Willem Boshoff and materiality according to Adorno

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This article presents a reading of South African artist Willem Boshoff's installation *Writing that fell off the wall* (1997) to illustrate how he used his material to expose colonialism and apartheid as inhuman ideologies. Adorno's views on materiality serves as a theoretical framework. According to Adorno history is sedimented in the artist's material and form elements. He distinguished between the *Inhalt* (material content) and *Gehalt* (social truth content) in artworks. Adorno claims that works of art do not explicitly need to have a historical content because they exercise their critique through the way in which they configure material that already contains history. The artwork's meaning is revealed through the dialectical relation between the *Inhalt* and the *Gehalt.* I argue that Boshoff exposed the bankrupt ideologies of colonialism and apartheid by conceptually scattering ideologically laden concepts in eight different and previously "superior" languages during colonialism and apartheid, on the floor.
Key words: Adorno, apartheid, colonialism, *Gehalt*, *Inhalt*, material, Willem Boshoff

Willem Boshoff en materialiteit volgens Adorno
Hierdie artikel bied 'n interpretasie van die Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaar Willem Boshoff se installasie, *Writing that fell off the wall* (1997) om te illustreer hoe hy sy materiaal gebruik om kolonialisme en apartheid te ontmasker as onmenslike ideologieë. Adorno se beskouinge oor materialiteit dien as 'n teoretiese raamwerk. Volgens Adorno is geskiedenis gesedimenteer in die kunstenaar se materaal en vormelemente. Hy onderskei tussen die *Inhalt* (materiaalinhoud) en *Gehalt* (sosiale waarheidsinhoud) in kunswerke. Adorno stel dat kunswerke nie eksplisiete historiese inhoud hoef te bevat nie, omdat kunswerke hul kritiek uitspreek deur die manier waarop die materiaal waarvan die kunswerk gemaak is, reeds geskiedenis bevat. Die kunswerk se betekenis word geopenbaar deur die dialektiese verhouding tussen die *Inhalt* en die *Gehalt.* Ek argumenteer dat Boshoff die bankrot ideologieë kolonialisme en apartheid ontmasker deur konseptueel ideologies-gelade konsepte in agt verskillende voormalige "superieure" tale gedurende kolonialisme en apartheid, op die vloer te strooi.
Sleutelwoorde: Adorno, apartheid, kolonialisme, *Gehalt*, *Inhalt*, materiaal, Willem Boshoff

T he South African artist Willem Hendrik Boshoff (born 1951) introduced himself on his website (2007)[2] as a conceptual artist focusing primarily on installation art, languages and text, botany and sculpture. Sudheim (2004) and Rattemeyer (2000) have both emphasized that the artist wrestles with memories, power and ideologies. This article focuses on the ways in which Boshoff has utilized his material, namely words, language, painted wooden panels, space and other form elements to expose colonialism and apartheid as inhuman ideologies. I illustrate this by interpreting one of his language based conceptual art installations, *Writing that Fell Off the Wall* (1997) which he created for the Second Johannesburg *Africus* Biennale with the theme *Trade Routes – History and Geography.*

Figure 1
Boshoff, W., *Writing that fell off the wall,* (1997),
8mx24m [variable], language installation: Type on paper, wood, paint on masonite,
Johannesburg Art Gallery
(source: http://www.willemboshoff.com).

The reading and interpretation of the installation is undertaken within the framework of Adorno's views on history, artistic materials and his dialectical distinction between the *Inhalt* and *Gehalt* of works of art. I argue that Boshoff has exposed the bankrupt ideologies of colonialism and apartheid by scattering ideologically laden concepts on the floor in eight "superior" languages during colonialism and apartheid, namely English, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, German, and Afrikaans.

Firstly, an exposition of ideologies is given, followed by an overview of colonialism and apartheid in the South African context. To be able to read and interpret the installation, a theoretical exposition of Adorno's views on history, art and artistic materiality is then given. After this, a description of the material and visual form elements the artist utilized is given, followed by the interpretation of the installation. The article concludes with some remarks on the relationship between materiality and art from a neo-Marxist perspective.

