approach to existentialism.

I would suggest that Heidegger still retained a fascination with metaphysical notions such as ‘being’, and that set him slightly apart from other existentialists. Nevertheless, as I will show in the following analysis, Heidegger’s understanding of emptiness is based upon the intimate relationship between Being and Non-Being, and is entirely different to Hegel’s thesis (identity) and antithesis (negation). In order to show that these theories are ideal in the analysis and understanding of selected sculptures by Kapoor, I will now proceed to give a comprehensive outline of specific notions within his writings that are pivotal to substantiate the interpretative framework.

In **Poetry, Language, Thought** Heidegger explains how an artistic creation can become a metaphor for the nature of existence. (1975) Like the human being, art stands in relations. One could say that these relations are the potential for the existence of an artwork, or rather that an artwork brings these very relations into being. Heidegger describes it in the following way:

"The work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself. For the work-being of the work is present in, and only in, such an opening up. …in the work there was a happening of truth at work."(1975:41) This definition of truth is a unique understanding that is explored in Heidegger's writing: "Truth means the nature of the true. We think this nature in recollecting the Greek word aletheia, the unconcealedness of beings." (51) Truth, in Heidegger's terms, is related to his notion of revelation, or an opening up, which he calls 'the Open'. (1975) This notion of opening up seems to be the coming into being of relations. In other words, the cleaving or division between subject and object is the prerequisite for conscious experience. By bringing a sculpture into being the artist opens up a novel set of relations which was previously covert or void.

Heidegger's understanding of art hinges around two 'concepts'. Firstly, we have the notion of relations, or difference. Dynamic relations come into being when there is a fissure, cleft or a fault in an ocean of indifference. Secondly, this differentiation takes place within nothingness, and consequently opens up in an already open space, which Heidegger terms the 'Open'.

Heidegger explains this by, in his own words, "deliberately selecting a work that cannot be ranked as representational art." (1975:41)

He proceeds by giving a detailed explanation:

> A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. …The temple and its precinct, however, do not fade away into the indefinite. …Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the obscurity of the rock's monstrous yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the construction holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing by grace of the sun, yet first brings to light the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The secure tower makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive forms and thus come to appear as what they are. …The temple-work, standing there, opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth. (1975:41-43)

Here Heidegger explains very elegantly how the creation of a temple, or an artwork, triggers a process of differentiation which literally brings novel identity out of nothing, out of an ocean of indifference. In this way Heidegger makes a profound association between cleaving, seeing and Being. It is through this process of cleaving that the temple is allowed to stand forward, to stand in contrast with the rock and the sky, the day and the night. Boundary has a crucial function. Heidegger states that it "brings to its radiance what is present. Boundary sets free into the unconcealed; by its contour in the Greek light the mountain stands in its towering and repose." (quote in Glass 1995:21) For things to 'enter into their distinctive forms' they have to be separated by a cleft, or a cut which marks their distinct boundaries. Furthermore, Taylor argues that this notion of cleft is intimately related to the notion of 'nothingness': "The temple images nothing by holding open the differential interval of the between."(Taylor 1987:49)

Newman Robert Glass states that

> Nothing has an active, complementary role in creating the tension which brings forth the vitality of Being. Being is intensified in relationship with nothing. This intensification is apparent in the deeply scised borders of the Greek mountain which stands against the light. (Glass 1995:21)

Heidegger's analysis of 'seeing' ultimately holds an answer for the fundamental nature of existence: "Both are characterized by Heidegger's unique pattern of deep scission: visual scission allows the thing to stand forth in relationship with nothing; existential scission allows the person to stand forth in relationship to the nothingness of anxiety or death." (Glass 1995:21)

It is clear that the process of complex differentiation, however, does not leave the creator/viewer of the artwork untouched; it has a profound impact on how the subject views him/herself. Heidegger states it in the following way: "The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to humans their outlook on themselves." (Heidegger 1975:43)

The art-work opens up new sets of relations, potentialities and possibilities, a dynamic interaction between the subject / object which Heidegger terms the 'world':

> To be a work means to set up a world. But what is it to set up a world? …By the opening of a world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits. …A work, by being a work, makes space for that spaciousness. 'To make space for' means here especially to liberate the Open and to establish it in its structure. …The work holds open the Open of the world. (Heidegger 1975:44)

Again Heidegger uses the metaphor of the art-work to define the nature of the 'world' on a grand scale; the world is not an *a priori* given or an elaborate set of categories, it can rather be defined as a coming-into-relation out of nothingness, out of the Open. Furthermore, it is necessary to emphasize that this non-being, 'nothingness' or 'emptyness' of the Open, is not a mere field of indifference or the indefinite before the subject/object dynamic comes into play, it is rather that which constitutes the possibility of presence itself. This line of difference, which is a cleft, or the between, is therefore a dynamic separation which opens the possibility for presence in the nothingness of Being.

> In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know. (Heidegger 1975:53)

Although Heidegger is often classified as an existentialist, it is clear that there are distinct differences between him and the rest of the existentialist school. The most important distinction is his understanding of Non-Being. For Sartre, Non-Being was overtly associated with the negative, or negation. The negative was seen as an irreconcilable other that fueled the tragic fate of the subject. (Blackham 1965)

For Heidegger, Non-Being or emptiness is at the very core of Being, not as a negation, but as an active participant in the coming-into-being of the world. It is on these grounds that I chose Heidegger as a suitable philosopher to assist in the understanding and the analysis of the work of Anish Kapoor.

Anish Kapoor encourages us to adopt an understanding of the void as an active principle:

> The void is not silent. I have always thought of it more and more as a transitional space, an in-between space. It's very much to do with time. I have always been interested as an artist in how one can somehow look again for that very first moment of creativity where everything is possible and nothing has actually happened. It's a space of becoming… *something* that dwells in the presence of the work that allows it or forces it not to be what it states it is in the first instance. (Bhabha 1998:35)

Here the void is described as an active principle, an in-between space, a space that allows 'space' to be perceived as such, or in Heidegger's words "…A work, by being a work, makes space for that spaciousness. *To make space for* means here especially to liberate the Open and to establish it in its structure. …The work holds open the Open of the world." (Heidegger 1975:45)

Homi Bhabha describes this notion of 'openness' or 'nothingness' in very precise and elegant terms: "The aura of the void produces a spectral shadow of man: too much emptiness to be invisible, too much absence to be mere vacancy. An aura that gapes rather than glows."(Bhabha 1998:35) This complements Heidegger's statement perfectly: "man is holding the place for the complete other of being, so that in its openness there can be such a thing as being present (Being). Nothingness belongs …to being present."(quote in Glass 1995:22) It is through the self-transcendence of being against the screen of nothingness that presence is constituted.

I would argue that for Anish Kapoor art making is a search for an articulation of the void.

This articulation, however, does not lie in a metaphorical appropriation of metaphysical notions of Non-Being; it lies in the lived experience of the presence of an artwork. By capturing the transitional nature of presence in a work, Kapoor 'brings to expression' the 'openness' or 'nothingness' that constitutes presence in the first place. I would argue that this is where Kapoor differs from the ideals of modernist art: his quest is not a search for the essence of form, or the contained 'absence' in the art of the color field painters. It is rather an expression of vertiginous and excessive emptiness, an 'aura' of the void that 'gapes rather than glows'.

Instead of being located only within a specific object, or a particular artwork, or even within the viewer, emptiness is everywhere. The sculpture of Anish Kapoor puts into question the 'ground' of the entire field of existence and brings to expression an excessive and engendering emptiness which 'constitutes' everything.

Homi Bhabha describes this excessive engendering emptiness in the following way:

> But the expansion of available space – the making of emptiness – never fails to register a lateral movement, a transitional tremor that disorders the boundedness of the void. …It is this transitional temporality, effected by the expansion of emptiness, that Kapoor seeks to inscribe into the very passage of time and movement that makes this exhibition the phenomenological experience that it is. (Bhabha 1998:14)

This then, is Kapoor's modus operandi: to enhance the tension between the static and the dynamic, the stable and the vertiginous, to such an extreme that it literally becomes a 'transitional tremor' that effects the entire scope of phenomenological experience. Let's take *Adam* (1988) [figure 15] for example.

Firstly, the work consists of a fairly rough piece of stone with a 'natural' surface, a texture that immediately evokes an enormous sense of weight. On the frontal plain, the surface is disrupted by a deep rectangular cavity, which creates a space so dark, that the depth literally rises to the surface. This creates a visual ambivalence that unfolds through time. It can be described as a transition that undermines the physicality and presence of the stone, a dynamic weightless movement that undermines the gravity of the rock.

In *Adam* [figure 15] the cavity in the stone embodies Heidegger's notion of the cleft, or rather the verb cleaving. As it is defined in Taylor's writing: " 'Cleave' means not only divide, separate, split, and fissure, but also adhere, stick, cling. Cleaving, therefore, simultaneously divides and joins."(Taylor 1987:48) The immediate visual juxtaposition between the stone and the cavity evokes the same ambivalence: the sense of intimacy, nearness on the one hand, and a sense of the disparate, incongruent and distant on the other. For Bhabha, this difference initiates a 'lateral movement' that dismantles a formal and stable composition:

> The enigma of the void is now discernible in the intimation of a lateral movement that obliterates the perceptual space and supplements it with a disruptive, disjunctive time through which the spectator must pass… (Bhabha 1998:14)

Here one gets a sense of the experiential nature of the work, the viewer as an active participant. The parallel that I have been drawing between the philosophy of Heidegger and the sculptures of Kapoor is twofold. On the one hand, cleaving is directly related to seeing.

This is manifest in the stark contour of the Greek mountain against the glaring light of day; the stability of the Greek temple that allows the storm to manifest in its unstable and chaotic violence; and the gaping cavities in Kapoor's monumental stone works.

On the other hand, the phenomenological experience that accompanies that viewing, a disruptive and vertiginous experience that Robert Glass described in the following way: " …existential scission allows the person to stand forth in relationship to the nothingness of anxiety or death." (Glass 1995:21)

Indeed, it is undeniable that Kapoor himself is fascinated with this state of transition, from certainty and stability to uncertainty and vertigo. As consciousness, or the self, is confronted with the abyss, or the 'void', all pre-conceived notions of stability, autonomy and essence are threatened. Kapoor is very interested in this initial confrontation, and describes it in the following way:

> The void has many presences. Its presence as fear is towards the loss of self, from a non-object to a non-self. The idea of being somehow consumed by the object, or in the non-object, in the body, in the cave, in the womb etc. I have always been drawn to a notion of fear, towards a sensation of vertigo of falling, of being pulled inwards… (quote in Celant 1996: XXXIV)

Untitled (1996) explores this particular aspect by transforming two rooms into site-specific installations. The first work is reminiscent of *Adam*. It consists of a minimal empty room, which is disrupted by a rectangular cavity in the floor. Again, the depth of the cavity is indiscernible, and it becomes a looming and threatening void that disrupts the surface of the concrete floor. The second work explores the same idea, this time the hole is circular, and it forms the inside of a parabolic cone.

