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Framing the Artwork of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle through Black Feminism

by

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Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements of the

Degree

Masters in History of Art by Coursework

at the

University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Anitra Nettleton

February 2011

University of the Witwatersrand (2009 – 2011)

Contents

Declaration 3
Abstract 4
Acknowledgements 5
List of Images 7
Introduction 9
Aim and Rationale 11
Chapter Summaries 12
Chapter 1: Black Feminism and the Exploration of Autobiography 14
Introduction 14
Black Feminism: Part 1 15
Defining Black Feminism 15
The Differences between Black and White Women Experiences 18
Black Women's Oppression 21
Why Black Feminism is important and necessary: The Topic of Self-Determination 22
Black Feminism: Part Two 27
Locating Black Feminism within Feminism 27
The Chronological Approach to the History of Feminism 27
The Thematic Approach to the History of Feminism 29
Schools of Feminist Thought 29
Marxist feminism 30
Third world and Postcolonial Feminism 30
Womanist Theory 31
Locating Black Feminism within Feminist Art 31
Locating Black Feminism within South African Art Histories 32
Autobiography as a Black Feminist Strategy 38
Autoethnography as a Black Feminist Strategy 40
Chapter 2: Berni Searle's *Snow White* 43
Introduction 43
Berni Searle's Biography 44
A Description of the *Snow White* Video Projection 45
Investigating *Snow White* Fairytales 46

Investigating the Ideal Body and Ideal Beauty (in the Arts) 50
The Black Female Nude and the Appropriated Gaze 52
The Black Female Nude as a Form of Protest..... 54
Conclusion 56
Chapter 3: Tracey Rose's *Ciao Bella* 58
Introduction 58
A Description of the *Ciao Bella* Video Projection..... 59
Performance as a Formation of Meaning and Identity 61
Tracey Rose's Catholic Reference in *Ciao Bella* 63
Stereotyping Black Women's Imagery..... 67
Mammy 67
Jezebel 68
Sarah Bartmann and Josephine Baker: Othering and Sexualising Black Women's Bodies through Performance 69
Subversive Sexuality: Cicciolina 72
Conclusion 74
Conclusion 75
Images..... 79
Bibliography..... 95

Declaration

I, Lorraine Porcia Malatjie, declare that the research in my thesis which is submitted in fulfilment of the degree Masters in History of Art by Coursework titled:

Framing the Art of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle through Black Feminism

represents my own and original work and has not been submitted previously for any degree at any other university.

Student: Lorraine Porcia Malatjie (0504408f)	**Date:**
Supervisor: Anitra Nettleton	**Date:**

Abstract

My research was motivated by the lack of elaborate feminism and particularly the absence of black feminism in South African art histories. I investigate how Tracey Rose and Berni Searle employ autobiography to insert themselves in their artworks and in the broader visual arts domain. Rose and Searle use their own bodies and performative strategies of self-representation in order to re-construct and re-structure their identities. In so doing, they subvert South African black women identities that have been prescribed by a patriarchal, colonial, and imperialist apartheid system. My research highlights how Rose's and Searle's work, when read in light of black feminism, not only critiques and subverts subordination of black women, but also provides new and empowering ways of contemplating the artworks of black female artists in the South African context.

Words: 131

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a growing process. I would like to thank the people who contributed to different stages of the process. Firstly, I would like to thank Thembinkosi Goniwe who supervised me in the initial stages of my paper. Goniwe helped me establish my topic and contributed by giving insight into theories and writers who were relevant to my thesis. Secondly, I would like to thank Anitra Nettleton – the Head of History of Art Department at the Wits School of Arts – for the support she gave men. Nettleton supervised the middle to final stages of my paper. She provided valuable comments during crucial stages of my writing process. Without her help, some arguments would not have been elaborated on.

Pumla Gqola and Dina Ligaga, who are black feminists in literature and media studies at Wits University, were present when I presented my proposal. Their perspectives from outside the field of visual art history opened up important paths for my exploration of black feminism. Gqola, who later became the reader for my proposal, gave further insightful comments and suggestions on how to advance my arguments. I am grateful.

The artists discussed in this thesis, Tracey Rose and Berni Searle, met with me to discuss their work. I managed to receive first hand information from their valuable input that I would not have been able to receive any other way. Londiwe Langa, Phala Phala and I were part of a Masters students' reading group. I thank them for their comments, input and support in the meetings that were had.

Thanks to Percy Zvomuya for his editorial input. Zvomuya helped restructure some of my sentences that didn't make sense. His critiques and suggestions ultimately made my thesis more coherent.

The National Arts Council funded my first Masters year. To them I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank Professor Anitra Nettleton who contributed funds from the Mellon Award to assist with tuition in my second year of Masters.

Lastly and most importantly I would like to thank my dear mother, Susan Malatjie, who gave me motherly support throughout the entire process, told me to take a break when she felt I needed one, and always believed in me and my research.

List of Images

Figure 1- Berni Searle, still from *Snow White*, DVD Projection

Figure 2- Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella- 'Venus Baartman'* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 120 x120 cm

Figure 3- Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella- 'Cicciolina'* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 119 x119 cm

Figure 4- Tracey Rose, *Still From Ciao Bella- 'Lolita'* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 120 x120 cm,

Figure 5- Tracey Rose, *Still From Ciao Bella- 'Lovemefuckme'* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 118 x118 cm

Figure 6- Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella- 'Regina Coeli,* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 119 x119 cm

Figure 7- Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella- 'Bunny'* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 118.5 x119 cm

Figure 8- Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella- 'Mami'* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 119 x119 cm

Figure 9- Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella- 'Silhouetta* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 118.5 x118. 5 cm

Figure 10- Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella- 'MAQEII'* (2001), Lambda Photograph, 118.5 x118.5 cm,

Figure 11-Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Whole stage)

Figure 12- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Bunny and Mami Wata)

Figure 13- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Cicciolina, Chinese School Girl and MAQEII)

Figure 14- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Cicciolina)

Figure 15- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Mami, Lovemefuckme, Venus Baartman, Lolita, the guitarist)

Figure 16- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Venus Baartman)

Figure 17- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (MAQEII)

Figure 18- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Lovemefuckme)

Figure 19- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Silhouette)

Figure 20- Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Lolita and Guitarist)

Figure 21-Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Bunny, Mami Wata, Silhouette and Cheerleader)

Figure 22-Tracey Rose, Ciao Bella Video Still (2001), (Mami and Mami Wata)

Figure 23- Tracey Rose*, Span II* (1997) Video Installation

Figure 24- Zanele Muholi, *Isilili II* (2008), Lambda Photograph, 63 x 48 cm

Figure 25- Jeff Koons, *Made in Heaven* (1989), Lithograph Billboard, 317.5 x 690.9 cm

Figure 26- Leonardo da Vinci*, the Last Supper* (1495 -1498), Tempera and Mixed Media on Plaster, 460 x 880 cm

Figure 27- Carrie Mae Weems (1978-1988) *Ain't Jokin'*, Silver Print and Plastic Panel, 36.83 x 36.83 cm (print) and 2.54 x 15.24 cm (panel)

Introduction

> *Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man [...] She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and he not with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other.*
>
> Julien Benda in Simone de Beauvoir, 1993; xxxix - xl

In September of 2009, I presented a paper at the South African Visual Art Historians' (SAVAH) conference at Pretoria University. I was in my first year of study as a Masters of History of Art student, and I was thus extremely nervous to present a paper (titled *Visual Commentary and the Image of Julius Malema*) at the same conference with notable Art Historians such as Professor Anitra Nettleton and Professor Brenda Schmahmann among others. What intimidated me most was the fact that Professor Nettleton had lectured me history of art courses since my second year of studies in Fine Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand; and I have read Professor Schmahmann's writing on South African women artists, some of the writing I am engaging in this thesis.

Besides my excitement at being at the conference, I was quite intrigued to notice the dominance of white participants. There were, to be sure, a handful of black participants, mostly comprised of younger students. The domination of SAVAH by white scholars is a problem that has been critiqued by scholars such as Thembinkosi Goniwe, Mgcineni Sobopha and Sharlene Khan (2006) among others. Their critiques illuminate not only the general dearth of black scholars but also the lack of black women scholars in the field of visual art history in South Africa. Khan's article in *Art South Africa*, titled *Doing it for Daddy*, underscores this point. Khan (2006) argues that, "White domination of the visual art industry is overwhelming. The dominance of white female's especially glaring".

The SAVAH conference is one of the prominent spaces where art historians meet their peers to critically engage with one another's work. The absence of black scholars and particularly black women scholars is very worrying because it also speaks to the absence of their voices and contribution in the field of South African visual art history and contemporary discourses. It is quite troubling to notice that, in the broader South African visual arts field, there is hardly a space for reflective theories and discourses that specifically concern black artists. Prominent white scholars tend to make use of postcolonial theories to discourse the works of both white and black artists. Yet there remains an absence of black feminist theories and discourses that enable one to theorise and critique works by black women artists in that light; some of these artists are making a significant contribution to contemporary art in a post-apartheid South Africa. In other words, there is a dearth, not only of postcolonial perspectives that are specific to ideas and experiences of black artists, but also a lack of black art historians, theorists and critics who are supposed to be espousing such postcolonial perspectives.

In my view, engaging with contemporary works of art from a postcolonial perspective would also mean engaging with issues that black artists are tackling in a post-apartheid era. These perspectives include a dismantling of white domination or white supremacy discourses that have, for a long time, influenced many facets of artistic production, art history, art theory and art criticism.

Theories of black feminism are important in dealing with the work of black women artists. There is scholarly work on black women artists in South Africa, yet these works seldom use black feminist theories. Of course, this problem is bound to occur when black women are absent from art history. The consequence is the paucity of discussions that critically engage their work using the lens of black feminism as I will demonstrate with my study of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle.

Aim and Rationale

In my thesis, I will investigate how Tracey Rose and Berni Searle employ autobiography in their artworks. As these are both South African black women artists, I will use black feminist theory to enable the reading of and writing about Rose's *Ciao Bella* (2001) and Searle's *Snow White* (2001).

My research is motivated by an absence of black feminism in South African art histories in which already there is a limited amount of work done on feminism in general. While some black women may be writing texts that contribute to art history discourses, often it is curators who are writing texts in the accompanying catalogues, something they would have done anyway[1]. Some of these catalogues are not academically rigorous. Consequently, it is difficult to have complex engagements with artworks that utilise black feminist strategies. One of the ways in which black feminists can begin to break free from their oppression is through autobiography. Autobiography enables women to represent themselves and their bodies, and in so doing, dismantle structures that did not permit them to write themselves into a patriarchal history (Perreault, 1995; Adam, 1996).

In South Africa, the politics of gender need to be discussed in light of race and class. All of these-gender, race and class-intersect. Patriarchy is the cornerstone of the oppression of black women. In order to dismantle patriarchal structures that oppress them, women have mobilised their subjectivity and agency. They have found strategies of self-writing and self-insertion that have allowed them to self-represent, and in this way giving voice to their barely audible voices. These are some of the autobiographical lenses through which I will read the works of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle. As quoted above (Benda in de Beauvoir), women have historically been treated as inferior to men. While "he is the subject...the Absolute", she is merely 'the Other". It is because of this

[1] Melissa Mboweni wrote on *Domestic*, an exhibition that she co-curated with Jackie McInnes, and Bongi Bengu wrote on the *Innovative Woman* exhibition. Both exhibitions were dedicated to discussing South African women's issues.

foregoing debate (for we still live in patriarchal systems that still subjugate women) that I have embarked on this research.

Chapter Summaries

In my first chapter, *Black Feminism and the Exploration of Autobiography*, I set out to define black feminism. I also unpack the issues that led to the necessity of the movement. The chapter is separated into two parts. In the first part, I define black feminism and differentiate black women's experiences from that of white women. This leads me to explore the manners in which black women in particular are oppressed by patriarchal societies. Thereafter, I explore the necessity of black feminism, which was derived from mainstream or white feminism. I then indicate the key strategy- that is self-determination/self-insertion- in which black women can subvert the structures that oppress them.

I dedicate the second part of chapter one to locating black feminism within mainstream feminism, within American feminist art, and, within South African Art Histories. At the end of the chapter, I briefly assess autobiography and autoethnography as strategies that can advance black feminism.

In the second chapter, I explore the theme of autobiography in Berni Searle's artwork titled *Snow White* (2001). I investigate how the *Snow White* fairytale, with its origins in Europe, has promoted an ubiquitous image of the ideal of the white wowan. I explore how images of white fairytale characters have been used to promote ideal beauty or the ideal body as something that can be possessed or acquired by white women only. This has, however, not stopped many black people from aspiring to that ideal beauty through radical physical transformations such as straightening hair, and hazardous skin lightening creams. As Searle performs her *Snow White* in the nude, I will explore the use of the

(black) nude in the arts. This invites issues pertaining to the male gaze, and until recently, the black female and male gaze, as well as the white female gaze.

In the third chapter, I examine Tracey Rose's *Ciao Bella* (2001) video performance. The work was mainly influenced by Rose's Catholic upbringing and her interrogation of Catholicism. I look at Rose's simultaneous examination of her Catholic upbringing and the role of phallocentrism in Renaissance, as well as in contemporary art. I explore Rose's use of women archetypes to subvert gendered roles prescribed for women. I look at how sexuality can be used as a tool of power (as in the case of Cicciolina), or how sexuality can be used to oppress (as in the case of Sarah Bartmann and Josephine Baker). The cases of these women archetypes are more dynamic than stating whether their sexuality makes them oppressed. I will consider their agency and subjectivity, whether they have the means of self-determination in the representation of their bodies and their sexualities.

Chapter 1: Black Feminism and the Exploration of Autobiography

Introduction

This chapter situates my research in the context of Black Feminism. I have divided the chapter into two parts: in the first part I define black feminism. I also indicate its necessity and how it can be used to eradicate oppressions against black women.

In the second part I situate black feminism in the context of mainstream feminism, feminism in the arts, and feminism in South African art histories. This will inform the basis of my exploration of how black women, especially Tracey Rose and Berni Searle (who form part of my research), have been discussed in the context of South African art histories. In the last section of the chapter, I briefly discuss autobiography and autoethnography, which I have employed as black feminist strategies.

Black feminism is an extension of feminism in general. While it broke away from the feminist movement- for reasons that will be discussed below- it retained the core tenets of feminist theory. This close relationship means that the strategies used by black feminists do not necessarily differ with those used by other feminists. The difference is that black feminists employ those strategies and theories to discuss black women's experiences instead of the experiences of women in general.

Black feminist theory advocates that black women need to assert themselves as speaking subjects in history. This can be achieved in the form on self-insertion and self-determination. Some of these self-insertion strategies are autobiography and autoethnography. By making use of these strategies, black women are able to write their selves in a history that was before written for them by a white supremacist patriarchal society. I will therefore discuss the necessity of self-determination in the advocacy of black feminism.

While I will discuss autobiography and autoethnography as black feminist strategies, they have in the past been used by feminists of all kinds and races. By discussing the strategies as black feminist, I am not suggesting that they were introduced as a fine art form by black feminists. However, for the scope of this paper, I will discuss how they have been used by black women to forward black feminism.

Black Feminism: Part 1

Defining Black Feminism

Black feminism stems from feminism. It has its basis largely in the Unites States of America in the early 1970s. While feminism in general is concerned with dismantling structures that oppress women universally, black feminism concentrates only on black women's oppression (hooks, 1992; Collins P. H., 2009). It argues that different women will probably be (mis) treated differently and that they may need different means of dismantling different oppressive structures.

Black feminism considers context specificity in it's advocacy for black women. It assumes that black women in the United States of America will have different experiences from black women in South Africa. To take it further, in a South African context, black women residing in rural areas might experience life and patriarchy differently to those living in urban areas. One could continue to narrow down the focus until one speaks about the individual oppressions that an individual black woman experiences.