Ideologies and how they function in societies

The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy describes an ideology as any wide-ranging system of beliefs or ways of thought, and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social action. It concludes by stating that an ideology is a conceptual scheme with a practical application. One can therefore say that an ideology, as a system of coherent ideas, has far-reaching effects and influences on the structure of a society and on the thoughts of members of the society. Van der Merwe and Viljoen (1998:147-148) state that the term ideology normally or often has a negative connotation, for instance when it is used as an instrument of subjection. An example of the latter occurs in the case of a racist-nationalistic ideology.

Under the influence of Marx and Lenin, Thompson (1990) views ideologies in relation to class differences. He, however, redefined class differences as group differences. According to Thompson, ideologies generally tend to enhance the reigning group's ideas and interests.:

> Ideology according to the epiphenomenal conception is a system of ideas which expresses the interest of the dominant class but which represents class relations in an illusory form. Ideology expresses the interest of the dominant class in the sense that the ideas that compose ideology are ideas that, in any historical period articulate the ambitions, concerns and wishful deliberations of the dominant social groups as they struggle to secure and maintain their position of domination (Thompson, 1990:37-38).

This means that in a political and power context an ideology can be defined as a system of ideas that represents people and the world in such a way that the interests of the people in powerful positions, the so-called elite groups in societies, are viewed as general interests. The reverse of this view is implied. Other people, not belonging to the elite groups, cannot claim any rights according to their interests or values because they are either suppressed or ignored. These particular interests of the people in positions of power are falsely presented as the absolute truth and as being to the benefit of all the people of a country. An ideology conceals the difference between general and generalized interests in a society. Therefore, the generalized ideas and interests of the reigning group are served by necessity because of the ruling, intellectual and material power disposed of by them. Therefore it is important to realize that ideologies cannot be viewed as innocent or harmless. Authentic interests are more than the sum of their individual components. They always contain something that has not yet become a reality. Contrary to this, generalized interests always have a way of concealing the false, limited view of the world to keep certain people in power and others in subordinate positions by using the ruling and material power imposed by people in positions of power (Adorno 2003a:17; 2003b:50; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 28-30).

From a Marxist perspective, the general interests of the people in power are mainly centred in a capitalistic struggle to gain, keep, or justify their wealth and power (Nairn, 1977; Hobsbawm, 1992; Kedourie, 1993). Hobsbawm (1992:146) views nationalism as an ideology because, according to him, it is an instrument in the hands of the capitalist elite to manipulate and channel the working class notion of the self and of a society in a specific direction. This manipulation of the working class is one of the reasons why Kedourie (1993:xiii-xvii) believes that nationalism is an ideological conspiracy consisting of fabricated fantasies about a ruling nation. These fabricated fantasies or modern myths typically belong to the sphere of ideologies.[3] Marschall (2005) correctly notes that generally people believe these myths to be the absolute truth without any questioning or verifying of the content of these myths. Ethnic myths, traditions, and histories in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are manipulated to reveal a so-called glorious past, symbols, and icons related to the ruling nation and their ideologies (cf. Marshall, 2010: 177; Hobsbawm, 1983: 7; Connerton, 2007: 5). Stone and Rizova (2007: 31) emphasize the importance of the maintenance and conservation of identity, language, and culture based upon a shared descent, history, and future.

The source of nationalism and a national identity is according to Smith (2004: 9) primarily located in the sphere of religion, and embedded in this sphere, are ethnicity, language, culture and the national state. The important role language plays in the self-assertion of the people in power and in the alienation of identity of the oppressed is highlighted by Fanon's (1986: 31) statement, "A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language". Imperial education set the language from the metropolis as the norm. Indigenous languages are then viewed as inferior, uncivilized and the deviation from the norm as is often the case in national formations and other ideologies, which privilege the group in power.

