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Curating silence: using archiving as a means of investigating silence

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1. Introduction

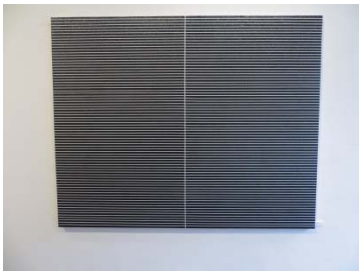
This research report outlines the rationale, the aims and objectives, planning, theoretical context and findings of an installation examining the presentation of silence. The practice of curation was used in order to establish, through the juxtapositioning of found and made objects drawn from personal archive, signs and representations of silence so that a language that is common could be created or found. The initial overarching question was whether it was possible to present silence by creating a visual language, using curation that became understandable to an audience without having to refer to explanation beyond what was presented to them. Meaning is by nature layered, in that it is socially constructed but adjusted by personal identity, experience, gender, social circumstances and history, and can change over time. Questions that were grappled with included whether interpretation is culturally driven, and what pains the curator had in choosing work to put on display which would drive meaning and the telling of the story as it were. By extension then questions emerged as to whose voice is being fore grounded in the act of curating. This could be the curator's alone but this then begs the question as to where the voice of the original artist sits. If it was the curator's voice alone that emerged then questions needed to be asked if there is anything wrong with that. The presentation, simply by the nature of the objects displayed, had a sense of layered meaning, but it was important that the layers were not so deeply embedded as to make singular meaning to individual viewers not apparent.

This research project is the culmination of a body of work undertaken over two years. It began as one thing, moved quickly into something else, turned in on itself and again became something somewhat different, finally spiralling unexpectedly back to its original form. The initial point of departure for this research was the state of silence that I found I had been living in for most of my life. This included silence, and the subsequent guilt, over Apartheid, silence and helplessness in the face of violence and corruption in South Africa, and the silence that I was subjected to as a girl growing up in a patriarchal society, which was later impacted by coming out as a lesbian.

The silence that I initially proposed to present in this research was a quiet spiritual silence that I hoped would reveal itself as the work progressed, not the silence of collusion or violence that so often presents itself in readings of this topic. The research began as an extension of a small shadow puppet play that examined the plight of the rhino, and his silenced voice, which was itself an extension of the initial point of departure as outlined above. The journey emerged from a thought, which materialized into a puppet play, morphed and evolved into an art installation and finally, on reflection, became something else altogether.

Whilst visiting the Netherlands I came across two exhibitions in Utrecht both dealing with silence. None of the work in either of the exhibitions spoke of silence to me. This led me to question whether I lacked the language that was needed in order to receive the messaging that the various artists were trying to convey, or whether they lacked the ability to convey their messages. Other questions began to emerge, such as: How is silence constructed? Is it possible to create a language that can be shared by audiences that can engage them with notions of silence? How would a South African audience experience silence, since so much around us is socially constructed? Was it because I was a foreigner, and therefore viewed silence as a South African would, that I was not able to engage with the work in the Netherlands, or was it because the artists were simply unable to share a language with me?

Both the exhibitions were disappointing to me in that I seemed to have missed something. In the speech that opened "Stilte/Silence" the curator spoke about the broader concept of silence and quoted Joker Hermse (contemporary Dutch philosopher), who has written much on silence and time, which she says are connected. The curator said that "silence is connected so much to the immaterial that a visualization of silence excludes the material. By investigating the material they (the artists) want to visualize silence" (Koos van Duinen, curator; 2013). This was very interesting to me in that they specifically chose to look at silence with reference to material. The work produced was all varying shapes of canvases with blank colour painted in oils or other material. What disturbed me about this exhibition was that I understood it only after I had gone home and had the brochure and the speech translated from Dutch to me. According to the outline by the curator in the brochure, it became clear that the exhibition was the culmination of much examination of the work of other artists that had worked with silence previously, and who had thus inspired the work on the exhibition. This included Mark Rothco, Ben Akkerman, Agnes Martin and Adolph Gottlieb. There is nothing wrong with understanding work only by reading a written text, but I do not like my work to be understood in this way. The work in the exhibition, as it stood, meant very little to me as viewer, and certainly there was nothing about silence in the message. This frustrated and annoyed me.



"AB16" by Willi Siber



"Wandistellatie" by Willi Siber

This experience of these specific exhibitions pre-empted consideration of what it was that I hoped to achieve in my presentation. Certainly I wanted my presentation to stand for itself; speak for itself, and convey the message that was my intention. I did however, acknowledge space for personal interpretation of viewers and understood that the audience conceivably would obtain a varying degree of the message I hoped to convey, but I did not want any message to have to be explained explicitly. I preferred to have the work speak for itself rather than have others speak for it. If it could not speak for itself then it would become something different, in that it is then presumed that the viewer will make all deductions and interpretations of the work him/herself entirely. It was important to me that the point of departure was not so far removed from the final destination that there needed to be explicit textual explanation, for this is what I believe so often occurs. Thought emerges, work begins, conversations and collaboration happen and the final product is presented, yet the audience is often hard pressed to understand the initial thought that pre-empted the work in the first place. Is this problematic? Not necessarily all the time, yet it depends on what the practitioner intends. In the case of this research my intention was to get as close to the intended message as possible.

The question that then needed to be asked is if the presentation was successful in its endeavours or not. The answer, as I will demonstrate, is threefold. As an installation that stood for itself it was wholeheartedly successful in that it moved the viewers and stood for itself in conveying meaning; in its intention to show a specific type of silence which was the intended meaning, however, it was a

failure. Thirdly on reflection it has emerged that the research endeavour was not about silence at all, but something entirely different. How this could have occurred is a question that will be examined in this report. This conclusion speaks directly back to the notions of descriptive imaging, intentions of practitioners and interpretation of an audience. It also speaks to the fluidity of practice-based research which has a life of its own as it evolves, and can move towards something entirely different to what was intended. It has been rather a shock to find however, that as much as one can expect the research to take on a fluidity of its own, one does not expect to find after everything has been completed that the research was about something entirely different to what was intended. This paper will outline the processes that went into the planning of the final presentation and the theoretical underpinnings that were the tools used to convey intended meaning, and then describe the findings that led to the conclusions that I have come to, also indicating the manner in which these conclusions were arrived at.

2. Aims/objectives

It has emerged now, post-presentation in discussion and in writing and reflecting, that the initial aims of the work were somewhat removed from the aims in the final presentation as outlined in the initial proposal and even the framing document. This is interesting in that this became clear only in discussion after the presentation was over, and became something altogether different again through reflection and writing. Is this problematic? Not necessarily, since this is what practice as research as a research methodology is all about. Work and thought evolves and disseminates as the process moves forward to the final product. The aims as outlined in the research proposal were problematic from the start. Here the aim was to establish if it was possible to create a language that speaks about a specific silence that can be shared, seeking to challenge conventional associations with silence. The language was to manifest in the objects chosen to display, through a process of deeming them worthy (which is an archival endeavour), and in the manner in which they are juxtaposed together (which is a curatorial endeavour). Yet at no point was there any real conclusive mention of the specific type of silence that was to be displayed, beyond a quiet meditative silence as opposed to a collusive and violent type of silence.

During the set-up of the presentation it became somewhat clear that this was a different type of silence that I was engaged with. By then the process was well under way and nothing could be changed. It was still unclear as to what exactly it was that the language was indicating, but just prior to opening the doors to the venue I realized that the message I was conveying was something altogether different to what I had intended. It was only in discussion later on that the type of silence that I was endeavouring to show was a silence particular only to me. This is a quiet thoughtful, meditative silence that is attached to separation and loss but not necessarily shared by any other. The intention to share this silence would have been a tall order in the first place had I known that this is what I really intended to do, since it is so deeply personal. Yet it was this silence that perhaps came through in a way, and there is also the possibility that had I intended this from the outset I would have been unsuccessful.

Now, however, through referring back to my journals and class books I have a clear picture of the journey that this research took from its initial inception two years ago to final presentation. This process was altogether about deep and very personal loss. This is arguably why the presentation in

some way was successful, in that it was a raw honesty that moved the viewers and it did speak to absence, but there was arguably little of the silence that was intended.

3. Rationale

The rationale of any research endeavour should indicate clearly the reasons why the researcher is undertaking the specific research, and provide an academic outline as to the gap in knowledge that the research could possibly fill. It should also indicate why the research will take the form that is proposed. Again this has been problematic from the outset, and it is only now becoming apparent as to why this is. It was the comment made by my mother after the viewing that made this thought begin to form, but it has been on reflection and writing that this has become clear.

Research projects can and should lead to further research and this is what occurred here. A small project dealing with the plight of the rhino led to consideration of what was really being dealt with and it was found that this in fact was less the voicelessness of the rhino as it is being mercilessly killed in South Africa, but more my personal search for voice, and at the same time a consideration of the type of silence I was engaged with. It was the Dutch exhibitions mentioned previously that drove the notion of trying to find a means of showing silence in a manner in which the work spoke for itself, especially since both exhibitions endeavoured to do what I set out to do. This too refers back to a journal entry that was written in 2012, when I wrote: “the discomfort of my research project lies in that the point of departure had now become so deeply personal, attached to personal loss, grief and the silence around so much, but at the same time needs to be presented in the form of a puppet show.

How can these two be integrated in such a way that the point of departure becomes so far away from the end product that it reminds me of contemporary dance which I hold in such contempt, for this very reason; how do I write about such deep personal loss in a way that does not hurt me further?” Again this concern became apparent with regards to what worried me about the Dutch exhibitions, in that the work could not speak for itself. It also indicates even at this early stage, what it was exactly that I was dealing with without even knowing, and this was my own personal loss and the absence of those that I have lost, and it was this that my mother suggested. What gap in human knowledge could this then fill, in considering the academic endeavour?

This was the use of the practice of curation in a different way in order to attempt to explain a fundamental human grappling: how to come to terms with death. We can philosophize forever as to what becomes of the human spirit, presuming that this exists at all, once the body dies, and we can mourn and come to terms with the absence in many different ways, but the answers can never be found. Entire religions have been based on this very human confusion, along with dictatorial doctrine prescribing behaviour designed to ensure life after death, yet we still can never be sure. My presentation gave one possible answer, and that is to find a healing and a peace in a particular and personal type of meditative silence, as presented in a particular means of curation. Did the answer that I presented fill a gap in academic knowledge? Arguably not, yet it presented one possibility to a group of people who clearly found some meaning there. It also provided a spring board for possible further research which I intend to leap at.

4. Theoretical context

This research project was couched in theory of semiotics which is the science that studies the production of meaning in a given society, of representation through language specifically. According to this theory a sign, as understood in a shared culture of meaning, can signify something other than what it is. So for example, a pair of muddy boots left at a front door can indicate to us that there was a person that went walking in the mud, took the boots off when he/she returned and has now gone away. The boots thus can indicate the absence of the person, in that they give us a sign that the person was there. The boots themselves are foot attire and not meant specifically to indicate either the presence or the absence of an individual.

