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TELLING STORIES: A Critical examination of the works of Tracey Emin (b1963-) and Claudette Schreuders (b1973-).

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts by Dissertation.

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Abstract

This research paper examines the ways in which the autobiographical impulse is constructed in selected artworks of Tracey Emin (b1963-) and Claudette Schreuders (b1973-). It is situated within contemporary discourses around notions of the self, namely postmodernist, feminist and post colonialist frameworks. This critical discussion of notions of the self, as evidenced in these selected artworks, leads into discourses of Authenticity, of Histories, personal and collective and of the role Identity formation plays in the performing self. In conducting this research I have drawn on a wide range of theoretical frameworks including philosophy, psychoanalysis and literary theory, including magical realism.

The first part of my study presents the theoretical frameworks of Authenticity, History and Identity regarding the autobiographical impulse. The second section of this paper examines the selected works of Emin and Schreuders. I chose these two artists because of their different strategies in performing themselves rather than their similarities, which allows for an interrogation of a broader framework of contemporary artistic practices. The concluding chapter examines my practical artwork during the period of my Masters degree. My work comes from an autobiographical base and I create a 'self-portrait' through my accumulation, production and display of objects. My exhibition took the form of an installation whereby I created an uncomfortable atmosphere through various methods including stimulating the olfactory sense in a predominant way.

Declaration

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

_____day of _____2007

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"Ah nowadays, sincerity's the thing. Once you can fake that, you've got it made."

[Groucho Marx, cited in Pippin 2005.]

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TELLING STORIES: A Critical examination of the works of Tracey Emin (b1963-) and Claudette Schreuders (b1973-)

Introduction

Everyone has a life story to tell, some get to tell theirs. Author Oliver Sacks believes that, "each of us constructs and lives a narrative and this narrative is us" [Sacks in Strawson 2004:13]. Performing your narrative or life story requires agency, a language and an audience. My research paper explores the genre of Autobiography and offers theoretical and philosophical frameworks for this genre under three specific categories, namely Authenticity, History and Identity. These theories are then linked to my investigation of the role of visual autobiographical narrative or story telling in selected art works of the British artist Tracey Emin (b1963-) and the South African artist Claudette Schreuders (b1973-). The last section of this study then discusses the practical component for the Masters degree, namely my exhibition **postbloodypast** and links the various theories to this work.

Storytelling, of a personal nature or otherwise is a completely integrated part of living. In particular relating stories about, or connected to, our lives is a very important part of our lives. Hoffman [1996: xix] argues that:

We need stories, visual and verbal, fiction and non-fiction.
His/story, her/story, persons' stories are all part of discovering
who and where we are, where we've come from and where we
are going, individually and collectively.

We need stories about life to reflect on our existence, we can make more sense of a life when we narrate it. White [1980:1] points out that:

So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form
of narrative for any report of the way things really happened,
that narrativity could appear problematic only in a culture in
which it was absent.

The word "narrate" has its etymology from the Latin word *gnarus*, which means knowing and *narro* which means to relate or tell. To narrate is *telling* from a point of knowing. To narrate also implies that there is a narrator, a knowing narrator. Autobiography, or self-writing, first had its official recognition as a word in the late eighteenth century. In 1786, William Taylor [cited in Treadwell 2005:3] the Norwich essayist wrote, in response to the use of the word 'self-biography' by D'Israeli:

We are doubtful whether the latter word ['Self-biography'] be legitimate. It is not very usual in English to employ hybrid words partly Saxon and partly Greek: yet autobiography would have seemed pedantic.

In 1809, thirteen years later, D'Israeli used the word, 'autobiography' with much doubt about its legitimacy. Self-writing appears in many guises, namely memoirs, diaries, letters, autobiographical poems, travel journals and personal narratives posing as fiction. In contemporary discourse, the word 'autobiographer' has come up for scrutiny because it has been pointed out that biographer refers incorrectly to the narration of *one* life, whereby the understanding today is that the average life can not be best explained as one life but rather as *multiple* discontinuous elements. Today, not only the word but also the genre of autobiography elicits much enquiry into its legitimacy as it is not a fixed or stable genre and its forms are numerous [Brosman 2005:96]. The term auto suggests a unified and autonomous entity rather than a being in context and formed and fashioned by society, history or ideology [Steiner and Young 2004:15]. Amidst all the doubt autobiography has however become an increasingly popular genre, quite remarkable in the audience it generates, thus fuelling authors' desires to make more work of this kind. It has also become a genre taken up by a much younger narrator than in the past.

In visual art, storytelling can play a part in the conception, production and the reception of art works. Throughout the history of art, from the earliest rock paintings, narrative has played a major role. An example of narrative that dominated medieval art is the life and suffering of Christ. Art was almost indistinguishable from its narrative meaning. In the 1950's and 60's modernists largely rejected narrative in art. During this time, heavily

influenced by American art critic Clement Greenberg, art veered towards the 'purely optical' [Morley 2003: 16]. However since then, in postmodernist times narrative in art has returned strongly in many guises. Visual Narrative can occur in painting, sculpture, architecture, in the digital arena, cinema, conceptual, installation art (in fact in all genres of art) and includes a wide range of stories from religious, allegorical or rhetorical, historical and personal. Today, digital narrative, whereby stories are told using technology over the Internet, in computer or DVD games, in cinema and in projections in art galleries and museums occupies a major position. The enquiry of this paper does not however focus on the lineage of narrative in visual arts or with all the genres associated with narrative, but rather concerns itself with personal narratives, the autobiographical and in particular regarding its relevance to selected works of Emin, Schreuders and myself.

"A large group of artworks can be usefully classified as narratives. These are works that tell stories. It is a far from easy task to set down criteria for membership in this genus" [Kania 2005: 47]. This research does not intend to merely attach a literary term onto visual art but rather, explore how narrative unfolds in art making processes through the works of the two autobiographical artists I have chosen. In postmodernist times referencing previous artworks in artworks either through pastiche or parody has become a common language, so often a history of art is essential to reading an artwork. Narrative or stories may exist in many guises in artworks; these are not always easy to read, so background knowledge is often essential to reading an artwork. Mieke Bal proposes that the space narrative occupies in a work of art needs to be explored and made specific. She asks "how can visual works of art specifically sculptures that resist coherent figurative readings, tell stories?" [Bal 2003:3]. Texts or theories supporting artworks can play a pivotal role in reading art today. To elucidate on the concept of "reading" an image, or object, Peter Mason in Reading New World Bodies [2003] explains that the primary 'literal' meaning of reading is with reference to the written word, but, in recent years with the notion of a culture as an ensemble of texts, the implication is that if we can write culture, we must be able to read it. The idea of culture being an ensemble of texts would include both imagery and words and we are inextricably linked to both. According to Bal,

one could then argue, that visual imagery could be read, since they are "texts precisely in that they constitute a network of discursive practices, albeit visually shaped" [Bal cited in Mason 2003: 149].

The first part of my research examines the theoretical framework for autobiography. The dialect of autobiography prompts a variety of discourses. For this research I have chosen to examine three discourses regarding their specific relation to Autobiography; namely Authenticity or self as a construct; ideas around Identity (both personal and national) and notions of History. This section is subsequently divided into these discourses under these three chapters headings. The three discourses will be investigated within themes of postmodernism but will include ideologies associated with feminism and post colonialism, related to notions of autobiography. The reason for the inclusion of the frameworks of feminism and post colonialism related to the theme of self-writing is because autobiography is essentially at loggerheads with postmodernism. Mary Warnock's working definition of postmodernism denies the authoritarian "I" and insists that postmodernism is " a theory based on the belief that there can be no such thing as a single, or even a properly privileged, point of view" [Warnock cited in Brosman 2005: 97]. Brosman [2005:100] points out that:

in its most radical version, at least, postmodernism would seem to exclude any meaningful self-writing whereas feminists and postcolonialists are obsessed with finding or creating unique voices and forms for their particular concerns or identifying examples in the past.

In the second part of this paper I examine selected works of Emin and Schreuders, both from a formal and an autobiographical point of view. Tracey Emin (b1963-) is an acclaimed British artist who works in a variety of media including installation art, monoprints, embroidery, media performances, performance art, painting and video. Emin shamelessly confesses very personal aspects of her life through her artworks, and this has generated huge controversy surrounding her status as one of Britain's most popular artists. She has strategically situated herself as one of today's voices in the art world,

fuelling the popularity of personal narratives. Claudette Schreuders (b1973-) is a highly successful Afrikaans South African artist who works in the medium of carved and painted wooden figures. Through her wooden sculptures, Schreuders tells stories about her life; these stories include people close to her, people she observes in her daily life, or even people she just reads about. [Hossack interview 2006] Whilst Schreuders is an autobiographical artist, her work straddles biography as well. Schreuders' stories stand solemnly contained in their wooden form. She does not loudly confess intimate details about her personal life,¹ and unlike Emin does not sensationalize her life and make herself the dominant subject of her art work. Schreuders by her own admission says, "I am interested in telling stories, but they must be quiet stories" [Schreuders in Brodie 2002: 4]. The processes she uses to create these 'quiet' stories are ironically not so quiet, namely a chainsaw and chisels.

I selected to discuss in depth only one work each of Emin and Schreuders, this selection being specifically for the autobiographical or storytelling content of these works. Both of these works are also an appropriate choice in representing the type of works both of these artists produce. I also situate these works in historical and contemporary artistic practises, as this furthers the story telling theme of this paper by linking the stories of Emin and Schreuders to the stories of other practising artists past and present. Throughout the examination of their work I also connect the philosophical and theoretical frameworks of autobiography to their selected works.

Emin and Schreuders' works both fit well, in different ways, into the theoretical framework of this research. Emin fits well into a theoretical framework of what post modernism, post colonialism and feminism offer to notions of autobiography. Regarding postmodernist theory, Emin's artworks in which she reveals or *invents* herself correlates with the idea of the self as a *produced* and *performed* identity. Emin also proves an extremely useful subject through which to explore notions of feminism and post colonialism whereby the expression of "I" as a unique, individual voice is accepted and encouraged. Although the sculptures of Schreuders belong to an age-old tradition of

¹ **The Boyfriend** 2005 may however be seen as a personal narrative.

wood carving, concepts driving her work fit into a postmodernist framework. She displays personal narratives through her work by appropriating a traditional form of sculpture. Schreuders, sees herself as a postmodernist artist and quotes McEvelly with whom she aligns her postmodern practices. McEvelly, [cited in Schreuders1997: 18] sees the postmodernist project as being able to:

focus one's particularity with as much clarity,
wholeness and integrity as one can, while still finding
a way to inject it into international discourse: a way of
making it readable or relevant to receptors of other ethnicities.

The Third section of my paper describes and discusses my practical work over the three-year period of this Masters study. In this section I link the imagery of my numerous threads of unravelled thoughts to a description of them in words, thereby offering an explanation of the autobiographical content in my practical work. The exhibition of this work was held at the Wits Substation in October 2005 and was titled **postbloodypast**. In **postbloodypast** I explored present day South Africa by remembering the past. The exhibition took the form of an installation artwork and used a carnivalesque² approach to deal with my intense, harrowing but hopeful outlook towards present day and past South Africa.

The final section of this paper offers a summary and conclusion to this dissertation. In this section I discuss possible interpretations of the meaning of the title *Telling Stories*.

² Carnivalesque is a term introduced to literary theory by the mid-twentieth century Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin referring to the challenge of authority instigated by the temporary reversal of social order.[Bowers 2004: 129]

Part One

The Autobiographical Impulse

1.1 Autobiography and Authenticity.

Everyone telling their life story does it their way; there are usually distortions and exaggerations. Strawson proposes that the telling and re-telling of ones past will automatically lead to changes, enhancement and shifts away from the 'facts' of ones life, but that this is not always strictly intentional and that not everyone is an "incorrigible self-fabulist" [Strawson 2004:15]. Memory is fallible and by definition is selective and exists not only in the realm of attempted recovery but in the process of suppression [Brink 1998]. Some biographers or autobiographers do however intentionally fabricate or fictionalise events in the 'name of truth' to serve narrative function. In the realm of visual narratives this intentional strategy has been employed, amongst other reasons, to reveal to an audience that they should be wary of claims of absolute authenticity. The genre of autobiography, as opposed to the genre of fiction, does however *imply* a truth claim. In autobiography the speaking subject and the subject spoken about are presumed to be the same person. There is a "truth " claim *by* the subject and *of* the spoken subject. Simone de Beauvoir who published four volumes of memoirs, admits that writing her work was governed by "an ethics of truth" [De Beauvoir cited in Brosman 2005:105]. Implicit in theories framing self-writing is however the awareness that truth is a naive concept. There is an attempt to convey a sense of truth and even a *belief* that one is "close" to the truth, but it is inevitable the work bears omissions, emphasis, interpretations, judgments, fallibility of memory and embellishments.

It is widely accepted that in self-writing, there will always be an element of inaccuracy; contents of a life may be sketched hurriedly, out of order, out of context. Mary McCarthy, when referring to her autobiography, claims that on one hand her story is the truth because it really happened, but "on the other hand the fictions she creates to cover the gaps in history and memory have come to fit so neatly into her narrative that they attain the status of remembered fact" [Gilmore 1994:69]. Strawson supports this by offering that it is a consequence of "the neurophysiological process of laying down

memories that every studied conscious recall of past events brings an alteration” [Strawson 2004:15]. By her own confession McCarthy goes on to admit that her autobiography, “is an example of "storytelling"; I arranged actual events so as to make 'a good story' out of them” [Cited in Gilmore 1994: 69/70]. McCarthy who was orphaned at an early age lacks a significant authority to oppose or confirm her early childhood memories. In her text, she manipulates the reader into the role of interlocutor, forced to witness and to acknowledge the fallibility of memory and bow down to the idea that "the telling of lies is inextricable from the writing of memories" [Gilmore 1994:71]. Autobiography may end up in fictitious narratives but it could be said that it does so with only the best intentions.

A further complication to the truth factor in autobiography is that the post-modern "self " is believed mostly to be a social construction, a body dependent on culture that is not a unified, stable, finite or final concept [Smith 1994:271]. Any attempt at presenting the truth of a unified whole is deemed naive. As we know theories of the self have changed over the years, a ‘self’ described in postmodernist theory is a dynamic subject that changes over time. W.J.T. Mitchell emphatically states, “I take as constitutive the notion that human beings are not uniform, unified, singular subjects with transparent access to themselves" [Mitchell cited in Raney 2003:56]. A definable identity is an improbability, therefore an authentic autobiography is almost impossible to capture. Sigmund Freud, writing in 1936, claimed that " biographical truth cannot be achieved... or even if it were, it could not be set out " [Freud cited in Brosman 2005:98]. Truth, in postmodernism (and its component, post-structuralism) is denounced, by many³ as an illusion and static notions of meaning are widely disbelieved [Sarup 1993:90].

Why present oneself at all? Presenting lived experience is associated with agency and power, as lived experience is difficult to dispute. In her artworks Emin refers to her past as lived experience.⁴ There is a certain authority attached to speaking on lived experiences. It becomes very difficult for others to say, ‘it wasn't true’ or ‘it didn't

³ For examples, Michel Foucault and Jean Francoise Lyotard following philosophies of Nietzsche.

⁴ Schreuders work that is discussed in part two is based on herself but she does not reference it as ‘lived experience’.

happen like that!' There is subjectivity and a perception attached to the way 'things happened', and in this there is an accepted notion of 'the truth'. Edward Said, has said of autobiography that it is "a modest refuge provided by subjectivity" [Said quoted in Porter 2002:4]. How one chooses to tell one's life is the prerogative of the author/artist who feels safe in expressing it as the truth. It is but a modest refuge because it cannot encompass an absolute truth, it can only be how one sees ones life, or how one want to see ones life.

Confessing aspects of a private world in public automatically has a performative aspect whereby the self-presented becomes the self-projected. When presenting oneself one is aware of an audience. That awareness brings about self-consciousness. Porter points out that autobiography implies a performance, an awareness of a performing self [Porter 2002:xx]. In his autobiography-Barthes par Barthes(1975), Barthes claims that the speaking subject is always aware of an audience. Barthes describes an inexplicable link between posing and not posing, between the self and the image of ones self. Barthes writes " All I look like is other photographs of myself, and this to infinity: no one is ever anything but the copy of a copy" [Barthes cited in Gilmore 1994:194].

Even if we try to present ourselves 'accurately' we can never really see ourselves accurately, we see ourselves only as a mirror image.⁵ We also only see or perceive ourselves as reflected in other peoples' eyes. The self, if exposed will always be perceived, once the self knows it is being perceived it is impossible for it not to become self aware. When one begins to express oneself we are conscious of an outward persona. The self becomes a presentation. Jay [Ashley et al 1994:195] in re-asserting Barthes position on posing, states:

The problem Barthes's remarks on posing reveals, is that the so called profound or essential self can never be represented as such. Indeed the very nature of this essential self becomes paradoxical : its subjectivity is linked to a notion of authenticity, yet any image of that self is a sign of its objectification,

⁵ The discussion on the image as reflection is explored in more depth in the following chapter on Autobiography and Identity.

and hence its in authenticity. The authentic self, in Barthes terms, is finally an impossibility, for it would be a self freed from the process of becoming an object.

Barthes [1976:10] enunciates further on the idea of presenting the ‘authentic self’, here, with regard to photography:

Now once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing", I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image...I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing, but this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality. ... What I want in short is that my (mobile)image buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, ... should always coincide with my (profound) "self".

With the acknowledgement that it is difficult to express the whole ‘truth’ about oneself numerous attempts at it still abound. It is an empowering process to be able to narrate your life. To do this requires one to be versed in a language. It would be very difficult to explain yourself without language. The manufacturers of autobiographies employ different artistic methods or languages to produce their stories. One such method is narrative structure. This varies in different artworks and is not always linear and does not always have a beginning, middle and end. One of the accepted strategies of narrative which is used in autobiographical works, is rhetoric, which manipulates a language for effect, this may obscure the truth. In a rhetoric use of language, ‘lies’ are conscious additions to produce an effect. Whether the alterations are there to produce an effect or whether they are there to construct a preferred identity, only the author knows.

The genre of autobiography is currently attracting much publicity about its "claim" to authenticity. One such example is the recent controversy surrounding the ‘truth’ in the work of Martin Frey’s A Million Little Pieces (2006) now called a “a semi-fictional” memoir [truthiness –wikipedia]⁶. Frey, when accused of claiming inauthentic events as the truth, responded by saying that, “memoirists had a right to draw on upon their

⁶ For more information see url in bibliography
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness#Truthiness_and_the_James_Frey_controversy.

memories in addition to documents, in creating their written work” [James Frey [o]]. Traditionally in literary autobiographies it *has* been a defining principle to attempt to convey the truth; Some visual artists⁷ however have intentionally presented inauthentic autobiographies as deliberate strategies thereby revealing an awareness that autobiographies can be (art)ificial and warning that visual autobiographies should be viewed with discretion. Often the aim of these artists is to expose the fictional aspect of biography or autobiography. Art can never really be real life’ but a re-presentation or enactment of real life. An autobiographical artist attempting to tell the truth may at the very least present a version of the truth. Alternatively if the truths pertain to personal history the artist may believe that the presentation *is* the truth. There are obvious differences to being an accused, a lawyer, a defendant or a witness, in a legal matter and to being an artist. A requirement in a court of law is to tell the truth. An artist may choose to tell a story based on historical events, and fictionalize the story somewhat through its formal presentation to create a subjective presentation of the purported historical events. There is an intention of action that purports to some kind of authenticity within this activity. Claiming artistic license is something not uncommon in artistic practise.

It follows that autobiographical artwork should not be judged for its truth-value alone, but enjoyed for its narrative content, visual expression thereof and its exposé as to what ‘truths’ are for people other than yourself, or truths you may not have considered prior to this reception of them. Breyten Bretenbach [cited in Sienaert 2001:105] speaks of truth and the creative process stating that:

The creative act, ideally is ethical: naked as close as possible to ‘truth’ in experience and observation, carrying its recognition and acceptance of responsibility. However, it does not necessarily conform to the constructs and discourses of public morality; in fact in order to be effective (heightening the awareness of textures) it will probably challenge these comforts.

Fuelling that concept, Kieran [2005:127] argues that:

⁷ For more information see artists Christian Boltanski and Sophie Calle, these artists expose the fictional nature of biography or autobiography. See Bibliography Steiner and Yang 2004.

The mistake made by most people who subscribe to the notion that truth matters in art is to over emphasize the extent to which it does so, as if the most important factor in evaluating a work concerned whether it was true to life in some fundamental respect... but much else besides is just as fundamental... Is what is conveyed worth taking seriously? Is it an intelligible way of perceiving or conceiving of its subject matter? Any work of art that stands up to this kind of critical examination is a good work indeed.