Here the descent is gradual, the cleft is not so distinctly marked; instead it brings the entire space to life: the solid, concrete interior becomes an organic and elastic mass, which is marked by a gradual collapse into the void.

In line with the other existentialists, Heidegger claims that the encounter with nothingness can be a very significant yet terrifying experience. Fred Dallmayr describes this experience in the following way: "From the vantage of Being, nothingness was encountered in the state of 'dread' (Angst), which was not equivalent to mere anxiety or nervousness, but rather meant a basic openness to Nonbeing." (1992:45) Furthermore, it is important to note that this encounter with nothingness is not necessarily an encounter with something external, it is rather a confrontation with something that lies at the very core of one's being. In this way Heidegger describes existence as the 'suspension' or 'suspendedness' of being in Non-Being:

> Nothingness is that which makes the disclosure of being(s) as such possible for our human existence …Nothingness not merely designates the conceptual opposite of beings but is an integral part of their essence. Nothingness is neither a negative nor is it a goal or an endpoint; rather, it is the innermost trembling of being itself. (quote in Dallmayr 1992:45)

Anish Kapoor's work can be said to initiate this encounter with nothingness, 'from a non-object to a non-self.' (quote in Celant 1996: XXXIV) In other words, Kapoor uses phenomenological mechanisms or effects that have a profound impact on the subject that can induce a state of vertiginous 'dread'. I would suggest that a profound encounter with a 'loss of self' is usually traversed by a dialectical movement in the opposite direction: a contraction, a desperate nexus. Maybe that is the answer to Heidegger's insistence on the primacy of Non-Being, the prerequisite of Being.

The very possibility of being-in-the-world is created by the contrast of the self against the screen of Non-Being. The self, which is involved in an ever changing process of transformation and transcendence can only exist as a counterpart to the void.

I would argue that Kapoor's sculptures do not represent Non-Being in a metaphorical manner. Rather, Kapoor's work can be said to *embody* the Being / Non-Being relation. An encounter with Kapoor's work can facilitate an experience where the boundaries of being is transcended and dissolved, revealing the ground of Nothingness and emptiness.

In the next section I will return to Kapoor's interest in Being, this time with specific reference to the inner-workings of human consciousness.

2.2: SURFACE DEPTH

For Anish Kapoor, light is the fundamental aspect of any visual experience; we saw in the discussion of his previous works that he uses the absence of light very effectively to inscribe a contrast, which in turn creates an engendering emptiness in his sculptures. In his later works, however, he moves away from the juxtaposed contrasts to pristine reflective surfaces, the kind of surface that belies the object's presence and weight. His concerns are the same, but his realizations are achieved by slightly altering the use of light.

We could start with *Turning the World Upside Down* (1998), a radical departure from his previous stone works. It consists of a massive steel ball, which is hollowed out to reveal a reflection of the world; every detail of the surroundings is first duplicated on the exterior and then once more in the interior, but this time upside-down, inverted. The effect is similar to the stone pieces, a defiance of gravity, a vortex in space. But this time it is more intimate, the viewer can see his/her own reflection as it is being sucked into the sphere, to reveal an inverted image.

> …The creation of emptiness is now, like the mirror itself, everywhere and nowhere, as interiority and exteriority fail to preserve their determining dimensions. …Such a reading illustrates the motility embodied in the reflective surface of the mirror. (Bhabha 1998:25)

For Heidegger, the dynamics of presence was characterized by definite boundaries; it is, after all, through a process of discreet differentiation that the figure is constituted against the screen or ground of nothingness. In Kapoor's later explorations, we find him moving into a slightly different territory, one that does not have clear delineated boundaries. The objects becomes mercurial, the viewer experiences his/her reflection

as a fleeting mirage that is in a constant process of deferred assemblage. The sculptures seem to shed their immense weight; they acquire dynamic lightness; a 'motility' as Homi Bhabha describes it.

> As soon as consciousness is said to reflect the world and itself by turning upon itself, and thus to be conscious of itself in this act of coiling upon itself, this metaphysics of light, or photology, is transposed to it. (Gasche 1989:16)

The notion of reflection is undoubtedly synonymous with consciousness. It was, since the first rudimentary speculations on the nature of consciousness, used as an effective and relevant metaphor. Firstly, one has the reflection of observation, a reflection that constitutes the 'subject' as such. Henri Lefebvre describes it in the following way:

> When the mirror is 'real', as is constantly the case in the realm of objects, the space is imaginary – and the locus of the imagination is the 'Ego'. In a living body, on the other hand, where the mirror of reflection is imaginary, the effect is real – so real, indeed, that it determines the very structure of the higher animals. (1991:182)

Here we have a description of the relation between reflection and subjectivity. For Jacques Lacan, it is through reflection that the human subject establishes its initial 'Ego'. This is called the 'Mirror Phase', and it is the first 'complex' that the infant enacts. According to Muller and Richardson,

> Lacan's principle thesis is that the newly born human infant, initially sunk in motor incapacity, turbulent movements, and fragmentation, first experiences itself as a unity through experiencing some kind of reflection of itself, the paradigm for which would be self-reflection in a mirror. (1982:29)

In this experience, the subject completely identifies with the unified reflection, the so-called 'I'. The infant can, for instance, experience its reflection through an interaction with any other human being; it is most likely to be the mothering figure. The infant, or 'subject' at this stage, idealizes this unified reflection and it becomes his primary identification, his initial 'Ego'.

The reflected space is therefore the 'imaginary' space for the infant; the mirror -image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world. The transcending Ego is formed through 'identification' with this imaginary space – the locus that will serve as a medium for any future interactions with 'real' space. Lefebvre writes: "Every form belongs to the subject. It is the apprehension of the surface by the mirror."(Lefebvre 1991:181)

So here we have the initial reflection that is internalized and constitutes the Ego, an identity that is dependent on a split, a self -reflection, duplication. This relates to Heidegger's notion of 'Being as difference', a cleft or a between that is the prerequisite for identity.

Rodolphe Gasche traces the notion of reflection in relation to the history of philosophy. He sees philosophy as a radical departure from the initial reflection where one confronts and encounters the world of objects, 'real' space, to an internalized reflection. This reflection shows itself to be "self-reflection, self-relation, self-mirroring… By lifting the ego out of its immediate entanglement in the world by thematizing the subject of thought itself."(Gasche 1989:13)

The notion of reflection dates as far back as the Greek and Latin philosophy, where the term

> has optic connotations, in that it refers to the action by mirroring surfaces of throwing back light, and in particular a mirror's exhibition or reproduction of objects in the form of images. In this sense, reflection signifies the process that takes place between a figure or object and its image on a polished surface. As a consequence of optic metaphoricity, reflection, when designating the mode and operation by which the mind has knowledge of itself and its operations, becomes analogous to the process whereby physical light is thrown back on a reflecting surface. From the beginning, self-consciousness as constituted by self reflection has been conceptualized in terms of this optic operation. (Gasche 1989:16)

Furthermore, we have a notion of a double reflection, first the world of multiple objects, events in time, and then the internal reflection that folds on itself. Gasche ventures to give a definition:

> Reflection is the structure and the process of an operation that, in addition to designating the action of a mirror reproducing an object, implies that the mirror's mirroring itself, by which process the mirror is made to see itself. …A metaphysics of light, or photology. (Gasche 1989:17)

In this sense reflection has a double movement, and far from being mutually exclusive, these two moments of reflection are intimately related. Gasche ask the following: "how can reflection as a unitary phenomenon at once be the reflection of the other and a reflection of the mirroring subject?"(Gasche 1989:20) Throughout history one sees that philosophy struggles with this problem, in a sense philosophy is a search for a harmonious unification of the two moments of reflection. Gasche suggests that the first thinker who defined and articulated a solution to the problem was Thomas Aquinas. He suggested a third moment, a dialectical resolution to the problem:

> Reflection is directed both at the reproduced image or concept of an object and at the act of reflection itself. Indeed, such a reflection provides a missing link; the third, in truth, first moment of reflection is found in the recognition that the object reflected by the mirroring subject is not just any object but rather the subject's symmetric Other – in other words, a representation of its alienated self. With such an alienating positing itself as object, its reflection truly becomes an act of bringing back, a recapturing recognition. In the reflection of the mirror-subject as an annulment of the mirroring subject's former alienation, the reflection of the Other becomes a reflection of the self. The mirror's self reflection is the embracing whole that allows it to release itself into the Other, which explains why it faces objects in the first place and why it returns reflexively to itself. (Aquinas q. in Gasche 1989:21)

Indeed, this kind of methodological thinking concerning the dynamic relationship between the self and the other had enormous repercussions in later philosophies. One could just have a closer look at the dialectic of Hegel. Refining Aquinas's writing on the subject, Hans Holz concludes: "The doubling of what is mirrored in the mirrored, the latter being the same as what is mirrored and yet an other, hence represents the dialectical relation according to which the species encompasses itself and its opposite: being is the species of itself and of nonbeing."(quote in Gasche 1989:21)

Kapoor uses phenomenological means to emulate the coming-into-being of consciousness. One has the first moment, the reflection of oneself in the surface, the recognition of the reflection and its relation to the reflected world, and then a gradual distortion of the reflection. Now the image reveals itself as distinctly 'other', not a perfect symmetrical reflection of the self, but an inverted and upside-down reflection. In this way Kapoor creates a certain tension to his works, in that the process of looking is never quite resolved, in that the space of ideal symmetry where the self and the other are fused is fissured, deferred and denied.