Lukes (2005) distinguishes between three dimensions of power and power relationships. The first dimension of power has specific implications for decision-making processes in cases of conflict between the interests of the people in power and their subordinates (cf. Zaaiman, 2007: 363). The second dimension embraces the first, but in a qualified way, because it leaves room for an investigation into ways in which the decision making process can be manipulated in cases of a conflict of interests between people in power and their subordinates (Lukes, 2005: 20). The third dimension encompasses both the first two dimensions, but deals specifically with

preferences according to norms, values, and ideologies. In this dimension, power is viewed as part of all social interactions because all ideas and beliefs are expressed through language and behaviour as bases for all social and political activities. This dimension also includes divergent religious ideals, as well as self-interests in economic affairs. According to Lukes (2005: 29-30) this third dimension is spontaneously and unconsciously incorporated in power relations and is therefore unconsciously determined. Degenaar (1980: 5-6) adds that the highest political loyalty is expected of people belonging to the same nation or nation state.

When ideologies are viewed as social pathological phenomena, they do not only have implications for power relations but also for identity issues. Intergroup relations between white European colonizers and black African and indigenous people were based upon identity issues, rooted in Manichean binary opposition[4] between light and darkness. These binary oppositions in the colonial discourse existed between the white European *self* as the norm and the black African *other* (the deviation from the norm)[5] (JanMohamed, 2006: 19-24; Bhabha, 2006: 155-156). The colonizers firmly believed in their own moral superiority and their civilized culture in contrast to the immoral and uncivilized colonized people (JanMohamed, 2006:19-24; Ghandi, 1998:31; Loomba, 2005: 54). This implied that the *other* or *das Nichtidentische* was viewed as an amorphous mass without any individual qualities or properties. Over a period, the subordinates internalized these negative views of the people in power, and they adhered to the artificially imposed inferior identity. This then became the way in which they viewed themselves, their language and identity, as well as their role in society. This process of internalizing artificially imposed values is known as the "colonizing of the mind".

Colonialism and apartheid in South Africa

Until recently, official documentation on the history of South Africa gave the impression that the Dutch colonizers arrived in 1652 at the bay of the Cape of Good Hope at an empty landscape or at least at the same time as the indigenous Khoikhoi[6] and San (Worden, 1994:5; Crais, 1991: 255-275). This impression confirms Loomba's (2005: 20) statement that the existence of a pre-colonial history of South Africa was often negated. The Dutch was not interested in colonizing the country; their goal was to establish a refreshment post for Dutch ships on their way to India. In 1795 the Cape of Good Hope became a British colony for a short period, and again in 1806 when it became a colony of the British Empire. As more Europeans, immigrants and slaves inhabited the country, the borders of the original Cape of Good Hope expanded into the rest of South Africa and the country was divided into four provinces; the Cape, Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal (Giliomee, 2003: 10 and 42-43; Thompson, 2006:40)[7]. McCleod (2000: 7-8) correctly claims that colonialism was driven mainly by capitalism. Africa, for instance, was colonized by the British because of the continent's rich minerals and the cheap labour of the colonized people.

White Afrikaners, also known as *Burghers* or *Boers* were descendants of the colonizers as well as from relationships between colonists and the indigenous Khoikhoi. Leatt *et al.* (1986: 70) correctly state that the process of the white colonists becoming indigenous or Africanised found expression in the term *Afrikaner* by which the colonists came to call themselves. This is confirmed by Giliomee's (2003: 33) remark that (European) observers expressed shock about a European community that appeared to become ever more African, or as some phrased it, "degenerate", or "wild". White Afrikaners were convinced that the British colonizers would always view them as white outcasts of the British Empire (Giliomee, 2003: 149-150) and their language as a minor and bad dialect of Dutch, calling it "kitchen Dutch" (Kapp, 2010: 110 or

"Hotnot's language"[7] (Scholtz, 1980:49). Afrikaners were therefore generally viewed by the British as their *other*. However, the colonizers viewed the white Afrikaners as "of a higher order" than the indigenous black people and slaves, as can be deduced from the colonial discourse of race purity rooted in the Manichean binary opposition between light and darkness.