Black women decided to break away from mainstream (white) feminism because they believed that white feminism was prejudiced against black women (Collins P. H., 2009; Qunta, 1987; Hooks, 1992).

While the feminist agenda might attempt to serve all women, it fails to acknowledge that women of different races and classes, within a particular society, are not oppressed in the same way.

To indicate the different kinds of oppressions between black and white women, black South African activist and scholar, Dabi Nkululeko (1987, p. 101) argues that:

> Settler women occupy a class, position and status which are above that of their native counterpart, male and female. For example, Euro-Settler women researchers enjoy the privileges which their male and female subjects who are native do not enjoy. They have liberal access to financial, educational and social facilities. This is the reason why settler women manage to write about their natives, not because they are more intelligent or more willing.

Nkululeko suggests that white women have better resources than black women. There is vast difference in terms of resources, education and class between black and white women; one could argue that black and white women, even though living in the same society, have different lived experiences.

Black feminists claim that when white feminists were attempting to dismantle oppressive structures, they were concerned with freeing only white women (hooks, 1992; Collins P. H., 2009). Black American feminist, bell hooks[2] (1992, p. 147) suggests that

> Arguably, white feminism has not offered (ample or enabling) grounds on which black women are able to subvert their subjugation in the process of self-writing. Thus there is a need for a distinct black feminism which counters white feminism that has failed to account for race in its advocacy for gender and class regarding black women's needs.

As the interests of black women are not factored in the quest to dismantle gendered oppressions, Patricia Hill Collins (2009, pp. 7-8), a black American feminist, concludes that white feminism is

> racist and concerned with white, middle-class women's issues. Theories advanced as being universally applicable to women as a group on closer examination appear greatly limited by

[2] bell hooks (original name Gloria Jean Watkins) spells her chosen pseudonym in lower case. She does this to reject patriarchal naming and therefore control of women (Scholz, 2010)

> the white, middle-class origins of their proponents [and therefore promote] the notion of a generic woman who is white and middle class[3].

Collins contends that the feminist movement foregrounded issues that concern white women. It also seems as though it was white women who were in the front of the movement. Collins (2009, pp. 7, 9 and 10) goes on to claim that when black women had something to offer the feminist movement, their ideas and suggestions often went unacknowledged.

The exclusion of black women's ideas limited black women from participating fully in the feminist movement. They could not be involved in the planning of their own freedom. In the end, black women formed a movement, separate from white women, where they could forge the tools to end their oppression. They (black feminists) also argued that black women know better than anyone else how they have been oppressed (Collins P. H., 2009; hooks, 1992; Qunta, 1987).

Stemming from Collin's arguments, it could be argued that black women's exclusion from art history discourses further enables white power structures that have been in place since colonialism. The result of excluding black women (and men) from institutions of higher learning and knowledge production serves to elevate knowledge production by white people, which ultimately enforces colonial hierarchies and its attendant oppressive structures (Collins P. H., 2009, p. 7). While black women remain on the margins, white men and women occupy the centre, in this way dominating knowledge production in South African art histories.

It is therefore critical that black women artists such as Tracey Rose, Berni Searle, Helen Sebidi, Zanele Muholi, Senzeni Marasela and others have a voice to communicate their black female experiences, ideas, identities, histories and desires. This can be done through their art. Their use of

[3] There are a few white feminists who consider race in their writing. These include Griselda Pollock (2003), Anne McClintock (1995), and Linda Nochlin (1988), to name but a few.

their individual experiences and the imprint of their personalities need to be acknowledged in the discourse around their art.

The Difference between the Experiences of Black and White Women

To view feminism only from a Western and white point of view is to deny a voice to black feminists or black feminist artists working outside of the Occidental paradigm. Race informs the battles and everyday experiences of black women (Collins P. H., 2009), especially in a country such as South Africa which is laden with so many politically racist histories. Racism, imperialism and colonialism helped structure black women's social identities in an oppressive South Africa (Qunta, 1987, p. 15).

Black feminists' concentration on black women's experiences is a reflection of Nkululeko's notion of the quadruple negation of black women[4]. In her argument Nkululeko (1987, p. 99) posits that the "oppression of women is...fourfold"; the locus of these oppressions is situated in that intimate space where "colonialism, racism, class and sexism" meet. She contrasts the oppression experienced by black women in South Africa and that of white women in Western Europe by pointing out that women in Western Europe, for instance, "understand sexism in their class society but fail to understand it in more complex situations of the Third World, where class and sex oppressions are joined by colonial rule and racist oppression" (1987, p. 99). Nkululeko argues that white feminism addresses issues of class, gender and sex and neglects race, a crucial factor in areas where there are histories of racism[5].

[4] Other black feminists, including bell hook (1992) and Adrian Piper (2003), have spoken about the triple negation of black women. Beyond suggesting that black women are oppressed through race, gender, class and sex, they also suggest that they are often oppressed, albeit differently, by white men, white women, and black men.

[5] Qunta (1987, p. 15) echoes this point, saying: "The enemies of African women, particularly in Southern Africa, are colonialism and imperialism, white racism, class oppression and sexual oppression. The first step towards the emancipation must be the defeat of colonialism and imperialism. The next step is to eradicate all the effects of exploitation based on race, nationality, sex and class."

One of the motivations of women activists, in their attempt to achieve rights equal to men, was to remove women from the domestic space, giving them the right to work and vote, among other issues. Collins (2009) suggests that the feminist fight to gain the right to work in the public sphere applies mainly to white, middle class American women. She asserts that black women were already in the workplace since their forced migration to America as slaves in the 1600s. Therefore, she argues, working class black women, in contrast to white women, could not fight to work in the public sphere as they already occupied those spaces. Instead, black women's activism could be based on fighting for better working conditions in the work place. They could also fight against a system that had circumscribed their working life, limiting it to domestic work (discussed below).

Of course, one has to take cognisance of the fact that most women, including white women, both in the USA and in Europe in the 19th century were already working in factories, domestic service and shops among other places (Davies, 1977; Hymowitz & Weissmann, 1978; McClintock, 1995). Olive Schreiner (1998) has also written about white woman's labour in South Africa.

Today, in some countries in Europe, it is mainly white women who work as domestic workers. It is only in some black dominated areas (the USA is a notable exception) where it is mainly black women who work as domestic workers. Collins' ideas about black women and domestic labour do however, apply to contemporary South Africa; this point is not applicable to white South African women who are no longer in domestic labour as was the case in the 19th century (Schreiner, 1998; Walker C., 1990).

In her famous speech in 1851, the American black feminist[6] abolitionist Sojourner Truth (cited in Collins P. H., 2009), questioned the societal treatment of black women in comparison to those of white women. She proclaimed:

> The man over there says women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man- when I could get it- and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

There are numerous deductions that one can draw from Truth's statement. Truth suggested context specificity with regard to the expected behaviours of men and those of women. From her statement, one can conclude that 'woman' and 'man'[7] are social and cultural constructs that are treated differently in different societies. Truth may be contesting the privileges enjoyed by upper class white women, benefits not enjoyed by other classes and races. She commands her spectators to look at her and in so doing she narrows down her womanly status to her physical features[8]. Society has reduced her gender to her physicality, concealing the cultural constructs that make her a woman[9]. She instead compares herself to a man, a man who ploughs and who gathers into barns. She has the ability to perform physical chores that are supposed to be done solely by men in some societies.

Deconstructions of certain ideologies are necessary in feminism. Maria Stewart (cited by Collins P. H., 2009, pp. 14- 15) deconstructs the notions of *woman* as defined by a patriarchal society. She

[6] I use the term black feminist loosely here given that black feminism as a movement had not yet been established in the 1800s. However, Truth's politics can be discussed in relation to black feminism.

[7] Truth in this instance depicts a certain class of whiteness. She is talking about upper class white men and women. There were white women who were her contemporaries who worked as "school teachers, seamstresses, domestics and factory operates" (Hymowitz & Weissmann, 1978). With that said, one needs to consider that, as I argue elsewhere in the paper, white and black women do not experience their oppression in the same way in any given society.

[8] French feminist Simone de Beauvoir (1997) has contested women being perceived as physically weaker than men.

[9] Judith Butler (cited Disch, 1999) speaks about gender constructs. She suggests that gender is a social construct, and that we perform our genders on a daily basis. I discuss this further in chapter three.

mentions that *woman* is not a natural occurrence, but a societal construct. This construct can be seen as giving more power to men who in turn dictate and construct the role of woman. In order to advance with black feminism thought, a deconstruction of not just womanhood, but black womanhood and its socially ascribed roles needs to be put in place.

Black Women's Oppression

Patricia Hill Collins (2009, p. 6) gives three key ways in which black women are oppressed. Firstly, she states that black women are oppressed through labour laws. In domestic work, black women work long hours in physically straining work, for very little wages.

Secondly, Collins (2009, p. 6) argues that black people's lack of proper education is another way to reinforce their subjugation by oppressive systems. Their working in intellectually unmotivating positions is a result of their political subordination. Black women's (and black men's) education, if they receive any education at all, is a below average, watered-down version of what is taught to their white counterparts[10]. A case in point is Bantu Education, apartheid South Africa's education system whose *raison d'être* was to limit black people to physical labour only that does not require any application of the mind.

The lack of proper education that black women have historically received ensured that they did not have control over how they were discussed in literature, art, and other platforms. They, therefore, cannot free themselves from their subordination because they lack the language, means and intellectual resources to do so. This is arguably the reason why oppressive socio-economic structures such as apartheid offered below average education to black people- so that they do not have the

[10] This was the case during the apartheid's Bantu education, and is arguably still the case in post-apartheid South Africa.

means and resources to break free from these structures. Ultimately, white patriarchal systems benefit fellow whites, ensuring that all socio-political and economic power remain in the hands of white people[11].

Thirdly, Collins (2009, p. 7) suggests that black women's oppression is perpetuated through oppressive, stereotypical images that are constantly portrayed in the media. Black women are often portrayed in roles of childminder (mammys), caregivers, or domestic workers[12]. These stereotypes, one could argue, reinforce black women's oppression. Black women are in the end limited to their stereotypical roles, with little chance for change or improvement. In order for the black woman to "achieve self actualization" and break away from these stereotypical roles and images, she has to "counter the representation of herself, her body, her being as expandable" (hooks, 1992, p. 65). For black women to eradicate the use of stereotypical images in the media, they need to determine a language with which to represent themselves.

Why Black Feminism is important and necessary: The Topic of Self-Determination

> *African womanhood has been an increasingly topical subject for writers in recent years. Unfortunately, however, the majority of them have not themselves belonged to the community of African women. This in itself is problematic, since the non-African who studies this rather complex issue is inevitably an observer rather than a participant. The limitation is further complicated by the fact that European authors tend to employ theoretical assumptions and methodology which hamper or in some cases preclude a realistic assessment of the subject matter.*
>
> Christine Qunta (1987, p. 11)

[11] This was also the case with other forms of oppressions, such as gender oppression, in most other societies. Cases where girls and women (of all races) were prevented from going to school, universities or following certain professions that were reserved for men is a form of oppression. This ensures that power and knowledge remained with the patriarchy.

[12] I discuss other black women stereotypes in chapter three.

Giving voice to black women is one of the underlying motivations for black feminism. The movement advocates the mobilisation and restoration of their subjectivity, which is necessary if they are to inscribe themselves in history. Black women need to self-determine. They have for very long not been able to do this as both black and white patriarchies have determined their identities on their behalf.

In order to express the necessity of black feminism and self-determination, Dabi Nkululeko[13] (1987) provides some insight. Nkululeko concerns herself with self-determination and argues that black women's oppression can cease to exist, or at least this can be a stepping stone, should they attain the right and means to determine themselves. She argues that, "If [black women] are to avoid basing their policies, strategies and tactics on the interpretation of others, they must write their own histories" (1987, p. 88).

Self-determination is the key approach in which black women can insert themselves in history. As argued above, black women have historically not attained the necessary education to become knowledge producers in a Westernised system. This is beginning to change in some postcolonial situations where black women have the means to attend universities and occupy certain positions of power. The majority of black women, though, still lack the resources[14]. Ultimately, black women continue to absorb information created by "others". This information, one could say, mainly glorifies oppressive systems while simultaneously portraying black people as inferior.

To make her point of self-determination, Nkululeko (1987, pp. 88 & 89) asks whose role it is to break oppressive structures for the oppressed:

[13] Although Nkululeko does not blatantly address her audience from a position of black feminism, her politics and ideologies pertaining to African (black) women can be read as black feminist.
[14] I argue that this is a gradual, slow process. Unfortunately, while some black women have the means and recourses, they are a minority. Most black women still lack opportunities to better their current oppressive situations.

> Can an oppressed nation or segment of it, engaged in a struggle for liberation from its oppressor, rely on knowledge produced, researched and theorized by others, no matter how progressive, who are members of the oppressed nation?...This knowledge cannot best be determined by alien researchers who will always be laden with the trapping of their own history, values, culture and ideology, regardless of how progressive they may be[15].

Echoing Nkululeko's concern, Collins (2009, p. 21) argues that, "Definitions claiming that anyone can produce and develop Black feminist thought risk obscuring the special angle of vision that Black women bring to the knowledge production process...Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of black women's reality by those who live it."

From Nkululeko's and Collins' arguments, one can conclude that in order for an oppressed people to gain freedom from their oppressor, they cannot rely on theory, strategies and ideologies written by somebody else, especially not their oppressor. White women may fight the battle against gender oppression with black women, but they have close relationships (husbands, fathers, brothers and sons) with the white men who oppress both black and white women. As suggested by Audre Lorde's (1984) essay title "*The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,"* one should not consider restructuring the *Master's House* with his tools. To continue with Lorde's metaphor, I suggest that the house should not be restructured. Instead, the system-every beam, wall and the foundation-needs to be broken down and rebuilt in ways that do not involve oppressive structures[16]. The oppressed should also not attempt to include the oppressor, or direct beneficiaries of oppressive systems in their quest for freedom.

[15] Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko (2004, p. 98), also poses the concern of white people being in the foreground of black liberation, saying "It is not enough for whites to be in the offensive. So immersed are they in prejudice that they do not believe that blacks can formulate their own thought without white guidance and trusteeship. Thus, even those whites who see much wrong with the system make it their business to control the responses of the black to the provocation. No one is suggesting that it is not the business of liberal whites to oppose what is wrong. However, it appears to us as too much of a coincidence that liberals- few as they are- should not only be determining the *modus operandi* of those blacks who oppose the system, but also leading it, in spite of their involvement in the system. To us it seems that their role spells out the totality of the white power structure- the fact that though whites are our problem, it is still other whites who want to tell us how to deal with that problem".

[16] Postcolonialism is greatly rooted in dismantling the centre of oppressive systems (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995).

In that regard, Nkululeko (1987, p. 100) is suspicious of a situation where white South African women could stand up for (or with) black women in the fight against women oppression. She states:

> The role of the colonial-settler woman in the oppression of the native woman is yet to be investigated, but as a segment of the colonizing people (nation) they played a major role in and are direct beneficiaries of colonial and racial oppression of the native people (nation), including women.

In a South African context, as is the case in most societies, the white man is seen as the main oppressor. The white woman is not considered an oppressor because she is also oppressed by the white man/white patriarchy. However, as Nkululeko suggests, it must be pointed out that the white woman has the power and resources to oppress black women. In most cases, white women can write about, often misrepresenting black, women's experiences (Nkululeko, 1987). By misrepresenting black women in order to forward their own agendas, I posit that white women are in fact perpetuating the oppression of black women.

Just as white women scholars can oppress black women by misrepresenting them in their writings, one can argue the same for the emerging black woman scholar. Nkululeko cautions the black woman scholar who takes on the task of writing black women into history, saying,

> It must not be overlooked...that the native [black] researcher, like her alien [white] counterpart has to overcome her class stand in order to take a class position opposing, as the oppressors have done, imperialism. Because she is of a petty bourgeois origin and has inherited the ideological trappings of her class, she too could take a class position which favours imperialism and not the oppressed and exploited masses. Over and above this, she has been alienated to a certain extent from her cultural heritage and, therefore, its tools of conceptualization. Hence, she must consciously employ her cultural heritage and tools of conceptualization. This means going beyond the present boundaries of theorization, beyond scholasticism, to the addition of new facts and/or the challenge to the old ones.

