Art After Loss: Aestheticized Memory, Auratic Capability and Affect Through Post-Holocaust Representation.

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Abstract

This paper summarises ongoing research, which I am currently developing as a *Doctorate of Philosophy* (PhD) candidate through *The University of Southern Queensland* (USQ), Toowoomba, Australia, The PhD involves a thesis with creative works component, where artistic, practice-led research is at the forefront of both my written and studio based outcomes. The following will discuss the focus areas and framework of my current research, including the objectives of my theoretical and studio based investigations, the contextualization of my studio practice in relation to my theoretical enquiry, and the aims and intended outcomes of this research.

KEYWORDS: Memorialisation, Remembrance, Memory Theory, Aura Theory
Negative Aura

Introduction

The objective of the PhD is to develop original outcomes on how to effectively address (through visual art) events of war and traumatic memory. The theoretical and studio research take particular focus on the Holocaust and its subsequent visual representation, which involves the investigation of memorialization, legacy and memory in the context of visual art. The research will develop a body of work in both written and practical outcomes, that responds to 3 distinct, foundational research areas: firstly, German philosopher, Theodor

Adorno's (original and later retracted) statement that there can be 'no poetry (art) after Auschwitz'. Secondly, ideas established by French philosopher, Jean- Francois Lyotard regarding the sublime as a way of 'presenting the unpresentable,' and lastly, German Jewish philosopher, Walter Benjamin's theory concerning the transcendental qualities of art ('aura theory'), which will establish theoretical framework for positioning the new term, 'negative aura' within the field of art theory.

The investigation of these three research areas will prove the necessity for, and ongoing role of memorialization, and the importance of visual art in relation to the continued representation, legacy and relevance of historical events such as the Holocaust. The research will also position existing artwork, and my own practice-based outcomes to challenge ideas surrounding 'aura & memory theory' in order to establish new terminology relating to the representation of traumatic memory and experience. The previously mentioned focus areas involve subsequent theoretical research and critical writing on the historical and contemporary role of remembrance, memory theory and concepts of aura and the sublime all in regard to a visual art positioning. As the research progresses, I am drawing from theorists, philosophers, writers, critics and artists associated within and around these fields of research to create a platform for the proposition of contemporary visual engagement with these issues. All these research areas in conjunction with collated interviews with seminal figures within the field, are all being utilized to investigate and produce outcomes regarding the creation, presentation and affecting qualities of art based on near incomprehensible loss (Art After Loss).

In his publication, *Prisms* (1955), Adorno was amongst the first to infer problems associated with post-Holocaust representation. "The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric." (Adorno, 1955, p. 34). This quote has since been addressed and interpreted many times, with it often being shortened to 'no poetry after Auschwitz.' This statement is utilized in vast amounts of Holocaust-related scholarship, particularly those that discuss the problematics of representing such an event. It requires mention that Adorno later retracted this statement in the final chapter of *Negative Dialectics* (1966), but nonetheless, the 'no poetry after Auschwitz' suggestion is foundational to the discussion of post-Holocaust representation. It is commonly considered that Adorno's comment addresses the vast effects this event has had on society, and the subsequent impossibility of condensing such tragedy into a single work of art (referenced as poetry). This raises questions as to how anyone can represent such barbarity, and the idea of 'presenting the unpresentable,' as Lyotard put it. In relation to my investigation of 'aura theory' established by Walter Benjamin, which uses the word 'aura' to reference the transcendental or ethereal qualities of art: my theoretical research also aims to establish and position the term 'negative aura' within art theory. This theoretical research maintains a critical and reflective relationship with my studio research via informed consideration of every decision regarding my studio research, which is currently focused on the creation of a large-scale artwork/Holocaust memorial (later explained in this paper). This reflective relationship aims to have my research outcomes assist with the broader creation and exhibition of visual based memorials & war art within a national and international cultural context.

