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TRIPTYCH OF HER, AN EXPERIMENTAL RESPONSE TO SABC'S DOCUMENTARY *DO GIRLS WANT IT?*: VIRGIN TERRITORY IN ALTERNATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING APPROACHES

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Abstract

The research aims to understand the commissioning and documentary filmmaking climate for the local broadcaster in South Africa, a climate that is in a state of transformation. The research paper looks to the experimental documentary filmmaking mode as a counterpoint to the usually practiced, and arguably journalistic approach taken by local documentaries. The case study provided is an analysis of a South African Broadcasting Corporation commissioned, produced and broadcast documentary, Do Girls Want It?, researched, developed and directed by the author, Nikki Comninos, on the topic of virginity in the specific cultural context of contemporary South Africa. This analysis leads to a discussion of different filmmaking approaches that utilise more experimental techniques through the exploration of film form. This is practically undertaken in a 15-minute film, Triptych of Her, focusing on the same overarching issue of virginity from a female perspective.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters in Film and TV in the University of Witswatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Nicola Comninos

15th day of February 2008

Preface

The written component of this research report is rather concise, stipulated to be about 10 000 words. Within it I have chosen to explore three research areas: the documentary film commissioning and producing environment at the South African Broadcasting Corporation, virginity from a female perspective and finally the avant-garde and experimental film. Exploration of the broadcast industry in its entirety, both locally and abroad, are beyond the scope of this rather succinct research report. Instead this research report serves as an exercise in exploring, narrowly, filmic approach through the analysis of my experience in producing content for the local broadcaster. The research is afforded the luxury of hindsight, as I am able to refer the film that I produced within this environment and can utilise the film as a control test of sorts. In a similar vein, the in-depth arguments that exist surrounding the avant-garde and experimental film cannot be fully unpacked, I have made use of the theoretical and practical pursuits that feed into the needs of this project, which essentially aims to explore my filmic approach. I would also like to acknowledge that the subject of virginity is equally as nebulous and fraught with debate; I have approached it in a personal manner, exploring broadly the issues inherent in the subject matter and focusing specifically on the feminine. Thus, within the confines of the word count I have attempted to engage the three research areas as best I could and in the ways that feed directly into the aims of this research report.

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1. Introduction

This research report endeavours to contribute to the existing debate surrounding content commissioned for the local broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). There is much discussion in the industry over the commissioning process and the quality and accessibility of the final content that is broadcast. This research is of a self-reflexive nature whereby I assess my experience in developing, researching, directing and editing a SABC-commissioned film with a view to understanding the industry and its constraints. This process will illuminate important paradigms of the local broadcast industry, and the practices of those producing for it. Through this analysis I examine my practice in creating the 48-minute film on virginity entitled *Do Girls Want It?* (2007). This was an interview-based documentary exploring how religion and culture impact on women's approaches to their virginity and their sexuality. I revisit the original film and produce a new one on the same issue outside of the broadcast environment constraints in order to explore the alternatives that exist outside of the SABC.

In producing the new film I build on the research done for the initial film, while also gauging the impact of the commissioning and documentary producing filmmaking climate for the local broadcaster in South Africa on my first film. Immersing myself in film theory, I approach the new film with a view to sophisticatedly marry form to content in order to build a rather more metaphorical and poetic film, one that blends both fiction and documentary. The research looks to the experimental mode as a counterpoint in order to construct the alternative film. The experimental mode is traditionally practised outside of mainstream filmmaking and allows for a broad scope of perspectives with regards to content; the experimental mode allows for the space to

be provocative with subject matter. The same approach can be translated to the technical methods. While producing for the local broadcaster I felt constrained by the necessary deliverable of the film speaking to the specific target market the documentary, SABC's channel 1. I felt my content and approach were moderated by both myself and the producers involved to ensure a successful 9.30pm SABC 1 slot. The experimental mode and the academic environment afford me the opportunity to take more risks and be more provoking without the constraints of producing within mainstream broadcasting.

2. Overview of Documentary Film Commissioning and Producing Climate for the Local Broadcaster

Film and television production requires a deep understanding of engagement with and dialogue between issues of form and content, of the construction and connotations of meanings. As a young South African beginning her initial engagement with the film and television industry, the learning process has been rapid and overwhelming. In 2005 Encounters Documentary Film Festival (Encounters) and the SABC launched their 6th Close Encounters Documentary Laboratory for which six filmmakers, coincidentally all women, were chosen. A workshop was held where the filmmakers, of which I was one, met and debated their treatments with commissioning editors and two executive producers. The brief (see appendix 1), given out by the SABC, urged young filmmakers to become 'urban explorers' through the making of their 48-minute films. I was commissioned through a proposal (see appendix 2) I wrote about virginity specifically as a construct placed on women. The film, *Do Girls Want It?,* uses three characters to explore various manifestations of women's engagement with virginity with a focus on a South African and Zulu perspective, a Christian outlook, as well as a Western and post-modern one.

In order to unpack the experience of producing content for the SABC one needs to begin by examining their policy. During the run up to democracy in the early 1990s there was an enormous amount of pressure for transformation within the SABC, which at the time was largely dismissed as a National Party propaganda machine. The Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, an umbrella organisation representing various progressive political groupings, finally pressured the State into establishing a new SABC Board. (Maingard, 1997:262). Thus, in a democratic South Africa the SABC has made a large effort in restructuring itself in order to move away from the

SABC of the apartheid years. The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was established to regulate broadcasting as the SABC made the move from state to public broadcaster and helped draft a new act of parliament. 'The Act defines broadcasting as functioning to entertain, inform and educate within three areas: public, private and community broadcasting. It emphasizes both the public interest or public needs and the necessity of opening the airwaves through the provision of a diverse range of services, which should cater for all languages and cultural groups' (Maingard, 1997:262).

The SABC's current internal mandate (see appendix 3) still sees vast improvements which can be felt expressly by myself as the SABC is endeavouring to give young and emerging filmmakers, and thus previously unheard voices, the ability to develop and direct projects for broadcast. There is, however, much debate in the industry about whether the broadcaster has sacrificed quality, and even professional conduct, in order to advance the agenda of their corporate transformation and although new unheard voices have been given a platform there has been a mixed response to the transformed SABC. As *Mail and Guardian* journalist Kwanele Sosibo (2007) reports

> …independent producers contracted to the SABC have complained that their problems with the public broadcaster have reached crisis point, with potentially grave repercussions for the production industry and broadcasters. The Independent Producers' Organisation (IPO) and The Producers' Alliance (TPA) set out their grievances in a five-page document to the SABC content hub…

In order to explore this 'crisis' I want to dissect the process I encountered in the production of my film. It must be noted, however, that while my experience may have similarities with producing for the broadcaster as a whole this research speaks specifically about producing for SABC 1. Each channel (1-3) has its own distinctive brand and target audience of a particular living standard measure (LSM). SABC 1

promotes itself as a channel for urban Nguni- and English-speaking youths who have not forgotten their roots (see appendix 4).

While I was engaged with the SABC for this making of *Do Girls Want It?* (some 18 months) I was under the control of the 'the Content Hub'. The Content Hub is an umbrella system which controls the employing of executive producers to oversee the new directors during their production (although it is unclear if this system will continue). These executive producers work in conjunction with the producers and under the commissioning editors. I found the system for the production of *Do Girls Want It?,* and the other films in the series, to be confusing. The system described here is one that is used for many documentary series at the SABC except for the particular Encounters involvement which happens once a year to coincide with the Encounters festival.

Steven Markowitz and Nodi Murphy from Encounters have a relationship with the SABC, who commissioned the series under two commissioning editors – Eugene Paramoer and Sylvia Vollenhoven. These commissioning editors both left the SABC before the series was completed and apparently Thando Shozi and Desmond Naidoo took over, although I never met with Desmond Naidoo myself. The SABC employed executive producers to oversee and manage all six films in the series. The executive producers were Yula Quinn and Dumi Gumbi under the company Anamazing Workshop. A production company, Vuleka Productions, under Julie Frederikse and Madoda Ncayiyana, then produced my particular film. While I can understand the purpose of this model to ensure smooth running of projects through micro-management it also led to some problems. Any decision that needed to be made had to

be passed through a series of people beginning with myself to my producers to the executive producers to the SABC and through their many bureaucratic processes. It was hard to get anything done fast, and this weighed on the creative process. In the same vein it was a complex process working under so many producers as the content was constantly under scrutiny from the many very different perspectives of the different producers - independent perspectives, male and female perspectives, black and white perspectives. This will be elaborated on later.

There are many other issues which producers and directors feel hinder the creative process at the SABC; for example there is debate about broadcaster editorial input and even censorship as well as the effect of budgetary and time constraints. It must be noted that this analysis, while dealing specifically with the South African landscape, can extend to the reality of the international broadcast environment in general. I speak from my personal experience and by asking these questions I hope to not only engage with the debate that already exists between the SABC and independent producers but also to explore what other possible alternative aesthetic and practical approaches exist.

2.1 Challenges within the Local Broadcaster Climate

The IPO and the TPA gave a presentation to the parliamentary portfolio committee on communications where they put forward their concerns regarding how the current producer-SABC relations are 'suffocating the independent production industry and thus [they] believe our current model is completely disempowering' (2007:2). They propose that the 'SABC operating models reduce producers (individuals and companies) to that of [their] "agents/brokers" or "contractors" or "employees/external staff" and does not allow for independent viable businesses in their own right'

(2007:11). They set out five key issues: contracts are one-sided, operations are 'patronising' and not enabling, independence is limited, margins are set (i.e. cost-plus) at a very low rate, and finally intellectual property is 100% SABC owned. Although these appear to be operational and legal issues, and I am looking at creative issues, one cannot divorce the two processes as they rest upon each other. This research considers the structural elements of the industry and their effect on the creative processes.

There is a lack of clarity between independent producers and the SABC regarding their exact roles and how much power can be exerted by the SABC over productions. The briefs put out by the SABC are felt to be too prescriptive and producers feel they are creating a SABC vision and not one of their own. Indeed it was very difficult for me to reconcile all the input that was given from the various producers, executive producers and commissioning editors involved. During the initial workshopping of the projects with the commissioning editors the documentaries as a series were under severe scrutiny.

Directors were encouraged to tease out a story and I was given some good story advice as worked through the beats of my film, I was also urged to insert myself as narrator into the film, something which I felt quite uncomfortable about. Later when commissioning editors and the SABC staff changed some of these prescriptions fell away. This was in someway a relief, however I think the project would have benefited from commissioning editors who provided input from pre-production through to post. The executive producers and producers were consistent, but their roles lay mostly with ensuring delivery. Thus the contribution I received regarding my content was difficult to reconcile to a direct way forward. As an emerging director at the time I was not

clear on the role of commissioning editors, and they seemed to oscillate between giving input on budgetary concerns, as well as creative aspects which sometimes extended beyond the stipulated budget. Virginity is a social taboo and a minefield to negotiate through factors of gender, culture and age. In moments of confusion about my subject matter I realised the importance of a strong producer, or commissioning editor, to help you return to the crux of your film.

