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The digital self-portrait: a malleable image and a post-medium

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to my own practice.

This study investigates ways in which postmodern digital culture has affected the self-portrait image, and how, as a malleable post-medium, it has become layered and ambiguous.

My current self-portrait project is part of an ongoing creative practice, with interests that are grounded in earlier work starting from the 1980s. These earlier works attempted to incorporate and develop a new syntax in sculpture, which Krauss refers to in *Passages of Modern Sculpture*, and to challenge traditional art mediums as she suggests. This current body of work has continued with the intention to challenge traditional art mediums, and has used digital technologies to do this by processing images of the self-portrait, as a means to invent a new medium and develop an artistic identity. This body of self-portrait images has been processed to produce images of the self, which express complex notions of identity. These digital self-portraits are prepared for exhibition by printing on museum-quality archival paper, which has a subtle texture which adds tactility to the image, and by using a colour-fast pigment ink to enhance the intensity of the colour range. These images are purposefully not framed in traditional frames, which would isolate the images from the site they are installed in, and inhibit their integration into the space. These self-portrait images are mounted on a slight support and sit closely against the wall surface and are thereby integrated into the site and, as an installation, become part of a totality and a post-medium condition.

My earlier work, which was largely sculptural, investigated a variety of traditional and non-traditional mediums, with emphasis placed on installation as the format for presentation, and on multiplicity as a means to read the work. The artwork I have developed since the 1980s has included sculpturally-orientated process, material and spatial investigations, with non-theatrical performances and time-based analogue video productions. These investigations consciously and intuitively responded to modernist notions of contemporary art, with a practice that embraced a set of concepts of “postmodernity” and “globalization” which as conceptual dominants of our time were, according to Harvey (2000:38), ways in which artists could consider questions of

politics, culture, and national identity. According to Harvey (2000:32), ‘Globalization’ is a term which postmodernism could not operate without, where the idea of the globe suggests a radical decentring of everything. He asks, “Is it not globalization that has so hollowed out the nation state and so decentered political power that everything dissolves into multicultural identity politics” (Harvey, 2000:32).

It was with the understanding of globalization as a radical decentring, that as a South African artist in the 1980s, it was possible to shift from a modernist to a postmodernist condition in the conceptual approaches to art making, where, as Harvey argues, this shift had “considerable impact on academic and mass media brokers and how we collectively represent, understand, and interpret the world” (Harvey, 2000:27). According to Harvey, this shift has depended on a “reconfiguration of all manner of conceptual apparatuses in many different spheres.” He suggests that the rise of concepts to do with chaos, complexity, fractals, and the like within mathematics and the sciences, are what adds to the “destabilization” of traditional concepts of a “postmodern sensibility” (Harvey, 2000:27).

This current project of self-portraits is a continuation of an investigation started in the 1980s where I used the enquiry of the body as a sculptural subject, with an awareness of its postmodern sensibilities/associations, as an attempt at the measure of things in a global world. Harvey (2000:27) claims that the body, “also provides an opportunity for enquiry, away from the monolithic categories such as class, and hence away from class politics, to embrace the micro-politics of the body as an alternative site for radical politics” (Harvey, 2000:38). It was with these and other postmodern sensibilities that a project of digital self-portraits was developed.

1.2 The postmodern condition

As a city Johannesburg is always transforming - a place where a large influx of people contribute to the experience of the postmodern condition, which is found in the continuity of the shrinking of space and the speeding up of time - as it experiences rapid globalization. South Africa is not what it used to be, according to Achille Mbembe (2007:1), who writes:

> Thirteen years after the formal abolition of apartheid, South Africa is no longer what it used to be. Whether by design or not, the country is undergoing multiple transitions, at different paces and rhythms. It is coming out of the dark age of white supremacy and entering, willfully or not, into a new age of diversity, pluralism and inclusion.

It was with these experiences of multiple transitions, with diversity, pluralism and inclusion in this postmodern culture which Mbembe writes about, that this digital self-portrait project was developed. As a South African artist, a consideration of the effects of globalization triggered my current project of self-portraits as a continuation of an investigation started in the 1980s where I used the body as a sculptural subject, but also with an awareness of its postmodern sensibilities/associations, as the measure of all things in a global world a need to investigate the self-portrait as a cultural means to develop a micro-politics, which included investigations of identities. According to Jameson (1984), modernism and postmodernism are cultural formations which accompany particular stages of capitalism. He further suggests that the third phase of capitalism, which we are in now, is a multinational or consumer capitalism where the emphasis is placed on marketing, selling, and consuming commodities, not on producing them. As an artist working in this time of consumer capitalism where emphasis is not on production of commodities, it becomes necessary to respond to these concerns, as well as to Jameson's claim that electronic technologies correlate with postmodern culture. I have therefore investigated these conditions in this project, using the digital camera phone and the malleable digital image as a means to create post-medium images of the self. The construction of racial identities in South Africa at a time of globalization and postmodern culture, is increasingly complex and layered and no longer pre-fixed. As Mbembe (2007:1) claims in his text, *Whiteness without apartheid: the limits of racial freedom*: "The meaning of race and the nature of racial identity are now far more complex and ambiguous than they have ever been. Who is "black", "Afrikaner", "white", "coloured", "Asian" or even African" is no longer pre-fixed."

This project focuses less on South African identity development than on the development of medium and how it has responded to reductive modernist theories as Krauss has suggested, where new syntaxes in late-modern and postmodern art practices develop by looking beyond the limits of modernism, and, "where the artist

reinvents and articulates traditional art mediums" (Jameson, 1984:55). This reinvention and articulation of traditional art mediums has become an important strategy for critical art production and as a condition of this age of postmodernism, is imbedded in contemporary culture, as argued in Jameson, where he claims that, "it is essential to grasp postmodernism not as a style, but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features" (Jameson, 1984: 55).

Jameson characterises post modernity as the total saturation of cultural space by the image, whether at the hands of advertising, communications media, or cyberspace, and that this complete image and its permeation of social daily life means, he says, "that aesthetic experience is now everywhere, in an expansion of culture that has not only made the notion of an individual work of art wholly problematic, but has also emptied out the very concept of aesthetic autonomy" (1999:56). In this state, he suggests, "everything is now fully translated into the visible and the culturally familiar," [and]… "aesthetic attention, finds itself transferred to the life of perception as such" (1999:56). This is what he calls a "new life of postmodern sensation," in which "the perceptual system of late capitalism" experiences everything from shopping to all forms of leisure as aesthetic, thereby rendering anything that could be called a properly aesthetic sphere, obsolete (Jameson cited in Krauss, 1999:56).

1.3 Krauss's notion of the post-medium

It is in the postmodern condition that the meaning of the traditional art medium, as we know it, has changed. Since the 1980s my own work has challenged reductive modernist notions of art, where the traditional art medium was considered as a dominant mode of expression. It was Krauss's claim that a new syntax had developed in sculpture, and where, in her modernist versus postmodernist debates she continued to play this out - first in *Passages of Modern Sculpture* (1981) and then again in *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1999). These texts show Krauss's interest in questioning theories of the medium, and, referring to a wide range of artists, she continued to translate, analyse and categorise the contemporary visual arts in relation to a modernist versus postmodernist orientation.

Krauss (2006:56) writes about the post-medium, describing it as a ‘technical support’ rather than a ‘medium’, and argues that it “refers to the specific material support for a traditional aesthetic genre”. This reduces the idea of ‘medium’ in the modernist art work to something too literal and specific - excessively aware of and responsible to its physical basis - where, as Stanley Cavell states in Krauss (2002:56): “its awareness and responsibility for the physical basis of its art compel it at once to assert and deny the control of its art by that basis.” What makes the post-medium, or the ‘technical support’ important here is, as Krauss (2002:56) suggests, that while it,

> acknowledg[es] the recent obsolescence of most traditional aesthetic mediums (such as oil on canvas, fresco, and many sculptural materials, including cast bronze or welded metal)… it also welcomes the layered mechanisms of new technologies that make a simple, unitary identification of the work’s physical support impossible.

Here Krauss cites William Kentridge as an artist who exploits and develops the support of animation. She argues, in a series of essays, that a number of artists do not work with the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture as they view these as exhausted. Instead they are forced to do something as “counterintuitive as inventing a new medium”, and where according to Krauss (2002:58), “they reach for modern, technological mechanisms as the ‘supports’ for their own work”.

The digital self-portraits in this research have come about as the result of my assessment of the traditional mediums of painting and photography as exhausted. Instead, these images rely on modern technological mechanisms, such as the camera phone and Photoshop on the computer, to produce complex and layered images of the self. The camera phone is a technological mechanism which offers a new approach to the self-portrait in terms of the immediacy and spontaneity in recording still or video images from arm’s length. It captures these as raw data, with detailed information as to when and where the image was recorded, and utilizes its convergence capabilities which are stored and selected from a database. Here the technological mechanism not only supports the work, it offers a counterintuitive invention (Krauss, 1999) of a new medium, where its complex and layered attributes establish these digital self-portraits

as a post-medium.