My choice to reference and address the Holocaust comes from various places including the lack of Holocaust related visual material in Australia (particularly Queensland) as well as the investigation and recognition of parallels between events like the Holocaust and ongoing acts of injustice and prejudice within contemporary society. Currently, there are growing concerns regarding the memory of the Holocaust, as there are very few survivors of the event alive today. This opens an area of research investigation into the role of future generations in the representation and recollection of history that is becoming further removed from direct experience. I have no immediate link or direct relationship to those persecuted during the Holocaust, nor do I have Jewish heritage. This puts me in a position where I am investigating the broader attitudes and responsibility regarding the representation and memory of events such as the Holocaust. In specific relation to my current studio research, my major bodies of work have all referenced personal memory as a catalyst for my studio outcomes. By this I mean that I create

artwork based on a relational engagement to personal memory and experience. This is an attempt to represent the things that have affected me most. Therefore my current studio research and decision to reference the Holocaust draws from my personal visit to the preserved Auschwitz concentration camps in February of 2016. I am also interested in utilizing this history to enable broader discussions about the horror we are capable of. Although my studio research is based on the Holocaust, I consciously create the work to be ambiguous and (on surface level) non-specific. This is in order for the work to simultaneously echo an understanding of the representational limits of that history, offer insight into my perception of such history, and also reference broad ideas surrounding the fragile and fleeting nature of life, while exampling extreme human experience and capability.

The finalized written outcomes of the PhD (summarized in this paper) will incorporate critical analysis and writing on the before-mentioned fields of research (memory theory, 'the sublime' and 'aura theory'). Seminal theoretical figures include Immanuel Kant, Theodor Adorno, Jill Bennett, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Gene Ray, Hal Foster, Georgio Agamben, Jacques Ranciere, Naomi Mandel, Marc Nichanian, Ray Chow and Walter Benjamin. My research also investigates and relies upon literature informing or otherwise contextualizing the work of contemporary artists who are within the field of memorialization and war art. This includes reviews, critiques and the writing of artists such as Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, Rachel Whiteread, Peter Eisenman, Lukasz Surowiec, Jan Komski, Manfred Bockelmann, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Christian Boltanski, Ai Weiwei, Alex Seton, Leon Golub, Cornelia Parker and Jake & Dinos Chapman, as well as writers such as Primo Levi and Art Spiegelman. By researching various artists and artworks, which find commonality through addressing memory, trauma and remembrance enables me to further contextualize my studio work within a historical and contemporary positioning. This will allow the research to be engaged with, and better understand the limitations of traumatic representation as well as the broader role of visual art in relation to such a task. To elaborate on my outlined, foundational research, I will now further discuss the primary theoretical areas being developed through the PhD.

To address, through visual art, the complexities of post-Holocaust representation; my research begins with an investigation of Holocaust history, with a focus on the experience of directly affected people. This research is specific to memory theory within visual culture, particularly in relation to horrific events and how lived experience can be visually represented through artwork. Although I am referencing the Holocaust, this research is applicable to the representation of traumatic experience and seemingly incomprehensible

events of past and present. Important to this research is the writing of Professor Jill Bennett in *Empathic Vision, Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005), who specifically discusses the role of art in the representation of events regarding trauma. Bennett argues that the 'affecting' qualities of art (later discussed in relation to 'aura theory') are effective in the representation of traumatic experience, and are able to place viewers in a position of reflection and contemplation. She also addresses the problematics of attempting to "reduce trauma or painful experience to a mere aesthetic concern" (Bennett, 2005, p. 5). The limitations of representation are particularly evident when creating work based on an event such as the Holocaust. This inevitably creates problems regarding interpretation of the work. "What is important is that art itself challenges rather than reinforces the distinction between art (or the realm of imaginative discourse) and the reality of trauma and war" (Bennett, 2005, p. 5). Memory, with its intrinsic faults, gaps and flaws, has consistently been a focus of my studio work because it recognizes a limitation to my representation and understanding of sensitive, multi-layered events and history. My ongoing investigation of this visual field recognises the impossible task of representing the experience and trauma of others, which is far beyond my comprehension. Seminal to my research of memory theory within visual culture is historian Dominick LaCapra's text, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (1998), who writes specifically on memory-based, post-Holocaust representation within art and literature, making reference to the problematics of representing trauma in a way similar to that of Bennett. "The problematics of trauma should not lead one to mystify problems or to discount the work of both memory and reconstruction with respect to limit-events" (LaCapra, 1998, p. 183). LaCapra suggests that regardless of these limitations, the creation of work related to an event such as the Holocaust is still necessary for the purpose of maintaining remembrance and commemoration. This recognition of limitation and difficulty is a necessary and unavoidable aspect of traumatic representation, which is an accepted aspect within my studio research approaches.