Many producers also feel they are disempowered in the commissioning process as the SABC holds the rights (intellectual property) for the production even after repeated screenings. The situation is different for licensing agreements but the majority of content aired is commission-based. One independent producer argues that: 'the status quo, where the SABC [owns] all intellectual property, [is] counterproductive. It also [means] the broadcaster [is] sitting on piles of material which it [is] doing very little to sell' (Sosibo, 2007). I hold no agency in the submitting of my film to festivals and am also unsure who, if anyone, is driving this process. I was once sent an email notifying me that my film was submitted to an international film festival but was not given the name of the festival. I also receive many requests for copies of the film, and wishes to screen it, but am unable to respond adequately to these requests as I do not hold the copyright. I can only refer the requests to the SABC and hope they get an answer. I have only a single DVD copy of the final mastered version and must incur the reproduction costs if I wish to answer any of these requests. Thus the shelf life of my film is essentially the single SABC 1 screening and the Encounters Documentary Film Festival.

SABC budgets are increasingly unrealistic in today's economy; I produced my film on a mere R3551 per minute with very little research and development time. Incidentally this is not a low budget by SABC documentary standards at the time. Contracts are not sent to producers promptly, but transmission dates are expected to be upheld, however the SABC does not always adhere to their own deadlines (this will be elaborated on during the analysis of my particular experience). I believe these issues need to be teased out and understood in order to facilitate a productive industry; it is in large part the infrastructure and the bureaucracy of the SABC that is hindering the creative output of producers.

2.2 Challenges in my Experience

This research process should not only analyse the restrictions of the environment but also the inadequacies of my own approach as a filmmaker. In my approach to developing and producing my SABC-commissioned documentary I realised I was not applying all the theory that I had engaged with during my studies at the University of Cape Town in my undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in film and television, but merely focusing on the more conventional journalistic practices of documentary. I rationalised this as a necessary concession to the practicalities of the broadcast environment.

As an emerging filmmaker with little experience the approach I considered best suited to *Do Girls Want It?* was one that had respect for my characters, as well as considerations of audience reception. I decided to employ an interview-based approach that privileged the characters' responses gathered from the interviews above all else; this decision was also reached after an assessment of the production schedule and the

minimal shoot days involved. The interviews were conducted in stable conditions with a focus on exposing certain issues in the subject matter, i.e. the interviews did not attempt to explore the subject matter, nor did they take on a confessional edge. This interview-based approach might fit into what documentary theorist Bill Nichols terms the expository mode, which 'emphasizes verbal commentary and an argumentative logic' (2001:33). I was dealing with contentious subject matter and wanted to allow space for the audience to come to their own conclusions; I did not want to the film to come across as didactic or biased as I was dealing with cultures of which I am not a part, i.e. the Christian faith and traditional Zulu culture.

Commencing my studies in the Masters programme at WITS and engaging once again with academic theory – while completing the documentary – I started to consider different filmmaking models. I found myself, due to 'practicalities', producing a documentary within a mode that I thought was not necessarily the most appropriate for representing the subject matter and that did not employ film form to facilitate content. I have the luxury of using my current practical study in counterpoint to my first film in order deepen my understanding of filmic language. I am able to employ a comparison with what was possible within the constraints of a national broadcaster environment and what other approaches I can employ within the freedom of the academic environment.

The outcome of the limited research and development time allocated within SABC budgets was that I focused mainly on my subject matter and did not have enough time to adequately explore the film conceptually and stylistically. This was compounded by the fact that the film was nominally commissioned in 2005 when we met to workshop

our treatments in October, but I only received a letter of intent some nine months later and a contract a further 18 months later. One of my characters, Zinhle, was attending her annual Nomkhubulwane festival in 2005 where she, amongst hundreds of other girls, would have her virginity 'tested'. Since the films were due for broadcast in June or July of 2006 I was encouraged by both my executive producers and the SABC to shoot without a contract. I shot the event as well as in-depth interviews with Zinhle and the woman in charge of the virginity testing who organises the festival. In 2005 I also shot sequences with another of my characters, Welile, who was moving to Johannesburg. She had a farewell party that I filmed as well as an interview and her packing her car and leaving Durban. However, after these shoots (which were funded by the producers of the film) the contract never arrived and I heard nothing from the SABC. I tried to follow up on the process but was told to wait as commissioning editors at the SABC had changed and they were experiencing an internal delay. In October 2006 I was told the project was back on track and to begin shooting again. I shot my third character and began post-production. I received my contract in January 2007. These delays were frustrating because, besides huge financial concerns (I was lucky enough to be signed to a production company that carried the costs), my creative vision had shifted dramatically since my initial shoots a year before; thus there was no cohesive filmic style for the documentary. I had also become more technically skilled but there was, of course, no budget to re-shoot.

As the IPO and TPA states as one of their points in the five-page document that was delivered to the SABC Content Hub outlining their grievances: 'slow contract turnaround affects producers' ability to deliver on commissions and undermines their ability to deliver quality products' (Sosibo, 2007). Ultimately I found it difficult to

work under these conditions; it was gruelling to direct and edit a film shot in such disparate ways and I began to feel very negative. The film, I believe, began to suffer and I started to long for a new filmmaking approach.

When it came to the post-production stage of the project the SABC requested I remove all footage of the actual virginity testing as they felt it demeaning to Zulu culture, which holds this practice as sacred. I felt I had shot the footage in a respectful way and with the permission of all those involved. I also felt it to be crucial, not only to the dramatic arc of the film and audience expectation, but also to the issue and argument being constructed in the film. Similarly, the SABC had voiced no such concerns during the approval of my treatment, which explicitly stated the inclusion of such footage. When I argued to keep this footage I was told that there would be a minefield of reports to write in order to placate traditional leaders and basically that it was not worth the contention. Once I had found suitable ways to incorporate these requests I found that the changes made actually enhanced the film as it forced me to find a more subtle way to depict what could be seen as gratuitous or even prurient. However, it is important to note that the decision to make these changes was not seated in concern for the film but was rather had as its aim avoidance of controversy. And the desire to placate a particular group within civil society: traditional ethnic leaders, who had in the past demonstrated their ability to lobby the SABC and demand censorship on issues that critiqued traditional practices, for example, the pulling of a drama series dealing with male circumcision, *Umthunzi Wentaba*. This occurred midway through the series, with drama episodes replaced by a talk/debate programme featuring traditional leaders' views.

I found that within the documentary strand or 'factual hub' of the SABC there is vast experience with news and this leads to an editorial understanding of documentary as fact or news, rather than as argument. This is witnessed by the very name given to the documentary strand at the national broadcaster – the factual hub. When producing *Do Girls Want It?* for the SABC I found this newsy approach to documentary meant some of the more intangible qualities of virginity could not be explored. I wanted to pepper the documentary with literary quotes surrounding virginity but was advised that these may be too intellectual. I think it is also important to note that had the broadcaster fostered an environment that creatively tackles documentary representation, rather than promoting a news style, the cutting of the virginity testing may not have been necessary. In a different environment perhaps the SABC would have suggested an alternative representation of virginity testing rather than simply cutting it out. The SABC was concerned with making transmission dates, sticking to budget and not offending their viewers. While these are very real concerns for a broadcaster it left me hankering for a new approach. Through my new film I try to merge use of the documentary mode with a less newsy and more experimental approach, one that I think audiences can benefit from.

I agree with documentary theorist Stella Bruzzi that states 'reality does exists and that it can be represented without such a representation either invalidating or having to be synonymous with the reality that preceded it' (2000:3). Thus, I want to explore more experimental approaches that function in a non-literal way as an investigation on how this approach might function in exploring sensitive subject matter such as that of virginity. This blend of documentary and fiction that looks to a more playful use of film language leads me to a discussion of avant-garde and alternative filmmaking

methods. New ways of representation allow me to touch on the taboo issues that surround virginity. It is, however, important to remember that in attempting to represent anything one must completely immerse oneself in the subject matter: form and content cannot be divorced.

3. Virginity

In order to explore the subject of virginity filmicly or otherwise, one needs to locate oneself within its historical and social context – but achieving this was very difficult. The frustration I found during both the research of this project and of *Do Girls Want It?* is well articulated in the preface of Hanne Blank's book *Virgin: The Untouched History* (2007). In 'Extra Virgin: A Note to Readers', Blank laments that she 'conjectured that it was possible there was simply not much to be known about virginity and virgins. [She] was finding little enough that was relevant, and nothing at all like the comprehensive overview of the subject [she] was hoping to find.' Virginity, it seems, is virgin territory.

The research on virginity that one does encounter is usually very specific; it will explore a certain small facet of society and their interaction with the concept. The research is also very Western dominated, save for some research on the South African tradition of virginity testing. A large amount of the scarce research centres on medieval notions of virginity. And indeed in order to understand how virginity works within society various cultures must be assessed however when the research presents itself as a holist look at a subject without including, for example, an African perspective it becomes very problematic.

3.1 Initial Look at Virginity

The route I chose in *Do Girls Want It?* was one that explored notions of virginity through real characters and through the lens of religion and tradition; it was interview-based and could almost be described as an oral 'herstory' of sorts. The documentary

spent much of its time exploring how cultural traditions and religious fervour surrounding virginity may be limiting for girl-children's sexuality, explicitly against the backdrop of HIV/AIDS. While this was interesting, and served its purpose as an issue-based documentary, I felt the more intimate and emotional qualities of virginity was not adequately teased out. I searched everywhere for literature on the subject matter and even looked to confessional teen internet sites. I was overjoyed to find Blank's book, which is certainly pioneering in that it appears to be the only thorough study on virginity, but it is not without problems. For one, it is centred on Western notions of virginity. Arguably, virginity and its treatment within society must be analysed in a culturally specific way in order to understand its various manifestations, however the Western take on virginity left me hankering for an African perspective. And in some cases this neglect of the rest of the globe is offensive in its disregard for social issues that impact on virginity. For example, Blank discusses the USA's big budget federal drive to promote and enforce 'abstinence-based sex education'. She goes on further to say

> This stunning backlash against changing virginity expectations, and the odd and telling isolation in which the United States pursues it, is proof positive that a culture's approaches to virginity may be more emotional and political than anything else. (2007:15)

Blank may be critiquing the Bush regime's conservative Christian approach but she fails to recognise two important things. Firstly, this 'abstinence-based sex education' has successfully travelled around the world with U.S campaigns such as 'the Silver Ring Thing' and 'True Love Waits' visiting and recruiting youth around the world including South Africa. Moreover and more importantly, she seems to overlook a very significant social factor in many other parts of the world – HIV/AIDS. Some parts of South Africa, in a hugely controversial bid to fight the pandemic, have reinstated the

tradition of virginity testing and this is also bent on 'changing virginity expectations' (Blank, 2007:15). Testing is practised and not only during cultural events such as Umkhosi Womhlanga (the Reed Dance) when young Zulu maidens carry reeds to the Zulu King's house, but also in everyday scenarios where young girls are gathered together, legs spread and awarded if declared virgins. This has caused a stir in the local media because technically it is illegal as it contravenes the Children's Rights Bill. However, 'in recent years the practice of virginity testing has been hailed by some as an effective measure to curb HIV/Aids by promoting abstinence' (Ngalwa, 2005).

