

PRECARIOUS VIDEO: HISTORICAL EVENTS, TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN
SOUTH AFRICAN VIDEO ART (JO RACTLIFFE, PENNY SIOPIS, BERNI SEARLE,
MINNETTE VÁRI)

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Declaration

I, Yvette Mariette Greslé, confirm that the work presented in this dissertation is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the dissertation.

Abstract

This dissertation explores four recent examples of video art by four South African women artists. It focuses on Jo Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive-by shooting)* [1999/2000], Berni Searle's *Mute* (2008), Penny Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* (2010) and Minnette Vári's *Chimera* (the white edition, 2001 and the black edition 2001-2002). I consider the visual, sonic, temporal, durational, spatial, sensory and affective capacities of these works, and their encounter with historical events/episodes and figures the significance and affective charge of which move across the eras differentiated as apartheid and post-apartheid. I seek to contribute to critiques of the post-apartheid democracy, and the impetus to move forward from the past, to forgive and reconcile its violence, while not actively and critically engaging historical trauma, and its relation to memory. Each of the videos engaged enter into a dialogue with historical narratives embedded within the experience and memory of violence and racial oppression in South Africa. The study is concerned with the critical significance and temporality of memory in relation to trauma as a historical and psychoanalytical concept applicable to ongoing conditions of historical and political violence and its continuous, apparently irresolvable repetition in political-historical life.

This inquiry is underpinned by art historical approaches to the relationship between art and trauma, and, in particular, the work of Jill Bennett (2005) and Griselda Pollock (2013). It is concerned primarily with Bennett and Pollock's privileging, from their particular theoretical perspectives, of the affects and internal logics/worlds of art objects, which prompt critical thought, and theoretical and historical inquiry. The particular temporality of video is engaged through historical and psychoanalytical concepts of trauma. The videos selected for this dissertation suggest ideas of temporal and spatial disorientation, displacement, collapse, and irresolvable repetitive return. The opacity that characterises the works is a major point of emphasis, and is related to the dissertation's concern with trauma, racial oppression and historical/epistemic violence.

A major concern is how artists and scholars enter into dialogues with history, from the perspectives of their own subjectivities, without reinscribing historical and epistemic violence, and the objectification of marginalised subjects. Situated within the parameters of feminist ethics the study foregrounds women artists. I argue for an ethics that takes into account self-reflexivity, and the artist's, and the scholar's, situated relationship to history, in the aftermath of sustained historical racial oppression and authoritarianism. It considers the possibilities of art objects as sites that facilitate empathetic, critical and intellectually engaged encounters with historical trauma and violence in South Africa. The videos explored counter spectacle and didactic, and authoritarian, modes of representation. In the absence of a sustained and visible art historical narrative of the history of video art in South Africa, the study focuses on work representative of the earliest, documented examples of video art by women artists, which emerge out of the transition from apartheid. The tension between history's relationship to objectivity, detachment and empirical knowledge, and its participation in subjective, imaginary, and performative processes underpins the study.

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Introduction

Apartheid/Post-Apartheid

In a 2009 *Mail & Guardian* article, Njabulo Ndebele draws attention to the political-affective charge of apartheid in South Africa today: ‘the existence of [...] a collective space of anguish may have to be recognised and acknowledged as the one feature in our public and private lives that has the potential to bind us. Beyond that it is vital to recognise that, being in that space, South Africans may not hold the same quantum of responsibility and accountability.’¹ Pumla Gqola brings into view the question of accountability and responsibility in the aftermath of sustained historical racial violence, critiquing the glib promise of the Rainbow Nation: ‘rainbowism is evoked at specific points where a certain kind of non-racialism, though not necessarily anti-racism, needs to be stressed. We are not always rainbow people, only some of the time when the need arises’.²

Apartheid – imagined in this dissertation in relation to the art object’s dialogue with historical events, memory and trauma in South Africa - is a profoundly affecting phenomenon, the psychic, emotional, bodily, political, social, cultural, economic and spatial, implications of which reverberate in the present. It continues to inhabit and circumscribe South Africa’s historical imagination, cultural forms, social and political life and the seemingly innocuous encounters of everyday experience. Public life is imbued with narratives of anger, guilt, shame, denial, blame, and complicity: Psychic trauma related to apartheid’s discourse of white supremacy is apparent, overtly and opaquely, in South African public discourse.³ To speak of a post-apartheid era - as if there is a definitive before and after - is to silence the continuums of memory’s relationship to historical trauma, which complicates the boundaries of past and

¹ Njabulo Ndebele, ‘Of pretence and protest’, September 23 2009, <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-09-23-of-pretence-and-protest> (accessed 5 August 2014).

² Pumla Gqola, ‘Defining people: Analysing power, language and representation in metaphors of the New South Africa’, *Transformation* 47, (2001), 94-106, 100.

³ Many of the debates that take place in South African public life are engaged on the blog ‘Africa is a Country’, <http://africasacountry.com/> (accessed 15 December 2014).

present. It is to negate the deeply ensconced psychic and power-laden disconnections present in South African social, political, cultural and economic life. And yet, the term post-apartheid has gained currency and is widely used.

Writing about apartheid and remembrance, Mark Sanders articulates questions that are fundamental, and yet infrequently asked: What was apartheid? How is it being remembered? What is apartheid?⁴ Sanders explores the historical contingencies of remembrance in post-apartheid South Africa with an emphasis on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).⁵ He brings a Freudian perspective to national mourning and also highlights the limitations embedded, discursively, epistemologically and ethically, in concepts of forgiveness and reparation: 'To remember apartheid is to remember that what made for its conditions of possibility can be repeated in the very acts of remembrance that, by linking epistemic and mournful practice, undertake to give an account of, and make reparation for, apartheid'.⁶ Sanders troubles temporal distinctions between past and present in South Africa; historical conditions of past and present are enmeshed and suggest future conditions of possibility. Historically sedimented violence, whether related to race, gender or epistemic and discursive structures more broadly, can be repeated.⁷ This notion of historical repetition and enmeshment is also foregrounded in the work of Mahmood Mamdani who draws attention to how the legal and administrative apparatus of apartheid underpinned the constitution of the TRC itself: 'It had eyes only for the apparatus of civil law that governed white civil society and excluded black society, and that was at the heart of the claim that apartheid was indeed a rule of law'.⁸

⁴ Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p.34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, 'Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)', *Diacritics*, Volume 32, Number 3-4 (Fall-Winter, 2002), 33-59, 58.

In seeking to disrupt the distinctions implied by the apartheid/post-apartheid binary I set out to contribute to critiques of the post-apartheid democracy, which have sought to trouble, although from a number of different theoretical positions and disciplinary foundations, discourses and metaphors of Rainbow Nation, and the historical, discursive and epistemological constitution of the TRC itself.⁹ Premesh Lalu asserts: 'it would be important to get beyond the neat temporal markers by which South African history has come to be known, classified, and policed - colonialism, segregation, apartheid and now the post-apartheid, or in its historiographical rendering, settler-colonial, liberal, nationalist and Marxist'.¹⁰ I am concerned with the question of how art objects might complicate the 'neat temporal markers' to which Lalu refers; with an emphasis on the apartheid/post-apartheid binary.

To make my argument I focus on video art, a medium that speaks, through its particular formal structure, to the temporal. I explore the particular temporality of memory as it relates specifically to historical and psychoanalytical concepts of trauma. I consider how four recent examples of video art in South Africa engage historical events/episodes, which move across eras historically differentiated as apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. I ask, what does video art as a medium contribute to how historical events, and the memories of these events, might be conceptualised and theorised now? Situating my study within the ethical concerns of feminist art history, I focus specifically on women artists and this emphasis is contextualised below. I stage multi-sited theoretical encounters with art objects and the historical events to which they speak resisting authoritarian and totalising modes of thought.¹¹

⁹ In particular see the work of Ndebele Njabulo, Pumla Gqola, Premesh Lalu, Mahmood Mamdani and Mark Sanders.

¹⁰ Premesh Lalu, 'Thinking Ahead!', *South African Historical Journal*, 63:4 (2011) 581-593, 582.

¹¹ The question of power is threaded across my exploration of historical events in South Africa. The work of Michel Foucault is foundational to the literature on history, knowledge, discourse and power. Both Foucault, and the literature that emerges from his work, informs my understanding of history as inevitably infused by relations of power – contingent upon the limits and possibilities of the historical-political conditions from which they emerge. In my understanding discourse exists in a continuous relation to power and thus histories, as they come into being via events, public or private, are mediated by the actors that imagine or produce them. Power and discourse is understood here not always as an ideological, monolithic, totalitarian force, or as enacted from the foundation of a political centre and its institutions, but as diffuse and not always necessarily determinable.

The art historical work on trauma, specifically the work of Jill Bennett (2005) and Griselda Pollock (2013) informs my emphasis on the visual, sonic, spatial, temporal, durational and affective internal logics/worlds of the artworks I encounter.¹² The historical scholarship on trauma, and how the work of Bennett and Pollock informs the approach mobilised by this study, is contextualised below. I introduce each chapter with a subjective and performative approach to the artwork, which is simultaneously grounded within a contextual and historical account. I am attentive to each artist's specific relationship to the medium of video, and to the work's particular relationship to the historical and geographical conditions of South Africa. I pay close attention to the historical events/episodes and figures engaged by the artwork locating these within South African historiography, and my own archival research. My approach to the videos, which I have deliberately chosen, and which relate to particular geographies, histories and politics, is informed by the internal worlds of the works themselves. I engage in a subjective, performative, critical and historical excavation of the works, a strategy that seeks to explore ways of historicising and theorising South African video art in the absence of sustained art historical inquiry. Nomusa Makhubu refers to the 'history of performance in South Africa as one of 'isolation and segregation' and, similarly to the history of South African video art, she states that performance art 'seems recent'.¹³ Her work, which foregrounds performance art, also signals an art historical narrative that locates significant developments in performance

My understanding of history is informed by a number of historians, sociologists and anthropologists focused on the African continent (or conditions that appear similar perhaps because of a shared experience of colonialism and liberation). This work is useful in formulating my understanding of history's relationship to the archive and historiographical tensions between positivism and invention and uses of power: Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001); Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹² Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005); Griselda Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013).

¹³ Nomusa Makhubu, 'Race and the anxieties of cultural obscurity: Meditations on blackness in South African performance and video art', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(1) [2012], 41–53, 43.

and video art in Europe and North America.¹⁴ Through an emphasis on race, which emphasises blackness but also alerts us to the meanings of whiteness in discourses on South African art, Makhubu brings into view ‘the perception that modernity, in the South African context, suggests an assimilation of Euro-American values’.¹⁵ This is a critical point that informs my choice of videos and artists, as does South African art’s relationship to the history and experience of apartheid.

The work of the artists foregrounded in this dissertation have been circulated internationally, and their work has political importance beyond the borders of South Africa. Okwui Enwezor and Terry Smith’s work has been important in engaging art’s relationship to contemporaneity and notions of Africa and the West.¹⁶ Smith interrogates the meaning and significance of art historical categories from the modern to the contemporary, locating his discussion within the specificities of geographical-temporal zones: EuroAmerica (previously the West) and, what he calls ‘the rest of the world’.¹⁷ He establishes a third arena of inquiry related to artists who ‘see themselves and their work as participating in international artistic exchanges and global culture’.¹⁸ I would like to challenge the assumptions implied in statements such as ‘the rest of the world’, and the historical-geographical-psychic narcissism this wording re-inscribes. Enwezor’s introduction to the Second Johannesburg Biennale Catalogue – ‘Travel Notes: Living, Working, and Travelling in a Restless World’ is an important critical

¹⁴ Ibid.,43.

¹⁵ Ibid.,44.

¹⁶ Smith’s work and Enwezor’s collaborative process of curating and writing about contemporary African art and photography more generally represents important departure points for my interest in contemporary African art. See: Okwui Enwezor and Olu Oguibe (eds), *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Market Place* (London: Iniva and MIT Press, 1999); Okwui Enwezor, *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2001); Okwui Enwezor, ‘The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a state of Permanent Transition’, in Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Campbell (eds) *Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes* (United Kingdom: Institute of International Visual Arts in collaboration with the Forum for African Arts and the Prince Claus Fund, 2003); Okwui Enwezor, and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980* (USA: Damiani, 2009); Nancy Condee, Terry Smith; Okwui Enwezor, *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (USA: Duke University Press, 2009); Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*. United Kingdom: Laurence King Publishing, 2011;

¹⁷ Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 2011, p.9.

¹⁸ Ibid.,p.10.

essay.¹⁹ For me, it informs the relationship between African contemporary art and the baggage of discursive and epistemological inheritances. These are inscribed across geographies and histories haunted by the historical encounters of Africa and the West.²⁰ Enwezor foregrounds heterogeneity and contingency disrupting monolithic notions of Africa and epistemological closure – ‘posts-and ends of something’.²¹

It is clear that what is called South African video art is a heterogeneous field of inquiry. I focus on works exhibited as digital video art installations projected from DVDs within the context of art galleries, museums or video art festivals. Video art can also be subsumed under the broader category ‘moving image practice’ which accounts for the many ways in which artists work with moving image technologies either as distinct or hybrid forms. I do, at times, use terminologies such as ‘moving image practices’ or ‘moving image technologies’ particularly when I am paying attention to how the artworks produce encounters and dialogues across mediums and moving image forms:

To assume the stability of any artistic (or non-artistic media) is to fail to appreciate that different image-making practices frequently cohabit the same technologies: video for instance, encompasses home movies, digital film, commercial television, internet broadcasts and video art (Tanya Leighton).²²

While I have chosen to foreground video art, the chapters will also take into account each artist’s relationship to other media both within the world of the videos themselves, and in relation to their practice as a whole.

I place emphasis on the historical events engaged by the videos. Chapters draw on aspects of the extensive bodies of work by historians, which document and critique the idea of apartheid through its ideologies and legislation, through its discursive,

¹⁹ Okwui Enwezor, ‘Introduction. Travel Notes: Living, Working, and Travelling in a Restless World’, in Enwezor, *Trade Routes: History and Geography* (South Africa: Greater Metropolitan Council and The Netherlands: Price Claus Fund for Culture and Development, 1997).

²⁰ Okwui Enwezor. *Trade Routes: History and Geography*, 1997.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

²² Tanya Leighton (ed.), *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing in association with Afterall, 2008), p.11.

epistemological, social, political, spatial, racial and economic violence, and the resistance to it.²³ Each chapter contextualises the archival research that I undertook in Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2011 and 2013. I relied on the Historical Papers Research Archive located at the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and the Newspaper archives located at the South African National Library in Johannesburg and Cape Town.²⁴

A significant critical contribution to discourses of apartheid/post-apartheid embedded in the visual is the recent travelling exhibition and volume *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* edited by Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester.²⁵ Enwezor describes the project as part of a trilogy of exhibitions ‘conceived around the history of photography and its legacy in Africa’.²⁶ This dissertation, in foregrounding video art, aims to consider other kinds of production.²⁷ Photography has dominated the study of South African lens-based art.²⁸

²³ This is contextualised and referenced within each chapter.

²⁴ See: Historical Papers Research Archive: <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/> (accessed 15 December) and the National Library of South Africa: <http://www.nlsa.ac.za/> (accessed 15 December).

²⁵ Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (New York: International Centre of Photography; and Munich, London and New York: DelMonico Books and Prestel, 2013).

²⁶ Enwezor and Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 2013, p.18. Enwezor articulates his curatorial work, over two decades, as ‘shaped around what could be described as the modern African imaginary’, p.19. The other books/exhibitions in Enwezor’s trilogy are: *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994* (2001) and *Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (2006).

²⁷ See: Nomusa Makhubu, ‘Race and the anxieties of cultural obscurity: Meditations on blackness in South African performance and video art’, 2012.

²⁸ Recent work includes: Patricia Hayes, ‘Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography’, *Kronos*, No.33 (November, 2007), 139-162; Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection: Events of the Self, Portraiture and Social Identity* (Germany: Steidl, 2010); Tamar Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011; Corinne Diserens (ed.), *Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection: Appropriated Landscapes* (Germany: Steidl, 2011); Darren Newbury, ‘Picturing an “Ordinary Atrocity”: The Sharpeville Massacre’, in Geoffrey Batchen; Mick Gidley; Nancy K. Miller and Jay Prosser (eds), *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); M. Neelika Jayawardane, ‘Everyone’s Got Their Indian’, *Transition*, No.107, *Blending Borders* (2012), 51-65; Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life*, 2013.

Annie Coombes' work on the contestations at play in the production of history, memory and art in South Africa following the official transition from apartheid (2004) is a major departure point for this study.²⁹ She thinks about public memory while I focus on conceptual and theoretical overlays between memory and trauma. Her book informs my emphasis on the artwork's exploration of historical events and its critical and conceptual relationship to the highly contested status of historical production within South African discourse. Coombes draws attention to memory as a site of contestation, alerting us to historical production, and historical imagining in South Africa, its fissures and tensions, the power relations that circumscribe it, and its relation to questions of heritage, community, memory and truth. She focuses extensively on the debates that forged public discourse in South Africa after the official transition from apartheid. Her book spans museums, monuments, heritage sites, ephemera, art practices and political processes such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The contestations over memory and historical narrative, which Coombes illuminates, is a distinctive aspect of South African historical production, and her approach and perspective is important to this dissertation's emphasis on the artwork's dialogue with historical events.

Chapter One focuses on Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive-by shooting)* [1999/2000], a video that brings the artist's photographic practice into a dialogue with the moving image. The work concerns the site of the farm that, during the 1980s, was the headquarters of Vlakplaas, the covert apartheid security police unit whose atrocities became visible during the course of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings (broadcast nationally by South African radio and television media between 1996 and 2001). Chapter Two focuses on Searle's *Mute* (2008) which brings performance, photography and video into dialogue. Foregrounding aspects of social and political violence following the official transition into democracy, I discuss the xenophobia-related attacks and killings of 2008. Chapter Three considers Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* (2010). Deploying found footage and sound, Siopis reflects on the figure of Dimitri Tsafendas, the parliamentary messenger who stabbed the then Prime Minister H.F Verwoerd to death in the House of

²⁹ Coombes, Annie. *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa: History after Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2004).

Assembly, Cape Town on the 6th September 1966. Chapter Four on Vári's *Chimera* (2001) also brings performance into the frame and focuses attention on the critical and conceptual possibilities of technological alteration. Vári's work enters into a dialogue with the imaginary of The Great Trek, from the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century, commemorated by the Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria, and the frieze located in its Hall of Heroes.

Against Spectacle

Narratives of South African contemporary art are mediated by an emphasis on the temporal marker 'post-apartheid', and the celebratory tone of ten, and then twenty years, of democracy.³⁰ Between 3 July 2014 and 1 November 2014, the South African National Gallery (Cape Town) hosted the exhibition 'Brave New World...20 Years of Democracy'.³¹ Exhibitions and texts function as echoes of each other, reinscribing and perpetuating a narrative that locks contemporary South African art production into generalised accounts of the apartheid/post-apartheid eras, and the artist's relation to these.

The psychic hold of histories marked by racial violence produces particular tensions within South African discourse. In 2005, Ashraf Jamal argued: 'South Africa's present remains psychically over-determined by the Manichean systems of colonialism and apartheid'.³² Anticipating the advent into democracy in 1991, Albie Sachs - political activist and constitutional court judge between 1994 and 2009 - published the much

³⁰ See: Allan Bowyer and Candice Breitz (eds), *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale* South Africa (Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, 1995); Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal, *Art in South Africa: The Future Present* (South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 1996); Frank Herreman, *Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa* (New York: The Museum for African Art; Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 1999); Emma Bedford, *Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994-2004* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books and Iziko Museums of Cape Town, 2004); Michael Godby, 'Art and Politics in a Changing South Africa: Bongi Dhlomo in Conversation with Michael Godby', *African Arts*, Volume XXXVII, No.4, Winter (2004), 62-67; Lize Van Robbroeck, 'Reimagining South African National Heritage: Two Ten-Years-of Democracy Exhibitions', *African Arts*, Volume XXXVII, No.4, Winter (2004), 42-47; Sue Williamson, *South African Art Now* (New York: Collins Design, 2009).

³¹ See: <http://www.iziko.org.za/news/entry/brave-new-world-20-years-of-democracy> (accessed 28 August 2014).

³² Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press and Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), p.69.

circulated article 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines' asking: 'can we say that we have begun to grasp the full dimensions of the new country that is struggling to give birth to itself, or are we still trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination'.³³ Ndebele, invoking the spectre of apartheid, famously mobilised the idea of spectacle to critique the dramatisation of social relations, inter-racial encounters and narrative in black South African literature.³⁴ He argued that this literature promulgates symbols that draw together oppression and spectacle, for example, 'obscene social exhibitionism' and 'brazen, exhibitionist openness' and 'social absurdity'.³⁵ In 2013, Colin Richards reflected on Ndebele's classic text in his essay on apartheid and photographic practices and noted Ndebele's meditation on the 'life-sapping, suffocating spectacularity of apartheid figuration [in South African] modes of expression, which could include photography'.³⁶ Tamar Garb notes the ongoing challenge of negotiating spectacle in South African photography in her catalogue essay for the exhibition *Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography*: 'The idea of spectacle has haunted this essay from the start'.³⁷

I am engaged by the idea of art that works to resist the 'Manichean systems of colonialism and apartheid' identified by Jamal; the 'multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination' of which Sachs writes; and the sense of 'life-sapping, suffocating spectacularity of apartheid figuration' foregrounded by Ndebele. Annie Coombes' substantive study of visual culture, history and memory in South Africa, following the

³³ Albie Sachs, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines. TDR, Vol.35, No.1 (Spring, 1991), p.187. For a critique of Sachs's text see: Eben Lochner, 'The South African Art Centre', *Third Text*, 27:3 (2013), 315-326.

³⁴ Njabulo Ndebele, *South African Literature and Culture: - Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.32-33.

³⁶ Colin Richards, 'Retouching Apartheid: Intimacy, Interiority, and Photography'. In Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (New York: International Center of Photography and Munich, London and New York: DelMonico Books and Prestel, 2013), p.235.

³⁷ Tamar Garb, *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* (Germany: Steidl & V&A Publishing, 2011), p.76.

official transition into democracy, is an important departure point for thinking about how artists might navigate, from the perspective of their own subjectivities, a historical condition characterised by racial violence and historical trauma.³⁸ In her chapter 'New Subjectivities for the New Nation', Coombes suggests how art might function to actively de-stabilise any impetus to reinscribe spectacle in the work of memory.³⁹ She considers how artists, from various subject positions, negotiate between the gradations of grand political narratives, their own histories, and indeed their lived experience of the transition from apartheid authoritarianism (in all its manifestations), to a historical time that while fraught, has enabled some opening up of the ways in which subjectivity might be understood beyond the constraints of the apartheid state.⁴⁰

Coombes explores video art by Tracey Rose, Clive van den Berg and Penny Siopis, making the nuances of subjectivity in South Africa apparent, while also drawing attention to the heterogeneity of South African art practice. She is alert to the tensions between apartheid racial categories and the formation and enactment of subjectivities that complicate monolithic, homogenous narratives:

I want to suggest that there may be ways in which the drawbacks of fine art – its ambiguity, its recuperability as a screen for personal projections, for example – may also be its strengths in this context. For those artists who attempt to do more than simply document or represent the effects of trauma or guilt and who try to tackle the gray areas in between complicity and victimisation, fine art, unlike the mass media, offers a smaller theatre in which their work may be consumed more intimately on a one-to-one basis. Indeed this might well be the reasons that fine art can sometimes more successfully juggle both the big spectacle of apartheid and the insistent personal intrusions and degradations so often invisible to others but that were such destructive features of some individuals' experiences of living under apartheid.⁴¹

³⁸ Annie Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa: History After Apartheid*, 2003.

³⁹ See Coombes, 2003, 'New Subjectivities for the New Nation' (Chapter 6), pp.243-278.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.245.

The works explored in this dissertation resist spectacle, and a transparent account of historical events. They refuse closure, lucidity and legibility. They counter a documentary stance that presumes a transparent, objective truth or a singular, didactic representation of what an event *is*. Each work presents theoretical and methodological challenges; the visual and sonic languages they deploy produce difficulty, they are murky and ambiguous. They are characterised by a certain impenetrability, a refusal to tell me what it is they are about in any didactic and definitive sense. They counter the ‘big spectacle of apartheid’, and invite an affective and subjective dialogue with the idea of history in South Africa.

Achille Mbembe offers a conceptual language that is transportable to South African video art and its particular geographically and politically situated relationship to history and the temporal.⁴² While Mbembe’s discussion operates within the context of his work on the postcolony it animates my encounter with historical events in South Africa through the medium of video. He writes of the postcolony as an age that ‘encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an entanglement’.⁴³ These concepts of historical time and entanglement, which so powerfully rupture any claim to an authoritative, causal narrative, may be brought to other historical conditions for ‘every age, including the postcolony, is in reality, a combination of several temporalities’.⁴⁴ Mbembe’s writing is a major conceptual departure point for thinking about the critical capacities of video art as it enters into dialogues with historical events in South Africa:

To think relevantly about *this time that is appearing*, this *passing time*, meant abandoning conventional views, for these only perceive time as a current that carries individuals and societies from a background to a foreground, with the future emerging necessarily from the past and following that past, itself irreversible. But of central interest was that peculiar time that might be called

⁴² See also, on the significance of Mbembe’s notion of temporality to art, Raél Jero Salley, ‘The Changing Now of Things’, *Third Text*, 27:3 (2013), 355-366.

⁴³ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), p.14. See the chapter titled ‘Time on the Move’, pp.1-23.

⁴⁴ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 2001, p.15.

the time of existence and experience, the time of entanglement [...] This time is not a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones.⁴⁵

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I hold Mbembe's conceptually rich language of 'interlocking' temporalities, of temporal 'depths' and entanglements in place as I encounter the historical events invoked through video art. The temporal aspects of video art, and its encounter with historical events, is also explored through the psychoanalytic work on memory and trauma.

Women Artists

In deploying the art historical, epistemological category 'woman artist', this dissertation is underpinned by a feminist ethics.⁴⁶ It considers how artists defined, or indeed self-defined, as 'woman', within a patriarchal historical condition, encounter historical events, in which male subjects and racial violence figure most ubiquitously. I am not imagining a 'feminine' aesthetic, a mode of practice that marks out empirically determinable differences between how subjects (defined or self-defined as men or women) approach visual images and art-making. The experiences of women in South Africa are certainly not homogenous, underpinned as they are by the historical conditions of slavery, settler histories, colonialism and apartheid; and heterogeneous relationships to language, heritage, class, gender identity, sexual preference and

⁴⁵ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. 2001, p.16. Entanglement, as a concept, appears in the work of Mbembe and Édouard Glissant whose concept of opacity is explored in the chapter on Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger*. Sarah Nuttall has also explored the idea of entanglement, in relation to post-apartheid South African literature and culture. See: Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ This is, of course, a broad statement of a complex field of research within which methods and theories are contested and disagreed upon. In the field of vision (encompassing histories of art and film) my reading historically has largely centred on Linda Nochlin, Laura Mulvey, Griselda Pollock, Rozsika Parker, Jacqueline Rose, and Tamar Garb. Historically, I have also engaged the literature that emerging in the 1990s (and named queer theory) troubled gender identity and its relation to sexual preference. I have also engaged the work of scholars, across historical, political and geographical conditions, which bring into view the intersections between race and gender. Where relevant this literature is engaged in individual chapters. Sara Ahmed's concept of the "willful subject" is mobilised in the chapter on Minnette Vári.

culture.⁴⁷ Of importance to a critical, politically engaged and ethical exploration of the histories of women and apartheid is the complicity of women classified white in the status quo of black women's subjugation, and invisibility, within the historical, political, social, economic and cultural conditions of white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism in South Africa.⁴⁸ Simply by virtue of being classified white, which is not to negate the impact of apartheid patriarchy on women more broadly, or to undermine the imagined possibilities of narratives of friendship, love and desire across the racial boundaries actively policed by the apartheid state, automatic privileges were granted which were denied to women classified black, coloured or Indian. In contemporary South Africa questions related to gender, sexuality, rape and LGBTI identities and experiences of violence have become highly visible in the public sphere and in scholarly discourse.⁴⁹

I focus on work by four artists: Penny Siopis (b.1953), Jo Ractliffe (b.1961), Berni Searle (b.1964) and Minnette Vári (b.1968). These artists are representative of the earliest (visible and documented) examples of women artists, working with video art, in South Africa, and this history is engaged in the conclusion to this introduction. The question of narrating a history of video art in South Africa speaks, of course, to the relationship between apartheid and histories of art, and the formation of canons.⁵⁰ A concern is how histories of media and modes of practice are constituted. Because I began this inquiry with an emphasis on generations, seeking to understand the emergence of video art as a visible and sustained mode of practice only after the transition from apartheid, I have not engaged younger generations of artists, born in the late 1970s and 1980s, working with the medium of video art across race.⁵¹ I conclude this

⁴⁷ In particular, see the work of Desiree Lewis; Yvette Abrahams; Pumla Gqola, Cheryl de La Rey.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See: Gqola, 'How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender based violence in contemporary South Africa', *African Identities*, 5:1, (2007), 111-124. See the significant work of artist/visual activist Zanele Muholi: Zethu Matebeni, INTIMACY, QUEERNESS, RACE, *Cultural Studies*, 27:3, (2013) 404-417,

⁵⁰ See: Sabine Marschall, 'Strategies of Accommodation: Toward an Inclusive Canon of South African Art', *Art Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), pp. 50-59.

⁵¹ See, for example: Zanele Muholi (b.1972); Tracey Rose (b.1974); Sharlene Khan (1977); Lerato Shadi (b. 1979); Dineo Sheshee Bopape (b.1981); Nandipha Mntambo (b.1982); Khanyisile Mbongwa (b.1984).

introduction with an account of South African video art and the problematics at play in constituting a history. This dissertation considers the ethics and politics of representation in the aftermath of sustained histories of racial oppression.

I explore the possibilities of a self-reflexive and situated approach to the representation of histories through art objects as subjects classified white by the apartheid administration. In the chapter on Searle, I consider her lived relationship to apartheid as a subject classified coloured, remaining attentive to the relationships between art, representation, and subjectivity as historical trauma is invoked. To name apartheid categories risks reinscribing its violence and its spectacle. In this instance, it is a decision that takes into account existing historical and structural oppressions, and the different ways in which artists, and indeed art historians, are situated as they enter into acts of representation in the aftermath of apartheid. Makhubu's work on performance and video art in South Africa engages distinctions made between black and white artists who embody different relationships to apartheid and its memory. She notes: 'The term 'Black' carries historical political weight (one does not speak of White art for instance, as it is presumed to be mainstream cultural production)'.⁵²

Narratives of racial violence are threaded across this dissertation, and are key to the historical events engaged by the videos. A major concern is how artists, and indeed scholars, classified white by the apartheid state enter into dialogues with historical events without reinscribing historical racial violence; and the objectification of marginalised subjects. Enwezor's essay 'Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Art' (1997) is a landmark in its critique of race and South African art practices.⁵³ He engages the question of how sustained histories of white supremacy in South Africa informs unconscious processes:

Despite the sincerity of the artists who have brazenly maintained a relationship in their work with the black body, there is a certain over-determination that

⁵² Nomusa Makhubu, 'Race and the anxieties of cultural obscurity: Meditations on blackness in South African performance and video art', 2012, 42-53, 42.

⁵³ Okwui Enwezor, 'Reframing the black subject ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African representation', *Third Text*, 11: 40, (1997), 21-40.

accompanies their gestures. They seem to neglect the fact that the black form is as much a grotesque bearer of traumatised experiences as it is the abject vessel of race as a point of differentiation. More than alerting us to how the stereotype fixes its objects of desire in that freeze-frame of realism, as prior knowledge, the work of these artists exacerbates the stereotype by replaying it, perhaps unconsciously, as if it had always been factual. The problem with this kind of work is that it is so fixed on the body, that it neglects to account for the more crucial psychic split which positions black and white bodies in polarities of worth and value. By seeking to merge them, albeit forcibly, and taking as licence the fact of their whiteness, they repeat that act of surrogacy which emphasises the subject's muteness and silence, while embellishing their own positions as the voices of reality, as the vocal integers of truth.⁵⁴

Enwezor's critique remains important as racial violence continues to be reinscribed in art practices, which have been at the forefront of current debates about race and representation.⁵⁵ Psychoanalytic aspects of race and racism are brought into view through Enwezor's article, and are explored in the chapters on Searle and Siopis in particular. Enwezor reflects on discourses that run the risk of 'fetishising identity as something that wholly belongs to and can be used only by a particular group'.⁵⁶ He also contemplates a critique of the 'postcolonial litany of the wounded black subject, caught in the mesh of white, European displacement, who must again be either protected or spoken for'.⁵⁷ He brings his own situated relationship to these discourses into view: 'The fact that I am an African does not in itself absolve me from this quandary'.⁵⁸ Enwezor locates his critique within the specificity of South Africa, and the fallacy of the Rainbow Nation's particular assertion of non-racialism. It is this

⁵⁴ Enwezor, 1997, 37 -38.

⁵⁵ See: Nomusa Makhubu & Ruth Simbao, 'The Art of Change', *Third Text*, 27:3, (2013), 299-302.

Refer to the debates around Brett Bailey's *Exhibit b*: Yvette Greslé, 'Twenty pound spectacle: Brett Bailey (exhibit b)', *3:AM Magazine*, 27 August 2014, <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/twenty-pound-spectacle-brett-bailey-exhibit-b/> (accessed 26 November 2014); 'Brett Bailey, the Barbican and Black Britons', *Africa Is A Country*, 2 October 2014 <http://africasacountry.com/brett-bailey-the-barbican-and-black-britons/> (accessed 26 November 2014); Christene Eyene, 'Exhibit b: de quel racisme parle-t-on' <http://eyonart.blogspot.co.uk/2014/12/exhibit-b-de-quel-racisme-parle-t-on.html> (accessed 16 December 2014).

⁵⁶ Enwezor, 1997, 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

particularity that is important here, and his 're-examination of certain facts lodged in the iconographical heart of South Africa, in a delimited forum of whiteness as a nation unto itself'.⁵⁹ He argues, taking into account, the fact of apartheid, and the myths of racial unity propagated by the ideology of the Rainbow Nation: 'should we not also admit that it is the reappropriation of blackness by Africans as a nationalistic emblem, as a fantasy of the coherence of African identity, that has set up the appositional measures against the 'Rainbow Nation?''⁶⁰ Enwezor staged a critique of specific works by artists including Siopis' cibachrome prints appropriating and reworking ethnographic postcards and early photographic portraits of black subjects.⁶¹ He argues that these images reinscribe rather than critique visual languages and modes of representation located in conditions of colonialism. He notes for instance Olu Oguibe's analyses of the artist's re-imagining of an ethnographic postcards of "'native" women': 'an effect that recalls what Olu Oguibe has called the scarred page. By sentimentalising her images, Siopis turns them into over-aestheticised vessels for pleasurable consumption, untroubled and available'.⁶²

Siopis – in her article 'Dissenting Detail: Another Story of Art and Politics in South Africa' – engages Enwezor's critique of her work. She mobilises her own subjectivities as woman, artist and South African, writing an intimate account of her process and practice paying close attention to the condition of being woman within the space of apartheid patriarchy contained, on the one hand, by Christian nationalist ideological positions and, on the other, resisted through a politics that foregrounded questions of race and suspended those of gender. She goes on to elaborate upon the fraught condition of making art in South Africa and the complexity and heterogeneity of self/other continuums. Reflecting on Siopis' response to Enwezor, I have attempted in this dissertation to pay close attention to how each artist wrestles with histories of racial violence through their practice, and the medium of video specifically. I am interested in how they articulate their own lived relationship to apartheid. I consider,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 38-39.

⁶¹ Ibid., 28-29.

⁶² Ibid., 28.

in the case of Ractliffe, Siopis and Vári, how white artists might engage histories of racial violence in South Africa, without reinscribing, through visual forms, processes of objectification and erasure. Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* builds on her prior interest in found objects and materials: I argue that unlike the works critiqued by Enwezor, it deploys a language that, in its opaqueness, refuses the objectification of a marginalised subject. It also brings into view narratives of whiteness, and the normalised, ordinary power relations of race within historical conditions of white supremacy. Christina Sharpe's book *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (2010) located specifically in the historical violence enacted on black bodies from slavery and afterwards, across geographical sites, writes about 'mundane horrors that aren't acknowledged to be horrors' and this sense of the mundane and the banal in everyday life, in extreme conditions of racial violence, enacted not only with overt brutality but also more insidiously and invisibly is transportable, conceptually, to the historical narratives that emerge in my encounters with the work of Ractliffe, Searle, Siopis and Vári.⁶³ I also consider Searle's staging of grief in the aftermath of xenophobic violence, arguing instead for the critical, conceptual and political significance of her performance, and how it is inflected by her own lived experience of apartheid.

I deploy the personal pronoun 'I' while acknowledging its contested status within disciplines of history and art history.⁶⁴ It functions, in my historical-critical imagination,

⁶³ Christina Sharpe. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010) p.3.

⁶⁴ On the 12 May 2014 the UCL European Institute hosted a colloquium which drew critical attention to these concerns within the context of the Holocaust, and the narratives of Jewish and German scholars (many of whom had direct ancestral links with Nazi Germany). Papers debated the usage of the first person and the particular role of the historian's relationship to detachment, objectivity, and evidence. History of art is arguably engaged not only in the idea of the empirical and questions of evidence and argument but also exists in an imaginative and performative relationship to visual images. The question of performativity was raised, and implicit, at the Colloquium but was neither drawn out nor an emphasis. The event also drew attention to the writing of history as an object of inquiry in and of itself. The historian Professor Aaron Sachs (University of Cornell) presented a paper (titled 'Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!) that engaged the question of the first person most directly; contrasting a more conventionally detached scholarly approach with a subjective one. He discussed the assumption that to deploy the first person is to draw accusations of narcissism and that the values attached to historical work are based in epistemological questions to do with, for example, bias, critical distance, fairness, balance, rationality, empiricism and so forth. His performance of an approach located in subjectivity brought the personal experience of his father's death into a dialogue with his interests as a historian (ideas to do with poetry and emotion entered his discussion as did the 'I' as a way for the historian to connecting with audiences/readers). Professor Mary Fulbrook in a paper titled 'Doing Justice to the past? History, objectivity and professional practices' foregrounded and identified factors

as a strategy for addressing methodological questions related to the writing of histories emerging out of an authoritarian regime grounded in ideologies of race and patriarchy, and the associated power relations embedded in discourses of gender, sexual preference and class.⁶⁵ The 'I' emerges out of conditions of erasure and the precarious ground of speaking on behalf of others in the aftermath of apartheid and continued inequalities. As Griselda Pollock writes, of her own 'situated knowledge':

Understanding is always partial, perspectival and inflected by the social formation and personal histories of the researcher'.⁶⁶ This is not, as she notes 'an excuse for relativism. Research is answerable to its subjects [...] I cannot pretend to a false universalism, neutrality or detachment. These works affect me, prompting me to undertake close readings.'⁶⁷

I have tried to be self-reflexive throughout the process of researching and writing this dissertation, refusing myths of objectivity and detachment. The tension between history's relationship to objectivity, detachment and empirical knowledge, and its participation in subjective, imaginary, and performative processes is a thread that runs across this dissertation. This tension is present in how the works themselves speak to history, and it also marks my own methods of research, writing and interpretation.

One of the ways in which I thought further about the relationship between art, subjectivity and situatedness was through the method of the interview. I was able to interview Siopis, Ractliffe, and Vári quite extensively, while Searle declined to be interviewed, a decision that I argue, in the chapter about her work, may be imagined conceptually and politically. Interviews do run the risk of opening up spaces for the interviewer to objectify the interviewee in some way, and perhaps psychically project various assumptions. There is also the risk of formulating interpretations filtered by an uncritical processing of the artist's narration. I refer to the interviews throughout the

such as professional responsibility and the relationship of the historian to evidence and argument (while simultaneously acknowledging the subjective processes of selection). See: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/european-institute/events/2013-14/past-transmission> (accessed 20 May 2014).

⁶⁵ African feminisms, self-reflexivity and the critical possibilities of dialogues between everyday lived experience and theory informs my mobilisation of the first person. See: Desiree Lewis, 'African feminisms', *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*, 16:50, (2001), 4-10.

⁶⁷ Griselda Pollock, *After-affects/After-Images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum*, p. xxii.

dissertation, and this opens up the question of what may or may not be constituted as evidence within the parameters of historical inquiry. While acknowledging that the substance of these conversations with the artists cannot be construed as evidence in a purely empirical sense I have made the decision to mobilise them. They illuminate the artist's subjective and situated encounter with histories that are enmeshed in racial violence, and bring into view ethical, critical and conceptual concerns within their process.

The interviews I conducted with Siopis, Ractliffe and Vári enabled me to collate necessary information about each individual work, where existing documentation was either absent or contradictory. This related to the pragmatics of dates and medium, and the work's relationship to the trajectory of the artist as a whole. Siopis allowed me close proximity to her research process and archive, and this informs my exploration of the 'artist as historian' in relation to her work, and her usage of found images, texts and sounds to construct an opaque, subjective and affective re-imagining of archival sources and modes of evidence.⁶⁸ Ractliffe spoke to me extensively about her encounter with Vlakplaas as a site of apartheid violence; and her particular deployment of video, which she mobilised as a way of expanding her critical dialogue with documentary photography, and its historical relationship to ideas about evidence and truth. Vári's account of her lived proximity to the Voortrekker Monument offered valuable insights into the nuances of her relationship, as woman, and as artist, to this site of apartheid memory. The medium of interview contributed to my account of her deliberately (in Sara Ahmed's sense), "willful" disruption of spaces produced in service to the apartheid state.⁶⁹ She makes visible the specificities of women's histories in South Africa, and Afrikaner Christian Nationalist imaginaries constellated around an imagined figure of the white Afrikaner woman. Ractliffe brings into view the gender politics of visibility/invisibility present in historical discourses about documentary photography in South Africa. There are a number of previously published interviews with Searle, produced in relation to earlier bodies of work. I was able to draw on these to think about the relationship between performance and video in her work, and the question

⁶⁸ Mark Godfrey, 'The Artist as Historian', *October*, no. 120, (Spring, 2007), 140-172.

⁶⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 2014.

of how she mobilises 'self' and body as a woman, classified coloured. I am concerned here with what this strategy might mean critically and conceptually to work produced more recently. Searle's videos stage, through the medium of performance, affective and subjective critiques of the idea of the post-apartheid democracy and the reinscription of historical forms of violence.

Trauma and Art

The extensive literature that has emerged from the experience and memory of the Holocaust is a major departure point for the study of trauma.⁷⁰ The work of Marianne Hirsch is of importance to the expansion of the work on trauma and memory; and the concept of post-memory, which foregrounds the transmission of trauma across generations.⁷¹ A psychoanalytically informed discourse of trauma; and an analytical language with which to theorise affect, and the unrepresentable aspects of trauma as experience is a significant aspect of the scholarship; and I am informed primarily by Griselda Pollock's (2013) art historical exploration of this literature.⁷² Dominick LaCapra's book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), brings a critical perspective to historiographical concerns embedded in the constitution of traumatic/post-traumatic historical conditions and experiences.⁷³ He engages the very problem of history conceived via 'positivism' or as 'imaginary construct', and suggests an approach self-reflexively invested in the articulation of problems and questions inherent to historical production. I consider how knowledge about the past is constituted through the

⁷⁰ See: Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub (eds), *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalyses and History* (London: Routledge, 1992); Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁷¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and the Work of Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14:1 (2001), 5-37; Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁷² Griselda Pollock, *After-affects/After-Images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁷³ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001.

production of narratives, which are shaped by; the selective processes at play in how evidence is mobilised; historical power relations; inherited forms of epistemic violence existing in relation to colonial and apartheid pasts; and affective, subjective and performative processes.⁷⁴

Ruth Leys work (2000) on the genealogy of trauma urges a more critical perspective on contemporary usages of psychic trauma drawing attention to its historical vocabularies and its discursive inflections.⁷⁵ Sigrid Weigel and Georgina Paul's 2003 essay – 'The Symptomatology of a Universalized Concept of Trauma' – argue that against the backdrop of trauma's 'meteoric development' and its 'transformation from clinical concept to model for the interpretation of culture' it has lost its 'analytical-theoretical profile'⁷⁶:

This renaissance is clearly rooted in the after-history of the Holocaust. But the application of the term to extremely diverse phenomena and its extension to the discourse of a 'century of catastrophes' has led to its becoming severed from the respective concrete historical events. And the most recent outcome of this process is that the concept of history itself has been subsumed in a universalized conceptualization of trauma.⁷⁷

These texts facilitate a process of thinking analytically about the uses and meanings of trauma. Each chapter gives close attention to the specificities of the historical events encountered by the artworks, and their relationship to conceptual and theoretical concepts of history, memory and trauma. I assert that in grappling with apartheid, as a history of racial violence, and the relevance of trauma as a historical-analytical tool, the literature on the Holocaust is of critical and conceptual significance. This is, of course, not to conflate different historical/geographical conditions of trauma. LaCapra

⁷⁴ I draw here on Chapter 1 'Writing History, Writing Trauma', p.1-42. See also Chapter 2 'Trauma, Absence, Loss' for his juxtaposition of the holocaust and the South African TRC, pp.43-85.

⁷⁵ Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁷⁶ Weigel, Sigrid and Paul, Georgina. 'The Symptomatology of a Universalized Concept of Trauma: On the Failing of Freud's Reading of Tasso in the Trauma of History'. *New German Critique*, No.90, *Taboo, Trauma, Holocaust* (Autumn, 2003), pp.85-94.

⁷⁷ Weigel, S. And Paul, G., 2003, p.85.

refers to both apartheid and the Holocaust as he emphasises the nuances of different historical, geographical and political conditions, and the heterogeneous lineages of history's relationship to trauma.⁷⁸ In 2005, the journal *African Arts* explored the theme 'Trauma and Representation in Africa', which includes an essay by Liese van der Wat.⁷⁹ Van der Wat draws significantly on Holocaust scholarship, expanding upon her earlier concerns with whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa.⁸⁰ She responds to the question of generational responsibility through a reading of video work by Minnette Vári and Kendell Geers. Her study draws attention to video's capacity for invoking non-linear, discontinuous histories and its metaphorical relationship to the experience of the memory-trauma relation.⁸¹

In their introductory essay to an edited volume of essays on Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*, Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman critique the name Holocaust, and put forward the concept of the *concentrationary*.⁸² This 'concentrationary' which is explored by means of a visually engaged and multi-sited theoretical encounter with Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* is 'both a historical and a conceptual tool'.⁸³ Pollock and Silverman explain: 'Historically, it relates to a specific space and to the problems relating to both the representability of that space and the legibility of the images created as its witnessing and archiving'.⁸⁴ The book, composed of essays by a number of theoretically diverse scholars, neither stages nor imposes a singular perspective of

⁷⁸ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001.

⁷⁹ Liese van der Wat, 'Witnessing Trauma in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Question of Generational Responsibility'. *African Arts. Trauma and Representation in Africa*, Vol. 38, No.3 (Autumn, 2005), 26-93. See also Kim Miller, 'Trauma, Testimony and Truth: Contemporary South African artists Speak'. *African Arts. Trauma and Representation in Africa*, Vol. 38, No.3 (Autumn, 2005), 40-94. In addition, refer to Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie van de Peer (eds), *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

⁸⁰ Liese van der Watt, 'Making whiteness strange', *Third Text*, 15:56 (2001), 63-74.

⁸¹ See: Van der Wat, 'Witnessing Trauma in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Question of Generational Responsibility', 2005, 28.

⁸² Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics and Political Resistance in Alain Renais's Night and Fog (1955)* [New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011, 2014].

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8.

‘concentrationary’. The ‘political and aesthetic complexity of the film’ is explored ‘in order “to enquire” into its specific “gesture of cinema” in the face of the “image” and the construction of memory for, and from, the *concentrationary space*’ (their emphasis).⁸⁵ The idea of the concentrationary refers to ‘a system, enacted in a historically specific time and space, but not identical with that moment alone’.⁸⁶ The ‘novel message of the concentrationary system’ is one ‘in which we have to *see* what it means that “everything is [now] possible”’(their emphasis).⁸⁷ I am concerned with what this *seeing* means, ethically, historically and politically for the particular historical-political conditions of apartheid South Africa, and its aftermath.

Pollock and Silverman differentiate between the concentration and extermination camps. The concentration camp ‘created a physiological and psychological mode of existence where men and women were intended to suffer until they gave in to its agonizing deprivations and/or its psychological destruction or were “polished off”, having thus been drowned by it, in the terms of Primo Levi’.⁸⁸ They note how ‘Levi’s writing bears witness to a political-legal event that has repercussions in other modern spaces in which an everyday normalcy co-exists with deadly violence and violation of the human which is not confined to barbed wire’.⁸⁹ Further support for this claim can be found in the work of Giorgio Agamben which Pollock and Silverman engage: his ‘reflections on the profound significance of the camp for understanding both a specific historical event and a more general logic in contemporary society’.⁹⁰ This relates to Foucault’s work on the ‘novel logic of modern power as disciplinary’ and ‘modern States as those which extend, via disciplinary measures, power over the bio-political

⁸⁵ Ibid.,p.8

⁸⁶ Ibid.,p.8

⁸⁷ Ibid.,p.1.

⁸⁸ Ibid.,p.9. See: Primo Levi, (translated by Raymond Rosenthal), *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1989).

⁸⁹Ibid.,p.15.

⁹⁰Ibid.,p.15. See: Giorgio Agamben (translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 1995), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). See also Pollock and Silverman’s engagement with the critiques of Agamben, and the idea of logics ‘which can occur historically in one form but also inform and translate into other instances (fn.28, p.50).

sphere of people's lives'.⁹¹ I am concerned in this dissertation with thinking, through the videos and close readings of their internal worlds, about the historical-political conditions of South Africa and the destruction, psychically and bodily, of human life. Apartheid, its conditions, its experiences, and the de-humanisation and objectification it systematically and insidiously inflicted upon those it deemed non-citizens can never be unseen.⁹² There are narratives that emerge in relation to the works of Ractliffe, Siopis and Searle in particular that speak to sustained historical conditions of extreme racial violence, state-enforced brutality, and psychological and physiological damage, and which are significant to theoretical and conceptual understandings of how racial violence may be inscribed and reinscribed across historical conditions. I am informed by the close, sustained attention paid in *Concentrationary Cinema* to the aesthetic-political language of one film, Resnais' *Night and Fog* and in the possibilities of this kind of visually attentive and conceptual approach.⁹³ The languages deployed by the videos under discussion here carry particular conceptual and critical importance to the conditions of South Africa, and the impetus to counter spectacle.

Similarly to Pollock, I argue 'against the notion that we are done with trauma as a topic'.⁹⁴ I also counter the notion that trauma, whether personal or historical, might be 'cured', and in this sense my work contributes to critiques of the impetus to move forward from the past, to forgive and reconcile its violence, while not actively and critically engaging historical trauma: 'The point of trauma studies is the necessity for individuals and for cultures, in different ways, to confront the "wounding" that, according to our theories of trauma, engenders symptomologies such as the compulsion to repeat and acting out. Trauma possesses and inhabits us'⁹⁵ I am concerned with the critical significance of trauma as a historical and psychoanalytical

⁹¹Ibid.,p.15.

⁹² Pollock and Silverman note that 'the phrase "everything is possible" is widely known from Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), although it was first used by [David] Rousset' (fn.61, p.52). See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951).

⁹³ See Pollock and Silverman's engagement with Theodor Adorno's well-known phrase: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (fn.39, p.51).

⁹⁴ Griselda Pollock, *After Affects/After-Images*, 2013, p.1.

⁹⁵ Ibid.,p.1.

concept applicable to ongoing conditions of historical and political violence and their continuous, apparently irresolvable repetition in political-historical life. Pollock contextualises the historical meanings of trauma, 'originating in the Greek word for what pierces the body', and 'adopted by psychology at the end of the nineteenth century', where it was brought to the 'shattering experiences typical not only of modern life in the city and the railway age but, notably, of warfare [...] that "pierced" the psychological mechanisms established to shield the psyche from excessive external stimuli'.⁹⁶ I am concerned here with historical trauma and its significance as a 'psychological problematic' alert to the idea that:⁹⁷

even if there is evidence of physiological changes in the brain because of severe shocks, trauma becomes a form of subjective non-experience that nevertheless, like a virus, becomes a structural part of the subject in ways which by inhabiting the psyche in unrecognizable ways, de-in-habit the subject.⁹⁸

I am not engaged here with the artist as trauma survivor, or with the artwork as a literal representation of trauma or a traumatic event. I am concerned with how the artwork through its particular internal logics might affectively speak to the Ndebele's 'collective space of anguish', which is simultaneously not a space within 'South Africans may [...] hold the same quantum of responsibility and accountability.'⁹⁹ Pollock asks whether artists 'affected by, or obligated to haunting pasts, journey away from or towards an encounter with traumatic residues?'¹⁰⁰ Each of the artists and works under discussion journey *towards* events that can only be described as traumatic. I begin in Chapter One with Ractliffe's process of journeying towards a site of apartheid violence,

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.2.

⁹⁷ Ibid.,p.2.

⁹⁸ Ibid.,p.2.

⁹⁹ Ndebele, 'Of pretence and protest', September 23 2009, <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-09-23-of-pretence-and-protest> (accessed 5 August 2014).