To further elaborate on this field of enquiry (memory theory in visual culture), the research of personal and collective memories is an important element to post-Holocaust representation. This personal/collective memory based research is "in order to approach as closely as possible, events that necessarily involve gaps, distortions, and limited evidence; at least with respect to the experience of trauma itself" (LaCapra, 1998, p. 182). This means that when representing broadly affecting and multi-layered events where the lived experience of an enormous amount of people is varied and complex; no amount of work can represent even an individual victim's experience. Their trauma alone cannot be contained by any means: speech, literature, art, or otherwise. Marc Nichanian's *The*

Historiographic Perversion (2009) includes writing on the recollection of genocide, particularly through the "archivization" of victim testimonies, and how that practice, despite it being directly linked to those with lived experience, raises moral and ethical dilemmas through the limitations of such practice. As an example, Nichanian writes: "Archivization was cutting short the memory of the victim and the impossible mourning" (Nichanian, 2009, p. 110). Similarly, Jacques Ranciere's writing in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) discusses victim testimony and its restrictions on encompassing broadly affecting history, regardless of direct experience. Reflecting on a video recorded testimony of an Auschwitz victim, Raciere writes: "his words do not capture the event in its uniqueness; they are not its horror directly expressed. It will be said that that is their merit: not saying everything; showing that not everything can be said" (Ranciere, 2009, p. 90). These limitations and dilemmas explored by theorists such as Nichanian and Ranciere example the absolute unrepresentability of traumatic experience. In considering that even through the testimony of victims, there are unquestionable limitations, leaves my research outcomes (in both written and practical contexts) to recognise and oblige to this reality. Because of this, my practice based projects maintain a level of ambiguity or non-specificity in order to represent our estimated understanding of collective experience, compiled largely through those who are able to share individual stories. These testimonies are also accompanied by statistical information in the aftermath of such events, which I also, subsequently incorporate into my practical outcomes. This particular field of 'memory theory' is foundational in the discourse of effective memorialization and investigating beyond the problems put forward by theorist such as Adorno, whose 'no poetry after Auschwitz' statement introduces critical discussion on the role of art in the face of incomprehensible human experience. In a sense, the barbarity of the event is an unavoidable quality of anything representing such history, which must be anticipated and understood in any attempt to produce art in its wake. This means that from the particular perspective of visual art, every element and decision of an attempted post- traumatic representation should consider this 'barbarity,' which, I believe, involves consideration and justification of things such as material choice, employed processes, aesthetic decisions, presentation methods and documentation. These theoretical elements, which discuss the inevitable limitations and problems involved in post-traumatic visual representation are further theorized through 'the sublime,' and ideas surrounding the 'presentation of the unpresentable.'