1.2 Autobiography and Identity.

Autobiographical artworks reference the identity of their producer in a way one cannot ignore. Narrating ones own life may speak one into existence or affirm ones existence but it also enables one to create or fabricate ones existence [Ashley, et al 1994:73]. Recent discussions of autobiographical writings make reference to autobiography as being in the field of identity construction rather than revelation. Identity today is seen as constantly changing and regenerating itself; to write or record an autobiography today is like writing your own identity [Steiner and Yang 2004: 15-16]. Reflecting on ones own life and expressing this reflection is an empowering process whereby an understanding can be reached of how an identity is produced [Ashley,et al 1994:73]. In this chapter I focus on notions of Identity of the producer of autobiographical artworks, and directly following this I investigate notions of identity of the consumer of these artworks. Often an artwork is as much about the audience as it is about the artist.

French psychoanalyst Lacan has done extensive research on identity formation. Lacan illustrates that it is impossible for the 'I' to be experienced without the context of a discourse. Sienaert [2001:47] explains the concept of Lacan's so called mirror stage when he states::

An infant observing himself for the first time in a mirror will erroneously assume that he recognizes himself in the mirror image. To Lacan this is a case of misrecognition since the mirror image is merely a reflection, a likeness of the subject. Nevertheless this

image is functional, given that within the interplay between the subject (holding the mirror) and the object (reflected in the mirror) the establishment of identity takes place.

Following Lacan one can ascertain that misrecognition is essential for the establishment of identity. Lacan's work has strived to denounce the commonly held idea that the ego is identified with the self. Lacan's theory contradicts the Cartesian view of 'I think therefore I am', and is better replaced by 'I doubt therefore I am' [Mitchell in Raney 2003:56]. Doubting who you are and reaching an understanding of how much of you is constructed out of an external identity formed by language, society and culture, is in keeping with postmodernist theories.

Reflecting on oneself always turns the subject into an object. When we look in the mirror, or introspectively, we see a 'look' [Sarup 2003:12]. We see a shape and a form, a 'look'. Lacan states that observing oneself in a mirror localizes the image of oneself in an exterior [Lacan cited in Steiner and Yang 2004:15]. Autobiography is an attempt to represent or explain oneself in physical material other than one's own physicality. If identification of oneself is based on misrecognition then a presentation of oneself furthers implicates the idea of misrecognition and misrepresentation becomes an ironic concept. Leigh Gilmore proposes that autobiography creates "a crisis in the hierarchy of autobiographical identities, for it is the autobiographer who becomes the site of meaning in this activity as producer of meaning and organizer of knowledge" [Gilmore cited in Ashley et al 1994:7].

Who is this speaking 'I'? With what and whom does one identify oneself with? There is the "person who says I and the I that is not a person but that is the function of language" [Gilmore cited in Ashley et al 1994:6]. Lacan postulates that the use of metaphor in language has enabled words to signify something quite different from their meanings. There is also the assumption that the self *can* be disclosed in language visual or literary. [Tambling in Porter 2002:67] An autobiography or autobiographical artwork can never be "a life" it is a story *of* a life, an allusion to a life.

Writing an autobiography enables an understanding to be reached of the relationships through which identity is produced. "Seeing oneself as someone else, is inherent in the process of creating any autobiography" [Steiner and Yang 2004:16]. Identity is constantly in flux as it generates and regenerates itself; one redefines oneself through the process of autobiography. Artists may choose to use this awareness as process or product in their artworks for the purpose of effect. A lack of authenticity in the construction of an identity for an effect does not imply a weakness in the artwork. The increasingly popular genre of autobiography has re-fuelled discussions around the search for identity. Weintraub offers a definition of the 'proper form' of autobiography as the self-conscious search for individuality guided by the questions: Who am I." [Ashley et al 1994:74] Lahr, however, points out that trying to describe yourself, or write yourself into existence does not necessarily have to imply knowing yourself, he goes on to say "to be human is not to know yourself" [Lahr in Brosman 2005:97].

Breyten Breytenbach defines identity as "the ability to renew oneself and to keep moving" [Breytenbach cited in Sienaert 2001:89]. He sees the creative processes of writing and painting as having the same function. Theories of 'the self' have changed over the years; a 'self' described in post-modern terms is a dynamic subject that changes over time. Our lives are often filled with contradictions, ambivalent thoughts and feelings we cannot always pinpoint. Some artists explore fictional roles of themselves⁸, by which they assume identities to portray themselves (or aspects of themselves), others try to perform themselves from a perceived authentic position. The performing self reveals her/himself to an audience and therefore is judged and looked at.

Identity of an audience

In this chapter I focus on the notion of an audience of an artwork, because stories, if narrated, will always involve a reader or audience. Visual Autobiography, making public

⁸ Examples of these artists include Jeff Koons, Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman. [Autobiography2004 Steiner et al Pgs51-67]

that which is private, invites an audience. This chapter offers some theoretical frameworks for the notion of an audience.

The autobiographical impulse implies going public. Artists' offer an audience a point of reflection. Letting viewers into a personal narrative, attracts an audience based on their responsiveness to the work. Who is doing the looking at the artwork alters the position of the work. Dilman proposes that the artist has something to convey and that where there is art, there is an audience to whom art says or means something. A work of art calls for an audience, an audience that understands its particular language. The work of art is directed at an audience, so the artist creates an audience so to speak [Dilman 2004:193]. Reading an artwork involves understanding; understanding usually takes place from a receptive audience, those willing or wanting to understand. We are receptive to images that speak to us. Understanding is dependent on many variables that include among others language, culture, gender, age, history, geography, philosophy and psychology. "Understanding is always from the point of view of the person who understands". [Gadamer in Wolff 1997/8:99]

Damien Hirst⁹ in his book, I want to Spend the Rest Of My Life Everywhere, With Everyone, One to One, Always Forever, Now (1977) states "I want the viewer to do a lot of work and feel uncomfortable. They should be made to feel responsible for their own view of the world rather than look at an artists view and be critical of it" [Hirst 1997:16]. An artist who is prepared to take risks and voice things others are afraid too, risks being ridiculed or criticized. The audience plays a safer role. Hirst is asking the audience to acknowledge their own feelings whilst viewing difficult work, rather than just ridicule the artist. An audience is able to partly conceal their identity because they are able to discuss it amongst themselves or just reflect on the work, in general, make quieter statements than the artist.

The audience or readers of the work unpack their own narratives when they stand in front of a work. Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) refers to the audience and the artist as two

⁹ Hirst is a very successful yBA or young British Artist, the group that Emin is often associated with.

poles responsible in the production of an artwork, "the pole of the one who makes the work and the pole of the one who looks at it" [Duchamp cited in Cabanne 1971:70]. He gives the audience as much importance as the artist. Duchamp [ibid: 94] attempts to explain what happens when one looks at an artwork:

One stores up in oneself such a language of tastes, good or bad, that when one looks at something, if that something isn't an echo of yourself then you do not even look at it. But I try anyway I try to leave my old baggage behind.

The French artist Christian Boltanski goes as far as to say 'there is no such thing as an autobiography' [Boltanski cited in Steiner and Yang 2004:15]. He believes that the autobiographer and the reader share common experiences, the difference being in that the producer of the work is manifesting these experiences in public. He argues that 'the really interesting autobiographies are those that speak not of the author but of every reader' [ibid]. Another point of view is that we have as much to learn from people we do not identify with as those we do. Nancy Miller proposes that reading the lives of other people with whom we do not identify, has as much to tell us, (if not more) about our lives as the lives with which we do" [Miller 2002:xv].

Duchamp re-enforces the importance of the role of the audience. Duchamp [cited in Cabanne1997: 202] believes:

the artist is not the only one who performs an act of creation, for it is the spectator who establishes contact between the work and the outside world, by deciphering and interpreting its underlying distinctiveness, and in this way bringing its own contribution to the creative process.

Whether in the performance of self, identities are revealed or produced, a perceptive audience is aware that this is a shifting identity. There is no static unified sense of self; the idea of identifying or defining yourself or your life with a narrow definition is unfeasible. It follows then that an audience's identity is shifting too, how one perceives

oneself at different periods in ones life changes; an audience may also change depending on different geographical or cultural positions. We will see in the artwork of Emin how even the work can shift¹⁰. The work itself, the producer and the consumer of the works can be seen in a state of becoming.

1.3 Autobiography and Notions of History

This section deals with notions of History in Autobiography. Autobiography portrays an event within a time period in the past. Autobiography is therefore by implication associated with history. Whether it is personal or political history an understanding of the present is gained by an investigation of the past. Hegel believed that any present political constitution couldn't be fully understood without an understanding of the past [Hegel in White 1980/81:12]. In this section I briefly discuss, within the broad framework of postmodernist theory, theories of history, and then apply these notions of history to the genre of autobiography.

History, in postmodernist theory, has become very contemporary; it is a topical discussion constantly in revision. We no longer speak of a history of a country or individual but histories. Inherent in the process of historiography is narrative content. Postmodernism may seem to imply that historical writers are free to suggest any presentation of the past, but history *is* governed by an ethics of truth. Hayden White offers that History belongs to the "discourse of the real, as against the discourse of the imaginary or the discourse of desire" [1980/81:19]. Implicit in the idea of history is the implication of truth. Due to the implications of postmodern philosophy, the problems associated with notions of truth in history have become intensified [Schinkel 2004:40]. The South African critic, Marita Wenzel notes, "reality, absolute truths and history are unknowable" [Wenzel in Bowers 2004:100].

¹⁰ This is discussed in part two of this paper regarding **My Bed** which altered slightly when it was exhibited in 3 different countries.

An understanding of the term *history* could come from Hegel when he explains that history unites the objective with the subjective. A Hegelian position is that a genuine historical account had to display narrative form as well as political/social content [White 1980/81:12]. MacClintock proposes that, "history is a series of social fabrications that we cannot do without. It is an inventive practice, but not just any invention will do, for it is the future, not the past that is at stake in the contest over which memories survive" [1995:328]. We learn about history to improve the present.

The events of history are recorded in narrative form and even if events were annotated strictly according to the times they occurred in and not in narrative form there would still be structural hierarchy as to *who's* history was recorded first. Historical writing implies a selection is made, aspects are highlighted others are omitted. Selection is an important aspect of history writing, otherwise *everything* would be recorded, and selections have to be made to record important elements. Historians do try to aim for historical truths; it is not their intention to be emotional or subjective. Absolute truths, the 'whole' truth may not be able to be recovered but one cannot and should not dismiss the notion of truth from historiography. McCullagh [2004:38] argues that:

Some historical interpretations are supported by such an enormous number of relatively independent facts that the chance of their being overthrown by new discoveries is negligible.

Artists often deal with history, memory and the re-construction or construction of the past. Living ones life does not happen extraneous to political and social structures. As man is a social being autobiography is automatically entrenched in a larger social structure than that of the self. The production of an artwork happens within a specific period of time. It follows that the work being produced is telling then about that particular time period, as well as the historical period that it is referring too! The present influences the telling of the past, memories are tied to particular days and events at the time of expression. On another given day different emphasis on what to record or how to record would be placed. Thus autobiographical writing is a reflection of both of the time

periods, the present and the past. Reconstructing the past in some way can also bring with it an aspect of redemption; there is the idea that a person who confesses is unburdened, liberated [Gilmore 1994:60].

The facts of our lives are not always easily digested or simply put. Professor Sarah Nuttall responded to a controversy over the autobiography of the South African writer Bessie Head. Head went into exile in Botswana in 1964; she left a number of autobiographical writings. In 1986 the South African critic Susan Gardner wrote a biography on Head which uncovered Head's autobiography as false. In response to this, three years later Teresa Dovey [cited in Nuttall 2002:293] wrote (in response to Gardner's accusations of falsehood):

If Bessie Head's ability to survive, and to transcend in writing, the suffering she endured growing up in South Africa was in some sense made possible by the autobiography she constructed for herself, then surely this identity should not and cannot be taken from her.

Nuttall, seemingly supported Dovey and asked in the book Re-figuring the Archive(1997) "Who owns the facts of our lives? And does 'own' here mean own as possession or own as to acknowledge, admit to or confess - own to something?" [Nuttall cited in Hamilton et al 2002 :293] Is there not a truth in how one sees oneself and then presents that self? Writing under conditions of censorship, such as Head did, may provoke a rebellious streak to profess to the truth that only the author herself could dispute.

One of the theoretical frameworks for this paper, which is post colonialism, offers us an opportunity to explore our past within a subjective framework. "Post colonialists are obsessed with finding or creating unique voices and forms for their particular concerns or identifying examples in the past" [Brosman 2005: 100]. The telling of ones personal history is thoroughly encouraged in post-colonialism, this paper briefly touches on an aspect of post-colonialism I wish to explore; that is the genre of magical realism. Homi Bhabha has called magical realism the language of the emergent post colonial world

[Bhabha in Hart 2005:6]. One way of trying to make sense of a life, often relies on telling stories, in magical realism the mingling of fiction with facts plays a role. In this genre the effects of colonization are explored and facts mingle with fiction. In this highly expressive form of story telling details are often portrayed so vividly that life's mysteries that we often have no words for are portrayed [Bowers 2004:115]. One South African post-colonialist novelist who explores the realm of fact and fiction is Andre Brink. Brink's work is mainly concerned with the re-consideration and revision of history. Another post-colonialist novelist Toni Morrison claims that "to forget the past leads to spiritual and cultural emptiness [Morrison cited in Evans in Bowers (Evans 1985:344) Bowers 2004:80]. A characteristic of Magical Realism is that its focus is directed towards the everyday. [Bowers 2004:116] The everyday is however in this genre expressed as strange. This is a way of pointing to the 'truth' or events in the past in a magical or mystical way that communicates a 'truth' that is often inaccessible and the 'normal' telling or displaying of it is too difficult or traumatic to comprehend.¹¹

I conclude this chapter with an idea from Degenaar who cautions that in a changing society we run the risk of emphasising the present over the past. He emphasises the importance of history in the production of art and frames art as a symbolic form that constitutes cultures [Degenaar 1992: unpublished seminar]. He believes that storytelling is an appropriate way to learn about the past. Historical memories of South African communities can be explored through stories and the power of art can expose hidden tensions and bring them to the fore, thus allowing the community to heal [Degenaar 1992:unpublished seminar]. Because we are social beings, autobiographical art works often automatically speak to broader fields such as historical, social and political arenas. One writes oneself into history when one constructs an autobiography.

¹¹ Magical Realism was a term coined by the German Art critic Franz Roh in 1925. For more information on this topic see Bowers 2004 in bibliography.

2.1 Analysis of Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1998) regarding the autobiographical impulse.

Introduction

As well as analyzing *My Bed*, [see figure 1] my research includes a description of Emin *as* art, and it is for this reason that I go into an in depth biographical description of Emin. Looking at *who she is*, not only at *what she does* is of particular relevance to an analysis of her work because a major part of her work *is* the persona she has created for herself. She is a celebrity artist, known as much for her physical attributes and her activities as for her artworks. Emin's storytelling tactics are not only expressed through her works but verbally at most public opportunities. The relentless process of talking and writing about herself, and her past experiences characterizes Emin's art. One of Emin's draw cards seems to be the un-intellectual staging of her work; which attracts a large audience. This trend began with a now famous interview she gave on a Channel 4 television programme in 1997. In what was supposed to be a serious debate about the Turner prize, Emin was completely drunk, swore and said she 'wanted to go home to her mum' [Emin-wikipedia 06:[o]] This seemed to have warmed the audience to her and her popularity soared.

Emin was born in London, in 1963 and grew up in Margate, a British seaside town. She graduated from Maidstone College of Art in 1986, with a first in Fine Art, which she achieved even though she left school at thirteen [Tate [o]]. She received her MA in painting in 1989 from the Royal College of Art. It is noteworthy that although she left school at thirteen she still received an MA from the Royal College of Art. She was determined to be an artist, despite her lack of education. Emin was very aware of her working class background and that she didn't have a rounded British accent and she was very unhappy at the Royal College of Art where she felt 'different and alienated from other students there' [Brown 2006:16]. Her present day success has changed all that.

Emin is an artistic creature of the 1990's; her work fits into the contemporary art culture, capable of being consumed by the general public and conceptual in its high art world status. She began her exhibiting career with a show ironically titled *My Major*

Retrospective, which was held in 1994 at the White Cube Gallery in London [Tate 2006:[o]]. The installation offered a resume of her life and introduced her as an autobiographical artist [Kent 2003:11]. Since then she has exhibited in major exhibitions all over the world. Her embroidered quilts that her work has become synonymous with are in huge demand from investors world wide. In 2004 she created her first feature film, a full-length film about her adolescent years called **Top Spot**, the name of a disco in Margate that Emin frequented whilst growing up. Top spot is also a derogatory sexual term referring to the neck of the womb when it is reached during penetration. This was slang used at the time when Emin grew up in Margate. This biographical information is relevant as Emin was raped as a teenager in Margate and the film reveals this [Brockes:2004]. Emin's film received a critique by film critic Jonathon Romney in which he stated, " [I]t's artlessness, even amateurishness, means that **Top Spot** is pure unvarnished Emin, which is something her admirers always appreciate" [Romney 2005: 36]. In 2005 she wrote her autobiography Strangeland, which was not the first book Emin had written but the first one aimed at a mass audience. Emin's stories are told in a variety of ways not only through her artworks but in her writing, her feature film and also directly from what she says and does.

Emin's type of autobiographical artworks verge on the confessional; however her confessions are not of a quiet nature; they are coupled with exposed media coverage of her face, figure and detailed accounts of her shenanigans [See fig 2]. She is an attractive media personality; photos of her circulate in fashion and society magazines while daily British newspapers report on social aspects of Emin's life frequently. Her fame and recognition of her image is like the fame that is associated with a pop star. She is well known in art circles *and* with the general public. It could be argued that Emin has perhaps become more popular than her artwork. She has turned herself into *the* art product. She is a recognisable almost household face. Emin seems to get very close to her audience, people feel as if they *know* her. Schwabsky believes Emin has this affect on people, he writes," she walked into an opening and immediately this warm, happy feeling went through me; Ah there's my pal Tracey! I had to quickly remind myself that Ms Emin and I had never actually met" [Schwabsky 2003[o]]. Doyle suggests that Emin

reveals herself to the audience, not as an artist, but as a woman, a woman with a messy sex life; a woman, women feel they can identify with [Doyle 2002:114]. When her Museum was still open Emin commented, "Sometimes people walk past the Tracey Emin Museum, they look in and say, 'there she is', it is like they have seen my art by seeing me" [Emin in Gisbourne [o]]. Emin is not the first artist to elicit the response of an audience to artist as persona. She is however arguably the one to have done it on the largest scale. Amongst the artists, living and dead, who have used the strategy of self-mythology as a tactical device, are Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp and Gilbert and George. All are recognised as much for their personalities as for their artworks. Andy Warhol [cited in MacCabe et al 1997:47] comments on this type of audience response when he exclaims:

Some company was recently interested in buying my "aura".
They didn't want my product. They kept saying, 'We want
your Aura. I never figured out what they wanted. But
they were willing to pay a lot for it.

Emin has made an art out of her life story so much so that, "In the past few years the tables have turned, from Tracey Emin telling you all about her life story to the British public wanting to know everything about her" [Eliasch and De Cruz 2003: 66]. In Britain and America, the social climate of the 1990's encouraged confessional works. Talk shows were extremely popular; hosts such as Oprah Winfrey, Jerry Springer and Ricki Lake encouraged personal confessions In these shows which grew in viewership status. It seemed inevitable that art would fall prey to this type of confessional culture. It did. Art critic Arlene Croce suggests that confessional art is appealing to an audience that in the past may have found art "too fine, too high, too educational, too complicated" [Croce [o]].

Emin acknowledges the value of her social fame and believes she is better than any artwork she can ever make, "when I'm dead my work won't be half so good." [Kent 203:11] She does however point out that she makes her living from being an artist *not* from being a celebrity. [Wright 2005:34] Her storytelling may be supported by the

biographical information surrounding her in the media and by her own admissions and the books she writes but it is also always presented in the art works she makes. **My Bed** (1998) is one of the artworks that rocketed her to success. Through this work, Emin reveals intimate details of her life, and it serves as a fitting case study for this research paper since it is a typical example of the type of artwork Emin produces, formally and conceptually.

My Bed

My Bed was first shown in Tokyo [See figure 3] in 1998, then in New York [see figure4] and was then presented in London [See figure 5] for the Turner Prize show. The three presentations differed each time. The fact that each time the work was presented, the installation shifted slightly emphasized the agency of the artist as producer of the work. Emin decide to shift the installation during its display in the three different countries, so the story she was telling altered at various times. This is in keeping with the notion that identity is not a fixed and finite concept and is continuously changing. The subject of an autobiographical work is said to be searching for an identity rather than displaying evidence of an achieved identity [Steiner and Yang 2004:13].

