

Mappings of the self through the theme of journey in the video installations of Minnette Vári

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This research focuses on selected video installations by Minnette Vári to critically examine her exploration of the theme of journey as a means to express notions of the self. It probes the extent to which the notion of the haptic may be used to interpret the theme of journey as manifest in Vári's work. This research draws on a particular reading of the haptic, which considers touch, movement and habitation to form key components of the haptic. The first part of this study investigates the way that specific video installations by Vári may facilitate a haptic perception. The second part of the study focuses on why Vári's creative production may be seen as a haptic activity. Here, the relationship between sense, movement and place is identified. The manner in which the creative process may be used as a tool for self-discovery is also considered. The concluding chapter reflects on my own artistic production in relation to this research.

DECLARATION

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

Colleen Alborough

_____ day of _____, 2010

This thesis is motivated by a number of factors. I have long been fascinated by Minnette Vári's digital¹ animations and her use of the medium of video installation. In 1999 I experienced Vári's *Oracle* (1999) (fig 3), which affected me profoundly. Moving through this video installation, I was struck by the way her particular manipulation of the space, light, sound and animated imagery combined to produce a heightened physical, sensory response in me, as well as transporting me psychologically. The possibilities for video installation art to cause an immersive, embodied sensation in the viewer became an area of major interest for me, influencing my own artwork. This resulted in a further wish for greater understanding of Vári's creative process.

A key aspect of Vári's video installation work is the way she uses this medium to map notions of the self, and this became a focal point of this research. To my mind, Vári's work has suffered from analyses² that overly stress the socio-political aspect of her work at the expense of her manifest engagement with the subjective realm. This is not to say that no link has been made in South African art criticism between the socio-political notion of the self and more personal terrain.³ It is rather a comment that Vári's work has been categorised as a politics of identity framed within a South African contemporary art discourse, in which race has dominated to the point of arguably suppressing other subject positions. These interpretations are justified in light of South Africa's historical circumstances and its infancy as a new democracy, and indeed in relation to much of the work Vári has produced. However, I feel that this dominant methodology results in a limited reading of her work.⁴

Furthermore, there is limitation in the literature on South African video installation art, especially on the particular kind of video installation art that Vári produces, which I suggest, affects the viewer on a sensory level. This research aims to contribute a specifically experiential and more intimate reading of Vári's work. To produce a context for my discussion, I will also reflect on aspects of the work of other video installation artists, namely Bill Viola (American) and Berni Searle (South African).

The scope and nature of this thesis include the following key theoretical and interrelated issues: video installation as a vehicle to explore and map geographies of the self; video installation as a manifestation of a habitable, haptic environment in which a viewer can be emotionally transported; the theme of journey as a means of self-discovery. As will be amplified in the introduction, I use the concepts of journey and mapping to discuss the development of Vári's manipulation of the medium as a means of self-exploration. I also

consider the above outlined theoretical issues in relation to my own video installations and art making practice.

I have adopted the following research methods: (1) reading core literature around the practice of video installation art and theory; (2) field work in the form of attending Vári's recent exhibitions and walkabouts, including an interview with the artist; (3) written accounts of my viewing experiences of Vári's video installations; (4) and my own art making process exploring the production of immersive video installations.

In recognising both the potential minefield caused by reception theory when trying to establish the subject position of the viewer in video installation art, and the contradiction such theory demonstrates in attempting a general account of an essentially subjective, individual experience, I decided to cast myself as "spectator" in my discussion of Vári's work. This is a deliberate strategy that marks the issue of the particularity of the viewer. As in my case the viewer is also an artist, I have chosen to write in the first person. To further register this strategy, I created a travelogue of my viewing experiences and responses recorded whilst inside her video installations. I weave extracts of these personal notes between my theoretical analyses of her works.

This subjective approach led me to search for an appropriate metaphor to describe the concrete, viewing experience. I have adopted the conceptual and structural approach of the journey and drawn on geographical metaphors to narrate a subjective, autobiographical path through Vári's and my own video installations. At these intersections, I shift the tone of the discussion and use "we" deliberately as a rhetorical device to mark the sense of engaging the reader on a journey through the artworks under discussion.

In the effort to amplify the artist's voice and to establish how Vári's video installations may be seen as mappings of the self, I use extracts of personal statements from Vári⁵ to extrapolate my argument. In the discussion of my own work, I include notes from my creative journals to highlight how my creative process serves as a means of self-exploration.

When quoting from these artists' statements I leave them unedited and often do not comment on them critically, as it is my wish to retain these statements as an entity. I believe that artists' commentary provides valuable subjective insights into the creative process. In her book, *Art in Question*, Karen Raney (2003:6) maintains that artists' statements reveal an investigative, at times uncertain, outlook:

One would expect artists to have a less systematic, more "lived" approach than those who theorize about art at one remove. In the interviews with practitioners [in *Art in Question*], uncertainty seems to come not only from postmodern dilemmas, but from the

imprecise, exploratory, immersed nature of making itself.... This is not to suggest that artists stand outside of theoretical debates. It is to recognize the often anarchic, foraging, trial-and-error quality of what they do.

By including statements from the artists themselves, I hope to infuse my discussion around video installation art with these exploratory traces of raw material: personal thoughts that represent the embodied nature of the creative process. The reader will notice two distinct streams within my discussion: a critical analysis of the topics under discussion and subjective material in the form of Vári's, my own and other selected artists' statements, including extracts from my artist-viewer experiences of Vári's video installations.

On the subject of artists' statements, I append three documents. The first is the transcript of the personal interview conducted with Vári. The second is the transcript of the walkabout conducted by Vári during her solo exhibition at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg in March 2007. The third is the personal travelogue that includes extracts from the records of my viewing experience while inside Vári's video installations, as well as writings from my creative journals. These documents offer the reader further insight into both Vári's and my own thought processes, working methodologies and artistic intentions.

The illustrations of the artworks under discussion are located after the bibliography. The first images are the selected artworks of Vári that are investigated in this thesis, arranged in chronological order of the date of production. Following are the images of other referenced artworks, including those of the video installation artists that I examine to locate Vári's art practice within a contemporary art discourse. The remaining images are of my own artworks, explored in the last chapter. To facilitate a smooth reading, on first mention of an artwork in a chapter, I include the title, date and figure number, and thereafter only the title of the work.

I also include two DVDs as reference material: the first is documentation of Vári's video installations discussed herein and the second is documentation of my video installation *Night Journey* (2005-2008). Please note that the documentation is intended for reference purposes only and in no way should it be a substitute for the actual viewing experience of the video installations under discussion.

Endnotes: Preface

¹ The word digital in relation to Vári's animations refers to the fact that her animations are produced by manipulating video and photographic material using digital software, as opposed to the more classical methods of animation production, such as stop frame or cel animation.

² See, for example, Bester (1998), Geers (2004), Neubauer (2004) and Pepper (2004).

³ For example, Schmahmann, B. 2004. *Through the Looking Glass: Representations of Self by South African Women Artists*. Johannesburg: David Krut. In addition, recent exhibitions exploring the notion of self include curator Clive van der Berg's successive exhibitions entitled *iSelf*, held at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival between 2000 and 2002; and more recently Brodie/Stevenson's two-part curated exhibition *Self/Not-Self*, held February – April 2009, Brodie/Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg.

⁴ van der Watt (2003) notes in her article on Berni Searle entitled *Disappearing Act* that much of Searle's work has been subjected to a repetitive reading and interpretation. van der Watt (2003:24) elaborates:

Searle's art apparently evokes a specific critique that always insists on relating her work to the racial binaries that scar South African history – which is of course inevitable given the grim reality of this place and time. But in the rush to situate her work in the mire of racial politics, at least as much is lost as is gained. I am not saying that Searle's work is somehow beyond race.... But I want to suggest nevertheless that Searle's art is less about the politics of race than about what Jane Blocker (1999:74) has described as "the lifelong process of coming to terms with the estrangement that is the soul of identity".

In my opinion van der Watt's comments could be applied to many of the readings on Vári's works.

⁵ These were taken from my interview with Vári and from her walkabout at The Goodman Gallery.

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Some of the best journeys we take are those we get to share with a loved one, a friend or colleague. This journey is no exception, and one that I most certainly could not have made alone. I would like to thank the following people:

This thesis would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Minnette Vári. Her openness and enthusiasm during our interviews is much appreciated. I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Penny Siopis. Without her insightful guidance, enthusiasm and support, I could not have completed this work.

A special thanks goes to Mandy Conidaris and Barbara Shaw for their astute recommendations and editorial expertise. Throughout this journey, my family and friends have given me endless support, which I greatly appreciate. Thank you especially to Tony de Castro, Richard Kilpert, Paula Louw, Nicole Ridgway, Nathaniel Stern and Paul Tosio.

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Finally, a special thanks goes to my husband, Matthew Townsend, for being my constant travel companion. I thank him for his understanding, love and support, this journey would be meaningless without him.

Works by Minnette Vári

(All works © Minnette Vári. Reproduced by kind permission of the Artist).

- Figure 1a. ***Selfportrait 1*** (1995). Digital print on vinyl, steel, 1200 x 600 x 35cm.
(Source: De Arte 55, 1997:65, fig 7)
- Figure 1b. ***Selfportrait 2*** (1995). Photographic print, 75 x 107cm. (Source: De Arte 55, 1997:66, fig 8)
- Figure 2. ***Alien*** (1998). Stills from digital video, video 52 sec, audio 2 min 14 sec, loop.
- Figure 3. ***Oracle*** (1999). Stills from digital video installation, video 2 min, audio 6 min, loop.
- Figure 4. ***Chimera (White Edition)*** (2001). Stills from digital video installation, multi channel projection, video 3 min 32 sec, audio 5 min, loop.
- Figure 5. ***Chimera (White Edition)*** (2001). Installation views, World Wide Video Festival, Amsterdam, 2001.
- Figure 6 – 9. ***Riverrun*** (2004). Stills from digital video installation, two-channel projection, video 2 min 30 sec, audio 5 min, loop.
- Figure 10. ***Riverrun*** (2004). Installation views, Kunstmuseum Luzern, 2004.
- Figure 11. ***Sketchbook*** (2006/07). Ink on paper, in Perspex box, 50 x 49cm.
(Photo: Colleen Alborough)
- Figure 12 – 14. ***Self-Portrait Series*** (2006/07). Ink on paper, 75 x 55cm.
(Photos: Colleen Alborough)
- Figure 15 – 16. ***Monomotapa Series I - IV*** (2007). Digital prints on 100% cotton rag paper with pigment inks, 78 x 110cm each.
(Photos: Colleen Alborough)
- Figure 17 – 19. ***Vigil*** (2007). Stills from digital video installation, video 3 min 45 sec, loop.
- Figure 20 – 21. ***Vigil*** (2007). Installation views, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 2007.
- Figure 22 – 24. ***Quake*** (2007). Stills from digital video installation, video 3 min, loop.
- Figure 25 – 26. ***Quake*** (2007). Installation views, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 2007.

Referenced artworks

- Figure 27. Francisco Goya, ***Saturn Devouring His Child*** (c1819–1823). Oil mural transferred to canvas, 146 x 83 cm. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn_Devouring_His_Son. (Accessed 15 September 2010)
- Figure 28. Hans Memling, ***The Last Judgement*** (c.1480). Oil on panel, 306 x 222 cm. Right wing panel. Available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Judgment_\(Memling\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Judgment_(Memling)). (Accessed 15 September 2010)

Other International Video Installation Artists

- Figure 29. Bill Viola, ***Room for St. John of the Cross*** (1983). Stills from Video/sound installation. Available at: http://arthistory.about.com/od/from_exhibitions/ig/the_third_mind/aaca_gugg_0109_28.htm. (Accessed 15 September 2010)
- Figure 30. Berni Searle, ***Home and Away*** (2003). Stills from double projection video installation, S16mm colour film transferred to DVD, 6 min. each, played simultaneously. (Credits: © Berni Searle, reproduced by kind permission of the Artist).

Works by Colleen Alborough

(All documentation is by Colleen Alborough)

- Figure 31a. Installation views of ***Before The Time*** (2007) and ***You aren't in sight*** (2007) in the passage outside The Premises Gallery, May 2007.
- Figure 31b. Installation views of ***Rabelais*** (2007) and ***Beneath The Darkened Sky*** (2007) in the passage outside The Premises Gallery, May 2007.
- Figure 32. ***Rabelais*** (2007). Archival inkjet prints, 30 x 60cm.
- Figure 33. ***Before The Time*** (2007). Installation view, The Premises Gallery, May 2007.
- Figure 34. ***Before The Time*** (2007). Detail. Concertina artist book, archival inkjet prints, 3m x 20cm.
- Figure 35. ***Beneath the Darkened Sky Series*** (2007). Archival inkjet prints, 30 x 40cm.
- Figure 36 – 37. ***You aren't in sight*** (2007). Gauze bandage and thread drawings. 39 x 49,5cm

- Figure 38. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Installation views, The Premises Gallery, 2007. Interactive video installation, mixed media, dimensions variable.
- Figure 39 – 40. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Installation views, Palazzo delle Papesse - Centro Arte Contemporanea, Siena, 2008.
- Figure 41. Schematic of installation layout of ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008).
- Figure 42. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Detail views of felt screens, feathers and wool.
- Figure 43. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Video stills from dream sequence projection above the bed.
- Figure 44. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Detail views of projection behind bed, showing combined poem and live video feed footage, and strips of gauze and bandage on floor.
- Figure 45a. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Detail views of physical computing components.
- Figure 45b-c. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Detail views of passive infrared sensors positioned within installation.
- Figure 45d. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Detail views of digital camera embedded in felt screens.
- Figure 46a. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Felt-making process.
- Figure 46b. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Detail views of gauze embedded in felt.
- Figure 46c. ***Night Journey*** (2005-2008). Detail views of feathers embedded in felt.

Addition material attached:

DVD 1: Documentation of the following works by Minnette Vári:

Oracle (1999)
Chimera (2001)
Riverrun (2004)
Vigil (2007)
Quake (2007)

DVD 2: Documentation of *Night Journey* (2005-2008) by Colleen Alborough

In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself**Franz Fanon**

My aim in this thesis is to explore the way notions of the self may be engaged through the theme of journey and through using a form of video installation that promotes a heightened embodied viewing experience. A key part of this investigation involves drawing out the haptic qualities inherent in the works of both Minnette Vári's and myself. My discussion focuses on the following video installations of Vári: *Chimera* (2001) (fig 4 – 5), *Riverrun* (2004) (fig 6 – 10), *Vigil* (2007) (fig 17 – 21) and *Quake* (2007) (fig 22 – 26), as well as one of my own video installations, *Night Journey* (2005-2008) (fig 38 – 46).

The first part of this study examines how Vári's video installations might facilitate a haptic perception. The second part of the study concentrates on how Vári's creative production may be seen as a haptic activity, probing the relationship between sense, movement and place. This involves reflecting on the extent to which the above works manifest as mappings of a mobile subjectivity, in which Vári explores her sense of self within her lived terrain of South Africa. The manner in which the creative process may be used as a tool for self-discovery is also considered. The concluding chapter discusses my own artistic production in relation to this research.

For the purposes of clarity, the following is an outline of the various forms of the notion of journey that arise in this research: (1) the physical journey of the viewer moving through the demarcated space of the selected video installations; (2) the theme of journey as represented in the iconography of the said works; (3) the metaphorical journeys embedded in the conceptual underpinnings of the works; (4) the way in which these three manifestations of journey promote an embodied, empirical viewing experience, which I see as facilitating a psychological "space" of self-discovery, (5) the artist's journey through the creative process as a means of self-exploration, and finally (6) my use of the concept of journey as a self-conscious strategy to take the reader on a voyage through this thesis. Despite these categorical distinctions, the reader will discover that throughout my narration, these journeys mostly occur simultaneously, and so the above categories will be conflated.

Using the theme of journey to explore selected video installations offers a way to reflect on the self, on the embodied experience that I, as the viewer¹, have of Vári's work; and on my own creative process. The voyage becomes one of self-discovery. We travel metaphorically through the spatiovisual² worlds of the works under discussion. This type of metaphorical

journey is encompassed in JE Cirlot's words in his *Dictionary of Symbols* (1962, Sv "journey"):

[The] journey is never merely a passage through space, but rather an expression of the urgent desire for discovery and change that underlies the actual movement and experience of travelling. Hence, to study, to inquire, to seek or to live with intensity through new and profound experiences are all modes of travelling or, to put it another way, spiritual and symbolic equivalents of the journey.

One of the primary books I use to substantiate my ideas, and which mobilises a similarly inclusive notion of the journey, is Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (2002). She uses the conceptual and linguistic approach of the journey to map the way emotions manifest within the production and viewing of the spatiovisual arts. I have borrowed Bruno's use of the journey as a guide and methodology for writing this thesis.

As one of my aims is to gain insight into the viewer's experience of such video installations, Bruno's theoretical framework is further relevant to my topic. A critical aspect of my interest in an embodied viewing encounter is how a heightened sensory awareness might provoke a more haptic perception than is often expected in work not manifestly tactile. Bruno's notion of the haptic argues for a comprehensive understanding of perception that incorporates both the optic and the haptic. She (2002:251) states that in a Western culture that privileges sight, touch has often been positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy of senses. Bruno considers touch in a wider sense than do conventional notions of tactility. The haptic becomes an agent in the formation of space – both geographic and cultural – and by extension, in the articulation of the spatiovisual arts themselves. By emphasizing the cultural role of the haptic, Bruno (2002:6) develops a theory that connects sense to place:

Here, the haptic realm is shown to play a tangible, *tactical* role in our communicative "sense" of spatiality and motility, thus shaping the texture of habitable space, and, ultimately, mapping our ways of being in touch with the environment.

Using this approach, Bruno explores how the experience of the spatiovisual arts shifts the viewer (the voyeur) from the perspective of the gaze (the optic) into what she calls a "haptic" encounter, where as "*voyageuse*" (voyagers), our bodies are able to sense their movement in space (2002:6,16). She investigates the emotion of viewing space in which a traveller's apprehension of space occurs through the engagement with touch and movement. Bruno charts how this sensuous movement through the spatiovisual arts can facilitate imaginary voyages into our interior, emotional spaces. Furthermore, she employs an architectural itinerary that considers the spatiovisual arts to be inhabitable *sites*. In this way, she includes habitation as a component of the haptic (2002:15).

At this point, Bruno also reflects that the spatiovisual arts might be seen as mental landscapes and inner worlds. She examines the artistic impulse to map psychocorporeal space. In considering the spatiovisual arts as mappings of emotive, geopsychic terrains, Bruno explores aspects of these art forms that she feels have been left out by theories of the gaze (2002:16). This geopsychic terrain – which comprehends haptic space – is also the place where “a tactile eye and a visual touch develop, for this way of looking is inscribed in the movement of psychogeography” (Bruno 2002:253). Bruno’s (2002:254) view of geopsychic space employs a physiologic notion of the haptic that explores the interaction between sense and place:

Touch is a sense actively involved with the locomotive capacity of the body and with kinesthetic perception. Because the haptic realm is not simply inclusive but “comprehensive” of this motile touch and its kinesthetics, the haptic, in a way, becomes an actual geographic sense. In our haptic experience of reaching, an extended, imagined, and even global touch is achieved. Hence contact, exploration, and communication are to be considered haptic activities.

Bruno includes writing, films and visual art as haptic activities, where artists use these creative methods of communication as a means to explore their sense of inhabited, traversed space. In this way, she explores the geopsychic relation between place and affect³, an exploration that includes the notion of topophilia (the love of place⁴). According to Bruno, in such topophilic explorations, “the land provokes an emotional response, geography is a way to express one’s feelings. It becomes a vehicle for emotions that may not surface otherwise” (2002:377). As mappings of haptic travel – the physical affect of movement on the emotions – Bruno claims the spatiovisual arts enable the spectator to take part in the intimate experience mobilized in the creative process, in which the artist’s relation between voyage and dwelling is remapped (2002:361).

Bruno’s atlas further explores the charting of the relationship between the self and one’s lived, navigational spaces. Since my topic includes exploring how video installations can be interpreted as mappings of the self, Bruno’s approach to cartography is further relevant to the aims of this thesis. She extends her use of the haptic, which combines locomotive and tactile properties, to foreground a cartographic impulse that “dwells in movement” (2002:207). In this manner, Bruno (2002:207) aims to move beyond the critical trend for which the map is a unifying and totalizing concept produced by a distant eye:

Despite postmodern theory’s interest in cartography – beginning notably with Frederic Jameson’s version of “cognitive mapping” ... mapping remains ... a contested paradigm, even a negative notion. Maps are the objects of a struggle in many geographic studies; and a number of efforts have been devoted to deconstructing and decolonizing them.⁵ Even in works interested in advancing knowledge of sexual difference, the negative persists.

Bruno is of the opinion that in order to prevent mapping from being dismissed as a hegemonic instrument, a diversity of cartographic practices need to be explored. *Atlas of Emotions* aims to draw attention to and explore the “nuanced representational edges of cartography” and the “varied potentials of different mapping processes” which include transformative “partial” mappings (Bruno 2002:207). By applying Bruno’s notion of the cartographic impulse, I consider how Vári’s and my own work may be seen as mobile explorations of intimate space.

Whilst Bruno is primarily a film theorist – and in *Atlas of Emotion*, she predominantly investigates cinematic space – she does extend her application and understanding of the haptic to other spatiovisual arts such as painting, sculpture, photography and exhibition space as an entity. I consciously apply Bruno’s theory throughout my discussion, as it provides an unusual perspective on the spatiovisual arts, and is extremely appropriate to the different aspects of the works investigated in this thesis. That Bruno discusses key cultural theories of perception and space in a manner I can synthesize is extremely useful as these bodies of knowledge, in and of themselves, fall outside the scope of my research. By making seeing and travelling inseparable and by apperceiving the haptic within the realm of spatiality, Bruno turns the voyeur into the voyager. In doing so she emphasises not only that “sight” and “site” but also “motion” and “emotion” are irrevocably connected (2002:16).

Using Bruno’s theoretical approach, Vári’s and my own artworks may be located within a terrain that engages with haptic psychogeographies. I investigate Vári’s spatiovisual mappings as an exploration of a lived, intimate space, where Vári navigates the relationship between voyage and dwelling. In addition, Bruno’s methodology echoes the approach I use within my own creative practice, which reflects on the impact of place on my emotions. I attempt to map my personal navigations through lived space into external territories, or *sites*, for the viewer to journey through. As such, my theoretical research has been drawn quite literally to the emotional terrains of the spatiovisual arts, drawing upon experiential trajectories and the discovery of self. I hope that this investigation contributes to an alternate form of mapping, one that explores the realms of emotions within video installation art.

The term “self” should be clarified in the context of this research. Throughout cultural studies on the self, the term *subject/subjectivity* arises frequently. Nick Mansfield, in his book *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (2000) provides a useful overview of the relationship between *self* and *subject*. Mansfield (2000:2-3) explains that although the two are sometimes used interchangeably, the word *self* does not capture the sense of social and cultural entanglement that is implicit in the word *subject*: the way our immediate life is

constantly caught up in complex political, social, geographical and philosophical concerns. Mansfield (2000:3) elaborates:

“Subjectivity” refers ... to an abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience. In this way, the subject is always linked to something outside of it.... It is this linkage that the word “subject” insists upon.... The word subject, therefore, proposes that the self is not a separate and isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles.

My use of the terms self/subject/subjectivity incorporates this understanding of the subject as being an entity that exists within the realm of such complex, shared concerns.

Because one of my interests is to register the subjectivity of the maker in video installation art, I actively seek to include personal statements from Vári and other selected artists to shed light on my hypothesis. In an *Art South Africa* feature entitled “The Reading List” (2007), the editor, Sean O'Toole requested artists, critics and curators to compile a reading list that they felt was mandatory reading for anyone with an interest in art, particularly South African art. One of the respondents was gallery owner and curator Michael Stevenson, who stated (2007:69) the following, before detailing his list of books and essays:

Surely mandatory reading for artists, critics, curators and collectors are those very rare instances where texts take us into the minds of the artists. In the reams that are published in this magazine and elsewhere, it is a surprisingly rare occurrence. Interestingly, in the instances when one does encounter such writing, it is seldom by art historians or art critics; it is more often by artists themselves or those outside the art world who tend to see the themes clearer and skirt the claustrophobia of theory.

I concur with Stevenson's comments. In attempting to take the reader further into “the mind of the artists”, I incorporate the writings of Bill Viola into my discussion of Vári's and my own video installations. I find Viola's philosophies and creative process supportive of my premise.

Primarily a video installation artist, Viola has been a practitioner of this medium for over thirty years. He has consistently and consciously pushed the boundaries of multimedia technologies to explore new ways of representing the relationship between sense and place. Viola (1995b:151) sees his art practice as a philosophy of research rather than expression, through which he researches ways of being in the world:

I have learned so much from my work with video and sound and it goes far beyond simply what I need to apply within my profession. The real investigation is that of life and of being itself; the medium is just a tool in this investigation.

Viola's attitude towards the creative process as a means of self-exploration is a philosophy that I embrace in my own approach to the art making process, and is pertinent to the aims of this research.

A further parallel to the endeavours of my research is the fact that the relationship between sense and place is of primary importance to Viola. Viola (1995b:149) comments that for most viewers of his work, this “sense of place” manifests as an apparent concern with landscape:

Yet these “landscape” works ... are all landscape works in a larger, extended sense. They find their unification in what for me is the original place of the landscape in art and culture: the natural raw material of the human psyche. I do not distinguish between inner and outer landscape, between the environment as the physical world out there (the “hard” stuff) and the mental image of that environment within each and every individual (the “soft” stuff). It is the tension, the transition, the exchange, and the resonance between these two modalities that energize and define our reality. The key agent in this exchange of energies is the image, and this “space between” is precisely the place in which my work operates.

This idea of the image – even a video installation – as an “exchange of energies” is important and adds impetus to Bruno’s exploration of the relationship between place and affect, the connection between inner and outer space. My investigation shows how Vári and I map a “tension” and “exchange” between psychological and physical, inhabited space. I indicate the way that such video installations manifest as a passage, a “space between”, which may offer a both a space for an “exchange of energies” and an embodied viewing encounter, thereby presenting an intersection between interior and exterior spaces.

Viola’s philosophies add further emphasis to Bruno’s reading of the haptic in his effort to unify perception and ontology. He considers the phenomenon of sense perception as a language of the body and avenue to self-knowledge. Viola (1995b:151) explains:

My ideas about the visual have been affected by ... something I call “field perception”, as opposed to our more common mode of object perception.... I think of all the senses as being unified.... [All] the senses exist simultaneously in our bodies, interwoven into one system that includes the sensory data, neural processing, memory, imagination, and all the mental events of the moment. This all adds up to create the larger phenomenon we call experience. This is the real raw material, the medium with which I work. Western science has decided it is desirable to isolate the senses in order to study them, but much of my work has been aimed at putting it all back together. So field perception is the awareness or sensing of an entire space at once.... This perception is linked more to awareness than to momentary attention.

Both Bruno and Viola map a comprehensive way of thinking about visuality, and suggest the sum of our five senses shape human perception and experience, something that is not wholly catered for by the idea of optical or visual perception. These trains of thought on sensory perception offer key insights into the embodied, haptic viewer experience I encountered inside Vári’s video installations. Furthermore, they reveal how video installation may be viewed as a mapping of a sense of place, and ultimately, the self.

Since my theoretical research has developed from my visual orientation and practice as a visual artist, I inflect the language of scholarly analysis with the subjective, even the autobiographical. As noted in the preface, in drafting this thesis I was compelled to interlace the language of theory with travelling anecdotes and experiential tales in narrating my viewing experience of Vári's video installations.

In emphasising aspects of a deliberately subjective methodology, I do not wish to override dominant art critical discourse. My aim is to draw attention to the experiential, embodied viewing encounter of video installations. In applying Bruno's approach and particular use of the haptic, it is not my intention to provide a theoretical justification for such viewing experiences. Rather, as I work in a similar terrain, I am using this theoretical endeavour as an opportunity to explore and understand the embodied situations provoked by Vári's works.

My theoretical enquiry embraces the notion of searching, rather than using theory to prove something conclusive. In *Art in Question*, Karen Raney (2003:1) comments that within the realms of art discourse, there is a sense of uncertainty about the vocabularies used to talk about art. Raney (2003:8) states that this uncertainty suggests that categories are being reconsidered and reformed:

Theorizing now is seen as a fluid enterprise in which we look backward and forward through a lens of a present which is itself constantly changing. Art history does not discover once and for all the way things really are or were. Instead, the values and languages of the present infuse our interpretations of the past and make them provisional.

Using this attitude of searching, which extends the notion of journey and movement, this research offers a provisional reading of Vári's video installations and my viewer experience. In drawing on a transdisciplinary approach, by using Bruno's geographical and at times psychoanalytic approach, as well as her particular use of the haptic, I hope to introduce new terms into the discussion around the immersive viewer experience in a manner which reframes these terms within new conversations.

It is pertinent at this point, to present to the reader the itinerary for our voyage. The thesis is divided into Three Sections. The First Section maps out the theoretical turf we will explore to illuminate a haptic, immersive viewing experience. Chapter One, *A Survey of the View*, looks at the historical development of video installation art. I investigate the defining characteristics of video installation art practice and explore what Margaret Morse (1990:154) terms the "space-in-between" that characterises this medium. Bruno's notion of the haptic is considered in relation to video installation art and the immersive viewing experience, including her definition of the haptic as an agent in the formation of space. This investigation includes looking at how the spatiovisual arts may facilitate an emotive, transporting viewing

experience, or as Bruno phrases it, a haptic encounter. Bruno's theory of the haptic is extended by briefly relating it to the situationists notion of psychogeography and mapping, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas around perception. Chapter Two, *Fellow Voyagers*, introduces a background to Vári's artistic terrain, and I briefly examine selected video installations of two contemporary artists, Bill Viola and Berni Searle, with the purpose of locating Vári's art practice within a contemporary art context.

Section Two focuses on the haptic viewer experience in relation to two of Vári's video installations, *Chimera* (2001) and *Riverrun* (2004). Chapter Three, *A Voyage through Time*, investigates Vári's use of the medium of video installation and her own body as site, to remap concepts of history, myth and self. I explore how her artistic mapping of *Chimera* can facilitate a haptic perception in the viewer. Chapter Four, *Terra Incognitae*, examines *Riverrun*, indicating the way that haptic perception may facilitate a psychological journey in the viewing subject. I consider the immersive viewing experience in relation to aspects of psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan's theories of the formation of subjectivity.

Section Three probes how Vári's and my own creative processes may be seen as haptic activities. Chapter Five, *A Journey In Solitude*, traces the development and interrelated nature of Vári's creative process. The body of work produced for Vári's 2007 Goodman Gallery solo show, which includes two-dimensional works and two video installations, *Vigil* (2007) and *Quake* (2007), is discussed. I reflect on the way Vári's creative output shapes the relationship between voyage and dwelling, as she engages with the emotional dynamics of traversing her inhabited space. Vári's cartographic impulse is investigated further in terms of the notion of topophilia. Chapter Six, *Here Be Dragons*, explores my Masters exhibition held at The Premises Gallery in 2007. The making and presentation of my own video installation, *Night Journey* (2005-2008), as well as related two-dimensional works, are examined. I map the topophilic relationship of sense to place, which considers how the works on exhibit may be seen as mappings of journeys through social and psychic space. This exploration includes surveying how the haptic manifests in both my creative process and my art works, as well as in the immersive viewing experience.

Endnotes: Introduction

¹ As I consciously position myself as spectator, I acknowledge that at times my narration may be overly subjective. In addition, not every viewer may experience Vári's video installations in the same manner in which I did.

² When I use the term spatiovisual, I refer to art forms that consider the spatial as well as visual elements as essential parts of the manifestation of the work. Such art forms include, among others, architecture, film, sculpture, installation and video installation. My focus in this thesis is on the spatiovisual art form of video installation. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the other spatiovisual art forms listed above.

³ I use the term *affect* in its commonly understood definition, namely "to act upon or have an effect on somebody or something, [or] to move somebody emotionally" (*Microsoft Encarta Dictionary*. 2007. Sv "affect").

⁴ See Tuan, Y. 1974. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*. Bruno's understanding and application of this concept in relation to the spatiovisual arts is explored in detail in Chapter 5 and 6 of this thesis.

⁵ See Bruno (2002:442) for a full citation of references that discuss these issues.

SECTION ONE

Art has always been a whole-body, physical experience. This sensuality is the basis of its true conceptual and intellectual nature, and is inseparable from it.