¹⁰⁰ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013, opening of preface.

and I mobilise LaCapra's concept of 'empathic unsettlement', which foregrounds the ethical questions at play in the representation of historical trauma.¹⁰¹

I consider the possibilities of art objects as sites that facilitate empathetic, intellectually engaged and critical encounters with historical trauma in South Africa. Bennett conceives of empathy as 'a distinctive combination of affective and intellectual operations', which I think of as ethically situated:¹⁰²

This conjunction of affect and critical awareness may be understood to constitute the basis of an empathy grounded not in affinity (*feeling for* another insofar as we can imagine *being* that other but on a *feeling for* another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible.¹⁰³

The idea of empathy informs my conceptualisation of the self-reflexive voice, which I relate to the ethics of entering territories scarred by sustained trajectories of racial violence in South Africa.¹⁰⁴

My reading of Bennett and Pollock informs my interest in the relations between art and trauma.¹⁰⁵ Theoretically, Bennett's argument is underpinned by a Deleuzian perspective, while Pollock's approach is Freudian in emphasis. While acknowledging their different theoretical emphases, and the different understandings they bring to subjectivity, and its relationship to trauma, I am concerned primarily with their privileging of art objects as sites for the experience and articulation of affects, which prompt critical thought; and theoretical and historical inquiry. Pollock's work on art

¹⁰¹ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001.

¹⁰² Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005, p.10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹⁰⁴ On self-reflexivity and the literature on trauma see Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005, p.6.

¹⁰⁵ Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005; Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013.

and trauma is a layered psychoanalytically informed theoretical approach to the relationships between art and subjectivity. In reading her work I am concerned primarily with the exploration of a conceptual language through which to think about video, trauma and memory in relation to South Africa.¹⁰⁶ She foregrounds the work of artist and theorist Bracha Ettinger, and a concept of artworking, which suggests working ‘transsubjectively’ *with* the artwork, which ‘traverses artist and world, work and viewer.’¹⁰⁷ Through a reading of Pollock I am interested in the particular capacities of the artwork to affectively and poetically speak to conditions and experiences of trauma, which may be buried and repressed, and which live outside of representation (in the sense of empirical understanding). Bennett argues that trauma is ‘never unproblematically “subjective”, neither “inside” nor “outside”, it is always lived and negotiated at an intersection’.¹⁰⁸ I negotiate the affective and subjective, and critical/historical/intellectual encounter with the artwork throughout this dissertation cogniscent of different theoretical and conceptual inflections brought to art, trauma and subjectivity.

I adopt an approach that foregrounds the idea of the subjective encounter with the visual, sonic, temporal, durational, spatial, sensory and affective capacities of the videos that are my focus. These encounters are never absolutely determinable, and their significance may remain opaque, unsignifiable and open to imaginary, performative and poetic processes. The unknowable, ungraspable quality of trauma, its irreducible-ness, is a distinctive aspect of the literature that seeks to theorise it, and I hold in place Pollock’s conception of trauma’s ‘irrepresentability’, which I relate to the opaque-ness of each work.¹⁰⁹ I am also concerned with elaborating on Mbembe’s

¹⁰⁶ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013, p.xxv. I have not engaged Pollock’s exploration of Ettinger’s ‘Matrixial theory’ here, or its relationship to Pollock’s engagement with the ethics of feminist epistemology or the relations between trauma and compassion. The ‘Matrixial’ is, Pollock writes, ‘the mark of the shared manner of all human becoming in prolonged prenatality that traumatically, namely non-cognitively, shapes postnatal subjectivity, ethics and aesthetics with another non-phallic potentiality (p.xxiii).

¹⁰⁸ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 2005, p.12.

¹⁰⁹ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, pp. 4-8.

conceptual articulation of the relations between history and temporality.¹¹⁰ I think here about psychoanalytically informed conceptions of time, through a reading of Pollock and her work on art and trauma: ‘Psychoanalytically, time is layered, archaeological, recursive’.¹¹¹ I also foreground the relationship between trauma and affect, and trauma and absence.¹¹²

Bennett stages a theoretical and methodological encounter with Deleuze, in particular *Proust and Signs*, and the idea of the ‘encountered sign’, which describes ‘the sign that is felt, rather than recognized or perceived through cognition’.¹¹³ She foregrounds, a Deleuzian notion of ‘affect or emotion’ as ‘a more effective trigger for profound thought because of the way in which it grasps us, forcing us to engage involuntarily’.¹¹⁴ She writes: ‘If art is akin to the sensory impression here, then it might be understood, not merely as illustrating or embodying a proposition, but as engendering a manner of thinking’.¹¹⁵ Resisting the imposition of a didactic reading of an artwork that seeks to identify what it is about, or what it means, Bennett argues that art is ‘not driven by or enslaved by any particular understanding; it is always productive of ideas’.¹¹⁶ She engages the question of work that does not declare itself to be about trauma whether in ‘narrative component’ or ‘ostensible meaning’.¹¹⁷ This idea of the art object as ‘always productive of ideas’ informs my attempt, within each chapter, to think about the ways in which the particular visual, sonic, spatial, temporal, durational, affective capacities of each work, and the specificities of its encounter with history, leads me to a theoretical concept and a political-ethical stance. I argue for the political, critical and

¹¹⁰ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 2001.

¹¹¹ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images* p.xxviii.

¹¹² See: Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005; Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013.

¹¹³ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 2005, p.7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.8

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

conceptual significance of art as it encounters historical events, and their memory, in South Africa. I am particularly interested in each work's resistance to spectacle and a didactic representation of histories that exist in relation to trauma. In this sense, the particular art objects explored here do not set out to singularly and literally represent historical events or memories. Neither do they seek to explain or resolve traumatic histories or experiences. Rather they invite affective encounters, which are also critical and conceptual in inflection.

I explore, through my encounter with the videos, Bennett's articulation of how trauma is present 'in a certain affective dynamic internal to the work', and not necessarily about the artist as 'trauma survivor' or the artist's documentation of actual accounts of trauma.¹¹⁸ She is attentive to the task of finding 'a communicable language of sensation and affect with which to register something of the experience of traumatic memory'; and not to 'reflect predefined conditions and symptomologies'.¹¹⁹ She addresses theories of trauma, language, representation, and art drawing attention to arguments that remain sceptical of trauma's reducibility, the redemptive capacities of art objects and their relation to 'the real'.¹²⁰ Bennett points out that 'an image, viewed under controlled conditions, may mimic the sudden impact of trauma, or the quality of a post-traumatic memory' but how, she asks, 'does the staging of shock become more than an aesthetic conceit or a kind of metaphoric appropriation of trauma?'¹²¹ Her conception of affect, which is brought to this study, is not one tied to responses articulated 'in narrow cause-and effect terms, as if the image functioned simply as a mechanistic trigger or stimulus'.¹²² The non-linear temporal structure of the works engaged in this study invite correspondences with Freudian iterations of the memory-trauma relation, and symptomologies surfacing out of psychic processes of repression, forgetting and what Bennett refers to as post-traumatic memory: 'The instantaneous,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.2.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.3.

¹²⁰ See Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 2005, chapter 1 'On the Subject of Trauma, pp. 1-21.

¹²¹ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 2005, p.11.

¹²² Ibid.,p.11.

affective response, triggered by an image, or the quality of a post-traumatic memory, characterised by the involuntary repetition of an experience that the mind fails to process in the normal way.¹²³

Pollock brings into view trauma's relationship to affects and sensations that suggest temporal entrapment and unconscious processes embedded in processes of remembering and forgetting: 'It is the eventless event, unremembered because, being never known, it could not be forgotten. This happening is not in the past, since it knows no release from its perpetual but evaded present. No words or images are attached to this Thing.'¹²⁴ Devices such as looping, which invokes the idea of traumatic repetition and return, suggests what Pollock calls 'traumas no-time-space', which she links to Freudian concepts of repression: 'Psychic trauma knows no time. It is a perpetual present, lodged like a foreign resident in the psyche.'¹²⁵ Something traumatic is experience, it is repressed (forgotten), and then it surfaces through apparently unrelated symptomologies.

My reading of Pollock expands my understanding of affect, which drives my encounter with the videos. She makes the critical distinction between emotion and affect articulating affect's intensity as well as its amorphous-ness: 'Affect is as intense as it is without shape or focus [It] is more like a colouring of our whole being; an opening towards something or a complete enclosure in its grip such as depression.'¹²⁶ Her emphasis on the 'after-affects' of 'post-traumatic art', is of significance here, which she articulates as working 'towards a phrasing – not merely linguistic, but gestural, sonic or graphic' that produces encounters 'capable of shifting us both subjectively and collectively'.¹²⁷ She conceptualises the encounter with the artwork as an '*aesthetic wit(h)nessing* of traces or residues of what could not be immediately represented:

¹²³ Ibid., p.11.

¹²⁴ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013, p.2.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.2.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.27.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

hence they bear *after-affects*'.¹²⁸ As I encounter each work I *feel* particular sensations and affects, and it is this intangible space, which Pollock theorises, through an engagement with Ettinger, that is the departure point for critical thought, and the process of working through art's relationship to trauma. I chose these videos because they produce in me a sense of what Pollock, citing Ettinger, calls '*fascinace*', which she explains is 'a prolonged, aesthetically affecting and learning encounter'.¹²⁹ My intention is not, as Pollock writes, 'to master meaning or stamp an interpretation' on the work:

I remain with the artworks to encounter certain movements or pressures within them that I identify as traces of trauma: events or experiences excessive to the capacity of the psyche to 'digest' and the existing resources of representation to encompass.¹³⁰

In writing about trauma's relationship to absence, Pollock refers to trauma's 'invisible pressure on psychic life'.¹³¹ She articulates how 'its work produces affects such as melancholia, anxiety and depression, and in some cases flashbacks that crack the continuity and logic of time with moments of literal intensity'.¹³² My own subjective encounter with the artworks, which introduces each chapter, is shaped by 'invisible pressures', absences and affects. Videos invoke the transient materialities of appropriated sounds or suggest the ambiguous absent-presence of ghosts through visual and sonic articulations and sensations of traces and residues.¹³³

Temporal disjunctures and displacements, and their implications for a critique of the apartheid/post-apartheid binary, through a historical and psychoanalytical lens of trauma, is important to my reading of the videos; and how it is I conceptualise the

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.27.

¹²⁹ Ibid., preface.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.xxii.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.3.

¹³² Ibid., p.3.

¹³³ A discourse of trauma and haunting is engaged in the chapter on Jo Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas*.

historical events that they explore. Chapter Two on Searle's *Mute*, which engages the xenophobic violence of the post-apartheid era, suggests, what Pollock articulates (through a reading of Cathy Caruth) as the 'unbound affects' of latency: 'Since trauma does not occur in its own moment, the unbound affects generated by traumatic impact, like ripples in a pond in which the originating stone is deep and unseen, can be inherited by later events, similar or associated.'¹³⁴ The videos discussed in this dissertation suggest ideas of temporal and spatial disorientation, displacement, collapse, and irresolvable repetitive return.

South African Video Art

While this dissertation is not a historical survey of video art produced in South Africa, I did at the preliminary stages of research endeavour to find archival and empirical evidence of the historical emergence of video art in that country. My intention was to complicate a narrative that situates video art as a mode of practice that only emerges with the transition from apartheid. It does appear that video art only emerged in South Africa as a visible and sustained form of aesthetic production and a component of art education following the transition into democracy, the dismantling of cultural boycotts, and South Africa's entry into an international arena during the course of the 1990s. Following the transition from apartheid and South Africa's official re-entry into an international arena during the course of the 1990s, art practices broadened to include video, sound installation and performance.

A number of artists whose primary focus was printmaking, painting or sculpture during the 1980s and early 1990s, for instance, began to work primarily with lens based media (video and photography) most visibly from around the late 1990s.¹³⁵ Robert Weinek

¹³⁴ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013, p.9. See: Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 1995.

¹³⁵ For example: Berni Searle, whose biography is well documented, graduated, in 1992, with an M.A.F.A in sculpture from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. For the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in 1997, she produced a mixed-media, site-specific installation at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town after which, from 1998 to the present day, she is known for lens-based installations (photography and video). The visibility of her video work accelerated with the two-channel video projection *Snow White* which, significantly, was commissioned for the 49th Venice Biennale exhibition *Authentic/Ex-centric: Africa in and out of Africa* in 2001.

notes that 'film and video equipment was difficult to come by in the Seventies and early Eighties, and there was no way of distributing and exhibiting the works that were made'.¹³⁶ Television first appeared in South Africa in 1975. The apartheid administration's Minister of Posts and Telegraphs Dr Albert Hertzog resisted its introduction on moral grounds calling it 'the tool of the devil'.¹³⁷ Prior to South Africa's political transition of the early 1990s, the emphasis in art education and practice was, most visibly at least, painting, sculpture, drawing, photography and print-making. Interviews with graduates of the Michaelis School of Fine Art in the University of Cape Town, from the late 1960s through to the early 1980s do, however, demonstrate experimentation with video media. Discussions and interviews with artists in South Africa, suggest that this was situated at Michaelis in particular. This is not officially documented, and further research would be required to test these preliminary assertions. Christo Doherty who is currently Professor and Head of Digital Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg notes: 'I remember as a student in the early 1980s seeing a performance of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* at Hiddingh Hall, organised by the drama department, next to Michaelis [...] This used quite a lot of video in the performance. They were filming each other. This was about 1982.'¹³⁸ Doherty referred me to individuals in South Africa including Robert Weinek and Malcolm Payne, both of whom were resistant to engaging in a dialogue about the history of video art in South Africa. According to Doherty, Payne is one of the earliest artists to have begun exploring video art as a medium.¹³⁹ I have had numerous discussions, over a number of years, with the South African artist Nina Romm about art practices and fine art education at Michaelis from the late 1960s through to the 1970s. Romm is also resistant to being formally interviewed and recorded and these conversations remain undocumented. She did narrate, at length, the ways in which experimental practices located in video art and performance, taking place in Europe

¹³⁶ Robert Weinek, 'The Processed Image: Video Art in South Africa', August 1998 <http://www.artthrob.co.za/aug98/news.htm> (accessed 21 August 2014).

¹³⁷ Weinek, 'The Processed Image: Video Art in South Africa', August 1998, <http://www.artthrob.co.za/aug98/news.htm> (accessed 21 August 2014).

¹³⁸ Interview (Christo Doherty and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 18 October 2011.

¹³⁹ Interview (Christo Doherty and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 18 October 2011.

and North America, migrated to Michaelis through conditions of travel and intellectual, cultural and educational exchanges that have historically always been present. As an undergraduate student in South Africa in the 1990s, at the University of the Witwatersrand, I was conscious of these exchanges in dialogue with peers and teachers. These lived experiences complicate and render more ambiguous the apartheid/post-apartheid binary. Much of the historical knowledge about South African video art is informal or ephemeral and located in memory, undocumented public lectures and anecdotal accounts.¹⁴⁰ A significant factor of my research is how race and gender, shaped by the historical conditions of apartheid, which also underpinned arts education and pedagogy, circumscribe who is most visible and vocal in the narratives, no matter how slight, of the earliest traces of video art in South Africa. The protagonists consistently encountered in my research on video art specifically are of a generation born in South Africa between the 1950s and 1960s. They are largely men, and on a lesser scale women, who were classified white by the apartheid regime and located primarily at the historically liberal universities of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand both of which have a significant reputation for fine arts education within South Africa.¹⁴¹ The resistance to engage in dialogue or in the processes of knowledge exchange also impacted upon my research. The politics and power relations of institutions and art worlds in South Africa was an ephemeral but significant factor of my research. The subjectivities of researchers and their historical relationship to the politics of prejudice, race and gender in South Africa is an ongoing concern that has underpinned my research process.

The only film-based work, from South Africa, shown on the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995 and documented in its catalogue is by William Kentridge.¹⁴² Kentridge has been working with the mediums of film and theatre since the late 1970s, and today his stop

¹⁴⁰ The work of Kathryn Smith and Roger van Wyk culminating in the 2009 exhibition *Dada South? Exploring Dada Legacies in South African Art 1960-present* and hosted by the South African National Gallery, Cape Town does begin the work of documenting experimental practices and international links despite the constraints of the apartheid era. But a catalogue has not yet been published.

¹⁴¹ A fuller account of these encounters is not within the scope of this dissertation and may be more thoroughly engaged and researched at a later stage. The question of apartheid and arts related pedagogies in South Africa is also of interest but outside of the scope of this study.

¹⁴² Bowyer and Breitz, (eds), *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale*, 1995.

animation technique, developed during the 1980s, is well-documented. The catalogue, published to coincide with the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in 1997, documents video-based work by South African artists Malcolm Payne, Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe, Stephen Hobbs and the collaborative group *Sluice*.¹⁴³

Since the 1990s, younger generations of South African artists and curators have played an important role in thinking about South African video art. An instance of the artist/curator led interest in video art is the artist collective *The Trinity Session* – founded in 2000 by Kathryn Smith, José Ferreira and Stephen Hobbs.¹⁴⁴ The Trinity Session is today composed of Hobbs and Marcus Neustetter.¹⁴⁵ *The Trinity Session's* interests include video art and new media in South Africa. In 1996, Stephen Hobbs, together with Clive Kellner and Marc Edwards curated the first video/new media exhibition in South Africa *Scramble: Video Installations and Projections* at the Johannesburg Civic Gallery. *The Trinity Session* positioned themselves, in part, as 'an important pioneer in the process of researching, collecting and collating various portfolios of video art and new media works in South Africa, and presenting these collections within the international arena'.¹⁴⁶ Talks in South Africa included *In No Particular Order: A History of South African Video Art* presented in 2003, at the *Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees*.¹⁴⁷ There is, however, no visible documentation or publication of these talks or research undertaken.¹⁴⁸ Two 1999 exhibitions followed the 1996 exhibition *Scramble: Channel*, curated by Robert Weinek and Gregg Smith at

¹⁴³ Enwezor, *Trade Routes: History and Geography* (South Africa: Greater Metropolitan Council and The Netherlands: Price Claus Fund for Culture and Development, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ See:

http://www.walcheturm.ch/archive.php?VIEW_DETAILS=61&session=PROJECT_DETAILS%25%3BARCHIVE_YEAR%252004%3B (accessed 29 August 2014).

¹⁴⁵ See: <http://www.onair.co.za/broadcast/> (accessed 29 August 2014).

¹⁴⁶ See:

http://www.walcheturm.ch/archive.php?VIEW_DETAILS=61&session=PROJECT_DETAILS%25%3BARCHIVE_YEAR%252004%3B (accessed 29 August 2014).

¹⁴⁷ This is an Afrikaans language arts festival which in a literal English translation would read as 'Little Karoo National Arts Festival'. The name is usually abbreviated to KKNK. The festival takes place annually in Oudtshoorn, a town situated in the Klein Karoo region of South Africa.

¹⁴⁸ I have interviewed Stephen Hobbs and have had informal discussions with Kathryn Smith. However, these have not yet yielded significant findings.

the Association for the Visual Arts and *Video Views* curated by Emma Bedford at the South African National Gallery. A video compilation series produced in 1993 and 1998 respectively by Robert Weinek is a document that signals the increased significance of video art in South Africa during the 1990s. The series titled 'The Processed Image I and II' aimed to set 'the fledgling medium in South Africa in a worldwide perspective'.¹⁴⁹ In 1993, Weinek, together with the Newtown Gallery (Johannesburg), released a 70 minute collection of 'non-narrative South African art videos' titled 'The Processed Image I'. The second series, 'The Processed Image II' was produced in 1998 by Weinek and the arts trust Public Eye of which Weinek was a member.¹⁵⁰ It presented work by nine South African artists.¹⁵¹ Within South Africa, monographs published by David Krut publishing and publications, including the magazine *Art South Africa* and the on-line platform *ArtThrob*, are significant as archives that document the dominant trajectories of contemporary South African art within the country.¹⁵²

The literature suggests that William Kentridge is the most internationally widely known and visible artist to work in a sustained and significant way with the moving image in South African contemporary art practice. His working life and education is inter-

¹⁴⁹ Weinek, 'The Processed Image: Video Art in South Africa' <http://www.artthrob.co.za/aug98/news.htm> (accessed 29 August 2014).

¹⁵⁰ 'The Processed Image II' was broadcast at the Grahamstown Arts Festival in July 1998 by CUE-TV, run by Christo Doherty who was then based at Rhodes University's Department of Journalism. (Weinek, R., 'The Processed Image: Video Art in South Africa'. <http://www.artthrob.co.za/> (accessed 29 August 2014).

¹⁵¹ These artists and their videos were as follows: Jo Ractliffe's *Balaam* (1997), Hi 8 video, 5 minutes (This work was first shown on the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in 1997); Stephen Hobbs' *On Interesting Places* (1997), Hi 8 video. 16 minutes; DJ Bonanza's *Larry the Inflating Sculpture* (1998), VHS, 4 minutes; Jeremy Collins' *Wake for Mr Pickle* (1998), VHS, 1 minute; Francois van Reenen's *Suburban Mishap*, 1998, PC animation, 6x2 minutes; Joachim Schonfeldt's *My Boy was a Beautiful Girl*, 1995, Beta, 3 minutes; Lisa Brice's *Identikit*, 1997, DVD, 4 minutes; Peet Pienaar's *Vita Awards*, 1997, DVD, 4 minutes; Allan Munro and Jan Celliers de Wet's *Jasper*, 1997, PC, 2 minutes. (Weinek, R. 'The Processed Image: Video Art in South Africa'. <http://www.artthrob.co.za/aug98/news.htm>) [accessed 29 August 2014].

¹⁵² Initiated in 2000 and published by David Krut, *Taxi* books are useful in their documentation of contemporary South African artists. In September 2002, the quarterly magazine *Art South Africa* was launched by Bell-Roberts Publishing. This magazine is a useful archive for contemporary art practices in South Africa and includes feature articles, artist profiles, exhibition reviews and interviews.

'ArtThrob' is a web-based publication focused on contemporary South African art. It includes artist biographies, reviews, interviews and features and was founded by the artist and writer Sue Williamson in August 1997. An archive of the publication between 1998 and 2003 is available on CD-Rom.

disciplinary and collaborative in orientation, incorporating theatre, film, opera, puppetry, stage design, drawing, film, video, stop-motion animation and sound. Kentridge began making films in the 1970s although it is the animated films and videos produced from 1989 to the present that are situated within the framework of contemporary art and exhibited as such.¹⁵³

Rosalind Krauss' essay *'The Rock'* (2000) is one of the most significant art historical texts to focus on Kentridge.¹⁵⁴ Her essay reaches beyond a reductive contextual approach to South African art: an approach that attempts to read the work against a narrow view of what it meant to emerge from and exist during the apartheid era, followed by the period after the political transition designated as a 'post'. Krauss produces an intimate visual exploration of Kentridge's work; teasing out the significance of his sources, influences and intellectual lineages. Her text imagines the emotional, intellectual, creative life of the artist concerned with the political as a profoundly affecting, human experience. She positions Kentridge's medium, its various methods and strategies within a critical mode of image-making that in its orientation towards the experimental is concerned self-consciously and deliberately with the processes of its construction. Krauss's interpretation of Kentridge's self-consciously outmoded imageries and techniques through the lens of memory and history are important. She thinks about apartheid not through a linear, description of historical dates, events and key figures, but rather in terms of a philosophical searching that pays attention to its monolithic status in imaginary life.

In November 2014 the South African arts and culture journalist Charl Blignaut wrote a newspaper article reflecting critically on the relationship between Kentridge's

¹⁵³ See: Dan Cameron; Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev; J.M Coetzee, *William Kentridge* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999); Garb and Enwezor, *Homelands-Land Marks: Contemporary Art from South Africa*, 2008; Jessica Dubow and Ruth Rosengarten, 'History as the Main Complaint: William Kentridge and the making of Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Art History*, Vol 27, No.4 (September 2004), 671-690; Michael Godby, 'Memory and history in William Kentridge's History of the Main Complaint', in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee., *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (South Africa: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 1998), pp.100-111.

¹⁵⁴ Rosalind Krauss, "'The Rock': William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection'. *October* 92 (Spring, 2000) 3-35.

significant international visibility and success, his inherited privilege and social and intellectual consecration, and his historical status as a man classified white by the apartheid regime.¹⁵⁵ While this is not to negate the significance of Kentridge's practice, important questions are asked of the historical relationships between art, race, class and gender in South Africa. Structural inequalities produced by the educational and cultural infrastructure instituted by apartheid, and pre-existing colonial structures, produced a political and pedagogical landscape that cannot be historicised or understood without attention to histories of race and gender in South Africa.¹⁵⁶

There are a number of artists who, while not as well-known internationally as Kentridge, are of critical importance to discourses on video art and moving image practices in South Africa more broadly. I foreground examples of these artists here – Jo Ractliffe, Berni Searle, Penny Siopis and Minnette Vári. Each of the works I have chosen deploy highly conceptual languages that speak to the affective and poetic capacities of artworks. Each work prompts me to excavate the historical events/episodes and figures it engages but does not empirically, and authoritatively, represent. I negotiate between the particular language deployed by the artwork, its ethics and its politics, as well as its affects and its poetics. I enter into a dialogue with the historical project of engaging the systemic violence of apartheid and its traumatic reinscription across historical time and space.

¹⁵⁵ Charl Blignaut, 'William Kentridge: The Art of Darkness', 10 November 2014 <http://www.citypress.co.za/entertainment/art-legend-william-kentridge-art-darkness/> (accessed 8 December 2014)

¹⁵⁶ See: *The Luggage is still labelled: Blackness in South African Art* (2003). Directed by Vuyile Cameron Vuyi and Julie McGee [DVD].

CHAPTER ONE

'The work I made was an attempt to make something out of nothing'¹⁵⁷: Jo Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive-by shooting)*.

Signposts

I see a blacked out frame and a vertical borderline (figure 1.1). An image enters my field of vision: its pace slowed and uneven; its edges irregular (figure 1.2). The image is a photograph: a sequence of joined-up scenes passes horizontally across my line of sight. I see a landscape: a bleached, blurred view of a mountain, grass, trees or shrubs, a road (figure 1.3). The edges of the photographic film, ordinarily hidden from view, are laid bare. The numbers and letters unveil the constituents of an image constructed by light.¹⁵⁸ Surfaces are over-exposed: effects of light white-out some of the mountain and perhaps it is they (these light-effects) that produce the haptic sensation of folds in the paper. I register a still image that moves, and the photograph's invocation of technologies, that in a digitised present, appear outmoded and anachronistic. A sound enters this space of looking: I know it to be the engine of a car. The work's title tells me that this is a 'drive-by shooting': the name (the artist, Jo Ractliffe) ascribes to the photographs, taken from her car, while driving.

At times my looking is structured through the windscreen of Ractliffe's car (figure 1.4). I see wipers that hint at a dashboard. I imagine myself behind the dashboard; and behind the steering wheel implied by the round, dark form. Through the windscreen, on the left hand side of the road is a sign but its lettering is indistinct and unreadable. I look through the car window I imagine is in front of me, and down what seems to be a long washed-out road. The road appears to fork between trees or shrubs.

¹⁵⁷ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁵⁸ See: Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006); Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

The car engine, audible at the beginning of the sequence, segues into a male voice, one of a number of voices that feature in the video. The voice, I discover, belongs to Dirk Coetzee, who was the much publicised founder and former captain of what is known as Vlakplaas.¹⁵⁹ Vlakplaas, invoked in the title of Ractliffe's work, and named in the recordings she appropriates for her sound-track, functions as the signifier both of the infamous covert apartheid police unit and its headquarters, a farm on the outskirts of Pretoria.¹⁶⁰ Coetzee speaks of his application for amnesty at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

As Coetzee speaks, a second voice intervenes and unfolds simultaneously, its volume oscillates. It is again recognisable as the voice of Coetzee: he narrates the murder of the missing student activist Sizwe Kondile, and the subsequent burning of his body, at which he (Coetzee) and other police officers were present. Coetzee tells of how Kondile was given 'knock-out drops' in a drink, and then while lying on his back was shot with a Makarov pistol on the 'top of the head'. 'There was a short jerk and that was it', he says. He then describes how Kondile's body was placed on a pyre of tyres and wood and then burnt for seven hours: 'Now of course', he says, 'the burning of a body to ashes takes about seven hours'. He adds: 'Whilst that happened we were drinking and having a *braai* [barbecue] next to the fire'. As Coetzee speaks intermittent sounds, suggesting gun shots, puncture his speech; and as his voice fades, the familiar voice of the investigative journalist Max du Preez makes its entrance. At first Du Preez is heard as a barely audible accompaniment to Coetzee's description of Kondile's killing. Du Preez invokes the name of National Party Cabinet minister Adrian Vlok, Minister of Law and Order between 1986 and 1991, but the various constituents of the sentence are barely audible. He recounts, now distinctly, questions directed to former state president F.W de Klerk during the course of media coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. Du Preez asks de Klerk why it is that 'he [de Klerk] did not do

¹⁵⁹ Coetzee died on 27 March 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa, is due to be officially re-named Tshwane.

something about Vlakplaas when he read Coetzee's confession in November 1989'.¹⁶¹ As Ractliffe's video draws to a close, De Klerk responds to Du Preez's questions. De Klerk's response is clearly heard - although ruptured by pauses, stops and starts: 'Vlakplaas was also then at a certain stage then disbanded when allegations came substantially [... stutters ...] almost [... stutters ...] you couldn't prove. You could no longer prove [...]. You could no longer say it was just rumours and we then took steps as information [...].' While De Klerk speaks, Coetzee's testimony continues but at a quieter register. De Klerk's voice becomes fainter and fades out mid-sentence. Once more, the engine of a car is audible, and what appear to be gun shots are heard.

Sound and image dissolve into silence and into darkness. Lettering, printed onto two roughly cropped signs appears: arranged vertically the first reads 'Vlakplaas', and the second a date, '2 June 1999' (figure 1.5). This date, invoked in the title of the work is the day of South Africa's second democratic election: the African National Congress wins the election for a second time subsequent to the official 1994 transition into democracy, and Thabo Mbeki replaces Nelson Mandela as president. The camera suspends the lettering in its view, with slight uneven movement, and then fades. The video repeats its continuous looped 2 minute 30 second journey, and returns, once again to the beginning.

Obscured Vision/Aesthetic Construction

The question of Vlakplaas first entered the territories of art – its production, its curatorial practices, and its critical discourses – in the 1999 Johannesburg exhibition 'Truth Veils'.¹⁶² Vlakplaas refers to an apartheid police counterinsurgency unit that operated covertly throughout the 1980s. The unit was based on a farm, called Vlakplaas and referred to ordinarily, and somewhat vaguely, as somewhere on the outskirts of Pretoria.¹⁶³ In his book on Vlakplaas investigative journalist Jacques Pauw describes it as a '44-hectare police farm alongside the Hennops River on the border of

¹⁶¹ The year 1989 inaugurates the public circulation of Vlakplaas.

¹⁶² See: Annie Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa: History after Apartheid*, 2004, p.246.

¹⁶³ Media accounts consistently refer to Vlakplaas in this way.

Pretoria's western suburbs'.¹⁶⁴ Vlakplaas, the police unit, was formed in 1979.¹⁶⁵ In 1989, previously hidden from public view, it was made visible through South African news coverage but was to surface again with greater impetus during the course of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission or TRC - broadcast nationally by South African radio and television media between 1996 and 2001.¹⁶⁶ The TRC, and the debates it produced, have been the subject of rigorous South African scholarship and cultural production.¹⁶⁷ It is at the centre of recent discussions of performativity, witnessing, testimony, memory and trauma in relation to South Africa's history.¹⁶⁸ During the course of the TRC process 'Vlakplaas' surfaced as a narrative trope shot through with apartheid-era themes of subterfuge and political violence.

¹⁶⁴ Jacques Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads*. (South Africa: Southern Book Publishers, 1991), p.47.

¹⁶⁵ The construction of a historical account of Vlakplaas is only possible via available archival documents, media accounts and available documents and reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Books in the style of memoirs and investigative journalism also construct accounts of Vlakplaas.

¹⁶⁶ See: Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission*, 2007. The TRC was chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and aimed to witness, investigate and document the testimonies of victims and perpetrators of crimes related to human rights violations committed between 1960 and 1993.

¹⁶⁷ Ephemera, bibliographies and many forms of documentation related to the TRC (visual, aural and textual) are available in a number of archives in South Africa including the on-line archives of the South African History Archive (SAHA) and the website of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself (<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/> (accessed 10 September 2014)). The archives housed by the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) have been especially useful to this project (this includes SAHA and 'Historical Papers'). The Lillian Goldman Library, situated at the Yale Law School houses a 'South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission Videotape Collection': <http://trc.law.yale.edu/> (accessed 10 September 2014). See also: 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission Special Report Multimedia Project' initiated by SAHA in collaboration with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The online archival platform – www.archivalplatform.org – is a useful source of information with regards to South African archival practice, debates and infrastructure.

The most well-known of the aesthetic and cultural output is to be found in the work of South African artist William Kentridge and in Antjie Krog's book *Country of my Skull*.

¹⁶⁸ See: Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Aletta J. Norval, 'Truth and Reconciliation: The Birth of the Present and the Reworking of History'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No.3 (Sep., 1999), 499-519; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001; Mark Sanders, 'Remembering Apartheid'. *Diacritics*, Vol.32, No.3/4, *Ethics* (Autumn – Winter, 2002), 60-80; Mahmood Mamdani, 'Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)', *Diacritics*, Volume 32, Number 3-4 (Fall-Winter, 2002), 33-59; Ulrike Kistner, *Commissioning and Contesting Post-apartheid's Human Rights: V2: HIV/AIDS – Racism – Truth and Reconciliation* (Germany: LIT Verlag, 2004); Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission*, 2007. Catherine Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).

Ractliffe made a photographic work *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive-by shooting)*, the first incarnation of the piece, for the exhibition 'Truth Veils' hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand's Gertrude Posel Gallery.¹⁶⁹ This was followed in 1999/2000 by the video, which carries the same title, and is foregrounded in this chapter. The 'Truth Veils' work and the video were in turn followed by an edition of five limited edition photographic prints (1999/2002). All three works are constructed from photographs shot on a single journey to Vlakplaas; and invoke a landscape captured in black and white film.

Ractliffe described three journeys to Vlakplaas, all of which contributed to the production of the photographic works for 'Truth Veils', the later video and the edited photographs. She refers to this first trip, in the language of military reconnaissance, as a *recci* recalling that once she got to the gate of the property she 'got out of the car and started videoing'.¹⁷⁰ She added: 'Initially I wanted to make this very forensic video. I was holding the video down on the ground, moving around'.¹⁷¹ The idea of forensics extends across Ractliffe's work as a whole; and appears to be part of a concern with the process of documenting what is unknown, or invisible: 'You don't know what you're looking at and especially at Vlakplaas. There are no bodies. There

¹⁶⁹ The work produced for 'Truth Veils' is damaged and in need of restoration. There is no visual document of it framed and installed on the 'Truth Veils' show.

'Truth Veils' was curated by a team associated with Wits University. The team included the Gertrude Posel Gallery staff: Rayda Becker and Fiona Rankin-Smith. Deborah Posel (then associate professor of Sociology at Wits) also participated in the curatorial process as did the artists Penny Siopis and Ractliffe herself. Both Siopis and Ractliffe were teaching in the Department of Fine Arts at Wits at the time. There is not much existing documentation on the 'Truth Veils' exhibition, and no catalogue. An account of the show has been sourced from reviews published on the South African on-line magazine *ArtThrob* <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 10 September 2014). In 2002, the Gertrude Posel Gallery (which incorporated the Wits Art Galleries) underwent structural changes. The University galleries are now known as the Wits Art Galleries and the Wits Art Museum. A historical account of the Gertrude Posel Gallery is available online <http://www.wits.ac.za/placesofinterest/wam/2830/learn.html>. (accessed 9 September 2014). Rankin-Smith is currently a curator at the Wits Art Museum, and Becker is now Curator of the South African Parliament's art collection. Deborah Posel is now Professor of Sociology at the University of Cape Town and Director of HUMA (Institute for Humanities in Africa). See: <http://huma.co.za/> (accessed 3 January 2015).

¹⁷⁰ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé) London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁷¹ Interview, London, 25 June 2011.

are no graves. You have no idea about what becomes significant in terms of the evidentiary'.¹⁷²

Ractliffe describes her first expedition to Vlakplaas as a 'non-trip' that left her with a 'sense of what [she] could and couldn't photograph'.¹⁷³ This journey was inhibited by the difficulty of gaining access to the site; its caretaker reticent about allowing her and her companions inside: 'We got through the gate, walked up through the drive to the house and then he [the caretaker] gave us all sorts of reasons for why we couldn't be there. So we had to leave'.¹⁷⁴ Her second expedition took place on the day of South Africa's second democratic elections – the date invoked in the title to both the photographic work for 'Truth Veils' and the later video:

I remember that drive [...] I felt as though I was at the bottom of a truck and I was looking through a high window. Even though I was driving through the landscape my perspective was as if I was on my back looking up and not being able to see. It felt like it was from the perspective of someone who was trussed up at the back of a trunk.¹⁷⁵

As Ractliffe describes, from memory, her trips to Vlakplaas she activates a language that is performative in register: the idea of a 'recci' or the imagined sensation of travelling to Vlakplaas in the role of a captive; a prisoner whose body is contained, and whose line of sight is obscured by the disorientating spatial experience of captivity. The video's movement registers an imagined sense of disorientation: fitful and uneven, the photographic strip moves counter-intuitively from right hand side to left.

¹⁷² Interview, London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁷³ Interview, London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Interview, London, 25 June 2011. Vlakplaas is now documented on the Liberation Heritage Route South Africa: <http://liberationheritage.co.za/articles/vlakplaas> (accessed 11 September 2014).

¹⁷⁵ Interview, London, 25 June 2011.

Ractliffe then made a third journey to Vlakplaas: ‘I knew then that I’d do a “drive-by Shooting”’.¹⁷⁶ Ractliffe describes the method of the ‘drive-by shooting’ as driving ‘slow enough for me to drive, look and shoot at the same time’.¹⁷⁷ She talks about how she ‘repeated the drive a few times [...] and then how, out of the car, she took a ‘series of single frame, close-up, forensic photographs [...] patches on the ground, track/tyre marks etc. – as if they could reveal something’.¹⁷⁸ The ‘drive-by shooting’ of the *Vlakplaas* work, although different in inflection, invites comparison with earlier bodies of work produced on road-trips during the 1990s, notably *reshooting Diana* (1990-1995) and *N1 (every hundred kilometres)* [1999] (figure 1.6). But of the comparison Ractliffe states:

I’m not sure I would use the term drive-by shootings for anything other than ‘Vlakplaas’ actually. There’s something very specific about an actual drive-by shooting: apart from the action – fast action, fast getaway – it also implies covert/clandestine behaviour and a certain cowardice. Like a sideways glance as opposed to registering seeing. I don’t think of ‘Diana’ like that at all (apart from the fact that almost all the ‘Diana’ pictures were taken conventionally, that is, out of a car, standing in front of the subject etc. And also, ‘N1 (every hundred kilometres)’ was taken through the front car window so that even it was deliberate looking not a drive-by.¹⁷⁹

These works suggest associations with North American literary, cinematic and photographic lineages; and the cultural imaginary of the North American road-trip imagined within the work of photographers such as Lee Friedlander. Okwui Enwezor invokes this tradition in his essay *Exodus of the Dogs* writing about the photographic series *reShooting Diana*.¹⁸⁰ He writes about the road-trip from which these works emerged: a 2000 kilometre journey from Cape Town to Johannesburg, across the Great

¹⁷⁶ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Email correspondence, 30 April 2012.

¹⁷⁸ Email correspondence: 30 April 2012. Ractliffe describes ‘shooting on 35 mm’ and using the Diana camera to photograph the ground at Vlakplaas.

¹⁷⁹ Email correspondence, 30 April 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Okwui Enwezor, ‘Exodus of the Dogs’, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Number 25 (Winter, 2009), 83.

Karoo desert.¹⁸¹ He notes Ractliffe's depiction of the unobtrusive, 'anti-heroic' moment, a counterpoint to South African documentary practice – that certainly at the time of the *Vlakplaas* works was dominated most visibly by male photographers invested in exposing apartheid era violence and its production of spatial, social, political and economic inequality.¹⁸² He asserts: 'Ractliffe is unlike her male counterparts. Her work cuts against the grain of what could be termed camera-ready'.¹⁸³ Although South African photographic practice is not the focus here, I would argue that the work of these photographers is, contrary to Enwezor's suggestion, more nuanced than this, and that a closer look at bodies of photographic work produced within the rubric of South African documentary traditions are not always necessarily oppositional to work such as Ractliffe's, although imagery, subject-matter and style might differ. For instance, Santu Mofokeng's *Train Churches* (1986) invoke the sensibility of the everyday: unobtrusive moments, ordinary gestures; and shadowy light effects counter the didactic, sharply delineated, political images of violence imagined of the apartheid era (figure 1.7).¹⁸⁴

Tamar Garb examines South African social documentary photography, its histories and its role in anti-apartheid cultures of resistance.¹⁸⁵ She notes its circulation in a number of different forms: photojournalism, photo-essay or exhibition. She draws attention to the significance of cultural magazines and the Afrapix collective: 'modelled upon the Magnum Photos cooperative in 1982', it was a 'key agent in the dissemination of images abroad'.¹⁸⁶ Garb writes of the ubiquity of images of state oppression, the picturing of violence, poverty and protest; but makes evident the nuances of

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 83-84.

¹⁸² Ibid.,84.

¹⁸³ Ibid.,84.

¹⁸⁴ See: Corinne Diserens, *Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection: Appropriated Landscapes*, 2011, pp. 120-123.

¹⁸⁵ Tamar Garb (ed.), *Home Lands – Land Marks*, 2008; and Tamar Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011. See also: Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011, p.43.

photographic discourse in South Africa.¹⁸⁷ She notes, for instance, that Mofokeng 'uneasy with the remit of reportage that accompanied "struggle" photography [...] sought to complicate his use of documentary, so that private experience, family life and hidden views entered his visual repertory'.¹⁸⁸

While the critical discourse on South African male photographers is certainly more visible, the work of women photographers requires some excavation and scholarly attention.¹⁸⁹ In an interview Ractliffe commented:

I was never a photographer in the '80s because I didn't work in the prescribed mode. So I was always slightly outside of everything. Either you're going to disappear or you're going to assert yourself. I think in some senses I wasn't aggressive and I lacked a certain kind of confidence [...] If you think of Afrapix: There were a lot of women social documentary photographers in the '80s who seemed to have disappeared. People like Lesley Lawson or Ingrid Hudson [...] Jenny Gordon. But the people who are 'seen' in Afrapix are say Paul Weinberg, Cedric Nunn, Omar Badsha, Santu Mofokeng.¹⁹⁰

Enwezor's work on Ractliffe and Garb's work on South African photographic practice does begin to address gaps in the representation of women photographers in South African photographic discourse.¹⁹¹ In an interview with Garb, Ractliffe draws attention to the nuances of documentary photographic practice in South Africa. She comments that it is not simply 'a coherent practice that progressed in tandem with events that shaped the country during the course of apartheid'.¹⁹²

The photographs Ractliffe calls 'drive-by shootings' are taken with disposable plastic cameras with gendered proper names: Diana or Holga. The characteristically female

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁸⁹ There appear to be no visible narratives on photography by women classified black, Indian or coloured and this is a potential area of research.

¹⁹⁰ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 21 October, 2011.

¹⁹¹ Enwezor, 'Exodus of the Dogs', 2009, pp.83; Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011.

¹⁹² Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011.

names coupled with the disposable camera invite us to imagine an ironic play on identities produced within the rubric of femininity. Ractliffe, interested in experimenting with the limits and possibilities of photographic practice, talks of the mechanics of these cameras: 'they take medium format film, a fixed plastic lens and no exposure controls [...] what all these cameras do (and it's the relationship of the lens to the film plane) is that they all have this vignette round the edges – a darkening fall-off'.¹⁹³ In speaking about the Diana and Holga she foregrounds the ways in which they allow her to experiment with effects of light: 'One of the things with all these plastic cameras – with the Diana particularly – is that you get these straight light-leaks'.¹⁹⁴ She draws attention to the ways in which she might at times quite literally re-constitute the mechanics of the camera: 'what the Holga has is a shutter in the lens and this opens to a circle and then closes and the light goes through and goes back onto the film through this plastic plate. This was a little loose and I pulled it out and then I realised that the image actually could go broader'.¹⁹⁵

The work produced for 'Truth Veils' was comprised of nine silver gelatine prints hung alongside each other in black box frames. The prints were nailed into the box at four corners. Of the actual construction of the photographic images Ractliffe says: 'I simply contact printed the uncut roll of negative film section by section (more or less from beginning to end) onto 8 x 10" sheets of photographic paper'.¹⁹⁶ The video was produced from the same negatives as the 'Truth Veils' work and was constructed by joining the 'contact strip sections'. The editioned prints titled *Vlakplaas* were made by a process of scanning the 'cut and paste contact used for the making of the video'.¹⁹⁷ The photographs were slightly enlarged and then printed in one continuous sequence onto cotton paper (figure 1.8).¹⁹⁸ Of the video, Ractliffe says she

¹⁹³ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁹⁴ Interview, London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, London, 25 June 2011.

¹⁹⁶ Email correspondence, 20 April 2012.

¹⁹⁷ Email correspondence, 20 April 2012.

¹⁹⁸ Email correspondence, 20 April 2012.

took a video camera and stuck it in a copy stand, the kind you used to use to copy works for history of art, for slides in the slide library. I laid the photographic image flat and then by hand (and slowly) pulled the print beneath the video camera. That's why there's that jerky effect in the video [...] It was very simple. I was just filming a photograph.¹⁹⁹

She recalls that the photographic strip was 'not panned by the video camera from left to right as we would expect; rather the strip was dragged from right to left in front of the lens'.²⁰⁰ In the video, spoken extracts are presented unevenly: they begin or end mid-sentence, and are in part inaudible. Her juxtaposition of two segments of speech simultaneously throughout the video is irregular. While one segment is clearly heard, the other is indistinct.

The video draws self-conscious attention to its status as construction: the black and white photograph; the borders of the photographic film with its numbers and letters revealed; the deliberate double exposure; the washed-out sensibility of photographic film encountering light; the uneven overlay of sound; the uneasy trajectory from right to left. At times I can indeed make out her construction, and the joins of the photographs. Taping recalls colonial panoramic photographs from the 1850s and 1860s, and in particular, the documented practice of linking photographic prints of landscapes manually by tape.²⁰¹ Ractliffe's work invites comparison with formal languages and technologies still nascent at the turn of the twentieth century, and which are well-documented.²⁰² Currently colonial film, produced under the auspices of

¹⁹⁹ Interview, London, 25 June 2011.

²⁰⁰ Email correspondence, 20 April 2011.

²⁰¹ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (Great Britain: Laurence King Publishing, 2002), see pp.108-109: 'Felice A. Beato, Panorama of Hong Kong, Showing the Fleet for the North China Expedition, March 18-27, 1860. Panorama consisting of six albumen silver prints from five wet collodion glass-plate negatives, each mounted on paper and joined by Japanese tape. Victoria & Albert Museum, London'.

²⁰² Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, 2002, p.216. Ractliffe's experimentation with outdated, hand-made technologies suggests something far more complex than benign aesthetic and nostalgic play. See: Paulo Magagnoli's inquiry into the critical potential of nostalgia and his critique of perspectives that are too sharply critical of the 'historical turn' within contemporary art practice: 'Critical Nostalgia in the Art of Joachim Koester'. *Oxford Art Journal* 34.1, 2011, pp. 97-121.

governmental bureaucracy, is far more accessible with regards to archives.²⁰³ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, encounters between colonial powers, settlers and indigenous peoples were documented by technologies of the moving image, in service to the news media and the administrative and ideological concerns of British colonial institutions.²⁰⁴ The South African War (1899-1902) was a significant media event, and it entered public circulation in verbal and visual forms that incorporated the medium of film. Films emerging from South Africa itself staged historical events and the literary and media tropes that constellated around them. For instance, the 1916 epic *Die Voortrekkers*: an account of the 'The Great Trek' and the 'Battle of Blood River'.²⁰⁵ While aspects of the technical effects and landscape imagery of Ractliffe's video recalls these early films, her imagery and execution is devoid of the tropes and the dramatic story-telling of epic forms. But the visual effects of the *Vlakplaas* video does produce associations with the visual language of colonial films such as those documented by the archive *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire* – their monochromatic language, their flickering movement, and devices such as panning and the panoramic viewpoint.²⁰⁶

Scholars, curators and critics continue to explore practices that, working with the limits and possibilities of photography, video or film, recuperate and invoke the technologies of the past: William Kentridge's conscious exploration of outmoded imageries and techniques, his 'stone-age film-making', is well-documented.²⁰⁷ I asked Ractliffe about

²⁰³ See: 'Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire', <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/archives> (accessed 3 December 2015). The conference 'Out of the Archive: Artists, Images and History'; hosted by Tate Modern (18th -19th November, 2011) drew on the recently inaugurated colonial film archive.

²⁰⁴ 'Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire', <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/archives> (accessed 9 September).

²⁰⁵ *Die Voortrekkers* was directed by the North American filmmaker Harold Shaw who was brought into South Africa by the head of African Film Productions, I.W. Schlesinger. The Afrikaans historian Gustav Preller collaborated with Shaw.

²⁰⁶ 'Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire', <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/archives> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁰⁷ Kentridge's reference to 'stone-age film-making' appears in: Jessica Dubow and Ruth Rosengarten, 'History as the Main Complaint: William Kentridge and the making of Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Art History*, Vol 27, No.4 (September 2004), 682; Dan Cameron; Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev; J.M Coetzee, *William Kentridge* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 114.

the material histories and visual languages that the historian might associate with her work:

You make these things to some degree self-consciously. I'm aware in some of the photographs I showed at the conference ['Figures & Fictions'] of sitting at the top of *Roque Santeiro* [Angola]. And I'm looking and thinking this is like colonial painting where you have the foreground and the aloe and then you have the vista. I know these things. It's not my intention to replicate them but I'm aware of the associations.²⁰⁸

The *Vlakplaas* video's unveiling of its status as construction functions not as benign visual play or nostalgic intervention into the material histories, visual languages and technologies of the past. Rather, the work draws attention to the power-laden, historical languages and affective capacities of sound and image. Our relationship to these is, of course, neither passive nor innocent but discursive and political. The video produces a critical visual-sonic space within which apparently disconnected constituents are juxtaposed, overlaid and brought into dialogic play.

Circulation

The exhibition 'Truth Veils' was curated alongside a conference at Wits University, titled 'The TRC: Commissioning the Past' and organised by the Centre for Violence and Reconciliation, and Wits University's History Workshop.²⁰⁹ It is out of the exhibition's

²⁰⁸ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), London, 25 June 2011.

²⁰⁹ A book based on papers presented at the conference was published later: Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, (eds), *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2002). The book does not refer to the exhibition.

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation was formed in January 1989 (as the Project for the Study of Violence). It is a multi-disciplinary initiative focused on multiple forms of violence and conflict in South Africa with an emphasis on 'building reconciliation, democracy and a human rights culture within South African governance and society' (See: <http://www.csvr.org.za/>, accessed 9 September 2014).

The Wits History Workshop was formed in 1977 after the 1976 Soweto Students Uprising, and aimed to 'promote research into the lives and experiences and social worlds of the vast and anonymous mass of black and white South Africans who at that point had mostly escaped scholarly attention'. For an account of its history: <http://www.wits.ac.za/academic/humanities/socialsciences/historyworkshop/8324/home.html> (accessed 10 September 2014).

curatorial process that the *Vlakplaas* works emerged. Ractliffe was herself part of the curatorial team. In a 2011 interview, Ractliffe recalls how someone in the curatorial group remarked on the absence of a Vlakplaas image, a remark that led to her decision to visit the site and photograph it:

We [the curatorial group ...] explored the ways that the TRC was looking at personal narratives and the performative aspects of these, and asked ourselves whether we would look at something similar in terms of the idea of truth-telling? One of the things we talked about was Jacques Pauw's documentary on Eugene de Kock [...], 'Prime Evil'. Somebody said 'but we have no image of Vlakplaas'. I thought I wanted to do this. I'm going to photograph Vlakplaas. I commissioned myself.²¹⁰

The video was produced over 1999/2000, for the travelling exhibition *Kwere Kwere: Journeys into Strangeness*, curated by Rory Bester. Ractliffe suggests that this work emerged out of pragmatic concerns:

Rory Bester was curating *Kwere Kwere* and that was how the video came about. He told me that I either had to do slides or a video. The whole show had to be in a suitcase because of his budget, which didn't allow for printing and framing. His entire exhibition was made up of either projections or video, and so I thought I must do a video.²¹¹

'Kwere Kwere' is an onomatopoeic term that is used by South Africans to describe Africans from other parts of the continent. It refers to the apparently indiscernible sounds of languages that aren't South African, and its signification is xenophobic.²¹² Of his interest in Vlakplaas Bester says:

²¹⁰ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), London, Saturday 25 June 2011.

Steve Biko, South African anti-apartheid activist and black consciousness leader, was detained on 18 August 1977 under section 6 of the Terrorism Act and taken to Port Elizabeth where he died in detention on 12 September. For a discussion of artist Paul Stopforth's Biko series see: Rory Bester, 'Trauma and Truth', in Okwui Enwezor et al, *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation*. Documenta 11, Platform 2 (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

²¹¹ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), London, 25 June 2011.

²¹² See the transcription of the exhibition's opening address ('Roll Back Xenophobia Campaign', delivered by Jenny Parsley) published in the catalogue *Kwere Kwere/Journeys into Strangeness: A Multimedia Exhibition on Migration and Identity in South Africa*, 2003.