Krauss was drawn to the more controlled writing of Clement Greenberg in response to the more poetic writings of Harold Rosenberg, but the subjective writing of these modernists was sufficient cause for Krauss to oppose them both. Krauss continued to be committed to systems of formal analysis to maintain seriousness towards her criticism. Most important is the term ’medium’, borrowed from Greenberg, which Krauss uses to analyze art with after the 1980s. It is Krauss’s commitment to thinking and writing about contemporary visual productions which has led her to write about the Avant-Garde in 1985, Cindy Sherman and photography in 1990, and the influence of Digital Culture on the materials of contemporary visual culture in *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition* in 1999. This publication includes numerous ideas used in this report, and which form a strong link in thought from modernism into a digital postmodern condition. Krauss has published her most recent book titled *Perpetual Inventory* (2009), which is further evidence of her need to continue with a progression of maintaining an up-to-date record of visual production, as the title suggests. Krauss constantly revises her ideas about the direction of contemporary art in her writing. She considers the "post-medium condition", to be an abandonment by contemporary artists of a modernist focus on the medium in an art work. Lyotard, she notes, argued that the *postmodern* condition is characterized by the end of a "master narrative," and Krauss sees the *post-medium* condition of contemporary visual art to put a similar end to coherence.

An end to coherence, or an end of a “master narrative” is an important concept in this time of the postmodernity and globalization, where the digital art work is accessible to a larger part of society, cancelling a traditional elitist way of image-making, and allowing freedom to express the fragmented self. Dada and concept art movements, for example, were art-making ideas which challenged the traditional mediums of the master narrative, and introduced collage, text, and caption amongst other things, to the image. As Krauss (2009:30) notes: “this master narrative of art ended when conceptual art and other contemporary practices jettisoned the specific medium in order to juxtapose image and written text in the same work.”

It is the convergence of all the information that exists in the recording of the digital self-portrait, and it is in the malleability of the digital image in Photoshop, where endless layers of collage and colour and transformed image not only produce the post-medium but reinvent the medium. It is the new industrial and commercial materials like the advanced, digital recording devices on the latest camera phone,[1] or the advanced manipulation capabilities which are built into the latest versions of Photoshop software, where raw data is prepared and processed for the image, which makes these new tools and apparatuses the kind of non-traditional medium which contemporary art can work with now, as a post-medium.

1.4 Background of my own earlier work.

The main claim in this report suggests that the digital self-portrait is not a traditional self-portrait, it is malleable and has been remediated. It is not a painting, or a photograph; it has altered its interiority and its exteriority and is constructed as a new subject, which contains both a painterly interiority and a photographic exteriority, and as a result is a new medium, a post-medium. This background offers a context to this practice of the digital self-portrait, which is also exhibited in the public domain in specific sites, from whence notions of its layered complexity and ambiguity develop and are constructed.

A seminal text used in the development of the grounds of my own creative research and practice has been Krauss's 1977 publication, *Passages of Modern Sculpture*, which has been useful in thinking about art and models of the self, the nature of sculpture and aesthetics, and thinking about the meaning and not the chronology in sculpture as a major concern. Krauss's text informed my own early work, which sought potential meaning through a visual language of the sculptural medium, which was an inclusive medium, in that it utilized broad ranges of materials and technologies, and as a result made for a good postmodern practice. As a new syntax, sculpture embraced broader means of representation, for example construction techniques, industrial materials and

[1] The camera phones used to record the images in this project are currently referred to by the manufacturers as 'smart phones', as they operate as convergence devices, where all manner of high level digital processes are possible.

machine technologies were used to produce work, which was meant to elicit postmodern engagement and produce potential meaning.

My own creative practice has also referred to theories of Dada and the Conceptual, which Krauss suggests contributed to and developed this new ‘syntax’, and which also “discarded narrative for instantaneous impact” (Krauss 1977:243). Krauss’s claim that the new syntax discarded narrative was a reference largely to the traditional and representational figurative sculpture that was popular academically until the late 1960s. The instantaneous impact was, according to Krauss, following on from what Gotthold Lessing wrote in his text titled, *Laocoon*, in which he writes about the experience that sculpture occupies; of sculpture’s concern with bodies in space; and how spatial character made sculpture different from art forms like poetry, whose medium is time. Krauss (1997:5) suggests:

> If the depiction of actions in time is natural to poetry, then as Lessing argues, it is not natural to sculpture or painting, for the character of the visual arts is that they are static. Because of this condition, the relationships formed between the separate parts of a visual object are simultaneously given to its viewer; they are there to be perceived and taken in all at once.

In *Passages of Modern Sculpture*, Krauss also notes other texts written on the subject of sculpture and its opposition between being an art of time and an art of space, and proposes that in a spatial art, space and time cannot be separated for purposes of analysis. As Krauss (1997:5) suggests, “Into any spatial organization there will be folded an implicit statement about the nature of temporal experience”. In her investigation she notes that modern sculptors were aware “that sculpture is a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing. From this tension, which defines the very condition of sculpture, comes its enormous expressive power” (Krauss, 1997:5).

These claims have informed my practice in that the tensions of time arrested and time passing, and the potential expressive power that comes with this condition, have led to my interests in spatial arrangements of work in multiples and in installation. When considering relationships between parts as in an art installation, it is in the relationship

of time, and the perception of this time between parts of the visual objects used, which has been important in this research - the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing in the installation.

Early work in this practice represented thinking through this new syntax of contemporary sculpture, which included the use of industrial materials and methods, including the installation of mixed mediums; where sculpture as an art medium allowed for this language to develop; and where the sculptural process allowed for multiple materials and found objects making up the work. This is seen as an activity which demands equal amounts of cerebral and physical input, as Krauss suggests: “sculpture asks us to experience the present in the way that Proust finds the past, somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object, or in the sensation which an object arouses in us” (Krauss, 1977:287).

An example of my own earlier work which was conceived and constructed to claim and develop this new syntax was an installation of mixed medium titled “*Learning History”* (Fig. 1), and was conceived for and exhibited as an installation in the ICA gallery in Johannesburg in 1993 and re-installed at JAG in 1995, and again at Culturgest, Lisbon in 1996. This project was exhibited as an installation in an attempt at constructing relative meaning and sensation through the new ‘syntax’ which Krauss refers to. Central to the concerns of this project, was the constructing of content in an installation format, of relative identity in art practice in South Africa during the end of apartheid. This project embraced late-modernist and postmodernist principles of the open-ended and paradoxical, by incorporating combinations of cast and molded figuration from life cast forms in blanket and resin, figurative images drawn and stained directly on the wall, and vinyl text and a football also mounted directly on the wall in a format that undermined a reductive traditional medium approach to representation. Instead it offered a complex, layered medium that relied on a system of multiplicity and an understanding of the ‘syntax’ that Krauss suggests is required to read the installation exhibition.

Learning History consciously rejected the reductive specificity of modernism by not relying only on its own particular material properties.[2] It was an interlocking installation that attempted to articulate meaning through a reading of its different mediums or parts. This work was included in an exhibition curated by Ruth Rosengarten titled '*Don't mess with Mr in-between'* held in Lisbon in 1996, as "a survey of South African art on the underlining nature of identity and issues of dismemberment of colonialism" (Rosengarten, 1996:3).

In the exhibition newspaper, which accompanied the exhibition as a catalogue, Rosengarten refers to Albie Sachs's paper titled "*Preparing ourselves for freedom*" where he points to the "lack of ambiguity that would be essential to an art that sets itself up above all as an instrument of political struggle, and that the power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions" (Sachs cited in Rosengarten 1996:3). The idea of the ambiguous art work as an instrument of political struggle would be useful in describing *Learning History,* where the medium of installation attempted to represent this idea in a complex, layered and multiple way, in order to expose its contradictions and tensions.



Figure 1: Marc Edwards, *Learning History*, 1993.

Mixed media, installation.

ICA, Johannesburg.

Collection: The artist

[2] Greenberg argued that painting or sculpture needed to be reduced to the fundamental nature of their respective mediums, which is a reductive approach. Greenberg is used as reference by Krauss (1999:7), partly because of the history of recent battles over formalism and the assumptions about the terms that those battles generated.

The body of post-photographic digital self-portraits in this study are part of this ongoing practice that sets itself up to find ways of constructing and progressing artistic identity[3] through visual arts practice and exhibition. The installation format, through its complex arrangement of ideas, objects, images and material, allows for ambiguity, tensions and contradictions, constructing relative complex and layered meaning. In writing about the works Rosengarten (1994:25) asks of *Learning History* "whether we are learning history or, is this the history of learning? That the word 'float' is buoyed up on the wall, with its inevitable suggestion of 'floating signifiers', reminds us that this learning project can only be open-ended, complex and layered. As Rosengarten (1994:25) describes it:

> Death we know, is un-representable. In this…installation one is reminded of crowd scenes – football matches, uprisings of the discontent, police brutality: the appearance of blanket-shrouded figures is never good news. There is a physicality and a haunting presence about these four figures, made representable by being hidden. They hover uneasily above the ground. The soccer ball which makes the 'O' of 'FLOAT' is itself a floating object, alluding to sports euphoria. The figures painted on the wall introduce a touch of lyricism and a temporal dimension to the work. Ferric nitrate (rust) is traditionally associated with the patina on bronze sculpture: and it is patina which obstensively narrates the history of sculpture. Here ferric nitrate is removed from its covering role, to become a metamorphosing material (when painted onto the wall, it is transparent), a suspended sign of change through time.

Rosengarten refers to the complex, layered installation, which is ambiguous in that it reminds the viewer of crowd scenes, and that the hidden figures have a haunting presence, implying underlying tensions. The figures painted on the wall add a temporal dimension and the patina is associated with traditions of the sculptural medium.