Bill Viola

To contextualise Vári's and my own work, I investigate the historical development of video installation. The cultural philosophies that propelled its emergence in the art world are discussed, as well as the shift in viewer experience that this art form precipitated. The characteristics of video installation are examined and the way this medium could be perceived as a "space-in-between" (Morse 1990:154). I take a closer look at Bruno's notion of the haptic in relation to an experiential viewing encounter. This includes considering the viewer's shift from voyeur to *voyageuse*, in which physical movement through the spatiovisual arts may facilitate a psychogeographic travel. Finally, I extend my choice of Bruno's use of the haptic in relation to the situationists' concept of psychogeography and mapping, as well as aspects of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception.

Throughout the 20th century, artists challenged the long tradition of painting as the privileged medium of representation. There were many reasons for this challenge, not least being the technological developments of this period, such as the innovations in photography, the invention of the moving image, and the ensuing development of cinema and television. Artists began incorporating technological media to explore new ways of visualising time and space. Video installation art was one such art form that evolved out of this climate of exploration and experimentation.

According to Graham Coulter-Smith, author of the online text *Deconstructing Installation Art* (2006), the foundation of contemporary video installation art can be traced back to the transgressive aesthetics of the early 20th century artists. These include the pioneer artist Marcel Duchamp, and the dominant art movements of Dada and Surrealism, which influenced much of the radical avant-gardist works of the 1960s and 1970s, which in turn, influenced the development of video installation art.

Coulter-Smith (2006) explains that the transgressive aesthetics of the early 20th century artists included the following fundamental ideas and values:

[F]irst, the aspiration to create a more direct involvement between the viewer and the work of art; second, the observation that [video]¹ installation art presents the viewer with fragments that must be explored and assembled in a manner that "activates" the viewer; and, third, the expanded sculptural (Krauss 1985) tactic of deconstructing the traditional concept of the precious work of art via the use of found objects and materials.

These ideas and values can be seen in contemporary video installation art practice. They have influenced artists to explore the potential of video installations to evolve into spaces that encourage the audience to experience the works in an open, immersive manner (Coulter-Smith 2006).

The numerous cultural and technological changes, especially from the late 1950s, have led to changes in human perception. With the continual innovation (and subsequent obsolescence) of new forms of communication and technology, we have experienced dramatic changes in our visual and intellectual habits. As artists began to integrate technology into their works, our understanding of art and our experiences of the world around us have been challenged. In addition to artists questioning the processes and materials involved in art making, a debate around the relationship between the artist and the audience emerged. Morse (1990:56) explains how this has created new types of viewing experiences:

Video installation can be seen as part of this larger shift in art forms towards “liveness” that began in earnest in the 1960s, in a field that included happenings, performance, conceptual art, body art, earth works and the larger category of installation art. These new art forms explored the expression of subjects in a here and now, in which we can speak and be present to each other.

A more subjective experience for the audience was being explored with video installations in an effort to establish a discursive environment in which a dialogue² between the artist, the art form and the audience was created.

This climate of cultural change and technological development challenged literary theorists and art historians to explore the role of the viewer in contributing meaning to the artwork. In *Methods and Theories of Art History*, Anne D’Alleva (2005:135) comments that structuralists and post-structuralists argued that the concept of authorship – the idea that individual genius and expression determine a work of art – was itself a cultural construct, a legacy of the Renaissance, which reached its peak in the Romantic era. D’Alleva (2005:136) explains that the structuralists and post-structuralists see texts and images as works that are embedded in a web of cultural representations, where the reader’s (or viewer’s) context, the patterns and conventions of representation with which he/she is familiar, are as important as the author’s (or artist’s) intentions. This concept of intertextuality explores how each text exists in relation to other texts and to other cultural expressions. In other words, texts owe more to other texts than to their own makers.

The writings of French semiotician, Roland Barthes, were key to the development of intertextuality, and his death of the author/birth of the reader thesis exerted a major influence. For Barthes (1975:146):

The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture ... the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology ... the reader is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.

From these structuralist and post-structuralist viewpoints, meaning is not pre-given. The reader (or viewer) thus engages in making connections in and between the texts (or artwork). In video installation, there is arguably an even greater need for the viewer to fill in the gaps, draw inferences and make hypotheses in terms of meaning. The assembled parts of a video installation need not have a narrative³ continuum. This combination and recombination of parts encourages an opportunity for the viewer to engage in a creative thought process (Coulter-Smith 2006).

Video installation art may incorporate the moving image on television monitors, or as video projections into sculptural and architectural configurations. It is a time- and space-bound art form that leads the viewer into a kinaesthetic experience. This is different from looking at traditional sculpture or painting or watching television. With video installation, the viewer *moves* into the space demarcated of the work and becomes a participant. The significance of this art form is the relationship of the viewer's body to the enveloping space of the video installation (Hall & Fifer 1990:20).

Video installation art is distinct from its closely related art forms. It adopts and fuses the characteristics of both installation art (the use of an activated space with material objects), and video art (the use of the moving image to construct narratives). In a video installation, the moving image may manifest as a video projection, becoming part of the architecture itself, such as covering the walls of a room. The artist creates an architectural, spatiovisual environment, which considers the totality of the space. The work then exists as a video installation and functions as that for the duration of its exhibition.

In her essay, *Video Installation Art: The Body, the Image and the Space-in-Between*, Margaret Morse (1990:154-155) states that the designation *video installation* is not an accurate guide to what she claims to be the most complex art form in contemporary culture. She explains that the term does suggest a lot about this art form's condition of existence, in that the word *installation* suggests that an artist (or gallery/museum staff) must actually install the elements of the work, including the multimedia components, in a designated space. Morse (1990:154) points out that this process of installing suggests a temporary occupation of space, an ephemerality, which is by the same token, never completely severed from the subject, time or place of its articulation:

While installation can be diagrammed, photographed, videotaped or described in language, its crucial element is ultimately missing from any such two-dimensional construction, that is, “the space-in-between”, or the actual construction of a passage for bodies or figures in space and time. Indeed, I would argue, the part that collapses whenever the installation isn’t installed is the art. The frame of installation is then only apparently the actual room in which it is placed. This room is rather the *ground* over which a conceptual, figural, embodied, and temporalized space that is the installation breaks. Then, the material objects placed in space and the images on the monitor(s) are meaningful within the whole pattern of orientations and constraints on the passage of either the body of the visitor or of conceptual figures through various manifestations – pictorial, sculptural, kinesthetic, aural, and linguistic.

An essential conceptual component of a video installation is that the viewer has to *directly experience* it, to *move* through the passage or “space-in-between”. The viewer’s encounter with this art form is conditioned not simply by what is projected or screened, but by the experience of becoming immersed within a total environment. Immersed in this “space-in-between” the viewer becomes an experiential subject, where both the act of viewing, and the time it takes to do so, evokes a spatial and temporal self-consciousness. It is here that Bruno’s notion of the haptic becomes significant.

Bruno applies the notion of the haptic to the moving encounter experienced when viewing the spatiovisual arts. In her definition of the haptic, she departs from the traditional art historical discourse that has focused primarily on optic perception. Bruno begins her book by making an intentional error in the title of the first chapter, changing “sightseeing” to “site-seeing”. Bruno explains (2002:15) the purpose of this:

An error implies a departure from a defined path; the semiotics of the term incorporates the notion of erring, or wandering. Error – the deviation from a route, a departure from principles – is bound to such wandering.... As an error, site-seeing partakes in a shift away from the long-standing focus of [art] theory on sight and toward the construction of a moving theory of site... [Our] erring is ... a movement from the optic to the haptic ... [where we shall] address the emotion of viewing space.

In making this theoretical shift, viewers are transformed from the historical position of the voyeur – from merely looking at the art – into Bruno’s haptic travellers, embodied in and moving through the spatial form of sensuous cognition. By addressing the emotions of viewing space, Bruno (2002:6) follows the trajectory that develops the spatiovisual arts along a path that is tactile and haptic⁴:

As the Greek etymology tells us, haptic means “able to come into contact with”. As a function of the skin, then, the haptic – the sense of touch – constitutes the reciprocal *contact* between us and the environment, both housing and extending communicative interface. But the haptic is also related to kinesthesia, the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space.

Using her geographic approach regarding the motion of emotion in the spatiovisual arts, Bruno explores the role that the haptic has played in art and its theorization. Bruno (2002:247) explains that Alois Riegl (1858-1905), an art historian and curator of textile art,

developed the notion of the haptic during the late 19th century, a period when the concept of spatiality in art theory was being reformulated. Riegl considered the haptic to be closely related to tactility and embodiment, and distinct from opticality, which foregrounds representation and disembodied vision. Riegl's development of the notion of the haptic influenced the German cultural critic and theorist, Walter Benjamin, in his pioneering theorization of cinema as an art form.⁵ Bruno (2002:247-250) explains that Benjamin, however, put a twist on Riegl's theory:

[Benjamin] subverted the separation of touch and vision and, by extension, the distinction between haptic and optic that Riegl had established.... [Benjamin] also objected to the teleological vision that saw art moving toward an optic mode of representation in modern forms.

Benjamin considered perception to involve a challenge to the senses, which foreground the modern notion of perception as tactile or haptic rather than optic (Bruno 2002:250).

In *Atlas of Emotion*, Bruno invests the spatiovisual arts, and specifically the moving image, with haptic appeal by mobilising the notion of the cinematic screen as a *site*, understood as habitable geographic space. As her starting point, Bruno examines Benjamin's reversal of Riegl, namely that "it is the haptic that defines the modern impact of the moving image" (Bruno 2002:248). Proceeding from Benjamin's logic – where film is considered to be tactilely apperceived by way of habitation, joining architecture as a form of *site-seeing* and habitation⁶ – Bruno conceives the haptic space of cinema to be a habitable space. She (2002:248) states:

In this sense, I understand *habitation* ... to be a component of the notion of the haptic, particularly if the haptic is placed in the realm of spatiality and set in motion in an investigation of travelling cultures. Here, the haptic nature of cinema involves an architectural itinerary, related to motion and texture rather than flatness⁷. It takes the haptic to be the measure of our tactile apprehension of space, an apprehension that is an effect of our movement in space.

As noted before, Bruno defines the haptic as an agent in the formation of space, both geographical and cultural, in the articulation of the spatiovisual arts. This offers rich potential for assessing how video installations as habitable forms may encourage sensuous movements through space, which could result in a haptic perception.

Another feature of video installation art further linking my discussion to Bruno's viewpoint is that video installations include elements of the cinematic. The development of video installation has seen artists using the strategies of motion pictures and the cinematic experience to create narrative works. In *Video Art, A Guided Tour* (2005), Catherine Elwes (2005:188) discusses how properties of film have been incorporated into video and video installation art:

If the new task of [the] moving image is to transmit the magic of dreams, then the spectacle of video is now as important as its ability to convey information.... Cinema and fresco painting combine in video once again to astonish and captivate the jaded eye of the contemporary media junky.... Gradually, through the 1990s, artists have played down video's tradition role as a medium of witness and concentrated on its power to conjure up an atmosphere, suggest a state of mind and stir the emotions. The individual subjectivity of the artists, their televisual dreams and hallucinations are given a Hollywood makeover with the high resolution of plasma screens and large-scale digital projections. In this respect, video [and video installation] art clearly shares with mainstream film and video the desire to transport and enchant its audiences.

As a major premise of her book, Bruno considers how the spatiovisual arts, including film and video installation, could facilitate an emotive, transporting viewing experience. By shifting the viewer from voyeur to *voyageuse*, Bruno examines the notion of psychogeographic travel. According to Bruno (2002:6):

We actually travel with motion pictures.... [M]otion, indeed, produces emotion and that, correlatively, emotion contains movement.... The Latin root of the word *emotion* speaks clearly about a "moving" force, stemming out as it does from *emovere*, an active verb composed of *movere*, "to move," and *e*, "out". The meaning of emotion then is historically associated with "a moving out, migration, transference from one place to another"....

Bruno extends this migratory investigation by considering how cinema was named after the Greek word *kinema*, which connotes both motion and emotion. With this understanding, Bruno's (2002:6) view of film as a means of transport understands transport in the full range of its meaning, including a "carrying away" by emotion:

It implies more than the movement of bodies and objects imprinted in the change of film frames and shots, the flow of camera movement, or any other kind of shift in viewpoint. Cinematic space moves not only through time and space or narrative development but through inner space. Film moves, and fundamentally "moves" us, with its ability to render affects, and, in turn, to affect.

I use Bruno's argument alongside the rhetorical device of engaging on a journey to explore how we, as *voyageuse*, might be transported through the site of a video installation and sense a haptic encounter as we (*e*)*motion* through space and time, allowing this experience of the art work to *move* us, in a bodily and affective way.

I selected Bruno's argument, as opposed to the situationist idea of psychogeography or a phenomenological standpoint on perception, because she focuses on an exploration of the spatiovisual arts and how they can facilitate a haptic, emotional *journeying* through exterior and interior spaces. Furthermore, Bruno's discussion of the haptic probes the manner in which the spatiovisual arts may be seen as cognitive, psychogeographic mappings of self. While I do not take a fundamental situationist stance, my use of the term psychogeography in describing video installations includes Guy Debord's (1989:5) situationist description of psychogeography as:

The study of the precise laws and special effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The adjective *psychogeographical*...reflect[s] the same spirit of discovery.

In my assertion that Vári's and my own video installations may be seen as psychogeographies which map the artists' intimate movements through space, and in turn, manifest as habitable sites that compel an emotive viewing encounter, I regard the notion of psychogeography as a "spirit of discovery". It is this "spirit of discovery" that coincides with my understanding of Cirlot's (1962, Sv "journey") notion of journey as a means of self-discovery.

By embracing an approach which sees video installations as psychospacial mappings, I acknowledge the value of Debord and Jorn in their construction of the psychogeographical map *The Naked City* (1957)⁸. Here Debord and Jorn challenge traditional ideas of mapping in relation to scale, location and fixity. They trace the drift of a city dweller's own psychospacial negotiation and explore the city as an intersubjective social space. I deviate from a situationist position in that I do not investigate the effects of city space, but rather those produced by the ephemeral spaces of Vári's, and my own, video installations.

My discussion also conceives aspects of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of space as something that is not positioned at a distance in front of us, but surrounds the body: it is an effect of the lived body's own motility. Merleau-Ponty (1964:64) comments that the relationship between our bodies and space is such that "our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space.... Through it we have access to space".

While my theoretical explorations navigate the edges of phenomenological and situationist turf, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss these bodies of knowledge in detail. Instead, I focus on Bruno's interpretation of the haptic since it concentrates solely on the spatiovisual arts as well as how emotions manifest in the production and viewing of such art forms. Her elucidation of the haptic augments my premise as it mobilises the notion of *journey* through the conception of viewers as *voyageuse*. In addition, the fact that Bruno includes habitation as a component of the haptic and views the spatiovisual arts as *sites* furthers my geographical approach of video installations as habitable mappings of the self.

At this point, a number of key terms in relation to the features of video installation and the viewing experience have emerged from the core literature, such as: *exchange of energies*, *(e)motion*, *space between/space-in-between*, *site-seeing* and *voyageuse*. Throughout my discussion I draw on such key terms (and their specific meanings used in the context of the core literature) to strengthen and illuminate my analysis of Vári's and my own video installations.⁹ Other cultural terms such as *space*, *time*, *self*, *immersion*, *myth*, *embodied*,

experience, perception, haptic, psychogeography, affect and *narrative* have also surfaced. Each one of these terms holds within its meaning complex philosophical, psychological, phenomenological, literary or sociological elements on which extensive discourses have been written. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into and navigate such discourses. My itinerary will include looking at these terms solely through the prism of video installation art.

The next chapter introduces Minnette Vári by giving a background of her earlier works. To locate Vári's work within a contemporary art realm, the works of two other video installation artists, Bill Viola and Berni Searle are briefly discussed.

Endnotes: Chapter 1

¹ In his historical analysis, Coulter-Smith (2006) focuses on installation art as a category of art that includes video installation art, video art and digital art. Video installation art's history and development evolved simultaneously with that of installation and video art and included similar, if not the same, influences. For the sake of clarity and to confine the scope of this thesis, I will add [video] into Coulter-Smith's historical analysis of installation art.

² Raney (2003:30-31) comments that video installation art absorbs the consciousness of the viewer into its logic:

Instead of seeing an artwork as a self-contained object whose meaning can be uncovered by the right kind of analysis, [comprehension occurs in] the space between object and viewer where meanings are created by clashes, quotations and cross-references. Meaning is open, fluid, unstable, ambiguous and constantly being made and remade. Meaning comes from a dialogue between the subjectivity of the viewer and what is being confronted. As a result of the dialogue, both viewer and object are defined and gain identity.

³ When I use *narrative* I am referring to what Coulter-Smith (2006) considers to be the inclusive concept of narrative as a continuum that includes linear and non-linear narrative:

At the linear pole of the narrative continuum lies work that is conventional, rule governed, and designed for "easy" or "passive" consumption. At the nonlinear pole lies the transgressive and/or playful narrative that is oriented towards active reception.... The importance of the nonlinear pole of the narrative continuum is that it allows the artist-author to play with convention in such a manner that the viewer-reader becomes critically and creatively engaged.

⁴ The shift from the optic (seeing as a disembodied viewer) to the haptic (seeing as touch) has been explored in a number of recent works, in the field of film and video, as well as the South African visual arts context. On the use of the haptic in film and video, see (1) Marks, L. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and The Senses*. (2) Marks, L. 2002. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. (3) Arnaud, J. 2005. Touching to See in *October* 114, Fall: 5-16, which gives an analysis of filmmaker Micheal Snow's work. For discussions on the haptic in a visual arts (and South African) context see Colin Richards' articles (1986, 2005) for an analysis of haptic and optic modes of perception in relation to the paintings of Penny Siopis.

⁵ See Hansen, M. 1987. Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology', in *New German Critique*, vol 40:179-224.

⁶ See Benjamin, W. 1973. *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Rendt, translated by Harry Zohn. London: Fontana.

⁷ Film theorist, Laura Marks (2000) also utilises Riegl's distinction between the optic and the haptic in art to develop the notion of "haptic cinema" in her book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and The Senses*. Marks explores the notion of the haptic to discuss an embodied experience of film and video. Marks' haptic visuality investigates how intercultural cinema appeals to a nonvisual, embodied knowledge and the experience of the senses, such as touch, smell and taste. At this point, Marks' discussion intersects with Bruno's notion of haptic, as both film theorists consider the haptic mode of perception to be a comprehensive vision resulting from the unification of the senses to produce experience.

However, Marks' interpretation differs from Bruno's use of the haptic, in that Marks focuses on the surface or flatness of the image. Marks (2002:162) explains:

Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze.

As such, the *Skin of The Film* explores the material, tactile qualities of film, and how the camera may be used to engage with the surface of the object to evoke the memory of touch. Marks extends her strategy to the sense of smell and to the erotic, in her meditation on the screen as skin. Whilst Marks' interpretation acknowledges a sense of movement that manipulates viewer proximity and time (Richards 2005:15), she focuses more on how the materiality of haptic visuality awakens memories that are unavailable to vision.

It is beyond the scope of my discussion to do a comprehensive comparative study of Bruno's and Marks' use of the haptic. My discussion primarily focuses on Bruno's reading of the haptic as she emphasises the role that movement and habitation play in haptic perception.

⁸ For an in-depth discussion on the Guy Debord and Asger Jorn's *The Naked City* (1957) see Sadler, S. 1998. *The Situationist City*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁹ The reader will notice that when I first explain the key term in relation to the core literature and the context of my argument, I place the term in quotation marks. Thereafter, I shall italicise the terms within my discussion so as not to interrupt the flow of reading.

My world is the imaginary, and that is a journey between forwards and backwards, between to and fro. Like Wim [Wenders], I'm a great traveller

Jean-Luc Godard

Minnette Vári is a South African artist, living and working in Johannesburg. She was born in Pretoria in 1968, and obtained her BA (Fine Arts) and MA (Fine Arts) from the University of Pretoria. In recent years, she has exhibited her provocative video installations both nationally and internationally, receiving much critical acclaim. Vári first gained exposure in 1995 with her controversial *Selfportrait* series (1995) (fig 1a and 1b). In these works, she digitally altered her physical features, transforming herself into the identity of a black woman. These works “almost immediately fuelled the indignation of even the most cosmopolitan and indulgent critics of contemporary African art” (Powell 2002:35). The works provoked heated debate in the press around issues of objectification, colonialism, appropriation and personal implication. Beyond this media furore, I believe, Vári was using the creative process to navigate her sense of self through the space of post-apartheid South Africa.¹ The *Selfportrait* series foreshadowed the direction Vári’s art making would take in future years. Moving into the realm of video and video installation art, Vári continued to use the image of her body to produce works that questioned the stability of her subjectivity within a post-Apartheid context.

In 1998, Vári produced *Alien* (1998) (fig 2), the first of her video works. In *Alien*, Vári digitally morphs images of her naked, shaven self into old news footage. Moving within a stark, isolated landscape, her strange dislocated identity squirms and stretches as she acts out scenes of political leaders emerging from jail, tourists at a game park and delegates at a conference table. Multiple, shifting and distorted figures of Vári pace anxiously through a zone of activity. The sound thumps at a frenetic pace, echoing the grotesque images of Vári’s characters. *Alien* reveals a subjectivity struggling to fit in, simultaneously entangled but alienated from its own history.

Oracle (1999) (fig 3), produced the following year, was a technical advance on *Alien* and saw Vári shift from the confines of the television monitor as used in the presentation of *Alien* into the realms of video installation. *Oracle* was on exhibition at the Sandton Civic Gallery as part of the First National Bank Vita Awards for 1999, and I was fortunate to encounter this work and to experience one of Vári’s video installations for the first time. The following extract is from the notes I made after viewing *Oracle* (Appendix 3:i):

Johannesburg, September 1999. Evening.

As I navigated my way down a passage of the gallery towards the room in which Oracle was housed, I could already hear the pulsating soundscape: fragments of haunting conversations, intermittent percussive beats, the constant, repetitive notes of a violin, a person coughing and then retching. The sound unnerved me and I was anxious to enter the room. Slowly, hesitantly, I drew aside the dark velvet curtain and journeyed into the darkness. I had crossed a threshold into another world, and was now engulfed by a three dimensional visual and aural environment. I stood motionless and alone, waiting for my eyes to adjust to the black space.

Gradually I began to decipher the form of three televisions in the centre of the room, one on top of the other. I cautiously made my way around the structure to view the moving imagery on the screens. I could still not see the darkened corners of the room. I was scared – of the darkness and the feelings of foreboding the sound was evoking in me. Was I alone? It was too dark; I could not see properly to know, but I hoped I was. My nerves couldn't handle the sudden vision of another visitor in the space.

The television monitors displayed a black environment that enveloped the stark white, naked, shifting figure of Vári's Oracle. In the foreground, Vári hovered, crouched and stretched as she tugged and gnawed at a flesh-like mass in her hands. Behind her contorting figure, molten, lava-like clouds of news footage floated by and then morphed back into the black background. As I stood mesmerised by this figure moving in the darkness on the screens, I recalled Vári's fragments of her artist statement for Oracle. Vári elaborates (1999) that "Unlike Saturn (or Chronos)², the god of time who, in an attempt to evade his fate, devoured his children, the figure in Oracle wants desperately to hasten her fate, to bite into, over and beyond time.... [This] figure becomes a metaphor for postcolonial identity, a craving to assimilate every fragment of information into one hybrid body". I watched as Vári's Oracle struggled to ingest the recorded moments of South African history. Exposed and vulnerable, Vári pushed herself to the limits of her digestive capabilities in order to assimilate the impact the history of her country has had on her sense of self.

The layers of sound echoed the anxiety and intensity of this personal struggle and filled the darkened space. Engulfed in this spatiovisual torment, I felt physically and psychologically threatened as I watched this masochistic act. Never before had I felt so embodied in an artwork, where all my senses were activated and I was being transported on an emotive journey.

With *Oracle*, as well as her subsequent video installations, Vári considers the totality of the work, which manifests into an all-encompassing sensory experience for the viewer. She exploits the potential of the characteristics of video installation art to create her mythological worlds. These characteristics include: the delineation of space to create a contained environment; the activation of this space through the use of lighting techniques and projections; the three dimensional use of sound; the layered construction and nature of her animations; and the formal and contextual meaning of the imagery. She invites us into these spaces, where we are compelled to suspend our disbelief, to allow our bodies and minds to

enter emphatically into a landscape of her creation, to travel through its space and become immersed in its psychogeography.

These three works (*Selfportrait* series, *Alien* and *Oracle*) reveal an early mapping of self-exploration within her lived terrain. Vári has continued to expand on these thematic concerns in recent years. Before examining her individual works in more detail, Vári's art practice might be considered in relation to Bill Viola and Berni Searle, two artists working in similar fields of video installation art.

In the introduction, I propose that Viola's creative practice is particularly relevant to the aims of this research. He has and continues to exert a profound influence on the development of video installation art. Consciously exploring the *exchange of energies* that operates in the *space between* of video installation, Viola strategically uses this medium to chart exteriorizations of his own interior, mental life. His works frequently address philosophical issues such as the mind, perception, meaning, the soul, death and transcendence. In the exploration of these matters, Viola maps complex spaces where the elements within these immersive terrains are filled with symbolic values. He creates passages within his geographies that allow him to simultaneously move us, as *voyageuse*, through the narrative of the artwork, as well as *moving* us emotionally through identification with the subject matter of the piece.

In *Room for St. John of the Cross* (1983) (fig 29) Viola uses space as a narrative element to confuse the apparently straightforward dichotomies of private and public domains, of interiority and exteriority. Viola constructs a spatial arrangement in this work to tell a story about a particular subject, namely St. John. He manipulates the spatiovisual and aural dynamics of the installation to create a work that emulates the historical and spiritual experience of St. John, thereby establishing similar conditions for our experience as contemporary viewers.

Townsend (2004c:127) explains that *Room for St. John of the Cross* is constructed around two enclosures, both of which include images of nature and are dominated by contrasting sounds. One of these spaces is public, whilst the other, although visible to the *voyageuse*, is intensely private. The small black box of the private room is set inside the middle of the larger, darkened room. The entire space itself is reached via a darkened corridor that separates the video installation from the rest of the gallery in which it is located. Thus a delineated pathway through the work is mapped out for the viewer-traveller (Townsend 2004c:127–129).

The outer room is dominated by the saint's imagination projected as an overwhelming, subjective view of a risky flight over mountain peaks. The roaring sound of the video fills the outer room, becoming a tangible property in the space. Meanwhile, inside the smaller room, a more private world is created. The traveller must bend awkwardly to look inside the small box, within which is a view of a private, intimate living space of an individual. The interior walls of the room are white, and the floor is covered with earth. In one corner there is a small wooden table, which supports a metal water jug, a glass of water and a 14cm colour monitor. On the monitor is a real-time projection of a snow-capped mountain, with a meadow and forest below it. The camera is fixed so that the image is incredibly still, as opposed to the animated, disorienting filming of the outer chamber projection. The sound in the smaller room is of a barely audible voice reciting four poems written by the saint when in captivity. The soft whisper is difficult to decipher against the sound of the wind from the video of the outer room (Townsend 2004c:128–129).

In *Room for St. John of the Cross*, Viola creates an interplay of space and subjects – both subject of narrative and the viewer-traveller as subject. In this work, the relation of private self to public world and its parallel relation of abnegated self to God, is mapped out in these spaces that are simultaneously topological forms and metaphorical structures (Townsend 2004c:127). As we move through the space we become aware of our role as participating subjects in the work. The act of looking into this private space forces upon us an awkwardness, a discomfort that effectively draws attention back to ourselves as viewing subjects. We become aware of our own role in the artwork. "Our action is not simply a scrutiny of the living space of an individual, but an apprehension of another's corporeally experienced space that mirrors and renders tangible the immaterial condition of their private spiritual being. The structure of the installation compresses examination and experience" (Townsend 2004c:129).

Viola's itinerary invites a self-reflexive acknowledgement of space and time. To journey through his visual terrains may start the viewer/*voyageuse* on a quest to question the experience of what it is to be human, and of what it means to enquire into that condition. By his act of reconfiguring and remapping, Viola offers another view of our world, another way to see the time and space in which we live (Townsend 2004c:127).

Room for St. John of the Cross is an example of how Viola sees video installation art as the most appropriate medium to explore the potential for self-reflection. Viola's (1995a:30) comment, "The real investigation is that of life and being itself; the medium is just the tool in this investigation" warrants emphasis at this point, as it reveals how video installation may be considered as subjective mappings of the self. His works are intended to open windows

into our inner worlds. Viola's works afford the chance to journey through his contemplative psychogeographies and encounter a haptic viewing experience which may facilitate an *(e)motion* towards our own inner spaces.

I suggest that Vári's work is similar to Viola's in that she exploits the characteristics of video installation to share immersive, transporting environments. Both Viola and Vári use large-scale projections and frequently darken the spaces of their video installations to the threshold of perception. Vári also delineates passageways through her installations along which the *voyageuse* can travel. Both artists consider sound as vital to the experience of their works as the imagery (which includes the spatial and temporal structures of each artwork). These manipulations produce a theatrical element in both Viola's and Vári's work. As *voyageuse* entering such enveloping spaces, we are immersed in psychogeographies that disorient and challenge us. In both artists' work, large-scale images confront us that, in their ambiguity, strangeness and transience, are reminiscent of dreamlike apparitions. The contemplation of their geopsychic terrains facilitates a journey into our inner worlds and I propose, provides an opportunity for self-reflection.

To establish Vári's art practice in contemporary South Africa, the working methods of Berni Searle will be examined. Searle, like Vári, uses her own body as site to map an intimate search through her inhabited spaces.

Berni Searle is an internationally renowned South African video installation artist, who interrogates how the issues of race, gender and place impact on her sense of self. Searle is always the protagonist in her own works, creating personal landscapes that meditate on and embody a suspended state somewhere between reality and fantasy. By using her body as canvas and site, Searle maps out introspective geographies that explore a changing subjectivity. Whilst Searle does engage with racial politics, her work also reveals deeper strata that go beyond issues of surface and skin. Embodied in her mobile subjectivity is a referencing to the fundamental struggle for identity that affects us all in various ways (van der Watt 2003:24).

In *Home and Away* (2003) (fig 30) Searle uses two large-scale projections of the ocean on opposite sides of the installation to create a blue swirling world of movement and suspension. One projection shows varying shots of Searle floating in the ocean with the Spanish coast as a backdrop. Searle is wearing a red skirt with a layer of white lace that floats on the surface of the water. The other projection is uninhabited, and shows a view of the moving ocean and the static Moroccan shoreline. Shot in the Strait of Gibraltar, Searle floats with the ocean, suspended in some world between Spain and Morocco. A politically

contested space, this strait is the site where many migrants make the night journey from Northern Africa to Spain, in the hope of a better life in Europe. In addition to this present context, the waters swell with historical and geopolitical references to the movements of humans and trade, not just from Africa and Europe, but also between the East and West (Bester 2003: 45, 48; van der Watt 2003:24–25).

This geographical location adds context and content to the work as Searle connects sense to place. By interrogating the impact of place on the emotions, Searle explores the relationship between contact and exchange, dislocation and diasporas, hope and loss (Bester 2003: 45, 48). Entering the seascape, the traveller stands immersed in Searle's world, surrounded by ocean and suspended in the *space between*. Sounds of slow, calm waves fill the room as we watch a relaxed, floating Searle gently caressing the water. These visual and aural topographies are overlaid with Searle's muffled voice as she conjugates the English verbs "to love", "to fear" and "to leave". Slowly, an inky black substance emerges from around Searle's skirt and begins to invade her body and her clothes (van der Watt 2003:24–25). Simultaneously, the camera zooms up and out, leaving Searle as a diminishing spot in the ocean. Searle appears lost, floating and then disappears. The remaining silent views of the ocean and two indistinguishable and distant shorelines evoke a feeling of overwhelmingly isolation.

By placing herself within dislocated, potentially threatening spaces, Searle navigates her way through unstable terrains, searching into the unknown. van der Watt comments (2003:27) on Searle's mapping of an unstable, moving self:

Searle's strategy of in/visibility enacts her/our struggle for identity by being never completely anywhere. Her form is always changing, hovering between appearance and erasure.... The body moves between absence and presence; never still, it appears and disappears. The multiple selves, situated in continual movement between appearance and disappearance, invoke ideas of reinventing the self over and again.

The charting of movement and exploration through such places exposes a vulnerability. It probes us to reflect on our own movement through life, and that the search for self is a continuous, uncertain process.

Whilst Searle usually locates her artistic journeys within actual, physical landscapes, Vári digitally relocates footage of herself within constructed realities. Vári uses digital technology and software to create phantasmagorical landscapes. Ghosts from the past, monsters and caricatures inhabit stark terrains, and in more recent works, hybrid cities (as we will see when we explore *Riverrun* (2004), *Vigil* (2007) and *Quake* (2007)). Vári's mythological worlds are suspended in a dream space and manifest as landscapes. By turning the camera onto herself, she interrogates her own subjectivity as well as the spaces she inhabits.