Theories of 'the sublime' can be traced back to the text of 18th Century philosopher, Edmund Burke. Burke was the first to link the human subject and aesthetics to negative and positive feelings associated with what is external or greater than that subject's ability

to comprehend. This enquiry of Burke leads to Immanuel Kant who writes; "the mind is in the presence of the sublime, attempting to imagine what it cannot" (Kant, 1996, p. 97). This suggests that the sublime links with incomprehensibility, which prevails through work associated with events such as the Holocaust. Interpretations of Kantian sublimity have been an important point of reference for justifying a link between theory of 'the sublime' and a research focus area for the PhD. These interpretations include the literature of Gene Ray in *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory* (2005), and Christine Battersby in *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (2007), where it is stated: "whatever is fitted to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects… is a source of the sublime" (Battersby, 2007, p. 24). To further enforce this, another interpretation of Kantian sublime is found within English philosopher Paul Crowther's, *The Kantian Sublime, The Avant-garde, and the Postmodern, A Critique of Lyotard* (1989) *w*ho writes: "the term 'sublime' is aptly applied to art when it is of colossal size or terrifying power, or employs form or imagery which successfully invoke such overwhelming associations" (Crowther, 1989, p. 72). The terror and tragedy of events such as the Holocaust translates through representational artwork and allows the work to be a source of this sublime effect. The expansive, varied and incomprehensible nature of what is experienced through events like war is where a direct association with the sublime can be drawn. The incomprehensibility of the event implies that, as mentioned before, its representation is problematic. This again relates back to the theory of Adorno (that 'poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'), which subsequently accompanies, Jean-Francois Lyotard's writing in: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). In this text (also interpreted through Crowther's writing), Lyotard characterises the sublime as 'presenting the unpresentable.' These theories highlight and further compel the difficulty of representing trauma and tragedy, although, such theories don't eliminate the necessity for post-Holocaust representation; they enforce the moral and ethical obligations of such a task. To reference Naomi Mandel in *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust and Slavery in America* (2006): "We may be – and, I will argue, we should be – complicit in the violence of representation, of comprehension, of speaking the unspeakable." (Mandel, 2006, p. 64). Even Lyotard accepts that the unpresentable can be presented, at least in some aestheticized form. This notion of the 'unpresentable' carries to previously discussed theories of Bennet and LaCapra, where the barbaric and tragic nature of an event introduces unavoidable limitations in their visual representation. The sublime or 'unpresentable' is recognition of the complexities and broad reaching consequences of certain events and experiences. This field of research is integral to the investigation of

effective, and affecting, memorialization and its ongoing role in contemporary society as well as in the development and outcomes of my studio, practice-based research.

My reading extends from the personal effects of traumatic memory and the limitations of post-Holocaust representation (theorized through 'the sublime'), to then focus on the potential affect of artwork regarding these topics. My reading of Walter Benjamin's text and current interpretations such as John McCole's *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (1993) and Rainer Rochlitz's *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin* (1995), offer insight into the role of 'aura theory' in relation to this 'affect-focussed' field of research, and how the concept of 'aura' connects to effective memorialization through a visual research outcome. Benjamin first engaged with 'aura theory' in his text, *On Hashish* (1927-34) and later expanded on his theories in the seminal text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935). 'Aura' relates to the transcendental qualities of an object: a particular 'presence,' which directly affects the viewer. This 'aura' or transient quality is commonly associated with aesthetic beauty, pleasure or uniqueness, and to touch on Benjamin's writing, he defines aura as "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 518). Benjamin's description of aura identifies it as something beyond physicality: a sense of "distance" or an untouchable quality, regardless of an observer's proximity to something. I believe that this concept of aura, and an artwork's affecting qualities can relate to an array of factors. In the case of my studio research (discussed shortly in this paper), I am investigating whether an identifiable 'aura' can be produced through work relating to specific, traumatic historical events and memory where "the aura sometimes appears as an 'atmosphere' that seems to envelope an object, a scene, or a moment" (McCole, 1993, p. 3). Further to this, the written component of my PhD research will propose new aura-related terminology, which can be attached to my ongoing studio research, alongside related works within the field of contemporary art. This new terminology is an intervention to existing aura theory and its association to pleasure and beauty. As an interpretation of Benjamin's 'aura theory,' I am establishing and situating (primarily through the PhD) the term 'negative aura' within the broader discourse of art theory. The PhD research will investigate the possibility of a transcendental effect, where traumatic, inconceivable and sensitive history is utilized as a catalyst for the creation of artwork. Through this 'negative aura' or "atmosphere," as described by McCole, a sublime effect also takes place whereby a 'special object' that has an aura, does so for the opposite reason that art usually does as Benjamin understands it, that is, because it is disturbing rather than beautiful. In such a position and via association with specific history, the work is able to be transcendental and affecting.