What then constitutes **My Bed**? Some items remained consistent whilst others change. In the Tokyo exhibition in 1998 **My Bed**, was presented as **Better to Have A Straight Spine Than A Broken Neck**. The bed itself was a double bed with a wooden base; it was minimalist in design, stylish and contemporary [Brown 2006:97]. The title of the bed suggests ownership, and it was assumed by many viewers, and most critics that it *was* Emin's own bed [Cherry 2002: 145]. Her use of the personal pronoun; *my*, implies an autobiographical reading of the bed. Emin placed the bed at angle to the room, which was an elongated space with large vertical windows. The angle of the bed contrasted with the upright verticality of the windows. A noose made of rope was suspended from the ceiling, this suspension contrasted with the horizontality of the bed. Next to the bed was a coffin and beside the coffin were two bound suitcases [Cherry 2002:136]. Emin tells her tale through the use of obvious symbolism for example suitcases chained together could imply feelings of being trapped [Kent 2003:11]; a noose and a coffin imply

thoughts of death. **My Bed** attracted varied critical attention, one critic Kieran wrote that the juxtaposition of the objects, specifically a noose and coffin next to the detritus of a bedroom scene presented some interesting propositions, namely hedonism coupled with suicidal thoughts [2005:121].

The bed consisted of stained, tossed sheets. These urine stained¹² sheets attracted different critical responses; they are are, according to Brown, “repulsive, and an insult to the idea of grace and harmony that drapery has commanded in art since classical antiquity” [Brown 2006:100] [For an example see figure 6]. The art critic Deborah Cherry praises the visually contrasting elements of the linen when she comments on it being both bright white and stained, ruffled and smooth [Cherry 2002:136-144]. [See figure 7]. Merck sees the stains on Emin’s sheets as an attempt by the artist to connect her body with the artwork [2002:125]. Even though **My Bed** was not a performance piece, and Emin was not physically present, her presence is implied by the indexical traces exhibited in **My Bed**. These traces speak of her activities.

On the floor, next to the bed was a small dark blue rug on which stood a small, round wooden bedside table. Partly on the table and for the most part on the floor a collection of items lay strewn. These included overflowing ashtrays, used tissues and condoms, contraceptive pills, unwashed underwear, (blood stained knickers), KY Jelly, medicine bottles and vodka bottles [See figure 8]. Emin explains the time that prompted the production of **My Bed**; she tells of a low period in her life which she knew she had to make art about, when having got out of bed after a couple of days of drinking and not eating she looked back at her bed and thought, “that’s it; I’ve got to do something with this. It was like a screen had come down between me and it, and I knew it was art. It was a vision” [Emin cited in Gargett[o]]. The bed serves as a memorial to a specific time and place in Emin’s life. **My Bed** is seen as a ‘self-portrait’. The abject display, and choice, of objects offers insight to this period in Emin’s life. Her work is cluttered, her life messy, the materiality of the exhibition re-enforces this emotional state. The vodka

¹² There is a history of what any Merck calls ‘excremental tradition’ in art. See Merck in Merck and Townsend in Bibliography.

bottles, dishevelled sheets, condoms and pregnancy kit suggests a period of reckless sexual activity.

Emin's life story is filled with sexual anecdotes and miserable confessions surrounding sex. It is however a mistake to believe that **My Bed** refers only to Emin's sex life, even with the semen stained sheets and used condoms surrounding it. Emin's choice of daylight lighting of the bed seems to highlight the authenticity of the state of incontinence witnessed on the sheets, as the viewer is not separated from the exhibition by the dramatic use of 'stage' lighting. Even though we are aware that this is a staged event, the bed is not put on a platform and the viewer is not separated¹³ from it, as one would be in the theatre. These stains serve to emphasize both the emotionally distraught psychological state of Emin and her self-abusive intake of excessive alcohol [Brown 2006:100]. The site of vulnerability expressed by Emin with **My Bed** has psychological as well as sexual referents. **My Bed**, even though it is a double one, speaks of loneliness, suffering and depression. Present, to a degree, is evidence of the luxury of self-indulgence but the work does not speak of comfort but rather a distressing emotional state, in the presence of 'luxury' items. Merck points out, the use of the double bed here serves to highlight Emin's loneliness and longing [2002:128]. This loneliness is fuelled with loss and disappointment because we know through biographical information that Emin has had two abortions and a miscarriage [Gisbourne[o]].

On the walls surrounding the bed there was a collection of small and numerous drawings¹⁴, which included small minimal watercolours that made a striking juxtaposition with the large readymade bed [Molyneux 2006 [o]]. Cherry commented that the dull surfaces of the drawings on paper contrasted well against the shiny linen surfaces [2002:136]. Also on the walls, in the distance, were two gleaming neon signs, one that read **Sobasex** and the other **My Cunt is Wet with Fear**. A quilt **Psyco Slut**¹⁵ hung on another wall. [See figure 9]. These accompanying pieces of **My Bed** expressed

¹³ In the London showing of my bed there was a rope put up that separated the bed from the audience, this was only put there after the bed was jumped on by two 'performance' artists. See Cherry in Merck and Townsend 2002:147

¹⁴ In all the references I have accessed on **My Bed** no detailed description of these drawings exists.

¹⁵ Incorrect spelling has also become a trademark of Emin.

a multitude of messages. These messages were offered in a variety of ways, the most direct¹⁶ being the text on the quilts and neon signs. **Psyco Slut** is full of personal pronouns and it seems to ‘addresses’ numerous people. Cherry describes this barrage of phrases as flowing from “past to present, from private pain to public recrimination, from immediate response to later recollection. And they were uttered not one by one, but all at once”[Cherry 2002:147]. The quilts seem to shout out, the messages seem to span time periods and experiences in no particular order. In **Psyco Slut** Emin appliques phrases such as; *‘I didn’t know I had to Ask To share your Life’*; *You see I’m one of the best; You know how much I Love You; Yea I Know nothing stays in my body*; and *Mrs D Mrs I Mrs FF I Mrs C Mrs U Mrs LTY* amongst numerous others. *Yea I Know Nothing Stays in My Body*, may refer to her abortions, or when the shoddy abortion caused the second undetected fetus to slip down her leg whilst entering a cab [Brown 2006:12]. On the other hand, *Yea I Know Nothing Stays in My Body* could also refer to a vomiting spree caused from excessive drinking. Emin has made no secret of her drinking habits. The quilts seem to inspire the belief that fragments of Emin’s life are literally pieced together to present a life. Patchwork quilts originated from the re-use of fragments of rare or sentimental fabrics and are usually associated with time past. Emin’s quilts speak of a time past.

In New York in May 1999 **My Bed** formed part of Emin’s show titled **Every Part of Me’s Bleeding**. The bedside table, rug and collection of personal articles surrounded the bed. The two suitcases in chains were there. The two blue neon signs; **Sobasex** and **My Cunt is Wet with Fear**, (also shown in Tokyo), were adjacent to **My Bed**. The quilt, **Psycho Slut** [See figure 9) hung on the wall next to **My Bed**. **My Bed** was set up amongst a number of small installations, in the same room. Seen just beyond the bed was a small installation **The First Time I Was Pregnant I started to Crochet The Baby a Shawl 1990-2000**. To get to the bed in the New York show, one had to approach it through a maze of intersecting installations, this altered the way one approached and read the bed. In installation art works, the work is not always read in a linear fashion,

¹⁶ Written text is a very direct form of communication. Emin’s text is however jumbled, personal, and often difficult to understand.

especially one such as this, whereby the nature of the assemblage makes it impossible to prescribe to the audience where to look first. The objects may be received in a random fashion, depending on where the reader focuses first. The work assembled in a variety of ways incites different readings. An accompanying installation in the show, in a separate room, **The Hut 1999** fueled the autobiographical content of **My Bed**.¹⁷

The third showing of **My Bed** was in October 1999 at the prestigious and valuable Turner Prize Exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London. Emin's entry **My Bed** attracted huge queues and 1999 was one of the most talked about Turner Prizes for years. Emin did not win the prize but her piece; **My Bed** was reportedly one of the most famous installations seen in years [edu/faculty 2006 [o]]. For the Turner prize, in London, **My Bed** was installed without the noose or coffin. A selection of drawings, monoprints and texts hung on the wall [Cherry 2002: 134-154]. This time the wall was painted light blue and the neon displayed was **Every Part Of Me's Bleeding**. The blue rug, bedside table paraphernalia (slightly altered) and the two-chained suitcases were there too. An obvious difference with this installation is that for this presentation Emin chose the quilt **No Chance** [See figure 10] to replace **Psyco Slut** the quilt displayed in both other locations. The prominent display of the Union Jack in her work, **No Chance** could reference a geographical politicizing of this work. Art theorist Deborah Cherry maintains that Emin created a commentary of the 'new Europe' of the 90s' in her London showing of **My Bed**. Cherry bases this assumption on the tattered reworked Union Jack Emin presented in the quilt **No Chance** accompanying **My Bed**. The display of the British flag served to assert national identity. The 1990's, the time period of the installation, brought the concept of a 'new Europe' into play this period was known both for its promotion of a shared European culture and for highlighting the differences between the countries not included. Turkey was a country not included in the European Union. Emin's father is half Turkish and half Cypriot. The time period of the exhibition also coincided with the drafting the Immigration and Asylum act passed in 1999 and stricter policing of borders was enforced. Cherry comments that the discarded nature of the objects scattered around

¹⁷ **The Hut** consisted of a reassembled beach hut bought by the artist as a memento to her youth, of growing up on the beaches of Margate and spoke to the transient nature of memories and structures that housed them. [Cherry 2002:154]

My Bed and the display of suitcases bound next to the bed reference themes of transit and displacement [Cherry 2002:151]. Cherry argues that Emin's work can be situated into a broader framework of historical references such as migration and Diaspora and should be considered for these larger social themes as well as for personal narrative [2002:150-154].

No Chance could reference a geographic politicizing of the work but this quilt with the date *seventy seven* appliquéd onto it also has very strong personal associations for Emin. In **No Chance** Emin appliquéd phrases such as: *At the age of 13 why should I trust anyone; No you listen I'm not late you lucky; No Chance*. 1977 was a very pivotal year for Emin, during which, at the age of thirteen she was raped and dropped out of school. **No Chance** could reference the hopelessness and despair Emin was feeling on a personal level during this year [Cherry 2002:147]. It is also noteworthy that she chose to reference this particular aspect of her life on her home soil so to speak, and to leave out implications of suicide, as the noose and coffin were not displayed in the London Exhibition. Emin herself refers to her work as political in so much as freedom of speech, non-censorship of the soul and her opinion are as political as she gets. [Gisbourne 2000 [o]]

When the objects of the installation shift the constant in the work becomes the author or artist of the work. In these circumstances the role played by the artist is highlighted. Art theorist Miwon Kwon contends that the role of the author as sole guarantor of the work is back¹⁸. Kwon speaks of the networking globally of art dealers, biennales, art fairs and says in light of this, the artists' role as the sight of meaning of the artwork has become more insistent. She concludes that this insistence of the role of the author in the work has unleashed a ton of autobiographical indulgences in the art world [Kwon cited in Cherry 2002:134].

Although Emin's artwork is mostly highlighted for its autobiographical content Emin's work is not of a dry conceptual nature and her relies on its visual sensory mode of

¹⁸ Following Roland Barthes treatise on the Death of the Author 1977

presentation and reception. Although **My Bed** is often described as a 'readymade', a concept originating in 1914 by Marcel Duchamp, its theatrical and emotional content is not strictly in keeping with the rigorous application usually associated with conceptual art. Emin identified the actual bed as being a non-art object from the real world that she added loads of paraphernalia to. [Brown 2006:101]. **My Bed** is an installation artwork and consisted of not only a double bed, but also surrounding elements.

Emin's predominant form of presentation of her artworks is installation art. Installation art can broadly be defined as anything an artist wants to do within a given room or space; there is likely to be an assemblage of objects and not a single object in an installation, although this is not a pre-requisite [Rosenthal 2003: 26]. According to Rosenthal there are predominantly four types of installations; they are *enchantments*, *impersonations*, *interventions* and *rapprochements*. *Enchantments* and *impersonations* belong to a genus called 'filled -space installation'; the latter two belong to a genus called 'site-specific installation'. While the scope of this paper does not require an in depth discussion of installation art, **My Bed** is an installation that falls within the genre of *impersonation*. An *impersonation*, according to Rosenthal is a presentation or elaboration of a real life situation [2003:47]. With **My Bed** Emin impersonates her own lived experience, a time passed that she is re-enacting. Often different genres of installation art are combined, as in the case of Emin's **My Bed** in which she incorporates aspects of an *enchantment* installation. An *enchantment* installation is defined as the simulation of a state of mind into an environment. This type of environment usually has as its referents origins of a psychological nature [ibid: 77]. In *impersonations* the exalted highbrow culture of art is usually diminished or down played, used and discarded everyday objects are often on display and form part of the artwork or *are* the artwork. In this type of installation these relics serve to highlight the 'authentic' aspect of the artwork. Just how authentic the objects are is debatable. In this type of installation the museum space contextualises the art work and an everyday occurrence becomes art.¹⁹ *Impersonations* are about filled-

¹⁹ Rosenthal compares *Impersonations* to tribal practices wherein art is not necessarily named as such but rather used practically in traditional ritualistic practices. Many African art objects, props, masks, that are now behind glass in Museums and stared at by audiences worldwide, were used in an integrated way with tribal life. The works were never intended for museums, they were objects

space, there is coherence between each of the parts, rather than coherence necessarily with the space the installation exists in. As in every installation, the dimensions of the room are always considered but some installations are site-specific. (*Interventions and Rapprochements*). Emin sets up the same installation in different spaces, and adjusts it slightly, so the work wasn't originally made for one venue in particular.

The formal aspects of the bed enhanced the psychological drama of the piece. The bed put emphasis on the horizontal, the quilts, lights and noose on the vertical. The composition of the horizontal and the vertical created tension, this tension aided in expressing Emin's anxieties. There is a psychological tension created when lying down. Fischer writes that when people lie down, they surrender themselves to the universe, he states "the fact that they abandon an active stance and expose themselves in their entire physical extent engenders a disconcerting tension between relief and defencelessness" [Fischer 2002:9].

The word 'debris' is often used when describing **My Bed** however Cherry maintains that the objects around the bed [See fig.7] are arranged in a thoughtful way and that these illicit varied responses, including ambivalence and contradiction. Descriptions of **My Bed** often include comments that it is an *unmade* bed and that the aesthetics are associated with "dirt and disgust" [Cherry 2002:144]. Cherry comments that this 'detritus' such as urine-stained sheets, heavily soiled knickers and used condoms are referred to repetitively and provoke "over-excited" descriptions [2002:114]. The repetition by critics of these words is sensationalist in appeal and speaks perhaps to needs of the audience. Treadwell comments that, "once the justification for autobiographical writing is transferred from the status of the author to the interest of the public sphere, it finds itself mirroring the debased criterion of curiosity [2005:76].

used in daily life or ritualistic practices. This presents a startling contrast to the revered art object when displayed in museums bearing the title of a work of art. Impersonations may just be an attempt to cross this divide between art and life, but yet the installations rely so obviously on the approval of the Art World. Their reason d'être is for public viewing in a museum, not for everyday use.[Rosenthal no date:48]

Emin makes work whereby the gap between art and the self is blurred. Stallabrass contends that Emin's exclusive subject matter is herself and that we hear about her life through a variety of media. Stallabrass comments further on Emin's work saying "to reject the art is to also heartlessly reject the artist". [1999:42] The words "I" and "my" feature in either the titles of her work or in the works themselves. Her 'signature' is all over the works. Merck contends, "Saying 'I' brings 'I' into being, makes 'I' really count." [Merck 2002:127] The title of the bed suggests it *is* Emin's bed.²⁰ In an interview cited by Townsend and Merck, Emin remarked that the work was made to represent specific emotions surrounding a particular period and implied a degree of constructedness in the work [2002:6]. The installation impersonated a low period in her life. In the 1999 Turner prize exhibition, the caption accompanying **My Bed** explained that this work contained the detritus of the period 1992-1993 of her life in Berlin. Emin comments in Kent [2003:11]:

It's a self-portrait but not one that people would like to see.
it records a tremendous amount of loneliness and unwellness.
I wasn't taking care. I had been making myself vulnerable and
dissipating my energies with too much drinking and travelling.
I stayed in bed for four days. I had diarrhoea, I was falling over
vomiting and crying. What's important about the work is the
honesty behind it- the truth. It's the best thing I've done in years.

Some critics focus on the authenticity aspect of the work, rather than understand it as a constructed artwork; however it seems that a critical position that a number of scholars on Emin adopt is that her work can be seen as an authentic personal expression and at the same time, carefully mediated art making [Merck and Townsend 2002:19].

Emin has managed to tell a very revealing story about a messy period in her life. Bearing witness to one's own life, or trauma is paradoxical, Merck quotes Hal Foster as saying "the subject is evacuated and elevated at once" [Merck citing Foster 2002:125] In a recent article in the Financial Times Emin confessed to being stripped bare, she admitted that confessing her vulnerabilities had stripped her of all the layers and left her with

²⁰ Emin, in response to that question answers that it is no longer her bed it is Saatchi's as he bought it. He reportedly paid 150 000 Pounds for it.

nothing, “just a thread of a human being” [Emin in Aspden 2006:10]. Albright proposes that the problem that arises from autobiographical expression is self-censorship when women do not have the courage to present themselves fully [Albright in Snaith 2000:56]. Emin does not paint a pretty picture of herself; her confessions of her fears, desires, abortions, rapes, suicidal thoughts and inadequacies are often criticized as ‘poor me’- and ‘victim mentality’. Her adversaries’ claim that she attempts to place her art and herself beyond the reach of criticism because of her self-proclaimed status as victim. At the same time she is praised by her supporters for empowering herself by confessing a dark side of female sexuality and becoming an agent of her own creativity [shutitdown: 2006 [o]].

Emin’s artwork can be likened to Pop art of the 1960s. Pop Art which had its heyday in mid 1950’s, early 60’s had amongst its features the ideas of shifting attitudes towards the art object; making art more popular, instantly available, fashionable, transient, young, gimmicky, sexy and witty Lucie-Smith 1983:233]. Andreas Huyssen defines pop art as “having a closeness to objects, images and reproductions of everyday life”[1986: 142]. He goes on to say that Pop Art acknowledged fantasy, play and spontaneity and ridiculed the deadly seriousness of art criticism of the 1950s. Huyssen mentions some of these artists; namely Rauschenberg, Johns, Warhol, Lichtenstein and Wesselmann. The assembled images or collages of the British pop artist Richard Hamilton are works that speak of an accumulation of ideas presented with narrative content and could be referenced in relation to Emin’s type of expression as well. Pop art speaks of the exultation of the everyday object, the inclusion of life into art and almost a mockery of the seriousness of High Art attitudes. A similarity between Emin’s art and Pop art is that art is supposedly freed from its elitist isolation and becomes more accessible to a wider range of people and experiences²¹. One of the proclamations of Pop Art was to merge art and reality. This is also an aim of post-modernism, both these claims are however problematic because Emin produces work that is situated in galleries and art institutions, her work is written about in art journals and when written about in fashion magazines is always referred to as art [Hardy 2006:130]. Emin demands to be recognized as an artist.

²¹ It has been argued that Emin appeals to a wide range of people not just high brow art gallery and museum goers, however this is probably due to her wide media coverage.

So yes, there is an inclusion of 'life' into art but both still remains quite distinguishably apart.

While Emin's art may share similarities with the pop art era, a more contemporary label used to describe Emin's type of art is *High Art Lite* coined by art critic Julian Stallabrass. Stallabrass, describes *High Art Lite* as "an art that looks like but is not quite art, that acts as a substitute for art." [Stallabrass1999:2] Emin is usually framed under the term *yBA* which stands for young British Artists but Stallabrass argues that the artists framed under this label are not necessarily young and they are not all British, and that the term *High Art Lite* is more deserving a name for the type of tendency in art Emin displays. [1999:2] *High Art Lite* implies an accessible, less serious attitude to highbrow art making processes.²² Roberts [Cited in Hardy 2006:131] believes in the seriousness of the art of the young British Artists and comments:

....it would be mistaken to identify the new art and its fuck-you
attitudinizing with anything as simple minded as the
'depoliticisation' of art. Despite much of the new art's
unqualified regard for the voluptuous pleasures of popular culture
it does not seek to assimilate itself to popular culture in fazed admiration.

Using a bed in an installation piece is not particularly subtle in symbolism but subtlety is not something Emin praises herself on. Whilst a bed has been referenced by numerous artists throughout the history of art and still continues to be represented in artworks today; the scope of this paper will not allow going into every one of these occasions, but will highlight instances. In a recent exhibition titled **Another World** held in the Kunst Museum in Lucern, Switzerland in 2002, thirteen artists exhibited work around the theme of The Bed. Peter Fischer in the catalogue to this exhibition Another World.12 Bedroom Stories writes:

The bed is a sanctuary of rest, of sleep, of recreation;

²² Since the 1960's this type of art was already established as a norm.

it is the place of pleasure and love, but also of illness and death. It is a sight of transition, a haven for the beginning and end of the human life cycle. It is there that the boundaries of our life are crossed.