In contrast to Searle, who uses a video production crew to film her explorative journeys, Vári's performances are usually solitary pursuits, as she mainly shoots footage of herself, whilst alone in a recording studio. Vári transforms her identity by frequently adopting the guise of mythological characters and is often naked and stripped of all personal identifying characters. Searle, on the other hand, uses everyday materials such as spices, flour and olive oil to literally transform the colour of her skin in a way that attempts to visually impose an identity on her body. Both Vári's and Searle's performances transform into public acts when their video installations become external, shared landscapes into which we are invited to travel.

In Section Two, the demarcated *sites* of Vári's video installations will be investigated. *Chimera* (2001) and *Riverrun* (2004) will be discussed in detail to show how her contemplative works may evoke a haptic perception.

Endnotes: Chapter 2

¹ In an article entitled *Domestic Affairs*, Penny Siopis (1997) examines Vári's *Selfportrait* series as part of a discussion around South African women artists' art production at the time. This article centres around what Siopis (1997:58) notes as a "shift away from the fixity and exteriority of identity politics of the apartheid past, towards an introspective complexity.... [This] interiority and self-examination ... involves coming to terms with the complex social and psychic configurations of gendered as well as racialised subjectivities."

² Vári used Francisco Goya's painting of *Saturn Devouring His Child* (c1819–1823) (fig 27) as a starting point for *Oracle* and transformed herself into a maniacal creature devouring 1990s media footage of South Africa.

SECTION TWO

Mobility lies at the heart of the historian's method ... knowledge depends upon travel, upon a refusal to respect boundaries, upon a restless drive towards the margins.

Stephen Greenblatt

In this chapter, we enter the world of *Chimera* (2001) (fig 4 – 5), one of Vári's earlier video installations. My focus is on two of Vári's key methods of creative production, namely the way she exploits the medium of video installation and mobilises the tools of mythmaking to map a search for self within a broader socio-political landscape. Firstly, the formal, iconographical and thematic concerns of *Chimera* are investigated to see how this mythological cartography could manifest as a psychogeographical map of the self. Then, I explore how this might facilitate a haptic viewing encounter.

In *Chimera*, Vári challenges the historical account of the Voortrekkers¹ recorded narratives memorialised in the Voortrekker Monument². Vári uses as source material the scenes and images of the marble bas-relief Voortrekker figures from the "Hall of Heroes"³ inside the Voortrekker Monument, together with an enactment of herself as the chimera monster, to create a fantastical animation. Using editing, layering and montage techniques, Vári embraces an alternate form of mapping history. Vári (2001) states: "There's a fine line between denial, omission and forgetting. I am interested in exposing the way in which ideologies and deep-seated desires and fears register in the way that histories are written, represented, remembered and commemorated." Embodied as a chimera, Vári traces a mythological, psychospacial negotiation through a reconstructed historical cartography.

Chimera is a multiple channel, immersive video installation that produces a freakish, hallucinatory space. The animation is projected onto suspended diaphanous screens floating within the gallery space. The moving images are not contained by the transparent screens, but rather spill onto the walls and floor of the installation space. The shadows of the bodies of those travelling through *Chimera* interfere with the projected images, becoming part of the work and adding layers of meaning to the space. The following extract is my description of this haunted topography (Appendix 3:ii):

Luzern, 28 March 2004.

As I enter Chimera the suspended screens immediately surround and envelop me. I am immersed in this stark world where isolated, Voortrekker figures drift past me, approaching and departing. Beams of light fracture into colourful prismatic trajectories and fall between pale, ghoulish figures and onto my body. Vári enters the barren landscape as the Chimera monster, a naked, clownish beast, with a masked head,

provoking and ridiculing the Voortrekkers. The frozen pioneers float in the foreground, superior and self-righteous, gazing forward into the distance. Fallen Zulu soldiers lie solidified in marble. Navigating her way between these historical spectres, the beastly Chimera female form contorts and challenges. As she shifts, her Chimera body transforms into a female Voortrekker. A stoic group of Voortrekker women float past, poised and motionless. The Chimera hovers then moves toward this group, flashing her genitals at the bonneted women before they drift away. Then, embodied with her power of metamorphosis, she morphs into a Voortrekker soldier, proud and resilient, posturing silently on his horse. The Chimera, with her deathly pale body and a lion's head, appears again, this time mimicking a pose of Voortrekker pride. She hovers and leers and then shifts into another Voortrekker figure. This ever-shifting sequence loops endlessly as I travel between the veiled screens and drifting shadows.

Hollow whispers echo through this world, suggesting that I am in a vast, open space. I am unsure of the source of the whispering. Are the floating figures speaking or are there ghosts in this space? A sharp tone signals the start of a choir's anxious, fearful chant, a fragment of a hymn. Footsteps. Voices. A reverberation. The howling of the wind through this chamber. The sound establishes a context and adds a sense of foreboding to the haunting visual sequence.

As the *Chimera* twists and shapeshifts through an overwhelming sequence of light, shadows, creatures and sounds, we are transported through this nightmarish manifestation of a mythical history. Enlivening the spectres of the past, Vári digitally recombines fragments of history with a personalised mythologising into a narrative continuum that manifests as a spatiovisual world.

I have selected Vári's *Chimera* specifically to present and examine one of her central artistic methodologies, namely her use of myth to explore notions of the self. In her book *No Go the Bogeyman*, Marina Warner (1998:242) explains that the chimera monster represents the following meanings:

Chimera lent her name to a wide generic concept: like the grotesque, the chimera combines antithetical parts to produce a phantasmagoric assemblage, a heterogeneous being. The word has come to mean, since the Renaissance, illusion itself, an impossible and delusory figure of the imagination.... The Chimera has an elusiveness of form and concept, for it is intrinsic to this monster that she cannot be pinned down.

Vári's choice and use of the chimera is significant as this mythological monster embodies the notion of shapeshifting and movement. In her artistic explorations, Vári teases out various mobile selves within a number of different imaginary worlds. I suggest that her pursuit of mutating subjectivities, which manifest as various mythological figures, represents her ongoing existential search for meaning.

Warner (1998:243–244) comments further that mythical characters that shapeshift and transform their identities reveal a deeper desire for change:

The Chimera stands at the root of another fundamental contemporary mental state, the fascination with the fantastic, the longing for escape, and relief in the vivid, created presence of the imaginary, however grotesque.... [This] mistress of metamorphosis presents a profound threat to the integrity of the self ... [and] who does indeed play havoc with bodies, mocking their original natures. But such metamorphoses can also provide release from the self, they are a form of joking, of storytelling, and they offer supple resources for transforming anxiety into pleasure.

Through the embodiment of various guises and mythological forms in her artworks, Vári may be revealing her own “longing for escape” and a potential “release” from self. I feel that her imaginary, mutating characters become emblematic of the Cirlot’s notion of the journey and Bruno’s concept of a haptic travel, which both embrace the idea of the voyage as self-discovery. Vári’s morphing, visual identities express “the urgent desire for discovery and change” (Cirlot 1962, Sv “journey”) and map “the physical affect of (e)motion” (Bruno 2002:361).

By inserting this mythical figure into the historical Voortrekker narrative, Vári “plays havoc with bodies, mocking [the Voortrekkers’] original natures” (Warner 1998:243) and disrupting the stability of recorded histories. Vári explores the “varied potentials of different mapping processes” (Bruno 2002:207) to shift a narrative that was memorialised – cast in stone – into an ephemeral landscape that refuses to settle into any definitive meaning. Vári’s creative process foregrounds Bruno’s cartographic impulse that “dwells in movement” (Bruno 2002:207). As the “mistress of metamorphosis” in this mobile map, Vári creates a work that “presents a profound threat to the integrity of the self” (Warner 1998:244).

When Vári removes the Voortrekker iconography from its context of meaning and mixes it with other historical, mythological and personal fragments, she muddles the conventional denotations of the categories that she charts. In her artist’s statement on *Chimera*, Vári (2001) elaborates on her intervention:

The figures in the relief panels are frozen in time and in ideology. Framed in their various roles, perpetually acting out one version of a history and etched in the hard light of a one-sided account where doubt is superfluous, even dangerous. This kind of cold perversion sneaks into almost any nation’s account of history at any given time....

Is the mythical creature - the Chimera – not always somehow present in the way we gather our histories into tellable tales? Is there, for instance, progress or degeneration in a list such as this:

History
Chronicle
Account
Narration
Story
Fairy-tale
Legend
Myth?

By interrogating and at times conflating these cultural constructs, Vári does not distance herself from the documentation of Voortrekker history; rather she chooses to directly involve herself, using her body as site and becoming a monstrous beast, to disturb the “one-sided account” of this historical narrative.

Vári’s unstable, shifting *Chimera* probes master narratives by highlighting the fact that history, culture and identity are in a constant state of flux. D’Alleva (2005:152) explains that the notion of challenging master narratives was extensively argued by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984). Lyotard proposes that we examine culture and history as a process rather than a thing, where social contexts shape the process. He argues that we must identify the master narratives that shape our culture and society, as these narratives conceal as much as they reveal; and they work to oppress as much as to enable human action. In Lyotard’s view, culture and history are not single narratives but rather conversations which struggle to come to terms with the relations of power (D’Alleva 2005:152).

Vári’s artistic excavations in *Chimera* reflect a personal investigation into the relations of power, as she explores South African history and the influence that Voortrekker ideologies have had on her social context and more subjectively, how this social context has impacted her sense of self. In collaging photographic source material of images from the “Hall of Heroes” together with a confrontational performance by the *Chimera* monster, Vári disrupts the conventional understanding of this historical narrative. Vári (2001) comments on her inclusive strategy of remapping history:

When used as an instrument against the forgetfulness of history, the strategies of art become volatile and impatient. Through my work I tear at the fabric of different realities, severing images from their origin and cleaving apart the logic of their familiarity. The links I make in this process can be chilling and brutal, but often the things we can't bear to face are the most telling witnesses of our times. Considering the socio-political imprint that this place and time has left on me, I choose in my work to bring the peculiarities of a mutating subjectivity to bear on the specificities of its historical context. We need all the individual fragments we can find in order to anticipate the places our histories could take us.

The *Chimera*’s hostile, mocking behaviour and presence is a profound threat to the visual logic of this recorded history. In *Chimera*, Vári embraces Lyotard’s postmodern call to examine history and culture as a process, as she engages in a conversation that alludes to the monstrous parts of our history.

Furthermore, and more significantly in terms of the aims of this research, contained within Vári’s interrogation of the recorded histories is a personal search in which the *Chimera* speaks from a fragmented, shifting position. In this, Vári maps an exploration of the impact

that her social context has had on her subjectivity. Vári (Appendix 1:iii) discusses how her sense of place, living in the turbulent landscape of South Africa, has influenced her notion of self and explorations as an artist:

One is always a mirror of the other. One always exists and is framed by the other. I do think that we tend to deserve the times that we live in. When those times are bad it is only natural to become really hard on ourselves as well. In any case, that is what I do. If, for instance, the political situation is incredibly bewildering, as it is to me right now, and I think to many people, that search and that strife turns inward. And it doesn't always stop at how am I going to say what I need to say; it continues into what is it that I am saying. So the question kind of eclipses itself.

Since it is not easy and since you can't just settle for the first best answer, that search is corrosive and aggressive and it makes you dig in places outside yourself and in society where you are not invited. And that same process goes on within as well. I somehow hope that the residue of such a process, the processing of yourself and the world, will constitute and end up being, even though it is fractured, something that can stand and speak for itself and be strong in a certain regard. Because if not, the process then would be destructive, and only that.

In *Chimera*, Vári's artistic endeavours reflect an exploration of the social and cultural circumstances that influence her daily life in South Africa, and how these "shared concerns" (Mansfield 2000:3) impact her interior life. In addition, it is evident that Vári continues to adopt a postmodern attitude when she considers her artistic search for meaning to be a *process*. Her personification of the *Chimera* as a shifting subject challenges another master narrative, namely the idea of a centred, unified subject, "embodied" by collective, historical images. D'Alleva (2005:153) comments on the postmodern notion of a decentred subject:

One of the key master narratives challenged by postmodernism is the idea of a single, unified, whole subject speaking from one place with a sense of authority. Postmodernism shares the post-structuralist concept of the subject as fragmented and contradictory, and challenges the idea that human consciousness or reason are powerful forces shaping human history. The postmodern subject is fragmented, decentred, speaking from a particular place with only his or her own authority from a particular viewpoint.

The anamorphic character of the *Chimera* monster alludes to an elusive, unstable subjectivity. As a transforming, furtive *Chimera*, Vári reveals a complex processing of self. Vári (Appendix 1:v) comments:

I think often in our narratives and stories, the voice of the hero is much heard. The story of the hero, the pathos, is much told. Now that I think of it, it is because of the maleness of our stories and histories. So when you are a female narrator, when you tell the story with a female voice, you tell the story of a heroine, but this is still a story of an "other", something else. I am not necessarily attracted to stories of heroes and monsters but the things that interest me are very layered, ambiguous, and that is what I find grabs and holds my attention. And these things often exist from an outsider's point of view. They are begging to be fleshed out, with words or images, they don't have bodies and that is what makes them monstrous...

There are many things in this world that deal with the monstrous and how being feminine ties into this⁴, and how being with or without words ties into that. That assumption occurs anyway if you only hear one side of the story then obviously the monstrous occurs on the

other side of the story. That unexplored thing, in this world that unexplored thing is being hammered further and further down the cracks between...

By assuming the position of the outsider and frequently embodying monstrous characters, Vári plunges into the depths of her self, as well as the cracks of South African society. In *Chimera*, a tense, dialectical relationship between an inward search of self and an exploration of the wider concept of the social subject (Mansfield 2000:3) is established.⁵ In drawing on visual iconography from the socio-political circumstances that have informed her own subjectivity, and combining this with the fantastical assemblage of the chimera monster, a complex mapping that traverses both the private and the social is created.

In this fantastical enactment of a monstrous subjectivity, Vári reveals the markings of inner strife. As the *Chimera*, Vári manifests the unknown “other”, the hidden parts of her self. D’Alleva (2005:100) notes how French psychoanalyst and linguist Julia Kristeva discusses the notion of the “other” in relation to the formation of subjectivity:

Kristeva uses the maternal body, with its two-in-one structure, or “other” within, as a model for all subjective relations.... Kristeva argues that, like the maternal body, each one of us is what she calls a subject-in-process. As subjects-in-process we are always negotiating the “other” within, that which is repressed.⁶

As an image of ambiguity and instability, the chimera becomes a suitable emblem to reflect the negotiation of the unknown parts of the self. By embodying numerous chimeras in her creative practice to map inner explorations, Vári mobilises the tools of mythmaking.

Frequently, when things are unexplored, hidden or repressed, such as aspects of society or parts of ourselves that we do not want to acknowledge, it is because we fear these things. Warner (1998:9) explains that uttering our fears and describing the phantoms are ways to deal with the feelings that these fears inspire, and mythmaking becomes one of the ways to describe the fear:

Myths usually function as a way to illuminate characters of fantastic terrors and dramatises the different stratagems to allay, banish or defeat them. Magnifying menace of all kinds through the telling of tales has become one of the most frequently adopted measures of diminishing terror...

As we see in *Chimera*, Vári’s artistic strategy is to plunge into her fears, into the dark, hidden cracks of society and her self, and to explore the unexplored, through her creations of mythological characters and worlds. *Chimera* is not a didactic statement, but rather an open-textured mapping that reveals a search into the impact that socio-historical circumstances have on the formation of subjectivity. Let us look at the concept of myth in more detail: how myth is interconnected with history, its original functions and how it can serve as a useful tool to chart an existential search inwards.

In her book, *A Short History of Myth*, Karen Armstrong (2005:i) states that myths are universal and timeless stories that reflect and shape our lives. They explore our desires, our fears, our longings, and provide anecdotes that remind us what it means to be human. Thus a myth may be seen as an attempt to explain the world via stories, a way of dealing with the world. Myth is deeply hidden within us and most people are not even aware of mythmaking but in fact this process constitutes every moment of our lives.

As human beings, we are continually searching for ways to understand and explain the experiences we go through, which are part of our existence. These enquiries into our human experience, “the questions of *conditio humana* have almost disappeared from our awareness in the Western world” (Neumaier 2004:47). Since the industrial revolution, life has developed along scientific and technological routes where we are now accustomed to being able to answer many of the questions that are commonly posed in everyday life, as well as in science. Thus we are inclined, on the one hand, to think that all questions can be answered and on the other, to expel from our consciousness those questions which we are unable to answer, in particular “the ‘big’ questions of our existence” (Neumaier 2004:47). Viola comments that the ancient people call these questions “The Mysteries”, elaborating (in Townsend 2004a:47):

These [Mysteries] are not to be answered. There is no answer to birth or death. They are meant to be experienced; they can be approached and studied, but not finally answered.

Part of our experience as humans is the fact that we often fall into despair, for example this may occur around an event such as an untimely death (Armstrong 2005:iii). When such situations arise, it is common to look for ways to rationalise and understand our circumstances, and mythmaking is one way of navigating such experiences of pain, chaos and confusion. Armstrong explains (2005:7):

A myth was an event which, in some senses, had happened once, but which also happened all the time. Because of our strictly chronological view of history, we have no word for such an occurrence, but mythology is an art form that points beyond history to what is timeless in human existence, helping us to get beyond the chaotic flux of random events, and glimpse the core of reality.

In recent times, mythical thinking has fallen into disrepute, and it is often dismissed as irrational and self-indulgent, as Armstrong says (2005:7):

Today the word “myth” is often used to describe something that is simply not true.... Since the eighteenth century, we have developed a scientific view of history; we are concerned above all with what actually happened. But in the pre-modern world, when people wrote about the past they were more concerned with what an event had meant.

Barthes argues that myths could be dangerous as they can be used to justify dominant beliefs, values and ideas. According to Barthes (1993:133) it “is a language which does not

want to die: it wrests from the meanings which give it its sustenance an insidious, degraded survival, it invokes in them an artificial reprieve in which it settles comfortably, it turns them into speaking corpses”. Thus we need to be aware that myth can be read as true – as if its representations were presumed natural instead of ideologically constructed. Because of this, Barthes recommends we deconstruct myth and approach this instance of cultural analysis as a form of play. Barthes (1993:135) suggests that “the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology”.

Armstrong (2005:8–9) argues that it is a mistake to regard myth as an inferior mode of thought, which is frequently cast aside when human beings have attained the age of reason. Armstrong does, however, embrace Barthes’ recommendation of adopting an attitude of play, and regards myth to be a form of make-believe. Armstrong (2005:9) explains that like a novel or an opera (or in our case, a video installation), myth is make-believe; it is a game that transfigures our fragmented, tragic world, and helps us glimpse new possibilities by asking “what if” – a question which has also provoked some of our most important discoveries in philosophy, science and technology.

As the embodiment of the chimera monster, Vári mobilises an attitude of play. *Chimera* manifests as an artificial myth that highlights the mythological construct and ideological bias of the manner in which the Voortrekker legends were recorded. More significantly, *Chimera* also maps a psychogeographical search located within this fantastical realm, becoming an ambiguous world that is in constant flux, refusing to settle into any definitive meaning.

By creating this timeless spatiovisual environment, Vári primordialises historical and personal moments into a situation of myth allowing us, as travellers, to access a more primal space within the work and ourselves. Through the spatiovisual use of imagery, sound, light and shadows, Vári creates a tangible world that provokes a haptic, transporting experience.

Chimera disrupts our stability as viewers by surrounding us with visual and conceptual motifs of flux, as well as immersing us into an ephemeral, shifting space. On entering this spatial territory, we encounter the drifting figures. We struggle to locate the morphing bodies as they change shape very quickly. The video projections flood our bodies which, in turn, leave their traces on this landscape in the form of shadows. The travelogue notes I wrote on my journey through *Chimera* examine the physical and psychological impact this work had on me as a traveller moving through its ghostly territory (Appendix 3:ii):

Luzern, 28 March 2004.

I am walking through a corridor of hell. I feel scared: perhaps these figures are going to loom out from the fabric and haul me into their anxious world. The animation loops endlessly, suspending these figures in a marbled, moving world. Chimera is the most animated character, appearing fearlessly in the background, in a mocking, jester-like fashion.

I am not fearless. I am scared in this space. Am I being followed? Is there someone else I can't see, but can sense, in here with me? Is it the reflections on the wall drifting slowly past or do the figures actually start to hover within the space I am occupying?

I see my shadow blacken the screen as I pass along – I become a player in the animated sequence except that I am black, staining the white ghost-like imagery with my presence. My shadow becomes the mark of an intruder, silhouetted, undefined but wholly present. As much as the colourless, silent images float past me, on me and between my shadows, so does the visceral, dreamlike soundscape. The sound's reverberations are palpable on my skin.

The strategic manipulation of the characteristics of video installation serves to engulf us within the mythical narrative that is *Chimera*. As we travel between the veils, we are compelled to stand in a beam of light, to interfere with a projection, to cast a shadow. Our physical interference with the multiple projections results in our shadows becoming part of the creation of the work yet our participation prevents us from experiencing the work in its spatial totality. Wherever we look there is always something happening outside our field of vision, or even behind our backs. The interaction with the projections promotes a heightened sense of bodily awareness as we move through the space. Let us explore how this visceral journey may produce a haptic perception and transport us emotionally.

In arguing for a holistic understanding of perception that includes tactile aspects of sensuous cognition, Bruno uses Etienne Bonnot de Condillac's 1754 *Treatise on the Sensations*⁷, which proposes that we are led to attribute to sight ideas that we owe to touch alone. Condillac (quoted in Bruno 2002:251) explains how touch projects us outward:

When considering the properties of touch I came to the conclusion that it was capable of discovering space and also of instructing the other senses to relate their sensations to bodies extended in space.... With the aid of touch, [the eyes] come to judge objects which are in space.

In designing a haptic field, Condillac demonstrates the interaction of touch, space and movement. For Condillac and Bruno, touch teaches the eyes to see beyond themselves. "The sense of touch ... makes the discovery and exploration of space possible in every way.... This sense not only implements desire but fosters curiosity, taking us from place to place in pursuit of pleasures that touch the spheres of imagination and reflection" (Bruno 2002:252).

As we wander through *Chimera*, our sense of touch discovers and explores this psychogeographical world and engages the other senses to cognitively “sense” our body surfaces extended in this space. In the video installation a “touching” interface (Bruno 2002:252) creates emotional space by projecting us outward to connect with people (including ourselves in the form of our shadows), objects (the diaphanous veils) and machines (the equipment projecting the *Chimera* sequence and the light falling onto our bodies). Bruno (2002:253) explains that such a “tactile interface mobilizes the human body ... in a vast, sentient expanse. The geographic path is profoundly haptic and relational. Site-seeing is, indeed, a tender mapping”.

Bruno (2002:253) notes that a reciprocal assistance between the senses can be used to illuminate haptic perception. Physiologically, perception involves the memory of sight together with touch, hearing and taste to create a sequence of automated movements, which are then linked together to form a long sequence of sensations, words and successive organic movements. Bruno (2002:252) explains that the distant gaze cannot explain space itself:

From the start, it is the tactile sense that extends surface into space. The senses not only work together in this enterprise but, in a series of traversals, interact in their function of fashioning space. This view does not, therefore, consider sight and touch to be in opposition. The eye itself can caress, and be caressed.

As participators in the work of *Chimera*, our haptic movement through the space involves this sense of reciprocity. While the basis of touch is a reaching out, for an object, a place or a person (including oneself), it also implies the reverse, that is, where we are touched in return. This reciprocal and participatory condition illuminates our “touching” encounter when inside *Chimera*.

Bruno (2002:254) motivates that as a receptive function of the skin, touch is not solely the prerogative of the hand. It covers the entire body, including the eye itself and the feet, which establish our contact with the ground. When inside *Chimera* our entire bodies are involved in a *touching* interface, as we are immersed in the projections and sounds of the work. There is a sensation of physically dissolving into the work, as the distinction between our bodies and the environment blurs. Bruno (2002:254) comments that “the haptic sense can be understood as a geographic sense in a global way as it ‘measures’, ‘interfaces’ and ‘borders’ our relation to the world, and does so habitually”. As we inhabit *Chimera*, the video installation triggers an emotional encounter that accesses, interfaces, borders and maps such a relation between us and the world, implementing a geographic passage.

The transitive, corporeal mapping that informs Vári’s video installation is also a psychoanalytic passage (Bruno 2002:254), as it borders on the intimate terrain of the self,

connecting inner and outer space. By creating moving images that exist as structural elements of space, Vári explores the relationship between space and the viewer's body, extending the one into the other, even conflating the two. The boundaries between our inner and outer space begin to collapse as the bodily limits between us and the work disappear. This interaction involves the reversibility of flesh⁸ where touching also means being touched, as we are transported emotionally into our interior worlds (Bruno 2002:255).

In the act of viewing *Chimera*, an interplay between space, projected light and the body develops where the sense of corporeal boundaries are challenged. Another element furthers the intersection of inside/outside, namely the encounter with our shadows. If we examine the notion of the shadow, it becomes apparent that Vári consciously controls the trajectories of the video projections to incorporate our shadows into the production of the work. In *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler (1998:71) states:

The archetype known as the Shadow represents the energy of the dark side, the unexpressed, unrealized, or rejected aspects of something. Often it's the home of the suppressed monsters of our inner world.... The Shadow can represent the power of repressed feelings. Deep trauma or guilt can fester when exiled to the darkness of the unconscious, and emotions hidden or denied can turn into something monstrous that wants to destroy us.... Thus in dreams, Shadows may appear as monsters, demons, devils.... Note that many Shadow figures are also shapeshifters...

The inclusion of our shadows in *Chimera* adds a contingent layer of shapeshifters to the topography, extending the conceptual meanings of the work and allowing *voyageuse* to become part of the work. These shadows could be seen to embody the unexplored aspects of South Africa's history as well as the dark, repressed qualities and impulses deep within us.

The physical exchange with our shadows broadens the tactile path into our psychological worlds, as confronting our material shadow or sensing its presence may remind us of the hidden parts of our minds. It also prompts imaginative thought as we project things onto shadows, such as our fears and desires. M.-L. von Franz (1964:173) discusses Carl Jung's psychological notion of the shadow:

Each of us is followed by a shadow, and the less this shadow is integrated into the conscious life of the individual, the more it is black and dense.... If the tendencies of the shadow, which come to be repressed, simply corresponded to evil there would be no problem. But the shadow stands for something that is only inferior, primitive, non-adapted and clumsy, but by no means absolutely evil. It includes, moreover, both infantile and primitive qualities which, in a certain sense, might make human life more lively and more beautiful, but which also conflict with the sacred rules of tradition.

Vári brings the enigmatic complexity of the shadow into the meaning and experience of *Chimera*, as she asks us to accept the challenge of confronting our shadows. The spatial conditions and interplay with light may cause a feeling of psychological displacement, where

mental and physical spaces become intermingled and confused. The result could be described as a state of waking somnambulism, where we are conscious, yet confronting aspects of our shadow selves.

This sense of physical immersion evokes a heightened sensory awareness in us, which facilitates a haptic viewing encounter. The outlined spatial and conceptual strategies of *Chimera* may cause viewers to experience a feeling of dissolution when immersed between the sheer veils and projections. The notion of sensory dissolution within a video installation is explored in the following chapter, as I examine *Riverrun* (2004).

Endnotes: Chapter 3

¹ Voortrekker means pioneer in Afrikaans.

² The Voortrekker Monument is a large, granite structure that was built to honour the Voortrekkers who embarked on the legendary Great Trek. Between 1838 and 1854, these Voortrekkers left the Cape Colony to escape the allegedly oppressive British rule of that time, and to search for the freedom of new lands in the interior territories of South Africa. The Voortrekker Monument was built between 1938 and 1949, a volatile time in the history of South Africa, which saw the rise of Afrikaner nationalist ideologies. The Afrikaner leaders of this time used the potent symbolism embedded in the legends of the Great Trek to build this monument as a means to gain political ground.

³ The “Hall of Heroes” at 92 metres in length, is one of the world’s largest marble friezes. It immortalises the Voortrekkers’ stories of victories during the Great Trek and their ideologies of superiority and illusions of power. Vári (2001) describes the architectural space and the marble frieze in her artist’s statement on *Chimera*:

Inside, light filters through panels of yellow Belgian glass into the vast domed hall. This great hall is always cold, even in summer. All around the walls runs a frieze in Italian marble depicting a large chapter of the battles of the Voortrekkers, early settlers of mainly Dutch descent who drove their wagons inland to be free from the British colony in the Cape. Battles won and lost against Ndebele and Zulu armies are a main theme, the stoic and righteous character of the Voortrekker heroes always beyond question.

Frieze
Frozen

⁴ See, for example, a discussion on the use of the monstrous in film in Creed, B. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

⁵ This aspect will be discussed in relation to Vári’s cartographic impulse in depth in Chapter 5.

⁶ Kristeva’s theories on feminist psychoanalysis and abjection explore the notion of the other extensively (see Kristeva, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An essay on Abjection*. Translated by LS Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press). Furthermore, Kristeva’s ideas have been used extensively in art critical discourse. See, for example, (1) Grosz, E. 1990. *The Body of Signification* in Fletcher, J and Benjamin, A (eds). 1991. *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Works of Julia Kristeva*. London: Routledge. (2) Jones, A. 1998. *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (3) Nead, L. 1992. *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*. London, New York: Routledge.

Whilst the concept of abjection could be applied as a theoretical framework to discuss Vári’s use of her body as site as well as her embodiment of the monstrous, these ideas are beyond the scope of my discussion. I use Kristeva’s theories within a broader psychoanalytic framework to shed light on the construction of subjectivity.

⁷ In his 1754 *Treatise on the Sensations*, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac wrote sentient aesthetics onto the mechanics of a body by envisioning a statue that is progressively animated. Bruno (2002:251) explains:

In Condillac’s plan, the statue’s senses are sequentially activated, one by one, and then combined until full sensation (and thus knowledge) is achieved. As the cognitive process unfolds, connecting sense to sensibility, an interesting construction of the haptic emerges, together with a theory that understands emotions as a transformation of sensations.

⁸ In her claims for a corporeal feminism Elisabeth Grosz explores the notion of the “inside out”, a psychic topography or a mental projection of the surface of the body. See Grosz, E. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press and also, Grosz, E. 1995. *Space, Time and Perversion*, London: Routledge.

If I seem to be on the verge of superstition, please recall that the images we make are part of our own minds, they are living organisms that carry on our mental lives for us, darkly, whether we pay them any mind or not.

Hollis Frampton

We move from the hallucinatory space of *Chimera* (2001) into Vári's darkened territory of *Riverrun* (2004) (fig 6 – 10), a meditative and engulfing video installation exploring the journey and transience of life. This chapter primarily focuses on the sensation of being immersed within such a work. To illustrate this, in the first section of the chapter, I narrate a subjective viewing experience of *Riverrun* that includes quoting excerpts from my travelogue. Aspects of psychoanalytic theory are discussed to analyse the embodied and transporting experience I encountered inside *Riverrun*, which also may illuminate the psychological displacement experienced in *Chimera*. The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan's theories on subject formation, specifically his psychological realm of the Imaginary and the mirror stage in relation to the acquisition of subjectivity are considered. Lacan's understanding of subject formation sheds light on the immersive, haptic viewing experience that I suggest characterises *Riverrun* and *Chimera*. My investigation of this psychoanalytic framework leads me to consider, in the second section of the chapter, how *Riverrun* could be interpreted both as Vári's negotiation of her sense of self with her inhabited surrounds, and as a mythologising of the unknown territory of life after death.

Riverrun is a two-channel digital video installation that maps a journey through a parallel world in which Vári explores the cycle of life. The title *Riverrun* refers to James Joyce's book *Finnegan's Wake*¹, of which the first word is "riverrun". In her artist's statement Vári (2004) explains the significance of her use of the word "riverrun":

[Many] of [*Riverrun*'s] conceptual concerns can be traced in the sentence that links the end of the book back to its beginning, namely "A way a lone a last a loved a long the ... riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodious vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs". This last reference to a place often doubles as the initials of the book's protagonist, but is also used by Joyce to mean "here comes everybody".