Through my studio research, I am not suggesting, in any way, that the tragedy and horror of the Holocaust can be emulated, or be wholly represented what was experienced during that time, but instead, empathetically address that history in relation to personal experience and research. I aim for the term 'negative aura' to apply to the broader field of memorials and 'war art,' as well as any artwork that addresses traumatic memory or experience. This proposition will be further developed (in the final thesis) via examples of artwork and writing from a wide range of artists, including those listed in the introductory section of this paper. The associated 'negative aura' of my studio research, and its connection to 'the sublime' both stem from the works proximity to specific history and relationship with trauma and memory. Understanding the theories associated with these enables a basis for respectful and appropriate contextualization of my art practice, and the development of my theoretical investigation that recognises both the limitations and possibilities for art practice to act as a catalysing force in the field of memorialization and representation.

As my research is heavily practice-based, I will now discuss the practical component of the PhD, which is a Holocaust-related artwork currently 'in progress.' For added context to my description of the PhD's studio research project, I will briefly describe some previous bodies of work, which have been addressing the themes and theories outlined in this paper, and leading toward the current studio project.

Most often-referencing traumatic experience and memory, my artwork commonly falls into the realm of 'ceramic installation work.' I am concerned with utilizing the precious, fragile and vulnerable nature of ceramics to address sensitive historical or personal events. I am also interested in the undeniable association of ceramic material to functionality and necessity. As a material that is often recognized as 'historical record,' I believe it has a heightened ability to covey my intentions because of its inherent and broad cultural significance, and historic relevance.

Previous work of mine includes *Five Hundred* (2012-13), which represents my Dutch Grandfather's military service during The Indonesian War of Independence.

Figure 1 shows an image of *Five Hundred* (2012-13) by Dan Elborne: slipcast earthenware bullets, glaze & custom decal.

The work contains 500 earthenware bullets, which are cast from the same standard issue ammunition given to my Grandfather, as one of 500 men initially drafted to go and fight in Indonesia. The bullets are decorated with traditional Dutch Delftware patterns, which are direct copies of the decorations featured on my Grandfather's Delftware ceramic plates he was gifted upon completing his military service.

Figure 2 shows a detail image of *Five Hundred* (2012-13) by Dan Elborne: slipcast earthenware bullets, glaze & custom decal.

Another work is *One Drop of Blood* (2013), which originally comprised of over 21,000 porcelain cells.

Figure 3 shows an image of *One Drop of Blood* (2013) by Dan Elborne: handbuilt, extruded porcelain & glaze.

The forms imitate white blood cells and as a group, are the equivalent to a high ranging white blood cell count (18 - 25,000 white cells per single drop of blood). This high ranging count most often indicates that the body is fighting disease or infection. The work was created as an interactive installation, where viewers are encouraged to take cells away in exchange for donations to the Australian *National Breast Cancer Foundation* (NBCF), which funds research into the treatment of breast cancer.

Figure 4 shows a detail image of interaction with *One Drop of Blood* (2013) by Dan Elborne: handbuilt, extruded porcelain & glaze.

This action is intended to emulate my mothers plummeting white blood cell count during chemotherapy: a common side effect of the treatment, which made her dangerously susceptible to infection and illness.