[3] This practice and research attempts to address a number of issues and is not limited to any one, where the development of artistic identity, an attempt to rekindle the self to be an instrument of political struggle and concerns of a syntax in a new medium, all contribute to the unfinished, layered, complex, ambiguous, contradictory, and hidden tensions in the work in this practice.

This work used non-traditional formats or mediums such as a mould of my own body, which is part of the process of constructing a cast, and not a traditionally modeled and cast object. Here, in using the mould as the object, attempts are made to undermine a traditional sculpture medium and, as such, question the value of the object. The painted image stained directly onto the wall using ferrous nitrate[4] operates similarly because it is transient in its application directly onto the wall, and its transparency adds to the temporal and layered contradictions which are constructed in the installation. The vinyl text mounted directly on to the wall makes up the word 'float' with the 'o' replaced by a soccer ball. This obvious inclusion of text in the work operates much like a caption does for a photograph[5] and helps to construct further layers of meaning in the installation, a post-conceptual strategy.[6]

What Krauss does in her book *Passages* is define moments between modernist art and in particular in the spatial arts, like sculpture, which is where my practice establishes itself from the 1980s and which informs further practice, where the temporal nature of this mixed medium approach to creative practice and its articulation of time and space is evident. The link between the background to my own work and the current research is to be seen in light of a progression of artistic identity, which is always unfinished in a search for a post-medium as a counterintuitive invention (Krauss,1999).

1.5 The post-medium and my practice.

The "post-medium condition" which has informed my practice is referred to by Rosalind Krauss in *A Voyage on the North Sea: The Work of Art in The Age of The Post- Medium Condition* (1999), in which she claims that the self-contained medium and its associated assumptions are challenged. This report argues that the theoretical strategies referred to challenge traditional art mediums, and explore a post-medium condition. As Krauss (1999:9-10) has stated:

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[4] The ferrous nitrate is a chemical which is used on traditional sculptures to create an instant rust patina, simulating traditional and ancient bronze sculptures.

[5] This is a background to my own work, and an introduction, the amount of reference to, either Sontag, Mitchell or Barthes, will be limited, as reference to photographic theories and their development in digital culture. The relationship between post-photography, image and text has not being developed in this research project and could form part of further investigation.

[6] Joseph Kosuth states that 'Works of art are analytical propositions' and would rely on titles and text of captions like photography does.

> This state of current art practice is best referred to as the post-media condition, because no single medium is dominant any longer; instead, all of the different media influence and determine each other. The set of all media forms a universal, self-contained medium. Digital media has influenced the practice of traditional art mediums like painting, photography and sculpture, and has formed a new universal, self-contained medium, a post-medium.

This self-contained post-medium strategy has been tested by exhibiting works produced in this practice in the public domain. The dynamics of the specific site are considered in decisions about how the artwork is displayed (site specific and installation), and how potential meanings are constructed in the format of installation, or as claimed in this report, the post-medium. The exhibition format has tested the idea of questioning the nature of art in general and how the installation produces a post-medium condition in a digital age (Krauss, 1999:10).

Krauss (1999) also discusses the success of new technical media such as video and computer, and its role in launching new ‘movements’ in art:

> The pivotal successes of the new technical media consisting of video and computer are not just that they launched new movements in art and created new media for expression but that they also exerted a decisive influence on historical media such as painting and sculpture. To this extent, the new media were not only a new branch on the tree of art but actually transformed the tree of art itself . . . [T]his state of current art practice is best referred to as the post-media condition, because no single medium is dominant any longer; instead, all of the different media influence and determine each other. The set of all media forms a universal, self-contained medium (Krauss, 1999:10).

In her text *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Krauss expands Clement Greenberg's description of the modernist desire for "pure" art forms in order to encompass the forms and issues of art today, the art of the "post-medium" age. She argues that while this drive for purity of art forms still exists, the forms of art themselves have evolved in such a way that the search for purity can no longer follow the same tenets. Instead of searching for painting or sculpture, the media have become so conflated that the artist must strive to attain a purification of Art itself.

She mentions Joseph Kosuth's idea that as painting and sculpture begin to come together, i.e. as different media become indistinct, the project of art will become more general, and modernist art must locate the "essence of art itself" (Krauss, 1999:10).

CHAPTER TWO: THE MALLEABLE DIGITAL IMAGE

2.1 Digital culture and the image

We live in an age which has been characterized by the individuals' ability to transfer information freely, with instant access to knowledge. The Digital Revolution or Digital Culture are concepts which help define this age, which is characterized by a shift from traditional industry of the industrial revolution to an economy based on information. Access to, and manipulation of this information, in what has also been termed the Information Age, is made possible by the proliferation of digital machine technology - the computer,[7] the camera phone, television, and related receptors.[8]

Many theorists argue that digital technology has had an influence on contemporary art and particularly on thinking about the painterly, the photographic and the video image. When thinking about digital culture, art and the image in our time, it is Krauss who suggests that digital art in contemporary art has been successful. In addition, digital media has influenced the practice of traditional art mediums like painting, photography and sculpture, and has formed a new universal, self-contained medium, which, as Krauss suggests, is a "state of current art practice [that] is best referred to as the post-medium condition, because no single medium is dominant any longer; instead, all of the different media influence and determine each other. The set of all media forms a universal, self-contained medium" (Krauss, 1999:9).

2.2 Convergence

[7] The computer as a universal media machine, as Manovich (2001:4) points out, was used as a production tool in the early 1960s, but now it is used not only for production, but for storage, research and distribution.

[8] Levy argues for the receptor of digital information to be seen as more important than the image as presented in mass media (Levy in Druckery, 1996:367).

All the information that exists in the recording of the digital self-portrait is malleable information that can be transformed, reinventing the medium. Jason Whittaker (2002:57) makes use of the term '*convergence'* as a means to describe the main difference between analogue and digital, old and new media. He argues that the movement away from analogue towards digital accelerated the process of convergence, and that processes that previously required very different technologies, like editing film and processing photography, can now be processed on the same computer (Whittaker, 2002:57). He points out that the distinction between analogue and digital formats is crucial to new media, describing an analogue sound wave as a continuous stream of data, while digital information, on the other hand, is *discrete*, with distinct breaks between one piece of data and the next. He suggests that a common analogy is to compare analogue processes to rolling down a hill and digital ones to walking down steps (Whittaker, 2002:58). The digital image is represented entirely by binary information, which consists of electronic impulses, on and off, or ones and naughts. Different media such as text image, video and audio are recorded by digital devices and converted into digits, to be interpreted and processed by the computer, which then outputs these ones and naughts as words, images, audio files or videos. Whittaker (2002:59) suggests that, "the editing of a digitized image is much simpler than using an airbrush or chemical processing". The digital processes offer countless layers, and millions of colour options in image processing. The digital processes are different from analogue and offer new opportunities for the image, where new configurations and subjects are developed, and where meaning is constructed differently. Digital culture offers the artist new methods of working and a freedom of image-making never before imagined. As Rush (1999:168) notes, the descriptive terms of movements in the modernist era are no longer tenable, and that new media technologies in making art, form part of any description of art practice today as Rush (1999:168) suggests:

> The sometimes uneasy alliance between art and technology has come of age: the inexorable march of the world toward a digital (or computerized) culture has included art in its step. Digital art is a mechanized medium whose potential appears limitless. As writer and curator George Fifield expresses it: 'The artist's ability to effortlessly reposition and combine images, filters, and colors, within the friction-less and gravity-free memory space of the computer, endows them with an image-making freedom never before imagined.'

The computer as a tool or a ‘technical support’ has made it possible to deconstruct all media into electronic impulses and to combine, mediate and publish the malleable results in multiple ways and to different platforms, making the digital self-portrait image a new subject.

2.3 The malleable image

In digital culture the image is convergent and malleable, and when remediated, exerts an influence on contemporary art by constructing itself as a post-medium. The malleable image is a digital art term and idea used by Rush (2001:184), which he uses to describe the power that digital technology brings to the image, where it renders the image infinitely malleable. Rush argues that the digital image is malleable and exerts an influence on contemporary visual art. The digital image is constructed in the context of a Digital Culture where the unlimited nature of the digital technology allows for a convergence, which is access to all media in an electronic form through the computer and related devices. This intersection of all media allows the artist the image-making freedom which Rush refers to, where the technology as a tool features manipulation software and hardware like Photoshop and drawing tablets that allow for almost infinite manipulation.

In the sub chapter on *Digitally Altered Photography* in his book, Rush refers to the photograph as a primary source material that artists manipulate using the language of the computer. He suggests that photographs are translated into the computer language via scanning, where the image is rendered into the mathematical binary language of the computer, and becomes malleable because it consists solely of discrete digits. Rush states that the representational image makes a comeback with digitally altered art in the 1980s because,

> artists toyed with the mechanical possibilities of computer imaging techniques. Several digitally reworked images of Leonardo's Mona Lisa, for example, appeared in the work of Jean-Pierre Yvaral and Lillian Schwartz. Yvaral's *Synthesized Mona Lisa* (1989), eerily similar to a Chuck Close portrait, consisted of a structural reconstitution of the famous face based on numerical analysis. Schwartz's

> Mona/Leo (1987) matches in the same frame half of Mona Lisa's face with half of Leonardo's. These artists, enamored of the capability of the computer to reactivate an overly familiar image, may be practicing the 'art of appropriation' (popular in the 1980s work of Sherry Levine and others), but, by giving it a technological twist, they are attempting, in Popper's words, 'to create visual phenomena in which figuration and abstraction are no longer in opposition" (Rush, 1999:184).