Riverrun combines a montage of images with layers of sound to create a disorienting journey through multiple time zones, across cities of present day, along roads of the past and into a mythological world of the afterlife. Vári (2004) elaborates on her intentions and the themes of *Riverrun*:

The piece is essentially a meditation on the courses that we cut in our lifetimes like water does into earth; sometimes resulting in flood and at other times a dry riverbed. It also contains biographical references and cryptic messages to family members no longer in this world. *Riverrun* runs a course set in a loop journey that I made by car to places of

personal significance, a loop of footage that serves as the route or backdrop against which many smaller visual encounters take place. The “journeying” footage runs backwards, creating a strange vertigo: a way of communicating that, although the world gears us into thinking of life and progress as rising and forward-moving, like all things we are constantly drawn back into the earth; we fail and fall in big ways and small, and are re-absorbed into something primordial.

Riverrun consists of a seamless loop of two video and two stereo audio components. These components are of different durations and run out of synch, “so the viewing experience is somewhat liquid and never quite repeats in the same way” (Vári 2004). The two video channels are projected into the corner of a large gallery space. The scale of the projections is grandiose as their height fills the entire volume of the 6,5m high room (fig 10). The rest of the vast space is empty, except for a small bench against the wall opposite the towering projections. Thick black curtains cover the two entrances to *Riverrun*, blocking out any light from entering the space. The only dim source of light in the otherwise pitch-black gallery space is from the two video projections. The following extract describes my viewing experience of *Riverrun* (Appendix 3:ii-iv):

Luzern, 30 March 2004.

The gallery space is extremely dark. I am scared. I stop moving to wait for my eyes to adjust to the dark. I sense I am in a large space, yet I cannot see the borders of the room. Again [as with Chimera] there is the eerie reverberation and an ambiguous soundtrack. I can hear fire burning, a voice on a gramophone? Singing? Water running? A baby crying? Children whispering? All the sounds merge into a low vibrating hum/echo that continues relentlessly. It feels as if I have stepped into an intensely personal space: someone’s private thoughts, fears and nightmares. Do I hear sounds of children playing in the park? Are they crying or laughing?

I see two faint projections in the opposite corner of the room. I vaguely distinguish that the rest of the room is empty, except for a small bench against the opposite wall inviting me to pause for a moment. I sit down to watch the projections.

I can’t quite figure out the imagery in the videos yet the forcefulness of this encompassing world draws me into the moving narrative of the visuals. The videos take me on a journey. It appears as if I am travelling along a canal, a gorge with images racing along the sides. Moving in a car along a highway, a cityscape in the distance, the road bends, fire, sandy road, a hand ... it flicks up a pile of dust towards me. Now much darkness, the space around me blackens and I now seem to be moving down a suburban side road. Blurred stars (or rain?) fall from the heavens onto the road. A bus approaches slowly; people in a queue begin to board the bus. Everything is very, very dark. Are these people queuing for a bus departing to hell? The figures become a pile of spaghetti people, writhing, contorting and then morphing into strange characters, piling on top of each other, then rising into the blackened sky. Neighbourhood gates, a silent street, old oak trees. I travel again along the same suburban road, travel along through the darkness. The trees now morph into the black.

Sand that is flicked up towards me becomes a cityscape, then floating images of a close up of Vári's face hover above the highway. She appears to be asleep; a netted fabric covers her face, creating a grid-like silhouette on her skin. Drops fall from her face onto the road and then transform into another pile of morphing, moving figures, piled up like a mass grave. Every now and then spotlights in the video allow me to see what the images are: bodies in pain struggling to emerge from a fiery surface. A shadow walks across the sand. Are there skeletons in the fire?

Cityscapes, then a journey on a suburban road. The journey is blurred, bumpy, and motionless at first and then moves fast. Vári hovers above this journey, as if in a dreamlike state, overseeing, storytelling, she then turns into a lizard and disappears.

The second video is very similar to the first, except it is even more indistinguishable. Rorschach memories dissolve into the sky, figures morphing, extremely difficult to decipher. An inaccessible hint at memories, lots of shadows, storm clouds and the darkness, always the darkness. Funerals, people standing around, waiting, suspended.... Bodies morphing towards the sky. Where are they going?

And the sound ... it continues to plague me: a crunching on a gravel surface? Humming start to a classical song? Sounds of keys rattling? The starting of a car? Whistling? My mind frantically searching to locate these obscure sounds and images.

This is a very heavy space to be in, I feel completely drained but rooted to the ground by some unknown force stunting my exit. Neither my video camera nor my stills camera are able to capture this space. Is this indicative of the overall defiance to understanding and accessing this piece?

This viewing experience is hypnotic. I am afraid I am being sucked into this space, like I am losing control. I feel my presence and consciousness begin to morph with the images. Where do I end and where does this video installation begin? It is as if someone has crept into my room, wired up my brain during the night and is now documenting my dreams. Except here I sit awake in the daytime and within this darkened space feeling and seeing the presence of this dreamlike state. Yet, it is not mine, but it is forcefully trying to seep into my subconscious the longer I sit in this room. How do I protect myself from this? From this nightmarish vision and sound. I feel a reverberation through my skin, there seems to be no stopping this integration; all has seeped through.

The experience of being immersed in the spatiovisual territory of *Riverrun* drew me into a place of private, concentrated attention. In the manipulation of visuals, sound, light and space, I encountered a geopsychic exploration, a movement of emotions, which seemed to carry me away. As with *Chimera*, the boundaries between inner and outer space gave way to a sensation of perceptual unity.

The theories of Jacques Lacan provide a useful schema that may assist in understanding the haptic perception and sense of physical immersion experienced when inside *Chimera* and *Riverrun*. Lacan's psychoanalytic method² examines the structure of our interior life, and

how we gain a sense of self and are able to differentiate between the self and others. For Lacan, the ego – the sense of self as a coherent, rational being expressed in the word “I” – is nothing but an illusion of the unconscious, which is the true foundation of all existence (D’Alleva 2005:96). Lacan’s theories³ explore how this illusion of self, or development of a social being, comes about. D’Alleva (2005:97) explains that at the core of Lacan’s work is the idea that the unconscious is structured like language:

For Lacan, the elements of the unconscious – wishes, desires, images – all form signifiers, which in turn form a “signifying chain”. There are no signifieds attached to the signifiers in the psyche: they don’t ultimately refer to anything at all. A signifier has meaning only because it is not some other signifier, not because it is linked to a particular signified. Because of this lack of signifieds, the signifying chain is constantly shifting and changing. There is no anchor, nothing that gives definitive meaning or stability to the whole system. Lacan says that the process of becoming a “self” is the process of trying to stabilize the chain of signifiers so that meaning – including the meaning of “I” – becomes possible. Of course this “I” is only an illusion, an image of stability and meaning created by a misperception of the relationship between body and self.

Lacan’s “mythology”⁴ discusses the emergence of the social being, and identifies (like Freud) three stages in the trajectory of development from infant to adulthood. Lacan labels these stages as the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic.⁵ Lacan asserts that in the realm of the Real, the infant has no sense of self and no distinction between inside and outside, the body and its environment. Mansfield (2000:41) explains that at this pre-Oedipal stage:

There is no understanding of the limits of the individual’s body, nor that there is necessarily anything external to it. The many surfaces that the child touches ... are all felt to be part of a continuous, uninterrupted, limitless being, so amorphous and open-ended that it cannot be compared to anything as located, specific and defined as selfhood.

This would be a highly immersive space due to the fact that the infant’s experience is intensified by lack of distinction between the self and the other (the other, at this point, is the primary caregiver). There is no absence or loss or lack; the Real is completeness, where all needs are satisfied. Since there is no absence, loss or lack, there is no language in the Real. Lacan says that language is always about loss or absence as you only need words when the object you want is gone (D’Alleva 2005:98).

All this changes when the infant first sees an external image of itself, perhaps in a mirror, which occurs sometime between six and eighteen months of age. It becomes aware that it is separate from its caregiver and there are things that exist outside of itself that are not part of it, thus the idea of other is created. As the infant becomes aware of its own mirror image, it engages in a process of misrecognition, as it mistakenly begins to identify a sense of itself as a whole person through this reflection, which is an image and not its physical self (D’Alleva 2005:98). This complex experience is called the mirror stage and is located in the

next developmental stage, what Lacan calls the Imaginary. In Lacan's words (1977:4) "the mirror stage ... manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality". This sense of unity and completeness is contradictory since the infant's subjectivity is not something it developed for itself, from within. Instead, its subjectivity is defined by something other than itself, it is always on some level a fantasy, an identification with an external image. Mansfield (2000:43) states, "Put in Lacanian terms, *the subject is the discourse of the other*".

Once the infant has formulated some sense of otherness, and identified a self with its own other, its own mirror image, it begins to enter the Symbolic order. The mirror stage ends, according to Lacan (1977:4) in "the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development". Almost as soon as it enters the Symbolic realm, the infant is tipped out of the sense of unity and completeness provided for it by the Imaginary. It realises that its sense of self is outside of it, projected at it from a world over which it has minimal control. This external world of the Symbolic order is the realm of language and culture. "The Symbolic order is the structure of language itself; human beings have to enter it in order to become speaking subjects, and to designate themselves by the 'I' that was discovered in the Imaginary" (D'Alleva 2005:98). To enter this realm is to be conditioned by social rules and regulations, and to obey the laws of language.⁶ This conditioning and regulation in the Symbolic realm provides stability, as signifiers have stable meaning in the conscious world, even if that stable meaning is an illusion. The subject's mature life is dominated by the Symbolic order. In the Symbolic, things appear to make sense as hierarchies of meaning are established and society functions in a tense but efficient manner (Mansfield 2000:45).

However, our involvement in the Symbolic order remains the result of an imaginary identification. When we discover that the image that seemed to offer us a sense of unity and completeness is an illusion, we realise that our identity is actually controlled by a public, shared world of order and hierarchies. Thus, according to Mansfield (2000:44), subjects only exist in the tension and interplay between the Imaginary and the Symbolic:

In this way, for Lacan as for Freud, subjectivity is not automatic or spontaneous. It is not simply as if there is always a subject where there is a biological entity we call the human being. Subjectivity is attained only at the end of a process which has many complex and dangerous passages. Subjectivity is always, therefore, problematic.

The formation of subjectivity is a constant negotiation for the pursuit of stable identities and structures, with the continual threat of loss and incompleteness. In his online book *Deconstructing Installation Art*, Coulter-Smith (2006) applies a Lacanian framework to the

potential immersive viewing experience of video installations.⁷ Coulter-Smith's interpretation is useful as it incorporates the idea that the mirror stage could be likened to a *journey* through the *space* of the Imaginary:

We can understand Lacan's ... "mirror stage" as a ... journey through the mirror away from the corporeal, polymorphously perverse, illusion-generating universe of the underworld that is the unconscious mind into the light of social reality and egohood ... [or] the Symbolic Order.... The mirror can be understood as figuring the Imaginary, and the Real refers to what might, metaphorically, lie behind the mirror: which is to say, a repressed mind of the body. In Lacanian terms the mirror, the zone of the Imaginary, is the interface between the two worlds: social consciousness, on the one hand; [and] the "Real" ... which is not subject to the Symbolic Order, something akin to the Freudian Id or the Jungian "shadow".

Coulter-Smith (2006) continues by stating that the exact nature of the Imaginary in Lacanian literature is somewhat inconsistent and unclear, but it appears to be mainly situated in the domain of fantasy, dreams and images, and so can be related to our understanding of imagination.⁸ I consider Coulter-Smith's spatial interpretation of the realm of the Imaginary and the mobility of the mirror stage to be analogous to Bruno's understanding of the spatiovisual arts as *sites* (and Imaginary spaces) that we traverse. As an interface, the Imaginary bridges the territories of the Real and the Symbolic. Similarly, the *space-in-between* of the spatiovisual arts is considered by Bruno (2002:252) to be a "tactile interface" that can facilitate emotive travel. In Bruno's terminology, the journey of the mirror stage could be likened to the migratory sense of emotion – that transference from one place to another – which forms a key element of the haptic viewing experience encountered during an immersive artwork such as *Riverrun* (Bruno 2002:6).

Since subjectivity exists in the tension and interplay between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, unstable signifiers are encountered on the journey of the mirror stage through the zone of the Imaginary. We navigate this "complex and dangerous" passage or interface, in the pursuit of stabilising our subjectivity and meaning (Mansfield 2000:44). I would like to suggest that in its destabilising effect, *Riverrun* facilitates an inward, psychological journey through the Imaginary, where the boundaries between our inner and outer selves are negotiated. This itinerant interpretation may be applied to my own experience of *Riverrun*.

At the start of the narrative mapping of my journey through *Riverrun*, I recorded the sense of becoming immersed in the darkness, which caused feelings of destabilisation and dis-ease. This description of a sudden immersion into this *space-in-between* is didactic because it can be likened to the experience expected from sensory deprivation. From a Lacanian point of view, this feeling may be interpreted as an interior journey through a psychoanalytic passage where we momentarily encounter the unresolved parts of ourselves (or unstable signifiers) in the realm of the Imaginary, leading to a perception that the distinction between body and

environment is blurred. Coulter-Smith (2006) comments that we can compare the dissolution of the boundary between body and environment thus encountered to the dissolution of the boundary between self and other.

In *Riverrun*, Vári uses a number of unstable signifiers to create a volatile, disturbing world. The darkness conceals the borders of the room, which disorients the *voyageuse* on entering. The grandiose size of the video projections and the loud, primal sounds confront us once inside the work. The imagery of the videos transforms at swift pace, and together with the dark tonal value of the videos, makes it difficult to identify and hold onto a particular image for an extended length of time. In addition, the reversal of the journeying footage “creates a strange vertigo” (Vári 2004). This technical handiwork could be likened to a visualisation of Lacan’s shifting signifying chain that lacks an anchor, or any stable, definitive meaning. The figures in *Riverrun* extend the visualisation of flux. They are in a state of continual disintegration, as they contort and morph into fire, water and each other. The sound is layered and difficult to decipher. The persistent, primordial drone adds a sense of apprehension. Overall, Vári’s creative manipulation in *Riverrun* denies the stability we search for in order to locate ourselves in space and ascertain meaning. *Riverrun* takes the *voyageuse* out of the seemingly stable Symbolic realm of reality into a transitive, Imaginary space.

Once I was seated on the bench, my viewing encounter in this tangible darkness transported me on an ebb and flow movement through my own interior space. I oscillated between sensory deprivation and immersion (an encounter with the undifferentiated parts of myself in the Imaginary), to an awareness of my dissolution (the mirror stage, the journey to self-recognition). *Riverrun* facilitated in me a complex interior navigation, as I journeyed into the realm of the Imaginary and encountered *terra incognitae* within.

Ultimately, however, Vári’s psychogeographies are constructed illusions. Her creative strategies offer an opportunity to reflect upon sensation, rather than being an ego-dissolving, submissive immersion in sensation. We are firmly in the realm of the Imaginary, or to use an older term, imagination, which remains at the heart of the aesthetic experience (Coulter-Smith 2006). Vári’s works are not sensory deprivation experiments designed to dissolve the ego boundary, but rather spatiovisual experiences that give us the chance to reflect upon spatio-corporeal boundaries. The disconcerting immersive experience of *Riverrun* draws our attention to the tension and interplay involved in the formation of subjectivity.⁹

In her geographical application of the haptic, Bruno, in a similar manner to Coulter-Smith, gives a spatial reading to Lacan’s theories. She explores how the Lacanian mirror stage and

the realm of the Imaginary can be seen as a visualisation of space. However as part of her analysis, Bruno critiques Lacan's theory stating that she believes it is firmly fixed on the gaze. Bruno (2002:113) explains:

The identification of the self with its own reflection, or its wearing of gender as a mask¹⁰, is not merely a visual issue. What is missing is the "scene" of the gaze, the fact, that is, that self-identification is a *spatial* affair – a narrative drama set in intersubjective space and enacted on a *corps morcelé*, an imagined anatomy. In this sense, the mirror ... is a *space*, a screen, on which identity is constantly negotiated.

Bruno's understanding of the mirror as a *site* substantiates Coulter-Smith's (and my own) interpretation of the mirror stage as a journey through the spatial zone of the Imaginary on the path to negotiating a sense of self. I suggest that these corresponding spatial analogies strengthen the notion of *site-seeing* as being a spatio-corporeal mobilisation of the spectator-voyageuse.

Furthermore, what is significant in Bruno's interpretation of Lacan's theory is that she sees the mirror as a space for self-imaging. In applying this reading to the spatiovisual arts, Bruno extends her idea that these *sites* reflect mappings of self-exploration. This notion of self-imaging is now discussed. Aspects of *Riverrun* are revisited to determine how the iconography of this video installation could reflect a charting of an inward search.

Bruno's reference to Michel Foucault's observations of the mirror in the context of his essay on "other spaces"¹¹ furthers her spatial reading of the mirror stage and the Imaginary. She explains that Foucault understands the location of the mirror to be a joint, mixed experience, set between utopia and heterotopia, where it is read as a *site* of self-representation, a space of constant displacements (Foucault in Bruno 2002:114):

The mirror is ... a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself; that enables me to see myself where I am absent.... The mirror ... exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy.... Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of virtual space ... I come back toward myself.

The mirror thus becomes the *site* of the subject's own visibility and self-exploration, a dwelling place of the self in virtual space. As the vehicle of self-exploration, the mirror – and in our case, the *site* of *Riverrun* – is the starting point of a spatiovisual diary, for it houses the tours and detours of identity (Bruno 2002:114).

In *Riverrun* Vári traverses the "placeless place" of the mirror (her Imaginary), to convey and negotiate a series of constant displacements. By consciously constructing a transitory landscape filled with unstable signifiers, Vári shifts into unfamiliar space, into a shadowy

world of the unknown. In considering the iconography of *Riverrun* this video installation may be seen as a mapping of self.

The journey of *Riverrun* represents a navigation of personal, lived spaces. The cyclical journey moves along city highways, moonlit suburban streets and down a winding waterway. We track Vári's intimate passage through "places of personal significance" (Vári 2004). The reversal of the footage suggests a looking back in time and space, into her past. The video charts an ambiguous, mythical time zone, as it follows the flow of a river, exploring its life path.

Vári (2004) explains that essentially *Riverrun* is a meditation on the "courses that we cut in our lifetimes like water does into the earth". The representation of a river is connected to the notion of the cycle of life, death and rebirth. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* (1996, Sv "river") states:

The symbolism of rivers is simultaneously that of "universal potentiality" and that of fertility, death and renew ... the river is that of life and death.... As they flow down from the mountains, wind through the valleys and are lost in lakes and seas, rivers symbolize human existence and its winding passages through desire, emotion and intent.

The flowing course of *Riverrun* moves us relentlessly along its passageway as we follow its winding motion, then morphs into nothingness, into enveloping darkness. Vári's (2004) statement, "although the world gears us into thinking of life and progress as rising and forward-moving, like all things we are constantly drawn back into the earth ... and are re-absorbed into something primordial" reinforces the symbolic use of the river as an emblem of the journey of life.

Furthermore, Vári reflects on her personal history as *Riverrun* journeys along familiar and familial paths, mapping along the way "biographical references and cryptic messages to family members no longer in this world" (Vári 2004). Vári elaborates how the river, as a symbol of femininity as well as death and rebirth, represents a communication with deceased family members:

The river being the female principle in *Finnegan's Wake* makes a poignant link to the fact that I have dedicated this piece to my two grandmothers, who died 11 Decembers and exactly one day apart, completing another, albeit more sombre, cycle.

As such, *Riverrun* could be seen as a personal reflection on the transience of human life. This exploration into death and the unknown of the afterlife is furthered through the physical and symbolic use of darkness.

Not only is the installation space blackened to the threshold of perception, but the imagery of the video projections is also dark and obscure. Vári appears as a number of unstable chimeras, transforming and morphing into shadowy forms as if “absorbed into something primordial” (Vári 2004). Examining the symbolic interpretations of the colour “black” can extend the figurative use of darkness in *Riverrun*. According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* (1996, Sv “black”):

As the antithesis of all colour it is often associated with primeval darkness and primal, formless matter.... Black ... is associated with the Underworld.... Psychoanalysts would view black in dreams by day or night as well as in the sense perceptions of the waking state, as...suggesting chaos, nothingness, night shadows on the ground, evil, anguish, sorrow, the unconscious and death....

The iconography in *Riverrun* further suggests an exploration of death and the unknown of the afterlife, as well as that of the unconscious. People are revealed as on a restless journey, passing through flames, then falling to the earth as a cloud of dust. Displaced travellers queue for a bus, in transit, a state of limbo. The waiting line transforms into figures that plunge and contort in the darkness and flames, becoming unstable signifiers.¹² They rise and merge into the shadows. We see a group of people gathered at a funeral. Vári’s own image hovers above the moving landscape, while a funereal veil dissolves into drops of tears that fall onto the path and morph into writhing bodies. Within these bodies, we catch glimpses of faces, including Vári’s.

The digital process of collating and montaging could be read as a representation of Vári transforming her memories and remapping personal traces. This creates a form of decomposition of a private history, as it blurs the reference to a specific time and space, which parallels the haziness of our memory.¹³ This way of processing her memories may be further interpreted in the context of Jacques Derrida’s theories of the work of mourning, which involves memory and interiorization, and is dependent on movement. Derrida (1984:24) describes the movement involved in interiorizing the physical persona – remembering the voice and the visage of the deceased – as “quasi-literally devouring them”. Accordingly, “this mimetic interiorization is not fictive; it is an origin of fiction.... It takes place in a body. Or rather it makes place for a body”. It is only when the other becomes mnemonically interiorized as flesh – becomes a part of us – that a “tender rejection” can take place and the labour of mourning is over (Derrida 1984:24). The dead can finally be left there, outside of us. *Riverrun*’s layered and morphing digital (de)composition could be seen as emblematic of the ritual work of mourning, where Vári moves through Derrida’s interiorization process of incorporating the dead.

Riverrun can be likened to “a narrative drama set in intersubjective space and enacted on a *corps morcelé*, an imagined anatomy” (Bruno 2002:113). Here, Vári’s creative mapping

reveals a journey of searching and processing, whereby she navigates the unstable signifiers of her Imaginary. Her continual transformation reveals a disrespect for the stable referents of the Symbolic. We witness the intertextual dynamics of the Imaginary, as Vári considers her digitally constructed spatial contours, her “mirror-screen”, while searching to fashion her self in, and as, space (Bruno 2002:114).

This marks the terrain between interior and exterior. Vári maps her own inhabited space, which then materialises into an external space that we may inhabit. *Riverrun* charts the personal traces of a biography, mobilising an intimate landscape in the form of a video installation. While moving through this tangible passage, the *voyageuse* follows a haptic route of memory mapping as Vári’s journey promotes an inward journeying of our own.

Section Two has focused on how Vári’s video installations may produce a haptic viewing experience. Chapter Three explored the nature of haptic perception in relation to a physiological connection between the senses. Chapter Four examined how this immersive viewing experience challenged the viewer’s spatial boundaries, by considering Lacan’s theories on subject formation. These two chapters briefly touched on the works under discussion could be seen as intimate recordings of a personal search. The next section will focus on the nature of Vári’s, and my own, artistic impulse, to probe in further detail how these video installations may be seen as haptic activities and mappings of self-reflection.

Endnotes: Chapter 4

¹ James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) is a confounding book over which there has been much scholarly debate about the meaning and symbolism of the book. Joyce's sentences are filled with obscure allusions and puns, which draw on different languages, histories, theologies, sociologies and mythologies. As confounding as *Finnegan's Wake* is to the reader, so is the world of *Riverrun* to a traveller entering its space.

² Much of Lacanian thought was inspired by the works of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and semiotician Ferdinand Saussure (Mansfield 2000:38).

³ There has been much criticism of Lacan's theories, especially from feminist psychoanalysts, because his work focuses on the realm of the Symbolic as being dominated by the Law of the Father. Feminists have argued that the maternal function in the development of subjectivity needs to be acknowledged. Kristeva has written extensively on how maternal regulation is the law before Paternal Law in the development of subjectivity (D'Alleva 2005:100). I hereby acknowledge that Lacan's theories are male-centred and thus problematic, as they do not consider the role of the maternal figure in subject formation. My use of Lacan's theory of the development of subjectivity is specific to the formation of spatial boundaries between our inner and outer selves.

⁴ Lacan's writing is notorious for its ambiguity and intentional obscurity. In addition, Coulter-Smith (2006) states that "very little of Lacan's speculations are based on scientific evidence, and his theory is akin to a mythic narrative. But it has proven effective as an aesthetic model possibly because Lacanian theory is more of a work of art than a work of science".

⁵ These three developmental stages are not clearly defined, separate entities. For Lacan the three orders are intermeshed, where each order is dependent upon the others. In the 1970s Lacan used the metaphor of the Borromean knot to illustrate the implication of these three orders. The Borromean knot, or ring, is made up of three intertwined loops constructed such that if just one is cut the others fall apart. Each loop, or order, is dependent upon the others (Benvenuto & Kennedy 1986:82).

⁶ Lacan considers that identities are constructed according to positive or negative relationships to the Symbolic order. As a child enters the Symbolic order through language, it is either privileged or not in relation to the language. In Lacanian terms the power rests with possession of the phallus, thus males have a privileged relationship to the Symbolic. Females represent a lack of the phallus, thus a lack of power. According to Lacan "the body's sexual specificity – or rather the social meaning of its sexual organs – will position the subject either as having [for men] or being [for women] the phallus, and ... positions it as a subject or object in the Symbolic" (Grosz 1990:85). Thus gender is a binary, cultural construct. The masquerade of womanliness "that which is put on or put off" (Schneider 1997:36) exists in response to masculine power; femininity is used to disguise the lack of power females have in the Symbolic. In her book, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Schneider (1997:1–42) discusses female artists who have challenged the binary constructs of gender.

⁷ See Coulter Smith. 2006. Immersion in a field of distance in *Deconstructing Installation Art*.

⁸ See also Benvenuto, B & Kennedy, R (1986).

⁹ Our reflections on our experience of being inside the works are just as important as the experience itself. When we reflect on this experience, through written or verbal actions, we return to the Symbolic Order (Coulter-Smith 2006).

¹⁰ See, for example, (1) Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Troubles: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge. (2) Laplanche, J & Pontalis J. 1986. Womanliness as Masquerade in *Formations of Fantasy*. Edited by V Burgin, J Donald and C Kaplan. New York: Methuen.

¹¹ Foucault, M. 1986. "Of Other Spaces" in *Diacritics*, 16(1):24.

¹² This section of *Riverrun* (see figs 6a, 6b, and 7) reminds me of Hans Memling's painting *The Last Judgement* (c. 1480) (fig 28), in which Satan's monsters drive the damned into the fires of hell.

¹³ In figures 6d, 8 and 9 we see a filmy membrane over parts of the video. This membrane further distorts the images, suggesting a decomposition or blurring.

SECTION THREE

Apparently exterior, the true extension of any landscape traverses both the exterior and interior of the individual. In short, landscape is the link between our outer and inner selves.

Bill Viola

The discussions of *Chimera* (2001) and *Riverrun* (2004) in Section Two revealed how these two video installations may facilitate a haptic viewing experience for the *voyageuse*. Section Three shifts focus to investigate how Vári's and my own creative process may be considered as haptic activities, which manifest as mappings of the self. Chapter Five studies the body of work Vári produced for her 2007 Goodman Gallery Johannesburg exhibition. Here, I trace the development and interrelated nature of her creative process for this exhibition from two-dimensional works, *Sketchbook* (2006/07) (fig 11), *Self-Portraits* (2006/07) (fig 12 – 14) and *Monomotapa I – IV* (2007) (fig 15 – 16), to the two video installations, *Vigil* (2007) (fig 17 – 21) and *Quake* (2007) (fig 22 – 26). In this regard, the progression of her ideas in relation to artistic choices vis-à-vis iconography, materials and processes used is surveyed. Descriptions of the works and my personal response to them are again quoted from my travelogue. My discussion incorporates Vári's statements from her walkabout (2007) held during the time of the exhibition, as well as from an interview with her. Since my intention is to determine how Vári's oeuvre may be seen as a self-exploration of her subjectivity within her inhabited terrain of South Africa, her reflections on this exhibition serve to amplify my analysis.

I consider how Vári, through the creation of two-dimensional works using traditional media such as ink and watercolours, maps a private, interior world. Then, as Vári shifts into (and within) the digital realm, which includes printed digital collages and two video installations, she charts a gendered exploration within an exterior landscape. I probe how the works on this exhibition chart a nomadic negotiation between a private-public subjectivity, which includes exploring the relationship between voyaging and dwelling. In the analysis of Vári's cartographic impulse, the relation between sense, place and movement is revealed. This includes an examination of the notion "topophilia".

The exhibition itself is an installation with each component (each work or sets of works) placed in space to engage us on a circular journey through the Goodman Gallery. The first work encountered at the entrance to the gallery is *Sketchbook*, a drawing from a personal journal. It is an ink drawing of a black bird, beneath which are written the words "Jesus Christ I was so alone". The sketchbook is encased in a transparent Perspex box and hung on the wall. The exposure of such a private statement immediately confronts the *voyageuse*

and sets the tone for the exhibition. Vári (Appendix 2:i) provides introductory remarks on the context of the exhibition and this intimate glimpse into her sketchbook:

This [body of] work materialised after a long period of solitude... Sometimes this is good because you get to concentrate on what you are doing. I got a chance to think about what is it that I am actually doing.... I hadn't drawn for a long time and I started to explore this medium again.... [*Sketchbook*] is the first bird that I drew. When I had just finished, it was like the bird spoke the words "Jesus Christ I was so alone".... [This] is not a religious statement, it is more of an exclamation, yet an exclamation not just from me. More of an exclamation on behalf of the world: the world is bombarded by communication, information is replication and we are surrounded by the noise of information, everything is coming at you at such a speed. This can all result in very isolating experiences.

Against the white page, the black bird is perched in isolation. The ink has seeped into the paper, forming contours and mounds that contort both the page and the outline of the bird. The Perspex box provides a barrier, revealing that which the artist wishes to, and concealing the remaining pages of the sketchbook. *Sketchbook* is a tentative, guarded prologue to a series of sombre, ink *Self-Portraits*. Thirteen self-portraits make up the series and are positioned near the entrance of the gallery, flanking the right-hand side of the outer section of the exhibition.

The fluid, cartographic *Self-Portraits* represent a nomadic tour of identity. As with the bird drawing, in each self-portrait the ebb and flow of the ink maps the contours and confluences of Vári's face. Bruno (2002:112) comments that a self-portrait moves beyond the physiognomy to make an inner world visible:

A portrait holds the corporeal imprint of the persona that it draws and redrafts.... The portrait presents a "map" of character. It makes a chart for the flesh. The self-portrait is a self-made map – a self made into a map.

Quick, impulsive strokes of black and ochre ink run towards each other, tracing the contours of a shifting self. Simultaneously similar and different, each solitary face documents a moment in time, a furtive exploration of self, captured and transformed into a topographical space. Vári (Appendix 2:v) comments:

They are very spontaneous works, usually made in very early hours of the morning.... In the self-portraits, I was trying to transfer onto paper what I saw, sometimes the self-portrait is very fraught, other times they are based on happy or sad thoughts. It is all very complicated. These emotions often stand in the way of portraying what you see but each work is a manifestation of a state of mind. It is interesting, as the works become like a journey, a journal, a documentation of states of mind.

Vári's fluid mappings of self create a field of energy expressing an itinerant, intimate form of visual communication. The viewing of these works marks a voyage of discovery as we follow Vári's own personal journey documenting private moments of self-exploration.

The fluidity inherent in the medium of ink and watercolour calls for a spontaneous and direct approach because, as the ink is applied across the page, the liquid is absorbed quickly into the paper. The ink leaves traces, as one moment the medium is wet and transient, the next it is dry and fixed, stained onto the page. Every inked brushstroke or accidental dripping of colour across the page is tracked and recorded, marking the movement of that moment. In this way, the transient and fleeting become permanent, opening the possibility of a “corporeal” way of seeing as the drawings encompass sentient, state of mind, mood, tonality and atmosphere (Bruno 2002:112).

In the *Self-Portraits*, the manipulation of ink creates an anamorphic mark-making that echoes the digital morphing techniques and visual iconography used in *Chimera* and *Riverrun*. In some of the self-portraits, the liquid pools of ink threaten to drown the contours of Vári’s face as her features disappear beneath dark surfaces of black ink. The loaded brushstrokes and dissolving surfaces create an ominous effect and become markers of unstable signifiers. Once again we see a suggestion of the disintegration of corporeal boundaries and a navigation between interior and exterior self.

Vári stated that in her research (Appendix 2:v), she investigated how birds have featured in mythology, and in every drawing of this series, a bird is shown resting upon her head. Although each has a particularity of form, signifying its species, not all of the birds’ physical contours are clearly identifiable, as they merge into, or perhaps out of, Vári’s mind. The flow of ink blurs the spatial boundaries between human and avian territory. These formal and iconographic techniques further the conceptual underpinnings of metamorphosis.