Closer to my current research was a 2014 work titled *Arbeit Macht Frei: Work Makes you Free* (2014). This installation work features a handmade replica of an autopsy table, which remains in the pathology lab of *Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp* in Oranienburg, Germany.

Figure 5 shows an image of *Arbeit Macht Frei: Work Makes you Free* (2014) by Dan Elborne: slipcast porcelain tiles, grout, stainless steel, timber, aluminum & dry ice.

This project was responsive to my 2013 visit to the preserved Sachsenhausen site, and involved my re-creation of the single object that affected me most from that visit.

Figure 6 shows a detail image of *Arbeit Macht Frei: Work Makes you Free* (2014) by Dan Elborne: slipcast porcelain tiles, grout, stainless steel, timber, aluminum & dry ice.

The 'hand-made' elements of this work aim to transcend the chilling sterility of the original table, and introduce 'human qualities' to a work representing such inhumane treatment. Alongside this, and to aid in the recollection of my visit to *Sachsenhausen,* I internally cooled the replica table so it was cold to the touch. This internal cooling was also an investigative experiment in the potential affect of involving non-conventional, sensory elements to ceramic artwork (similarly investigated through the interactive element of *One Drop of Blood*), which addresses traumatic experience and history.

More recently and similarly addressing *World War II* is *Where They Burn Books* (2016). This project Primarily acts as a memorial to the 1933 Nazi book burnings, where over 25,000 volumes of text were deemed 'un-German' and subsequently destroyed.

Figure 7 shows an image of *Where They Burn Books* (2016) by Dan Elborne: slipcast porcelain books, glaze, gold lustre & compressed book ash.

This work comprises of porcelain 'books' accompanied by similar dark forms, which are made from the compressed ashes of the books I used, and consequently destroyed, while making moulds for the porcelain pieces. The work references the power, resilience and preciousness of knowledge, which is made increasingly apparent through the act of burning books for the purpose of oppression.

Figure 8 shows a detail image of *Where They Burn Books* (2016) by Dan Elborne: slipcast porcelain books, glaze, gold lustre & compressed book ash.

As previously mentioned, These four projects are some examples, which acknowledge my ongoing investigation of the representation of traumatic memory through visual art, as well as an interest in the role of memorialization. These projects' proximity and association to sensitive experience aims to convey the previously discussed theories of 'the sublime.' Through their intrinsic relationship to particular history and memories, they also investigate the possibility of a 'negative aura' to be experienced by viewers.

This brings me to my current studio research and project, which is the 'creative works component' of the PhD. Conceived in June of 2015, my practice-based research has been engaged in intensive production of a ceramic installation artwork titled: *Deathgate*. This work will stand as a significant contribution to the memorialization of the Holocaust, particularly considering the absolute lack of Holocaust based visual material in Queensland. The project will be an admittedly limited physical representation of all those detained in the *Auschwitz I & II Concentration Camps*, giving a direct visual reference to the staggering amount of deaths against those who survived. The project involves an individually handmade ceramic object for every Auschwitz victim.

The work will be presented as two parallel lengths of objects on the floor, one length containing the amount of people who died in the Auschwitz camps (1.1 million)   alongside another length containing the amount of people who survived (200,000). Aesthetically, *Deathgate* draws influence from the railway leading through the main entry

to *Auschwitz II* (*Birkenau*) concentration camp, commonly referred to as 'the death gate,' which was used as the main mode of prisoner transportation into the camp.

Figure 9 shows a photograph (taken by Dan Elborne in 2016) of the actual railway leading through Auschwitz II (Birkenau) Concentration Camp.

Figure 10 shows a detail photograph (taken by Dan Elborne in 2016) of the stones throughout and surrounding the actual railway leading through Auschwitz II (Birkenau) Concentration Camp.

I am individually hand-making ceramic 'stones' comparable to those surrounding and covering the actual railway. I am making one 'stone' for each of the 1.3 million people detained in the Auschwitz camps.

