Memory studies at the turn of the century are in a boom, strug-
gles with the concept of memory meaningfully occupy contempo-
ary artists, writers, historians and theorists across fields as
diverse as cognitive sciences, cultural studies and psychology.
Announcements such as Christian Boltanski have become a familiar
focus for problems of understanding personal and cultur-
al remembrances and their relationship to identity, memory
and remembrance, yet they also offer us new ways to map the performa-
tiveness of memory and the interpellations that highlight the engage-
ment of memory and art to body and cultural space. Boltanski’s
works point to memories as continuously reproduced events,
based on the past, but understood through the present. Through
re-presented by Boltanski’s, “performative” process, we can
further optimise in the context in which it grapples modern society.
Boltanski’s work seems to see memory comfortably in its uncer-
tainly a place. Rather than rushing to ineffectively freeze-
frame past Bull, continuously and
best articulating, questioning and unsettling the concep-
tions of memories through the complex-
ties of the photographic medium.
Revisiting Boltanski it is thus possi-
ble to map memory not just as a host of
fixating signifiers nestled in fragile
physiologies, but a performative
form, a set of encounters which
hover between original and copy, a
theatrical source of creativity.

Replicating Memories

Andreas Huyssen locates the mil-
lenial critical and artistic obsession
with memory in “a deepening sense
of crisis often articulated in the
reality that our culture is termi-
nally ill with amnesia.” This is a cri-
sis, born of the dangers to memory,
perceived in the growth of techno-
logy, the image-laden spread of mass
communication and the rapid ac-
climatization of modern living. Memory
is here seen as a medium for a
continuously and
obsessively archived, memorialised,
monumentalised, recorded and
mapped through the photographs
and filmic image, but time, as Scott
McQuire says, “for judgment
between one flicker on a screen and the next disappears.”
Huyssen goes on to claim that
the memory boom however is a potentially healthy sign... a contextualisation of the informational hyperspace and
an expression of the basic human need to live in extend-
ed structures of temporality however they may be or-
organised. It is also a reaction formation of mortuary bodies
that want to hold on to their temporality against a media world
spinning a cosmos of timeous claustrophobic and night-
marish phantasms and simulations.

Jay Warner maps the strengths and the weaknesses of the con-
temporary fascination, even “obssession with memory” when
he notes that,
the study of memory is one of the most fashionable
branches of scholarly inquiry in a wide variety of disci-
plines. ... Consequently, we have a dazzling array of inquir-
es into memory, postmemory, counter-memory, traumatic
memory, collective memory, collected memory, national
memory, testimonial memory, witness, repressed memory, dislocated memory, underground mem-
ory, memory policy, cultural memory, and so on. No pair of terms can be equated. Indeed, there is no consensus
at all on even the rudimentary elements out of which
some kind of conceptual ordering of memory studies
could be built. He questions the vagueness as “the term
memory becomes a metaphor,” but for what is unclear.
For melancholy? For nostalgia? For the “uncanny”? And what’s
more, the memory discourse does not mean the same thing in
German or French as it does in English. Metaphors multi-
ply in this field at an exponential rate.

Without dwelling too deeply it is possible to see that memories are potential, simultaneously irrevocable, instable, fluid, tran-
sent, poignant, melancholic and goldenly nostalgic. The mapping of
memory offers history a chance to reinvent itself and yet con-
sequently exposes the unreachable voids; these irreversible
wounds that remind us of what humanity is capable of. Memory
is a source of power, a powerhouse of cultural reassessment and memory
of grief and obituary. Perhaps part of the contemporary critical
appeal of the notion is thus in its postmodern slipperness, its
poetics, its coupling of irony and identity and it chameleon
propensity to multiply and mutate across fields of inquiry.

Huyssen notes:
It does not require much theoretical sophistica-
tion to see that all representation—whether in
language, narrative, image or recorded sound—is based
in memory. Re-presentation always comes after, even though some media will try to provide us
with the delusion of pure presence. But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving
us verifiable access to the real, memory, event and especially
even in its belatedness, is itself based on re-
representation. The past is not simply there in memory, it must be art-
culated in memory.
In constantly questioning memory, we
then hover in the in between, neither the true and exact rec-
presentation of a past event, nor an entire contem-
porary tradition. Memories are inex-
tricable threads to the past yet can-
not be articulat-
ed, viewed or shown without a contemporary reconstructualisa-
tion. Filtered through the present, they are what Huyssen calls a ‘re-presentation’ problem: restored events or behav-
iors. Yet this gap between past and present in memory, argues
Huyssen, may be cause for celebration. The fixture
on the concepts of memory and representation in
memory in representation is unavoidable.
Rather than lamenting it or ignoring it, this split
should be understood as a powerful stimul-
um for cultural and artistic creativity... it is in this gap that
Boltanski’s performative representations of memory reside.