It was a place that had a very clear articulation of borders – fencing around the farm, the sense of it being out of bounds and off limits. I was very interested in the kinds of journeys [that would have taken place to the farm]. This was mostly through hearing the testimony of the TRC – of people being abducted and the journey that they took to the farm and the sense of displacement that was created through the hood that they had to wear – dislocating them in time, dislocating them in space, as a way of torturing people. That was the way you tortured people. Through these forms of dislocation and displacement.²¹³

The photographs filmed for Ractliffe’s video suggest the sense of dislocation and displacement of which Bester speaks (figure 1.9). Without the context provided by sound and title the landscape is emptied of discernible indicators of place. Road signs are illegible and blurred. Although not the bland, much travelled spaces of international airport or highway, Ractliffe’s landscape invokes the idea of Marc Augé’s ‘non-place’.²¹⁴ This sense of the ‘non-place’ in Ractliffe’s work is explored by Bennett in her discussion of *End of Time* (1999): ‘[Ractliffe’s] aim was to document a journey by uncovering how “registers of nothingness” are intersected by events that may go unnoticed by the car driver (figure 1.10). One such incident involved the death of three donkeys which Ractliffe found shot by the side of the N1’.²¹⁵

Banality and violence are recurring themes in the narratives about Vlakplaas and the curation of the video, within the context of *Kwere Kwere*, contributed to this inflection. The exhibition explored the histories and politics of migration in South Africa including the question of violence in contemporary South Africa. It paid attention to violence directed at migrants, refugees and asylum seekers entering South Africa from other parts of the African continent and explored in the following chapter on Searle’s *Mute* (2008). The show travelled to Cape Town, Johannesburg and outside of South Africa to Amsterdam.²¹⁶ ‘Kwere Kwere’ does not appear to have provoked the kinds of tensions

²¹³ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 21 October 2011.

²¹⁴ Marc Augé, (Translated by John Howe), *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995).

²¹⁵ Jill Bennett, ‘Journeys into Place’ (Chapter 4, p.83), in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005.

²¹⁶ *Kwere Kwere* travelled to: B-Block, the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, 21 March – 15 April 2000; The Gertrude Posel Gallery, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 16 May – 21 June 2000; Arti et Amicitiae, hosted by NiZA, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 21 March 2003 – 15 April 2003.

and debates which, as will be demonstrated, were produced by the 'Truth Veils' show. In email correspondence with Bester, he noted that the exhibition did not generate responses that were especially provocative in the reviews, but that it did produce debates around migrant rights and the relationship between the media and xenophobia. He wrote that 'trainees from the Legal Resources Centre came to the exhibition as part of their training around migrant rights' and that there was a 'panel discussion hosted by Niza in Amsterdam around media and xenophobia'.²¹⁷

Subsequent to the exhibitions 'Truth Veils' and 'Kwere Kwere', Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* has continued to circulate in texts and exhibitions. Both the video and the editioned photograph have appeared most recently in the exhibition 'Appropriated Landscapes' curated by Corinne Diserens for the Walther Collection, in Neu-Ulm/Burlafingen, Germany (2011/2012).²¹⁸ 'Appropriated Landscapes', pays attention to the picturing and representation of landscape in photographic practices from the African continent. The exhibition is accompanied by a book edited by Diserens.²¹⁹ A section on Ractliffe publishes images of early work, and includes a brief text on *Vlakplaas* by Ractliffe who contextualised the work historically.²²⁰ The video was exhibited on what Ractliffe describes as 'a large, black monitor (a clunky old fashioned looking thing), placed quite low on a table opposite a super modern leather couch'.²²¹ Shown at the Walther Collection exhibition space, in Germany, the *Vlakplaas* work is displaced from the geographical and political conditions of its making. The Walther Collection is situated in what, on the surface, seems to be a quiet residential village, surrounded by green fields.

Vlakplaas, the video, has been displayed in a number of different ways, and this suggests different kinds of exhibition aesthetics and the visual politics embedded in

²¹⁷ Email correspondence, 20 April 2012.

²¹⁸ See: 'The Walther Collection', www.walthercollection.com (accessed 10 September 2014)

²¹⁹ Diserens, *Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection: Appropriated Landscapes*, 2011.

²²⁰ Diserens, 2011. See, pp. 238-261 for the section on Ractliffe.

²²¹ Email conversation, 23 April 2012.

curatorial decisions. Ractliffe recalls that at the 2nd International Seville Biennial in 2006/07 it was projected onto a screen. At the 2004 exhibition 'Tremor', which took place at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Charleroi, Belgium, the video was shown 'on a small monitor suspended at eye level a bit like a surveillance camera'.²²² The reference to surveillance invokes the histories and affects attached to how Vlakplaas is remembered, its covert and violent presence within the mechanisms of the apartheid state. The old-fashioned television monitor engages the work's visual dialogue with an outmoded, anachronistic aesthetic and draws critical attention to the histories of censorship and state propaganda that dominated the SABC's broadcasting of apartheid era violence, ubiquitous during the 1980s and the States of Emergency of 1985 and 1986.²²³

The photographic work produced for the 'Truth Veils' exhibition is now in the home of a private collector, who bought the work from the art dealer Warren Siebrits.²²⁴ In 2000, the South African publisher David Krut published a book on Ractliffe.²²⁵ Titled *Jo Ractliffe: Artist's Book* the text printed images of the Vlakplaas work although it is not clear whether these are constituents of an actual work (the 'Truth Veils' installation, the video, the editioned prints, or the photographic sources used to construct the works).²²⁶ The video was shown at the 2nd Seville Biennial as part of Enwezor's curated exhibition 'The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in a Global Society'.²²⁷ In an interview with Román Padin, Enwezor summarised the concerns of 'The Unhomely' as a show concerned with a global context 'sort of darkened by all kinds of questions of struggle,

²²² Email correspondence, 23 April 2012.

²²³ See: William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2nd Edition), 2001, p.265.

²²⁴ I did see the work, when on a research trip in Johannesburg, but unfortunately it is partially damaged, and in need of restoration.

²²⁵ Taxi books, initiated in 2000, and published by David Krut are a useful resource for South African art: <http://www.davidkrutpublishing.com/bookshop/taxi-art-books> (accessed 25 December 2014).

²²⁶ One of the difficulties of formulating a narrative about the Vlakplaas work is the absence of detail in the documentation. It is not always clear whether a published image refers to the video or the photographic works (of which there are two), the 'Truth Veils' installation or the editioned prints.

²²⁷ The 2nd Seville Biennial took place between 26th October 2006 and 15 January 2007.

contestations of place'.²²⁸ Ractliffe's work is not discussed in reviews of the biennial, but the question of place recurs in the curation of the work. In 2009, Enwezor published the essay 'Exodus of the Dogs' the most significant critical text on Ractliffe's photographic practice thus far.²²⁹ The essay refers to both the video and the photographic edition and engages Ractliffe's interest in what Enwezor calls the 'inadequacy of pictorial certainty.'²³⁰ For Enwezor, Ractliffe's tendency to explore 'the unseen', the elapsed, the yet to emerge' is a counterpoint to 'the ponderous concreteness of moments that often give South African spatial situations an effusive realism depicting readymade symbols of ideological decadence'.²³¹

The editioned photograph also appears in two exhibition catalogues published alongside shows curated by Garb.²³² While it is published in these texts it was not actually exhibited on the exhibitions.²³³ Garb observes that 'emptied of action or interaction, *Vlakplaas* provides a powerful counter-image to the confrontational representations of oppression that the photography of resistance had routinely and repeatedly engendered'.²³⁴ She draws attention here to the ubiquitous role that documentary photographic traditions have played in the visual history of South Africa; and the shifts in emphasis brought about by the transition from apartheid in 1994. Garb's emphasis on the work as a 'counter-image' brings to the foreground shifts in the discourse on South African contemporary practice: these reach towards

²²⁸ Roman Padin, 'ARTNOTES: Interview with Okwui Enwezor curator of BIACS2, 26 October 2006, *Art Notes* 13, <http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/newsInfo/newsID/3425/lang/1> (accessed 3 January 2015).

²²⁹ Enwezor, 'Exodus of the Dogs', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (2009), 60-95. The essay includes an 'Introduction' by Ractliffe.

²³⁰ Enwezor, 2009, p.86.

²³¹ Enwezor, 2009, p.85.

²³² Garb (ed.), *Home Lands – Land Marks: Contemporary Art from South Africa*, 2008; Garb, *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography*, 2011.

²³³ See Garb, 2008, p.32-3 and 2011, p. 51-2. Enwezor refers to Vlakplaas in his essay published in the *Home Lands-Land Marks* catalogue.

²³⁴ Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011, p.48.

approaches that are less fettered by a narrow view of what it meant to emerge from and exist during the apartheid era.

Ractliffe's experimentations with video began during the course of the 1990s, although photography is the primary locus of her intellectual and aesthetic concerns. She speaks about video as a medium that allowed her to explore questions about photography: Video, she says: 'was my way of trying to find a way of destabilising that thing of the photograph. I was trying to make the photograph more evocative, more open-ended or less located to its causal relationship to reality'.²³⁵

The uncertainties attached to the interpretation of Ractliffe's work are invoked in Enwezor's 'inadequacy of pictorial certainty' and Garb's 'counter-image'.²³⁶ But what Enwezor and Garb find compelling about the work is a point of contention elsewhere. Ractliffe speaks about David Goldblatt's dislike of the *Vlakplaas* work; its erasure of specificity. Ractliffe says: 'It was an argument I used to have with David Goldblatt because he doesn't like it [the *Vlakplaas* work]. He thinks it would have worked much better if it had been a straight shoot. He said the same thing about *The End of Time*. He says that on one level I'm finally engaging in specificity, unlike *Vlakplaas*, but there's nothing specific'.²³⁷ The dialogue between Ractliffe and Goldblatt requires further excavation, but is beyond the scope of this chapter. Neville Dubow drew attention to Goldblatt's critical work on spatial 'structures' (in the sense of architecture, and objects) that emerged out of the apartheid era. Goldblatt stated: 'It was to the quiet and commonplace where nothing "happened" and yet all was contained and immanent that I was most drawn'.²³⁸ Ractliffe's interest in the non-specific and innocuous is clearly articulated:

I remember in the '80s, even then, not fitting. I remember being in Crossroads. It was the height of the state of emergency. There were cops everywhere.

²³⁵ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), London, 25 June 2011.

²³⁶ See: Enwezor, 'Exodus of the Dogs', p.86 (2009) and Garb, p.48, *Figures & Fictions* (2011).

²³⁷ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 21 October, 2011.

²³⁸ David Goldblatt, *South Africa: The Structure of things Then* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.24.

Soldiers everywhere. I was with Roger Meintjies and he was just looking at me with my Mimea twin-lens reflex photographing the other side. Not the bulldozers. Not the casspirs. I'm photographing just this raised land.²³⁹

These extracts complicate the idea of specificity in the discussion between the two photographers and highlights points of connection. The discussions between Goldblatt and Ractliffe are emblematic of the kinds of tensions and nuances that continue in the discourse on South African photographic practice.²⁴⁰

Contested Histories

The 'Truth Veils' exhibition highlights the political and intellectual conditions within which Ractliffe worked at the time of producing the *Vlakplaas* photographs and video. The South African on-line magazine *ArtThrob* notes that 'Truth Veils' produced 'heated discussion in Gauteng' (the province in which Johannesburg is located) and published two texts on the exhibition, a review by the art critic Brenda Atkinson, and a critique by Derek Hook (then a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Wits University).²⁴¹ Both Atkinson and Hook took issue with the exhibition's relationship to the conference. For Atkinson the conference was 'an occult academic affair publicised to a highly select audience and attended by the opening of "Truth Veils"'.²⁴² Hook saw the conference-exhibition relation as reductive, 'a case of bad art politics' that 'risks reducing exhibitions to a largely illustrative or, worse, decorative role'.²⁴³ This criticism appears to be supported by the post-conference book *Commissioning the Past*. Published in 2002, it makes no reference to the exhibition.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 21 October, 2011.

²⁴⁰ See: Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011; Enwezor and Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 2013.

²⁴¹ See 'Listings': "'Truth Veils" at the Gertrude Posel and Market Theatre Galleries' (Review by Brenda Atkinson and Critique by Derek Hook). *ArtThrob*, July 1999: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁴² Brenda Atkinson, *Review* [of 'Truth Veils']. *ArtThrob*, July 1999: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁴³ Derek Hook, *Critique* [of 'Truth Veils']. *ArtThrob*, July 1999: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁴⁴ Posel and Simpson (eds), *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 2002.

Atkinson described 'Truth Veils' as an exhibition that she wanted 'all South Africans to see' while taking issue with its lack of 'contextualisation, through information, of all elements on the show'.²⁴⁵ Of the absence of contextual information she explained: 'Although [...] information was there to a degree, its cursory form assumed the knowledge-base of viewers – South Africans included – who would have found themselves struggling with a string of half-truths, and a series of images perhaps intuitively grasped but not entirely known'.²⁴⁶ Atkinson's text does not address specific artists or works and the perceived impenetrability of the images and what she calls 'half-truths' are not elaborated.

Hook's critique of the exhibition, and Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas*, is more provocative, and draws attention to the fraught relationship between art and apartheid in South Africa:

If the show practices bad art politics by lacking a stronger self-motivating purpose, then this situation is only compounded by those works which appear to inject the element of artifice into the exhibition's primary subject-matter [...] Where is the purpose behind works which [...] like Jo Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas, 2 June 1999, drive by shooting*, sentimentalise these histories? There is a banality to these appropriations [...] stark, black and white letterboxed photographs that locate Vlakplaas at the intersection of fact and contrived horror do not add to the reality of its history. The oppression and horror that these images refer to does not exist at the level of aesthetic form. To try and recreate or revisit them at this level as an artist is to lie, pure and simple. It is to indulge in the theatrical, to risk trivialising history.²⁴⁷

This text appears to take issue with the aestheticised representation of apartheid history subsumed by Hook into a vocabulary of 'oppression' and 'horror'. Hook's critique invites a more critical examination of how terminologies of oppression and horror in South African discourses are mobilised, by whom and towards what end. Njabulo Ndebele, for example, reflects on the idea of oppression in the 2006 book *Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts about our Country*:

²⁴⁵ Atkinson <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁴⁶ Atkinson <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁴⁷ Derek Hook: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

It struck me then that no matter how much black people suffered under apartheid, they did not experience oppression in the same way. They did not evoke the pain of oppression in the same way. It struck me then that oppressed people were far more complex than the collective suffering that sought to reduce them to a single state of pain.²⁴⁸

Hook argues for an ethics of representation (at 'the level of aesthetic form') which privileges certain formal languages, media and stylistic concerns. Concepts mobilised in his text include artifice, banality, theatricality and sentiment and aesthetic constructions such as starkness and black and white photography. But these are not explained and presented as self-evident, as signifiers of a vacuous 'arty style' out of touch with actual lived experience and insensitive to the politics and ethics of representation.

Black and white photography is deployed self-reflexively by Ractliffe and others (for example, Mofokeng and Goldblatt). The histories and significations of colour in South African visual traditions have not yet been the object of a scholarly inquiry, and Garb's *Figures & Fictions* does draw attention to the potential of this. She addresses Roland Barthes' 'binary of tone and colour, truth and artifice' and the 'competing claims of sculpture and painting' in European academic theory.²⁴⁹ Goldblatt's relationship to black and white photography is documented: 'For Goldblatt, the formal severity of black and white and (as well as its historical relationship with truth) is appropriate for the project of social critique that current economic conditions and political failures necessitate'.²⁵⁰ Colour photography is increasingly visible in South African photographic discourse. Garb discusses the work of Zwelethu Mthethwa, an 'unashamed colourist who works against the gritty realism of much black and white documentary, eschewing its monopoly on morality and formulating a new argument for the ethics and efficacy of colour'.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Njabulo Ndebele, *Fine Lines from the Box: Further thoughts about our Country* (South Africa: Umuzi, an imprint of Random House, 2007), p.10.

²⁴⁹ Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011, p.59.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.53.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.59.

In Ractliffe's video the unsettled surfaces of the black and white film disrupt any assumed veracity, and differs from the sharp, delineated picturing of Mofokeng's *Vlakplaas* (Dated c. 2001) [figure 1.11]. Mofokeng's *Vlakplaas* is a familiar South African landscape that could, without the context provided by the title, be anywhere. There is an uneasy relationship between banal landscape and title (the violent significations of which are known to me). Situated alongside these kinds of representations, which appear also in the work of Goldblatt, Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* is disruptive. Spilled light and the animation of the photograph, the deliberate, performative pulling of the joined up photographs beneath the video camera, resist a looking mediated by assumptions about 'truth' and the black and white photograph as a stable, coherent document. Ractliffe sets out to capture what cannot be seen but simultaneously tampers with the evidence. Her *Vlakplaas* draws attention to the instability of photographic representation in South Africa, and the uncertainties attached to how we look.

Ractliffe was not the only artist to explore *Vlakplaas* for the 'Truth Veils' exhibition. Merryn Singer produced a landscape painting on paper titled *Vlakplaas* (figure 1.11). Singer's painting invokes the familiar language of the traditional watercolour: background, foreground and gradations of scale in-between are deliberately contrived. The scale of trees, mountain, wire fence, farm house, water tower, *veld* are carefully pictured.²⁵² Except that here Singer's medium is her own blood.

Singer's *Void*, a multi-media installation, which also engaged *Vlakplaas*, was considered by Hook to be one of the show's more successful works (figure 1.13).²⁵³ *Void* consisted of a series of five transparent Perspex boxes. Each box held earth excavated from sites associated with apartheid era violence: *Vlakplaas*; the Pretoria Central Prison and the Johannesburg Central Police Station at John Vorster Square; sites of the 1976 Soweto

²⁵² 'Veld', an Afrikaans word, is the popular South African name for a field.

²⁵³ In 1999 Singer was completing a Master of Fine Arts degree at Wits University, and was invited to make a work for the 'Truth Veils' exhibition (this is *Void*) [email correspondence, 20 January 2012].

uprising and of the assassination of Wits University anthropologist and anti-apartheid activist David Webster.²⁵⁴ For Hook, *Void* exemplified what it is the artwork should do:

In its near-minimalist form and indexical content, the work seems to exemplify exactly the inability of the works on show to contain or express history, to speak of past horrors and oppressions, in any other than an arbitrary manner. Interestingly, this work lists shadows among its media (the shadows cast by the suspension of samples of real skin, bone, flesh, blood and hair in front of the boxes of earth); a wry comment about the projected nature of historical fact. These, of course, are not the only shadows of the work's viewers, who, standing between the gallery lights and the work itself, have the prerogative to take from it whatever they project upon it.²⁵⁵

Although he did not use the term 'trauma' Hook seems to be touching on the difficulties of representing traumatic histories or experiences. He appears to be arguing that *Void's* strength is its non-figural form and its particular materiality: the earth, shadows and bodily detritus speak to histories that are unspeakable, irreducible and beyond recuperation. Hook's discomfort with the ethics of representing what he calls 'South Africa's newly recovered apartheid history'²⁵⁶ is made unambiguous in the following extract:

The TRC has become something of an artistic and academic bandwagon, a shortcut to relevance and political importance for work that would seek to substantiate itself with unnecessary and unasked for commentary. Perhaps it is the case that we don't at the moment need new, aesthetically modulated contributions here, as a way of understanding these events. If the greatest respect one can pay is the silence of attentive listening, then perhaps the greatest failing of the exhibition (and of South Africa's response to the TRC more generally) has been to not demonstrate a greater ethics of respect (and silence) in properly listening to what has been told us by apartheid's victim/survivors [...]. There is a disturbing element of profit in much of the intellectual and artistic engagement with South Africa's newly recovered apartheid history. This profit emerges in both the appropriations of authorial voice (that is, the taking on, by artists and academics, of the speaking voice of apartheid's victims), and along with it, the appropriation of historical legitimacy (the ability to comment with authority on what the past was).²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ This was clarified in email correspondence with Singer, 15 January 2012.

²⁵⁵ Hook: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁵⁶ Hook: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 9 September 2014).

²⁵⁷ Hook, <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (Last accessed 9 September 2014).

Hook's critique of 'Truth Veils' speaks to tensions present in the historical relationship between apartheid, South African art and scholarship.²⁵⁸ It also inscribes a binary opposition between what Hook called 'victim/survivors' and an assumed 'artistic and academic bandwagon'; a 'we' or 'us'.²⁵⁹ Hook wrote as though the identities, memories, life experiences and subject positions of an amorphous unknowable community of victim/survivors are simply opposed to the 'we' and the 'us', that they are homogenous, self-evident, known and understood.²⁶⁰ His text does not acknowledge the problem of how apartheid, ideologically and discursively, situated all South Africans classified white, including himself, into a relationship with complicity, as all are historic beneficiaries of the automatic privileges that it conferred.²⁶¹

In an interview Ractliffe drew attention to her memories of South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s as a subject classified white. She refers to the 1980s as a time of 'real conscientising' and speaks about what this decade meant to her politically and as an artist: 'If I think artistically, the '80s were incredibly difficult for me. I didn't fit the mode of sloganeering and all of that. At the same time you felt that what you were doing had meaning. You were very aware that art had meaning. It was not a frivolous pursuit'.²⁶² She also recalls growing up in Cape Town in the 1970s:

I'd never heard of Mandela in High School. You'd think that that's shocking in the '70s. The one single impression I have about high school in the early 1970s

²⁵⁸ Hook's foregrounding of the term 'profit' highlights the relationship between apartheid and capital, which remains to be examined within the parameters of the South African art world, and its international circulation. The relationship between capital, culture and apartheid is most starkly illustrated by the example of the apartheid museum; which adjacent to the theme park and casino Gold Reef City, was funded, as part of a social responsibility incentive of a consortium bidding for a gaming license which would entitle them to build a new casino. And thus, the South African businessmen, the 'Krok brothers' – whose capital was in part accumulated from skin-lightening cream – came to fund the museum which opened in 2001. See: Coombes, A. *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, 2003, p.22.

²⁵⁹ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, 2007.

²⁶⁰ See: Mamdani, 'Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation, 2002, pp. 33-59.

²⁶¹ See: Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*, 2002.

²⁶² Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, October 21, 2011.

is from my first Standard 6 geography lesson. A teacher made us go through every page in our geography books. She'd say: 'ok page 3, line 3 cross out non-white and write black'. We did the entire school text-book in silence and every time there was the word 'non-white' we would cross it out and replace it with black. We were all amazed at her, and at the end of it she said: 'nobody in this class is a non-person'. We will not speak of non-anything. We will talk about whites, blacks, coloureds, Indians or whatever but we will not talk about non-white'. She was Sally Hogan, Barbara Hogan's sister who was in detention. That was the most political event of my childhood.²⁶³

This extract brings into view the insidious presence of apartheid ideology in everyday life, including pedagogy.²⁶⁴ Ractliffe narrates aspects of her memories and her subjective and personal experience of apartheid as a subject classified white and this self-reflexivity and self-reflection is of political and ethical significance to her practice as an artist. This extract also suggests the possibilities of articulating women's histories in South Africa, and political acts and practices that remain undocumented and invisible. I assert that what Hook finds problematic about Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* is what is critical and important about it. In exploring how Ractliffe enters into a dialogue with *Vlakplaas*, and in particular the later video, I will pay attention to the ethical questions raised by Hook. The aesthetic constructions to which he draws attention - artifice, banality, theatricality, sentiment, starkness, black and white photography - are addressed as self-explanatory. I argue that there is critical and political possibility in Ractliffe's video, and the visual-sonic language it deploys, which is also in dialogue with her practice as a photographer. The work refuses spectacle and counters a monolithic, didactic, homogeneous conception of apartheid as experience. The work does not claim to know *Vlakplaas*, and it does not assume to speak with any authority on behalf of the experiences or memories of others.

²⁶³ Interview, Johannesburg, October 21, 2011. For more about Barbara Hogan see: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/barbara-anne-hogan> (accessed 3 January 2015).

²⁶⁴ See: Enwezor and Bester *Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 2013.

Vlakplaas

This narrative of Vlakplaas is constructed out of disparate accounts.²⁶⁵ While evidence, in the form of events and dates, reaches towards the possibility of order and narrative coherence, all are constituted and deployed in ways that signal the instability of historical knowledge and the uncertainties that circumscribe apartheid historiography. One of the difficulties of narrating a history of Vlakplaas is the tension between what is known (dates, events, and protagonists) and what is unknown and amorphous. TRC documentation on ‘Human Rights Violations’ draws attention to vast bodies of information accumulated at different stages in the resistance to apartheid:

From the mid to late 1970s onwards, a considerable amount of information about apartheid era conflicts and related human violations was amassed by domestic and international human rights organisations, academic institutions, faith communities, organs of state, political parties, the liberation movements and others. This material, although largely untested, provided an important, albeit unwieldy, body of evidence that highlighted a range of individual concerns and systemic abuses that had occurred during the apartheid era.²⁶⁶

Histories of apartheid are circumscribed by institutionalised and discursive processes embedded in secrecy, censorship and state control. The inheritances of apartheid became especially visible during the course of research into the history of Vlakplaas

²⁶⁵ Patrick Laurence, *Death Squads: Apartheid's Secret Weapon* (England: Penguin Books, 1990); Jacques Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1991); Jacques Pauw, *Into the Heart of Darkness: Confessions of Apartheid's Assassins* (South Africa, Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1997); Jeremy Gordin, *A Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State* (Johannesburg: Contra Press, 1998); Eugene de Kock, as told to Jeremy Gordin. *A Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State*. (Saxonwold, South Africa: Contra Press. 1998); Martin Meredith, *Coming to Terms: South Africa's Search for Truth* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999); Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Terry Bell, *Unfinished Business: South Africa's Apartheid and Truth* (Observatory, Cape Town: Redworks, 2001); Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003); Jacques Pauw, *Dances with Devils: A Journalist's Search for Truth* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006); Max du Preez, *Pale Native: Memoirs of a Renegade Reporter* (2nd revised edition), [South Africa: Struik Publishers, 2010]; Jacob Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (South Africa: Jacana, 2014).

²⁶⁶ ‘TRC Category – 2. Human Rights Violations’. From the South African History Archive, Wits University. ‘Traces of Truth: Documents relating to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission’, p.1.

and the 1980s. For instance, I approached Trevor Moses, the curator of the South African National Film Archive about access to footage that drew attention to the relationship between the apartheid state and the medium of film. He wrote back to me saying: ‘Unfortunately there is little to no footage on the 1980s at all. Our newsreels run out at 1984 (little or no footage) and there was no sensitive material that was entrusted to us, even though the National Film Board (our predecessor) was a creation of the National Party’.²⁶⁷ Archives function as repositories of memory, chance encounters, oral histories and fragments of knowledge and in this sense, the South African archives, formed in relation to the ideologies of the apartheid state, unsettle any claim to historiographic authority.

Vlakplaas is referred to not only as Vlakplaas but also, ambiguously, as section C, C1 or C10 in many of the texts that produce its history.²⁶⁸ More precise definitions of these sections are provided by the ‘Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression’ (IBIIR) – a precursor to the TRC. The IBIIR documents: ‘Section C concerns itself with the ANC and the PAC. Section C1 is a sub-division of Section C, made up of “Askaris”, who are former ANC or PAC operatives now working for the SAP.’²⁶⁹

One of Vlakplaas’ strategies was the ‘turning’, under threat of torture and death, of captured anti-apartheid activists, who were then dubbed *askaris*. The term *askari* has a complex etymology, but broadly it is used to describe indigenous troops deployed in

²⁶⁷ Email correspondence, 12 January 2012.

²⁶⁸ This nomenclature, appearing in archival documents and media accounts, suggests the secrecy and ambiguity that shapes a history of Vlakplaas.

²⁶⁹ Definitions are based on evidence presented before the Harms Commission. Citation from p.14 of the IBBIR document, ‘Who Lied? A discussion of the Findings of the Harms Commission: Prepared by the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression’ (From the Yasmin Sooka collection). I have also drawn on archival documents: ‘Traces of Truth: Documents Relating to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission’, Historical Papers (William Cullen Library, Wits).

The acronyms ANC and PAC stand for the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress respectively. The acronym SAP stands for the South African Police.

the armies of European colonial powers, and appropriated in a number of contexts.²⁷⁰ The IBIR draws attention to the apartheid era inflections of the term defining *askaris* as ‘former ANC or PAC operatives now working for the SAP’.²⁷¹ According to the findings of the IBIR *askaris* were based at Vlakplaas and operated ‘under black and white security policemen. The official duties of the *askaris* were given as tracking down, identifying and arresting insurgents’.²⁷²

Vlakplaas operated throughout the presidency of P.W. Botha. In 1979, the year that Vlakplaas was formed, Botha replaced B.J. Vorster as Prime Minister, and between 1984 and 1989, Botha was the first state president of South Africa. P.W Botha, caricatured as ‘*Die Groot Krokodil*’ (or ‘The Great Crocodile’), is one of the most notorious of South Africa’s Nationalist Party leaders, and the 1980s is often remembered in terms of his intransigent position on apartheid policy. William Beinart notes that during the ‘first phase of Botha’s rule from 1978 to 1983, the military role in government expanded’ and the military concept of ‘Total Strategy’ came to the fore in the ‘reinvented traditions of the Afrikaner commando – a people’s army defending a nation at war’.²⁷³ Botha’s ‘Total Strategy’ is crucial to an understanding of the Vlakplaas unit, and militarised propaganda:

In 1977 the period of national service demanded from young white men was extended from nine months to two years; they could be recalled for camps and commando service [...]. Hostility to communism, terrorism, the ANC, and opposition movements was inculcated into servicemen. Many learnt a language of male bravado and violence – of themselves as heroes fighting dehumanized targets.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Conversations between myself and military historians on the social media platform Twitter prompted one of these historians, in the absence of a history focusing on the historical inflections of the word, to write a blog post for <http://wwiafrica.ghost.io/>. See: <http://wwiafrica.ghost.io/a-brief-history-of-askari/> (accessed 12 September 2014). See also: Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*, 2014.

²⁷¹ See: ‘Who Lied? A discussion of the Findings of the Harms Commission’: IBIR, p.10.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p.10.

²⁷³ William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2nd Edition), 2001, p.264.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.264.

This extract speaks to the narratives produced by Vlakplaas, not only in the language of its commanders and operatives but also in the ubiquitous and highly visible narratives of the white male journalists who told their story.²⁷⁵

Vlakplaas was propelled into public consciousness following the affidavit of former Vlakplaas *askari*, police constable Butana Almond Nofomela on October 19 1989.²⁷⁶ Nofomela confessed to complicity in the murder of Griffiths Mxenge, a Durban based human rights lawyer, whose death in 1981, and the later murder of his wife Victoria Mxenge, in 1985, figures tragically in media accounts, and subsequent investigative journalist style books by Pauw.²⁷⁷ Pauw interviewed Coetzee extensively in 1989 and 1990, and his later published accounts are largely based on these interviews.²⁷⁸

In 1989, Nofomela was on death row for the murder of a farmer, Johannes Lourens, and was due to be hanged only hours after his affidavit.²⁷⁹ Nofomela's revelations about Vlakplaas were headlined by the anti-apartheid, English language newspaper, the 'Weekly Mail', now the 'Mail & Guardian'.²⁸⁰ The 'Weekly Mail' was founded in 1985, by South African journalists Anton Harber and Irwin Manoim and in the late 1980s established a partnership with London's 'Guardian' newspaper, a collaboration that ensured its continuation.²⁸¹ Harber and Manoim were the newspaper's editors

²⁷⁵ This is elaborated later. See also Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*, 2014.

²⁷⁶ Nofomela's confession is well-documented in the media and in books by the investigative journalist Jacques Pauw.

²⁷⁷ Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads*, 1991, pp.3-11.

²⁷⁸ Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 1991.

²⁷⁹ This murder was unrelated to Nofomela's Vlakplaas activities. See: Pauw, 1991.

²⁸⁰ See the 'Weekly Mail', 20 October, 1989.

²⁸¹ For an account of the newspaper's history see: <http://mg.co.za/page/history>. See also: Irwin Manoim, *You have been warned: The Story of the Weekly Mail & Guardian* (South Africa: Penguin Group, 1996).

until 1996.²⁸² Similarly to the Afrikaans language, progressive, anti-apartheid newspaper the 'Vrye Weekblad' the 'Mail & Guardian' experienced sustained resistance from the apartheid state, for its political positioning and its critique of apartheid. The Nationalist Party wielding its legal system, attempted to ban it and succeeded for one month in 1988.²⁸³

Dirk Coetzee corroborated the veracity of the 'Weekly Mail' story detailing Nofomela's statement; and the question of Vlakplaas was subsequently taken up in some detail by the 'Vrye Weekblad', founded in November 1989 by Max du Preez who was its editor.²⁸⁴ An interview with Coetzee was published in the 'Vrye Weekblad' in November 1989. Pauw was on the paper's editorial staff and, according to accounts he later published, discussions with Coetzee and the 'Vrye Weekblad' had been unfolding for quite some time before Nofomela's confessions.²⁸⁵ Coetzee had, in fact, left Vlakplaas in acrimonious circumstances.²⁸⁶ President Botha used the apartheid judicial and legal system to curtail the work of the 'Vrye Weekblad' and attempted to silence its revelations about government corruption and the more covert operations of the apartheid state.²⁸⁷ The newspaper's offices in Newtown, Johannesburg were bombed in 1991 after it published a story about the apartheid government's Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB).²⁸⁸ It was forced to close in February 1994 after having to declare bankruptcy as a result of the legal costs incurred in defending a story about South

²⁸² The 'Mail & Guardian' is now owned by M&G Media: <http://mg.co.za/page/about-us/> (accessed 10 September 2014).

²⁸³ For an account of the newspaper's history see: <http://mg.co.za/page/history>. See also: Manoim, 1996.

²⁸⁴ For accounts about the 'Vrye Weekblad' see: Pauw, 1991, p.19.

²⁸⁵ See: Pauw, 1991, Chapter 2, pp.12-30.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.,pp.12-30.

²⁸⁷ For accounts of the 'Vrye Weekblad' and Vlakplaas see the published accounts of Pauw and the newspaper's editor Max du Preez.

²⁸⁸ See the accounts of Pauw and Du Preez.

African Police General Lothar Neethling.²⁸⁹ It published evidence that suggested that Neethling had provided poison to security police to murder anti-apartheid activists.²⁹⁰

David Tshikalanga, also a former Vlakplaas *askari*, further corroborated the accounts presented by Nofomela and Coetzee, and all three confessed to 'hit squad' activities both within and across the borders of South Africa.²⁹¹ On February 2 1990, following escalating pressure from anti-apartheid and human rights groups and the revelations of the 'Weekly Mail' and the 'Vrye Weekblad' President de Klerk appointed a commission of inquiry.

As Ractliffe's edit of De Klerk's denial of prior knowledge of Vlakplaas suggests, his role was somewhat ambiguous. De Klerk, previously the Minister for National Education, succeeded Botha in 1989, and was not, as Beinart remarks, one of Botha's 'preferred candidates'.²⁹² By 1989 two-thirds of the white electorate were in favour of reform and De Klerk 'was determined to seize the initiative from opposition forces and keep his party and constituency in the political vanguard'.²⁹³ Beinart observes: 'He sought to develop a power base and constitutional system that, while it might end the overall political dominance of whites, would protect their position in the country'.²⁹⁴ De Klerk's initiation of a Commission of Inquiry was led by Mr Justice Louis Harms, and is known as the Harms Commission. Its trajectory, its findings and the criticism set against it is extensively documented by the IBIR.²⁹⁵

The tensions between the documents and findings of the IBIR and the Harms Commission produce an asymmetrical discourse characterised by slippages, denials,

²⁸⁹ See: Pauw and Du Preez.

²⁹⁰ See: Pauw and Du Preez.

²⁹¹ See the reports of the IBIR.

²⁹² Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2nd Edition). 2001, p.272.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.272

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.272.

²⁹⁵ The beginnings of the Harms Commission are documented by the IBIR.

evasions and contradictions.²⁹⁶ The Harms Commission found, despite the statements of Nofomela, Coetzee and others that no security police operations existed at Vlakplaas, and the testimonies of Nofomela and Coetzee were discredited.²⁹⁷ The Harms Commission ‘found that no hit squad existed at Vlakplaas, although members of the SAP were guilty of common law offences’.²⁹⁸ The question of Vlakplaas then surfaced forcefully during the TRC hearings as former Vlakplaas leaders, policemen and *askaris* sought amnesty in return for their testimony. In the accounts of Vlakplaas, documented by the IBIR and the TRC, crime and political violence converge in narratives about cross-border raids, abductions, torture, killing, theft and corrupt business transactions.

Du Preez and Pauw are key protagonists in shaping how accounts of Vlakplaas became public during and after the TRC hearings. Between 1996 and 1998, Du Preez produced and presented the SABC’s ‘Truth Commission Special Report’, which was broadcast nationally. The programme reported and commented on TRC hearings taking place throughout South Africa. Scholars have examined how the ‘TRC Special Report’, anchored by Du Preez, represented the TRC process. They have been particularly critical of how Du Preez, to cite Catherine Cole, ‘performs the role for which he is famous in South Africa, especially from his days with the newspaper *Vrye Weekblad* under apartheid: the tough, hard-nosed investigative journalist making unprecedented revelations about corruption and depravity’.²⁹⁹ Cole also asserts that the ‘TRC Special Report’ constructed a role that purported to bring to the surface ‘truths’ that the TRC ‘was not producing’.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ On the notion of asymmetrical discourse see: David William Cohen, *The Combining of History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.54.

²⁹⁷ See: ‘Who Lied? A discussion of the Findings of the Harms Commission’, pp.14-25.

²⁹⁸ ‘Who Lied? A discussion of the Findings of the Harms Commission, p.10.

²⁹⁹ Catherine Cole, *Performing South Africa’s Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), p.101.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.101.

The segments of speech appropriated by Ractliffe are to be found on on-line archives of the 'Truth Commission Special Report' (1999) and feature the voices of Coetzee, Du Preez and F.W de Klerk (figure 1.14).³⁰¹ Coetzee who in the video narrates his version of the killing of Kondile is a dominant figure in the accounts of Vlakplaas. He appears repeatedly in Du Preez's 'TRC Special Report' and Pauw's numerous books written in the style of investigative journalism and memoir. Pauw's books document covert meetings with Coetzee who, embittered by his acrimonious dismissal from the Vlakplaas unit, seems only too happy to comply. The relationship between Pauw and Coetzee appears to have been extremely convivial and affectionate obscuring the idea of investigative journalism as an objective practice. Pauw describes a secret meeting between himself and Coetzee in Mauritius in November 1989:

Sitting cross-legged next to me on the beach under a swaying palm tree, slowly sipping a frosty beer, was Dirk Johannes Coetzee, his handsome face tanned and clean-shaven, a slick of hair on his forehead [...] But this was no holiday. We were booked into the hotel under false names. Every night after dinner, we would retreat to our rooms and Dirk Coetzee would start talking into my tape-recorder [...] The trip to Mauritius was the culmination of weeks of secret planning, of late-night meetings, cryptic messages smuggled to the Political-Military Council of the ANC and clandestine visits to the organisation's headquarters in Lusaka.³⁰²

Pauw seems to revel in the risks attached to his meetings with Coetzee and the prospect of a political exposé appears thrilling. The language that Pauw and Coetzee use is often strangely gendered. One of the most ubiquitous examples of this appears in a statement by Coetzee: 'I was the commander of a South African Police death squad. I was in the heart of the whore. My men and I had to murder political and security opponents of the police and the government'.³⁰³

³⁰¹ For the segments used in the video see: 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_9EVNurFNE (accessed 9 September 2014).

³⁰² Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads*, 1991, p.12.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

The image of the whore, a trope of misogynist imagining, is used here to characterise Vlakplaas, and its transaction with the apartheid state. The idea of the 'whore' is fraught within the context of South African gender and sexual politics. The significations produced suggest the power of language and the insidious absorption of identities and roles shaped by sedimented conceptions of gender roles and identities. There is much at stake in thinking about the language of gender, and sexual violence, in South Africa. The TRC process addressed the sexual exploitation of female activists during the apartheid era. Testimony presented at the TRC is re-told with visceral force by Krog.³⁰⁴ This issue is given much needed scholarly attention in Sanders' book *Ambiguities of Witnessing* (2007). Drawing on Derrida, Sanders points out the blurred lines between rape, consent and prostitution in the discourse on testimony:

In a fascinating analysis inspired by Krog's book [*Country of my Skull*], Derrida argues that rape [...] is not one violation among others but, insofar as it will have been accompanied by the denial of the woman's role as political activist and the accusation that she is a prostitute, it deprives the victim of her very ability to testify to the violation: 'It is at once the condition of testimony, of truth and reconciliation that was assassinated in advance in these acts of violence done to women'.³⁰⁵

Coetzee's crude and melodramatic 'I was in the heart of the whore' is often repeated in relation to the TRC and is the title of Pauw's 1991 book *In the Heart of the Whore* (from which the extracts referred to here are taken). Du Preez deploys it in an episode of the 'Truth Commission Special Report' (the episode from which Ractliffe's extracts are derived).³⁰⁶ As the 'Special Report's' upbeat signature tune fades Du Preez proclaims:

'I was in the heart of the whore'. These were the words of security police captain Dirk Coetzee used exactly 7 years ago to describe his role as the Commander of the Vlakplaas death squad. And this week Coetzee and two of

³⁰⁴ Krog, *Country of My Skull*, 1999.

³⁰⁵ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, 2007, fn.31, p.208.

³⁰⁶ See: 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_9EVNurFNE (accessed 9 September 2014).

his colleagues told their horror stories to the nation. They were in the heart of the whore.³⁰⁷

Du Preez goes on to spend considerable time introducing Coetzee and, similarly to Pauw, produces a quasi-mythic narrative that functions to re-imagine Coetzee as a hero-villain, a larger-than-life figure. The effect softens Coetzee's relationship to apartheid violence, killing, torture and subterfuge. Du Preez recalls his first meeting with Coetzee in 1989. His characterisation conjures up literary or cinematic tropes associated with the hero-villains of espionage or political thriller genres. Coetzee, in Du Preez's story, is 'a hard-headed maverick', a member of the political elite, who heroically turns on his bosses, fighting back as they attempt to 'walk all over him'.³⁰⁸ At great risk to himself, he tells his story to the nation apparently exposing the corrupt underpinnings of the system under which he served.

At the time of the Harms Commission, Coetzee wrote an account of his life titled *Hitsquads: Testimony of a South African Security Policeman: The Full Story*. It exists as an unpublished manuscript, discovered in the 'Historical Papers' archive at Wits University.³⁰⁹ The document is approximately 173 pages and is unbound. It is a hybrid of testimony, confessional, memoir and statement written for the purposes of the law. Coetzee had intended to submit it to the Harms Commission. Each paragraph is numbered with the pedantic precision of a legal document or an inventory. For example, the section titled 'My rise and fall in the police security culture (January 1977 to December 1981)' is numbered '5' and sub-headings accordingly numbered '5.1', '5.2' and so on.³¹⁰ Each of these sub-headings refer to a theme. For instance, section

³⁰⁷ For the segments referred to here see: 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_9EVNurFNE (accessed 9 September 2014).

³⁰⁸ See: 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_9EVNurFNE (accessed 9 September 2014).

³⁰⁹ Dirk Coetzee, *Hitsquads: Testimony of a South African Security Policeman: The Full Story*. Unpublished manuscript. Archived as accession number A2790 Dirk Coetzee. It includes a preface by Coetzee's brother, Ben Coetzee, dated 12 April 1990, and below this a second preface dated 1994, Roodepoort, South Africa. Ben Coetzee assisted with the writing of the text.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43.

5.4 titled 'Vlakplaas' begins with the subheading 'Inheriting the askaris' (in turn numbered '5.4.1').³¹¹ Several paragraphs then follow. The extracts selected here are of particular interest. They speak to Vlakplaas as place, and to the role of the *askari*, an ambiguous, compromised figure in the story of Vlakplaas:

5.4.1.2 Vlakplaas is a 44 ha farm, seven kilometres out of Erasmia, on the Schurveberg road. The police had hired Vlakplaas from a Mr Steward in 1978. The southern border of the farm is the Hennops River. There was an old farm house with an out building that included a garage and two servant rooms.³¹²

[...] 5.4.1.4 Viktor [the officer in command] had a proper 'maplotter' enterprise at Vlakplaas, with a number of farm animals, some of uncertain lineage, including fowl, geese, ducks, turkeys, a cow, goats, and a dog or two. He and the askaris had a veritable squatter garden with a few mealie plants, some pumpkin and sweet potato creepers, tomatoes, green beans and onions.³¹³

[...] 5.4.1.5 The farm was used as base for freedom fighters of the ANC that were caught and 'turned' against their former comrades to work for the police. In a few cases they had walked there on their own accord. These are the so called 'askaris' a Swahili, ultimately Arabic word, meaning a 'black soldier' [...].³¹⁴

5.4.1.6 The task of the askaris was to mix with the population at public places such as shebeens, bus stops, railway stations and taxi ranks, spot ex ANC comrades and point them out to qualified policemen.³¹⁵

Coetzee's absurdly pedantic numbering invokes the figure of a Kafkaesque petty bureaucrat. His language is inflected with the prejudices and inequalities rendered natural and ordinary in the social worlds produced by apartheid's policies of racial segregation. The *askaris* are unnamed and anonymous. The servant's rooms are separate, located in an out building. The garden is dismissed as a 'squatter garden'; a prejudiced reference to 'squatter camps' or informal settlements. The farm appears in some instances benign and picturesque – we imagine the old farm house, the garden

³¹¹ Ibid.,p.70.

³¹² Ibid.,p.71.

³¹³ Ibid.p.,71.

³¹⁴ Ibid.p.,71.

³¹⁵ Ibid.p.,71.

and the animals. A clip from an episode of the ‘Special Report’ depicts Coetzee on the farm at Vlakplaas (figure 1.15).³¹⁶ Casually chewing on a blade of grass, he stands gazing into the distance, from the elevated perspective of a hill. In the distance is a mountain, veld and barely discernible dwellings. The image recalls the visual languages of colonial representations, their ideals and fantasies.³¹⁷

Ractliffe’s landscape emptied of utopian picturing is a powerful counter-image. The Vlakplaas of Coetzee’s inventory is a space of illusive conviviality, political compromise, torture and killing. It is impossible to imagine the choices of the Vlakplaas operatives he describes, the moment of turning or, as he puts it, of walking there ‘of their own accord’. The TRC brought to the surface the role of the *askaris* in subterfuge, abduction, torture and killing but they occupy a compromised, unstable ground that remains to be fully explored. The figure of the *askari* generates questions about aspects of the historical conditions of political complicity in apartheid South Africa, and the limits of agency in conditions of state authoritarianism.³¹⁸

Jacques Derrida commented on the South African TRC in ways that open up the enormity of the problem of forgiveness as a political, ethical and philosophical question.³¹⁹ Sanders recalls Derrida’s 1998 lecture at the University of the Western Cape: ‘Entitled “Forgiving the Unforgivable,” the lecture will, Derrida states, “systematically avoid the temptation – however strong it may be here – to make any reference [...] to the process of reconciliation, or even of forgiveness – although I will argue that it is not the same thing”’.³²⁰ Derrida’s work on the subject of forgiveness, and Sanders’ work on the TRC, informs my reading of Coetzee’s amnesty application

³¹⁶ TRC Episode 80, Part 3: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-O2Lctw6fFM>. (accessed 9 September 2014).

³¹⁷ See: W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, second edition, 2002), p.10.

³¹⁸ Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*, 2014.

³¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, [Translated by Elizabeth G. Rottenberg] ‘To Forgive: The Unforgiveable and the Imprescriptible’, in John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, Michael Scanlon, *Questioning God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

³²⁰ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, 2007, p.87.

and the opposition that he encountered: 'As soon as "Pardon" as a speech act is uttered, is there not, Derrida asks, the beginning of a movement, a calculus of redemption, reconciliation, and so forth, that will allow a wrong to be neutralised?'.³²¹ Sanders comments on the question-and-answer session which followed Derrida's 1998 lecture and his observations speak to the philosophical difficulties that arise out of the Vlakplaas story:

Derrida assures his questioners that reconciliation, the work of mourning, and so forth are good things, but insists that they do not amount to forgiveness. When he said that forgiving is heterogeneous to the economy of mourning, and reconciliation, he was not opposing it to those processes; he was just saying that one must not confuse them with one another.³²²

The relatives of Sizwe Kondile (his presence in absence is invoked in Ractliffe's video) were strongly opposed to Coetzee's amnesty application. Kondile's mother Charity Kondile commented on Coetzee's application and her views were shown on the 'Special Report'. She said: 'My [...] feeling is that the Act favours the perpetrators because so far we the victims have not been [granted reparation].'³²³ At Coetzee's amnesty application hearing Adu Imran Moosa, counsel for the Kondile family, addressed Coetzee saying: 'You have said that you would one day like to meet Mrs Kondile and look her in the eye' (figure 1.16).³²⁴ Coetzee responds: 'I would like to do that in future. Yes'.³²⁵ To which Moosa states: 'Mrs Kondile asks me to convey to you that that is an honour that she feels you do not deserve and that if you were really remorseful you would not have applied for amnesty but in fact stood trial for what you

³²¹ Ibid., p.88.

³²² Ibid., 88.

³²³ 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_9EVNurFNE (accessed 9 September 2014).

³²⁴ 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1'.

³²⁵ 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1'.

did with her son.³²⁶ Coetzee, evading the substance of Mrs Kondile's statement communicated through Moosa, responds: 'I will honour her feelings. As far as not wanting to see me I can understand it. I would feel exactly the same I suppose'.³²⁷ He then explains his amnesty application and this is one of the segments that Ractliffe deployed in the video:

As far as the amnesty application is concerned I think the Peace and Reconciliation Act was constructed by all walks of life. All parties represented and I think I'm entitled as anyone else not to be isolated and looked at alone in single context. But [am] entitled to the right of the laws of this land as any other individual [...] involved. And according to the laws I then applied when amnesty came up.³²⁸

Coetzee mobilises the discourse of the New South Africa and the constitutional rights of the post-apartheid citizen. The soundtrack that Ractliffe selects for her video makes visible the tensions embedded within the post-apartheid democracy. Sanders suggests the aporia present in the idea of reparation writing: 'there must be reparation; there can never be (adequate reparation). Such a situation calls for decision – the type described by Derrida in "Force of Law", where responsibility lies in deciding in a "night of non-knowledge", and where justice is irreducible to the application of law, or to any other calculus'.³²⁹ In the face of impossible recuperation of what has been lost, ideas of aporia and 'non-knowledge' appear to be the only meaningful strategy open to the navigation of questions of ethical complexity.

³²⁶ 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1.

³²⁷ 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1.

³²⁸ 'TRC Episode 27, Part 1': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_9EVNurFNE (accessed 9 September 2014).

³²⁹ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, 2007, p.116. See the chapter on the TRC and reparation, pp.114-146.

In 2003, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela entered the Vlakplaas narrative offering an account from the subject position of a black South African woman.³³⁰ Her perspective is, of course, nonetheless particular to her subjectivity and professional relationship to the TRC. She participated in the TRC co-ordinating the public hearings of victim's testimony in the Western Cape. In 2003 she published an account that brought into view questions that arose from the TRC particularly those related to forgiveness, human rights violations and trauma. Her book titled *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* focuses on Vlakplaas Commander Eugene de Kok interviewing him from the prison where he is currently serving his 212 year sentence for atrocities committed during the apartheid era.³³¹ De Kok was transferred to Vlakplaas from the police counter-insurgency unit 'Koevoet' which was based in present-day Namibia (or South West Africa as it was then called). A full account of De Kok's relationship to Vlakplaas is beyond the scope of this chapter but similarly to Coetzee he is foregrounded in the narratives produced by Du Preez and Pauw. Pauw, produced 'Prime Evil', a two hour documentary on De Kok while working on the Truth Commission Special Report between 1996 and 1997. Gobodo-Madikizela recuperates notions of humanness and empathy. Her book is an interesting counterpoint to those of Pauw and Du Preez and invites further critical exploration. It reinscribes the emphasis on De Kok in the narratives of white male journalists and simultaneously produces an account of surprising empathy from the position of someone who has immediate and embodied knowledge of what it meant to live under apartheid as a black woman.

One of the functions of the TRC was to facilitate the process of identifying the graves, known and unmarked, of murdered activists. Much of the imagery associated with the TRC and, indeed the Vlakplaas story is the exhumation for re-burial, and identification, of the remains of those murdered. This was covered quite significantly by the 'Special

³³⁰ See Sanders (2007) and the chapter 'Hearing Women', an important text on the TRC and the 1997 women's hearing in Johannesburg.

³³¹ The book is also the basis of a play by Nicholas Wright: <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/may/29/a-human-being-died-that-night-review-apartheid-south-africa> (accessed 14 September).

Report'. The exhumation of the remains of *askari* Brian Ngqulunga was filmed and shown on the program in some detail (figure 1.17).³³² Ngqulunga lived on the Vlakplaas farm and participated in the murder of Mxenge. According to the 'Special Report' Ngqulunga was murdered in 1990 because he became a threat and by 1987 was 'about to crack'.³³³ The documentary footage shown on the programme begins with the drive across the Vlakplaas farm to the site of Ngqulunga's grave. Coincidentally the insert invokes Ractliffe's photographs of Vlakplaas: it begins with a view through the window screen of the reporter's car through which we see an ordinary South African landscape of *koppies* and *veld*.³³⁴ Ngqulunga's relatives, including his widow and young son, witness the exhumation and his widow performs a ritual of mourning.³³⁵ Screened on the 'Special Report' this documentary insert appears as an intrusion into intimate spaces of grief and mourning.