Amongst the artists exhibiting was Louise Bourgeois. Bourgeois's work, like Emin's, references her emotions and expresses personal narratives. Bourgeois gains some release from being able to express her emotions through her artworks. Fischer, quotes Bourgeois, "My emotions are inappropriate to my size. So they bother me! And I really have to get rid of them...[A] nd that is why I transfer them. I transfer the energy to sculpture" [Bourgeois cited in Fischer 2002:79] .

Much earlier than this, in 1917 Duchamp exhibited an assisted ready-made, which featured a bed, titled **Apolinere Enameled**. A further correlation between Emin and Duchamp is that Emin's **My Bed** has been referenced to Duchamp's use of the ready-made in 1917. Duchamp pioneered the idea that "what is done in the name of art is more important than the technical skill brought to bear upon its creation"[Rorimer 2001/2004: 29]. Emin's art seems to bear witness to this doctrine. Other artworks that reference a bed include numerous illustrations from artists including Van Gogh, Munch and Kahlo. All three of whose artworks exhibit strong autobiographical tendencies [Fischer 2002:9].

In 1955, the American pop artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925-) exhibited **Bed** (1955) a mixed media piece [See figure 11]. **Bed** (1955) consisted of a combination of oil paint and pencil on pillow, quilt and sheet, all attached to a wooden support. It is believed that the bed linen was Rauschenberg's own, made at a time when he lacked the money to buy a canvas. [moma.org 2006: [o]] **Bed** (1955) was a very personal self-portrait with associations of sleep, sex, comfort and dreams. Rauschenberg's use of materials in **Bed** is also interesting in relation to Emin's aesthetic with his use of paint-splattered marks and trashy aesthetics. **Bed**, like other works of Rauschenberg at the time, combined elements of both painting and sculpture but were neither. Rauschenberg christened this new concept in art 'combines.' Emin's **My Bed** installation with her use of mixed media

ranging from ‘original relics’ to assisted readymades, quilts, drawings, photographs and neon signs can be seen as moving this concept of ‘combines’ into three dimensional space. An uncanny similarity between **Bed** (1955) and **My Bed** (1998) is that both have been referred as ‘murder scenes’. “When **Bed** was first exhibited in 1958, Newsweek commented that it ‘recalls a police photo of the murder bed after the corpse has been removed’”. [Kotz 1990:85] Emin herself has described **My Bed** as looking like a “crime scene” in which someone had “been fucked to death.” [Emin referenced in Brown 2006:100]

Being a female artist, Emin makes work from a women’s point of view. Emin does not however identify herself as a feminist. Her stories do not revolve around women’s issues *per se* but rather around her own personal issues. Emin may not feel the need to identify herself as a feminist because women have a far higher profile in art today than in the past. In contemporary art practice, Emin is as well known as her male counterparts [Hardy 2006:68]. Cherry argues that Emin finds the term feminist limiting and that she positions feminism as an art practice belonging to an earlier generation of artists [Cherry [o]]. This may be so but, the materiality and content to a large degree in Emin’s work is indebted to a previous generation of 1970’s feminist artists [Cherry 2002:141]. Regarding the embroidery and autobiographical aspect, one such artist is Annette Messager²³. Miriam Schapiro²⁴ is an artist who could be referenced as inspirational to Emin with regard to her patchwork quilts. Aspects of **My Bed**, such as Emin’s menstrual stained knickers reference women artists of the 70’s such as Judy Chicago with her **Red Flag** and **Menstrual Bathroom** and Carolee Schneeman’s²⁵ **Interior Scroll** of 1975 [Cherry 2002:145]. Emin’s use of text in her work can be seen in reference to American artist Jenny Holzer²⁶ an artist well known for her texts *as* art works. Emin’s use of words in her artworks often predominates [Reckitt and Phelan 2001:182-183]. Emin’s type of victim or confessional art can be likened to a previous generation of

²³ See Annette Messager by Catherine Grenier in bibliography.

²⁴ Shapiro is a textile artist of the 70’s who made large scale works which combined fabric collage with painting. [Reckitt and Phelan 2001: 74]

²⁵ For more information see [Grosenik 2001:487]

²⁶ For more information see Rheckit and Phelan in Bibliography.

confessional artists such as Hannah Wilke, a performance artist of the 70's and Jo Spence both of whom witnessed their lives (and deaths) through their art works [Smith and Watson 2002:63].

Emin has created an identity for herself using her own particular language, which although bears reference to other works previously stated is also quite remarkably *Emin*. Feminism is a complex field and the scope of this paper will not allow going into it in depth. Kirsten Chambers proposes that subscribing wholly to an *-ism*, may be seen as accepting all its limitations [Chambers 2001: 6]. Emin may feel that she doesn't want to be labeled. And that she is free to explore and express the complexities of her life. I have tried to show that Emin's work which appears simple and superficial is complex. Betterton [2002:38] commenting on Emin's work writes that it is:

Active and passive, contrived and confessional,
performative and truthful. The work refuses any simple
reading of female identity. Emin has developed her
own language for dealing with sexual inequalities,
which is neither traditionally feminine nor feminist,
but articulates a new kind of independent and iconoclastic
femininity in all its complexity and contradictions.

Artists Emin does cite as influencing her are Egon Schiele (1890-1918) and Edvard Munch (1863-1944). Both of these expressionist painters articulated an emotionally disturbed state of being [Townsend 2002:80]. One can understand the connection she feels with them as her work deals mostly with the expression of her emotional state. **My Bed** does not bear physical resemblance to works of Munch and Schiele but is a highly expressive emotional piece and links can be made to the expressive qualities inherent in the works of both Schiele and Munch. The expressionist style from which we could surmise Emin's self-expressive style is indebted to tends "to stretch human emotions, and in particular the emotions of sorrow and anxiety, to a point of pronounced tension"[Selz 1976:6]. Van Gogh whose work depicts great spiritual and mental anguish, influenced Munch. It could be said that Munch's **Scream** (1893), Van Gogh's **Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear** and Emin's **My Bed** (1998) are "part of a continuity of

practice” [Brown 2006:12]. Schiele’s influence is seen on Emin’s drawings with their themes on childhood sexuality. Some of these drawings were in the walls in the **My Bed** installation. The difference between the production of Emin’s drawings and Schiele’s is that Emin exercises her own prerogative to be observed and Schiele’s drawings were of models other than himself, very young models. Emin discusses the difference between her drawings and Schiele’s when she says ‘...the difference with my drawings is that they are of me ...and its me coming to terms with those things in my life. The fact that I want people to look at the drawing is that I want people to confront what I’ve had to confront - what other people have” [Emin cited in Brown 2006:29].

Emin exercises her skills as an artist to admit and express very painful aspects of her life. Telling her stories through her art she uses a contemporary form of self-portraiture that displays objects in an environment that is somehow representative of herself. Her huge success achieved by her literal and visual representations of herself come with an excellent business acumen and an unbelievable ability to promote herself [Durden 2006:[o]]. Emin can be credited with her ability to not hold back; her personal narratives are blatant and very revealing. Often criticized for their degree of truthfulness or rather lack of it Emin [Cited in Gargett 2001[o]] comments on this:

Whether or not my art is the truth, or whether or not its honest,
Its real, it’s how I feel about a situation. I’m trying to work out
something for myself, and then it goes out into the world and
becomes something else... the true essence of this testament
is to communicate an emotion, trust your own memory...
my art comes out of my real experience of life: it’s how
I feel at the time. I have an emotion and I make it real.

Emin is able to reflect on her past by re-constructing it as an artwork. As has been established Emin’s personal narratives have an effect on a large audience. Art critic Sarah Kent sees Emin as not only an artist who bares intimate details of her life but also as a brilliant storyteller whose stories go further than the personal and reach an audience through moral messages as well [Kent 2003:11].

Figure 1:
Tracey Emin. **My Bed.** 1998. Detail of installation view.
[Reproduced in Steiner and Yang (eds) 2004:1]



Figure 2:
Collaged Photographs of Tracey Emin
[2005: Sunday Times, Financial Times, Evening Standard London]



Figure 3:
Tracey Emin. **Better to have a Straight Spine Than a Broken Neck**
1998
Installation Shot. 79x211x234cm. Sagacho Exhibition Space, Tokyo
[All images on this page Reproduced in Merck and Townsend (eds)
2002]



Figure 4:
Tracey Emin. **My Bed** 1998
Various Dimensions
Installation Shot, New York



Figure 5:
Tracey Emin. **My Bed** 1998
79x211x234cm.
Installation Shot, Tate Gallery
London



Figure 6:



Eugene Delacroix. **Un Lit Defait**. 1824-8
Watercolour on paper. 18.5 x 29.9 cm
Musee Eugene Delacroix, Paris.
[Reproduced in Brown 2006: 100]

Figure 7:



Tracey Emin. Detail of installation. **My Bed**
1998. Saatchi Gallery
collection. [Reproduced
in Brown 2006:100]

Figure 8:



Tracey Emin. Detail from the installation **My Bed** 1998
[Reproduced in Eliasch 2003:69]

Figure 9:
 Tracey Emin. *Psyco Slut* 1998
 Applique Blanket. 243.8x193cm
 [Reproduced in Brown 2006:46]

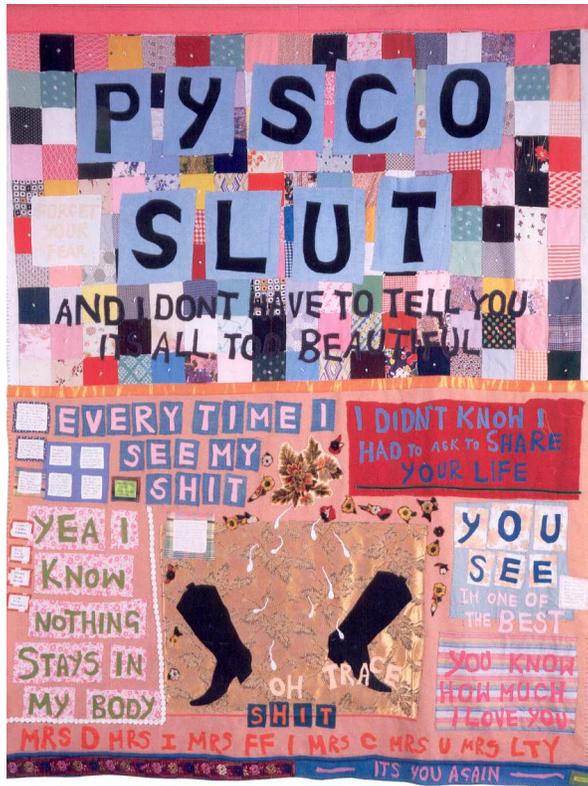


Figure 10:
 Tracey Emin. *No Chance* 1999
 Appliqué blanket 216x228cm
 [Reproduced in Brown 2006:43]



Figure 11:

Robert Rauschenberg

Bed 1955 Combine painting: oil and graphite on fabric 75 x 31 x 8".

(Collection the Museum of Modern Art, New York)

[Reproduced in Kotz, M. 1990:84]



Claudette Schreuders

Introduction

The work of Schreuders I have chosen to analyse regarding its narrative content is a wooden sculpture titled **Speel Speel** (1996). [See figure 12]. It is similar to all Schreuders other works in that it is a figurative representational sculpture carved out of wood with a chainsaw. She is a prominent South African artist who sells mostly internationally and has been called, “one of South Africa’s most exciting sculptural talents”. [O’Toole: 2004:11] Schreuders is an autobiographical artist who prefers working from her own reality [Bester 2004:26]. Schreuders, however, unlike Emin, is cautious not to reveal intimate details of her life in her work [Hossack interview 2004]. Although she is known as an autobiographical artist, she is not a celebrity artist like Emin; therefore this paper does not require an in depth discussion of her personal activities or social life. Schreuders acknowledges that the telling of her stories through her sculptures is about making public that which is private. She lets her sculptures tell her stories. Biographical information about the artist does however help inform the work.

Schreuders was born in 1973 in Johannesburg, South Africa and now lives and works in Cape Town. She grew up in Linden a suburb of Johannesburg in a white conservative Afrikaans family. In an introduction to Schreuders work in the book Liberated Voices Contemporary Art From South Africa, Schreuders work is described as an "attempt to come to grips with her closeted upbringing" [Williamson in Herreman 1991:40]. She attended Linden High School; where she says she wasn't overly happy because there was too much emphasis on sport. She did, however, love doing art at school. She remembers her childhood as happy even though she grew up during the apartheid era. Her father, who came from Holland, was the main breadwinner in the family and her mother was a painter who sold at the Sunday Market at the Zoo Lake, so art, or painting was part of her environment at home [Hossack Interview: 2004]. She studied Fine Art at Stellenbosch University where she received her Honours degree and obtained her Masters degree in sculpture from the University of Cape Town in 1997. She began carving figures out of wood during her studies at Stellenbosch University where her lecturer Brett Murray advised her to switch from carving in plaster to carving in wood. She has worked

consistently in this medium for ten years and says that she has had no desire to try any other medium [Hossack interview :2005]

When Schreuders figures are not self-portraits they are mostly based on people emotionally or physically close to her [O'Toole 2004:17]. She also uses a particular method of auto/biographical storytelling that includes basing her figures on people she observes or reads about. Most often one can assume that a biographer's tale is very telling about the biographer. Schreuders stories most often link personal observations to collective histories, this is particularly evident in the sculpture **Speel Speel**. Steiner and Yang propose that living in South Africa, "encourages a strong critical approach to the political context, and, of course, has side effects for the artist's autobiography". [2004: 190] Schreuders, however, dislikes the emphasis on art as a political tool. [Lineberry 2004 :16] I asked Schreuders whether she felt that being a South African artist dealing with issues from a political, albeit personal aspect, had any influence over her success internationally. She replied that the origin of her work probably did have an influence in some way on some of the collectors of her work, but that she did not see herself as being biographically determined. She added that she was pleased when reviews of her work made comparisons with other artists either working in the same medium, or in a figurative way or because their work had an autobiographical context.[Hossack interview 2006]. Art educator Terry Barrett cautions that one should be wary of 'biographical determinism' and that artists should never be limited to constraints such as where they were born or their race and gender[Barrett 2000:118]. The personal issues that Schreuders does explore do, however, reference a more public history and her stories have a political resonance.

Her figures are all representations of people²⁷; there is no escaping their humanness despite their small scale and exaggerated heads. Her sculptures may be small in stature but they command great presence. They are neither loud nor gaudy but quiet and eloquent. Schreuders is interested in telling quiet stories through her sculptures even though they are autobiographical and include a lot of self-portraits, it is important to her

²⁷ An exception to this is her sculpture of her cat Ben in The Long Day exhibition at Warren Siebrits.

that her self-portraits do not look like her. [Schreuders 2004: The Long Day] I was intrigued by this comment, and questioned Schreuders about it. Her reply was, [Hossack interview 03/08/2006]:

I find it a bit of a burden if the work is interpreted as being me, even though it is largely based on my experiences, that might just mean something I had read, but there are also many great faces and it is more interesting to do new faces everytime, so I use different references and sometimes I look in the mirror to place an ear or jawline or whatever.

Her love of woodcarving and her formalist considerations would explain wanting to explore a variety of faces. Her need for quiet stories, that are not too revealing explains the burden she might feel if each figure was directly translated as being her.

If the figure she is carving does not represent herself it is always carved with a specific person in mind and imbued with highly individualistic characteristics. It is a labour driven activity and each sculpture takes a considerable amount of time to carve. This labour intensive process allows Schreuders the time to reflect on what she is doing and ponder over the stories she is telling through her figures. This somehow imbues her figures with the stories they originated from. [Hossack taped interview 2004] W.J.T. Mitchell [2005:246] comments on the process of sculpting representations of man. He says,

There is a kind of circular process at work here. Man is both the sculpted object and the sculpting agent, both created as and creator of sculpted images. G-d introduces man and other creatures into the world by means of the art of sculpture.²⁸

The strong material presence, given to the forms of human figures in this sculpture, is evocative, I am sure this has something to do with the primitive pull of recognition²⁹

²⁸ See Mitchell What do Pictures Want. “The material in which G-d worked to fashion the first man was a lump of clay, notes Vasari...variations of this myth appear in many cultures and materials...”[2005: 245]

Speel Speel is typical of the type of work Schreuders produces, both in form and in its story telling capacity. **Speel Speel** (1996) is ripe and heavy with stories and prompts a critical discussion around autobiography specifically with focus on personal and national identity. Political ideologies impact on private lives in a way that is not always easy to understand or to define. Schreuders is aware of these complexities and explores them through her personal narratives in her sculptures. In her catalogue for her exhibition The Long Day, Ian Chambers [Lineberry 2004:18] writes that:

Identities cannot be lived in a state of understanding that is already fully established and realized. Identities become a point of departure, an opening onto the continual elaboration of becoming.

Speel Speel affords a look into the affect on personal lives amidst prevailing political ideologies, particularly regarding the apartheid period of South African history. **Speel Speel** formed part of Schreuders submission for her Masters Exhibition (1977) that was titled **Family Tree**. The title **Family Tree** relates to both the personal content and formal considerations of her work. In her MFA, Schreuders' writes that the word 'family' refers to the autobiographical content of her work. She explains that she uses the word 'family' not only in reference to specific people but also as a means to identify types within the social context she grew up in. [Schreuders 1997] The word **Tree** refers to her medium of carved and painted wooden figures.

Speel Speel³⁰ is 29cm in height. It is made from yelutang, avocada, lime and poplar woods, and painted in enamel. In her MFA thesis, Schreuders describes these woods in the following manner; Yelutang - as a popular wood amongst amateurs, very soft with hardly any grain; Avocado as an uncured wood suitable for carving; Poplar, a hard, cured wood of her preference and Lime - highly suitable but generally unavailable in South Africa [Schreuders 1997: 18]. Schreuders explained the reason for using so many

²⁹ A heading art critic Kathryn Smith used in the FNB 2000 catalogue describing Schreuders work, a phrase she admits borrowing from South African based Marlene Dumas.

³⁰ This sculpture is in a private collection in London and I am basing my visual analysis on colour photographic reproductions.

different types of wood to make **Speel Speel**; this being that at that time, it was the "early days", her success had not been established and she was unsure whether to buy wood or use found wood. Her uncertainty prompted her to experiment with different types of wood as were available to her [Hossack interview 8 March 2005].

Speel Speel depicts four children playing a game; this game involves throwing something up into the air with a blanket. In this instance the *thing* being thrown up into the air is a golliwog [See figures 13,14 and 15]. I asked Schreuders where the motivation came from for using a golliwog. Schreuders replied that she had not played this game as a child but was influenced by a book titled White on Black Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture³¹ which deals with representations of blacks, portrayed by whites [Hossack interview 8 March 2005]. In this book the author, Nederveen Pieterse discusses the *golliwog* at length, he describes it as being England's most popular black type from the beginning of the 1900's. A golliwog is a racist representation of a black person [See figure 16]. It is a politically incorrect symbol surrounded by controversy.³² It was popularised in children's nurseries, in magazines, the theatre and the circus [1992:156]. Various dictionaries describe the term golliwog as a grotesque black doll. [Pieterse 1992:156] Schreuders choice of a golliwog and not just any rag doll brings with it political associations and is pivotal to the interpretation and narrative content of this sculpture.

The three girls and a boy in **Speel Speel** are all dressed in contemporary casual summer clothes; they are all light skinned and have strawberry blond hair. Their skin tone is left

³¹ White on Black. Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture by Jan Nederveen Pieterse, see bibliography.

³² The origin of the Golliwog dates back to 1895 where he first appeared as a character in a book The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwog by Bertha Upton. "A Black rag doll in the family, a 'grotesque, nigger (minstrel)doll' was the model for the *golliwog* of the books." [Nederveen Pieterse 1992:157] The *golliwogg* was never patented and its logo was extensively used in advertising. Over the years it eventually lost its 2nd 'g' and then had connotations with the racist term 'wog', which originally stood for 'Western Oriental Gentleman', and later on "as a term of abuse for coloured people".[ibid] Enid Blyton published her books including characters that are *golliwogs* as late as 1969.

unpainted and is the natural colour of the lightly coloured wood; their hair colour is painted with enamel paint [Hossack interview 2006]. The colours of the children's clothes are predominantly red, blue and green and are not out of the ordinary in any way for middle class children. The children each hold a corner of the blanket taut between their thumbs and fingers. The blanket is small and white and, attached to it in one corner is the golliwog they toss up in the air. The four white children use this golliwog as their plaything. They toss their plaything into the air making it quite powerless. With the use of the symbol the *golliwog* that is established as a racist representation of black people, the game the white children are playing seems rather sinister. Are the children innocently playing with any rag doll, has it not been explained to them that the golliwog is a symbol of racist stereotypical representation? The children are joined together by the blanket they are holding. This unit positions the children as a group; the children are all white, the *thing* they throw up is black.

