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THE USE OF HAIR AS A MANIFESTATION OF CULTURAL AND GENDER IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF TRACEY ROSE

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts by Coursework and Research Report.

Johannesburg 2006.

DECLARATION

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

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Lee-At Meyerov

. . . day of . . . . . , 2006

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ABSTRACT

This research report investigates the manifestation of hair as a symbol of cultural and gender identity as is seen in selected works of South African artist Tracey Rose, whose usage of her own culturally specific hair and body serves as metaphor through which she critically engages with issues surrounding the gendered and racialized body. The report will explore the ways in which Rose both in her video piece *Ongetiteld* (1996) and her performance video installation *Span II* (1997) challenges and subsequently deconstructs the rigidly defined monoliths of 'Woman', 'femininity', and the racially constructed category of 'Coloured', assigned and imposed on her during the Apartheid era. Rose's work, highlighting the extent to which the conceptualization of gender and racial identity are bound and read off the body's corporeality, relates to my own artistic practice, whereby I examine the metaphorical functioning of skin, as a corporeal 'text' and parchment, facilitating the inscription of my own cultural, religious and linguistic Otherness.

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FOREWORD

The concepts of ‘Black’, ‘White’ and ‘Coloured’ are historically, culturally and politically constructed categories, they are not identities as such, as there is no such thing as an innate or essential blackness, whiteness or colouredness, instead they are racially constructed and homogenously defined categories, borne out of apartheid’s racial classificatory system. I use them throughout my dissertation within this context. The ‘lower case’ black, white and coloured are not signifiers of ‘race’, nor do they represent racial categories, rather they are used generically, and must be differentiated from the ‘racial identities’ of Black’, ‘White’ and ‘Coloured’.

INTRODUCTION

This research report investigates the manifestation of hair as a symbol of cultural and gender identity as is seen in selected works of South African artist Tracey Rose (b.1974, South Africa). Through the usage of her own culturally specific hair and body, she confronts the complexity and multiplicity of her own identity as a coloured South African woman, disrupting not only essentialist notions of the racially constructed category of 'Coloured', assigned and imposed on her during the apartheid era, but also challenging racialized notions of beauty and femininity. The works selected for detailed discussion and critical analysis are the video piece *Ongetiteld* (1996) from the "*Purity and Danger"* exhibition held at the Gertrude Posel Gallery in Johannesburg and *Span II* (1997) a performance video installation created for the second Johannesburg Biennale.

The concept of 'race' as a signifier of the physical, biological, moral and intellectual differences between human beings is not an objective reality but rather an ideological construct, borne out of a relationship of dominance and oppression between the colonizer and the colonized. Within this racialized and racist dichotomous mode of thinking, whiteness occupies a position of power, authority and privilege, assuming a normativeness against which all other 'races' are read and conceptualized. Whiteness, is therefore associated with notions of 'purity', 'beauty' and 'civilization', while everything it 'despises' and finds 'intolerable' within itself, is projected on to and defined as the Other. Thus blackness comes into signification as its complete antithesis, connoting all that is 'evil', 'primitive' and Other to the white Self. Colouredness, ambiguously situated between the monoliths of 'Black and 'White', constantly and ambivalently oscillates between the Self and Other, between the 'desirable' and the 'undesirable, between the valorization of whiteness and the marginalization of blackness, continuously reminded of its interstitial status as "not only not white, but less than white*;* not only not black but better than black" (Erasmus, 2001:13).

Hair, within the context of apartheid body politics, played a crucial role in the subjugation and marginalization of the coloured body, inflicting upon it the most humiliating and degrading form of symbolic violence. Hair did not merely inscribe the body with a racial Otherness, but instead marked it as a 'tainted' site of 'racial impurity', acting as both a corporeal reminder of 'miscegenation'[1], and a symbol of shame, degeneration and lowliness. The legacy of this totalizing racism, more than a decade after the demise of apartheid, continues to resonate through South African society today, with colouredness still largely ignored as an identity in its own right, and instead conceptualized as residual, inferior or simply 'lacking' in relation to both the 'authenticity' of blackness and the 'purity' of whiteness. (Erasmus, 2001). It is from within this ambiguous racial landscape that Rose situates her own artistic practices, critically engaging with issues surrounding the gendered and racialized body.

Chapter One introduces the concept of hair, examining the symbolic meaning ascribed to women's hair within western patriarchal society. Working within a feminist framework, I argue that the eroticization of the female head and hair is a form of symbolic decapitation which denies woman identity, subjectivity and selfhood. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's reworking of Freudian theory regarding subject formation, acquisition of sexual identity and castration anxiety is discussed, in relation to the construction of 'Woman' as man's lacking and subsequently inferior 'other'.

I will also refer to Helen Cixous' essay "Castration or Decapitation?" (1981) wherein she draws parallels between male castration anxiety and the female's fear of symbolic decapitation, arguing that if "man operates under the threat of castration," (Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger, 1995:6) the female equivalent of this threat is symbolic decapitation. Cixous' feminist reading of hair, undermines both Freudian and Lacanian concepts regarding the acquisition of female identity, showing that woman does not 'merely' slip into her identity, but rather acquires it as a response to the fear of

[1] "A nineteenth century European eugenicist concept referring to 'race mixture' specifically between white masters and black female slaves" (Erasmus, 2001:17)

decapitation. Thus the horror attached to male castration anxiety is equated to the female's fear of losing her head and subsequently her identity.

The notion of symbolic decapitation as a denial of women's identity, selfhood and autonomy is part of a larger symbolic process entangled with notions of power and authority. This manifests itself through various religious, cultural and social processes and practices in which both women and their sexuality are controlled and subjugated through the symbolic removal of their head. Chapter Two explores the notion of symbolic decapitation and its effect on the coloured female body within the context of apartheid body politics. I argue that this form of 'decapitation' was most 'violent' and cruel as here the female hair and head was neither veiled nor eroticized but rather transformed into an 'abject' Otherness, a symbol of 'racial' inferiority, degeneracy and shame.

This chapter also introduces the concept of abjection as defined by Julia Kristeva in "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection" (1982). Here I investigate the abject properties of hair, discussing its ambiguity as a substance which simultaneously provokes a response of horror and disgust, as well as eliciting intense pleasure and fascination. Kristeva describes abjection as that which "disturbs identity, system, order" as "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." (Kristeva, cited in Oliver, 1993:56). The abject occupies the zones of indeterminacy, existing on the very edges of categories, between the 'self' and 'other', the body and not body, the inside and outside, and between the 'desirable' and the 'undesirable', belonging to neither one category, nor the other but instead hovering ambiguously between the two.

Kristeva's concept of the abject, as a transgression and rupturing of bodily boundaries, evokes a direct analogy with the notion of colouredness, which within apartheid's rigidly defined and obsessively policed racial classificatory system, was constructed as the unspeakable taboo, the 'hybrid', inferior product of 'miscegenation', "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva cited in Oliver, 1993:56), not only rupturing the boundaries of racial 'purity', but threatening their very existence.

Chapter Three examines the historical construction of the body of the Other as an 'abject' site of excess, deviancy and degeneracy - focusing specifically on the body of the non white, non western female, doubly objectified under the white colonial male gaze. This will include a discussion of Saartjie Baartman, the so called 'Hottentot Venus', who because of her apparent 'primitive' genitalia and protruding buttocks was constructed by nineteenth century Europe as the embodiment of racial and sexual Otherness, occupying "the lowest rung on the great chain of being" (Gilman, 1985:89).

The first three chapters provide a theoretical foundation regarding the notion of hair, identity, the 'abject', and the construction of 'racial' and sexual Otherness, within the context of apartheid body and identity politics. Chapter Four engages directly with these theoretical concepts as they relate to the works of Tracey Rose. I offer an in-depth discussion and critical analysis of *Ongetiteld (*1996) and *Span II* (1997), examining the multiple ways in which Rose, working within a post colonial feminist framework, problematizes and subsequently deconstructs the rigidly defined monoliths of 'Woman', 'femininity', and her previously imposed racial identity of 'Coloured'.

The issues examined in this research report stand in direct relation to my own artistic practice, which although not featuring hair as a medium, similarly explores the corporeal relationship and association between skin, the body and language.

Chapter five focuses on the practical component of my research. This will include an analysis of my Masters exhibition *"DextroSinistral"*, held at the Substation gallery at the University of the Witwatersrand, in March 2006. Here I discuss my own exploration and interrogation of the metaphorical functioning of skin, as both a 'living' text or parchment- facilitating social, cultural and religious inscriptions and as a palimpsest- constantly inscribed, reinscribed, 'overwritten' and reshaped, producing different narratives, histories and experiences

In conclusion this research report demonstrates how Rose's work, functioning on a number of symbolic levels, opens up a conceptual space for the re-imagining and

re-articulation of both gender and coloured identity, based not upon visible signs of sexual ‘otherness’, nor upon differences in skin pigmentation, skull shape or hair texture, but rather upon a heterogeneity and multiplicity of subject positions, experiences, narratives and histories, constantly shifting and fluctuating according to social and cultural ideologies.

CHAPTER ONE
Hair Politics

Hair is an ambiguous material, an ephemeral substance, whose absence, presence and physical appearance inscribes the human body with a multitude of meanings. Its physicality manifests itself not only as an outward expression of individual subjectivity but also of collective identity, marking and categorizing the body into socially significant and culturally specific groups, differentiating not only between the genders but also between race, class and different religious beliefs.

As a product of the body's physiological processes, hair operates as a biological marker containing DNA and inherited genetic information distinctive to each individual, constituting the very biological organization of the subject. Although dependant upon the interweaving of genetic, environmental and biological factors, hair is by no means a 'natural' or ahistorical mode of corporeal inscription. Instead it is a highly pliable organic material, whose arrangement and physical manifestation transcends the personal, and forms part of a larger symbolic network, reflecting societal and ideological values and practices, within particular social structures.

Hair, within the context of apartheid body politics, played a crucial role in the subjugation and marginalization of the coloured body, inflicting upon it the most humiliating and degrading form of symbolic violence. Conceived of as "the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin" (Mercer, 1994: 101) hair negatively inscribed and marked the coloured body as a site of shame, humiliation and pain, acting as a corporeal reminder of the unspeakable taboo of 'miscegenation'. The hierarchical racialization of the coloured body according to its proximity to the ideal of 'whiteness' was especially traumatic for the coloured woman, who already 'Othered' by her sexual difference was now further oppressed by her 'race'.

This chapter will provide a broad introduction to the theme of hair, examining the symbolic meaning ascribed to women's hair within western patriarchal society. Working within a feminist framework, I will then offer a psychoanalytic reading of hair, arguing that the eroticization of the female head and hair is a form of symbolic decapitation, which denies woman identity, subjectivity and selfhood.

The concept of symbolic decapitation is pertinent to my research and establishes the groundwork for the analysis of Rose's artistic practice as a whole. The following chapters will explore the symbolic decapitation and ensuing oppression of the coloured woman during the Apartheid regime and will consider how Rose through the usage of her own violently inscribed and racially marked 'Coloured' body, challenges and deconstructs the monolithically defined categories of both gender and 'race.'

Psychoanalytic interpretations of hair are inextricably tied to the gendered dualisms which inform Western patriarchal thinking. Within this paradigm the symbolism attached to the female head and hair is imbued with meaning dependant upon the hierarchical differentiation between the categories of 'Man' and 'Woman'. Freud in his "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905) argues that the upper body and specifically the head acts as a symbol upon which the repressed desires and drives of the lower body are projected. According to Freud upper and lower body displacement is a result of repression, whereby the internalized desires of the lower body, although deeply embedded within the unconscious, are expressed and manifested through the subject's language, thinking and behavioral practices. Thus the female head and hair, through their erotic association with the erogenous and sexualized zones of the lower body take on an explicitly sexual meaning, signifying not only male desire but more importantly masculine authority and dominance over women and their bodies[2]. (Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger, 1995:38)

[2] The sexualization of the female head and hair within psychoanalytic discourse will be expanded on later in the chapter and will be discussed in relation to Helene Cixous' essay "Castration or Decapitation?" (1981) in which she offers a psychoanalytical, feminist reading of hair.

Western patriarchal thought, based upon a binary system of difference, has constructed a set of conceptual dichotomies, within which the hierarchical differentiation between men and women is highlighted. Within this inequitable sexual order, man assumes the position of autonomous speaking subject, while woman is constructed as a negatively inscribed 'other', whose entry into signification and language is dependant on and defined through the term 'man'. This dichotomous mode of reasoning is further complicated, by the alignment of concepts and valued associations with the masculine, while other elements, construed as subordinate, are positioned on the side of the feminine. 'Man', therefore is a potent signifier of language, culture, knowledge and reason, whereas 'Woman', signifies nature, emotion and all that is 'other' to, and excluded from the dominant masculine order. (Cranny-Francis et al, 2003:60)

In accordance with psychoanalytic theory, woman and femininity are not seen as autonomous categories, but are defined in relation to the Phallus, which in Lacanian thought, no longer refers to the biological organ, as described by Freud[3], but rather is a signifier of woman's 'lack' in relation to the power and authority associated with the masculine, Symbolic order. (Beasley, 1999) For Lacan the subject's entry into language and the Symbolic is through the mirror stage[4], whereby the child recognizes its own wholeness and unity as a separate entity independent of the (m)other. It is within the 'mirror stage' that the concept of an 'I' is first recognized and formed, as prior to this the child conceives of itself as a collection of fragmented experiences interdependent upon the mother. The mirror stage is therefore crucial in the formation of individual identity, as it not only presents the subject with an image which separates itself from the other, but is also essential for the break up of the "mother-child dyad." (Oliver, 1993:22) The repression and subsequent rupturing of this intimate bond is accomplished through the intervention of The Law of the Father, which, acting as a substitute of the mother,

[3] Lacan describes the development of sexual identity in linguistic or "symbolic cultural terms," (Beasley,1999:70), whereas Freud adopts a more literal, biological account

[4] Within the mirror stage the child recognizes its own image in the mirror as a unified whole, however the recognition of the self is grounded in misrecognition as the image is not 'real', but a reflection of the 'real'. Lacan argues that because identity and the subject's sense of self is constructed on an illusion, it is always in danger of regressing.

facilitates the child's acquisition of language and marks its socialization, as a subject, within the Symbolic order.

Lacan argues that "The unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan cited in Cranny-Francis et al, 2003:46), therefore the constitution of the self may be understood in linguistic terms, as it through language that identity and subjectivity are constructed. The acquisition of language, however, within Lacanian thought, and the child's entry into culture and society, is organized around a masculine order, in which the feminine and femininity exists only through their opposition to the concept of 'Man'. The female child's entry into language is, therefore, experienced in a different way to the male. She suffers a double 'lack' as she cannot be the Phallus but also cannot have the Phallus. Thus within the Symbolic order, femininity is depicted as a castrated state, with woman constructed as man's lacking 'other', not only by her lack of Phallus, but also by the absence of the real penis, which provokes the threat of castration.