Untitled (1996) [figure 17] consists of two concave mirrors, approximately 2 meters in diameter each, facing one another in a narrow room. Here Kapoor introduces the second moment, where reflection turns on itself, and he describes the process in the following way:

> … The curious thing about double mirrors, concave mirrors, when you put them together, is that they don't give you an infinite repeatability… What interests me is that from certain angles and positions there's no image at all in either mirror. I'm very interested in the way that they seem to reverse, affirm and then negate… To place the viewer with these blinding mirrors in this narrow passage… this transitional space… somehow at an oblique angle to the mirrors 'visuality' or the viewer's visibility is to be caught in the contest of mirrors. They cancel each other out in one moment and yet demanding that they be looked at from a strange, oblique perspective…Where time and space are seemingly absent, at a standstill… in that narrow passage, paradoxically there is a restlessness, an unease… (Bhabha 1998:14)

We see that Kapoor sets up a drama, both metaphorical and phenomenological, which is forever re-enacted as it were. In our brief discussion we have seen philosophy's movement toward the second type of reflection, self-reflection.

Kapoor's concave mirrors distort the symmetrical reflection, creating a sensitive locus where the metaphysics of light is undermined, where a dark spot rises from the surface to create 'restlessness, unease'. This blind spot is the Other that cannot be assimilated into the self. As Mark Taylor writes: "… which, in its failure – in its gaps and fissures, its faults and lacks – inscribes an Other it cannot represent …for this Other is not merely outside but is 'inside' as an 'outside' that cannot be interiorized." (Taylor 1992:303,319)

Through this interpretation, Kapoor undermines Aquinas's 'embracing whole' (q. in Gasche 1989:21) that assimilates the other. Identity, which is defined as a reflection and assimilation of the other within the self is challenged. The self is never complete, because there will always be an 'outside' or an 'other' that cannot be assimilated. This Other therefore always remains as an un-figured emptiness.

Untitled (1997) [figure 18], reminds one of the earlier works in stone. It is a monolith in stainless steel, standing upright, measuring approximately 2 x 1 x 1 meters. This geometrical object is disrupted by an opening on the one side, an organic vortex that collapses into a dark fissure, a lesion of emptiness. I would suggest that Kapoor inscribes the emptiness twice: firstly, the reflective surface negates the physical object; the form is not something internal to the object, it is rather constituted through reflection. The object is non-existent; it only exists as a series of relations with the environment. Secondly, Kapoor denies the reflective surface by creating a spot where the process of reflection ceases, not to bring back the object in its autonomous physicality, like a rock, but to create an engendering emptiness. Homi Bhabha describes the intimate relation between observation and internal reflection:

> Kapoor stays with the state of transitionality, allowing the time and space to develop its own affects - anxiety, unease, restlessness - so that viewing becomes part of the process of making the work itself. The spectator's relation to the object involves a process of questioning the underlying conditions through which the work becomes a visual experience in the first place: how can the conceptual void be made visible? How can the perceptual void be spoken? (Bhabha 1998:16)

2.3: BEING AS NOTHINGNESS

An analysis of the work of Anish Kapoor would be inadequate without a brief look at potential parallels with the philosophical tradition of Buddhism. Strangely enough, the published writing available on Kapoor does not explore this relation at all, despite Kapoor's insistence on the importance of the 'void' in his work.

As we have seen, Kapoor's sculptures are structured around a complex relationship between form and anti-form, between presence and absence. An encounter with Anish Kapoor's work can be described as a confrontation with the 'void', a theme that is strongly present throughout his oeuvre, with works such as *Adam* 1988-89 [figure 15], *Turning the world inside out II* 1995, *Untitled* 1996 [figure 17] and *Ghost* 1997 [figure 16].

> That void – wellspring and abyss, maelstrom and the fullness of Being. (Celant 1996:17)
>
> The internal void contains everything and nothing, and it is the latter that substantializes it. The act of an artist consists in opening the rigid surface of the world upon that abyssal void that constitutes its substrata rather than its essence. The vertigo is provoked by the opening of the crust that covers the void inside. (Tazzi quoted in Bhabha 1989:104)

Any analysis and definition of Non-Being would be inadequate if one avoids the great eastern traditions and philosophies; they have, after all, thousands of years of experience in that field. In the current analysis, I have, however, narrowed it down to a specific Japanese philosopher, called Keiji Nishitani. He comes from a Zen Buddhist tradition, and his emphasis is analytical and theoretical.

Nishitani is a twentieth century thinker; his writings include comparative studies between Buddhism and western metaphysics, with a special emphasis on the work of Heidegger. Nishitani is by no means a representative for the entire scope of Buddhism, but his thinking is very comprehensive and substantial.

Nothingness or Emptiness is the cardinal characteristic of all Buddhist thought, and, in contrast to the western nihilistic traditions, Nothingness does not imply nihilism and despair, it rather carries life-affirming implications. In line with Heidegger, one could say that Being is constituted by and through Nothingness. Furthermore, Nothingness is seen as the original potential of existence. Kapoor sympathizes with this definition:

> The void is not silent. I have always thought of it more and more as a transitional space …I have always been interested as an artist in how one can somehow look again for that very first moment of creativity where everything is possible and nothing has actually happened. (quote in Bhabha 1998:35)

According to Nishitani, the western notion of nihilism is not only a reaction toward the tradition of metaphysics, but it is also a realization of groundlessness. He describes it in the following way: "A sense of nihility that brings the restless, forward-advancing pace of life to a halt and, instead, turns the light to what is directly underfoot. This fundamental conversion in life is occasioned by the opening up of the horizon of nihility at the ground of life." (Dallmayr 1992:38) Nishitani argues that this encounter with nihility is still being made from the standpoint of subjectivity, in line with a tradition epitomized by Cartesian thought, which hailed the ego as a reality beyond doubt.

The radical turn in Existentialism was latent in the philosophy of Descartes; it occurred the moment that the subject was declared to be devoid of substance and foundation. What follows is the Existentialist tradition "with its focus on alienated existence and the abyss of self-constitution."(Dallmayr 1992:40)

In Existentialism the ego is said to be the only reality, the only absolute that can give the subject a sense of certainty, the "basic warrant of cognitive truth." (Dallmayr 1992:40) Furthermore, the ego is groundless, it is embedded in nothingness, where the only purpose of the ego is to transcend itself, an 'overstepping'. This self-transcendence is, however, still bounded; it is the constant overcoming and redefinition of the boundaries of the ego.

Nishitani describes the shift from metaphysics to the nihility of existentialism in the following way:

> On the field of nihility, though, all nexus and unity is broken down and the self-enclosure of things is absolute. All things that are scatter apart from one another endlessly. And even the 'being' of each thing that is scatters in every direction, riding atop its tangents, as it were, of which we know not whence they come or wither they go. This existence seems to evaporate into a bottomless nihility; its possibility of existence seems to continually sink away into an impossibility of existence. (Nishitani 1982:145)

Existentialism therefore sees existence as maximum multiplicity, where nothing can be reduced to an identity, or unified into a system. Nihility lies at the ground of self-being or the absolute 'self-enclosure' of beings. For Nishitani, the only way to overcome this kind of nihility is to question the very process of subjectivization itself.

In Existentialism, "nothingness as nihility is still seen as a reference point of subjectivity or as something to which existence relates; differently put: it functions as representational correlate of existence."(Dallmayr 1992:42)

The Buddhist notion of Nothingness, which is called Sunyata, denotes a kind of emptiness that

> …empties itself even of the standpoint that represents some 'thing' that is emptiness… True emptiness is not to be posited as something outside of and other than 'being'; rather, it is to be realized as something united to and self-identical with being. (Nishitani 1982:96)

The notion of 'true emptiness' is, in line with Heidegger, synonymous with presence. Sunyata is simultaneously the emptiness and fullness of being:

> It is only on a field where the being of all things is a being at one with emptiness that it is possible for all things to gather into one, even while each retains its reality as an absolute and unique being. Here the being of all things, as well as the world as a system of being, become possible… All things in the world are linked together, one way or the other. Not a single thing comes into being without some relationship to every other thing… Figuratively speaking; its roots reach across into the ground of all other things and helps to hold them up and keep them standing. It serves as a constitutive element of their being so that they can be what they are… (Nishitani 1982:148)

This interconnectedness of everything in the field of existence is called 'Paticca Samuppada', and it is roughly translated as co-dependent arising. Sunyata is synonymous with Paticca Samuppada; Emptiness is the emptiness of independent existence, everything in the field of existence is constituted in relation to everything else:

"In the understanding of emptiness as co-dependent arising, there is no individual existence, or individual identity, but there is mutual existence or mutual identity."(Glass 1995:101) This emptiness is synonymous with interconnectedness, which is the transcendence of individuality.

This infinite network of interconnections is described in an ancient Buddhist mythology:

> Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net that has been hung… in such a manner that it stretches out indefinitely in all directions… A single glittering jewel hangs in each 'eye' of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in all dimensions, the jewels are infinite in number… If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection, and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring. (Glass 1995:32)

Here then is an elegant explanation of the intimate relation between Being and Nothingness, the self can be perceived as a monad, an autonomous individual, a 'single glittering jewel', or it can be revealed as a phantasm, a network of interconnections which is ultimately embedded in groundlessness. In Nishitani's own words: "I have described the field of emptiness, however, as a field whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. At bottom, each and every thing among all things is such an absolute center."(Nishitani 1982:263)

Anish Kapoor has the unique ability to translate these ideas into matter, to bring them into a phenomenological scope of experience. In his own words: "The idea is to make an object which is not an object, to make a hole in space, to make something which actually does not exist."(Celant 1996:20)

Void Field [figure 19] consists of a field of large individual stones; each pierced by a small hole to reveal an empty interior. Kapoor describes his concerns in this work:

> *Void Field* is a work in which this kind of binary opposition that I've always been juggling with seemed to place itself in some very clear way. It's a work about mass, about weight, about volume and then at the same time seems to be weightless, volumeless, ephemeral; it's really turning into sky. The darkness inside the stones is the darkness of black night, the darkness of sky. (Celant 1996:21)

Similarly, Nishitani's description of interconnectedness between autonomous identities is the notion that they are all embedded in a field of nothingness, that emptiness is the common ground as it where. Here we have the individual physical stones, each of them with a hollow interior only visible through a small hole that reveals their common ground: emptiness. Furthermore, the revelation of Sunyata or Paticca Samuppada is often described as a process of looking inward, a meditative introspection. The epiphany of Emptiness is not a revelation of the transcendent; it is a realization of the inner core of things in existence. The stones in *Void Field* do not renounce their weight, or their clearly delineated boundaries, they are simultaneously with and without substance, full and empty.