The children are allies not only as siblings, they are carved in the likenesses of Schreuders and her three siblings [Schreuders in Herreman 1999: 166],³³ but also as a race segregated from the rest of the non-white population. Schreuders' comments in her Masters thesis about the meaning of the word 'family' explains that the children could refer, not only to her siblings but also to white children per se within the social context she grew up in [Schreuders 1977]. Schreuders grew up under the apartheid system where whites and non-whites³⁴ were segregated and as a child, she was prohibited by law from integrating naturally with children of all colour. During the apartheid years white children were complicit in the discrimination of other races simply by honouring and obeying their parents, their teachers and the legal system. What was presented as the norm during this period was in fact an extremely unacceptable form of racism. Schreuders describes this sculpture as referring to the subtle ways negative stereotypes get played out in popular culture [Schreuders in Herreman 1999:166]. Schreuders tells a story through her sculpture of the innocence of children that has been tainted. She writes of childhood innocence compromised and doomed [ibid]. For most white children

³³ The figures are carved in a traditional African way see notes under chapter on art historical references.

³⁴ Racist term where by implying a non-group, a group not fit to be named, a group just NOT white.

growing up during the apartheid regime they had the difficult choice of trying to understand what was non-discriminatory behaviour and doing something about it or following their parents lead who were 'governed' by prevailing apartheid laws at the time. Schreuders refers to childhood years compromised and doomed because the child is put in a 'no win' position.

The title of the sculpture **Speel Speel** is an Afrikaans word that directly translated into English means *play play*. *Play play* is a word often used in children's terms as referring to that which is not real but with connotations of the real. This *play play* could imply a type of avoidance of reality; in this case, taking the form of a game that in reality could refer to the political period where blacks were being toyed with, namely the apartheid period in South Africa. One way of surviving apartheid South Africa was by avoiding the shocking reality. The children in **Speel Speel** don't look as though they are having fun; their gestures are robotic, their postures stiff and their expressions blank. The expression of the sculpture is produced both by the sombre look on their faces and their robotic postures. I asked Schreuders the reason for the sombre look and she told me of her attempt to make all her figures seem less frozen in time by not animating them with a fixed expression. A carved wooden smile, for example, would be about a gesture arrested in time. She generally uses a more neutral expression that gives her figures a more naturalistic look rather than a frozen animated gesture. [Hossack telephonic interview March 2005] I picture a wooden smile and accept Schreuders' explanation but these particular expressions in this context remain particularly alarming. In addition to this, the arrested activity created by freezing the game at a given moment insists on an inspection of the game. One does however not need a close inspection to quickly pick up the political connotations of this sculpture.

Schreuders based the idea for **Speel Speel** on two sources [Interview Hossack 2004]. The first source being Goya's **El Pelele** (1791-2) (**The Straw Mannequin**) an oil painting that hangs in the Prado in Madrid. **El Pelele** was painted in 1791/2 whilst Goya was Court Painter for Carlos IV and Queen Maria Luisa [See figure 17]. The painting depicts four women dressed in attire accorded to their time, pulling on the corners of a

blanket lifting a man (mannequin) made of straw into the air. The mannequin's posture is limp; his left leg hangs without life from the hip, he seems helpless. The women seem exhilarated. This painting references the type of overarching narratives that Goya painted, in this instance a commentary on the "grace and deceptiveness of women and childhood." [Bareau and Marques 1994:185] Goya's paintings often dealt with a side to life that was dark and even in his lighter more colourful paintings like **El Pelele** one becomes aware that he is referencing a belief that things are not quite as they seem, there is always a subtext going on behind the 'story' witnessed. Goya's **El Pelele** has a mocking tone. Robert Hughes refers to the subject matter of the painting as " a traditional carnival game" [2004:100]. During carnival time, the natural order of the day is overturned and a new order is installed, albeit temporarily. In this painting the women seem to be in charge; they look enthralled. The male mannequin seems powerless in the hands of the women. Hughes proposes that Goya is commenting on the power of women over men and on what he saw as the waning of Spanish masculinity [2004:100]. The mannequin represents a male in Goya's painting; the Golliwog represents a black person in Schreuders' **Speel Speel**. The link between this painting and Schreuders' sculpture is clear. Both tell a story of a time and a place. Both tell this story through the use a symbol or representation of a gender or population group. The helplessness of the passive participant is echoed in both. The mocking tone is there too. Schreuders uses the innocent children as her antagonists; Goya uses sweet, frilly feminine women as his. The antagonists in both the sculpture and the painting are in a position of power. The children in Schreuders sculpture, one could surely assume, are innocent; this then implicates the authorities children usually take guidance from; parents, teachers and indirectly the ruling party of the day.

The second source for **Speel Speel** that Schreuders cites comes from an image she saw in the South African Edition of Time Life Series. [Her MFA thesis lists the source of this photograph as unknown] [See figure 18]. In this image a group of adults are involved in a similar game to the one depicted in **Speel Speel** and **El Pelele**. In the background of this image stands the Voortrekker Monument, an icon erected to represent the stronghold of whites in South Africa. The people portrayed in this image are nine men,

conservatively dressed in white shirts, some wearing waistcoats, throwing a woman dressed in a Voortrekker *kappie* and *rok*³⁵ up in a blanket. The **Voortrekker Monument Image** is not accredited to any artist. There is no title or explanation accompanying this image in Scheuders thesis. This photograph depicts a large crowd at the Voortrekker monument and I can only assume that it is taken on one of the many celebrations that has taken place there over the years on the 16th December when huge crowds meet to celebrate the events of the Great Trek. [Bulpin1969: 8] In this image the atmosphere is jovial, the mocking undertones are less obvious than in **El Pelele**. The passive recipient (a woman) being thrown up in the air is enjoying herself. This woman in the image does not seem passive or helpless, but rather silly and gullible. The antagonists and the recipient all seem silly. They play foolishly at a time of much strife and heartache, death and destruction. They play in front of a building that represented the Apartheid state, the might and power of 'Afrikanerdom'. The Afrikaners were the rulers of the minority Government at that time, roughly between 1950-1994.

The Voortrekker monument is often described as an apartheid monument. Melinda Silverman of Wits University, however states that it is not an apartheid monument. Silverman goes on to say that it is however a building that had very much to do with constructing an Afrikaner identity. The Afrikaner identity had tremendous resonance with the Apartheid regime. Silverman believes that the building is a monument to Afrikaner Nationalism [thepropertymag [o]]. The historical and political aspect of **Speel Speel** is compounded by Schreuders when she cites **The Voortrekker Monument as Background** image as one of her influences for **Speel Speel**. By doing this Schreuders further positions this piece as political commentary. This is biographical information that offers insight into the artwork. The Voortrekker Monument is a building that has a narrative history that cannot be ignored. Annie Coombes writes that it has "a historical status as the centre piece of an orchestrated mass spectacle of Afrikaner unity and power" [Coombes 2003:25]. Whichever way you choose to look at it, the Voortrekker Monument is a building with strong political and historical implications. Schreuders by

³⁵ A Voortrekker *kappie* and *rok* refers to type of hat and dress worn particularly by Afrikaners in the 1820s'.

citing this image, which has this strange activity taking place in front of the Voortrekker Monument, as an influence for her sculpture **Speel Speel** comments on South African history.

More generally, Schreuders' acknowledges a variety of sources as influencing her work. She acknowledges that religious sculpture is her primary influence and stipulates specific influences from; West Africa, especially the Cote` d'Ivoire and Nigeria; Western European religious woodcarvings (especially Spanish Baroque) and works by American comic artist Chris Ware. [Schreuders in O'Toole 2004:11] Because woodcarving is a material and an activity most often associated with West African art³⁶, particularly the Baule, Asante, Ewe and Yoruba peoples, by carving all her figures out of wood Schreuders evokes a connection between South Africa and the African continent. [Schreuders 1977:5]. The forms of African wooden figures that favour a large head and small body over naturalistic proportions influence her figures in **Speel Speel**. This style is typical of the sculptural style found in North West Africa. It is believed, particularly in the works of the Yoruba of Nigeria³⁷, that the reason for exaggerating the head size is to express the "inner head" or personality of the individual, the part associated with controlling destiny and receiving guidance from the ancestors [African Arts 1977:38]. In **Speel Speel** the children's' bodies are short and squat, their heads disproportionately large.³⁸ Having met Claudette, as well as one of her sisters and her brother I can vouch that they are all remarkably tall and thin, it is significant then that Schreuders chooses to carve them in a style that favours short squat bodies. Schreuders explains the reasons for this style are that she has a personal preference for the more rounded figure and that she also prefers using the natural shape of the trunk as opposed to laminating wood. She related how she was influenced by African Sculpture that relies on the shape of the trunks unlike the more western tradition of laminating wood that enables the carving of the more elongated figure [Hossack 8 March 2005].

³⁶ An interesting aside is that traditional African woodcarving is a domain belonging to males in particular.

³⁷ Schreuders has been influenced by the Yoruba specifically in her sculpture titled **Twins** which was inspired by the *ere ibeji*, the practise of carving a figure to represent a deceased twin.

³⁸ Schreuders use of large heads and small bodies in her sculptures will be addressed in the section that deals with her work in an art historical context.

Schreuders African influences come specifically from the Blolo (later known as Colon³⁹) sculptures made by the Baule people of the Cote` d'Ivoire [See figures 18 - 19]. In her Masters' thesis she describes how investigating the Blolo figures have helped her define her own artistic practises. She quotes McEvelley in The Self Of the Other who contends that appreciating objects from a culture other than your own will have a positive effect in understanding where ones own tastes comes from [Cited in Vogel 1991:271 in Schreuders 1997:16]. Schreuders' work shows affiliation to stylistic conventions of the Blolo figures, an obvious one is their straightforward, unanimated expressions. The Blolo figures possess a very limited range of gestures and have emphasis placed on their heads, hands and feet. Schreuders figures possess similar characteristics to these [Lineberry 2004:17]. A more conceptual similarity is that each Blolo figure represents a particular person and articulates an individual experience [Schreuders 1997: 16-17]. Schreuders carves each of her figures with a particular person and/or experience in mind. She believes that this offers credibility to the stories the sculptures contain [Schreuders in Herreman 2001:171].

An obvious conceptual difference between Schreuders figures and the figures of the Baule is that the Baule figures, unlike Schreuders' figures, were never intended as works for sale in the art world; but were used as solutions to problems in everyday life. Blolo figures are used in the ritual realm, they (female,blolo bla; male,blolo bian) are otherworld mates that are brought down to earth (physically manifested i.e. carved by a diviner) if there is a problem on earth. Impotence or infertility would be a reason to have a figure carved [African Arts Spring 1997]. The Baule group of the Cote d'Ivoire believe in a supernatural place that exists beyond that which we can touch. A place the spirit of a newborn comes from and a place the spirit of the dead will go to. In the natural world, each living person has a partner of the opposite sex in this spiritual world. [Ravenhill 1994:18] Schreuders, on the other hand, specifically carves her sculptures as works of art and identifies herself, and is known as, an artist in the western contemporary sense of the term. It is somewhat possible though that through her figures she identifies

³⁹ The controversy surrounding the word colon extends to the confusions surrounding the origin and intention of the colon, and involves the Western approach of analyzing African works of art. See Ravenhill in bibliography.

her own concerns, and by physically manifesting them, gets them off her chest, so to speak, and in this way perhaps they too are used as her 'problem solvers' in everyday life.

In her MA thesis Schreuders explains that her wooden figures not only evoke an African context but also conceptually draw on Western European concepts. The use of carved and painted wooden figures is associated with religious sculptures in both African and Western traditions. Her work shows evidence of merging cultures, this is important to her as it disrupts the idea of culture being "a self enclosed whole" [Schreuders 1977:3]. At the same time as uniting cultures she also speaks of how the medium evoking an African context,⁴⁰ emphasizes the dislocation of the white 'family' she examines. [Schreuders 1997] Kathryn Smith [First National Bank catalogue 2000] believes that:

Much of what constitutes Schreuders' worldview is that of a white, Afrikaans female in a country where she feels quite 'foreign'. Of near Dutch descent, her ancestors were those who colonized and effectively ruled a country where the concerns of the indigenous people were swept under the proverbial rug.

In an artists' statement in *Liberated Voices*, Schreuders [cited in Herreman et al 1999:40] claims:

My own preoccupation with Colon figures of West Africa lies less in wishing to align myself with the meaning and significance of these artistic objects than in their status as strangers or 'ambiguous aliens'

Schreuders as a white person in Africa, is not waiting to be classified as an outsider, she identifies her feelings as belonging to the status of 'outsider'. Herbert Cole has written extensively on the 'stranger' in African art history, he writes that the depiction of the outsider in African art has, from ancient until present times, been represented in numerous ways. Outsiders are sufficiently inside to be identified, but as such are identified as outsiders or 'aliens'. Neighbouring Africans speaking different languages to

⁴⁰ Traditionally African Art is associated with carved wooden figures, it has also been associated traditionally with a male dominated arena. Schreuders comes to this medium, as a white South African woman, as an outsider.

one another are classified as strangers; white people are even greater strangers [Cole 1989:136].

Other influences Schreuders cites include Spanish Baroque, this period produced carved wooden usually polychromed figures with intense attention to detail and realism. During this period these works were revered as religious fetishes. Their medium and intense preoccupation to details bears similarities with the works of Schreuders. The difference between these figures and the figures in **Speel Speel** is that Spanish Baroque sculptures usually depicted saints and religious figureheads not ordinary everyday people. In Schreuders work the lives of ordinary people are highlighted.

On a very different note, one that points to the diversity of Schreuders influences, the contemporary influence she cites is American cartoon artist Chris Ware [Interview Hossack: 2004]. Schreuders claims that she is influenced by what she calls his powerful work and that it is a challenge for her to try and make work equally as strong as his. [Interview Hossack: 2006]. Ware states that he is interested in “the weird process of reading pictures not just looking at them” [wikipedia Ware [o]]. This can be likened to the process of encountering Schreuders’ sculptures where one derives pleasure by looking and ‘reading’ them.⁴¹ A formal similarity Schreuders shares with Ware is that he utilises the representational form of large heads and small bodies. In the Western world however images of large heads and small bodies are associated with caricature, which is a very different concept to their association in an African context with ancestral worship.

Stephan Balkenhol (b1957-) is a contemporary German sculptor whose work has similarities with regard to Schreuders’ work and is worth mentioning here. Balkenhol carves wooden figures, like Schreuders he uses both power saws and chisels. He then paints these figures and like Schreuders he uses paints sparingly preferring the natural wood colour as skin tone and painting the clothes and hair. He too, like Schreuders,

⁴¹ See Mitchell W.J.T 2001 who writes that the audience projects a voice onto the image and that the image doesn’t actually *say* something.

favours deadpan expressions. The description Neal Benezra [Broadartfoundation: 2006 [o]] uses for Balkenhol's work aptly fits Schreuders' work, when he says,

He does not seek to capture the heroic glory of
bygone periods but rather demonumentalizes the
figurative statue by thrusting the most unremarkable
men and women onto pedestals historically reserved
for heroes and heroines.

Not only is the representational aspect of carving and painting people out of wood one that Schreuders and Balkenhol have in common but what they both offer conceptually is monumentalising ordinary people or events. This power given to the everyday forces a closer inspection of the work and creates a mystique or story that seems well worth investigating.

Conclusion

Speel Speel combines content with rich materiality. Her technical and conceptual skills blend together to offer rich stories contained in her strong silent figures. She is not afraid to represent herself and her siblings in a negative way as stereotypes of other white children. By doing so Schreuders implicates herself and her 'family' and reveals an aspect of her childhood as being involved in a thoughtless cruel *game* affecting the lives of Black people. Schreuders has said that she takes a harsh rather than sentimental approach to her work. She avoids sentimentality by trying to see herself (or her 'family' and friends) as part of a group and explores the way in which she can use this group as a stereotype [Lineberry and Yapelli 2004:24].

Speel Speel has particular resonance for me because I grew up during apartheid South Africa. Growing up in apartheid South Africa, we South Africans were fed a history, a one sided perspective fuelled by lies and deceit. We were forced to live under the yoke of our oppressors and all authoritarian figures seemed compliant in the corrupt, evil system of apartheid. During the past 10 years our history books have started to change and South African history has been given a much-needed transformation. In post apartheid South

Africa there are many stories that need to be told, stories of the past, everyman's stories. Story telling or the re-presentation of events has a role to play, in transitional South Africa. Philosopher John Degenaar [*Art and Culture in A Changing South Africa*, unpublished seminar] speaks of the importance of the role of storytelling of an historical nature in the new South Africa:

Stories about the past, enable us to create and share a common future. [s]tories with an historical resonance are of greater importance for they introduce us to that which is unconscious in the South African community

Schreuders work explores the political, but from a personal point of view, where everyday life is investigated and presented. Schreuders highlights the idea that politics manifest itself in extremely private ways, and affect the personal narratives of the everyday. I find re-looking at a South African history through the works of Schreuders therapeutic as it is a way of re-looking at apartheid South Africa's troubled past. Schreuders offers us a point of reflection. There is a cathartic value in embracing the past, addressing the past does not mean living in the past. The past is not recoverable, and lives only in the imagination, or in the act of expressing it. History is brought into being or activated by our presence or existence in the present. Schreuders tells a story of a certain aspect of history. Remembering the apartheid past and reflecting on it in an artwork does not put it to rest or force us to live in the past but rather helps to clear the way for the new.

Figure 12:

Claudette Schreuders. **Speel Speel** 1996

Yelatung, avocado, lime, poplar woods and enamel paint.

Height 29 cm. (Robert Loder Collection United Kingdom)

[Reproduced in Herreman 1999]



Figure 13:
Claudette Schreuders. **Speel Speel** 1996
Yelutang, avocado, lime, poplar woods
and enamel paint.
(Robert Loder Collection, U.K.)
[Reproduced in Schreuders 1977]



Figure 14:
Claudette Schreuders. Detail of
Speel Speel 1996.
[Reproduced in Schreuders 1977]



Figure 15:
Claudette Schreuders. Detail of sketches for **Speel Speel**
[Reproduced in Schreuders 1977]



Figure 16:
 Newspaper Article on the gollywog.
 [Reproduced from found Internet article]

Daily Mail, Tuesday, June 22, 1999

A sticky end at last for Golly?

By JAMES CLARK
 Home Affairs Reporter

THE famous gollywog on Robertson's jam and marmalade jars may finally be forced into retirement.

For years anti-race groups have campaigned for Golly, who first appeared in 1910, to be scrapped.

Now they may get their way following the latest row - over a Royal Doulton figurine for the Millennium.

The gollywog is among a collection of 20th Century advertising 'icons' including the Fox's mint polar bear, the Guinness toucan and the John Player Special sailor. But despite the range being the most popular made by Millennium Collectibles, protesters are demanding it be scrapped because Golly is racist.

Gerry German, of the Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources, told the black newspaper The Voice: 'I find it appalling that any organisation in this day and age can produce anything which would commemorate the gollywog.'

'It is an offensive caricature of black people. The word "wog" stems from gollywog. When children are exposed to this it is devastating.'

A spokesman for Robertson's, of Manchester, said yesterday: 'We have kept Golly under constant review for some time because of the way a minority feel about him.'

'He's still very popular. Each year we get more than 340,000 requests for Golly badges. Since 1910 we have sent out more than 20million.'

'The sad thing is that unlike so many modern children's characters, Golly is non-violent, positive and cheery. I can't see how he inspires racist language. Nobody ever called for the banning of Bugs Bunny - that's what children called pears with protruding teeth.'

'But some people seem determined to see Golly as something he never was. It may be his time is coming to an end.'

The Robertson's icon was moved from the front to the back of jam jars more than 15 years ago after 'racism' protests.

Miranda Kodill, of Millennium Collectibles, said last night: 'The figurines are sold out now. We've had hundreds of letters from older people who say Golly reminds them of their youth.'