Rush includes the work of American artist Keith Cottingham (b. 1965) who confounds boundaries of race, gender and age – and questions the nature of representation in his 'fictitious portraits'. As Cottingham (cited in Rush, 1999:187).explains: "Instead of representing subjects, I imagine bodies, both generic and specific." Cottingham has relied exclusively on digital manipulations of images in all his photographic work to date. As Rush suggests, "he grappled with the myths he sees behind traditional painted and photographic portraiture in his digitally constructed color photographs," *Fictitious Portraits Series* (1992). Cottingham started with a photograph and applied the tools of digital painting and montage to create composite images which Rush suggests confound the boundaries of race, gender and age although they appear at first glance to be normal photographs (1999: 186).

Rush also makes reference to American Antony Aziz (b.1961) and Venezuelan-born Sammy Cucher (b. 1958) who in their collaborative project, *The Dystopia Series* (1994), where they are critical of technological advances in photography, as they claim, "with the end of truth in photography has come a corresponding loss of trust," they say, "every image, every representation, is now a potential fraud." They take normal portrait photographs of people and digitally erase the eyes and mouths, resulting in a series of dehumanized heads.

Rush includes in his book a number of important International artists who use the malleable properties of the digital image to construct their work, these include Victor Burgin (b. 1941) who Rush says seeks affinities with a painterly tradition in his work, especially with the practice of chiaroscuro (rendering light and dark to enhance a three-dimensional effect). Rush notes that Burgin's interests in semiotics and psychoanalysis has been evident in his photography since 1971, and since he turned to digitizing images in the 1990s these interests have been successfully played out in works such

as *Angelus Noms, Street Photography,* 1995, which is a triptych of digital prints, in which the central image of a woman (a photograph taken by the artist in 1980) is re-worked in terms of its light and dark contrasts and then flanked by two manipulated photographs of bombs dropping from planes in the Second World War (Rush, 1999:170). Rush points out that artists often refer to their use of the computer as a process to 'madify' their photographs, that is according to Rush, altering their original photograph digitally to represent a different reality. Japanese-born Mariko Mori (b. 1967) as an example, photographs herself in costumes she designs to suggest surreal creatures. In *Birth of a Star* (1995), after digitally manipulating her image, Rush (1999:193) describes her appearance as a plastic doll/pop star, looking both gruesome and mysterious. Canadian artist Jeff Wall (b. 1946), is represented by Rush as one of the photographic artists who uses digital technology to expand the visual possibilities of their work. He uses the computer, according to Rush, to makes montages that “couldn't be made otherwise,” Wall says. In *A Sudden Gust of Wind* (1993), for example, Wall creates what Rush suggests looks like a freeze-frame of papers and objects flying in the air in a gust of wind (Rush, 1999:192). The digitization of the photograph has undermined its authenticity and as a result its authority, and the malleability of digital technology in constructing the image undermines the photographs’ reliability as an unbiased witness of reality.

Kevin Roberts writes in *The Virtual Unconscious in Post-photography* about magical values and photographic visions that make the photographic image more malleable. Roberts (1996:155) questions images and ways that new image technologies are “inserting themselves into our culture.” He considers, not their technological terms, but their “unconscious motivations”. Roberts also refers to Walter Benjamin’s description of “magical value” in *A Short History of Photography* in which Benjamin writes that we discover an optical unconscious through photography, “another nature that speaks to the camera [rather] than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious” (Benjamin cited in Roberts, 1996:14). “It is,” he continues, “through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.” Roberts (1996:155) asks: “150 years later, what speaks to the camera? What has happened to this unconscious of the image?”

Sophisticated technologies now exist that are able to record vast amounts of metadata of the visual information being recorded by high level devices, at the same time expanding the range of image sensing and processing, including microwave, infrared and radar imagery, and opening up dimensions of reality to electronic scrutiny, analysis and manipulation (Roberts, 1996:155). It is now possible to capture vast amounts of visual photographic information with digital technologies and at the same time it now becomes possible to reverse the process where digital information allows the generation of information, in turn allowing a new production or simulation of the visual image. Digital photography or the digital imaging technologies that are developing are becoming increasingly sophisticated and open up possibilities of recording information or data, allowing the image to become more malleable. According to Roberts (1996:155), the vast range of image technologies opens up new dimensions of reality to electronic scrutiny, analysis and manipulation. These dramatic technological developments offer capacities to generate another reality in the image, and as Roberts (1996:155) claims, this mathematical application to photography is a dramatic and significant development of the medium of post-photography.

2.4 The digital self-portrait

The digital self-portrait consists both of a painterly interiority and a photographic exteriority. It is not a self-portrait painting, nor is it a self-portrait photograph. It is a new subject - a post medium. The digital self-portrait is used here as a strategy of practice, as a counterintuitive invention of a new medium, as seen in Krauss (1999). The strategy of using the self-portrait in this project was to investigate image-making processes, of the body, or aspects of the body, which include developing an artistic identity and finding ways in which to represent identities of the self.

In her book *The Subject in Art, Portraiture and the birth of the Modern*, Catherine Soussloff (2006;4) claims that the self-portrait requires an interactive process to construct the subject of the work. She argues that it takes the artist, the work, and the viewer to construct the subject of the work and suggests that this visual interactivity of the portrait cannot be understood as a narrative or a purely historical event, in the same way that other representational paintings and photographs might be.

Soussloff contextualizes the portrait in relation to the contemporary artwork, the post conceptual, the post-medium and the post-photographic. She refers to the Viennese art historians who find an alternative to naming the subject in the portrait, stating that when they see another represented in the portrait they see their social context and themselves, including their history. In writing about the portrait, Soussloff claims that the portrait genre is significant in how we understand our world in visual terms, where the resemblance of the 'sitter' - what she refers to as an exteriority and a truth - coexists with representing an interiority or spirituality. She suggests that these both reside in the way the portrait (or in this case the self-portrait) is represented, and how it is seen by the viewer:

> Two apparently discrepant claims about the genre of portraiture both distinguish it from other kinds of art and signal its significance for the larger question of how human beings understand their world in visual terms. We might call these discrepant claims the functional dialectic of the portrait representation. The truth claim of an indexical exteriority, or resemblance, to the person portrayed simultaneously coexists in the genre with a claim to the representation of interiority, or spirituality. Both of these are said to reside in the portrait representation itself and in the eyes of the beholder (Soussloff, 2006:5).

One of the aims of this research has been to create an image of the self which is ambiguous, by mediating the self-portrait by layering visual interference, in order to question the portrait's representation. Soussloff claims that the portrait cannot claim to depict an identifiable individual, and that this absolute identification cannot be strictly maintained, for example if we consider a passport photograph which claims to depict the person named and shown, yet may be forged. "Recognition is less precise than identification, and as a result this expectation that the portrait claims a truth has allowed artists to use effacement of physical characteristics as a means of exemplifying an interiority or spirituality" (Soussloff, 2006:7). Soussloff uses Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (Fig. 2), as an example of how the interiority in a painted portrait works. She points out that when Picasso wrestled with the problems of exact resemblance, he decided to paint out Stein's face and substitute it with the conventions of an African mask, maintaining a recognition of Stein's features, even with this substitution.

According to Soussloff (2006:7), we recognize the interiority of Gertrude Stein in this painted portrait, despite the layered complexity of in the portrait.



Fig 2: Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, 1906 (Soussloff 2004: 7).
Oil on canvas, 100 x 81.3 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The photographic portrait on the other hand has appeared to present us with the assurance of our identities as (Soussloff, 2006:8) suggests:

> The social history of art has taught us to consider the location of all art making in the social sphere, but art-historical methods and their attendant assumptions often privilege certain genres in order to maintain the order of the social imaginary. It can be said with some assurance that portraiture, with the important inclusion of photography, remains the visual genre in which the social imaginary has been most heavily invested throughout the modern period, precisely because it appears to present us with the assurance of our identities.

If the painted and the photographic portraits maintain the order of the social imaginary, where the genre of portraiture, or self-portraiture, is seen to present us with the assurance of our identities, as Soussloff suggests, then the digital self-portrait image will surely do the same. For that matter, its malleability and capacity to consist of both a spiritual interiority and a recognizable exteriority should offer it as an inventive, complex and layered post-medium. Soussloff (2004:4) offers two more answers in her search for the questions of what we have seen in portraits and what we can see with them, suggesting that the power of art offers a visual alternative to textual explanations of the human condition. According to Soussloff (2004:4), this genre of the self-portrait or

portrait gives us more than face value for example, “that the portrait is not only about adherence to an exterior reality etc. the face was commonly held to be the window of the soul by the beginning of the 20th century”.

It is with the potential for the digital self-portrait to be seen as an inventive post-medium, which refers to both a spirituality and a recognizability, that it may consist of an ambiguity and expose contradictions has made the post-medium digital self-portrait a most suitable subject for this creative project. As an interactive post-medium, a body of digital self-portraits has the potential to work as a counterintuitive invention (Krauss, 1999) in a series of installed exhibitions, where the process to construct the subject of the work involves the artist, the work, and the viewer in constructing the subject of the work, as will be discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: EXHIBITIONS OF OWN WORK

3.1 Introduction:

My interest in this project of digitally produced self-portraits, began with an attempt to represent using digital machine technologies. The camera-phone was the most convenient way in which to record self-portraits, which could be uploaded via Bluetooth to my computer for storage, mediation and distribution. Manovich, for example, uses the terms selection, compositing, and teleaction, as discussed in Chapter 3.2.This project has been developed for exhibition, where as a post-medium the mediated self-portraits refer to both an interiority and exteriority.