After the two wars for independence between the British forces and the two independent Afrikaner Republics (the Free State and the Transvaal or *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*) for freedom from British colonialism and imperialism, the four provinces became a unified British colony in 1910. In 1931, the Statute of Westminster was accepted and South Africa became a dominion of the British Empire. Dubow (2007: 55) argues that a unified South African dominion was "directly shaped and controlled from the metropolis". Because the country was still a British dominion, the interests of the white English population were understood and were obviously still the guiding interests in the country. In 1948, the National Party[8] (NP), consisting of mainly Afrikaans speaking people, came into power. Initially the NP had especially the interests of the white Afrikaans-speaking people at heart and their main objective was to serve the interests of the white Afrikaans speaking group to become the equals of the British settlers' descendants in all spheres of society.

The justification of the advancement of the private interests of white people had its foundation in the nineteenth century in a so-called God-given law, namely that of racial separation and purity, stemming from Eurocentric views on race, culture and nation which viewed the white races as superior (Shohat, 1993: 110; Bhabha, 1985: 153; Young, 1995:9). In this way colonialism, and in the twentieth century apartheid, was justified and viewed as a form of a "missionary nationalism" (Hastings, 1997: 6). Because racial purity was believed to be a law ordained by God, this "law" was unchangeable, justified, and therefore obviously enforceable. Bhabha (1991: 53) states that imperial colonialism was viewed as an education project to bring The Word of God and the Light of Civilization to the colonized countries, and in this case to Africa. Hoskins concurs:

> Eurocentric history deliberately promulgated the myth that Africa was a 'dark continent' replete with cannibals, savages, and inferior, uncivilised, backward, primitive peoples, devoid of knowledge and culture… (Hoskins 1992: 248).

White Afrikaners identified with imperial colonial views and agreed to Eurocentric views on race, culture, and nation. Because they were generally a religious group, white Afrikaners believed that they were "planted" on the African continent to maintain and further enhance "civilization" and to spread the Word of God to uncivilized people. This was explicitly stated by *inter alia* H.F. Verwoerd, former prime minister of the country (1958-1966) (Verwoerd, 1963:xix, xx; Smith, 2004:78). The vicious circle of race discrimination not only continued but also expanded during apartheid. Because the indigenous people were by far the majority, the emphasis of the NP gradually shifted from the advancement of Afrikaner interests to keeping the white population of the country in power, and advancing and serving white socio-political and power interests (Giliomee, 2003: 287, 469, 477-478; Arnold, 2005: 331,726).

In 1961 the country became a Republic under the leadership of the NP. Afrikaners were now free from British colonialism and on an equal footing with their English counterparts. The black people, however, did not receive any such freedom. Loomba's (2005) perspectives on what happened in countries after decolonization are important. She (2005: 16) claims that after decolonization new formations of nationalism in former colonized countries seldom had the interests of all the people of a country at heart. She argued that when a colonized country received its freedom, this freedom was very selectively applied. According to Loomba an elite

group that identified with the colonial views and perspectives took over the role of the *self* and these elite groups in their turn continued to view all the other formally oppressed groups as the *other*. In the case of South Africa, the elite group left behind by imperial colonialism, was the white Afrikaners.

The NP gradually enforced ever more draconian laws to keep the white people in power and to ensure the separation of white and black people. The cornerstone of apartheid was the Population Registration Act (1950) according to which all South Africans were divided into four racial groups based on the colour of their skins, namely whites, blacks, coloureds and Indians (Asians) (Arnold, 2005: 725-727, 334-338; Slabbert, 1999: 21, 50-54). Gradually South Africa came in for more and more criticism by the international community for its apartheid policy. To "soften" the concept of apartheid, the NP invented the slogan, *separate, but equal* (De Klerk, 1991: 65-66) with minor changes to the fate or destiny of the majority of the population.[9]

Adorno's views on history, art and materiality

Adorno (2003d: 96) believes that history is the narrative of what people in power did to their victims. In the same way as Thompson describes an ideology, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: 28-31) argue that in an unfree society power is aimed at the cultural progress of the group in power, regardless of the pain and suffering that is done to the *other* or *das Nichtidentische*. They also state that in cases where there are differences in interests, the interests of *das Nichtidentische* are always denied or ignored. This is why they convincingly claim that Europe has two versions of the same history: the well-known official version of history as documented in textbooks, and an "underground" version from the perspective of the victims (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 231). In his critique on modernity, Adorno states that "[t]he need to let suffering speak ... [has been] the precondition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject" (Adorno, 2003c: 30-31; 1973: 17-18). By giving a voice to suffering, art can play a therapeutic role. Adorno (2004:133, 137-138) explains that all authentic works of art are a form of expression, even when works of art are not recognizable imitations of reality: "... art is expressive when what is objective, subjectively mediated [?] speaks, whether this be sadness, energy, or longing. … [E]xpression is suffering's countenance of artworks" (Adorno, 2004: 146).