The texts, archival documents and images discussed here produce a discursive field shot through with absence, erasure, ambiguity and questions of profound ethical difficulty. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's work on power and historical production highlights the problems attached to the construction of historical narratives, particularly those, that, I argue here, are shaped out of conditions of trauma. Trouillot writes:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).³³⁶

³³² See TRC, Episode 86, Part 2:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exMpVMcTUDY&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PLB5E49FFA382FFC46 (accessed 9 September 2014).

³³³ TRC, Episode 86, Part 2.

³³⁴ The Afrikaans word 'koppie' is the word for hill.

³³⁵ Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Cape Town: New Africa Books, an imprint of David Phillips, 2003).

³³⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p.26.

Silences born out of circumstances of censorship and oppression mediate my looking and signal the ideological and discursive conditions from which South African historiography emerges. The voices of the relatives of those abducted, murdered and tortured by Vlakplaas operatives are overshadowed by the florid style of investigative journalists such as Du Preez and Pauw. The *askaris* are compromised and ambiguous figures subordinate to the spectacles produced by the media accounts that appear to privilege the narratives of De Kok and Coetzee.

Haunted Landscapes

Ractliffe's work enters a saturated, highly charged, discursive field produced by discourses of law, journalism, testimony and grief. And yet the images appear to yield nothingness: an everyday semi-rural world of dirt roads, gates, fences, electric pylons, a river, dogs, distant hidden dwellings, trees, *veld* and *koppies*. The joined up photographs Ractliffe filmed for her video suggests the idea of a panoramic view.³³⁷ But here there is no attempt at a seamless, spectacular vista.³³⁸ This is a landscape that appears unremarkable and banal. It is neither spectacular, picturesque nor sublime. Despite the violence of the histories suggested by the work's title, the sounds that accompany it, or that which is known *a priori*, the visual image itself is not imprinted with visible marks of death or trauma. The violence is heard rather than seen, and this disjuncture is unsettling. I find myself looking more carefully, forensically, for signs of disturbance.

³³⁷ In 1995, a travelling exhibition curated by Clive van den Berg appeared in North America and Johannesburg. It was titled 'Panoramas of Passage: Changing Landscapes of South Africa'. It explored the historical, social and political configurations of landscape from the late nineteenth century to 1994.

For a general literature see: Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1998). The panorama also appears in a discourse about so-called post-war rubble-films: Jaimey Fisher, 'Wander in/to the Rubble-Film: Filmic Flânerie and the Exploded Panorama after 1945'. *The German Quarterly*, Vol.17, No.4, *Focus on film*. (Fall, 2005), pp. 461-480.

³³⁸ See: W.J.T., Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2002 and in this volume David Bunn, "'Our Wattled Cot": Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle's African Landscapes', pp.127-173. See also: Garb and Enwezor, O., *Homelands-Land Marks: Contemporary Art from South Africa*, 2008; and Diserens, *Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection: Appropriated Landscapes*, 2011.

Vertical black or white lines suggest distinctions and separations but I am not always certain where one image begins and another ends. The beginnings and endings of roads and gates, and their whereabouts in the land in which they are embedded, are unknowable (figure 1.18). Dirt roads are imprinted with the tracks of tires, markers of journeys that remain invisible (figure 1.19). The photographic sequence is unevenly paced: it moves in gradations of slowness, from right hand side to left. Its trajectory disallows any attempt to imagine a narrative guided by conventional filmic languages, that shaped by movement, deploy seamless pacing and causal openings and closings. Relations between scale, horizon line, background and foreground are ambiguous and unstable: I see a miniature landscape of mountain and water-tower nested within a larger image (figure 1.20). Above this diminutive landscape is a dominant expanse of sky (or what I imagine to be sky), and on the left hand side is a monumental, apparently incongruous tree.

I make out what appear to be joins between the photographs: tree is joined to tree, gate to gate and so forth but the joining is artificial, and the overlaps not always congruous (figure 1.21). Trees, gates and road appear repeatedly and insistently but I am not always sure how it is I am seeing them. The landscape is cropped from above and below structuring and shaping how I look. Shadows, folds and the whited-out images of the double-exposure form a kind of *leitmotif*. An ambiguous black form is perhaps an unstable indexical reference to the wing mirror of the car from which Ractliffe photographs (figure 1.22). I see these ambiguous forms elsewhere – perhaps the artist’s shadow as she photographs, or imprints of her car – but I can’t always make out what they are (figure 1.23).

As I watch the video, I enter the imaginative space of a simulated car journey. I reach a paved driveway leading to a gate (figure 1.24). Behind the gate, trees obfuscate my view. Dogs are behind the gate: distant, barely visible. The video continues its movement and the imagery of dogs moves to the foreground. I am confronted by a dog, barking through a fence (figure 1.25). As the video moves, I encounter what I imagine to be a still and stagnant pool of water surrounded by dense grasses and what may be trees and shrubs (figure 1.26).

The barking dog, the tyre tracks, the water, the illegible signposts, the ambiguous spatial ordering of the landscape, the repetition of gates without walls or fences, the fitful movement and pacing, the unexpected trajectory from right to left function in my imagination, as points of disturbance. They puncture the veil of ordinariness, and suggest things that cannot be seen. This ambiguity between banality and disturbance threads itself through the narratives, both visual and verbal, that shape the images, meanings and affects associated with Vlakplaas. Stories are vividly told but Vlakplaas remains in many ways unknowable and unreachable.

In considering the significations of the word Vlakplaas and thinking of 'vlak' - not simply as syllable or prefix, but as adjective - and of the word 'plaas' as noun, the banality of the landscape is symbolically reinscribed. The Afrikaans word 'plaas' translates as 'farm' or 'place'. As an adjective, 'vlak' describes a flat surface, a geometrical plane or shallow water.³³⁹ In Afrikaans, shallowness or flatness is described as 'vlakheid'. This sense of shallowness or flatness is suggestive to the ways in which the landscape might be read, and resonates with the hidden but threatening aspects of Vlakplaas' significations. The ordinariness of this landscape veils what is known, but unseen. References to Vlakplaas the police unit and Vlakplaas the place are audible in the video. I hear sounds that suggest, even if not literally, gunshots and listen to Coetzee's account of the killing of Kondile. But in the landscape I see, there are no graves, no visible marks of trauma, violence or death.

J.M Coetzee reflects on the idea of landscape and an idea of Africa in early South African literature: 'This landscape remains alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it.'³⁴⁰ Of course, the meanings and significations of all landscapes as they relate to the contingencies of historical time and viewing subjects are mutable. There is a dense network of ideas and images that shape

³³⁹ I rely both on prior knowledge and the definitions presented in D.B. Bosman and I.W. van der Merwe *Tweetalige Skoolwoordeboek* (Cape Town: Pharos Dictionaries, an imprint of NB Publishers, 2007).

³⁴⁰ J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), p.7.

how land is thought about in the history of South Africa.³⁴¹ Historically, land is a protagonist in encounters and conflicts that inform how the relations between colonial powers, settlers, migrants, indigenous peoples, and apartheid administrators are imagined.³⁴² Paul Emmanuel's *After-Image* (2004) although monumental in scale counters the heroic picturing of South Africa's embattled relationship to land (figure 1.27). The work exists in a disruptive relationship to the constituents of photographic media: Emmanuel scratched obsessively for several months at exposed AGFA photographic paper with a craft knife.

Coetzee refers to landscapes imagined by colonial and settler cultural practice, and its particular conditions, but his vocabulary - of alienation, impenetrability and a language yet to be discovered - echoes with the opaque nothingness of the landscape that moves before us in Ractliffe's video. And following the transition from apartheid attempts in South Africa to excavate and picture a traumatic past.³⁴³

The question of Ractliffe's banal picturing of Vlakplaas is discussed in the work of Atkinson (2000), Enwezor (2009) and Garb (2011). Atkinson remarks on the tension between the heightened, traumatic sense of Vlakplaas (of the place and its association with apartheid violence) and the apparently unreadable banality of Ractliffe's representation: 'Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* images emphatically resist the obvious interpretations we bring to them, confounding our search for clues: here is a gate, there a tree, a paved driveway, in the distance four or five dogs. But where is the red earth? Where are the signs of death, the weapons, the graves?'³⁴⁴ Enwezor comments similarly: 'Despite its unassuming, even drab quality, the site is one of the most grotesque of apartheid landscapes located in the outskirts of Pretoria [...] However, nothing in the image of this normatively "ordinary" place has the capacity of conveying

³⁴¹ The political discourse on land in South Africa is continuously evolving. Currently, indigenous land rights and the nationalisation of mines is a significant aspect of public discourse in South Africa largely in the form of media interventions.

³⁴² See: Coetzee, *White Writing*, p.7.

³⁴³ The works that form the basis of my study are examples of this.

³⁴⁴ Brenda Atkinson, *Jo Ractliffe: Artist's Book. TAXI-001* (South Africa: David Krut Publishing, 2000), p.13.

its horrific history, nor the ability to register, in visual language, the horrors that took place there'.³⁴⁵ Garb writes of the dislocation between Ractliffe's work and the significations produced by the idea of Vlakplaas: 'the banality and emptiness of the world it captured jarring with the symbolic significance that the name had acquired as the locus of apartheid-era death squads and torture camps'.³⁴⁶

The idea of banality is not developed by Atkinson, Enwezor or Garb but their accounts, which appear to be arguing for the conceptual possibilities and critical potential of banality, are interesting to consider alongside Hook's discomfort with the 'banality' of Ractliffe's 'appropriations'.³⁴⁷ I present a counter argument to Hook's critique of banality; and argue that it is precisely the mundane, ordinariness of the landscape represented that speaks so disruptively to the Vlakplaas narratives.

I watch the work repeat its continuous looped trajectory in the hope that if I look carefully I will be able to find an opening; a way of excavating this impenetrable, ordinary landscape. The disturbance of surface - spillages of light, imagined cuts, folds and bends, the smudgy effects and the phantom forms I project - must yield something. I listen again to the violence of Coetzee's account and the banality of the *braai* while Kondile's body burns.³⁴⁸ De Klerk responds to Du Preez and I hear the stutters and half-finished sentences. But as I look and as I listen the work becomes increasingly opaque; and it is this that drives the critical impetus of the work.

The numbing effects of media representations and re-iterations of catastrophe are well-documented and suggestive to Ractliffe's juxtaposition of banal landscape and the

³⁴⁵ Enwezor, 'Exodus of the Dogs', 2009, p.87.

³⁴⁶ Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011, p.48.

³⁴⁷ Hook: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm> (accessed 14 September 2014).

³⁴⁸ On the braai in South African national culture see T.O. Molefe, "'National Braai Day' a day of forgetting", News 24, 17 September, 2014 <http://www.news24.com/Columnists/TOMolefe/National-Braai-Day-a-day-of-forgetting-20140917> (accessed 26 December 2014).

sound sourced from the South African television media.³⁴⁹ Ractliffe mobilises a visual language vastly different to media images of Vlakplaas: episodes of the ‘Special Report’ featured images of explicit violence including the bloodied aftermath of killing (figure 1.28).³⁵⁰ Ariella Azoulay’s work on representations of violence and death in contemporary life foregrounds the Israeli-Palestinian political sphere and draws on western philosophical traditions focused on modernity, contemporary life and democracy.³⁵¹ This work opens up possibilities for South African scholarship where the meaning of modernity, inflected by colonialism, apartheid and the post-apartheid democracy, is not necessarily clear.

Azoulay argues that the ‘different patterns identified by Benjamin as intended to overcome distance (and thus destroy the aura) succeed in creating distance as something that cannot be reduced. Accordingly, not only do they produce the aura, but they also produce an indestructible aura’.³⁵² For Azoulay television ‘is a quintessential expression of this paradox’: It ‘shows what is happening “there” – draws it closer, makes it similar, overcomes difference – and yet it illustrates the unbridgeable distance between the viewer and what is happening “there”’:³⁵³

In other words, television embodies the modern distinction between physical space and the space of appearance (in which intervention may take place). Television is the ultimate display showcase: it allows viewers to approach ever closer and yet never arrive, to observe and yet to be unable to touch. Television cameras are present in nearly every place, as if no one-time moment shall remain alone. Cameras would lurk in anticipation of capturing the ultimate one-time moment – death – at its moment of occurrence. Already, the television camera, an accessory serving the secular practice of breaking distance and overcoming the different and the one-time, brings its prey to the ultimate display showcase, in which ritual takes place within display. This is death’s display showcase.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ See: Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1979 and *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 2004.

³⁵⁰ TRC Episode 80, Part 3: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-O2Lctw6fFM> (accessed 14 September 2014).

³⁵¹ Ariella Azoulay, *Death’s Showcase: The Power of the Image in Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2001).

³⁵² *Ibid.* p.28.

³⁵³ *Ibid.* p.28.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.28.

In South Africa, the media's filtering of the TRC process, and its foregrounding of the imagery of death, torture, trauma and grief, brought into the spaces of everyday life the narratives that were censored and obfuscated by the apartheid regime. During the TRC what was previously excised or part of a discourse of resistance and liberation is brought closer entering the space of intimate viewing produced by the communal or private watching of television. But the forms that this closeness might take are unclear. Media representations are circumscribed by ideological interests, power relations, agenda-setting and the concerns of capital.³⁵⁵ The political urgency of images is distorted by the language of spectacle. Ractliffe's soundtrack, appropriated paradoxically from television media, counters the ubiquitous imagery of violence that dominates the visible photographic and televisual accounts of apartheid. The work's opacity, and the distancing this produces, is a critical counter-point to Coetzee and De Kok's omnipotent presence in the public discourse about Vlakplaas. The repetitive return of the looped video disallows the coherence promised by causality and narrative closure. Ractliffe's staging of Vlakplaas is without a *dénouement* and an ending.

Film and video scholarship draws attention to the conceptual possibilities inherent in representations and histories of time. Notions of transience, contingency and non-linear time obscures the distinctions between what in the historical imagination figures as past, present or future.³⁵⁶ In Ractliffe's video, 'Vlakplaas' is not a singular event fixed in time and place. It is an unstable repository of discontinuous events. It produces accounts of places actual, symbolic and imagined. It invokes a number of historical protagonists and the shadowy, invisible presences of those whose voices it suppressed. Sound is an anchor that locates the video in a time and place and so is the date: 2 June 1999. But the meanings of the landscape that unfolds across my field of vision obfuscates the impetus to produce meaning. Discontinuous time, and its relationship to mourning and states of transience, is registered across the surface of

³⁵⁵ I am particularly interested here in concepts of power and discourse: the work of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu are important here.

³⁵⁶ See: Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. 2001; Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*, 2002.

the work, in movement and effects of light. As I watch the video I observe the blurry motion of the drive-by shooting, the spillages of light as Ractliffe tampers with the mechanics of the plastic disposable camera; and the manual pulling of the photograph beneath the video camera (an action that is unseen but invoked in the experience of watching the photograph move). The tension in the video between time as known and stable and time as amorphous, unstable and unknowable speaks to Ractliffe's ongoing resistance to the causal telling of a story, but it also opens up a way of thinking about how historical events might be narrated in South Africa: most obviously it recalls the question of a historiography lodged in an oppositional relationship between apartheid and post-apartheid eras.

Ractliffe's video, a continuous 2 minute 30 second loop, suggests the idea of the repetitive return to the psychic space of trauma. It invokes the documented clinical symptoms of trauma; and the signs and symptoms of traumatic memory imagined by means of a conceptual language linked to Freudian iterations of repression, traumatic memory and the after-shock of war. The work's critical potential is located in its impenetrability. It does not claim to speak on behalf of those who can no longer speak. It registers the impossible task of speaking on behalf of others, of those tortured and killed; or indeed for survivors transformed, in different ways, by lived experiences of trauma. La Capra's concept of 'empathic unsettlement' is applicable here to the questions of who speaks, how one speaks and for whom in South Africa:

Historical trauma is specific, and not everyone is subject to it or entitled to the subject position associated with it. It is dubious to identify with the victim to the point of making oneself a surrogate victim who has a right to the victim's voice or subject position. The role of empathy and empathic unsettlement in the attentive secondary witness does not entail this identity; it involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place. Opening oneself to empathic unsettlement is [...] a desirable affective dimension of inquiry which complements and supplements empirical research and analysis.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001, p.78.

This critical and self-aware negotiation of the concrete and analytical aspects of historical inquiry and the more uncertain territories of trauma, memory, affect and empathy is central to my conception of the relationship between history and trauma. The opacity of Ractliffe's landscape, emptied of the visible signs of death, trauma and grief, is suggestive to La Capra's empathic unsettlement. We are offered the signposts of dates and events. Apartheid themes of violence and censorship are suggested by the voices that speak, and how they speak: De Klerk's stuttering and linguistic obfuscation. But the landscape yields nothing, except an unsettled surface.

Hook, referring to the photographs, argued that: 'The oppression and horror that these images refer to does not exist at the level of aesthetic form'.³⁵⁸ I disagree with him, arguing for the possibilities of the aesthetic in contemporary life, and the South African political sphere. Not in the sense that contemporary aesthetic practice is to be imbued, idealistically, with transcendent or didactic, moral functions. In response to the argument Hook makes in relation to Singer's *Void*, I argue that there are a number of strategies open to the artist and the possibilities and limitations of each work should be considered on its own terms and in relation to the particular aesthetic and critical lineages to which it refers. In Ractliffe's work the banality that Hook finds so troubling is its critical point; and so is its deliberately disruptive appropriation of the language of black and white photography. But perhaps the later video – with the addition of sound and movement - makes the point more powerfully. Speaking in an interview about the Vlakplaas work and its participation in photographic discourse Ractliffe comments:

'Vlakplaas' is quite simple. It's about the failure. The failure of the photograph to signify in the ways that the place does in our imagination. The photograph cannot live up. It was finding a way to mark the failure of the photograph, but also to contradict that. To say that the photograph can do something else.³⁵⁹

Ractliffe's performative appropriation of the disposable plastic cameras and the action of pulling the photograph beneath the video camera is deliberately de-stabilising: a

³⁵⁸ Hook, <http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/listings2.htm>.

³⁵⁹ Interview (Jo Ractliffe and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, October 21, 2011.

retort to the objectivity claimed by aspects of South African documentary photography. Ractliffe's strategy of the 'drive-by' is similarly performative in register. It suggests an irreverent play on South African documentary photographers whose images were shot in conditions of danger and the visible discourse of male documentary photographers who during the apartheid years were caught between activism and (in the case of those classified white) the complex position of speaking on behalf of those whose agency was compromised and whose citizenship erased.³⁶⁰

An idea of trauma shaped by a vocabulary of haunting is appropriate to the conditions of South Africa where the spectre of apartheid remains a presence in the country's historical imagination and the experience of everyday life. As La Capra remarks: 'there is an important sense in which the after effects – the hauntingly possessive ghosts – of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone and, in various ways, affect everyone'.³⁶¹ The idea of haunting appears in contemporary discourses about the relations between history, photography and film.³⁶² But there is particularity to how this historical haunting imprints itself, and the relationship of haunting to loss and absence. It is certainly not universal and homogenous and the same for all conditions of trauma:

The past is misperceived in terms of sheer absence or utter annihilation. Something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or symptomatic revenant. Moreover losses are specific and involve particular events, such as the death of loved ones on a personal level or, on a broader scale, the losses brought about by apartheid or by the Holocaust [...]. I think it is misleading to situate loss on a transhistorical level, something that happens when it is conflated with absence and conceived as constitutive of existence.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Ariella Azoulay (2008) writes powerfully on ideas of visibility and invisibility as they relate to citizenship, war, violence and political catastrophe.

³⁶¹ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001, p.xi.

³⁶² See: T.J. Demos's exhibition catalogue essay Sven Augustijen's *Spectropoetics* (USA: ASA publishers, 2011). See also: Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter* and Jane Connarty, and Josephine Lanyon (eds), *Ghosting, The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video* (Bristol: Picture This Moving Image and The Arts Council, 2006).

³⁶³ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001, p. 49.

T.J Demos mobilises an idea of haunting in his discussion of Sven Augustijen's 2011 film *Spectres*.³⁶⁴ At the centre is the question of Belgium's relationship with its former colony the Democratic Republic of Congo. In particular, the film focuses on the uncertainties surrounding the execution of Patrice Lumumba on 17 January 1961; and what can only be described as the absurdly obsessive attempts of Belgian diplomat turned historian (Jacques Brassinne de la Buissière) to control the narrative of Lumumba's death. For Demos '*Spectres* investigates the way discourse releases the ghosts of history despite, and no doubt because of its speakers intentions, as they try – but inevitably fail – to bury the traumatic episodes of history, which come back to haunt them in the present.'³⁶⁵ Drawing attention to the constituents of trauma and repression La Capra draws out the psychic registers of repression: 'In acting out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed'.³⁶⁶ *Spectres*, although very different in execution, is interesting to consider alongside Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* as it signals the political risks attached to the singularly positivist quest for a stable truth, and the volatile space of the voices it represses. Writing about Augustijen's film, Demos makes visible historical production's visual dialogue with the internal logics of imagination and fact: 'Documentary and fiction – normally opposed – are here made to intertwine, such that fiction is shown to be a way of recreating the world through inspired narration, and documentary a contingent, subjective act that is equally an imaginary construct'.³⁶⁷ Demos' observations produce a way of thinking about Goldblatt's assertion that Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* is not specific enough, and the truth-claims attached to documentary traditions constituted by a relationship to resistance, activism and liberation.

Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* invokes and then disrupts narratives that are intimately linked to political trauma, violence, oppression, censorship and erasure. The uncertain and the

³⁶⁴ Demos, *Sven Augustijen's Spectropoetics*, 2011.

³⁶⁵ Demos, 2011, p.10.

³⁶⁶ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001, p.70.

³⁶⁷ Demos, 2011, p.9.

non-specific opens up the strategic impossibility of historical recuperation and redress in South Africa. Memory is contingent on the vagaries of remembrance and the constraints of power and political life. In acknowledging the traumatic inflections that circumscribe South African historiography, Ndebele's unifying space of anguish is a paradoxical space of possibility. As La Capra writes: 'Possession by the past may never be fully overcome or transcended, and working through may at best enable some distance or critical perspective that is acquired with extreme difficulty and not achieved once and for all'.³⁶⁸ Against the backdrop of histories forged in the face of censorship, secrecy and erasure nothing, in the purely positivist sense, can ever be fully grasped.

³⁶⁸ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001, p. 70.

CHAPTER TWO

‘I strive to express my sadness’: Berni Searle’s *Mute* (2008)

Tracing

It is 2011, and I am in Belgium, at De Hallen, in Bruges, in the monumental space that was once a 13th century, medieval market hall and which forms part of a constellation of medieval sites associated with the town’s heritage. Bruges is a UNESCO World Heritage Site which encompasses both medieval and nineteenth century sites.³⁶⁹ The space is very dark and the only available light emanates from numerous screens, of various scales and kinds. Sound fills the space suggesting dialogues punctuated by sonic overlays and repetitions. Titled *Interlaced* after the work that lends the exhibition its name and that was, in fact, filmed in Bruges, this is a solo show of video work by Berni Searle.³⁷⁰ While trained as a sculptor, and working across media with installation and photography, Searle is one of the most significant artists to work with the medium of video in South Africa. This chapter focuses on one work in Searle’s already extensive *oeuvre*.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ See: Michel Dewilde; Julie McGee; Mirjam Westen, *Berni Searle: Interlaced*. (Holland: Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Arnhem and Belgium: Frac Lorraine & Cultuurcentrum Brugge, 2011), p.23.

³⁷⁰ Michel Dewilde, et al., *Berni Searle: Interlaced*, 2011.

³⁷¹ See: Emma Bedford, *Fresh: Berni Searle* (Cape Town, South African National Gallery, 2003); Rory Bester, *Float: Berni Searle* (Cape Town: Bell-Roberts Publishing, 2003); Emma Bedford (ed.), *A Decade of Democracy* (Cape Town: Double Storey and Iziko, 2004); Annie E. Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, 2004, pp.246-254; Sophie Perryer (ed.), *Berni Searle: Approach* (South Africa: Michael Stevenson Gallery and Johannesburg Gallery; United States: Contemporary Art Museum/Institute for Research in Art, University of South Florida, 2006); Emma Bedford (ed.), *A Decade of Democracy* (Cape Town: Double Storey and Iziko, 2004); Marion Arnold, *Berni Searle: Recent Work 2007/8*, 2008; Tamar Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011; Dewilde et al., *Berni Searle: Interlaced*, 2011.

Titled *Mute* (2008) it is, unlike the other works on show, and as its title suggests, soundless (figure 2.1). *Mute* is a double-channel video projection presented on two screens which face each other. Four minutes and 11 seconds in length, the video runs on a loop. Each screen deploys a different visual language. One presents a sequence of photographic images which appear to document an event, although the images selected are shrouded in darkness and, without context, appear opaque. The focal point, illuminated by torchlight, is an ashen form marked out on the ground (figure 2.2). The form yields nothing except, in its documentation of ashen traces, the absence of someone that once existed. On the opposite screen a woman (the artist, Searle) weeps, amongst animated images of black crosses and what appears to be burning paper. These crosses are grounded in a pristine, white surface and are multivalent in signification. They invoke a Christian cross (their arms, of equal length, suggest a Greek cross). But their tilting also resembles the cross ('X') made on a ballot when voting.

My looking moves between the screens. On the one screen is the weeping woman and the migrating crosses. On the other screen, sequences focused on the illuminated form are encircled by figures in darkness. An animated cross/'X' moves downwards and across, slowly and silently on a white ground, a papery surface transformed by fire (figure 2.3). A second cross/'X' emerges and, at first, its image is faint but becomes bolder. Figures are visible at the edges of the darkness, and one shines a torch which casts light on the ambiguous absent presence of a human form. The sequences of photographic images produce subtle, almost indiscernible, shifts in perspective. As the two crosses/'X's' are animated, ghostly traces appear and disappear (figure 2.4). On the opposite screen, slight shifts echo those of the crosses that move slowly and soundlessly on the other. Two of the figures shine torches and the form, marked out on the illuminated ground in front of them, appears to move closer. As it does so, its composition is gradually more visible: dust and debris, and the ashen, grey colour of burnt substances. Crosses continue to surface, to shift and move. At first faint, then distinct, visual sensations of ghosting and shadowing are reiterated. Burn marks transform into formless abstractions, losing their relationship to the graphic shapes that brought them into being (figure 2.5). One of the crosses/'X's' topples off the edge

of the surface at the bottom of the screen. As the crosses multiply, the torchlight appears brighter: its focal point is constant, always the ashen, absent form.

The figure of the artist appears, her image at first faint (figure 2.6). Then, in a sequence of slight, almost invisible movements, she surfaces more fully. She blinks. She faces me, confronting the viewer with her gaze (figure 2.7). Only her head and shoulders are visible. Without superfluous adornment she wears black, as if in mourning. Her body, only head and shoulders are visible, is overlaid by the marks made by the burning of the paper. On the screen opposite, the figures in the darkness continue to shine their torch onto the ground, where the now visible but unidentifiable debris lies (figure 2.8). Searle does not speak. Her face registers emotion, tensing up. She begins to cry but her weeping cannot be heard.

The crosses/'X's', now faint, move, and overlay the artist's body. The marks left by fire's encounter with paper, casts amorphous patterns (figure 2.9). One of the figures, shrouded in the darkness, becomes more distinct and appears to signal at something. But the space mapped out by light and ashes refuses clarity. Searle lifts her sleeve up to her face and wipes the tears from one of her eyes (figure 2.10). There are subtle shifts in what can and cannot be seen. Her body appears to fade and then become more distinct. While there is no sound, I can see that she takes in breath. The muscles tense up on her neck and on her face and the weeping takes hold (figure 2.11). On the facing screen, figures walk forwards towards the space lit up by the torch. Movement, captured by a camera, invisible to the viewer, is registered in the ghosting of limbs. Searle again lifts up her arm to wipe her face. She repeats the gesture once again, with the opposite arm, and her face is tensed up and reddened from weeping (figure 2.12). The paper's crinkling and puckering is visible as it responds to the heat of the flame that cannot be seen. The marks that consume the paper, swirling, amorphous forms, invoke flames gathering in momentum (figure 2.13). Someone leans over to observe the illuminated ground and touches it as if to make sense of what it is the ashes and debris represent (figure 2.14). As the ground is scrutinised, I imagine that something will be discovered to explain what it is I am looking at. But nothing is explained. The

images simply fade, alongside those presented in the opposite screen. The woman, the artist, stops her weeping. She looks downwards, her face is visibly reddened by emotion and tears; she appears exhausted (figure 2.15). Burn marks, its textures and patterns overlay the previously pristine surface and the figure of Searle herself. Slowly, again almost indiscernibly, these begin to fade along with the image of Searle. And then, the looped video projected onto the two facing screens, repeats.

Fire and Smoke

In May 2008, photographs depicting images of horrific violence, circulated in both the South African and international press. This included images of the beating and burning to death of people who, in the midst of mob unrest, came to function as repositories of escalating social anger. At this time, photographic images of a burning body were widely circulated. The image of this body, titled ‘the flaming man’ or ‘the burning man’ by the news media, came to represent this cycle of violence (figure 2.16).³⁷² The man was later identified as Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, a Mozambican national, one of many entering South Africa unofficially in the hope of finding work.³⁷³ The photographs of Nhamuave as he burned to death show a man on his hands and knees, his body engulfed in flames. He is in an informal settlement; a makeshift home constructed out of corrugated iron is visible in the background. The ground on which he kneels is dry earth and dust littered with rubbish and debris. Smoke fills the image, and uniformed police appear to move towards him as his body is consumed by flames. The image of Nhamuave burning invokes numerous other images and, in particular, produces historical associations with the apartheid-era practice of ‘necklacing’. Developed as a technique in order to punish perceived political traitors, a rubber tyre, filled with petrol, would be placed around the chest and arms of the victim identified as the

³⁷² Glynnis Underhill and Sibonile Khumalo, S., ‘No Justice For Burning Man’, <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-07-30-no-justice-for-burning-man>. (accessed 27 August 2013).

³⁷³ See: Stephen Bevan, ‘The tale of the flaming man whose picture woke the world up to South Africa’s xenophobia’, *Mail Online* (Last updated 9 June 2008) www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1024858/The-tale-flaming-man-picture-woke-world-South-Africa-xenophobia.html (accessed 20 August 2013).

object of vengeance. The tyre would then be set alight.³⁷⁴ The exhibition catalogue, accompanying Searle's solo show *Interlaced*, states that *Mute* was made in response to the specific events of May 2008.³⁷⁵ During this period, riots broke out in informal settlements located in the apartheid township of Alexandra in Johannesburg and spread to other parts of the country.³⁷⁶ According to documentation, sixty foreign nationals were reported killed, while over three hundred were injured and over thirty thousand displaced.³⁷⁷ The figure of the foreigner came to serve as the paradigmatic image of the events of May 2008 which escalated into brutal attacks and killings, including the burning to death of human beings.³⁷⁸ This violence was enacted upon migrants (dubbed *Makwerekwere*) from other parts of the African continent.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ See Jonathan Ball, 'The Ritual of the Necklace'. Research report written for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, March 1994, accessed on-line, on 22 October 2013: www.csvr.org.za/index.php/publications/1632-the-ritual-of-the-necklace.html. Ball writes that the 'first widely reported necklacing occurred in the Eastern Cape in March of 1985. The victim, Mr Tamsanqa Kinikini, was a member of the town council in the township of KwaNobuhle and was believed by some people to have been involved in corruption and violence'. Ball cites the burning of a woman on 20 July 1985, in Duduza, a township outside of Johannesburg, as the next one to receive media attention. This 25 year old woman was 'accused of being an "informer"' and 'beaten and stoned, stripped, soaked in petrol and burnt to death'. Ball argues for differentiations between different kinds of burning practices, of which necklacing is one example, and draws attention to the absence of evidence with regards to the origins of necklacing as a practice and form of punishment.

³⁷⁵ Dewilde et al., *Berni Searle: Interlaced*, 2011, p.9.

³⁷⁶ There is a significant literature on the events of May 2008. A useful overview of this literature is presented in David, M. Matsinhe, 'Africa's Fear of Itself: the ideology of *Makwerekwere* in South Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.32, No.2 (2011), 295-313. Matsinhe's article also draws on extensive fieldwork and documents organisations and sources important to the study of Migration in South Africa notably the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP); the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and Human Rights Watch (HRW).

³⁷⁷ Matsinhe, 'Africa's Fear of Itself: the ideology of *Makwerekwere* in South Africa', 2011, 297.

³⁷⁸ There are many histories of xenophobia in South Africa aspects of which are engaged in the chapter on Siopis. Histories of immigration, and xenophobia, in South Africa intersect histories of colonialism, apartheid and narratives about the post-apartheid condition. Race, and historical attitudes, sedimented in prejudice and xenophobia that includes anti-Semitism, and prejudices directed at southern and eastern European immigrants is a significant aspect of the history of immigration to South Africa and is part of broader narratives about migration. See: Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994); 'Antisemitism in South Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives', *Jewish Affairs*, 64:1 (2009), 6-11 and 'Jewish Cultures, Identities and Contingencies: Reflections from the South African experience', *European Review of History: Revue Europeene d'Histoire*, 18:1 (2011), 89-100.

³⁷⁹ See Alan Morris, 'Our fellow Africans make our lives hell': the lives of Congolese and Nigerians living in Johannesburg'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21:6 (1998), 1116-1136. This term *Makwerekwere* 'originated in the 1990s and is a disparaging term for foreigners from Africa whose language cannot be understood. The word, encountered in the chapter on Ractcliffe's *Vlakplaas*, is a play on the sounds

Searle's video trilogy *Black Smoke Rising* (2009-10), also exhibited on *Interlaced*, suggests visual and political dialogues with *Mute* (figure 2.17, refer to the enclosed videos). The trilogy consists of three single-channel videos: *Lull* (2009), 7 minutes/33 seconds; *Moonlight* (2010), 6 minutes; and *Gateway* (2010), 4 minutes. The works are screened consecutively, and visually are held together by the imagery of fire (figures 2.18-2.20). In *Lull* Searle sits with her back to the viewer on a swing constructed out of rubber tyres; unlike in *Mute* where she faces us directly. Her action is staged in an outdoor setting, the beauty of which appears idyllic, and in which the colours and the sounds of birds and insects are heightened. As she swings, Searle hums. The river in front of her sparkles in the sunlight, long, green grass waves in a gentle breeze, and a butterfly flies past. The scene is seductive, a trope of an idealised landscape, it has the capacity to quite literally lull the viewer into a dreamlike, detached state of being. It is not unlike the settings available to historically privileged South Africans, spatially and socially separated off from spaces of deprivation such as informal settlements. Searle gets off the swing and walks away, although her humming continues to be audible. The swing, now empty, continues to rock gently backwards and forwards. The atmosphere is thick with the familiar sounds of birds and insects. As the swing disappears, the figure of Searle reappears, although now she is standing, facing the river, and not quite visible through the long grass and foliage. This visual language of appearance and disappearance is not unlike that encountered in *Mute*. The crackling of fire is audible, and a rubber tyre, heavy with flames, and suspended by a rope, swings violently across the visual plane, disappearing from view and then returning. Gradually the tyre begins to slow, and as it does so it is consumed by flames escalating in force. Black smoke becoming gradually thicker emanates from it. There is a strange, artificial dislocation between the violence of the burning tyre and the scene of nature in an idyllic form. Searle stands motionless with her back to the burning, as if unaware. It appears that these are two disparate moments filmed at different times and places, and digitally altered. The work, through the symbolic conduits of the burning tyre and the idealised landscape appears as a visual allegory of violence in South Africa, and its relationship to spatial dislocation and unrest produced by structural inequalities that remain. The temporal disjunctures and juxtapositions disrupt linear time, perhaps an allusion to the

"kwere, kwere" based on the notion that a foreigner's language sounds like "kwere, kwere" (see notes, no.2, 1134).

artificiality of historical demarcations. According to a text published on the Stevenson gallery website, the *Black Smoke Rising* series was driven by social and political issues to do with poverty and 'rising levels of discontent among the poor' in South Africa.³⁸⁰ The text notes fire as a recurrent theme, as well as the imagery of a burning tyre associated with the apartheid era, but also more recently 'with poverty and unemployment, as tyres are burnt to recover the wire inside – giving off toxic smoke with harmful effects for the environment'.³⁸¹

The literature on the relationship between violence and immigration, official and unofficial, in South Africa, includes striking perspectives that complicate and obscure the relations between apartheid and post-apartheid narratives of a before and after. David Matsinhe's essay 'Africa's Fear of Itself: the ideology of *Makwerekwere* in South Africa' (2011) makes an important contribution to the period after 1994, and the events of 2008. He outlines the numerous approaches of what is a significant scholarly literature on xenophobia in South Africa, with an emphasis on sociological perspectives.³⁸² He also draws on the work of Frantz Fanon, whose work on psycho-analysis and race remains an important departure point for reflecting on apartheid and its aftermath. The focus of the literature on xenophobia has been on immigrants, and refugees from countries that include Somalia, Burundi, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and from Southern Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Lesotho.³⁸³ The literature draws on field work, and extensive primary research and interviews, and proposes a number of causes for the xenophobic attacks and killings of 2008. It includes historical perspectives that consider the impact of South Africa's isolation from the African continent, and the world at large, during the course of apartheid. This question of xenophobia in South Africa, as a historical and

³⁸⁰See: <http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/searle/index2011.html> (accessed 10 September 2013).

³⁸¹ See: <http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/searle/index2011.html> (accessed 10 September 2013).

³⁸²See: Matsinhe, 2011, the section titled 'Beyond Xenophobia', 297.

³⁸³ Refer to: Matsinhe, 'Africa's Fear of Itself: the ideology of *Makwerekwere* in South Africa', 2011 and Morris, 'Our fellow Africans make our lives hell': the lives of Congolese and Nigerians living in Johannesburg', 1998.

sociological field of study, is extremely complex and beyond the scope of this thesis. The purpose here is to present some context for the discussion of Searle's work, and *Mute* in particular.

Matsinhe presents a number of perspectives on the country's isolationism and its fostering of attitudes, that, in fact, preceded the apartheid era, and produced a social unconscious whereby South African became synonymous with whiteness, while 'blackness symbolised "evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, famine"'.³⁸⁴ Matsinhe (engaging the work of Mahmood Mamdani, Michael Neocosmos and Neil Lazarus) elaborates on the 'fantasy of South African exceptionalism' which includes a discourse on skin: 'the bizarre idea, among others, that South Africans have lighter skin complexions than Africans from the greater continent.'³⁸⁵ Neil Lazarus recalls: 'For most whites in South Africa [the country] was not really in Africa at all. It was a "Western" society that just happened, accidentally and inconsequentially, if irritatingly, to be situated at the foot of the Dark Continent'.³⁸⁶

Both prior to and during the apartheid era, limits were placed on black immigrants to South Africa, while white immigration was encouraged.³⁸⁷ The literature shows, for instance, that between 1960 and 1987 'close to 900 000 [white immigrants] formally immigrated to South Africa, were actively recruited and received financial assistance from the state.'³⁸⁸ Although, as Morris notes, small numbers of black Africans did enter

³⁸⁴ Matsinhe, 2011, 301.

³⁸⁵ Matsinhe, 2011, 301. See: Michael Neocosmos, *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Dakar: CODESRIA, 2006; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). There is a significant discourse on coloniality and skin that encompasses broader geographical and historical conditions. See: Sabelo, J., Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Beyond the equator There Are No Sins: Coloniality and Violence in Africa'. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 28: 4 (2012) 419-440.

³⁸⁶ Neil Lazarus, 'The South African Ideology: the Myth of Exceptionalism, the idea of Renaissance', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103 (4), [2004] 610.

³⁸⁷ Morris, 'Our fellow Africans make our lives hell', 1998, 1118.

³⁸⁸ Morris, 1998, 1118 (Morris uses the term 'Caucasian' which is itself has racialised overtones associated with, for instance, histories of anti-Semitism). See also: Carole Cooper et al., *Race Relations Survey, 1988/89* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race relations, 1989) and *Race Relations*

as legal immigrants despite race-orientated immigration policies and ‘hundreds of thousands came as contract workers and, increasingly in the 1980s, as refugees’.³⁸⁹ In the 1980s many refugees fleeing civil war in Mozambique entered South Africa.³⁹⁰ Research on xenophobia asserts that prior to the transition, xenophobia was a less significant unifying factor than the resistance to apartheid. This is, of course, debatable, and not necessarily determinable. According to Morris, ‘pre-1990 the overwhelming proportion of black foreigners were poor, unskilled and originated mainly from Southern African countries’ although then the ‘extent of the racism appears to have been limited’.³⁹¹ One of the points he makes is that the focus then ‘was mainly on *fighting* apartheid’ [his emphasis].³⁹²

Perspectives on post-apartheid manifestations of xenophobia posit that the media played a role in fostering prejudice and xenophobic sentiments, particularly around the point of political transition from apartheid.³⁹³ The media, this literature asserts, constructs images of foreigners congruent with state discourses that criminalise Africans entering South Africa (the South African Police Service and the Department of Home Affairs, in particular).³⁹⁴ At the intersection of State and Media the foreigner is described via a language of ‘illegals, ‘illegal aliens’, ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘criminals’ and drug traffickers’.³⁹⁵ Morris notes the prevalence of xenophobic attitudes based on

Survey, 1989/90 (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1990); Sally Peberdy and Jonathan Crush, *Rooted in Racism: the Origins of the Aliens Control Act*, (Migration Policy Series No.3. Cape Town: Southern African Migration Project, 1996).

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 1118.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 1118.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 1118.

³⁹² Ibid., 1118.

³⁹³ Matsinee, 2011, p.298; Ransford Danso & David A. McDonald ‘Writing Xenophobia: Immigration and the print media in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Africa Today*, 48 (2001), 115-138; Bronwyn Harris, ‘Xenophobia: a new pathology for a new South Africa?’, in Derek Hook & Gillian Eagle (eds), *Psychopathology and Social Prejudice* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2002).

³⁹⁴ Matsinee, 2011, 298.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p.298. See also: Bronwyn Harris, ‘Xenophobia: a new pathology for a new South Africa?’, in Hook & Eagle (eds), *Psychopathology and Social Prejudice*, 2002.

perceived differences: 'Because of their physical features, their bearing, their clothing style and their inability to speak one of the indigenous languages'.³⁹⁶ The figuring of the foreigner as scapegoat is a significant aspect of the literature around the events of May 2008.³⁹⁷ Here it is argued that the foreigner functions as the repository for deeply sedimented social and political dissatisfaction.³⁹⁸ Poverty, unemployment, the competition for labour, HIV/AIDS, and crime are among the many concerns highlighted by this.³⁹⁹ Writing in 1998, Morris notes: 'Post-apartheid South Africa has been witness to dramatic political transformation but job creation has been negligible and a large part of the population is still living in acute poverty'.⁴⁰⁰ His research demonstrates that: 'African immigrants generally are being blamed for the shortcomings of post-apartheid society, most centrally for lack of jobs'.⁴⁰¹ Strong arguments have also been made for the ways in which South Africa's isolation from the African continent during the apartheid years fostered an intolerant attitude towards difference.⁴⁰² It is important to emphasise that, although this chapter explores a strand within the story of xenophobia in South Africa, prejudice and xenophobic attitudes directed at Africans from other parts of the continent cuts across race. This is not a narrative that seeks to imply that xenophobia, in post-apartheid South Africa, exists solely amongst black Africans, thus re-inscribing racial stereotypes. Cawo Mohamed Abdi (2011) offers a perspective that is useful here, alongside the Matsinhe text, and as a critical counterpoint to the extensive literature on xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa.⁴⁰³ Abdi is careful to emphasise not only inherited and continuing structural inequalities but also the nuances of race and historical segregation (economic, social,

³⁹⁶Matsinee, 2011, p.297; Morris, 1998, 1125.

³⁹⁷Matsinee, 2011, p.297; Morris, 1998, 1130.

³⁹⁸See: Clarence Tshireke, 'Xenophobia and relative deprivation', *Crossings*, (1999), 3(2), 13.

³⁹⁹Matsinee, 2011, 297.

⁴⁰⁰Morris, 1998, 1124.

⁴⁰¹Ibid.,1124.

⁴⁰²Ibid., 1125.

⁴⁰³Cawo Mohamed Abdi, 'Moving beyond Xenophobia: Structural Violence, Conflict and Encounters with the "Other" Africans', *Development Southern Africa*, Vol.28, No.5 (December 2011), 691-704.

political, and spatial). He is rightly critical of 'a discourse that lays the full blame for this violence on poor black South African in townships and informal settlements, portraying them as filled with hatred for others'.⁴⁰⁴ A key point is his juxtaposition of violence and space in South Africa: 'The spatial concentration of this violence translates to silence about privileged groups within this social arrangement, and thus a lack of critical analysis regarding segregation and the continuing poverty, relative poverty, crime and exclusion affecting millions of people'.⁴⁰⁵ While all South Africans may be 'prejudiced against African migrants, violence against the migrants and the location where these attacks occur remain specific'.⁴⁰⁶ He calls for a more considered approach to the relationship between xenophobia and what he calls structural violence 'defined as social, economic, political and psychological relations of domination, exploitation and exclusion among and within individuals and groups'.⁴⁰⁷ Abdi also examines examples where immigrants are not 'passive recipients of violence' but rather enact agency.⁴⁰⁸

Matsinhe's theoretical approach opens up a productive way of thinking about apartheid's imprint on recent iterations of discrimination, violence and xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. He cites an extract from Ernest Cole's *House of Bondage*, which is particularly powerful in its articulation of the actual, lived experience of racial violence in South Africa historically:

The infectious spread of apartheid into the smallest detail of daily living made South Africa a land of signs [...] to the African the signs are nothing but oppressive. They are always there, wherever he turns, to remind him that he is inferior. They shout at him that he is unfit to mingle, unworthy to enter through a certain door or to do business at a certain corner. And always the

⁴⁰⁴Ibid.,693.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.,693.

⁴⁰⁶Ibid.,693.

⁴⁰⁷Ibid.,694.

⁴⁰⁸Ibid., 692.

separate facilities for the blacks are poor. The lines are long. The buses and trains are jampacked because they run so infrequently.⁴⁰⁹

Matsinhe, theorising the xenophobic violence that erupted with such force in May 2008 - a recurring theme in post-apartheid narratives - reflects on how it came to be that those persecuted by apartheid could in turn enact xenophobic violence upon other black Africans. Abdi, making reference to these kinds of internal contradictions in South Africa, refers to Ami Pedahzur's and Yael Yishai's 1999 study on xenophobia in Israel noting 'one implicit message conveyed by the South African debate is that oppressed peoples should always take the high moral ground, and never oppress others'.⁴¹⁰ Matsinhe's deployment of Afrophobia, an idea of self-contempt, opens up our understanding of the psychic complexity of the experience of apartheid, which I argue is a condition of trauma: 'Half a century ago Fanon wrote of the "black man" as a "phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety" among whites. Today it is a fair assessment to suggest that Africans are phobogenic unto themselves, that Africa is a stimulus to its own anxiety'.⁴¹¹ He continues: 'Africa's fear of itself is exemplified by the loathing of black foreign nationals in South Africa – peculiarly by the nation's ex-victims of apartheid – which is increasingly becoming a fundamental component of South Africa's collective identification and public culture.'⁴¹² Matsinhe poses the question: 'how did it come to pass that in the imagination of an African nation, Africa and Africans represent the negativity of Otherness?'⁴¹³ He argues that, similarly to Fanon's Antillean subject - 'colonised comprehensively to the point of negating the whole of their heritage' – the self-identifications of South Africans and their relation to the other were subject to similar kinds of negations, distortions and displacements.⁴¹⁴ He cites W.E.B. Du Bois

⁴⁰⁹Matsinhe, 2011, 300.

⁴¹⁰ Abdi, 2011, 691. See: Ami Pedahzur and Yael Yishai, 'Hatred by hated people: Xenophobia in Israel'. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 22 (2), 1999, 101-17.

⁴¹¹Matsinhe, 2011, 295. See Sander Gilman's work on the self-hating Jew, and ideas about the internalisation of anti-Semitic discourse: Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁴¹²Matsinhe, 2011, 295.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 298.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 299.

and his well-known assertion: ‘Say to a people: “The one virtue is to be white,” and the people rush to the inevitable conclusion, “Kill the nigger!”’.⁴¹⁵ Matsinhe’s re-staging of Fanon and Du Bois within the particular parameters of South Africa offers a critical point of entry. He argues that in South Africa where power is so asymmetrically and unequally distributed, those disempowered are (to draw from Du Bois), denied “true self-consciousness” allowing them instead the “peculiar sensation [...] this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”.⁴¹⁶ Matsinhe writes powerfully of the conditions produced by apartheid:

The almost exclusive loathing of African foreign nationals in South Africa suggests that to a lesser or greater extent, South Africans – their social relations, their interdependencies, their attitudes towards life, their habitus, their personality structure, their collective conscious and unconscious, and their emotions – bear the imprint of colonial/apartheid relations. Among African countries South Africa is unique in that it is the place where the doctrine of white supremacy was meticulously systematised and implemented to the smallest detail of the mundane for the longest period of time.⁴¹⁷

Matsinhe goes on to make a compelling argument for the Afrophobic self forged from colonialism and apartheid’s sustained assault on anyone who, by virtue of racial difference, or the appearance thereof, occupies the subjugated, diminished space of the Other, and a psychic space of self-contempt. He presents a detailed sociological exposition that demonstrates via the conduit of the body how ‘the foreigner’ or *Makwerekwere* is constituted and brought into consciousness in South Africa: ‘Bodily looks, movements, sounds and smells are legible as evidence of imagined citizenship and foreignness. Deviation from bodily ideals of citizenship or conformity to fantasies of strangeness warrants strip searches, arrests, detentions, deportations, humiliation, tortures, rapes, muggings, killings, etc.’⁴¹⁸ He draws on sociological research

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.,300.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.,302.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.,300.

⁴¹⁸Ibid.,302-303.

undertaken by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) which demonstrates modes of racial profiling akin to those produced by apartheid classificatory procedures, its ideology and its discourse. Post-apartheid profiling documented by the SAHRC includes 'skin colour, language, hairstyle and manner of dress.'⁴¹⁹ Matsinhe presents numerous examples of how this profiling functions in practice, including identification processes deployed by police officers: 'Body parts are examined, graded and coded. When asked how they identified foreigners, the police officers replied: "It's very easy. People from Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and places like that have big noses, big lips, and round heads"' .⁴²⁰ Matsinhe draws attention to how the identification processes of the police and criminals collapse. Research demonstrates that both deploy the same kinds of physical assessments which determine whether an individual might, for instance, be arrested or (in the case of a criminal) attacked or killed.⁴²¹

As Matsinhe's essay so convincingly demonstrates, to cordon off apartheid from post-apartheid South Africa is to reduce its traumatic imprint on all aspects of South African life and experience. He does not deploy 'trauma' to explore his concept of Afrophobia, and the violence related to it, but his essay draws out the idea of temporal overlays between the race-orientated violence of apartheid, and its aftermath, what I conceive of as a traumatic relation. Trauma, grounded in the experience and enactment of race-based ideology, both as visible and invisible manifestation, is crucial to a deeper understanding of violence, and its iterations in South Africa in the aftermath of apartheid.

Matsinhe's investigation of how the body of the foreigner functions as a site of violence, race-based prejudice, and scapegoating in the decades after the transition of 1994 is important in dialogue with the widely circulated photographs of the burning

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 303.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.,303.

⁴²¹ Matsinhe, 2011, 303-304.

body of Nhamuave. These images represent the furthestmost limits of xenophobia manifested in bodily violence, expressed not only in language and discourse, but also in actual physical brutality.

Burning Bodies

Searle's weeping bodily presence in *Mute* enters into a dialogue with bodies as historical sites for the enactment of prejudice, power and violence. Watching the video, I look between two facing screens. On the one is the body of the artist and her staged weeping, and on the other is the absent-presence of a human object of xenophobic violence. In viewing the work, I imagine Searle's own historical relation to racial violence as an apartheid subject. Coombes, writing about Searle, refers to the history of the body in feminist art practice, and its wider significance, alerting us simultaneously to the particularity at play in the significance of Searle's work:

But in the context of a society that was systematically oppressed on the basis of 'evidence' apparently writ large upon the body, such an emphasis is immediately charged with another political dimension. Searle has commented on a number of occasions on how the racialised classification system that formed the basis of apartheid has shaped her work.⁴²²

Searle enters the history of the body in South Africa as an artist and as a woman who, during the course of the apartheid regime, was classified coloured. Searle's three-channel video projection *About to Forget* (2005) speaks to cross-generational family trauma associated with having been classified coloured by the apartheid regime.⁴²³ The departure point for the work was a handful of family photographs that belonged to Searle's mother, 'the only visual reminder she had of family who had been classified

⁴²² Coombes, 2004, p.246.