This is a point to bear in mind, for any black woman who attempts to speak for *all* black women undermines their individual quest for self-determination (for the black woman she attempts to speak for). There are different types of black women with varied experiences. This is one of the

underlying points of black feminist thought. It is therefore equally important for the middle to upper class black woman with ‘scholastic’ traits to voice her opinion, and to determine herself. A problem naturally arises when she attempts to foreground her experience as a black woman as the standard experience of all black woman.

Black Feminism: Part Two

Locating Black Feminism within Feminism

> *[Feminism] is a movement, an academic discipline, a way of life, a political commitment, a cultural relation, and so much more.*
>
> Sally Scholz (2010, p. 13)

This chapter locates black feminism within larger feminist discourses. It is essential to understand that black feminism is not in opposition to white feminism, but rather an extension of the same. In order to locate black feminism within feminism, it is essential to map out a brief history of feminism. I will do this with the help of feminist and philosophy professor Sally Scholz (2010). Feminism is a much bigger project than the scope of this paper allows. Feminism has myriad manifestations and this paper will briefly highlight its defining traits.

Sally Scholz (2010) has two approaches to the reading of feminist history. There is the chronological approach, which periodises the history of feminism, and the thematic approach. Both approaches are discussed with regard to the waves of feminism. I will discuss and situate black feminism within these two approaches.

The Chronological Approach to the History of Feminism

The chronological approach to the history of feminism maps out the three distinct periods of feminism in a chronological order. First Wave feminism is seen as spanning the centuries 1600s to the early 1900s (Scholz, 2010, p. 5). The First Wave feminists saw inequality in how men and women were treated. Men had more socio-political power; they could own homes and had suffrage. Women

were often excluded from such socio political activity. First Wave feminists sought to give visibility to women's issues by seeking equality between men and women.

Second Wave Feminism spans the years between 1948 and the 1990s (Scholz, 2010, p. 5). Feminists who formed part of this wave sought sisterhood and solidarity amongst all women. They believed that if all women came together, they stood a better chance of dismantling patriarchal structures that oppressed them. However, as Scholz (2010, p. 7), and most other feminists have stated (hooks, 1992; Collins P. H., 2009; Nochlin, 1988), "women do not [all] share the same social class or race". Therefore, the sisterhood sought through second wave feminism posed numerous problems. Not all women are oppressed in the same way and by the same structures; therefore, women of different races and classes fighting to end their oppression cannot employ the same strategies because they are oppressed differently.

Third Wave Feminism is said to have begun in the mid 1990s (Scholz, 2010, p. 7). Unlike second wave feminism, it acknowledged diversity among women. It is "characterized by a rejection of sisterhood in favour of diversity not only in identity but in subjectivity and thought of self" (Scholz, 2010, p. 7). If one were to follow the chronological approach to feminist history, one would locate black feminism within Third Wave Feminism. This is on the basis that Third Wave Feminism acknowledged the different feminisms that existed, feminisms that acknowledged oppressions based on gender, race, class and sexuality.

The chronological approach to reading feminist history is very limited and is beset with the limitations typical of periodisation. By placing feminism in chronological order, this approach suggests that the problems faced in the first wave had been resolved by the time the second or third

wave kicked in. A chronological model also favours Western feminist history, simultaneously excluding African and Oriental feminisms.

The Thematic Approach to the History of Feminism

The thematic approach to feminist history looks at the themes that were forwarded by the different waves. Scholz (2010, p. 8) describes this as follows:

> In the thematic approach, the first wave of feminism focuses on efforts to obtain rights and formal equality. Second wave feminism expands on these accomplishments by offering a wider analysis of oppression and exploring how oppression affects identity and agency. The third wave turns to the structures of consciousness and language to see how oppression is reproduced there and how it might be fought.

Black feminism is better suited to the thematic approach than the chronological approach. The thematic approach "acknowledges different histories, issues, and causes within feminism" (Scholz, 2010, p. 9). The thematic approach therefore eliminated the idea of a generic white (or perhaps Western) woman's experiences as all encompassing. This opens up possibilities for the advocacy of other feminisms.

Schools of Feminist Thought

There are numerous schools of feminist thoughts. Scholz discusses liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, cultural feminism, womanist theory, postmodern feminism, third world and postcolonial feminism. For the purpose of this paper, I will discuss Marxist feminism, womanist theory, and third world and postcolonial feminism in order to locate black feminism within these schools of feminist thought.

Marxist feminism

Marxist feminism asserts that women's oppression is maintained for the purpose of supporting capitalism; domestic work is part of the cash nexus system. In other words, Marxist feminism is deeply embedded in the questions of class. Scholz (2010, p. 16) maintains that "the Marxist feminist holds that it is the material conditions of life, rather than legal barriers that inhibit women's freedom. Whereas liberal feminists identify legal, social, and intellectual inequality as the roots of the oppression of women, Marxist feminists claim that capitalism causes women's oppression in society".

Some feminists have critiqued Marxist feminism. They, including Gayle Rubin (1975), maintain that capitalism is merely one form of patriarchy. One should not aim to only dismantle capitalism; one should aim to dismantle all patriarchal structures (capitalism happens to be one of many such insidious structures) in order to liberate women from oppression. I have previously discussed the working conditions of black women (in part one of this chapter) and identified this as one of the ways in which black women are oppressed. In order to liberate black women from their oppressive working conditions, capitalism needs to be eradicated.

Third world and Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism acknowledges that colonialism played a significant role in the oppression of the colonised, especially women. The conglomeration of "colonialism, exploitation, imperialism, sexism, and racism" has enabled colonial structures to subjugate oppressed groups even further (Scholz, 2010, p. 34). As a result of the colonial oppression experienced by previously colonised groups, these groups need to determine subversive strategies that are specific to their locale.

Womanist Theory

Out of all feminist school of thoughts, the Womanist theory can be seen as the one that best describes black feminism. Womanist theory looks at "the intersections between race, class and gender" (Scholz, 2010, p. 29). Black feminist Alice Walker is a big advocate of the term. In her collection of essays and speeches, *In Search of our Mothers Gardens* (Walker A., 2005), she includes numerous definitions of the term; one of her definitions for a womanist is "A black feminist or feminist of color". Scholz acknowledges bell hooks as the driving force behind Womanist theory. hooks (quoted in Scholz, 2010, p. 29) advocates that the term feminism be rejected to begin with because feminism (as discussed in part one of this chapter) was seen as being solely concerned with the oppressions of middle class white women. White women's issues were seen as universal, not bearing in mind the multiplicity of feminisms and women's experiences. hooks (quoted in Scholz, 2010, p. 29) calls "for a redefinition of feminisms as 'a struggle to end sexist oppression'". For hooks, the phrase "sexist oppression" means all those forms of oppressions that affect women's political existence. These include "Racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism..." and so forth (Scholz, 2010, p. 29).

Locating Black Feminism within Feminist Art

Art production and its reception in Europe have always been dominated by males. White male artists were seen as art masters and those that were fortunate enough to gain celebrity status (such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock) were male geniuses (discussed further in Chapter 3) (Nochlin, 1988). In most cases women entered the world of art only as subjects; they were often subjects of male painters (Schmahmann, 2004) and were painted for the consumption of the male gaze. In order to dismantle the objectification and exclusion of women in

the arts, women in the 1960s and 1970s began to subvert art grand narratives of art practice. Women visibly became makers, buyers and spectators of art[17].

Since women were perceived as subjects (or objects) in art, very few had the means to represent themselves and their experiences of womanhood[18].The power was always in the hands of the male artist. Through the feminist movement, women artists began to take control over how they were represented and produced works about women's experiences-Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Martha Rosler, Cindy Sherman and the Guerrilla Girls come to mind. This movement did, however, begin in the late 1800s with women Impressionists such as Berthe Morrisot. Parallel to this, women art historians were also working to disrupt paternalist discussions about the representation of women (Pollock, 1996; Parker & Pollock, 1987; Nochlin, 1988; Raven, 1981; Lippard, 1976), and in the process, produced ample literature on women artists.

Black women artists (Adrian Piper, Rene Cox and Carrie Mae Weems) were also producing art about black women's experience in the American context. Black art historian and artist, bell hooks, was among the art historians who were producing literature about women's art, especially art produced by black women (hook, 1995; 1984).

Locating Black Feminism within South African Art Histories

In a South African context, there are three art history books that have engaged with women artists: *Women and Arts in South Africa* (1996), *Through the Looking Glass* (2004), and *Between Union and Liberation* (2005). In *Through the Looking Glass,* Schmahmann (2004, p. 2) explores "representations of self by South African women artists". Her motivation is based on the fact that the topic has "not yet featured in prior shows".

[17] This argument is entirely confined to the Western tradition and Western master narratives of art history.
[18] There were a few notable women artists who were producing art since the Renaissance. These include Sofonisba Anguisciola and Berthe Morrisot.

In the book, which is based on an exhibition of the same name, Schmahmann (2004, p. 8) critiques the portrayal of women as a object and men as subject in visual art. She does this by examining two types of representations that have featured in artistic production. One is portraiture, which often involves a female subject being portrayed by a male artist. The other is self-portraiture, a genre most often associated with white male artists representing themselves. In such representation of male and female subjects in art, women are seen as the subjects- or objects- of art, while men are the producers of that art. As such, women are not accorded an opportunity to represent themselves; they are repeatedly portrayed by male artists.

Schmahmann's research attempts to insert South African women artists in art history. She does this by affirming the work done by South African women artists, work that has evidently taken into account the representation of women's bodies and selves. Schmahmann discusses how South African women artists employ strategies of self-representation to mobilise subjectivity and agency. Such subjectivity recalls Adrian Piper's proclamation that, "My objecthood becomes my subjecthood" (cited in Altshuler, 1997, p. 100).

Schmahmann's book follows Marion Arnold's *Women and Art in South Africa*, the first book that dealt with women artists in the South African visual arts landscape. She acknowledges the work done by women artists (1996, np), asserting that those who transgress patriarchal holds should be read as feminist. She suggests that "we must be cognisant of a multiplicity of feminisms which create theoretical positions and a plethora of cultural backgrounds reverberating with their own histories" (1996, p. np). Although Arnold suggests the need to be "cognisant of a multiplicity of feminisms" there appears to be no effort to engage with any black feminist text throughout her book. This is also the case with Brenda Schmahmann's *Through the Looking Glass*. The book, *Between Union and*

Liberation, co-edited by Arnold and Schmahmann, has only one black female contributor, Jacqueline Nolte, who writes on black women artists Noria Mabasa and Helen Mmakgabo Sebidi. Jacqueline Nolte is also the only black scholar that Schmahmann (2004, p. 31) references, and only in discussions of works by black female artists, Lallitha Jawahirilal and Bongi Bengu.

In her book, *Women and Art in South Africa*, Arnold acknowledges that she does not know what it is like to be a black woman; she has experienced her womanhood solely as a white woman (1996, p. np). Despite this realisation, she goes on to compare herself with black women while she suggests that both black and white men "have spoken for [women] for so long- and they continue to claim that right in discussions on women's social roles, work and bodies" (1996, p. np). After differentiating herself from black women, she places herself under the same umbrella with black women who have been oppressed by black and white men. In other words, Arnold suggests that black and white women have been victim of both black and white patriarchy. Although this might be true for the black women, in the context of colonialism and apartheid, both instruments of white imperialist supremacy, the claim that white women have been oppressed by black men is difficult to substantiate.

Arnold's book engages with only 6 black women artists compared to her 61 white women artists. This discrepancy between black and white female artists indicates that, although white women have gained grounds in inserting themselves in South African art history, black women still remain on the margins. While black woman artist Gladys Mgudlandlu was included in Arnold's book she was not discussed in the same scholarly rigour that is applied for her white women artist counterparts. This is evident in numerous ways. Firstly, Arnold (1996, p. 12) discusses Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser, Maud Sumner and Dorothy Kay as modernist because of their exploration of self-portraiture. She then discusses Gladys Mgudlandlu as having "the first exhibition of a black woman artist". When

discussing Mgudlandlu, Arnold falls into the trap of placing importance on black artists' biographies. She mentions that Mgudlandlu "came from a Ciskei missionary family, had gained a teaching diploma and was a trained nurse. She was largely self-taught as an artist, but like many black children, she had played with clay forms and made designs for murals on huts." It is important that Arnold acknowledges Mgudlandlu's black womanhood. She, unfortunately, essentialises Mgudlandlu's black women experience of engaging with it critically.

Schmahmann's (2004) text also has its shortcomings. Her first chapter gives a historical background of art by women artists in South Africa. Kay, Sumner and Siopis are extensively and critically discussed as the makers of (white) woman art. Bonnie Ntshalintshali, who is discussed at the end of the chapter, feels like an afterthought; the discussion fills three quarters of a page to close off the chapter (Schmahmann, 2004; 19). In her discussion, Schmahmann fails to critically engage with Ntshalintshali's sculpture (*Self Portrait,* 1991) as a work of art worthy of the critical discourses such as feminism, representation of the body, identity and modernism. In discussing the occasional inclusion of black female artists in texts, bell hooks (1995; xv) suggests that, "Often critiques of their work are descriptive rather than critically interpretative." This indicates a lack of critical engagement by white American critics with the work of black-American artists. I posit that this is sometimes the case with writings by white South African writers on black artists' work[19].

[19] Elsewhere, hooks (1992; 115) suggests that "Many white critics feel their position of 'authority' challenged as more people of color claim a critical voice. All too often these individuals are defensive when asked to discuss issues of cultural appropriation or to talk about the way in which the existing social structure creates a cultural context where what white people have to say about blackness continues to be deemed more relevant than other voices speaking on the same issues...While it is always a useful and necessary intervention for white scholars to address issues of race and creativity, of art and aesthetics in the black Atlantic world, if that work is merely providing yet another way for white folks to 'eat the other' (i.e., appropriate non-white cultures in ways that diminish) structures of racist hierarchy and domination remain intact. This work then becomes part of the colonizing apparatus.'

hooks is not, of course, suggesting that white writers cannot write about black artists. Her grievance is the way black people are written about, an assertion I agree with. For the purpose of multiplicity of voices and perspectives, everyone should be able to write about everyone else. The problem arises when the writing of black people by white people (or any other group in a position of power) helps in the suppression of black people.

In place of a lack of critical engagement with Ntshalintshali's work, Schmahmann (in the same breath that Arnold discussed Mgudlandlu) reduces Ntshalintshali to her biography. She notes that Ntshalintshali showed gratitude to Juliet Armstrong (who invited her for a three month residency at the University of Natal) who accommodated her in "a private and properly appointed room" which "was a luxury to which she [Ntshalintshali] was wholly unaccustomed" (Schmahmann, 2004, p. 19). All that is said about Ntshalintshali's artwork is

> In her *Self-Portrait* (1991)...Bonnie Ntshalintshali represents herself at the worktable. A series of colourful and highly decorated works, typical of her output, are on the depicted table that is in turn positioned on a black-and-white linoleum floor.

There is no mention of the strategy of self-representation that Ntshalintshali uses in the work. The work is not considered as transgressive nor does it have any merit as a conceptualised piece of art. It is an example of the attempted acceptance of blackwomen into the art domain. This short passage on Ntshalintshali follows a statement made about the shortage of black women artists in South Africa.