The image of the castrated woman is crucial for the production of meaning within the symbolic order, as it is her 'lack' that produces "the phallus as a symbolic presence". (Mulvey 1975) Here, however, lies the paradox of phallic culture, as the construction of woman as man's 'other' depends on her 'lack', yet it is precisely, this 'lack', her radical sign of difference, which not only denies her access into the symbolic, but also constructs her as its most dangerous threat. Hence, it is woman's 'lack' and absolute 'otherness', which ensures and validates the autonomy and universality of the category Man.

Western culture, inscribed by patriarchy and ordered around a hierarchy of sexual difference, has attempted, through ideological discourses and practices, to control and define not only the female body itself, but also the way in which it is imagined and represented within society. The ideological construction of 'Woman', as the embodiment of 'otherness' is inextricably bound to the implicit threat of castration that her sexual difference implies. According to Freud[5], the horror evoked at the sight of the mother's

[5] In Freudian theory, the threat of castration is posed by the father. The male child, sees the father as a rival for the mother's affection and, imagining that the father will castrate him, eventually overcomes his desire

genitals, (sexual difference), arises not so much from the fear that the vagina castrates, but rather that it is castrated and this in turn, transforms the female body into a source of danger and castration anxiety for the male (Creed, 1993:110).

Fear of castration, evoked at the sight of sexual difference, coupled with the construction of the female body as a site of excess and deviation, has justified and legitimized the cultural disciplining and symbolic violence inflicted upon women's bodies. Lynda Nead in the "The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality" (1997) analyzes Western historical traditions of representing the female nude, and examines the totalizing effect erotic and aesthetic objectification has on both the female body and female subjectivity. Nead argues that the transformation of the female body into the female nude is an act of regulation and control, whose main goal is to eradicate the threat female sexuality poses to patriarchal systems of order. She further states, that the forms, conventions and poses of the fine art nude:

> "…have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body- to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other." (Nead, 1997:6)

This analytical model, following Douglas's "Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo" (1966), suggests that power lies at the margins of socially constructed categories, for it is at this point of vulnerability that meaning is called into question and threatens to collapse. Borderline states, because of their ambiguous and indeterminate nature, are perceived as a danger to both the individual and society as a whole. They are undecidable, neither subject nor object, self nor other but something which blurs and threatens the categories of distinctions themselves.

Fear of the female sexual body may arise from the sight of sexual difference, but the cultural loathing and disgust with which it is associated, stems from its construction as an uncontained formlessness, whose chaotic corporeality threatens to destroy meaning,

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for the mother. The fear of the father as castrator enables the child, to renounces the mother as object of his desire, and in turn he identifies with the father, thereby taking on masculine identification (Creed.1993:109) This briefly summarizes the processes which produce feminine and masculine subjects in western patriarchal culture, with the social construction of women's bodies as a lack and the constitution of the male body as phallic.

identity and order of the Symbolic. Women's bodily processes of pregnancy, menstruation, lactation and parturition transgress the boundaries of the socially inscribed and culturally disciplined body of the social subject, defined as 'whole' and 'clean', whose corporeality is fixed and contained, and instead draws attention to the openings and orifices of the body, its corporeal functioning, its waste products and its points of utmost vulnerability. This transgression of bodily margins and the subsequent conflation of categories, between inside and outside, self and other, body and not body, threatens both sociality and subjectivity, as the perception of self and the construction of identity depends upon the notion of the body as a unified and contained whole. (Nead, 1997)

The female nude masks the 'horror', associated with women's corporeal functioning, presenting an idealized image of the female body, centered on the concept of aesthetic wholeness and containment. The erotic objectification of the female body, and the visual pleasure derived from this image, not only removes the threat of castration implied by sexual difference, but also maintains and reinforces patriarchal power relations, with woman assuming the subordinate role of object, while man occupies the privileged position of autonomous subject. Woman, within this "active-male/passive–female dichotomy" (Cranny-Francis et al, 2003:160), is constructed as a passive object, upon which the active male gaze projects its fantasies and desires.

The conceptualization of woman as object, denied subjectivity and relegated to a silent 'other', signifies the unequal balance of power relations in a society, whereby the female body is always marked by difference as defined by the dominant masculine order. This ordering and regulation of difference not only removes the potential threat and danger female sexuality poses to the Symbolic order, but also ensures and maintains masculine dominance over the actual apparatus of representation itself.

Patriarchal representations of women in Western visual culture are inextricably bound with notions of the body and sexuality, with woman constructed as both the object of the male gaze and as a projection of male desire. Woman is reduced to a body, and the body is in turn reduced to a site of sexual difference, whose erotogenic zones are aesthetically

contained and eroticized into an ideological image of femininity. The symbolic violence inflicted upon the female sexual body, through the act of representation, is exemplified by the tradition of the fine art nude, yet this form of violence is not restricted to only the erotic parts of the body, but also to the female head and her hair. The eroticization of the female head, within western patriarchy, is a subtler yet no less coercive method of control, used in the oppression and subjugation of women.

The female head and her hair is an important site in the symbolization of gender and cultural identity, marking the body in different and often contradictory ways. The relationship between hair and femininity is an ambivalent one, as both excess hair and a lack of it, is considered a transgression and a deviancy from accepted notions of female beauty. Excess hair on the female body or face is regarded as culturally 'unacceptable', signifying a transgression of gender distinctions, which blur the boundaries of categorization between the masculine and feminine, yet lack of feminine hair, especially on the head, is perhaps even more terrifying as it is immediately associated with illness, disease and bodily disintegration.

Both a lack and excess of hair signals a desexualization of the body, marking it with an ambiguity, which defies and exists outside the normative boundaries of gender coding and sexual identity. This not only undermines patriarchal constructions of femininity, used as a means of controlling the female sexual body, but more importantly it exposes the socially and culturally constructed nature of the categories 'Man' and 'Woman.' These categories in themselves have no innate or fixed meaning, but rather are a series of repetitive performances which are enacted through discourse and language, in an attempt to give an illusion of a coherent and stable identity. The body, which is biologically female, yet (through either lack or excess hair) does not fit into the culturally and aesthetically constructed category of 'woman', is a body which exists outside the confines of symbolic meaning , a body which because of its indeterminacy and ambiguity is marked as dangerous and threatening, and therefore relegated to the margins of society.

It is not however, only in extreme cases of hairiness or hairlessness that the female body provokes such horror and contempt. In fact she becomes even more threatening when her transgressions are subtler and less overt. Long lustrous hair, when disciplined and controlled through representation and culture, epitomizes feminine beauty and functions as an erotic sign of femininity, evoking sensual desire and visual pleasure, yet when left unmediated by cultural intervention, to grow freely in its 'natural', wild state, transforms itself from an erotic object of desire into a threatening 'otherness', symbolic of women's unrestrained sexuality and power.

The relationship between female sexuality and hair is a complex one, whose meaning is entangled within larger religious, cultural and symbolic processes. The most simplistic explanation for this association is that hair, like the female body, is eroticized into an object of desire, signaling femininity and beauty. Thus, for the Buddhist nun, the shaving of the head signifies a rite of separation, whereby she renounces material possessions and sensual pleasures for a chaste, religious existence. The act of shaving removes physical signs of woman's femininity and sexual attractiveness, thereby eliminating the potential threat of sexual desire, 'cooling' the body as a means of 'cooling' the mind away from the heat of sensual and bodily desires. (Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger, 1995:38)

Cultural and religious practices of covering the head and hair operate in a similar fashion. The head is not shaved but rather veiled or hidden, as a means of controlling the potential erotic distraction of female hair. The covering up and hiding of the hair, conceals and controls women's sexuality from public view, signaling modesty and sexual unavailability, yet ironically it has the opposite effect as that which is forbidden to the gaze, is eroticized in the imagination . The hidden head and hair, instead of resisting the gaze becomes a heightened object of its desire, and in fact intensifies its erotic allure. The explanation for the various forms of head coverings (the veil, the headscarf or the wig) as forms of modesty and chastity, which remove the potential threat and provocation aroused by the sight of feminine hair, is perhaps partially true. However the significance and implications of head covering, within cultural and religious contexts, transcends notions of modesty and chastity, and instead reflects upon power relations within a

particular social structure whereby the control of female sexuality, is symbolized through the control of her hair. The hiding of the hair is therefore a sign of not only sexual submission but also of political and social submission

The practice of veiling is controversial and is subjected to heated debates. It can be critiqued as yet another instrument used in the oppression and subjugation of women, which denies her a voice and relegates her to the status of object, or alternatively be regarded as a form of tradition which is culturally specific and acceptable. Meyda Yegenoglu in "Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism" [6](1998), challenges western, feminist discourses which seek to 'liberate' Muslim women from the veil. She argues that the tradition of veiling in Islam, while seemingly oppressive to the west is not unlike western modes of marking and disciplining the body. Thus the veiled head of the Muslim woman and the unveiled head of her western counterpart are both forms of social inscription. The former, she states, is regarded as 'subversive' and 'oppressive', simply because it fails to comply with white, western, feminist ideology and practices.

Another link between Female sexuality and hair, is their mutual association with concepts of "generativity, power and life" (Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger, 1995:8) meaning connected to women's reproductive and corporeal functioning, which as stated earlier, signifies woman at her most 'impure' and dangerous borderline state. At the onset of puberty the visible and tangible signs of female sexuality are the development of breasts and the growth of bodily hair, which further associates sexuality with hair, but perhaps most 'shocking' is the beginning of menstruation, which marks the female body as a site of pollution and contamination. The taboos associated with women's menstrual blood are culturally and socially specific, yet in each case, are indicative of women's marginal state of menstrual impurity. Female hair, within this context, functions as yet another sign of women's irreducible sexual difference, reinforcing cultural dualistic modes of thinking, whereby women are identified with the biological processes of their bodies.

[6] This is discussed in great detail in chapter four titled "Sartorial fabric-ations: Enlightment and Western feminism" (1998:95). Yegenoglu presents a thought provoking argument regarding the process of veiling which unfortunately cannot be examined further due to the restricted scope of this research.

The unrestrained female sexual body displays the inscriptions of its changing and consuming corporeal needs and desires. It is a body in process which excretes, secretes, menstruates, gives birth, ages, decays and subsequently dies, and whose transgression from the socially accepted codes of bodily decorum, signify a deviation from 'respectable' femininity (dependant upon the maintenance of bodily decorum and the repression of sexual desires). The transgressive female sexual body, existing outside the social norm, resists and defies erotic objectification, its body cannot be contained and regulated into the passive female nude and instead takes on the form of the "female grotesque" (Russo, cited in Arthurs and Grimshaw, 1999:42) depicting woman at her most horrific and frightening state, reiterating cultural fears associated with the female body, of castration, pollution, bodily disintegration and death.

The wild, uncontrollable body of the female 'grotesque' is often pictured with long, untamed hair, which echoes her subversive nature and unrestrained sexuality. The myth of Medusa is just one of many examples in which women's hair and head are conflated with notions of the monstrous and the grotesque. Medusa, the gorgon of Greek mythology, known for her beauty and luxurious hair was transformed into a monster with hair of writhing snakes, which had the power to turn any man that looked at her into stone. The Medusa myth alters slightly in content, yet in all the versions she is subsequently decapitated and her disembodied head continues to threaten and exact vengeance on men. The transformation of hair from the beautiful to the grotesque is symbolic of both the allure and danger which female sexuality poses to patriarchy

The notion of decapitation, as a means of silencing women's voices, operates not only in the realm of fantasy and myth, but is part of a larger symbolic process, entangled with notions of power, which manifests itself not only in religious and cultural practices of covering the head, but also in the various ways female hair is eroticized and imagined within contemporary western culture.

Helen Cixous in her essay "Castration or Decapitation?" (1981), draws parallels between male castration anxiety and the female's fear of symbolic decapitation, arguing that if

"man operates under the threat of castration", (Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger, 1995:6) the female equivalent of this threat is symbolic decapitation. Both instances depend upon fear of the 'other' and in both cases the signifier of power, authority and privilege is threatened with dismemberment. The female head is the part of the body which gives women the power of identity, language and selfhood, which once removed (either through its eroticization, the practices of veiling or its representation in popular culture etc) denies woman her subjectivity and individuality and objectifies her even further into a sexualized symbol of male desire.

Castration anxiety, according to Freud, is crucial for the male child's psychic development and acquisition of gender identity, the female child, on the other hand does not experience the threat of castration and therefore her acquisition of feminine identity is formed out of her envious longing for the attributes of the father, what Freud terms "penis envy" (Beasley, 1999:67). Female identity is therefore, in Freudian psychoanalysis, seen as a passively obtained identity, shaped by envy in relation to her 'lack' or deficiency. Cixous's notion of symbolic decapitation undermines Freud's analysis, arguing that woman does not passively slip into her identity, but rather acquires it through an active response to the fear of decapitation. The male's fear of losing the penis, and the horror attached to this threat is equated to the female's fear of losing her head, and subsequently her identity (Cixous, cited in Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger, 1995)

The notion of symbolic decapitation as a means of depriving woman of power, relates itself to the sexual binarism that informs Western patriarchal ideologies of gender. The head, which gives women a voice, identity and a concept of selfhood, signals a transgression of the gender based dichotomy, in which man assumes the privileged position of autonomous speaking subject, holding power and authority over the silent and passive woman. It is in fact women's power, hidden under the guise of sexuality, which is the 'threatening otherness' that provokes such intense cultural horror and anxiety. The continuation of patriarchal power relations is therefore dependant upon the symbolic decapitation of women, as it is only through the complete disavowal and denial of female

power and identity that masculine hegemony can retain and sustain its own privilege and dominance.

Symbolic decapitation can thus be understood as a powerful and effective device through which male castration anxieties and fears, aroused by the sight of sexual difference, can be displaced and alleviated. The eroticization and sexualization of the female head, hair and within the context of the fine art nude, body, transforms woman from autonomous speaking subject to a sexualized and passive object of male desire. This not only eradicates the threat female sexuality poses to patriarchal systems of order but more significantly, articulates the way in which oppressive and violent systems of subordination are maintained, inscribed and inflicted upon the female body.

The implicit violence embedded within the notion of decapitation takes on a more explicit and brutal form when examined in relation to the non white female body. Already silenced by both her 'race' and gender, the threat her sexual difference poses to the established gender hierarchies of privilege is overshadowed by the greater danger her 'racial' Otherness represents to the continuation and preservation of the white 'race'.

Chapter Two will explore the symbolic decapitation of the coloured woman, within the context of Apartheid body politics. I will argue that her 'decapitation' signified not so much an exertion of patriarchal oppression or domination, as she already occupied a lowly position, having very little social, political or economical power. Instead her symbolic decapitation violently objectified and reduced her body into a 'tainted' site of 'racial' impurity and degeneration, stripping her of both her cultural identity and her personal dignity.