I made *Do Girls Want It?* before Blank's book was published and constantly longed for academic material to inspire and solidify the film; when I finally purchased a copy of the book for this research project I was eager to plunge into critical theory. However, the book is also neither profoundly analytical nor questioning; it gave glib analysis and did not offer me any new perspective, it rather just floridly articulating ideas.

3.2 Take Two

In my previous film I had assessed virginity in a news-style and had neglected a focus on the intellectual and academic aspects. Blank's preface alludes to the slippery nature of the subject; 'virginity's very nature – socially, religiously, physically, and otherwise – means that it has often been a taboo, uncertain, and sometimes deliberately obscured subject' (2007:x). She also notes the important fact that 'virginity is as distinctly human a notion as philanthropy' (2007:3); no other species places any importance on virginity. 'There is no purely biological argument that explains human interest in

virginity, so we are forced to begin considering the possibility that awareness of virginity may have stemmed from social factors instead' (2007:25)

A virgin, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, is firstly 'a person who has not experienced sexual intercourse' and secondly 'a chaste or unmarried woman; a maiden' (1973:1431). This simple definition highlights two quandaries surrounding virginity. Of course virginity is having not had sex but the second part of the definition links being a virgin to being female, it also links it specifically to an unmarried female. It is safe to assume here that when the word 'marriage' is used we are to infer heterosexual marriage. There is no place for homosexual marriage and sex; virginity is a distinctly feminine, and heterosexual phenomenon. This is something I find worth probing. As Blank notes,

> the male body has never commonly been labelled as being virginal even when it is, but rather as 'continent' or 'celibate'; even within the Catholic church, male renunciation of sex has been characterised as a matter of continence, not virginity. Additionally, virginity has never mattered in regard to the way that men are valued, or whether they were considered fit to marry or, indeed, to be permitted to survive. (2007:10)

So what exactly is meant by virginity, if it is not merely those who have not had sex? In many ways 'one function virginity has served over the ages is to control women's sexual activity and make it something that can be policed and regulated' (Blank, 2007:225). This is witnessed in traditions such as dowries and more locally, lobola in which an eleventh cow is given to the bride's mother by the groom in thanks for her daughter's virginity. But virginity is also about growth, about rite of passage; 'throughout history, losing one's virginity has been viewed as a ritual of transformation' (Blank, 2007:97). Essentially, 'virginity is because it ends' (Blank, 2007: 97). Part of this ritual has become the 'telling, comparing, and validating [of]

such stories [in order for] adolescents [to] confirm to themselves and one another that they've officially crossed the threshold into the world of adulthood' (Blank, 2007:103).

I think it is important for me to acknowledge that by the very making of a film about virginity I am in someway paying homage to the concept or at least conceding its currency. However, in my second assessment of the subject I move away my previous evaluation of virginity, which did not include women's desire and exploring women's sexual urges and feelings which are often overlooked. While sex is not always about desire for a woman, can we totally disconnect virginity from sexual desire? Yet, in popular manifestations of the virgin women are presented as pure, white and clean. Is desire then something dirty? 'Desire is uncivilised. It is all about individual needs and has nothing to do with relationships. It is male, and it is masculine. Thus conceived, desire is not only incompatible but at odds with society's conceptions of femininity, precluding it from being part of the array of feelings and behaviours that we expect from girls…' (Tolman, 2002:13) Using my new film I want to expose the uncomfortable space where women are robbed of the agency of desire and encouraged to be passive. I want to challenge the common conception of submissiveness among women and their virginity, and indeed their sexuality. Many women, in fact, lose their virginity because they crave sexual stimulation.

Another common conception surrounding feminine virginity is the belief that one's 'first time' is a memory that will be forever treasured. But what of cases of rape, which occur daily in this country. Is baby Tsepang no longer a virgin? Surely not. Saint Augustine argued that being raped 'did not constitute a loss of virginity, providing one

had resisted with all one's heart and soul' (Blank, 2007: 7) so then, is virginity more an attribute of the soul? It now becomes apparent how difficult a subject this is and how difficult it is to represent filmicly. In the film for this research report I have tried to asses the subject in its many facets by approaching it both historically, metaphorically/poetically and through confession. This desire for a multifaceted approach that combines the use of non-literal, and rather poetic, representations of virginity lead me to an exploration of experimental filmmaking methods. By anchoring my assessment of the broadcast environment through the example of *Do Girls Want It?* as an illustration of one approach, I have used further theoretical strands of filmic discourse in order to open a discussion regarding film language and film practice, the marriage between form and content.

4. Notions of the Avant-garde and Experimental Filmmaking Mode

The definition of the avant-garde (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* Online accessed May 2007) cites its earliest use in 1470–85 as 'the foremost part of an army; the vanguard or van'. The filmic definition today is anchored in the broader context of mainstream cinema in that the avant-garde is seen as an alternative, self-constituted approach, working in counterpoint to this dominant system. If we 'first refer to the social practices of the mainstream cinema, to its economic and social "base", we can argue that the dominant and mainstream cinema is strongly marked by its alliance with concentrations of economic and social power. In certain situations these alliances associate cinema with the power of the state [or of the market]' (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979:9). Through estrangement from the dominant cinema the avant-garde is allowed the freedom to perform 'more general ideological operations than those determined quite "directly" by the immediate economic or industrial base' (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979:9). Another characteristic of the avant-garde is that, since it is in opposition to dominant cinema, films are produced outside the mainstream production circles and are thus freed from the 'oblique relationship to profitability at the economic level'. (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979:10).

Film theorist Peter Wollen draws a distinction between two avant-garde movements, a distinction characterised both by their institutional framework and their aesthetic assumptions informed by historic and critical origins:

> …the first is the painterly tradition of North American experimental film, which defines "modern" art taking as its object its own materials of expression. The second is a European "narrative" tradition that from Eisenstein to Goddard is concerned with problematizing cinematic illusionism by exploiting, through various montage strategies, the heterogeneity of the semiotic channels available to film. (Rodowick, 1988:4)

While this distinction is important in understanding the historic context of the avant-garde, what excites me is Wollen's assertion of the 'possible emergence of a third trend that combines the reflexivity of the former with the intertextuality of the latter.' (Rodowick, 1988:4)

At this point it is important to note that issues of the avant-garde and what is known as counter cinema have increasingly lost their political currency, as mainstream intuitions, such as MTV, have embraced its qualities, and audiences have become savvy with regards to its techniques. Similarly many films utilise these techniques, such as *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) and *The Rules of Attraction* (2002). It is this very acceptance of avant-garde techniques that urges me to open this discussion to filmic approach within SABC commissioned content.

In my film, *Do Girls Want It?* a central character gets her virginity tested. This is a contentious issue in South African society currently and I approached it (and was encouraged to approach it) in a current affairs style. The SABC expressed concerns about someone outside the culture representing this issue, as did some audience members in Q&A sessions after screenings. Although I am not afraid of controversy and was happy to engage in debate surrounding my representation of another culture, I strongly feel that the SABC and the audiences reacted in this way and were fixed on the virginity-tested character in a defensive way because the style of the documentary mimicked that of news and information programming. I think this gave the impression of an exposition of virginity testing rather than, as I had intended it, a discussion on various ways cultures relate to the notion of virginity. Thus, some audiences missed my aim to unite my three characters (a Christian, the virginity-tested character and the

'modern girl') through a sisterhood of sexual experience and interpreted the film as my attempting to expose the practice. I would like to use this space to explore virginity through a lens that is neither a literal interpretation nor controversial through its pandering to media hype, it is this literal exploration of the subject matter that I believe caused some people to become upset. Rather the aim of this practical exercise is to find ways and approaches of representing abstract concepts through film, to look to a more personal and poetic expression of the complexities of feminine virginity.

4. 1 Film Language

Pioneering feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey links feminism and the avant-garde together in her 1979 article titled 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde'. She posits that

> …feminists have recently come to see that the arguments developed by the modernist avant-garde are relevant to their own struggle to develop a radical aesthetic ... The questions posed by the avant-garde, consciously confronting traditional practice, often with a political motivation, working on ways in which aesthetic challenges alter relations both with modes of representation and with expectations in consumption - all these questions arise similarly for women. (1979:112)

This raises questions for this particular project about women and their understanding of virginity and my attempt to represent virginity in a renewed way. Mulvey, however, cautions that 'women cannot be satisfied with an aesthetic that restricts counter-cinema to work on form alone. Feminism is bound to its politics; its experimentation cannot exclude work on content' (1979:124). Thus, although this renewed approach to filmmaking will focus on film form in order to utilise the medium in its entirety and thus in a deeper and more expressive way, it is still very much concerned with content.

Mulvey posits that ‘the first constructive steps towards feminist film culture have begun to turn in the direction of the matter of film language itself, probing dislocation between cinematic form and represented material and investigating various means of splitting open the closed space between screen and spectator’ (1979:119). Discussions of form and content lead one to analysis of film operating as language and indeed a language that can form a dialogue with its viewers.

The Russian formalists were the first to develop an analogy between language and film in a systematic way. Yet it was only with structuralism and semiotics in the late 1960s that theorists like Umberto Eco, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Christian Metz explored the film language concept in depth (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992:28). This understanding of filmic linguistics is useful in the research of form facilitating content. Cinema can be understood as ‘a language, in sum, not only in a broadly metaphorical sense but also as a set of messages grounded in a given matter of expression, and as an artistic language, a discourse or signifying practice characterised by specific codification and ordering procedures’ (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992:37). The exercise of this research report concerns itself with grasping film language in order to create meaningful content.