Adorno (2004: 191) distinguishes between the *Inhalt* and *Gehalt* of works of art and believes that works of art are historically determined. History is sedimented in the *Inhalt* of works of art, that is the material, and the way in which the artist arranged the material (in Adorno's words, the artist's "constellations" of the material), as well as all other visual form elements (Adorno, 2004: 134; cf. Jarvis, 2002: 105). Therefore works of art do not need to be explicit images of historical events because, as stated, history is sedimented in the *Inhalt* of artworks, that is the material, constellations and form elements that the artist utilizes: "History is the content of artworks. To analyse artworks means no less than to become conscious of the history immanently sedimented in them" (Adorno, 2004: 112).

Adorno regards *Gehalt* as the social truth content of works of art. He (2004: 191-192) claims that social truth resides in the specific negation (German: *bestimmte Negation*) of the untruth of an inhuman society. The *Gehalt* of works of art must be understood as the socially mediated meaning of works of art which comes to the fore in the dialectical relationship between the *Inhalt* and the *Gehalt* of works of art. Because history is sedimented in the material and because the material is taken from reality, albeit in a fragmented way, the artwork becomes a monad – it is autonomous and windowless. According to Adorno (2004: 146-147, 275) art is the

antithesis of society because art has a double character: it is socially determined in its autonomy and at the same time a social phenomenon that absorbs in itself the unsolved tensions in society: "We must reverse the copy theory of realist aesthetics: in a subtle sense reality ought to imitate artworks, not the other way around ... For only what does not fit into this world is true" (Adorno, 2004: 182, 76).

Adorno (2004: 308) uses the metaphor of Leibniz (1646-1716)[10] to explain the relationship between autonomous art and society and transposes this metaphor to artworks:

> Adorno holds that each artwork is a coherent entity constituted by a dynamic force field of meanings. Furthermore, no artwork is reducible to any particular message (unlike, for example, committed art). Yet each is a cipher of society awaiting the appropriate interpretation. Art can be critical both in encouraging praxis which is contrary to socially prescribed experiences … and in drawing attention to the extraordinary in the ordinary (O'Connor, 2000: 240).

Following Kant Adorno emphasizes that a specific function cannot be ascribed to works of art. This notion he puts in a paradoxical way: "Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness" (Adorno, 2004: 297), and "[t]he purposefulness of artworks requires the purposeless" (Adorno, 2004: 134). Function must in this sense be understood in terms of utility.[11] He also follows Kant when he argues that it is often necessary to have access to information about an artwork. Adorno (2004: 253) quotes Benjamin that the "eyes" of the public left their "footprints" on the work of art and that the viewer has to look through all these layers of "footprints" to understand and interpret the work of art. In similar vein Mills (2009: 3) points out that materiality in works of art extends beyond the simple fact of physical matter to broadly encompass all relevant information related to the work's physical existence. She adds that not only are the work's production date and provenance of importance, but also its history and the artist's personal history, as it pertains to the origin of the work and the work's place in the canon of art history. All these aspects are important for experiencing the work aesthetically:

> Kant's critical philosophy would make reflective judgments equivalent to determinant judgments. For this reason, aesthetic judgment is said to be imaginative. ... Aesthetic judgments are subjective, in spite of the fact that they must also have universal validity by which they not only apply to the person making the judgment but to all other persons (De Bolla, 2002: 27).

Reading and interpretation of Writing that fell off the wall (1997)

Willem Boshoff (2009) uses the words of an unknown American-Indian author to explain his inspiration for, and intention with this installation: "At first we had the land and the white man had the Bible. Now we have the Bible and the white man has the land" (Boshoff, 2009). The material the artist uses in this installation, that forms part of the *Inhalt*, consists of fourteen separate standing wooden panels painted white. The panels are placed in two rows of seven panels each, which give the impression of clean, empty white walls. Scattered on the floor all around these panels are wooden blocks also painted white with one word printed in black ink on each block.