If one looks at *Untitled* (1997) *White Dark 1* (1994) and *When I am pregnant* (1992) [figure 20], one sees that Kapoor explores the same idea, but physically realized in a very different way. Germano Celant describes Kapoor's interests:

> In the series *White Dark*, 1994-95, the correspondence between inner void and outer void makes all presence interchangeable, and affirms neither space over the other… The unexpected leap it proposes is no longer into the nothingness of darkness but into light… To live through the experience it offers is to submit to the ordeal of loss that underlies and animates the void. (Celant 1996:26)

Here Kapoor discusses the intimate relation between the convex and concave forms used in the sculptures to create a remarkable sense of presence through a negative form, a void. *Untitled* (1997) consists of a pristine white block of limestone; the frontal plane is carved into a deep concave recess, sloping gradually from the sides toward the interior. It measures approximately 250 x 150 x 180 cm. The marble is so translucent that the whole object seems to glow; in the deep interior the white light radiates outwards. The object creates an ambivalent relationship between substance and ephemerality, between physical weight and pure light. The limestone object is on the verge of dematerializing into an ethereal field of light, where boundaries dissolve and dissipate. Here Kapoor articulates the loss of boundaries not through the lack of light, in a dark void, but uses the excess of light and physicality of the sculpture to vaporize its own presence. Emptiness is also it's opposite, the fullness of being.

In *When I am pregnant* (1992) [figure 20] Kapoor transformed an entire wall in the Hayward Gallery into a sculpture, with spectacular effect. It consists of a convex protrusion in a white wall. The amorphous pregnant form is only visible if one looks at it from the side, in the frontal view it collapses into the surface, with a slight hint of shadow. Here Kapoor uses the phenomenological and optical qualities of the sculpture to articulate the nature of emptiness. The convex pregnant form signifies presence, potential and the fullness of being. From a different angle the wall seems perfectly flat, creating just a hint of an empty shadow, negating the pregnant form. *When I am pregnant*, with the void… the sculpture embodies the paradoxical nature of emptiness, which contains Being and Nothingness, presence and absence.

CHAPTER 3: STEFANUS RADEMEYER

3.1: *DEFERRED RECONSTRUCTIONS* (1998)

This installation was originally conceived as a structural study of cathedrals. Most cathedrals were built over a very long period of time; consequently they often contain several stylistic variations in one building. Furthermore, cathedrals located in diverse geographic regions may also differ radically.

My aim, however, was to look beyond this incongruence for underlying similarities. In this respect I took a kind of modernist route, mimicking the process of distillation of form. I looked for a way to reduce the cathedral to its essential elements, a process that determined a twofold direction and resolution; one, the architectural and structural characteristics of the cathedral as a building, and the other, the symbolic connotations to that form.

At the time, I was familiarizing myself with working in heavy industrial materials like steel. It occurred to me that this might be the perfect material to construct the sculpture with, both conceptually and practically.

The artwork began with a series of drawings, some impressionistic, to get a feel for the atmosphere and experience of the sacred space, and others very precise architectural drawings, that were the preparations for the intricacies of this complex structure. Working in steel allowed me to make the sculpture or miniature cathedral very detailed yet strong. The scale was intimate, not larger than 80 x 70 x 30 cm. The steel rods also allowed me to focus on the structure of the cathedral, and thus the work developed into a kind of schematic or skeletal model.

I used the thin steel rods in ordered geometric clusters in a vertical direction, simulating the soaring form of the cathedral. The work became a spatial experiment, transferring the monumental properties of a real cathedral onto this miniature model.

In this construction, the detail never supersedes the whole. The entire building can be reduced to a very simple floor plan. Structurally it is a vertical elevation of a horizontally orientated crucifix.

In the final exhibition, this cathedral model was part of an installation. I was attempting to create a setting in which the relation between the complexity and simplicity of the form is visually displayed. This was created be suspending the cathedral in a dark room with a light directly overhead. The elevated three-dimensional building could now be projected as a flat shadow on the ground, revealing a crucifix as the basis of the floor plan. The suspension also served as a way of affirming the soaring structure of the model, in contrast to the extreme weight of the steel mass.

Such a sacred space embodies interesting paradoxes. This solid architectural material mass is also considered to be a dwelling of the spirit, a meeting point between heaven and earth. It is therefore as much material as it is infused with immaterial and transcendent qualities. This led me to the second part of this artwork, to bring to life this hidden dimension of the space, to find a way to represent these abstract and otherworldly characteristics. This was achieved by creating a virtual simulation of the building that is then rendered into an animation.

This process of re-creating the cathedral in a virtual space was very similar to the welding used in the steel construction. Instead of using real materials, actual steel, I worked with virtual geometrical building blocks that are shaped and attached to form aggregates and larger forms. In this way the cathedral was reconstructed, an exact facsimile of the steel model. Being a projection in virtual space, it allowed me new possibilities, to move and rotate the building, or to see it from unusual perspectives. This created a great deal of excitement, and in a very short period of time, I produced a virtual animation that functioned as an integral part of the installation.

Unlike the steel cathedral, which is only completed as an end product, the virtual animation allows one to see a process unfold over time. I wanted to use the potential of this temporal dimension to its fullest, and not only create a moving sequence of the cathedral model.

As I became more familiar with the technicalities of the software, I realized that I could once again simplify or distill the form with the new effects possible in virtual space. Virtual objects are illusions. They exist as information that describes the positions of clusters of vertices in a hypothetical three-dimensional space. In order to actually see them, the data has to be mediated through a monitor or a projection onto a screen. This fascinated me, because I had started with steel, and ended with light. It was a logical conclusion to create a kind of metaphor for this process, by taking the virtual cathedral, and slowly dissolving it into a ghostly abstraction of pure light.

Now the complementary oppositions within the installation were completed. The final space consisted of two rooms, connected by a doorway.

The first room, which was accessed through the entrance, housed the suspended cathedral, with the projected shadow on the floor. The only object clearly visible was the cathedral itself, the boundaries of the room disappeared into the darkness. Symmetry and stark chiaroscuro gave the room a sinister theatrical quality, and one feels as if one has walked in on a critical moment of suspension. The second room consisted of the virtual projection onto a screen. Again, the blue-white moving image of the cathedral was in stark contrast with the rest of the room, which was completely dark. The first room gave the impression of weight, solidity and dark mass, while the second space contained the ephemeral transformation of the sacred gothic building into abstract light.

In *Deferred Reconstructions* [figure 21] my initial intentions were to carefully explore the relationship between physical matter and light. The cathedral indicates another dimension: a metaphorical relationship between the matter and spirit. The installation becomes a small reflection of a grand dialectic. This is the binary opposition between the immanent and the transcendent. The shadow created by the steel cathedral represents absence; the abysmal foundation of the material world. This absence is slowly transmuted into the cathedral. Here matter becomes symbolic, referring to a transcendental realm beyond itself. This aspiration is articulated through the vertical axis: the cathedral is lifted off the ground and slowly rising upwards. In the virtual projection the cathedral is transformed into light, and like water might evaporate into steam, the structure of the cathedral is slowly dissolved to become a formless representation of the absolute, representing theological transcendence.

I created a second animation that also relied on the unique properties of virtual space. It took me an extensive period of time to create the steel model, somewhere in the vicinity of three months. By simulating the sculpture, I had the opportunity of dismantling and manipulating it in virtual space. This provided me with an opportunity to further explore and articulate process and dualism in the installation. Because the sculpture represented such a geometrically balanced and ordered structure, and the sum total of all the parts culminated in such a powerful symbol, a crucifix, I decided to simulate an explosion of the cathedral.

The dissolution of the symbol was discussed in the chapter on Anselm Kiefer, in the section titled 'Representations of Transcendence'. As we have seen, the theologians regarded the symbol as a very special sign, in the sense that it was regarded as the only vehicle that could represent the transcendent through the immanent. (Bell 1997:6) Walter Benjamin suggested that the dissolution of the symbol is manifested in the image of the ruin. By attempting to signify beyond itself to the transcendent, the symbol opens a space that is filled by the allegorical, which is part of immanent temporality. (Bell 1997:10) The symbol is subsequently robbed of its unique capabilities and is transformed into the ruin, which is an allegory of the passing of time. In the installation, the static steel sculpture of the cathedral that is suspended to create a frozen image of the symbolic crucifix is negated by the video projection, which animates this building in a temporal sequence, and subsequently dismantling the symbol structure into a ruin.

By creating the image of the symbolic crucifix by casting a shadow, the symbol appeared visually as a gaping hole.

This establishes a further negation of the symbolic, by inversing the presence of the symbol to absence. We have also seen that in deconstructivism signs are shown to be caught in the filed of simulacrum, referring beyond themselves to other immanent signs. This represented the impossibility of the transcendental signifier. (Olson 1981) The symbol becomes an empty sign.

3.2: *MIMETIC RECONSTRUCTIONS* (2000- 2001)

When I conceptualized this sculpture, I saw it purely as an experimental piece, both technically and theoretically.

In 1999 I created a small work that was to be the clue to the realization of *Mimetic Reconstructions*. It consisted of two mirrors, placed at an angle to one another, with one edge touching. This created a simple circular repetition as the mirrors reflected in one another. I enhanced the visibility of this space by sandblasting a pattern at the back of the mirrors, which was lit up with two fluorescent lights. The illusion of the internal space created through this effect was bigger than the external dimensions of the sculpture, and this ambiguity immediately fascinated me.

Mimetic Reconstructions [figures 22] was executed in the same manner, only on a larger scale, measuring 1800 x 1200 x 500 mm. I decided to build the two mirrors into a wooden box, where viewing is allowed through a rectangular window located in the top face. Externally, the work appears very discreet, not unlike the minimalist sculptures from the 1970's. It is industrially sprayed in a dark blue color. My intentions were to create a form that has monumental and architectural properties. In exhibition spaces, most people's first reaction to the sculpture is that it must be some kind of a plinth. I have also designed it in such a way that it resembles a gravestone, or a slab of granite, so it is immediately associated with physical weight.

The interior of the work is designed to be a complete eclipse of the exterior.

The window in the top face follows the long narrow dimensions of the wooden box, and measures 100mm x 700mm. The interior creates such a vast and abysmal space, that this window serves as a threshold between to radically different worlds.

The sculpture was the result of careful technical and conceptual planning. Despite all the control over the materials, I could only partially visualize the illusionistic space of the interior, because of the complex optical properties of my design. It was therefore quite exciting to assemble the work at the end.

Throughout my postgraduate studies, I had done most of the visualization and preparatory work for my artworks on computer. My end products, which were mostly sculptures, therefore retained quite a lot of the characteristics of computer-generated designs. I found that it allowed me to work with a higher level of visual precision and complexity.