Figure 11 shows a detail (work in progress) photograph of some ceramic 'stones' already made by Dan Elborne for the *Deathgate* project.

I began developing the *Deathgate* project during a six-week international artist residency at *Ateliers Fourwinds Art Centre* near Aureille in France (June-July, 2015). Primarily utilizing this residency as a platform to calculate logistical requirements, and establish an effective/efficient process, I produced the first 'stone' there on Sunday, June 28 of 2015, I will therefore finish the final 'stone' on Wednesday, November 21 of 2018. To the day, this timeline matches with the first 'gassing' of Auschwitz prisoners (the main mode of mass extermination) on Wednesday, September 3 of 1941, to the liberation of the Auschwitz camps on Saturday, January 27 of 1945. This timeline: both the duration of mass killing at Auschwitz, and the production of the *Deathgate* project, total 3 years, 4 months and 24 days.

The project will be the first installation of its kind in Australia both in its scale and production. Each ceramic piece is handmade and consequently unique, which intends to reference the individuals who suffered. The 'pinching' process behind making the 'stones' leaves each one as a gestural object that features a fingerprint.

Figure 12 shows a detail (work in progress) photograph of the fingerprint left on the ceramic 'stones' already made by Dan Elborne for the *Deathgate* project.

This 'mark of the hand' (similar to that of my previous work: *Arbeit Macht Frei: Work Makes you Free*) is an attempt to introduce a sense of physicality and care into and event that is so shrouded in inhumane atrocities. The physical scale of the finished project will offer insight into the enormity of the event itself and my decision to create 'stones' also references the Jewish tradition of placing stones on gravesites. This ritual has been interpreted in various ways but is commonly recognized as an act of memorialization, where stones, unlike flowers that wither and die, remain on the gravesite as a symbol to the permanence of memory and long-lasting legacy.

Fig 13 shows the pinching process behind making the ceramic 'stones' for the *Deathgate* project.

Fig 14 shows the pinching process behind making the ceramic 'stones' for the *Deathgate* project.

The *Deathgate* project, both in its creation and eventual presentation, remains aware of the inherent limitations of post-Holocaust representation. The 'unpresentable,' is recognized both in the aesthetic simplicity of the objects, alongside the monotonous exercise of their production. Primarily through its association to Holocaust history, but also through the production of individualized, unique objects: the project aims to produce an 'atmosphere' or 'negative aura' because of its historic and traumatic connotations. I intend for the work to not only commemorate the victims within the Auschwitz camps, but also reference the magnitude of the Holocaust, honoring the legacy of those who experienced and suffered through such ordeals. It also has the ability to draw comparisons to other moments of degradation within history and those that suffered and perpetrated such events, while intending to engage the viewers' capacity for empathy. Personally, the ability for my studio outcome to broadly speak about the abhorrence and ongoing nature of things such as genocide, injustice and prejudice is an important aspect of the research and final outcome.

To conclude, this paper has summarized the primary fields of (ongoing) investigation within a current *Doctorate of Philosophy* (PhD). The expected outcomes of my research and contribution to the field include a comprehensive analysis of the role of memorialization and the representation of traumatic memory through art, the further development of theory in relation to my chosen field, and an original and substantial body of practical work aiming to memorialize the Holocaust and its victims. These outcomes, which will be further contextualized through continued theoretical enquiry and 'artist research,' remain conscious of the inherent limitations of post-Holocaust, or post- traumatic representation. Through the investigation of memory theory in visual culture, 'the sublime,' and existing 'aura theory,' I intend for my practice-based research to assist in introducing appropriate, not-yet-existing terminology (negative aura) as an intervention within the discourse of art theory. This investigation aims to assess the effect, affect and contemporary role of art, where sensitive historical events and those victimized, act as a catalyst in the production of work. This art, by association/proximity to catastrophe, and by acceptance of undeniable representational limits can be a source of 'the sublime' and thus produce an affecting, atmospheric 'negative aura' for the viewer.

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