In addition to Schmahmann's and Arnold's books, South African women artists have been discussed in light of the feminist strategies that they employ in their works. Unlike Schmahmann's and Arnold's books, these articles are however merely features in books that tackle issues broader than feminism. For instance, Emma Bedford (2004, pp. 76-78) in *A Decade of Democracy*, makes a point of discussing Tracey Rose and her use of self-insertion in her work. Other discussions about South

African women artists, including Tracey Rose and Berni Searle, allude, overtly or covertly, to the feminist strategies utilised by South African women artists (Coombes, 2004; Jamal, 2004). Unfortunately, none of these texts discuss black women artists in light of black feminism. When some, such as Schmahmann, mention the difficulties that black women artists have to face in comparison to white women artists (2004; 19), they do not take it further by discussing how black women have overcome these obstacles, if they have overcome them at all. There is, therefore, a limited reading of South African black women's work using the lens of black feminism.

If we take into account Pam Allara's[20] sentiments on this topic, it's safe to state that the existence of feminism in South African art history is questionable. Allara taught South African students on her short visits to the country and she found that the word 'feminism' was regarded with scepticism by her class. Allara (2008, p. 53) states that:

> When I first arrived in South Africa in 2000, on assignment in part to teach feminist theory, I was told by my students that feminism was not considered relevant; it was an import, and could not address the complicated conditions of the apartheid and post-apartheid struggles. The students had no trouble with the term 'women's right', however, which was an indication of battles, often semantic, that surround political correctness.

In *Leora Farber's A Room of her Own: Feminist Performance as Class Play*, Allara discusses Farber's work, *A Room with a View*, as a feminist work. It is important to note how Allara discusses the work as feminist, without shying away from the label and its implications.

Allara criticises the lack of activism inherent in contemporary feminism that has become tired and lifeless. She argues that in her "opinion, much of contemporary feminist art has become dogmatic; the activist mindset that generated it- the spirit of protest against patriarchal oppression- has evaporated" (2008, p. 56). Allara ascribes this to contemporary education institutions: "The artists, scholars and curators we taught have all proven to be 'good girls', producing knowing work designed

[20] Pamela Allara is a feminist professor from the American Brandeis University. She came to South Africa in 2000 as part time associate professor in the Department of Fine Arts at Rhodes University.

to generate a good grade" (2008, p. 56). Allara alludes to the fact that the stigma associated with the feminist discourse sometimes comes from university lectures. The result is that university students learn to hate feminism. When feminism is sneered at like this, it is not a surprise that these same institutions are not producing black feminist art historians.

This suspicion of feminism has taken root in other locales. Take, for example, comments from an interview between two American feminist artists, Collette Copeland and Coco Fusco (2008, p. 4). Copeland is infuriated by how the term feminism has become 'a dirty word'. She wonders why young women are unwilling to associate themselves with what she calls the 'f' word (that is, feminism). Fusco (2008, pp. 4-5) suggests that the stigma around feminism is not new and that the movement has never been acceptable to all women. They further argue that the scepticism about feminism exists despite a lack of knowledge that people have about the movement. Perhaps it was ignorance of feminist studies that stoked hatred towards feminism.

Autobiography as a Black Feminist Strategy

Autobiography enables women to represent themselves and their bodies, and in so doing, dismantle structures that did not permit them to write themselves into patriarchal history (Perreault, 1995; Adams, 1996). It has been adopted by feminist artists as a strategy that enabled women to have a say in the representation of their own bodies, identities and selves. Laurie Schneider Adams (1996, p. 101) discusses the biographical approach in art history, which can be extended to autobiography, as "a method…of art in relation to the artist's life and personality." In the biographical and autobiographical approach, "the meaning of a work, its conception and execution, is seen as ultimately determined by the artist" (Adams, 1996, p. 101). In such cases, there is an emphasis on the author. With regard to feminism, importance is given to the woman author who has gained grounds on which to insert herself into her own work, and therefore into the histories of art.

Applying a feminist strategy of autobiography in reading and writing Searle's and Rose's work could be enabling, particularly from a black feminist perspective. Their artwork shows evidence of the use of autobiography, which allowed (black) women[21] to insert themselves inside their art works. While reclaiming their subjectivity through this self-insertion and centralising their own bodies, black women also question, disrupt and subvert patriarchal structures by occupying the same representational spaces that have been reserved for men. In this regard, the body functions as a subject and a site through which some women contest their subjection.

Rose's and Searle's work should be studied in light of such theorising of the body in performance art, as they also make use of their own bodies in their artistic representations. Jones and Stephenson have dubbed such theorising *Performing the Body/Performing the Text* (1999), a theorising that speaks to Perreault's theorising of *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (1995) which describes autography as a form of 'self- writing' and 'self-insertion'. Perreault (1995, p. 2) suggests that:

> The feminist texts affected by this process of self writing make the female body of she who says 'I' a site and source of written subjectivity, investing that individual body with the shifting ethics of a political, racial and sexual consciousness.

In postcolonial discourses, previously reinforced structures that marginalised certain groups and excluded them from attaining power are disrupted and decentred. Postcolonialism examines the limited opportunities that were available to the colonised. In such colonial institutions, as Gayatri Spivak (1994) has argued, the colonisers had the means and power to write themselves into history. The colonised were denied the power to write themselves into that same history and were ultimately (mis)represented by the coloniser. Autobiography, therefore, aims to include in history

[21] As mentioned above, feminists of all races have made use of autobiography as a strategy. For the purpose of this paper, I am looking at how autobiography is used in discussions on black feminism.

the voices of the previously colonised, in this instant black people and women, who suffered race and gender based discrimination. This strategy gives women the platform to write their own histories according to their own voices and perspective.

Black feminism forwards the notion of autobiography through self-insertion- this ability to intervene is generated from consciousness of self. Through autobiography, black women are able to mobilise their subjectivity which is essential in redressing their previously marginalised and muffled voice. Rose's and Searle's use of the autobiographical strategy in their artworks enables them to render themselves visible and give themselves voice to be heard in a patriarchal, white male dominated structure.

The history of artists' biographies began with Vasari's recordings in *Live of the Artists*[22] (Vasari, 1998). Through biographies and autobiographies, artists were granted immortality and took on the forms of deities. The intention of these methods is to preserve the names of artists and to enable an association with their works. This (self-) insertion in history allows artists to be remembered. In addition to the deification of artists, Vasari deifies himself by inserting himself in history through his self-writing, (that is, his autobiography). In the same light, black women artists use similar autobiographical methods to write themselves into contemporary art histories.

Autoethnography as a Black Feminist Strategy

Autoethnography is on the same continuum as autobiography; while autobiography is concerned with the self, autoethnography foregrounds the self within the artists' cultural context. Nicholas Holt (2003, p. 2) describes autoethnography as 'a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context." Berni Searle and Tracey Rose make

[22] Vasari wrote biographies of artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Sofonisbo Anguiscuiola.

use of this strategy as they insert themselves through their bodies and identities into a culturally constructed womanhood. Holt (2003, p. 2) further asserts that

> by writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's [or artist's] voice is not included in the presentation of findings [or final art product]".

Rose and Searle defy these limited notions of the artist's silent voice by being present in their own works through the inclusion of their bodies. As such, the two artists comply with Tierney's (cited by Holt, 2003, p. 5) proclamation that

> ...autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflexive response, representational spaces that have marginalised those of us at the boarders.

Although equally important and useful in a search for self-identity and self-consciousness, autobiography as a strategy concentrates solely on the self while autoethnography relates the self to its cultural context[23].

Sophie Perryer (2003) has argued that, "Searle's work is routinely discussed in relation to the racial binaries that scar South African history." While Searle's work has sometimes been discussed as feminist, the general consensus has been to discuss her work in relation to her race, and not her gender. Liese van der Watt (2004, p. 24) suggests that, "Searle's art is less about the politics of race than about what Jane Blocker has described in her reading of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta's work as 'the life long process of coming to terms with the estrangement that is the soul of identity'".

[23] Although I mention both Tracey Rose and Berni Searle next to each other, I do not intend to promote a generic black woman identity. I acknowledge the plurality and diversity of black women's identities and experiences. As two black women artists working in the contemporary South African art scene, they experience and forward their autobiographies differently. For the purpose of this chapter, I merely intend to point out the fact that they both make use of this strategy. The manners in which they do so will be unpacked in the following chapters.

I want to add that in the identity process that Searle explores, a reading of autobiography is still possible. While the above mentioned texts often acknowledge the feminism inherent in Searle's work, they seldom consider her use of autobiography. It is Hassan's (2002, p. 26), Jones' (2004, p. 29) and Bedford's (2004, pp. 76-78) texts wherein Rose's and Searle's use of the strategy of autobiography, in the form of self-insertion, is acknowledged. Coombes (2004, p. 258) acknowledges Rose's use of autobiography, saying:

> Her use of autobiography enables her to tell of this secret complicity and to own it as 'hers,' but in addition, the device of employing a 'proxy', who is physically responsible for the exposure of this complexity, ensures that this action (being once removed from Rose) also become an effective means of signalling a larger complexity. In other words, the autobiographical mode produces an air of authentic lived experience without simply being reducible to Rose's individual experience.

It is for this foregoing argument that employing black feminist theory in the analysis of their artworks will begin to address the gap in the production of knowledge and contestation of ideas in South African art.

Chapter 2: Berni Searle's *Snow White*

Introduction

Black South African women have used their bodies as a subversive strategy in their artworks. By using media such as performance, photography, video and installation, black artists such as Tracey Rose, Berni Searle, Nandipha Mntambo, Zanele Muholi and Dineo Bopape, among others, have produced works that challenge images of codified, heteronormative black women's bodies. They employ strategies that aim to decode the subordination of black women which has been put in place by a white, apartheid patriarchy and its imperialist forebears.

In the performance, *Snow White* (2001) (**FIGURE 1)**, Berni Searle has adopted black feminist discourses by investigating the ways in which the black body has been treated historically and how it is treated in contemporary culture. Searle makes use of her own nude[24] black body to open up discussions about the portrayal of black women's bodies in the arts.

In this chapter, I will look at how the ubiquity of European fairytales has affected how we perceive beauty in contemporary society. I will investigate how the princesses in fairytales such as *Snow White* have promoted a white feminine beauty as the ideal beauty. I will also consider how nudity or nakedness has been employed as forms of protest by women in contemporary South African art, as well as in pre 1994 South Africa as a form of political activism.

[24] Kenneth Clark (1956, p. 1) differentiates between nudity and nakedness by saying: "The English language, with its elaborate generosity, distinguishes between naked and the nude. To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes and the word implies some of the embarrassment which most of us feel in that condition. The word nude, on the other hand, carries, in education usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of balanced, prosperous and confident body."

By making use of her body and her experiences, Searle makes use of autobiography to insert herself as a speaking and visible subject in art history. She makes use of her nakedness to assert her subjectivity and agency in a manner reminiscent of black feminist strategies used in America in the 1960s to date. She accomplishes this by performing a particular constructed identity in her video.

Berni Searle's Biography

Berni Searle is a black/coloured[25] South African performance artist. Born in Cape Town in 1964, Searle received her Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts from the University of Cape Town in 1987. She later went on to do her Higher Diploma in Education in 1988 and an Advanced Diploma in Fine Arts in 1991. She completed her Masters Degree in Fine arts in 1995; since then she has been exhibiting in solo and group exhibitions both locally and internationally. Searle's biographical background- her birthplace and education- informs the work that she produces. Exploring Searle's work from a black feminist point of view requires an acknowledgement of identity politics that are gender, race, and class specific. These three points have informed Searle's continual use of her racialised and gendered black body in her video performances and photography.

Searle's repertoire of works that deal with race and gender are numerous, and, "[with] titles such as *Discoloured*, *Colour Me, Colour Matters, A Darker Side of Light, Off-White,* and *Snow White*, one cannot ignore the barbed play on racial categories and classification" (2003, p. 24). For instance, the images in *Colour Me* (1998/1999) "draw attention to the role of the spice in exoticising and exorcising a black presence in South Africa's colonial past" (Baderoon, 2006, p. 13).

[25] Under apartheid in South Africa, people were classified under different races: Black, Coloured, Indian and White. Beyond these four classifications, there were two main groups that differentiated white people from the rest: White and non-White. If one were to follow the latter classification, then Coloured and Indian people will be classified as non-White. In contemporary culture, most non-White races, including coloured and Indian, are loosely classified as Black.

In most of her works, Searle explores how we are often confined to a racialised existence because of the classifications based on skin tone/colour. By covering her body with red, orange and white spices, as is the case in *Discoloured* (1999-2000), she explores how our skin colours, or perhaps racial classifications, can be malleable and indeterminate- she accomplishes this by alternating the colours of the spices on her own skin.

A Description of the *Snow White* Video

Another work in which Searle covers her skin with different co;lours, in this case white flour, is '*snow white'. Snow White* (2001) is a dual DVD projection that was commissioned by Olu Oguibe and Salah Hassan for the show *Authentic/Ex-Centric* at the forty-ninth Venice Biennale in 2001. The work comprises two video projections that show simultaneously. They present the same action recorded from two different positions.

The projection begins with Searle kneeling naked on the ground in a dark room. There is a spotlight that lands in a circular shape around her body. Seconds later, white flour swiftly pours from a position above her head and lands lightly on her exposed body and on the floor. Once the flour has ceased to fall from above, Searle bends her head and removes the flour that has settled on her head, thighs and shoulders- the flour falls onto the floor. From the floor, Searle accumulates the flour and forms a cone like structure. Thereafter, water drops onto the floor from a position above Searle's head- it produces a water droplet sound in the process. Searle then mixes the water and flour together to form dough on the floor. She finally shapes the dough into an approximately 60 centimetre strip. From here, Searle tears pieces of the dough and violently throws the pieces onto the floor. She mixes the dough again and forms another long strip on the floor. She then kneels back in her initial position and waits for the camera to fade out.

The second video recorder is positioned above Searle's head. From here, one experiences a surreal and abstract view of Searle's performative body. From this position, more white flour is visible on the subject. Searle's face is, however, out of view. Unlike the frontal camera angle where her entire face is visible to the viewer, her facial identity has been concealed in the second projection.

Investigating *Snow White* Fairytales

Berni Searle's *Snow White* is a direct reference to the European fairytale, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Made famous by Disney's animated films, the original tale is based on a story of a Queen who prays to have a daughter with "skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as ebony"[26] (The Grimm Bothers cited in Hurley, 2005, p. 223). In her text, *Seeing White: Children of Colour and the Disney Fairytale*, Eastern University Professor of Education Dorothy Hurley (2005) investigates how she thinks teaching European fairytales to black American children negatively impacts their self image. Hurley argues that there has been a difference in the symbolic use of colour in original fairytales (such as those by the Grimm Bothers), and Disney movie versions of the same stories. I will expand on this below. In the original fairytales, Hurley (2005, p. 223) suggests that whiteness is often equated with goodness. This recalls Umberto Eco's opening remark in his *On Beauty* (2004, p. 223) in which he says that "it seems that what is beautiful is the same as what is good". The statement is based on the fact that "Beautiful", among other words, "is an adjective that we often employ to indicate something that we like".

In discussing "Ugliness" in relation to Beauty, Eco (2004, p. 133) suggests that, "Various aesthetic theories, from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, see Ugliness as the antithesis of Beauty, a discordance

[26] The Queen later falls pregnant and gives birth to a 'beautiful' daughter. The Queen dies soon thereafter and the king marries another woman. As Snow White grows up, she becomes more beautiful, which makes her stepmother jealous of her. As a result of her jealousy, the new Queen sends her servant to kill Snow White, *sans* success.

that breaks the rules of that proportion...on which both physical and moral beauty is based, or lack of something that a creature should by nature possess.". Accordingly, for beauty to exist there had to be something to measure it against- and that was ugliness.