Vári also comments that since she had not drawn for a long time, the activity of producing the *Self-Portraits* was an awkward exercise for her. Vári (Appendix 1:v) explains that out of this awkwardness the birds appeared in the works:

For me I cannot create drawings and paintings and keep a straight face about it.... It was a ... self-conscious ... activity. Almost like an exercise in the suspense of this feeling, where you have to be frightfully sincere about the whole thing.... So when I hunched over the desk to sincerely create some self-portraits even the self-portraits became fantastical. ...They harbour something that was not really there ... The birds were not perching on my head! (Laughs) But there they were on paper, they made an appearance and they stayed, they stuck around. And to me those elements became the holder for whatever else I couldn’t say within the confines of the portrait. ... It’s like a valve that opens and out comes a bit of phantasm that you can’t really make it work on paper. It doesn’t add up. That is the thing about what I do. It doesn’t add up and it is delightful that it is so.

The presence of the birds on Vári’s head adds another layer of meaning to the work. In many cultures, a bird is an emblem for the human soul, messengers from heaven, spiritual states, angels or higher beings (Cirlot 1962, Sv “bird”; *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*

1996, Sv “bird”). The merging of human and avian ink territories suggests a simultaneous mythical, perhaps even spiritual, and psychological exploration. As “holder[s] for whatever else [Vári] could not say within the confines of the portrait” the birds could be considered as mental projections, mappings of invisible thoughts and non-verbal communications (Appendix 2:i,v). In these acts of spontaneity and playfulness – namely the creation of her self-portraits – Vári remaps her intimate terrain into a phantasmagorical identity. Vári (Appendix 2:i) comments on her associations with the birds:

I ... believe that animals and humans are equal and that they talk to each other, there is a communication, a consortium between animals and humans.

The act of blending these bird images with representations of the self provides tangential paths for us. In a similar manner to that seen in the *Sketchbook* exclamation, the self-portraits become the public sharing of a private moment and open up avenues towards the non-literal and intimate, as they are visualisations of invisible, inner thoughts. This mythological self-representation maps a traversal across the liminal space between interiority and exteriority.

Vári retraced her explorations in ink by photographing the *Self-Portraits* to produce another body of work entitled *Monomotapa I – IV*. Vári (Appendix 2:iv) comments:

I ... took photographs of the self-portraits under candlelight. Suddenly these images resembled landscapes when you look at them from a strange angle or height. However, these are not landscapes or shorelines but actually ink drawings, very personal self-portraits and suddenly they become another world, a fictitious place when you look at it from a different perspective. When I rolled the crystal ball around, the whole drawing become almost jewel-like.

In *Monomotapa I – IV*, Vári’s cartographic impulse literally manifests into fabricated maps of Imaginary lands. The landmasses are constructed from combining photographs of the *Self-Portraits* and photographs of ancient maps. On each landmass, far in the distance, are hints of the present day Johannesburg skyline. Elaborate writings from ancient maps mark the contours of the oceans around the landmasses. Because Vári photographed the drawings and maps in dim lighting and through a crystal ball, they have a pinkish glow and the constructed worlds appear to be curved, producing a three-dimensional quality. A mapmaker’s cartouche borders these distorted, convex lands.

As a female mapmaker, Vári departs from the dominant forms of mapmaking. Using collage, she merges personal and engendered iconography with historical and contemporary social references into the silver, embossed frames. These include the following: Voortrekker soldiers look afar into the distance; a Zulu chief sits in ceremonial dress, overlooking his lands; a lion strides in the forefront; two male Kudu regally stretch their necks, displaying their horns; a warthog bears his tusks next to a leopard lunging towards us. At the top of

each frame forming the insignia of each map are images of security cameras, guns and barbed wire, fragments from the present day realities of living in South Africa. Between these arguably masculine symbols of dominance and protection lies the multiple presence of Vári's hybrid, naked form.

On each frame, Vári appears as a shifting, female subject. Each pose embodies the sense of movement and exploration, for example, crouching forward, peering out at viewers in a confrontational manner, or sometimes lurking against the edges of the territory, alert, stalking. On one of the frames, she appears on either side of the crest, with a lantern in hand, searching into the terrain. There is a dialectical relationship that exists in this manifold, naked presence. Whilst her exposed body signifies a vulnerability, an unprotected self, moving within a territory filled with untamed and threatening male beings, this seemingly vulnerable state is counteracted in how she safeguards herself, namely through the adornment of various ape-masks and wigs, the wielding sticks and sabres, and in her active, ever-mobile and multiple presence. Furthermore, as a hybrid, anamorphic figure Vári again makes reference to the monster, drawing on the similar conceptual concerns she used in *Chimera*, as examined in Chapter 3. The multiple, mythological figures in *Monomotapa I – IV* (and later in *Vigil*) embody a geopsychic search between inner self and the social subject as we shall see below.

As Vári collages a personal and female chimerical presence into a constructed world, she challenges the traditionally (white and colonial) male-dominated world of voyage, exploration and cartography. However, and more significantly, by inserting a nomadic, hybrid female subjectivity into this world, the works become more about a geopsychic search within her inhabited, lived space², suggesting a negotiation of the self in the *space-in-between* voyage and dwelling. Let us take a brief look into Bruno's consideration of the representation of female subjectivity within the theoretical discourse on space and travel³ in relation to Vári's cartographic impulse.

Bruno (2002:84) states that "the critical questioning of space and travel does not always include a treatment of the diversities of the female subject, or if it does, often treats them in problematic ways". Here, Bruno references Rosalyn Deutsche who has shown that even contemporary spatial theory tends to erase both the female subject and the subject of feminism.⁴ Deutsche challenged the problematic notion of cognitive mapping (first introduced by Kevin Lynch⁵ and later expanded on by Fredric Jameson⁶) claiming that whilst these theories explored the roving eye and moving body in space, their concepts were not ultimately able to sustain the consideration of dislocation or to embrace multiple mobile mappings. Bruno (2002:84) states:

Fearing disorientation and anxious about unmappable space Lynch sought reassuring measures; ... eventually, with contributions from Jameson, cognitive mapping became a way of ordering, even domesticating, space – a way to lock mapping into a regulative ideal. In her critique, Deutsche shows that the fixed and unitary viewpoint of cognitive mapping excludes female subjectivity.

Bruno (2002:81) reflects that although cognitive mapping potentially hints at the narrative of inhabitation, it fails to explore the lived navigational space and to understand psychic mapping as a part of socio-sexual terrain. Within contemporary spatial theories, Bruno deduces that a regrettably persistent resistance to acknowledging the mobilities of female subjectivity informs the binary assumption that equates the figure of the male with voyage and woman with home – a static, enclosed space.

To counteract these fixed and unitary viewpoints Bruno advocates thinking geographically, as it assists in remapping the cultural landscape. Bruno (2002:85) suggests that assessing sexual difference in terms of space, as “a geography of negotiated terrains”, could help to resist the immobilization of the female subject. In her method Bruno highlights that the problem of the domestication of the home is deeply embedded in the textual and critical discourse on voyage. Such discourse considers the home to be the origin and destination of the activity of travel. Bruno (2002:85) concludes that:

In this logic the voyage is circular: a false move in which the point of return circles back to the point of departure.... Conceived as a circular structure, the metaphor of travel locks gender into a frozen, binary opposition and offers the same static view of identity.

To dismantle the fixity of this binary system, Bruno proposes that the metaphor of travel be considered as a voyage of the self, a search for identity through a series of cultural identifications.

When the identity of home is seen as both point of departure and destination, and is gendered female, Bruno (2002:86) elucidates:

The [home] represents one's origin: the womb from which one originates and to which one wishes to return. This particular scene has been constructed by or for a male voyager. Psychoanalytically, it represents a recurrent male fantasy, one that historically returns in the travel and theoretical writing of (often) white males. The circularity of the male voyage is a problematic notion for the *voyageuse*. The question of origin, separation, and loss are much more complicated for a female subject. There is position implied in positing an origin which was enjoyed, lost, and capable of being reacquired. This does not define the female condition, for in [Freudian and Lacanian] psychoanalytic terms, the female subject experiences neither that possession nor the possibility of return.

Bruno goes on to suggest that thinking as a *voyageuse* – where seeing and travelling are seen as inseparable and the haptic is apperceived within the realm of spatiality – can trigger a relation to dwelling that is much more transitive than the fixity of the traditional notion of home, and a cartography that is errant (Bruno 2002:86). Wandering defines this cartography

and is motivated by a fundamental remapping of dwelling. In this manner, a constant redrafting of *sites*, rather than the circularity of origin and return, ensures that spatial attachment does not become a desire to possess (Bruno 2002:86).

As a *voyageuse* within her artist terrains, Vári becomes the wanderer, mapping transitive explorations through fantastical *sites*. In *Monomotapa I – IV* Vári transforms her personal and social dwelling space into “a geography of negotiated terrains” (Bruno 2002:85). This nomadic, exploratory attitude is reflected in Vári’s (Appendix 2:iv-v) thoughts on *Monomotapa I – IV*:

For this show, I was looking at old maps of the world, looking at how the world was envisaged ages ago. The person who drew the maps was always the explorer, the conqueror, and frequently they were drawn from the “hero’s” perspective. A map is a claim on land they have conquered. However, someone was at the receiving end of this conquering, which frequently involved incidents of violence and loss. So these maps are also a representation of these events, the consequences of such explorations that we still live with. In addition, such conquering processes are still happening.... These old maps were terribly inaccurate and often very grandiose. They are signifiers of who had the power at the time, who has the resources to own the land, survey and exploit the land. Thus, a map always states ownership. In addition, the cartographer would always embellish these maps with images of whatever riches that land had to offer: objects, people, animals, plants, and monsters, from that land. It also contained representations of savages, weapons; the Westerners take on the savage, the idea of the other. These images were always fantastical, mythical.

I have tried to parody this convention; I have replaced these images with objects and characters from my own environment, such as landmarks, a Braamfontein sculpture, a Parktown prawn (I found it dead in the corner of the gallery - all things are interrelated and connected somehow). I specifically selected objects that do not positively reflect the environment as the function was in the old maps. For example I used guns instead of a spray of flowers.

As a result of her merging personal visual references together with historical and mythological imagery, Vári causes the *Monomotapa I – IV* maps to create the effect of disrupting the classificatory systems and analytic procedures of the historically colonial, white, male authority. Vári’s artistic intervention redrafts her inhabited space through a series of subjective dislocations and female mobility. Such forms of mapping become a record of haptic travel, as she charts emotive responses to her dwelling space. This geopsychic mapping no longer becomes about an instrument of conquest and control. Reflecting on her gendered and cultural identity by inserting multiple, hybrid chimerical identities, Vári becomes “the nomad [who] has a sharpened sense of territory but no possessiveness about it” (Braidotti 1994:35). Vári’s maps visualise Bruno’s (2002:85) notion of travel as a voyage of the self which embodies the search for identity through a series of dislocations.

The territories of these digitally collaged, psychogeographic maps are activated in a layered, interrelated and sequential manner in the video installation *Vigil*. Embodied as hybrid

identities, Vári's characters wander through the transitive, mythical terrain of *Vigil*. Vári again creates a digital mapping of self whilst redrafting her dwelling space.

For this exhibition, *Vigil* was located in a back room of the Goodman Gallery (see fig 20 and 21). This room was a narrow space with an entrance on either side, more of a thoroughfare or passageway than a contained, separate space.⁷ As will be noted below, the idea of passage reinforces the concept of the work. The large projection screen is suspended in the centre of this space. *Voyageuse* are able to move around the projection screen and view the digital animation from both sides. Below are extracts of my description of the work interspersed with comments by Vári made on the exhibition walkabout (Appendix 3:iv):

Johannesburg, 3 March 2007

The animation begins with a creature stirring beneath the earth. The video's point of view becomes that of an unknown presence. I hear a drawing in of breath and this creature moves.

Vári (Appendix 2:iv) explains:

At the beginning [of *Vigil*], a lone figure is watching as the nighttime begins to take shape. It feels like a consciousness from below, a subterranean feel. It is almost like something wakes up and becomes aware of something, of a life outside.

Again, as with Riverrun, I track the creature's viewpoint on screen. Viewing the underground world through the eyes of this unknown creature, I follow a slow movement through the silent, ancient earth.

This cinematic strategy draws us in to the narrative of *Vigil* as we concentrate on the elements to which this unknown character's glance directs us. Bill Viola (1995b:148) provides insight into his understanding of the camera as point of view:

In my work I have most strongly been aware of the camera as representation of point of view – point of consciousness. Point of view, perceptual location in a space, can be point of consciousness. But I have been interested in how we can move this point of consciousness over and through our bodies and out over the things of the world.... I want to make my camera become the air itself. To become the substance of time and the mind.

Vigil reflects this point of consciousness as Vári invites us to follow her line of sight as she travels a personal journey through a mythological digital space (Appendix 3:iv-v).

Johannesburg, 3 March 2007

Time is unhurried and quiet in this underground world I find myself. I pass subterranean layers of earth and roots along the walls of an underground tunnel. I make my way towards the light, the outside world. The sounds from the outside world filter into the tunnel, getting louder as I creep closer and closer towards the opening. I peep out through the hole and see a spinning landscape. This outside world is

mapped within circular vignette, a porthole onto a contemporary world. Almost instantaneously the contrast between the interior, silent, primal space and the exterior, moving world is revealed. I watch as the outside landscape spins on an anti-clockwise, disorienting journey.

Vári (Appendix 2:iii) elaborates on the conceptual underpinnings of this journey:

I superimposed two twilights: a skyline going past, where I am taking you on a journey; there is a reference to the time of the gold rush. The sun is going down, it is getting darker and darker. ... I start to question our understanding of wilderness, the unexplored. What exactly do we see as wilderness? I want to parody this. All the imagery is passing rapidly; the horizon is changing from sundown to darkness and back again.

I catch glimpses of trees, a Ferris wheel, a mineshaft, a road, a billboard, and more trees. A baboon barks. The piercing drill of insects. Imperceptibly, a grey shadowy frame from Monomotapa I – IV encircles the window onto this rotating world. The previously static figures on the frames start to morph slowly over time. All the while, the journey continues within the frame, spinning relentlessly.

The mobile landscape gets more layered as Vári's hybrid, masked identities, historical figures and geographical landmarks are overlaid onto the spherical voyage. A Voortrekker maiden. Clouds in the sky. An eagle flies past. A telephone pole. Vári's naked figure crouched and watching. In the distance, a baboon. Then a faint presence of one of Vári's characters, standing on the edge of this geography, repeatedly hammering a large stick into the ground. A journey along a highway; trees flash by.

The journey slows and between the turns, I catch glimpses of a clearing in a forest. Gathered in this clearing are historical and mythical figures, who appear to be conversing around a fire.

Vári (Appendix 2:iii) comments:

[Vigil] is about creating a parallel world, a world that doesn't have to exist, I dreamt up a place. In this place, in the twilight of a fire, the viewer comes upon a conversation between figures from history: Paul Kruger and Mrs Kruger, Vasco de Gama, Harry the Hottentot, Shaka Zulu. Figures are engaging in actions that are woven into the narrative.

Vári's naked, chimerical form, wearing a red wig and ape mask, scurries across the frame in front of this meeting of the disparate characters gathered together. She has a lantern in hand, and is looking, searching, and restless. A female explorer, a nomad, exploring an unknown, wild territory.

A textured soundscape echoes the digital layering of the imagery and hints to an untamed terrain: The alarm calls of a baboon, and then a zebra. An incessant buzz of cicadas. A gun cocking. A shot whizzing through the air. Fairground sounds, chanting, a distinctive beat, bagpipes. The pace of the sound increases, matching the whirl of the visuals. A persistent whispering. The lyrics of "Bye Bye Black Bird"⁸.

Vári (Appendix 2:iv) elaborates that her intention was to layer a multitude of sounds, which make reference to every culture that has inhabited the region of South Africa:

Some of the sounds I used are as follows: ...Flesh being devoured. Animals, snakes, references to the jungle ([South Africa] is so wonderful but it will eat you). ...Songs from World War I and World War II... The "Last Post" Trumpet: I stretched it and took a

portion of this. Cicadas: cicadas spend most of their lives underground, drinking sap, and then finally they grow and come into the sunlight and begin their song. This is the last day of their life cycle, and then they die.

The voice is me reading from *The Conference of the Birds*⁹. It is an Islamic text, in which a certain worldview is being represented. It is a mythological story about how all the birds of the world come together to try to decide who will be their leader. The Phoenix is decided upon; this is a bird that gives birth to itself through its own ashes. This is also the reference to cycles of life.

The layered soundtrack floods the space around me. I continue to watch the spinning journey as the animation moves through an unknown, wild territory. My cinematic point of view remains that of the unknown presence. Vári's masked, hybrid forms make multiple appearances. The disparate historical figures are still gathered around a fire in the forest as Vári appears, crouching and peering into the hole that opens onto her mobile world. Behind Vári's foreground figure are three more versions of her, embodied as wild, prancing ape-women. As they twist, their unkempt, long red hair leaves a trail of scarlet across the twilight.

The whispering continues. Is that an animal yelping in pain? The layers of footage pile on top of each other, and the video gets darker and sounds more frenetic, as the work builds into "a monstrous narrative" (Vári Appendix 2:iv). I catch glimpses of flaming red hair in the top corner of this land: Vári's ape-women are lurking, staring at me from behind the shadowy layers.

The darkness seeps across this transitive landscape, leaving a small hole of light in the centre of the screen. The visual layers swirl around this light, as it recedes into the distance. The pace of video and sound becomes feverish. The darkness increases to flood the remaining fracture of light in the corner of the animation. The circling light surrenders and collapses into the darkness leaving trails of starry lights flecked against the black sky. Then blackened stillness. But just for a moment. The creature stirs again, and the phantasmagoria begins another loop.

With its construction of actual and mythological fabrications, *Vigil* reflects Vári's negotiation of alternate subjectivities within a hybrid, cultural space. This intimate wandering delves into the darkened territories of South Africa's historical and current socio-political landscape. Moreover, voyage and dwelling work together in intrinsically interrelated ways, rather than being seen as separate domains. There is a linkage of travel to home, which manifests as a construction of a *space* that lies *between* the two realms.

There are numerous references in *Vigil* to the concept of a *space between*. The actual physical space of the installation becomes a passage through which the *voyageuse* can move. The iconographical structure of the animation also empowers the concept of a passage, as the site of action takes place both within a tunnel, an inside, dwelling space and the outside world of the spinning voyage. Furthermore, there are a number of visual motifs that embody the notion of in-between states: the setting of the animation's events during twilight, an ambiguous time between sunset and evening; the word "vigil" means a watch

kept during normal sleeping hours¹⁰; the iconographical layering of a number of landscapes, digitally merged to create a fantastical location; and Vári's chimerical characters which are hybrid, anamorphic forms, constantly shifting within this layered landscape.

The combination of all these elements produces a video installation that manifests as a liminal passage. As viewers, we witness Vári engaged in a haptic navigation of darkened territories, both private and social spaces. Vári (Appendix 2:iii) states:

Ultimately, the viewer must decide for themselves [sic] the meaning of this all. When we free ourselves from contemporary life, we are able to renegotiate everything. I have a wish to structure the narrative of our history in a new way.... The work is very layered, much heavier than what it represents... [In *Vigil*] the darkness encroaches and devours you. There are places we wish to go, we want to go there but we are fearful of being consumed by the darkness, we are afraid to go inside.... *Vigil* contains a moment when you go all quiet, you look through a tunnel and you structure a whole new time; it therefore relates to *Quake*.¹¹

Again, as with *Chimera*, this exploration of the darker sides of a public-private subjectivity signifies a probing of personal fears. Vári's use of masks in *Vigil* suggests such an interrogation of fears. In *No Go The Bogeyman*, Warner (1998:16) considers how masks are used as a means to express and confront our fears: "It is possible that scaring ourselves to death, by investing ourselves with the face and features of the bogeyman, by pretending to extremes of violence and aggression may have become the most favoured way of confronting fear in times of anxiety and disarray". As the chimerical figures donned with masks and wigs in *Vigil*, Vári negotiates Imaginary situations, playing out her fears and fantasies. In this manner, Vári's geopsychic movements explore the interaction between sense and place, as she maps the impact her socio-historic surrounds have had on her formation of self.

In all three works examined thus far, the *Self-Portrait* series, *Monomotapa I – IV* and *Vigil*, Vári's cartographic impulse becomes a mapping that emphasises movement – a voyage of the self across personal and social boundaries. To further understand Vári's mappings of haptic travel, I examine Bruno's interpretation of topophilia, or the love of place (Bruno 2002:354).

As a crucial part of *Atlas of Emotion*, Bruno uses the notion of topophilia, an idea derived from the field of geography¹², to examine the relationship between movement, sense and place. She explores a diversity of cartographic practices that foreground the nuanced representational edges of cartography, including partial mappings. In a similar way, Bruno (2002:354) uses the term *topophilia* to describe a form of spatiovisual artworks that expose the labour of intimate geography – a love of place that works together with residual textures:

Such work is driven by a passion for mapping that is itself toponomically routed not on wholeness but on the fabric of the lacunae. This “exposure” of remnants ... is the texture of a palimpsestic writing of place. This is the site of (in)visible traces, inscribed and laid bare...

Vigil (as well as *Chimera* and *Riverrun*) manifests as a toponomilic site where Vári's love of place engages with mapping her movements through the residual textures of intimate terrains. Bruno (2002:352) comments that this type of toponomilic mapping requires the labour of search and the accumulation of imaging:

Here, memory places are searched and inhabited throughout time in interconnected visual geographies, thus rendering, through cumulation and scanning, our fragile place in history.... [This] architexture [sic] is an absorbing screen, breathing in the passage and the conflated layers of materially lived space in motion.

Vári's artist enactments in *Chimera*, *Riverrun* and *Vigil* chart a constant series of displacements as she moves between “the fabric of lacunae”, into the gaps of history and the present, to map an intimate, laborious search through her lived navigational space.

On the walkabout of her Goodman Gallery Johannesburg exhibition Vári (Appendix 2:i) stated: “I love Johannesburg dearly and therefore love to represent it in my work”. In the works under discussion, there are many visual references to Johannesburg as well as socio-political and historical references to South Africa. The mobile map of *Vigil* and the preceding *Monomotapa I – IV* series are literally constructed of historical references to Johannesburg's foundation as a city. There are numerous mining and geological references such as mineshafts, strata of the earth in the tunnel, the layering in the compositional structure of the video and the reddish colour in both the video and the *Monomotapa I – IV* maps (“The colour in the works is a reference to ore, rich wealth in the ground” (Vári Appendix 2:v)). Both *Vigil* and *Monomotapa I – IV* reveal the labour of an intimate geography: (memory) paths are travelled; remnants are exposed, collected and are recorded in layered, digital compositions. Such toponomilic mappings of (*e*)motion rest on a nomadic wandering through partial, hybrid passages.

Bruno (2002:355) purports that this toponomilic drift is quite distinct from the centric view of a nesting drive, saying “Topophilia is not to be collapsed with nostalgia, especially when the latter is used to advocate univocal attachment to one's land of origin”. The artworks examined up to this point manifest as unstable *sites* that function against nostalgia and monumentalisation. In *Chimera*, historical iconography is combined with enactments of a morphing monster to produce ghostly, translucent passages in the installation space. *Chimera* exists as a furtive re-mapping that disrupts the visual logic of a historical narrative. *Riverrun* becomes an elusive search into the afterlife as memory-paths and phantasmagorical, darkened realms are navigated. In *Vigil*, historical narratives are again

transformed into a mythical, transitive landscape in which Vári tracks an intimate search. Let us examine how the idea of topophilia manifests in the second video installation on exhibit, entitled *Quake*.

Quake was positioned in the large, central space of the Goodman Gallery, forming the heart of the exhibition. In *Quake*, Vári continues to restructure space and time, creating a parallel world through which her multiple, female subjectivities traverse. The relationship between voyage and dwelling and the impact place has on emotion is still being explored as Vári maps a public-private navigation of a world filled with imminent threat. Whilst *Vigil* makes specific reference to South Africa through the use of historical figures and geographical landmarks of the Johannesburg region, *Quake*'s iconography refers to a contemporary, hybrid city that includes glimpses of Johannesburg's skyline. In addition, the figures that traverse the landscape of *Quake* are not as easily recognisable as Vári herself.

On entering *Quake* (fig 25 – 26), we are immediately confronted by a large video projection (approximately 4m in length by 2m in height) across the width of the opposite wall.¹³ To outline *Quake*, I include my description of the work interspersed with comments by Vári made on the exhibition walkabout (Appendix 3:v-vi).

Johannesburg, 3 March 2007

The expansive landscape that forms the topography of Quake shudders on the wall. The terrain appears to be compiled of a visceral, white noise from TV static that continuously shifts and vibrates. Far in the distance, on the horizon of this quivering landmass, lies a mammoth, hybrid city. This city is also in a transitive state as it shifts, morphs, stretches then collapses, only to push through the wavering earth to emerge as another forceful metropolis. Cloaked, faceless figures drift towards me. They appear to have left the city and are travelling across the volatile terrain. The shimmering projection reflects onto the gallery's polished resin floor, creating a flickering mirror image. Standing on this unstable reflection I watch the narrative unfold.

Vári (Appendix 2:i-ii) elaborates on the conceptual underpinnings of *Quake*:

In *Quake*, I am creating these buildings that are rising and falling, exploring the idea of the "what ifs" of our desires and hopes of the world.... I set the work into a landscape, so that the perspective of the viewer would be standing very far out of a huge city ... that is so big that even when it is so far in the distance, it makes the ground shake and tremble. The term *quake* is something disastrous, a desolation ... taking place. In addition, there are little disasters for all of us, things that make us quake and shudder. All these events make us who we are.... We become a different person as a result; there is a growth experience.

The spatiovisual site of Quake visually and acoustically shudders, tangibly manifesting the threat of an imminent quake. The nomadic figures dominate the territory. The closer they get to me, the larger and more threatening they become. Their bodies are

made up of flashing images that appear to be female and move at a tremendous pace. It is difficult to fully decipher the images, as they are moving so fast. As these uncanny figures move, their dark cloaks flap in the wind, creating shadowy silhouettes.

Vári (Appendix 2:ii) explains these mysterious characters:

There is this crowd of people; they keep walking towards the viewer but are inaccessible. On top of these walking figures I placed images of women I found on the Internet. I sourced hundreds and hundreds of images: women of all ages, creeds, famous, ordinary folk, bloggers, actresses.... I put together a variety of these images, 25 images per second... This is very fast, the images are flashing at the viewer, flickering, nothing has been softened or delayed. Frequently these images flash by too quickly for the viewer to build a solid, cohesive ... idea of what each image is. What occurs is that the viewer picks up that the images are of females but that is all.... In addition, the figures continually walk towards the viewer, where the viewer starts to question, who are these people?... These figures are simultaneously everyone and no one. They are however, very lonely figures....

The mirror reflection on the gallery floor duplicates the presence of the unstable figures. Between the size of the projection on the wall and the reflection on the floor, it almost appears as if the figures move beyond the visual field of the projection and emerge into the exhibition space. The ghostly presence of these shadowy bodies increases the overall threatening atmosphere of this installation. They move forward relentlessly, on an endless quest across this volatile territory. The landscape trembles and on the horizon, the hybrid city continues to rise and fall, mirroring the instability of the figures' identities.

Vári (Appendix 2:i-ii) comments on the transforming skyline:

I researched on the Internet and found skyline of cities from across the world. ... I have sourced and ordered all of these strange places that we have fantasies about. ... A skyline is always an expression of what a place is, each skyline is an expression of hope, of will, of the history of the place, of greed, money and motives. A skyline reveals the history or culture of the people and the reason for the city's existence. A skyline also represents the geographical influence on a place. It is a representation of a place. ... I also have a curiosity to see how the cities all fit together. I think we all create subconscious links between different places – I do and I was playing with that idea.

Every now and then I am able to recognise and identify the skyline of Johannesburg within the altering metropolis. The landscape darkens as a shadowy sand storm drifts across the ground. The buildings of the metropolis in the distance collapse. A loud boom reverberates through the gallery. It appears an earthquake is happening, shaking this world to its core. The primordial sound shudders across the quavering space of the gallery. It becomes a tangible vibration that envelops me. I feel the sound waves tremor against my skin.

Vári (Appendix 2:iii) discusses the construction of the soundscape:

I took fractured white noise from TV and stretched the sound so it became a moving earth, a primordial landscape sound, like a storm rolling towards the earth. It starts to sound like voices are being carried on the wind. Then I added sounds of a city to represent the places we live in and the places we dream about. I wanted the sounds to sound like they were moving past you, like they are being carried on the wind.

Sound becomes tactile, adding to the ominous, textured atmosphere of this foreboding space. The dense shadow moves across the screen clouding everything in its path. Its vast presence suggests a looming apocalyptic event or the aftermath of a disaster.

Yet, the figures march inexorably forward through this cloud of darkness. Their journey is ceaseless. Figures keep appearing as the earth quakes and the buildings collapse and re-form within this looped phantasmagorical landscape.

Quake becomes a topophilic mapping of a nomadic journey across an unstable *site*. The atmosphere of *Quake* echoes the turbulent environment of present-day Johannesburg. The fabricated city in *Quake* is compiled of hundreds of skylines morphed together on a dislocated map. It represents a cosmopolitan, hybrid city that – like Johannesburg – resists control and reinvents itself on the margins. Fragmented, shuddering figures navigate this threatening environment.

The landscape of TV noise surrounding the city manifests as a tactile, shivering passage. The solitary journeys of these figures across this seemingly treacherous territory represent a simultaneous exterior and interior movement, a displacement, a laborious navigation across textured “lacunae” (Bruno 2002:354). Their continually changing forms, constructed of accumulated, flashing images, are unstable signifiers, which imply a shifting vulnerability at the core of their existence. This could be seen as the existential trembling that Vári (Appendix 2:ii) referred to above: “There are little disasters for all of us, things that make us quake and shudder. All these events make us who we are”.

This palimpsestic mapping of movement across space charts an exploration of psychocorporeal space, an interaction between sense and place. Vári’s topophilic creative style makes visual Viola’s understanding of landscape in a larger, extended sense, as the “raw material of the human psyche” (Viola 1995b:149). As seen in *Vigil* (as well as *Chimera*, and *Riverrun*), *Quake* demonstrates a haptic travel that maps the journey of transient self-reflection. During her walkabout Vári (Appendix 2:v) commented:

This is one of the most personal shows that I have ever had. There are many references to intensely felt solitude.... There is no overarching theme, but if I think about it I would say possibly a theme of journey, but often *a journey in solitude*. Each figure travels alone and our condition of being in the world is one of being alone. You have to negotiate your life, your history, and all the consequences of your actions and the events that happen to you. All these different things tie together and influence your life. (*My Italics*)

Quake contains a performance of a private voyage, mapping the sense of being alone and the negotiation of the journey through life. This haptic, architectural *site* publicly houses such liminal experiences: an inner search that is exhibited and shared. Standing on the reflected, tangible terrain destabilises us as *voyageuse*. We become immersed in this space, the viewing of which transports us on Imaginary journeys. Positioning ourselves as viewers moving through this intimate geography offers us an opportunity to take measure of our current geopsychic situation vis-à-vis shifting forms of (intimate) habitation.

As seen in the above discussion, the works in this exhibition manifest as recordings of a haptic activity. Vári's mappings of personal movements between voyage and dwelling create *sites* of self-exploration, a *space-in-between* that interface intimate and social, private and public narratives. She surveys the land searching for the emotion of the cultural landscape. By inhabiting her constructed mental geographies, Vári exposes a rarefied terrain of the interior voyage, connecting socio-political, historical landscape with a female explorer's emotive viewpoint of her lived territories. Bruno (2002:376) comments on the movement involved in such haptic travels across the land:

This mobilization becomes particularly important if we continue to understand it in relation to a concomitant "interior" movement, for landscape is not only a matter of exteriority: the impact of the landscape extends inward, into one's own interior landscape. The mobilization of one potentially impacts the expansion of the other.

Our explorations of Vári's *sites* reveal that "landscape is the link between our outer and inner selves" (Viola 1995b:253). We have considered how Vári's mental landscapes map spatiovisual geographies of affects. In this manner, geography has drawn psychic paths, such as how photographs of Vári's sombre ink *Self-Portraits* are morphed into the face of the earth in the *Monomotapa I – IV*. In this type of exploration, the South African landscape lends itself as a vehicle for Vári's subjective voyages of self-discovery.

These tangible passages of moving landscapes include the architectonics of memory, as Vári excavates through her psychic and inhabited space. In *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama (1995:6–7) remarks: "Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock." In Vári's cartographic mobilisation, histories and personal stories are mapped into geopsychic terrains. This archaeological project charts an imaginative process that also measures emotions.