CHAPTER 2
Abject Hair / Abject Bodies

The previous chapter discussed the concept of symbolic decapitation, as a denial of women's identity and power, examining the various religious, cultural and social processes and practices in which both women and their sexuality are controlled and subjugated through the symbolic removal of their head. This chapter will focus on the symbolic decapitation of the coloured female within Apartheid body politics. I will argue that her 'decapitation' and subsequent oppression was most violent, as her hair was neither veiled, as a means of controlling female sexuality, nor eroticized into an object of desire, but rather constructed as an abject, corporeal symbol and reminder of the unspeakable taboo of 'miscegenation'.

This chapter will further examine how colouredness within Apartheid's racial classificatory system was constructed as an inferior and 'tainted' category, whose rupturing of racial boundaries not only disrupted the monoliths of 'White' and 'Black' upon which construction of racial identities depended, but threatened the very existence and continuity of 'White' hegemony. The coloured body represented the ultimate threat to Apartheid's symbolic systems of order, identity and 'purity' and thus acted as the bearer of, and projections for white fears, guilt and anxieties.

Julia Kristeva in "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection" (1982) describes abjection in terms of ambiguity, arguing that,

> "It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." (Kristeva cited in Oliver, 1993:56)

The abject incites feelings of horror, repulsion and disgust. It occupies a liminal space between the subject and object, neither inside nor outside the body, it's a place where meaning collapses, "where 'I' am not" (Oliver, 1993: 58). Kristeva claims that the abject is not a "quality in itself", (Oliver, 1993: 56) but rather it is a relationship to a boundary, representing that which has been "jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a

margin" (Kristeva cited in Oliver, 1993:56). The abject threatens the identity of both society and the subject, challenging the frail borders of the Symbolic order and our concept of bodily wholeness and autonomy. The Symbolic order although prohibiting the abject must nevertheless tolerate it, as it is only through the recognition of the abject, of what it is not, that it is able to maintain and define itself.

For Kristeva the most significant borderline is that which separates the inside from the outside of the body, the self from Other. The subject's acquisition of a sexual and psychical identity within the Symbolic order depends upon an awareness of this distinction and entails a disavowal of the body's corporeal functioning, especially those deemed anti- social and unacceptable. Subjectivity and sociality are premised upon the expulsion of all that is considered improper and undesirable, from the clean and proper self. Kristeva, however, argues that this process of expulsion is never complete, as the threatening anti-social elements which disturb identity, systems and order, can never be fully obliterated and instead hover uncomfortably at the edges of subjectivity, threatening identity and challenging the subject's notion of unity and wholeness. It is the recognition of the impossibility of a fixed and stable identity that provokes the experience of abjection.

Objects that produce abjection, according to Kristeva, are those that have traversed the external boundaries of the body. Marginal matter, such as blood, saliva, faeces, urine and tears provoke cultural and individual disgust and are subjected to a range of social and culturally specific taboos. These bodily wastes point to the corporeal functioning of the body, signifying an opposition between the clean and unclean, the proper and improper, and the inside of the body and its outside. Inside the body they are the necessary conditions of life, while outside of it they represent the filthy and the unclean. These wastes however can never be fully externalized, as even when separated from the body, they still remain inextricably bound to it.

Hair, because of its ambiguous nature, can also be read as abject. It is both dead and alive, easily transformed from the beautiful while attached to the body, to the grotesque

when separated from it. Sometimes absent at birth, it grows and develops with the body, reaches maturity, when its at its healthiest and then, with the ageing process, begins its downward descend towards death, losing its youthful appearance, its colour and texture change and in certain instances of old age it falls out completely. Its absence is most prominent when closest to the margins of life, in birth and death. Hair, like the dead, feels no pain, yet it is still alive, growing and ageing with the rest of the body but, unlike the body, it seems to 'resist' death in that it takes longer to decompose and disintegrate. Hair is never completely dead nor completely alive, it is part of the body but effortlessly becomes detached from it, it is seemingly 'natural', yet it is never left 'natural', it femininizes or masculinizes the body but can easily, through lack or excess, conflate the distinction between the two, and in the most extreme form of symbolic violence inflicted upon the body, hair acts as a biological marker of race, classifying the body, according to the "tilt of whiteness," (Mercer, 1994 :103) into the racially constructed categories of 'White', 'Black' or 'Coloured', with often devastating results.

Hair when separated from the body, evokes an intense physical reaction of disgust, not because it is an inherently disgusting or dirty material but rather because it is "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966: 35), which disturbs symbolic categories of distinction through which order and meaning are maintained. Thus hair, when situated within the 'acceptable' confines of the body's boundaries, attached to the head, is an attractive and appealing part of the subject, signaling femininity and beauty, however the same strand of hair, eroticized on the head of a woman, when detached from the body and seen in a different context, for example on a plate of food, immediately becomes an object of repulsion.

In "Purity and Danger", Douglas (1966) explores the rupturing of bodily boundaries in terms of cultural difference, linking the transgression of bodily boundaries to the transgression of social and cultural boundaries. For Douglas the body serves as a metaphor for social structure, she describes it as "a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Douglas, 1966: 121). Douglas argues that both the body and society are

most vulnerable at the margins, for it is in the zones of indeterminacy, at the very edges of categories, where symbolic meaning threatens to collapse. Rituals, rules and practices which regulate the body's boundaries, and through which acceptable bodily behavior is maintained, function metaphorically for symbolic cultural boundaries, which through the construction of the binary opposing categories of purity and pollution implement powerful taboos (on certain sexual practices, bodily wastes and consumption of unclean foods) in which all that is defined as dangerous, impure or threatening is expelled from society.

The threat to social formation and subjectivity emanates not from elements defined as 'unclean' or 'impure', but rather from their marginality. The concept of 'dirt', like the abject, is not a pollutant in itself, but rather "matter out of place", which arouses cultural anxiety and disgust, not because it possesses intrinsic properties of impurity or filth, but because it signifies a perpetual state of ambiguity and transgression, belonging to neither one category nor the other but instead hovering ambiguously between the two.

Hair, nails and skin, along with bodily fluids and wastes, when outside or detached from the body, are attributed with powerful and dangerous qualities. They are bits of discarded body, no longer part of the body, but nevertheless remain "magically" linked to it, as they retain "something of the cathexis and value of a body" (Grosz, 1994:81). Metonymically, they stand in for the subject, carrying within itself the 'memory' of the subject. However these 'memories' are tainted, as they are in fact waste products ejected from the body, associated with bodily pollution and 'dirt'.

The permeability of the body's boundaries and the ease in which they collapse and conflate with one another, attest to the precarious nature of borders, upon whose entire existence, symbolic meaning depends The disgusted fascination and fear aroused when viewing these objects, is due to the subjects recognition of the impossibility of a "clean and proper self" (Grosz,1994:194), the realization that the body's corporeality and materiality cannot be ignored and that the 'impure', anti social elements, although repressed and controlled, within the symbolic order, can never be fully obliterated.

The visceral response provoked by the abject or “matter out of place”, is a response not only to the transgressions of bodily boundaries, but also to transgressions and subversions of any systems of classification through which meaning is established. Hair, precariously balances on the cusp between the beautiful and the obscene, the masculine and the feminine, nature and culture, and within the context of Apartheid body politics between the racially constructed categories of ‘Black’ and ‘White’.

These hierarchically organized categories are structurally interdependent upon each other, with the privileged term, assuming a normative position in relation to its binary opposite. Within this fragile dichotomy the conceptualization of the one depends upon the repression and subordination of the other and therefore any change or slight shift in one category, threatens to destabilize all classificatory systems, whose meaning is constructed through the marking of ‘difference’. This binary model however with its rigid either/or categorization process is both reductive and over simplified, it assumes that each category is in itself a homogenous and coherent entity, whose meaning is fixed and innate. The attempt to assign intrinsic meaning to any given category, is impossible, as meaning, is never static or ‘neutral’, but instead constantly shifts and fluctuates according to social and cultural ideologies. Furthermore the protean nature of each category and the fine line separating one from its respective other, articulates the impossibility of absolute, categorical binary oppositions.

When ‘race’ enters this dichotomy, the violent hierarchy embedded within the language of binary oppositions becomes even more explicit and aggressive, with the racially constructed categories ‘Black’ and ‘White’ intersecting with the categories of ‘nature’, ‘culture’, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. Thus the positive attributes in the dichotomy are characterized as being part of the white ‘Self’, while the subordinated elements are assigned and imposed on to the black ‘Other’. This categorization process, based upon visual signs of difference, is similarly, if not more complex than the gender based dichotomy, discussed earlier, as the boundaries constructed to fix and naturalize the difference between the White/Self and Black/Other become even more difficult to define.

The ideological construction, within Apartheid's racist and racialized discourses, of 'Black' and 'White' as primary markers of identity, not only essentializes blackness and whiteness into two monolithically defined and homogenous categories, but also dictates that all other identities be read against this binary paradigm of race. Any group or individual which disturbs or transgresses this system of classification, either through 'racial mixing' or through their racial indeterminacy, is constructed as 'abject' and subsequently marginalized.

Within South Africa's long history of oppression and discrimination, hair along with skin colour became the most visible sign of racial difference, allowing for the systematic classification of the body to be based upon a biological determinism embedded within colonial discourses[7] of power. Within this context, hair and specifically 'coloured' hair, took on a significantly political dimension, playing a crucial role in the construction and subsequent subjugation of the coloured body, marking it as a site of shame, humiliation and pain. Its indeterminate physicality and ambiguous status positioned it in a liminal space, "not only not white, but less than white; not only not black, but better than black" (Erasmus, 2001:13)

Apartheid body politics with its rigorous and methodical categorization processes, constructed racial identities whose very conceptualization was premised, and heavily reliant upon the binarisms of the signifiers 'Black' and 'White', in which whiteness is valorized and assumes a normative position of privilege, whereas blackness is devalued and allocated a lowly status within "racism's bipolar codification of human worth" (Mercer, 1994: 101). The origins of this oppressive racial system can be traced back to colonialism's discourses of 'scientific racism' which emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whereby 'visible' evidence of racial inferiority and difference was provided as 'scientific' justification for the oppression and exploitation of the black

[7] Colonialism's pseudoscientific theories and practices established a set of conceptual dichotomies between European, white superiority and African black inferiority. The black body, within these racist stereotypical discourses, was systematically oppressed and marginalized, constructed as a site of excess, fear and deviancy, and reduced to a "pathological form of 'otherness"(Hall, 1997; 265) This will be discussed further in Chapter Three, with regard to Saartjie Baartman the so called 'Hottentot Venus'.

Other. The rigidity with which these categories were imposed and the strict policing of racial boundaries, reduced the body to skin colour, inscribing it as either essentially black or essentially white, thereby assigning it to the racially constructed category of either 'Black' or White.

The coloured body, ambivalently situated between the homogonously constructed binaries of 'Black' and 'White', was constructed within apartheids racial hierarchy as an in between, residual identity, "characterized as 'lacking', supplementary, excessive, inferior or simply non- existent" (Erasmus, 2001:16). Although occupying a slightly higher status to other subordinate racial groups, the coloured body was subjected to the most extreme form of symbolic violence during the Apartheid era. Derogatorily defined as a body borne out of 'miscegenation', it posed an immediate threat to white identity, as "blood mixing" (Erasmus, 2001: 17), it was argued, lead to both 'moral' and racial pollution and degeneration.

The objectifying practices which rendered the black body as an inferior Other to the idealized white Self, constructed the coloured body as an 'abject' hybrid, possessing neither the 'essence'[8] or 'purity' of whiteness, nor the 'authenticity' or 'cultural traditions' of blackness. Neither Self nor Other, Black' nor 'White' the coloured body occupied an interstitial position, privileged as 'better than black' because of its approximation to whiteness but despised and regarded as 'less than white' because of its association with miscegenation and "bastardization" (Erasmus, 2001:35). Inscribed with guilt and shame, the coloured body, was the unspeakable taboo "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva cited in Oliver, 1993:56) which disturbed racial and cultural order, and 'purity'.

The apartheid government's obsessive policing of racial boundaries and its systematic classification and categorization of bodies into hierarchically structured racial groups, culminated in the passing of various laws which acted as "key components in the

[8] I use these in quotations, as the notions of 'racial' purity, homogeneity and authenticity, are ideological constructs, based upon a biological determinism, embedded within colonial, and later Apartheid's racial classificatory system.

'purification', unification and consolidation of white identity" (Erasmus, 2001:42). In this way the 'White' Self managed to distance and rid itself from the abject threat of the 'Coloured' otherness. In the opening section of The Population Registration Act of 1950, racial identities are defined in relation to one another stating that,

> "A 'coloured' person means a person who is not a white person or a native. A 'native' means a person who in fact is or is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa. And a 'white person means a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as, a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person (Statutes, 277)" (cited in Erasmus, 2001:74)

In a further attempt to prevent erroneous classifications, or 'ambiguity' between 'White' and 'Coloured' identities, stricter measures where adopted and the racial group 'Coloured' was divided in 1950 into seven sub categories comprising of "Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua, Indian, Chinese, ' other Asiatics', and 'other Coloured" (Erasmus, 2001:74). The political construction, and subsequent reconstruction of the racial category 'Coloured', is a paradox in itself. Firstly the classification of a diverse range of people under the category of 'Coloured' completely ignores both their external differences such as language, religion, tradition and culture as well as their internal differences and diversities such as class, gender, age and experience. But even more contradictory is that a system so dependant upon the notion of cultural and racial 'homogeneity' and 'purity' and so obsessed with the marking and classification of racial difference, inadvertently, through the amendment to the category of 'Coloured', acknowledges the impossibility of fixed, homogenous identities, by allowing new ones into this category. These inconsistencies and contradictions of what constitutes 'Colouredness' and who belongs into this category further problematize the notion of 'Coloured' identity.

The double objectification of the black female body under the white colonial male gaze, constructed her as an object of difference, lacking in power and constantly subjected to derogatory racial and sexual descriptions. Furthermore, racialized notions of beauty and femininity, with their valorization of white skin, straight hair and 'delicate' features, not only marked the black woman as a deviance from European classical standards of female

beauty but also consolidated and reinforced eugenicist ideologies[9] of racial inferiority and degeneracy.

For the coloured woman, occupying the ambivalent position between "less than white" but "better than black" situated her uncomfortably between the idealized Self and the 'deviant' Other. Whereas the black woman's 'difference' was constructed as the absolute antithesis of the white female body, the coloured woman was simultaneously despised and privileged, having elements of the white 'ideal', which were 'tainted' by 'race mixture', her light skinned 'black' body was both valorized and stigmatized within the coloured community and outside of it. (Erasmus, 2000)

To have light skin and 'sleek' hair was associated not only with ideals of beauty, but more significantly, the approximation to whiteness ensured a higher, more privileged social standing, whereas the 'darker' coloured body with its *'kroes'*, 'kinky' hair was devalued and constructed as inferior. The hierarchic implications of this led to internal racism and prejudice within the coloured community itself, as the body was inscribed and valued according to "whiteness and 'degrees of whiteness' (Erasmus, 2000:381).