⁴²³ See: *Berni Searle: About to Forget*. (Exhibition catalogue), [South Africa: Michael Stevenson, 2005].

white'.⁴²⁴ The video was based on groupings of figures (derived from the photographs) which Searle cut from red crêpe paper: 'She placed these cut-outs into a bath of hot water and orchestrated the filming of the swirling, draining away of the red pigment until all that remained was a pale trace of what had been before.'⁴²⁵ This swirling red pigment, bleeding across the figures, invokes themes of family and bloodlines. *About to Forget* is also one of the few works in which Searle does not literally insert her own body, as a filmed performance, into the work. *Mute* takes on inflections that relate not only to the events of May 2008 but to wider conditions of prejudice in South Africa, and the artist's own relationship to these conditions. Narratives of race, gender and the body as a site of signification and psychic projection, are central to Searle's practice and have meanings that are particular to South Africa even as her *oeuvre* speaks imaginatively and affectively to a number of geographical-historical circumstances of violence.⁴²⁶

On 19 May 2008, 'The Cape Times' published a large scale version of one of the images of the burning man, later identified as Nhamuave (figure 2.21). This particular, and widely circulated photograph, is by the South African photojournalist and documentary photographer Shayne Robinson. The headline in large, bold lettering reads: 'Fanning flames of hate'. The man is anonymous, his name and identity, as yet, unknown. The caption and the descriptive article draw attention to targets of violence; apparently this violence is aimed at 'Shangaans'.⁴²⁷ The photograph itself is explicit, a bare, uncensored representation of human brutality and suffering.⁴²⁸ It is an image without

⁴²⁴ Yvette Greslé, 'Berni Searle' (Exhibition Review), 'Art South Africa', Vol. 05, Issue 03, Autumn 2007, 70.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁴²⁶ Sophie Perryer (ed.), *Berni Searle: Approach*, 2006.

⁴²⁷ Beauregard Tromp, 'Fanning flames of hate'. *Cape Times*, Monday, May 19, 2008 (page number was not visible on the microfilm, sourced at The National Library, Cape Town). The meaning of Shangaan has a complex history referring to the Tsonga ethnic group historically located in parts of what is now Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and the South African provinces of Mpumalanga and Limpopo. It has accumulated pejorative meanings in South Africa, most visibly in the media at least, in post-apartheid South Africa.

⁴²⁸ There are ethical concerns with the ubiquitous representations of violence in the media. The question of whether to insert this photograph into this dissertation's volume of images is one that I

any ambiguity. The event of a burning body is presented as a spectacle accompanied by a headline, its wording staged in the sensationalist language of the media. The meaning of this spectacle, this gross violation of human rights and freedoms, is vividly rendered. And yet the lengthy article that accompanies it functions to describe in forensic detail both what is made visible by the photograph; and what it cannot show: sensations, smells, sounds, movement, the interaction of the police and various bystanders:

Police poured out of a Nyala, waving their shotguns in arcs at the emptiness where moments earlier hundreds had gathered. The smell from the human pyre stung the nostrils. The burning man reached out to no one in particular. The circle of police and journalists stared incredulously. “Get the fire extinguisher! The fire extinguisher”, came the shout from police and journalists to those inside the armoured police vehicle. One officer braved the flames, pulling at the burning orange-and-white blanket wrapped around the man’s torso. The blanket came away to show pieces of wood with blackened nails lying over the man’s lower body. The man reached out again, but his movements were slower. Fifteen minutes earlier police had tried to negotiate with [sic] number of people from Reiger Park. Many of the group reeked of alcohol and had slurred speech [...] The burning man’s legs were crossed [...] The man rocked slowly from side to side.⁴²⁹

Photographer and journalist are witnesses mediating the scene for the consumption of publics, who were not present, drawing these closer into a relationship of proximity with an event presumably far removed from their own everyday lives. In South Africa, violence taking place in the so-called townships was historically transmitted to those spatially and socially removed via the media (print, radio, and after 1976, television). This practice of drawing violence closer (although a pertinent question is, of course, closer to whom?) is inflected by the legacy of apartheid, and the production, reception and circulation of media images in South Africa. Images are consumed and experienced at a remove. These histories of violence, existing in relation to apartheid’s

grappled with. I did decide to insert it to think about the ethics and politics of these kinds of images in the media, and to foreground Searle’s countering of spectacle in particular kinds of South African image-making and discourse. The image forces me to look, and see, horrors that perhaps I may not otherwise choose to engage. Yet, it is deeply troubling from the perspective of the ethics and politics of representation particularly in relation to race, and historical violations.

⁴²⁹Tromp, ‘Fanning flames of hate’, 2008.

ideological policies of racial, social, economic and political separation and disenfranchisement, haunt South Africa's still freshly constituted democracy, and are reinscribed in the twenty-first century.

The text that accompanies the image of the burning figure suggests that the image itself is not enough, not singularly adequate as evidence of the event at hand: 'The smell from the human pyre stung the nostrils'. The text describes what is both contained within the world of the photograph but also what it excludes or cannot capture. Other bodies are brought into focus: 'Less than 10 metres away another bloodied and battered body'. And the violence of a mob: 'crowds pelted the police with pieces of rubble and the police fired back sporadically'/'One plump woman, dressed in a knitted cap and overalls, could not contain her laughter as she pointed to the barbarous scene and regaled her audience with details of the events'. Traces of other kinds of prejudices are inserted, almost inconspicuously, through the text, drawing attention to the precarious truth-claims and evidentiary capacities assumed by practices such as journalism and reportage. What does it mean to emphasise the laughing woman's plumpness (her body); and what are the ways in which human subjects negotiate the utmost limits of trauma witnessed, enacted or experienced? Indeed, who assumes moral authority in conditions such as these? The conditions and experience of trauma remains immeasurable and opaque even as it is simultaneously the object of practices and theories that seek to comprehend its conditions and its meaning. Visual documents of violence produce meanings that are contingent on who looks and how, and not simply on the specificities of context or the minutiae of labels, captions or descriptive texts. Ariella Azoulay reiterates:

The photograph exceeds any presumption of ownership or monopoly and any attempt at being exhaustive. Even when it seems possible to name correctly in the form of a statement what it shows – "This is X" – it will always turn out that something else can be read in it, some other event can be reconstructed from it, some other player's presence can be discerned through it, constructing the social relations that allowed its production .⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), p.12.

This point is made in the history of South African image-making, not only in photographs but also in the images circulated on television. During the 1980s, for example, images of ‘township violence’ were deployed by the Botha administration to bolster the ideology of the apartheid state and the State of Emergency. But these images functioned simultaneously as symbols of resistance. Newbury re-states these kinds of historical oppositions, and their various inflections, in the story of South African photographic practice, opening them up to scrutiny and critique: ‘As photography was put to work by the apartheid state in the oppressive bureaucracy of the pass system, which regulated the movement and residence of black South Africans, so too the medium was appropriated as a means of exposing injustice and indicting the brutal suppression of dissent’.⁴³¹

Okwui Enwezor notes the ‘paradigmatic role played by social and documentary photography, reportage, and the photo-essay in documenting, recording, transmitting, and shaping a broad and complex understanding of the law, bureaucracy, institutions, and everyday life under apartheid’.⁴³² Enwezor, writing about the 1980s, makes the important distinction between photojournalism and documentary photography. The former ‘embodied a kind of frontline approach to image making’, the latter was ‘argued from the point of view of social documentary rather than photojournalism’.⁴³³ Shayne Robinson’s photograph of overt horror is shot in the tradition of photojournalism: ‘the photograph is not an analytical object but a conveyor of information, and the more direct its emotional content the more vivid its narrative becomes’.⁴³⁴ During apartheid, particular photographs were transformed into icons of the anti-apartheid movement and continue to hold a powerful place in the post-apartheid imaginary. The memory of particular events are collapsed into a singular visual image. The 1976 Soweto uprising is forever represented by the transformation

⁴³¹ Darren Newbury, ‘Sizwe Bansi and the Strong Room of dreams: Photographic Histories After Apartheid’. In Enwezor and Bester (eds), *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life*, 2013, p.226.

⁴³² Okwui Enwezor ‘Rise and Fall of Apartheid’, in Enwezor and Bester (eds), 2013, p.30.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.31.

into icon of the photograph of Hector Pieterse which in the post-apartheid era was the impetus for a commemorative architecture: The Hector Pieterse Museum in Soweto.⁴³⁵ Newbury has written about the Sharpeville Massacre's absence of an iconic image.⁴³⁶ He focuses on a set of photographs by Ian Berry, which Berry regarded as 'non-pictures' and makes the argument for a different kind of looking: 'The enduring significance of the photographs lies not simply in their powerful indexicality, important though that is, but also in what a careful reading can disclose about the unfolding of history in an ordinary South African township at a moment of terrible transformation'.⁴³⁷

As I look again at Robinson's photograph of violence and human suffering, my eyes fix on the ground, where the body kneels, and I notice the unidentifiable bits and pieces of discarded rubbish (figure 2.21). In my imagination, I see innumerable human beings consigned, whether by race, class, gender, sexual preference, to a status not unlike that of rubbish. It is this status, the historical, repetitive denial of basic human rights and freedoms; and the right to life and dignity, that underpins these kinds of events and the images that make them visible. Tamar Garb draws out the relationship between human beings, waste and discarded remains in Searle's three-channel video projection *Night Fall* (2006): 'When Berni Searle films herself in *Night Fall* and its associated photographs, tumbling down a grape skin mountain, her dress stained by the blood-like juice of the fruit, she not only records the specific smell and shape of the wine lands of the Cape, but invokes the leftovers, both human and material, on which the industry is based'.⁴³⁸ Garb engages the relationship staged between the human body and themes of loss and lamentation, all of which are so central to *Mute*: 'Using her own body, which lies corpse-like on the purple mound, and surrounded by the

⁴³⁵ Yvette Greslé, 'In Memory of Hector Pieterse', *Mail & Guardian*, 26/04-03/05/2001.

⁴³⁶ Darren Newbury, 'Picturing an "Ordinary Atrocity": The Sharpeville Massacre', in Geoffrey Batchen, Mick Gidley, Nancy K. Miller and Jay Prosser, *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), pp.209-223.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.* p.209.

⁴³⁸ Garb and Enwezor *Homelands/Land Marks*, 2008, p.25.

plaintive wailing of a female voice, she [Searle] offers a lamentation for the lives damaged by the conditions of work that this form of agriculture produced.⁴³⁹

A number of images picturing human subjects in spaces such as rubbish dumps in South Africa have emerged in recent years. Searle's video *Moonlight* from the *Black Smoke Rising* series films waste-pickers on 'a vacant plot in Philippi' – Table Mountain is visible in the distance (figure 2.22).⁴⁴⁰ The explanatory text previously published on the Stevenson website refers to images of smouldering and burning tyres, as people search for remnants of wire.⁴⁴¹ In *Moonlight* a rubber tyre engulfed in red flames, is dragged across the frame (figure 2.23). The photographer Mikhael Subotzky has produced a series shot at Vaalkoppies, Beaufort West Rubbish Dump (2006) [figure 2.24]. At times huddled figures appear to merge ambiguously with each other and the littered ground in which they stand. These images draw attention to rubbish dumps as sites of economic survival for those facing extreme levels of poverty.⁴⁴²

Whether images, produced by photojournalists and documentary photographers, induce critical and political consciousness, action, empathy, apathy, or the apparent numbing brought about by the media bombardment of violent images in everyday life, is a matter of debate. Azoulay refers to the 'image fatigue' of Postmodern theorists including Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, and Susan Sontag:

The world filled up with images of horrors, and they loudly proclaimed that viewer's eyes had grown unseeing, proceeding to unburden themselves of the responsibility to hold onto the elementary gesture of looking at what is presented to one's gaze.⁴⁴³

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 2008, p.25.

⁴⁴⁰ See: <http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/searle/index2011.html> (accessed 29 September 2013).

⁴⁴¹ See: <http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/searle/index2011.html> (accessed 29 September 2013).

⁴⁴² Pieter Hugo focuses on a similar theme in Ghana, and photographs from this work appear in Garb, *Figures & Fictions*, 2011, pp. 138-9. See also Garb's interview with Mthethwa, in that volume, pp. 284-286.

⁴⁴³ Azoulay, 2008, p.11.

In South Africa, violent practices so prevalent in the images of the apartheid era are worked into the fabric of democracy. The image of Nhamuave burning invokes numerous other images of violence including those introduced in the chapter on Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* where another burning body was encountered – that of the student activist Sizwe Kondile. Images of fire and burning mesh across the historical terrains that overlay the story of South Africa, blurring and folding repetitively, into one another.

Pulling at threads

The photographs that Searle deploys in *Mute* are credited to the South African anti-apartheid activist and press and documentary photographer Benny Gool. During the 1980s, Gool's photographs documenting apartheid-era violence were published in 'Grassroots', a banned, underground newspaper.⁴⁴⁴ Although the reasoning behind Searle's decision to select Gool's photographs, from others focusing on May 2008, is undocumented. The precise context of the photographs, and Searle's own selection and re-staging of the Gool photographs, remain unknown. Searle is, I imagine, strategically resistant to describing the processes underlying the construction of *Mute*. Coombes focuses on *Mute* in a text titled 'The Sound of Silence' but no precise contextual background is presented. Coombes situates the video within the events of May 2008 drawing attention to an 'earlier version [...] produced in May 2008'.⁴⁴⁵ Although access to this, or any process related work, has not been possible, Coombes' reference is interesting. It points to the immediacy of Searle's response to May 2008, an immediacy traditionally reserved for the photojournalist or documentary photographer. Coombes notes the ubiquity of the image of Nhamuave burning, and its international dissemination. It is not clear whether the Gool photographs, which Searle re-casts, are of Nhamuave but, as Coombes writes: 'Searle's poignant re-use of Benny

⁴⁴⁴ On 'Grassroots' see: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/cape-town/grassroots-community-newspaper> (accessed 27 December 2014).

⁴⁴⁵ Annie, E. Coombes, 'The Sound of Silence', in Marion Arnold et al., *Berni Searle: Recent Work 2007/8*, 2008, p.34.

Gool's images taken during the outbreak of violence can't help but recall Nhamwavane's [*sic*] fate and that of others like him'.⁴⁴⁶ In the catalogue published for *Interlaced*, a caption again acknowledges the Gool photographs but also thanks Jean Brundit for 'additional still images' (Brundit is an artist, who works with photographic media).⁴⁴⁷ There is thus some ambiguity surrounding the provenance of the photographs that Searle deploys in *Mute*, even as elsewhere they are attributed to Gool.

Azoulay differentiates 'the *objective* dimension possessed by an image imprinted in a photograph by virtue of its being, always, of necessity, the product of an encounter – even if a violent one – between a photographer, a photographed subject, and a camera' [her emphasis].⁴⁴⁸ She writes:

[An] encounter whose involuntary traces in the photograph transform the latter into a document that is not the creation of an individual and can never belong to any one person or narrative exclusively. The photograph is out there, an object in the world, and anyone, always (at least in principle), can pull at one of its threads and trace it in such a way as to reopen the image and renegotiate what it shows, possibly even completely overturning what was seen in it before.⁴⁴⁹

Azoulay's metaphor of pulling at a thread; the idea of reopening and renegotiating the photographic image is a suggestive departure point for how artists deploy photographs in the making of video works. Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* video (1999) – the filming of a strip of photographs shot in a deliberately obfuscating style – inaugurates, in its staging of a dialogue between photography and video, a different kind of engagement in the visual realm constituted by photographs and political resistance in South Africa. A dialogue

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p.36.

⁴⁴⁷ Dewilde et al, *Berni Searle: Interlaced*, 2011. See the series of unnumbered pages at the end of the catalogue, after p.67.

⁴⁴⁸ Azoulay, 2008, p.13.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p.13.

between photography and video is staged once again almost a decade later in Searle's *Mute*.

The photographs that Searle selected represent the aftermath of burning. They were shot at night-time, and all that was left of a burning body was its absence and its ashes. Through the enfolding darkness, the figures of uniformed police are vaguely apparent and police torches illuminate the ground where the killing took place. Searle provides no clues as to the context of the photographs, their time, place or date. There is no means of determining whether she made changes to Gool's photographs in any way, or what her process of selection was.

Within the space of the exhibition *Interlaced*, *Mute* brought a South African event into a relationship with broader questions of violence, and xenophobia. As an art object, moving across sites, cities and art worlds (not only in South Africa, but also in Europe), *Mute* opens up questions about what it means to represent and engage actual, contemporaneous violence not as a photojournalist or documentary photographer but as an artist. *Interlaced* travelled from Belgium to France to the Netherlands, and this breadth of international circulation is a significant aspect of the exhibition, and circulation, of Searle's work.⁴⁵⁰ Working with the medium of video, Searle explores violence perhaps not with the same kind of immediacy and proximity as the photographer, but nonetheless within a few months of its occurrence. Of the impetus for *Mute*, Searle wrote in 2010:

In the context of South Africa, issues of migration and borders exploded in xenophobic attacks on foreigners in May 2008. In response, I created *Mute* (2008), a double-screen video installation in which I strive to express my

⁴⁵⁰ *Interlaced* travelled from De Hallen, Bruges (where it appeared between 17 April-12 June 2011) to Frac Lorraine, Metz, France (20 May-18 September 2011) and then finally to the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem (MMKA), Arnhem, the Netherlands (9 July-16 October 2011).

sadness about the attacks and my inability to voice the shame sparked by them.⁴⁵¹

This statement, foregrounding both sadness and shame, conveys the immediacy of Searle's response to the violence of 2008, and how she felt personally affected by it.⁴⁵² Her foregrounding of the personal, and the first-person – 'my sadness' – is not narcissistic but rather grounded in a history of the relationship between citizenship, the compromised nature thereof, and art and the political in South Africa. In inserting herself into the work Searle harnesses her identity as both artist and post-apartheid citizen at a time of crisis. Coombes, touching on the question of narcissism, draws attention to how the crosses mediate the image of Searle weeping: 'The bleeding crosses put some distance between viewer and viewed and mediate any trace of narcissistic empathy in Searle's tears [...]'.⁴⁵³ Searle's visual practice is not located in spectacle. Video as a medium grounded in histories, such as feminist art practices, and processes that are conceptual, political, critical and self-reflexive in orientation offers a different kind of language: one that requires another kind of engagement, a slower, more considered and intimate, mode of looking. *Mute* resists the urgent truth-claims and didactic charge of the photojournalist. In exhibition form, *Mute* presents the spatial and physical experience of standing in-between and negotiating two projections: it actively works against complacent looking and passive consumption. We have to negotiate between the multiple narratives and temporalities of two projections in dialogue with one another.

⁴⁵¹ Berni Searle, 'Sites of Refuge: A Photo-essay from Three Works'. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109:3 (Summer, 2010), 545-6. The other two works discussed in this essay are *Seeking Refuge* (2008) and *Home and Away* (2003) both of which were filmed outside of the specific context of South Africa. *Seeking Refuge* is a single screen projection (5 minutes, 56 seconds) and *Home and Away* is a dual-screen projection (6 minutes). Both were filmed outside of the specific context of South Africa: the former on Lanzerote, a volcanic island in the Canary Islands and the latter in the ocean between Spain and Morocco. As is usual in her practice, Searle produced prints to accompany *Seeking Refuge* and *Home and Away* but did not do so with *Mute*.

⁴⁵² See: Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (United States: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵³ Coombes, 'The Sound of Silence', in Arnold et al., *Berni Searle: Recent Work 2007/8*, 2008, p.36.

Mourning/Silence

The three-channel video installation *Interlaced*, after which the solo exhibition at De Hallen, in 2011, was named, and where I first encountered *Mute*, suggests points of connection with *Mute*. Searle again brings the enactment of grief and mourning into a relationship with historical violence and the political. *Interlaced*, filmed in the Gothic Chamber of the Bruges Town Hall and the Bierkorf theatre, produces significations that are multivalent but the video also suggests dialogues not only with Bruges' historical wealth, at the centre of Northern European trade, but also with Belgium's violent colonial relationship with the Congo.⁴⁵⁴ Searle performs as costumed figures, first draped from head to toe in gold coloured fabric, a figure reminiscent of Biblical figuration and iconography, and then in black lace (figures 2.25-2.26).⁴⁵⁵ A black lace veil covers her face.⁴⁵⁶ Costumes and fabrics function as props through which particular movements and gestures are played out, and different performances, highly choreographed and ritualised, occur simultaneously.⁴⁵⁷ Searle stages a mirroring across screens: her hands painted to her wrists in gold leaf are raised to her head, which we see in profile, in a gesture that signifies sorrow (figures 2.27-2.28). Unlike *Mute*, sound is important to *Interlaced*, and the work could be heard across the exhibition space at De Hallen. While I watched *Mute*, I could hear *Interlaced*. Searle collaborated with the musician Neo Muyanga who arranged a discordant sonic dialogue with the bells of the belfry in Bruges.⁴⁵⁸ Muyanga based his composition on the Muslim call for prayer or *adhan*. As I listened to these sounds at the exhibition in Bruges I found myself imagining a dialogue between the Muslim call for prayer from a familiar mosque in the centre of Cape Town and the Roman Catholic bells of Bruges.⁴⁵⁹ The sounds of

⁴⁵⁴ Julie L. McGee, 'Interlaced', in Dewilde et al., *Interlaced*, 2011, p.23.

⁴⁵⁵ Michel Dewilde, Béatrice Josse, and Mirjam Westen, 'The Power of the Image: Berni Searle', in Dewilde et al., *Interlaced*, 2011, pp. 8-9

⁴⁵⁶ On this image of the veil see McGee, 'Interlaced', in Dewilde et al., *Interlaced*, 2011, p.23.

⁴⁵⁷ McGee, 'Interlaced', in Dewilde et al., *Interlaced*, 2011, pp.22-25.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁴⁵⁹ On the significance of this to Searle's own biography see: McGee, 'Interlaced', in Dewilde, et al., *Interlaced*, 2011. McGee notes: 'Searle's mother who was raised as a Muslim, converted to Catholicism

discordant and repetitive bells inhabit the exhibition space which *Mute* shares and expands the geographical, political and historical significance of the works and the rituals of mourning Searle enacts.⁴⁶⁰

The question of mourning, and the significance of grief politically and subjectively, have entered the video practices of artists focussed on histories and experiences particular to their personal relationship to the African continent. The Nigerian born artist Zina Saro-Wiwa, daughter of the environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was hanged in 1995, made the video work *Sarogua Mourning* (2011) exploring, what she calls, her 'inability to mourn her father's death' and her 'dissatisfaction with the Western mourning rites she found herself having to draw on' (figure 2.29).⁴⁶¹ The South African born artist Mohau Modisakeng says of his video work *Inzilo* (mourning), produced in 2013: 'South Africa is a country caught in a state of mourning. It is caught between trying to remember, forget and move on'.⁴⁶² (figure 2.30). The point that Searle makes in *Mute* can be read as a political one. It is the mourning of which Judith Butler writes in *Precarious Life*: 'I propose to consider a dimension of political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows'.⁴⁶³

Images of grieving, weeping subjects are ubiquitous in the images widely circulated by photojournalism and documentary photography narrating war, loss and violence through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In South Africa, photographic

at the time of her marriage. Ostracized by her Muslim family, Searle's mother steadfastly raised her children to be Catholic', p.24.

⁴⁶⁰Ibid., pp.22-25.

⁴⁶¹ See the artist's website: <http://www.zinasarowiwa.com/works/sarogua-mourning-2011/> (accessed 5 October 2014).

⁴⁶² Liduduma' Lingani Mqomboti, 'Artist Mohau Modisakeng: Probing Subliminal Violence', *Africa is a Country*, 26 June 2014, <http://africasacountry.com/82023/> (accessed 27 December 2014).

⁴⁶³ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso: London and New York, 2006), p.19. See: Chapter 2, 'Violence, Mourning, Politics'.

documentation of grief following protests, strikes and confrontations with the police are ubiquitous. Media photographs of the events of Marikana in 2012 are an example, and present a way of thinking about the political meaning of grief in South African discourse (figure 2.31).⁴⁶⁴ The act of weeping and affective protest, in the presence of the media, invites a discourse about weeping as a gesture that is not simply about the expression of grief as a subjective, private emotion. It is also potentially a form of public, affective protest in conditions of extreme political, social and economic oppression.

Weeping has been an object of inquiry across disciplines, in the history of art, classical scholarship, religious studies, anthropology, the history of music, theatre and literary studies.⁴⁶⁵ There is also some examination of weeping and the holocaust from a theological perspective.⁴⁶⁶ What emerges is a complex pattern that speaks to how the meaning and critical significance of weeping is contingent on conditions of history, and the particularity of social and cultural practices continuously in processes of transformation and re-imagining. There is a significant body of anthropological

⁴⁶⁴ There is extensive media documentation of Marikana. For an example of a media image see Pumza Fihlani, 'Marikana: "My husband dies in vain"', BBC News, Marikana, 15 August 2013: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23710613> (accessed 15 November 2013). David Goldblatt has also documented Marikana extensively. Refer to the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg and Cape Town: www.goodman-gallery.com. Searle is also exploring Marikana. See, for example, 'Remembering Marikana' (From the 'Into the dark' series, 2014). See the artist's website: <http://bernisearle.com/remembering-marikana-image-produced-proposed-billboard-2014/> (accessed 15 November 2014).

⁴⁶⁵ See, for example, the following: Jeremy Lewison, "Gaudier-Brzeska's 'Weeping Woman'", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.129, No.1009 (April, 1987), 243-245; Anne MacNeil, 'Weeping at the Water's Edge'. *Early Music*, Vol.27, No.3, *Laments* (August, 1999), 406-417; Judi Freeman, *Picasso and the Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar*, 1994; William Werpehowski, 'Weeping at The Death of Dido: Sorrow, Virtue, and Augustine's "Confessions"', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol.19, No.1 (Spring, 1991), 175-191. Gary L. Ebersole, 'The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse'. *History of Religions*, Vol.39, No.3 (Feb 2000), 211-246; Sharon L. James, 'Her Turn to Cry: The Politics of Weeping in Roman Love Elegy'. *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-), Vol. 133, No.1 (Spring, 2003), 99-122; Jay A. Clarke, 'The Weeping Woman I', *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol.30, No.1, Notable Acquisitions at the Art Institute of Chicago (2004), 86-87+96; Kimberley C. Patton and John S. Hawley (eds), *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴⁶⁶ Nehemia Polen, 'Divine Weeping: Rabbi Kalonymos Shapiro's Theology of Catastrophe in the Warsaw Ghetto'. *Modern Judaism*, Vol.7, No.3 (October, 1987), 253-269.

literature on weeping that draws attention to these kinds of nuances.⁴⁶⁷ Weeping is attached to rituals of death, loss and mourning, in both private and public life, and it also takes on significance in woman's histories and modes of resistance to social and political oppression.⁴⁶⁸

In art historical depictions, the iconography of woman's weeping is linked to Biblical representations notably the art historical *Mater Dolorosa*, the iconography and meaning of which has been reimagined in Bill Viola's video diptych, *Dolorosa*.⁴⁶⁹ Echoes of Biblical weeping, and in particular the figure of the weeping woman, remain in late twentieth and twenty-first century depictions, but appear to be increasingly attached to themes of war and violence.⁴⁷⁰ The presence of weeping women in Picasso's response to the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War is well documented.⁴⁷¹ Tate Modern's collections include Chris Ofili's *No Woman No Cry* (1988) produced in response to the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence in April 1993. It is a stylised depiction of a weeping woman in profile.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁷See: Gary L. Ebersole, 'The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse', 2000.

⁴⁶⁸ Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Tova Gamliel, 'Performed Weeping: Drama and Emotional Management in Women's Wailing', *TDR: The Drama Review*, Volume 54, Number 2 (Summer 2010), [T 206], 70-90.

⁴⁶⁹ See: http://interactive.org/2011/06/bill_viola_mater_dolorosa/ (accessed 15 November 2013). See also Marilyn Zeitlin (ed.), *Bill Viola: Buried Secrets* (Tempe: Arizona State University Art Museum, 1996).

⁴⁷⁰ See: Claudia Siebrecht, 'Chapter Nine The Mater Dolorosa on the Battlefield – Mourning Mothers in German Women's Art of the First World War'. *History of Warfare*, Vol. 49 (2008), 259-292 and 'Imagining the absent dead: Rituals of bereavement and the place of the war dead in German women's art during the first world war', *German History*, Vol.29, No.2, 202-223; For an examination of the figure of Mary in studies focusing on the idea of Mary and the maternal see: Margaret Bruzelius, 'Mother's Pain, Mother's Voice: Gabriela Mistral, Julia Kristeva, and the Mater Dolorosa', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol 18, No.2.

⁴⁷¹ Freeman, *Picasso and the Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar*, 1994. See also: Julie Springer, [Exhibition Review]. *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol 17, No.2 (Autumn, 1996-Winter 1997), pp. 47-49. *Picasso and the Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar* curated by Judi Freeman at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1994), p.49.

⁴⁷² See: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ofili-no-woman-no-cry-t07502> (accessed 15 November 2013).

Searle's *Mute* enters the visual field of death, and historical and cultural practices embedded in ritual and performance. Writing about the idea of performed weeping in the mourning rituals of Israeli Yemenite Jews, Tova Gamliel notes: 'Death is an emotional event that abounds with ritual. The nature of the emotionality that takes place within the structural bounds of death rituals has ignited a rich debate in the anthropology of emotions, including the question of emotional authenticity (sincerity).'⁴⁷³ Gamliel also draws attention to the nuances of vocabulary: mourning is the 'outer expression of distress' and grief the 'inner experience of distress'.⁴⁷⁴ To deliberate on emotional authenticity or sincerity is reductive within the context of *Mute*, and certainly within the context of art practices that are highly conscious of performance as a critical, political strategy mobilising visual modes of address. It is also entirely without foundation to speculate in empirical fashion on the relationship between the artist's outer expression of mourning and her inner, emotional and subjective relationship to the events to which she refers. Gamliel notes, in reference to changing patterns in Western mourning rituals, the relationship to 'emotional authenticity and understanding of inner feelings' is a Western one, and there are cultural differences in the understanding of mourning and grief.⁴⁷⁵ While I query homogenous conceptions of 'Western' Gamliel does simultaneously draw attention to the specificity of mourning and grief and its heterogeneous meanings and uses across geography and social and cultural practices. She also brings the relationship between mourning and performance into view.

In *Mute* Searle has quite literally excised the sounds of weeping that would otherwise have been audible. According to Roget's Thesaurus 'mute' in its capacity as a noun refers to descriptive categories such as 'silence'; a 'state of rest' or 'voicelessness'.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ Gamliel, 'Performed Weeping: Drama and Emotional Management in Women's Wailing', 2010, p.71.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p.71.

⁴⁷⁵ Gamliel, p.71. See also: Osei-Mensah Aborampah, 1999. 'Women's Roles in the Mourning Rituals of the Akan of Ghana'. *Ethnology* 38, 3:257-71; Lila Abu-Lughod, 1993. 'Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, 1:187-205. Philippe Ariès, P. *The Hour of Our Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁴⁷⁶ *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, New edition prepared by George Davidson (Penguin Books: Penguin Group. My edition, 2004), p. 157.

Listed under 'silence' are words such as 'soundlessness', 'inaudibility', 'stillness', 'lull', 'rest', 'peace', 'quiet'.⁴⁷⁷ As a 'state of rest' mute is taken to mean 'taciturnity, muteness, speechlessness'.⁴⁷⁸ 'Voicelessness' refers to 'solemn silence', 'dead silence', 'uncanny silence', 'deathly hush', 'enforced silence' or 'gagging order'.⁴⁷⁹ Thought about in this way the word embodies various inflections and associations. It is significant that one of the words for silence is 'Lull', the title of one of the works in the *Black Smoke Rising* series and a staging of an elusive peace disrupted by the transformation of the swing into the one of the most brutal signifiers of violence in South Africa, the burning tyre. The significations of 'enforced silence' or 'gagging order' invokes the violence of state censorship and the policing of what can and cannot be spoken; brutally enforced during the apartheid era.

Watching *Mute* we cannot hear Searle, and in this way, she places distance between artist and viewer. The absence of sound, connecting us across the visual field isolates her, and distances me. The impetus, as a South African, to mourn a terrible xenophobic killing and express the subjective grief that is felt for the brutal death of another human being is not necessarily a unifying and collective one experienced in the same way by all. Rather, it brings closer, subjective understandings of the solitary processes of loss and suffering. Nhamuave burned to death in view of others, and nothing in his mortality and abject human vulnerability, enabled his survival.⁴⁸⁰ The pain that he suffered was solitary and extreme; and in his dying the flames separated him from others, perpetrators and concerned but helpless interlocutors alike. Butler asks: 'What makes for a Grievable life? Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a "we", for all of us have some notion of what it is to

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.p.157.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.p.157.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.p.157.

⁴⁸⁰ The xenophobic impetus for the killing of Nhamuave and widely circulated photographs of him burning to death is the visual, visceral embodiment of the human being violently discarded. See also: Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous “we” of us all’.⁴⁸¹ Butler’s juxtaposition of violence, mourning and politics opens up a path through which to navigate the idea of Searle’s weeping in *Mute* as a political, critical staging. Her assertion of a ‘we’, no matter how tenuous, skirts the actual lived experiences of those perpetually pushed to the margins of the ‘we’ by those who hold power (economic, social, political, cultural). In South Africa, a collective ‘we’ was not even minimally possible in the social, economic and political conditions that apartheid produced. In contemporary South Africa, events such as the burning to death of the body of the foreigner or the ongoing conflicts around Marikana demonstrate there is no such thing as a collective ‘we’. And some lives, within the compromised post-apartheid national imaginary, are more grievable than others. Azoulay’s work on citizenship, disaster and violence can be turned to the conditions of South Africa where the category of apartheid non-citizen now accumulates inflections that render the political and social aspirations of the post-apartheid constitutional democracy ambiguous, and not necessarily legible.⁴⁸²

Ndebele’s novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* presents a literary/semi-biographical hybrid as a point of entry into how women’s tears in South Africa, and their political and social significance, might be imagined. The novel is, in part, a re-casting of the story of Winnie Mandela. Her twenty-seven year wait for the release of Nelson Mandela is refracted through Homer’s Penelope and Odysseus.⁴⁸³ Ndebele weaves together a series of individual stories that speak to private experiences of apartheid, women’s suffering and women’s waiting: ‘Departure, waiting, and return: they define her experience of the past, present, and future. They frame her life at the centre of a great South African story not yet told’.⁴⁸⁴ The novel is a departure point for thinking about the critical possibilities of women’s weeping, as a form of political mourning in South Africa. But the story about women and apartheid is not one of passive, weeping,

⁴⁸¹ Butler, *Prekarious Life*, 2006, p.20.

⁴⁸² Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books: New York, 2008).

⁴⁸³ Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing: Oxfordshire, UK, 2003).

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1

waiting counterparts to men who leave home as migrant workers or political activists, perhaps never to return.⁴⁸⁵

Women's roles, socially and politically, in South Africa are complex, if not always fully acknowledged.⁴⁸⁶ Mark Sanders, writing about women activists and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), notes: 'women despite being in the majority among witnesses, were not testifying to human rights violations done to themselves'.⁴⁸⁷ He continues: 'A number of these women had been activists in their own right and had been detained, assaulted, and tortured by the police'.⁴⁸⁸ Sanders casts some light on the relationship between women, law and custom surrounding the identification and burial of the dead in South Africa. He foregrounds how the concerns and complexities of mourning and burial emerged in women's testimony during the course of the TRC (he cites Lephina Zondo):

Withholding the corpse, specifically sight of the corpse, represents a disruption of usual funeral rites, of the work of mourning that a family, and community, would customarily carry out. Blocked are the usual affective transactions, what is custom or habit for the community to do: 'We felt that if we go and don't see the body because it's our custom [umkhuba wethu], before a person can be buried we have got to look at him and be sure that it is the right person'.⁴⁸⁹

The practice of necklacing and the burning of bodies is made all the more poignant here. In *Mute* there is no body. There is the suggestion of ashes but what it is we actually see is uncertain. The testimonies produced around the bodies of the dead during the TRC placed emphasis on vision, on being able to see the body, familiar marks and traces, identifiable remains. Through vision the identity of the body is

⁴⁸⁵ See, for example, Dubow, *Apartheid 1948-1994*, 2014.

⁴⁸⁶ See: Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, 2007.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.59.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*p.59.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*p.64.

established, and the person that has then been lost can be properly mourned and buried. Sanders' essay 'Remembering Apartheid' engages the question of mourning in post-apartheid South Africa, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC):

Though by no means adequately understood by the Commission or its commentators and critics, the implication was clear: in order to overcome the divisions of the past, in order to make reparation for the violations of the apartheid era, an equally massive joining in mourning would have to take place. Mourning would make good for the violation of the apartheid era. As a system of social separation, apartheid would be undone through condolence.⁴⁹⁰

The apartheid image of the burning body reinscribed in the post-apartheid era re-traces the traumatic dehumanisation of the past, the separation of those accorded full human status, the wholeness of citizenship, from those herded into spaces, ideological, discursive and epistemic, of non-humanness. Butler observes: 'Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as "grievable"'.⁴⁹¹ Butler, engaging Freud, reflects on the relationship between mourning and melancholia, and foregrounds the enigmatic aspects of loss: 'If mourning involves knowing what one has lost (and melancholia originally meant, to a certain extent, not knowing), then mourning would be maintained by its enigmatic dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom'.⁴⁹²

Can apartheid ever be undone? Can the work of mourning ever be completed?⁴⁹³ This is the space of sadness that *Mute* enters. In *Mute*, the burning paper, which overlays

⁴⁹⁰ Sanders, 'Remembering Apartheid', 2002, 60-80.

⁴⁹¹ Butler, *Prekarious Life*, 2006, p.32.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.* pp.21-22.

⁴⁹³ See: Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914-1916), [Great Britain: Vintage, The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 2001], pp.243-258. See

the body of Searle, becomes, in an imaginative sense, a visual metaphor for burning skin. Colour, its relationship to discourses about race and skin, its affects, and its status as a site of signification, is central to Searle's practice historically. Works such as *Colour Me*; the photographic works *Red, Yellow Brown* (1999), *Not Quite White* (2000); and the video installation *Snow White* (2001) invoke and destabilise historic and discursive constructions of race. Searle's transformation of papery substances and surfaces to suggest the idea of skin is engaged by Coombes in her discussion of the making of *A Darker Shade of Light* (1999). Searle immersed Polaroid photographs of her body in hot water enabling her to float the images off the backing of the photographs themselves.⁴⁹⁴ The images, Coombes writes, 'seemed to reproduce the same qualities of skin itself – creasing, folding, and wrinkling'.⁴⁹⁵ In *Mute*, Searle's weeping presence is overlaid by the fragile, papery, burning crosses which suggest the marking of a ballot paper. The first non-racial elections began on 26 April 1994, as William Beinart notes, 'amidst national euphoria'.⁴⁹⁶ But post-apartheid narratives of citizen and nation, emerging out of the historical conditions of apartheid, are precarious. The apartheid state demonstrated within its own borders and towards its own non-citizens, profound inhospitality.⁴⁹⁷ The events of 2008 are one of many that, in contemporary South Africa, call into question the idea of a democracy forged out of a historical relationship to conditions of racial authoritarianism and capitalism.⁴⁹⁸ As we observe the burning

also Sanders, 'Remembering Apartheid', 2002; Butler, *Precarious Life*, 2006; Pollock, *After-affects/After-Images*, 2013.

⁴⁹⁴ The placement or immersion of paper-based objects or materials in bath water as a way of transforming their material qualities, or their meanings, recurs in Searle's work. Paper also appears in works such as the single-channel video projections *Spirit of '76* (2007) and *Alabama* (2008). *Spirit of '76* deploys the visual and significations produced by the effects of hot bath water on crêpe paper in red and black: figures cut-out of the red paper wash out and blur with one another. Then, Searle's hands appear, holding a black crêpe wreath. The hands place the wreath over the figures so that it circles them: black and red, wreath and figures, blur into one another (Dewilde, et al, 'The Power of the Image: Berni Searle', in *Interlaced*, 2011, p.8).

⁴⁹⁵ Coombes, 2004, p.249. Searle then went on to scan these images transformed by the hot water, digitally enlarging them, and reproducing them on 'translucent paper, laminated between sheets of Perspex, and boxed'. (p.249).

⁴⁹⁶ Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, second edition, 2001, p.285.

⁴⁹⁷ On hospitality, power, violence, and the state see: Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, A., [Transl. Bowlby, R.] *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.55.

⁴⁹⁸ The events of 2008 also bring historical conditions of labour and capital into focus. As Saul Dubow points out in *Apartheid 1948-1994*, 2014, the 'extent to which South African racism and capitalism were

crosses, read here as ballot marks, and the grieving figure of Searle on one screen we register, on the opposite screen, the ashen traces of a human body transformed into an object of xenophobic hatred and photographic spectacle. Historical conditions of brutality towards an imagined Other formed in relation to the enactment of extreme ideological, discursive and epistemic racial violence is reinscribed in the fabric of democracy the meaning of which remains an object of critique and scrutiny in South African discourse from a number of perspectives.⁴⁹⁹ Pollock, writing on art and trauma, refers to the 'atrocious crimes against humanity of the modern era'.⁵⁰⁰ She notes the persistence of 'after-affects as well as real effects' in 'cultures that have not addressed their legacies – not merely with empty gestures of commemoration'.⁵⁰¹ These after-affects/effects endure because:

It appears that individual trauma is transmissible down the generations not only by the exposure of individual subjects in typical intersubjective relays but also what has been named encryptment, which imagines trauma not only as extreme suffering but also as the legacy of guilt, shame and other side-effects of compromised existence caused by extremes of oppression and violence/violation.⁵⁰²

The video's looping returns us repeatedly to the scenes of distress and ashen remains. In mobilising silence, Searle calls into question the speaking mobilised by post-apartheid enactments of citizenship and democracy, such as those made so visible by the public processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its modes of

mutually dependent remains subject to contestation' (p.277). See also the work of Shula Marks. I have foregrounded racial violence in this dissertation although I would argue that race and capitalism in South Africa are historically intertwined and that events such as those highlighted in this chapter as well as those of Marikana demonstrate this. See: Crispin Chinguno, 'Marikana: fragmentation, precariousness, strike violence and solidarity', *Review of African Political Economy*, 40:138 (2013), 639-646.

⁴⁹⁹ See, for example, the work of Pumla Gqola and Desiree Lewis on the Rainbow Nation. Refer also to the historiographical work of Premesh Lalu which I highlighted in the introduction.

⁵⁰⁰ Griselda Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 2013, p.10.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.* p.11.

testimony and confession.⁵⁰³ The silence she mobilises suggests the contingencies of listening, and the continued invisibility of those who are not heard. *Mute* speaks to the historical and political dehumanisation of which Butler writes, and which is reinscribed in present conditions: 'Violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark'.⁵⁰⁴ Similarly to Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* work and Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger*, the focus of the following chapter, *Mute* counters the impetus to represent what cannot be singularly and empirically explained, measured, determined, or even ever fully comprehended. As Pollock writes: 'Herein lies the confusion at the heart of any discussion linking art, trauma and representation: trauma is the radical and irreducible other of representation, the other of the subject and, linked to the unsignifiable traumatic Thing, cannot thus become something'.⁵⁰⁵ But, as she argues, we can think about trauma, 'not in terms of event (which we cannot know), but in terms of *encounter with its traces* that assumes some kind of space and time, and makes some kind of gap as well as a different kind of participating otherness'.⁵⁰⁶ The videos of Ractliffe, and Searle, and as we shall see Siopis, and Vári all speak to this idea of an encounter with traces. These traces are registered in the picturing of absent-presence as affective residue. The continuous movement of multiple, simultaneous narratives and temporalities, imagined here in image, sound and duration, function as strategies that, to deploy Mbembe's temporal entanglements, obscure assumed distinctions between historical pasts and presents.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰³ Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, 2007.

⁵⁰⁴ Pollock, *After-affects/After-images*, 2013, p.36.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.4.

⁵⁰⁷ Mbembe, A., *On the Postcolony*, 2001.

CHAPTER THREE

'Something composed and then decomposed': Penny Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* (2010).

Disorientation

A murky, watery world enters my field of vision, and an octopus appears (figure 3.1). It swims downwards in its tank, towards an artificial bed of shell and sand. I observe its pink whiteness as it moves upwards and downwards again. I hear music but without prior knowledge cannot identify its source. Wind and string arrangements are audible, and the score is slow in tempo and melancholic in tone, plaintive, as though a lament. The image of the octopus is obscured by sprocket marks, and the effects of light and age on obsolescent film (figure 3.2). A text appears in the manner of a film subtitle: 'Can you remember what happened?' (figure 3.3). Without knowledge of context - the images yield none - this interlocutor remains anonymous. An unseen, unidentified respondent replies: 'I don't remember what happened' (figure 3.4). A phrase, incongruous against the unfolding imagery, appears: 'but yes I did stab him right through' (figure 3.5). The octopus continues to navigate its way through the water: 'the blade had anti-rust solution' (figure 3.6). An act of violence is communicated: 'which made it sink into the flesh'/'when the doctor tried to pull it out'/'it caused a bigger wound'/'and it killed him' (figures 3.7-3.10). The meaning communicated, by the still unidentified respondent, is clear. It was not the stabbing that was fatal but rather the doctor's attempt to remove the blade. Doubt enters the frame: The identity of the murderer is obfuscated and ambiguous.

These film sequences, which are derived from found footage, have no empirical relation to what is read or what is heard, or even to each other, except imaginatively. The video by Penny Siopis is titled *Obscure White Messenger*. It is 15 minutes, 7 seconds in length, and is composed of 8mm film transferred to DVD. It invites a critical awareness of the processes of interpretation filtered through the mechanisms of subjectivity, imagination and psychic projection.

Obscure White Messenger is constructed entirely from found footage discovered, often serendipitously, in markets, and second hand shops, in Greece and South Africa.⁵⁰⁸ South African born, Siopis is of Greek heritage, an aspect of her personal history invoked obliquely in *Obscure White Messenger* but a significant aspect of an earlier video: *My Lovely Day* (1997).⁵⁰⁹ The found footage, which she refers to as 'found domestic footage', is composed of 8mm film used for home movies in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵¹⁰ Siopis edits, and splices images. She describes how she builds a personal archive out of extensive bodies of 8mm and, more recently, 16mm film, which is transferred to digital format and then stored in this way:

I take [the found footage] to a company who'll get them projected [...] There are two processes: The one process is that you can film the projected film, shown off an old projector. You stand there with a camera and you film the film projected. And then you have the thing on digital and you can edit. Or they have another kind of cine machine they put the film through. This re-films/re-photographs it as it goes through but on digital. Then I use Final Cut Pro. All of these films are on various hard drives that I've got – once they are digitised. You can also use QuickTime which is a digitising process as well.⁵¹¹

At times, the material of the film is disturbed by time; and burned and transformed by encounters with light and heat as it is screened off a projector for the process of transferring it to a digital format. The film appears discoloured, crinkled and cracked, obscuring people, places or events that were once legible (figure 3.11). The pace of the soundtrack and the movement of film sequences oscillate, music is melancholic then jarring, images are legible and then obfuscated (figure 3.12). An imagined narrative forms through a reading of the subtitles: 'Why are you crying? The reply: 'I don't know'. Another question: 'Aren't you pleased with what you've done?'/ 'Yes' (figures 3.13-3.14). Then, subtitles speak to conditions which, although neither contextualised nor explained, propels my interpretation of the work into the arena of the social, political and historical: 'How do you feel now?'/ 'I'm glad to speak to you'/ 'someone

⁵⁰⁸ Interviews (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 1 and 3 November 2011.

⁵⁰⁹ Annie Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, 2004, pp.274-278.

⁵¹⁰ Interviews (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé) conducted 1 and 3 November 2011, Cape Town.

⁵¹¹ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé) Cape Town, 1 November 2011.

of a better class'. And then: 'always amongst the poorer class of people' (figures 3.15-3.18).

Obscure White Messenger produces the amorphous, subjective, sensate spaces of affect and feeling.⁵¹² This has critical importance to Siopis, and how she thinks about the relationships between historical events and narrative. She foregrounds her interest in the affective quality of found film as material, and in disruptions that register across the surfaces of her films. These are caused by occurrences such as sprocket marks and the burning of the original film footage. Siopis draws attention to the deliberate obfuscation of narrative:

What interests me is drawing attention to the fact. It's actually a material thing. It's not something that you see through to a narrative. It is something that disturbs the objects enough to make you know always when you're watching it that this is a construction.⁵¹³

The significance of Siopis' attentiveness to the constructed-ness of representation, the materiality of film, and the self-conscious deployment of obsolescent film is a well-established aspect of the history of avant-garde film and the moving image practices of artists.⁵¹⁴ Siopis' video practices suggests conceptual and historical connections with these histories. But the particular significance of the work is in its relationship to the political-historical conditions of South Africa, and Siopis' subjective and critical relation to these.⁵¹⁵ Her experimentation with found film and home movies is connected to her practice historically, which encompasses painting and found objects and materials.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² My reading of the work through a lens of affect, sensation and feeling is informed primarily by the work of Pollock (2013) and Bennett (2005).

⁵¹³ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 1 November 2011.

⁵¹⁴ The theory and historiography of avant-garde film, artist's film and video art is beyond the scope of this chapter. Siopis' relation to debates about obsolescence within the contemporary practices of video artists more broadly, and questions of medium and materiality may be the object of further inquiry at a later stage. These debates also have historical-geographical inflections that are particular and this dissertation, in its emphasis on South Africa, aims to pay attention to this.

⁵¹⁵ See: Coombes, 'New Subjectivities for the New Nation', in *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, 2004, pp.243—278, and on Siopis, pp.271-278.

⁵¹⁶ See the forthcoming book published to accompany Siopis' retrospective at the Iziko South African National Gallery (Cape Town), December 2014 and the Wits Art Museum (Johannesburg) in 2015:

Siopis has produced a number of film-based works: *Per Kind Permission (Fieldwork)* (1994); *My Lovely Day*; *Verwoerd Speaks 1966* (1998); *Pray* (2007); *Obscure White Messenger* (2010); *Communion* (2011) and *The Master is Drowning* (2012). She first deployed found film in 1997 in the making of *My Lovely Day*; a 21 minute, 15 second film composed of spliced sequences of 8mm home movies that Siopis' mother Anna Siopis had filmed in South Africa in the '50s and '60s.⁵¹⁷ Siopis imagines the text as the voice of her maternal grandmother (Dorothy Frangetis), who narrates how the family fled Asia Minor in the wake of Turkish invasion, and migrated from Smyrna, to England, and then, finally South Africa (figures 3.19-3.20).⁵¹⁸ The home movies made by Anna Siopis also appear in the video *Verwoerd Speaks 1966* (1996).⁵¹⁹ In a discussion of the artist Penny Siopis' film-based installation *My Lovely Day*, Annie Coombes posits that 'film is a particularly appropriate medium for memory since it has the capacity to reproduce a material equivalent of some of the qualities of the workings of the unconscious mind as classically defined by Freud' (condensation, displacement, and symbolization).⁵²⁰ She notes in particular 'the seamlessness of the film's movement among different geographical and temporal zones'.⁵²¹ Coombes' sense of this earlier

Olivier, G. (ed.) *Penny Siopis: Time and Again* (South Africa: Wits University Press, 2014). Contributors are TJ Demos; William Kentridge; Achille Mbembe; Njabulo Ndebele; Sarah Nuttall, Griselda Pollock and Colin Richards. See also: Kathryn Smith, (ed.), *Penny Siopis* (Johannesburg: Goodman Gallery Editions, 2005). Contributors are Kathryn Smith, Penny Siopis, Griselda Pollock, Brenda Atkinson, Jennifer Law, Achille Mbembe, Sarah Nuttall.

⁵¹⁷ See: Coombes, 2004, pp.273-278; Penny Siopis, in Kathryn Smith (ed.), *Penny Siopis*, 2005, pp.93-101; Colin Richards [Exhibition Brochure] 'The Wake of Words: A Response to "My Lovely Day"' (Johannesburg: The Goodman Gallery and The Artist's Press, 1999).

⁵¹⁸ See: Coombes, 2004, p.274.

⁵¹⁹ On home movies, including a literature of childhood and memory, see: Linda Williams and B. Ruby Rich, 'The Right of Re-Vision: Michelle Citron's "Daughter Rite"', *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), 17-22; Fred Camper, 'Some Notes on the Home Movie', *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4, Home Movies and Amateur Filmmaking (Summer-Fall, 1986), 9-14; Patricia Erens, 'The Galler Home Movies: A Case Study', *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4, Home Movies and Amateur Filmmaking (Summer-Fall 1986), 15-24; Maureen Turim, 'Childhood Memories and Household Events in the Feminist Avant-Garde', *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4, Home Movies and Amateur Filmmaking (Summer-Fall, 1986), 86-92; Heather Norris Nicholson, 'Seeing How It Was?: Childhood Geographies and Memories in Home Movies', *Area*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Jun., 2001), 128-140; Guy Edmonds, 'Amateur Widescreen; Or, Some Forgotten Skirmishes in the Battle of the Gauges', *Film History*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Nontheatrical Film (2007), 401-413.

⁵²⁰ Annie Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa: History After Apartheid*, 2003, pp.276-77.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.* p.277.

work is brought here to *Obscure White Messenger*, and my exploration of its affective relationship to buried narratives and experiences, and its deliberate obfuscation and displacement of geographical and temporal specificity.