5. A New Stylistic Approach

Given the ideological limitations of dominant cinema, such as the methods employed by the SABC, some analysts such as Wollen recognised the need for another approach. To this end, Wollen conceived seven binary features of counter-cinema The first explored what he termed 'narrative instransitivity' or the systematic disruption of narrative flow, while the second binary observed estrangement techniques (through acting style, audio and visual disjuncture etc…). The third binary involved the foregrounding of the process of meaning construction, while the forth promoted the use of multiple diegesis instead of single diegesis. The fifth binary prescribed narrative opening instead of closure or resolution, and the sixth binary observed the use of 'unpleasure' where a text resists the habitual pleasures of coherence, suspense and identification. The final binary suggested a use of reality instead of fiction, or the exposing of the mystification of filmic fictions. (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992:198). Through these binaries Wollen attempts to expose the realist strategies of dominant cinema by developing a new filmic language that implodes conventions by developing new ones. I find these binaries useful in understanding film language and understanding how dominant film language operates. I find the documented series of filmic experiments in the film by Dogme film pioneer Lars Von Trier and Jorgen Leth in Von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* (2003) equally interesting. Just as Von Trier sets filmic obstructions for Leth, such as 'each cut can only be 25 frames long, the film must be filmed in India' etc, similarly I set obstructions for myself. I do not, however, term these 'obstructions' or 'binaries' but rather 'challenges', as I want to interrogate the dominant system's use of particular aspects of film form by playing with them in an experimental manner.

Thus, in exploring the limitations of the broadcast environment and exploring the shortfalls of my SABC broadcast film I introduce a series of filmic challenges in order to facilitate the practical undertaking of my research. The methodology feeds into the treatment for my film. I decided to assess these challenges separately, although obviously with a final product these three aspects all work in concord. Accordingly, my new film is a triptych: a film comprised of three fragments that each explore one of the challenges. Each fragment can also stand alone however they are better viewed collectively in the triptych. It is important to remember how a triptych works dynamically to form the illusion of a whole out of many pieces. In the same way the film explores various facets of virginity (and indeed film form) but ultimately fuses them together in the collection of feminine understandings of virginity.

5.1 The filmic Challenges

I aimed in part to recognise the physics of film projection: a film projector flashes a succession of still images interspersed with black; it is the brain that perceives these still images as motion. This happens for two reasons: firstly, the flashing of images is so rapid that the moments of blackness go unnoticed, and secondly the pictures show successive movements so that the sequence of frames is perceived as cohesive and coherent movement (Wead, 1981:38). The phenomenon is something known as the 'persistence of vision' (Wead, 1981:39), the idea whereby a light that flashes about 50 times per minute appears as a continuous beam as it leaves a residual image on the retina. Similarly, film flashes at 24 frames per second to give the appearance of fluid motion. This so called 'persistence of vision' is helped along by the second phenomenon, what some have termed the 'acceptance of phenomenal identity' (Wead,

1981:39). If we see images that flash at a slower speed we may note the flicker between the images but we still perceive movement: 'even with relatively long gaps between one discrete image and another, the eye still perceives apparent movement' (Wead, 1981:39). Phenomenon number two caused a big stir with perceptual scientists and later film theorists. If the illusion of movement is not based solely on the 'persistence of vision', i.e. the physiological response of stimulation to the retina, then there must be come kind of psychological response, where the brain knows it is being tricked but colludes in its own trickery. This initial grappling with film technique, craft and effect led the medium of film into the world of art. In 1916 Hugo Münsterberg wrote as seminal work entitled *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* in which he was one of the first to suggest that film was art, not a mere representation of reality because its technology created 'entirely new mental life conditions' so that the mind was in fact collaborating 'in providing a unique experience that was indeed more vivid, fascinating, and unified than any real scene' (Wead, 1981:43). If this grand illusion is the mechanism of film, dominant cinema serves to try and conceal it. It does this through 'a repertoire of strategies and effects [which] supports the aesthetic and ideological hegemony of mainstream cinema' (Wead, 1981:44).

So if film is a series of still images linked together in a sequence to give the semblance of motion, by drawing attention to the construction of film the audience is confronted with the illusion and forced to actively think about it and its connotations and meanings. 'Distanciation pulls the spectator out of fixity by an endless displacement of identification and representation, so producing an understanding both of the construction of representation and of the spectatorial position as contradictory' (Lapsley, 1998:186). By attacking the illusion of movement and using still frames to

create movement, or sometimes denying the possibility of movement, I hope to challenge my audience and remind them this form is documentary is not reportage. *The self-conscious use of the still frame is the first challenge.*

Ultimately I made use of the still frame throughout the project but concentrated my efforts on the first piece of the triptych. I searched thoroughly for suitable found footage and began to weave together my narrative through a combination of these still frames and moving archival footage. In the second piece of the triptych, I used still frames to create movement in four stop-motion sequences. I shot a series of stills and then edited them quickly to give the illusion of movement. Although there appears to be movement, it is also apparent to the viewer that this is visual trickery. I hoped this would give a magical and more emotional edge to the exploration of virginity, while also exposing the mechanics of film. The still frames in the first sequence, which is essentially a history of women and of virginity, aim to give an encyclopaedic feel.

If smooth movement, achieved through 24 frames per second, is one organising principle of dominant cinema, it is also the principle on which editing technique rests. As the 24 frames per second indicate reality, so do certain editing techniques. The 'seamless' editing style does not draw attention to choices made in the edit suite but allows the audience to view the film without being aware of its construction. Looking at the editing styles of Soviet filmmakers such as Vertov, Eisenstein and Kuleshov, many challenging questions about technique and effect arise. Through experiment with the 'syntax' of film by montage inspired by collision editing, the Kuleshov effect and Pudovkin's experiments editing technique can explore ideas of point-of-view (or gaze) and character agency. *Playful use of editing technique is the second challenge.*

Once again I used editing technique throughout the triptych but concentrated my efforts onto the second piece. I took a mischievous approach to editing that did not rely on certain conventions, for example I cut from medium close up to medium close up without changing the angle dramatically. This was over a sequence exploring the internal thoughts of a girl having just lost her virginity. This was to create a feeling of interiority and to expose the ambiguity of feeling the girl was experiencing. I attempted to use the cutting style to create a different texture, one that exposes the girl's lack of surety in her decision. I edited playfully in a 'scratch video' style by using 50s archival footage juxtaposed by modern, more risqué footage in order to redefine meaning in post-modern parody. Through juxtaposition of the two textures of footage the audience begins to read the 50s footage with a sense of irony – how impositions on woman with regards to their sexuality are outdated, but still exist.

Another fundamental on which dominant film rests is coherent narratives. Mayan Deren and particularly her film *At Land, A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) employs a revolutionary approach to narrative as her film crosses time and space, somehow seamlessly, using movement rather than story to link scenes together. Since my subject matter, virginity, is complex and multifaceted the use of split or dual narratives can help to display contradiction in a way that urges active engagement from the viewer. 'Like all semiotic inquiry, narrative analysis seeks to peel away the seemingly "motivated" and "natural" relationship between signifier and the story-world in order to reveal the deeper system of cultural association and relationships that are expressed through narrative form' (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992:69). *Manipulating narrative (through affecting the relationship between time and space) is the third challenge.*

My use of narrative collapsed distinctions between past and present in all the films and in the films as a collection. In the first segment there is a spacio-temporal disintegration as the history being explored tracks ancient history, contemporary history and a universal feminine history simultaneously. The second segment also weaves together a narrative consisting of 50s footage and an almost timeless present. In the third segment interviews are editing together as if they are in conversation, I ignore conventions of strap lines and character set ups.

I found in retrospect that in my SABC film I relied too heavily on interviews. In addition, I think my questioning was too tame and reflected an uncomfortable attempt on my part to keep them feeling comfortable. The outcome of this approach, albeit sanctioned by the commissioning editors and producers to whom I was responsible, was a series of moderate and moderated interviews that revealed very little of an intimate nature and rather just gave facts. In order to get deeper interviews and more provocative answers I needed to spend more time with the characters to get to a place where I could ask more intimate questions. My previous approach was one that edited out my own interaction with the interviewees. I have now come to believe that leaving some recognisable trace of the filmmaker's presence in the interviewing and filmmaking process is one way of achieving honesty as it lays bare the process that was undertaken in this interaction. Interviewing is also at the heart of negotiating representation. *Exploring and exposing interview technique is my fourth challenge.*

Through my use of interviews I avoided certain conventions. I did not establish characters or locations using cutaways or introductions by the talking heads. I merely established faces and allowed them to speak. I also left traces of my interaction with

the interviewees in the edit. You can sometimes hear me asking the question or hear the interviewees' response to the question even if they don't answer it. I find this approach more honest and more playful. It does not present itself as exposing an objective truth but merely presents a series of opinions, woven together to create a collective truth as the women begin to overlap in perspective or begin to argue or even speak across purposes.

In the film treatment that follows these four filmic challenges are neatly translated into my script.

6. *Triptych of Her*: Film Treatment

Title
Triptych of Her

Question
(It is good practice to reduce a film's intent to a single question. This single question is the driving force for a film so whenever you feel lost along the way you may go back to your single driving question.)
What is virginity from a female perspective, and how are these perspectives manifested through an experiment with film form?

Synopsis
This is an experimental film, one which attempts to find new ways of revealing content through the use of the film form. The film is a collection of three shorts: *her story*, *her first time* and *her reflection.* They are not, however, necessarily of equal length. They may be watched separately, or as a collection, and in any order. Each of the three films focuses on a particular film construct (respectively the still frame, editing, and interviewing technique – narrative is explored in the collection as a whole) in order to explore the relationship between film language and content. The film threads together an intimate portrayal of the loss of one's virginity from a feminine perspective while assessing the societal influences on the choices and emotions surrounding this experience.

Director's Intention
The film focuses on a subject that is difficult to represent. Just as film is an illusion of reality, this is an illusion of 'her' and her loss of virginity. In giving precedence to form the film explores the iconography and emotional landscape of virginity through non-literal ways, using poetic methods to express ideas. Through the focus on a central archetypal character – 'her'– the triptych is woven together such that each sequence explores film form in a way that exposes its underlying constructs.

My intention is to explore the various manifestations of virginity and notions of sexual purity that are upheld in society and how they impact on feminine sexuality. I draw on my research from my previous film, *Do Girls Want It?* (2007) for which I spoke to many women about their virginity, as well as a sex therapist and a virginity tester, thus allowing me to consider the impact of religion and culture on virginity.

The triptych begins and ends with excerpts from writings that locate the piece within its subject matter. The use of quotation also refers to the Brechtian notion of 'literarisation' that 'occurs through the persistent use of quotation… thus conforming to Brecht's call to acknowledge that acting [and in this case filming] is indeed a quotation and not origination' (Lapsley, 1998:197). This encourages the audience into active intellectual participation with the subject matter as they are reminded that what they see is a representation of a subject, one that draws on many sources. Just as Barthes suggests that captions of photographs or written images in a film serve to 'anchor' a concept and function as a device that coaxes the viewer to a preferred reading of the text, I hope the quotes lead the audience to active consideration of the subject matter. The quotes are taken from Freud and Blake by which I aim to introduce a degree of irony. Virginity, some argue, is a construct given currency by men, and

often mused on in academic writing and literature by these two male figures. Freud is often accused of cultivating this precious femininity that surrounds and clouds notions of virginity.