The infamous 'pencil test', utilized in 'borderline' cases, attempted to control and regulate the abject threat, the 'Coloured body posed to apartheid's racial boundaries. The racial classification and reclassification of people according to their hair texture, was the most humiliating and extreme form symbolic violence inflicted upon the coloured body. This 'scientific' testing, implemented through pencils and matchsticks, concluded that if the pencil got stuck in the hair, the person was assigned to the category 'Coloured' as 'coloured' hair was presumably denser and thicker than 'white' hair, similarly if the pencil fell out, the person was categorized as 'White,' since 'white' hair was sleeker and

[9] Eugenics theories introduced to Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, provided 'scientific' justification for colonial exploitation and domination. Based upon the belief of inherent racial difference, eugenicist ideologies perpetuated the racist myth of white, superiority and black inferiority, constructing the black body as a site of racial degeneracy and inferiority. The fear of eugenic pollution, occurring through 'miscegenation' was viewed as not only morally unacceptable but as a degeneration of white racial 'purity', with those born from these liaisons, negatively defined in terms of 'lack' or taint. The concept of 'miscegenation' and its contribution to the marginalization of coloured identity will be expanded on in greater detail in chapter three.

straighter. Another method, involved the twirling of hair around a pencil. If it sprang back once the pencil was removed, it indicated that the person was coloured, as 'coloured' hair was '*kroes'* and naturally more tightly curled than 'white' hair. The black body was not spared this humiliation either and in certain instances when applying for reclassification from 'Black' to 'Coloured', this method was used, with slight alterations, to allow for the 'inherent' differences of 'black' hair. (Du Pre, 1994)

The pencil test was not gender specific, but its effect on the coloured female body was even more painful and pronounced. Already 'othered' by her race and gender, her hair inscribed her with the burden of shame and guilt, marking her body as a site of transgression and deviancy as it signified the unspeakable taboo of 'race mixture'. Her symbolic decapitation attempted not only to silence her, but to annihilate her very existence from society. She represented not only the racial 'impurity' and degeneracy associated with 'miscegenation' and 'race-mixing', but furthermore posed an explicit threat and danger to 'white' South Africa as she was the potential carrier of the 'mixed race' group.

The coloured woman's ambivalent and painful relationship with her hair and 'mixed race' body, the constant need to transform her 'bad', '*kroes*' hair into 'good', straight hair, "that looks like white peoples hair" (Erasmus, 2000:383), highlights the symbolic violence and cruelty of apartheid body politics. Whether practices of hair straightening are adopted to assume the position of ' better than black' in an attempt to be closer to whiteness, or as a means of removing the 'physical' signs of an identity constructed as a racially 'impure', 'tainted' version of whiteness, they nonetheless point to the inhumanity of a social system, which in order to maintain white supremacy, not only subjects the Other to social, political and personal oppression but also promotes internalized racism and self loathing.

The overlapping and exploitative hierarchies of gender and race inscribed, marked and categorized the coloured female body as a corporeal object of shame, taboo and 'racial' impurity, subjecting her to contradictory racist and sexual stereotypification. She was

constructed as the ‘inferior’ and ‘obscene’ product of ‘miscegenation’, an inherently degenerate ‘hybrid’, whose presence acted as a potent reminder of the illicit sexual relations across the racial boundaries. However, although despised for the ‘contamination’ and degeneration of ‘racial purity’, her proximity to whiteness positioned her as a “partially privileged subject” (Erasmus, 2000:18) midway between the privilege of ‘whiteness’ and the subordination of ‘blackness’.

White anxieties regarding the sexually debased and ‘primitive’ nature of the black female Other and her subsequent subjection to violent forms of racial and sexual objectification, formed the very fabric of Apartheid’s racist ideologies. However the hierarchical categorization and differentiation between the ‘races’ although formally institutionalized and vigorously implemented by the Apartheid government is not a twentieth century construct. This explicit racism has a longer history whose origins can be traced back the ‘pseudoscientific’ racist discourses of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, which positioned whiteness as the exemplar of racial and intellectual superiority and constructed blackness as its ‘primitive’, and ‘inferior’ Other.

The next chapter will examine the symbolic violence and brutal objectifying practices inflicted upon the body of the non white, non western female under the presumably ‘objective’ pseudoscientific theories of eugenics, ethnography, physiology and physiognomy. I will argue that the construction of these disciplines not only facilitated nineteenth century Europe’s obsessive desire to look, probe and gain authority over the body of the Other but more significantly licensed and legitimized colonialism’s unregulated acts of voyeurism under the guise of ‘science’, objective knowledge and ‘truth’. (Hall, 1997)

CHAPTER THREE
The construction of the Other

Both within the context of Apartheid body politics and in post apartheid cultural production, the body has become a privileged site of political contestation upon which power, struggle and the interrogation and subsequent subversion of racially imposed identities are played out. Colonialism's embodiment of racial difference constituted the very core of oppression, trapping the body in a violent racial hierarchy between the binarisms of the categories 'Black' and 'White', leaving no conceptual space for the imagining of coloured identity as anything other than a transgressive 'mixture' of races.

Although dominant ideologies of race and their typecasting of the 'other' may have changed, the legacy of this totalizing racism and its political and cultural implications still resonate through South African society today, with colouredness still remaining a highly contested and unstable identity, intertwined with issues surrounding the notions of 'race' mixture, sexuality, and shame. It is within this ambiguous racial landscape that South African artist Tracey Rose (b.1974, South Africa) previously classified as 'Coloured', situates her artistic practices. In a number of her artworks through the usage of her own culturally specific hair and body, she attempts to confront the complexity and multiplicity of her own identity as a coloured South African woman, disrupting not only essentialist notions of the racially constructed category of 'Coloured', assigned and imposed on her during the apartheid era, but also challenging racialized notions of beauty and femininity.

Colonialism's hierarchical structuring of human worth, firmly grounded within evolutionary ideology and supported by the newly emerging pseudoscientific theories and practices of eighteenth century Europe, established a set of conceptual dichotomies between European, white superiority and African black inferiority. Within the discourses of 'scientific' racism, visible signs of difference, ranging from skin colour and hair texture to the shape and structure of the genitalia and buttocks, were seized upon as

signifiers of the irreducible and inherent differences between the 'races', on both a physical and intellectual level.

The black body, falling outside the ethnocentric ideal, was reduced to a "pathological form of 'otherness" (Hall, 1997; 265) regarded not only as belonging to an inferior and sub-human 'race' to the white European, but characterized as 'sick', 'diseased' and 'impaired'. Furthermore the association of blackness with degeneracy and pathology was so deeply entrenched within nineteenth century's racialized discourses, that it was assumed at its most extreme that black skin was a result of congenital syphilis. Syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease, was thought to be a form of leprosy, originating in Africa, which spread to Europe and England during the middle ages, with black skin identified as one of its defining 'symptoms'. Thus another set of negative associations emerged between blackness and "syphilophobia", (Gilman, 1985:101) which further reinforced and legitimized eugenicist claims regarding the 'subversive' nature of the black 'race'.

For the black woman, the interweaving of the pathological and the sexual was especially problematic. Already despised for being an active agent in the continuation of the black 'race', she was blamed not only for 'tempting' white men to participate in the 'contamination' of their 'race', but also for its actual degeneration, as she, being the "source of corruption and disease" (Gilman, 1985:101), would subsequently infect its 'purity.'

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries 'scientific' study of human sexuality and development focused largely on the pathological and 'abnormal' sexualized subject. Within this 'scientific' paradigm, the notion of female sexuality as an unrestrained and dangerous 'otherness', physically manifested itself through the image of the female genitalia, which was considered "deviant" (Young, 1996: 49) and "more 'primitive' than those of the male"[10] (Gilman, 1985:91). The black woman, already constructed as a signifier of a more 'primitive' and excessive sexuality than that of the 'civilized' European woman, was, because of her "excessively proportioned genitalia and buttocks"

[10] Freud in "Three Essays of Sexuality" (1905)

(Young 1999, in Arthurs, J. and Grimshaw, J: 68), compared to the European prostitute, herself an object of medical patholigization.

The supposed physical anomalies of the white prostitute, her excessive weight, asymmetrical face, misshapen nose, and her so-called Darwin's ear[11] were read as signs of degeneration and atavism, which were paralleled to the external, 'primitive', 'peculiarities' of the black woman. Both were subjected to intense 'scientific' examination, with particular interest invested in the 'pathologies' of their genitalia, with the elongation of the labia majora in the prostitute, likened to "the apron of the 'disgusting' Hottentots[12]." (Gilman, 1985:98). The 'scientific' rationalization for the linkage between the two, assumed that all women, black and white, possessed a lascivious sexuality, but whereas the 'civilized' white woman was able to control her sexual excessiveness, the black woman, still locked in the 'early' stages of human development, was unable to, hence her 'primitive', unbridled sexuality. The prostitute signified the 'fallen' white woman, whose loss of control, was marked by her regression and degeneracy into the realm of 'blackness'. (Gilman, 1985)

The colonial hold over the body of the Other is best exemplified by the case of twenty five year old Saartjie Baartman[13], who was brought to England in 1819 from South Africa and exhibited as the 'Hottentots Venus[14].' (Gilman, 1985:85) Travelogues, dating back to the European explorers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, already identified and 'documented' the innate differences between the Hottentot woman and her European counterpart. Assumed to be 'evidence' of the 'missing link', between the human and animal, the Hottentot female was considered the lowliest of 'species' on the scale of humanity, and was derogatorily portrayed as "beast-like, disease-ridden (and)

[11] "The simplification of the convolutions of the ear shell and the absence of a lobe"(Gilman, 1985:95)
[12] The 'Hottentot apron' refers to the enlargement of the labia, this was caused by the manipulation of the genitalia, considered as beautiful and desirable by the Hottentot and amongst other Africans. To the European, medical gaze, this signified the 'primitive' development of the black woman, and thus explained her 'primitive' sexual appetite and nature. (Pacteau,1994)
[13] also known as Sarah Bartmann, or Saat-Jee (Gilman, 1985)
[14] While I am aware that the range of scholarship on the Hottentot Venus is extensive, this discussion is nevertheless important to this dissertation as Baartmaan is a strong referent in the conceptual processes and workings of Tracey Rose.

lascivious" (Erasmus, 2001:34) as well as 'stupid', 'ugly' and 'primitive'. These 'truths' contributed significantly, and validated, nineteenth century's 'scientific' discourses of 'race', which so vehemently sought to, and subsequently established a linkage between the apparent 'primitive' genitalia of the Hottentot and the diseased genitalia of the infected prostitute.(Gilman,1985)

Baartman's sexual anomalies, held a titillating fascination for the European observer. To the general public, her 'performances' (Hall, 1997:264) provided a carnivalesque type of entertainment, with many flocking to see the spectacle of the 'Hottentot Venus'. Yet this form of public humiliation, degrading as it was, was still incomparable to the violent objectifying practices, inflicted upon her within the 'scientific' community. Under the anthropological/ medical gaze, Baartman's 'radical' signs of racial and sexual difference were forcibly objectified, scrutinized and analyzed. In accordance with the polygenetic views of the time, it was established that her apparently different sexual organs, distinguished from the "ordinary varieties of the human species" (Gilman, 1985:89), provided visible 'proof', that the black belonged to a completely separate, and inferior 'race' to the European. Baartman, perceived and constructed as the very embodiment of Otherness, was positioned as the "the lowest exemplum of mankind on the great chain of being" (Farr, 1995:27), acting as an icon for the sexual difference between the black and the European.

Thus within colonialism's racist, stereotypical discourses, the image of the Hottentot, epitomized by Saartjie Baartman, came to signify, the quintessential black woman, who in turn acted as the essential signifier of the most primitive', and 'deviant' form of female sexuality. The construction of blackness, as a singular, homogenous category, not only ignored and completely obliterated the diversity and multiplicity of subject positions, cultural identities, histories and languages, which constitute black identity, but also articulated colonialism's conceptualization of Africa, as the primitive, 'uncivilized',

"dark continent"[15] (Young, 1996:23). In addition to her racial objectification, the black woman, physically bearing the stigma of her sexual difference, was symbolically fragmented and reduced to a fetishized sexual object, with her body acting as an inscriptive surface, upon which colonial fears and anxieties regarding the nature of the sexualized black Other , could be projected and fixed.

The racializing of the body, under colonial and later apartheid rule, and the systematic categorization of people into racial groups, attempted to legitimate itself through various 'scientific' discourses and 'empirical observation'. The racist myth, however, of biological markers acting as signifiers of either inferior or superior moral, psychological and intellectual characteristics, although formally institutionalized by the Apartheid regime, and still held by the twenty first century racist, obviously holds no real merit, but rather are fabrications woven out of Europe's anxiety and fear concerning the Other.

The concept of 'race' is not an objective 'truth', but an ideological construct, based upon a hierarchical relationship of domination and oppression between the colonizer and the colonized. The notion of blackness like whiteness is a meaningless category as there is no innate essence to either one, instead the former is constructed as a means of defining and guaranteeing the status of the other. White identity has assumed a normative and universal status, with the power to define itself against the negative and undesirable qualities with which it designates its other. Thus the white Self projects its own fears and anxieties on to the black Other, and so marks the black as 'lacking' everything that the white presumably has. Just as the category 'Man', within the gender based dichotomy, is highly dependant, and subsequently validated by the construction of 'Woman' as its absolute 'other,' so too is whiteness, structurally interdependent upon blackness for the conceptualization of itself.

Sander L. Gilman in Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness (1985) argues that "the very concept of colour is a quality of Otherness, not of

[15] Freud in "Three essays on sexuality" (1905) uses the trope of the 'dark continent', whereby he compares the Otherness of (white) female sexuality, to the unexplored Otherness of Africa, both of which, presumably, need to be controlled and civilized.

reality" (Gilman, 1985:30). Historically, Jews and the Irish, like the European prostitute, have all at one time or other been constructed as 'black'. The Otherness of the black was shifted onto the Jew, as both were seen as degenerate 'races', ugly, inferior and evil. Furthermore racist biology of the late nineteenth century concluded that the Jews were the "inferior product of a crossing of absolutely different types", a hybridization between "Negro blood and Jewish" (Gilman, 1985:30). The repeated association, and interchangeability of blackness and Jewishness, with evil, and disease, and the conflation of both categories into the racial, 'black' Other, reveals both the violent hierarchy embedded within European hegemony and the arbitrariness of colour as a marker of race.

Blackness, as a signifier of 'race', therefore transcends physical and aesthetic notions of colour, and instead functions as a symbolic category under which all that is defined as threatening, undesirable and deviant from the 'norm' is homogenized and essentialized into the Other. Thus the construction of the black Other as the antithesis to the white Self, exists not because of differences in skin pigmentation, skull shape or hair texture but rather because it is a projection of all that is undesirable, dangerous and threatening within the Self.