Kim Miller interviewed Siopis about *Communion* (2011), constructed, similarly to *Obscure White Messenger*, from found footage.⁵²² Miller drew attention to the 2011 exhibition 'Who's Afraid of the Crowd?' in which the film was exhibited together with Siopis' glue and ink works. Siopis speaks to the relationship between form and formlessness in both painting and film: 'Some sequences are so fractured as to render representation unreadable – a formlessness that corresponds to the paintings. These parts are actually bits of burned film, the product of amateur camerawork like shakiness, light flares, and the artefacts of old 8mm film – sprocket marks, dust specks and so on'.⁵²³

Obscure White Messenger was also shown alongside Siopis' ink and glue works at the exhibition 'Furies' at Stevenson in 2010. Anthea Buys, in a *Mail and Guardian* review of the show, notes points of connection between the video and the mixed media paintings displayed.⁵²⁴ She refers to 'a painting of an octopus [which] repeats a striking underwater image of an octopus in *Obscure White Messenger*' (figure 3.21).⁵²⁵ In Siopis' ink and glue works (such as those exhibited with *Communion* and *Obscure White Messenger*) human and animal forms are scaled as to be barely discernible within amorphous grounds of colour, forms and textures (figures 3.22-3.33). These are often reminiscent of the qualities of the film surfaces, foregrounded in the video works. The relations between background and foreground, depth and flatness, are

⁵²² Kim Miller, 'Fire, Water, Forests, Swarms', in Sophie Perryer [exhibition catalogue] 'Penny Siopis: Who's Afraid of the Crowd?' (Cape Town: Stevenson, 2011), pp.47-51. *Communion* draws on the story of an Irish nun, Sister Aidan (as well as a doctor, Elsie Quinlan) killed by a crowd during the Defiance Campaign in the Eastern Cape in 1952 (see p.49).

⁵²³ Siopis in the interview with Kim Miller, 'Fire, Water, Forests, Swarms', 2011, p.50.

⁵²⁴ Anthea Buys, 'White Spectre'. 28 September 2010. *Mail & Guardian* online <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-09-28-white-spectre> (accessed 8 September 2014).

⁵²⁵ Buys, 'White Spectre'. 28 September 2010. *Mail & Guardian* online.

rendered ambiguous through colour, mark making and line.⁵²⁶ *Quake*, a portrait of a weeping female subject, was one of the works exhibited with *Obscure White Messenger*: its layered, translucent surface, and obscured background, invokes the material properties of the found film, the effects of light and time, and marks, such as those across the figures arms, resemble burned film encountered in Siopis' video work (figure 3.24).

In *Obscure White Messenger* we never actually see the subjects that appear to converse in the subtitles. Although we see the home movie footage of Siopis as a child in *My Lovely Day*, her presence, selecting and recasting her mother's home movies, is never explicitly registered. Performance is not a sustained aspect of Siopis' videos as it is in the work of Searle and Vári. It is only on one occasion that Siopis deliberately inserts herself, her body, into the space of a video work (she does do so in photographic works).⁵²⁷ This work, first shown in 1994, was titled *Per Kind Permission (Fieldwork)*.⁵²⁸

Any impetus to dismiss the device of found footage in Siopis' work as benign nostalgia is countered by its language of disquiet, disorientation and displacement. The construction of an authoritative narrative is thwarted by the non-linear structure and the absence of any descriptive anchor. Images, sounds and texts are presented without any reference to a historical source or context. *Obscure White Messenger*, and indeed the devices of home movies and found footage deployed in Siopis' video work, recalls Catherine Russell's concept of 'experimental ethnography', an idea that derives from postcolonial anthropological theory: 'a way of referring to discourse that

⁵²⁶ See: Griselda Pollock, 'Painting, Difference and Desire in History: The Work of Penny Siopis 1985-1994', in Kathryn Smith (ed.), *Penny Siopis*, 2005, pp.48-61.

⁵²⁷ See the *Comrade Mother* series, 1994, cibachrome prints documented in Kathryn Smith (ed.), *Penny Siopis*, 2005, pp.64-65 and Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal, *Art in South Africa: The Future Present* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1996), pp.132-133.

⁵²⁸ See: Colin Richards, [Exhibition Brochure] 'Penny Siopis', published to accompany the show 'Private Views' held at the Standard Bank Centre Gallery, Johannesburg (8 – 28 September 1994).

circumvents the empiricism and objectivity conventionally linked to ethnography'.⁵²⁹ Russell's analysis of 'found footage as ethnography' grapples with its conceptual significance to notions of history, memory, time and narrative all of which underpin *Obscure White Messenger* and its deliberate muddling of 'documentary and fictional modes of representation'.⁵³⁰ Any assumption of time, as linear and causal, is also actively undermined throughout the film, beginning with the fabric of the found film itself. In *Obscure White Messenger* the found film is converted to a digital format which retains the visual traces and residues of the obsolescent film, and its material susceptibility to deterioration. The device of found film and the soundtrack and subtitles in *Obscure White Messenger* speaks to theoretical concepts of intertextuality alert to the refusal of linear narration and stable relationships between texts and images. In Siopis' videos neither sound nor subtitles passively illustrate images. Furthermore, the anonymous found film which Siopis discovers, often serendipitously, is already detached from its context and the historical conditions of its production. Russell conceives of found-footage filmmaking as 'allegories of history' which disrupt 'narrativity as a symbolic system'.⁵³¹ She continues: 'In the process of being appropriated, the original image gives over its meaning to the new text and is manipulated by the new filmmaker on the level of the signifier'.⁵³² Siopis' video disrupts any assumption of a stable relationship between signifier and signified.

This chapter considers the labyrinthine systems of signification deployed in *Obscure White Messenger*, which functions subjectively within the territories of affect and poetic modes of association and meaning. I pay attention to how the video stages a tension between historical reconstruction and imaginary projection. It offers up glimpses of narrative coherence and causality only to thwart the empirical authority of evidence and sources in the production of history. The idea of allegory, which Russell

⁵²⁹ Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), opening of the preface. Chapter 9, 'Archival Apocalypse: Found Footage as Ethnography', pp.238-272.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.238.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.* p.240.

⁵³² *Ibid.* p.240.

brings to history and the mechanisms of found-footage filmmaking, is a significant aspect of *Obscure White Messenger*: 'Allegory implies a certain randomness, a seriality without necessity, rendering the logic of narrative necessity null and void'.⁵³³

In *Obscure White Messenger*, scenes of landscapes, oceans, buildings, and what appear to be footage of family rituals and holidays, public events, and travel are evident but this material cannot be placed, with any specificity, either geographically or temporally. Our unseen respondent is asked about a place of birth and replies 'Lourenço Marques': this subtitle is juxtaposed with buildings in front of which are Cyprus trees, of course, not a literal picturing of Mozambique's capital, now Maputo (figure 3.25). The visual signifiers of place (Cyprus trees, architecture, dress, and so forth) bear no relation to the subtitles, or necessarily to the music heard. Textual references to growing up in 'Alexandria in Egypt' and Middelburg (in South Africa) are similarly disconnected from accompanying images (figures 3.26-3.27). A banal and obscure landscape appearing with a textual reference to Middelburg could, in fact, be anywhere (figure 3.28). The video's subtitles inform us that our unseen subject lived with a grandmother in Alexandria, and has a photograph 'in Arab dress' - 'Arab', a vague reference to a complex world (figure 3.29). Footage shows women clothed in black *abayas* and *hijabs* but their identities and the geographical and temporal-historical space they occupy is not contextualised. Viewing *Obscure White Messenger*, the experience of disjuncture, and displacement, is geographical, historical and temporal.⁵³⁴ Siopis' moving image work suggests the affective displacements and disorientating temporalities of dreams, the 'condensation, displacement, and symbolization', noted by Coombes, who, in her analysis of *My Lovely Day* invokes the work of Freud.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ Ibid.p.240.

⁵³⁴ On questions of geography and displacement see: Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (United Kingdom, Canada and U.S.A: Routledge, 2000). On temporality, film and video see: Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 1999. In particular, see 'Another Look' (chapter 1, pp.2-25).

⁵³⁵ Coombes, 2004, pp.276-277.

In *Obscure White Messenger*, anonymous people perform and speak to the cameras operated by amateur filmmakers. But they cannot be heard. The sounds of moving cars, of crowds at public events and ceremonies, of market places, streets and what appear to be heritage and tourist sites are inaudible. What is heard is the music soundtrack that Siopis constructed from a personal collection of Turkish folk music, a compilation from the 1998 series 'Music around the World'.⁵³⁶ Sound is a significant aspect of Siopis' film-based work as a whole. The soundtrack of *My Lovely Day* takes the form of traditional Greek music, and a 78rpm record made in 1955 of Anna Siopis singing 'This is my lovely day'.⁵³⁷ The music soundtrack of *My Lovely Day*, originally screened within the context of an installation – an early twentieth century 'picture house' - also invokes silent cinema and the music that would accompany it.⁵³⁸ Siopis recently returned to the idea of screening her work within a twentieth-century cinema house (although this time not in the sense of a specially constructed installation). A series of videos, including *My Lovely Day* and *Obscure White Messenger*, were shown at the Prince Charles Cinema, London in 2012.⁵³⁹ Coombes' work on *My Lovely Day* pays close attention to sound, drawing attention to its affective and disruptive presence:

[...] we sit in the darkness listening to the crackle of the film and the sound track of Siopis' mother singing from an old recording she made of the eponymous song of the title. Scenes are interspersed with the haunting sounds of Greek bouzouki music or moderated by the lilting melody of early recordings made in Greek villages. The juxtaposition of scenes and music evokes tensions between "East" and "West", between Turkish and Greek influences. Part of the combination of these various components is to shake the viewer from his or her attachment to sequential narrative.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶ In an email conversation (16 November 2012) Siopis wrote: 'Tracks taken from CD is "Music Around The World" series: Turkey. Performed by Whirling Dervishes. Compilation: 1998, galaxy music.

⁵³⁷ The song was originally composed by the English composer and lyricist Vivian Ellis, well-known between the 1920s and 1950s for West End musical comedies.

⁵³⁸ Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory*, 2004, pp. 273-274.

⁵³⁹ See: Yvette Greslé, 'Frieze: Penny Siopis at the Prince Charles Cinema', *FAD*, September 22, 2012: <http://www.fadwebsite.com/2012/09/22/frieze-penny-siopis-at-prince-charles-cinema/> (accessed 27 October 2014).

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.227-8.

Obscure White Messenger, and Siopis' film and video practice more broadly, deploys sound as a strategy that brings affect into the experience of the work and its dialogue with history. Siopis speaks about sound in terms of 'feeling', and recollects her grandparent's 'picture house' in South Africa:

The music's also very important for me. That's also about a feel. There are lots of different parts of music that could function for these films. And effectively like *My Lovely Day* I also saw them as silent movies. But in fact silent movies were never really silent. My grandmother in fact played for my grandfather's silent movies, played piano.⁵⁴¹

Russell, in her discussion of surrealist film, examines sound both in silent cinema, and later as an integral aspect of film as text. She deploys the term 'Surrealist Ethnography', focusing on Luis Buñuel's 1932 work titled *Land without Bread*, *Unpromised Land* or *Las Hurdes*.⁵⁴² She draws attention to the incongruity between music and image in Buñuel's film, and its 'failure' in the 'fixing of meaning and the production of knowledge'.⁵⁴³ Russell discusses his use of the soundtrack as a 'montage element' that builds 'the film on three separate discursive levels – music, image, and narration – realising that film is an audiovisual medium'.⁵⁴⁴ Russell writes: 'The power of the soundtrack, the impact of narration on the way images are read, and the effect of music on how they are "felt" are laid bare in *Las Hurdes*'.⁵⁴⁵ In *Obscure White Messenger*, the music shifts register, varying in tone, structure, duration and form. Sometimes its pace is slow, and plaintive, at other times it gathers momentum, becoming disquieting. The music draws us into an affective space of disorientating sensations, and emotions that are not readily described or placed.⁵⁴⁶ Without prior

⁵⁴¹Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 1 November 2011.

⁵⁴² Catherine Russell, 'Surrealist Ethnography' (Chapter 2, pp.26-47), in *Experimental Ethnography*, 1999. For her discussion of *Las Hurdes* and sound see pp.30-31.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁵⁴⁶ See: Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 2005; Griselda Pollock, *After-affects/After-images*, 2013. See also Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion: Journey's in Art, Architecture, and Film*. New York: Verso, 2007 (first published by Verso in 2002). These texts are useful for thinking about how one might theorise and think

knowledge of the particular musical forms at play, their history, their materiality, and the contexts in which they were produced, and are heard and circulated, there is little foundation upon which to build a narrative, except imaginatively and associatively. As historians we run the risk of projecting our own assumptions and preconceptions onto the unstable, obscure narratives that unfold not only through music but also through the devices of found film and subtitles. Indeed, as Russell notes of the criticism and commentary on *Las Hurdes*, there is agreement that ‘the film foregrounds and throws into relief some of the basic prejudices and conceits of anthropological cinema’.⁵⁴⁷

Russell cites Vivian Sobchack:

Even though we are doomed to failure, we are asked to strain and squint and peer through our own history, our own culture, to get a glimpse of some adorned and shadowy reality which can never be made clear and visible but which will forever lurk in our peripheral vision.⁵⁴⁸

Obscure White Messenger presents glimpses of historical events and narratives that while they appear empirically grounded are simultaneously subject to doubt. Dates, names of countries and cities, and decontextualised conversations about the event of a stabbing appear in a form that is affective and sensate. The work’s visual-sonic-textual language of disorientation and displacement thwarts any claim to objectivity, and the authoritative authoring of a causal narrative grounded in empirical evidence and the belief in an unshakeable truth.

about experiences that in the writing of history are not easily pinned down and categorised, and that elude the impetus to narrate and describe via empirical constellations of facts and evidence, and causal structure. This work is useful to the practice of art history which in thinking about visual images (that in their very nature encompass the territories of affect, emotion, sensation, the haptic, corporeality, performativity and so forth) brings other inflections, no less critical, to the practice of writing history.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p.31.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p.31.

Telling Tales

Underpinning *Obscure White Messenger* is a historical event that the formal devices, structuring, and materials of the work, renders obscure. At the close of the video, a postscript narrates:

In 1966 Demitrios Tsafendas stabbed Hendrik Verwoerd, the Prime Minister of South Africa, to death in parliament. This was considered an act of madness rather than a political assassination. He was imprisoned on death row at Pretoria Central prison for a quarter of a century before being moved to an insane asylum at Sterkfontein in 1994. He died there in 1999 (figure 3.30).

Obscure White Messenger troubles the construction of narratives and the selection, and re-casting of evidence. Evidence is subject to the problems of supposition, prejudice and the historian's own political relationship to the narrative and its stakes (institutional, ideological, personal, and subjective). Siopis explores the materials of the historian – dates, facts, evidence, an historical event, and historical protagonists – but simultaneously, in her capacity as artist, she disrupts claims to an authoritative voice and deliberately disorientates us.

Siopis' exploration of historical events and archives in her videos, while informed by the historical and political conditions of South Africa, also has points of connection with how contemporary artists, working internationally, are thinking about the relationship between art and history (as idea, as event, as historiographical object, and as archival practice).⁵⁴⁹ Mark Godfrey's essay 'The Artist as Historian', and his discussion of the research practices of artists, which includes archival research, opens up a path of inquiry into Siopis' methods as an artist: 'These varied research processes lead to works that invite viewers to think about the past: to make connections between events, characters and objects; to join together in memory; and to reconsider the ways in which the past is represented in the wider culture'.⁵⁵⁰ The artist is, of

⁵⁴⁹ Mark Godfrey, 'The Artist as Historian', *October*, no. 120, (Spring, 2007), 140-172.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.142-3.

course, not a historian in a disciplinary, empirical sense. Rather, the relationships between art objects and historical practices and the critical, imaginative and affective dialogues staged between contemporary art practices and history, might be mobilised to draw renewed critical attention to the construction of historical narratives, the constitution of archives, and the uses of evidence and sources.

In the making of *Obscure White Messenger* Siopis researched and collated material that works as an archive, although not in an official sense. This archive consists of found footage and home movies transferred to digital formats; and also cultural texts, official documents and newspaper reports (contemporaneous with the assassination of Verwoerd and its aftermath). Siopis provided me with copies of two official documents in her archive: the 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the late Dr. the Honourable Hendrick Frensch Verwoerd'; and selected pages of a trial transcript (reporting the cross-examination of the psychiatrist Dr Isaac Sakinofsky by the principal advocate for the accused, Wilfred Cooper). The 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry [...]' draws attention to the inconsistencies that dominate the tales told about Tsafendas. It records a number of variations on Tsafendas' first name: 'Demetrio, Dimitrio, Dimitro, Demetrios, Demitrius and James'.⁵⁵¹ His surname is similarly contradictory: 'Tsafandakis, Tsafendakis, Tsafantaki, Tsafendos, Tsafendis, Tsafantakis and Williams'.⁵⁵² It is noted that 'Both Tsafendas's name and surname underwent changes from time to time in the course of his life, besides which he was known to some people by the nicknames of MIMIS and MIEME'.⁵⁵³ Variations on the name of Tsafendas demonstrates how prejudice is registered in naming – its way of diminishing the identities of its subjects.

The Report, an important source for Siopis' subtitles, also attempts to determine 'the facts' of Tsafendas' birth and biography. It records his date and place of birth

⁵⁵¹See: 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the late Dr. The Honourable Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd', p.1.

⁵⁵²*Ibid.*, p.1.

⁵⁵³*Ibid.*, p.1.

(Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, 14 January 1918). It states that his mother was 'Amelia William, alias Amelia Williams', 'a Portuguese subject of the Portuguese East African Territory of Mozambique'.⁵⁵⁴ And then, it draws attention to her race: 'She was a non-White. Presumably one of her parents was a White and the other a Swazi. In Tsafendas' birth certificate she is shown as Amelia Williams, a domestic servant'.⁵⁵⁵ 'It is probable (the Report continues) 'that Tsafendas was illegitimate'; his father 'Michaelatos alias Michael alias Miquel Tsafendakis or Tsafandakis, was originally a Greek subject from Candia, Crete, born in 1885. In 1947 his father became a South African citizen'.⁵⁵⁶

Zuleiga Adams' PhD dissertation is the first sustained scholarly investigation of the figure of Tsafendas to date, and I build on this work through my engagement with Siopis. Her dissertation, of which Siopis is aware, was completed in 2011, the year after the production of *Obscure White Messenger* (2010), and is titled *Demitrios Tsafendas: Race, Madness and the Archive*.⁵⁵⁷ Adams narrates a biography of Tsafendas and brings together the disparate accounts of his birth and heritage, elements of which are re-cast in *Obscure White Messenger*:

Demitrios Mimikos Tsafandakis (Tsafendas) was born illegitimate to a mother that he never knew. All that is known about Tsafendas' biological mother, Amelia Williams, is that she had a German father and a Swazi mother, and was regarded as a mulatto in colonial Lourenco Marques. His father, Michaelis Tsafandakis was born on the Greek island of Crete in 1885, but the family moved to Alexandria in Egypt. Both Greece and Egypt were part of the Ottoman Empire at the time, and it was not uncommon for its subjects to migrate freely across the Mediterranean. From there, Michaelis emigrated to South Africa, and moved to Lourenco Marques in 1916. He began a liaison with Amelia, who was in his employ as a domestic worker. A year after Tsafendas' birth she disappeared and Michaelis Tsafandakis was left to care alone for the young Tsafendas.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁴Ibid., p.1.

⁵⁵⁵Ibid.,p.1.

⁵⁵⁶Ibid., p.1.

⁵⁵⁷See: Zuleiga Adams, *Demitrios Tsafendas : Race, Madness and the Archive*, a dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of the Western Cape, December 2011.

⁵⁵⁸ Zuleiga Adams, *Demitrios Tsafendas : Race, Madness and the Archive*, 2011, p.29.

Adams documents archival material on Tsafendas, held at the National Archives and the South African Police Museum (both in Pretoria).⁵⁵⁹ She imagines two archives of Tsafendas: the apartheid archive which includes media reports on the assassination of Verwoerd, the 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry [...]', and an archive of documents produced during Tsafendas' incarceration (including prison letters).⁵⁶⁰ The letters appear to represent the only evidence of Tsafendas' subjective voice, unmediated by a court official, a psychiatrist, a biographer, a documentary film maker, or a journalist. Adams notes: 'Most important, these letters give us Tsafendas in all his rationality and irrationality, which coexisted in equal measure'.⁵⁶¹ Adams' post-apartheid 'secondary archive' focuses on Tsafendas as the subject of cultural texts. She frames these texts as psychic archives, which overlay autobiography and biography, factual account, and fiction, and are scripted by 'individuals profoundly affected by the event' and who themselves have formed subjective, 'troubled identifications' with it.⁵⁶² Two cultural works in particular are important to post-apartheid narratives of Tsafendas: Henk Van Woerden's biography *A Mouthful of Glass: The Man who Killed the Father of Apartheid* (1998) and Lisa Keys' documentary film *A Question of Madness: The Furiosus* (1999).⁵⁶³ Siopis referred to both the biography and the documentary in interviews and informal conversations with me. Adams pays close attention to both and also examines four plays.⁵⁶⁴ Two of the plays were written during the apartheid era: William Tanner's *Tsafendas* (1976) and Mathew Krouse and Robert Colman's *Famous Dead Man* (1986). The other two were written following the transition from apartheid: Anton Krueger's

⁵⁵⁹Ibid., p.2.

⁵⁶⁰See: Adams, 2011, 'Chapter Two: The Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. The Honourable H.F. Verwoerd', pp.67-93. See also: Chapter 3: 'I am a Cosmopolitan Man': The Prison Letters of Mimikos Demitrios Tsafendakis Von Willem De Kanhume, 1966 -1986, pp.94-136.

⁵⁶¹Ibid., p.9.

⁵⁶²Ibid., p.212.

⁵⁶³Ibid., p.187.

⁵⁶⁴ See Chapter 4 for Adams' discussion of the Van Woerden biography, pp.137-160. See Chapter 5 for her discussion of Key's documentary, pp.161-186.

Living in Strange Lands (2001) and Anthony Sher's *I.D.* (2003), to which Siopis referred in conversation about her work.⁵⁶⁵

The idea of madness is central to the biography of Tsafendas, and is given close attention by Adams: 'According to the doctors, he acted out of irrational impulses and was driven by insane delusions'.⁵⁶⁶ Alongside narratives of nationality, race and madness many others are woven into the stories that are told about him: 'What was he? Was he a madman, a drifter, a schizophrenic, a communist, a psychopath, or as the Judge would have it, "n niksbeduidende skepsel wat 'n nuttelose lewe gelei het" [a meaningless creature leading a useless life]?'⁵⁶⁷ Adams drew attention to the fact that Tsafendas, whose life prior to the assassination, was peripatetic, had lived in Colonial Mozambique, Portugal and South Africa, all of which were repressive regimes: 'Tsafendas' delusions or semi-delusions were certainly intelligible when read in their historical contexts'.⁵⁶⁸

The stabbing of Verwoerd by Tsafendas was, in fact, preceded by an earlier attempt on his life, the departure point for Siopis' video *The Master is Drowning* (2012).⁵⁶⁹ On 9 April 1960, David Beresford Pratt, a Cambridge educated businessman and farmer based in Johannesburg, shot Verwoerd at the Rand Easter Show (a major annual consumer exhibition held in Johannesburg).⁵⁷⁰ Verwoerd had opened the Union Exposition to celebrate the anniversary of the Union of South Africa.⁵⁷¹ After his address, he was seated when Pratt walked up to him and shot him at close range,

⁵⁶⁵ See Chapter 6 for Adams' analysis of the plays, pp.187-207.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,p.34-35.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁵⁶⁹ See Adams, 2011 on David Pratt, p.55.

⁵⁷⁰ Rajat Neogy Sagittarius, 'David Pratt is Dead'. *Transition*, Issue No.75/76. *The Anniversary Issue: Selections from Transition, 1961-1976* (1997), 270-272.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*,p.1.

twice in the face with a .22 revolver.⁵⁷² In *The Master is Drowning*, Siopis' re-imagining of the event, we see actual news footage of Verwoerd immediately after the shooting, along with the device of the found footage (figure 3.31). Pratt, was also diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder, and psychiatric assessments and reports were a significant aspect of his trial.⁵⁷³ Pratt committed suicide by hanging himself with a bed-sheet while confined at the Orange Hospital, Bloemfontein on 1 October 1961.⁵⁷⁴

The question of Tsafendas's race, nationality and citizenship presented a conundrum for the apartheid state, and archival material demonstrates the minutiae of its obsessive preoccupation with racial types and categories: 'A man who could be Greek, Portuguese, Mozambican or Arabic, was difficult to pin down in the Verwoerdian racial lexicon'.⁵⁷⁵ Verwoerd remains an omnipresent figure in the history of apartheid which 'in its broader conception has increasingly become associated with H.F Verwoerd'.⁵⁷⁶ Anti-apartheid political slogans and songs such as *Ndodemnyama* (Beware Verwoerd!) leave behind impressions of a figure, synonymous with political oppression and race-based authoritarianism.⁵⁷⁷ In *The Master is Drowning* Siopis deploys archival footage of Verwoerd at public events. This footage offers literal visual representations of the power relations of state authority and the display of white supremacy in apartheid South Africa (figure 3.32). Some of the footage of Verwoerd that Siopis deliberately selects obscures his image as the material of the film is damaged by time and use (figure 3.33). Verwoerd, who succeeded J.G. Strydom (Prime Minister from 1954-1958), is popularly referred to as the 'Architect of Apartheid' but it is not only

⁵⁷²Ibid.,p.1.

⁵⁷³ See: Sagittarius, 1997 and Adams, 2011.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.,p.1.

⁵⁷⁵ Adams, 2011, p.34.

⁵⁷⁶ William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 (Second Edition), p.146.

⁵⁷⁷Refer, for example, to the song 'Beware Verwoerd' (*Ndodemnyama*) sung by Miriam Makeba.

Verwoerd, but also his predecessors, that were incalcitrant proponents of Afrikaner Nationalist politics and institutionalised racial segregation.⁵⁷⁸

The figure of Verwoerd is also a departure point for Siopis' earlier video *Verwoerd Speaks 1966* (1998-1999), a 9 minute, 30 second work that deploys found film, her mother's home movies, and a jarring soundtrack including actual archival footage of a 1966 speech which, in the absence of television in South Africa, was transmitted on radio. Verwoerd's voice is audible as he addresses his audience in Afrikaans: Siopis incorporates an English language translation, as subtitles. Verwoerd's words, and his political rhetoric, sound with apparent precision and clarity against intermittent applause and a frenetic and jarring musical score. Viewers hear his voice, and read his words as they were officially documented. Verwoerd's institutional and ideological right to a voice and a platform, both political and public, is staged by Siopis and simultaneously disrupted, and undermined, through visual-sonic-textual strategies that, similarly to *Obscure White Messenger*, are embedded in ideas of disorientation and displacement.

Newspaper archives in South Africa are important repositories for twentieth-century events of significance to histories of apartheid, and an aspect of Siopis' research process.⁵⁷⁹ On the 7 September 1966, *Die Burger's* front page foregrounded a photograph of Verwoerd's body as it was taken from parliament to an ambulance (figure 3.34). The headline, in bold typeface, reads 'SO IS HY VERMOOR' (In this way, he is murdered). The text accompanying the image of Verwoerd's lifeless body, covered up by a blanket, describes how the Prime Minister's body is carried, carefully

⁵⁷⁸ Siopis and Coombes discuss whiteness in Siopis' work in: 'Gender, "Race", Ethnicity in Art Practice in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Annie E. Coombes and Penny Siopis in Conversation', *Feminist Review*, No. 55, *Consuming Cultures* (Spring, 1997), 110-129. The idea of whiteness is an important aspect of the videos exploring the figure of Verwoerd and while of interest is beyond the scope of this particular chapter.

⁵⁷⁹ An aspect of my research towards this chapter entailed looking through the newspaper archives of the Central Library in Cape Town, focusing on visual representations of Verwoerd and Tsafendas. See also Adams' analyses of press coverage: 'Reports of the assassination in the White English Press: September 1966', p.45; 'The Afrikaans Press', p.49; 'Media Reports on the Summary Trial: 17 - 20 October 1966', p.52.

(‘versigtig’), out of the parliament building, by the ambulance men. But the text slips in innocuous details that are morbid, and sensationalist, in their forensic precision: ‘Links voor op die foto plaas ‘n helper die voet van dr.Verwoerd, wat van die draagbaar geglip het, terug onder die kombes’ (‘At the front-left of the photo a helper places the foot of dr.Verwoerd under the blanket, after it slipped out from the stretcher’).⁵⁸⁰

Newspaper headlines in the aftermath of Verwoerd’s death register currents of disbelief and shock, both in South Africa and abroad: ‘Dazed House Sat Aghast: Silence, then tears in Assembly’; ‘Unbelief, then shock in London’; ‘Shock throughout the U.S over killing’ (figure 3.35).⁵⁸¹ Verwoerd (Prime Minister and family man) is figured too through headlines foregrounding his wife Betsy, often a frail, feminine counterpoint: ‘The small brave figure of Mrs Verwoerd’ and elsewhere ‘Agony of a widow’ (‘Lonely – she’ll never forget’).⁵⁸² An article published in *The Cape Times* on Wednesday 7 September, the day after the killing, presents a celebratory account of Verwoerd: ‘the most successful Prime Minister South Africa ever had’; ‘his influence was felt not only throughout the Republic but in an increasing measure throughout Southern Africa, and in the countries of the world’; ‘he died at the height of his power, when even unsympathetic observers accepted that he was “one of the ablest White leaders that Africa has ever produced” and others saw him as “the De Gaulle of the African continent”’.⁵⁸³ The article goes on to highlight key moments in Verwoerd’s political life, and draws attention to his speeches: ‘Whether he spoke in English or Afrikaans, his fluency and articulateness were always remarkable – and it was rare indeed that some interjector either flustered or nonplussed him’.⁵⁸⁴ The article then draws our attention to a landmark ‘off the cuff’ response to Harold Macmillan’s ‘Winds of Change’ address

⁵⁸⁰ ‘So is hy Vermoor’. *Die Burger*, Wednesday, 7 September 1966.

⁵⁸¹ ‘Dazed house sat aghast’, September 7 1966.

⁵⁸² ‘The small brave figure of Mrs Verwoerd’. *Cape Times*, 12 September 1966, p.7; ‘Agony of a widow’. *The Cape Times*, Monday, September 12 1966.

⁵⁸³ ‘Dr Verwoerd died at the Height of his Power’. *The Cape Times*, Wednesday September 7, 1966.

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Dr Verwoerd died at the Height of his Power’. *The Cape Times*, Wednesday September 7, 1966.

to parliament in Cape Town in 1960⁵⁸⁵: 'Though obviously taken by surprise by the tone of the speech, Dr Verwoerd replied with courtesy and dignity, strongly putting his Government's point of view. It was from that point that the two most crowded and crucial years in Dr Verwoerd's life and premiership began'.⁵⁸⁶

The front page of the Afrikaans medium newspaper 'Die Burger', published 8 September 1966, in the aftermath of Verwoerd's death, presents two photographs of Tsafendas alongside each other: the context of the photographs is unknown although they deploy the characteristic style of the police mug shot (figure 3.36). To the right hand side is a photograph of a hand grasping a dagger. The headline reads: 'Die Moordenaar – Die Wapen' ('the murderer, the weapon'), and a descriptive text tells us:

*Dimitri Tsafendas sluipmoordenaar van die Eerste Minister, dr.H.F. Verwoerd. Die Foto toon Tsafendas van die kant en van voor. Met 'n dolk soos dié op die foto regs is dr.Verwoerd vermoor. Na verneem word, was die lem van die moordwapen sowat agt duim lank. Die dolk op die foto is een van die miljoene wat in Wes-Duitsland gemaak word. Dit is glo so sterk dat dit 'n muntstuk kan deurboor sonder dat die lem beskadig word.*⁵⁸⁷

Dimitri Tsafendas the assassin of the Prime Minister dr. H.F Verwoerd. The photo presents Tsafendas from the side and the front. With a dagger such as that on the right hand side was dr.Verwoerd murdered. We understand that the blade of the murder weapon was about eight inches long. The dagger in the photo is one of millions manufactured in West Germany. It is believed to be so strong that it can pierce a coin without damaging the blade.⁵⁸⁸

Tsafendas was the focus of extensive press coverage which appears to have gone out of its way to exaggerate contrasts between Verwoerd the Prime Minister and family man and Tsafendas, his murderer. Coverage of Verwoerd's funeral - he was buried on

⁵⁸⁵See: Saul Dubow, 'Macmillan, Verwoerd, and the 1960 "Wind of Change" Speech'. *The Historical Journal* (2011), 54:1087-1114.

⁵⁸⁶ 'Dr Verwoerd died at the Height of his Power'. *The Cape Times*, Wednesday, September 7, 1966.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Die Moordenaar – Die Wapen'. *Die Burger*, Kaapstad, Donderdag, 8 September 1966.

⁵⁸⁸ 'Die Moordenaar – Die Wapen'. *Die Burger*, Kaapstad, Donderdag, 8 September 1966.

Saturday 10 September 1966 - includes headlines such as “Magnificence for ‘Quiet Man’” (The Cape Argus) and ‘Die Einde van ‘n Treurspel’ or ‘The End of a tragedy’.⁵⁸⁹ Tsafendas, in contrast to Verwoerd, functions as a site of doubt and negative projection. Newspaper articles speculate about his character producing images of an unstable, slightly sinister, peripatetic personality: ‘Assassin a lone worker’; Tsafendas ook uit Brittanje Gesit’ (Tsafendas also thrown out of Britain); ‘Drifter, an Outcast: Tsafendas in turmoil all his life’.⁵⁹⁰ On Thursday September 8 *The Cape Times* published a photograph of Tsafendas, a portrait (figure 3.37).⁵⁹¹ The caption tells us that this is ‘Demetrio Tsafendas, the alleged assassin of the Prime Minister, Dr Verwoerd’. Here, the caption is speculative, careful of the processes of the law. Tsafendas smiles outwards at us as we look at an ordinary, commonplace photograph of a man, cropped at the shoulders and dressed in a white shirt and tie. In interviews, Siopis refers to this page and one article in particular. Titled ‘Untidiness, grime in his bedroom’ the reporter, who is unnamed, describes in detail the appearance of Tsafendas’ apartment in Rustenburg Avenue, Rondebosch, Cape Town. The journalist tells us that photographs were forbidden but that the room was ‘inspected [...] under supervision’.⁵⁹² Siopis recounts how struck she was by this, the absence of a visual image countered by the reporter’s detailed description:

A bed left unmade, its sheets grimy, clothes, personal effects and other objects strewn across floor and furniture – this was the state in which Demetrio Tsafendas left his room when he went to the Houses of Parliament [...] I inspected the room under supervision, but was forbidden to take photographs. Except for two suitcases on top of the wardrobe and three threadbare jackets hanging inside it not an article in the room in its appropriate place. A hammer, a file, a pair of soiled socks, tins containing odds and ends, polish, shoe brushes, cutlery, an Oxford English Dictionary, and a hair brush lay scattered on the dressing-table. [‘DISORDERED’ reads a heading] On the floor lay clothing, shoes, more cutlery, a box containing pots, pans and a crumpled tog-bag, a tool box, a spanner and screwdriver lying loose, jars, tins, paper and rubbish. Other articles

⁵⁸⁹ ‘Magnificence for “Quiet Man”’. *The Cape Argus*. Cape Town, Saturday, September 10 1966; ‘Die Einde van ‘n Treurspel’. *Die Burger*, Monday, 12 September 1966.

⁵⁹⁰ ‘Assassin a lone worker’. *The Cape Argus*. Cape Town, Wednesday, September 1966. ‘Drifter, an outcast: Tsafendas in turmoil all his life’. *The Cape Times*, Monday, September 12, 1966.

⁵⁹¹ *The Cape Times*, Thursday, September 8, front page.

⁵⁹² ‘Untidiness, grime in his bedroom’. *The Cape Times*, Thursday, September 8, front page.

of clothing lay in heaps on the bed hanging limply behind the door and over the chair. Above the bed, hanging from a nail in the window, was a yellow vest. At the bottom of the wardrobe lay a welder's mask and a straw hat, in the drawers more rubbish.⁵⁹³

In this description what may simply be ordinary, everyday untidiness comes to hold great significance. The emphasis is unequivocally on disorder, and the absence of cleanliness ('soiled socks'; 'a hair brush [...] scattered on the dressing table'; 'crumpled tog-bag'; 'a spanner and screwdriver lying loose'; 'in the drawers more rubbish'). In the absence of photographic evidence the reporter's idea of the attributes of a criminal type, or a disturbed mind, are presented by means of a description that is forensic in observation.

The subtitles in *Obscure White Messenger* are Siopis' recasting of her archive of Tsafendas. Siopis speaks about how the voice of Tsafendas, in *Obscure White Messenger*, is drawn from various sources but also her own fictive constructions:

I have sometimes changed or reduced something he said to make them more clipped. I wanted a more elemental sense of the text. I manipulated or changed his texts [...]. And I shortened some. Or invented some of the questions [...] They're all drawn from different sources in a way. I suppose some might be invented in that there needed to be a question too so that I could put his words into an answer. So that's where the fictionalised part comes in. So I had texts from all kinds of sources. Bits and pieces of things he had said.⁵⁹⁴

Subtitles stage a dialogue between the imagined voice of Tsafendas, and various interlocutors. But the voice, imagined as that of Tsafendas, is ambiguous and inflected by that of Siopis. Viewers, in their encounters with the work, may also bring their own subjectivities and psychic projections to the subtitles. The identity of the questioner, or rather questioners, is multivalent, and can be envisioned as Siopis herself, or the figures that variously examined, interrogated or interviewed Tsafendas. These include psychiatrists, and legal figures, and the producers of cultural texts about him. In the

⁵⁹³ 'Untidiness, grime in his bedroom'. *The Cape Times*, Thursday, September 8, front page.

⁵⁹⁴ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 3 November 2011.

making of *Obscure White Messenger* Siopis deliberately, and irreverently, selects, discards, foregrounds, or obscures historical sources.

Obscure White Messenger

The title of Siopis' video - *Obscure White Messenger* is derived from Nelson Mandela's 1995 biography *A Long Walk to Freedom*:

We did not know how the Prime Minister had died. Later we heard about the obscure white parliamentary messenger who stabbed Verwoerd to death, and we wondered at his motives. Although Verwoerd thought Africans were lower than animals his death did not yield us any pleasure.⁵⁹⁵

The emphasis on obscurity and whiteness in Mandela's phrase reiterates the inconsistencies present in representations of Tsafendas. Adams notes the instability of apartheid classificatory systems to which the case of Tsafendas attests, and describes the 1960s as 'a decade of race-making by the state': 'Citizens and non-citizens actively wrestled with these laws and remade themselves 'white', 'coloured' or 'black' in efforts to avoid what they perceived as the worst consequences of official classification.'⁵⁹⁶ This suggests one of the ways in which agency, during the apartheid era, might be theorised, although, of course, within such extreme conditions, it is a precarious agency. Adams focuses attention on whiteness - 'The Verwoerdian period brought into sharp focus the fragile and unstable quality of "being white": if whiteness became a legislated category, one could of course become "white"'.⁵⁹⁷ Siopis recalls, in an interview, that due to the uncertainties that plagued Tsafendas' (with regards to citizenship and racial category) 'it was a mistake' that he was both able to enter South Africa, prior to the killing of Verwoerd, and find employment as a parliamentary messenger.⁵⁹⁸ Recalling her research of the Tsafendas case she comments anecdotally:

⁵⁹⁵ Nelson Mandela, *A Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little Brown, 1996), p.512.

⁵⁹⁶ Adams, 2011, p.32.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁵⁹⁸ Adams, 2011, contextualises this. See, p.89.

This was a mistake that Tsafendas got into South Africa. Because they [the authorities] mis-spelt his name or mis-read his name. There are different spellings of it. And so he basically got into the country. Then he was given an employment card. Or card that indicated that he could be employed. And on that card was 'W' which meant white. But he wasn't actually classified white he was classified coloured. He wasn't South African. It was also a mistake that he became a parliamentary messenger. This was a position reserved for whites and for South Africans.⁵⁹⁹

Mandela's description of Tsafendas as an 'obscure white parliamentary messenger' also suggests the ambivalence, towards Tsafendas, of anti-apartheid activists in general: 'Had he acted as part of an organized political grouping, Demitrios Tsafendas would have been celebrated at the time and now as a venerated hero of the anti-apartheid struggle'.⁶⁰⁰ Helen Suzman – who was leader of the liberal Progressive Party at the time of Verwoerd's assassination, is cited as referring to Tsafendas as 'a nutcase' – a crass reference to the experience of mental illness.⁶⁰¹

Adams observes that despite the presence of Verwoerd's assassination in the personal and collective memories of South Africans 'nowhere, in the contemporary excess of post-apartheid memorialisation, was there public acknowledgement of the importance of this event, or of the person responsible for its execution'.⁶⁰² She comments that the assassination has received little scholarly attention despite the fact that it 'was one of the most dramatic political events: public, bloody, and violent'.⁶⁰³ There is no visual image of the event of Verwoerd's death, which was captured and quickly suppressed: 'A photographer from the *Cape Times* who captured the event on camera, was seized upon immediately by security police; his camera and film was confiscated'.⁶⁰⁴ Adams writes: 'That the event has left a deep impression on the minds of individual South

⁵⁹⁹ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 1 November 2011.

⁶⁰⁰ Adams, Z., 2011, p.23.

⁶⁰¹ Cited in Jon Robins, 'The Assassin and the Tapeworm'. *New Statesman*, 27 March 2000.

⁶⁰² Adams, 2011, p.1.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2011, p.1.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1.

Africans is without doubt, but the memory of the event has been consigned to a kind of psychic archive'.⁶⁰⁵ Her examination of the Tsafendas archive places emphasis on the psychic damage, engendered by apartheid's 'racial rationalism', asking 'what can "madness" tell us about apartheid?'"⁶⁰⁶ She presents a critical account of apartheid's race-based legislation and the historiography of madness in South Africa.⁶⁰⁷ She asks of the case of Tsafendas:

In what ways may historiography have to extend the terms of its discourse in order to take account of the irrational forces in social life? If one steps outside the terms of the liberal/revisionist debate, which is also a debate about the rational versus irrational bases of apartheid, is it possible to entertain the idea that apartheid was a form of madness, the origins of which lie in the demons that possessed the 'men who invented and installed apartheid?'"⁶⁰⁸

Apartheid was a form of madness in and of itself, and a demonstration, along with historical events such as the Holocaust, of the human capacity for racial violence orchestrated by the state but kept in place, not only by state institutions, ideologies, indoctrination and propaganda, but also by the participation, complicity, and everyday, normalised prejudices of its subjects.

Adams emphasises the 'deep presence in people's consciousness of the day that Verwoerd was assassinated', and indeed this became evident during the process of research trips to South Africa, even in the most innocuous processes of talking to Siopis and others about their own memories of the day.⁶⁰⁹ Mathew Krouse, who played the character of Tsafendas, in the play he wrote with Robert Colman (*Famous Dead Man*, 1986) recalls, in 1999:

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., p.1.

⁶⁰⁶ Adams, 2011, dissertation abstract.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.10-23.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p.27.

⁶⁰⁹ Adams, 2011, p.1.

All South Africans over 35 have a memory of that fateful day, September 6 in 1966, when the parliamentary messenger Tsafendas stabbed Verwoerd. Mine is of a young Jewish boy, loitering around Germiston's Zionist Hall after Hebrew class, while his community prepared the venue for a fundraising fete. With the country in a state of mourning, the fete had to be called off. I remember sobbing with my sister, denied our chance to eat cake, to take home fabulous prizes. For our Jewish parents the moment smelled of disaster. After all, Tsafendas was foreign. If there was a backlash, would it rub off on the Jews?⁶¹⁰

Themes of prejudice, recur in the histories explored in this study, those related to race, xenophobia, and the multivalent histories of migration to South Africa which, as Krouse's recollections demonstrate, encompass anti-Semitic narratives and experiences in South Africa.

One of the most ubiquitous and sensationalised aspects of the Tsafendas case is the story of the tapeworm: Tsafendas believed himself to be inhabited by a tapeworm, which led him to stab Verwoerd. The narrative of the tapeworm is documented in the numerous accounts of Tsafendas, from trial transcripts to newspaper reports:

He persisted with his delusion: there was 'a worm' inside him that needed to be removed. This worm, demon, dragon, snake had 'destroyed his personality'. He refused 'to take holy communion', as it would make the devil inside him 'holy'. This worm was responsible for his killing of Verwoerd. He blamed 'African witchcraft' for implanting the worm inside him.⁶¹¹

Incidentally, the reference to 'African witchcraft' alludes to Tsafendas' own absorption, and relaying, of colonial and apartheid prejudices concerning the knowledge and belief systems of black Africans.⁶¹² In interviews, Siopis draws connections between the sequences of the octopus swimming in its tank and the tapeworm:

the octopus is a key signifier but it's also a beautiful and strange thing the octopus. It's not a worm but we read it as the worm – the tapeworm or the monster (the monster of apartheid) or the vulnerable creature in a tank.⁶¹³

⁶¹⁰ Mathew Krouse, 'The Key to Tsafendas', *Mail & Guardian* online, 25 June 1999: <http://mg.co.za/article/1999-06-25-the-key-to-tsafendas> (accessed 23 October 2014).

⁶¹¹ Adams, 2011, p.23.

⁶¹² See Adams' interesting analysis of delusions and political history, pp.24-28.

⁶¹³ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 1 November 2011.

Sequences of the octopus appear a number of times: at the start and close of the film, and towards its ending. For Siopis, the octopus is a site of signification, although a personal one. She speaks about it as an important narrative element which drives the construction of the film. The language she uses to describe the octopus - 'beautiful', 'strange', 'vulnerable', 'monster' – brings poetic metaphor and affect to a reading of the narrative of Tsafendas. Siopis' octopus is a site of multivalent signification, and a narrative device, that resists a reductive representation of historical trauma, and in Bennett's sense, 'crude empathy', allowing for a more nuanced and reflective encounter.⁶¹⁴ In the film, themes of violence, disquiet and menace, are made visible and felt through the relationships Siopis stages between image, subtitle and sound. The film draws attention to physical violence rendered explicit through the subtitles, their description of a stabbing. It also registers violence that is not necessarily visible, and only registered within particular conditions, contingent on who looks and how, and on who listens and how. *Obscure White Messenger* tells of violence, to do with class, race and themes of belonging and displacement. It tells of violence that is enacted not only physically, but also emotionally and psychically.

Siopis' painting *Furioso*, exhibited on 'Furies' at Brodie/Stevenson in 2010, establishes the connection between Tsafendas and the octopus in Siopis' work (figure 3.21). Judge Wilfred Cooper, a retired judge of the Cape High Court, who led the defence for Tsafendas, recalls the moment of Tsafendas' sentencing, and the reference to Tsafendas as a 'furiosis' (a term also deployed by Keys in the title of her documentary). Cape Judge-President Beyers 'in a stentorian voice declared that as psychiatrist followed psychiatrist in the witness stand it had become clear that Tsafendas was a psychophrenic – a lunatic, a furiosis, a mentally disordered person'.⁶¹⁵ The octopus Siopis imagines through the medium of ink and glue on canvas appears as an object of violence, its staring eyes indicate either life or death. Its body is brutalised, some tentacles are severed, and its head is wounded. The red ink invokes blood, perhaps human blood, as that of an octopus is blue. Siopis' application of the red ink to her

⁶¹⁴ Jill Bennett, 2005, p.10.

⁶¹⁵ Judge Wilfred Cooper: <http://www.outlitnet.co.za/seminarroom/mimis.asp> (accessed 27 October 2014).

surface suggests the processes of bleeding, blood spurts from the creature's body, and disperses. The octopus here is bloody, and corporeal, the representation of violence suggests caricature, even parody, through the device of exaggeration.

Adams brings into view the brutal institutional aftermath of Tsafendas' trial, and the persistence of the tapeworm, in the reports that were produced during the course of his incarceration. Her description of events demonstrates the cruelty of Tsafendas' sentencing. Reading this historical account alongside Siopis' *Furioso* with its bloody, coagulating, violent surface we are made aware of the distinctions between the artist and the historian, which Godfrey draws into a dialogue in his essay.⁶¹⁶ The artist may bring affective excess to historical sources, while the historian is still subject to the disciplinary codes of detachment and objectivity:

As he was found to be insane, Tsafendas could not be tried and could not be held responsible for the death of Hendrik Verwoerd. The apartheid regime, nevertheless, exacted its psychic revenge. Instead of being sent to a mental hospital, which was what the law decreed in cases of insanity, he was placed in the Maximum Security section of Pretoria Central Prison, Section C (for white prisoners), in solitary confinement for a period of 23 years and denied any human contact except with his prison warders. This was also the section in which prisoners condemned to death were held. He was kept close enough to the death row section, perhaps to be reminded what his fate should have been were it not for the civilised mercy of 'a highly civilised country'. The periodic reports on Tsafendas, year after year, simply repeated the following: prognosis poor; persists with his 'delusion [waangedagte] of the worm'.⁶¹⁷

Writing in the *New Statesman*, in 2000, journalist Jon Robins, draws attention to the language often attached to Tsafendas and the story of the tapeworm. His text also tells of prejudices attached to Greek identities in South Africa:

The story of "Tsafendas and the worm" has reduced the stature of this political assassin to little more than a freakish footnote in the liberation story. According to the legend, the delusional assassin was acting under the command of a giant tapeworm wrapped around his guts. This is the man the

⁶¹⁶ Mark Godfrey, 'The Artist as Historian', *October*, no. 120, (Spring, 2007), 140-172.

⁶¹⁷ Adams, 2011, p.26.

people of South Africa remember today – the crazy Greek with no race axe to grind – if they remember him at all.⁶¹⁸

Terms such as ‘freakish’, ‘delusional’, or ‘crazy Greek’ speak to the dehumanising historical terminology deployed for psychiatric conditions – currently still in colloquial usage, and ubiquitous in the press coverage of Tsafendas and his trial. Newspaper articles published at the time of Verwoerd’s assassination suggest that Greek/South Africans experienced some anxiety about Tsafendas’ Greek heritage, and were uneasy about being identified with him. Adams notes: ‘Amidst reports of Tsafendas’ Greek origins, fears of reprisals against South Africans of Greek descent increased markedly’.⁶¹⁹ She brings into view the nuances of prejudice and whiteness in South Africa which is neither homogenous nor monolithic. In a discussion of Krueger’s play, *Living in Strange Lands* (2001), she examines the recollections of the actor who played Tsafendas - Reno Spanoudes, a Greek South African: ‘Reflecting on the process of trying to write on Tsafendas, he describes how ‘many Greeks, Cypriots, Portuguese, Italians and Egyptians joined their fellow Chinese and Japanese detainees under the Group Areas and Immorality Acts’⁶²⁰ Spanoudes, who was a child at the time of the assassination, recalls threats and acts of vandalism: ‘You people are foreigners. You must go back to Greasy Greece where you came from’/ ‘You Griekies murdered our Prime Minister.’⁶²¹ Adams remarks on attempts to prove that Tsafendas was not of Greek origin at all.⁶²² An article on the front page of *The Cape Argus*, published the day after Verwoerd’s assassination, begins ‘Not of Greek Origin’:

Johannesburg, Wednesday, - Mr Peter Paizes, president of the Hellenic community of Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand, said today that he had

⁶¹⁸ Jon Robins, ‘The Assassin and the Tapeworm’. *New Statesman*, 27 March 2000 <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/137212> (accessed 9 October 2014).

⁶¹⁹ Adams, 2011, p.47.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.196.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p.195. See also p.106 for an account of Spanoudes memories of the Immorality Act and the Group Areas act which ‘were applied with equal ferocity to immigrants of questionable white pedigree’.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.

information that the alleged assassin of the Prime Minister was not of Greek origin, as had been originally reported.⁶²³

Siopis also refers in interviews to the distancing of South African Greek communities from Tsafendas. Siopis' own Greek heritage, and what the Tsafendas story might mean to her personally, is worth noting given her deployment of personal family narratives in *My Lovely Day*. Siopis speaks about the conditions of her own family's migration to South Africa, comparing their experiences to those of Tsafendas. Tsafendas had at one point written a letter to Roosevelt requesting American citizenship but was rejected:

[The stories about Tsafendas' struggle for citizenship] intrigues me because I suppose my grandfather was one of those Greek migrants who was probably seen to be an adventurer. He became South African. He became naturalised – this was my maternal grandfather. They were living in London. They were still Greek. They wanted to live in what they thought was a warmer climate – either the States or South Africa because they had an asthmatic child. They applied to both countries. And of course South Africa wanted white people to bolster the white community here at that stage. It doesn't mean to say that he might not have got citizenship in the States. He spent some time in the States. The point was I was very aware of my grandfather's life as told to me by my grandmother because I never met my grandfather. He was migrating all over the place trying to find a home. He was more of an entrepreneur. He had rights. Whereas with Tsafendas he was a person with no rights.⁶²⁴

Verwoerd's heritage is also embedded in histories of twentieth century migration to South Africa, although his trajectory is somewhat different to that of Tsafendas. This is unsurprising given the social, political and historical conditions of white supremacy described, and associated discourses and ideologies of race. Verwoerd was born in Amsterdam in 1901 but in 1903, his father, Wilhelmus Johannes Verwoerd, emigrated, with his family, to South Africa. Immigration from Europe was encouraged at this time. The expansion of a white population was formally supported by Lord Alfred Milner, High Commissioner in South Africa from 1898 to 1905 and the 'main architect of British policy'.⁶²⁵ Some of these immigrants, William Beinart notes, were 'absorbed into

⁶²³ 'Decision on funeral today' (headline, followed by various front page articles by staff reporters). *The Cape Argus*, Wednesday, September 7, 1966.

⁶²⁴ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), 1 November 2011, Cape Town.

⁶²⁵ Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, 2001, p.66.