With the interior of *Mimetic Reconstructions* I wanted to find a basic material way to replicate the ephemerality and weightlessness of virtual space. The two mirrors proved to be a perfect solution, mainly because the surface disappears in the process of reflection, creating an artificial three-dimensional environment. The central focus of the sculpture was the words that were sand blasted or etched on the back of the mirrors, which were then revealed on the front surface as glowing lights. I used two fluorescent tube lights that were built into the box, to provide the illumination for the words from the back of the mirrors. The array of reflections created a circular cascade of words that seem to have no spatial boundaries. This stood in sharp contrast with the exterior, which had very definite boundaries.

At the time that I was working with the layout of the words, I had developed interests in the topographical properties of poetry, and how the meaning and interpretation of a poem could change according to the spatial arrangement of the words. Most of these experiments that I have come across were conducted on a two-dimensional surface, a sheet of paper. With this work I could project the words into a three-dimensional space, essentially creating sculptural poetry. As the viewer's position moved, different words would collide or align to create new connotations. The sculpture could be described as an idea-generating machine.

The structure of the words resembles an explosion, and looks remarkably similar to sparks created from arc welding. The circular reflection affirms this dynamic aspect, suggesting stars in orbit or a slowly rotating galaxy.

The selection of words was a process that had already been engaged with a year prior to the realization of the work. A small percentage of words relate to research that I have conducted for my artwork in general, but the totality of words represents an encyclopedia. I wanted to create a comprehensive book that mapped out all categories and territories of human thought. It could be described as an ultimate or absolute catalogue.

The words are arranged in a radiating form, but random enough not to fall into any pattern. Words that describe very specific areas of thought were placed towards the periphery, and words that described more absolute or generic ideas were placed closer to the center.

As the layers of words are reflected in the circular rotation that the two mirrors create, every second layer of words were mirror-reversed. This meant that they were barely legible. Half of the words in the sculpture are rendered into abstract shapes, therefore suspended at the level of form.

The array of words was systematically more densely packed towards the core of the sculpture, which represented a negative space, where there was no light. Visually, this effect resembled the appearance of a black hole, with a density of imploding matter and nuclear activity on the periphery of the event horizon. This black hole continues a theme initiated in *Deferred Reconstructions*, the shadow cast by the cathedral. In the previous section it was explained that this shadow represents an empty sign. In the radiating structure of the words in *Mimetic Reconstructions* [figures 22] this core is exclusively reserved for transcendental signified, and represented the apex of the hierarchy of information within the sculpture. By keeping the core empty, the transcendental signified is negated. Furthermore, there is also a metaphoric resemblance between this negative space and the blind spot discussed in the chapter an Anish Kapoor, in the section titled 'Surface Depth'. This blind spot resembled a fault in the totality of the self, "an Other it cannot represent …for this Other is not merely outside but is 'inside' as an 'outside' that cannot be interiorized."(Taylor 1992:303,319) In the context of the sculpture, the blind spot signifies the impossibility of closure of the encyclopedia, the transcendental totality.

The initial conceptualization of *Mimetic Reconstructions* was quite multi-faceted, and I consciously incorporated several parallel narratives.

There is, however, one particular thread that I regard as a kind of substrate to all the ideas that followed, and this thread is to be found in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. At the time I developed an interest in the metaphor of the eternal return, one of the core ideas in Nietzsche's writings.

I will briefly introduce a series of interpretations of Nietzsche's eternal return. This conceptual framework will then be discussed in relation to *Mimetic Reconstructions*.

In a sense, the eternal return or eternal recurrence is one of the last remnants of the metaphysical tradition, in that it concerns the state of 'Being' in its entirety. On the other hand, however, it poses to us a metaphysical critique and an existential riddle.

James Winchester argues that there is no singular interpretation of the eternal return. This finding suggests Nietzsche's perspectivism and plurality. The metaphor is often referred to by Nietzsche himself in many of his writings, subsequently the meaning or interpretation changes according to the context. I would argue that this kind of plurality lies at the core of the theory.

> Nietzsche's eternal return is more radical than most other conceptions of cyclical history, for he often seems to argue that everything both has been and will return, eternally. But does he believe in a literal, unending preexistence and return of all things? Or is this strange doctrine simply a metaphor or an aid to help us visualize the difficulty of the Nietzschean affirmation of life? Can we desire everything both to have been and to return endlessly? (Winchester 1994:9)

Firstly, it is important to note that Nietzsche insists on the return of everything; that would be the totality of Being.

If we live in a universe where everything returns eternally, we would have no real agency in life. Being, the absolute ground and unifying identity, would determine everything. Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return is a circular repetition in time. I would suggest that what Nietzsche is implying is that if one conceives of the Absolute as finite, like Hegel, all possible differentiation within that totality would be exhausted at some stage in time, and since time is, according to Hegel, eternal, the entire system would inevitably repeat itself indefinitely. Heidegger states that the point where the eternal return is interpreted as a metaphysical theory, it would mean that "we can never decide what returns, but rather 'What becomes is the same itself'."(Winchester 1994:11) Nietzsche therefore reminds us that to 'will' the same, or the identical, or the absolute totality, can become a very terrifying thing.

The second level of interpretation is introduced in the **Gay Science**. Here Nietzsche ties his theory of eternal return explicitly with his notion of the will to power, the affirmation of existence despite terror and suffering. In the story the narrator does not claim that the eternal return is absolute or literal, but rather, if one can live with such as idea. In Nietzsche's own words: "If life were so could you affirm it?"(Winchester 1994:14) He furthermore claims that those who could affirm it would be capable of carrying the heaviest weight. This is how the passage is phrased in the **Gay Science**:

> How would it be if one day or night a demon where to steal up to you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'this life, as you now live it and have lived it, you must live it another time, even an infinite number of times. And there will be nothing new in it, rather every pain and every desire and every thought and breath and everything unspeakably small and large in your life must come to you again; everything in the same succession and sequence' (quote in Winchester 1994:14)

In the **Gay Science** Nietzsche reverses the relationship between the thinking subject and the absolute. Whereas the eternal return was previously described as an absolute *a priori*, as a given which determines the subject itself, Nietzsche now describes it as an idea, which one is challenged to will into existence. In other words, can one affirm life in the face of the eternal return?

The third level of interpretation is the final overcoming of the eternal return. In Nietzsche's final work, entitled **Thus Spoke Zarathustra**, the notion of the eternal return is again revisited. The significant dialogue occurs between Zarathustra and a dwarf. Zarathustra calls the eternal return the 'Vision and the Riddle', and he describes a metaphorical image of a doorway with the word 'Augenblick' written on the top. The word can roughly be translated as 'moment' or 'in the blink of an eye'. At this doorway two infinite paths meet or collide, one proceeds forward into the future and the other one goes backwards into the past. Zarathustra asks the dwarf whether or not these two infinite paths contradict each other, to which the dwarf replies that "every straight thing lies" and that "All truth is crooked, time is a circle."(Winchester 1994:17)

Zarathustra reacts aggressively towards the dwarf's fortuitous explanation of the eternal return, and proceeds to pose a series of questions concerning the moment, or the present. Heidegger claims that the dwarf "sees only two infinite paths, he fails to see their collision in the moment. To see the moment as a collision one must be more than an observer, one must be the moment (Augenblick)."(Winchester 1994:18) Heidegger explains this in the following way:

> …[between the past and the present] there is a collision. Obviously only for he who does not remain an observer, rather himself is the moment, who acts into the future and thereby does not allow the past to fall away, but rather at the same time overtakes and affirms it. He who stands in the moment is facing two directions: for him the past and the future runs against one another. He allows that which runs against one another to collide in himself and yet not come to a stop because he unfolds the conflict of that which is already given up and that which is given with… What does all this say about the right way of thinking the eternal return? The essential: what becomes in the future is precisely a conduct of decision.(Winchester 1994:18)

This is the great turn in our third understanding: that the human being does have agency in the moment, that one can determine what will return and what will not return. On a metaphysical level this implies that the cycle of eternal return is thus broken. This is also the interpretation that Gilles Deleuze affirms:

> Why did Nietzsche, who knew the Greeks, know that the eternal return is his own invention, an untimely belief or a belief in the future? Because 'his' eternal return is in no way the return of the same, a similar or an equal. Nietzsche says clearly that if there were identity, if there were an undifferentiated qualitative state of the world or a position of equilibrium for the stars, then this would be a reason never to leave it, not a reason for entering into a cycle. Nietzsche thereby links the eternal return to what appeared to oppose it or limit it from without – namely, complete metamorphosis, the irreducibly unequal. Depth, distance, caves, the lower depths, the tortuous, and the unequal in itself form the only landscape of the eternal return.(Deleuze 1994:242)

Furthermore, Deleuze argues that the eternal return and the will to power are inseparable: the eternal return is in fact the eternal return of difference. The affirmation of the moment, the agency to act in the present, to change the course of events and to initiate difference; that is the eternal return of difference. "The will to power is the flashing world of metamorphosis… of differences… Eternal return is the being of this world, the only Same which is said of this world and excludes any prior identity therein."(Deleuze 1994:243)

The doctrine of literal eternal return is an impossibility, a law contrary to the laws of nature. The will to power has one goal: to make chaos, the groundlessness of nature, an object of affirmation. Finally, Deleuze states the following: “It is because nothing is equal, because everything bathes in its difference, its dissimilarity and its inequality, even within itself, that everything returns – or rather, does not return.”(Deleuze 1994:243)

The doctrine of the eternal return is therefore a complex and convoluted idea. Hereby Nietzsche overcomes the metaphysical tradition, the tyranny of the One, the ‘Same’. He affirms and embraces the implications of the infinite; the system or systems that are never closed and can never reach closure to ensure a repetition. The eternal return is the eternal play of difference.

For me, *Mimetic Reconstructions* engages in this complex spectrum of ideas that are associated with the metaphor of the eternal return. The sculpture poses a fundamental question: can one conceive of the transcendental totality of Being or Existence? Is it possible to create a representation, a mimetic reconstruction of the myriad complexity that constitutes existence? These are the aspirations: to create a comprehensive encyclopedia, a grand metaphysical system.

The exterior of the sculpture signifies the unified closure that such an encyclopedia would bring. It resembles a giant book, a monument or a gravestone of a metaphysical philosophical project that has discovered the meaning and structure of Being in its entirety.