Apartheid's construction of 'Colouredness', problematizes simplistic and reductive concepts of identity, highlighting the banality of the 'Black'/'White' binary model, as the 'Coloured' Other, hierarchically situated as "less than white" but "better than "black" (Erasmus, 2001:13), is both part of and separate from the white Self. As a result coloured identity has always been relationally defined in terms of either 'lack' or 'excess', but never as an autonomous identity, in its own right. Although the rigid taxonomies of apartheid South Africa have been dismantled, the coloured community, is still to this day haunted by the stigma and humiliation associated with the category 'Coloured'.

Zimitri Erasmus in "Coloured by History Shaped by Race: New Perspectives on Coloured identities in Cape Town" (2001), discusses the need for the reconceptualization of coloured identity, both by the coloured community itself and by the rest of South

Africa. The first step, she argues is to acknowledge, the relational aspect of all identity formations. Identities are neither fixed nor singular but rather fluid and open, constantly changing and shifting, in accordance to political and social contexts, and in the case of coloured identity, borne out of an intricate and complex web of power relations, between the dominant and the subaltern group.

The re-imagining of coloured identity most importantly necessitates a rejection of the derogatory notion of colouredness, as being a product of 'miscegenation' and "race mixture', as the implicit connotations of 'impurity', 'illegitimacy' and 'immorality', have only contributed to the ongoing marginalization of the coloured people. Instead, Erasmus suggests, coloured identity should be recognized as one constructed through an active process of creolization, whereby identity is formed through the appropriation, translation and borrowing of elements from both the dominant and subaltern cultures. This articulates the fluidity and agency involved in the formation of coloured identity, and challenges the assumption that coloured identity was a purely racist construction of the apartheid government, with no history and culture of its own. In fact coloured identities, she explains, were formed in the colonial encounter between the Dutch and British colonists, the slaves from Asia and the colonized indigenous people of Southern Africa, resulting in a unique and specific cultural formation, comprising of Dutch, British, Malaysian, Khoi and African cultures (Erasmus, 2001). Thus the coloured community has a rich history, comprising of a diversity of cultures, religions, languages and experiences, which has been denied and trivialized under the racially constructed category 'Coloured'.

The artistic conceptual workings of Tracey Rose interrogate the notion of colouredness, and explore her own personal experience as a historically classified 'Coloured' woman, within the larger framework of Apartheid body politics. Rose situates herself in the centre of the contemporary debate regarding coloured identity, which before its reconceptualization, needs to be examined in relation to other factors which mediate identity beyond colour and common oppression. The fact that a sector of the population was homogenized into, and oppressed under, the racially constructed category

'Coloured', although linked through a terrible and traumatic history of subjugation and domination, does not necessarily mean that they all share a common coloured identity. To recall from Chapter Two, the term 'Coloured' was used copiously to refer to any person who did not fit into apartheid's rigid classificatory system and thus, a diversity of people, ranging from the 'Cape Coloured' and 'Cape Malay' to the 'Indian', 'Chinese' and 'other Asiatics', were all forcibly welded together into a non-existent category.

The challenges facing the coloured community today are the articulation of what constitutes coloured identity, what it means in post apartheid South Africa and how it can be successfully re- claimed and renegotiated from the past. The next chapter will attempt to show how Rose deconstructs and problematizes the concept of coloured and gender identity, highlighting its fluidity and openness, as well as stressing its restrictions and limitations. Rose's work lends a voice to the previously silenced and marginalized coloured woman, calling attention to the symbolic violence inflicted upon the female body through racism. Chapter Four will comprise of a detailed discussion and critical analysis of the video piece *Ongetiteld* (1996) from the *"Purity and Danger"* exhibition held at the Gertrude Posel Gallery in Johannesburg and *Span II* (1997) a performance video installation created for the second Johannesburg Biennale.

CHAPTER 4
Re-imagining coloured identity in the works of Tracey Rose

"Hair is significant in the coloured communities. It marks you in certain ways, towards whiteness or blackness. On the one hand, its about the 'privilege' of having straight hair as opposed to 'kroes' , but on the other hand, having straight hair meant you were often insulted for thinking you were white, for pretending to be white." -Tracey Rose[16]

The intricate complexities of hair, its ambiguity as an organic substance, its symbolic meaning as a signifier of female sexuality and 'otherness', its metonymic relationship with the body, the simultaneous reaction of repulsion and seduction which its presence or absence provokes, and its conceptualization, after skin colour, as the most visible sign of 'racial' difference, all offer key insights into the conceptual workings and artistic production of Tracey Rose, whose usage of her own culturally specific hair and body, serves as metaphor through which she critically engages with issues surrounding the gendered and racialized body.

This chapter will offer a detailed discussion and critical analysis of Rose's video piece *Ongetiteld* (1996) from the *"Purity and Danger"* exhibition held at the Gertrude Posel Gallery in Johannesburg and *Span II* (1997) a performance video installation created for the second Johannesburg Biennale. These works have been chosen specifically because of their exploration of the interface between race, gender, hair and the body, yet their significance extends far beyond the framework of coloured identity, as they open up a conceptual space where the rigidly defined 'racial' identities ('White', 'Black' and 'Indian') of South Africa's turbulent past can all be deconstructed and transcended.

[16] Pienaar, H. (2000) "Documentary images add gloss to old truths" in *Sunday Independent*. 9 January 2000

Working within a post colonial, feminist framework, Rose's critique, deconstruction and subsequent rejection of the racially constructed category of 'Coloured', extends to the equally problematic and reductive concept of 'Woman', as both notions of race and gender, within the colonial imagination, were interconnected and conflated with that of sexuality and Otherness. Thus the body of the non-white, non western woman doubly objectified, under the white colonial male gaze, became a site upon which the violent hierarchies of race and gender played out, trapping the body in an interconnecting system of oppression and domination, through both its sexual and racial difference.

Homi Bhabha, in "The Other Question"[17] (1994) examines the concept of ambivalence, with regard to colonialism's construction of the Other, which he argues "is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" (Bhabha,1994: 67). Ambivalence as a psychoanalytic concept refers to a continual fluctuation, desiring one thing, but also wanting its complete opposite. It is a simultaneous response of both an attraction and repulsion to an object or person. Within the context of colonial discourse, ambivalence, argues Bhabha, is reflected in the conflicting ways in which the black Other is constructed simultaneously as both an exotic/erotic object of desire and as an object of fear and loathing. The black within racist stereotypical discourses, he continues, is represented as both 'savage' and the most obedient of servants, 'primitive' and 'simple minded' yet ruthless and manipulative, the black (man) is the embodiment of "rampant sexuality", yet at the same time attributed with innocent and child like qualities (Bhabha, 1994: 82).

Nowhere is this process of ambivalence more pronounced than in the stereotypical representations of black women, whose depictions range from passive and docile, "desexualized mammies" to the hyper sexual black 'seductress', who 'tempts' white men with her lascivious nature, to the image of the "tragic mulatta"[18] (Young cited in Arthurs, J. and Grimshaw, J, 1999:68), whose light skinned black body, is marked and inscribed

[17] "The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism" in Bhaba, H. K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
[18] Young, L. (1999) "Racializing Femininity" in *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression* eds Arthurs, J. and Grimshaw, J. London and New York: Cassel

with the shame and guilt of 'miscegenation'. In all these instances the black woman is conceived of and imagined only through her body and sexuality, constructed accordingly to suit the needs of the colonial oppressor as either excessive and 'primitive' or completely non existent. In either case she does not exist as an individual but rather is merely an object, signifying a heightened sign of racial and sexual difference, serving as a locus for others consumption, inscription, exploitation and crude objectification.

Rose's deployment of strategies of disruption and subversion, contest the racialized and stereotypical regimes of representation, cited above. In both works, she does not simply attempt to replace negative stereotypes, with positive ones, as this, although challenging the binaries of white/superiority and black/ inferiority, does not effectively undermine or displace them, as their meaning is still dependant upon this reductive either/or structure. Instead Rose undermines these categories from within, exposing their inconsistencies, ambiguity and fragility of meaning, as well as highlighting, the extent to which the conceptualization of gender and racial identity are bound and read off the body's corporeality. It is precisely this critique from within, which makes Rose's work so captivating. Her aim is not to replace old stereotypes of colouredness, with new ones which are 'good', but rather, her refusal to succumb to any rigidly defined monolith of identity, allows her to examines the multiplicity of her own identity and problematize concepts of 'Woman', 'femininity', colouredness and her previously imposed racial identity of 'Coloured'.

The video piece *Ongetiteld* was exhibited in the *"Purity and Danger"* exhibition, held at the Gertrude Posel Gallery in 1996. Drawing its title from Mary Douglas's anthropological analyses of purity and pollution - "Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo" (1966), the exhibition, curated by Penny Siopis, comprised of work by nine South African artists[19], whose task was to provide a critical space for the examination and exploration of the notion of taboo in South African society

[19] Tracey Rose, Clive Van Den Berg, Minette Vari, Moshekwa Langa, Terry Kurgan, Veliswa Gwintsa, Robyn Orlin, Heather Thompson and Pat Ward Williams, were all participants in the exhibition which also included the work of Siopis and five other public figures, who made curatorial interventions in and around the gallery space.

at the time. Although held ten years ago, in the early stages of South Africa's democracy, the issues engaged with then, ranging from the taboo of homosexuality, death, nakedness and the dissolution of boundaries between the private and public domain, still remain relevant and pertinent to cultural production in South Africa today.



Figure 1 : Rose, T. *Ongetiteld*, 1996, Video

In *Ongetiteld*, there is no subtle easing of the viewer into the work through a definite beginning or end, instead one is immediately faced with the image of Rose, naked in the intimate space of a bathroom, shaving off all her bodily hair. This image is both shocking and disturbing, causing the viewer an intense feeling of uneasiness and discomfort. Yet at the same time it lures the gaze, 'forcing' us to look at something which we would prefer not to see but nevertheless cannot escape. Every aspect of the video seduces us, from the black and white grainy texture of the video, to Rose's seeming oblivion of the camera, to the eerie buzzing of the electric shaver.

The surveillance camera captures Rose from above, face down, shaving off all her bodily hair. She begins systematically, from the long hair on her head, which slowly falls to the floor, and then proceeds to shave the rest of her body, never once acknowledging the viewer or the camera. The video, running on a loop, suspends and conflates the notion of time, and subsequently the repetitive image of Rose, appears as one continuous, fluid activity. The only hint of any temporal sequence, is suggested by the growing pile of hair

on the floor, but the subtlety of the cue, does very little to dispel the sense of temporal dislocation and ambiguity. The viewer's growing discomfort is further intensified by both the recognition of the physical space in which the footage is taken, and by Rose's refusal to validate our presence in her 'space'.

The position of the viewer is problematized through the juxtaposition of the personal and intimate space of the bathroom and the external and public domain of the gallery. This blurring of boundaries between the internal and external, the public and personal and between what is permissible and what is forbidden to the gaze, results in the audience finding themselves precariously balanced between the position of viewer and voyeur.

Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" [20](1992[1975]) examining the power relations embedded within the looking process, argues that the act of looking is in itself gendered, in that it privileges the male gaze. She distinguishes between two distinct modes of pleasure in looking; the first is voyeurism, associated with notions of power and control whereby the voyeur derives pleasure from seeing without being seen. For the voyeur, she continues, satisfaction arises not through the proximity to the object of desire, but rather from watching it, as it is through the active look, that a constant state of control over the object is maintained.

The second look is that of the fetishist, which includes a sexual element. As discussed in Chapter One, woman, both by her lack of Phallus and also by the absence of the real penis, provokes castration anxiety. Thus woman as an icon, both in film and representation, argues Mulvey, always invokes in the male spectator the original threat of castration, implied by her sexual difference (Mulvey, 1992:29). Freud in his essay on "Fetishism"[21] (1927) explains that the male child, upon discovering the mother's lack of penis, is overcome with a sense of shock and horror, at what appears to be a result of castration. His response is either a symbolic acceptance of the possibility of castration, or alternatively, a complete disavowal or denial of castration. Freud argues, that in the mind

[20] Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', first published in the Screen journal in 1975.
[21] Freud in his essay "Fetishism" (1927), focuses on male fetishism, and although allowing for the possibility of female fetishism, largely neglects it.

of the male child, "woman has got a penis, in spite of everything; but the penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute…" (Freud, cited in Hall, 1997:267). Fetishism, therefore derives from the denial of castration, whereby the male subject turns an object into the symbolic replacement of the mother's missing penis.

Mulvey argues that "woman as representation signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat." (Mulvey, 1992:32) The sexualization of woman in cinema[22] and her reduction to a fetish object alleviates the implicit threat her sexual difference implies and instead presents a non-threatening, reassuring image. The fetish object, whether a female body part, or an inanimate object, becomes eroticized, and acting as a substitute for the missing Phallus, is invested with all the desire and emotions associated with it. The fetishistic look, epitomized in the case of Saartjie Baartman, reduces and fragments woman into her sexual parts, she does not exist as a person, but rather is a collection of 'bits' of body, which have become eroticized under the male gaze. Here the fetishistic look, is masked under the 'sciences' of eugenics, ethnography, physiology, physiognomy, anthropology and so forth, appearing to be 'objective' and non-sexual, when in fact the opposite is true, as these various 'sciences', simply provided an excuse, for what Stuart Hall calls an "ethnographic voyeurism" (Hall, 1997:268)

In *Ongetiteld* the viewer is unconsciously caught in the act of voyeurism, as we see, but are not seen, yet unlike the voyeur who is in complete control over the object of the gaze, we are in effect controlled by Rose, who although seemingly oblivious to our presence, dictates and manipulates the conditions of looking. The viewer is positioned as voyeur, but the pleasure derived from looking is marked by a sense of guilt and fear of being 'caught'. The gaze of the viewer is in effect turned on itself and the projections of fantasy and desire which such an image could facilitate is made unattainable, through Rose's

[22] Mulvey discusses this in relation to Hollywood cinema and film, but this extends to the representation of women in all spheres of visual culture, including 'high' art.

subversion of the power dynamics and sexual hierarchy embedded within the gender based dichotomy of passive, female, object/ active, male subject.

The underlying notion of voyeurism and 'spying' is reinforced constantly throughout the video, from its physical display in the gallery space on a television monitor, to its appropriation of methods of surveillance and control, to Rose's deliberate avoidance of the gaze, but perhaps most disturbing and unnerving is the intimacy of the site in which this occurs. The bathroom is the most intimate of bodily spaces, it is a solitary place, of private actions and personal rituals. It is within the confines of the private, that the body is 'prepared' and 'groomed' to face the external world, and it is here where the body is most free of cultural, social and bodily restraints. For women, I will argue, the bathroom is a symbolic site, in the 'femininization' of the body, as it is here that strict self surveillance occurs, where the 'unrestrained' female body is aestheticized, sanitized and 'disciplined' according to the ideological dictates of femininity and beauty and where the unwanted signs of corporeality are masked, hidden and removed.