It was intended, in the presentation, to present a series of signs and signifiers that would indicate a silence, often in the form of absence both of people and objects. Keir Elam describes semiotics as "a working definition of the sign, as a two-faced entity linking a material vehicle or signifier with a mental concept or signified" (Elam, 1994: 6). So for another example, an image of an empty kitchen may indicate absences of a person or persons that were there before. This relies on language which is shared by certain members of groups but not necessarily shared in its entirety, and this was a very important notion to consider when preparing for the presentation, that was not necessarily thought through to its full potential. Objects and images should have been considered more carefully in the context of semiotics and what the message was that each component would really convey. Here specifically for example, two sealed packets of material that had been deemed not worthy of displaying, were marked "my stuff not using" and "Marilyn's stuff not using" and placed in a corner of the venue. The intention here was to show that there had been decisions made as to what was worth displaying and what was not, but to still put this material on display even if it was not deemed worthy. In other words I acknowledged that the objects still had possible worth as valued by another despite holding the authority to decide what was deemed worthy. In fact it was more a matter of lack of space that drove the decision not to use that material, and this is a valid, if somewhat frustrating issue, which curators and archivists face all the time.

However, these two packs of unused material were placed next to the venue dustbin. The stage manager had asked, during the set-up of the venue, if I wanted the dustbin removed, and I had said to leave it there. Why I made this decision is anyone's guess, but it was not thought through properly. The result therefore, was that the packs sat next to the dustbin and this juxta-positioning of these objects gave a clear message that was not intended. It is the signification of what the meaning is of a dustbin that gave the packs their new meaning, and this was the intention of all the other objects and paraphernalia that was so carefully placed in the venue.

4.1 Silence

Philosophies on silence are diverse. Many revolve around the negative aspects of silence, such as the silence of those in the centre of political upheaval or human subjugation. Silence can be the clearest way of telling a story – one may be so traumatized that nothing can be said. Most religious doctrines, however, encourage a place of individual silence as the place to find spiritual enlightenment. Jesus Christ went into the desert for 'forty days and forty nights' in order to meditate and face his demons. Buddha found his spiritual path in silent meditation while sitting underneath a tree. Malcolm X found his way in confinement in prison. There is much literature on the philosophy of silence, and by extension, guilt. Many investigations, such as "Politics and Guilt:

The Destructive Power of Silence," (Schwan & Gesine. 2001) have been undertaken on the silence of thousands of Germans during World War Two. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-Apartheid South Africa sought to heal the country by providing everyone the opportunity to break from their position of silence and guilt. "The Shadow Side of Fieldwork" (McLean & Liebing: 2007) compiled by Athena McLean and Annette Leibing is a collection of papers written by women anthropologists, and concerns the silence that needs to be read when doing ethnographic fieldwork. Anne M. Lovell in her paper entitled "When Things Get Personal: Secrecy, Intimacy, and the Production of Experience in Fieldwork" (says: "[s]upposedly at stake in the secret are truths to which the ethnographer may or may not accede: truths unquestionably personal, or collective and dangerously political, or both" (Lovell, 2007: 56).

Robert Sinclair quotes Keith Basso, who was one of the earliest investigators into the philosophy of silence, in his study of the Western Apache, saying that: "[w]hat is interesting about silence is that it is socially constructed. In some cultures, silence is seen as an accepted behaviour while in others it is interpreted as a symbol of distress" (Sinclair cited in Basso,2008, p.2). Other publications that are relevant to this study include "The Social and Cultural Construction of Silence" by Robert N. Sinclair (Sinclair 2008), Fernando Poyatos' "Nonverbal Communication across Disciplines: Culture, Communication, Interaction, Language" (Poyatos 2002), and "Silence. Interdisciplinary Perspectives" edited by Adam Jaworski (Jaworski: 1997).

It is important also to discover what philosophers, both ancient and contemporary, have to say about silence and the shadow. Thus I have referred to publications such as Philip Stokes' "Philosophy: 100 Essential Thinkers" (Stokes 2010), and Bertrand Russel's "The History of Western Philosophy (Russel 1996), and its connection with political and social circumstances from the earliest times to the present day." Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" is most interesting with reference to shadow and knowledge, who it is that holds the knowledge and what it is that is done with it. This refers directly to the processes of archive and curation, in that it is the archivist or curator that makes choices that impact on knowledge and power. The various types of silence presented through readings made me realize that a choice was needed. This became more apparent in Leslie Kane's introduction where he presents the following succinct list:

> "The dumb silence of apathy, the sober silence of solemnity, the fertile silence of awareness, the active silence of perception, the baffled silence of confusion, the uneasy silence of impasse, the muzzled silence of outrage, the expectant silence of waiting, the reproachful silence of censure, the tacit silence of approval, the vituperative silence of accusation, the eloquent silence of awe, the unnerving silence of menace, the peaceful silence of communion, and the irrevocable silence of death illustrate by their unspoken response to speech that experiences exist for which we lack the word" (Kane, 1993: 34).

The presentation was shaped by a combination of the peaceful and the irrevocable, both with reference to Kane's communion and death, and the attempt to juxtapose the notions altogether using curation.

4.2 The archive

There are many forms of the archive, and much discourse on what exactly this comprises of. The term 'archives' is a broad term that includes museums, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,

missing persons, land claim, art galleries, the home archive; in fact anything that is attached to memory in any way. The parameters are soft, in that there are discrepancies between community and public archive, as much as there are discrepancies between these and personal archive. Archive processes seek to ensure that we do not forget, but many claim that by archiving we are doing just that – allowing ourselves to forget. By writing something down, by displaying images and objects we take them out of the mind of memory and put them in a physical world, allowing us to put aside that which we do not want to remember. But it also gives us the opportunity to revisit the memory should we so wish.

In their introduction to "Acts of Memory, cultural recall in the present", Meike Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer say that "[b]ecause memory is made up of socially constituted norms, narratives, and relation, but also amenable to individual acts of intervention in it, memory is always open to social revision and manipulation. This makes it an instance of fiction rather than imprint, often of social forgetting rather than remembering" (Bal, Crewe & Spitzer, 1999: xiii). Events and archives are continually revisited, but always with an older eye, with new discoveries and perceptions. Walter Benjamin says that collecting objects gives renewal to them, gives new life to the objects, a rebirth so to speak. He says that:

> "[e]verything remembered and thought, the frame, the base, the look of his property. The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership – for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magical encyclopaedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object" (Benjamin, 1970: 60).

Here Benjamin refers to the process of deeming an object as worthy of archive. By itself an object may hold little or no meaning, until it is deemed worthy, but by juxtaposing it alongside another object meaning may be further altered. New value and meaning may be placed on a collection of such objects. This research study dealt specifically with personal archive, as opposed to public or community archive. It was hoped that the audience would find their own meaning and empathy in their experience of the presentation as relates to their own personal archive/memory.

There is a big difference between public and private memory, although at times these intersect and are sometimes difficult to separate. We might say that public memory is constructed by those who write history, speak history (as in politicians' speeches) or construct history (as in monuments, textbooks, etc). The iconographic picture of Hector Pieterson taken by photojournalist Sam Nzima came to be the symbol of what occurred at the time, but who was Hector Pieterson? Why should he of all those who were killed, be elevated and revered above all else? So many of us have a sense of the events in 1976, but often it is a memory that has its origins in a text book, reconstructed by the writers of history.

4.3 Curation and the archive

For the purpose of this research I considered the use of objects, art works and documents as representations and signs to investigate silence. As pointed out above, these objects and art works were drawn from my own collection of inherited and made material. These had been collected and made over the span of my life, almost fifty years. Archival objects and documents were specifically

chosen for the signs and signifiers that they represented, in order to signify the intended meaning. On semiotics and the arts, Pierre Guiraud says that:

> "[i]t is the basis of all the arts, which by their very nature are wedded to the iconic and analogous modes of signification. Their function is not to make us understand the sensations perceived by placing them in a network of objective relations, but to make us experience them by presenting us with an imitation of the perceived reality" (Guiraud, 1995: 11).

The curatorial process of considering objects and placing them on view as a collective in order to provide new meaning is similar to that of archiving, in that the curator and the archivist both construct a narrative that is particular to something specific, and also speaks directly to the notions mentioned above by Guiraud. In curating the reference is more specifically towards works of art, as opposed to found objects. Frank den Oudsten says of an exhibition that it:

> "constitutes a given conscious spatial arrangement of a more or less consistent body of objects that, on the basis of a more or less succinct set of selection criteria, will for the duration of the event enter into a documentary, dramatic inter-relation which, according to the intentions of the author, will produce a cohering narrative potential capable of giving the ensemble its expressive power and of addressing the public in a clear way" (den Oudsten, 2012: 9).

As Herman Kossmann, Suzanne Mulder and Frank den Oudsten mention in their introduction to Narrative Spaces, "[e]very exhibition harbours an idea – a thought or a consideration of a programmatic nature. This consideration is founded on the assumption that the exhibited is worth showing and it is essentially a selection criterion" (Kossman, Mulder & den Oudsten, 2012: 6). Through the curation of objects and images this project proposed to create a narrative that draws an audience in, with the main criterion being the representation of silence. This then led to the consideration of what objects and artefacts were to be chosen to display. What could be used that would signify silence to a viewer? I drew these objects and images from my personal archive, and these were a combination of art works made and collected over the years and objects and documents inherited from those of my family and friends who had died. The consideration of the archive and what was to be used was a driving force in the making of the final presentation.

As much as one could say that the processes of archiving and curation are similar in many ways in that they are the collection of objects and documents that, placed together in a particular manner, allow the curator/archivist to create a particular narrative, these processes differ as well. Archivists keep objects and documents, including the attached narrative, for posterity, whereas the curator carefully creates a narrative that is fleeting and ephemeral. The curator may draw from the archive, and in doing so create a new and personal narrative that is again bounded in time, but the archival endeavour is to preserve memory over time. Narrative may be re-examined over time, and should be, as social environments shift and change, and material is added to the archive giving new insight, yet the specific intention of the archivist differs to that of the curator. What is exciting is that the curator can be the archivist and vice versa, in performing the different functions at different times and these functions can overlap and move apart as need be. So too can both the archivist and curator become the artist.

Here I would like to propose the mid-life retrospective exhibition by James Webb in 2012 as example. For this exhibition James Webb was approached by the Johannesburg Art Gallery to curate an exhibition of his own work, also using work from the Gallery's archive. He drew from his own body of work which was his personal archive, then he drew from the JAG archive of contemporary art and finally he added various components to the space that were new. Here for example he installed a loud speaker outside the entrance to the gallery. The speaker was designed to look like a World War II concentration camp speaker, and it blasted a message out over Joubert Park every five minutes. It was an intrusive and disturbing sound since it was so loud and had violent historical connotations (for me at least) and the message was broadcast in all official South African languages, plus Gaelic. The message ran: "Attention please ladies and gentlemen. Please note that everything is fine!" This was in such opposition to the historical memory that such a loud speaker holds that it was refreshing and thought-provoking.

In the various rooms of the gallery he had positioned his work juxtaposed with art work from the gallery creating his own personal narrative, but at the same time had made work specifically for the exhibition such as the loud speaker outside. So we can see that Webb was at the same time curator, artist and archivist, in varying degrees according to functions at any given time. As Webb performed the functions of artist, curator and archivist in his exhibition, so too did I in my presentation. I chose work from various personal archives, I presented some of my own work and I curated the whole to form one cohesive entity.

In examining silence, the objects chosen were a collection of objects that were owned by people that had passed away; some having been known to me and others not. Despite the audience not having known these people it was hoped that the manner in which these objects were displayed would give interest to the viewer and new meaning and value to the objects and images themselves. Objects are photographs, diaries, letters, and memorabilia found in the drawers and cupboards of the dead. In their individual capacity the objects and images hold little or no meaning to the viewer, but collectively it was proposed that the display would show a silent presence of absence. A new meaning would thereby be constructed by the audience from the objects and images, and as Benjamin says "… a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife" (Benjamin, 1970: 71). Memory is closely linked to silence in that it is memory that often pre-empts a silence, or certainly this is what is examined in much literature on the subject. Carol B Bardenstein, in her essay "Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory" says that:

> "[t]he particulars of the 'something' that is absent, and how or why it has come to be experienced as no longer continuously present, and no longer taken for granted as being 'at hand', are part of what characterize and distinguish the shape and texture of specific individual or collective memories…" (Bardenstein, 2009: 148).