Through several formal qualities of the sculpture the viewer is made aware of the fictitious nature of such a closure. Firstly, the exterior is incised to reveal the interior. In this sense the encyclopedia becomes an 'anti-object'. In order to access and study the encyclopedia, the 'closure of the system' or the exterior of the sculpture is negated by an incision in the surface. It is impossible for a being within existence to objectify and comprehend the totality of existence. Secondly, the interior of the sculpture creates an illusionistic space that contradicts the exterior of the sculpture. Again, the containment that the exterior promises is negated. The object is destroyed by being 'exploded' from the interior.

Where Nietzsche used the metaphor of the eternal return to signify an endless circular repetition in time, the internal structure of *Mimetic Reconstructions* recreates a circular repetition in space. The angle of mirrors creates a reflection that forms a barrel-shape, suggesting a gigantic rotating motion. The three-dimensional encyclopedia is constructed around a circular spine, and becomes a book without a beginning or end, with a potentially infinite repetition of the information contained therein.

For a moment the viewer might ponder the physics of the construction: although it seems to be infinite, one can infer that there is a repetition of a finite amount of information. Similarly Nietzsche encourages us to entertain the idea that the world we live in could be finite, and return eternally. Immediately the metaphysical speculation becomes deeply personal, as one questions your own agency and responsibility in the world.

As the viewer scans through all the words floating in the virtual space, every single concept becomes a vector that points through the viewer to the actual world outside. The sculpture cannot be a static objective encyclopedia; the viewer is intimately involved in the process of creating meaning. In this way the cycle of the eternal return is broken: the viewer is an active participant in the construction of meaning, and has real agency in the world to construct his/her own future.

Here the symmetry of the sculpture is broken; it is opened up to an asymmetrical depth of metamorphosis. From the viewer's perspective, the words are not static entities; they are constantly shifting in three-dimensional space, standing in relation to other words, creating a new world of interpretation and signification. Similarly, exploring the spectrum of words through time creates a labyrinthine sequence of connected words, as one's eyes moves sinuously from one concept to another.

Mimetic Reconstructions becomes a celebration of an ocean of difference, where interpretations and meanings are constantly transforming.

3.3: *VANISHING POINTS* (2002), *PHASE SHIFT*, *GESTALT* and *PLATEAU* (2004)

One of my main concerns with these pieces was to find a way to dissolve the surface of tactile sculptures. This concern has largely been the result of my previous works, where my focus had shifted from heavy and solid materials to virtual animations. At the time I started thinking that this process might be reversed, that I could build physical sculptural pieces that have the ephemeral and immaterial qualities of virtual space.

In these sculptural light-boxes the viewers position in relation to the sculpture determined the structure of the image, in other words, the sculpture changed visually as one moves through the room. Furthermore, the three-dimensional illusion is so stark that it can induce a very physical experience of vertigo.

Vanishing Points, *Phase Shift* [figure 27], *Gestalt* [figure 28] and *Plateau* [figure 29] can be described as simulated landscapes. They are typographically very similar to a painting, because only one flat side of the sculpture is clearly visible. All the individual pieces consist of a flat box mounted against the wall, and the sizes are 900 x 1800 x 200mm (*Vanishing Points*) and 1000 x 2000 x 245mm (*Phase Shift*, *Gestalt* and *Plateau*). The image is generated by light reflected between two parallel mirrors. A mirror inside the box is etched from the back with the design, allowing light from the fluorescent light source to pass through. The second mirror that is viewed as the frontal face has a degree of transparency, therefore allowing a certain percentage of the light to escape, making the illusion visible. The result is a series of parallel repetitions of the highlighted image, creating a three-dimensional pattern field.

In all of these works I specifically experimented with the symmetrical properties of the design. *Vanishing Points* consists of a diagonal metric grid of crosses, the graphic '+' symbol. I wanted to suggest the demarcation and/or creation of space. A metric arrangement of this symbol is used in aerial photographs to denote distance. The grid is widely used to structure and organize new geographic territory and most cities on earth are planned according to this pattern. By reflecting this two-dimensional grid, it is transformed into a three-dimensional matrix. Despite the neutrality of the design, it relates visually to the landscape tradition. The perspective horizon and vanishing points affirm this connotation. Quite a few viewers remarked that it looks like the symmetrical rows of plants, especially the optical impression one experiences looking at plantations when driving at high speeds in a vehicle. The arrangement of light crosses in the deep somber space also evokes a cemetery landscape like one would find in northern France, where the crucifix grave-markers are dedicated to the anonymous victims of World War II. For me, these connotations are visual introductions or more literal interpretations of abstract notions.

Phase Shift, *Gestalt* and *Plateau* are a progressive series. The complexity of the design increases with every successive light-box. *Phase Shift* [figure 27] consists of a simplified arrangement of parallel vertical lines. These lines are all cut along a horizontal axis, and the two halves are moved slightly out of phase. *Gestalt* [figure 28] is made up of thousands of short vertical lines, all staggered to form a brick-like formation. The illusionistic perspective reveals an entirely different structure where all the lines agglutinate into a grid of diamond shaped diagonals. In *Plateau* [figure 29] all the lines are removed except for the critical starting and ending points of every line. These points create a grid at a 45-degree angle.

In the reflected space, all the points draw towards a multitude of vanishing points, creating an extremely complex symmetry. As the viewer moves closer or further away the symmetry transforms and constantly generates unique structures.

With this series of light-boxes, my aim was to create an expression where ‘infinity’ is contained within a finite artwork. The optical illusion suggests a potentially infinite space. The recession of the grid creates vertigo of linear infinity, which stretches into every direction to create vanishing points. Beyond these points is a deep cavity of dark space, too dark for light to escape; and the structure disappears in the density and vacuum of this depth.

These light-boxes continue a thread that I have started with the earlier works. The relation between the physical and the virtual contains a reference to my interest in the theological and metaphysical immanent / transcendent relationship.

More importantly, the contrast between the patterns of light (figure) and the negative space (ground) is an articulation of existentialist and Buddhist notions of transcendence and emptiness. In the introduction it was shown that for the existentialists, the absence of an absolute meant that humanity was standing on the abyssal ground of nihility. (Nishitani 1983:95) This experience of groundlessness is also described as being vertiginous. This is the dominant response that viewers have when engaging the light-boxes. For me, this is an interesting phenomenon, because the works are so extra-sensory, but the response is physical, almost unmediated.

As we have seen, Kapoor has similar interests, for him it is a challenge " …to make an object which is not an object, to make a hole in space, to make something which actually does not exist."(Celant 1996:20) In the case of my sculptures, the bottomless ground is defined through the matrix of lights, where Kapoor relies on the sandstone periphery around the 'void'. This kind of experience might also be initiated by a sense of a loss of boundaries between the subject (viewer) and the object (sculpture). It is interesting to note, that the scale of these sculptures 1 x 2m was roughly determined by the minimum size its takes to encompass the visual field of the viewer, to facilitate an experience of total immersion.

Buddhist parallels are abundant; as we have seen in the analysis of Kapoor's sculptures, Buddhism considers existence and emptiness to be two sides of the same coin. These light-boxes are an ideal metaphor for describing this apparent paradox. The lights (figure) and the spaces between the lights (ground) define one another, it is therefore the relationship that creates the complete image. Furthermore, this relationship also has a strong resemblance with Heidegger's understanding of the complex relation between Being and Non-Being.

3.4: *UTOPIA*, *FISSURE*, *FRACTURE* and *TREMOR* (2004)

I visualized this quartet of sculptures as 'freeze-frames' in a dynamic process. Every sculpture represents a progression or transformation within a system. Definite correlations and change can be seen from one sculpture to the next, but the last sculpture in the series seem to be a distant relative of the first, bearing very little relation to the beginning stages.

These sculptures or 'surfaces' participate within a system of signification, which can be defined as a language with its own grammatical and syntactical logic. Here letters or words can be substituted with modules or units; sentences and paragraphs resemble clusters and large aggregates. This does not, however, mean that these works are a code that has a definite didactic meaning for the viewer to decode; instead they suggest an open-ended reading.

Utopia [figure 23] is conceived as the first in the progressive series, and is made up of thin vertical layers of plywood, laminated into a solid block within a landscape format, measuring roughly 1 x 2m. I have kept these dimensions constant throughout the exhibition, which also gives the viewer an instant indication that these works all relate intimately.

The structure of this work is perfectly symmetrical along an x, y and z - axis. It resembles the great modern skyscraper or an apex of modern formalism. This, however, is a very fragile illusion, as one looks closer.

The sculpture is literally taking itself apart, as the layers are sliding across one another, resembling an abstraction of a geological event. The calm is momentary, as the viewer realizes that the entire structure is deforming along a gradual but dramatic concave. It is almost as if this 'building' is anticipating an impact, or registering pre-shocks of a mammoth catastrophe.

The visual qualities of the surface also belie the solidity of the form – the solid nature of the timber is only visible in the central core, further toward the peripheries the sculpture is only seen as a surface, as the strong contrast between positive and negative form is impossible to read as a 3 dimensional form.

Fissure [figure 24] is the second step in the process.

The impending catastrophe seen in *Utopia* is now fully registered in the structure. In *Fissure*, a dramatic tectonic movement introduces a schism in the sculpture, disturbing the equilibrium. A diagonal cut is set slightly off the horizontal axis, creating the impression that the top half of the sculpture is sliding across the bottom half. This instability almost renders the work kinetic; it creates an impression of an enormous weight out of balance.

The vertical axis of the sculpture breaks away from the rectilinear qualities seen in *Utopia*. The building seems to be slowly turning into a rock formation with tremendous internal tension squeezing the laminated layers into rhythmic folds.

As the layers are sliding apart, the front face of the sculpture is broken up into staggered white lines that stand out strongly against the black spaces in-between. The contrast and the detail produce a complex moiré effect, creating fantastic optical effects that swarm across the surface if viewed from the right distance.

The third work in the installment is titled *Fracture* [figure 25]. This sculpture is made up of 2600 wooden units or 'modules'. A three-dimensional aggregate is created by the lamination of these '+' shaped units into an interlocking symmetrical pattern along the vertical axis. Each unit is extruded along the horizontal axis of the sculpture, and carefully placed to create the surface definition that resembles a randomized landscape.

In this manner I have introduced an element of indeterminism into the construction of the sculpture. The structure of the first two were completely pre-meditated, and therefore quite predictable, purely an execution of the design or 'blueprint'. Fracture on the other hand, is created through the intuitive placement of each individual module within a larger form. The sculpture seems to respond to some external force creating a dramatic definition on the surface. Conversely the structure can also be seen as the crystallization of a fluid matter into a solid.

The wooden pieces are cut to show maximum visibility of the end-grain. This creates a tension and contrasting rhythm between the geometrical structure and the random organic arcs of the wood grain on the surface.