The ritualistic processes enacted by women everyday, are paralleled by Rose's own private and secret ritual. However her systematic and methodological removal of all her 'feminine' hair, signifies a complete defeminization of the body, which challenges the socially and culturally constructed category of 'Woman', whose reduction of all women to an irreducible, biological essence, is based upon the 'otherness' of sexual difference.

The act of shaving is symbolic for Rose, as the removal of her hair, eliminates both 'racial' and sexual corporeal signs of difference, used in the construction of Otherness. Here, Rose through her de- racialized body, free from its 'coloured' hair, exposes the arbitrariness and banality of hair as a potent marker of racial identity, undermining the symbolic significance given to hair within apartheid body politics, whose utilization in 'borderline' cases, devastated and destroyed individual families and collective communities.

Rose, herself in various interviews[23] , has articulated the pain and suffering associated with having '*kroes'* hair as opposed to the 'privilege' of having 'white', sleek hair. In "Grey Areas", Rose writes, "…Coloured hair is strange: a fusion of black and white but not quite. Not black enough to be shamefully treated not white enough to be pampered. Status and beauty effected (sic) by your crowning glory…" (Atkinson, B. and Breitz, C. 1999: 211). Hence Rose's act of shaving is an act of defiance and empowerment, against racial classifications of the past, used to pre-determine identity according to physical signs of difference, as well as emancipation from symbols used in the oppression and stigmatization of the coloured body.

This physical process is cathartic, suggesting a cleansing or a purification of the body. Rose's repetitive and rhythmic actions are evocative of some sort of religious ritual, and there is indeed a rich religious undertone to her work, as Rose, raised a Catholic, draws upon the notion of penance, in her work. She states that "purging oneself through penance is quite an important feature (in my work)" and *Ongetiteld*, she claims "is where the catholic purge started" (Johannesburg Art Gallery archives)[24]. The purging and penance referred to by Rose, implies some sort of violence, which is echoed in the atmosphere of the piece, there is an underlying tension and danger embedded within the calmness of Rose's actions, which threatens to erupt. This creates an unsettling and disturbing effect on the viewer who anxiously awaits the impending violence, which never manifests itself.

One wonders about the purging of the self, the notion of penance and the implicit threat of violence. Perhaps it is a purging from the past, an eradication of corporeal signs of

[23] Excerpt from interview with Rose in Pienaar, H. (2000) "Documentary images add gloss to old truths" in *Sunday Independent*. 9 January 2000. The significance of hair in the coloured community is also discussed in an interview between Rose and Pitso Chinzima in "Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art". (Atkinson, B. and Breitz, C. 1999: 89)

[24] This interview was sourced from the Johannesburg Art gallery archives unfortunately no further details regarding this interview have been recorded. I am therefore unable to reference neither the date nor the name of the interviewer. Excerpts from this interview however can be found in the March 2001 issue of 'ArtThrob' in "A Feature of an Artist in the Public Eye" compiled by Sue Williamson. (see Williamson, S. (2001) 'A Feature on an Artist in the Public Eye: Tracey Rose', Art Throb http://www.artthrob.co.za

shame and guilt inscribed upon the coloured body, or liberation from the constraints of identity. This is not an attempt by Rose to purge or 'cleanse' herself from her 'colouredness', nor is it a self indulgent act of narcissism by the artist, but rather, I believe, it is a freeing of the body from the trappings of its own corporeality, it is about the articulation of the multiplicity of identity and it is one step further in the re-imagining and reconceptualization of the coloured women as an active agent and participant in her own identity and culture.

Ongetiteld is an intensely powerful work on a number of levels, which are paradoxical in themselves. It is, in spite of the medium of video, quite a visceral and physical work evoking a kind of tactile quality which contradicts the flatness and 'neatness' of its aesthetic. It is highly personal and intimate but reads as some sort of surveillance footage, it disturbs systems of (stereotypical) representation and questions the concept of identity, yet the strongest and most intriguing aspect of the work is its confrontation with the viewer. It demands an active and critical engagement from its audience, and the audience in turn cannot remain indifferent nor passive to the work, as we are implicated, we feel uncomfortable, a little guilty, and one is left wondering if this guilt arises from the confrontation of a taboo, from our 'voyeuristic' looking or perhaps it runs deeper to our own complicity in racial and sexual objectification.

Span II, a performance video installation created for the second Johannesburg Biennale- *"Trade Routes: History and Geography"*, was exhibited at the Colin Richards curated show *"Graft"*, held at the South African National Gallery in 1997. This performance was accompanied by *Span I*,[25] in which a paroled prisoner, situated opposite Rose's live installation, sat and etched text directly on to the gallery's wall, with a penknife. The text comprised of Rose's "personal memories" and "secrets" (Johannesburg Art Gallery archives) but also included racial slurs, derogatory insults and 'coloured' *slang*, which were drawn from her own history and personal experience as a coloured person. The title of both works, 'span', is in fact derived from the coloured *slang* word for 'work', which

[25] *Span I*, will be examined briefly and only in relation to *Span II*, as the scope of this research is limited to the analysis of Rose's work, which directly relate to the notion of hair as a manifestation of cultural and gender identity.

highlights an important feature of Rose's work, bound to the concept of labour and the labouring (female) body.

This piece articulates the physical experience of the 'lived in' coloured body, which was represented in *Ongetiteld,* through the medium of video, but being a live performance, the range of sensations and emotions felt in *Ongetiteld* are intensified, as here the viewer is put in an even more perplexing situation, as the 'object' of the gaze is no longer hidden behind a camera lens, but rather is physically placed within the gallery space. Rose, bald headed, is seen naked in a large glass cabinet, with a mass of her own hair resting on her lap, she sits on an inverted television set, which shows close-up footage of her body, focusing specifically on her breasts, stomach and fingers which are occupied in the process of weaving and knotting hair. There is a slippage, between the pre-recorded 'fictional' time depicted in the video, and the 'real' time which we, as viewers are experiencing. Mirroring the images on the screen, Rose sits silently, face down, deeply immersed in her own repetitive actions, of weaving and knotting her own discarded hair.



Figure 2 : Rose, T. *Span II,* **1997, performance video installation**

As mentioned earlier the concept of labour is significant in *Span II*, functioning on a multitude of symbolic levels. The foremost connotation of 'labour' refers to Rose's own physical act of weaving, which is crucial to the meaning of this work, as it is through this act that Rose asserts and articulates her own agency and autonomy, as both object and subject, as bearer of meaning but also as the maker of meaning. Appropriating the

language of the fine art nude, Rose's conscious and deliberate positioning of herself as object of the gaze, complicates the alignment of femininity with passive objectification, as here her own body, actively engaged in the process of 'labour', challenges and subsequently subverts the notion of woman as passive and silent object. This in effect establishes the groundwork from which Rose proceeds in the deconstruction and subversion of strategies of control and domination used in the representation of both the female nude and in the depiction of the ethnographic female Other.

Weaving, historically associated with other 'feminine' activities such as sewing, craft and handwork, makes a significant statement about the gendered division of labour, whose meaning is suffused with sexual hierarchy. The hierarchical differentiation between 'men's work' and 'women's work', based upon the essentialist assumption that the female is weaker and more docile than her male counterpart, has contributed to a 'femininization' and 'masculinization' of space, with certain spaces aligned with the masculine, while others, situated within the confines of the private and domestic realm are associated with women and 'femininity'. Rose's performance, dissolves the distinctions between the two, her 'feminine' act of weaving, takes place within the traditionally 'masculine' domain of the gallery space, and her naked, shaved and completely exposed body disrupts conventional notions of 'women's work', as a passive, 'delicate' and inconsequential pastime.

Kellie Jones in the "Fresh"[26] catalogue describes Rose's actions as a "mediation and a penance" but also, as signifying "the black labouring body, that fulcrum of colonial and modern affluence." (Jones, 2003: 14). The exploitation, objectification and consumption of the black body, prevalent throughout the history of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, is interrogated by Rose, whose critique extends specifically to the commodification of the non- white female Other, whose body, stripped off identity, selfhood and agency, was reduced to an object, to be owned, controlled and abused. Rose, drawing upon this history, stages her own self objectification, offering her body to the consuming and objectifying gaze, yet her body does not play to, nor does it signify male desire, she does

[26] Bedford, E. (2003) 'Tracey Rose', *Fresh. Cape Town*: Iziko: South African National Gallery.

not, as object of the gaze, connote what Mulvey defines as "to-be-looked-at-ness." (Mulvey, 1992:27) Instead, her naked body and bald head, disrupts the aesthetic wholeness and containment of the female nude, she is the corporeal, visceral, unregulated body, which refuses to be fetishized and eroticized. Rose's 'labouring body', effectively repels the gaze, as her performative and deliberate actions are not those of passive object, nor of silent Other, but rather of empowered and autonomous subject.

Rose, in her performance does not merely allude to the ethnographic exploitation and objectification of the Other, but rather she physically, "reenacts the scopic regimes of colonialism" (Jones, 2003:15). Freud, in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality",[27] argues that scopophilia, is an obsessive pleasure in looking, reducing people to objects of the controlling gaze. In the most extreme cases the fixation with the 'object', or with a part of the object leads to a perversion, which produces "obsessive voyeurs" (Mulvey, 1992: 25), whose only satisfaction is derived from this compulsive and illicit act of looking.

The colonial gaze can be understood as a scopophilic fragmentation and dissection of the body of the Other, with its compulsive fixation on visible signs of 'racial' difference, especially those associated with the genitalia, buttocks and the sexualized parts of the body. The ethnographic museum accommodated and perpetrated this obsessive desire to look, to posses and to gain mastery and authority over the Other, through its endless displays of various 'indigenous' people from the colonies, whose 'difference', 'exoticism' and 'primitivism', were emphasized quite crudely for the visual pleasure and satisfaction of the spectator.

Rose's appropriation of colonial modes of display used in exhibiting the 'spectacle' of the Other, also reminds one of the dioramas in the natural history museums, who too under the guise of a 'documentation', and 'objectivity', employ voyeuristic and titillating elements in their display of the Other, depicting 'indigenous tribes', in their 'natural'

[27] Freud cited in Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1992:24)

surroundings, more often than not naked, involved in their 'traditional' activities and rituals. In both instances the body of the Other served as a curiosity and a 'spectacle' for the European audience, and was relegated to the same status as other 'exotic' and 'different' artifacts, animals or plants from the colonies.

Rose deliberately places herself within her own 'diorama', she too is naked, silent, isolated, and completely exposed to the gaze of the viewer, however she upsets the racialized regimes of representation, in that she is not the helpless and silent, stereotypical female Other. Unlike Baartman, and others like her brought to Europe, and staged as 'curiosities', Rose is an active agent and willing participant in her own self 'exploitation'. She exposes her own 'coloured' body to the look, to be scrutinized and probed for signs of 'racial' difference and sexual Otherness. Rose occupies a position of power, she possesses control and authority over the manner of looking, upsetting the power dynamics between the gazed and the gazed upon. As viewers, we are powerless, implicated in an act of voyeurism, which deliberately 'ensnared' us, but which we cannot turn away from.

The notions of purging, penance, and self purification, were examined in *Ongetiteld*, however, in *Span II* and specifically in its complementary piece, *Span I*, their meaning is of a much more complex and intricate nature. Rose's 'penance', entangled within a power relationship, between herself and the prisoner she has employed, is carried out 'doubly', both by her, within the glass cabinet (in *Span II)*, and on the gallery wall, through the prisoner's actions (in *Span I).* Rose, fully aware of the contentious and somewhat problematic relationship between herself and the prisoner, describes *Span I* as a "perversion of the idea of a lack of penance, where I become vindicated through the act of employing an ex- prisoner to 'perform' my confession" (Johannesburg Art Gallery archives).

Little is known about this faceless, nameless prisoner employed by Rose, yet his physical presence is symbolic, as his actions, inextricably bound to Rose's own, are part of her personal purging process. It is through him that she 'confesses' her 'secrets' and it is

through his carving, of her own 'memories' and experiences, that she publicly 'purges' herself. The prisoner is both an employee and a labourer, who was commissioned by Rose for the duration of three months, to execute this piece. In this sense, he is an active and autonomous subject, however his physical participation and positioning within the work, can also be seen as a form of objectification, whereby he in turn, becomes just one of many elements, along with the video, the monitor and the glass cabinet which make up Rose's heterogeneous installation.

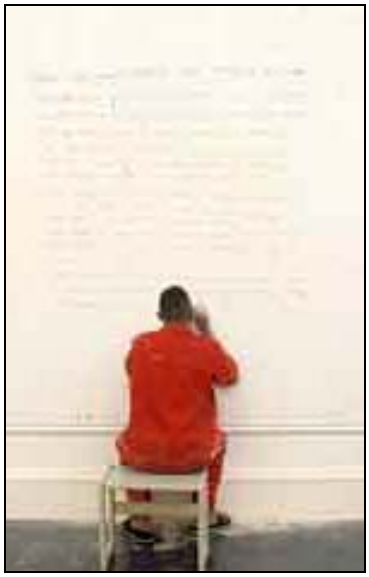


Figure 3 : Rose, T. *Span I,* 1997, performance and mixed media installation

While Rose could be accused of participating in the very objectifying practices, which she so vehemently attempts to defy, the prisoner's anonymity is effective, and in fact necessary, as he acts as a mediator, between the viewer and Rose, between her physical performance in the glass cabinet and her conceptual work on the wall, and it is through his 'labour', his physical carving of the text, that we as the audience can gain insight into, Rose's obsessive need and desire for penance, confession and atonement. To a certain extent, he is controlled by Rose in that she employed him, paid him and instructed him on the content of the carvings, yet she also allowed him an autonomy and freedom, to include and insert his own story, his own memories and his own experience of colouredness.

Rose's 'confessions' and penance, her personal 'ritual' of weaving, her nakedness, and her own self objectification, are all situated and implemented within the public domain. she is completely exposed, both physically and psychologically, and this adds a sense of vulnerability and a sadness to her performance, however, coupled with this, there is also an implicit threat of danger embedded within the work, as Rose seems almost too controlled, too indifferent, too 'calm', completely absorbed within her own space and actions.

The repetitive and rhythmic weaving, are, at first, mesmerizing and almost spiritual evocative of a religious ritual or even some sort of rite of passage, but as the performance progresses, her actions become disturbing and her obsessive and compulsive weaving threatens to spin out of control, to erupt in a chaotic violence. This unnerves the viewer, we anticipate a danger, we do not want to get too close, we want to maintain a 'safe' distance between ourselves and the 'work', but the materiality and physicality of the performance, the richness of the installation, its ambiguity, and its obvious transgression of social and cultural taboos, regarding the female body, does not allow us to remain passive and instead we are drawn in.