Figure 2
Boshoff, W., *Writing that fell off the wall*, (1997), detail,
(source: http://www.Willemboshoff.com).

Each printed word is repeated in Afrikaans as well as in seven European languages, namely English, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, and German. These languages were the official languages during colonialism and apartheid, and were forced upon the oppressed *other* or *das Nichtidentische*. Words such as *Salvation, Perfection, Truth, Identity, Boundary, Order, Faith, Purity, Reason, Destiny, Progress, Ordnung, Razão, Principio, Purité, Identität, Grens, Perfeçión, Geloof, Waarheid* and *Identiteit* form part of the material the artist utilized. All the words on the floor can easily be read.

Figure 3
Boshoff, W. , *Writing that fell off the wall*, (1997), detail,
(source: http://www.Willemboshoff.com).

In line with Mill's views, Boshoff gives the following important *Gehalt* information on his website (Boshoff, 2009) when he states that the white wooden blocks which are scattered on the floor, contain words to reveal several bankrupt ideologies in seven different languages plus Afrikaans.

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: 38; Adorno, 2003c: 23) claim that the language and terminology of the Enlightenment served to offer "uniform security" and "truthful values" as generalized and standardized measurements of order and civilization. This self-assured discourse of the Enlightenment was used by colonial states to oppress people from colonized countries, and arrange Africa and big parts of the rest of the world according to their own needs and interests (Boshoff 2009). The artist (Boshoff 2009) also explains on his website that the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century offered this rhetoric of so-called universal norms to the world. He believes that the most important consumable goods that were to be sold by the colonial states in Africa were ideological in nature. The countries that Boshoff focuses on in this installation that were involved in colonial imperialism, totalitarianism and nationalism are England, Germany, Portugal, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Spain and South Africa. By scattering the ideologically

laden concepts on the floor in the official languages of these countries, Boshoff conceptually reflects upon the bankruptcy of their policies by using their own languages. The artist further degraded the ideologies of colonialism and apartheid by using words in the official languages of these countries. The installation offers a walkabout tour of this philosophical "consumerism" which is now no longer in demand: "Its pathways grant a look at how idealistic assurances that were once proudly offered for sale by the pioneers, are disqualified" (Boshoff 2009). The artist conceptually forces the viewer to look down upon them to be able to read the words. Looking down upon someone or something implies disdain and disillusionment. Therefore, this act of literally looking down upon is conceptually metaphoric for the way in which people have to view and evaluate colonialism and apartheid. The artist, by the way in which he arranged the constellation of his material and the form elements, emphasizes that there is no longer any room for such words in the public sphere and on walls of buildings. In an artistic way, he confronts the so-called elite and intellectuals during colonialism and apartheid to account for the consequences of their actions. He furthermore confronts the viewer with the untruth, falseness and fleetingness of this so-called everlasting, "cast in stone," solid, generalized norms and values. These Western and European norms, cultures and values were once promised in the name of "progress", "order" and "prosperity" to all the people of colonized countries. The artist conceptually represents these so-called solid certainties and beliefs in the modern rhetoric in "writing that fell off the wall":

> A wise crack then, not the writing on the wall but the writing that fell off it. ... Fallen language. The grand abstractions of the Enlightenment come down to earth with a bump. The fallen terms ... hold your attention for a spell, but the sheer profusion is discouraging. ... Wandering through this rubble of meaning, your eye snagged by one term after another, you might be gripped by a disconcerting sensation ... You are standing in a ruined book. The walls are pages that have been rattled until their printed contents came tumbling down. The work is a book writ large (Vladislavic 2005: 6).