What is present and what is absent is what shapes memory and these have a direct bearing on silence. For the purposes of my presentation I drew objects and documents from my personal archive, I manipulated material and made new material. In this way I functioned as archivist and collector from the outset, artist as addition and finally curator in final presentation.

So where did my personal archive come from? Marilyn lived two doors up from me. Four years ago she caught a cold, which rapidly turned into flu and a week later she died. Her brother arrived subsequently from Cape Town, to sort out her affairs and arrange her funeral. Of her affairs he sorted through her clothes, sold her car and gained access to her will. This left the rest to whoever would take it on. By a process of default I took on the care of her garden and swimming pool and then by extension her home and the rest of the objects that had been left behind. Over the next two years I developed an intimate relationship with the woman I had known fleetingly in life, through moving through her space and her belongings, clipping her edges, mowing her lawn, cleaning her pool. The absence of her presence was profound and the more I came to know her in death the more I mourned her in life. However, it was through her collection of objects that I came to know her most intimately.

Drawer-fulls of paraphernalia that spoke of a woman so much more than the woman I sometimes met in the park with the dogs. Here I found a vast wealth of history, both of individual strangers and well-known artists. Marilyn had worked a family tree, then re-worked it, copied it, made notes in margins and re-copied it. Photographs of her artist mothers' paintings, stored in scrap books but also in piles of envelopes; photographs of teas, lunches, dinners, holidays with people I had never met and did not recognize. Original birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, all folded and kept, some of which went back a hundred years.

Then objects from her Nana's going away outfit, beautifully crafted embroidery folded and wrapped carefully and stored away. I discovered an envelope, tightly sealed, which upon opening revealed embroidery pieces marked 'from Nana's going away outfit'. How long had they been sealed up and by whom, and who was the intended person that would open the envelope? It certainly was not an action intended for me, despite me being the one who opened it in the end. They then became objects that are part of an academic archive, inherited by a stranger, to be examined and touched intimately without permission.

The question then arose: why did Marilyn keep all of these documents and objects? Why was she obsessed with producing a clear and complete family tree? She was not married and never had been, she had no children or nieces and nephews. She had only a brother who had made it clear by his behaviour that he was not interested in more than was absolutely necessary. Who was she then, collecting these objects and knowledge for? Further questions then arose: who was to keep these objects and documents? Were they of any value, and if so, why and to whom? The answer will never be known but could possibly lie simply in that she may have been a hoarder. I was unable to throw anything out.

Such a collection of objects, so lovingly kept for so many years, for so ephemeral a reason, I felt compelled to hold onto to respect the woman who spoke so eloquently through her history. Now the collection has been defined and named and becomes an academic conversation. Yet still, who gives me the authority to even so much as own these objects, and according to what right do I claim authority to become Marilyn's archivist? Again, I might also simply be a hoarder. These questions should probably remain rhetorical certainly as far as Marilyn is concerned since she is no longer with us and unable to provide answers. For myself I am reticent to label myself as hoarder, since I have become deeply conscious of what I keep, what I discard, and why. This however, may be the subject once again of further study.

I keep all sorts of stuff, such as diaries and documents from my nuclear family's past, for example a short account by my father, entitled "My life so far". He seemed intent upon keeping a record of his life and by the notes in the margins he had referred to someone to edit the piece. I cannot find a completed work and I doubt if there is one. But I do know that he wanted his memories and experiences recorded, for what reason I will never know. Perhaps he fancied himself as a writer. Kabakov says though that "[t]o deprive ourselves of all this means to part with who we were in the past, and in a certain sense, it means to cease to exist*" (*Kabakov, 1997: 33). I do believe that there is a strong desire in all humans to be remembered. We are, after all, the most important people in our own lives. We are a complex conglomeration of DNA, genetics, memory, social history, education and thought. It seems such a waste not to remember every individual. Just as it is not possible sometimes to keep a collection of objects and documents in an archive for spatial constraints, how could the world keep records of all individuals over all time?

The discrepancy between the theory and practice of the archive is enormous. Discourse on what the archive actually is, how it could or should be put together and who the archivist is, abounds. This discourse became particularly prevalent with post-modernism which changed the course of academic thought in most fields. Suddenly the work of the archivist became more reflexive, and power positions began to be questioned. The archive was no longer permitted to be a tool for subjugation, to be accessed by a chosen few. No longer is the archivist viewed as a somewhat glorified librarian, hiding away in darkened rooms, making decisions based on personal prejudice, social positioning and/or adherence to management mandate with no accountability. As T Nesmith says "[t]he postmodern view of communication helps us to see archiving anew and, perhaps for many, to see it for the first time, since it is an activity that had typically gone on almost invisibly, even to those who often use archives" (Nesmith, 2002: 26).

One would think that the post-modern discourse would have resulted in a fairly smooth transition from the self-righteous endeavours of the past (colonialist and apartheid practices for example), but one would be wrong. There are other mitigating factors that come into play in the day-to-day practice of archiving, and these are not always apparent to the naked eye, so to speak. Time and space do not allow for delving into these issues here, but suffice to say that it is the postmodern view that allows for the individual, the man-in-the-street so to speak, to be his/her own archivist.

Why do I keep these things? Why did Marilyn keep her things? Why do I keep Marilyn's things? Even of myself I struggle to answer this question. All people keep things, whether they keep photographs, old diaries written by themselves or others in the family, objects inherited, given, bought or collected. In their study of the home archive as read in "On Human Remains: Excavating the Home Archive", D Kirk and A Sellen begin by saying "[w]hat is it that people wish to archive? Why are they doing it? For whom do they do it, and how?" (Kirk & Sellen, 2010: 2). Their objective for the study was to establish what kinds of digital archives would suit the family, and they did this by examining various family archives, looking at what was kept, why and how as the quote indicates. They identified four core values that drive the reasons for collecting and/or keeping objects and documents:

A. Provide a link to personal histories
B. Preserving a legacy
C. For others outside of the family, perhaps unknown people

D. Honouring achievements, great effort (prizes), milestones (graduations).

These provide an attempt to answer the questions that I posit to myself regarding the family archive. Yet now I keep objects and documents for a reason that does not fit neatly into the four core values that Sellen and Kirk provide. My reasons now are to enable me to grapple with issues of memory, value and history as an academic process and thereby work towards possible further research. Here I would like to elaborate on one of these values that Sellen and Kirk speak about. Victor Rosenburg in his paper "The Power of the Family Archive" talks about the unknown people that find value in family archive. He says that "[t]raditionally, an archive of family letters provides primary source material for historians" (Rosenburg, 2011: 77). His paper deals with a box of family letters opened only when its owner, Rosenburg's grandfather, died. The letters were written by family members before and during the Holocaust and provided a rich insight into personal experience at this time. He goes on to say that "[g]enerally the personal letters or photographs of an ordinary individual are of interest only to the family or friends of the individual, but personal writings or artifacts are produced in an extraordinary time, they become valuable to historians and others as eye witness accounts" (ibid: 78). Naturally the producers of the writing and/or artifacts could never know that their work would one day become so valuable so we could say that they could not have kept them because of this.

This is not a new question that the archivist has to face on a day to day basis. Nancy Peace, in her essay entitled "Deciding What to Save: Fifty Years of Theory and Practice", says "[f]or the past fifty years, archivists throughout the world have sought to articulate some model or set of criteria that would guide them in the difficult task of determining which records, among the vast number produced each year, shall be reserved for posterity. "To date, no single model or set of guidelines has emerged" (Peace, 1984:1). Of course this is in reference to public archives and not the personal, but one could consider both in the same light as both public and private archive face the same dilemma – what to keep and what to discard. Peace mentions Brooks who is of the opinion that the archivist cannot work in a vacuum, and that documents need to be archived almost as soon as they are created. She says of this that Brooks recognized that the archivist cannot function alone, that he needs the cooperation and assistance of staff members in the agencies for whose records he is responsible (ibid: 5). This is sound advice for a person attached to a specific organization that values the work of the archivist; what of the archivist whose task it is to sort through a defunct organization alone and make decisions based on criteria that are only personal?

In their introduction to "Acts of Memory: Cultural recall in the present", Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer say that "[b]ecause memory is made up of socially constituted norms, narratives, and relations, but also amenable to individual acts of intervention in it, memory is always open to social revision and manipulation" (Bal et al, 1999: xiii). Verne Harris, the head of the memory programme at the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, during a seminar conversation on the 2nd September 2013 agrees with this, claiming that events and archives are continually revisited, but always with an older eye, always with new discoveries and perceptions.

Professor Dilip Menon, in a lecture entitled "History, Memory and Forgetting" on the 14th September 2013, asked if the past continues to exist, suggesting that there is a notion that the past cannot be left alone, that the past has to be fought with. This is in opposition to what much writing on the Holocaust refers to, which suggests that there is silence around the past. He went on to ask how a

'new' modern nation remembers the past and where does historical imagination figure in new thinking. This is, in essence, what re-enactment is all about. It is the revisiting of history, of memory, with new eyes, or older eyes. It is a means of remembering and reinterpreting history, for those that were part of that history and those that were shaped by it.

For example, my grandmother kept a picture of her older brother who died of injuries sustained in Delville Wood in the First World War. She kept it in keeping with Sellen and Kirk's first value, that is, to provide a link to personal history. Yet if we look at the back of the photograph we see writing there that provides information that is not apparent by only examining the image. Firstly his mother, who was the writer, mentions his age. He was sixteen when he went to war – this is in line with Rosenburg's claim that we can learn much from family archives. Here we learn that boys as young as sixteen were conceivably sent to war from South Africa. But this is not all that we learn. His mother also writes: 'my only son who never gave me a moment of heart ache, died in Delville Wood'. As his great niece it does lend insight to me but I suggest to the wider public or historians it has no meaning or relevance at all. He was his mother's favourite and when he died she went into a depression from which she did not recover. This shaped entirely the life of her youngest daughter who was five at the time. This little girl, who grew up in a lonely existence surrounded by misery, later became my grandmother. How did her upbringing shape that of her own son, and then by extension his daughter, me? What do I do with this documentation and the loaded meaning?



Postcard of George Geddes

The Latin term *domicilium derelictum* refers to that which is thrown out by one person is then freely available to be owned by another, and by extension to be put to new use by its new owner for whatever and however s/he sees fit. Despite all of this, can the curator simply go ahead and display discarded objects and documents simply because they have been discarded by their original owners or because their original owners have died, and qualify this simply by acknowledging having thought about these issues? Questions arose as to the ethical consideration of displaying both Marilyn's belongings and those that had belonged to my family.

In an exhibition of the work of Kendall Geers' at the Goodman Gallery in 2012, one of the works on display was a reworked piece of a fertility figure, with a human skull added to it and painted. As much as the image was powerful and almost shocking, questions were immediately raised as to the ethics of using a piece of work made long ago for ritual purposes, adding human remains to it and displaying it in another context. What about the person, long dead and forgotten, whose skull was used in the making of a new art work? Again we can ask if this devalues the culture of origin, the

original piece itself, or if it in fact adds value? If it had been an unknown artist that had made the final piece, as opposed to the well-known Geers, would the value shift and would ethical considerations be any less or more pertinent?