As it involves searching through psychic space, we may liken Vári's creative search to Freud's archaeological metaphor for the process of psychoanalysis (Adams 1993:3). Like the artist-archaeologist, the psychoanalyst begins with visible remains (such as symptoms), clears away the rubbish collected over time and searches for buried material to assist the patient on the path to self-knowledge. Commenting on the Goodman Gallery exhibition as whole, Vári (Appendix 2:i) alluded to her creative process as being an inward, solitary search:

This work materialised after a long period of solitude, of spending time on my own. Sometimes this is good because you get to concentrate on what you are doing.... The way in which I worked was to gather things together and build in a very layered experience, very much like layers of a mind and the world around us.

Vári's process of self-reflection is not simply a private retreat, as it becomes a public act through her exhibitions. Viola (1995b:173) comments that art commences in the artist's withdrawal and struggle, that includes the state of confusion and non-understanding, which he likens to "a cloud of unknowing" or to the "dark night of the soul". In her exploration of the unknown, feared parts of herself and South Africa's socio-political and historical reality, Vári maps a personal struggle. Vári uses the creative process as a mirror she holds up for self-examination, not for the purpose of narcissism or self-enjoyment, but self-scrutiny and even self-interrogation. It is a private-public analytical act of self-reflection, a voyage of transformation, of refashioning the self.

As moving documents of history and her personal stories, Vári's video installations act as traces and passages of her retrospective subjectivity. They provide an itinerary to traverse historical and personal materialities as well as a bridge between the artist and the spectator. As spatiovisual manifestations, the architectural *sites* of Vári's video installations become an interface between the portrayed psychogeographic terrain and ourselves, as *voyagueuse* engaged on a haptic travel inside these worlds.

In the final chapter, I examine my video installation *Night Journey* (2005-2008) and related two-dimensional works. I look at how my own cartographic impulse maps a personal search through exterior and interior landscapes.

Endnotes: Chapter 5

¹ Vári (Appendix 2:v)

² There are a number of references in *Monomotapa I – IV* to Vári's lived terrain of Southern Africa, and more specifically, her current city of residence, Johannesburg. The title *Monomotapa* refers to the Portuguese name that was given to the Medieval Kingdom (c. 1450-1629), which stretched between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers of Southern Africa (Oliver & Atmore 1975:202). This area is now Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The skylines on the landmasses of *Monomotapa (I – IV)* are compiled of contemporary buildings in and around Johannesburg. The barbed wire, security cameras and guns allude to the current socio-political climate of living with high levels of crime in South Africa. The historical characters reference South Africa's history and the wild animals indicate the animal life that has and still does inhabit certain areas within the Southern African region.

³ For an in-depth discussion on this matter see *Traveling Domestic: The Movie "House"* in Bruno, Guiliana (2002:75 – 170).

⁴ See Deutsche, R. 1996. 'Men in Space' and 'Boys Town' in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁵ See Lynch, K. 1960. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁶ See Jameson, F. 1991. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

⁷ In comparison to the installation spaces of *Chimera* and *Riverrun*, the space of *Vigil* is less controlled. Light leaks into the space from both entrances and as a result, the projection is slightly bleached.

⁸ "Bye Bye Blackbird" by Gene Austin (released 1926).

⁹ Farid Ud-Din-Attar. 1177. *The Conference of The Birds - Mantiq Ut-Tair*. Translated by Charles Stanley Nott. 1954. London: The Janus Press.

¹⁰ Vigil means "a period of keeping awake during the time usually spent asleep, to keep watch or pray" (*Microsoft Encarta Dictionary*. 2007. Sv "vigil").

¹¹ Vári's statements about the exploration of an interior darkness extend Chapter Four's analysis of the symbolic use of black/darkness in *Riverrun* as a metaphor for an inner search or the unconscious.

¹² In 1974, the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, in his book *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* examined how people are affected by what he named topophilia, or the love of place. Although Bruno draws inspiration from this book she asserts that Yi-Fu Tuan's conception of topophilia is problematic. Bruno contests that in order to explain the love of place, Yi-Fu Tuan ended up establishing a system of values for places that ultimately made claims for ideals of landscape in an evaluative structure based on binary oppositions and harmonious wholes (2002:354). Bruno's engagement with the notion of topophilia stems from a very different premise and includes partial or residual mappings of place.

¹³ Again, as with *Vigil*, there are two entrances to this demarcated installation. The space is larger than that of *Vigil* and is more contained as an enclosed entity rather than the passage of *Vigil*.

***In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood
where the straight way was lost ... I cannot rightly tell how I entered there, I
was so full of sleep at that moment when I left the true way...***

Dante Alighieri

In this chapter, I reflect on my Masters exhibition, held in May 2007 at the Premises Gallery, Johannesburg.¹ The exhibition comprised the video installation *Night Journey* (2005-2008) (fig 38 – 46) and a series of related two-dimensional works (fig 31 – 37). In this discussion I want to extend the exploration of the haptic I have undertaken thus far to my own art making process. I also wish to further the idea of how video installations may activate a haptic experience in the viewer. My art making process generally involves intimate labour, a labour manifestly tactile in its mapping of my journeys of self-exploration. These journeys include visualising personal dream space as well as the “real” space of travelling through Johannesburg and the Kruger Park, both places that I love. In the fact that these exterior journeys involve real places that I am attached to, I also address the idea of topophilia.

My intention is that the reader travel with me through this chapter in the manner that the spectator travels through this exhibition: as the *voyageuse*. As before, I intersperse my discussion with extracts from my creative journals and artist statements. I begin by briefly examining the two-dimensional works, which are the first artworks the viewer encounters on entering the exhibition. These works are positioned in the foyer or passage that leads to the main gallery (fig 31a and 31b). Thereafter, I focus in detail on the heart of the exhibition located inside the main gallery space, the video installation *Night Journey*, which I discuss in relation to the above-mentioned ideas (fig 38).

I organised the space of the gallery to facilitate a journey through the works. The two-dimensional works in the passage outside the gallery set the tone for the exhibition and map an introduction to the artistic topography of *Night Journey*. In a similar manner to Vári, as revealed in the previous chapter, these works chart intimate journeys. These are articulated as being at once exterior and interior landscapes.

The first work we encounter in the passage is a digital print entitled *Rabelais* (2007) (fig 32). It pictures a desolate view of the now defunct watering hole, Rabelais, near Satara Camp in the Kruger National Park. A photographic overlay of netted gauze bandage, intertwined with grey strands of wool and a red feather, veils the landscape. This scene can't be visually possessed as a seamless view on account of the way the gauze, wool and feather break the illusion. Instead it is a smooth surface that reads as assertively tactile. The work has three

significant iconographical elements present in *Night Journey*: the imaging of the bushveld, gauze fabric and feathers. In this it heralds key features of *Night Journey* that are discussed later in this chapter.

The work on the opposite wall is entitled *Before the Time* (2007) (fig 33 – 34). It is fashioned in the shape of a concertina book and stands stretched open in a zigzag on an enclosed, Perspex shelf. A mirror runs along the back of the shelf against the wall, and reflects the back pages of the book. The book maps views from a moving car window: a southern journey along the N1 highway, between Kroonstad and Bloemfontein. I used a Lomo actionsampler² camera to capture moments along this journey. The technical effect of this particular Lomo camera emphasises a textured, blurred snapshot. The four lenses of the camera fix four different scenes in one frame: each image is a view of a millisecond further along the length of highway. The four fragments of each photograph are then cut up and re-arranged, with two fragments on top and two fragments below. Seamed together, the photographs form the book. The collaging of the photographs has the effect of disrupting conventional viewing and the resulting images are reminiscent of a Rorschach test.

The back pages of the book reflect a similar yet darker journey along this national road, a feeling enhanced by the fact that the images are mediated through the mirror on the wall. The effect of light leaking into the camera stains the edges of the images giving a red tint. Fragments of distant mountains, farmlands, burnt veld, dams, windmills and telephone wires are captured in the scenes. The red flash of a chevron arrow on one sequence of photos cautions the traveller about a bend in the road ahead. Hand written text is included on some of the corners of the images. This adds private thoughts to the images of the book. The text includes:

birds of prey...pole 4...lies down...projection...standing on the edge.

In making and presenting this work I was aware of its effects in encouraging *voyageuse* to physically move along the length of the book to trace its sequence. I include myself here in this voyage as both maker and viewer of the work. We track an intimate journey recorded from a car window and transformed into an emotive cartography in the form of a book.

On the opposite wall is *Beneath the Darkened Sky* (2007) (fig 35a-f), a series of six photographs of the African bushveld at night. A mood of darkness and shadows prevails. The first two images map the outlines of a railway track and its surrounds (fig 35a and 35b). The moon is full and rising, casting a twilight glow onto the soft clouds and illuminating the contours of the bushveld plains. The second two images reveal night views of the bushveld through a barbed wire fence (fig 35c and 35d). Between the wires, the distant bushveld appears to be on fire. In the remaining two photographs, there is more shadow and darkness

(fig 35e and 35f). Moments of light shudder and blur into the shapes of trees, bushveld and a watering trough. Below is an extract from a journal entry recorded during the time these images were taken (Appendix 3:vi-vii):

Kruger Park, December 2004

It is late in the evening. The physical darkness around me echoes the dark space of my mind. I sit motionless in the black, watching, waiting; aware of a potential threat that may emerge from the darkness. My camera in hand, on slow exposure, captures the fractures of light in the darkness. The camera becomes a means to represent the physical negotiation between the light and the dark. This photographic exercise to capture a trace of the darkened landscape, to record a stable image, mirrors my internal effort to find a psychic balance.

In my creative practice, I am interested in exploring the negotiation between light and darkness and the existential metaphor that this suggests. Photography is a medium that tangibly manifests as an exploration with light. These dark images are photographed in the bushveld, using a slow exposure. In the bushveld, at night, there is a constant threat that a dangerous animal may be crouching in the shadows watching, opportunistic, waiting to pounce should you drop your guard. I find this fact a significant metaphor in relation to the constant presence and influence the shadow self has on a person's subjectivity. The photographs of *Beneath the Darkened Sky* mark personal movements through a physical (and simultaneous mental) unknown, threatening territory.

The representation of a physical space alluding to a negotiation of psychic space brings to mind the following note made by Bill Viola (1995b:146):

The body as the unconscious.
The body as mind.
Landscape as the body.
The mind as landscape.
The dissolution of the self in the breakdown of inside/outside
The skin as conceptual membrane.

I make a connection between Viola's idea of "the mind as landscape" and Jung's notion that the space of our unconscious minds can be likened to that of a moonlit landscape, as Jung (1962:173) reflects:

In the unconscious, one is unfortunately in the same situation as in a moonlit landscape: all the contents are blurred and merge into one another, and one never knows exactly what or where anything is, or where one thing begins and ends.

Rabelais, Before the Time and *Beneath the Darkened Sky* are representations of personal journeys through exterior landscapes. They chart sensory movements through the land that trigger emotions and memories. The works manifest as documentations of states of mind

experienced whilst moving across each particular site or landscape. In this they may be associated with Bruno's concomitant interior movement in which the impact of the landscape extends inward (Bruno 2002:376).

This topophilic charting of the affect of place is extended in the next work, a series of gauze drawings entitled, *You aren't in sight* (2007) (fig 36 – 37). This work is positioned just outside the entrance to the gallery. The exterior landscape seen in the previous works is transformed into a mapping of an Imaginary space. Images from dreams and nightmares are sewn into gauze tracing my thoughts. My journal notes elaborate on these images (Appendix 3:vi):

Johannesburg, September 2004

It is still dark and I am awake; or somewhere in the space between sleep and wakefulness. I'm uncertain of the unknown land I occupy in my head but totally aware of the feelings of dis-ease that prevail. Images play in my mind's eye. A lone, armless figure lies in a bed (fig 36a). A bird flies away (fig 37b). A beast-like hound stretches through the grid, running at full pace (fig 36c). Vultures gather in a dead tree, hovering and watching (fig 36b). A monstrous form rages fire onto a body huddled on the ground (fig 37a). The figure has no arms, it is defenceless; it lies there, defeated. Danger moves all around it. I float above myself, watching as I lie in the bed. A song plays through my mind:

*Cuttin' through the darkest night in my two headlights
Trying to keep it clear, but I'm losing it here to the twilight
There's a dead end to my left, there's a burning bush to my right
You aren't in sight, you aren't in sight³*

The gauze drawings of *You aren't in sight* map subjective, residual moments from the *space between* unconscious and conscious. The gauze as a choice of material in my creative production relates to the process of healing. The bandage is a delicate, yet strong material. Using a sewing machine, I sew images into the gauze. As the thread of the drawings weaves its way through the gauze bandage, it tugs on its structure. The gauze grid attempts to maintain its structure but the sewn thread pulls and distorts the grid into complex mappings of images from insomniac moments. This could be seen to correlate with the tension involved in the formation of subjectivity, which involves a constant negotiation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Mansfield notes (2000:85) that for Kristeva, "shifts in the quality of selfhood are like tugging on the weave of a complex fabric". These drawings literalize this effect of the negotiation of self.

The haptic textures and taut lines of thread drawings pull us closer towards the networked geography. We are confronted with mind mappings of uncertainty and an interrogation of fears. The title of the works references lyrics from a song that speak about a journey through

the dark and a feeling of being lost along the path. Deformed and ambiguous characters trapped within a mesh manifest as unstable signifiers. We follow these wanderings, going back and forth, weaving in and out following a sentient voyage.

Our *site-seeing* voyage along the outside passage of the gallery, moving past the two-dimensional works, has tracked a private journey through exterior and Imaginary space, revealing a selfhood in a constant state of flux, and brought us to *Night Journey*, the focus of the exhibition.

Night Journey is located in the main gallery space (fig 38). It maps a nomadic search and private struggle through an inhabited, hypnagogic space. It is an interactive, immersive video installation that invites *voyageuse* to enter a shadowy *site* to explore perilous nocturnal worlds, both interior and exterior. Below is an extract from my artist statement for *Night Journey* (Alborough 2005):

Each day we retreat to our bed, to the place that is so private, so familiar, so intimate. It lures us with its promise of comfort, protection and restoration. In our beds we can escape the endless traffic, incessant noise and smothering fog, into the oblivion of sleep, transported to other worlds beyond the borders of ordinary perception. *Night Journey* explores and interrogates the epic journeys we embark on when the night shuts out our visible reality and gives free rein to our hopes, fantasies, dreams, fears and nightmares.

The video installation is positioned in the corner of the darkened gallery. Due to the height of the gallery's ceiling, the work appears to be floating in the exhibition space. The illusion of floating is important in invoking an exteriorization of a mental geography that the *voyageuse* physically must enter and journey through. *Night Journey* comprises a structure, 8m by 5m in size (fig 41), produced by sheets of handmade felt screens suspended from a complex grid of steel cables. The felt screens delineate a path that suggests a maze. Surrounding the exterior of the labyrinthine structure are layers of white, diaphanous gauze that contain and demarcate it from the rest of the gallery. Dim lights flicker behind the layers of fabric; the only light source in the otherwise darkened gallery space.

A light behind the gauze shows us the entrance of the maze. We pass the outer layers of gauze and enter a narrow, faintly lit passage, surrounded by tactile walls of felt interwoven with fragments of woollen fibres, gauze bandage and feathers (fig 42). Piles of raw wool and feathers lie on the floor in the corners of the maze and intrude into the *space-in-between*. We turn the first corner of the maze and our movement triggers a sound, that of howling wind.

Embedded in the felt passages are four passive infrared sensors (the kind we use as motion sensors for alarms in our homes)(fig 45b and 45c) and a hidden video camera (fig 45d).

Each sensor is connected to computer software, via a physical computing interface (fig 45a) located in a hidden compartment behind the structure of the maze. As we journey through the maze and pass by the sensors, signals are transmitted to the software. The software is programmed to activate a specific sound or video depending on which sensor has been triggered. The further into the installation we travel, so more sensors will be activated, setting off additional sounds and videos. If we stand still for more than 30 seconds, the sounds and videos will stop playing and fade out, causing the entire installation to become silent again. The installation has to be actively explored in order to trigger the media, as well as to ensure we see the whole sequence of the videos. However, as we are not yet aware of the presence of the sensors, our participation occurs without our immediate awareness.

We follow the bends in the maze. The labyrinthine passage opens onto a small, private resting place. A fragile, mummy-like figure lies motionless in a bed surrounded by soft, pale felt screens (fig 39 – 40). Our presence near the bed activates the sound of breathing. Above the figure, a voile screen, 60 by 40 cm in size, captures its dreamlike projections (fig 43a-h). I describe the sequence in my journal (Appendix 3:vii):

Johannesburg 2005

A winding journey at night along a dust road. The road is barely illuminated by dim headlights (fig 43g). An unfamiliar path through the darkened bushveld. I cannot see beyond the glow of the headlights but sense potential danger in the enveloping darkness. Bare trees and blades of long grass are exposed as the headlights flash momentarily past the edge of the road. The sound of the squeaking Land Cruiser and the distant hum of the engine. Speed bumps slow the journey, focusing the headlights skywards (fig 43h).

The night journey crosses to a small, breathless figure panting fire (fig 43d). An eerie soundtrack builds in amplitude. A zoom into the gridlike maze of her head, into her interior, dissolves into a bird flapping across a textured gauze landscape (fig 43c). It tweets and flaps, then blazes into fiery motion. A duck floats on turbulent water. The figure appears again, this time struggling to free itself from enveloping flames (fig 43b). "No! There is no escaping here". A child runs amongst a flock of pigeons at a park, scattering them in all directions, whilst he searches for his mother (fig 43e and 43f). "Maam, maaammiee." A floating angel drifts across the screen (fig 43a). "I see angels Mickey, I see angels Mickey, I see angels Mickey." The fragmentary encounters and the disarming soundtrack fade away and the journey along the forlorn dust road continues.

The felt enclosure around the bed is illuminated by the visuals on the screen. Projections bleed across and into the felt surrounds creating palimpsestic layers of moving imagery (fig 39 – 40). Our presence near the bed triggers another two sensors that, in turn, activate another video behind the bed and simultaneously, the sound of typing and of a girl saying

prayers. We move towards this final bend of the maze, a corridor behind the bed, but a pile of disintegrating bandages, feathers and wool strewn across the floor prevent us from going further (fig 44). Another video projection, 30 by 20 cm in size, reveals the poem that is being typed across the screen (Appendix 3:vii):

*casno 520/07/2004⁴
there is no escaping here
riding down the road
what lies wait in the shadows
spiritual hounds
running along side me
tracking pacing panting*

The girl's voice is praying for loved ones:

Dear God, please pray for Clive, Gillian and Jordan. Dear God, please pray for Auntie Sue, Mike, Trish and Uncle Roy. Dear God please pray for Mommy, for Wayne, for me, for Colleen, for Matthew and for Colleen's car. Dear God, please pray for Isaac that he is happy in heaven. Dear God, please prayer for Daddy, Angela, Kim and Granny, and Granny's cancer that she may get better soon...⁵

The cacophonous texture of sounds layers the space: the typing, the breathing, the incessant praying and the sounds from the projected dream sequence. The visual poem continues (Appendix 3:vii):

*casno 53/08/2004⁶
angels of God
to whom God's love
entrusts you here
place a white shining light*

As we read the poem, we catch a glimpse of ourselves *in* the video projection beneath the typed text. A digital video camera embedded in the felt screens near the bed (fig 45d), captures live footage of us moving through the space near the bed. This footage is transmitted to the computer software, where the software merges it with the typewritten poem. A 30 second delayed feed of this combined video is then transmitted to the video projector behind the bed (fig 44). In this way, traces of our presence are incorporated into the work. The poem continues over the delayed feed, as it traces textual contours across our digital presence (Appendix 3:vii):

*the fog drifts in
you fade to the distance

headlights flash and shine
down the road

it comes closer, closer still*

Personal moments of intimate journeys (the artist's and the viewer's) become tracked, recorded and mapped into a digital realm.

Having described *Night Journey*, I now consider the iconographical, technical and material elements of the work to examine how it may be seen an expression of haptic activity. I also reflect on the nature of my cartographic impulse, which includes a topophilic charting of the impact of place on my sense of self.

My intention in *Night Journey* was to construct a dreamlike, Imaginary space through which *voyageuse* could wander and explore. A primary structure of the work is the emblem of the maze, with its inherent symbolism. For me, it represents a physical manifestation of the unconscious. In Jungian terms, a maze of strange passages "recalls the old Egyptian representation of the underworld, which is a well-known symbol of unconscious with its unknown possibilities" (von Franz 1964:170). The impetus behind the construction of a maze was to create an environment that *voyageuse* could physically inhabit. In addition, the length of the passages provided a space along which *voyageuse* could journey. These two elements⁷ were used with intent to promote sensory, haptic movement through a tactile, unknown territory that alluded to an embodiment of the unconscious mind. Furthermore, as the *voyageuse* enters the maze, four outer layers of gauze are passed, suggesting a movement from the exterior world towards an interior space. In this way, the drops of fabric make reference to the layers of the mind.

In the darkening of the gallery space as well as the dimly lit *space-in-between* of the felt passages, the symbol of a psychic, Imaginary space is reinforced. As we saw with *Riverrun* (2004), the symbol of black and darkness relates to the unconscious, as well as to primordial darkness and chaos (*The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* 1996, Sv "black"). In a similar manner to Vári, the conceptual manipulation of lighting furthers the idea of exploring a hypnagogic space.

The iconography of the video sequence above the bed is also imprinted with the traces of the unconscious as it incorporates fragments from my dreams and nightmares. Jung (1974:68, 73) understands dreams to be the arising of spontaneous, subjective mental or visual images:

The dream is a fragment of involuntary psychic activity.... Even though dreams refer to a definite attitude of consciousness and a definite psychic situation, their roots lie deep in the unfathomably dark recesses of the conscious mind.... [We] call this unknown background the unconscious.... Because dreams are the most common and most normal expression of the unconscious psyche, they provide the bulk of the material for its investigation.

Furthermore, in *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud famously described dreams as "the royal road to the ... unconscious". The dream sequence reflects a mapping of the movement between interior and exterior worlds and the psychic negotiation of ensuing emotions and fears. This haptic searching is also evident in the footage of the journey through the bushveld at night.

The night journey literally and figuratively navigates an unknown, dark terrain of the South African bushveld⁸. The bushveld as a site embodies a special tension in that it is a place of beauty and peace yet is simultaneously wild and threatening, particularly at night. When driving through the bushveld at night, a car's headlights only light up a portion of the surrounding landscape. We are unable to see what lies beyond the light, moving in the darkness. Since this territory is a game reserve, there exists the very real threat that a predator may be lying a few metres away from us in the darkness.⁹ I find this a powerful metaphor for the structure of the mind, with the light from the headlights referencing conscious states and the darkness beyond the light suggesting the unresolved, and potentially threatening, unconscious.

For me, the site of the bushveld exists as both a real landscape that may be visited, as well as an Imaginary location in the realm of memories. As such, this landscape forms part of the Imaginary, which I carry with me. Frequently, my daily movements through Johannesburg (my hometown) remind me of negotiating an untamed, foreboding space, as the levels of crime in this city can be overwhelming. During the time I was making *Night Journey*, I was hijacked outside my house. The poem (entitled *casno 520/07/2004*) in the second video projection behind the bed references this experience and my subsequent feelings of post-traumatic stress. I am deeply attached to Johannesburg, and South Africa. As with many South Africans, I find this country to be a complicated, wonderful and terrifying place to live in, which produces in me equal and simultaneous feelings of love and fear. *Night Journey* aims to interrogate this dialectical relationship to my homeland.

My creative work became a tool for me to process the relationship between place and emotion, and personal and social trauma; and to chart the seeping impact my nightmares were having on my waking life. As with Vári's cartographies, *Night Journey* embodies the labour of an intimate search recording an archaeological process that involved the digging through layers of fear, memories and dreams. Nairn (2004:41) says that according to Jung, dreams are mostly irrational and difficult for the waking mind to understand:

Dreams present us with imagery for specific purposes. They seek to establish balance within the psyche and to promote psychological integration, which conscious attitudes prevent.... Dreams [present] in vivid details images of thoughts and feelings the dreamer tries to suppress in life.

The processing of my dreams and nightmares emerged as a textural, habitable spatiovisual room. The mental geography of *Night Journey* houses the projected stories of my negotiation of place. Bruno (2002:356) purports that such emotional mapping represents a cartography that is fundamentally a psychoanalytic residue:

...It excavates one's archaeology: the fragments and relics of one's *terra incognitae*, sometimes travelled so much by way of habit and habitation that they have become unknown.

Night Journey is one such haptic map that retraces my sensory movements through inhabited space. It becomes an analytic room, a place of "projections", where the voyage of the unconscious works itself into stories and dreams that populate the walls of a maze (Bruno 2002:357).

For Bruno (2002:413), the cartographic impulse to map the subject in space can be likened to a material charting, and here, she explores a section of the etymological root of cartography, namely *grapho* to expand on this idea:

Grapho is writing, drawing, recording. Geography, topography, and indeed, cinematography are all connected, for they are all "graphic" arts of space they "graph" space with the love of place. Their common terrain is mapping, and graphing room (the room of one's own).

Bruno observes how mapping can be a way to pay our respect to our home and hometown while contributing to the knowledge of it. Bruno (2002:415) explains that rather than being a description of an elsewhere, mapping turns out to be a domestic endeavour:

The cartographer travels domestic, so to speak, as she travels her own territory. Cartography, a public form of knowledge, is actually a private journey, a mapping of one's own – a drawing of one's home.

Night Journey is an intimate drafting of a home-space; a manifestation of a cartographic impulse that offered a means for self-discovery. In mapping personal movements through places I love, as well as exploring memory paths relating to these external landscapes, I invest the work with elements that reference Bruno's notion of topophilia.

The technical processes of this spatiovisual cartography embody a topophilic nature as they incorporate "the accumulation of images" and the "exposure of remnants" (Bruno 2002:354). Traces and fragments of my haptic travels are digitally layered – in the two video projections as well as the soundscape – throughout the video installation. The felt screens manifest the notion of topophilia in a physical and tangible manner, as I made each felt screen by hand (fig 46a).¹⁰ Bits of wool, bandages and feathers are mapped together into textured strata that form the passages of the maze. Embedded within the mesh of felt, lie personal moments of my physical and psychic movement. Bill Viola (1995b:266) remarks on the haptic unification

of perception and movement: “You learn so much more deeply when you move, when you move through it – in fact, thinking *is* a form of movement.”

I am particularly interested in the physical and ensuing psychological journeys involved in the creative process and how these journeys can facilitate a search for meaning. My artistic practice has always involved a labour intensive approach. The time and effort it takes to make the work allows for the processing of emotions and thoughts that trigger the impetus for such a work. The ritualistic aspect of the making process is also important as it promotes a meditative headspace.

The time spent on producing the work, as well as the frequent physical exhaustion and pain involved, becomes symbolic of the process of psychological exploration. In *Night Journey*, my own manufacture and structuring of the felt, which embeds an analytic movement, can be considered in relation to Kay Redfield Jamison’s (1993:123) understanding of the creative process as a means for self-exploration and a voyage of transformation:

Creative work can act not only as a means of escape from pain but also as a way of structuring chaotic emotion and thoughts, numbing pain through abstraction and the rigours of disciplined thought, and creating a distance from the source of despair.

The symbolic meanings of the materials used to construct the maze of *Night Journey*, namely the felt, bandages and feathers further the idea of creative work being a means to process psychic pain and loss.

Felt has been linked to mourning and funeral rites in ancient civilisations and was used as a symbol to mark a person’s journey entry into the afterlife (Olschki 1949: 8, 17). Depending on the type of wool used, felt has the potential to be a sensuous, tactile material. The inner walls of the maze are constructed of pale, cream Merino wool, which is soft and invites touch. The heart of the maze of *Night Journey* is intended to create the impression of a nurturing, “holding” environment that incorporates the traces of (*e*)motion (Bruno 2002:356). Bruno (2002:357) notes that in this form of holding in an intimate vicinity – which explores a space of memories, trauma and loss – a type of sustenance and a way of moving on with life may be facilitated.¹¹

The gauze forms a complex structure within the felt, netting the organic pieces of wool (fig 46b). In this way, it provides a metaphor of holding things together and ordering chaos or unformed matter. Here, the grid-like structure of the gauze again¹² makes reference to Kristeva’s understanding of subjectivity being constant process or negotiation, like “tugging on the weave of a complex fabric” (Mansfield 2000:85). The mummy in the bed is wrapped and covered in gauze bandage, referring to a figure that is healing, resting, processing.¹³ In

addition, the entire maze has a perimeter of gauze, suggesting that *Night Journey* is a protected space of healing.

Traces of feathers are interwoven in the felt (fig 46c). Feathers collected along personal journeys through the bushveld are strewn across the floor (fig 42). Birds occupy the shifting terrain of the dream world of the mummy: birds near a lake, a floating duck, a matted bird and an angel in flight. These visual elements point to the symbol of the bird, which furthers the notion of a search for self-knowledge and a release from present psychological states. For Carl Jung, according to Henderson (1964:151), the presence of a bird or flights of birds in dreams are the most fitting symbols of transcendence and provide the means by which:

...[The] contents of the unconscious can enter the conscious mind, and they also are themselves an active expression of those contents. [They are] connected with the periods of transition in a person's life.... [They] point to man's need for liberation from any state of being that is too immature, too fixed or final. In other words, they concern man's release from – or transcendence of – any confining pattern of existence, as he moves toward a superior or more mature stage in his development.

Night Journey became a creative means for me to process emotions and fears experienced during a period of psychological transition. This haptic activity of a psychospacial negotiation traces the nomadic travel between real and Imaginary spaces. The search for self-discovery is imprinted into the textured strata of *felt* passageways and materialises as a habitable video installation.

Up to this point, I have considered how the key elements of *Night Journey* may be seen to reflect mappings of personal journeys and self-exploration. I now briefly summarise how the above-discussed formal and conceptual devices have been used to provoke a haptic viewing encounter.

The entire space of The Premises Gallery is narrated in such a manner to facilitate a physical journey for the *voyageuse* through the artworks. As noted, our journey begins by travelling along the passage outside the gallery, tracking the two-dimensional works that record the emotive search through exterior/interior worlds. Once inside the darkened gallery space, *voyageuse* are invited to enter the architectural form of *Night Journey* and navigate its labyrinthine passages.

As mentioned previously, my intention was to create a maze-like structure that alluded to an external, physical manifestation of my mind. In this way, I aimed to create a site-seeing itinerary that becomes a geographic navigation of space. Travelling through this mental landscape, following an unknown, darkened passageway and encountering the visceral spatiovisual qualities of the work, we might experience a heightened sensory awareness.

Bruno (2002:254) explains that the extent to which the haptic experience combines tactile and locomotive properties, in geographic terms:

[Haptic perception] involves a knowledge of surface, geometry, material, location, energy, and dynamics. All these are mesmerising properties of [the spatiovisual arts], and they are mobilised in the sensorium of [such] environments to implement, augment, transform and reinvent, by technological means, our sensory cognition and our sense of space.

As a video installation, a form of spatiovisual arts, *Night Journey*, combines traditional and digital art making elements to produce an environment that promotes a reinterpretation of space and cognition.

In her article in *Art South Africa*, entitled “Haunted Territory”, Catherine Green (2007:90) comments that moving through the maze of *Night Journey* was an unsettling experience:

It forces the viewer to engage with physical and psychological space. While the soft walls, littered with debris of gauze, feathers and dull lighting created a womb-like environment that was comforting and restorative, the bodily texture of the installation also became repellent and foreign. The soundtrack of overlaid sounds, coupled with the typing of text on the screens was overwhelming, prompting psychological retreat. Similarly, the flicker of red alarm sensors and the image of oneself in the animation evoked a sense of vulnerability...

As discussed, tactile qualities were specifically used in the construction of the maze to engage the viewer in a physical and emotional manner. I incorporated physical traces of the bushveld into the work to appeal to travellers’ memories and call upon personal associations *voyageuse* may have with the specific materials, inviting a more tactile kind of vision.¹⁴ This involves a “sensing” of space, which “enables the imagination to form the habit of feeling through the eye” (Bruno 2002:203). The emphasis of Bruno’s haptic perception is that one is taught to *feel* through sight: “Here, the eye is epidermis; it is a skin; sight becomes a sense of touch” (Bruno 2002:203). In the viewing of *Night Journey*, our eyes reach out to “touch”, to discover the nature of the tangible space we inhabit and travel through, and in turn, we are “touched” emotionally.