The first piece is a montage that looks at virginity in an evidential, scientific and historic way beginning historically and ending in the present day. The second piece explores virginity in a metaphorical, poetic and subjective way, through a blend of personal and social manifestations of the subject. In contrast the last piece, focusing on interviewing, explores the social construction of virginity in a confessional way as it exposes women's experiences. The three pieces are linked through lunar imagery to create an aesthetic unified collection; the moon has been linked to the feminine through metaphors of menses and mania and thus the moon as motif links the three pieces together.

Script and Treatment
The film is split into three parts; each analyses a different element of film form – although the subject matter remains crucial and informs the form.

The high value set upon her virginity by a man wooing a woman seems to us so deeply planted and self-evident that we become almost perplexed if called upon to give reasons for it. - Sigmund Freud (primary text unknown, quoted in Hanne Blank's *Virgin: The Untouched History*, 2007:21)

Part One: *her story*

Visual	**Voice/Text (Key: text, *voiceover)***
The words are white on black, rendered in a classic font, slightly blurred so as to be reminiscent of silent movie intertitles or old encyclopaedias. This alludes to the educational or evidential feel about the piece. (this font will be the same for all three pieces)	**her story**
Imagery of the moon motif.	
Egg-embryo-baby (Heart beat)	**she was conceived**
Stock footage of woman preparing to give birth	***stock voice over***
Portrait of Ibn Sina, stock footage showing the female anatomy and pointing out the hymen.	***An Arab doctor named Ibn Sina first concieved it in the 10th century. A small ridge or flap of skin inside the opening. It was this that caused pain and bleeding. It was this that was damaged during first sexual experience.[1]***

[1] Blank. Virgin: The Untouched History. 2007, pg. 49

Woman going into labour	***stock voice over***
Childbirth (Heart beat, baby cry, birth)	**she was born**
Portrait of Andreas Vesalius, pictures of dissections from medical journals, akin to Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings (gives the feel of dusty academia, dated medical enquiry), pictures of actual hymen	***Its existence was confirmed in 1544 by world-famous Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius, the first person to find it in a dissection.***[2]
Text over heavenly imagery and rain falling meditatively	**she was christian, she was jewish, she was muslim, she was agnostic**
visuals of antiquity through classical Greek sculpture, pictures of Hymenaeus	***For some, its namesake is Greek; Hymenaeu, the god of marriages and weddings. Hymenaeus is a young man with a wreath of flowers and a torch. The hymen is the custodian of virginity.***[3]
images of girls, women media constructed images around stereotype	**she is a girl, she likes pink, she is long hair, breasts, hips, ass.... she is pretty. she bakes. she crosses her legs, flutters her eyelashes. she marries in white**
images ancient Greece	***In ancient Greece young women who lost their virginities before marriage could be sold into slavery***
Garlic. Lemons. Condoms.	**In South Africa today. HIV/AIDS. RAPE.**
Court, images of honour crimes, beaten women, nuns and religion.	***Roman law allowed fathers to murder their daughters if they lost their virginities before marriage. Even today women's virginity and sexuality is still controlled… and their bad behaviour punished.***
Graffiti	**On bathroom walls women still pay the price.**

Visual Treatment

This first segment is a brief history of 'her': she is both women and virginity; the two are inextricably linked. It explores how society socialises women sexually and simultaneously creates a feminine history of virginity. The aim is to draw attention to this link in order reveal it as a social construction. The piece collapses space and time as it explores 'her' history in conjunction with an ancient history of virginity. Tracing

[2] Blank. Virgin: The Untouched History. 2007, pg. 52
[3] Blank. Virgin: The Untouched History. 2007, pg. 45

her life span from birth the sequence illuminates facts that have contributed to the shaping of feminine sexuality; these moments are juxtaposed with societal concerns with virginity. It makes use of mostly found images, such as images from medical journals about embryonic growth. The film makes strong use of the still frame in the way that jars the audience into realising that movement, and thus cinema, is an illusion. It makes use of normal movement and slow motion. The purpose of this play in film speed links form to correlate with content as the script jumps through time, slowing down at a particular moment and then proceeding to skip centuries again. The feeling is akin to how memories operate; some feeling as if they are etched in a real time, or even slower, and others speeded up to a blur. The edit of this sequence is strongly directed to music, which is instrumental, also lending an educational and classic feel to the piece. The voiceover used is of an older woman giving an air of wisdom and knowledge, she reads in a very matter of fact way which is in contrast to the younger, more musing voiceover that is used in the second piece. The voiceover works in conjunction with the stock footage voiceover and gives an edge of irony, as the stock footage is overtly masculine in its perspective – from the use of male narration to the outdated understanding of gender dynamics, for example the voice over states 'so in preparation [of labour] you'll pack a bag to take along: toothbrush, makeup, a bed jacket perhaps and so on – useful things and things to make you pretty'. The images that construct the piece are found images that piece together the historical and evidential feel to the piece.

Part Two: *her first time*

Visual	**Voice/Text (Key: text, *voice over)***
the words are represented in the same manner as the first piece	**her first time**
This is followed by the moon motif	
Various metaphorical representations for the act of losing one's virginity. -a flower losing its petals	**deflower**
stock film, mother giving daughter advice	
-cherries disappearing, collage of women interviewed disappearing and the word pop dancing around them	**pop your/her cherry**
Imagery of awakening desire	
stock film, daughter voicing desire	**'I felt something so strong mama'**
Imagery of awakening desire, ends in orgasm, egg breaking	
Stop-motion of finger erasing the word virgin	

She is looking in the mirror; she closes her eyes (close up), she looks to see if she can note a difference in her appearance	***(Speech bubble text)*** **Do I look different? Is there a trace of this experience?**
She is eating, drinking	**I don't mourn the loss of hunger when I eat, the loss of thirst when I drink. What do I mourn now?**

Visual Treatment
The sequence employs experimental editing techniques: slowed down movement and the use of layered footage with shifting opacity to give the dream-like feeling of imagination. These poetic representations allow for play with diegetic and non-diegetic sound, cross fades, jump cuts and overlays. It also uses stop frame animation in parts. This segment reflects Maya Deren's work. This sequence metaphorically and poetically represents the act of losing one's virginity. It has a dream-like quality and plays with the iconography and feelings surrounding virginity. It is centred on a single actress, a young girl, who performs in a reflective, subjective manner.

Part Three: *her reflection*

This is a sequence woven together through intimate interviews with a variety of women, young and old, religious and non-religious, virgins and those who are no longer virgins, all musing on what their virginity means or meant to them. Covering large ground with character's musings edited into the short sequence serves to unify the myriad of women in one nebulous but interconnected feminine sexuality.

Visual Treatment
This sequence is an experiment in interviewing style. It does not take one approach in interviewing but explores various ones. Sometimes there is a trace of the filmmaker/her – adjusting of the camera or her voice asking the questions. At other times the interviewees speak as if they were not prompted by questions.

Every harlot was a virgin once. - William Blake
(excerpt from the poem *To The Accuser Who is The God of This World*)

A Note on Narrative
Narrative conventions are explored within each of the three parts and within the triptych as a collection. The first part, for example, collapses the dominant sense of time and space by exploring 'her' history in sync with, but not temporarily sequential to, a history of virginity. Similarly 'her' life is told in a way that extends and compresses time as only significant landmarks in her life are explored and the time frame jumps are not consistent. In the second part space and time are fluid as the film muses on the actual act of losing one's virginity. It also explores poetic and metaphorical representations of virginity and the loss thereof. The third part also jumps from interview to interview, weaving a narrative that is not based on the traditional trajectory of a single character, rather creating a unified (yet not clearly defined) feminine experience.

7. Analysis of the Undertaking of the New Approach

Essentially the practical element of this research paper explores a different approach to documentary, an approach transformed from how I set about making the first film, *Do Girls Want It?* This new approach explores the more experiential elements of virginity and the notions of 'loss' that surround it rather than the current affairs style employed previously that focused on factual engagement with the subject matter. This is new method is in stark opposition to the previous one where I operated with the assumption that there was a certain solidity surrounding the subject and this could be revealed through interview. The new film opens up possibility for new, various and contradictory experiences and understandings of the subject.

My new approach was very considered and grew out of an analytic process as I reflected back on my previous film and the environment in which it was produced. It also reviewed the subject matter and the technical and practical ways to explore it. Yet I still found myself wanting to make changes to my approach during the production phase and even in post-production. This leads me to what I believe to be the most profound learning I have gained from this process: the value of research and development time. There are significant changes between the treatment I submitted with my proposal (see appendix 5) and the final treatment included in this research report. In the broadcast environment I believe this also happens very often. Independent producers conceive of and compose proposals quickly in order to meet deadlines; they may even submit these proposals without having done real world research, as this research is both costly and usually not remunerated. When these producers and directors are finally awarded the project, some time may have passed and contexts and characters may have changed so that new or alternative ones may

now need to be found, thus altering the look of the film. Furthermore, many insights are gained during production which help to realise the scope and direction of the project fully, especially if it is a documentary project. For me this proves to be the natural and most effective way of producing – some of my best ideas came during production and even during post-production – however the problem arises when the broadcaster expects delivery of a project based on the proposal they originally commissioned. This is an understandable desire as they are funding the projects and want to ensure quality and ideology worthy of public broadcast, however it overlooks and can demean the creative process.

A recommended response to the issues raised above would seem to require a twofold approach: firstly, there is a need for more intensive dialogue between commissioning editors and directors during the production process, with a view to bringing more flexibility. In the creation of my film within an academic environment I was afforded the luxury of conversing with the staff, getting their opinions, synthesising these views and modifying my film accordingly. Their input was invaluable from the stage of conception through to post-production. While I acknowledge the broadcast environment is different to that of a university, I think that closer contact between commissioning editors and directors is needed and could result in improved content. This could have a knock-on effect for lowering production costs as productions could be regulated and directed to avoid overshooting but it could also provide higher audience ratings, as the content would be more accomplished. Secondly, there also needs to be a commitment to cultivate more rigorous research processes. This could result in increased pre-production costs, as it may need to be achieved through a

budget for research and development lest it become a financially unfeasible burden for independent producers.

The changes I found myself making during the production of my film were many. I pared down the script significantly; I stripped the voiceover and the script to their most basic. I removed long-winded sentences and preachy sequences. Although I work professionally as an editor and have knowledge of how footage cuts, it was only once I began piecing the film together that I was able to discern which parts of my script that were not working.