Yet on the other hand, another Geers piece entitled "Untitled" (1993) is a fine example of how what is discarded by one as deemed unworthy of keeping can be used by another, manipulated to form a new narrative, and presented for viewing. Here the artist 'found' a leather bound journal in a skip, along with many other bound documents of this nature, discarded as unwanted and unvalued. This held particular value to him though, in that in the journal in question he found the hand written list of all who had died in the 1976 uprisings which were to be the beginning of the end of Apartheid, including dates and details of all deaths, as it was the official Death Inquest Register. And there on careful examination, he found Hector Pietersen's name.

This is one of the most iconic of South African figures since it is he that is considered the first of many children who died in the uprising, and one would have thought that the journal would have thus been deemed invaluable, never mind for its historical value with regards to the events of that time. The ledger represents the process of governance that Apartheid embodied; we see the processes of recording speaking to hierarchical philosophy which is of historical value in itself. Yet clearly someone (or a group of people) had chosen to discard it and it thus became common property to be owned by whoever then found it, in alignment with the concept of *domicilium derelictum*.

Geers then manipulated the journal by adding his father's death certificate and it is now deemed all the more valuable since it was changed into an artwork by him, a well-known South African artist. There now appear three stamps – first by the state, then by Geers and finally his date which is 1993. Geers' stamp appears at the same time as the state stamp leading us to question whether he subverts or perpetuates state power. We also question whether he is 'messing' with authority by stamping his father's death certificate. He imposed his narrative onto the object which changed it from beaurocratic object to found object, and then to art object.

Transfer of ownership changes meaning, and copyright issues now exist whereas before they did not. The object has had three lives so far: its first life was for the original purpose for which it was created, the second life was as object manipulated into an art work housed at the Everard Reid Gallery, and the third life which is its present life, is as a museum artifact which is probably a combination of all which encompasses value on all levels as described, now housed at the Museum Africa who bought it from the gallery.

Still, just because my family for the most part and Marilyn are long gone, I had to consider deeply the ethical considerations of not only using their unwanted belongings but also manipulating them to suit my needs as well. One manipulation that I made that I found rather daring was to original school reports that had belonged to my father and my brother. I used these as 'coasters' on the table where I set out wine glasses and wine for viewers after they had moved through the presentation. Just prior to opening doors I deliberately spilled drops of red wine onto the documents and made a round pattern as a wine glass would make on a coaster. The decision to do this was deliberate and in the moment of decision I was shocked at the response in myself. In that moment I suddenly had a twinge of regret and a deep sense of disrespect for the people that the objects

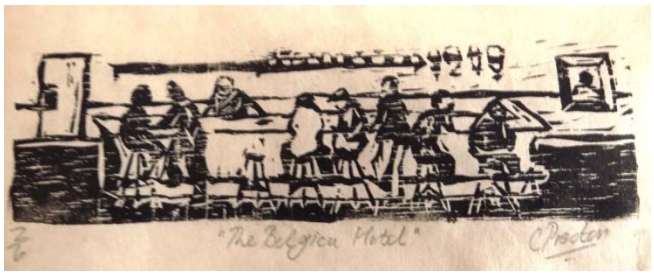
embodied. I felt as if I was defacing valuable documents, despite these documents having absolutely no value to anyone besides me for value of sentiment.

5. Creative Context

Referring back to how lives are shaped by history which shows itself through the objects we keep, it is arguably useful to examine lives within the academy but sometimes, such as this, we cannot superimpose academic theory onto practical reality. Here I am again referring to my grandmother's photographs for example. I am not keeping these artefacts for any reason that fits into the neat description of core values and behaviours that Kirk and Sellen describe, and I suggest that neither did Marilyn.

We keep things because we keep things. Such as the portfolio of art work that has been kept under my bed for the most part of thirty years. Absence is intricately woven into the presentation and the woodcut prints chosen from the portfolio speak directly to this. Although it is rather obscure, the processes of making a woodcut print speak directly to absence in that the artist needs to be very specific about each cut that is made in the wood. It is what is removed that shapes the bits of raised wood and these provide the surface from which to take a print. So we find that what in essence does not exist in a physical world i.e. empty space, is so important in this process that it defines what does exist in the physical world.

Much of the woodcut prints and etchings that were used in the presentation were made when I was an art student, or fairly soon after that. "The Belgica Hotel" for example, is a small woodcut print that was the result of a doodle on a paper serviette made in the seedy hotel where students and the unemployed 'hung out' in Durban, for its cheap beer. Then, while I was drawing the initial image, I was struck by the silence in the bar. It was early afternoon, and these men were clearly regulars, yet they had very little to say to each other. Turned from each other on their bar stools, they gripped beer glasses and gazed into the middle distance. In retrospect, perhaps this said more about loneliness than silence but it was the silent manner in which these men engaged with each other, or more to the point, did not engage with each other that struck me. Little did I know that this image would form part of a bigger picture thirty-something years later. It was fortuitous that I kept it.



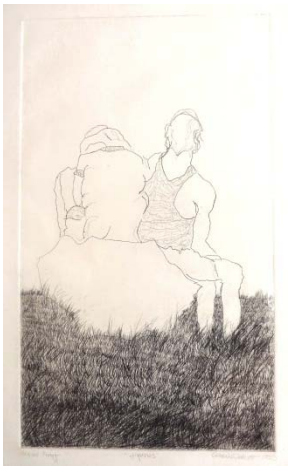
"The Belgica Hotel" by C Preston

Similarly we find the same processes in etching and silkscreen printing. Here though, it is what is removed that becomes the image. In etching the removal of parts of the plate using acid become the areas that hold ink which in turn then form the image on paper. In silkscreen printing stencils hold back the ink and the image is formed by the shapes that the stencils define. Again then, what is removed and what is kept define the final image. Here for example are "Shumba" and "Figures". These were a silk screen print and an etching that were a gift of an artist friend of mine many years

ago, which too have been kept unframed under many beds as I have moved across the country. These became all the more valuable to me when the friend died of cancer some years back, yet it was only when I pulled out the portfolio from under the bed that the images came to present meaning beyond what they were presenting as they stood alone. "Shumba" is a dog in an empty landscape. His back is to us as he recedes into the distance. In "Figures" we see two people sitting together in a landscape, also with their backs to us, yet they are slightly turned from us, possibly indicating that they are sitting in a silence of their own.



"Shumba" by C Walcott"



"Figures" by C Walcott

Other images used include "Howard and Simon" which was a woodcut made to experiment with technique and scale. The reference was a photograph that I took randomly in class when Howard asked Simon if he could borrow something from him. In that moment Simon turned from the work he was doing at his desk; hand over his mouth, to respond to the request. Yet it is in their body language that we can read a 'silence' into the image. I knew what the conversation was about that the young men were engaged in, but the viewer will see a hand over a mouth, a body turned away, a silence. The print was so large and time consuming to make that I had made only two. The paper was fraying in age and many times over the years I deliberated as to whether I should discard them or not. The simple reason that I did not was that I could not bring myself to throw out work that had taken so much effort to make, and it took up so little space in the portfolio.

"Spirits Having Flown" is a triptych of woodcut prints that I made after my brother died. Here I was examining empty spaces, those that have recently been vacated. I intended to show a sense that the couches had so recently been vacated that they were still warm, yet at the same time the spaces were drawn in a linear fashion to indicate a bleakness, a starkness of some sort. Little did I know that these images would speak volumes in years to come. "Bellevue Lamps" was bought at a gallery many years ago and the artist is unknown to me. The empty kitchen, with its paraphernalia strewn across the table, is indicative again of the absence of a person or persons recently having vacated the space. And years later I was to find myself in Marilyn's home, with the book she had been reading just before she died, open on a page and casually left on the arm of a couch, along with her brother's dirty dishes and un-emptied ashtray that he had left when he had gone home from sorting out her affairs. In that moment I had the sense of a spiral turning, of repetition of history in some way, possibly simply life being what it is that we all experience similar things over time. I was reminded of what my mother said when a neighbour's husband had died suddenly at his desk. She

was struck with sadness by his glasses that were left on the paper that he had been reading, almost as if he had taken them off to rub his eyes moments before he died. This then is what the curator relies upon in the construction of narrative – shared meaning and experience.



"Spirits Having Flown" triptych by C Preston

Cartooning is another art form that interestingly mirrors theatre in many ways. Here, in theatre, we have framed scenes defined by spaces in between; scenes are framed by the convention of black out or lighting change, and these together narrate a story. The spaces in between the scenes are as important as the scenes themselves in that it is they that define the narrative, by delineating each component of the 'story' and thereby giving it structure. This is similar to cartooning in that each part of the narrative works as a whole with clearly defined spaces in between. Once again we see that what does not exist, what is absent (the space in between) is what defines what does exist, and this is outlined in more detail later in this report.



A detail of the cartoon "Teach Me How To Scream" by C Preston

All the art works were chosen for similar reasons, however, none of the woodcuts, cartoons or silk screen prints were made specifically to speak to any notion of silence, with the exception of the triptych. This is the dilemma that the archivist faces: what to keep and what to discard? The overarching question is whether the object or document could possibly have value at a later stage, and if so to whom? Of course there are spatial issues that factor into the decisions. Now I sit with boxes of old and somewhat smelly gloves. These were specifically collected for the purposes of this research endeavour, and they were all picked up on cycle tracks, in trains or off frozen 'sloots' in The Netherlands.

I began collecting them because they instilled a sense of such loss and loneliness when I saw them lying in the mud or the snow, and the absence of their 'partner' was what pre-empted the collection. Useless now by themselves, since we have two hands, I might as well have thrown them into a landfill, and the original owner, on discovering the loss, might as well have tossed the lonely, glove partner into a landfill as well. Their shapes are intimate in that they take the form of their owner, and yet they are lost in public spaces, 'silenced' by their uselessness. These are inanimate objects, yet lying alone in the cold it became very difficult not to anthropomorphize them, so I brought them home. They became my personal collection as part of my personal archive. Three panels of framed gloves were displayed in the exhibition presentation, and the rest were discarded, once again to be lost, in the venue. This framing of some and discarding of others says much about the deeming of objects as valuable and the choices that the curator makes.

In themselves as part of this collection they conceivably say nothing except that I am a hoarder, yet in the space, juxtaposed with all the other objects and art work they spoke about shared experience and absence. Interestingly the gloves are left handed for the most part, which makes one wonder. I have done a little investigation into why this is and this, I hope as the spiral turns, may lead to further research of this nature.

As part of the catalogue for the presentation most of the gloves were labelled with numbers which corresponded to a narrative that linked the gloves together. For example, one glove may have been labelled 'teenager's glove, dropped as he was leaving home in a hurry after being beaten once again by his step father.' Then another glove may be labelled 'boy's glove, dropped in the playing field after being bullied by a boy who had recently been beaten by his step father', etcetera. It was hoped that, besides adhering to the convention of labelling objects, this would lend a little lightness to the presentation, in that there were small narratives that were humorous if the viewer had the inclination to piece them together. This too lends itself to possible further writing in the form of a light and humorous account of lost gloves/objects and at the same time investigation into memory and the construction of narrative.