The Quiet Afterimage

Boltanski famously works with ongoing themes of
childhood and death, and of memory shaping our sense
of reality. His works show a “shifting con-
ciousness between now and then,” and work with the
“lingering shadowy presence of the past.”
Boltanski’s works for the “Places with a Past: New
Site Specific Art in Charlotte” exhibition during the
towns Spoleto Festival in 1991, for example, centered
on the concepts of memory and reconstructed past.
Shadows, designed and installed by Boltanski, centered
on the Peter Buxtory House, 93 Broad Street, Charleston. Shadows
mapped what he saw as the collective memory of Charleston city.
"A dream reconstructed according to modern day memory" not a real
town but a museum town" shaped by our images from this film
"gone with the Wind" and other sources - that simulates a
past that can never be again. He used characters, imagery and
actual projections of stills from Gone With the Wind covered
inside the antiquity of a Franco-American period house. The
images presented were shadowy and indistinctual, projected
only as silhouettes onto screens that fluctuated in the bor-
rows or windows near it and visible only through half opened doors.
In one section of the house, Boltanski also placed images that
emphasise this passing of time, a Polared and old books. Visible
only though a crack in the wall, Boltanski lit these objects with a
bake, but this bake was again what Boltanski calls a "figment of reality" not a real object, but another image projection.

Much of Boltanski’s work uses the power of light and shadow to
emphasise memory’s place in the twilight between past and pre-

sent. Helga Vikas Hakansson highlights this in her introduction to the Camera
Lucida exhibition of 1986.
The physical presence of reflected and projected light giving
the flat, transparent surfaces of photographic print a dynami-
cal presence. Metaphorically significant gains and shadows express
the intangibility of light and form... in fully exploiting the trans-
mportive properties of light, artists such as Boltanski, keep
images in this enlivened state and consequently, import a sensu-
al and disturbing immediacy to these works, similar to the quin-
queffect of an afterimage.”

The second part of Boltanski’s Charlotte work inventory of
Others Belonging to a Young Woman of Charleston, was housed
in the Gibbes Museum of Art, 135 Meeting Street, Charleston. This
work echoed the ongoing theme in Boltanski’s art, the ques-
tioning of self-representation and identity and the problematic
significance given by the present to objects from the past.
Boltan-
ski took objects belonging to an anonymous college student at
the College of Charleston, arranged them on white pedestals and
exhibited them at the Gibbes Museum of Art. There were
other works of other Boltanski exhibitions, including a fantastic
with human remains, lost property offices, catalogued
belongings of the dead, but in contrast to those, Boltanski’s inves-
tigations of a contemporary living student. To Mary Jane Jacob who curat-
ed the “Places with a Past” exhibition, Boltanski’s inventory gave
significance to the everyday. Boltanski’s exhibit spoke about how
objects became memorialized and made valuable by the passage
of time and through the manner of their presentation. She
said this as “using the belongings of one individual... touching on the
life of the Everyman... in the context of Boltanski’s body of work, however.
This work can also be seen as a gentle critique of attempting to
inventory and thus re-present the past. Here the objects were present day, and yet by their inclusion in an exhibi-
tion “the present seemed cast into the future.”

Boltanski’s display "emblazoned the objects so effectively that
one sensed that they were all that remained of the owner’s life.”
His careful labelling of each contemporary object “Umbrella,”
"Gloves," "Shoes," also parodies the historical museum label that
attempts to fix an object in the past, to solidify the memory of his-
story. Boltanski’s inventory also refers to his wider interest and
distrust of evidence gathering, and inventories as a whole. Many
of his other installations refer to the idea of an inventory as an incomplete and shadowy device for memory dis-
scription. Instead of visual way of describing the past, Boltanski
often inventories can provide the only clues to an erased life,
Boltanski remains fascinated as to how these "clues can only be
gathered and examined through contemporary eyes, thus working
in the present,” what Scott
McQuire calls memory’s "sense
of irretrievable loss.”