While whiteness in original fairytales was associated with goodness, as Hurley suggests, ugliness was not equated with blackness[27]. However, in Disney versions of the fairytales, "a binary color symbolism that associated white with goodness and black with evil" was more obvious (Hurley, 2005, p. 224). To indicate the "binary colour symbolism in *Snow White* fairytales, Hurley (2005, p. 225) says

> The black and white symbolism in the Disney versions is pervasive and powerful, For example, the *Snow White* (Disney, 1937) features a wicked queen dressed in *black* who lives in a *black* forest containing *black* bats and *black* owls. Moreover, the wicked Queen has a *black* crow like bird perched in a human skull. In the end, the film implies that the wicked queen is devoured (off screen) by *black* vultures. Even the poisonous apple turns *black* to symbolise what lies within before turning red again. On the other hand, Snow White is surrounded by *white* birds, the Prince appears in a *white* horse; Snow White is laid to rest (when presumed dead) on *white* flowers holding a bouquet of *white* flowers before the Prince returns to rescue her and they ride off on his *white* horse towards the (sic) his *white* castle.
>
> (My emphases)

In the end, children (of all colours) who end up reading and watching these fairytales "see 'white' [people] as good,[and] living happily" (Hurley, 2005, p. 225).

Perhaps it was with this in mind that black American feminist artist Carrie Mae Weems, parodied the *Snow White* fairytale. In *Ain't Joking* (1978-1988) **(IMAGE 27)**, Weems stares into a (magical) mirror and asks it who the fairest of them all is[28]. Below the image, Weems includes the following text:

[27] Reasons for this could be that during the tale's inception, blackness had not yet been perceived (by colonial systems as was the case later) as inferior to whiteness.
[28] In the *Snow White Fairytale,* the evil Queen asks her magical mirror "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, who's the fairest of them all". The mirror would always reply that Snow White was the fairest of them all.

> Looking into the mirror, the black woman asked, "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, who's the finest of the all? The mirror answered, "Snow White, you black bitch, and don't you forget it.

Weems, like Searle, depicts how the *Snow White* fairytale has been used to canonise idealised white female beauty. Black women are excluded from that idealised beauty.

It is essential to acknowledge that black people (or people of other races that are not white) do not feature in these European fairytales in the same way that white people do not feature in African folktales. However, this "should not be read as sinister, since these tales, with the exception of Aladdin, are all in fact European tales and it is logical that European characters should be represented graphically as white" (Hurley, 2005). However, European fairytales have become globalised through global education systems and the dominance of white cultures. Due to their distribution to various parts of the world, European fairytales are read (or seen in Disney movies) by children of different races and cultures. It is when these images are perpetually presented to black children as paragons of beauty, goodness, and happiness that the situation begins to look sinister.

Fairytale books are often accompanied by visual representations. In the case where colour illustrations are used, the characters are white (Hurley, 2005, p. 224). Therefore, children are not only exposed to the themes in the texts, they are also presented with imagery of the white beautiful and good people who experience happy ever afters[29].There are, however, fairytales that feature black women protagonists[30], however miniscule their presence. Their existence cannot surpass the ubiquitous image of the white princess.

[29] To illustrate this point, Hurley (2005, p. 224) refers to Disney's publication, *Princess: The Essential Guide* (2003). She is awed by the imagery of the princesses, who are all white, on the book's front cover. She states: "The presentation was visually striking; however, to realize that for the child of African heritage, not one of these Disneyfied princesses came close to resembling her."

[30] These include John Mufaro's *Beautiful Daughters* (1987), San Souci's *Talking Eggs* (1989), Virginia Hamilton's *Her Stories!* (1995) and Shearer's versions of *Snow White* and *Cinderella* (1990 and 1992), which feature black princesses instead of white ones.

Berni Searle thus explores the manner in which people of races other than the white race have attempted to attain white attributes. By titling her work *Snow White*, she foregrounds the problems inherent in the ubiquity of these fairytales. Her work can be read as opposing the perception that white people are inherently good, and that black people are inherently bad. In reading Searle's work, which stresses racial differences, one has to bear in mind that the celebration of the ideal (that is white beauty) happens through denigrating blackness. This strategy of placing importance on whiteness is one of colonialism's insidious strategies. bell hooks (1992, p. 2) observes how black people have been taught to self-hate, mainly through derogatory, stereotypical imagery of blackness. She asserts that everyone living in white supremacist societies (including black and white people) has been taught to "devalue blackness" while simultaneously "[overvaluing] whiteness" (1992, p. 12). The result of this is that black people undergo dramatic means to attain whiteness (as I argued below). It is arguably for reasons of a devalued blackness that Searle, through an artistic representation, chooses to cover her black body with whiteness.

Feminine beauty ideals whose foundation is whiteness still persist today. White notions of skinny female blonde beauties have become globalised; even black models based in America and Europe such as Tyra Banks and Naomi Campbell have some of those defining attributes. Referring to Somali-born model, Iman, former South African model and actress Nakedi Ribane (2006, p. 23) says that: "Even though she is African she conforms to what Europeans regard as the epitome of beauty- tall and svelte, with lovely skin, sharp nose, high cheekbones and long, silky mane." It is because of this ongoing issue that most black activist movements aim to promote a positive image of black people as a way of dismantling their oppression. hooks (1992) proposes that one of the ways in which people can attain freedom is to start *Loving Blackness*, as the title of her paper suggests. Similarly, the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa celebrated African beauty, among other African

or black attributes[31] (Biko, 2004, p. 53). Searle's work suggests that if black people were content with their blackness, or even proud of it, they would not look up to whiteness to the extent that they would want to change the pigmentation of their skins to white.

Investigating the Ideal Body and Ideal Beauty (in the Arts)

The human body has been examined in different ways in the arts. It has often been categorised according to notions of the beautiful and the ugly (Eco, 2004; Nuttall, 2006), the ideal and the grotesque (Pitts, 2003). Reading the body according to these binary classifications has posed numerous problems. Depending on who holds the power in a given society, and therefore dominates knowledge production and the means of representation, subordinated groups could be portrayed as ugly and grotesque while the powerful can represent themselves as beautiful and possessing the ideal[32]. The result is a negative imaging of oppressed bodies- those of black women and black men, for example.

Sarah Nuttall (2006) explores "the unpredictability, mutability and volatility of beauty and its relationship to ugliness in Africa and its intersections with the world." She argues that, "Beauty in Africa...has an ugly history" (Nuttall, 2006, p. 8). Reasons for this include "the inscription of Africa in dominant Western aesthetic discourse as the figure of the ugly" (Nuttall, 2006, p. 9). Nuttall (2006, p. 9) posits:

> Racist accounts, widely accepted into the time of European colonisation and beyond, present the African continent as the metaphor *par excellence* for physical ugliness and moral decay. According to these accounts, ugliness and decay were particularly visible in the black body, which was nothing more than a mass of organs lacking in form and self-awareness.

[31] Biko (2004, p. 53) asserts that Black Consciousness "seeks to infuse the black community with new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value system, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life."
[32] In *Can the Subaltern Speak*, postcolonialist Gayatri Spivak (1994, p. 71) contests "the structural principle of a dispersed and dislocated class subject: the (absent collective) consciousness of the small peasant proprietor class finds its 'bearer' in a 'representative' who appears to work in another's interest."

When one looks at the representation of the ideal female beauty in the arts, one is often limited to the nudes that have been popular during the Renaissance. The art history that is part of university curriculum was, after all, conceived in Europe; it is only natural that only white bodies are prominent[33]. It becomes problematic, however, when these images become pervasive outside of its original European context. The history of art taught in Western-style academia parades images of white female nudes as the ideal; black women are seldom seen[34].

As the image of the white female ideal is what we are often presented with as the universal ideal, some black women aspire to acquire it so that they are seen as beautiful or successful. Black women often look up to whiteness as a means of finding acceptance. Berni Searle's depiction of racial discomfort, racial transformation and racial discrimination can be linked to this black experience in relation to whiteness. Representing a complete state of desperation, Searle showers her body with a metaphor of whiteness (represented by the flour that falls from a position above her head). The intention, to my mind, is to cover herself with whiteness; this is similar to black women who use skin-lightening creams. Could one read Searle's act as a melodramatic metaphor of the bleaching of the black body? One could read this as Searle's simultaneous negation and ridiculing of a culture that has placed so much importance and capital on whiteness.

Searle's attempt to whiten her body does not, of course, change the pigmentation of her skin. In fact, efforts to transform her voluptuous, not so tall self into an ideal feminine beauty are ineffectual, if not completely disastrous. Her efforts to possess elements of a white identity- or perhaps the privileges that accompany whiteness- ultimately transform her into a ghost-like, grotesque, non-human being devoid of any identity.

[33] There are a few art historical publications that look at the inclusion of black people in Western art. Most notably, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Cambridge, 1979), which comes in four volumes, explores this subject.

[34] There are historically some portraits of black women's bodies. Examples include Jules-Robert Auguste's *Portrait of a Nude*, and most of Paul Gauguin's portraits of dressed or undressed Tahitian women.

Likewise, some black women who use skin-lightening creams[35] to 'whiten' themselves end up with blemished faces as a result of the dangerous Hydroquinone and other chemicals that are used in the creams (Ribane, 2006, p. 51). Bernie Searle thus explores the issue of placing so much value on whiteness to the point of actually trying to be white. Unfortunately, we still live in a society where lighter skinned, black women are perceived as more beautiful than darker skinned women[36]. Today, the straight, long, shiny hair extensions (known as weave) industry is possibly making millions from black women who adore "white" hair[37].

The Black Female Nude and the Appropriated Gaze

> *Since antiquity, the nude female has been understood, by and large, as a passive creature. She reclines or poses placidly in a pastoral setting or in a domestic interior for the benefit of an often unseen but variably assumed male viewer. Her eyes are either modestly averted or shyly welcoming, and she offers herself up as a feast for the male gaze. Passive, receptive, and available, she is presented as sexual spectacle- an invitation to voyeurism, lacking individuality, cognition, or the ability to act decisively.*
>
> Lisa Farrington (2004, p. 15)

The use of the white female nude in the arts has long been identified by feminists as one way of objectifying women's bodies for the titillation of the male gaze (Farrington, 2004; Schmahmann, 2004; Parker & Pollock, 1987; Pollock, 1996). Black feminist discourse argues that, "Despite the abundance of nude figures in Western art, the black body has been virtually invisible within this

[35] Skin lightening creams, which were all banned in the early 1990s in South Africa because of health hazards, include Metamorphosis, Artras, Butones, Ambis, Highlights and Super Roses.
[36] If a dark black woman is thought to be beautiful, she is called a 'dark beauty' to indicate that she is not the normal, light, beauty.
[37] The politics of black hair are much more complex than what I have stated here. While my perception is one way of perceiving the reason behind black women's wearing long and straight hair extensions, it can also be argued that in contemporary culture, black women have gained their subjectivity and agency. They therefore have the abilities to choose whichever hairstyle they wish to wear. For a more extensive argument on the politics of hair, see Zimitri Erasmus' *Oe! My Hare Gaan Huistoe! Hairstyling as Black Cultural Practice* (1997) and Chris Rock's movie, *Good Hair* (2009).

context" (Farrington, 2004, p. 19). It has not always been like this. In the 19th century, black women's nude bodies entered Western visual culture in anthropological photographs. An example is the portrayal of the clothed or unclothed black woman body in postcards in the 1990s (Geary, 2008). This register cannot leave out the early 19th century exhibition of Sarah Bartmann's near naked body in Britain and France (Crais & Sally, 2009; Gqola P. D., 2010; Holmes, 2007; Magubane, 2001) nor Josephine Baker's early 20th century use of her half naked body in French performances (Coly, 2008).

Black feminists both in Africa and the diaspora have produced many works that look at the way black women's bodies are portrayed in the arts. Rene Cox's *Back Baby* (2001), Alison Saar's *Sable Venus* (2003), and Wangechi Mutu's *Double Fuse* (2003) all subvert the objectification of the bodies of black women. Searle and Cox (among other artists) make use of their own nudity to subvert patriarchal structures that have been used to oppress black women. Women's use of their own bodies in their artworks could be read as their means of subverting the singular, omnipresent male gaze (Schmahmann, 2004).

While historically it was white men who gazed at the white female nude, a lot has changed in contemporary art practice. Firstly, women artists have begun to determine the manner in which their bodies are represented in the arts. They accomplish this by becoming the artists that represent their own bodies. Brenda Schmahmann (2004, p. 7) critiques the portrayal of women as objects and men as subjects in visual representations by male artists. She discusses how South African women artists employ strategies of self-representation to mobilise their subjectivity and agency. By foregrounding women's presence in visual imaging as subjects, these strategies involve the use of their bodies to challenge patriarchal representations that objectify women. Schmahmann asserts that

> [Women] artists have frequently produced self-portraits that challenge and interrogate ideas that creativity and subjectivity are, by definition, masculine. Many women artists in

> South Africa, like those elsewhere, have sought ways of allowing their representations of self to emphasise that they are in fact speaking subjects.

In *Snow White,* Berni Searle makes use of these appropriating strategies by using her naked body to insert herself as a speaking subject. She has transformed her body into a site through which she can contest the previous subjugation of women[38]. She simultaneously opens up different reading of her numerous identities. By so doing, Searle indicated that her identity as a woman is not set- she is a fluid human being who performs multiple roles in society. By using postcolonial and feminist strategies, the objectification of women's bodies has been disrupted by introducing a different gaze- that of the black woman and man and that of the white woman (hooks, 1992)[39]. The white man is no longer the sole spectator of the arts, today women are also acknowledged as spectators and buyers of art (Pollock, 2003; Berger, 1977). In *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators*, bell hooks (1992, p. 115) explores how black women have also become spectators of art. She asserts that "[there] is power in looking" and black women have historically been denied that power to look. In reading Searle's work, one is conscious of this gaze, which in this case is neither exclusively male nor white. Searle's work can be viewed by spectators of any gender, race and class in contemporary South Africa and beyond.

The Black Female Nude as a Form of Protest

Black women's nude/naked bodies have also been used in settings other than the arts to challenge patriarchal, oppressive structures (Coombes, 2004, p. 254). This anecdote is instructive: on the 12th of July 1990, a troop of South African Police was sent to demolish illegal squatter houses in

[38] Lisa Farrington (Farrington, 2004, p. 19) suggests that: "When a woman paints the female nude, whether it be her own body or that of a model, there often exists a self-referential fluency that allows for a more expansive and less trivialized 'gaze'. The artist becomes the object of her own self-reflexive desires as well as an active surveyor of her own body (in the case of the self portrait), or of a cognate body with which she identifies. This creative art contradicts and counteracts the presence of the male artist-viewer".

[39] The title of hooks' book, *Black Looks,* does not only allude to the image of black people. It alludes also to the fact that black people are also capable of looking at various kinds of visual representations.

Dobsonville. The women occupants had been waiting for the government to provide them and their families with houses (Mentjies, 2007, p. 347). Their names had been on waiting lists for a long period of time. Two weeks prior to the protest, the women (in an act of activism) occupied a piece of land which belonged to a mining company. It was there that they settled their shacks illegally. After numerous warnings from the government to evacuate the area, and an unrelenting response from the settlers, the police came barring "tear gas, dogs, a caspir and a bulldozer" (Mentjies, 2007, p. 347). The aim was to demolish the newly constructed shacks. The women of the community stood their ground against the police by taking their clothes off as a form of protest. Mentjies describes this scenario as follows:

> As the police moved to dismantle their shacks, the younger women shack dwellers stripped off their clothes, taunted the police, ululated, shouted in anger about their plight and their pain, sang and danced, and held up printed placards demanding homes and security tenure.

The women of Dobsonville made use of their half-naked bodies to challenge a patriarchal system that had denied them the basic right to shelter. In an exhibitionist strategy[40], the women drew attention to themselves and their bodies as a way of disallowing further oppression. They also determined the manner in which their bodies were viewed (I argue that they aimed to instigate shame from their male observers)[41] by the authoritative male gaze.

The police at the Dobsonville protest left without demolishing the shacks or harming any of the women protesters. This brings into question the perception of black women's bodies that render them a threat once they are exposed in an unconventional manner or space. Nakedness is arguably

[40] Exhibitionism is a term that refers to "the art of exposing the body, or part of it, particularly the genitals" (Baunach, 2009). The act of exhibiting one's naked body in public is perceived to be public indecency, and can lead to arrest. Reasons could be that some of form of exhibitionism is sometimes sexually motivated (Freund, Rienzo, & Watson, 1988). Women have often used exhibitionism to shame groups of men into performing some form of social service (Baunach, 2009), as is the case with the Dobsonville women protesters.