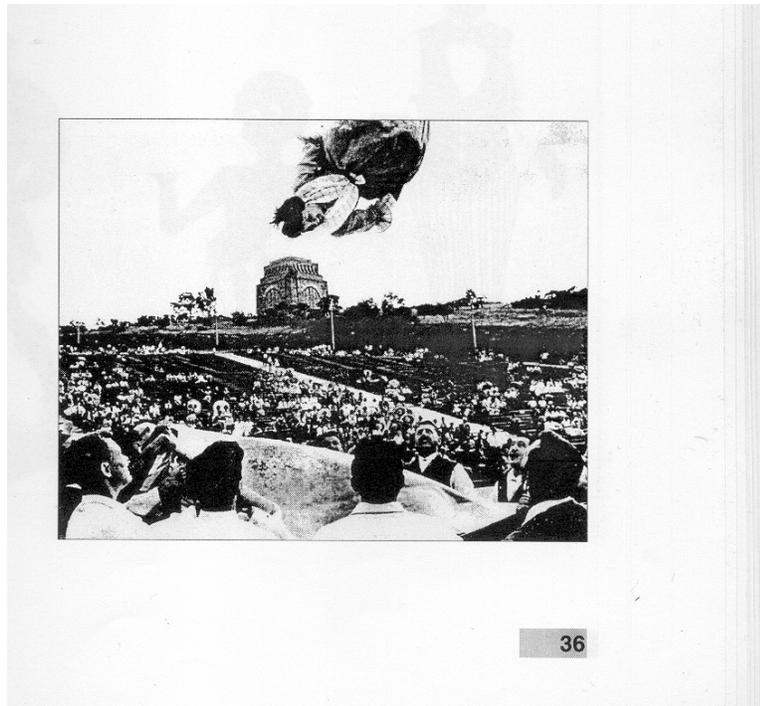



Figure 17:
Francisco de Goya **El Pelele** 1791-2 as seen in Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin
[Reproduced in Sunday Independent Newspaper. Exact date unknown: 2005]



visitors walk through an exhibition of masterpieces by Goya

Figure 18:
Unknown Photographer. Untitled. **Voortrekker Monument as Background**
[Reproduced in Schreuders 1997:36]



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Figure 19:
Figure of an otherworld woman. Blolo Bla
Photograph by Lap Nguyen Tien
Wooden Sculpture. Dimensions not given.
[Reproduced in Ravenhill 1996:37]



Figure 20:
Figure of an otherworld man.
Blolo Bian
Wooden Sculpture. Height 33.6cm
Fowler Museum of Cultural History
University of California
[Reproduced in Ravenhill 1996: 29]

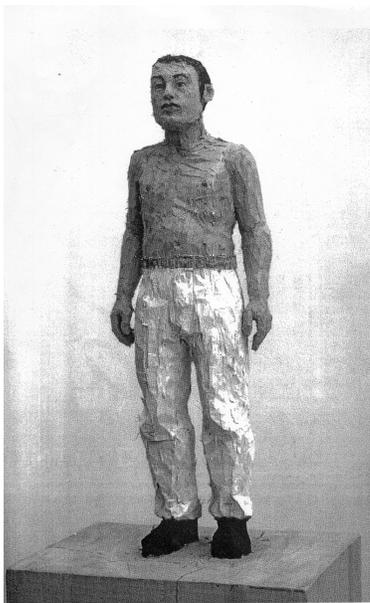


Figure 21: Stephen Balkenhol. Wooden Sculpture.
Found Image Art Magazine

Part Three

Practical Component.

On the 20th October 2005 I exhibited the practical component of my Masters Degree at the Substation art gallery at Wits University. My exhibition or ‘show’ was titled **postbloodypast**. It took the form of an assemblage installation with aspects of performance art: the audience playing the role of the performers, by moving through the show. They were the ‘guests at my party’ so to speak, a coming together of people who were still standing, homage to those who weren’t. The show was meant as a party *and* a memorial service. The invitations for **postbloodypast** were specifically small, business card size and not at all ‘flashy or glitzy’ [See figure 22]. The posters advertising the show looked equally as ‘unvarnished’ and ‘home-made’ [See figure 23]. Invitations to art exhibitions can be grand and glossy and often present a slice of the work on show; miniature signifiers of the art world. The glossy photograph serves as advertising and stimulates a kind of visual familiarity with this work and people are drawn to this image in a show. I have observed that the image chosen for the invitation the *chosen one*, is often a work that is sold. I wanted a low-key invitation that showed no hint of advertising or the promise of consumables. The front of the invitation bore only the title of the show, and because of its *gravitas* I added a touch of levity and introduced the theatrical aspect to the show by sticking a fun childish sticker onto the invitation. The invitation was orange, and this colour was representative of the predominant colour scheme of the exhibit. So, in this way the invitation *was* a signifier through the association of colour. Choosing a name for my exhibition was an integral part of my art making process. By titling the show I was forced to clarify exactly what I wished to express. When I started conceptualising the show in 2004 it had several titles. A discussion of these titles offers insight into the processes informing the production of my work. Listed below are titles I nearly chose instead of **postbloodypast** and the motivation for nearly choosing them.

Sem Vergona. *Sem Vergona* means *without shame* in Portuguese. My connection with the Portuguese language is that from 1988-1990 I lived in Brazil. For the first six months I could not speak any Portuguese, but I insisted on being heard and attempted to speak the language. I was the *gringa* that spoke such bad Portuguese that the locals remarked

‘she speaks our language *sem vergona*.’ My desire to communicate knew no boundaries of grammar; pronouns, tenses verbs, adverbs and the likes. I was alone, English speaking in a foreign country and had to accumulate enough language skills to be understood. I surprised the locals with my readiness to make a fool of myself by speaking continuously in a very childlike Portuguese. The Brazilians were non-judgemental of my poor language skills and I enjoyed a healthy communication with the people there. My passion to communicate in art as in life is equally as strong. The strength of my motivation to communicate may produce work that is not seamless or sophisticated. This does not bother me as I believe I find a way to make or obtain the objects that in some way can speak for me. If the title of my exhibition had been **Sem Vergona** it would refer to my shamelessness in exposing my urgency to communicate immediately, directly, spontaneously and without too much editing.

How Can WE Help YOU? *How can we help you* is a catch phrase taken directly from a First National Bank advertisement. The patronising slant of this particular advertisement annoyed me. A banking institution being a ‘stranger’ would only help if it were in its interest; there were obvious limitations to this offer. This triggered off thoughts of the way authorities or institutions hoodwinked or ‘governed’ the people. I also began thinking of just *what* it was that could ultimately help someone. Art making as a form of self-expression has always helped me feel a little more in control of my life, more empowered. I wondered just how the things I made helped me. What role does the art making process and the objects I make play in my catharsis, how do they alleviate my burden of unexpressed thoughts? I would use the *WE* in the title **How can WE help YOU?** in an animated form to refer to the objects/images that I create and the *YOU* would reference me. In other words, my objects *ask* how they can help me.

Alas, the artist is everything or It’s all about me. The arrogant role the artist must assume, as director of the exhibition is one that interests me. Deciding to go public with an artwork implicates the artist in the need to be heard, the insistence on being seen and being in the limelight at the opening of her show. The artist must assume that what she has to say is worthy of being heard, that what she produces is worthy of being seen. It is a

pompous and yet humbling position. It is a role the artist must assume for she is an exhibitionist. Lack of confidence is no excuse; the artist is expected to produce and to display her wares. Not only is she expected to do that but she is also required (if she wants to make a living from her craft) to price her work and offer herself up for criticism. The artist has no choice but to be in the spotlight.

Unmasked? Or **Masquerade**. The fourth title that I nearly chose was **Unmasked?** Or **Masquerade**. Masks were a pervading theme of my exhibition. Masks and facades have long interested me. How much of our daily life is a performance? When are we really being ourselves? Do we know ourselves? Is your face, a facade? Was I really unmasked, did I reveal myself, or an aspect of myself through my work? Did I censor myself too much or perhaps not enough? Have I revealed my artistic weaknesses in my urgency to be heard, should I mask my emotional immaturity and present a streamlined, ‘grown up’ show?

Whilst making the work for the show I thought about the implications of all of these titles, the title I eventually chose was **postbloodypast**. On a negative note South Africa today, is fraught with fears and anxieties⁴² this is mostly as a result of the extraordinarily high crime rate, South Africa having the second highest murder rate in the world, the first highest being Columbia. [2007 Guinness Top Ten of Everything] I come across a lot of conversations where the crime rate is discussed. Whenever a friend or acquaintance expresses any of these fears or anxieties I find myself more often than not replying “We’ve had a bloody past”. It seems people are quick to forget. The word *post* as a prefix is interesting, it references that which is past, by naming it, thereby acknowledging it. During my course of studies for my Masters degree I read a lot of ‘post’ theory; post-modernism, post-colonialism, post- feminism, post-structuralism and even post-theory. I decided on post-past and threw *bloody* into the mix. My exhibition was concerned with the past, present and future; personally and collectively. The past is in our midst, was I over my past? Are we ever post-past? We are living in the after-math of a bloody past,

⁴² This opinion does implicitly not imply that in the past things were better, far from it.

prone to criticize the present, afraid or uncertain of the future. We are a country in transition, on the move.

How much should we remember, how much should we forget? Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in his seminal paper of 1914 *Remembering, Repeating and Working through* wrote, “ The patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as memory but as an action: he repeats it, without of course knowing that he repeats it.” [Freud cited in Phillips 2005:182] A concern of mine is to what extent we, as a nation, have processed our troubled past. I believe that there are a lot of unexpressed emotions that are not being acknowledged but are rather being ‘acted out’ in the ‘new’ South Africa. This emotional deficit in our countries psyche causes friction. Bringing the past up is scary, it could incite aggression, but not acknowledging or remembering the past at all is just as dangerous. Freud believed that remembering the past stops you living in the past and that the right kind of remembering enables *the new*. [Freud cited in Phillips 2005:182] I felt I needed to tell a story about the past for my Masters exhibition. The story I was going to tell included my personal past and a collective past. I felt I needed to remind myself where we had come from.

In three recent art exhibitions prior to **postbloodypast**, I had expressed my pain on a more personal level. Firstly in 2002 in **Concrete Thoughts** I expressed my pain over the recent death of my mother, in June 2003 I was still expressing this loss in **Room as a Tomb**. [See figures 24-25]. Later in the same year in **Hair Today, gone tomorrow** I referenced my pain at the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust and the mass genocide of the Rwandan people [See figure 26]. It seems that it is difficult for me to separate my pain from the pain of others. In 2004 in **Hey Fever** I addressed my fears over the personal safety of my children and my scepticism in the power of religion to comfort me. [See figures 27-29]. I now felt ready to tackle that which had been, and to some extent will always be, a suppressed memory. **postbloodypast** was concerned with my personal past as a South African growing up during apartheid South Africa, it addressed the hope of a future here in South Africa too. Growing up I knew the apartheid regime was evil and humiliating, I was unaware of the physical cruelty being inflicted on

the people of Africa. I left the country shortly after matriculating and returned when Nelson Mandela was freed almost 10 years later –leaving was all I could do, rather pathetic.

A strange thing happened whilst making the work; it became something other than a story about South Africa's past, it brought up thoughts about the three years I had lived in Israel between 1982-1984 and the present conflict in the Middle East, my work became concerned about the suffering of others, generally The violence in the Middle East has escalated since I lived there, as I met many inhabitants of Israel, this is something that deeply affects me. I began to realise that my past could not only be contained within one country and also that suffering people, in general troubled me.⁴³ During the time I spent preparing for the exhibition I had watched a DVD made in Ghana about the slave trade and this too disturbed me. I wanted to reference the evilness of slavery as well in my exhibition. **postbloodypast** was particularly about South Africa's apartheid past but it could easily have referenced the general state of evilness in the world as well. J.M. Coetzee [cited in Salmagundi 2003:52] comments on evil

A measuring of vileness against vileness in which the very act of measuring leaves a vile taste in the mouth. Twenty million six million, three million, a hundred thousand; at a certain point the mind breaks before quanta;... [A] sparrow knocked off a branch by a sling shot, a city annihilated from the air; who dare to say which is the worse? evil all of it, an evil universe invented by an evil god.

My narrative was vast and sprawling I needed to contain it by *becoming* the space. I was inspired by Carlos Feuntes in his book Terra Nostre [(1975:705-6) Nash 2001:112] in which the prophet Luovico declares that:

We will transform this place into a space that truly contains all spaces into a time which truly embodies all time...all things being converted into all men, all men into all things...

⁴³ I once looked up this *condition* in a dictionary and found the word *pathetic fallacy*, which implies that the sufferer cannot separate the pain of others from his or her own pain.

postbloodypast took place at the Wits University gallery, the Substation on the 20th October 2005. The substation is a modernist concrete block, a dark concrete near cube on the outside, a rectangular vacuous white, windowless space on the inside. To demarcate and make my occupation of the substation known I chose a dead paper clown, dead by suicide. I wanted a symbol, an image that could signify me. My choice of a clown spoke of pretence, a dead clown upset me, I went with it not trying to analyse it too much. Sometimes I make things without necessarily knowing where they come from, I trust this instinct. The clown, an unsubtle symbol of performance, was tired of performing. She hung by a rope from her neck three metres off the ground from a tree immediately outside the substation [See DVD]. She had orange frizzy hair made from shredded computer paper, a throwaway material. She had a clowns' face, a large red nose, and a beautiful life size body and was made out of paper and glue, so she was light inexpensive and disposable. She wore a red strappy evening dress which showed off her shapely legs and in her right hand a red ribbon wrapped around her fingers trailed to the ground and was blown by the wind between her legs. The position of her hands were remarkable; they were held rigid, outstretched in front of her, in the position of someone who offers their hands for someone else to wind wool around them for weaving. It was as if she was busy right before she decided to kill herself; actively involved in life right before she decided to end it. On the night of the show there was a slight breeze, which was perfect as it blew the limp clown from side to side, in a type of neglected throwaway fashion.

Like most of my recent artworks **postbloodypast** [See figure 30] took the form of an installation. When exhibiting I prefer making an entire area representative of myself, I create a little world of my own to put on display. The aspect of presentation I chose for my installation was carnivalesque.⁴⁴ Carnivalesque was a term introduced to literary theory by the mid-twentieth century Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin referring to the challenge of authority instigated by the temporary reversal of social order. [Bowers 2004:129] Carnival also has personal associations for me; I witnessed three carnivals whilst living in Brazil, in Salvador De Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. Carnival happens for a

⁴⁴ This carnivalesque kind of exhibition has similarities with the **Happenings** genre of exhibiting which began mostly in New York in the 1960's with Allan Kaprow. [For more information see Sontag 2001: 263-274]

short period of time when the natural order of things is turned upside down. During carnival the world seems to be at play. The form of representation I prefer is theatrical and when expressing serious issues I choose to stay away from realistic documentation as a form of presentation and I choose to reference the horrors in a macabre or theatrical way. I felt so ineffective during South Africa's gruesome apartheid past, by being able to express it now in art, I find some refuge. Like Nabakov, art-making processes are for me an escape into aesthetics. Nabakov writes through Shade, one of his characters, "I feel I understand existence, or at least a minute part of my existence, only through my art" [Stegner 1967:123]. "Physical decay, suffering, cruelty, vulgarity, can be transcended, Nabakov suggests, only by death or by an intense concern with aesthetics" [Stegner 1967:116]. My carnival of **postbloodypast** was meant as a celebration of life and a remembrance of those who suffered in apartheid South Africa and more generally, anyone that has suffered or is still suffering.

To dramatize the theatrical aspect of the 'show' I put black curtains up at the entrance through which the audience had to enter. I wanted the beholders to witness the world I had created and acknowledge entering it by separating it from the outside world. **postbloodypast** spoke of perceptions, there is the world and there is my perception of the world. I wanted the audience to acknowledge their perceptions of the world, to feel something, even if it is not how I feel. Once inside it was difficult to ignore the strangeness of the space I had created [See figure 30]. The main source of lighting for the show came from wax *death masks*⁴⁵ or severed heads that were supported by rusty neck braces and mounted on the walls. The rusty neck braces served as a support for the heads and also referenced the slave trade I had been exposed to via the DVD I had watched of Ghanaian slave trade [Reference unrecorded]. These masks had human hair and the odd tooth or bone embedded in them. The hair was human in origin and this was important as it came from a real human head that bore an indexical trace to a human subject albeit not the actual subjects that I was paying homage to. The teeth were plastic

⁴⁵ Death masks are memorial sculptural objects formed from a mold set upon the *very* face of the dead. [Saltzman 2006:12] I refer to my severed heads in **postbloodypast** as *death masks* as these heads represent the dead but am well aware that they are not taken specifically from the dead and so ideally should not be called death masks ; hence the use of italics

and I didn't mind this as it referenced the representational or make believe or *play play* aspect of art. The wicks embedded in them were functional I wanted them to burn, to alter shape, and in the process to let off an awful smell of burnt protein. I prefer not to call these heads, candles. Although there is the obvious ritualistic association of burning candles both for prayers and remembering the dead, I did not necessarily have these in mind but am not adverse to the association. The reasons they were produced with the functionality of candles were multifold; firstly I wanted to reference the past, in the distant past, candles were used as the main source of lighting, secondly this form of lighting can also be associated with a poor socio-economic group that can not afford electricity, (this references a large percentage of our populations' past and to a lesser degree still references South Africa's present situation). Thirdly as the wax burned, the faces became disfigured, or destroyed. With their life force slipping away this spoke not only to the passing of life and referenced time, but of the disfigurement through the torture of many victims during the apartheid regime. As they burned, the molten wax left a trail of red *blood* on the wall and the smoke left a trace of black soot. At the end of the show that was all that was left of some of them. This trace provided material evidence or indexes that *life* or an event had taken place. Lastly, and not in order of diminishing importance, by burning the human hair embedded in them the wax heads let off a revolting smell which sickened the audience in a way I had hoped for. The activation of the olfactory sense in this exhibition was an important aspect for me. One does not forget smell easily and I wanted this show to linger in the memory of the audience.

For the most part these heads were blood red in colour, some were transparent white and most of them were modelled to include scarification marks⁴⁶. There were about 40 of these *death masks* [See figure 31] that filled the interior perimeter of the substation. Both male and female they were positioned about a metre apart from each other and one and a half metres above the floor. The masks or severed heads were inspired by the horrors I read about in Antjie Krog's, Country of My Skull, those that I am trying to forget; such as how long it took to burn bodies, how decaying bodies looked and smelled. I poured the

⁴⁶ These marks spoke to the disfigurement previously discussed but also of scarification rituals that take place willingly as a perception of beauty.

hot liquid blood red wax into the paper casts that I had made, sometimes the wax would tipple the heads and the liquid would come running out, sometimes the wax was too hot for the paper and the liquid would seep out through the face. The liquid wax became a substitute for blood, this would harden and a face was formed. Each head that I made referenced a person, or several people. Earlier on in this paper I stated that the heads *represented* the unknown sufferers, however whilst I was making them, they *became* the people. In Country of my Skull I read about the abuse black women suffered which always had specific reference to their gender, and often implied sexual abuse; breasts getting slammed in drawers and menstruating women humiliated by being given no form of protection. The wax masks of women with open mouths bore reference to the sexual abuse women suffered, women with orifices to be abused. By allowing the heads to burn I brought in an important element into the *show*, that of fire. Working with fire, for me, was a reference to our past; in **postbloodypast** this referred to the act of necklacing⁴⁷ and also to the burning of bodies to get rid of them⁴⁸. The burning heads also ensured that none of them remained the same; they were all altered during the duration of the show. The fact that the heads changed form during the ‘show’ furthered my aim of expressing the passing of time. Fire is also so sadly a sore point in our present time, by this I refer to the amount of fires caused in the inadequate shelters that so many people still live in today. My ‘shacks’ or wooden portals are placed precariously close to the burning heads and the dry leaves; this created an atmosphere of a potential fire hazard, thus referencing a danger many face today in SouthAfrica.

postbloodypast took place in October. October is a spectacular month in Johannesburg⁴⁹ the Jacaranda trees are in full bloom and their lilac coloured flowers form carpets softening the otherwise harsh tarred Jo’burg streets. Soft summer breezes and intermittent summer thunderstorms make sure the flowers do not stay on the trees, although these are soon replenished. The streets are littered with areas of lilac from the jacarandas, this

⁴⁷ Necklacing involves a tyre being put around the neck of someone this tyre is doused with petrol or inflammable substances and set alight. This form of *punishment* was usually inflicted by the community when they suspected someone of being an *impimpi* or police informer.

⁴⁸ In Country of My Skull reference is made to testimonies confessing to the burning of the bodies of the victims.

⁴⁹ This acknowledgement does not exclude the possibility that October is a spectacular month anywhere else in South Africa or anywhere for that matter.

coupled with the fuchsia from fallen bougainvilleas make for a visual spectacle difficult to ignore. It was important for me to have my exhibition during this month, when nature is so spectacular, because a large proportion of my show was made up of nature, namely autumn and winter leaves. I emptied about fourteen huge garbage bags onto the floor of the substation. The leaves virtually covered the floor surface, providing a messy, unkempt texture. Because it is spring/summer in October in South Africa, my autumn leaves bore witness to the passing of time, and also because leaves are not usually displayed indoors added to the strangeness of the atmosphere. The visual spectacle outdoors contrasted perfectly with my **postbloodypast** dried autumn and winter leaves indoors.

The leaves served a formalist function as well as important conceptual ones; they were an invaluable cheap readymade and created a makeshift weird indoor /outdoor atmosphere. The leaves also offered a sense of decay, leaves are often perceived as mess, to be swept away and put into plastic bags and thrown away. They referenced things that should be swept under the carpet so to speak, not on display. As well as having a strong visual effect the audio effect the leaves produced as the adults stepped or the children ran through them, offered a nice crunchy sound. As people kicked their way through the leaves, the leaves shifted positions; this created proof of the movement that took place during the show. Movement was important for me because it showed the passing of time, going from one place to another, moving on.

To create a fuller chaotic look I added bales of human hair to the floor space. These clumps of hair were placed in corners and under most of the *death masks*. The hair provided another form of texture and added more hair to the 'show', a material of an indexical nature that referenced a human trace. The hair also contributed to the upside down, inside out carnivalesque feel of the show. Hair once cut, like leaves is usually swept up and thrown away, not kept for display. Also an entirely new texture was created by the molten wax falling on the hair as the heads burned this altered the hair and spoke to movement and change.