This tension is further heightened by the viewer's own visceral response, at the realization and the recognition, that the woven material is in fact Rose's own hair. Here the abject undertones hinted at in *Ongetiteld* become much more explicit, as the sight of Rose's hair, separated from her head, and scattered around the space, provokes horror, disgust and repulsion, one is immediately taken aback. Her hair on the floor is disturbing and threatening, it is "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966: 35), which ruptures the boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable, between the contained and 'disciplined' exterior body and its internal, unrestrained corporeality, between the image of 'Woman' and the physical, individual experience of being a woman.

The image of Rose, naked and bald is in itself a difficult image to assimilate, not only because it challenges the category of 'Woman", with its associations and ideological constructions of femininity and beauty, but also because such an image, connoting

illness, disease, death or some kind of 'subversion', is usually eliminated from our visual field. The bald female head is a transgressive sign, reminiscent of prisoners of war and of holocaust victims, signifying a humiliation and dehumanization of the body, a total loss of control of individuality and of dignity. It is therefore ironic that Rose's bald head and shaven body may be seen as signifying the complete opposite to this. Here she asserts her own individuality, staging her own corporeal revolt against visual signifiers of difference, which oppressed, marginalized and negatively inscribed her colouredness, this is her act of empowerment, her transgression of each racial and gendered category which attempted to fix, categorize and subsequently oppress her.

Rose's removal of her 'coloured' hair, is symbolically significant, as I mentioned in *Ongetiteld*, it liberates her from racist constructions of identity, and frees her from the homogenously defined monolith of 'Coloured', but it also spares her from the continuous stigma attached to coloured hair. The humiliation of having '*kroes'*, 'kinky' hair has not disappeared with apartheid, and according to Erasmus, neither has the legacy of nineteenth century western racism, instead she argues, the heritage of these racial hierarchies, and the effects of colonial racism, are still deeply felt within South Africa's coloured community, with "whiteness and 'degrees of whiteness' still regarded, within our post apartheid, democratic country, as the yard stick of beauty, morality and social status." (Erasmus, 2000:381).

Ongetiteld and *Span II* are incredibly rich and powerful works whose meanings are intricately interwoven and entangled on a multitude of levels. Each work demands an active and critical process of looking by its audience, and the audience in turn cannot remain passive or indifferent as they are implicated and ambiguously situated, both within *Ongetiteld* and *Span II* as active participants and 'objective' observers, as viewers and voyeurs, as the aggressors but also as victims to violent acts of objectification.

Rose's work prompts a much needed dialogue concerning the complex, intersecting and equally oppressive hierarchies of gender and race. Within South Africa's turbulent racial history, gender related issues were of secondary importance, as focus rested on the much

larger racial issues at hand. The demise of apartheid has provided an opportunity for previously marginalized and silenced voices to make themselves heard, opening up an unequivocal space for South African women to re-imagine their own identities, subjectivities and sexualities outside the confines of ‘race’ and free from the racially constructed taxonomies of ‘Black’, ‘White’, ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indian’.

Chapter 5
DextroSinistral

The issues examined in this research report stand in direct relation to my own artistic practice, which although not featuring hair as a medium, similarly explore the corporeal relationship and association between skin, the body and language. This chapter focuses on the practical component of my research and includes an analysis of my Masters exhibition *"DextroSinistral"* held at the Substation gallery at the University of the Witwatersrand, in March 2006. Here, I discuss my own exploration and interrogation of the metaphorical functioning of skin, as both a corporeal 'text' and parchment, facilitating the inscription of my own cultural, religious and linguistic Otherness.



Figure 4 : Meyerov, L. *DextroSinistral,* 2006, mixed media

The notion of skin plays a crucial role in my work, and my own artistic practice has involved an ongoing investigation and interrogation into the intricate complexities of skin. My initial interest arose out of the physical materiality of skin, and its metaphorical functioning as a corporeal, 'living' text or parchment, which facilitates not only the inscriptions of social, cultural and religious practices and conventions, but also acts a palimpsest, constantly inscribed and reinscribed, reworked and reshaped, producing different narratives, histories and experiences. Skin has its own memories and tells its own stories, either of its stigmatization and marginalization or its adoration and valorization, or perhaps, as in the case of 'colouredness', its indeterminate positioning between the two.

Skin, like hair, is liminally situated between the beautiful and the grotesque, an erotic and sensual substance, whose surface, once aged, marked or distorted, provokes a response of disgust, shame and fear, both within the 'self' and 'other'. Skin is in a continuous process of death and regeneration; it absorbs, secretes, wrinkles, stretches, decays and sheds from the body, metamorphosing with age, from a smooth, flawless patina to a diseased and grotesque surface. Skin, as a container enfolds the formless flesh of the body, as a boundary it marks the interface between the internal and external realm, it protects the vulnerable interiority of the body from outside aggression, functions as a site of sensation through which we experience pleasure and pain, and serves as a primary means of exchange and communication with others.

Skin is both the 'raw' material, the surface, upon which the text is inscribed, as well as the text' itself, it can be read as a language, whose corporeal markings act as signs, symbols and signifiers of meaning. The symbolic language of skin is paradoxical, it is visually expressive and compelling yet also camouflaged and hidden by its own surface. In my work I have attempted to articulate the relationship between skin and language in the most visceral and corporeal of ways, paralleling the ephemeral and metamorphic character of the skin and the body, to that of language and the authority which accompanies it. I have also attempted to symbolically rupture the surface of my own

‘skin’, to expose my own Otherness, which although concealed under the ‘neutrality’ of my whiteness, is nevertheless marked by its Jewishness, femaleness and foreignness.

My exhibition, *“DextroSinistral”* was held at the Substation gallery at the University of the Witwatersrand, in March 2006. The exhibition comprised of six works which together formed an installation. The space was divided into two parts, the upstairs section contained the more contemplative and ‘quieter’ works, while downstairs I placed the more visceral and tactile pieces, which physically oozed and dripped an oil, bitumen and coffee mixture, evocative of bodily fluids and secretions. I wanted to recreate the dark and nurturing environment of the womb, a enclosed space, saturated with bodily references, in which the viewer is engulfed and subsumed by the most corporeal of sensations, experiencing the work on a visual, tactile, emotional and visceral level, however I also envisaged this ‘womb’ as taking on a more threatening and sinister quality of that of a slaughterhouse, with its hanging flesh, flayed skin and dripping viscera.

The conflation of the womb and the slaughterhouse, the one a signifier of life, birth and generativity, and the other a place of death, violence and dismemberment, are seemingly conflicting, and diametrically opposed concepts, yet both metaphorically represent the margins of life, when the body is at its most vulnerable and fragile state, the first few seconds after birth the child is still not yet ‘fully’ alive and similarly the animal, moments after its slaughter, is not completely dead, both hover, if only for a split second, in a transitional life/death state. It is precisely this liminality, the blurring of boundaries between that which is considered dead and that which is considered alive, between the inside and outside of the body, between ‘real’ skin and the simulacra of skin, between the beautiful and the grotesque, between language and not language and between the sacred and profane, which I have sought to explore and capture in my own work.



Figure 5: Meyerov, L. *FleshTones*, 2006, Newsprint, bitumen, linseed oil, ink, coffee, latex, varnish

FleshTones is an installation piece, which is comprised of sheets of newsprint, soaking in oil and bitumen, ranging from about two to six or seven meters long. Each sheet was individually hand written in Hebrew and inscribed with specific prayers, drawn from my own cultural and religious background, which hold personal significance to me. The texts were taken from passages from the Torah, from the Book of Psalms, as well as from Kabbalistic writings, used in prayer and meditation. Hebrew is my mother tongue, it is the language I pray in, and the one I feel most comfortable expressing myself in, this however, only partially influenced my decision to use Hebrew text, rather the primary reason lay in the foreignness of the language itself, which physically and in the most literal of ways concretized my own Otherness, my own ambiguous positioning between two different languages, cultures and places. The inaccessibility of the language to others, the fact that the majority of viewers could not read, understand, and in some cases even recognize the language, afforded me the freedom to completely expose myself, within the

public realm, to experience my own cathartic process, without any of the vulnerability or embarrassment, attached to such an act of public self exposure.





Figure 6: Meyerov, L. Detail of *FleshTones*, 2006, Newsprint, bitumen, linseed oil, ink, coffee, latex, varnish

The sheets were suspended from the ceiling, at various heights, some were draped over each other, while others hung off the floor, the longest ones were either stretched out across the floor, or else were rolled at the ends into 'scrolls'. The installation was positioned in the centre of the space, and the overlapping sheets created a sense of depth and movement. I did not want the sheets to be static and rigid but rather 'organic' and free, as if they were freshly flayed, and in a process of liquefaction or alternatively coagulation. The viscous mixture, of linseed oil and globs of hardened bitumen, which slowly dripped off their surface, reinforced this notion, suggesting either something in the throes of life or death. The viewer was required to physically 'enter' the work, moving in and around the space, to experience each aspect of the installation from a different viewing position. I wanted to elicit the most visceral of responses in the spectator, to engulf and ensnare them within this womb-like, corporeal slaughterhouse, with its oozing and dripping flayed skin, my intention, however was not to shock nor too repel, but rather to entice the viewer into a symbolic and visceral realization of the body's corporeality, as well as its vulnerability and ephemerality.

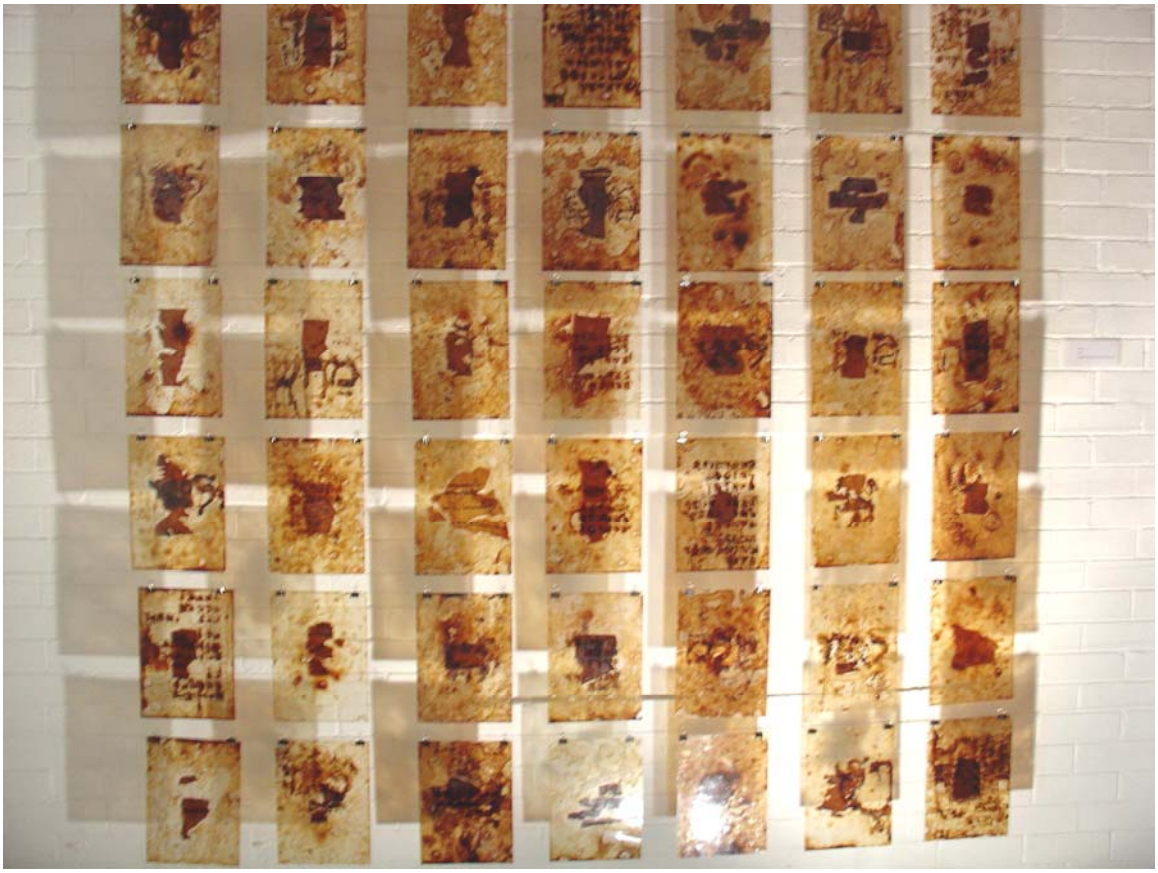


Figure 7: Meyerov, L. *Relic*, 2006, newspaper, coffee, bitumen, linseed oil on acetate

The notion of skin as a parchment or medium inscribed and marked with Otherness, be it the bodily inscribed Otherness of 'racial' and sexual difference, or alternatively the symbolic Otherness of cultural, religious or linguistic difference, is once again examined in *Relic*. This piece consists of forty nine A4 size plastic sheets, which were suspended slightly off the wall to form a large grid. The illumination of the backlighting, gave them a translucent skin-like effect, which emphasized each and every 'trauma' inflicted on the surface of the work, highlighting the 'veins', the 'wrinkles', 'scars' and the text itself. 'Relic', is a more subtle and quieter work than 'Fleshtones', here the 'skins' are rigidly contained both within the rectangular format of the page, as well as in the overall grid. They were neatly spaced out and painstakingly hung, I wanted them to look 'perfect', to be displayed in the most aesthetically pleasing and 'precious' way, as if they were ancient, sacred manuscripts or perhaps abject remnants of a body or bodies.

Each sheet in the grid comprised of text, from a contemporary Israeli newspaper, which was then soaked in coffee, and worked upon with bitumen. The paper, began to rot, (and is still rotting) and with each day the text became more and more obscure, masked under a viscera of rotting coffee, mould and oil, which formed, the most incredibly intricate and beautiful surface textures. This whole work was in a process of metamorphosis and decay, transforming from an inanimate object, simulating 'real' skin, to a living organism which was continuously growing. In order to see the work in its entirety, the viewer needed to physically face each sheet, and the closer one got to the work the more overpowering the smell of fermenting coffee became.



Figure 8: Meyerov, L. Detail of *Relic*, 2006, newspaper, coffee, bitumen, linseed oil on acetate

Relic, articulated the corporeal associations between language and the body, with the text physically metamorphosing from an orderly and sequential structure of meaning, to a chaotic viscera of symbols and textures, which although not easily identifiable as a 'proper' language, could still be read as one, eliciting specific meanings and responses. Here the act of reading, invited a different kind of looking and exchange between the viewer and the text. Confronted with a range of tactile and sensory experiences, one could read the work, not only through the eye, but also through the body.