[41] Mentjies (2007, p. 350) suggests that the women "used their bodies to shame the authorities into responding to their needs".

reserved for one's private space or home[42]. I argue that it is acceptable to encounter the naked body in contexts such as the arts. Following Kenneth Clark's differentiation between nakedness and nudity (1956), we tend to accept nudity (as in the form of the nude in the arts) but we do not accept nakedness (as in the form of the Dobsonville naked protest). The use of the black female body as a tool of political protest can thus be seen as a form of black feminist activism. It can also be seen as a means for women to forward their subjectivity and agency in order to fight for their rights, often against a patriarchy.

Conclusion

Berni Searle's work can be read from a black feminist point of view. I have indicated that Searle has made use of the autobiographical strategy of self-insertion in her work. She accomplished this by using her naked, black woman body to comment on issues of ideal beauty, the ideal body, as well as the issue of the black nude in the arts. Searle appropriates the *Snow White* fairytale, a tale whose origins were intended for a white audience, to tackle black women's issues. It is through ridiculing the fairytale that Searle subverts white feminine beauty ideals that exclude black women from being seen as beautiful. She also challenges the (white) patriarchal gaze that viewed women's bodies through demeaning, objectifying and victimising eyes.

I have read Searle's work from the perspective of a black feminist, a view that emphasises the intersections of race, class and gender. Coming from a middle class family that could afford Searle's higher education at the University of Cape Town in pre-1994 South Africa, Searle obviously does not experience her class oppression in the same way that lower class black women (like the Dobsonville

[42] Paradoxically, the women protesters would have been unable to 'get naked' in their private spaces (that is their homes) because the government had not provided them with houses. As a result of being symbolically robbed off their privacy, they decided to strip naked in public, in full view of the very structures that had robbed them off their privacy.

protestors) do. Be that as it may, the activism in Searle's work and the Dobsonville protests are informed by a strong sense of socio-economic and political injustice.

Chapter 3: Tracey Rose's *Ciao Bella*

Introduction

Tracey Rose's *Ciao Bella* (2001) is a triple DVD projection artwork that was produced for the 49th Venice Biennale. The work formed part of *The Plateau of Mankind*, which was the Biennale's main exhibition. When *Ciao Bella* came out, it was a signature performance artwork in South Africa. It is notable that Rose produced this work in a South African postcolonial[43] era. This period[44] marked the political end of censorship in the works of most black artists. Prior to 1994, some artists had to flee into exile[45] to produce works that subverted the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy[46] that was governed by the apartheid government.

In a postcolonial era, black artists could overtly explore and challenge the remnants of apartheid in the societies in which they lived. Rose's *Ciao Bella* is an autobiographical work that was influenced by her Catholic upbringing, class issues with historical overtones, and the gendered roles of women. By making use of different women archetypes from around the world (Sarah Bartmann, Josephine Baker, Mami Wata, the American mammy stereotype of black women, Queen Elizabeth and Cicciolina, to name a few), Rose explores the multiple identities that are inherent in women, identities that are often kept in check by patriarchy and conservative upbringings.

[43] I am discussing postcolonialism here as a time that was enabled by the first democratic elections in 1994.
[44] Periodisation is the process of putting things into periods. It is a convention used in the linear teleological writings of history in the West, and is problematic for numerous reasons. One of these is the idea that apartheid ended in 1994. I argue that an ideological apartheid persist not only in South Africa, but in many parts of the world.
[45] Many black artists, including Ernest Cole, Thami Mnyele and Dumile Feni went into exile due to the subversive nature of their works against the apartheid government.
[46] I have borrowed the phrase 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' from black feminist bell hooks (1992). I have used the phrase throughout the entire paper.

A Description of the *Ciao Bella* Video Projection

Ciao Bella **(FIGURE 11)** consists of three DVD projections that show simultaneously. They are placed next to each other and are meant to be read as one. The video comprises twelve women characters, all performed by Rose. The women are positioned on, behind, and around a stage-like table. Meghan Heur (2002, p. np) describes the video as having "no overarching narrative; it is a video collage as each character plays out her role, some dying, some becoming violent, some flying away, some writing in ecstasy".

Behind the table are the characters of the Boxer **(FIGURE 18)**, a Chinese doll **(FIGURE 13),** Sarah Bartmann **(FIGURE 15)**, the dual figure of Queen Elizabeth and/or Marie Antoinette (MAQE2) **(FIGURE 17)**, and the Bunny **(FIGURE 12)**. Seated or standing on the table are the nymphet Lolita **(FIGURE 15)**, the indeterminate guitar player **(FIGURE 18)**, Cicciolina the prostitute **(FIGURE 14)**, the mermaid/Mami Wata **(FIGURE 12),** a cheerleader and a silhouette **(FIGURE 19)** on the far right of the table- the silhouette transforms into many different characters, including Josephine Baker. The last character is that of Mami **(FIGURE 22)**, who gives a speech at the beginning and end of the work.

Mami opens the performance by giving a parodied speech of William Shakespeare's "All the World's a Stage" from *As You Like It.* Throughout the duration of the performance, the twelve characters perform their stereotypical personas. The boxer, with the letters "Lovemefuckme" **(FIGURE 5)** written on her boxing gloves destructively beats her face up. The Chinese doll stands behind the table and reads from a book. The Bunny character amusingly goes up and down from behind the table, revealing her head and bent hands that are placed in front of her face. The Marie Antoinette and/or Queen Elizabeth II character (MAQEII) cuts and dishes up chocolate cake onto saucers. The cheerleader moves her pompoms in the motions of a rehearsed cheer. Sarah Bartmann stands naked on the far left hand side of the stage/table- she faces in the opposite direction. She is later

hung by the neck with a rope that appears above her head and is pulled out of frame with the rope. Bartmann later reappears on the table, when she has grown wings that look like chandeliers **(FIGURE 16)**; she then flies away into the horizon as she transforms into a piece of meat.

On the table, adding depth to the video is Lolita. Lolita is heard speaking to what Rose describes as Lolita's 'schizophrenic' self (Rose, 2010), "What big eyes you have", to which her other self responds in a masculine voice, "You are so beautiful to me." The childlike and insecure nymphet proceeds to ask questions such as: "And tell me, are my toes too small?", "And tell me, are my fingers too short?", "And tell me, are my calves too thin?" To all the questions, her other self simply says: "You are so beautiful to me." Clearly dissatisfied with the responses she has received, an angry Lolita, in destruct mode, drops a glass as she descends the table and runs towards the screen, swearing at her other self, or perhaps at the viewer (**FIGURE 20**). She runs back towards the table, hides under it, leaving her white underwear visible to the camera.

The guitar player's and Mami Wata's actions are minimal in comparison to the others'. The guitar player sits on the table and plays the guitar throughout the performance while Mami Wata looks into a mirror and fixes her hair. The silhouette, called Silhouetta, is situated on the far right hand side of the table. She transforms into many different women- she begins as a nun who morphs into an Indian with feathered headgear and then into Josephine Baker and finally into a cowgirl playing the guitar. The silhouettes are reminiscent of the silhouettes by black American feminist, Kara Walker; the silhouettes tackle the oppression of black women since slavery (Heuer, 2002, p. np). The Cicciolina character is seen crouching in a sexual manner at the centre of the table. Her legs are provocatively wide open, revealing a made-up, oversized red vagina **(FIGURE 14)**.

Performance as a Formation of Meaning and Identity

Women have used performance art[47] to insert themselves as speaking subjects into art history. MacKenny (2001, p. 5) suggests that "a performance artist exhibits her or himself, becoming both the subject and object of the work." Black women performance artists such as Trace Rose are therefore able to determine the manner in which their bodies are represented in their artworks. Through performance art, women use an autobiographical approach- they physically become a part of the artworks. By so doing, women artists "[blur] the distinction between artists/art, artist/model, constructor/constructed, finder/found, mind/body, subject/object" (MacKenny, 2001, p. 17). This disallows any subordinating representations that oppressive structures have often enforced on women's bodies, and in this particular case, black women's bodies.

Judith Butler (cited by Disch, 1999) asserts that "gender is performative". This can be understood to suggest that gender is an act. According to Disch (1999, p. 549), some critics dismissed Butler's statement as stripping feminism or women off their "selfhood, agency and autonomy". However, the meaning of the statement could be that gender is a construct and is not set. People in society arguably perform gendered constructs/roles that are taught to us by society. We are also reminded, throughout time, of the roles we need to perform in our particular genders (Disch, 1999, pp. 549-550). However, these gendered constructs can be unlearned. One of the ways in which to do this is through performance art or performativity.

Tracey Rose takes up different roles in her performance. Through performance and performativity, she represents the multiple identities that can be experienced by a single woman[48]. Artists such as the American Martha Wilson (cited by Wark, 2001, p. 48) realise that "artmaking [could be] an

[47] Performance art is an art movement which has its origins in America in the 1960s. Through this art form, artists questioned the value of the art object.

[48] Rose undeniably performs these identities and experiences in an art context and art representation. She does not experience her womanhood through all 12 archetypes in 'real' life.

identity making process". Wilson suggests that she has been refused any other identity except that which is prescribed by the patriarchy. Through taking up numerous identities in performance art, those boundaries of womanness can be blurred and ultimately restructured. Her identity as a woman is not set; she has the tools to inscribe and re-inscribe her subjectivity and agency as she so wishes.

Similarly, Eleanor Antin takes on different roles and shifts between numerous identities to structure and restructure her identity. By taking on the roles of a ballerina, a king, a black movie star, and a nurse in her works, Antin's performances can be read as theatrical, perhaps even a carnivalesque[49] act of the formations of numerous identities. The carnivalesque/masquerade strategy is echoed by Rose as she also takes on a theatrical element to her work. This is evident through her use of costume and the stage like table. In this regard, "performance [uses] disruptive strategies to reveal the multiplicity of selves required of women in daily lives" (Wark, 2001, p. 47).

Performance art was employed as a subversive art form for numerous reasons. American performance artist Cheri Gaulke, (cited in MacKenny, 2001, p. 1) proclaims that "in performance we [women] found an art that was young, without the tradition of painting or sculpture- without the traditions governed by men." Accordingly, women could establish themselves in that genre without having to deal with a possessive patriarchy frowning at the interlopers. Through performance, women artists could also step away from the male gaze. In a performance setting, the audience (the gaze, whether male or female, black or white) has to directly confront the subversive body. MacKenny (2001, p. 17) indicates that, "The idea of 'performing identity' highlights the presence of a viewer for whom the 'performance' is enacted". There has been a reversal of roles. While

[49] MacKenny (2001, p. 16) points out Helen Cixous' and Luce Irigaray's discourse about the 'masquerade' that allowed women to gain their subjectivity. She explains, "'masquerade' or 'masking' occurs when women play with their assigned gender roles in multiple, often contradictory ways- adopting, adapting, overlaying and subverting the hegemonic discourse in the process."

traditionally women have been depicted for men to look at, now women can look back. Performance art, particularly live performances, allows women to look back at the gaze that looks at them. In Rose's still of Lolita **(IMAGE 4),** the nymphet's gaze is reminiscent of the model's gaze in Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and *Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe* (1863). Manet's works, through the portrayal of the naked model that looks back at the viewer, arguably shifted the gaze in the arts from model to spectator. While John Berger (1977, p. 47) might suggest that women are aware of the male gaze, women have finally attained the means, through performance art, among other platforms, to return that gaze (hooks, 1992).

Tracey Rose's Catholic Reference in *Ciao Bella*

Tracey Rose was raised in a Catholic home (Rose, 2010; MacKenny, 2001). She has made use of the Catholic religion in most of her works to explore the issue of the Catholic God's omnipotence. For example, in *Ongetilde,* Rose explores how God is seen as the overseer of all the activities of all human beings[50]. Virginia MacKenny (2001, p. 20) describes this as follows: "Stemming directly from Rose's Catholic upbringing, the reference to penance and purging is an intensely personal one." Rose produced *Ciao Bella* at a stage in her life when she was questioning her Catholicism (Rose, 2010). In *Ciao Bella*, the stage or table on which the 12 characters are placed is based on Leonardo da Vinci's the *Last Supper* (1495-1498) **(FIGURE 26).** Da Vinci derived his subject matter of the *Last Supper* from the biblical and Christian Eucharist[51].

[50] The work consists of Tracey Rose standing naked in a "cramped bathroom, shaving all the hair from her person and letting it drop to the floor" (Jones K. , 2004, p. 12). There is a video camera placed in a high position (possibly the ceiling) in the bathroom. The viewer, playing God, oversees this whole performance in the assumed manner that God would oversee everything on earth.

[51] The Eucharist is the last meal (the Passover) that Jesus had with his disciples before he was betrayed by one of them (Judas Iscariot) (Hall, 1974, p. 188).

Da Vinci's representation of the meal is one of his famous works. In it, thirteen men (Jesus and his 12 disciples) are seated on a long table inside a room. Jesus is the focal point of the painting. He is seated at the centre with his twelve disciples conversing with him and with each other. Rose adopts the famous setting, but subverts da Vinci's subject matter to forward questions of womanly identities.

One cannot ignore the obvious replacement of the thirteen 'white' men in da Vinci's the L*ast Supper* with twelve[52] mixed race women in Rose's *Ciao Bella*. In *Ciao Bella*, the twelve women are placed in accordance to the setting in da Vinci's painting (Rose, 2010). From left to right, Mami represents Bartholomew, the Boxer is James son of Alpheus, and Sara Bartmann is Andrew. The youthful Lolita is Judas Iscariot. San Pedro (the guitarist) is Peter, Leona the China Doll is John, and Cicciolina is Thomas. MAQEII is James the Greater while Philip is represented by Bunny. Mami Wata is Matthew, Silhouetta is Judas son of Thaddeus, and Regina Coeli is Simon. The Jesus figure is missing in *Ciao Bella*; however, Rose stipulates that all the women represent Jesus (Rose, 2010).

Rose has referenced white European men to forward her feminist agenda. She has used da Vinci's famous painting to question notions of the male genius in the arts[53]. The idea of the male genius is partly based on the presumed notion of women's lack of intelligence. Women are seen as biologically inferior (de Beauvoir, 1997) while men are considered intellectually superior. Men, therefore, can be geniuses, while women cannot be (Jones A. , 1998, p. 152). This led Linda Nochlin to question the non-existence of the female genius in the arts (1988)[54]. Rose has appropriated both

[52] Although Tracey Rose plays each of the twelve characters in her work, I have referred to the work as consisting of different women.
[53] She also references a literary 'male genius', which is Shakespeare, in Mami's opening speech.
[54] Nochlin (1988, p. 153) states that: "'Why have there been no great woman artists?' points to major areas of intellectual obfuscation beyond the specific political and ideological issues involved in the subjection of women. Basic to the question are many naive, distorted assumptions about the making of art in general, as well as the making of great art. These assumptions, conscious or unconscious, link together such unlikely superstars as Michelangelo and van Gogh, Raphael and Jackson Pollock under the rubric of 'Great'- an

subject matter (13 white men) and medium (painting) that the white male genius (da Vinci) used in his work. This is reminiscent of American feminist Cindy Sherman's *History Portraits* series (1989-1990) in which she appropriated works by male artists, Ingres, Caravaggio and Raphael[55].