The quotes, for example, that I wanted to include at the beginning of every segment began to fall away. I had initially encountered quotes from stalwarts of patriarchal academia such as Freud, Voltaire and Blake. I decided to balance this with subversive quotes gathered from feminist women and pop culture icons. All this eventually became too much for the viewer to read. I decided to leave just two quotes to serve as bookends. These two quotes are from Blake and Freud, the kind of men whose writings helped construct the commonly understood notion of virginity – as something to be taken from a woman by a man, as something entwined in virtue. Ultimately these quotes are meant to be read with a sense of irony. I had intended them to serve as interstitials linking the three sequences together and without them I felt there was no unifying component. I decided to use imagery of the moon as an interstitial to link, again forcing me back to the rigours of my discipline: filmmaking, not writing, thus using visuals and audio-visual material, rather than simply printed text on screen. The moon has always been linked to notions of the feminine, given that its cycle is the same length as the average menstrual cycle, this serves to propound the myth that the

two are somehow in tune. The word menstrual is derived from the Latin ‘mensis’ meaning month or moon.

I then began to piece together the film, finding archival material and sourcing imagery to feed into my vision. It must be noted here that this freer academic environment allowed to me explore and utilise found footage as my film places itself within the realm of research. If this film were for broadcast, however, it would be swimming within a sea of copyright and intellectual property issues. Once I had created the basic structure I put the film to bed and allowed my mind to be free of it for a while. This is indeed a luxury borne out of my production environment but is a method that I find quite helpful. Having gained some distance from the project I was able to see more clearly what was working and what needed to be pushed further. Again this is something that is not possible within the usual high turnaround schedules of the broadcast environment – although it would not seem too undoable for broadcast production schedules to allow a short period between the finalizing of a script or approach and the final ‘locking’ of a production before shooting. Possibly even a short period between fine cut and final cut status.

The interviewing section of the film took me through a process I found very edifying. I tried to use voices surrounding the issues of virginity that are often marginalised, such as those of lesbians and older women, but I also aimed to approach the interviews in a very different way to that of the SABC documentary. During the SABC process I spent the time during which the camera was set up trying to ease the interviewee into a comfortable space by talking about the project, for example when it would be on television and on which channel. However, while I was setting up the camera during

the making *Triptych of Her* I spent the time talking about the subject matter, leading the interviewee into the realm of sexuality and reminiscing about or imagining their virginity loss. I spoke to the interviewees candidly about my own experience and about my motivations for making the film and what interested me. I was very open and honest with them. In the SABC process I did not reveal anything about myself and what I thought to the interviewees, thinking that it would somehow destroy the supposed objectivity of the documentary. However, in this process I conversed much more with my subjects having now decided for myself that the truth of this film lies in the heart of women, in my heart and in the hearts of my subjects. I think it created a much more personal and intimate space. During the editing phase, I included footage taken for the SABC documentary that had been left out because I felt it was 'too personal' and not in the same tone as the rest of the film. It was gratifying to revisit this material with a new eye.

The editing of the interview segment I found quite challenging – besides the conceptual concerns of what to include, what to leave out and what to highlight, I was faced with a very real technical concern, how to edit the women's voices together. There were natural pauses in the arguments that the women constructed in their interviews as they moved from subject to subject and I was initially tentative about how I should represent these pauses. Eventually I settled on a decision to edit interstitials using short sequences of the women in thought. By editing into the sequence their candid moments of thought I hoped to provide a frank representation of how they navigated this subject matter. The interstitial of the women thinking, edited swiftly, I thought served to unify them; although different women of different ages and of different races groups, their voices merged into one indistinct but recognisably

feminine viewpoint. By treating each talking head the same within the interstitial I hoped to underscore their shared female perspective.

Paramount in my exploration during this research project was the desire to find my own filmic voice, to explore the tools I have as a filmmaker and to understand how I can use them to express myself. There has been some critique that my film in someway coddles the women it films, that it protects the subject matter of virginity. Initially I was startled by these remarks because I was aiming to do just the opposite. However, after considering the critique I realised I had simply allowed my personal voice to emerge. That I myself wanted to explore and implode notions surrounding virginity, but I did not want to devalue the concept. I value my own experience and while I wanted to understand what the reasons for that may be, I do not think that the notion of virginity has no validity. I think this fascination with first sexual experience is innate, although, of course I do not deny that it has been perverted by culture and religion, which is usually male dominated. Thus, if a trace of ambiguity surrounding the subject matter discernible within the film, it is the trace of the filmmaker. My approach has been to embrace both the idealised and the cynical and I can only hope that it opens a dialogue with women – it has never been my aim to provide answers.

8. Conclusion

Ultimately I do not wish to pit the two films against one another and try to gauge which comes out top. The environments in which they were produced are very different. Each film had its own purpose and its own context. This research exercise was to explore how a certain subject can be looked at very differently within the same medium. I wanted to assess the broadcast environment and find out how one could operate differently, either within it or beyond it. I acknowledge the luxury that I have been afforded in this opportunity to explore for the sake of enquiry. I emerge from this experience, in both writing this research report and making the film triptych, with the view that this is an exploration that will never end, that filmmakers are always learning and that I will relish the continuation of this learning experience.

This process has also given me inspiration for more experimental documentary styles, ones that are not intended for elite audiences who are well versed in issues of experimental or avant-garde film, but rather styles of films that can be enjoyed by any and all television and film viewers.

Making *Do Girls Want It?* for the SABC exposed me to the workings of a national broadcaster; through that process I learnt how to work within constraints. Making *Triptych of Her* exposed me to a free environment where every decision I made was mine, and the advice offered was not mandatory to take. I was able to work without a certain target market in mind, without a budget (which also meant it was shot by myself, not a professional camera person) and without quotas needing to be met. This allowed me to be much freer with my content and the film became a piece of self-

expression in an artistic sense. I gave myself the space to be sarcastic and ironic, but I also allowed myself to be reverent where I felt I needed to be.

After these two films where I approached virginity in a current affairs manner, in a historical manner, in a personal manner and in a contemporary manner, I still find myself in a daze about virginity. It is subject that puzzles, and consistently I find myself returning to the quote from Freud with which I open *Triptych of Her***,** **'**The high value set upon her virginity by a man wooing a woman seems to us so deeply planted and self-evident that we become almost perplexed if called upon to give reasons for it.' (Blank, 2007:21) Virginity is not only taboo, it not only makes people uncomfortable but it also confounds, it intrigues. Hanne Blank's history of virginity concludes in a similar manner as she muses: '…if nothing else, I feel I can say with certainty that no matter where our changing culture takes us, and no matter how our notions of virginity change, as long as sex is important in the slightest, virginity and virgins will continue to matter profoundly to us all' (2007:257). There is, and always has been, something intangibly yet deeply important about virginity.

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(Taken from September 2005 Request for Proposals on the SABC Website)

RFP NO.	SPECIAL FACT B16
RFP TITLE	ENCOUNTERS LABORATORY

GENRE	Factual: Documentary
LAB 2005 THEME	URBAN EXPLORERS
SERIES	6 X 48'
EDITORIAL GUIDE	The SABC is the Broadcast Partner for the Encounters Documentary Festival 2005. In terms of our agreement we will assist with the annual Encounters Laboratory that aims to identify and train six talented young filmmakers. The Lab's initial workshop will be conducted in Cape Town (in the run up to Sithengi) in November 2005. This year the theme is "Urban Explorers". Young people have to explore their worlds and do this in many different ways… some good, some bad. We are calling for young filmmakers (some filmmaking experience is essential) to submit proposals that are aimed at exploring their worlds in the broadest possible sense. The Encounters Laboratory aims to grow and develop the South African documentary film making industry by identifying up and coming young talent, especially from previously disadvantaged groups.
LANGUAGE	90 percent African Languages
GUIDE PRICE	R 3,500 – R 3,700 Cost Per Minute
COMMISSIONING EDITOR	Eugene Paramoer
PROPOSED SCHEDULE	Delivery November 2006
CLOSING DATE	6th October 2005

(Proposal submitted to SABC by N. Comninos, 6 October 2005)

Do Girls Want It?

The high value set upon her virginity by a man wooing a woman seems to us so deeply planted and self-evident that we become almost perplexed if called upon to give reasons for it.

- Sigmund Freud

Logline
Why are virgins currently in demand? An exploration of the current focus on female purity and virginity in society, and how it manifests in contemporary South Africa.

Synopsis
This 48-minute documentary assesses the societal pressures in South Africa placed on women with regards to their sexuality, with a specific focus on the current value placed on virgins. The documentary explores the South African notion of virginity, with a focus on what women and young girls think – whether they are rural or urban, traditional or modern, guided by religion or not. This is documentary about what girls really want: to be virgins? How they value this concept and how they view their own control of their bodies.

Treatment
In today's society notions of virginity and purity manifest themselves in interesting ways, usually placing pressure on women, so much so that virginity has seemed to become a solely feminine construct. Internationally, conservative Christians have embraced female virginity while (remaining silent on the male's sexual activity), advocating abstinence through campaigns such as 'True Love Waits' which encourage young women to commit to sexual abstinence until marriage. In South Africa such campaigns are also led by African traditionalists. This documentary features the doyenne of female virginity testing, Nomagugu Ngobese, in action. How does one reconcile these staunch approaches to female sexuality in a today's world? And how does this focus on virginity change in our society that has such high rape statistics.

This documentary explores the sexy topic of virginity and sexuality through an intimate look at the social and sexual world of young South African women. Within this contemporary context abstinence seems to being promoted as countercultural in relation to normative teenage sexual behaviour, yet therein lies the paradox of the virginity movement: counterculture, yet through the timelessness of scripture and tradition.

Historically, female virginity has been closely linked with personal or even family honour in many cultures. The loss of virginity can be viewed as a milestone to be proud of or as a failure to be ashamed of (particularly if a lack of self control was involved), depending on cultural perceptions – and often, whether a child was conceived in the process. These perceptions were heavily influenced by perceived gender roles, such that for a male the association with virginity loss was more often

with pride and for a female the association was more often with shame. There has been a widespread belief that the loss of virginity before marriage is a matter of deep shame for a woman. I, myself, raised as an atheist in a non-orthodox home found myself struggling with how I felt about the loss of my virginity, yet I could not pin my guilt to tradition or God – where did this pressure come from? Why am I preoccupied with female purity if my background does not dictate it? I lament the focus of on virginity because it perpetuates the notion of purity with regard to women, labelling those as who are not virgins in some way socially unacceptable – but not men. Virginity testing, for me is problematic because it brings with it issues of human rights infringements and because it interferes with the right to privacy and dignity even sexism. If indeed virginity testing was a guaranteed way of reducing unsafe teenage sex, that would be great, but it does not necessarily work that way. Similarly, I find a pledge to God for virginity equally problematic. Both work, it seems, to absolve women from the power to make decisions for and from themselves. I believe this documentary is a way of talking about a major, controversial issue that affects all youth – but in a truly African and South African way. The documentary will interrogate why and how these movements protect "family values" by using young, unworld-wise girls and not their male peers.