The final sculpture in the series is titled *Tremor* [figure 26]. This is the most dynamic of the four sculptures, and it creates the effect of being in a state of perpetual motion. The gentle curve of *Utopia* [figure 23] is now broken into a manifold of random fractured pulses. The structure of *Tremor* consists of a very complex symmetrical sequence, where each modular 'L' shaped unit rotates according to its position in the larger aggregate.

This timber laminate is the heaviest of the four, weighing in at about 900 kilograms. It is considerably wider, accentuating the extrusions along the horizontal axis.

With the conceptualization of these works I was quite interested in notions of abstraction. Abstraction in visual art was defined in very specific aesthetic parameters in the 20th century. Claims for transcendence have been made in relation to artworks that could be defined as 'abstract'. Hartt, for instance, compares experiencing Rothko's work as being synonymous with a 'mystical experience' (1993:1025). Formally it was characterized by a move towards the emphasis of the surface, and a shift away from 'form' to a kind of formlessness. In certain extreme examples it was characterized by an aspiration towards anti-representation. Abstract art had the privilege of being self-referential or referring beyond the horizon of representation towards a transcendental realm. Jameson states that:

> Relying on 'religious terminology which defines representation as …a picture language that embodies, expresses, and transmits otherwise inexpressible truths,' modernists claim that representation possesses 'truth content' or 'epistemological value'. This, in turn, is contested by the postmodernists, who claim to use 'representation against itself to destroy the binding or absolute status of representation' (quoted in Taylor 1998:166)

Mark Taylor argues that with the advent of post-modernism, visual art seem to have developed very strong parallels with tendencies within writing. These tendencies can be characterized by a critique of the notion of an author, breaking down the ever-present 'meta-narratives', and a substantial interest in the de-construction and appropriation of historical writing. Furthermore, in visual art, these linguistic tendencies are used in the realm of signification. The implications are that visual art construction and critique developed an uncanny resemblance with literature. (1992)

Taylor also argues that through appropriation or 'intertextuality' the original was challenged. (1987) Abstract art in particular has a very interesting and strange relation to these post-modernistic tendencies. Amongst others, Abstract art practice was an attempt to communicate human experiences that cannot be articulated through language. (1992)

I would suggest that within the post-modern critique, however, even abstract tendencies in art could be seen as a text amongst other texts, which can be cited, appropriated and re-contextualized. Abstraction is therefore robbed of what it set out to be in the first place- an invocation of human experiences outside of language.

It was this paradox that initiated my conceptualization of this series of sculptures.

CONCLUSION

In a Post-Modern era where the present is characterized by an almost forensic investigation into the past, where ideas and ideologies are hypothetically compared and placed side-by-side, the real weight of notions such as transcendence and emptiness is sometimes lost. In this dissertation, I hoped to show that these theological, philosophical and existential understandings of transcendence and emptiness still enjoy participation with the world through the medium of art.

I would argue that by articulating, thematizing and embodying these notions through representation, the artists have contributed to the critical investigations of transcendence and emptiness.

Despite numerous exhibitions Anselm Kiefer is still seen as an outsider and he has retained his image as a mysterious artist that grapples with historical and existential questions. His personal discoveries, however, remain largely secrets. The chapter on Kiefer made it evident that *Zweistromland* is not didactic; instead the viewer is lured into a complex web of references, sometimes even contradictory. If Kiefer, like the metaphysicians, attempted to create a transcendental encyclopedia, it is deliberately created with flaws, contradictions and paradoxes. Maybe the key to understanding this monumental installation is not to look for a pristine ideology of transcendence or a coherent philosophical system. I would argue that the real subject of *Zweistromland* is the lack of credibility of such ideological systems if one acknowledges historical tragedy.

In the beginning of chapter 1, 'Transcending Time and Space' explores Kiefer's fascination with dualisms in *Zweistromland*. I argued that the material nature of the installation suggested that the work is a metaphor for the world, and the subsequent analysis showed that Kiefer had a strong interest in transcendence of temporality. In the course of the argument, it was discovered that Kiefer's work never showed an emphatic allegiance with theological or metaphysical transcendence, but these notions are nevertheless invoked through his metaphorical use of materials.

I would argue that by aligning temporal history with transcendental notions such as a-historicity and eternity, *Zweistromland* [figure 1] questions the agency of humanity within history. Questions like these open up moral dilemmas that in turn undermine notions of theological and metaphysical transcendence. If humanity is indeed guided by a theological transcendental presence in the immanent world, which O'Brien described as 'divine goodness and perfection' (1979:3555), or a metaphysical transcendental described as 'truth' and 'goodness' (Reese 1980:585), why is history marked by so much senseless destruction and suffering? If however, the immanent world is truly independent of the transcendental, how can the transcendental ever be represented in the immanent world through the visual symbol? The flaws of the symbol instead point to the flawed construction of an ideology that is all too worldly.

The emphases of spatial representation in *Zweistromland* lead me to muse about the relationship between transcendence and space. I discovered that the conception of spatial geography is hardly a new idea, and it was conceived of as far back as the 1400's (Harvey 1989) This lead to the desire to conceive of the entire world as a spatial totality, which I called 'geographic transcendence'.

Although a spatial conception of the world was discovered to be another way to transcend time, *Zweistromland* was shown to be a fragmented representation of the world, and undermined notions of spatial global totality that Kiefer seem to consider impossible. Similarly, the 'totality' of time that can also be described as eternity was shown to be an impossible conception in the previous section. I also pointed out that in *Zweistromland*, global geography could be a potential metaphor for consciousness. A complete transcendence is impossible because we are part of the world that we are trying to transcend.

'Existential Aesthetics' sees *Zweistromland* confronting an existentialist and materialist world that is beyond morality. Humanity is ultimately alone; furthermore, the only grasping of reality is through the individual subject. Technology such as nuclear power aligns humanity with other destructive powers in nature. This immanent world of creation and destruction is now seen as an aesthetic process, and humanity is encouraged by Nietzsche to participate in this process like the artist. (Dollimore 1998:236)

As I have shown in the introduction, for the Existentialists the locus of the world is not in a transcendental reality anymore, it has shifted to the self. This self is not considered to be the Soul of the theologians or the Cartesian Ego of the metaphysicians, but a constantly transforming entity in the materialistic work that is in permanent confrontation with the world. This process of confrontation and assimilation in our experience of the world is called self-transcendence. With the vivid imagery of nuclear fuel rods Kiefer reminds us that with this freedom beyond morality comes responsibility.

In ‘Representations of Transcendence’ I looked at *Zweistromland* in relation to the symbol that was considered by the theologians to be the only vehicle for the visual representation of the transcendent.

I went further to argue that Kiefer articulates the failure of the symbol in the image of the ruin. Walter Benjamin argues that the allegory challenges the unity of the symbol; it marks the break between the form and the content, the immanent signifier and the transcendental signified. The allegoric is rightfully part of the immanently historical, and is figured in an image synonymous with temporal transformation: the ruin. (1977)

Kiefer alludes to the impossibility to represent or construct a transcendental totality, and shifting allegories constructed by the viewer create the narratives in his work. Like an archeologist discovering an archaic ruin, the artist and the viewer meander endlessly through a mass of fragments.

The strong reference to books in *Zweistromland* gave me the incentive to consider the installation in terms of contemporary literary theories, and Mark Taylor’s writings on the relationships between historicity, books and transcendence played a large part in my analysis. Parallels were drawn between *Zweistromland* and literary criticism, especially the work of Jacques Derrida. Like Derrida, Kiefer challenges the traditional hierarchy of representation. *Zweistromland* does not parade as an ultimate referent, or a transcendental encyclopedia. Instead, the viewer is constantly reminded that the world cannot be presented, but only re-presented in a fragmented puzzle of simulacrum.

Anish Kapoor's sculptures and installations are visually far more abstract than Kiefer's work, and the non-referential quality of his work demanded an analysis that acknowledges the importance of physical encounter and experience. This led me to incorporate philosophical discourses that use phenomenological experience as its point of departure.

In 'Being and Non-Being' I introduced the reader to Martin Heidegger's very specific philosophical approach. His theories where very useful in relation to Kapoor's sculptures: both are interested in the intimate relation between presence and absence. For Heidegger, this mystery is re- awakened by posing a fundamental metaphysical question: What is Being?

> " …man's existence is "held into" "this" nothingness, into this completely other of being. Put differently, this means, and could only mean, "Man is the seat-holder for nothingness." This sentence means that man is holding the place for the complete other of being, so that in its openness there can be such a thing as being present (Being). Nothingness belongs …to being present."(Glass 1995:22)

This constant coming-into-being against the background of nothingness is for Heidegger a process of transcendence. Furthermore, Heidegger claims that the experience of 'nothingness' is grounded in dread. (Blackham 1965:260) Kapoor shares a very similar understanding:

> "The void has many presences. Its presence as fear is towards the loss of self, from a non-object to a non-self. I have always been drawn to a notion of fear, towards a sensation of vertigo of falling, of being pulled inwards…" (Celant 1996: XXXIV)

In the analysis I drew a careful parallel between Heidegger's understanding of 'nothingness' and Kapoor's interest in the 'void'. The challenge here was to show how formal characteristics of Kapoor's sculptures resembled the abstract images that Heidegger uses to explain his thinking. A fundamental parallel is that they share an interest in the image or metaphor of a figure / ground relationship. For Kapoor and Heidegger, this is analogous to the relationship between being (presence) and nothingness (the void). Here we find a visual metaphor for Heidegger's definition of Being: "Both are characterized by Heidegger's unique pattern of deep scission: visual scission allows the thing to stand forth in relationship with nothing; existential scission allows the person to stand forth in relationship to the nothingness of anxiety or death." (Glass 1995:21)

In 'Surface Depth' the metaphoric significance of Kapoor's highly reflective sculptures is explored. Where the previous section was dedicated to an understanding of the inner workings of Being, this section suggests that certain of Kapoor's later work introduced an almost analytic parallel with theories concerning the origin and nature of consciousness and self-consciousness.

Through a complex discussion it was shown that mirror reflections have frequently been used as a metaphor for consciousness. In relation to identity formation, Jacques Lacan used the image of the mirror to show how an infant identifies with the unified nature of its own reflection given to it by other human beings. (Muller and Richardson 1982)

In a retrospective analysis, Rudolf Gasche shows how reflection becomes the basis of philosophizing: “self-reflection, self-relation, self-mirroring… By lifting the ego out of its immediate entanglement in the world by thematizing the subject of thought itself.”(Gasche 1989:13) For the metaphysical thinkers, this kind of reasoning that the self-reflective ego is engaged in could reveal qualities and characteristics of the transcendental.