The camera phone, or smart phone, as it is also known, has become technologically advanced and conveniently small, and as a result is always available to record self-portrait images as and when needed.[9] The digital self-portrait images are stored in an electronic state and filed according to the dates they were recorded, and then on remediation they are filed according to dates the images were finally prepared for print. The images are stored in large numbers on the computer, for future use in any number

[9] Traditional photography bulky equipment, like a SLR camera, tripod and flash, that necessitates forethought, thus losing the spontaneity and freedom to record images as and when they might be needed.

of formats. For example, the portraits could form part of an interactive web-based publication, or they could be prepared for broadcast on television, or on the computer screen. For this project the digital self-portraits have been selected and processed, to be printed for installation in a series of group and solo exhibitions.

My training as a sculptor and working with traditional sculptural mediums had become too limiting, and this led to an interest in post-medium approaches to art making, which developed into a contemporary art practice using a new syntax. This new syntax in sculpture, as Krauss refers to, was tested in an installation, exhibited at the ICA in Johannesburg in 1993, where *Learning recent history* (Fig. 1) was first exhibited. This installation format of exhibiting resulted in the production of artworks, which were conceived as components for installation as assemblages. One such component was produced in 1995 and titled, *Neither Known nor Unknown* (Fig. 3), where combined found and made parts were constructed and described as mixed media. This work was constructed as an assemblage, where a table leg supports a precariously balanced kitchen table on the head of an ambiguous, blanket formed body reclining on the floor.[10]

In 2001 a looped, animated gif. titled *Anything of small value* (Fig. 3), was produced and exhibited as an artwork on the Switch on/off, group exhibition, as an exploration of the development of work, from the sculptural to the interactive, as is evident in *Neither Known nor Unknown* (Fig. 2) and *Anything of small value (*Fig. 3). The exhibition was curated by Marcus Neustetter in Oudtshoorn as part of the Klein Karoo art festival, where the relationship between art and technology was a source of interest and inspiration for curators and artists. As Neustetter claimed in the exhibition catalogue, “Artists… have been exploring shifts of their concepts to incorporate digital interactivity”, and Neustetter also claimed that some of the artists on the exhibition showed what he referred to as, “transformations from the sculptural, performance and two-dimensional works into the virtual environment created by technology” (Neustetter, 2001). It is this relationship between art and technology, where shifts of sculptural

[10] This work was exhibited in an exhibition curated by Kathryn Smith and Roger van Wyk, titled *Dada South,* at the Izizo National gallery in January and February 2010, which re-examines Dada as an art-making position in South Africa. This work attempted to remediate earlier Dada works, embracing assemblage.

concepts, as Neustetter suggests, incorporate digital interactivity. It is these concepts and the search for what Krauss (1999) suggests a “counterintuitive invention”, which have informed this study and contributed to the development of the installed exhibition of digital self-portraits that are investigated in this research project.

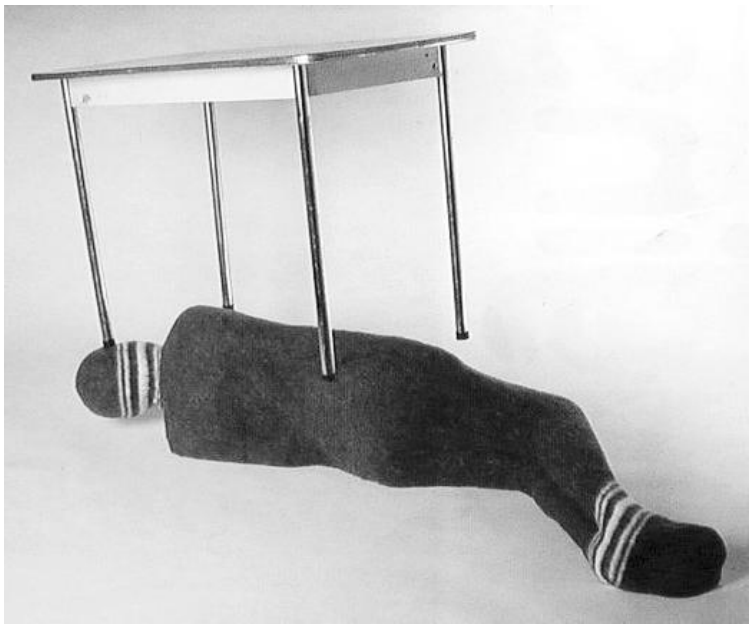

Fig. 3: Marc Edwards, *Neither Known nor Unknown*, 1995.
Fiberglass, blanket and table. 180 cm x 80 cm x 110 cm.
Collection: Johannesburg Art Gallery.



Figure 4: Marc Edwards, *Anything of small value,* 2000.
Animated gif. and html. 640 x 480 pixels.
Collection: The artist

3.2 Making the digital self-portrait image

The making of the digital self-portraits in this project employed a system of operations, which Manovich discusses as “three typical computer media operations which are: selection, compositing and teleaction,” which he suggests have also affected our general thinking and ways of working in this computer age. As Manovich (2001:116) states,

> While the operations are embedded in software, they are not tied up to it. They are employed not only within a computer but also in the social world outside of it, but also outside the computer. They are not only ways of working with computer data but also general ways of working, ways of thinking, and ways of existing in a computer age.

In the first operation, where ‘selection’ begins, images are selected from a database of my own assembly of media, where, I am creating media ‘from scratch’ and am fully aware that, as Manovich (2001:125) argues, the act of selection brings authorship into question. As he suggests, “although software does not directly prevent its users from creating from scratch, its design on every level makes it ‘natural’ to follow a different logic: that of selection” (Manovich 2001:125). Authorship is seen as selection, yet the media generally exists in databases and libraries, which as he says, “becomes the default”.

The second operation, which is ‘compositing’, an operation which Manovich suggests belongs exclusively to designers. This operation generally refers to the service of film or moving image, where digital compositing can be broken into three conceptual steps which are, as Manovich (2001:147) claims:

1. Construction of a seamless 3D virtual space from different elements.
2. Simulation of a camera move(s) through this space (optional).
3. Simulation of the artifacts of a particular media (optional).

These operations are not solely for use in film or video footage, they apply to the still image as well, where these operations will also respond to layers in Photoshop, which

in the still image becomes flattened after compositing. The third operation, ‘teleaction’, as Manovich points out is “an example of an operation typically used by users”. As he puts it, “it is not employed to create new media, but only to access it” (Manovich 2001:152). For the purposes of this project the teleaction would be used in the process of making, in which the computer screen and its interaction capabilities allow for these operations of making to exist. The decision to take the composited images in this project to print and not to screen is previously documented.

In Manovich’s view, Jameson’s claim of a postmodern cultural condition, has, according to Manovich (2002:58) “found its perfect reflection in the emerging computer software of the 1980s, which privileged the selection from already existing media elements over creating them from scratch. And at the same time, to a large extent it is this software, which made post-modernism possible”. Manovich makes a connection between postmodern culture and the operation of selection, and suggests that it also applies to compositing. One operation selects elements and images from a database of culture and other is used to composite and assemble them into new objects. As a result selection and compositing are the key operations of a postmodern, or computer-based authorship.

The self-portraits used in this research project are constructed by selecting images in a database, which I have already established, and then compositing and assembling the malleable images as new objects. Two sets of ten images were constructed as digital self-portraits as part of this research and practice, with the intention of exhibiting the images in a number of different sites. Here the installation configuration adds to the construction of an unfinished, layered and ambiguous set of self-portrait images, which contribute to establishing post-photographic images, a post-medium state, and notions of complex identity.

The first set of ten images were remediated after being recorded on a Sony Ericsson P910 ‘smartphone’[11]; the second set of ten images were remediated after being

[11] The Sony Ericsson P910i was introduced in 1994 as a ‘smartphone’, running a Symbian OS v7,, with a 3.2 megapixel VGA digital camera.
(http://www.sonyericsson.com/cws/support/phones/p910a?cc=ca&lc=en) accessed 02/02/2010.

recorded on a Nokia N95 'smartphone'[12]. All the images were downloaded onto a MacBook Pro[13] computer for storage, and processed using Photoshop CS3 and CS4. The first ten images were printed by Silvertone digital printing on Fine Art textured paper and the second set of ten images were printed by Imagefarm printing on archival textured paper using pigment ink.

A standard square format of 60 x 60cm is used for all images in this series so that they refer to the square format of instant Polaroid images, drawing attention to the remediation of an instant photographic medium. This is similar to the manipulated Polaroid self-portrait image Lukas Samaras produced in 1973, where he mediated the close up image he recorded of himself by rubbing the pigment (wet dye) of the instant photograph, before it set, creating a painterly image quality. Samaras produces a post-photograph by obscuring the authenticity of his identity and attempting to introduce an interiority by manipulating the pigment to create an enigmatic portrait, *Photo-Transformation* (Fig. 5). This physical malleability is a precursor to the digital malleability referred to earlier.