An example of a glove found in The Netherlands

In "The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art" edited by Charles Mereweather, Ilya Kabakov presents an essay entitled "The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away". Here she describes a plumber who lived all his life in a solitary existence, who became known to the other residents of the block of flats only after he died. He had thrown nothing away. The plumber's entire life was documented. Everything packed into envelopes, numbered and archived. On the back of all envelopes were references to the items, which were glued together on sheets of paper. For

example: on a bus receipt one might read: "[w]ent to visit Iona in the rain and got wet – left my raincoat at home"(Kabakov, 1997: 33).

Of this Kabakov says "[i]t is possible when a person honestly doesn't know which of these papers is important and which is not, why one principle of selection is better than another, and what distinguishes a pile of necessary papers from a pile of garbage" (ibid:33). Certainly I can say as much of myself in this regard, that I am always loathe to discard diaries, documents, objects, as I am always unsure of future value both for myself or others, or if I will simply miss them in the future and find myself regretful. Kabakov puts this succinctly by saying:

> "The vacillations in making such a choice become agonizing. A simple feeling speaks about the value, the importance of everything. This feeling is familiar to everyone who has looked through or rearranged his accumulated papers: this is the memory associated with all the events connected to each of these papers. To deprive ourselves of these paper symbols and testimonies is to deprive ourselves somewhat of our memories. In our memory everything becomes equally valuable and significant" (Kabakov, 1997: 33).

Best I keep the gloves. I will hold onto my archive, as smelly as it may be, since I do not want to 'cease to exist' as Kabakov puts it.

Clementime Deliss says in the essay: "Seven stories, seven stages, one exhibition*"* that the "spotlight on the artist as the storyteller is not new" (Deliss, 1995: 18). We can equate the curator as a story teller in many ways as well. These can include the telling of history, the teaching of morals or the raising of awareness in activism. The practice of curating is more than simply hanging work on a wall or in a room and making it all 'look nice' together. The curator needs to consider many aspects other than practical, such as framing and positioning of work. There has been much discourse on the practice of curating, and the various considerations that the curator needs to take into account are as diverse as they are varied.

A concluding remark made after the series of seminars which resulted in the publication of "Naming a Practice*"*, was "[a]t Naming a Practice, everyone agreed that the status of the curator has shifted and the rhetoric used in conversations to describe it has as much to do with technology and management as art" (White, 1996: 205), and "[c]urators, like most citizens, have a serious identity crisis on their hands" (ibid: 205). The curator thus needs to narrow down what drives choices, or at least make careful decisions regarding what the driving forces are behind choices of work and the manner in which the works are displayed. This is arguably similar to what the postmodern archivist faces in that the curator now needs to consider more carefully what it is that is being said in putting together a body of work, considering the rapid rate at which communication and technology is developing.

None of this is to say that this work should not be put on display. In fact we could argue that by placing work in the 'white cube' of the gallery that the work is uplifted and given sacred place. As Brian O'Doherty says, "A gallery is constructed along the laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white" (O'Doherty, 1986: 15). So we could say that by placing the work in the gallery we are already providing special meaning of some sort.

This, however, begs a wide spectrum of new questions which will not be examined here, especially considering that he also goes on to say: “The white cube is usually seen as an emblem of the estrangement of the artist from a society to which the gallery also provides access” (ibid: 80). What is being said is that the curator needs to take careful consideration of ethical issues when making choices and decisions. These include the voice of the original artists, the cultures of origin from where the work emerges and the possibility that there may be conflicting interests involved. If a work is displayed as an artefact rather than a work of art, in a place of learning, we could question what this means to the original artist. We could question whether it holds a different meaning to those that view it as a piece of art or another person viewing it as an artefact that teaches. It could arguably hold more value to the culture of origin if it is displayed as a piece that raises awareness and teaches about other cultures, or it could hold more value displayed as a piece of art that stands alone.

These are all statements of possibilities but the main question here is what it is that the curator is placing value on – the culture of origin, the voice of the artist or the piece itself. Clearly ethics are the driving force behind this argument, and rightly so, especially in considering the dire disrespect that first nations endured during and after colonialism. This not only included the manner in which indigenous cultures were regarded but also in the way that their art was viewed.

As Gesine Schwan says, “while ignoring their conscience, people are also willing to forego the exercise of political responsibility, personal autonomy, and political freedom, especially in situations where the state power ignores, oppresses, or extinguishes the dignity and integrity of human beings” (Schwan, 2001: 4). It is interesting here to note what Debora J. Meijers has to say in her essay “The Museum and the Ahistorical Exhibition”, where she examines the history of the practice of curating (which she refers to as ‘exhibition designing’), she points out that the choices to place work together was historically driven according to its considered closeness to the highest form of beauty, so a Ruebens may be placed next to a Raphael, for example. She goes on to say that it was only after the end of the eighteenth century that work was arranged according to school or even period.

It was however, only at the beginning of the twentieth century that a new type of exhibition appeared, “in which non-Western, ‘primitive’ art was combined with abstract Western art” (Meijers, 1996: 11). This new way of viewing or experimenting with juxtapositioning of work across time and space by curators and museum collectors coincided with interest in non-European art within the art world as a whole. Collections of work began to be arranged in a ‘mixed’ way, and Meijers claims that “[t]hey did so to demonstrate the parallels between (expressionist) modern art and the sculptures of so called primitive peoples. Ethnographers and art historians gradually came to regard these artefacts as works of art” (Meijers, 1996: 15). She asks “[w]hat kind of new phenomenon is being created from these fragments of museum history?” (ibid:15).

My role was multiple in that objects were drawn from my own archive, considered and deemed either worthy or not in relation to the presentation, as curator who arranged the objects accordingly and as artist who made work to be exhibited, and finally as performer embedded in the presentation incorporating all three of the above. Therefore the roles that were incorporated included the archivist, the curator, the artist and the performer, sometimes all at once and at other times individually in the process of planning, making, putting together and in the final presentation.

I thought that combining objects that I owned personally that I had inherited over the years with objects that had belonged to another who had passed on, would remove the personal from the final work. It seemed to me that this would make the presentation not about my loss, or of the absences that I felt, and de-personalize the presentation in a way. Yet this was not the case. Why I thought that is anyone's guess, since I knew otherwise as is clear from a reference to this that I made, and later found in my journal: "Who I am today is a construction of memory. So what is it that I bring, therefore, into the creative process? I cannot be value neutral." All of the arts is about the heart, so it is not possible to leave the heart out of the process.

When we consider the genre of still life in the visual arts we think of an arrangement of objects that are rendered into an image in water colour or oil painting. However, if we think about the two words 'still life' in another context, we can mean it to be life that is still, gone or dead; and the word 'still' implies a silence, quietness or muteness. How then do we represent this life? Here we are considering the notion of the presence of absence, which means that we signal the presence of something or someone once they have gone or have been removed. Erasure deals with that which has been removed with particular reference to what is left behind.

Just as an artist may draw an object by examining the negative space around the object it was proposed that erasure could also be referred to with regards to the showing of silence. Photographic representations of people and places are very important aspects of archiving. Many photographs represent those that are lost or have passed away, and are a means (sometimes the only means) of holding onto memory.

This presentation comprised of a series of photographs where those that have passed away were removed from the image altogether. Copies were made of the images and copies of the copies and so on, until the images faded away into nothing. Their presence will have been erased but it will still be felt, in the silence that the erasure has pre-empted.

6. Process

6.1 Practice as research

This research has been conducted within the framework of Practice as Research. The underlying principles of this methodology are involvement and experience, interaction of some kind, as opposed to gazing at the research object/s from a distance. Here value is placed on experience, and the researcher is not ignored in the process. The researcher is therefore not only permitted to reflect on his/her own experience, but also encouraged to do so. This is in direct opposition to the traditional methods of investigation as set by the academy, which viewed the researcher as the outsider, and the researched as the other.

This methodology breaks away from the academy that dictates that the self is not placed at the centre, that we are taught not to draw attention to the self, but that we now place the self at the centre and radiate outwards and sometimes even inwards. Here there is no beginning, middle or end, so to speak, but a more liquid way of investigating. Dr Myer Taub refers to this as the rhizome system of investigation, meaning that if one were to look at a map of the process one would see it rather in terms of a convoluted linking of thought, ideas and patterns of experience that are then pieced together in writing, but that the writing is not necessarily an end in itself. In essence then,

according to Taub, there will be no end just as there is no real beginning. The researcher is no longer a passive observer, but takes an inside view of the process. Autobiography then comes to have value and finds its place in academic writing as well, and we are now able to theorize on the work that is first created rather than the other way around.

One of the most useful tools in this method of research is the research journal. This allows the researcher to play with different styles of writing, to break away from a linear style based on logic, allowing logic and passion to co-exist, allows for the mapping of concepts and ideas to speak to the questions, mapping knowledge in a variety of ways. Finally it allows for the researcher to be at the centre of the research, continually gazing both inwards and outwards, allowing for continual reflection and re-reflection.

Often the researcher engages in research with a sense of self that is not problematized and this is what was lacking in this research process. One of the underlying principles of practice as research is that the researcher needs to be aware of assumptions, and this can be overcome by self-reflection through the journal. For a random example, a white male researcher may not be aware of his ingrained prejudice when it comes to the examination of black women in low income groups, since he conceivably had been raised in a middle class patriarchal society where racism had been until recently, law. These prejudices may not be apparent in that the human condition is such that, unless we are careful about who we are and how we think in terms of the socio-economic environments in which we have been raised, these prejudices may infect our research.

Therefore the tools that are needed are to be reflexive and to be self-aware. The researcher is encouraged to be reflective, meaning that s/he needs to gaze inward as well as outward, and then by providing critical reflection on the reflection, to become reflexive. As Taub says, this is somewhat likened to holding a mirror up to a mirror. Putting this in another way, Robert D Romanyshyn says that "the task is to open a space beyond the researcher's complexes where the soul of the work can speak" (Romanyshyn, 2006: 44). He goes on to say that "[m]ore often than not the work of reflection sets the stage for another dialogue" (ibid: 45).

From the outset I have been diligently journaling. Initially the interest that drew me into researching was a far cry from where it is now as has been mentioned previously. It was the work of two specific American female cartoonists that sparked my interest some years ago, specifically in what they were not saying in their work. This was the work of cartoonists Diane DiMassa and Allison Bechdell, both American. This led to an examination of their language and use of specific words, such as 'dyke' (both of the artists are lesbian), and the context within which the words were placed. This speaks to my own cartoon character, Doris Dyke who is an autobiographical character, and the reasons that I use the word 'dyke' as well.

Doris Dyke appears in the cartoons painted on large canvas as outlined below. Doris emerged as I was 'coming out of the closet' as a lesbian myself, and grappling with the meaning of what this all means for me. By embracing a naming word such 'dyke' which holds many negative connotations for many people, I felt that I was placing myself at the core of me, looking in the mirror and accepting who and what I saw there.

It was astonishing to me that others, across the world it seemed, were happy to use the same terminology that I was happy to use, in describing themselves. The character that DiMassa draws is

called “Hothead Paison: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist”, and her image clearly reflects DiMassa. So too does Bechdells’ main character Mo in her cartoon strip entitled “Dykes to Watch Out For” which has become popular both in lesbian and mainstream literature in America. Clearly both these artists employ deep autobiography in their work. It was also in the journal that I began to examine the parallels between cartooning, negative space, theatrical lighting and how all these frame narrative. Then looking at the position of the researcher over time, as a person who traditionally examines the world and the contents of the world from a distance, and the relatively new method of positioning the researcher in the centre of investigation, led to questions around what is not said and what the researcher cannot uncover in the process.