The central, interior space of the substation consisted of six upright wooden structures, five of these were portals and one was a booth [See figure 32]. The booth differed from the portals in that it was an enclosed space, one could walk through the portals but not the booth. The booth stood at the furthest end to the entrance. The orange portals were life-size doorways two metres in length, 90cm wide and were joined to form a double portal by 50cm wooden beams along their base. I chose the colour orange for three specific reasons. Firstly, I vividly remember how as a teenager I identified orange overalls with municipal workers. These people were the silent work force of our country. They were involved in the construction of South Africa, but had little or no say in it. Secondly, orange spoke to the past, the predominant colours of the old South African flag were orange, white and blue. Thirdly, and on a brighter note orange, for me, represented a sunny, dynamic South Africa. A country filled with hope. Each portal stood on two concrete blocks, which raised them substantially off the ground. The portals were simple structures of average doorway height that referenced the unnaturally low height of shacks, (the majority of housing types for the people of low or no income groups in South Africa). However, once installed, I made the decision to raise the portals to accommodate the very high ceiling of the substation.⁵⁰ From portal to portal I constructed flimsy paths made from sliced wooden off cuts, bound loosely together with string and shredded diaphanous cotton fabric, that I had ripped into strips. I cut this diaphanous cotton cloth⁵¹ into strange shapes, sometimes resembling prayer flags, this fabric together with the string and wooden off cuts formed the pathways. These off cuts that I attached together to form the flimsy paths were also painted bright shiny orange. Balloons of analogous colours: reds and yellows were affixed to these makeshift paths and hazardous structures. This helped to further create a strange party, carnivalesque atmosphere. At intermittent intervals some of the vertical struts of the portals were bound and bandaged with strips of paint soaked canvas. The canvas material was ripped from old failed paintings or canvasses never started and referred to a history of art making processes, or

⁵⁰ Working in my studio where the ceiling was much lower the portals gave more of the claustrophobic feeling I was hoping to achieve.

⁵¹ This cloth that I bought in Lenasia is specifically imported from India and used in the making of underclothes for Saries. There is a large population of Indians in South Africa, they too were oppressed under the yoke of apartheid. This for me points to a further connectedness to South Africa's diverse past.

perhaps a tongue in cheek reference to the thirty year old announcement of "the death of painting".

This interior space of the installation referenced a kind of South African construction site. I see South Africa as a nation in transition, a country under construction. The portals were spindly, vertical structures that were standing upright but were nevertheless precarious, almost as if they could fall down at any moment. They referenced two things; firstly our South African shacks where so many people are forced to live. These 'structures' or shacks are almost uninhabitable but are used as dwellings for a large portion of the population. Secondly this construction site was our new South Africa, a construction arising from our shaky past. It represented the difficulty and uncertainty of a future with such a chequered past, metaphorically a kind of phoenix rising up from the ashes, a new South African identity. The fact that the vertical structures were open doorways meant that you could walk through them and this was about going forward, leaving the past 'behind'. You could walk through or you could be stuck, stuck in the past. The booth at the end offered no place to go. Some people were stuck in the past. The doorways also provided a type of framing of the installation, different areas of the exhibition were framed depending on where you stood and which particular portal you were looking through at the time. The diaphanous fabrics connecting the portals compounded this, so as you walked along the paths the show was seen or veiled in different ways. This spoke to perceptions once more.

The masks and the portals represented my more collective thoughts I now wanted to create a space within this space that represented my personal thoughts. I have ascertained though, that these are not necessarily separate. Anyhow my attempt at the more personal representation took the form of an altar and an altarpiece, which I placed opposite the entrance to the substation [See figure 33]. The altar consisted of an assemblage of smaller images and objects that added to the cluttered feel of the installation and referenced and consisted of my personal clutter at home. By choosing an altar and an altarpiece to be my self-portrait I was referencing some kind of ritualistic practise, and the religious fervour I feel whilst making art. The closest I get to being religious is the daily rituals that I

perform; making and looking at images, writing and reading, being a mother and teacher, communicating with and being communicated to and thinking about life and relationships. The altar took the form of the seating arrangements in a sports stadium. It consisted of three levels each one raised consecutively by concrete building blocks. I presented the altar as a makeshift structure that projected a transient nature and could be reconstituted and taken apart easily. I wanted to project that all this preciousness, all the things that make up a life could be gone in an instant a kind of transiency of life feel. The altar spanned a four-metre length and each tier (it was three tiered) was 50 cm wide. The wide horizontal format of the altar was inspired by the Yoruba and Brazilian altars that are wider rather than vertical in format. This referenced my personal past as I had witnessed, when I lived in Brazil, these types of altars in a completely different context however.

The lowest rung represented childhood, my children's and mine and consisted of stuffed toys, all were wrapped up in plastic, some were individually wrapped; others were wrapped in groups and bound to the shelf of the altar. My children had outgrown these toys; I was still trying to outgrow mine. I washed them prior to the exhibition and was ready to give them away. Wrapping them up referenced my attempt to say goodbye to these years, to let go. My children were growing up, they still needed me but not in the same way, their toys are now replaced with digital toys.

The second rung consisted of pharmaceuticals; medicines, pills, boxes of medicines and packets of pills; paraphernalia from chemists that aided lives, mentally, physically and superficially; even shampoo was included. The collection process of these pharmaceuticals for this middle rung was also a process that provided meaning. The fact that they had come from friends, people who identify me by association, was important. Displaying them on the altar was the aim of collecting them, but the requesting, collecting and archiving of these products proved a tremendous source of stimulation for me. Firstly it spoke of the collective similarities, and differences amongst us, as humans. It referenced our weaknesses, a reliance on products to get us through the day, and in particular the dependence on prescription drugs this seemingly difficult task requires.

This collection included vast contributions from friends, quite an array of anti-depressants and antihistamines. I enjoyed the audiences concern as to the enquiry of whether all the medication was mine.⁵² I paid attention to the colours of the pills and packaging and grouped them on display according to their colours. I piled them up in quite a messy way on the shelf or middle rung of the altar.

The highest rung consisted of a shelf with lots of *stuff* on it; objects that I surround my life with, that identify me, in some way. A self-portrait made of *stuff*; images and objects [See figures 34-35]. I gathered these from my home and these included, amongst other things, an assortment of memorabilia; my children's' cut hair and pulled teeth, objects, balls of wool, cotton and threads that I had for the most part unravelled, ornaments meaningful and meaningless, objects I had made and objects I had bought, stuff that made up my life. The unravelled balls of threads, wools and cottons left lots of *loose threads* and referenced two things; potential art works that I had left unfinished and a futile attempt to tie things up. I wanted this assemblage of small paraphernalia in some way to explain the big picture. My inability to keep my personal thoughts personal forced me to express feelings I had about the world. So in this space that I had chosen as my self-portrait, I brought in thoughts about the crippling third world debt. This *is* personal because I live in Africa and as previously stated I had lived in Brazil. I projected my thoughts about the crippling third world debt onto the form of an American beggar [See figure 36]. This pathetic paper person crouched on the top rung of the altar was naked save for an American paper flag shawl and had in *its* outstretched hands a beggars bowl and some South African cents in it. I had reversed the tables in this world of mine, America was poor and begging for money and the currency of value was South African.

Directly above the highest rung of the altar the altarpiece began. This consisted of my and my children's drawings and paintings, empty frames, notes, photocopies of art pieces by my favourite artists and paper and wax relief faces - paraphernalia that created a jumbled assemblage of images. There were mirrors on this portion of wall framed with

⁵² I sometimes wonder if there isn't a 'pill' I could take that could take away the emotional pain I feel about the evils of the past and the present, that is inflicted on humans.

ornate plaster frames, cast from Wits University manholes, painted with the design of flags from powerful western countries that included Britain, France and America. The audience catching a glimpse of themselves in the mirrors were at once framed by the symbols of these Western powers, and were meant to reflect on their status in regard to the colonial powers. Muslims and Jews were represented in the show too, as paper faces; their similarities highlighted by the religious headgear they wore. As mentioned I lived in the Middle East from the age of 21-24 so have a strong affiliation with the ongoing suffering there. Each one of these objects or images had conceptual value but I was well aware of their formal contribution, their colours and textures their scale and composition were well considered.

On the altar I introduced two other forms of lighting to the show. On the top shelf I placed two lamps; one puffer fish lamp (a possession I have owned since I was 16 and references a summer holiday in Mauritius) and the other my polka dot bedside lamp. I brought in these two lamps, both of which I feel very attached to because they offered a personal domestic feel and also because they provided a bit more light on the altar, which was otherwise quite indistinctly lit. Another small source of lighting came from my garden light that I had placed under a pile of leaves on the floor and this lit up a small area and gave the sprawling leaves and construction site a bit more light and made this area slightly more personal feel, for me anyway.

Music blared from a CD player that I had placed haphazardly on one of the rungs. I wanted music to feature in the show as part of life, part of my life. The music added movement to the show as one song ended and another one began. I chose the songs specifically as part of my narrative and included Louis Armstrongs' - **What a Beautiful World** and **I like the way you move** by the Boo Radleys. This song in particular I chose to remind us of our physicality, to become aware of our movements; the act of being in the here and now [Hear attached CD ROM].

On either side of the altar I situated my *Ambassadors*, like Holbeins⁵³ **Ambassadors** they stare out at the audience and present a collection of objects. My ‘ambassadors’ are two paper life-size clowns; these two clowns represented my parents. The ‘parents’ as clowns framed the altar and presented the objects that were, in a way, a ‘self-portrait’. The female clown on the left was dressed in a short black evening dress and sported yellow plastic washing up gloves, but they don’t fit and she doesn’t mind them hanging in a dysfunctional manner off her hands, she is rather undomesticated. My mother always used to joke she couldn’t boil an egg. She went out dancing a lot hence the evening dress. The male clown on the right is a doctor of some sort; he wears a white lab coat and sports a plastic stethoscope around his neck. Although my father is not a medical doctor, he purports to know everything. The clowns both stand on ladders that make them able to oversee events from a distance, the male from a tremendous height, the female less so. My parents were both quite absent parents. The height the clowns stood at not only distanced them conceptually but added a component of extra height to the show and improved the scale ratio. The ladders, though at first, part of the installing process of the installation served perfect, transient construction site type pedestals for the clowns. They also added to the transient feel of the installation as if the clowns could topple over at any point.

To the right of the altar, in the corner of the substation, I placed a pile of ‘rubble’. This consisted of papier-mâché human matter, paper adults and babies, *bodies* ready for a bonfire and also what looked like the aftermath of a party, streamers fancy dress masks and shards of wooden orange off cuts that were burnt on the edges and looked like fake fire [See figure 37]. This pile of discarded junk was mostly *human* in nature, made from paper and referenced the idea that life was cheap. The pile of *rubbish* spoke to the difficulty I have in reconciling myself with the images I am exposed to daily in the newspapers, these images include bloodied dead bodies regularly. The lack of respect for human life is frightening. The throw away nature of life is something I am, regrettably trying to get used to [See figures 38].

⁵³ This painting **The Ambassadors** dated 1533 by Joannes Holbein can be researched in Hervey, M.S. 1900 Holbeins Ambassadors, George Bell and Sons, London

It is a commonly accepted position that the artist draws inspiration from life experiences. Art critic Donald Kuspit puts it simply saying that, “The artist is not exempt from life” [cited in Barrett 2000:118]. He believes that there is no other way of seeing art other than a comment on life [ibid]. Making self-expressive art fills me with a passion that may be likened to religious fervour. I am aware that this indulgence should be tempered to a degree by the constraints of formal visual language, but I am interested in pushing these boundaries.

The art making process is paramount to me. How I interact with the materials whilst working is of vital importance to me. I prefer working in a variety of materials because each one plays a particular role in its specific expression. Collecting leaves for me was an important process. Sweeping up leaves and packing them into garbage bags spoke to me about the cheap labour available in South Africa and the frequency to which leaves are swept, packaged in garbage bags and thrown away. Grown men are employed to do this job mostly, and mostly the men are black. This work seems to relatively go unnoticed; more leaves fall and more leaves are swept up each day, until the season ends, only to return the following year. The parallel and inclusion of life into art in this show happened on many levels. Because process is so important to me, where I collected these leaves from was also important to me. They bore physical traces of two geographical areas of my life during the preparation time for **postbloodypast**. I collected the leaves from my garden at home, which witnessed my domestic life and from the Wits University gardens that witnessed my academic pursuits.

Hair that is cut and swept away has similarities to this leaf falling/sweeping process. That which is not wanted is discarded; it is an ongoing process, until death. I collected hair from two local sources for over a year, The Melville barbershop and Terenzo hair in Melville. Whilst I was busy image making, I felt content that others were working towards my show; just by doing their daily job, barbers and hairdressers were creating art materials for my exhibition. The materials were free, were original ‘relics’ from real people, and spoke about daily life processes thus allowing for the inclusion of life into

artistic practises on many levels. The hair was originally collected for a previous exhibition of mine that had referenced the Holocaust this imbued it with further meaning for me. Using materials, where appropriate, from prior exhibitions is an intentional strategy of mine; this speaks to a sense of connectedness that I am interested in, as opposed to the beginning an end of something. I believe the materials' history becomes richer, if coming from a previously embedded past. The ties that were used to bind the shards of wood that created the flimsy paths were torn from the robes of the ghoulish nightmarish figures in **Hey Fever**. Transforming materials from previous exhibitions also speaks to my attitude towards the transient nature of representation or presentations and how things can be reconfigured to offer different meanings in different contexts.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly where ideas come from. **postbloodypast** was not influenced directly by any one artist's work, my artwork stems from an autobiographical base, and because I have a life on which to reflect, I am never short of references. However the rich history of image making for thousands of years has certainly influenced and encouraged my production. Artists that I am indebted to for their insistence on art making providing me with the courage to continue are numerous. In this chapter I discuss some of the artists whom I reference for various reasons in relation to **postbloodypast**. I will refer to these artists after citing the primary literary source that influenced me during the making of **postbloodypast**.

Although the genre of magical realism influenced the macabre and strange atmosphere of my 'show' and thus helped create the form of the exhibition, the most influential literary source for **postbloodypast** was -Antjie Krog's- Country Of My Skull (1998) an account of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When I knew my show was going to reference South Africa's apartheid history and present day South Africa I knew I had to learn more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I decided to access this knowledge through Country Of My Skull. This account by witnesses to the apartheid brutalities both from victims and perpetrators of these crimes filled my head with horrible unforgettable visual images. Krog's story telling methods, accounts of personal histories, of people that were tortured and whose lives were altered in almost inconceivable ways

because of the barbaric apartheid regime influenced the making of the *death masks*. Each burning head represented countless people, individuals who had suffered so, a humble homage to those I never knew. Horrors revealed by reading this account of stories from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission exposed a world I ashamedly admit I only had superficial knowledge of.

My inspiration for the presentation of **postbloodypast** and for most of my previous installation works dates back as far as the sixteenth century. This inspiration comes in the form of the *Wunderkammer* that existed in Europe between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The *Wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosities exhibits a wondrous sense of creativity and displays a bizarre accumulation and juxtaposition of objects that explore the rational and irrational. Though the objects may be displayed in what recalls frivolous abandonment, the *Wunderkammer* was a revered space. It also expressed the belief that nature was linked to art. The *Wunderkammer* believed in the notion that the world could be contained or displayed in one room or cabinet. It also expressed the belief that nature was linked to art [Putnam 2001:10]. My aim with **postbloodypast** was to try to represent in one place, time – past, present and future. I try to reconcile my thoughts of an apocalyptic future, by remembering the nature of my/our past. My attempt was to create a space, a time and a place that was somehow connected to all men and all things. Referencing nature through the dead leaves in my exhibition was a way of creating a link amongst people and places as we all have some kind of connection to nature

Story telling artists who have influenced me are those that have used the installation form of what I term “cluttered assemblage” using everyday objects; these include Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg. This three dimensional use of collaged images or objects date back to an initial influence of the Cubists who in the early 1900’s first introduced the idea of adding on objects from everyday life onto paintings. What followed on in this vein was the 1950’s New York School of painters in particular Rauschenberg with his form of *assemblages* which combined a variety of materials that produced a hybrid of painting, collage and sculpture. [Sontag 2001:269]

Andy Warhol's **Raid the Icebox** 1970 was an exhibition Warhol curated, made up from the collection of art of the Museum of Art in Providence. He made the decision to exhibit the complete collection of various types of objects rather than choose individual items to exhibit. Making this decision meant displaying what was in storage and resulted in the display of some damaged objects and also in the display of duplicated objects. In this exhibition all things became part of a whole [Putnam 2001 18]. This has similarities with **postbloodypast** in that a lot of the objects on the altar-piece were moved from my kitchen or lounge into the museum space, each had their own specific meaning but the entire group of 'stuff' was chosen. Hierarchy was not given as to whether there were duplicates of objects or whether objects were damaged, worn or old. Knowing about this work of Warhol encouraged me to present objects for display that may have otherwise be seen as unfit for gallery consumption. Claes Oldenburg, another artist from the same genre of artists as Warhol inspired the production of my work on the macabre or grotesque side specifically with his exhibition **The Store** 1961 [See figure 39]. For this exhibition Oldenburg made ugly looking objects representing ordinary consumerables out of papier-mâché, plaster and big blobs of splattered paint. His materials and the ugliness of the objects he made were reminiscent of the ugly aspect of the paper people and the wax masks I made for **postbloodypast**.

More recent influences include Paul McCarthy and Jakes and Dinos Chapman. These three artists produce 'ugly' art that inspires me. [See figure 40] On a different note Georgina Starr is an artist that produces installations of a personal nature that have also had an influence on me. A particular influence is her work titled *The Nine Collections of the Seventh Museum; the collection*, this is an installation of a collection of objects that include clothing, images and objects in a strange juxtaposition that references sorrow and loneliness [See figure 41]. This work of Starr's was in turn inspired by a Willem van Haecht's painting of the seventeenth century. [Putnam 2001:80-81] Her inspiration has similarities with my inspiration of the *Wunderkammer* for **postbloodypast**. The installations of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz inspire me in their form and content and the way in which they tell a 'snippet' of a story in their assemblages and tableaux.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For more information and images on Reddin and Kienholz see bibliography Pincus 1990.

Although **postbloodypast** depended on the ‘performance’ or participation of the audience of my ‘show’, **postbloodypast** could not strictly have been termed a performance piece as neither myself nor anyone else was *strictly* performing. I believe the form it took could be compared in many instances to the Happenings genre of art. Susan Sontag writes an excellent description on Happenings in her book Against Interpretation.(2001) Happenings was an art form that took place particularly in New York, in the 1960’s, it resembled a cross between an art exhibit and a theatrical performance. Happenings are an event so always reference the present; **postbloodypast** referenced the past but was about being in the present. Materials are of primary importance in a Happening, they include a huge variety, from hard and soft to dirty and clean. In a Happening, objects are not placed but rather scattered and heaped [Sontag 2001:267]. Sontag [2001:268] goes on to say that:

The Happening takes place in what can be best called an ‘environment’ and this environment typically is messy and disorderly and crowded in the extreme, constructed of some materials which are rather fragile, such as paper and cloth, and others which are chosen for their abused, dirty and dangerous condition.

Regarding these aspects of a Happening, **postbloodypast** exhibited tremendous similarities. The materials used for **postbloody** past were of a wide variety that included hard and soft and ranged from rusty metal, fire, dead leaves and shards of wood to stuffed cuddly toys. In **postbloodypast** the objects and images on the altar and altarpiece were scattered, the leaves and hair heaped and the general feel of the environment messy and crowded.

There are other similarities a Happening and **postbloodypast** share, these include, a keenness for displaying ready-made materials that are most often junk from urban material culture and also their emphasis on spectacle through arousing the senses of sound, smell and sight. A Happening is also well known for its abusive treatment of its audience, this can include crowded spaces, extremely loud music, squirting water at it, difficult to see dark exhibitions and a general mistreatment of the audience.

postbloodypast created a claustrophobic effect with the dark curtains and the proximity of the unpredictable fire to the dried leaves and wooden structures. The smell of **postbloodypast**'s burning human hair was unbearable and sent the audience scurrying outside. The 'show' was noisy with the audience scuffling through the dried leaves and music blared from the CD player on the altar.

Happenings is the genre of art that is very reminiscent of **postbloodypast** in form, the difference being however is that there was not a practised performer so to speak in **postbloodypast**. However I believe **postbloodypast** could be compared to the genre of **happening** art in the performance aspect of it too because the 'show' relied heavily on audience participation and the objects in the show 'performed' by altering their form throughout the duration of the show. Movement and transformation played an important role in the presentation of my work. The show needed the audience as guests *and* participants. The audience made up a section of South Africa's population, people with pasts, presents and futures, all aiding the conceptual relevance of the show. The show was not about *visual masterpieces* that demanded specific attention and long periods of observation this ensured that the audiences would move around. Throughout the show things moved, shifted transformed. The wax heads melted, or rather burned away, the walls were blackened, the wax dripped, the leaves were shuffled around, the music played.