Thomas Aquinas suggests that self-reflection is engaged in a constant process of confronting, recognizing and internalizing the ‘other’. This can be defined as a kind of self-transcendence where an assimilation of the other or ‘alienated self’ results in a constant expansion of the horizon of the self.

This optimistic process of transcendence is ultimately challenged in Anish Kapoor’s work. In all of his reflective sculptures the potential of reflections and double reflections are sabotaged. The reflected image is manipulated and distorted and the infinite repeatability of a double reflection is marked by a blind spot, resembling a black hole.

In this manner, Kapoor introduces an ‘unease’ in the viewing process: the perfect symmetry between the self and the other is broken. This asymmetry represents an Other that cannot be assimilated into the self. As Mark Taylor writes: “… which, in its failure – in its gaps and fissures, its faults and lacks – inscribes an Other it cannot represent …for this Other is not merely outside but is ‘inside’ as an ‘outside’ that cannot be interiorized.” (Taylor 1992:303,319)

The totality of the transcendental whole is therefore challenged.

The last essay on Kapoor, titled ‘Being as Nothingness’ explores the possible parallels between his sculptural forms and Buddhist philosophy, especially the writings of Keiji Nishitani. The decision to incorporate Buddhist thinking was done for two main reasons. Firstly, the rest of the dissertation has been devoted solely to western philosophy and how it relates to transcendence, and I thought it necessary to include a brief essay that acknowledges an aspect of oriental philosophy. Secondly, Anish Kapoor declared in several interviews that he has a strong interest in the notion of the ‘void’, which is a central theme in Buddhist thinking.

It is important to note that Buddhist philosophy does not consider ‘nothingness’ to be a transcendental reality. This is because they would acknowledge that Being and Nothingness is the same thing, there is no transcendence from one to the other.

As discussed in the essay, Nishitani feels very strongly about having a definite understanding of the difference between an existentialist understanding of nothingness and a Buddhist understanding of nothingness. The Buddhist notion of nothingness is more aptly described as dynamic emptiness, and does not carry the nihilistic implications of existentialist nothingness.

The notion of dynamic emptiness can be applied to most of Kapoor’s sculptures. Kapoor creates forms where physicality and weight is undermined by hollowed cavities or distorted reflections. This incision is often so powerful that the emptiness gains a strong presence while the physical form recedes to the background.

A tension is created where the viewer experiences perceptual and cognitive ambivalence. Is the sense of the 'void' or emptiness created through an absence of the physical form, or does the emptiness, in some strange manner, constitute the form?

Through these remarkable formal subtleties Kapoor captures the nature of dynamic emptiness.

The majority of theoretical considerations within my own work were initiated by my analysis of the work of Anselm Kiefer and Anish Kapoor. Frequently my research would indicate a novel or creative resolution to the complex problem of figuring the transcendent. Similarly, the critique of traditional and antiquated philosophical models also interested me immensely, and these theoretical sentiments were often incorporated into my latest work.

Deferred Reconstructions [figure 21] was my first venture into the field of transcendental representation. With this piece I decided to re-work or re-construct one of the epitomes of western religious tradition. In line with the methodology of deconstruction, I approached the reconstruction of this sacred cathedral similar to the analysis of a text. Through this critical process, I was setting out to reveal the faults and weaknesses within a system, all of which would be visually marked. Hence the wordplay in the title: referred deconstructions.

As I described in the analysis, the installation consisted of a systematic transmutation of physical matter into pure light.

The physical model of the cathedral could be seen as a structural diagram for the construction of a large-scale cathedral, and is of a highly geometrical nature. This was a metaphor for the immanent world. The virtual animation, projected on a screen, shows the cathedral in a dynamic motion, where all the physical characteristics dissolve into an amorphous abstraction. This represents the ineffable nature of the transcendent, which transcends form into a field of formlessness.

In the animation, the process of fracturing and dismantling the cathedral challenged the integrity of the symbol. Furthermore, the transcendent is shown to be contingent on the laws of the immanent world, where forms come into being and dissolve again.

Mimetic Reconstructions [figures 22] was conceived as a multi-faceted and extremely complex work, and there are various relevant theoretical angles that can be used to analyze the sculpture. In the chapter on my own work, I have chosen to look at the sculpture through the lens of one specific philosophical exposition: Nietzsche's 'eternal return'.

For me, there is an underlying central theme in the sculpture. This theme can be posed as a series of questions or unresolved paradoxes, and deals with the problem of transcendence. At the core is the basic question that I have encountered several times in this dissertation: Is it possible to have a 'transcendental perspective' of a world that one is a part of? Nietzsche's eternal return can be seen as an allegory that poses this fundamental question.

To have a transcendental perspective is to know the totality of existence, both spatial and temporal. For Nietzsche such an understanding or comprehension implies finitude, because existence as a whole is transcended, thereby reduced to a limited object. This limited object could exist as a spatial totality or a temporal time-span. Nietzsche insists that such a time-span would invariably repeat itself, creating the eternal return, the repetitive linear infinity. (Winchester 1994)

To acknowledge the failure of transcendence is to admit that the world is truly infinite, and that there is no return of the 'Same' but rather an infinite procession of difference.

In the sculpture *Mimetic Reconstructions* the failure of the transcendental totality is visually portrayed. This encyclopedia does not represent an ultimate model of the world; instead it opens up a field of interactive and generative ideas that are constantly shifting and transforming.

Furthermore, the center of the visual cascade of words is left empty, denying language the possibility of an ultimate referent that anchors the myriad of words. In line with deconstruction, this marks the absence of a transcendental signified.

The series of light-boxes titled *Vanishing Points*, *Phase Shift*, *Gestalt* and *Plateau*, [figures 27 - 29] is an excursion into more abstract work, and touches on a wide spectrum of themes. Like most of Anish Kapoor's concerns, I was grappling with the challenge to capture the dynamic relation between presence and absence, existence and emptiness.

The formal qualities of the sculptures emphasize the figure / ground relation where the figure is made up of thousands of lines or points in a geometric composition, and the ground is pitch-black space. Optically, this differentiation between the figure and the ground is challenged, therefore suggesting a dynamic understanding of emptiness suggested by Nishitani. Lines or points create clusters that are pushed towards the background, while the dark background takes on the quality of a positive form as it is forced to rise to the foreground.

Furthermore, the geometric patterns is never resolved or frozen into a stable image. The complexity of the optical interference created by overlapping of different layers perpetually mutates into novel configurations. In this regard the light-boxes shares conceptual sentiments with Mimetic Reconstructions, where an interpretation never comes to a halt.

Utopia, *Fissure*, *Fracture* and *Tremor* [figures 23 – 26] is the last group of sculptures that I completed. Structurally and technically they are very different to the previous works, and they are a move away from the illusionism explored in the light-boxes.

Conceptually, these pieces can be described as contemporary exploration of the representational possibilities within abstraction. As discussed within the analysis, formalist abstraction within modernism was viewed as a distillation to the essence of form, or a reduction to formlessness that is said to signify the transcendental.

In this series of sculptures I appropriated some of the mechanisms used within modernist abstraction. Instead of reducing a form to an essence, I started with an idealized abstraction that was then systematically deconstructed and complicated. The progression within the sculptures reverses the modernistic process of distillation, and opens up the form to an endless series of mutations. Like the 'eternal return', the completeness or closure of a system is subverted. Furthermore, the modernist paragon of abstraction or *Utopia* is shown to be a constituent element within a process of random differentiation. In this way the hierarchy of representation is undermined and the apex or transcendental signified is shown to be one of many variable representations caught in the network of simulacrum.

I was also interested in creating a metaphor for cataclysmic change. These four sculptures can be described as monuments of temporality, challenging the veneration of a-historicity that is found in the theological and metaphysical representations of the transcendental.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ANSELM KIEFER

Illustrations sourced from The High Priestess (1989).

Photographic credit: Horst Bernard, Uwe H. Seyl.

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1) *Zweistromland* (1989)
Installation : Approximately 200 lead books in two steel bookcases, with glass and copper wire, c. 14 ft x 26 ft 3 ft.

2) I: Book 36
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 38 solder-bound leaves
29 ¾ x 20 ¾ x 4 ¾ inches.

3) II: Book 56
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 48 solder-bound leaves
28 ¾ x 19 ¾ x 5 inches.

4) III: Book 65
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 34 solder-bound leaves
34 ¾ x 24 ½ x 2 inches.

5) VIII: Book 88
Claywash and original photographs mounted on treated lead. 46 solder-bound leaves
27 ¼ x 18 ½ x 7 ¼ inches.

6) X: Book 73
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 9 solder-bound leaves
30 ½ x 23 ¾ x 2 ½ inches.

7) XIII: Book 97
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8) XVI: Book 40
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9) XVII: Book 43
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 42 solder-bound leaves
33 ½ x 25 ¼ x 5 ¾ inches.

10) XVIII: Book 46
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 74 solder-bound leaves
35 ¾ x 24 ¾ x 6 inches.

11) XIX: Book 35
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 38 solder-bound leaves
29 ¾ x 20 ¾ x 4 ½ inches.

12) XXVII: Book 102
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 62 solder-bound leaves
27 ½ x 19 ¾ x 8 inches.

13) XXVI: Book 60
Original photographs mounted on treated lead. 38 solder-bound leaves
27 ½ x 20 x 4 ¾ inches.

14) IV: Book 11
Claywash, Burlap and treated lead mounted on board. 9 canvas bound leaves
34 ½ x 24 ½ x 2 inches

ANISH KAPOOR

Illustrations sourced from Anish Kapoor (1998)

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Courtesy: Lisson Gallery
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STEFANUS RADEMEYER

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Photographic credit: Bob Cnoops

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23) *Utopia* 2004
Laminated Plywood.
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24) *Fissure* 2004
Laminated Plywood
1000 x 1855 x 375mm

25) *Fracture* 2004
Pine
1000 x 1840 x 424mm

26) *Tremor* 2004
Pine
1000 x 1765 x 550mm

27) *Phase Shift* 2004
Wood, Mirrors, Fluorescent lights.
1000 x 2000 x 245mm

28) *Gestalt* 2004
Wood, Mirrors, Fluorescent lights.
1000 x 2000 x 245mm

29) *Plateau* 2004
Wood, Mirrors, Fluorescent lights.
1000 x 2000 x 245mm

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