One other biblical reference in *Ciao Bella* is to menstruation; menstruation is a monthly biological occurrence involving bleeding that is experienced by women usually in their mid-teens to early fifties. The bible has specific rules with regard to menstruation which the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) refers to as 'un-cleanliness'. In Leviticus 15: 19-30, the following lengthy instructions are given in the King James edition of the Bible:

> And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. And every thing that she lieth upon in her separation shall be unclean: every thing also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sat upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And if it be on her bed, or on any thing whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even. And if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and all the bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean. And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean. (...) And on the eighth day she shall take unto her two turtles, or two young pigeons, and bring them unto the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her before the LORD for the issue of her uncleanness. (Leviticus 15, 19-30)

Women's menstrual blood in thus perceived in as abject[56] in the bible. As the above biblical statement suggests, women are seen as dirty and impure during their periods- they were not fit for

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honorific attested to by the number if scholarly monographs devoted to the artists in question- and the Great Artist is, of course, conceived as one who has 'Genius'; Genius, in turn, is thought of as an atemporal and mysterious power somehow embedded in the person of the Great Artist."

[55] In this works, Sherman makes a photographic and performative re-enactment of the 'old masters'' works. She references the subject matter in the 'old masters', copies the settings and poses as the subject (instead of object) in the work.

human contact. Anything they touched had to be avoided by others; otherwise they would also be rendered impure. After her period, a woman had to repent for her impurity and ask God for forgiveness.

This law is demeaning and prejudicial to women, turning them into a plague to be avoided. What is a natural monthly occurrence, crucial for reproduction, is turned into something to be ashamed of. The theme of menstruation is prominent in Rose's *Ciao Bella*. Clearly aware of the politics of menstruation that are portrayed in the bible, Rose makes use of the blood metaphor. Towards the end of the performance, the bunny character takes out a machine gun from underneath the table and shoots all the characters, except for Mami **(IMAGE 21)**. Blood splatters on the screen. Rose (2010) describes this part of the video as follows: "The end is a mass suicide. Essentially, they all have their period at the same time." Mami, who has avoided being shot, brings out newspapers and wipes the blood off the screen. She reveals the rest of the characters lying dead on the table. Later on, they all get 'resurrected[57]' (that is, they all wake up) and prepare to carry on with whatever activity they were doing before.

Rose appears to be drawing an analogy between the shedding of blood through violent death (Bunny shooting everyone) and the blood of menstruation. Unlike other feminists, such as Ana Mendieta, who make use of 'real' menstrual blood, Rose has instead constructed a set metaphor for menstrual blood. Other artists, such as Zanele Muholi, also make use of the menstrual blood metaphor in their works. In her photographic series **(IMAGE 24),** Muholi represents a person (presumably a women) wearing underwear that is stained with a red, blood-like substance. In this instance, the viewer is unsure whether the red substance is real menstrual blood or merely a

[56] *In Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas analyses the notion of defilement by referencing the bible. Her analysis of such notions of pollution formed the praxis of Julia Kristeva's analysis of the abject (Kristeva, 1982).
[57] As I mentioned above, Rose suggests that all the female characters in the work represent Jesus. After Jesus was captured and killed, he rose from the dead after three days. The resurrection of the twelve women could thus be connected to that of Jesus in the bible.

representation. Nonetheless, a readership that is based on the notion of the abject and the disgusting is invited.

Stereotyping Black Women's Imagery

There are various stereotypes of black women that are out there in the public domain perpetuating unflattering images of black women (hooks, 1992). Black feminists in the USA have argued against the portrayal of black women as "mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas" (Collins P. H., 2009, p. 76). Patricia Hill Collins (2009, p. 77) suggests that black women's "controlling images are redesigned to make racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of injustices appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable part of everyday life."

I will refer to two black women's stereotypical imagery as an introduction to the next sections. In the next sections, I explore how Rose has made use of the stereotypes. I will briefly speak about the black woman stereotype of the mammy and that of the jezebel or whore.

Mammy

The mammy stereotype stems from America. It is often an image of a black woman caregiver taking care of a white child. This particular image usually shows the black women happy or smiling as she cares for the white child. I would like to draw the reader's attention to the exploitative nature of domestic work (Collins P. H., 2009). Black women in these roles are often paid very little wages. The mammy stereotype could be deployed to control how black women should relate to white power. Collins (2009, p. 80) suggests that

> The mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all black women's behaviour. By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and 'family' better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perception of the ideal of Black female relationship to elite White male power.

In Rose's *Ciao Bella,* one experiences the maternal and care-giving nature of the Mami character. When Bunny shoots all the characters in the video, except for Mami herself, it is Mami who comes and cleans the blood on the screen.

Jezebel

The stereotype of the black woman as the whore still persists in the media[58]. Black women are often portrayed as promiscuous and overly sexualised (Collins P. H., 2009; hooks, 1992; Pilgrim, 2002). David Pilgrim (2002, np) suggests that

> Historically, white women, as a category, were portrayed as models of self-respect, self-control, and modesty- even sexual purity, but Black women were often portrayed as innately promiscuous, even predatory. This depiction of Black women is signified by the name Jezebel[59].

The image of women's bodies and sexuality has been equated to sexual animalism (hooks, 1992). bell hooks (1992, p. 66) suggests that black women's bodies gain attention when they are synonymous with accessibility, availability, that is when they are sexually deviant. The origins of oversexed black women's imagery in an American context[60] can be seen as stemming from slavery.

[58] It was initially the white patriarchy that enforced the images of the promiscuous black woman stereotype. Today, in the form of rap (and kwaito) music videos, as well as numerous movies, the black male patriarch are continuing this stereotypical tradition (hooks, 1992).

[59] Hall (1974, p. 170) describes the origins of Jezebel as "a forceful woman who, like lady Macbeth, schemed murder on her husband's behalf. An uprising of the defenders of Yahver was led by the warrior Jehu. On his coming to Jezreel, Ahba's capital, Jezebel arrayed herself as queen, having 'painted her eyes and dressed her hair'. He taunted him from the window. He ordered her to be thrown out and she dies in the street, trampled underfoot by his horses, her body eaten by dogs. She is depicted in the clutches of the eunuchs, about to be thrown out from the window."

[60] From a South African apartheid context, Christine Qunta (1987, p. 84) explains the reinforcement of the sexual oppression of black women's bodies by saying: "The violation of African women sexually and their alienation culturally are important mechanisms in the total subordination of the colonised African nation. On the one hand, sexual abuse of African women by European settler men is treated very leniently by both the police and the courts. These cases are rarely followed up by the police; where they are, the courts usually hand out very moderate fines or sentences, if the white defendant is found guilty. On the other hand, African men who rape white settler women are invariably sentenced to death or in a few exceptional cases, given other heavy sentences. Thus, a signal is sent out to the settler community in general, and settler men in particular, that African women are fair game. To African people, especially men, the message is that while their women can be defiled, settler women are sacrosanct and as such must not in any circumstance be tempered with by African men."

Lisa Farrington (2004, p. 16) says, "the stereotype of the sexually promiscuous black 'Jezebel' has its roots in the history of the sexual abuse of African women by slave traders and slave owners...Before even arriving in the new world, African woman were labelled promiscuous and lacking in morals by the very men who had raped them."

Sarah Bartmann and Josephine Baker: Othering and Sexualising Black Women's Bodies through Performance

Tracey Rose makes use of the image of Sarah Bartmann[61] (Venus Baartmann) and Josephine Baker (who is one of the interchangeable Silhouetta[62]) in her *Ciao Bella*. Both Bartmann and Baker are archetypal examples of black women's performativity through their bodies. As discussed above, performance art as a feminist strategy is beneficial to the assertion and insertion of women's subjectivity. However, in the case of Bartmann, she was forced[63] into performance profession by an exploitative white patriarchy. The name she was given, Hottentot Venus, could be read as a humorous form of oppression. Venus is the Roman "goddess of love and fertility" (Hall, 1974, p. 318). In Greek mythology, she is called Aphrodite. Pumla Gqola (2010, p. 62) argues that "renaming [Bartmann] as 'Hottentot Venus' was in line with a slavocratic 'humorous' tradition...which saw African house 'servants' (slaves) given classical Roman names". Gqola (2010, p. 63) sees the juxtapositioning of slave (Hottentot) and a goddess (Venus) as a "humorous idiom".

[61] Bartmann's name has been written differently by numerous writers. Pumla Gqola (2010, p. 66) uses the spelling "Sarah Bartmann" as she suggests that that is the manner in which her name was spelt on her baptismal certificate. I will adopt Gqola's spelling in my text. Please note that Rose spells the name 'Baartmann'.

[62] Rose borrowed Silhouetta from Ana Mendieta's Silueta performance/land art series of 1976.

[63] There are numerous debates as to whether Bartmann went to London, and later Paris, willingly (Gqola P. D., 2010). Some argue that she went willingly to London to seek a financial stability that she could never get in colonial South Africa (Holmes, 2007). Others have argued that she could not have willingly participated in her oppressive display, prostitution, and later alcoholism (Gqola P. D., 2001; Magubane, 2001).

In art history, numerous male artists, including Botticelli and Bronzino, have made use of the nude goddess[64]; she was seen as the ideal feminine beauty. Umberto Eco (2004, p. 188) discusses the Venus under the heading "Magic Beauty between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries". This alludes to Venus also being synonymous with beauty. Rose's use of Sarah Bartmann provides a reading of both the historical and colonial treatment of black women. After reaching London in 1810, Bartmann was an overnight sensation. There was pleasure in viewing her on stage, a pleasure which was derived from the sensationalist exposition of her black body form that was different from the European norm.

The manner in which Europeans viewed Bartmann and Baker has, perhaps, paved the way for the way black women are viewed today (hooks, 1992, p. 62). Collins argues that "one key feature about the treatment of Black women in the nineteenth century was how their bodies were objects of display" (Collins P. H., 2009, p. 147). I wish to posit that the manner in which black women's bodies were exhibited before prospective buyers during American slavery has contributed to the perception of black women's bodies as being easy and accessible. The rough manner in which their bodies entered America from Africa is far removed from their white counterparts. Drawing a line between American slave women and entertaining black bodies such as Sarah Bartmann's and Josephine Baker's, bell hooks (1992, p. 62) says :

> Most often attention was focused on the complete black female on display, at a fancy ball in the 'civilised' heart of European culture, Paris. She is to entertain guests with the naked image of Otherness. They are not to look at her as a whole human being. They are to notice only certain parts. Objectified in a manner similar to that of black female slaves who stood on auction blocks while owners and overseers described their important, salable parts, the black women whose naked bodies were displayed for whites at social functions had no presence.

However, black women's bodies did have a presence in Europe. Their presence was arguably limited to Otherness- they were also objects who were 'synonymous with accessibility, availability [and are] sexually deviant" (hooks, 1992, p. 66).

[64] Hall (1974, p. 318) argues that "Venus is often simply a synonym for the female nude in art".

This leads me to the second part of how Bartmann's and Baker's bodies have paved a way for perceiving black women as oversexed and sexually deviant. Although this was already established during slavery in America, as argued above, the roles of these two women in Europe helped reinforce that perception. One of the attributes that gained Sarah Bartmann immediate fame in Europe was her elongated labia (Holmes, 2007). This physical attribute, which was supposedly different to European women and therefore contributed to Bartmann's othering, eroticised her, assuming that she was sexually wild (Holmes, 2007, p. 140). Josephine Baker's use of her "butt" also gained her fame in Paris. It is important to note here, however, that Baker, who was in Paris over a century after Bartmann, used her physical difference to attain fame. She used her blackness to other herself before a foreign, Parisian audience. hooks (1992, p. 63) declares that Baker was "content to 'exploit' white eroticisation of black bodies [and] called attention to the 'butt' in her dance routines". Nicknamed the Bronze Venus, she often performed almost naked, allowing her viewers to see her body. In the dance routine, *Dance Sauvage* (Savage Dance), Baker performed wearing a skirt made out of bananas only. She would also perform with her pet cheetah, Chiquita, which had a gold band around its neck. The exoticisation and eroticisation in this act is highly evident.

Tracey Rose's reference to the two women, Sarah Bartmann and Josephine Baker, has allowed for a reading of how black women's bodies were paraded for the entertainment of Europeans. In both instances, it was the already existing perception of black people as exotic others that opened a path for further exploitation (in Bartmann's case) and appropriation of the exploitation (in Baker's case). Black women's physical difference, in the form of Bartmann's labia and Baker's buttocks, have allowed for a reading of black women as easy and available, oversexed and deviant.

Subversive Sexuality: Cicciolina

Some feminist theories introduced different ways of viewing female sexuality. It pointed to "the construction of male sexuality and its function in the social control of women" (Jackson, 1994, p. 1). Margaret Jackson (1994, p. 1) mentions that feminism at some point concerned itself with the right to female autonomy. This suggested that women needed to determine the nature of their sexuality, among other things, instead of allowing patriarchal systems to dictate the sexuality of every woman. Instead of being sexually submissive, women were encouraged to explore themselves sexually and not shy away from their bodies and its sexual uses. However, other feminists believed that in so doing, women were conforming to patriarchal perceptions and representations of the female body. By exploring herself and her sexuality, woman could be seen as doing so for the benefit of men's sexual longings.

It is important to note here that although previously oppressed groups may have gained the means to represent themselves, they may do so in ways that are seen as perpetuating their oppression. For example, while postcolonial feminists might perceive the portrayal of women's nudity in the arts as progressive and indicative of their finally attaining the rights to represent their bodies as they wish, it can also be seen as a further subjugation of women's bodies. Another example is that of reclaiming female subjectivity through women's sexuality in pornography. Arthurs and Grimshaw (1999, p. 3) have observed that

> Many feminists argued against the censorship of pornography, rejecting the assumption made by anti-pornographic feminists that representations of sex were a primary course of men's violence towards women and arguing the importance of constructing space for explicit representations of sex, which were addressed to women's desire.

The use of women's bodies and sexualities as appropriating men's control over women's bodies is therefore contested. Echoing the feminism that advocates women to explore their sexuality, Tracey Rose (Rose, 2010) declares that, "Women have the advantage of their sexuality. A woman's pussy is

her weapon. Why does she not use it to her benefit?" This idea is deployed in Rose's use of the sexually free Cicciolina. Cicciolina is known for her use of her body to gain what she wants. Cicciolina (real name Illona Staller) is a Hungarian-born Italian woman politician, porn star and singer; a lot of her political campaigns were against the censorship of pornography. Cicciolina often had sexually controversial public appearances while she was in office (Walker A. , 2005). Rose's Cicciolina character is based on Staller's persona. Among her controversies, Cicciolina gave a political speech with one breast exposed (Walker A. , 2005). She had sex with her then husband and artist Jeff Koons as part of his art projects- *Made in Heaven* **(IMAGE 25)** is among the most famous ones. She also offered to have sex with Saddam Hussein, twice; once if he released his prisoners of war, and the second time if he revealed the whereabouts of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Walker A. , 2005).

When I asked Tracey Rose of Cicciolina's ready use of her sexuality to further her political ambitions, Rose (2010) said that it was "post-feminist" and that women should have the ability to use their vaginas as they so wish, even to further their ambitions. Cicciolina is an example of women advocating and practising sexual freedom. In the *Ciao Bella* performance, Cicciolina is in the centre of the stage like table. She is crouching, with her legs provocatively parted. Where her genitals would be, Rose has placed a made up, enlarged[65], red vagina that perhaps (over) emphasises her sexuality. In the performance, Cicciolina is seen whipping herself with a whip suggestive of masochistic sexual behaviour. While sexual masochism can be read as women taking charge of their own bodies by determining how their bodies are involved in the sexual act, it has also been read as women extending the abuse of their bodies, something men have traditionally done.

Whipping, masochism or any other bodily pain on the female body have been a subject for scrutiny and hostile criticism. Victoria Pitts (2003, p. 48) refers to this as 'postmodern feminism'; in this school of thought, marking of women's bodies, whether it be scarification, tattooing, cutting or

[65] This enlarged genitalia is similar to Sarah Bartmann's 'enlarged labia' that led to her assumed over sexuality.

whipping, is seen as a reclamation of the body, a deconstruction of bodily norms. On the other side of the debate were radical feminists who strove for a preservation of the pristine female body, unscarred and untouched. They described any female body modification (including masochism) as "woman's hatred of the self" (Affrica Taylor cited by Pitts, 2003; 53).

