



## Aftershocks: Psychotechnics in the wake of apartheid

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*I watched the passing colors intently and noticed red passing a few times [...] Then I reacted and was surprised when I heard that I had been entrapped.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

What we at first found intriguing about Simon Gush's *Red*, what the documentary and the installation seemed to mutually conjure, was the Mandela car as a body to be mourned.<sup>2</sup> Mourning recurred as a latent theme through the documentary in the interviews with the workers at the Mercedes Benz factory – as Phillip Groom described Mandela's words on receiving the car, he stressed that its colour 'represented the many people that have spilled blood in this country to liberate it, to bring it to liberation', a notion the workers seemingly anticipated, as at the factory the Mandela car was, as Groom put it, 'literally carried', like a coffin, not simply a 'labour of love', but a work of mourning.<sup>3</sup> Attuned to this, the shell of Gush's reconstruction of the car body installed within the Goethe-Institut gallery in Johannesburg and then outside the Ann Bryant gallery in East London seemed to lie like a cadaver on an autopsy trolley (see image in the editor's introduction to this issue).

At the time of *Red Assembly*, which asked participants to consider the ways in which art pressures historical readings, it seemed to us that *Red* placed itself in relation to scholarship on mourning as a threshold condition of post-apartheid sociality.<sup>4</sup> The Mandela car seemed to present itself as an object of melancholic loss, not an encasing of an already lost object, but, as we argued in our paper at *Red Assembly*, which leaned on Giorgio Agamben's reading of melancholia, as an object shot through by 'the paradox of the intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object'.<sup>5</sup> The assemblage of the car, we thought, was an anticipatory act that conjured a post-apartheid social formation as lost so as to bring it into being, an act attended, we stressed, by rivalry; for while the workers interviewed in the documentary spoke of the euphoria of assembling the car, it was in fact only after its delivery that worker solidarity fragmented and things in the factory went awry. It was, then, we argued, in relation to this fragmentation that Gush's reproduction of the Mandela car, torn apart, should be understood as a questioning of the official reconciliatory narrative of the gift these workers offered.



































Verwoed, Hendrik Frensch. "A method for the experimental production of emotions." *The American Journal of Psychology*, 37, 3 (1926): 357-371.