Afrikaner society' and 'included the Dutch parents of one of the strongest Afrikaner nationalists of the twentieth century, Hendrik Verwoerd'.⁶²⁶ Adams remarks, that during the trial Verwoerd's 'foreignness' was figured in Tsafendas' narratives - 'Some of these delusions were recounted in court: Verwoerd was a foreigner, whereas he Tsafendas was a South African; his mother was a member of an overseas Royal family, Von Willem ('Ask Prince Philip', he writes to Gordon Winter in 1976, 'he will give you more details and a better description')'.⁶²⁷ The theme of class, and other anxieties either obscure or grounded in social and political realities, are present in Tsafendas' telling of tales about himself, and are invoked in Siopis' subtitles. Each anecdote, official document, cultural text, or image of Tsafendas leads to a potentially labyrinthine historical process of attempting to imaginatively reconstruct his biography, and comprehend the conditions of extreme prejudice into which he was born as an illegitimate, mixed-race subject. His convoluted, peripatetic existence between countries, borders and psychiatric institutions is reconstructed by Adams.⁶²⁸ Even though Tsafendas' father, step-mother and their four children were granted permanent residence in South Africa in 1937 Tsafendas himself was refused.⁶²⁹ Adams draws attention to the contents of a 'folder of Volume Three of the Commission of Enquiry documentation in the National Archives in Pretoria' and a document titled 'The contents of Briefcase belonging to D. Tsafendas', a list consisting of:

ninety-nine items and is three pages long. The items on this list include immigration documents, rent receipts, pay-slips, deportation orders, driving licenses, savings books, hospital and clinic cards from cities that included Pretoria, Athens, Lisbon, Jerusalem, Frankfurt, London, Cape Town, Brussels and many more.⁶³⁰

Displacement is embodied by *Obscure White Messenger* and the subject called into being is an unsettled subject, a subject without a coherent, stable narrative; a place

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p.74.

⁶²⁷Zuleiga, 2011, p.24.

⁶²⁸Ibid.,pp. 28-32.

⁶²⁹Ibid.,p. 30.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.,p.28.

through which to imagine the myths and ideals of belonging, whether through citizenship, nationality or systems of shared belief. A man walks down a flight of steps and seats himself on a landing (figure 3.38). Behind him a window lets in some light but we cannot see his face, his shadow is cast on the wall behind him: 'Are you Mozambican?' Siopis selects another sequence from her archive of found film: a man in a white coat and cap in a park. His back is turned to the camera, and around him are trees and people on benches (figure 3.39). Subtitles read: 'couldn't get citizenship' / 'because they said I was a communist'. A man stands in front of a display of religious icons: 'Are you Greek? At first, reading race, I assume he is not Greek, and then I am frustrated by the assumption I make (figure 3.40). A procession of priests in Orthodox dress: 'A Greek Orthodox priest in Rhodesia' / 'said I was not a Greek but a Turk' (figures 3.41-3.42).

Tsafendas left South Africa in 1941 on a Greek Merchant, the S.S. Livanos, where he worked as a mess boy.⁶³¹ Adams scripts a summarised biography of Tsafendas documenting his travel to the United States, Canada, various Western European countries, the United Kingdom, Palestine, Turkey, and Eastern Europe. His life appears as a convoluted trajectory of applications for permanent residence, followed by refusals, illegal entry, arrest, deportation and time spent in psychiatric institutions, as well as a time of refugee status and periods of living and working in Greece, Portugal and Germany.⁶³² His work included a bout as a translator in Greece in 1949 as part of a post-war American reconstruction project, trading as a hawker in Portugal, teaching English in Palestine and Turkey, and working as a court interpreter in Durban, in 1965, before he was employed as a parliamentary messenger in Cape Town.⁶³³ It appears that after leaving South Africa in 1941, it was only in 1963 that Tsafendas returned to Mozambique, and was given 'a permit for temporary sojourn to enter South Africa'.⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, pp.28

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.32.

This was followed by travelling to what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Malawi, and Mozambique followed by Durban and then, in 1965, Cape Town.⁶³⁵ He began working at the House of Assembly on 1 August 1966, as a ‘temporary parliamentary messenger’.⁶³⁶

Following the stabbing of Verwoerd, Tsafendas was held on Robben Island and then transferred to the Maximum Security Section of Pretoria Central Prison on 14 November 1966.⁶³⁷ On 30 September 1989 he was moved to Zonderwater Prison near Cullinan.⁶³⁸ Finally, in 1994 he was moved to Sterkfontein Hospital in Krugersdorp.⁶³⁹ He died there on 7 October 1999 at the age of 81.⁶⁴⁰

Colour

Siopis pictures Tsafendas in the ink and glue portrait, *In Alexandria*, one of the works exhibited with *Obscure White Messenger* on ‘Furies’ at Stevenson in 2010 (figure 3.43).⁶⁴¹ A corporeal, fleshy form is ambiguously pink-white suggesting visual connections with the octopus in the film which Siopis connects with Tsafendas and Mandela’s ‘obscure white messenger’: ‘Mandela himself almost dismissed him and called him (that’s where I get the title from) that obscure white messenger [...] I thought that title was amazing, and also the octopus is a bit white. It’s a bit pale and washed out’.⁶⁴² In the portrait, this whiteness and paleness is exaggerated. Siopis

⁶³⁵ Ibid.,p.32.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.,p.32.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.,p.108.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.,p.108.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.,p.108.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.,p.108.

⁶⁴¹ This point was clarified by Jessica Smuts, Stevenson gallery over email, 26 October 2014. There appear to be inconsistencies in the review by Buys referred to earlier where another work is referred to as *In Alexandria* <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-09-28-white-spectre> (accessed 29 October 2014).

⁶⁴² Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 1 November 2011.

obscures the borderline of skin and the interior of flesh, organs, bone and blood. In the works corporeal translucency there are subtle connections with the material of the film, imagined metaphorically as skin vulnerable to surface disturbances wrought by time. It also suggests the mechanisms of medical imaging technologies allowing us to envision the interior spaces of a living body. Amongst the flesh and organs of Siopis' Tsafendas an image of the worm is visible. Here, this animal, which figures so powerfully in his imagination, is diminished in scale. It is small, innocuous, and humorous, ridiculous even, embedded in this fleshy, washed out portrait of Tsafendas whose eyes Siopis renders vividly amongst the muted, whited out, facial features of nose and mouth.

Obscure White Messenger incorporates sequences which bring race into view, either overtly or obliquely. The video's mobilising of a vocabulary of race appears as snippets of memories that recall racial labelling and objectification: 'Are you coloured?' Elsewhere: 'I think they classified me white' (figures 3.44-3.45). In South Africa, the histories, discourses, ideologies, vocabularies, and the anxieties brought to mixed-race subjects of colonial discourse, take on particular inflections within the conditions of apartheid. The apartheid category coloured was mobilised as a way of naming subjects of mixed-race and, more ambiguously, those who appeared to be not white enough, as the narrative of Spanoudes attests.⁶⁴³ Adams notes that in 1965 Tsafendas arrived in Cape Town at the invitation of Helen Daniels, and comments on his 'unsuccessful courtship of her', Tsafendas was then classified white, and Daniels coloured.⁶⁴⁴ The story of Tsafendas and Daniels is romanticised in particular instances and imagined as an unrequited love within the conditions produced by apartheid legislation.⁶⁴⁵ These narratives foreground the implications of the Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950) criminalising love, sex and desire across pre-determined racial categories. Adams states that apparently 'Helen Daniels told her father that 'Demitrio

⁶⁴³ Zimitri Erasmus, (ed.), *Coloured by History: Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town* (South Africa: Kwela Books and South African History Online, 2001).

⁶⁴⁴ Zuleiga Adams, 2011, p.32 and 194.

⁶⁴⁵ Adams refers to Anton Krueger's play, *Living in Strange Lands* (2001), see p.199.

does not come up to the standards I am looking for in a man.”⁶⁴⁶ Van Woerden narrates that Tsafendas attempted, without success, to be re-classified coloured through the Population Registration Office drafting an official declaration in which he expressed ‘the intention of entering into marriage with a woman of mixed racial origins’.⁶⁴⁷

During the course of my research on Verwoerd and Tsafendas, in South Africa, which included everyday conversation, I would often hear references, in the mode of anecdote, to the apparently ambiguous racial status of Verwoerd’s wife. Van Woerden also recalls this preoccupation with whiteness in the figuring of the wife of the ‘Architect of Apartheid’ himself: ‘everyone knew that this Verwoerd was himself married to a Coloured woman. She had “passed”, or her mother had “passed”. So now she was white’.⁶⁴⁸ Adams comments: ‘The Verwoerdian period brought into sharp focus the fragile and unstable quality of “being white”: if whiteness became a legislated category, one could of course become “white”’.⁶⁴⁹

In *Obscure White Messenger*, the power relations of race and class are embodied by many of the film sequences that Siopis selects from her archive of found film. Siopis draws attention to the found footage she discovers and their suggestion of what she calls ‘micro-narratives’ about everyday South African life within conditions of apartheid. At the same time, she thinks about the ethical question of using the ‘home movies’ of private people, most likely no longer alive:

The people who made them mostly are dead. And what they show is this dead life coming alive again but in the hands of somebody else, and doing something different with the material. And in some ways it is a bit transgressive. It is a bit disrespectful. But at the same time this is a history of South Africa. These films are these micro-narratives. These little stories. These stories mostly of white

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p.199.

⁶⁴⁷ Henk van Woerden, *A Mouthful of Glass*, transl.1998, p.95.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., p.105.

⁶⁴⁹ Adams, 2011, p.32.

people and their encounters occasionally with black people but usually in negative contexts or situations with servants.⁶⁵⁰

A public event is depicted: A man in suit and tie is in the foreground, and a child, a boy, is in front of him (figure 3.45). What appears as a Zulu shield and spear is visible, perhaps produced for the consumption of tourists. The man and the boy smile as they face the camera and the unknown person who films them. A crowd taking part in a competitive ritual progresses towards us up a road, watched by spectators on the sidelines, the footage is at first blurry (figure 3.46-3.47). The subtitles, in dialogue with archival sources, narrate that Tsafendas was classified white when he ‘worked as a parliamentary messenger’/‘because I was very light’/‘my complexion’/and because my English’/‘my pronunciation was good’ (figures 3.48-3.50). Another question: ‘But didn’t you apply to be coloured’. The response: ‘I did apply’. A public figure, wearing what appears to be a mayoral chain of office, stands on a podium, in front of a microphone, beneath a large umbrella (figures 3.51-3.52). Other men stand behind him. The man speaks into the microphone, although his words are unheard by us. A black man carrying a broom, and ostensibly in the dress of a servant, walks up towards the suited white men elevated on their podium.

The register of the music shifts: less jarring, now plaintive once again. A phrase – ‘but I never wanted to be coloured’ – accompanies sequences of what appear to be a playful, light-hearted filming of a family seaside holiday, a dark blue sea edged by a rocky landscape (figure 3.53). A youth in rolled-up jeans and a white shirt, clambers onto rocks at the water’s edge, and stages a pose. Next a woman in a swimming costume performs for the camera, balancing on the rock, on one leg (figures 3.54-3.55). The subtitles read: ‘but the only girl who wanted to marry me’/‘didn’t have the right identity card’. The woman climbs down from the rock and gestures towards people we cannot see. ‘I couldn’t keep changing’, says the text, as the young man, encountered earlier, re-enters the scene with a woman in a black dress (figure 3.56). She performs playfully for the camera, as if dancing. Once again, images and texts are detached from their contexts, and the pleasure of a family holiday is underscored by

⁶⁵⁰ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), 1 November 2011, Cape Town.

subtitles that speak of love and desire across the colour bar, forbidden by the apartheid state, and policed by legislation, and state bureaucracy. Texts speak unequivocally to the classificatory practices of apartheid South Africa but the decontextualised images yield nothing other than what they are imagined to mean. A cable car makes its way down a mountain: 'when I got here', I read, unable to determine the location of the 'here', 'I got an inferiority complex' (figures 3.57-3.58). Now the landscape is recognisable: Signal Hill in Cape Town. A mountain is obscured by cloud (the mountain could be anywhere): 'I wanted to be blonde with blue eyes' (figure 3.59). The words of Tsafendas sourced from archival documents and cultural texts merge ambiguously with Siopis' editing processes and reconstructions.

Colour, or rather the idea of colour, is woven into the fabric of *Obscure White Messenger*. The body of Tsafendas, conceived of historically, is the site of contingent, oscillating projections which mark him, discursively and psychically, as an Other, that from the perspective of race, in Frantz Fanon's sense, locks him into the 'massive psychoexistential complex' engendered by 'the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races'.⁶⁵¹ The subtitles tell us: 'Are you coloured?/ I think they classified me white'/'because I was very light'/'my complexion'/'But didn't you want to be coloured'/'I got an inferiority complex'/'I wanted to be blonde with blue eyes'. Tsafendas emerges as the discursive subject of narratives and ideologies embedded historically in the idea of race. Situated within a context of racial trauma, and apartheid bureaucratic processes, the questions staged by the video's subtitles are interrogatory, and the responses indicative of anxieties engendered by not fitting, visibly and unambiguously, into pre-determined, state-orchestrated racial categories. The archive of Tsafendas demonstrates the violence enacted through the reduction of human subjects to racial categories, and the textual sources, which Siopis selects, alerts us to ideologies and discourses of white supremacy intent on the discursive construction, and separation, of racial types and hierarchies. The 'inferiority complex'

⁶⁵¹ Frantz Fanon, (translated from the French by Charles Lam Markmann). *Black Skin, White Masks*. (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p.12. Originally published in French as *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1952).

referred to in *Obscure White Messenger* is countered too by the 'superiority complex' of the white supremacist logic brought into view, in the work of Fanon, in Algeria.⁶⁵²

Fanon's inquiry, written in relation to a particular historical time and place, is not understood here as a theoretical template against which the figure of Tsafendas is to be mechanistically read. But it does enable a consciousness which takes into account the psychic trauma enacted by apartheid, and the violence inflicted by its ideologies and discourses. These do not exist, as the experience of apartheid so visibly and exaggeratedly demonstrated, within the realm of theoretical abstraction, but rather are knotted into the fabric of the most innocuous aspects of everyday life itself.⁶⁵³

The scholarship on race has made visible political, social, psychic and epistemic anxieties attached to sex and desire across pre-determined racial boundaries.⁶⁵⁴ It has drawn attention to the terminologies, geographical specificities, and histories through which the mixed-race subject is brought into being.⁶⁵⁵ Hybridity, a contested term, attached to colonial imaginings of miscegenation, is theorised in the work of Robert Young and the volume edited by Coombes and Avtar Brah: *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (2000).⁶⁵⁶ Young, for example, traces its lineage to colonial discourses which deploy hybridity to speak against racial mixing not only

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Adams' dissertation is an important study of the Tsafendas case in relation to the psychic effects of race within the conditions of colonialism and apartheid. Her emphasis on Tsafendas' archive encompassing archival documents and fragments both official and banal draws attention to the overlaying of state-sanctioned institutions, functioning as authoritative, official, meta-narratives; and the innocuous, idiosyncratic experiences and encounters of everyday life.

⁶⁵⁴ I draw particularly from selected scholars and writers who write in relation to the African continent, the Caribbean, Haiti, North America and the United Kingdom. Writers whose work has been of interest to me historically are: W.E.B du Bois; Frantz Fanon; Édouard Glissant; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Françoise Vergès. I am especially interested in the work of scholars who work on race from the proximity and ground of lived and historical-theoretical knowledge. In South Africa, the work of Zimitri Erasmus has been of particular importance for my work. See also: Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post Slavery Subjects* (United States: Duke University Press), 2010.

⁶⁵⁵ See: Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombes, *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁶⁵⁶ Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 1995; Brah and Coombes, *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, 2000.

socially but also sexually: thus the term itself embodies and reinstates languages embedded in race, prejudice and relations of power. Colonialism, Young argues, was 'always locked into the machine of desire' and nineteenth century European colonialism's fetishized preoccupation with the children of 'whites' and 'non-whites'.⁶⁵⁷ He asserts that 'folded within the scientific accounts of race, a central assumption and paranoid fantasy was endlessly repeated: the uncontrollable sexual drive of the non-white races and their limitless fertility'.⁶⁵⁸ Cheryl Hendricks, in dialogue with Young, and writing from the perspective of colonial histories at the Cape observes:

The representations of those of 'mixed' descent (which is a signifier for coloured identity) are tied to racial and sexual politics. For, to conceive of people as of 'mixed' descent it is necessary to believe in the existence of separate 'races', 'racial purity' and, concomitantly, that sexual intercourse between 'races' – 'miscegenation' – produces a hybrid group [...] Young (1995), analysing hybridity through the interrogation of colonial desire, emphasises that it is mainly by exploring hybridity that the language of 'race' is fully revealed.⁶⁵⁹

Historical discourses and ideologies of race that have functioned to sediment racial violence, and imagined notions of superiority-inferiority, continues to haunt contemporary life and culture. *Obscure White Messenger* makes manifest the trauma inflicted by these histories through its recasting of the archives of Tsafendas, and Verwoerd: 'I got an inferiority complex'/'I wanted to be blonde with blue eyes'. Zimitri Erasmus draws attention to the anxieties and lived experiences embedded in the experience of having been categorised coloured in South Africa:

Being coloured often means having to choose between blackness and whiteness. When one lives aspects of both these cultural identities having to choose one means the denial of some part of oneself. This is not easy especially when one's actions are judged in these stark racial terms. Being coloured means the privileged black and the 'not quite white' person. It means a

⁶⁵⁷ Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 1995, pp.180-181.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.181.

⁶⁵⁹ Cheryl Hendricks, "'Ominous' Liasons: Tracing the interface between "race" and sex at the Cape', in Zimitri Erasmus, 2001, p.29.

distinction between being 'sleek' or *kroes* haired, and between being *kris* (Christian) or *slams* (a derogatory term for Muslim). Being coloured is about living an identity that is clouded in sexualised shame and associated with drunkenness and jollity.⁶⁶⁰

To be coloured is to experience political domination but it is also to risk the 'exclusion and subordination of black Africans'.⁶⁶¹ Erasmus writes, for example, of the politics of hair and skin in coloured identity formation: 'dark skin and kinky hair are the markings of coloureds constructed as 'other coloured', inferior or lower class'.⁶⁶² 'These exclusions', Erasmus notes, 'are reflections of unresolved internal contradictions at the heart of coloured identity formation. Living with these contradictions is part of the pain of being coloured.'⁶⁶³ Erasmus draws attention to discourses that associate colouredness with 'immorality, sexual promiscuity, illegitimacy, impurity and untrustworthiness'.⁶⁶⁴

Hendricks points out that 'coloured identity has largely been dismissed as a social construction of the Apartheid regime'.⁶⁶⁵ In her work with Edgar Pieterse, Erasmus asserts: 'Underlying the notion that there is no such thing as coloured culture and identity is the assumption that because coloured identity does not have an 'essence', in the sense that African ethnic identities are assumed to have one, it is not a "real" identity'.⁶⁶⁶ While the idea of coloured does exist in relationship to apartheid, its bureaucracy, ideology and discursive formations, this is not to say that coloured

⁶⁶⁰ Erasmus, 2001, p.13-14.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, p.24. See also: Zoë Wicomb, 'Shame and Identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa', in Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly, *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁶⁶⁴ Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 2001, p.21.

⁶⁶⁵ Cheryl Hendricks, "'Ominous" Liaisons: Tracing the Interface between 'race' and sex at the Cape', in Erasmus, 2001, p.29.

⁶⁶⁶ Erasmus, 2001, p.21. See: Zimitri Erasmus and Edgar Pieterse, 'Conceptualising Coloured Identities in the Western Cape Province of South Africa', in Mai Palmberg, *National Identity and Democracy in South Africa* (Pretoria: The Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa; The Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape; The Nordic African Institute, 1999).

identities and subjectivities were simply passive recipients of a pre-determined epistemic and ideological order. Erasmus notes that while coloured identities at the Cape were shaped by particular encounters, which existed in relation to power, 'elements of Dutch, British, Malaysian, Khoi and other forms of African culture [were] appropriated, translated and articulated in complex and subtle ways. These elements acquire their specific cultural meaning only once fused and translated'.⁶⁶⁷ The research of Erasmus et al emphasises the nuances of history, region, language, political affiliations, class and cultural practice in the making of coloured identities and subjectivities at the Cape.

This foregrounding of specificity is important, and there are other inflections to be brought to histories of subjects classified or named as coloured in South Africa. Also of significance are histories related to subjects who, while classified white, were regarded as racially ambiguous or culturally, ethnically or visually 'not quite white' within discourses enacted through the devices of white supremacy in apartheid South Africa.⁶⁶⁸ Everyday prejudices directed, for example, at Jewish South Africans or South Africans of Mediterranean descent were described through the examples of Krouse and Spanoudes.

The work of Françoise Vergès, and her participation in debates about coloured identities in South Africa, presents a critical perspective on concepts such as Creole, Creolité and Creolisation (deployed in post-apartheid South African scholarship).⁶⁶⁹ Vergès pays attention to the geographical and historical specificities attached to these terms and concepts forged in the historical relations between oceans, islands and

⁶⁶⁷Erasmus, 2001, p.21.

⁶⁶⁸ Erasmus does address this writing: 'Among [the texts] many limitations are its focus on the western Cape and the absence of a rural focus' (Erasmus, 2001, p.15).

⁶⁶⁹ Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael conceive of creolisation as a useful term for undoing apartheid categorisations in their introduction to the volume of essays published in *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*, 2000. Nuttall refers again to creolisation in her recent book *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008. Erasmus thinks about what creolisation might mean to colouredness in South Africa in *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, 2001. She draws on the work of Édouard Glissant and Françoise Vergès but while she explores the possibilities of creolisation for colouredness in South Africa she is careful to engage the specificities of that context.

plantations.⁶⁷⁰ Fanon's relationship to the Antilles is taken up by Vergès' in her critique of his work which draws attention to the specificities attached to different geographical and historical conditions of race. Her work expands a critical space that thinks about how foundational texts are themselves constituted and brought into being.⁶⁷¹ She complicates Fanon's relationship both to Algeria, and to his birthplace Martinique, troubling both his political narrative and the ground from which his psychoanalytic methods of analyses are formed. Vergès also reflects critically on Fanon's own masculinity conceived of in a traumatic relationship to race, to France, and the experience of colonialism. Algeria, Vergès argues, 'gave Fanon his dreamed filiation. It embodied the future of emancipated mankind and could claim, Fanon imagined, a precolonial past untainted by the whites'.⁶⁷² But Fanon's 'philosophy of the alienated subject that presupposed a before of truth and integrity and an after of regained authenticity could not be applied to the Creole subject'.⁶⁷³ In the Antilles, Vergès argues there 'was no precolonial culture and society to return to, no past to glorify, no heroic fathers, no moment before the Master.'⁶⁷⁴

For Erasmus, creolisation 'refers to cultural formations historically shaped by conditions of slavery'.⁶⁷⁵ The 'creolisation of colouredness', she argues, 'is not simply about cultural fusion, connection and contact'.⁶⁷⁶ She foregrounds historical conditions of contact and domination reflecting on how these 'shape and position the new cultural formation'.⁶⁷⁷ She notes: 'Coloured self-representations have been shaped by

⁶⁷⁰ See: Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Metissage* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁶⁷¹ Françoise Vergès, 'Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal', 1997, 578-595.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, p.594.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.594.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.594.

⁶⁷⁵ Zimitri Erasmus, *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, 2001, p.22.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.

struggles against dominant representations'.⁶⁷⁸ For Erasmus coloured identities were shaped not only through resistance and survival but also through 'compromises and opportunities in the encounters between settlers and what she calls 'indigenous Africans'.⁶⁷⁹ Erasmus, in dialogue with Vergès and others, explores how ideas about the Creole might open up how we think about and imagine coloured identities and subjectivities so as to recuperate a sense of agency and creativity in the otherwise debilitating and authoritarian conditions produced by racial segregation, labelling and categorisation. The work of Erasmus et al extricates coloured-ness from a discourse of miscegenation constrained by reductive, and violent historical and epistemological assumptions about race, and racial purity. Her work 'undermines the common sense view that conceives of colouredness as something produced by the mixture of other 'purer' cultures. Instead, it stresses the ambiguity and ceaseless fluidity of coloured identity formations while remaining conscious of the conditions under which they are produced'.⁶⁸⁰

Read from the vantage point of this theoretical and historical work the story of Tsafendas as a mixed-race subject allows us to grapple with tensions between apartheid as a brutalising force obliterating agency, and engendering enduring psychic trauma upon the objects of its madness; and apartheid as an oppressive system which was actively resisted through individual and collective acts of agency, and creativity, whether social, cultural, economic or political. The figure of Tsafendas emerges, in my historical imagination, as an example of the limits of agency in extreme conditions of racial authoritarianism. Myths, psychic projections, subjective identifications, discourses and ideologies constitute Tsafendas as a historical subject. Amongst other things, in the imaginations of those who encounter him he is an 'obscure white messenger' whose colour Siopis exaggerates and parodies in the portrait *In Alexandria*, and de-stabilises in the video.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., p.22.

⁶⁷⁹ Erasmus, pp. 23-24.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p.14

Transparency/Opacity

Opacity, in Édouard Glissant's sense, while applied to specific historical conditions and the example of the French Language, has conceptual significance to the internal logic of *Obscure White Messenger* and its dialogue with the story of Tsafendas.⁶⁸¹ Glissant's opacity - related to the 'indistinct' and 'unexplored' but embodied in a fertile substance and an insistent presence – offers a conceptual language with which to think about what cannot be readily represented or even comprehended in the aftermath of historical encounters located here within the context of the artist's encounter with traumatic histories. Glissant places concepts of 'transparency' and 'opacity' alongside one another:

Transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its own image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing.⁶⁸²

Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* disrupts the transparency of which Glissant writes. He linked transparency to 'Western humanity' and particular historical and geographical conditions of slavery and colonialism. He invokes the historical objectification and dehumanisation of subjects imagined, through ideologies and discourses of race, as Other. Glissant aligns transparency with a Western epistemology associated with Enlightenment clarity and rationalism which he links to 'the spirit of conquest and discover', an order of knowledge and being that conceives of itself as legitimate, as 'based on a Right'.⁶⁸³ Taking into account the construction of Tsafendas

⁶⁸¹ Glissant, Édouard (translated by Betsy Wing, 1997), *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997). Originally published in French by Gallimard, 1990. On Glissant's opacity and art historical perspectives see: T.J. Demos, 'The Right to Opacity: on the Otolith Group's Nervus Rerum' (chapter 6, pp.144- 1590, in T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (United States: Duke University Press, 2013); Tamar Garb, 'Gauguin and the Opacity of the Other: The Case of Martinique', pp.24-39, in Belinda Thomson, (ed.), *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010).

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, p.111.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.111.

as a subject of colonial and apartheid racial taxonomies, Glissant's 'transparency' is also applicable to South Africa and the discursive and ideological condition of the apartheid state; its particular assumption of 'a Right'. Tsafendas was unequivocally an object of this condition of transparency.

Siopis' video *Obscure White Messenger* deliberately obstructs, and undermines the assumption of this 'Right' which Glissant relates to 'transparency'. As Russell argues, in her articulation of the ethnographic, the medium of found footage 'denies the transparency of culture'.⁶⁸⁴ T.J. Demos relates the obstruction of the ethnographic gaze to Glissant's opacity in his analysis of The Otolith Group's film *Nervus Rerum*: 'this film is ruled by opacity, by the reverse of transparency, by an obscurity that frustrates knowledge and that assigns to the represented a source of unknowability that is also, as we shall see, a sign of potentiality'.⁶⁸⁵ Demos emphasises the 'significance of the "opacity" of the image', which resists, 'both the ethnographic gaze and the compassionate heart of conventional documentary practice'.⁶⁸⁶ He notes that opacity 'signals the image's impossibility of capturing the "truth" of its subject'.⁶⁸⁷ In *Obscure White Messenger*, opacity is registered not only in indecipherable relationships between images, texts and sounds. It is present in Siopis' foregrounding of the material substance of the film itself. I see sprocket marks, blurry images, and the colours and marks produced by obsolescent film as it encountered light and heat before Siopis transferred it to a digital format. Contrary to the forensic language of images produced by the visual technologies of criminality, psychiatry, and the news media, Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* constructed entirely out of anonymous found footage offers us no image of Tsafendas or the events described. Tsafendas is never visible and never actually knowable. Russell argues: 'Because the filmmaker works with images that are already filmed ("ready-mades"), she can distance herself from the body filmed'. She

⁶⁸⁴Ibid., p.238.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., p.145.

⁶⁸⁶ T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crises* (Duke University press: Durham & London, 2013), p.xx.

⁶⁸⁷Ibid., p.xx.

continues: 'In the intertextuality, fragmentation, and discursivity of found-footage filmmaking, the body has a very different status than it does in conventional ethnography. It is no longer representative of culture, but an element of culture, a signifier of itself.'⁶⁸⁸

The critical and political significance of Siopis' dialogue with the archives of Tsafendas in *Obscure White Messenger* is in the device of the found footage. This device, or visual strategy, refuses historical languages of visual objectification and violence.

Simultaneously, the material of the found footage, and how Siopis has selected and mobilised it in *Obscure White Messenger*, is not necessarily detached from the artist's own subjectivity and personal history. The work is also inflected by Siopis' dialogue with her Greek heritage and her family's migration to South Africa. This is a significant aspect of videos such as *My Lovely Day* which deploy not only the found footage but also the home movies filmed by her mother. For Siopis the found films are also not innocent and narratives of power and race are visible depending on who looks and how: 'They're also terrible indictments of what South Africa was at the time. These were all white people treating the country mostly as a playground and then obviously having the liberty to travel to other exotic places'.⁶⁸⁹ The strategies Siopis deploys in the making of *Obscure White Messenger* speak to the idea of opacity which Glissant theorises and which I am transporting to South Africa.

Adams, as historian, brings the Tsafendas archives into view and she has opened them up to analysis revealing the 'madness' of apartheid, its affects and psychic oppressions. These function both overtly and in ways that are less readily grasped. The archives of Tsafendas, which are constituted by official, anecdotal or cultural accounts, are compromised by the prejudices, assumptions and psychic projections of those who attempted to determine who he was. Tsafendas, as a subject forged by conditions of colonialism, apartheid and profound racial alienation, and violence, cannot simply be defined, categorised, labelled, or understood. Any such method, located in the

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.238-9.

⁶⁸⁹ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 3 November 2011.

assumption of a singular authoritative and objective voice, further enacts epistemological violence and the violence of historical 'Right'. Siopis mobilises visual-sonic-textual languages which bring affective-poetic proximity to the Tsafendas archives and thwarts the 'transparent' narrative. *Obscure White Messenger* suggests the presences, not necessarily distinct, of experiences, feelings and narratives which may yet surface. There are histories that are absent from the Tsafendas archive: The figure of his mother, her biography and her history, exists only in fragments. It is marked by the disappearances produced by historical power relations of race and gender in conditions of colonialism. Siopis invokes the absent-presence of Tsafendas' mother in the video itself. I read a subtitle: 'My mother was a mixed woman' and I see a blurry image of an illegible figure in an obscure landscape (figure 3.60). The textual authority suggested by a film subtitle is destabilised by Siopis' re-casting. She crops, makes additions, and inserts herself into the story of Tsafendas. We are uncertain whose voice it is we are reading, it may even be our own. We have established that the work deploys formal devices of temporal and affective disorientation and displacement. It appears to embody 'something', to invoke Pollock, of the affective-temporal sense of the encounter with trauma. Pollock writes of art that has this capacity to 'aesthetically affect'; to 'perform more than representation'.⁶⁹⁰ This is true of *Obscure White Messenger* and its refusal of literal or empirical forms of historical representation. The video thwarts a mode of representation which re-instates the epistemological and discursive violence enacted upon Tsafendas by the apartheid state. It refuses the colonial and apartheid mechanisms of visual violence. In Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger*, Tsafendas is neither fetish nor object of voyeuristic fascination: the video 'disrupts the hunger for mastery (*epistemophilia*) and sadism or voyeurism (*scopophilia*)'.⁶⁹¹

Dark water, its surface shifts and moves but I cannot see through it: 'What's eating you away?' (figure 3.61). The scene moves from water to street: a woman walks towards us, her form obscured by shadows (figure 3.62). She carries slices of watermelon. The

⁶⁹⁰ Pollock, 2013, p.7.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.8

music appears urgent and repetitive. I hear hoarse, rhythmic chanting, it sounds ominous, threatening even: 'My stepmother made a big mistake'. The woman moves closer, looks upwards and smiles (figure 3.63). She holds up a slice of the watermelon as if to offer it to someone: 'when the Portuguese chemist discovered/I had a tapeworm/he gave me some medicine/a powerful poison' (figures 3.64-3.66). The camera follows the woman as she pauses to offer the fruit to someone through a doorway. Another sequence of images appears. I see freshly caught fish, perhaps at a market, and the hands of a woman as she cleans and prepares them with a knife: 'He said/'You must bring the species head/I must study it'/I drank the extract/and the following day' (figures 3.67-3.71). The octopus reappears, and swims through the murky water of its tank (figure 3.72). Its body appears further away than before and a series of subtitles read: 'I went to the toilet and half of it was out/two or three meters'/I think it's still alive in the sewers' (figure 3.73-3.75). I read associatively and recall Siopis' reference to the tapeworm as 'the monster of apartheid': 'the tapeworm or the monster (the monster of apartheid) [...] All these multiple things we can read'.⁶⁹² I imagine the sewers as the murky, opaque conditions which make racial violence possible and enable its reinscription whether ideologically, discursively or in ordinary, everyday life.⁶⁹³ Pink light flashes across the surface of the film. The rhythmic music, accompanied by the hoarse, urgent chanting, is still audible. Then, the octopus swims more frantically upwards and downwards. It moves quickly, but there is nowhere else to go.

These sequences return us to Tsafendas' tapeworm re-imagined through the device of the octopus in Siopis' own poetic-affective recasting. They suggest Russell's sense of 'a montage of memory traces, by which the filmmaker engages with the past through recall, retrieval and recycling'.⁶⁹⁴ These 'memory traces' in Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* are embedded in the found films, the subtitles either fictive or historical,

⁶⁹² Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 1 November 2011.

⁶⁹³ See: Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, 'Introduction: Concentratory Cinema', in *Concentratory Cinema*, first published 2011, my edition 2014, pp.16-17.

⁶⁹⁴ Catherine Russell, 1999, p.238.

and the capacities of sound (subjectively heard and felt). But meaning is neither fixed nor transparent. Once again we are made aware of the constructed-ness of representation which draws our attention to the found film as an obsolescent material. The film, transferred to a digital format, is marked by the textures and residues of light and time. The world of the octopus is obscured by hues of pink registered in flashing light and discoloration. The empirical language of scientific inquiry is simultaneously invoked and obstructed by the poetic-mythical associations brought to image and sound: 'You must bring the species head'/'I must study it'. I project memories of myths and fairy tales onto the sequences of woman and fruit. These are mediated by the ominous soundtrack, and the subtitles which tell of a stepmother who 'made a mistake'. Van Woerden's biography, an important source for Siopis, narrates a fractious relationship between step-mother and step-son.⁶⁹⁵ Of the woman with the fruit, Siopis speaks of her own associations with Greece: 'She's just an ordinary Greek woman on an island eating *Karpousi* – Greek watermelon. Very much what you'd enjoy in the summer time [...] Lots of associations I myself brought to it'.⁶⁹⁶ In the subtitles, imagined as the voice of Tsafendas, the tapeworm is amplified in scale, the sense of threat palpable in the soundtrack Siopis selects for these sequences. But the octopus, viewed from afar, has diminished in scale.

Tsafendas, whom we cannot claim to know, is ultimately a figment of the imagination and an object of the projections, ideologies and epistemologies produced by the narratives which stake a claim to his image, and which fashion him as a historical subject. Attempts in cultural texts and historical work to recuperate a sense of compassion, humanity and redress simply contribute to a narrative that offers no truth, no way of really knowing who Tsafendas was, what he thought, or what his motives were for the stabbing of Verwoerd on 6 September 1966. Siopis' deliberately irreverent, subjective remaking of her sources invites us to reflect on the epistemologies of marginal subjects and the historical processes of reconstruction, which are also subjective.

⁶⁹⁵ Henk Van Woerden, 2000, p.38.

⁶⁹⁶ Interview (Penny Siopis and Yvette Greslé), Cape Town, 3 November 2011.

CHAPTER FOUR

'I wanted to imply that there is something under the surface that you cannot pin down': Minnette Vári's *Chimera* (White Edition 2001/Black Edition 2001-2002).

Mutability

Ghostly figures, human and non-human animals, animate and inanimate entities, migrate eerily across four screens composed from translucent voile fabric. Chimerical figures morph and transform, appear and disappear (figures 4.1-4.2). I hear strange fragments of disconnected sounds, not always identifiable – howling wind, snippets of music, human voices. The words spoken are not always audible or distinct and I cannot see who speaks. A woman's voice speaks in Dutch. Some sounds overlay others, but they also fade only to return. They are reminiscent of early twentieth century wireless communication technologies, the oscillating frequencies of radio systems and the scrambling of sound as radio frequency or television antennae are adjusted. In my imagination, otherworldly floating images and sounds recall the visual and sonic debris of science fiction genres, and fragments of lost civilisations forever detached from the historical and temporal ground to which they once belonged.

Minnette Vári's digital video *Chimera* consists of two editions. The white edition was produced in 2001 and the black edition between 2001 and 2002. In the white edition, figures and objects risk absorption and obscurity (figure 4.1). In the black edition the language of the photographic negative is suggested and emphasised by the ghostly translucency of the figures as they float on the voile screens (figure 4.2). In constructing *Chimera*, Vári filmed the white marble frieze in the Voortrekker Monument's Hall of Heroes and then edited and digitally re-configured aspects of it (figures 4.3-4.4).⁶⁹⁷ In the videos, the symbolic language of history painting or public statuary is apparent. I see a woman on horseback her arm raised in a dramatic, urgent gesture derived from panel 15 of the frieze (figures 4.5-4.7).

⁶⁹⁷ *Chimera* was commissioned for the 19th World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam in 2001. The white edition was shown there in 2001 followed by the black edition in 2003.

In Vári's videos chimerical figures, and human and non-human animals are foregrounded and float like phantoms lost in time and space (figures 4.8-4.9). In the visual world produced by the frieze, heteronormative and patriarchal gender identities and social roles, which function too within the parameters of Afrikaner Christian Nationalist constructions of racial difference, are fixed: this is a man, this is a woman, this is a child, this is a black man, and this is a white man, this is a white woman and this is a black woman.⁶⁹⁸ Non-human animals are similarly unambiguously rendered. I see horses, dogs, goats, sheep, oxen and so forth. The frieze contains white and black subjects alike within its all-encompassing whiteness (figure 4.10).

In this chapter, I set out to explore how Vári's *Chimera* enters into a dialogue with the Voortrekker Monument and the frieze in the Hall of Heroes. The Voortrekker Monument, located on Monument Hill, Pretoria, commemorates The Great Trek and the Voortrekkers, the name given to the burgher families who left the Cape Colony between 1835 and 1845.⁶⁹⁹ The Monument took 11 years to build: from 1937-8 and 1940-9.⁷⁰⁰ Initially the aim was to complete it in time for the centenary celebrations that were to commemorate The Great Trek on the 16th December 1938, an aim that was not met.⁷⁰¹ Its main structure, which was officially opened on 16 December 1949, was designed by the architect Gerhard Moerdijk who also oversaw the design and production of the frieze.⁷⁰² The frieze is composed of 27 panels and four sculptors

⁶⁹⁸ See: Liese van der Watt, 'The Comradely Ideal and the Volksmoeder Ideal: Uncovering Gender Ideology in the Voortrekker Tapestry', *South African Historical Journal*, 39:1, (1998), 91-110.

⁶⁹⁹ Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Cape Town, Tafelberg and Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p.161.

⁷⁰⁰ The South African art historian Elizabeth Delmont contextualised the Voortrekker Monument and the frieze, in the Hall of Heroes, in her 1993 article 'The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth'. This article was initially presented as a paper at the 1992 conference 'Myths, Monuments and Museums' hosted by the Wits History Workshop in Johannesburg. Her perspective is grounded in a South African historical discourse of resistance, which functioned as a critical counterpoint to the Nationalist ideologies of the apartheid state, and state-sanctioned, official histories. At the time of the 1992 conference, South Africa was in a process of political transition from apartheid. Delmont foregrounded the Voortrekker Monument's ideological function; its relationship to the fashioning of a National Afrikaner identity in the 1930s; and its participation in the making of myths central to the formation of the apartheid state.

⁷⁰¹ Delays were caused by the outbreak of the Second World War.

⁷⁰² Elizabeth Delmont, 'The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth', *South African Historical Journal*, 29:1, 76-101 (1993), 80.

executed the design: Peter Kirchoff, Laurike Postma, Frikkie Kruger and Hennie Potgieter.⁷⁰³ Life-size plaster models were completed in 1946 and then sent to Italy to be carved in quercetta marble.⁷⁰⁴ Elizabeth Delmont argued that European monuments, designed and constructed in dialogue with nationalist ideologies and sentiments, would have been seen by Moerdijk.⁷⁰⁵ She made a convincing case for the influence of the design and statuary of the *Volkerschlachtdenkmal* in Leipzig, although Moerdijk denied this claim (figure 4.11).⁷⁰⁶ Even so, the frieze in the Hall of Heroes draws on European nationalist architecture and sculpture, and deploys historical, mythological and biblical iconographies as well as Renaissance and other European modes of representation.⁷⁰⁷ Cynthia Kros, reflecting on the literature on South African public history and heritage, revisited Delmont's work, and drew attention to her demonstration of the 'supreme effort that was expended by its architect and artists to reference the Europe of the Renaissance and Enlightenment as well as to lay a nativist claim to Africa'.⁷⁰⁸

Twentieth-century theoretical critiques located in post-colonial, feminist and Marxist thought have laid bare the historical power relations and privileges of the European humanist and enlightenment subject imagined as a 'He', as Man. Historically, this subject's status as citizen relied upon factors of race (whiteness), geography (European), class and access to property and monetary wealth (inherited or acquired).⁷⁰⁹ Histories of colonialism and its offshoot in South Africa (apartheid)

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁰⁴ In a footnote, Delmont describes the Italian stage of the frieze's journey: 'Romano Romanelli was in charge of the project and he hired four other workshops in Florence. A total of 50 masons worked on the panel for which thick blocks (30 cm thick) of quercetta marble were used (fn.46, 89-90).

⁷⁰⁵ Delmont, 'The Voortrekker Monument', 1993, 80-81.

⁷⁰⁶ See Delmont, pp.81-86, for illustrations comparing the design of the *Volkerschlachtdenkmal* with the Voortrekker Monument.

⁷⁰⁷ Delmont, 'The Voortrekker Monument', 1993.

⁷⁰⁸ Cynthia Kros, 'Public History/Heritage: Translation, Transgression or More of the Same?', *African Studies*, 69:1, 63-77 (2010), 68-69.

⁷⁰⁹ See Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press, 2013). I refer, in particular, to chapter 1, 'Post-Humanism: Life beyond the Self, pp.13-54; and chapter 2, 'Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species', pp.55-104.

reinscribe the power relations embodied by this idea of Man. It is to historical European aesthetic ideals, outside of the ambit of the avant-garde and the experimental, that Moerdijk refers in the construction of the frieze. This art historical language was transplanted to the conditions of apartheid South Africa and functioned, within the parameters of the Voortrekker Monument, in service to the apartheid state.

Vári brings fluidity to the immutable nationalist architecture of the Voortrekker Monument and the frieze. I am concerned in this chapter with the visual, sonic and spatial strategies she deploys, which encompass performance and the interventions enabled by digital technologies. In *Chimera*, the bodily edges of animals and the clothes of figures pulse unexpectedly. The voile fabric of the screens onto which these images are projected ripple with the slightest breeze or touch (figure 4.12). Mutability is engendered by these diaphanous surfaces as images spill onto both the surrounding walls and the bodies of viewers (figure 4.13). The exhibition of *Chimera* as a four channel video projection refuses linear time and causal narrative. Viewers are able to walk around and in-between the screens, the experience of which is spatial and architectural (figures 4.14-4.15). The monumentality of the screens suspended from floor to ceiling simultaneously suggest and displace the imposing, unyielding presence of the Voortrekker Monument itself. *Chimera* is shown on a loop: the actual duration is 3 minutes, 32 seconds but the sound component is slightly longer, 5 minutes in length. Of this disjuncture between sound and the duration of the visual component of the video Vári says: ‘the result is that even though the loop repeats on a 3 minute basis, the audio is different every time. It segues on and on. It overlaps in a different way’.⁷¹⁰ The looping refuses causality and linear time: ‘The loop is completely circular. There is no beginning or ending. This is important for me. Wherever people enter the installation is the beginning of the experience for them; of the narrative. It ends when they choose to walk out’.⁷¹¹

⁷¹⁰ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷¹¹ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

Situated within the historical, social and political conditions produced by apartheid, Vári's affective visual language of whiteness and blackness, embedded in her making of a white and a black edition, is not benign. Critical discourses on race pay attention to the constructions, epistemologies and uses of whiteness and blackness to speak of the power relations and psychic damage engendered by racial violence.⁷¹² Vári's white and black editions suggest the affective and embodied experience of racial violence, although how these are felt and experienced through the process of viewing the work is, of course, subjective. Viewing the white edition I imagine the omniscient, all-absorbing, narcissism of whiteness produced by historical conditions of apartheid and white supremacy in South Africa.⁷¹³ The black edition is reminiscent of the photographic negative, and the absent-presence this now defunct analogue technology suggests: how and when its images of human and non-human animals and objects are seen or not seen is contingent on who looks, and the conditions of this looking. I recall Fanon's conception of the 'massive psychoexistential complex' engendered by 'the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races', engaged in the chapter on Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger*.⁷¹⁴ Fanon mobilises a psychological condition circumscribed by narcissism, although his vocabulary is lodged in the idea of man: 'The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness'.⁷¹⁵ Histories of white supremacy, and discourses and ideologies of whiteness and blackness in South Africa, are inscribed into the very fabric of the Monument.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² See, for example, the historical work of Fanon, W.E.B Du Bois, Audre Lorde, bell hooks all of whom are of significance to my own reading on race and gender. In thinking of inflections on psychic violence of race in South Africa, from contemporary perspectives, I also draw on the work of Zimitri Erasmus et al.

⁷¹³ In thinking about whiteness and the image I have drawn on the work of Christina Sharpe. See: her book *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post Slavery Subjects* (United States: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁷¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, (translated from the French by Charles Lam Markmann). *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Originally published in French as *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1952) p.12.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

⁷¹⁶ See: Alta Steenkamp, 'Apartheid to democracy: representation and politics in the Voortrekker Monument and Red Location Museum', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, Volume 10, Issue 2-3, September 2006, 249-253.

In Vári's account of her working process, she relates how she took her camera into the Hall of Heroes, and then 'ambled [...] walked in the direction of the flow of the narrative, around the Hall of Heroes, and backwards again, forwards and backwards'.⁷¹⁷ In the construction of the work she then selected scenes and using Photoshop, she cut and edited these together 'frame by frame'.⁷¹⁸ She draws attention to how the motion of walking through the hall remains as a residue in how the work is experienced: 'It's not like I had my camera on a dolly moving like a professional or a ghost. My own gait is in the image. So while you look at these images there's this ship-like gait, or my own gait translated into that rocking motion of walking'.⁷¹⁹ Vári's description of walking, a 'rocking motion', and a ship-like gait, embodied by the video, produces imaginative, associative connections: I think of the migration of the Voortrekkers as they travelled in the ox-wagons, on horseback and on foot. I also imagine an iconography of ships, oceans and coastlines which form a significant aspect of the histories of settlement from Europe to the Cape, and the historical relation of the Voortrekkers to these.⁷²⁰

The idea of the chimerical is alive within the fabric of Vári's work and its sonic aspects produce an aural bricolage of different kinds of sound including those that suggest human presence: 'whispers and footsteps and people'.⁷²¹ Vári recorded the voices and sounds of people at the Monument, and the sound of the howling wind, on the day she filmed the frieze. She also recorded tourists and tour guides who happened to be at the Monument on the day that she was there. In the video Dutch is audible, and Vári explains how she overheard Dutch tourists remarking on panels representing encounters between Voortrekkers and the Zulu King Dingaan.⁷²² One of the tourists

⁷¹⁷ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷¹⁸ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷¹⁹ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷²⁰ See Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 2003.

⁷²¹ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷²² Dingaan was one of the Kings of the Zulu nation. See Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 2003, pp.162; 164-5; 174; 177. See also revisionist narratives which critique the constitution of historical archives and the figure of the Zulu man in historical and cultural discourses: Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The*

overheard by Vári remarks in Dutch: ‘Here is Dingaan again [...] He looks different. He has a different head, they’ve got different faces in this picture’.⁷²³ Vári comments: ‘Which to me was interesting because of the chimeric idea, of a different head, something that doesn’t fit and has changed. So I kept this in the soundtrack’.⁷²⁴ Of the music, which includes Afrikaans folk music (*Boeremusiek*), Vári says: ‘there’s bits of music that I sampled from everywhere. There is an orchestral, operatic twentieth century piece that I captured where the male singer is saying: “I’m freezing to death” [...] it’s very dramatic’.⁷²⁵ This exaggerated, even parodic, dramatic sensibility is foregrounded by elements such as the orchestral music which we hear at the point of crescendo. Throughout *Chimera*, fabrics and clothing, and the bodies of human figures and animals, are made to pulsate as if wind-blown.

Chimera

Vári describes her experience of visiting the Hall of Heroes, and mobilises an affective vocabulary of strangeness and coldness: ‘It’s a strange place. Whether you visit in winter or summer it’s always very cold in there’ (figure 4.4).⁷²⁶ She extensively researched the mythological chimera, which she narrates, also attach it to the idea of winter ‘and the place where we go to remember, where we go to store, the idea of cold storage, history’.⁷²⁷ She explains how she ‘often [creates her] work starting from words or the origins of thoughts, of things, of different words’.⁷²⁸ Drawing from the OED, amongst other sources, she describes her usage of the term ‘chimera’ referring

Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention (United States: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁷²³ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷²⁴ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷²⁵ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷²⁶ Interview, Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷²⁷ Interview, 26 October 2011. In this interview, Vári says, about the Chimera: ‘I did some research to find out about its origin. I found the word *hima*, it’s Sanskrit. It means winter. It also means a goat of one year, one winter in age’.

⁷²⁸ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

to both its mythological and scientific associations, and the idea of ‘something made up of different parts’.⁷²⁹ In *Roget’s Thesaurus* ‘Chimera’ refers to that which is ‘lacking substance’.⁷³⁰ It exists in relation to words such as ‘insubstantial’, ‘non-physical’, ‘non-material’, ‘bodiless’, ‘incorporeal’, ‘ghostly’, ‘spectral’, ‘groundless’.⁷³¹ It appears too as a ‘mythical animal’ associated with others in a list that includes the unicorn, phoenix, griffin, centaur, Minotaur and others.⁷³² It is categorised under ‘Imagination’ where it is associated with words such as: ‘unreal’, ‘illusory’, ‘dreamy’, ‘fictitious’, ‘fabled’, ‘legendary’, ‘mythological’, ‘fabricated’, ‘thought-up’, ‘pretended’, or ‘make-believe’.⁷³³ The current on-line version of the Oxford English Dictionary refers to the Chimera’s mythological status as a ‘fire-breathing female monster with a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a serpent’s tail’; or as a ‘thing which is hoped for but is illusory or impossible to achieve’.⁷³⁴ An earlier version of the OED refers to ‘a fabled fire-breathing monster of Greek mythology, with a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a serpent’s tail (or according to others with the heads of a lion, a goat, and a serpent, killed by Bellerophon).’⁷³⁵ It refers also to ‘the terrible character, the unreality, or the incongruous composition of the fabled monster [...] a horrible and fear-inspiring phantasm, a bogey’.⁷³⁶ Or an ‘unreal creature of the imagination, a mere wild fancy; an unfounded conception’.⁷³⁷ In painting and architecture, according to the OED, a Chimera is a ‘grotesque monster, formed of the parts of various animals’.⁷³⁸ Vári

⁷²⁹ Interview, Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷³⁰ Davidson, (ed.), *Roget’s Thesaurus*, p.2.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 365.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, p.204.

⁷³⁴ See: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/chimera> [accessed via University College London’s on-line library catalogues on 10 April 2014].

⁷³⁵ See: <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/31708?redirectedFrom=chimera#eid> [accessed via University College London’s on-line library catalogues on 10 April 2014. This earlier version was first published in 1889, and has not yet been fully updated].

⁷³⁶ Accessed via University College London’s on-line library catalogues on 10 April 2014.

⁷³⁷ Via University College London’s on-line library catalogues on 10 April 2014.

⁷³⁸ Via University College London’s on-line library catalogues on 10 April 2014.

comments: 'The Chimera would also seduce victims before devouring them. This is also interesting for me because in any rendition of a series of events you have to seduce people to believe in the narrative. Hitler did it'.⁷³⁹ In Vári's *Chimera*, the notion of the chimerical as mythical, fabricated, illusory or ephemeral is brought to the Voortrekker Monument and the Hall of Heroes: sites of state-sanctioned historical memory.