Rose's use of Cicciolina opens up similar debates. Is Cicciolina's use of her sexuality and body a means of self-objectification? The image of her readily available vagina could be seen as perpetuating men's use of women for their lust. Cicciolina could also be seen as subverting a patriarchy that once dictated how her body and sexuality should be seen and used.

Conclusion

Tracey Rose's use of the many women archetypes in her work *Ciao Bella* exemplifies self-insertion of an artist in her work, while relating the self to a broader cultural context. In *Ciao Bella*, Rose dealt with the notion of identity swapping, something that other feminists have looked at before. This performance, which has been recorded on video and shown to audiences after the editing process, subverts the notion of women's bodies as an object in the arts.

Different from a performance piece where the audience is present during the enacting of the performance, this piece is viewed by the audience after the fact. This allows Rose to mediate the information that the audience receives. In so doing, one could argue that Rose chooses the identity that she wishes her audience to see, editing any material that might seem irrelevant.

Rose has opened up possibilities for the reading of her work from an autobiographical and black feminist point of view.

Conclusion

Tracey Rose's and Berni Searle's works can be read from a black feminist perspective. In my view, it is necessary to employ black feminist theory, among other theories, in the discussion of black women artists. The discourse speaks specifically to black women's experiences. These experiences are often informed by the intersections between race, class, sex, gender, and so forth. It is therefore essential to acknowledge those intersections that have often influenced the works that black women produce.

Reading Searle's *Snow White* from a black feminist perspective allows for a reading based on the intersections between race, class, sex and gender in a South African context. If these intersections are not acknowledged, I think we fail to understand the complete influence and meaning of the work. Searle's work speaks to how South African black women aspire to whiteness. When looked at from a black feminist point of view, one understands the colonial roots that taught black women (or black people in general) to hate blackness and strive for whiteness. From this black feminist reading, I believe that there will be a deeper understanding of why Searle is metaphorically undergoing the whitening process.

Black feminism advocates for black people to start loving blackness. If we continue to hate blackness as we have been taught by structures that have oppressed us (hooks, 1992), we will continue to strive for whiteness. Searle's work in my view advocates black feminism as it also indicates what black women undergo by using skin lightening creams in an effort to attain whiteness. The work also indicates that black women can never become white by these skin-lightening processes- they become ghost-like instead. Berni Searle's artwork begins to show the dangers and absurdity of trying to attain whiteness as a black person.

Black feminists such as Dorothy Hurley (2005) have investigated how European fairytales have become detrimental to black children's self-esteem and self-worth. This occurs because the ubiquitous fairytales model white people as the only ones that can attain beauty, goodness and happiness. Knowing how the history of European fairytales has been discussed through black feminism thus allows for my reading of Searle's *Snow White* as a counter-hegemonic statement about bodily identity.

Tracey Rose's work speaks to the different forms of oppressions that women have endured. She references slavery, the bible, women's sexuality, women's nudity, women's performativity and so forth. Her work not only points to the manners in which women have been oppressed, she also parodies and appropriates those manners. This strategy, through which Rose and Searle are able to show and ridicule phallocentric structures that have subjugated women, indicates the fact that women, particularly black women, have finally attained the means to speak for themselves.

Reading Tracey Rose's *Ciao Bella* in light of black feminism is necessary to fully understand her use of different black women archetypes. Unpacking these archetypes from a black feminist point of view gives new insight to the work. Understanding the histories of Sarah Bartmann and Josephine Baker, how their bodies were eroticised in a European setting, allows one to understand the use of black women's bodies in performance. Thus one needs to acknowledge that Baker had subjectivity and agency; she had control over how her black body was exposed to the European audience that othered her. Bartmann, by contrast, was paraded in a manner that was determined by a white patriarchy and not by herself. Reading these two women archetypes from a black feminist perspective shows the (American and European) histories of how black women's bodies were treated. This opens up a debate about how black women's bodies are treated today.

In reading *Ciao Bella*, it is essential, in my view, to know the politics of black women's stereotypical imagery. Black feminism has argued the detriment of stereotyping black women as mammy and the oversexed Jezebel. The sexuality of black women has been discussed by numerous black feminists (Collins P. H., 2009; hooks, 1992). Tracey Rose makes use of a white woman archetype, Cicciolina, to explore how women can subvert being sexually subservient. Through the Cicciolina archetype, Rose suggests that women are allowed to explore their sexuality as they so wish. This point becomes interesting in contrast to the history of black women's sexuality. As I have argued, black women are stereotyped as being oversexed and sexually deviant. In contrast to white women, black women were already free with their sexuality and did not need feminism to explore that sexuality. Their sexual freedom was seen as a result of their different bodily attributes, which is exemplified in Bartmann's extended labia and Baker's 'butt'. Reading the Cicciolina archetype becomes interesting when one bears in mind the assumed suppressed sexuality of white women, in comparison to the supposed overt sexuality of black women.

Through their work, Rose and Searle are able to portray their bodies as they wish. They also determine the manners in which the audience views their bodies. This ultimately diminishes the power of any oppressive gaze that they might encounter. In my paper, I demonstrate that European nudes in the arts model the European notion of a feminine beauty ideal that is exclusively white. In that instance, I argue it is necessary for black people to acknowledge that there is not one idea of beauty. I suggest that it is necessary to produce images that model black beauty and goodness. If black people do not have images modelling their own notions of beauty, as bell hooks (1992) suggested we must have, then we will continuously be modelling ourselves against other races and cultures. I argue that, it is black people who need to determine the nature of their freedom from oppressive structures. Thus, it is black people that need to produce counter-oppressive images of blackness. Tracey Rose and Berni Searle have begun to do so by exploring racial dynamics through their art by foregrounding some politics pertaining to black women's bodies and images.

In conclusion, I believe that it is imperative that where black women artists such as Tracey Rose and Berni Searle are producing autobiographical and autoethnographical works we read them through a lens of black feminist theory. They exemplify artists' ability to represent themselves in their works, a strategy of self-insertion that allows them to speak for themselves, instead of being spoken for. As more black women insert themselves in their artworks, they will bring attention to more black feminist issues. This will also be accomplished as more black women come to populate the world of art critical and art historical writing.

Recently, Rhodes University professor, Ruth Simbao made a response to Sharlene Khan's (2006) article. Simbao (2010) questions why the problem of the dominance of white art historians has not yet been rectified. She (2010, p. np) asks, "So where do we stand now, five years [after Khan's article]? ...To what degree have the visual arts in South Africa transformed?" Her answer "would be that we have achieved very little... [A] consideration of the top art schools in the country also reveals that leadership is back in the hands of white males". I argue that although white men dominate most of the powerful positions in the art scene, Simbao should not diminish the dominance of white women. However, the issue at hand here is the lack of black women art historians, art critics and art theorists. The lack of black women art historians means that in the five years since Khan's article, there has been an absence of black women's voices that can contribute to the histories of art in this country. There are therefore no black women, or black feminists that can read Rose's and Searle's work from a black feminist point of view. If more black women enter the field of art history, then more black women, in art as well as in art history, are representing themselves, leading to complete autonomy as well as a complete eradication of patriarchal structures that oppress black women.

Images



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10



FIGURE 11



FIGURE 12

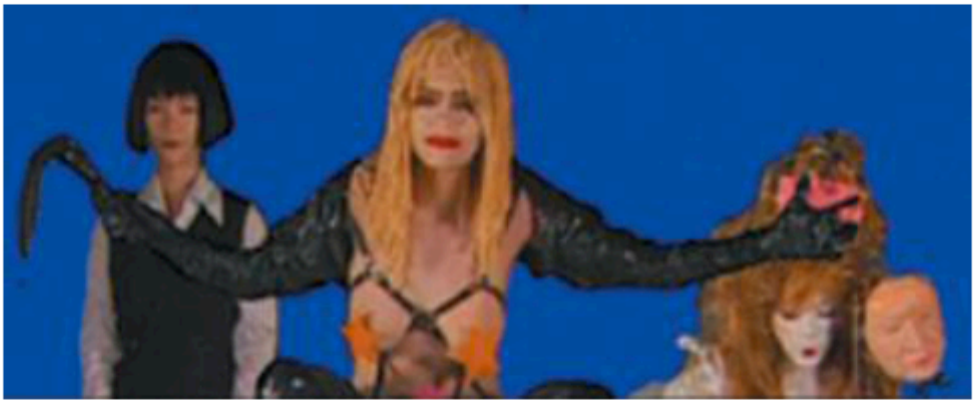


FIGURE 13

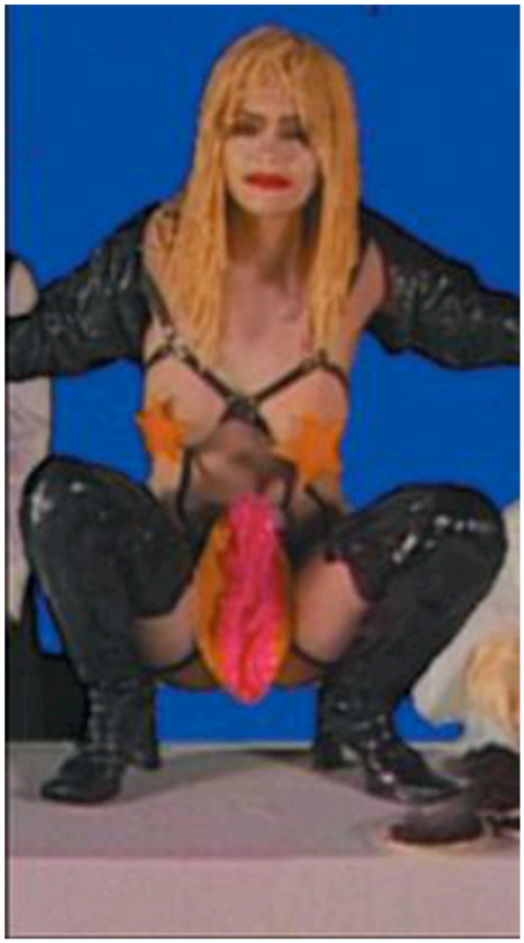


FIGURE 14



FIGURE 15

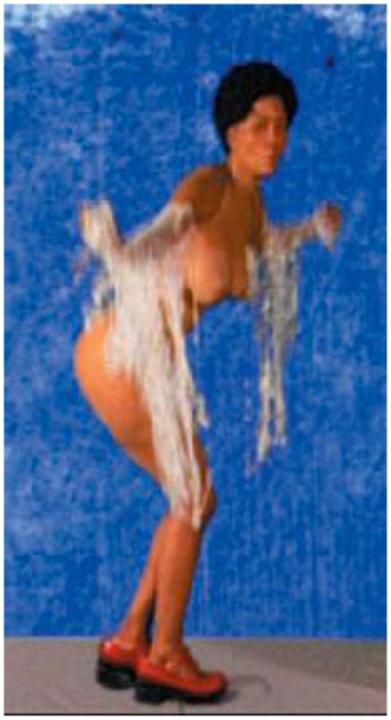


FIGURE 16



FIGURE 17

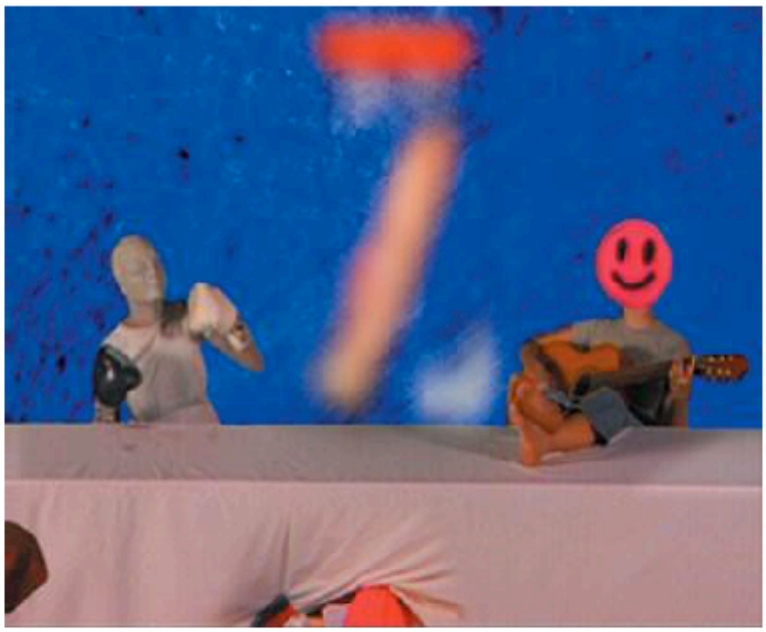


FIGURE 18

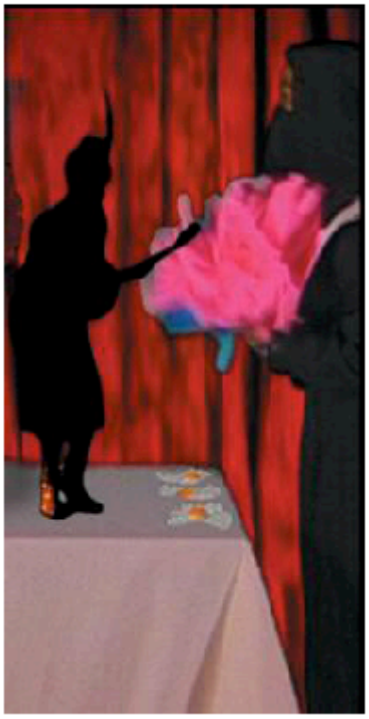


FIGURE 19



FIGURE 20



FIGURE 21



FIGURE 22



FIGURE 23



FIGURE 24



FIGURE 25

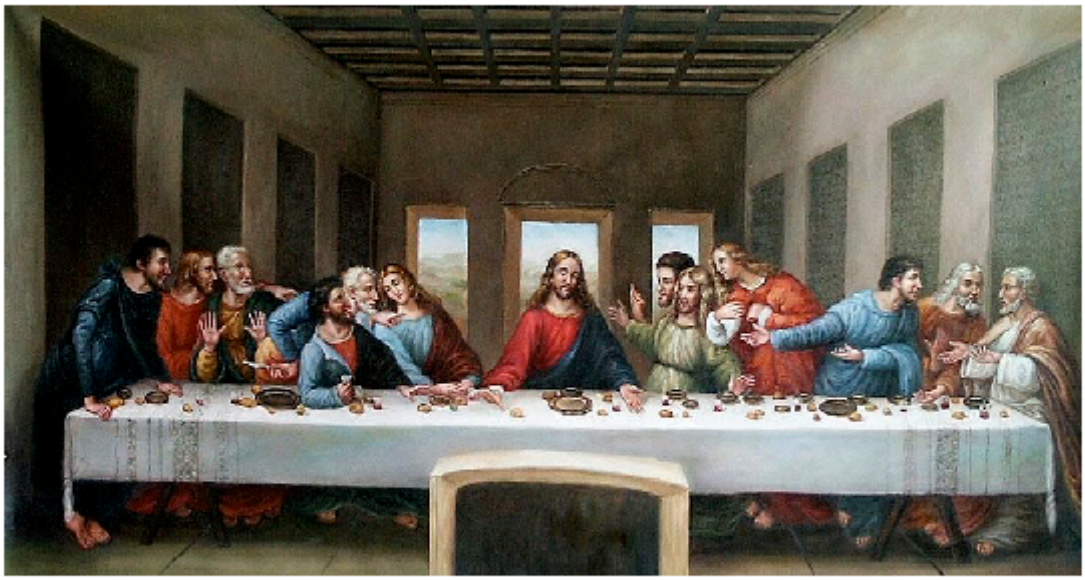


FIGURE 26



LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR, THE BLACK WOMAN ASKED,
"MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO'S THE FINEST OF THEM ALL"
THE MIRROR SAYS, "SNOW WHITE, YOU BLACK BITCH,

FIGURE 27

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