The vast majority of Boltanski’s work uses the photo-
graph in some way as the medium has proved master-
ful at capturing the inconstancy of the self and self-
identification. Boltanski’s Monument toured as part of the Islands
Contemporary Installations Exhibition in 1986, being featured as part
of the "Camera Lucida" Exhibition at the Walker Phillips
Gallery, Atlanta, curated by Helga Pakaslander. It used photographs
encased in installation, a Boltanski trademark, whilst works like
Lessons of Darkness, also featured in the "Camera Lucida" exhibi-
tion were produced as hard bound books. Both works utilise the inconstancy within the photographic medium to unsettle and question the place of memory in the self and in time and both engage the body in a performative reading of the work. A photograph captures a moment in time, but is fil-
tered by the perception of the photographer. By its very nature it
implied selection and priority, one moment chosen out of a million possibilities. The multiplicity of possible perspectives is endless, whilst the definite moment in time remains crystallised as Barthes notes.

The photograph then becomes a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination, false on the level of perception, true on the level of time; a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modern equivalent of hallucinatory images of the one hand (it is not true! but on the other it has indeed been!): a man made image chaled by reality. Bohltanis emphasizes the contradictions possible in the

to the photograph to the contradictions in memory and representation itself. "Representation is problematized by exposing its rhetoric as well as its mere opaque meaning. The paradoxical nature of the photograph as an image is its characteristic record that is witness to "and denial of human existence-is explored."

Monument, contains three black and white photographs placed into an installation shaped on a conventional memorial column and into Bohltanis's trademark individually placed bulbs. The photographs are of French children, individually unnamed but collectively referred to in their many reincarnations in Bohltanis's work as The Children of Dijon. A sense of lost presence is thus conjured up, we know little of these children beside the fact that Bohltanis was personally interested in the children growing up in post-war France despite the constant attempt to read this as well as relating to the Holocaust). Bohltanis admits that whilst the children were anonymous French children of the 1970's, the images did fit with death, as the children in the photographs were "now dead, not really dead but killed images of them were no longer true," since they had grown to adulthood. He states "(the children in the photos no longer existed, so I decided to make a monument to the glory of childhood now dead.

Helga Pakasla's calls Monument a

"a strange little collection of Christmas wrapping paper and blue and yellow faces, dimly lit by the incandescent lamps led by a network of veins like wires... Bohltanis...transfers the remains of human lives into an ironic memento mori. He acknowledges that photography is a pathological affair and draws on this sense of loss to evoke collective memory.

Andrea Lisa acknowledges the general role Bohltanis's work has taken in the heated discussions around the ethical problems of photography and memory, particularly in reference to the Holocaust. She joins the debate in her chapter "Between Trauma and Nostalgia: Christian Boltanis's memory and Art Spiegelman's Maus", in her recent work Trespassing Through Shadowy Memory: Photography and Christian Boltanski's more directly Holocausanion, aiming "to point out the dilemmas and the possibilities (Bohltanis's) world raises about eliciting, eliding, subordinating and riddling", turning specific historical memory into nostalgias to provocatively engage with the past with the present and to implicate the contemporary viewer.

Artistic images of post Holocaust "postmemorial", like Bohltanis", have been famously interrogated by theorists such as Andrea Lisa and Marianne Ihlen, due to the fact that "the very presumptions they generate their horrific fullness simultaneously couply with hovering abstractions about the realizations of the people's endurance and destructions: that tantamount with the veil.

Even though the fear that the nameless documentation, repetition of images, illusionary sentimentality and unclear references that mark Bohltanis's work will only contribute to the irrecoreanl pain, loss and erosion of Holocaust victims and their families, Lisa Andriessen argues, as Bohltanis's work "refers to identity. The method of installation of art, its use of everyday objects in conjunction with his photographs, is one of the things that made him become highlycharged.

"Indeed, Bohltanis's work embodies the theatriality of memory in its presentation as well as in its content. The method of installation of art, its use of everyday objects in conjunction with his photographs, is one of the things that made him become highlycharged. The method of installation of art, its use of everyday objects in conjunction with his photographs, is one of the things that made him become highlycharged. The method of installation of art, its use of everyday objects in conjunction with his photographs, is one of the things that made him become highlycharged.

"Indeed, Bohltanis's work embodies the theatriality of memory in its presentation as well as in its content. The method of installation of art, its use of everyday objects in conjunction with his photographs, is one of the things that made him become highlycharged. The method of installation of art, its use of everyday objects in conjunction with his photographs, is one of the things that made him become highlycharged. The method of installation of art, its use of everyday objects in conjunction with his photographs, is one of the things that made him become highlycharged.