As we saw in *Chimera*, this touching interface that connects interior and exterior space involves an element of reciprocity. In *Night Journey*, the reciprocal encounter is extended by its interactive nature. Immersed in the *space between*, our movement through the passages activates the interactive components of the work, producing a participatory condition. The work “sleeps” until the sensors pick up our voyage through the passages of the maze and trigger the videos and sounds. Viewing becomes an exploratory affair. Drawn ever more deeply into the architecture of the maze, our search elicits the full interactive narrative of the video installation, as more videos and sounds unfold. Furthermore, as the video camera captures our presence in *site*, and digitally embeds us into the narrative (fig 44), we are

incorporated into the production and meaning of the work. Our sentient, immersive journey through this geopsychic world is mapped into the digital realm and the boundaries between self and work collapse, as traces of us become part of this dream space.

The interactive nature of the work also produced an element of contingency. Since the unfolding of the visual and aural narrative is dependent on the number of viewers within the maze, as well as the extent of their exploration through the passages, the sequence of viewing is always a unique encounter. In addition, the visual quality of the digital feed captured by the digital camera varies, as it is influenced by the position of the viewer in the space next to the bed, as well as the changing light qualities emanating from the dream sequence projection above the bed. These conditional qualities were incorporated to reference the characteristic nature of dreaming, as being at once both vague and visceral.

Night Journey asks the *voyageuse* to sense a place, to be both in *site* and inside. In his essay for the *Young Artists Project 05/06 Catalogue*, Nathaniel Stern (2006) comments that *Night Journey* is an invitation into the perilous depths of emotional thought:

It asks us to play out the tensions between fear and loss, being and space. *Night Journey* ... is a tearing at the seams of a labyrinthine mind, and an interrogation of the complexities of our fragility. The work begs us to stumble through walking and waking and wanting and winding, finally, wielding a fleshly comfort in that dark, but beautiful, place we call home: our selves.

As we move back out the maze, we re-trace our steps of the sensory journey. The labyrinthine space offers no crescendo or solution but rather a chance to catch glimpses of our *terra incognitae*, a chance to reflect on the relationship between interior and exterior and motion and emotion.

All the above-mentioned methods were consciously used to take viewers out of the knowledge of the everyday on a journey into an unknown, habitable psychogeography. By suspending disbelief, entering this transient world and travelling along of the tactile path, *Night Journey* offers us an opportunity to haptically engage in the experience of the *space between*. We encounter a physical exchange with the materiality of the work: the felt, feathers, gauze, the moving projected visuals on the translucent screens and the layers of sounds throughout the installation. This form of site-seeing, or “exchange of energies” (Viola 1995b:149), challenges our spatial boundaries as the physical environment affects our interior world. We are transported both physically and emotionally as we negotiate an Imaginary zone.

My creative journey has been inspired by the art making practice of Minnette Vári. Her work pushes the intersection between technology and traditional art forms to create worlds that

challenge our perception and reflect on our ways of being. Viola (1995b:152) quotes the thirteenth-century Persian poet and mystic, Rumi, as a source of inspiration and which is relevant at this point, “New organs of perception come into being as a result of necessity. Therefore increase your necessity so that you may increase your perception”. In my creative output, as well as this theoretical research, I have endeavoured to increase my understanding of the relationship between sense and place, and how emotions may materialise within visual art practice. In particular, examining the notion of haptic perception and the creative act as a form of haptic activity has assisted in gaining insight into my viewing experience of video installations more generally, as well as my ongoing creative practice.

Endnotes: Chapter 6

¹ Although the exhibition was held in 2007, in further description and analysis of the work, I write in the present tense to facilitate an easier flow of reading.

² Lomo cameras are a brand of cameras that were invented by the KGB in the 1950s to assist the Soviet army with subversive operations. In the 1990s they entered mainstream Western culture becoming a tool for Lomo fans to capture chance moments. Lomo cameras produce images that are often framed by a vignette or a red, murky halo. The unpredictability and uniqueness of Lomo images is what gives Lomography its appeal. See www.lomography.com for more details on this and other models of Lomo cameras.

³ First verse from "Standing Still" by Jewel (released 2001)

⁴ This is a South African Police Service (SAPS)-issued case number for a highjacking that occurred to me in July 2004.

⁵ Extract of sound recording from *Night Journey*. This recording is of a family member's nightly prayer ritual.

⁶ The SAPS-issued case number for a road-rage incident my husband and I experienced in August 2004.

⁷ These key components of *Night Journey* are discussed later in the chapter in relation to how *Night Journey* may facilitate a haptic viewing encounter.

⁸ The bushveld, and more specifically the Kruger National Park, has become a space of great personal significance for me. My childhood holidays were mostly spent in the Kruger Park and many personal memories are attached to this place. I continue to visit the Kruger Park each year.

⁹ At this intersection, the photographic series *Beneath the Darkened Sky* relates directly to the night sequence through the bushveld in the dream projection above the bed in *Night Journey*.

¹⁰ The felt making process is a labour intensive and time-consuming activity. Tiny pieces of wool are gently pulled from the loose ball of raw wool and laid down onto a flat surface. Depending on the thickness required of the felt, up to eight to ten layers of criss-crossing pieces of wool (called wefts and warps) may be laid out. Pieces of gauze bandage are stretched between the layers of wool to act as a structure that holds and binds the organic nature of the wool during the felting process. This layered construction is then wrapped in netting and washed in warm water. The agitation of the water and soap mats the wool and the gauze bandage forming a felted fabric.

¹¹ The most noteworthy artist to use felt as emblematic of memories associated with personal trauma is, of course, Joseph Beuys. Felt, along with fat, became Beuys's signature materials. He used these materials specifically for their metaphoric associations as well as for the personal connection to his past. Beuys often recounted the story of his plane crash in 1943, in which he was seriously injured. He was saved by a group of Tartars, who covered his body with fat to help it regenerate the warmth and wrapped him in traditional felt blankets as an insulator to keep the warmth in (Kuspit 1980:79). Beuys referenced these personal associations, as well as the symbolism of felt – a material that acts as an insulator, a preserver of warmth and a means of protection – in his art works.

¹² As discussed earlier in relation to the gauze drawings of *You aren't in sight* (2007).

¹³ The figure in the bed is a deliberately generic form and is not meant to be heavily symbolic of the human figure or human condition. My intention is for it to be a type of "presence" in the space, which acts as a proxy or marker of the psychic mind. I recognise it can be seen in contradictory ways and to this extent it also becomes a marker for the complexity of subjectivity.

¹⁴ Marks (2000) notion of how memories may be activated through the engagement with the tactility of objects could be applied to this material aspect of *Night Journey*. My focus in the research, however, remains on Bruno's use of the haptic.

The true journey of discovery lies not in seeing new landscapes but in having new eyes

Marcel Proust

We have reached the end of our journey that has traversed a selection of Minnette Vári's video installations, as well as one of my own video installations. I have pursued what I believe to be an interesting angle of the selected artworks, namely considering the extent to which the notion of the haptic may be used to interpret the theme of journey as manifest in the production and viewing of these works. A particular reading of the haptic, which regards touch, movement and habitation as key components, was applied as a framework for this exploration. This included firstly, investigating the way the selected works facilitated a haptic perception, and secondly, noting how Vári's and my own creative production may be seen as haptic activities and tools for self-reflection.

My investigation of an embodied viewing experience probed the role that the haptic plays in perception and the formation of space. Here, Bruno's elucidation of the haptic to be the measure of our tactile apprehension of space, an apprehension that is an effect of our movement in space was analysed in relation to *Chimera* (2001) and *Riverrun* (2004) (Bruno 2002:250). In the uniting of touch and vision, Bruno shifts the viewer's role from voyeur to *voyageuse*, where we become travellers engaged in a form of sensuous cognition as we move through the *sites* of the spatiovisual arts. In considering the spatiovisual arts as *sites*, habitation forms a key element of the haptic.

This architectural itinerary became apparent in the spatiovisual construction of the video installations under discussion. The formal strategies used by Vári such as the floating veils of *Chimera* that created a path through the installation, the blackened room of *Riverrun*, the passageway of *Vigil* (2007) and the shimmering, reflected landscape on the polished floors of the gallery in *Quake* (2007), transformed each installation space into delineated worlds. In my video installation, *Night Journey* (2005-2008), the structure of the maze became a tactile, liminal passage that opened up onto a private-public resting place. In the analysis of my travelogue notes, it was evident how my movement through Vári's mental geographies challenged my senses. Taken out of the familiarity of daily existence and plunged into each of Vári's habitable psychogeographies, shifted my perception into becoming acutely aware of my movement through these constructed spatiovisual *sites*. A sensuous cognition was mobilised where the interaction of space, touch and movement created a feeling of being physically and psychologically immersed in these worlds. The physical journeying through

each space transported me on emotive, interior journeys and in this way, permeated the construction of a haptic perception.

To further understand the nature of the sensory immersion experienced in *Chimera* and *Riverrun*, Lacan's theories on subject formation were deliberated. His notion of the structure of psychic life, particularly the Imaginary as well as the mirror stage, provide a useful schema in understanding the manner in which we differentiate between our interior and exterior worlds. I focused on exploring Lacan's understanding of subjectivity to be a constant process and negotiation for the pursuit of stabilising meaning, where subjects only exist between the tension and interplay in the space between the Imaginary and the Symbolic (Mansfield 2000:44). I furthered my geographical itinerary by applying Coulter-Smith's (2006) interpretation of the Imaginary as the realm of imagination, and the mirror stage as a journey we embark across the Imaginary toward the Symbolic, in pursuit of stabilising meaning. The unstable nature of the iconography and spatiovisual configuration of *Riverrun* had a disorientating effect on me, where I felt immersed in this world, travelling through an Imaginary space, that resulted in a perception that the distinction between my body and the environment had blurred. This emotive, interior travel included a feeling of oscillating between sensory deprivation and an awareness of the sense of dissolution. This encounter with the constructed illusion of *Riverrun* afforded me the chance to reflect upon the formation of spatio-corporeal boundaries.

In the effort to establish how both Vári and my own video installations could facilitate a haptic perception, I examined not only the spatiovisual constructions of the works but also the iconographical meanings of the visual and aural elements of each work. By extending Bruno's notion of the haptic to the analysis of the creative process, I considered how the artworks under discussion could be seen as mappings of haptic activity, which revealed the impulse to chart psychocorporeal space. This exploration took us through a terrain, which reflected on the way both Vári and I record the relationship between place and affect. Here, the notion of topophilia, the love of place, was probed, to investigate how the relation between voyage and dwelling is remapped, materialising as spatiovisual, mental landscapes.

We traced Vári's artistic development by examining selected works from 2001 – 2007. In each work I considered how Vári maps a personal search through her lived terrain. The early works, *Alien* (1998), *Oracle* (1999) and *Chimera* (2001) are located in stark, isolated landscapes. As Vári's works develop, the topographies get more complex and layered, as is evident in *Riverrun*, *Vigil* and *Quake*. In addition, traces of Vári's physical environment, such as skylines of Johannesburg and footage of journeys along highways, are used as

backdrops against which the action takes place. What remains consistent throughout all these works is the way Vári maps her personal movements often embodied as mythological figures and shapeshifters, or using guises to change her appearance. In *Chimera*, we examined how this embodiment of the chimera monster can be seen to reflect an exploration of personal fears, and reveal a longing for the release from self. The shapeshifting remains in *Riverrun*, as Vári's journey transforms her into writhing, ambiguous forms moving through the darkness and the unknown of the afterlife. The multiple, mutating subjectivities in both these works become a mapping of her personal movement through mythological geographies, and can be construed to represent a complex processing of self.

Chapter Five examined the body of work produced for Vári's solo exhibition, held at Goodman Gallery Johannesburg in 2007. The interrelated nature of the works was considered in relation to Vári's cartographic impulse. This included probing the extent to which the works mapped a nomadic negotiation between a public-private subjectivity. Here, the relationship between sense, place and movement was revealed. The intimate ink drawings of the *Self-Portrait* series (2006/07) are a manifestation of the disintegration of boundaries between exterior and interior, as the form of Vári's face disappears beneath pools of ink. Each *Self-Portrait* becomes a topographical mapping of personal moments. The geopsychic terrains of the *Self-Portraits* were then used to construct the Imaginary lands of the *Monomotapa I – IV* (2007) maps. In the creation of these maps, Vári acts as a female cartographer, redrafting her inhabited space as she reflects on her gendered and cultural identity. These reflections come to life in *Vigil*. Through a series of subjective dislocations and female mobility, her dwelling space of South Africa and its history is playfully remapped. Vári's chimeras negotiate Imaginary and fantastical situations in the darkened and layered world of *Vigil*. Each of the works discussed reveal a cartographic impulse that emphasises movement, the voyage of the self, across personal and social territories.

In order to understand this haptic travel in more depth, I considered the notion of topophilia, in which the affect of place is charted via the labour of an intimate search and accumulation of imaging. I examined the topophilic nature of *Quake*, which records the nomadic journey of hybrid female forms across an unstable landscape. In *Quake*, visual fragments are accumulated and assembled together – the shuddering figures, the morphing city and the hazy landscape – to form the textured lacunae of this unstable world. All the works on exhibition reflected Vári's sensuous journeys across her inhabited terrains. The artworks exist as memories and fragments of an archival process, an intimate search across inner paths, a record of her shifting cartography. As moving documents of history and fractions of Vári's personal stories, her works act as traces, vehicles, and passages of the negotiation of subjectivity.¹

Chapter Six considered the work produced for my Masters exhibition held at The Premises Gallery in 2007. I applied the theoretical points discussed throughout the thesis to both the two-dimensional works as well as the video installation, *Night Journey*. The two-dimensional works were seen to explore the relationship between seeing and travelling. The notion of a searching eye tracing the path of personally lived space, which facilitates a reconciliation of emotions and memories triggered by this haptic travel, was deliberated. This analysis was furthered in relation to *Night Journey*, and more specifically, how the video installation embodies the concept of topophilia. Here, the connection between Imaginary landscapes and exterior social realms was expanded on.

Whilst my work does not include images of myself, as we saw in Vári's work, it does however incorporate traces of my physical and ensuing psychological movements. I layered fragments of wool and feathers collected along journeys across the land and matted these into tactile screens. The projection of the night journey and the dreamlike sequence record a search through both a physical and mental geography. Through the theme of journey, a life in motion was represented and the motion of emotion mapped. In this manner, my discussion revealed how the creative process may be used as a tool for self-exploration.

The tactile and sculptural elements, as well as the interactive components of *Night Journey* were explored to distinguish how physical movement through such a habitable psychogeography may encourage a haptic viewing experience. Here, I highlighted my interest in the intersection between traditional and digital art forms, and my intention to juxtapose and combine such media to produce a multidimensional, immersive environment, which aims to challenge the understanding of space and cognition. In creating a pathway through a physically tactile and shadowy audiovisual world, my hope was to appeal to an embodied vision.²

In the introduction, for the purpose of clarity, I made a distinction as to the types of journey we would encounter in this research. However, in reality, these journeys happen simultaneously. The key to all these journeys is that they embody the spirit of exploration and discovery. This attitude of searching was extended to my research approach, whereby I have examined video installation art through a haptic, travelling "lens of a present which is itself constantly changing" (Raney 2003:1). The insight I sought in this approach was not to find some truth or answer that makes further discussions redundant, but rather to consider how this discussion itself can infuse our interpretations of past and future readings and make them, and mine, provisional. In this sense, this dissertation aims to attain a better understanding of how video installation might manifest a process of subjectivity formation.

In using the rhetorical device of the journey to describe the videos, by narrating my own viewing experience of each video installation, I reconstitute the sequences of the works. This is necessary since my investigation included establishing how Vári's video installations could facilitate a haptic perception. Furthermore, a reference to a succession of still images would not convey the complexities that manifest in the narrative of the videos nor the spatiovisual atmosphere of each video installation. Here, I deliberately combined the use of emotive and analytical methods thereby locating my own subjective viewer experience within this discussion. In addition, I have selected to foreground the artist's voice, especially those of Vári, Viola and my own – as practitioners of video installation art – throughout this research. The artist's voice is a strong one in producing meaning as it provides insight into the practitioner's creative intentions and process of working.

In all the spatiovisual worlds discussed, the artist's search becomes a shared, public search in that as viewers moving through these visceral territories, we are given the opportunity to rethink our psychogeographic mapping in the face of our hybrid histories and changing physical and psychic landscapes. To end, I find Bruno's words illuminating in this regard. Bruno (2002:418) reflects, "We still scan the map of our lived space, not to find what we have lost but to search for clues of our finite historicity, to measure what pleasures of discovery may lie ahead".

Endnotes: Conclusion

¹ This research has not examined Vári's recent works (produce since 2008). Her new works, especially *Rebus* (2009), produced for the 2009 exhibition at Goodman Gallery Cape continue to explore the notion of mobile subjectivities within mythological worlds. It would be of interest to examine Vári's latest works to see if Bruno's notion of the haptic may also be applied

² An aspect that has arisen within this research and warrants further investigation is a comparative study between Bruno's and Marks' use of the haptic in relation to the material elements of *Night Journey*. The incorporation of handmade felt screens in the works, as well as the grainy, layered animations may also be understood in terms of Marks' emphasis on haptic vision that is precipitated via a surface density. Marks (2000:168-171) notes that the close examination of the weave of textiles invites a physical, sensuous vision that spreads out over the surface of the fabric instead of penetrating into a spatial, illusionistic depth (one of Bruno's components of the haptic). Marks extends this idea by viewing the surface of video itself as a loosely woven fabric, and considers how this medium, as a material texture, may provoke an embodied spectatorship. Examining the tactile and audiovisual aspects of *Night Journey* within the premise of such a comparison may offer an intriguing viewpoint to further understand the manifestation of the haptic within *Night Journey*.

*Transcript of a personal interview with Minnette Vári: Rosebank, 11 December 2007.
Reproduced with kind permission from the artist.*

MV: Minnette Vári

CA: Colleen Alborough

CA: Can you discuss your creative process a bit, how ideas manifest into works:

MV: My working process changes over the years and each project has its own character. Some develop through things or themes that recur and sometimes for instance, I don't necessarily go out to look for themes or projects that I can do, it is more like things that come to me.

I read a lot and very attentively, I read all sorts of things, newspapers, fiction, and the dictionary. Reading the dictionary to me can be a poetic experience. Things jump out at me from the page and I make a mental note of it. If it comes up again and again I make a mental note, or a note in the book itself. I bookmark the page with gallery invites, a flyer etc.

I hoard a lot! Things and information. Sometimes I have merely to browse through my bookmarks, and web page bookmarks to see where my headspace is and the themes I am working with at a particular time. These interests then have to be fashioned into a workable project. It is incredibly arbitrary but at the same time as an artist you know when it feels right, when you are onto something. Recently it has become much more intuitive. So much so that it has also become harder to really talk about my art and my creative process, because it is like going with a sense of what you are doing as an artist, not in single instances or single projects, but you start shaping your projects as a trajectory of your life.

CA: Is your creative practice influenced by any particular events that occur in your life?

MV: My current headspace or mindset as well as certain events can inform my work. But I don't feel comfortable with taking one single personal event to embark on an art project. I am so not a hippy; I don't have that mindset. That kind of sensibility in other artworks very easily annoys me when I encounter that.

But at the same time there are certain universal experiences that tie your own personal living through these experiences to the rest of the world. Even though the choices that you make and the paths that you take are unique and defined by a unique set of factors, things that map out your paths as you travel along, these things are universal. Nothing is that special, that unique.

To me what shapes a good or bad artwork is how you respond to it. To me what matters is how do you, as an artist, compel other people to engage with what you have to say, and that can sometimes be very difficult. There are some works that are in their essence more poetic and more ephemeral in their nature, and it is very hard to get all the different things that create or make up that work to twine together to create a very strong work. Other times, a work can just be something monolithic. Somehow it has a very distinct character. It can be something as simple as a word in a dictionary, or an image that can inspire a work.

Sometimes it can involve a process of translating a moment that has nothing to do with the image, to take something that belongs to the world, such as a picture, something arbitrary, and just looking at it made the gears in my head turn and made me want to connect the why's and the how's of that moment. Translating that moment into something that has

nothing to do with the image in the end and ultimately it becomes more personal. One can take something that belongs to the world, that is completely arbitrary and then somehow mentally or psychologically inhabit it to such a degree that it becomes a personal issue. Then of course once you are onto something that interests you: the image, the phrase, a word, it is like Velcro and you start rolling it and things attach and acquire significance, and sometimes radically alter the balance and the swing. It brings into it other significances and meaning, something that you would never have intended or been able to think rationally how it could contribute to the meaning of the artwork, it is a very organic process.

CA: Which programmes do you work with? Technically, what is usually your starting point? Where do you go to from there? To me, as a viewer, the technical proficiency of your image making appears seamless.

MV: I wish my works were seamless to me...(Laughs)

It can be something as simple as taking a few still shots and tweaking them in Photoshop until they could kind of merge, or exist as part of a time sequence. Then placing this into Adobe Premier or After Effects and fading and morphing them into one another.

I use a whole variety of programmes actually. Although there is something about efficiency, maps and systems and things that work, such as a dictionary, labels, or an index, arbitrary indices of knowledge, I really find comfort in these structures. These can provide all kinds of structure. I always like to take my art making down to the simplest possible way. Even if the images that I produce in the end are quite layered, they are distilled from a process of deliberately choosing the most efficient way to achieve the effects or what I wanted to communicate or how I want to get two events connected through a series of events or movements.

If I have to morph things I do but it is always begrudgingly and reluctantly. I find it incredibly annoying to see work on TV where people have been lazy or switched on a certain effect. Once you know these tricks you can recognise them immediately. The magic is not in these details or effects. Often what gives the work its character are the difficulties that you went through where it wasn't quite right, where it wasn't quite seamless, where you had to compromise and find some kind of other solution.

It is the same with people's bodies. What makes their bodies interesting is where it all went wrong, the scars, broken bones, or where you swam into the swimming pool wall, like I did, and broke your nose. This is attached to a story, with feelings, smells and all kinds of sensations that get locked away in memory.

It is the scariest thing to me to be human because even in the unique, homogenous thing that you are supposed to be, you are not. There are errors in how you express yourself. You may think you have got your story all sorted out but when you tell it again it is not the same as the first time. Things are incredibly liquid all the time, and we should live in such a way as to remind ourselves how infinitely fractal the world is. It is a very febrile experience.

Of course then one has to impose artificial things onto that all the time, like a deadline, which I am terribly bad at. For example x and y is possible but not necessarily then, so you have to tweak and worm your way through x and y so as to convince those two letters to resemble z in the end.

It is something between coercing yourself and the world and seducing yourself and the world. The one is pleasant and delightful, and the other one is harmful and difficult, fraught and rigorous. And then to try and find some kind of balance – they both are dangerous. Danger is what art is because you are always poking your nose in places, taking things. It is

an intrinsically aggressive way of living, it is not only outwardly aggressive, but it is inwardly aggressive because you keep taking yourself apart.

CA: This comment interests me as the way I read your work is that you are engaged in a personal search for meaning, that there is a search for an existential self occurring within each work. Whilst I realise that we are embedded within our social contexts and everything we do is related to the space we are living in, how much of your work is motivated by an inner search vs. a reflection on your socio-political context?

MV: One is always a mirror of the other. One always exists and is framed by the other. I do think that we tend to deserve the times that we live in. When those times are bad it is only natural to become really hard on ourselves as well. In any case, that is what I do. If, for instance, the political situation is incredibly bewildering as it is to me right now, and I think to many people, that search and that strife turns inward. And it doesn't always stop at how am I going to say what I need to say; it continues into what is it that I am saying. So the question kind of eclipses itself.

Since it is not easy and since you can't just settle for the first best answer, that search is corrosive and aggressive and it makes you dig in places outside yourself and in society where you are not invited. And that same process goes on within as well. I somehow hope that the residue of such a process, the processing of yourself and the world, will constitute and end up being, even though it is fractured, something that can stand and speak for itself and be strong in a certain regard. Because if not, the process then would be destructive and only that.

That is why, ultimately, that would be the only sense in leaving some kind of residue in the shape of artworks that are named and dated. These are not necessarily to me the focal points of a career or of what you do. They are just milestones that you hammer into the ground as you go along. The real struggle is from one to the other, to the next work. Sometimes I want to go back and hammer them all the way into the ground so you can't see them any more and erase them off the horizon!! (Laughs) But unfortunately the world won't let you forget, it won't let politicians forget, it won't let artists forget what you have done.

CA: Once you have made the work, how do you feel when you see the finished work, and experience it?

MV: It is different with every piece. There are works that I have made – one has to make peace with the works you have made. I have made works that to me after all these years still make sense. I think that was the right time to do that, the moment for that work and I can still trust that moment. There are other works that are less easy to pin down and that keep turning on me, and often these to me are more difficult later on to live with.

These works present the same or a similar conundrum to you all the time. And then you make an uneasy peace with it. It is not a constant and specific thing and there are some that I have a love/hate relationship with. One such work would be *Cyclops* (2004), which would make sense to be me because the whole thing is centred around the anus, the abject, and the progress occurring in the world. Since I enveloped and identified all that was appropriate and horrible about the world and myself in that work, that work will continue to kill me.

The works that I have done also function on different levels. Other works can be annoying because they are so descriptive to myself of things that I went through. But then this becomes a personal matter and it is more that I haven't resolved certain things that I was dealing with at that time and it is not so much about the work. Although these difficulties do attach themselves to the work and reside within the work, and will communicate, but not always in the way you expect them, to the outside world.

I am eternally neurotic. My studio and working space is very private. For example I write notes on my mirror that I don't want anyone to see.

There is a fine line between works that you consciously put out there on exhibition and then the latent ideas that you live with and are swarming around. One's intention as an artist and the stuff that you make is of course always open to interpretation and misinterpretation. But that is already on the bargaining table as possibilities when you exhibit a work. It is when you open that world up to that kind of scrutiny prior to it being ready that I sometimes squirm or resist it completely.

At the same time, there is nothing magical or secret about my work, I don't feel that is the case at all. It is normal everyday things that exist for everyone to see. It is just that for me to be an artist, I process it in an idiosyncratic way, a way that is my own. It doesn't bow to any exterior law and it is also not that arbitrary because I am not anybody in the world. I am me. But still it provides one with a set of variables that aren't that variable but are variable enough to be mind-boggling and you have to find your way through the jungle.

It is almost as though you build this jungle in the first place and then you get lost in it. And that is what's maddening, that's the thing about being an artist and going through spots of difficulty. You can't really complain to the world that it is so hard because you could have been a banker. Bankers are tortured too though! (Laughs) I often think it is really not a choice. It just so happens that the way in which I make sense of the world to myself has produced, over a period of time, a certain kind of effect and product. Somehow I was lucky enough that the world of fine art has decided that my products belong to its world.

Some works are easy to frame within a certain theoretical ideological framework, using a certain kind of terminology. But I find that it becomes harder and harder for me to do that. I have become incredibly weary of having to justify my work to the *n*th degree and to have to unravel it into the smallest part constituent parts. In that it loses touch with the fact that the artwork has become something of its own.

Everything is fractured but once you collect one work under a title and you present it to the world, there is also something about it that has a specific homogeneity and character. I have become very resistant to unpacking a work completely. It is also dangerous because then things become very mysterious and ephemeral, if you not careful. For instance those self-portraits of twelve years ago, the political reception of those works was so intense that in the end there was just nothing about those works that I had not questioned. The process itself became so fraught, that it lost every sense of playfulness and innocence of it. I think if you are that self-conscious about your work you miss out on what the whole creative project is about.

CA: In your walkabout at the Goodman Gallery in March 2007, you commented that the exhibition had come about after an intense period of solitude and loneliness. Can you expand on this please?

MV: I think by the time you are ready to exhibit your work, you have taken from the process whatever it can give you. These artworks remain as that kind of activity. For that exhibition I went back to the drawing board, experiencing hateful hours and hours of having to admit to myself: "you cannot draw, how is it possible?" It brings you back to those basic questions. But as an artist we all know you don't have to pick up a pencil. It really is a mental process; I don't think there is any form of art that is not conceptual.

There was something about the activity of painting that forced me to focus again on having consciously chosen to be an artist. To do something once again that forces you to explore

some kind of residual skill kept over from art school. It is strange, almost like a sentimental journey. I found it deeply affirmative. A huge affirmation to pretend. There are artists that are fantastic draughtsman and this becomes the character of their work. For me I cannot create drawings and paintings and keep a straight face about it! For me it is fun and it was like playing at being an artist. It was a hugely self-conscious, twee, very annoying activity. Almost like an exercise in the suspense of this feeling, where you have to be frightfully sincere about the whole thing. Because in this cut and paste era everything exists in parenthesis. I just want to smack people and say: "Mean what you say and say what you mean".

It has become very hard to do exactly that. So when I hunched over the desk to sincerely create some self-portraits even the *Self-portraits* (2007) became fantastical. They carry within themselves, they harbour something that was not really there – who knows. The birds were not perching on my head! (Laughs) But there they were on paper, they made an appearance and they stayed, they stuck around. And to me those elements became the holder for whatever else I couldn't say within the confines of the portrait. Maybe if I was a better self-portrait artist I wouldn't have had to enter that, but I don't think that it is only that. It's like a valve that opens and out comes a bit of phantasm that you can't really make it work on paper. It doesn't add up. That is the thing about what I do. It doesn't add up and it is delightful that it is so.

To be writing great philosophy and great theory, the fabulousness of that and the accomplishment of that, the different ways in which you can make things appear to be coherent, cohesive and congruent, and yet it doesn't add up, and its in that little leap that makes you gasp, and it is a really cool thing to be an artist. You forced to follow the artist in that leap of faith and it is in that instance that the magic resides. When you suspend disbelief for yourself, you force the viewer to do the same. In that sense everybody gets to be creative in that moment, you can't be a passive observer. It compels you, it catapults you into participating in a creative assumption, project, leap of faith.

CA: In your works, you physically and conceptually take a lot of risks by becoming the provocateur in these worlds you create. In mythology, there is often a hero-figure that ends up saving the day. However, in your mythologies, you position yourself as the outsider, the monstrous figure, and the shape-shifter. I am fascinated with this and read it as a means to facing fears and anxieties. Can you comment on this?

MV: I think often in our narratives and stories, the voice of the hero is much heard. The story of the hero, the pathos, is much told. Now that I think of it, it is because of the maleness of our stories and histories. So when you are a female narrator, when you tell the story with a female voice, you tell the story of a heroine, but this is still a story of an "other", something else. I am not necessarily attracted to stories of heroes and monsters but the things that interest me are very layered, ambiguous, and that is what I find grabs and holds my attention. And these things often exist from an outsider's point of view. They are begging to be fleshed out, with words or images, they don't have bodies and that is what makes them monstrous.

In the telling of such points of view, in the telling a monstrous story: today, people who experience horrible things, go for counselling, they have to get rid of the experience, the story; they do it by telling it on Oprah, the more people who hear about it, the less monstrous it becomes. The more people can relate to it then suddenly you have a situation where humanity feels better about itself.

I feel more ambivalent about monsters and heroes; I am almost debating, sarcastic and cynical. It is really hard to be in the world and not be touched by it and in the next second not be left cold by it. It is a process that rips you open and pumps your chest full of concrete. I

am always incredibly torn between tearing my hair out, ripping my skin with [indistinguishable], and howling in the street and telling them all to just go fuck themselves and say you deserve everything that has happened to you. I don't know. That kind of karmic thing happens to me in art too, it's an exploration of that. I sound like I should go and burn some incense.

There are many things in this world that deal with the monstrous and how being feminine ties into this, and how being with or without words ties into that. That assumption occurs anyway if you only hear one side of the story then obviously the monstrous occurs on the other side of the story. That unexplored thing, in this world that unexplored thing is being hammered further and further down the cracks between. Every story has about three sides and they all get airtime.

Having been a media junkie for a long time, reading the newspaper compulsively, I think I would kill myself by forgetting to eat, bath etc., as I am transfixed, compelled by the television. I am very thankful that I don't own a TV at my studio, as I would never get anything done. It is like a poison, an opium, to me. I have to go and force myself to switch the radio off, or unplug my modem so I don't watch another You Tube video. The amount of information out there is truly overwhelming.

I am spellbound by these videos. I am also always drawn to the macabre, the darkness and the morbid. I want to want to stop and see the road kill or the little dying bird. What's the word? Mmm. Yes, phantasmagoria, that's it. It is maddening that one is like a sponge where you continuously absorb and absorb and it can become too much. In moments when I am incredibly busy, everything about you then is totally consumed by this, and then there are moments when you turn on the TV and realize the information overload. You can't stop it; you are magnetically drawn to this information. It is impossible to compile all the useless information that you take in everyday. Yet still, all of this shapes your thoughts for that day, for that life that you have.

CA: Can you speak about your artistic influences?