During apartheid discrimination against the so-called *other* continued. In this process indigenous people had been displaced and were viewed as the inferior *Nichtidentische*. Because the indigenous people were viewed as divergent from the superior *self* as the norm, they were deprived of their full enjoyment and practice of their identity, culture, heritage and language (cf. Said, 1995:89; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 2006). With *Writing that fell off the wall,* the artist got even with the bankrupt ideologies of colonialism and apartheid that contributed to the polarization of the South African population and the suffering of millions of people due to these ideologies. Ideologically laden concepts in so-called superior languages are now scattered on the floor in a disordered fashion around the clean white "walls" as useless and worthless writing that fell off the wall. By utilizing his material in a modernistic fragmented way, and through the constellation of elements such as painted wooden panels and words printed on white wooden blocks, the artist has succeeded in exposing the social antagonisms inherent to the reality of the suffering of subordinate people at the hands of people in power. At the same time, the artist has conceptually revealed the ideal of a society in which "suffering is foreign to knowledge" (Adorno 2004:24).The dialectical relation between the *Inhalt* and the *Gehalt* of this installation brings to light the social truth content and the socially mediated meaning of the installation.

Conclusion

Boshoff, apart from being the creator of the installation, has also functioned as both a critic and a reviewer of *Writing that Fell Off the Wall* because the installation represents a negative evaluation of colonialism and apartheid and exposed them as inhuman ideologies. At the same time, the artist is also an activist, because by his own artistic acts, he consciously degraded

these previously "superior" languages and concepts during colonialism and apartheid, namely English, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, German, and Afrikaans by throwing these "important" and "meaningful" words on the floor (cf. Vladisclavic 2005: 6). Therefore, it could be argued that through this act, the artist in an artistic way demanded explanations from those previously imperialist and totalitarian regimes. The *Gehalt* or truth content of *Writing that Fell Off the Wall* leaves a clear message, namely that the time for the following of ideological ideas that caused pain and suffering to the so-called *das Nichtidentische* has passed.

Notes

1   This article is based on a paper delivered at the 7th Annual Conference of the *South African Journal for Art Historians*, 7-8 June 2013 hosted by the School of Language, Media and Culture, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Dr. Swanepoel is a senior lecturer in History of Art at the North-West Univeristy, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa.

2   This webpage is no longer available on the internet. It has been replaced with an updated webpage, 2009.

3   This is in contrast to ancient mythologies that belonged to the religious sphere (Marschall, 2005).

4   Manichean binary oppositions referred to the doctrines of the Persian prophet Mani (Circa 216-276) based upon the conflict between light and dark (JanMohamed 2006: 19).

5   Said (1995:78, 89) in his postcolonial critique from an Oriental perspective, uses the terms *Occident* (self) and *Orient* (other).

6   White people often called the indigenous Khoikhoi "Hotnots", an abusive name (Scholtz, 1980:49-51).

7   The First Freedom War (1880-1881) between the two independent Afrikaner Republics (The Free State and the Transvaal or *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*) ended in defeat for the British Empire, while the Boer Republics lost the Second Freedom War (1899-1902) generally known amongst Afrikaners as the *Anglo-Boer War* (Kapp 2002: 273-281; Pretorius 1999: 404-411; Spies, (2001)

8   The National Party came into power for the first time in 1924 in coalition with the "Labour" (Worker's) Party and again in 1948 after a merger between the Purified National Party (*Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party*) and the Refounded National Party (*Herstigte Nasionale Party*) (Worden 1994: 91-92; Giliomee 2003: 376; Welsh & Spence 2007: 282).

9   The white, dominantly Afrikaner National Party ruled the country until its democratic independence in 1994 when all the people of the country could for the first time cast their votes.

10   According to Leibniz monads are individual unities, and each monad is an individual entity with its own internal dynamics. Monads are also windowless. This means they do not affect one another, but each reflects the universe from its own individual perspective (O'Connor 2000: 240).

11   In his dialectic of art and society – in the radicalization of, and critique upon Kant (1724-1804), Hegel (1770-1831) and Marx (1818-1883) – Adorno (2004:174-183) states that art can act as critique upon the *status quo* (Belluigi, 2001:2). The truth content (*Gehalt*) of works of art comes to the fore in the way in which an artwork challenges current states of affairs, while at the same time, Adorno, in his negative utopia suggests how problems in society can be solved and changed for the better.

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