Notions of shadow and silence, followed by guilt, began to emerge in my writing. Then came the idea of a shadow play, which was followed by a strange waking dream of a tiny, golden rhino that seemed to sit very still on the edge of my awareness. Sitting still in myself, with my journal, thrashing through so much, led to horrible personal crises. Despite knowing all my life that I had sat in a daze of silence around so much, I had never faced it head on. For the first time I faced demons that had lived on the periphery of my psyche. Finally I wrote in my journal: “Then I remember, beyond theatre schedules, beyond needy staff and demanding superiors, that I am an artist, that once I made a living out of a small puppet theatre that I made myself; made so that it could be worked as a one-woman show because to rely on others is to set oneself up for failure; I remember that I made puppets out of cereal boxes when I was eight years old. I also remember that I have something to say, and that I am angry. I am so angry that I cannot speak. The little rhino shadow puppet encompasses everything. His silence. His presence. His soon to be absence. His shadow. My voice. My silence. My healing”.

It was the small shadow puppet play that spurred further research into an examination of silence that culminated in the presentation described in this paper. The journal has allowed the research process to follow a non-linear shape. It allowed connections to be made that would otherwise not have been found. For example sitting in my car for two hours in the Lion and Rhino Park, looking at rhinos and being able to write about them in their presence, was very useful. Then examining what I had written later allowed me to disseminate information and connect bits and pieces of information that otherwise would not have been apparent. Here for example, as I watched the lumbering animals eat, I wrote: “The rhinos are graceful in a silent way”. Then later reflecting over lunch at the cafeteria: “So glad I made the decision to come here alone. The further I get into this research the further away from others I want to be; want to spend more time in my own head. None of us spend enough time in silence”.

Without thinking, the notion of silence came back to the fore; meaning so much more than simply how I had placed it in a conscious manner. The rhino as a metaphor for silence then became a creature that is physically silent, then also speaking back to the notion of silence as being a place for sanctity and spiritual importance. Through the journal I was able to place myself right in the centre so to speak, and this is one of the fundamental principles of Practice as Research as methodology.

The journal was supported by a drawing book where preliminary drawings assisted in preparations for cartooning, puppet design (for the initial smaller project) and planning of positioning of objects. Here I was able to pull ideas apart on imagery and choices of language used. For example, I deliberated as to whether to use the word ‘fuck’ in one of the cartoons. Professor Beth Dickerson,

retired professor of drama at Rhodes University, said that "the use of expletives shows poverty of language"[1], and in this I do agree. I therefore wanted to find another word that held the same weight, and consulted many others over this. However, I could not find another word to replace it sufficiently and made the decision to use the word nevertheless, and risk showing my own poverty of language.

This specific research study encompasses all the principles of PaR (Practice as Research), in that the questions emerged from the work as opposed to the other way around. Concepts and theories were grappled with, mostly during journaling, before the project was honed into a final research plan. Questions were still being formulated at the very latest stage and rationale is only now becoming apparent, as has been mentioned previously. There is also a strong autobiographical pull, in that the notions of guilt and silence are so deeply embedded in my point of departure, and the outcomes and conclusions that include a healing of self in some way. Heather M Carver puts this succinctly when she asks "[w]here does my life and academia separate?" (Carver, 2007: 11) and of the writing up or research such as this "[a] methodology of the heart brings the mind, body and soul not just into the experience, but into the writing about that experience" (ibid: 5).

Constant recording of all steps in all processes including the academic considerations, emotional floundering and practical planning has been altogether vital. Here I am able to refer to the process from the very beginning up until the final writing of this report, and it is only in being able to track progress in this way that I have been able to form a clear picture of what, in fact, this entire research process was and is about. Had there been no record it would never have been possible to establish this with any clarity. Mind mapping on a white board was also a wonderful tool in arranging thoughts and design, and photographs were taken of each map prior to wiping the board clean for the next step. Photographs were pasted into the journal so there is a record of most of the mind maps in the journal as well. At this stage it is astonishing that where I thought I was and the journey that I thought I had taken was altogether different indeed, and it is only through referring back to the journal, working drawings, notes taken in class and in meetings with my supervisor that the true nature of the journey unfolds.

One could question the reasons behind presenting an autobiographical project, and the reasons are many. Some seek to teach or warn others by telling personal stories, some endeavour to heal the self through cathartic writing which may or may not be made accessible to the public. John-Raphael Staude in his "Search for Meaning: Autobiography as Spiritual Practice" says that "autobiography is "liberating" because it allows people to interpret events in a particular way and to make peace with the past" (Staude 2005). Of autobiographical writing Stephen Spender says that it "is transformed. It is no longer the writer's own experience: it becomes everyone's" (Spender, 1951: 117), and we can apply this to the work of the visual artist as well. In as much as this research project being largely autobiographical, the intent was to present the audience with content that is meaningful beyond the researcher. Jan Mukafovsky in his essay entitled The Essence of the Visual Arts, says that:

> "th]ere is a fundamental difference between the originator and the perceiver. The originator is a single, unique individual, whereas the perceiver is anyone. The originator determines the organization of the work, whereas the perceiver

[1] Personal conversation with Professor Beth Dickerson

> confronts a finished work, and he can interpret it in various ways" (Mukafovsky, 1976: 231).

This is referring directly to semiotics in that it is a message that the artist/curator/archivist is proposing to convey, but the receiving of the message can vary. Audience response, therefore, cannot be ignored. Since I was building a language that aimed to convey meaning to audiences, using erasure, collection and arrangement of objects, visual images and performance, the question that arose was whether this language was shared by the audience or not. Despite language being shared, humans are still shaped by aspects such as gender, race, education and social standing, which are not always shared. It is certain that audience members received varying interpretations of the language of silence in the presentation as shaped by their own experience etc. The aim here was to investigate the language of silence using semiotic theory.

It was important that the audience received a clear message, but meaning had to be constructed by individuals in their own way, and what was important is that the audience was able to make some meaning whether this is the intended meaning or their own constructed meaning, or a combination of both. The presentation should have held expressive power but at the same time allowing the audience to construct meaning of their own. A problem lay in that sometimes audiences do not receive the meaning immediately; the understanding, whether it is that which was intended or an individual understanding, may lie in abstract meaning for days. The challenge then for the purposes of this study was that it would possibly be impossible to establish whether the intended meaning was received by the audience, and I will show later that this indeed was the case.

6.2 Planning

6.2.1 Venue

It is almost impossible to find a venue that is neutral in all ways, since all space contains memory and history of some sort. As soon as there is movement in space it becomes place, in that moment of embodiment. We can ask if space has memory as place has memory. We contain the memory of place as well as the place containing the memory. The closest that one comes to this is in the black box of the theatre or the white cube of the gallery. However, these are elevated and somewhat sacred spaces in themselves, and this is unavoidable. There is an assumption that those that enter a gallery of a theatre have some level of sophisticated knowledge about the language that is used in these places. This, as opposed to the assumption, that those who enter a museum have no knowledge or background to what is being presented, hence the oversaturation of information in museums and the lack thereof in galleries and theatres. A middle ground needs to be found, but again this is a topic for further research.

I used the Nunnery at the Wits Theatre, Wits University for my presentation. This space used to be the hall attached to the Catholic Church which is adjacent to the university. The Nunnery is now used as a theatre for Wits School of Arts student productions and for outside hirers. It is interesting to me that the space was originally a place of spirituality as used by the nuns living there, and was then turned into an empty black box experimental theatre for drama students. It thus becomes a different place as it is transformed according to the needs of performance at any given time. It feels somehow appropriate that for a moment it was possible for it to revert back to the quiet place of prayer or meditation that it possibly was when it was being used by the church, even for a short

period of time. I relied on the context of the gallery/theatre to elevate objects for the presentation and at the same time using the history of the space to compliment the notions of spiritual silence.

6.2.2 Convention

Conventions make up the illicit and implicit rules of a genre or culture, and the conventions of theatre and gallery were used to a certain extent, but not altogether. For example, focus on objects was created by using theatrical lighting which is a theatrical convention, and a catalogue of work on display was provided, which is a gallery convention. Using some theatrical and gallery conventions were necessary in order to present the work, for example the use of hanging work at eye level and placing objects on tables at arm's length made it possible for viewers to see the hanging images and manipulate objects and documents on the tables, and using lighting allowed for basic illumination.

There is something fundamentally different between a painting in oil and a found object, and if their commonality is the message of silence that is one thing, but all the components still had to be linked together in a manner that could be understood. All objects and documents were labelled and all objects were given financial value of some sort, and were grouped by their physical labels into one composite whole. Objects were not displayed in conventional ways, for example, as much as a framed piece of art may find its way onto a wall hung in a conventional manner, another may lie flat on the floor. This may find itself lying next to a lost glove while other gloves are displayed on the wall above. Collected archival objects may be strewn around the space randomly or hung on walls, but they may also find themselves arranged neatly on a table.

Basically there was a specific convention in the display of work, which was constructed to suit both the space and the presentation – work was intended to integrate with each other, becoming at one time a discarded object with no value and at another time a valued object deemed worthy of high value. One lost glove lying randomly on the floor may have had a price tag of R1,500.00 while a framed piece of art work may have been be priced at R5,00.00. Some objects had tags on that give no price at all, making them 'priceless'. The cartoon oil paintings of the rhinos were priced at R8,000.00 and R5,000.00 respectively, but this was an indication of the price of the rhino and not the price of the paintings as such.

Challenges lay too, in the manner in which the audience was to be led through the space. This could have been an organic and somewhat random pathway, chosen by the audience themselves; it could be a specifically outlined pathway, which led them from one display to the next; or it could have been a linear and very structured indication of route. This seemed more appropriate since it would allow the curator to actively control what and how the audience experiences the presentation.

However, it is exactly this power of the curator that I was questioning. If however, the choice to allow the audience to find their own path was made, then another challenge presented itself. Care needed to be taken that the audience did not become confused and lost, and this could so easily have occurred. I decided to cover the floor of the space in between the objects with a layer of mine dump sand. This was to give the audience a 'path' of sorts, would provide a means of leaving foot prints, and would have an audio component. I specifically chose mine dump sand for its colour and its consistency; it has the same consistency as flour or baby powder but it is coloured; it has a silencing effect on footfall for the most part, but would also have slight crunchy sounds at times in that it is not uniform in its makeup. I would have liked a combination of both the muting of footfall

and the soft sound of footfall that this element would have brought. The footprints in the sand also refer to the leaving of trace, which is what the process of archiving speaks to, in other words leaving an indication of memory and history. It was thus also hoped that it would incorporate the audience as part of the presentation and part of the detritus left afterwards.

However this was not to be. It is now illegal to remove mine dump sand since it contains such high levels of toxins used in the processes of gold extraction. For me this speaks back to how history and memory are shaped by changing thought and knowledge, since my father and I brought back truckloads of mine dump sand to our home in the early seventies, which we used to underlay paving around our new swimming pool. Now one may not venture near a mine dump at all, since they are all strictly out of bounds. This is also because new technology has been developed and more gold is now being removed from the dumps, also interesting in that this speaks to re-visiting old memory and places with new eyes and new wisdom.

So a new decision had to be made with regards to the use of sand in the venue. It was then decided that builders' sand would be purchased but the stage manager, who was to do the purchasing of this, suggested simply using the sand that had been left over from a building site down the road from where she lived. In the end this worked out perfectly, since there were three different colours in the sand that she was able to bring. These were a range from light yellow, to brown and then dark brown. Colours were overlaid upon each other from lightest to darkest and the result was exciting. This contributed to the description of the presentation afterwards as having a sepia tonal quality, and as much as this was not consciously intended was most exciting, since this was what would have been the intention had it been thought about in the planning stages. The sound quality that the sand provided, which allowed for a distinct crunching under foot, was altogether much more satisfactory than the muted sound that I believe the mine dump sand would have provided, as much as this was what was initially intended in order to mute all foot fall and create as much of a silent space as possible.