In *Excresentia*, the notion of bodily disintegration and decay is articulated through the incorporation of 'real' bodies into the work. This piece consisted of five wooden boxes, mounted horizontally across the wall, whose heavily worked upon surface, comprising of apples, at various stages of decomposition, and dead moths, physically jutted out of the picture frame. The apples and insects heavily submerged under layers of varnish, resin and wax, transformed from recognizable living organisms into abject hybrids, suggestive of congealed wounds or sores on the body's surface. The excessive amount of putrefying fruit, coupled with dead, fragments of insects, provoked an unsettling and disturbing effect, as one could not escape the suggested bodily connotations of rupture, pain, dismemberment and death.



Figure 9: Meyerov, L. *Excresentia*, 2005, apples, moths, varnish, resin on board

The apple is a highly gendered and potent symbol of the 'feminine'. In a biblical context, the apple signifies the link between female sexuality and sin, evoking Eve's Original Sin, and her subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Eve was seen as the prototype of the sinful and sexual woman, whose inability to control her corporeal desires and appetites, lead to her eating of the forbidden fruit. This not only held her responsible for the Fall of Man, but also brought with it the curse of ageing and painful childbirth, as well as the awareness and 'shame' of sexual difference. The apple, apart from its biblical

significance, also has strong bodily references, it is a living entity, covered in a skin, which protects its fleshy interiority, subjected to the vicissitudes and ravages of time, it ripens and then with age, slowly begins to decay and rot, its flesh dehydrating and withering much like that of the ageing human body.

In this work I attempted not only to record the various stages of ageing and decay, but also to physically capture these processes, fixing them in an eternal intermediacy between life and death, between decomposition and eventual disintegration. In a sense I wanted to immortalize the 'ephemeral', to stop the ensuing demise of these 'bodies', allowing them to decay to a point, and then halting this process through the varnish and wax. The dead moths, found in and around my studio, evoked a sadness and poignancy, reminding me of tiny corpses or fossilized, bits of bodies, while the apples, acted as metaphors for the corporeal, female body, with its visceral bodily processes. In chapter one, I discussed the notion of the female body as an uncontained, formless matter, masked under a fetishized and aestheticized surface of 'femininity', here this surface is literally ruptured exposing the inner abject outpourings of the body, reinstating its corporeality, as a body which eats, excretes, menstruates, lactates, ages, dies and eventually disintegrates into a 'nothingness.'



Figure 10: Meyerov, L. *Entropy*, 2005, teabags on board

The teabags in *Entropy* similarly evoke a direct analogy with the body, transforming themselves from seemingly banal, consumable objects into ambiguous body-like materials or substances. Here however I did not rupture nor 'wound' the surface, but rather allowed them to age and wilt 'naturally', resulting in a less violent and more 'soothing' overall effect. I wanted to emphasize the beauty of the teabag itself, its subtle colouring, texture, materiality and distinct smell, elevating it from its lowly status as a trivial and disposable 'thing' into an object of beauty and appreciation.

This work, measuring approximately two by two meters, when mounted on the wall seemed to physically engulf the viewer, who was overwhelmed, not only by the sheer quantity of teabags, (numbering about nine hundred), but also by the strong, overpowering smell of tea, which filled the room. The teabags, glued on to a wooden frame, were worked from the inside out, to create a spiraling, circular pattern, with the edges of the work continuing beyond the boundaries of the surface, as if suspended in space. Here an underlying tension prevails, between the rhythmic and repetitive ordering of the teabags, and the implicit danger implied by their 'controlled' excessiveness. This,

in a sense is the moment of calm, of bodily wholeness and containment before its violent eruption into a chaotic 'viscera' of tea, 'flesh' and 'skin'.

The second room of the exhibition comprised of my apple installation, *Luzior De La Madre*, together with the sound piece, titled *The Western Wall*. Whereas downstairs, I sought to provoke a visceral and tactile experience, here my aim was to construct an intimate and 'spiritual' environment, devoid of any pungent smells or dripping liquid. I wanted to move away from the violence of the flayed skins and decaying bodies, and instead create a clean and pristine space, dimly lit and bare except for the installation itself.



Figure 11: Meyerov, L. Installation view of *Luzior De La Madre*, 2006

The sound piece was inspired by my previous visit to the Western Wall, situated in Jerusalem's Old City, which as the last remaining structure of the Second Temple, functions as the most holy of Jewish sites. Praying amongst the other women, (as the space is segregated) I was overcome by the intensity of the surrounding bodies, the smells, and most of all by the sounds of prayers, intermingled with confessions, pleas and weeping. Witnessing these intensely private rituals, and listening to the prayers of others, I found myself ambiguously positioned in the conflicting role of both active participant in, but also as 'voyeur' and 'eavesdropper' to , this spiritual, communal experience.

I attempted to recreate this ambiguous experience, through the medium of sound, whereby I recorded myself reciting a Hebrew prayer, and played it back within the public space. The soundtrack itself was superimposed and layered at various intervals, lending it a 'depth' and magnitude, creating the impression of a multitude of voices participating in a ritual. Here I deliberately staged my own self exposure, revealing myself to others, while they, in turn, were subsequently situated as the 'outsiders' or 'eavesdroppers'. The foreignness of the language, however, with its unfamiliar guttural sounds, functioned as a linguistic screen, mediating the interface between my personal whispers and the public realm. This acted as a protective mechanism, shielding me from complete exposure, but more significantly, acted as an audible symbol, evoking my Otherness.



Figure 12: Meyerov, L. Detail of *Luzior De La Madre*, 2006

Luzior De La Madre, the last work featured in my exhibition, was a site specific installation, created specifically for the Substation gallery. Here once again, I used the apple metaphorically, this time as a signifier of the transitory and ephemeral nature of both the body and language. This installation comprised of dried apple skins, which were collected over a period of two years from various sources. The skins underwent a fascinating process, transforming from the beautiful when 'alive', to the grotesque when decaying, and then once again becoming beautiful in 'death'. In the first stages of

decomposition, they were extremely unappealing, emitting a nauseatingly sweet odour, and secreting a sticky fluid, which made them repellent to the touch, however, with the procession of time, they began to harden and transform into shapes, suggestive of an 'archaic', corporeal language, comprising of hieroglyphic-like symbols and characters. Although taking on the visual properties of a language, there was also an implicit sense of violence and danger, embedded within the beauty of these forms, as their sharp protrusions, looked conspicuously like barbed wire, evocative of a prison or a boundary, either keeping something in or alternatively keeping it out.



Figure 13: Meyerov, L. Detail of *Luzior De La Madre*, 2006

The skins, threaded through long pieces of gut, where suspended along the circumference of the 3,5mx2.3m frame, which hung across the ceiling. This created the illusion of a room, within a room, as one could step into the interior space of the installation. A slight parting was made, which maneuvered the flow of movement in the space, acting as an entrance, as well as an exit, other than this there was no way out, unless one walked through the skins themselves, which physically scratched and entangled the viewer with their thorny edges. The viewer was literally and symbolically trapped within the 'language' and the 'text', reinforcing the notion of containment, restriction and entrapment.

This work comprised of two elements, the actual installation itself, and the shadows which it cast across the walls, which created an internal dialogue between the physical and the ephemeral. The one was inter-dependant and inextricably bound to the other, as any manipulation to the light source, not only destroyed the shadow 'work', but also visibly altered and subsequently weakened the apple work. The overall effect of the installation was therefore contingent on both functioning together as a whole. Furthermore the viewer's silhouette interacted with the existing shadows on the wall, adding a 'live' element to the installation.

The relationship between the corporeal materiality of the apple skins and the ephemeral nature of the shadows is marked by a process of metamorphosis, which was an important theme running throughout my exhibition. In all the works, I attempted to, articulate the associations between language, skin and the body, highlighting their mutual transience and vulnerability to mortality, as well as emphasizing the fluidity and ease with which they transform into and out of each other. In *Luzior De La Madre*, the apple skins morphed from rotting 'waste', into a symbolic language, which although unreadable, nevertheless incorporated a sequential and orderly structure, which enabled them to function and 'read' as a 'text', whereas in *Relic*, the 'real' texts, transformed into a viscera of patterns and textures, which ultimately concealed and 'tainted' the language itself. In *Excresentia*, I attempted to 'capture' and 'memorialize' the moment of metamorphosis, between gradual decomposition and eventual disintegration, and in *FleshTones*, the inscribed skins themselves, represented a symbolic metamorphosis from 'flesh' to the 'word'.

Whether these works, will completely disintegrate and disappear, I do not know, but nevertheless, the experience which they evoked here, can never be fully re-captured, as their realization was dependant upon a number of external factors ranging from the configuration and specificity of the space, to their own organic, corporeal processes of decomposition and putrefaction.

Both skin and hair are corporeal, organic and seemingly 'natural' biological materials, heavily invested with symbolic value and meaning, whose physical presence marks, inscribes and categorizes the body into culturally constructed and socially significant groups. Each plays a crucial role in the conceptualization of both gender and 'racial' identity oppressing the body in a rigid disciplinary framework based upon a reductive binaristic structure of either 'Black' or 'White', 'Masculine' or 'Feminine', part of the 'Self' or negatively defined as the 'Other'.

Such superficial readings of skin based solely upon differences in pigmentation ignore the richness and complexity of skin as a potent site of exchange and communication between the external and internal realm and between the self and others. In my work I attempt to investigate the corporeal viscerality of both the surface skin and the fleshy interiority it protects, to document its metamorphic processes of decay, putrification and disintegration, as well as examining its metaphorical functioning as a corporeal palimpsest constantly inscribed and reinscribed, reworked and reshaped by cultural, social and religious ideologies and practices, all of which will eventually be ravaged both symbolically and literally by the vicissitudes of time.



Figure 14: Meyerov, L. Detail of *DextroSinistral,* 2006, mixed media

CONCLUSION

The artistic conceptual workings of Tracey Rose contribute significantly to cultural production in post Apartheid South Africa, opening up a space after decades of oppression and marginalization within Apartheid's rigid hierarchically structured racial classificatory system for the re-imagining and re-conceptualization of coloured identity. Rose does not attempt to resolve nor present a clear cut definition of what constitutes coloured identity. Instead she adopts a non essentialist approach, articulating the need for exploratory and reconstructive engagement with issues surrounding the notion of both colouredness and femininity.

Rose's endeavor is not to replace negative stereotypes of colouredness with positive ones, as this merely reinforces and validates the reductive and over-simplified binary structure of both racial and gender stereotyping. Instead, and this is precisely what makes her work so intensely powerful, she undermines the categories of 'race' and 'gender' from within exposing their inconsistencies, ambiguity and fragility of meaning, highlighting the extent to which the conceptualization of gender and racial identity are bound and read off the body's corporeality.

This research explored the symbolic meaning ascribed to women's hair within western patriarchal society, examining its function as both an erotic and threatening symbol of female sexuality and power. I discussed the significance of the female head and hair in the symbolization of both gender and cultural identity, showing it to be an ambiguous material whose absence or presence marks the body in different and often contradictory ways. Both a lack and excess of hair signals a desexualization of the body, marking it with an ambiguity, which defies and exists outside the normative boundaries of gender coding and sexual identity. The body, which is biologically female, yet either through lack or excess hair, does not fit into the culturally and aesthetically constructed category of 'woman', is a body which exists outside the confines of symbolic meaning , a body

which because of its indeterminacy and liminality is marked as dangerous and threatening, and relegated to the margins of society.

The discussion of hair was then related to Rose's own artistic production. I examined how Rose, through the manipulation of her own culturally specific hair and body, problematizes and disrupts essentialist notions of both the racially constructed category of 'Coloured', and the monolith of 'Woman', with its associated ideals of beauty and 'femininity'. I discussed the significance and symbolism attached to Rose's physical act of shaving, arguing that her systematic and methodological removal of all her 'feminine' hair, signifies a complete de-feminization of the body, a transgression and deviancy from the socially accepted codes of bodily decorum and 'femininity'. The act of shaving, however, also implies a de-racialization of the body, as Rose's removal of her own '*kroes'*, 'coloured' hair, strips her of 'racial' signs of difference and Otherness, effectively blurring and disrupting the fragile boundaries between whiteness and colouredness.

I further discussed Rose's naked and de-racialized body as an act of defiance and empowerment against racial classifications of the past, which oppressed, marginalized and constructed her 'coloured' body as a site of shame, guilt and 'racial impurity. The shaving and weaving of her hair, implies a ritualistic healing, a catharsis of sorts, or in Rose's own words a 'penance' and a 'purging', yet apart from its personal significance to Rose, it exposes the arbitrariness and banality of hair as a potent marker of racial identity, articulating the symbolic violence and cruelty inflicted upon the coloured body through racism

I examined the way in which this symbolic violence operates in and through the body, arguing that although not gender specific, had a more pronounced and humiliating effect on the coloured female. Already 'othered' by her 'race' and gender, she was now additionally burdened with the negative connotations of impurity', degeneracy and 'miscegenation' which her 'coloured' hair implied. Ambiguously positioned within Apartheid society, as 'less than white" but "better than black", her light skinned 'black'

body was simultaneously privileged and despised, valorised for its approximation to whiteness, and loathed precisely for that very reason, as her 'tainted' whiteness signified the unspeakable taboo of 'race mixture', posing the ultimate threat to the 'purity' and continuity of the white 'race.'

Lastly I provided a discussion of my own exhibition *"DextroSinistral"*, in which I examined the metaphorical functioning of skin, as both a 'language' and a corporeal 'text', facilitating the inscriptions of my own cultural, linguistic and religious Otherness. I attempted to articulate the relationship between skin, language and the body, in the most visceral and corporeal of ways. Paralleling the ephemeral and metamorphic character of the skin and the body, to that of language and the authority which accompanies it, I attempted to capture the symbolic metamorphosis, of 'flesh' transforming into the 'word' and the 'word' in turn, transforming into 'flesh'.

Identities, are not fixed, singular, homogenous categories, trapped in an ahistorical timelessness, nor or do they possess any 'essence' or inherent qualities which can be attributed to 'whiteness', 'blackness' or 'colouredness'. Instead identities are fluid and open, inscribed through experiences, culturally constructed in specific social and historical contexts, and in the case of coloured identity, borne out of an intricate and complex web of racialized power relations, between the dominant and the subaltern group. The re-imagining of coloured identity within post Apartheid South Africa, is part of a larger reconstructive process, entailing not only a rejection of the derogatory notion of colouredness, as being a product of 'miscegenation' and "race mixture', but also a re-conceptualization and interrogation of both blackness and whiteness as 'pure' and homogenous 'racial' identities.





Figures 15 and 16: Meyerov, L. *FleshTones* hanging in Artist's studio, 2006



Figure 17: Meyerov, L. Detail of "*DextroSinistral*", 2006



Figure 18: Artist's studio, 2006



Figure 19: Meyerov, L. Detail of *FleshTones*, 2006



Figure 20: Meyerov. L. Detail of *Fleshtones*, 2006

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