My first character, Zinhle is 18 and a "certified", through regular testing conducted by Nomagugu Ngobese, virgin. She is a member of the Nomkhubulwane[4] Youth Group headed by the vocal virginity tester Nomagugu Ngobese. *(She was interviewed, along with Nomagugu, in December last year, she has subsequently matriculated, started studying town planning and moved to Durban from Pietermaritzburg. She, however, assures me I will find "the same Zinhle", i.e. a virgin)*

Through Zinhle's eyes there is the space to talk about the Zulu monarchy and the inherent patriarchy in Zulu culture, as well as the issue of abstinence from sexual activity in the context of HIV/AIDS. We also speak to her youth group leader and virginity tester, vocal Nomagugu Ngobese, who helps to bring discussion of tradition in a modern world to the fore. We see Zinhle interacting with Nomagugu Ngobese as she gets inspected, then certified as a virgin, among some 500 young girls participating in this recently revived practice.

In parallel, the documentary introduces another group whose members pledge their virginity. True Love Waits, an international organisation created and coordinated by the Baptist Sunday School Board of Nashville, Tennessee. In 1994 True Love Waits launched a South African branch, and reached about 350 000 pledges in 2001. A recent study at Harvard, however, reveals that more than half of the teens who take virginity pledges end up breaking this vow within a year. Jerusha Stuart is a woman in her early twenties who heads the Durban branch of the organisation. She talks candidly about virginity, telling me she can introduce me to a recently married couple, "and he was a virgin too". She bemoans pop figures who promote sexuality, but is quite impressed with Jessica Simpson's public loss of her virginity after marriage. Zinhle represents a South African incarnation of the global trend of chastity, usually seen as the new organising principle of the Christian right. This is an interesting paradox as part of Nomagugu's argument for virginity testing is that its banning is due

[4] The daughter of god and a respected Zulu goddess of rain, nature and fertility (festival revived in 1996 after about 200 years)

to those who want to stamp out traditional Zulu culture, such as Christians. True Love Waits and its members are making a presentation at the University of Zululand in order to get more youths to pledge, which provides an interesting event to document and I have been given permission to film.

It is not that often that the province of KwaZulu-Natal is showcased on national TV, or that authentic stories from our area are flighted, stories that will move from a urban setting to the deep rural areas, so we are very excited about this opportunity to focus on this important (and most populous) province and its culture. The documentary's use of strong, compelling characters, coupled with potent illustrative events will allow dramatic action to unfold on screen, even including lighter and humorous moments, while still tackling weighty issues. This documentary will fit very nicely into prime time viewing due to its sexy and contentious subject matter.

The documentary has many opportunities for vibrant footage, starting with the fact that we will have contrasting characters, and also contrasting different locations; Zinhle and her Nomkhubulwane festival, Jerusha and her efforts to take the message to Zululand.

This documentary will appeal to a youthful market, starting with young teenagers through to young adults in their 20s, but it will also appeal to their parents who are inherently interested in this issue because it affects their children and their long-term future. Virginity is currently the focus of increasing media coverage throughout South Africa, in response to the Children's Rights Bill that outlaws virginity testing for girls younger than 18 years. The virginity issue has also had strong international focus because conservative Christians in the US, led by the current administration of President George W. Bush, are highlighting virginity in their efforts to fight HIV/AIDS by promoting abstinence-only sex education and not only forbidding, but seeking to prevent, condom use. These policies impact on us in South Africa, as they have led to crippling cuts in aid to organisations promoting, or even allowing, the use of condoms. Thus this documentary lends itself to a much broader audience, ranging from teens through older adults. The documentary's unique blend of current popular culture, both urban and rural, will serve to further widen its strong intrinsic appeal.

Structure

The documentary opens with the film's catchy soundtrack, in a visually enticing music video styled montage the audience is introduced to the film's characters and the themes of the documentary. I am interested in unpacking the icons and symbols of virginity: the Virgin Mary, Nomkhubulwane, the white wedding, the reed[5], blood, bare breasts[6] etc… And want to perhaps begin the film with a montage of this iconography, concluding with a reworking of these ideals as the film's debate has destabilised them I am also interested in the diction of the phrase "to lose one's virginity", what is the loss implied here? I am interested in the patriarchy that lies beneath this web of guilt, shame and desire, both in my life and in what I see reflected in Zinhle's and in True Love Waits. These natural book ends of iconic montage serve to augment the story in a subtle, yet interesting way; unpacking traditional notions of femininity.

[5] The reed represents fertility in a Zulu context, and maidens carry reeds during the reed dance festival where a broken reed symbolizes one who has had sex.

[6] Traditionally Zulu maidens (and thus virgins) bare their breasts, and only married women cover up

Soundtrack
All the music in the film will be original and the soundtrack will be developed specially for the film to create an urban soundtrack that illuminates the mood and tone of the film. I would like to get in touch with a female spoken word artist to collaborate to create a theme song. The lyrics of this song would be very important and would be created in a dialogue between myself and the artist. Parts of the song could also be used interstitially throughout the film, as well as literature and mythological references (African and those in popular consciousness) that explore the notion of virginity. I am also interested in getting rights to/speak to SARRAL about using Arthur Mafokate's infamous kwaito song 'Sika lekhekhe' (directly translated as 'cutting the cake') referring to having sex with women.

Appendix 3

(Taken from September 2005 Request for Proposals on the SABC Website)

SABC Mandate

Content

1. Ensure the SABC promotes democracy, non-racism, nation building, and empowerment through, news, current affairs and innovative programming that is informative, educational and entertainment in all official languages.
2. Ensure the SABC produces compelling, professional and authoritative news, current affairs and other programming that tells the South African and African story accurately, fairly and in balanced way to all South Africans in line with its Editorial policies and regulations of ICASA.
3. Ensure that the SABC reflects the World, in particular Africa, in line with its editorial policies and corporate goals, and plays a meaningful role in the supporting the African Renaissance and NEPAD.

Stakeholders

4. Create an SABC that enjoys the support and respect of its viewers, listeners, shareholder as well as other stakeholders.

Financial

5. Create a financially sound corporation built on a sustainable business model, and ensure that its assets are used in an effective and efficient way. Establish a procurement policy that complies with the ICT Black Empowerment Charter, and promotes ownership and the participation of youth, women and disabled in the broadcasting industry.

People

6. Make the SABC a place of preferred employment by attracting, retaining and nurturing talent in the Corporation and the country, while ensuring appropriate compliance with the Employment Equity.

Technology

7. Put in place an innovative technology platform and infrastructure that will enable the SABC to deliver on its mandate.

Governance

8. Ensure full statutory compliance of the SABC with the Broadcasting Act, the Charter, Editorial policies and other relevant legislation. Put in place systems, policies and procedures, and systems to ensure improved business processes, achieve efficiencies and good governance of the Corporation.

Performance monitoring

9. Monitor, evaluate and reward performance on the implementation of the SABC Corporate Goals and Editorial policies.

Appendix 4

(Taken from September 2005 Request for Proposals on the SABC Website)

Channel Statement

WHAT IS SABC 1

SABC 1 is a full spectrum television channel providing programming in English and Nguni languages. The channel's programme offering provides for entertainment escapism, and promises information and education that can make a difference in the target audience's life.

OUR EDITORIAL LINE

"Creating, reflecting and celebrating our youthful South African identity"

Our programmes will go beyond an urban and contemporary bias to reflect the broad canvas of our country with a focus on "real people and real issues". Our programming signature will have "straight-talking honesty, a celebratory yet outspoken tone and provoke responsible social action and dialogue". While we aim for popular and broad appeal programming, we will remain honest and responsible, never tabloid and sensational. Our programmes are not just about "pure urban" culture but the culture emerging out of youthful consciousness in Mzansi generally – although keeping us at the cutting edge of our world.

THE PROGRAMMING STRATEGY

SABC 1 has pioneered what is now called "popular public service". This is based on the belief that public service television can be delivered to mass audiences in an environment of viewer choice. Over the last few years, the channel has delivered on the belief with programmes such as Soul City, Yizo Yizo, Soul Buddyz, Tsha Tsha and Gaz'lam. Educational drama in South Africa remains one of the most popular genres in television. Over the last 3 years the channel has systematically increased the delivery of public service value with increased delivery of factual programmes (additional news bulletins, current affairs, documentaries and talk shows). Of significance is the fact that the prime-time factual programmes – Zola 7, the documentary strand – regularly win their slots.

THE BRAND

SABC 1 re-positioned in August 2003 with a new brand and editorial promise because the channel was looking to strengthen its relationship to its viewers. Research with the viewers has demonstrated that this exercise has been very successful. When asked to personify the channel, respondents to a study said that SABC 1 was "a people's person, friendly and caring and with lots of vibe. But she hasn't forgotten her roots".

Going forward the channel aims to consolidate the brand's popularity and success with its audiences by evolving it to something more accessible and embracing beyond it bold gritty engagements.

SABC 1 can celebrate what it means to be youthful and South African. It is a channel defined by courage, like the youthful South Africa it serves – celebrating the freedom to question and to uncover new truths.

Reflecting the new archetype of "responsible youthfulness", entertaining social realism that is more enthralling than fiction – it is an inspiration and a guiding light for youthful people, never retrospective – its eyes are fixed firmly on the horizon of possibilities.

Like our viewers, SABC 1 is a social pioneer taking television where it has never dared to go before. SABC 1 is South Africa's youthful dreams, aspirations, needs and identity unfolding before your very eyes.

OUR BRAND PROMISE

Only SABC 1 empowers youthful Mzansi through entertaining social realism – "authentic story telling". What the brand means:

- SABC 1 is youthful and brave.
- It embraces the changing social reality in South Africa, but always with fresh eyes.
- SABC 1 makes a difference by provoking individuals about issues affecting South Africa.
- Accordingly, creative work and communication must show the same degree of bravery, celebrate the freedom to question and engage with society.

It's not about age but about a mindset – an attitude.

OUR VIEWERS

"Television is the first truly democratic culture – the first culture available to everyone and entirely governed by what people want. The most terrifying thing is what people want." Clive Barnes

With more than 15 million viewers per week, SABC 1 is the number one channel in the country. The channel's youthful bran d quality is not to be confused with who watches it. In the same way that Coca cola is a youthful brand with a broad range of consumers, SABC 1 will build a consistent brand quality while remaining a mass volume channel reaching the most TV viewers on any day.