The sand was to guide the audience through the space yet allow for freedom of choice as to where and how the space was traversed as well. Therefore the sand was placed around the tables and objects in a sort of 'un-delineated' pathway. The numbered catalogue also served to lead the viewers through the space since there was a chronological order in the arrangement of images, objects and tables. This was more to facilitate ease of identifying labels to objects rather than have viewers struggle with a jigsaw puzzle of information in space. This had occurred to me in the Netherlands at an exhibition I attended where one had to first identify the room by letter, then work out the lay of the room according to east/west orientation, and finally put label to art work. This annoyed me intensely as it became a treasure hunt rather than a traverse through a gallery.

The method chosen in my presentation for leading the viewers through the space may have given an indication of where they may or may not move but, it is conceivable that they were impeded in their desire to manipulate objects and images as they had been invited to do. In photographs of viewers taken during the presentation we see many of them bending over tables in order to see objects and read documents presented there yet at the same time trying to keep to the 'pathways'. It is interesting that people are, consciously or subconsciously, restricted in their movements by an ingrained and enculturated notion of obeying rules, whether these rules exist or not.

In “Archive or Memory? The Detritus of Live Performance”, M Reason talks about the ‘left over’ detritus that one finds at the end of a theatre performance. This refers to the props and set pieces or even costumes that are strewn across a stage at the end of performance that the audience sees when the actors take their bows. This is what I proposed the space to be at the end of the presentation, with objects having been moved, footprints made, remade and destroyed, documents adjusted and readjusted. Reason describes this as “the memory of the performance is contained in this final tableau, represented by remains, with all the fragmented traces prompting fragmented memories” (Reason, 2003: 88). So it was hoped that the presentation would culminate in the detritus of shared experience of artist, curator, archivist and audience, and their cumulative embodied memory once the presentation was over, would be left in the silence of their absence, leaving just a trace of their memory.

Some of the objects chosen were found in landfills and rubbish dumps, or even bought from second hand shops. Over a period of a year objects and documents were collected to form a vast archive of paraphernalia from which to draw. Periodically during the planning phase this archive would be spread out over my living space in order to pick and choose what was to be used and what was to be discarded. In the process of photocopying the images and photographs it was interesting in that the black and white images eventually faded out and the colour photographs, as copies were made of the copies, became richer in colour, denser and saturated until they were almost abstract.

Framing of the art work took place over six months for financial reasons. Most of the art work was framed and all the frames were the same. This was to ensure cohesiveness in the work. Work that was unframed were the two woodcut prints of the rhino entitled “Last One Standing I” and “Last One Standing II”. An assortment of old frames without art work in them was borrowed from the framer. These were to add to the image of absence in that the frame is there but the art work is not, possibly never having been there or having been removed.

It was decided that all work would be labelled, including the gloves and the three tables. Old fashioned package labels were used, and the reason for this is simply that I liked their texture, their colour and their sense of history. Labels corresponded to a catalogue of work, providing descriptions and pricing since most artwork was for sale. All the gloves had historical background provided, indicating where they were found and what their histories were. A narrative was presented in the gloves in that if the viewer read the catalogue carefully s/he would have been able to draw links between all the gloves. This was to add a fun and light element to the presentation which could have become somewhat heavy in mood.

After much deliberation I finally decided that I would provide a title for the presentation. I titled it “Silence” and had a sign made and laminated to place outside the venue. The word “silence” also appeared in the flier that was sent out. These became problematic but this will be dealt with later in this report.

Once all objects and documents were chosen and ready for presentation a model was built. This assisted in deciding on final positioning of the presentation in its entirety, within the venue. Conversations were had with my stage manager and tiny details were ironed out, including one hilarious journey to a building site to establish how much sand was needed to cover what square meterage of floor space. At this stage I was under the impression that there was no detail that had not been considered. Nails had been bought, labels had been written, lights and projector had been

borrowed, all transport had been arranged and a schedule had been sent. All signage had been printed and laminated; bags of tools, masking tape and other random bits and pieces that might be needed were packed. Above all permission had been granted to bang holes in the walls in order to hang the artwork. There was a team that assisted in the move in and set up of the presentation. Since the venue was a theatre all the seating and seating risers had to be removed before anything else could be set up. Once this was done the move in was fast and painless, and this was altogether due to the model. The team had a very clear idea of where things were meant to be positioned and any decisions that I had to make on site were not major ones. Decisions as to lighting and sound had also been made prior to move in and I was able to be very clear with the technician allocated to the venue in what was required in this respect. Once sound, lighting and audio-visual checks had been run the sand was placed in the venue. This was done last so that it would not be disturbed before the audience entered. The final visual presentation was exactly what I had had in mind from its inception, and I was altogether satisfied with this.

Live performance formed an important aspect of the presentation, and this was threefold. Carolee Thea in her publication "On Curating with Ten International Curators" says that "a curator's work is not done after the selection of artists or themes. The exhibition must also be choreographed" (Thea, 2009: 51). This brings to mind the notion of art as performance whether we are discussing visual or performance art, and we can include here embodied memory as we find in the archive. Objects are able to represent something different to that which they are, but the body represents itself and cannot do otherwise. Performance is therefore an entirely different component to the other aspects of this investigation. Movement of the body includes time in space, and it is in the passage of time that memory is made and embodied. It is through the body that the bringing to life of silence is explored.

Firstly as artist, archivist and curator I placed myself in the space at a desk with a sign above my head. The sign had two boxes against the notation 'curator, artist, archivist' and each had a removable 'tick' against it. At any given time the curator, artist or archivist could either be 'in' or 'out'. This refers to a number of things. It questions who is present when I am present, since I am archivist, curator and artist. It asks if the presence of one cancels out the others, or not? If so, then why not? This also refers to the gallery practice of putting up signs on gallery doors to tell the public when the artist exhibiting will be present for engagement on the work, which is another gallery convention that I manipulated to my own ends.

The work of Marina Abramovic, arguably the first performance artist, in her piece "The Artist is Present", (performed at the Museum of Modern Art, March 14th to May 31, 2010), sat for the duration of her exhibition, engaging silently with her audience. During my presentation I sat at the desk and arranged piles of screws, nuts and bolts, beads and seeds. Periodically I would stand and move the 'ticks' so that the archivist for example, would no longer be 'in' but would then be 'out'. This was in reference as well to presence and absence. Arrangement of little objects was according to a prescribed pattern that I had chosen for the three roles but I knew that, unless I was to be watched carefully by any viewer, would not be apparent.

The second aspect of live performance was the audience themselves. Here viewers were invited to move or change any part of the exhibition that they might choose based on their personal notions of silence. This was to establish if there were other juxtapositions of objects and documents that could

show a language of silence, and it was also to allow for the audience to claim their own agency as opposed to having the authority of the curator subjected upon them.

Finally, since the presentation was to be photographed, it was hoped that documentation of audience response to this could assist with evaluation post the presentation. The third aspect of live performance also involved the audience. Here they were invited to enter an enclosed booth where they sat facing a camera and were asked to respond to a question: "what in this presentation brought you to silence?" Their response was recorded but it was only the visual image that was projected onto a wall on the opposite side of the venue. Here then were large scale images of participants, recognizable to other viewers in that they were in attendance together, projected onto the wall, clearly speaking but having no voice. Recording of the voices however, made for valuable evaluation after the event.

6.3 Ethical considerations

On reading notes taken during class work as preparation for writing this report I came across an entry referring to my mother and autobiography that I found rather enlightening. It reads as follows: "what are the ethical considerations of an auto-biographical representation that I need to face? Do I have the right to write about autobiographical silence when the writing of it is as much about my mother as it is about me?" This extends beyond just my mother but to my extended family as well, and also Marilyn and her family and friends.

There are political considerations of whether a fragment of an archive can be viewed as art work as well, and these are also ethical considerations. An example of this is "The Blue Dress" by Judith Mason. This was inspired by a freedom fighter called Phile Ndwandwe who was captured, raped and tortured and finally murdered. Since she was naked in the final days of her life Ndwandwe covered her nakedness with a plastic packet that she had found. "The Blue Dress" is the result of how Mason had been moved by the story that emerged during the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. The artwork hangs now at Constitution Hill as part of a collection founded by Albie Sachs. So here we see the story of an historical person now embodied in a work of art hanging in a museum.

Was Ndwandwe's story stolen by Mason, or did Mason uplift the young woman by honouring her memory in the form of an art work? We could also question whether museums should be places where empathy should be evoked as opposed to simply places for education, but this again, is a topic for possible further study. With reference to this study however, it brings to mind questions of the ethics of using Marilyn's belongings as art work. I could ask myself the same questions as put to the ethics of the Mason piece, and there would be as many answers, or as few, that could possibly present themselves. These would apply too to the use of objects and documents from other people who have died such as my brother, father and grandfather.

So what then, is the difference between using objects belonging to a person or people that are still living and using objects that had belonged to those who are now gone? Prior to the presentation the concern was more with regards to those who are gone than to those who are still living, in that it was felt that it was simply a matter of asking the living for permission to use these objects. As long as it was made very clear what the intention was from the outset then it was felt that ethical considerations were covered. Here I referred to my mother for permission to use the family archive and she was more than happy to grant this. However, during the setup of the presentation I realized

that the implications were potentially going to be shocking for her, considering that she would be confronted with piles of images of her long dead, and also not so long dead, family members, including those of her son. These images were also manipulated, and as much as permission was granted I doubted that she would have understood the implications when she granted this permission. I was quite right in this concern as my mother was almost inconsolable during the presentation.

I recently worked on a digital story telling workshop with a group of young lesbians from Alexandra Township. The result of the workshop was a short movie made by each of the participants which told their individual, deeply personal and at times shocking stories. They were initially very happy for their stories to be put on the internet but it was decided to wait until the full implications of this were made clear to them. Some of them were not out to their parents and others had been victims of assault for their sexual choices. The point is that it is not always possible to identify ethical considerations until it is too late, as was the case with my mother. I was more concerned in the planning of the presentation of the ethical considerations of using Marilyn's material. I referred to her friends for advice as her brother was not interested.

6.4 Final installation

Viewers entered from the south door and moved around the space quietly. One could argue whether they were reticent to speak in anything other than a whisper because of the sign outside, mentioned previously, which read 'silence', or because of the low lighting and sound scape that played throughout. The sign was meant to be a label but it was understood that it could have been read as an instruction. Unfortunately there is no way to establish what drove the whispered interaction between viewers as there are many possible reasons for this. Firstly viewers could have been simply obeying an instruction as has been mentioned previously, secondly the low lighting, which was designed to create a somewhat theatrical environment, could have driven this behaviour; finally the soundscape which played throughout the presentation could have set a church like experience. Since the soundscape, which was a meditation sound-track combining Tibetan prayer bells with Australian didgeridoo, was chosen specifically in order to create a quiet and sombre 'religious' space, rather like the underscoring strains of an organ in a church or a cathedral as a congregation enters. It is hoped that this was the reason the viewers moved silently through the space.

It is also possible however that none of these reasons were the case, and on reflection, the quiet manner in which they moved through the venue could have been that the viewers were simply quietly engaged with the experience.