Figure 5: Lucas Samaras, *Photo-Transformation,* 1973
(http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=131374).
Polaroid SX 70 print. Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

[12] The Nokia N95 is regarded as a smartphone, running a Symbian OS v9.2, with a 5 megapixel digital camera with Carl Zeiss optics, flash and video recording capabilities. Specifications of the camera are, frontal CIF video call &main rear 2592 x 1944 camera with auto-focus, with a capture ratio of 4/3 (1.33:1) (http://mea.nokia.com/find-products-en/devices/nokia-n95/technical-specifications) accessed 02/02/2010.
[13] The MacBook Pro runs on a 2.33 GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor with 2 GB 667 MHz DDR2 SDRAM, with Mac OS 10.5.

The creative process employed in this series of work is complex and layered, where notions of emotion and identities are expressed by processing digital images with a layered approach to the making. These self-portrait images are recorded at times in the day when the light conditions are good enough for the ‘smartphone’ used to record an acceptable and detailed-enough image, and when the chance exists for the digital image to become susceptible to unpredictable visual information being recorded in the image. Most of these self-portrait images are recorded in the early morning when the light is not as harsh as it is at midday. Although not at twilight,[14] these self-portraits are generally recorded shortly after the sun has risen. This time of the day is when my creative practice is usually initiated, shortly after waking, and shortly before leaving for work. Often I am still in a state of sleep, my eyes are not fully open and are sometimes bloodshot, my sinuses ache and my hair is disheveled. This time at which I chose to record my self-portrait is a time not usually associated with being presentable. It is a private time, one used for introspection, not generally shared in the public domain. It is this time of the self, a time of introspection which is important for me to express in these images. Each image is captioned with a title of the date it was captured, and dated according to the day it was remediated. Each image is mounted on 5mm foam core backing board, to give the paper some support but thin enough not to disrupt the image the way a frame would.

Each of the following self-portraits are to be seen as components of this project, where they will be used in any number of installation configurations. The images are all titled using the date the image was recorded and not the date the image was composited. All twenty images were printed as proofs, ten of the images were printed on archival paper using pigment ink, resulting in clean, clear, colourfast and stable prints. At the outset of this project and for economic reasons, ten of the images were printed on good quality paper using inkjet ink. These prints have not lasted as well as the inkjet ink has been susceptible to deterioration.

[14] The light in Johannesburg after 9:00 and before 16:00 is mostly too harsh for photography, the direct sunlight tends to overexpose the image, creating very little subtleties in tone and colour, where the images mostly appear washed out. Photographers traditionally quote ‘the time between dog and wolf’ to be the time to take photographs, a transitional time in the day also known as twilight, when the atmosphere is saturated with moisture the light is reflected differently, from the upper atmosphere and not directly from the sun, intensifying and saturating colour and offering a wider range of tone, making photographs appear more subtle and mysterious.

Each of the self-portraits in this series will be described as follows: *20050428* (Fig. 6) and *20050430* (Fig. 7) are self-portraits recorded at arms length, from above, utilizing natural light. These images were chosen for their appearance, lack of recognition and are cropped to offer a close-up of the face, obscuring my identity in the portrait, adding to the ambiguity of the image. The images were processed in Photoshop, where they were cropped, the colour and tone was corrected, and new layers were added to simplify the image further, allowing it to be enlarged without breaking up or pixilating. The final simple colour added to the surface of the face, in this case a white mask, has allowed the image to enlarge quite convincingly. The white mask in these two images contributes to developing notions of identity here, where the layered, almost painterly white areas appear as an image which has overexposed. As mentioned earlier, photographic images taken in Johannesburg during the day in summer are usually too bright and burn out the highlights of the image. This ambiguity of identity and of medium, creates images which attempt to express social and analytical complexities.



Figure 6: Marc Edwards, *20050428,* 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection of the artist.

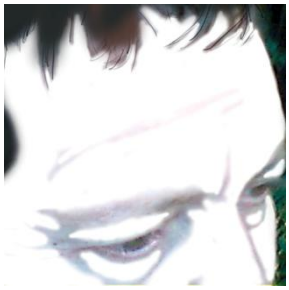

Figure 7: Marc Edwards, *20050430,* 2006
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection of the artist.

20050411(Fig. 8) and *20050413* (Fig. 9) are self-portraits which are drawn using a Wacom tablet and digital pen. The images were enlarged in Photoshop until the lines broke up into pixels, creating an image that is neither a drawing, in the traditional sense, nor a digital photograph, the inaccuracies of the hand drawn lines, create and suggest a tension between mediums. These two drawn images, when exhibited in relation to any of the other images, add to the complexity of the portraits, where the medium or processes employed to make these images becomes unclear, and the viewer questions the mediums used, imagining painted or photographic images and hand drawn sketches.



Figure 8: Marc Edwards, *20050411,* 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.



Figure 9: Marc Edwards, *20050413*, 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20050431 (Fig. 10) and *20050506* (Fig. 11) were chosen for their questioning expressions, which seem to offer a vulnerability, expressed in the eyes, which offer another layer to the image and in the lips where a pursed expression adds to a determination in the way the self-portrait is expressed.

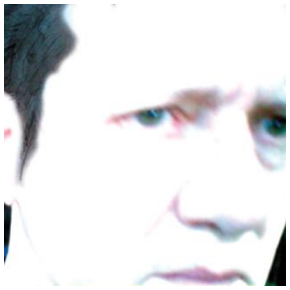

Figure 10: Marc Edwards, *20050431,* 2006. Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm. Collection, the artist.



Figure 11: Marc Edwards, *20070506,* 2007. Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm. Collection, the artist.

20050313 (Fig. 12) was recorded using a Sony Ericsson P190 I camera phone with a 3.2 megapixel camera, resulting in low resolution. The relatively strong available light gives sufficient detail to the eyes that are accentuated by the white layer. The ambiguity in this self-portrait image lies in the overexposed image parts that are at once, mask and painted makeup. These ambiguities rely on a range of references used in the remediation applied.



Figure 12: Marc Edwards, *20050313*, 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20050502 (Fig. 13) and *20050512* (Fig. 14) are images which appear to be more layered than most of the other images in this series, where the lighter, almost white or pink mask appears to be drawn or painted onto the skin, creating an almost dramatic sense to the self-portrait. Here reference from Xhosa initiation masks appears to be used as a system to offer a diverse hybrid identity, which is at once Eastern and African. The masked layer is drawn and painted in Photoshop as a separate set of layers, as close to the contours of the original self-portrait as possible, to suggest makeup or less convincingly a decorative mask. Fig. 14 has more detailed eyes which become focal points, where they strain to maintain some authentic identity in their detail. Fig. 13 is less detailed and more overexposed, where the white mask appears more authentic in its obscurity. The eyes are also less detailed and obscure where they appear to be glazed over and vulnerable, suggesting a submissive self.



Figure 13: Marc Edwards, *20050502*, 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20050512 (Fig. 14) is a self-portrait image with enough detail to create an accurate likeness where a vulnerability is developed with a combination of devices, which include the detailed bloodshot eyes, the pursed lips and the tenuous quality of the painted mask, where decorative shapes in the outline of the mask add a poetic quality.

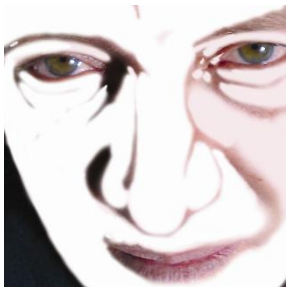

Figure 14: Marc Edwards, *20050512*, 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

The saturated colour in *20050507* (Fig. 15) adds to the intensity of the mask, which consists of some digital artifact, which contributes to the vulnerability and the uncertainty of the expression. This image was constructed in Photoshop using untried filter combinations, working with a digital medium to produce unpredictability, incorporating mistakes into the process. What results is an image or a self-portrait image, with a complexity of layers, which construct an ambiguous identity that is almost magical.



Figure 15: Marc Edwards, *20070507,* 2007.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20050412 (Fig. 16) is a construction and combination of two of the processes employed in the making of these self-portraits, using drawn and painted processes to construct a layered self-portrait image, which appears to be both handmade and digital.



Figure 16: Marc Edwards, *20050412,* 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20051510 (Fig. 17) is the most photographically accurate representation of the self-portrait in the series, where little alteration to the surface and colour is made. Here the expression and angle of the self–portrait becomes enough to express a reaction which resembles a recoil. The accurate representation of a surprised expression is enough for the image to suggest a real vulnerability and honest uncertainty. The colour grading maintains a natural accuracy to support the true colour of the eyes, lending a truth or an exteriority to the self-portrait.



Figure 17: Marc Edwards, *20070510*, 2008.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20051223 (Fig. 18) and *20050429* (Fig. 19).
The closed eyes in both these images attempts to suggest a submission, a vulnerable trait. The first image has not been colour-graded and represents the digital camera's interpretation of the subject.



Figure 18: Marc Edwards, *20051223*, 2007.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

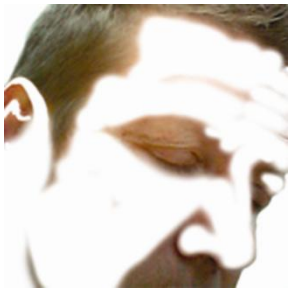

Figure 19: Marc Edwards, *20050429*, 2006.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20050505 (Fig. 20) has a tenuous, almost submissive and vulnerable quality, and the powdery ‘makeup’ or paint accentuates an expression of resignation.