MV: I am incredibly guilty of not really engaging with art when I don't have to. When I am in Madrid, I go into the Prado, I go. But I don't find a lot in contemporary art that makes me want to go there. If I say who my influences are to which works move me then it is going to sound like I am vain. I would be enormously happy if what I make could do the same to other people that I have experienced from some works I like, but now I feel vain, because I am going to compare myself to a genius.

I love the black paintings by Goya: they have brought me moments where I thought, "Now I can see everything more clearly". Some of the very curious sculptures and drawings of Louise Bourgeois have done the same, but in different ways. I also love the paintings of the Dutch masters and their exploration of light.

These works open up a little porthole to something really big, something so much bigger than we ever thought was out there. So there are many such instances that have done that and it can also be obscure things. Sometimes when I encounter the sheer ease and fearlessness of Picasso's lines, he had absolutely no fear, no qualms, no shame. I want to have no shame and that will never be, unfortunately! (Laughs) Sometimes it doesn't take an artist, it can be a photograph in a newspaper, seen upside down, and then you realize what it is and you want to go back to the moment of seeing it upside down, where it looked so fascinating.

Transcript of walkabout conducted by Minnette Vári during her solo exhibition at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, on 3 March 2007. Reproduced with kind permission by the artist.

Unless otherwise stated, Vári made the following statements:

Introduction

This work materialised after a long period of solitude, of spending time on my own. Sometimes this is good because you get to concentrate on what you are doing. I got a chance to think about what is it that I am actually doing. Often I would work during very late evening hours when everyone is asleep, around Three a.m.

Sketchbook (2006/07): this is the first bird that I drew. When I had just finished, it was like the bird spoke the words “Jesus Christ I was so alone”.

I frequently reference myths in my work. I research mythological stories. I also believe that animals and humans are equal and that they talk to each other, there is a communication, a consortium between animals and humans.

“Jesus Christ I was so alone” then is not a religious statement, it is more of an exclamation, yet an exclamation not just from me. More of an exclamation on behalf of the world: the world is bombarded by communication, information is replication and we are surrounded by the noise of information, everything is coming at you at such a speed. This can all result in very isolating experiences.

We are living in stressful times: our local, current situations, as well as all across the world people are waging wars for resources and religious beliefs. Everything is so mixed up, intermingled and we live in a public space that is extremely loaded. So the phrase is an exclamation, a statement as much as it is an obscenity.

Quake (2007)

My working situation was very isolated and alone. I frequently accessed the Internet: there are so many things on the Internet, floating out there; it is bursting with information, images, and multiple realities. It is both confusing and at the same time liberating.

Generally there are many layers and layers of meaning in my works. The way in which I worked was to gather things together and build in a very layered experience, very much like layers of a mind and the world around us.

I researched on the Internet and found skyline of cities from across the world. All these skylines are so different and so intriguing. I have assembled a collection of city skylines from all different continents, and have ordered them in terms of where I sourced them. I have sourced and ordered all of these strange places that we have fantasies about.

I love Johannesburg dearly and therefore love to represent it in my work. It has such a small, but very distinctive skyline. It is a very small skyline compared to other places. A skyline is always an expression of what a place is, each skyline is an expression of hope, of will, of the history of the place, of greed, money and motives. A skyline reveals the history or culture of the people and the reason for the city's existence. A skyline also represents the geographical influence on a place. It is a representation of a place.

We all have these longings for certain places, places we wish to travel to, to visit. We have a curiosity, fantasies about faraway lands, about wildernesses and landscapes around the world. We have this curiosity; perhaps because it is easier to look without, to search around us instead of looking within.

Some viewers have read references to the September 11 attacks in New York. It is very humbling to see a city collapse, it emotionally shakes you, affects you to your core. Since 9/11 people are not the same, the world is a different place. This work was created after 9/11 and therefore it does have that reference and that is fine if people read this factor into the work. The world has its own history that it has to live with.

In *Quake*, I am creating these buildings that are rising and falling, exploring the idea of the “what ifs” of our desires and hopes of the world. I also have a curiosity to see how the cities all fit together. I think we all create subconscious links between different places – I do and I was playing with that idea.

I set the work into a landscape, so that the perspective of the viewer would be standing very far out of a huge city, a city, a very large metropolis just out of sight, that is so big that even when it is so far in the distance, it makes the ground shake and tremble.

The term *quake* is something disastrous, a desolation occurring, taking place. In addition, there are little disasters for all of us, things that make us quake and shudder. All these events make us who we are. All of these little instances make us quake. We become a different person as a result; there is a growth experience.

There is this crowd of people; they keep walking towards the viewer but are inaccessible. On top of these walking figures I place images of women found on the Internet. I sourced hundreds and hundreds of images: women of all ages, creeds, famous, ordinary folk, bloggers, actresses, references to female artists (such as The Guerrilla Girls), a woman holding a baby – every possible reference for the female image. A sort of collection of goddesses from our culture, women representing destruction, protection, victory, nurturing. The only category that I imposed on my research was that the image needed to be an image of a person or a three-dimensional object, because the figures are walking towards the viewer, thus the images couldn't be drawings or sketches.

In South Africa, as well as Europe, 1 second of video is broken into 25 frames per second. I had categories such as “faces”, “bodies”, “legs”, “my own image”, “personal references” and I put together a variety of these images, 25 images per second.

1/25 of a second for every images, this is very fast, the images are flashing at the viewer, flickering, nothing has been softened or delayed. Frequently these images flash by too quickly for the viewer to build a solid, cohesive set idea of what each image is. What occurs is that the viewer picks up that the images are of females but that is all. Our eyes process images much faster than we are verbally able to express what we see. What results in the work is a surge of non-ending imagery. In addition, the figures continually walk towards the viewer, where the viewer starts to question, who are these people? Refugees? What are they fleeing from? Are they coming to welcome you to the city? I don't have an answer for that. These figures are simultaneously everyone and no one. They are, however, very lonely figures. I want viewers to create their own experience and interpretation of the work and what the figures mean.

The soundscape of *Quake*:

I have used televisual sound in the background, none of the sound used is analogue, it is all is broken up and fractured into smaller parts. This is our sense of the world, a fractured reality. Therefore I took fractured white noise from TV and stretched the sound so it became a moving earth, a primordial landscape sound, like a storm rolling towards the earth. It starts to sound like voices are being carried on the wind. Then I added sounds of a city to represent the places we live in and the places we dream about. I wanted the sounds to sound like they were moving past you, like they are being carried on the wind.

Vigil (2007)

This work is about creating a parallel world, a world that doesn't have to exist, I dreamt up a place. In this place, in the twilight of a fire, the viewer comes upon a conversation between figures from history: Paul Kruger and Mrs Kruger, Vasco de Gama, Harry the Hottentot, Shaka Zulu. Figures are engaging in actions that are woven into the narrative. Ultimately, the viewer must decide for themselves the meaning of this all.

When we free ourselves from contemporary life, we are able to renegotiate everything. I have a wish to structure the narrative of our history in a new way. *Vigil* contains a moment when you go all quiet, you look through a tunnel and you structure a whole new time; it therefore relates to *Quake*.

I superimposed two twilights: a skyline going past, where I am taking you on a journey; there is a reference to the time of the gold rush. The sun is going down, it is getting darker and darker, and the darkness encroaches and devours you. There are places we wish to go, we want to go there but we are fearful of being consumed by the darkness, we are afraid to go inside.

This work is also a parody of the libidinous hunger/greed/interest in a place. The characters in the work are also references to seafarers, dressed up as such. These folk want to acquire a place, they have a desire for this place, and certain actions are taken to obtain the place.

Roger Webster's *At The Fireside* (2002) is one of the references I used for this work. This book contains legends; it is a verbal diorama of how a region has been portrayed to itself, through these stories. Figures, war heroes such as Scotty Smith are discussed. In this book, bands of crooks become heroes to certain folk. It reveals nuances of a region.

I start to question our understanding of wilderness, the unexplored. What exactly do we see as wilderness? I want to parody this. All the imagery is passing rapidly; the horizon is changing from sundown to darkness and back again. There is definitely a mining reference, of underground, subterranean, where the loop of *Vigil* begins. The work is very layered, much heavier than what it represents, it represents something else, very layered, a parody of itself.

The journey sequence is taken from R21 East, past Benoni and the East Rand Mall. There is a referencing to the landmarks in that area: a Ferris wheel, street signs – mundane imagery. There were beautiful reflections at the East Rand Mall.

As an artist part of your job is to be observing what is around you and compulsively making narratives. As children we lay on our backs and watched the clouds, and identified images we could see in the formation of the clouds. The mind will always make these associations from an image, make something from an image, and make a narrative. It is about playing games.

All my works are loops, which I feel signifies our lives, how they are always continuing, the quests we are on still continue. In our lives something bad may happen, but life still goes on. There are ups and downs but life continues. It is all quite circular.

At the beginning, a lone figure is watching as the nighttime begins to take shape. It feels like a consciousness from below, a subterranean feel. It is almost like something wakes up and becomes aware of something, of a life outside. The video builds up into a monstrous narrative.

The works can be interpreted in whatever way you want them to be.

The soundscape of *Vigil*:

In this soundscape there is a reference to every culture that came to this region that made us who we are. I was playing and layering with the sounds.

Some of the sounds I used are as follows:

Playground sounds, sounds at a fair, a Ferris wheel, some chanting, a distinctive beat. The "Last Post" Trumpet: I stretched it and took a portion of this. Bagpipes. Flesh being devoured. Animals, snake, references to the jungle (this place is so wonderful but it will eat you). Guns cocking. Songs from World War I and World War II, such as "Bye Bye Black Bird". Cicadas: Cicadas spend most of their lives underground, drinking sap, and then finally they grow and come into the sunlight and begin their song. This is the last day of their life cycle, and then they die.

The voice is me reading from *The Conference of the Birds*¹. It is an Islamic text, in which a certain worldview is being represented. It is a mythological story about how all the birds of the world come together to try to decide who will be their leader. The Phoenix is decided upon, this is a bird that gives birth to itself through its own ashes. This is also the reference to cycles of life.

Monomotapa I – IV (2007)

In this series, a map frames the entire work. I took photographs of these old maps through a glass ball, rolled it around the images, un-flattening the maps. Suddenly the imagery came alive, you become aware of what the coastline looks like from an aerial perspective, you start to see how easy things can relate to each other, how similar they can look.

I also took photographs of the self-portraits under candlelight. Suddenly these images resembled landscapes when you look at them from a strange angle or height. However, these are not landscapes or shorelines but actually ink drawings, very personal self-portraits and suddenly they become another world, a fictitious place when you look at it from a different perspective. When I rolled the crystal ball around, the whole drawing become almost jewel-like.

For this show, I was looking at old maps of the world, looking at how the world was envisaged ages ago. The person who drew the maps was always the explorer, the conqueror, and frequently they were drawn from the "hero's" perspective. A map is a claim on land they have conquered. However, someone was at the receiving end of this conquering, which frequently involved incidents of violence and loss. So these maps are also a representation of these events, the consequences of such explorations that we still live with. In addition, such conquering processes are still happening.

I am interested in the names given to far-off continents; I think *Monomotapa* is such a rich name. These old maps were terribly inaccurate and often very grandiose. They are signifiers

of who had the power at the time, who has the resources to own the land, survey and exploit the land. Thus, a map always states ownership. In addition, the cartographer would always embellish these maps with images of whatever riches that land had to offer: objects, people, animals, plants, and monsters, from that land. It also contained representations of savages, weapons; the Westerners take on the savage, the idea of the other. These images were always fantastical, mythical.

I have tried to parody this convention; I have replaced these images with objects and characters from my own environment, such as landmarks, a Braamfontein sculpture, Parktown prawn (I found it dead in the corner of the gallery - all things are interrelated and connected somehow). I specifically selected objects that do not positively reflect the environment as the function was in the old maps. For example I used guns instead of a spray of flowers.

I have also played with scale, drawing into the realm of fantasy and legend. If we look at these maps, and then look at where we are today, there is nothing that is not related to someone or something from these past events. The colour in the works is a reference to ore, rich wealth in the ground. The security cameras: we are always under surveillance, even our own surveillance. The three graces and their uncle is a funny, ironic, playful parody of oneself.

I use my own body and film these actions. Usually I am the only one present filming this with a static camera, but I am cringing my ass off whilst I am doing these actions. It is much more difficult for me when I involve someone else. In this you also translate your own personal mythology into the action. (I hate being photographed, strangely enough).

Self Portrait Series (2006/07)

The *Self Portraits* are all named after birds. The ink on paper starts to resemble craters in the ground. They are very spontaneous works, usually made in very early hours of the morning. In most cultures, the bird is a representation of the soul, or a messenger. My research involved looking at how birds and females have featured in mythology. Each bird has a place in mythology. As an artist, I compare myself to a magpie, I collect things: shiny things, bits of information, texts, words, sound and out of these collections, works grow.

For these works I sourced images of local birds. These birds flow into self-portraits. My workbook image was the first bird that I drew. In the self-portraits, I was trying to transfer onto paper what I saw, sometimes the self-portrait is very fraught, other times they are based on happy or sad thoughts. It is all very complicated. These emotions often stand in the way of portraying what you see but each work is a manifestation of a state of mind. It is interesting, as the works become like a journey, a journal, a documentation of states of mind. I hadn't drawn for a long time and I started to explore this medium again.

I kept this workbook image out but each time a person came to visit, I would hide it away. As soon as the show is over, it is going home with me. This is one of the most personal shows that I have ever had. There are many references to intensely felt solitude. When you show that kind of work in public it becomes a personal journey.

Audience member: Is there a title or a theme to the show?

MV: There is no overarching theme, but if I think about it I would say possibly a theme of journey, but often a journey in solitude. Each figure travels alone and our condition of being in the world is one of being alone. You have to negotiate your life, your history, and all the consequences of your actions and the events that happen to you. All these different things tie together and influence your life.

Audience member: Are your works a commentary on the South African political situation?

My works are very specific to South Africa. As an artist, I started working after the generation of protest artists, in the early 1990s, which was a time of tremendous demographic changes. Overall, things are very fraught and in my work I am attempting to participate in the questioning and understanding of this environment. One of the questions I ask is can I consider myself African? The *Selfportraits* of 1995 caused an uproar in the way they were interpreted. I went to an all-white school, and this scars you; I have huge resentment that as children we were separated. I did want to provoke, but you can never speak for the plight of others. All these issues are fraught and problematic, the imagery made you ask uncomfortable questions.

There are things that are still scratching at us. The imagery in my videos will always be representative of a location, a situation but I am not just using political elements and situations because it is fashionable. My main impetus is to take note of the ways in which the country represents itself to itself. *Vigil* is completely about South Africa and what has made it into the country that it is. Colonial lust was a great influence on that development. I am also interested in how we collate a fantasy about a place. *Quake* is universal but it also has a grittiness: and local and personal phantasmagorical elements to it.

As an artist everything you do is loaded with history and politics and all your work can be interpreted as such. I am always digging after the origins of things. My decisions for all my titles are determined by the origin of the word and its original usage.

Endnotes: Appendix Two

¹ Farid Ud-Din-Attar. 1177. *The Conference of The Birds - Mantiq Ut-Tair*. Translated by Charles Stanley Nott. 1954. London: The Janus Press.

Section 1:

Transcript of extracts from personal travelogue notes of my subjective viewing encounters inside Minnette Vári's video installations:

Oracle (1999): Johannesburg, September 1999. Evening.

As I navigated my way down a passage of the gallery towards the room in which Oracle was housed, I could already hear the pulsating soundscape: fragments of haunting conversations, intermittent percussive beats, the constant, repetitive notes of a violin, a person coughing and then retching. The sound unnerved me and I was anxious to enter the room. Slowly, hesitantly, I drew aside the dark velvet curtain and journeyed into the darkness. I had crossed a threshold into another world, and was now engulfed by a three dimensional visual and aural environment. I stood motionless and alone, waiting for my eyes to adjust to the black space.

Gradually I began to decipher the form of three televisions in the centre of the room, one on top of the other. I cautiously made my way around the structure to view the moving imagery on the screens. I could still not see the darkened corners of the room. I was scared – of the darkness and the feelings of foreboding the sound was evoking in me. Was I alone? It was too dark; I could not see properly to know, but I hoped I was. My nerves couldn't handle the sudden vision of another visitor in the space.

The television monitors displayed a black environment that enveloped the stark white, naked, shifting figure of Vári's Oracle. In the foreground, Vári hovered, crouched and stretched as she tugged and gnawed at a flesh-like mass in her hands. Behind her contorting figure, molten, lava-like clouds of news footage floated by and then morphed back into the black background. As I stood mesmerised by this figure moving in the darkness on the screens, I recalled Vári's fragments of her artist statement for Oracle. Vári elaborates (1999) that "Unlike Saturn (or Chronos)¹, the god of time who, in an attempt to evade his fate, devoured his children, the figure in Oracle wants desperately to hasten her fate, to bite into, over and beyond time.... [This] figure becomes a metaphor for postcolonial identity, a craving to assimilate every fragment of information into one hybrid body". I watched as Vári's Oracle struggled to ingest the recorded moments of South African history. Exposed and vulnerable, Vári pushed herself to the limits of her digestive capabilities in order to assimilate the impact the history of her country has had on her sense of self.

The layers of sound echoed the anxiety and intensity of this personal struggle and filled the darkened space. Engulfed in this spatiovisual torment, I felt physically and psychologically threatened as I watched this masochistic act. Never before had I felt so embodied in an artwork, where all my senses were activated and I was being transported on an emotive journey.

Chimera (2001): Luzern, 28 March 2004.

As I enter Chimera the suspended screens immediately surround and envelop me. I am immersed in this stark world where isolated, Voortrekker figures drift past me, approaching and departing. Beams of light fracture into colourful prismatic trajectories and fall between pale, ghoulish figures and onto my body. Vári enters the barren landscape as the Chimera monster, a naked, clownish beast, with a masked head, provoking and ridiculing the Voortrekkers. The frozen pioneers float in the foreground, superior and self-righteous, gazing forward into the distance. Fallen Zulu soldiers lie solidified in marble. Navigating her way between these historical spectres, the beastly Chimera female form contorts and challenges. As she shifts, her Chimera body transforms into a female Voortrekker. A stoic group of Voortrekker women float past, poised and motionless. The Chimera hovers then moves toward this group, flashing her genitals at the bonneted women before they drift away. Then, embodied with her power of metamorphosis, she morphs into a Voortrekker soldier, proud and resilient, posturing silently on his horse. The Chimera, with her deathly pale body and a lion's head, appears again, this time mimicking a pose of Voortrekker pride. She hovers and leers and then shifts into another Voortrekker figure. This ever-shifting sequence loops endlessly as I travel between the veiled screens and drifting shadows.

Hollow whispers echo through this world, suggesting that I am in a vast, open space. I am unsure of the source of the whispering. Are the floating figures speaking or are there ghosts in this space? A sharp tone signals the start of a choir's anxious, fearful chant, a fragment of a hymn. Footsteps. Voices. A reverberation. The howling of the wind through this chamber. The sound establishes a context and adds a sense of foreboding to the haunting visual sequence.

I am walking through a corridor of hell. I have this incessant feeling that I have stepped into someone's world and that I am intruding upon her secret thoughts. I feel trapped and scared: perhaps these figures are going to loom out from the fabric and haul me into their anxious world. The animation loops endlessly, suspending these figures in this marbled, moving world. Chimera is the most animated character, appearing fearlessly in the background, in a mocking, jester-like fashion.

I am not fearless. I am scared in this space. Am I being followed? Is there someone else I can't see, but can sense, in here with me? Is it the reflections on the wall drifting slowly past or do the figures actually start to hover within the space I am occupying?

I see my shadow blacken the screen as I pass along – I become a player in the animated sequence except that I am black, staining the white ghost-like imagery with my presence. My shadow becomes the mark of an intruder, silhouetted, undefined but wholly present. As much as the colourless, silent images float past me, on me and between my shadows, so does the visceral, dreamlike soundscape. The sound's reverberations are palpable on my skin.

Riverrun (2001): Luzern, 30 March 2004.

The gallery space is extremely dark. I am scared. I stop moving to wait for my eyes to adjust to the dark. I sense I am in a large space, yet I cannot see the borders of the

room. Again [as with Chimera] there is the eerie reverberation and an ambiguous soundtrack. I can hear fire burning, a voice on a gramophone? Singing? Water running? A baby crying? Children whispering? All the sounds merge into a low vibrating hum/echo that continues relentlessly. It feels as if I have stepped into an intensely personal space: someone's private thoughts, fears and nightmares. Do I hear sounds of children playing in the park? Are they crying or laughing?

I see two faint projections in the opposite corner of the room. I vaguely distinguish that the rest of the room is empty, except for a small bench against the opposite wall inviting me to pause for a moment. I sit down to watch the projections.

I can't quite figure out the imagery in the videos yet the forcefulness of this encompassing world draws me into the moving narrative of the visuals. The videos take me on a journey. It appears as if I am travelling along a canal, a gorge with images racing along the sides. Moving in a car along a highway, a cityscape in the distance, the road bends, fire, sandy road, a hand ... it flicks up a pile of dust towards me. Now much darkness, the space around me blackens and I now seem to be moving down a suburban side road. Blurred stars (or rain?) fall from the heavens onto the road. A bus approaches slowly; people in a queue begin to board the bus. Everything is very, very dark. Are these people queuing for a bus departing to hell? The figures become a pile of spaghetti people, writhing, contorting and then morphing into strange characters, piling on top of each other, then rising into the blackened sky. Neighbourhood gates, a silent street, old oak trees. I travel again along the same suburban road, travel along through the darkness. The trees now morph into the black.

Sand that is flicked up towards me becomes a cityscape, then floating images of a close up of Vári's face hover above the highway. She appears to be asleep; a netted fabric covers her face, creating a grid-like silhouette on her skin. Drops fall from her face onto the road and then transform into another pile of morphing, moving figures, piled up like a mass grave. Every now and then spotlights in the video allow me to see what the images are: bodies in pain struggling to emerge from a fiery surface. A shadow walks across the sand. Are there skeletons in the fire?

Cityscapes, then a journey on a suburban road. The journey is blurred, bumpy, and motionless at first and then moves fast. Vári hovers above this journey, as if in a dreamlike state, overseeing, storytelling, she then turns into a lizard and disappears.

The second video is very similar to the first, except it is even more indistinguishable. Rorschach memories dissolve into the sky, figures morphing, extremely difficult to decipher. An inaccessible hint at memories, lots of shadows, storm clouds and the darkness, always the darkness. Funerals, people standing around, waiting, suspended.... Bodies morphing towards the sky. Where are they going?

And the sound ... it continues to plague me: a crunching on a gravel surface? Humming start to a classical song? Sounds of keys rattling? The starting of a car? Whistling? My mind frantically searching to locate these obscure sounds and images.

This is a very heavy space to be in, I feel completely drained but rooted to the ground by some unknown force stunting my exit. Neither my video camera nor my stills

camera are able to capture this space. Is this indicative of the overall defiance to understanding and accessing this piece?

This viewing experience is hypnotic. I am afraid I am being sucked into this space, like I am losing control. I feel my presence and consciousness begin to morph with the images. Where do I end and where does this video installation begin? It is as if someone has crept into my room, wired up my brain during the night and is now documenting my dreams. Except here I sit awake in the daytime and within this darkened space feeling and seeing the presence of this dreamlike state. Yet, it is not mine, but it is forcefully trying to seep into my subconscious the longer I sit in this room. How do I protect myself from this? From this nightmarish vision and sound. The sound has already penetrated my body. I feel a reverberation through my skin, there seems to be no stopping this integration; all has seeped through.

Vigil (2007): Johannesburg, 3 March 2007

The animation begins with a creature stirring beneath the earth. The video's point of view becomes that of an unknown presence. I hear a drawing in of breath and this creature moves. Again, as with Riverrun, I track the creature's viewpoint on screen. Viewing the underground world through the eyes of this unknown creature, I follow a slow movement through the silent, ancient earth.

Time is unhurried and quiet in this underground world I find myself. I pass subterranean layers of earth and roots along the walls of an underground tunnel. I make my way towards the light, the outside world. The sounds from the outside world filter into the tunnel, getting louder as I creep closer and closer towards the opening. I peep out through the hole and see a spinning landscape. This outside world is mapped within circular vignette, a porthole onto a contemporary world. Almost instantaneously the contrast between the interior, silent, primal space and the exterior, moving world is revealed. I watch as the outside landscape spins on an anti-clockwise, disorienting journey.

I catch glimpses of trees, a Ferris wheel, a mineshaft, a road, a billboard, and more trees. A baboon barks. The piercing drill of insects. Imperceptibly, a grey shadowy frame from Monomotapa I – IV encircles the window onto this rotating world. The previously static figures on the frames start to morph slowly over time. All the while, the journey continues within the frame, spinning relentlessly.

The mobile landscape gets more layered as Vári's hybrid, masked identities, historical figures and geographical landmarks are overlaid onto the spherical voyage. A Voortrekker maiden. Clouds in the sky. An eagle flies past. A telephone pole. Vári's naked figure crouched and watching. In the distance, a baboon. Then a faint presence of one of Vári's characters, standing on the edge of this geography, repeatedly hammering a large stick into the ground. A journey along a highway; trees flash by.

The journey slows and between the turns, I catch glimpses of a clearing in a forest. Gathered in this clearing are historical and mythical figures, who appear to be conversing around a fire.

Vári's naked, chimerical form, wearing a red wig and ape mask, scurries across the frame in front of this meeting of the disparate characters gathered together. She has a lantern in hand, and is looking, searching, and restless. A female explorer, a nomad, exploring an unknown, wild territory.

A textured soundscape echoes the digital layering of the imagery and hints to an untamed terrain: The alarm calls of a baboon, and then a zebra. An incessant buzz of cicadas. A gun cocking. A shot whizzing through the air. Fairground sounds, chanting, a distinctive beat, bagpipes. The pace of the sound increases, matching the whirl of the visuals. A persistent whispering. The lyrics of "Bye Bye Black Bird"².

The layered soundtrack floods the space around me. I continue to watch the spinning journey as the animation moves through an unknown, wild territory. My cinematic point of view remains that of the unknown presence. Vári's masked, hybrid forms make multiple appearances. The disparate historical figures are still gathered around a fire in the forest as Vári appears, crouching and peering into the hole that opens onto her mobile world. Behind Vári's foreground figure are three more versions of her, embodied as wild, prancing ape-women. As they twist, their unkempt, long red hair leaves a trail of scarlet across the twilight.

The whispering continues. Is that an animal yelping in pain? The layers of footage pile on top of each other, and the video gets darker and sounds more frenetic, as the work builds into "a monstrous narrative" (Vári Appendix 2:iv). I catch glimpses of flaming red hair in the top corner of this land: Vári's ape-women are lurking, staring at me from behind the shadowy layers.

The darkness seeps across this transitive landscape, leaving a small hole of light in the centre of the screen. The visual layers swirl around this light, as it recedes into the distance. The pace of video and sound becomes feverish. The darkness increases to flood the remaining fracture of light in the corner of the animation. The circling light surrenders and collapses into the darkness leaving trails of starry lights flecked against the black sky. Then blackened stillness. But just for a moment. The creature stirs again, and the phantasmagoria begins another loop.

Quake (2001): Johannesburg, 3 March 2007

The expansive landscape that forms the topography of Quake shudders on the wall. The terrain appears to be compiled of a visceral, white noise from TV static that continuously shifts and vibrates. Far in the distance, on the horizon of this quivering landmass, lies a mammoth, hybrid city. This city is also in a transitive state as it shifts, morphs, stretches then collapses, only to push through the wavering earth to emerge as another forceful metropolis. Cloaked, faceless figures drift towards me. They appear to have left the city and are travelling across the volatile terrain. The shimmering projection reflects onto the gallery's polished resin floor, creating a flickering mirror image. Standing on this unstable reflection I watch the narrative unfold.

The spatiovisual site of Quake visually and acoustically shudders, tangibly manifesting the threat of an imminent quake. The nomadic figures dominate the territory. The

closer they get to me, the larger and more threatening they become. Their bodies are made up of flashing images that appear to be female and move at a tremendous pace. It is difficult to fully decipher the images, as they are moving so fast. As these uncanny figures move, their dark cloaks flap in the wind, creating shadowy silhouettes.

The mirror reflection on the gallery floor duplicates the presence of the unstable figures. Between the size of the projection on the wall and the reflection on the floor, it almost appears as if the figures move beyond the visual field of the projection and emerge into the exhibition space. The ghostly presence of these shadowy bodies increases the overall threatening atmosphere of this installation. They move forward relentlessly, on an endless quest across this volatile territory. The landscape trembles and on the horizon, the hybrid city continues to rise and fall, mirroring the instability of the figures' identities.

Every now and then I am able to recognise and identify the skyline of Johannesburg within the altering metropolis. The landscape darkens as a shadowy sand storm drifts across the ground. The buildings of the metropolis in the distance collapse. A loud boom reverberates through the gallery. It appears an earthquake is happening, shaking this world to its core. The primordial sound shudders across the quavering space of the gallery. It becomes a tangible vibration that envelops me. I feel the sound waves tremor against my skin.

Sound becomes tactile, adding to the ominous, textured atmosphere of this foreboding space. The dense shadow moves across the screen clouding everything in its path. Its vast presence suggests a looming apocalyptic event or the aftermath of a disaster. Yet, the figures march inexorably forward through this cloud of darkness. Their journey is ceaseless. Figures keep appearing as the earth quakes and the buildings collapse and re-form within this looped phantasmagorical landscape.

Section 2:

Transcript of extracts from my creative journals 2004 - 2007:

Johannesburg, September 2004

It is still dark and I am awake; or somewhere in the space between sleep and wakefulness. I'm uncertain of the unknown land I occupy in my head but totally aware of the feelings of dis-ease that prevails. Images play in my mind's eye. A lone, armless figure lies in a bed. A bird flies away. A beast-like hound stretches through the grid, running at full pace. Vultures gather in a dead tree, hovering and watching. A monstrous form rages fire onto a body huddled on the ground. The figure has no arms, it is defenceless; it lies there, defeated. Danger moves all around it. I float above myself, watching as I lie in the bed. A song plays through my mind:

*Cuttin' through the darkest night in my two headlights
Trying to keep it clear, but I'm losing it here to the twilight
There's a dead end to my left, there's a burning bush to my right
You aren't in sight, you aren't in sight*

Kruger Park, December 2004

It is late in the evening. The physical darkness around me echoes the dark space of my mind. I sit motionless in the black, watching, waiting; aware of a potential threat that may emerge from the darkness. My camera in hand, on slow exposure, captures the fractures of light in the darkness. The camera becomes a means to represent the physical negotiation between the light and the dark. This photographic exercise to capture a trace of the darkened landscape, to record a stable image, mirrors my internal effort to find a psychic balance.

Johannesburg 2005

A winding journey at night along a dust road. The road is barely illuminated by dim headlights. An unfamiliar path through the darkened bushveld. I cannot see beyond the glow of the headlights but sense potential danger in the enveloping darkness. Bare trees and blades of long grass are exposed as the headlights flash momentarily past the edge of the road. The sound of the squeaking Land Cruiser and the distant hum of the engine. Speed bumps slow the journey, focusing the headlights skywards.

The night journey crosses to a small, breathless figure panting fire. An eerie soundtrack builds in amplitude. A zoom into the gridlike maze of her head, into her interior, dissolves into a bird flapping across a textured gauze landscape. It tweets and flaps, then blazes into fiery motion. A duck floats on turbulent water. The figure appears again, this time struggling to free itself from enveloping flames. "No! There is no escaping here". A child runs amongst a flock of pigeons at a park, scattering them in all directions, whilst he searches for his mother. "Maam, maaammiee." A floating angel drifts across the screen. "I see angels Mickey, I see angels Mickey, I see angels Mickey." The fragmentary encounters and the disarming soundtrack fade away and the journey along the forlorn dust road continues.

Joahnnesburg 2005

*casno 520/07/2004³
there is no escaping here
riding down the road
what lies wait in the shadows
spiritual hounds
running along side me
tracking pacing panting*

*casno 53/08/2004⁴
angels of God
to whom God's love
entrusts you here
place a white shining light
the fog drifts in
you fade to the distance

headlights flash and shine
down the road
it comes closer, closer still*

Endnotes: Appendix 3

¹ Vári used Francisco Goya's painting of *Saturn Devouring His Child* (c1819–1823) (fig 27) as a starting point for *Oracle* and transformed herself into a maniacal creature devouring 1990s media footage of South Africa.

² “Bye Bye Blackbird” by Gene Austin (released 1926).

³ This is a South African Police Service (SAPS)-issued case number for a highjacking that occurred to me in July 2004.

⁴ The SAPS-issued case number for a road-rage incident my husband and I experienced in August 2004.

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