As viewers moved past my table where I was alternating between being the archivist, the curator and the artist, they greeted me and some stopped to talk. Some gave me a hug. Since I had not wanted to be completely emotionally disengaged with the viewers I did look up from what I was doing at the table to make eye contact. Had I not done this it is unlikely that anyone would have disturbed me in my performance, but of course this is a presumption and nothing else. Periodically, just as I was about to stand up and move the 'ticks' on the chart above my head, I would clear the table of its design. Since many of the objects on the table were metal this made a sound, and this sound drew attention from the objects and documents to its source.

Viewers moved quietly through the space, examining objects, artwork and documents. From there they were invited to the interview booth or to write in the comment book, and finally outside the venue where they were offered a glass of wine. The only sounds that were audible were the low murmurings of talk, the sound-scape over the PA, the crunch of footsteps in the sand and the sounds of my small objects on the table whenever I stood to adjust my poster. As the presentation commenced, however, and more people engaged in conversation outside, viewers seemed to be more at ease with louder conversation in the venue which was interesting. This might have been because they were trying to be heard above the noise coming in from outside.

7. Findings

Evaluation of audience response was enabled via a number of means. Photographs of the audience were taken throughout the presentation, as the audience moved through the space. This was to establish as far as possible how much viewers interacted with the objects and documents. Then the interview booth provided rich insight into thought on the work by the ten audience members that agreed to answer the question posed. Finally, informal conversation, both overheard and engaged with, after the presentation over drinks was insightful.

Photographs gave a clear indication that viewers were willing to engage with the objects and documents, and many images taken show viewers leaning over tables, handling objects and picking up documents and diaries in order to read them more easily. What is interesting in the images is that for the most part viewers were reticent to move off the sand 'pathway'. However as much as photographic images showed willingness to handle material, there was little in the way of movement or rearrangements of objects, artwork or documentation, what were moved were a few photographs from my family archive, such as an image of my late brother had been moved from the table where it had been originally positioned to inside the frame of one of the 'Spirits Having Flown' triptych of woodcut prints. An image of my mother in her wedding dress was also moved from its original placement and was repositioned in the frame of "Baboon On Bicycle Eating", also a woodcut print. It was interesting that the documents moved were only images from my family archive and it is impossible to say why none of the other images, for example from Marilyn's collection, were moved or manipulated.

There were other objects that were rearranged, such as a collection of old spoons, yet it is impossible to fully understand the motivation behind the specific choices that motivated these choices made, this in itself is interesting as there were conceivably no real indication to my audience as to what drove specific decisions to place what object next to what object. This is exactly the power that the curator holds.

Transcripts taken from the audio track lent the most insight into how audience members reacted to the presentation. Athena Mazarakis, contemporary dancer and choreographer, had this to say: "I think the whole aura of the exhibition created a sense of silence, even now with the silent moving through because underfoot [sic] makes you aware of the noise as you move – constantly. I was silenced particularly by these series of photographs and objects inherited from family members and the repetition of images that faded. Very poignant; so your silence completes the fading in a way with each reproduction of print. The empty spaces also brought me to silence and the gloves telling a particular kind of story; the absent, empty spaces where body should be; deflated gloves; absence of that person; very particular story; you fill the narrative as you watch them."

Tracey Humby, doctor of environmental law: "...the pics of the rhinos and how you followed through with the other pictures being present and then slowly fading away. That touches me; it's about how these species slip away silently and then also the loved ones passing away – the vibrancy of their words and the colour of their lives and then slowly fading to silence. And then the gloves – I think what they did was they added colour to the presentation. I just had the image of them lying in the snow in landscapes, everyone's gone home and they are in silence, silent landscape."

Ben Law-Viljoen, technician for the art school: "The rhino that doesn't have a voice to scream. I was incredibly moved by that."

Jessica Dennyshcen, choreographer and director of the Ar(t)chive: "I just want you to know that it's just brutally, brutally honest and beautiful and reminds me of the integrity that I'm growing towards. There's not a moment in the presentation that brought me to silence; it's leaving this presentation that's making me... that's making me silent. I'm going to carry this with me."

These responses were astonishing in that much of what was said referred directly to the intention from the outset, particularly in the responses from Mazarakis and Law-Viljoen. Here is an indication that the audience 'got it', and by 'it' I refer to the intended message and not a message as shaped by themselves. However it cannot be said that this is conclusive, as for the most part the people that were willing to comment knew me, so their responses could conceivably have been shaped to a greater or lesser extent by this, and not so much by the work and arrangement itself.

The comment book was disappointing in that there were very few comments, and in fact nothing that gave any indication as to response. The only exception however, was from my mother, who said that she was in tears. This in itself though was not exactly a response to the work and the presentation as a whole.

7.1 Successes

The projection of viewers as they were answering the question in the booth, onto the wall, was hugely successful in that it gave a sense of life rather than the loss of death, yet at the same time their silent movement spoke also of voicelessness. This contributed towards a performative aspect of the work; a live embodiment to the notion of silence. The artist/curator/archivist as performer contributed to this as well for the same reasons.

The use of the catalogue was successful in that it provided direction and information to the viewer yet without indicating message in any way. In other words, each label gave clear information such as 'this is what it is, this is what it cost, this is where it came from', allowing the viewer to make meaning him/herself. Numbering of items was necessary, enabling the viewer to identify objects and artwork without having to do too much work, despite this also providing certain direction in the movement within the space. The gloves as a lighter component worked well. Viewers understood the connection between the gloves through the narrative provided in the catalogue, and also the notion of loss and loneliness that a single glove, anthropomorphized, can represent.

With reference to the objects, images and documents displayed, it was the documents that had the most impact. These spoke directly to absence and to loss, as most people have these types of documents in their own personal archives. However, many of the woodcut prints were mentioned

as having particular meaning with reference to silence, most particularly the triptych and the "Belgica Hotel". This was established during informal conversation after the event.

The result of the sand was successful in that it was disturbed and had spread all over the space by the end of the presentation; under the tables and also even on the artwork and objects themselves. Footprints were embedded in the sand and footprints over the footprints were to be seen. This was in line with the detritus found after the viewers had left the space, as mentioned previously.

7.2 Failures

The title for the presentation, both in the flier and the exhibition itself, gave the viewers a very direct and clear framework within which to view the work. This then impeded the investigation as whether the intended message was received or not. It was thus impossible to establish if the true message was received or if it was driven by the title. The use of sand also impeded the manner in which the viewers moved through the space and had an effect on how they were able to engage with the objects and images. For the most part it did seem as if they were somewhat reticent to move away from the sand 'pathway' and direct their own journey. It was prescriptive and this was not the intention.

Also the venue should have been considered in more depth, for example the positioning of what was not to be used next to the dustbin as outlined previously, and also the meaning of fixed aspects of the venue such as exit signs. It was apparent that the manner in which work was priced was not understood as well. Here the price of objects was to indicate value of endeavour or of what the image represented, and not the pieces themselves. For example, the exorbitant price of the rhino paintings were not for the paintings themselves but were to indicate the value of the rhino that is rapidly fading into extinction. Those viewers that bought work were astonished that they were required to pay such a little for the work that was priced cheaply, and thus this indicated that they did not understand the notion of value that was placed on them.

8. Conclusion

To conclude it could be argued that this research project as an academic endeavour from beginning to end has had some successes and some failures. The real success of the presentation lies in that the act of curation was questioned in order for us to become more aware of how meaning takes place, who participates in the meaning making and how, as well as the enormous responsibility that a curator has to question the modes and contexts of representation. Answers to the grappling with these issues have been provided for the most part. Karen Atkinson sums this up neatly when she talks of considering how the curator frames work and how curators are also framed by factors that are beyond control. She says that "[o]ur voices as curators, and the voices of the artists that we gather, are important elements of contemporary culture. Perhaps by being aware of our decisions, the models and the language we use, our work will be perceived closer to the way in which it was intended"(Atkinson, 1996: 130).

While walking in Braamfontein recently I stumbled upon an art exhibition. It was hung in that beautiful, somewhat industrial but at the same time colonial space, The Canopy. It was entitled, of all things, "Stillness" and was by artist Hermann Niebuhr. Paintings in oil, all South African landscapes, except one which was of an emaciated dog-like creature. Open, empty desert roads,

leading the eye to a point on the horizon; wind pumps standing sentinel over vast flat Karoo land; storms in landscapes that I can only describe as still lives, since moments captured were the split seconds when lightning striking the earth – black clouds above and desert vistas lit up in that moment below. These stormy still lives were my favourite and I got to thinking how clever the artist was. Lightning is not noisy by any means – its strike is completely silent, yet it changes atoms in the air and causes the world to hold its breath, in expectation of the violent clap of thunder that is its shouting antithesis that follows. Staring into these landscapes, which truly spoke of silence to me, I think I understood. These are familiar images to me. They sit deeply in my African spirit. The semiotic representation of a single wind pump in a vast open desert space is so deeply culturally bound I wonder if a European would/could ever read it as intended by the artist. I could hear the constant meditative sound of the clank, clank, clank as the blades turned (so different to the powerful whoosh whoosh of a Dutch windmill). I could hear water pouring gently into the reservoir as it was pumped up from dark cavernous homes underground. I could hear the calls of the sheep as they walked across the desert to water and feel the gathering closeness of an expected storm. This is the familiarity that all South Africans know in our blood, but for me it's something so much more. The deserts of the Karoo have always been my sanctuary; always been the places I have run to when my spirits needs quiet and healing. These spaces are not silent places of loss; these are the true meditative spaces I had been searching to articulate in the research project all along.

Sitting with all of this 'stuff', the objects and documents used for the presentation, I feel the need to wait. All the gloves and documents, including diaries, photographs, copies and all of Marilyn's objects are all sitting in a suitcase, which belonged to a lover lost, and stored in the garage. It is kept as part of my personal memory, but is stored out of sight and thus out of mind for the time being. We archive so that we have the luxury of forgetting. There is however a need to return after a time and relook at all of this with different eyes, new experience, new personal history and make something new of all of this. I will not be taking away the old archive; I will be making a new one, and in the act of curating will provide new meaning and a new message.

Subsequent to the presentation, I discovered that the research was not necessarily about building a language of silence, but more about the position of myself as researcher in the process, presenting my own personal silence. Therefore, in most respects, the aims of this research were not achieved, in that the question and subsequent practice led to answers that were surprising and radically different to what was initially expected, and also to new questions emerging. Research of any sort requires an outcome of some sort, and within the very broad confines of Practice as Research methodology, there can be forgiveness found in an outcome that is radically different to the point of departure and the aims of the research. The work became deeply autobiographical without planning to be, and at the same time achieving what it set out to. Here I refer specifically to the awareness raised in the audience by a quiet, spiritual experience that was simple yet powerful.

Throughout the journaling and processing of outcomes from the research experience I have been continually reminded of a lady that cleaned my home for me when I was very young. She would sit me down at lunch time and serve us lunch. At the end of the meal she would clear the dishes away and say, "That is the end of part one". I always asked her when part two would begin but she would never answer. At this point in time I find that I am only at the end of part one, and that Romanyshyn is quite correct in saying that in Practice as Research we may find that the stage is set for another dialogue, possibly for many dialogues, and that part two conceivably will never begin. In the

meantime I have also discovered that I am able to produce good art, even if I am the only critic, and that I am indeed able to step out of my own shadow into the voice of light, and as Plato said: …"release from chains, and turning away from the shadows to the images of light, and an upward passage from the underground to the sun…" (Romanyshyn, 1956: 332).