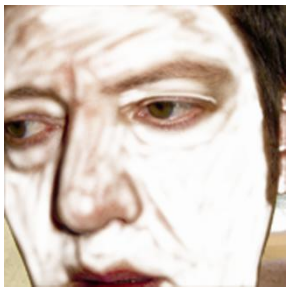

Figure 20: Marc Edwards, *20050505,* 2008.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20050506 (Fig. 21) is a mask, an enlarged trinket bought in Santiago, Chile, on the Day of the Dead- a South American festival which celebrates the dead. Here the ambiguity of the smiling skull mask adds to the suggestive image, which is also a mask reminiscent of the mask in the movie of the same name, where the mask consumes and controls the wearer.



Figure 21: Marc Edwards, *20050506*, 2008.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

20060826 (Fig. 22) intended to express an ethereal self, an enigmatic identity, so as to add to a variety of expressions and identities. The subtleties of the image on the white backing paper make for a vulnerable image and a tenuous portrait.

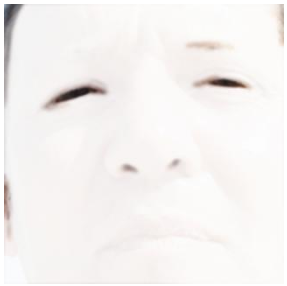

Figure 22: Marc Edwards, *20060826*, 2008.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

In *20070901 (*Fig.23) the glasses offer another layer - the glass surface suggests a distance from the subject and, in the remove, a dislocation and vulnerability. The suggestion of an eye detail in the background is intended to suggest a continuum of dislocated or fragmented gazes.



Figure 23: Marc Edwards, *20070901*, 2008.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

*20050525 (*Fig. 24) is a side view of a mask which appears to be painted directly onto the face.



Figure 24: Marc Edwards, *20050525*, 2007.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

*20070511 (*Fig. 25) is an overexposed white face, with a copy of the self in the background, a self-portrait of the self looking at the self. The cutout quality in places in the image appears to be neither painting, nor photography, nor collage, but only an image detail, which is made up artificially.



Figure 25: Marc Edwards, *20070511,* 2008.
Pigment print on archival paper, 60 x 60 cm.
Collection, the artist.

These self-portraits are printed on a subtly-textured archival paper that suggests an ambiguous surface that is read as neither a painting nor a photograph. The square formatted, unframed printed images are mounted onto a backing board which is in turn mounted directly on to the walls of the exhibition space so as to deny the need for a frame. The thin mounting allows the image to become more closely related to the wall, thereby becoming part of the space, the installation and the totality, as Kabakov (1991:66) describes it.

3.3 Installation

The self-portrait images are always installed in groups so that a sense of complex, layered and fragmented identity is constructed, where one image is read off the other. Group exhibitions generally offer restricted space, which means that the configuration of images shown is more limiting. These exhibition presentations discussed in this report are a form of interactive installation, which involves the viewer responding to the configuration of images, video and audio.

As discussed earlier, the digital self-portrait requires an interactive process that takes the artist, the work, and the viewer to construct the subject of the work. And when the digital self-portraits are exhibited as an installation, the interactivity process constructs

notions of complex, layered and fragmented identities in a post-medium condition. This interactive configuration that is constructed in the solo exhibition, processes meaning much like Giotto's fresco installation in Padua, where his representational figurative images construct meaning through a narrative, where they point, face and gesture from painting to painting, across the room and back again.

Installation art describes a genre of site-specific artwork generally designed to transform the perception of the space it is exhibited in, an example of a departure from traditional sculpture. Krauss argues for the installation as a presentation in a post-medium condition. What is attempted in configuring these images in these gallery sites, is to utilise architectural details to help configure an installation which sets up an element of potential chaos, complexity and layering which as Kabakov believes, constructs some mental discomfort and adds to the totality of the installation vision, which as he suggests acts as a magic crystal, where everything can be surveyed (Kabakov, 1991:66).

Ilya Kabakov in a conversation with V.Tupitsyn on the installation, *The bridge* (1991). At the museum of Modern Art , New York. Kabakov (1991: 63) suggests,

> One of its features is a claim to totality, to a connection with universals, to certain models that, in the general view, no longer exist…An attempt is being made to encompass all the levels of the world, all of its corners, to describe everything that happens in it …The installations now being made all over the world are of two different types: first, there is the installation that is essentially a collection of objects, of which one large object is composed; second, there is the installation that rejects, or claims to reject, the object as a matter of principle but nevertheless completely transforms space and is the principal agent of such transformation.

An installation is often an unfamiliar space, where the spectator, expecting to see familiar territory, is confronted with the unfamiliar, a new level of danger. As Kabakov (1991:72) suggests, "An anxiety is created. Paintings and sculptures are safe, they have been tamed and corrupted long ago, whereas in an installation a level of chaos and entropy exists, a mental discomfort from which an installation offers no insurance."

3.4 Exhibitions

For the purposes of this report three group and one solo exhibition configurations will be referred to, where each exhibition was responded to differently, according to the specific site. In all, a concept of the installation was developed, and in particular, a consideration of the specifics of the site and how the sometimes subtle arrangement of images in response to specific details in the site could construct some measure of mental discomfort and meaning. The limitations that exist on the walls of these exhibition sites are often intersected with disruptions like columns and air-conditioning ducts, which interrupt the wall spaces, limiting the positions available for hanging images. These interruptions become useful in configuring sets of images on the walls and in the spaces, and in constructing potential meanings. Images are generally laden with historical baggage, as they immediately relate to painting or photography when exhibited in an art gallery, where they would traditionally be hung at eye level with relatively clear space between each image, creating a regular visual pattern, which allows for a comfortable and easy ‘read’.

3.4.1 Group exhibitions

The dynamics of a group exhibition are very different from that of a solo exhibition. A group exhibition is usually curated by a theorist in the field who takes a critical responsibility to the exhibition, and operates within a theoretical framework, which is generally directed in part by the different works chosen for and on the exhibition. The critical position of the curator, the site, and the post-medium works on exhibition, will all contribute to, and direct the final presentation, and in so doing, the content of the exhibition.

Three group exhibitions will be referred to and used to describe the nature of this type of exhibition. These group exhibitions will introduce the argument that the site of the exhibition (coupled with the curatorial position) defines the final presentation, and that the work that is being defined by the site (as it relates to the site and as it relates to its component forms), is a new subject, a new medium, and a post-medium.

The first opportunity I had of exhibiting and testing these self-portrait images was at a student exhibition in ‘University Corner’ (Fig.26) where the limited site directed the final presentation. In this exhibition the limited site of a wall space between two columns was chosen for the presentation, and the wall had an air-conditioning duct in it, positioned at head height, disrupting the visual continuity of the wall as a neutral exhibition site. This exhibition space has not been sanitized to resemble a neutral white cube gallery, which would require clean walls with no structural or visual interference. This exhibition space has a non-elitist quality about it, where as an exhibition space, the realities of its location, history and its intentions as a non-commercial exhibition space, contribute to the development of potential meaning in the work presented.

This specific site prompted a response, which was seen as an opportunity to test the idea that a compilation of images in a specific site can set up a complex and layered and ambiguous meaning. Ten images were mounted on a thin backing of foamcore, to serve as a limited preservation device and to hold the paper the images were printed on, in a stable and consistent state. The images were then installed on the wall at a comfortable height and presented in a grid format between the architectural details. The air-conditioning duct and two columns which demarcated the space where this grid of self-portraits was exhibited presented some particular problems, one of which is the use of an industrial space to install the work in. As a result the authenticity of the images are questioned by the contradictions set up with the ‘real’ air-conditioning duct and columns in the space, which place the images in a real space as opposed to in an idealized, gallery space, in which other power structures are at play. The images in this presentation space worked in a number of ways, presenting the self-portrait in various ways. Some images were cropped more than others, adding to a sense of ambiguity, while others were drawn in a pixilated way, suggesting a constructed self. Some were remediated by having layers of simulated paint or what could also be seen as makeup, adding layers to the identification and thereby, through a layering process, beginning to construct complex identities, which are simultaneously real and not real, authentic and not authentic, and recognizable and ambiguous. The grid format suggests a notion of sequence, which could suggest a notion of time and a notion of the unfinished as a result. The grid format of the images would also suggest a reading of the work, which would be different to the reading of a single image for example, where the grid of images suggests a multiplicity of images and identities, where the viewer is confronted

with numerous images and identities. The specific site in this case has affected the ways in which the images are read, and meaning is constructed in digital self-portrait images.



Figure 26: Marc Edwards, *Post-medium self-portrait*, 2007.
Installation view, from University Corner, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

The second group exhibition that these post-photographic, post-medium self-portraits were exhibited in was curated by David Paton (this exhibition had a curator, who did work with a theoretical framework), and required a selection of work to be chosen for the show to accommodate the allocated / limited space. The exhibition was presented as part of the Aardklop Arts Festival Potchefstroom. Paton, who has researched the artist book extensively is now interested in how the codex of the book is affected by digital culture.

In the second group exhibition discussed here, a body of work was coordinated for *Navigating the bookscape, artists' books and the digital interface*, an exhibition of works that responded to the title of the exhibition as a theme and curated by David Paton from

the 25th to the 30th September 2006 at the Aardklop Arts Festival and again from the 5th October to the 13th October 2006 at the FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg. A documentation of the work with accompanying text can be viewed on theartistsbook.org website.

An artwork was produced for this exhibition after an invitation from Paton where he requested a response to a curatorial position that elicited an artists response to making an artists' book with reference to the digital interface. Selected artists were invited with a brief that aimed to interrogate conventional and the digital ways of navigating the book. A list of criteria was presented, which included the following: As an invited artist, your brief is to interrogate the relationship between the conventional codex and 'the digital'.