Triptych of Her
A Film Treatment

Title
Triptych of Her

Question
(It is good practice to reduce a film's intent a film to a single question. This single question is the driving force for a film so whenever you feel lost along the way you may back to your single driving question. This film has two.)
What is virginity from female perspectives?
How are these perspectives manifested through an experiment with form?

Synopsis
This is an experimental film; one attempts to find new ways of revealing content through the use of the film form. The film is a collection of three 5-minute shorts: *herstory*, *her loss* and *her rumination.* They may be watched separately, or as a collection and in whatever order the particular viewer pleases. Each of the three films focuses on a particular film construct (frame rate, editing, and interviewing technique – narrative is explored in the collection as a whole) in order to explore the relationship with film language and content. The film threads together an intimate portrayal of the loss of one girl's virginity, while assessing the societal influences on her choices and emotions surrounding this experience.

Director's Intention
The film focuses on a subject that is difficult to represent. Just as film is an illusion of reality, this is an illusion of 'her' and her loss of virginity. Giving precedence to form the film explores the iconography and emotional landscape of virginity through non-literal ways. Through the focus on a central character – her – the film weaves together a poetic triptych as each sequence explores film form in a way that exposes its mechanics. This is a visual experience.

My intention is to explore the various manifestations of virginity and notions of sexual purity that are upheld in society and how they impact on feminine sexuality. The film makes use of a loosely autobiographical frame, while also having the opportunity to poetically interpret as well as also representing in a documentary style. I will draw on my research from my previous film, *Do Girls Want It?* which I spoke to many women surrounding their virginity, as well as a sex therapist and a virginity tester, putting me in a good position to consider the impact of religion and culture on virginity.

Each segment begins with a literary quote that locates the piece with in its subject matter. The quotes also refer to the Brechtian notion 'literarisation' which 'occurs through the persistent use of quotation… thus conforming to Brecht's call to acknowledge that acting [and in this case filming] is indeed a quotation and not origination' (Lapsley: 1998, 197). Thus the audience is encouraged into active intellectual participation with the subject matter as they are reminded this is just a representation of a subject, one that draws on many sources. The quotes I have

initially encountered come from stalwarts of patriarchal academia such a Freud and Blake. I aim to balance this with subversive quotes gathered from feminist women, which will be included at the end, or possibly within the actual sequences. Just as Barthes suggests that captions of photographs or written images in a film serve to 'anchor' a concept and function as a device that coaxes the viewer to a preferred reading of the text, I hope these quotes lead the audience to active consideration of the subject matter.

The first piece is a montage that looks very personally at virginity; the second piece explores spatial temporal collapse and explores a blend of personal and social manifestations of the subject, while the last piece, looking at interviewing, explores the social construction of virginity.

Script and Treatment
The film is split in to three parts, each will be analysing a different element of film form – although the subject matter remains crucial and informs the form.

Part One: *herstory*

It is an infantile superstition of the human spirit that virginity would be thought a virtue and not the barrier that separates ignorance from knowledge. **-** Voltaire

Visual	**Voice-over**
Embryo growing (medical pictures) (photos, now and then) twins (medical pictures and photo album) (images of Mugabe, *None But Ourselves*, anti-apartheid posters etc…)	**She was conceived,** **in Johannesburg, Hillbrow** **(it was different then).** **She was not alone.** **Together they moved to Zimbabwe.**
medical pictures	**In the tenth century, it was conceived. An Arab doctor named Ibn Sina determined that there was a small ridge or flap of skin inside the vaginal opening. And that it was this that caused pain and bleeding. It was this that was damaged by the penis during first sexual experience.**
(images of fashion, of social landscape: cold war, early computers, ninja turtles) (photos of twins)	**She was born, it was 1982** **(he was born too).**
pictures of dissections	**The existence of this little bit of skin was confirmed in 1544 by world-famous Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius, the first person to find it in an actual dissection.**
(flags and mementoes of each country,	**She (as he) was Greek, South African,**

Greek food etc…) churches, Greek churches etc…) pictures of traditional Greeks, slavery, Greek orthodox churches Pictures of her (and brother), growing up, being a kid. Also showing media – women's magazines, girly magazines etc. . .	**American, Dutch, Italian, Zimbabwean** **Her name meant defender of the people.** **Its name was also Greek, after the god Hymenaeus. He is the god of marriages and weddings. Hymenaeus is represented as a young man with a wreath of flowers and a torch. The hymen is represented as the custodian of virginity.** **but she had no religion**
Pictures of ancient Rome, of courts and jails Present day imagery of religion visuals of constitution(?) visuals of antiquity images of her, women, media images… photojournalism (?) *	**In ancient Athens, the law required that young women who lost their virginities before marriage be sold into slavery, because that was all they were worth. Losing their virgnity, losing their sexual purity, they ruined their reputations and their family honor.** **But she had no traditions** **But she had nothing to answer to** **Roman law allowed fathers to murder their daughters if the daughters lost their virginities before marriage.** ***She speaks of her desire, about experimentation, and also coercion**** **In some parts of the world, "honor crimes" are still commonplace – women who lose their virginity before marriage can be beaten, mutilated, or killed by their families.** **She cried when she lost her virginity**

Visual Treatment

This first segment is a brief history of 'her', the central character, and what formed her moral code, something so often closely linked with sexual behaviour. The aim is to draw attention to this link in order reveal it as a social construction. The piece collapses space and time as it explores 'her' history in conjunction with an ancient history of virginity. Tracing her life span from birth to when she loses her virginity,

the sequence illuminates certain events in her life that shaped her sexuality; these moments are juxtaposed by societal concerns with virginity. It will make use of found images, such as images from medical journals about embryonic growth, but also images of events that happened historically in her life, as well as family photographs and images taken especially for the sequence. This film is loosely autobiographical; this allows me to play freely with the family photographs that I have access to as well as a playful interaction with the real world. The film will play with frame rate in the way that jars the audience into realising that movement, and thus cinema, is an illusion. It makes use of stop-motion still frames, normal movement, slow motion and speeded up sequences. The purpose of this play also links to content as the different speeds of movement will correlate with how memories operate, some feeling like they are etched in a real time, and others are a speeded up blur. It will also make playful use of sound effects. The rate of movement created will also be indicative of how one's life unfolds – how some moments are etched in our memories in slow motion, whilst other speed past in a blur.

Part Two: *her loss*

The high value set upon her virginity by a man wooing a woman seems to us so deeply planted and self-evident that we become almost perplexed if called upon to give reasons for it. - Sigmund Freud

This sequence will metaphorically and poetically represent the act of losing one's virginity. It has a dream-like quality and plays with the iconography and feelings surrounding virginity. The piece is centred on a poem that anchors the exploration of the act.

I was born into her
She was born in me
And now this virgin me is pure memory
I was space to rent
I was temporary
I was housing untouched naivety
But it never was lost
My virgin memory –
So see the virgin me
The me outside memory
The me more real than my purity,
The me that extends beyond my body

I was born into her
My birth made manifest
Which declares me virgin before I am me
Hear my untouched being
Screaming I am free
This is my pride march
Don't fall in line
You'll need to sing your song, freedom keeps its own time
I'm singing a pride song here and it goes

I was born a virgin soul
I live a virgin being
I don't want the title
The name isn't me,
I am me before I am my purity
I never really owned my virginity, she owned me

Visual Treatment
Once again the sequence will employ experimental use of still frames and audio. But this time the editing will be more obvious in certain ways, there will be sequences filmed at the normal frame rate, but there will also be the use of layered footage with shifting opacity to give the dream-like feeling of imagination. This poetic representation calls for play in the edit suite; experimenting with diegetic and non-diegetic sound, cross fades, jump cuts and overlays. This segment has influence of Maya Deren's work. The piece shows the girl in bed alone, and with various lovers; visual overlays reveal her in bed with herself - this is a sexual moment with herself, *her* loss of virginity. The piece also blends in the negative connotations that surround sexual women. She repeats these thoughts to herself, only when they come out of her mouth it is through a male voice. As she in trying to engage in this moment, the act of losing one's virginity, derogatory words for women slip into her head 'slut' 'loose' 'slapper' 'cheap fuck', as well as sexist idioms such as 'a woman is a chef in the kitchen, a lady in the dining room and a whore in the bedroom'. This is visually represented through split screen.

Part Three: *her rumination*

Every harlot was a virgin once. - William Blake

This is a sequence woven together through intimate interviews with a variety of women, young and old, religious and non religious, virgins and those who are no longer virgins, perhaps even sex workers, all musing on what their virginity means or meant to them. Covering such a large ground through the many interviews conducted the piece serves to unify the myriad of women in one nebulous but interconnected feminine sexuality. The interviews will be conducted on the streets, in women's bedrooms, at old age homes, at universities and at schools.

Visual Treatment
This sequence is an experiment in interviewing style. It will not take one approach in interviewing but will explore various ones. Sometimes there will be a trace of the filmmaker/her – adjusting of the camera, or her voice asking the questions, at other times the interviewees will speak as if they were not prompted by questions. Similarly the shooting style will differ from interview to interview – the women will sometimes be shot left to right, and other times right to left, they will be shot from above, below, in the dark, in the light, hand held and on a tripod. Some interviews will be conducted informally, while the interviewee is engaged in an activity for example, such as getting dressed, choosing underwear, making a bed or a cradle. While at other times the interview will be quite formal; the implications of these decisions which decisions will be felt through the answers given by the women. The edit will shift between various sorts of interviews and will draw attention to the process by showing candid moments usually cut out of documentary film, as well as the physical set up of the interviews. It

will also reveal traces of the interaction with the filmmaker and the interviewees. The use of colour and black and white will also be experimented with to see how it affects the perceived authenticity of an interview.

A Note on Narrative

Narrative conventions are explored within each of the three parts and within the triptych as a collection. The first part, for example, collapses the dominant sense of time and space by exploring 'her' history in sync with, but not temporarily sequential to, a history of virginity. Similarly 'her' life will be told in a way that extends and compresses time as only significant landmarks in her life are explored and the time frame jumps are not consistent. In the second part, space and time will be something fluid as the film muses on the actual act of losing one's virginity and the thoughts that happen while in this act. The space moves from the actual act, to these thoughts that take us to new locations and timeframes. The third part also jumps from interview to interview, weaving a narrative that is not based on the traditional trajectory of a single character.

The viewing of the films will mimic this playful approach to narrative: when you put the DVD on you can randomly select the order in which to play the films. It is a gimmick, one that film lovers enjoy, but is also a comment on narrative structure. There is a director's choice which suggests an order to watch the triptych in, but there is also the space for a particular viewer's own choice. The film should be able to be viewed in any variation of the order as the films serve as a collection and each version merely tells a different part of the same story.