More specific influences for **postbloodypast** included Holbein's **Ambassadors** [See figure 42]. This choice surprised me but I have always been drawn to this painting. I based my two parent figures on Holbein's **Ambassadors** by mimicking their position of framing their presentation by standing on either side of it. Something I hadn't thought of at the time of making **postbloodypast** was that the **Ambassadors** was also an excellent choice regarding perceptions. The painting differs depending on where you stand when you look at it. From the frontal perspective the painting displays a meaningless fuzzy shape in its bottom centre, if the beholder moves to the extreme right of the painting the smudge reveals itself to be a skull [Hardy 2006:147]. I take this to reference perceptions, depending on how you look at things they differ. Being stuck in the past or walking

through the portals to a new future albeit a somewhat shaky or scary one was one of the tales of **postbloodypast**.

Regarding conceptual inspiration for my work I am and have been influenced by particularly brave women artists whose work deals with autobiographical confessions of an extremely personal nature these artists are Louise Bourgeois, Annette Messager, Kiki Smith, Jo Spence and Hannah Wilke.⁵⁵ During the making of **postbloodypast** I was motivated by my need to express. The word motivation means to act on emotions. Often emotions can be crippling, creativity is productive and can be motivated by emotions. Kiki Smith claims that a lot of the things she makes, work as a kind of exorcism, that by making it physical she gets it out from the subrational and then can deal with it [Smith 1990:138]. Addressing how I felt about my past during the making of **postbloodypast** was an enabling process for me. Making art has always been very cathartic for me, it brings out that which I suppress in everyday living, and I always feel better for having externalised my thoughts. I feel better by somehow having made myself heard.

Conclusion

Being well aware of artistic strategies I heeded and enjoyed formalist considerations and was well aware of the aesthetic value of the constraints/opportunities of scale, composition, texture, colour, sound and smell. The form of my installation was not of a dry or rigorous conceptual nature but was driven by emotional expression. My excitement at the freedom I felt to express myself can be likened to the feelings that non-censorship of speech or actions can bring. Something we, as South Africans, were not allowed to experience in the apartheid years. I had my first taste of freedom of speech when I was eighteen years old in Hyde Park corner in London; there I witnessed people on their soap boxes speak out about the Thatcher government. I have never forgotten the astonishment I felt, the fear that just by witnessing such an event I was involved in something illegal, and could be found guilty. Such was my conception of the law thanks to my upbringing. I know I am no longer eighteen and things have changed but I never

⁵⁵ For more information on Louise Bourgeois, Annette Messager, Hannah Wilke and Jo Spence see Smith and Watson (eds) 2002 [Interfaces Women/Autobiography/image/performance](#). University of Michigan Press, U.S.A.. For more information on Kiki Smith see bibliography Smith, K 1990.

spoke at Hyde Park or Joubert Park. I never publicly displayed my outrage at racism and oppression, my anger at being lied to by authorities. I never publicly acknowledged the shame I felt at not having done anything to try to prevent what was going on and the fact that I am still haunted and disturbed by images of violence from South Africa's past. Not until **postbloodypast** gave me the opportunity that is.

postbloodypast's narrative was vast and sprawling. The stories I told spanned countries and time periods and acknowledged pain I had experienced and pain I had only witnessed in the eyes of others. My artworks give me an opportunity to acknowledge the past and the pain so that I can go on with the everyday.

Figure 22:
Daryl Hossack
Invitation to **postbloodypast**

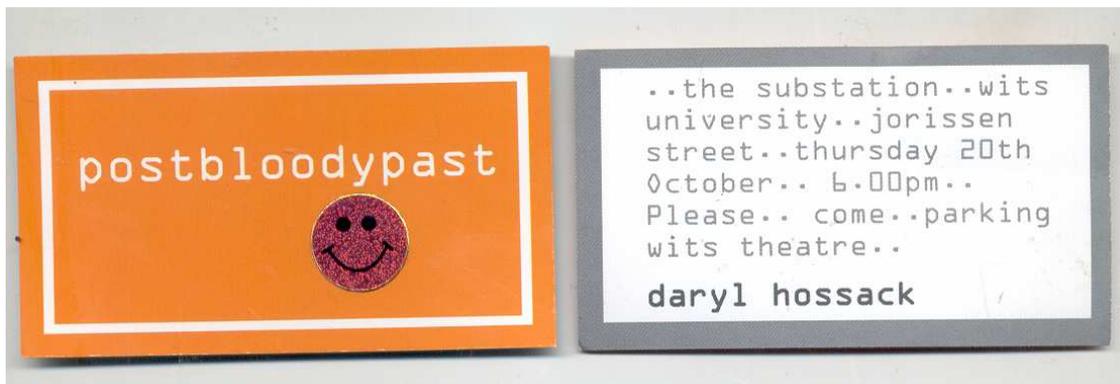


Figure 23:
Daryl Hossack
One of the posters advertising **postbloodypast**

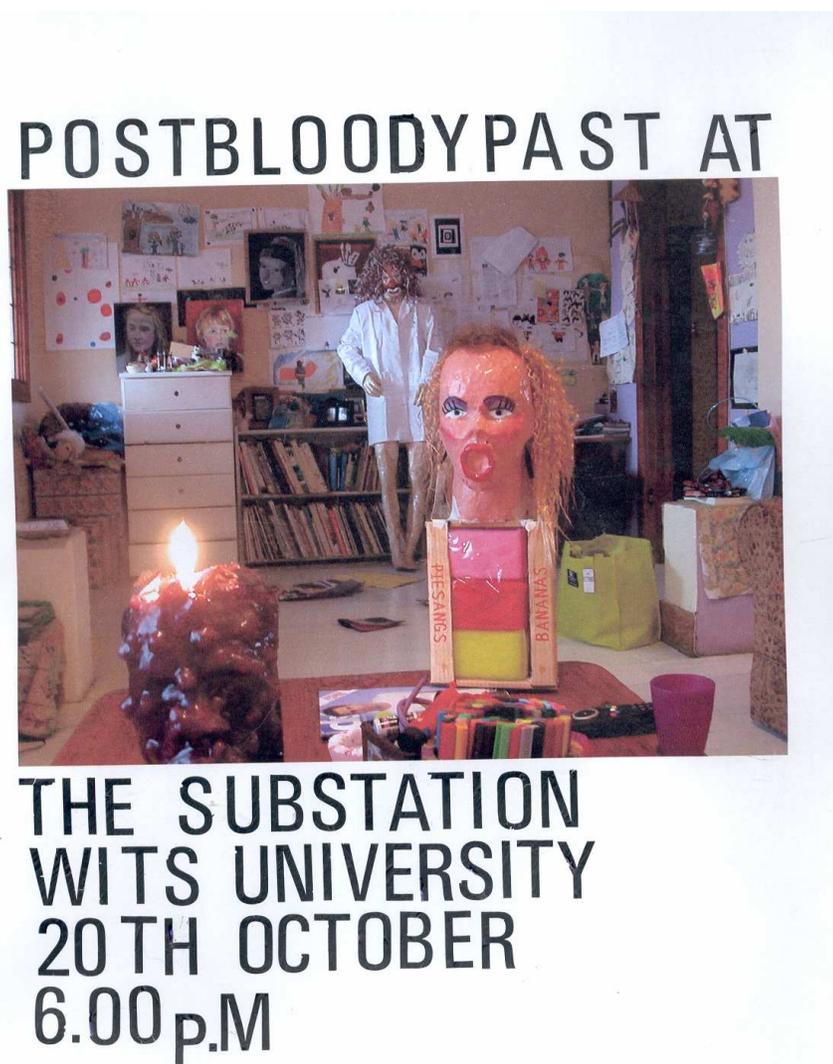


Figure 24:
Daryl Hossack. June 2003. Detail of Installation **Room as A Tomb**
Wits University Exhibition.



Figure 25:
Daryl Hossack.
Detail of Installation **Room As A Tomb** June 2003.



Figure 26:
Daryl Hossack. Detail of installation **Hair Today, gone Tomorrow**. 2003
Held at Wits University.



Figure 27:
Daryl Hossack. Detail of installation **Hey Fever** 2004
Substation, Wits University.



Figure 28:
Daryl Hossack. Detail of Installation **Hey Fever** 2004
Substation, Wits University.



Figure 29:
Daryl Hossack Detail of Installation **Hey Fever** 2004
Substation, Wits University



Figure 30:
Daryl Hossack. Details of Installation View of **postbloodypast** 2005
Substation, Wits University

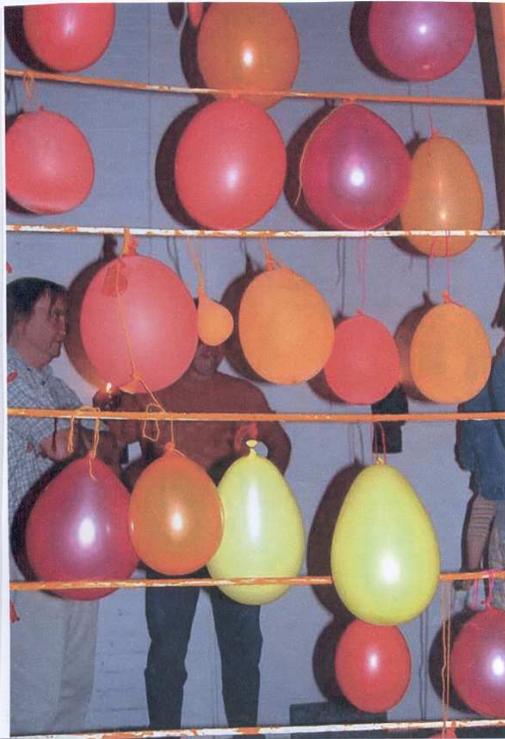


Figure 31:
Daryl Hossack
Various *Death Masks* from Detail of installation **postbloodypast** 2005
Substation, Wits University

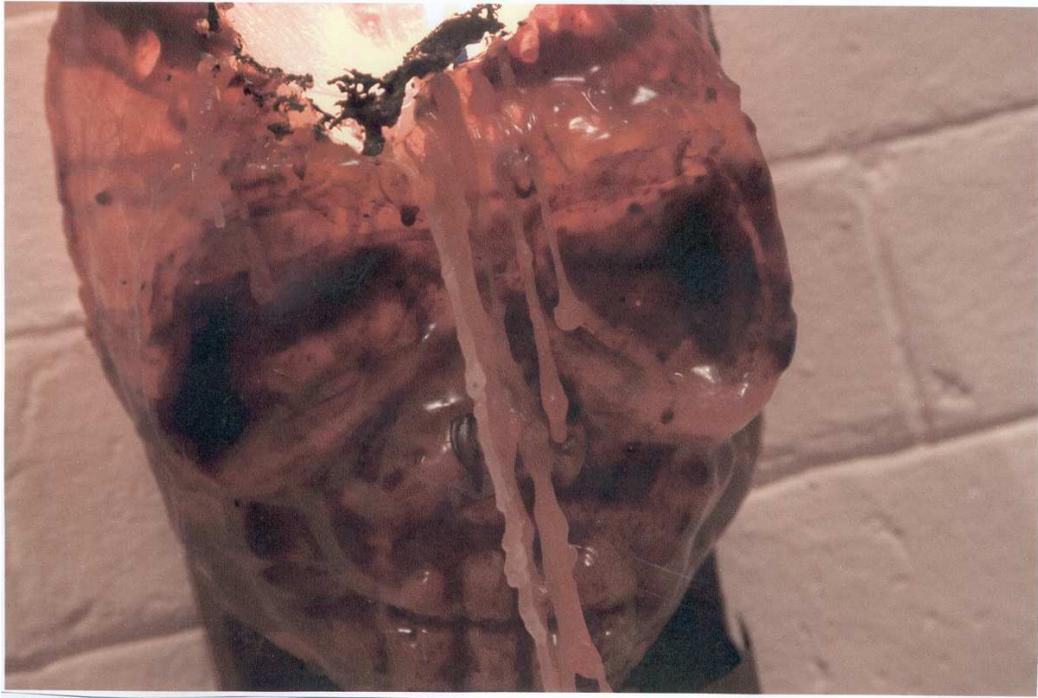


Figure 32:

Daryl Hossack. Detail of installation view of **postbloodypast** 2005
Substation, Wits University.



Figure 33:

Daryl Hossack. Detail of altar from installation **postbloodypast** 2005
Substation, Wits University,



Figure 34:

Daryl Hossack

Detail of highest rung of altar of installation **postbloodypast** 2005.
Substation, Wits University,



Figure 35:

Daryl Hossack. Detail of highest rung of altar from installation **postbloodypast** 2005
Substation, Wits University.



Figure 36:
Daryl Hossack. **American Beggar.** Detail from installation **postbloodypast** 2005
Substation, Wits University.



Figure 37:
Daryl Hossack. Detail of 'human paper rubble' from installation
postbloodypast 2005.
Substation, Wits University.



Figure 38:
Photograph by Golden Mtika. 2006
Reproduced in Article titled " They raped in SA's toughest township...and they paid
the price." [Lesedi Mapheto]
[Reproduced in Daily Sun. Monday 20 November 2006]



Figure 39:

Claes Oldenburg. **The Store** 1961

107 East Second Street, New York [Reproduced in Siegel,K and Mattick,P 2004:114]



Figure 40:

Jakes and Dinos Chapman. **Great Deeds against the Dead**.1994

Mixed Media 277x244x152cm

[Reproduced in Ellis 2003:53]

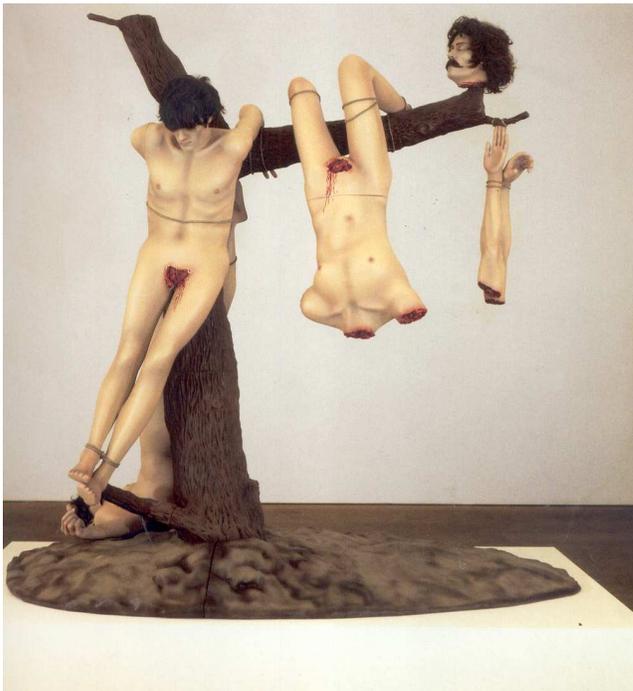


Figure 41:
Georgina Starr. **The Nine Collections Of the Seventh Museum; The Collection.** 1994
[Reproduced in Putnam 2001:80]



Figure 42:
Hans Holbein. **The Ambassadors** 1533
National Gallery London.
[Reproduced in Hervey, M.F.S. 1900]



Conclusion

There are numerous reasons as to why artists produce art. A belief generally accepted is that art allows one to reflect on life. In postmodernist theory it is widely thought that we need a broad inclusion of life experiences into art [Bowers 2004:81]. This expression of oneself through ones art encourages proactive stimuli that could increase self-esteem and identity formation. This belief in the sense of self underlies most postmodernist artistic production. However there is a contradiction with notions of autobiography and post-modernism; Brosman argues that in its most extreme version post-modernism *excludes* any meaningful self writing [2005:100]. In postmodernist theory the self is seen as fragmented and unreliable so it therefore follows that the insistence of oneself in ones artwork cannot be taken at face value. Following this, self-expression and self-writing are better bedfellows within the doctrines of feminism and post-colonialism which encourages the individuals' voice and the reconciliation of oneself with ones own particular life experiences. Despite the controversy over the theoretical framework for the autobiographical impulse this paper argues that the contribution of personal stories is invaluable, both for the producer and for the consumer and that by creating a narrative of our lives it enables us to reflect on our lives and somehow make meaning out of our existence.

This research has explored personal narratives within the theoretical frameworks of Authenticity, Identity formation and History. Regarding the authenticity claim to autobiography it has been argued that there are different kinds of truths. Truths are contingent on context. It has been proposed that, in an artwork, to over subscribe to the notion that truth is of primary value *in* an artwork is to miss the point. Artworks of a personal nature usually attempt to express a 'truth' and in doing this, may introduce something that normally may not have been considered as the 'truth'. In this way, artworks of a personal nature may reveal possible truths otherwise disregarded. Regarding the notion of identity, expressing the *self* in an artwork requires reflecting on ones life; like looking in a mirror which "localises the image of oneself as an exterior" [Steiner and

Yang 2004:15]. Artists like Emin, Schreuders and myself aim at an expression of the *truth* of an aspect of our identities through our artworks, other artists create entirely fictional identities, and are at liberty to do so. Regarding history in terms of autobiography, the production of autobiographical artworks is one way of making memory matter.⁵⁶ Using the term *history*, conjures up, according to Saltzman, “a range of experiences and events that ground our understanding of the past, and in turn found our relation to the present” [2006:7]. The selected works discussed of Emin, Schreuders and myself display the ability to reflect on the past and this ability to reflect on the past highlights our existence in the present.

Throughout the course of this research I struggled with conflicting responses towards Emin’s seemingly narcissistic approach with her extreme motivation to tell her life stories. The true stories of the women I read about in Antjie Krog’s Country of My Skull, did not produce fame and fortune, they were expressed only during the course of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and then relayed by Krog in her book. I confess that Emin’s stories seemed less significant to me than the extreme humiliation and physical abuse suffered by the women (and men) during the apartheid era. By juxtaposing Emin with Schreuders I highlight the difference between personal and collective stories or histories. Is any ones story more valid than the next?

We can assume that everyone in possession of life has *a* story of his or her life to tell. One would have to be versed in an accepted language to communicate this and most importantly have the desire to express it. In the instance of Emin, Schreuders and myself we are all well equipped in a visual language and with motivating reasons, whatever they may be, to produce personal stories. Art enables a mode of expression that affords the artist a sense of power through activity, viewers too are afforded the opportunity to become interested, to discover and become more aware. Fromm includes art in his definition of ‘active’ stimuli in which he describes that through art one does not play a passive role, upon which stimuli acts, but rather assumes an active role, expressing ones faculties and becoming productive [Fromm 1977: 322]. The right to comment, to support

⁵⁶ I have copied this phrase from a title of a book Make Memory Matter by Lisa Saltzman. See bibliography.

or to express opposition is an enriching experience. Though the moment may be temporary and soon overturned the positive effect of the expression/confession enables one to continue with the present order of the day.

I interpret the title *Telling Stories* as having three possible applications. The first supposes *Telling* is a verb and presumes the ‘conventional’ understanding of what is entailed in story telling. As discussed Emin, Schreuders and myself do this in various ways in our artworks. The second option supposes that *Telling* is a noun and that the stories being told are very revealing. As in: ‘that is a very telling tale’. Schreuders’ stories fit into this category as well; through **Speel Speel** an aspect of the cruelty of South Africa’s apartheid past is revealed. On a personal level, and a somewhat geographical political level as argued by Cherry⁵⁷, Emin’s tales may be seen as revealing and informative, and may too be classified as *telling* stories. The third interpretation of *Telling Stories* supposes that it is used as a phrase when admonishing children as in “are you *telling stories*?” This usage presupposes that the child is fibbing. This has relevance to this paper concerning the controversy over the authenticity aspect surrounding Emin’s work. Was she *telling stories*? Are the stories true, are the relics she displays ‘real’ was the bed her own? Regarding Schreuders’ work, attaching this usage is particularly intriguing. Schreuders admits to *never* playing the particular game in **Speel Speel**, and yet she fashions the figures of her sculpture on herself and her siblings⁵⁸; as if they did or ‘could have’ played that game with all its reference to discrimination and abuse. So, in affect she is telling stories, pretending she played this game. What *is* revealing is that through this ‘fabrication’ of an event Schreuders tells the ‘truth’ about an aspect of South Africa’s apartheid past. Regarding **postbloodypast**, my stories or histories told were not singular and are difficult to encapsulate but perhaps could be described under all three criteria as well.

To conclude on a completely contrary note I introduce an antithesis to this dissertation and although I do not support these views Strawson [2004:15] proposes that:

⁵⁷ See Cherry,D 2002 in Bibliography and section on Emin’s **No Chance** quilt in this thesis.

⁵⁸ See Herreman 1999 in bibliography.

[N]arrativity is not a necessary part of the 'examined life' and it is in any case most unclear that the examined life, thought by Socrates essential to being fully human, is always a good thing.

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