The response to the call from the curator was to coordinate a limited (small) installation as a compilation of the work I had been working on at the time. This would result in a grouping of two printed self-portrait images, mounted on foam core and presented on the wall in proximity to each other, and in relation to a video which played on one of a double screen portable DVD player. These screens were mounted on the wall in relation to the printed images and in relation to the given site, which played its part in directing the final presentation. For this group exhibition, images that had been recorded on my camera phone were enlarged in Photoshop and printed on textured paper, mounted on a thin sheet of foam core and exhibited as a group of two images in a site-specific configuration. The two images were installed together with a digital video, that consisted of a combination of sequences of my self-portraits and footage I shot while in transit at Frankfurt airport. The complex arrangement of sequential still image, video footage and audio from the airport created a layered and ambiguous atmosphere in the gallery.

The artwork submitted for this exhibition consisted of a combined format of image and video with sound. Two inkjet prints were digitally printed on archival paper and mounted on 3mm x-press-it-foamcore and positioned on the wall at a comfortable average eye height. The Video part of the work was played on a loop on one of two portable monitors that had built-in speakers for sound. The potential meaning in this work is

constructed through a complex narrative that uses still layered images, double split video (moving) image and sound.

In the double wall mounted DVD installation of *Authentic – not authentic, self-practice from 11/04/05 to 12/05/06* (Fig.27), the video component consisted of images and sound that were recorded on a Sony Ericsson P910i, stored, selected and processed on a MacBook Pro and edited with Adobe Photoshop, Premier Pro, After Effects and Encore. In the video, the sound component included the sound of a pre-flight testing of aircraft flaps that were recorded while taxing at Frankfort airport. The ambiguous and awkward sound is suggestive of an animal bark more than mechanized one. The video image is made up from a constantly changing collage of still images from my diary, some of which have been autographically altered. These still images are juxtaposed with live footage shot at the time in the same airport as the sound recording, creating a contextualization. The double screen was an attempt to simulate the symmetry of the pages of a book. And the duplicity of video image was an attempt to simulate the multiple screens found on the backs of seats in most contemporary long haul airlines.

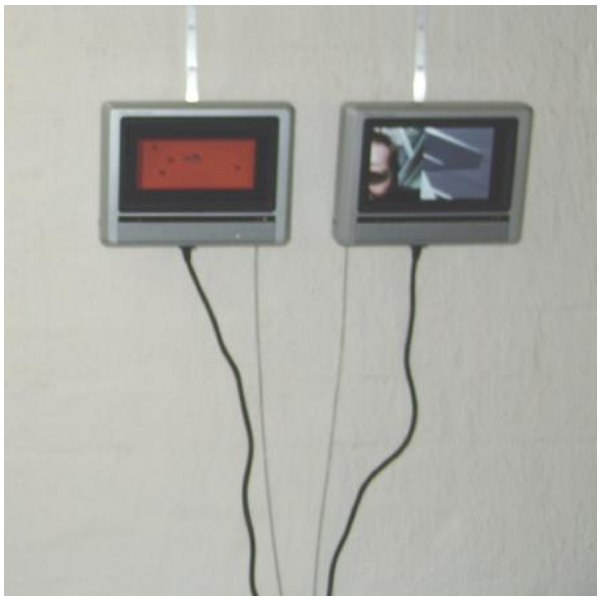

Figure 27: Marc Edwards, *Authentic – not authentic, self practice from 11/04/05 to 12/05/06*, 2006. Installation detail, from Aardklop Arts Festival,
University of Potchefstroom.

The third opportunity I had of exhibiting and testing these self-portrait images was in a group exhibition curated by Rory Bester at the University of Johannesburg Faculty of

Art, Design and Architecture Gallery (Fig.28). (This curated group exhibition looked at Practice led Research in the faculty, and attempted to find patterns of intentions.) Each time the self-portrait images were exhibited they would be re ordered according to the space (site) in a post medium condition. The allocated space here is important, as it allows the layers and ambiguity in the work to develop further. The potential content in the work is developed, firstly by the limited number of images shown, the selection of the images shown, and the inclusion of a video sequence of images, with the addition of audio, sets the work up with multiple layering and multiple mediums, constructing a new subject and as a result, a new layered and ambiguous identity in a post-medium condition.



Fig. 28: Marc Edwards, *Post-medium self-portrait 3*, 2009.
Installation view, from the FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg.

This exhibition is partly a result of a practice of creative activity, a project-based activity that Carine Zaayman (2005:160). refers to, where she comments on “recent shifts” in the visual arts as “the move towards less object-based more project-based art, more non-gallery art, a sense of events as art, the rise of audio art.”.

3.4.2 Solo exhibition

In the solo exhibition titled, *Post-medium self-portraits at the substation* the self-portrait images are exhibited in the Substation Gallery in an unconventional manner where the fragmentary arrangement of the works is evident. One of the images in (Fig. 29), is placed inside one of the four rectangular recesses in the wall, responding to an architectural detail on the site, drawing attention to the specific site where the perception of the space is transformed. This is in direct response to Krauss's call for the post-medium presentation as installation.

The work is mounted on thin board and not framed, mounted directly onto the walls so that the images become part of the site. The frameless images maintain a general quality in the site as opposed to a specific quality like images that are framed which are read as specific objects. This series of images relies on each other to set up a complex reading through a system of multiplicity where the totality is read through the combination of the parts. This coupled with a fragmentary sequence of the images and a time-based video with sound constructs a new subject that changes the potential meaning of the work and constructs a post-medium installation in this practice.

The images are positioned in such a way so as to elicit an engagement with the work and site, As Kabakov (1991:72) suggests, to claim totality, "to a connection with universals", where there is the installation "that rejects, or claims to reject, the object as a matter of principle", where he claims that this installation "completely transforms space and is the principle agent of such a transformation". Images are hung at different heights, thereby utilizing the totality and including the height of the site. This forces the viewer to follow the gaze from one self-portrait to another, thus constructing a visual narrative, see (Fig.30). The placement of the self-portraits creates an effect of interactivity. The images are positioned in such a way that the direction of the face and the direction of the eyes encourage the viewer to respond to visual clues (Fig.31). The

viewer responds by looking to the left, right, or turning to the opposite wall, depending on the visual clue.[15]

This series of images is exhibited in the substation gallery, which is a non-commercial experimental exhibition space with a history of an industrial nature. This specificity of the site is important as it frees the exhibited work from the traditions of a commercial art gallery or art museum allowing the construction of a complex convention. The Substation was chosen as a site for installing this exhibition because of this atmosphere that would allow the work to be contextualized differently to what it would, if shown in an established gallery or museum. The limitations of the site forced a rethinking of how to configure the component images, so that they were able to construct the intended potential meaning in the viewer's mind where the images articulated the space and each other.



Fig. 29: Marc Edwards, *Post-medium self-portraits at the substation*, 2009.
Installation view 1, North West, from the Substation Gallery, University of the Witwatersrand.

[15] As mentioned earlier, Giotto frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua, are figurative and narrative. Their visual clues of head and eye direction elicit a response from the viewer who interact with them by reading the visual narrative in a fragmented way, from one side of the chapel to the other.



Fig. 30: Marc Edwards, *Post-medium self-portraits at the substation,* 2009.
Installation view 2, South, from the Substation Gallery, University of the Witwatersrand.



Fig. 31: Marc Edwards, *Post-medium self-portraits at the substation*, 2009.
Installation view 3, North East, from the Substation Gallery, University of the Witwatersrand

The solo exhibition is a result of a testing of a site-specific installation, where images and their positioning in the specific site configures potential meaning. The site configures a complexity and a layering, and a sense of potential chaos which Kabakov (1991:66), for example, suggests constructs some mental discomfort introduced by the irregular spacing height difference, and positioning of the images in response to architectural and interior detail, which is in itself evidence of the history of the site and adds further layering to the installation. Kabakov also refers to the totality of the installation vision, which he suggests acts as a magic crystal, where everything can be surveyed (1991:66). This format of the installation is useful in setting up a body of self-portrait images which attempt to construct a new subject and notions of identity, where the format of dispersing images across the space in response to the site, claims some totality, as Kabakov (1991:66), has suggested. That these take us back to the epic genre, as he puts it, to literature, which encompasses all levels of the world - in this case an attempt to use the site as a kind of metaphor to describe ‘all corners’ of identity.

In conclusion this report finds that the digital self-portrait, in a postmodern condition, is a malleable image and that it constructs a new subject and a post-medium. That post-modern culture in South Africa, which is contextualized by notions of flux, dislocation, complexity, vulnerability, ambiguity and the layered, constructs art expressions and identity in a post-medium condition. This practice has constructed relative layered notions of identity through digital self-portraits that used aspects of the convergence and malleability in the digital technologies used, to create complex, layered, unfinished and ambiguous work. That the digital self-portrait in this report has become a new subject and a post-medium, by developing both an interiority from the painted portrait and an exteriority from the portrait photograph.

In the creative work the end result is an exhibition and not just the proving of a specific hypothesis, it is also a process of visual praxis that is investigated. The creative work is exploratory where the variables are not always known, they become manipulated and are subjective. The creative work involves the visual realization of concepts, which are processed and developed through a series of formal and non-formal decisions that are included in aspects of the postmodern condition and the post-medium, its convergence, malleability, mediation, scale, and systems of display.

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