The OED refers to the biological meanings of the chimera, which Vári also mentions: 'an organism containing a mixture of genetically different tissues, formed by processes such as fusion of early embryos, grafting, or mutation: "*the sheeplike goat chimera*"; 'A DNA molecule with sequences derived from two or more different organisms, formed by laboratory manipulation'.⁷⁴⁰ In her book *When Species Meet* (2008) Donna Haraway foregrounds the 'meaning of "chimerical vision" for "figuration" in an eighteenth century source' documented by the OED. She proposes that this 'meaning is still implicit' in her 'sense of *figure*'.⁷⁴¹ She writes that 'figures' help her 'grapple inside the flesh of mortal world-making entanglements' she calls 'contact zones'.⁷⁴² In Haraway's sense: 'Figures collect the people through their invitation to inhabit the corporeal story told in their lineaments'.⁷⁴³ These figures are 'not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another'.⁷⁴⁴ She continues: 'figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all the force of lived reality'.⁷⁴⁵ Reflecting on her work on cyborgs, monkeys, apes, oncomice and dogs Haraway conceives of these figures as both 'creatures of imagined possibility and creatures of fierce and ordinary reality' where 'the dimensions tangle and require

⁷³⁹ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁴⁰ See: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/chimera> (accessed via University College London's on-line library catalogues on 10 April 2014).

⁷⁴¹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.4

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.4.

response'.⁷⁴⁶ Haraway's conception of figuration and 'chimerical vision' as well as 'imagined possibility' and 'ordinary reality' is suggestive for Vári's dialogue with the frieze and her undoing of the prejudices and myths lodged within it.

Vári's *Chimera* foregrounds the chimerical mixing of human and non-human animals, and I will return to this, and the conceptual and political possibilities of Haraway's cyborg, in conclusion (figure 4.8). *Chimera* also pays significant attention to the non-human animals depicted in the frieze. For example, a ram, ewe, goat, and lamb is detached from the densely populated frieze in which they ordinarily appear: Panel 1, 'The Voortrekkers leave the Cape Colony', designed by Peter Kirchoff (figures 4.16-4.16.2). In panel 1, men and women prepare to leave the Cape Colony. They busy themselves with a number of activities: a woman packs a chest with household objects, another tends to the procession of farm animals lined up in the foreground (figures 4.16-4.16.1). One of the men whips oxen attached to his wagon while a woman seated at the wagon's front looks ahead (figure 4.16.1). A man, gun at his side, is mounted on a horse, and prepares to lead the party, a dog is visible alongside the horse (figure 4.16.2). The black subjects who historically accompanied the Voortrekkers from the Cape Colony are excised from this scene. In the background is a dense grouping of rows of oxen and presiding over the scene is a mountain range (4.16.2). All three of the male sculptors commissioned for the frieze were models for some of the figures in panel 1: 'Peter Kirchoff for the man on the extreme left, Frikkie Kruger for the horserider and Hennie Potgieter for the man tying up the sack on the extreme right'.⁷⁴⁷ But in Vári's re-casting of panel 1 male and female figures, including the Voortrekker leaders/artists, are excised. In the video, the animals are activated and propelled forward (figures 4.17-4.20). They are filmed by Vári, transplanted to a digital format, technologically transformed, and then finally projected onto the voile screens. The exhibition strategy of the four screens further displace the narrative within which the animals were originally fixed. Vári's re-imagining of panel 1 of the frieze includes

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., p.4.

⁷⁴⁷ Delmont, 'The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth', 1993, p.95.

the figure of a dog which she transported from panel 8 (figures 4.21-4.23). She narrates:

You see a scene where the Voortrekkers are leaving the Cape. But I've taken images from elsewhere in the Frieze. This dog appears in a different scene. I was taking something carved out of stone and making it liquid [...] It's not like faithful documentation of that scene or of that history but rather a re-interpretation, intervention in how these things have been put together.⁷⁴⁸

The dog, depicted in the frieze, was modelled on Moerdijk's pet which he named *Leeu* (or Lion). *Leeu* was a crossbreed, greyhound and collie, 'especially bred to approximate the description of typical dogs in that period'.⁷⁴⁹ In the way of affectionately attaching personalities to pets, the species dog and lion converge. In *Chimera*, the dog is transformed, by digital technology, into a pulsating figure. In the black edition, Vári's practice of digital colouring is pronounced and the body of the dog is re-imagined with his natural markings (figure 4.23). Vári's *Chimera* leads our eye away from human protagonists and towards the presence and meaning of animals in the narratives of The Great Trek. The story of *Leeu* opens up the practice of cross breeding animals and species to scrutiny: 'Leeu was bred specially to conform to the description of a typical dog from the Voortrekker era, i.e., a crossbred greyhound'.⁷⁵⁰

Haraway's work on dogs and wolves brings the more violent aspects of the historical relationships between human and non-human animals into focus. Her writings add to the historical, social and political significance of the figures of dogs encountered in Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas*. Her work draws attention to scientific experiments in service to the apartheid state. North American northern gray wolves were brought to South Africa with the intention of 'breeding an attack dog with a wolf's smarts, stamina, and a sense of smell to track down "insurgents" in the harsh border areas'.⁷⁵¹ These

⁷⁴⁸ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁴⁹ Jackie Grobler, *Discover the Voortrekker Monument* (Pretoria: Grourie Entrepreneurs, 1999), p.80. See also the revised 'Visitor's Guide and Souvenir', 2007, p.22.

⁷⁵⁰ Revised Visitor's Guide and Souvenir', 2007, p.22.

⁷⁵¹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 2008, pp.36-37.

experiments were unsuccessful and these wolf-dog hybrids ‘became failed mixed-blood immigrants in the apartheid state intent on enforcing racial purity’.⁷⁵² But the narrative does not end there, Following the official transition from apartheid, the imported wolves, and the hybrid animals bred from them, are transformed into commodities and ‘signifiers of security once again, as people terrified for their personal safety in the ripe, still racialized discourses of criminality rampant in South Africa engaged in a brisk newspaper- and Internet-mediated trade in animals’.⁷⁵³ This has had consequences for the animals who can no longer return to their country of origin and ‘epidemiologically and genetically “impure” these canids enter the cultural category of the disposable “homeless”, or in ecological terms “nicheless”’.⁷⁵⁴ Haraway concludes: ‘The new state could not care less what happens to these animate tools of a former racist regime’.⁷⁵⁵ Vári’s disruption of the apparently ordinary depictions of animals in the frieze itself brings into focus ‘species’ as the discursive and ideological locus of scientific inquiry, which is subject to and complicitous in historical human brutality and failure, hardly an objective, detached, empirical process. The term species is not benign:

The discursive tie between the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal – all reduced to type, all Others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution – is at the heart of racism and flourishes, lethally, in the entrapment of humanism. Woven into that tie in all the categories is “woman’s putative self-defining responsibility to “the species” as this singular and typological female is reduced to her reproductive function Other to man.⁷⁵⁶

Chimera counters this heteronormative female Other constituted by the ideologies and discourses of the apartheid state and lodged in the architecture and sculpture of the Voortrekker Monument. The chimerical figures which appear and disappear throughout Vári’s *Chimera* are, as I will demonstrate, an irreverent, parodic and

⁷⁵² Ibid., p.37.

⁷⁵³ Ibid., p.37.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., p.37

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., p.37.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., p.18.

disruptive presence working to subvert the Voortrekker Monument's discursive and ideological fixing of knowledge about the world. They are a critical counterpoint to the apartheid state's preoccupation with empirical forms of knowledge deployed most violently on its black subjects.

'Familiar Discomfort'

History of Art and Visual Culture scholarship, published from the late 1990s and into the new millennium, draws attention to the public circulation of images of the Voortrekker Monument in photographs, magazines, exhibitions and related ephemera.⁷⁵⁷ Annie Coombes considers the Voortrekker Monument's contested status as a site of Afrikaner Christian Nationalism and historical memory and grapples with its place in the post-apartheid context:

I am curious to know how far it is possible to disinvest such an icon of its Afrikaner nationalist associations and reinscribe it with resonances that enable it to remain a highly public monument despite a new democratic government whose future is premised on the demise of everything the monument has always stood for. How is it possible to simply accept the coexistence of such an oppressive reminder of apartheid?⁷⁵⁸

Coombes brings these concerns into view in her analysis of images and events emerging after the official transition to democracy. She brings a vocabulary of agency, self-fashioning and translation into play positing that the 'narrative of the interior frieze invites a performative reading'.⁷⁵⁹ This is, of course, suggestive to a reading of Vári's *Chimera* which is not discussed in Coombes' book. Coombes explores how the monument functions as a 'staging post for self-fashioning for both white and black

⁷⁵⁷ Delmont, 'The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth', 1993; Michael Godby, 'Dismantling the Symbolic Structure of Afrikaner Nationalism: Gideon Mendel's *Beloofde Land* Photographs', *South African Historical Journal*, 39:1, (1998) 111-12; Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa: History After Apartheid*, 2004; John Edwin Mason, 'Picturing the Beloved Country: Margaret Bourke-White, Life Magazine, and South Africa, 1949-1950', *Kronos*, No.38 (Special Issue: Documentary Photography in South Africa) [2012], 154-176.

⁷⁵⁸ Coombes, *History After Apartheid*, 2004, p.23.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

constituencies across the political spectrum’ arguing that the ‘semantic distance between them foregrounds the extent to which an apparently stable signifier of monolithic nationalist associations can be undercut by the necessarily hybridizing effects of different acts of translation.⁷⁶⁰ Coombes’ conception of the ‘hybridizing effects of different acts of translation’ is embodied by Vári’s performative relationship to the construction of the work, and her preliminary processes of filming and recording sound at the site of the Hall of Heroes itself. Vári disrupts and muddles the narratives captured and contained within the marble of the frieze and reinvents its narrative, its iconographies, formal conventions and visual vocabularies.

Coombes brings the performance of another female figure into view: Dina, who models at the site of the Voortrekker Monument, for the Afrikaans language pornographic magazine *Loslyf* (founded in 1995).⁷⁶¹ She discusses two photographs of Dina in the indigenous garden at the base of the Monument: ‘One of the primary conceits is that Dina is not another porn star but is apparently related to one of the central figures in the Great Trek Narrative, Gen. Andries Hendrik Potgieter’.⁷⁶²

Coombes writes that:

Mobilising the very discourses through which Afrikaner nationalism constituted itself as the guardian of the white race (civilisation) – the indelible bonds of blood and family – [Dina] is quoted as saying, “My great-great-grandfather, Hendrik Potgieter, has been my hero since my childhood. He was the sort of man who inspired people to trek barefoot over the Drakensberg Mountains so that we Boere could be free and at peace living here in the Transvaal. If only we could have a leader of his calibre today”.⁷⁶³

Coombes brings concepts of performance and humour into view and the capacities of these for critique particularly in opposition to historical conditions of authoritarianism. She observes that Dina’s apparent words are a ‘pastiche of the standard children’s

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., p.25.

⁷⁶¹ See: Coombes, ‘Sex, Censorship and Heritage’, In *History After Apartheid*, 2004, pp.39-42.

⁷⁶² Ibid., p.40.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.,p.40.

textbook version of the Trek'.⁷⁶⁴ A number of Afrikaner artists of Vári's generation, resist a traditional, state-sanctioned, monolithic national identity in their work and this concern is also present in how it is they speak about their practice. But acts of resistance, formulated in relation to apartheid, runs the risk of repeating and reinscribing the very language that is the object of critique. This is a challenge encountered not only by historians engaged in South African historiography but also by artists. Tamar Garb draws attention to this question in her analysis of Roelof van Wyk's documentary photographic project *Young Afrikaner – A Self Portrait* (2009). The photographs suggest multivalent languages, derived from histories of photography and art in Garb's text (figure 4.24).⁷⁶⁵ Garb concludes, alluding to the work's visual relation to freighted modes of representation: 'he refuses the traditional pictorial conventions and technologies that produced taxonomic representations of race' but simultaneously 'in focusing on the group called 'Afrikaners', Van Wyk engages with another powerful pictorial inheritance, to which he and his generation are heir'.⁷⁶⁶ The artist 'subjects himself to surveillance and confronts the complicity of his clan' in referencing the loaded photographic language of typecasting.⁷⁶⁷ Garb asks him what 'Afrikaner' means to him, and he replies:

The strongest bond we have as a group is located in the language Afrikaans. However, within that we have a very specific historical role as the oppressor, which is what differentiates an Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaner from an Afrikaans-speaking 'Coloured' person, who was on the receiving end of the apartheid system, the oppressed. That is how I start defining it. Exploring how we as a group carry forth that difference, that history, perhaps that guilt, into our current and future identity.⁷⁶⁸

Unlike Van Wyk's photographic project, a self-portrait not literally of the artist himself but rather of his circle, Vári, similarly to Searle, inserts her own body into the work.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., p.40.

⁷⁶⁵ Garb, *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography*, 2011. See Garb's analysis of Van Wyk's work pp.28-31 and her interview with the artist pp.295-297.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., p.31.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., p.31.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., p.295.

Garb draws attention to this strategy in her discussion of Van Wyk, contrasting his project to photographic works by artists such as Searle: 'Van Wyk stages himself by proxy, that is, through the depiction of a specific friendship group with which he closely identifies. And it is not all Afrikaans speakers that concern this "young Afrikaner". It is "whiteness", its association with the historic racial politics of "Afrikanerdom" and its vexed relationship to African identity, that Van Wyk lays open to exposure'.⁷⁶⁹ Van Wyk's project visually re-inscribes a mode of representation that walks a troubling line between glossy fashion photography, ethnographic photographic portraiture and the freighted visual codes of white supremacy. The work implies a detached, objective observer. His body is absent from the work.

The historical, political and critical significance of Vári's dialogue with the Voortrekker Monument rests in her insertion of self and body into the space of the work itself. In doing so she, as an artist, and an Afrikaans speaking Afrikaner subject resists a visual language that assumes objective distance and detachment. In the process of constructing *Chimera*, Vári placed herself within a site, the Hall of Heroes at the Voortrekker Monument, which functions as a material and affective reminder of what she calls 'familiar discomfort'.⁷⁷⁰ Vári explains how she came to make *Chimera*: 'I'd always wanted to do something about or with that monument'.⁷⁷¹ She describes the Voortrekker Monument as a 'centrepiece growing up in an Afrikaans environment'⁷⁷²:

For instance, as school children we were brought to this monument annually on specific dates, and at certain commemorative moments that celebrated The Great Trek. It was part of the Christian Nationalist process of being brainwashed and being made part of the people, the *Volk*. I have never been able to identify with that properly. My father was born in Amsterdam: half Dutch/half Hungarian. I grew up in a household that didn't subscribe to the 'rugby and *braaivleis*' culture and yet I was sent to Afrikaans schools where this

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., p.28.

⁷⁷⁰ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁷¹ Interview, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁷² Interview, 26 October 2011.

was really big. Their version of the Scouts, at school, was 'Die Voortrekkers'. I haven't talked about this for such a long while. That familiar discomfort.⁷⁷³

This extract draws attention to the heterogeneity of subjects conceived of as white Afrikaans speaking Afrikaners. Similarly to the chapter on Siopis, the artist's personal relationship to histories of migration from Europe to South Africa is highlighted. Vári foregrounds the presence of the Voortrekker Monument within her everyday line of sight during the course of her youth:

This monument stands on a hill and can be seen from a huge area around Pretoria. I spent a large portion of my youth in a place called Verwoerdburg and, of course, named after Verwoerd. There were streets named Monument Laan (Monument Lane) and you could see the Monument. You can see it from the streets and suburbs around.⁷⁷⁴

The Voortrekker Monument is deliberately raised up on high ground, on a *koppie* (or hillock) and set in an official nature reserve surrounded by a fence (figures 4.26-4.27). The daunting set of stairs that lead upwards towards the Monument itself, reinforces its emphasis, spatially and architecturally, on aspect and approach, on visibility, and its dominance of the surrounding landscape (figure 4.3). The Union Buildings, constructed between 1909 and 1913, are famously in its direct line of sight (they were, as Delmont notes, a symbol of South Africa's dominion status within the British Empire'.⁷⁷⁵ The main structure of the Monument has its own walled-in garden with a green, manicured lawn and indigenous plants, flowers and trees (figure 4.28).⁷⁷⁶ The wall is embellished with a frieze of the iconic Voortrekker wagon, its form repeated to structure a laager, a

⁷⁷³ Interview, 26 October 2011. On the beginnings of the Voortrekker youth movement referred to by Vári, and the broader historical context see Giliomee, Chapter 11 ('To stop being agterryers': The Assertion of a New Afrikaner Identity', pp.355-402). Giliomee describes how the Voortrekker youth movement for Afrikaners was launched in 1931 and became an 'officially sanctioned' form of 'nation-building' (p.400). Vári recalls spending time in the Voortrekker youth group: 'I was coerced into it by friends. We were having fun, we went on camps and I was in 'Die Voortrekkers' for about a year and a half. We were taught how to tie knots, how to build a fire and that sort of thing. But underlying all of that was a very strict, conservative Christian Nationalist Spirit. Young people were inculcated with this. At that time nothing really mattered except having cool friends, and listening to cool music, and doing fun activities' (Interview, 26 October 2011).

⁷⁷⁴ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁷⁵ Delmont, 1993, 80.

⁷⁷⁶ See: Coetzee, J.M., *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, p.3.

mode of fortification at times of conflict and war (the wall is the design of Professors E.C. Pienaar and A.C. Bouman).⁷⁷⁷ Giliomee describes the laagers constructed by the Voortrekkers: ‘a circle of wagons with thorn bushes jammed under and between the wheels’.⁷⁷⁸ I imagine the walled garden as a space of containment staged to separate an inside from an outside. These spatial significations of outside and inside are inscribed onto the suburban landscapes of post-apartheid South Africa, and the historically white suburbs barricaded against crime, the discourses of which bring race, violence and criminality into a relation.⁷⁷⁹

Moerdijk, Delmont demonstrates, obscures the ideological underpinnings of the narrative of the Great Trek and ‘stresses the notion of history as truth’.⁷⁸⁰ His aim, in his words, was to show ‘all the most important phases of the Great Trek’ and present a ‘complete and faithful picture of the important events’ connected with it.⁷⁸¹ There was also an emphasis on ‘the authenticity and accurate representation of everyday objects and details of the past’.⁷⁸² Delmont notes the emphasis, in the design of the frieze, on truth, authenticity, naturalism and its relationship to sources and events depicted.⁷⁸³ Preller is ‘said to have arranged for old Trekkers to be photographed and the photographers were “given orders not to touch up the wrinkles on the head-and shoulders-portraits they took”’.⁷⁸⁴ Delmont also draws attention to the emphasis on the ‘accurate rendition of individual likenesses and the constant use of life models in

⁷⁷⁷Delmont, 1993, ‘The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth’, 80.

⁷⁷⁸ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 2003, p.163.

⁷⁷⁹ See: Gary Kynoch, ‘Fear and alienation: narratives of crime and race in Postapartheid South Africa’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 47:3, (2013), 427-441.

⁷⁸⁰ Delmont, ‘The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth’, 1993, 92.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 92.

⁷⁸² Ibid. 92.

⁷⁸³ See Delmont on the frieze, pp. 92 – 97. Re-visiting the historiography of the frieze is beyond the scope of this chapter and may be the focus of future research.

⁷⁸⁴ Delmont, ‘The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth’, 1993, 92.

the service of authenticity' ('drawings of the Voortrekker leaders were used where possible, as in the cases of Pretorius, Tregardt and Erasmus Smit').⁷⁸⁵

Vári deliberately obscures official historical claims to authenticity, truth and objective narration. She speaks about the Monument's emphasis on the sacredness of the Great Trek narrative, which it preserves both spatially and architecturally: 'It's also about the preservation of a history. It's also made very precious. It's a hagiography basically of the Boers, and whoever they were. Because at the time of the Great Trek they were comprised of bunches of disparate people. It was not a homogenous group.'⁷⁸⁶ The sacred, articulated through the affective and symbolic capacities of architecture, space and precious material, is staged by marble surfaces, architectural scale and volume, lighting, and the spatial relation of the oculus in the upper Hall (the Hall of Heroes) to cenotaph and sacred flame in the lower Hall (figures 4.29-4.30). Delmont drew attention to the glass used for the four arched windows in the Hall of Heroes which 'casts a golden glow, emphasising the notion of sacred shrine' (figure 4.4).⁷⁸⁷ David Bunn likens the Voortrekker Monument to a tomb: 'With its laager of 64 encircling concrete wagons and its great protective dome, the Voortrekker Monument is a gigantic tomb containing the symbolic sarcophagus of the martyred trekker leader Piet Retief' (figure 4.31).⁷⁸⁸ Official historical narratives of Retief's death, told from the perspective of canonical Afrikaner accounts, is one of treachery and bloody massacre (instigated by the Zulu King Dingane on the 6 February 1838).⁷⁸⁹ In the subsequent Battle of Blood River on the 16 December 1838 Dingane and his army were defeated by the Voortrekkers led by Andries Pretorius.⁷⁹⁰ Delmont highlights ideological, spatial

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁷⁸⁶ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁸⁷ Delmont, 'The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth', 1993, 89.

⁷⁸⁸ David Bunn, 'White Sepulchres: On the Reluctance of Monuments'. In Hilton Judin, and Ivan Vladislavić (eds) *Blank: Architecture, apartheid and after* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers and Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 1998). Note: the book is not paginated but structured by sections, the Bunn article is to be found in 4C).

⁷⁸⁹ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 2003, p.165.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., p.165.

and symbolic references to the events of 1838 which are embedded in the design of the Voortrekker Monument: its oculus was designed so that at noon on 16 December the sun shines through it onto the closing words of the apartheid era national anthem: 'ons vir jou Suid Afrika' (figure 4.31).⁷⁹¹ She notes: 'Moerdijk equated the sun's rays with God's grace. In conflating the spiritual symbol of altar with the symbolic grave of a war hero and the closing words of the national anthem, and the sunlight with divine blessing, the connection between God and Country is overtly made.'⁷⁹² The frieze, and the architecture it inhabits, embodies an affective and seductive power. As Bunn puts it, 'less like a building than a machine for reproducing forms of affect associated with the fiction of Afrikaner nationalism: the founding exodus of the Great Trek'.⁷⁹³

Vári's deliberate intervention in the Voortrekker Monument, to which she herself has an articulated lived relation, suggests critical synergies with Pollock's work on trauma and aesthetic transformation.⁷⁹⁴ Vári made *Chimera* in 2001 following the official transition from apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's mediated public staging of an attempt to address a traumatic past. Now at this historical time, *Chimera* speaks to Pollock's conception of artworking: Vári journeys towards a site that produces within her discomfiting memories and associations and towards the narratives that were an aspect of her formation as an Afrikaans speaking subject and a woman classified white by the apartheid regime. Similarly to Ractliffe, Vári visits the site that is at the centre of the work. While Ractliffe documents from the edges of Vlakplaas, using the disposable camera, Vári works from within the heart of her site, the Hall of Heroes, filming the frieze as she walks, following its narrative, and then back again. Both Ractliffe and Vári then re-work and transform these documents of place and, in different ways, the physical, bodily actions of each remain as residues.

⁷⁹¹ Delmont, 1993, 88. The translation is 'We for you South Africa'. 'Ons vir jou, Suid-Afrika' is a line of 'Die Stem van Suid-Afrika' ('The Call of South Africa') which was the South African National anthem (1957-1994). Until 1997 it was kept on as the National Anthem alongside 'Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika'. The official National Anthem is now a combination of 'Die Stem' and 'Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika'. See South African History Online: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/national-anthem> (accessed 21 May 2014).

⁷⁹² Delmont, 1993, 88.

⁷⁹³ Bunn, 1998, 4C.

⁷⁹⁴ Pollock, *After-affects/After-images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum*, 2013.

Ractliffe pulls her constructed panorama beneath the suspended video; and we note the uneven action of this manual pulling. Vári's action of filming the frieze in the Hall of Heroes, while walking with a hand-held video camera, is registered in the uneven, and at times shaky, movements registered in *Chimera*. Vári's presence in the Monument, and her own subjective, historical relation to it, is embedded in the work itself. How she inhabited and moved through the space of the Hall of Heroes but also what she heard and how she listened is sonically re-imagined and registered.

Unreliable Presence

The *Historical Record* documenting the official opening of the Voortrekker Monument in 1949 contextualises the political significance of Vári's *Chimera* and its impetus to disrupt an official authoritarian narrative rooted in the patriarchal Christian nationalist ideology of the apartheid state. This text tells of the Monument's commemorative, ideological and discursive role in the formation of apartheid; and its place in histories of white supremacy in South Africa. Photographs issued by the State Information Office, Pretoria, depict various scenes from the 1949 inauguration. In one of these we see Doctor D.F. Malan (First Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, 1948-1953) who opened the Voortrekker Monument on 16 December (figure 4.32). Reminiscent of some of the footage that Siopis selects in the making of works such as *Obscure White Messenger* and *Verwoerd Speaks*, Malan is positioned spatially and hierarchically on a podium, beneath sun umbrellas, microphones are in front of him. The group of people that stand with him includes formally attired suited men, and a woman in full Voortrekker attire.⁷⁹⁵ His speech refers unequivocally to the ideology of his party and its alignment with a particular narrative of the Great Trek, and the Voortrekker Monument which commemorates it. Malan's speech is a document of propaganda; its performance of a supposedly benign rationality erases racially charged conflicts: 'Neither was it resentment nor hatred of any other race or section of the population which prompted them [the Voortrekkers] to leave home and hearth and to brave the

⁷⁹⁵ *Historical Record of the Consecration of the Voortrekker Monument, December 16th, 1949*, p.12.

privations and the dangers of the wilderness'.⁷⁹⁶ His account presents a narrative that opposes the apparently honourable Voortrekker and his 'military superiority' to 'the murderous treachery on the part of some native tribes'.⁷⁹⁷ The Monument is, in Malan's speech, a 'tribute to the Voortrekkers':

That is, however, an insignificant part of its meaning. It is not a monument to the dead, but to the living. It is not merely an ornamental structure of artistically arranged stone and granite, but it is the bearer of a message. And when your eyes, or the eyes of your children to most distant generations fall on it, it is intended that you should read on it a question – a question to you as a people and to you and your children as individual members of a nation. It is this deeply serious and soul-searching question: People of South Africa, also you who proudly strike yourself on the chest and call yourself an Afrikaner: where are you going?⁷⁹⁸

Photographs published in the *Historical Record* echo Malan's emphasis on children and future generations, descendants of the Voortrekkers. But the voices and narratives of subjects other than those representing state-sanctioned whiteness in apartheid South Africa are excised and indeed not even taken into consideration. One of the photographs published in the *Historical Record* represents the moment at which the Voortrekker Monument was officially opened (figure 4.33). Standing in the doorway to the Hall of Heroes are 'Six Afrikaner girls and six boys in Voortrekker costume' who 'opened the doors' following 'a signal from Dr. Malan in the amphitheatre'.⁷⁹⁹ On the left hand side of the doorway, panel 27, the final panel in the frieze is visible. It represents 'The signing of the Sand River Convention' in January 1852': Transvaal Afrikaners were given the official right to self-governance by Britain.⁸⁰⁰ The photograph, with its depiction of young Voortrekker descendants at the doors to the Hall of Heroes folds into the mythology of Afrikaner Christian Nationalism. The victorious signing visible in the photographed frieze is integral to this highly staged

⁷⁹⁶ 'Opening Speech by Dr. D.F. Malan' translated from Afrikaans to English in the *Historical Record*, 1949, p.20.

⁷⁹⁷ *Historical Record*, pp.19-20.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁸⁰⁰ Giliomee, 2003, p.175.

image. The Voortrekker Monument's history as a commemorative architecture deployed in service to the apartheid state is unambiguous. Simultaneously, this is not to say that the Monument, its Hall of Heroes and related sites and spaces, are not sites in which disruptive, critical and imaginative interventions and performances might take place.

The social, political, economic and cultural narcissism produced by ideologies and discourses of whiteness in apartheid South Africa is embedded in the historical narratives of the Voortrekker Monument. Alta Steenkamp notes that the Monument was deliberately 'constructed solely by white labour' (this was 'publicly stated') and 'non-whites were allowed into the monument only on Tuesday afternoons'.⁸⁰¹ Delmont considers the frieze's obscuring of narratives about black subjects who accompanied the Trekkers in the journey from the Cape: 'The builders of the Monument acknowledged both the presence of servants on the Trek [...] and the death of many in battle [...] Yet there are only two representations of servants in the entire frieze'.⁸⁰² They 'perform menial tasks' and are 'depicted in the background' ('one from back view' and the other 'from side view').⁸⁰³ John Edwin Mason examines Margaret Bourke-White's two photo-essays covering South Africa for *Life Magazine* (1949-50): the first focused on the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in December 1949. His analysis makes visible a photograph's depiction, as if it were a normal and natural state of affairs, the disempowerment of black women in historical conditions of apartheid and, indeed, broader geographical-historical conditions notably the United States: 'An image of black women bending over cooking pots, preparing a meal for whites, depicts but does not critique the implied racial hierarchy'.⁸⁰⁴ Within the laager of whiteness that the Voortrekker Monument reproduces (white) Man is at the centre.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 251-252.

⁸⁰² Delmont, 'The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth', 1993, 93.

⁸⁰³ Ibid., 93.

⁸⁰⁴ Mason, 'Picturing the Beloved Country: Margaret Bourke-White, Life Magazine, and South Africa, 1949-1950', 2012, 159.

Master/slave relations are projected onto men and women situated by virtue of their race outside, or never quite inside, the laager.⁸⁰⁵

The friendship and family group of architect, artists and others engaged in the conception and design of the frieze are depicted within it as models who, ‘immortalised in stone and, by their integral association with the “heroic” deeds of the Voortrekkers, are imbued with an active role in the building of the Afrikaner nation, just as in the building of its monument’.⁸⁰⁶ Where black men functioned as models, it is clear that in life, they are assistants and not active participants in the narrative of the frieze. In Panel 8, the model for the Barolong leader Moroka was ‘Piet Malotho, a Sotho man who was employed as an assistant to the sculptors while they created the frieze’ (figure 4.21).⁸⁰⁷ Of course, the Afrikaans name ‘Piet’ would not necessarily be this man’s birth name but rather, as was usual in colonial and apartheid conditions, the name given or adopted for the purposes of navigating worlds economically, socially and politically dominated by whiteness. In *Chimera*, Vári cuts out the figure of the Voortrekker leader and that of the Barolong people modelled by Malotho. The official narratives tell of peaceful relations between the Voortrekkers and the Barolong, although, of course, the tale narrated here is compromised by the power relations and larger conditions of racial violence which were amplified and rendered unambiguous by the ideologies of the apartheid regime. In the white edition the ground in which the figures stand is obscured by whiteness (figure 4.34).

Vári deliberately selected and foregrounded the female figures depicted in the frieze: ‘I wanted to concentrate especially on the role of women and girls in this narrative of The Great Trek – the frieze in the Hall of Heroes’.⁸⁰⁸ Asked about the impetus for the

⁸⁰⁵ See: Steenkamp, ‘Apartheid to democracy: representation and politics in the Voortrekker Monument and Red Location Museum’, 2006.

⁸⁰⁶ Delmont, ‘The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth’, 1993, p.95.

⁸⁰⁷ Grobler, *Discover the Voortrekker Monument*, 1999, p.80. See also ‘The Visitor’s Guide’, p.80. Grobler refers to the tribe represented as ‘Rolong’ while the official visitor’s guide refers to it as the ‘Barolong’. The latter does not refer to Piet Malotho. These inconsistencies are beyond the scope of this study but function here to make a point about the frieze’s relation to questions of race, art and representation in conditions of apartheid.

⁸⁰⁸ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

emphasis on women she replies: 'I am a woman' - that would be the first order of my involvement in this story.⁸⁰⁹ Female figures, white women and girls, in the language of apartheid racial classificatory systems, are a significant feature of the Voortrekker Monument as a whole. At the top of the stairs leading to the Hall of Heroes, the entrance to the Monument, is a bronze sculpture by Anton van Wouw of a woman, and two children, a girl and a boy, who hold onto her skirts as they look upwards at her (figure 4.35). The woman looks resolutely ahead, her face shielded by the Voortrekker bonnet, the *kappie*. She, and women like her, are an unmistakable iconic presence throughout the monument. She is the *volksmoeder*: the Voortrekker ideal of wife and mother. Liese van Der Wat draws attention to the significance, and the heterogeneity of histories and attitudes attached to this gendered Afrikaner ideal: 'The main tenets of *volksmoeder* ideology are clearly internalised in this desire to honour both one's biological mother and also the so-called mothers of the *volk*. Since its inception, exaltation and objectification formed an integral part of the *volksmoeder* discourse'.⁸¹⁰ While the *volksmoeder's* role as the virtuous cornerstone of family continued to be celebrated the 'emphasis that was placed on the suffering and passive aspects of the *volksmoeder* was gradually displaced by an increasing importance given to active and strong women who wanted to be active in the political sphere as well, drawing on that tradition of Voortrekker women who were prepared to march over the Drakensberg barefoot rather than submit to British rule'.⁸¹¹ But it is not only Afrikaner heroines that the frieze depicts and pays tribute to: Thérèse Viglione, depicted in panel 15, and re-staged in Vári's *Chimera*, was not attached to the Great Trek or the Voortrekkers but rather to a group of Italian traders (figures 4.5-4.7).⁸¹² Despite the narratives figuring these heroines, they are active participants in ideologies attached to belief systems grounded in white supremacy, Afrikaner Christian Nationalist patriarchy, and the

⁸⁰⁹ See: Charl Blignaut, 'Untold History with a Historiography: A Review of Scholarship on Afrikaner Women', 2013.

⁸¹⁰ Van der Wat, 'The Comradely Ideal and the Volksmoeder Ideal: Uncovering Gender Ideology in the Voortrekker Tapestry', 1998, 93.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸¹² Viglione is referred to in the visitor's guide to 'The Voortrekker Monument', originally compiled by Riana Heymans, 1986 and then revised by Salomé Theart-Peddle, 2007. See p.29 of the guide.

master/slave relations that these generated and enacted.⁸¹³ Vári's insertion of her own body into the space of *Chimera* and her critical re-imagining of the frieze in the Hall of Heroes deliberately transgresses the ideal of the *volksmoeder* and the identities and roles attached to heteronormative conceptions of femininity within the world constructed by the Voortrekker Monument.

According to Moerdijk, panel 18 by Laurika Postma, the one woman artist commissioned for the design of the frieze, 'pays tribute to the women of the Great Trek who stood by their men in spite of all the tribulations and dangers of the Trek, giving their moral support in moments of crisis and danger' (figure 4.36).⁸¹⁴ The panel is titled: 'The women spur the men on to persevere'. Postma, Delmont notes, 'was the model for the standing woman on the extreme left who looks back to her husband and urges him forward. Her directional gesture to the right climaxes in the heroic rhetoric of Susanna Smit who significantly was modelled on Moerdijk's wife'.⁸¹⁵ One of Vári's chimerical figures, mimics, in a gesture of parody, the grand bodily gesture of Susanna Smit, wife of the Reverend Erasmus Smit, urging the Trekker men on (figure 4.37).⁸¹⁶ The head of this chimerical figure is ambiguous, neither distinctly human nor animal, its face is uncanny, resembling the blank expression of a mask. The heroic gesture of Susanna Smit is undone by Vári's technological rendering, her arm and hand obscured, flimsy and insubstantial.

Panel 14 of the frieze, by Postma, reproduces white supremacist narratives and tropes of vulnerable and innocent white women and children at the mercy of black men (figure 4.49). The frieze refers to official colonial, settler and apartheid narratives of conflicts and battles between Voortrekkers and the Zulu Kingdom over land and territory.⁸¹⁷ Steenkamp documents the furore that erupted around the prior depiction

⁸¹³ On race and gender in South Africa see the work of Desiree Lewis and Pumla Gqola et al.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.95.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.95.

⁸¹⁶ Delmont notes that Panel 18 refers to 'the episode that occurred in the office of the landdrost in Pietermaritzburg when Susanna Smit is said to have told the British representative that the Trekkers would rather return barefoot over the Drakensberg than bow down to the British government' (p.94).

⁸¹⁷ This complex historiography is beyond the scope of this study.

of the figure with the torch: ‘while still being planned, a scene, showing a Zulu soldier killing a baby, was made public by an English newspaper’ and following ‘an outcry from all sectors of society’ the figure was ‘replaced with a scene of a Zulu setting an ox-wagon alight’.⁸¹⁸ This frieze brings to mind Mbembe’s observation that ‘Africa is almost always deployed in the framework (or on the fringes) of a meta-text about the animal – to be exact, about the beast: its experience, its world, and its spectacle’.⁸¹⁹ He remarks drawing attention to historical racism and prejudice in discourses of the human: ‘We can give an account of him/her in the same way we can understand the psychic life of the beast. We can even, through a process of domestication and training, bring the African to where he or she can enjoy a fully human life’.⁸²⁰

Vári transforms panel 14 into a malleable, fluid space. Figures within its narrative and the tales that it tells are rendered less legible. She cuts out the female figure at the base of the panel who lies on the ground, propped up on her arms. Her head is tilted back, her hair is loose and uncovered by the traditional *kappie*, her clothes ripped to reveal a breast. In the video the figure morphs and detaches from the scene that is her ground, her body is turned towards us (figure 4.39). One of the chimerical figures derived from Vári’s technologically altered performance floats above the dying Voortrekker woman (figures 4.40-4.41). The figure’s head is that of an ox, and where hands or feet are imagined I see the hooves of animals. Unlike the other chimeras Vári imagines it is fully clothed and its legs are crossed. Vári disrupts and parodies the scene of violence imagined by Postma in panel 14 and in mobilising the head of a male animal, an ox, brings gender ambiguity to the digital re-invention of her own body.

Vári’s *Chimera* not only foregrounds the figures of women and girls in the frieze but also her own body as a woman artist. The chimerical figures that morph, float, dance, twist, crouch and contort throughout *Chimera* are technologically transformed versions of an actual performance that Vári staged privately, alone in a room with a

⁸¹⁸ Steenkamp, 2006, 251.

⁸¹⁹ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. 2001, p.1.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2.

camera, with various masks, costumes and props (figures 4.42-4.43). Vári explains that she is 'uncomfortable with live, physical performance' and films her performances with a 'stationary camera' alone 'in a room'.⁸²¹ While her first video *Alien* (1998) was produced with the assistance of a 'broadcasting design company' subsequent videos were made without external intervention.⁸²² In the construction of *Chimera*, Vári's performances were inserted into selected footage of the frieze that she reworked using Photoshop. Of *Chimera* Vári says, 'there are moments of nudity, of broaching the idea of the perverse, the taboo [...] I find it difficult to expect of others, to do that for me, to be pornographic for me, to be rude, and disgusting for me, or whatever it is'.⁸²³ Humour, in the form of parody, is present in Vári's deliberately exaggerated performances that disrupt and subvert the site of the Hall of Heroes, and its significance to Afrikaner Christian Nationalism.⁸²⁴

Vári's chimerical figures invite us to consider the gender politics at stake in her deliberate, considered disruptions. She refers to the chimerical figures as a woman saying: 'I wanted to have this woman as an unreliable presence. Something that morphs and changes. One moment she will have the head of a lion. Then she will have the head of a goat. In certain instances she's wearing bandages. I wanted to imply that there is something under the surface that you cannot pin down.'⁸²⁵ While these chimerical bodies refer to the body of the artist, and embody the biological attributes, breasts and genitalia of female gender identity, this is not always unambiguous. Vári's figures sometimes embody the signifiers of male animals, such as the mane of a male lion (figure 4.44)

⁸²¹ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁸²² Interview, Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁸²³ Interview (Minnette Vári and Yvette Greslé), Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

⁸²⁴ Humour, in the form of parody or irony, is a significant aspect of South African art practices and culture. See: Sharlene Khan, *Postcolonial Masquerading: A Critical Analysis of Masquerading Strategies in the Works of South African Artists Anton Kannemeyer, Tracey Rose, Mary Sibande, Nandipha Mntambo and Senzeni Marasela*. PhD dissertation, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2014.

See also the classic study of parody in art: Linda, A., Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Great Britain: Methuen, 1985).

⁸²⁵ Interview (Yvette Greslé with Minnette Vári) Johannesburg, 26 October 2011.

Vári's performances which she imagines as 'broaching the idea of the perverse, the taboo' suggest, within the particular conditions of South Africa and Vári's own relationship to its history, what Sara Ahmed names 'willful subjects'.⁸²⁶ Ahmed 'assembles a willfulness archive', which is potentially of critical and theoretical value to contemporary feminist art histories on South Africa working to untangle and critique legacies and reinscriptions of patriarchal, heteronormative, white supremacist authoritarianism: 'A willfulness archive would refer to documents that are passed down in which willfulness comes up, as a trait, as a character trait'.⁸²⁷ Locating the 'willful subject' within a philosophy of the will, and bringing this figure into a dialogue with the idea of law, Ahmed imagines her thus:

The willful subject is under arrest in coming to appear to a watchful eye, to the eye of the law, as the one who has certain qualities and attributes. To be arrested is not to be stationary. She moves around; she turns up by turning up in all the wrong places. The willful subject led me to where she came to appear.⁸²⁸

Vári's paradoxical, morphing, moving chimerical figures 'turning up in all the wrong places' are 'willful subjects'. These figures are a disruptive, contingent, pulsing force refusing a world in which each subject knows its place in a world structured to maintain the omnipresence of whiteness and Man. I imagine Vári's *Chimera* as an 'archive of willfulness' actively working to undo the meanings of the Voortrekker Monument, the Hall of Heroes and the wider ideological and discursive conditions produced by the sustained experience of apartheid and its particular relationship to patriarchal ideologies and myths.

⁸²⁶ Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.

Cyborg

A figure morphs from the frieze, which Vári re-imagines (figure 4.45). A cloth is wrapped around her waist, and a woman's breasts are visible, one elbow is bandaged and she leans on a cane. Her face and head bears the markers and significations of the animal, horns are visible, but she also appears alien and otherworldly, and there are no visible and distinct facial features. The wounds covered by the bandage are unknowable. She disappears and another emerges (figure 4.46). This figure floats, either dead or asleep. She is both a human and a non-human animal, a hoof is visible, and her skin appears to merge with unidentifiable matter, perhaps organic or artificial. I imagine each chimerical presence, which Vári constructs by means of digital technology, as a cyborg: a 'cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction'.⁸²⁹

The historical meanings of the cyborg and its uses encompass military technologies, medical and scientific research, science fiction genres and the virtual worlds made possible by digital technologies.⁸³⁰ The cyborg complicates historical narratives, lodged in the assumption of causal, linear time, bringing current political, social and cultural realities into a dialogue with imagined futures. It inhabits a contingent, temporal space of possibility and imagination: 'Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.'⁸³¹ Oppressive dualisms are embedded in how difference is imagined historically, and in apartheid South Africa these fixed on race. The cyborg is imagined here as a critical and political presence in Vári's performative dialogue with The Voortrekker Monument and the Hall of Heroes. Haraway asserts:

⁸²⁹ Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century', in David Bell and Barbara, M. Kennedy, *The Cybercultures Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p.291.

⁸³⁰ Chris H. Gray, (ed), *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

⁸³¹ Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', in Bell and Kennedy (eds) *The Cybercultures Reader*, 2000, p.316.

The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of self from the reflections of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in this border war have been the territories of production, reproduction and imagination.⁸³²

The idea of borders is lodged in the Voortrekker Monument and its ideological policing of historical memory. Haraway's cyborg, is attentive to the question of feminism and race and the conflicts, power-relations and exclusions that this implies.⁸³³ Ruth Kerkham refers to the cyborg in her critique of race and gender in Vári's work, although her focus is not on the figure of the cyborg as a critical strategy in itself.⁸³⁴ Kerkham draws attention to the absorption and uncritical relay of racial violence in the work of white South African women artists, particularly around the issue of black women's bodies. She examines Vári's depiction of the bodies of black women. Kerkham focuses on specific works, all of which are digital prints. In her discussion of Vári's *Souvenir* (1996) she describes how the artist '(super)imposes a computer image of her own body onto a wooden figurine of an African woman in the traditional pose of balancing a clay pot on her head'.⁸³⁵ She writes: 'The two races of these women merge in an offbeat questioning of racial identity and origin, as the constructed African cyborg sports stereotypically large lips and broad nostrils, as well as blue-green eyes and distinctly fair skin'.⁸³⁶

Kerkham also critiques Vári's *Self-Portrait I* and *II*, her practice of digitally 'darkening' her skin and her conflation of the animal and the body of the black woman. She argues that Vári's *Coup* (1996) where the artist's body is only subtly alluded to and 'where

⁸³² Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', in Bell and Kennedy (eds) *The Cybercultures Reader*, 2000, p.292.

⁸³³ Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', in Bell and Kennedy (eds) *The Cybercultures Reader*, 2000.

⁸³⁴ Ruth Kerkham, 'A deadly explosive on her tongue', *Third Text*, 14:50, (2000), 45-60.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.47.

issues of race, identity and authenticity are explored without direct representation of the black avoids the narcissistic tendencies of *Self Portrait* and *Zulu*.⁸³⁷

The problem of reinscribing historical violence, which Kerkham foregrounds in her article, reinforces the project of continuous, self-reflexive processes of hearing, critically and attentively, the voices of subjects who embody histories of racial violence and the traumatic iterations of these. The historical deployment of the artist's own body within feminist-informed and conceptual and experimental art practices is not necessarily narcissistic. This is contingent on the particularities of each work and the strategies, and modes of representation mobilised by the artist. Within the specific conditions of South Africa these strategies/modes of representation can function to obstruct and resist histories of objectification, and have the capacity to draw attention to the artist's own subjective relation to the past.

The Voortrekker Monument and the Hall of Heroes appear, in their materiality and physicality, immutable. These are sites in which Christian Nationalist ideologies and myths are deeply embedded. How then is the historical and ideological excision of narratives to be addressed? Histories of black women in the narrative produced by the frieze are, with minor exception, excised: Panel 25, designed by Postma ('Dingane is murdered by the Swazis, 1840') depicts black female figures (figure 4.47).⁸³⁸ One of the women weeps at the death of Dingane, her grief expressed as she buries her face in her hands.⁸³⁹ In the frieze these female figures are not named, and any individuality remains unmarked. *Chimera* foregrounds the grouping of these women, the dying figure of Dingaan and two of the Swazi warriors (figures 4.48-4.49). Vári inserts herself into this scene as chimera, or cyborg, appearing and disappearing, in a continuous process of transformation. In the black edition the figure of Dingaan is luminous, and in both editions Vári explores the significations of colour and light, whiteness and blackness, fading and luminescence (figures 4.50-4.51). In *Chimera*, Vári's practice of

⁸³⁷ Ibid., p.49

⁸³⁸ Grobler, *Discover the Voortrekker Monument* (Pretoria: Grourie Entrepreneurs, 1999), p.114. See also the revised 'Visitor's Guide and Souvenir', 2007, p.25.

⁸³⁹ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 2003, p.165.

digital colouring undoes the omniscient whiteness of the frieze. The mediums of performance and the imaginative possibilities of technology allow Vári to work towards dislodging, even if not literally, the monolithic ideological presence of the Voortrekker Monument. Imagined as cyborgs, the chimerical figures, which are digital transformations of Vári's own body, allow her to displace the intractable dualisms and violent excisions of the Monument's architecture and sculpture. Haraway's cyborg resists a narrative certain of its place in the world, and this is of political significance to the aftermath of historical authoritarianism and racial brutality in South Africa.

Chimera's material embrace of multiplicity, transience and performativity stages a political and historical sensibility critical to the dismantling of visual languages that work ideologically and discursively to oppress, silence, excise and reinscribe violence.

Conclusion

Jo Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (drive by shooting)* (1999/2000) mobilises a covert site of apartheid violence, which bears no visible traces of brutality. I hear, through appropriated sound, an account of abject violence, yet the landscape I see yields no visible evidence, only affective registers of haunting, displacement, unease and irresolution. Berni Searle's *Mute* (2008) stages a soundless encounter across two screens. On one screen I see her weeping figure overlaid with X's that burn and fade, leaving only amorphous reminders of their existence. On the other I see an illuminated form, the ashen remains of a xenophobic killing, encircled by figures in darkness. The space mapped up by light and ashes brings no clarity as the video loops and repeats. Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* (2010) explores a marginal subject, Dimitri Tsafendas, who is also Verwoerd's assassin but through the visual, sonic and textual devices mobilised by Siopis, I come to understand that I cannot claim to know Tsafendas. He is ultimately a figment of historical imagination, and an object of psychic projections, ideologies and epistemologies produced by narratives that fashion him as a historical subject. The media of anonymous found film detached from its context and the historical conditions of its production, the music soundtrack and the subtitles produce sensations of disorientation and displacement. The film registers its encounter with light: burns and sprocket marks invoke affects and sensations. In the making of *Chimera* (White Edition 2001/Black Edition 2001-2002) Vári enters the Voortrekker Monument's *Hall of Heroes*, a site of apartheid and personal memory, and deliberately sets out to resist and disrupt the Voortrekker Monument's immutable ideological and architectural presence. Ghostly figures of human and non-human animals, and the chimerical, morphing image of Vári herself, imagined technologically through the conceptual and theoretical figure of the cyborg, appear, disappear and reappear on the translucent, ephemeral architecture of voile screens.

I argued that video art, which is temporal in structure, has the capacity for a highly conceptual and imaginative dialogue with South African histories. I foregrounded the idea that the art object, in a particular form, may function as a productive site for

historical, theoretical and philosophical thought. The history and memory of apartheid in South Africa, as a prolonged experience of racial oppression and violence, underpinned the emphasis, in this dissertation, on memory and trauma. I sought to contribute to ongoing critiques (now established within post-apartheid scholarship) of ideologies and metaphors of the Rainbow Nation, and of the constitution and processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the discourses of truth, forgiveness and reparation, which it produced. I hoped to disrupt what Premesh Lalu refers to, in his critique of South African historiography, as ‘neat temporal markers’ with an emphasis on the commonplace distinctions between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.⁸⁴⁰ I focused on video art’s encounter with historical events/episodes and figures in South Africa, the significance of which is registered across the historical/temporal zones defined as apartheid and post-apartheid. An important departure point for thinking about the temporality of video art’s engagement with history was Achille Mbembe’s textured and conceptually rich articulation of enmeshed, contingent and fluid temporalities in relation to history as an object of inquiry.⁸⁴¹ This dissertation made visible each work’s staging of multiple, non-linear temporalities, which may be experienced simultaneously, and through the contingent and ephemeral experience of movement. This aspect of the videos is a particular strength working towards the conceptual and theoretical process of troubling the apartheid/post-apartheid binary, and posing questions about the relationship between history and trauma in South Africa.

Each of the videos engaged enter into a dialogue with historical narratives embedded within the experience and memory of violence and racial oppression in South Africa. My study, as a whole, which also includes research into South African archives and historiographic concerns, brought into view the ubiquity of violence in South Africa, across apartheid/post-apartheid. My exploration of the artworks as sites of inquiry unearthed buried narratives of violence as well as elaborating on forms that are well documented in South African historical and social research. My emphasis, in

⁸⁴⁰ Lalu, ‘Thinking Ahead!’, *South African Historical Journal*, 63:4 (2011) 581-593, 582.

⁸⁴¹ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 2002. See the chapter titled ‘Time on the Move’, pp.1-23.

considering each work's encounter with violence, was on its resistance to spectacle in Njabulo Ndebele's sense. Each refuses a didactic representation of what a historical event/episode or figure *is* or *was*. Annie Coombes' work on history and memory in South Africa, following the official transition from apartheid, informed my interest in paying attention to the particular capacities of artworks, their relation to subjectivity, and their dialogue with the contestations embedded in the idea of history and memory in South Africa.⁸⁴² I deliberately selected work that refuses to yield transparent and legible representations, and that deliberately contributed to historiographic concerns with the political, ideological, discursive and epistemic limitations of evidence, truth and objectivity.

Concepts of trauma, historical and psychoanalytical, contribute to how the relationships between temporality, violence and history might be theorised. Informed by art historical approaches to the relationships between art and trauma, and in particular the work of Jill Bennett and Griselda Pollock I foregrounded the internal worlds/logics of the videos I chose to focus on.⁸⁴³ While acknowledging that Bennett and Pollock are differently situated theoretically I was engaged by their emphasis on the specificities of visual languages, on the internal logics/worlds of art objects, and their significance as sites for critical thought, and historical, theoretical and philosophical inquiry. I grappled with both the historical and psychoanalytical significance of trauma as a theoretical concept. The relationship between psychoanalytical concepts of trauma, temporality and the idea of post-traumatic memory has emerged as a significant aspect of the videos. The idea of opacity surfaced as a major conceptual underpinning of the works. Édouard Glissant's theorisation of opacity and transparency was brought to my analysis of Penny Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger*.⁸⁴⁴ In this sense, it relates particularly to histories and experiences of racial oppression, and can be brought to the dissertation as a whole. I also explored the conceptual links

⁸⁴² Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa: History After Apartheid*, 2004.

⁸⁴³ Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005; Griselda Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, 2013.

⁸⁴⁴ Glissant, (translated by Betsy Wing, 1997), *Poetics of Relation*, 1997.

that might be made between an idea of opacity and psychoanalytical and historical conceptions of trauma. These relate to the irrepresentability of trauma, and its elusive, unsignifiable presence. Psychoanalytical concepts related to absence are invoked by visual and sonic vocabularies of haunting, ambiguous absent-presences and residues and traces. Spillages of light suggest ghostly forms in Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas*. Vári's soundtrack suggest ghostly echoes of sounds travelling across time and space, unmoored from their source. Searle's staged weeping in dialogue with the ashen absence on the opposite screen brought me to Judith Butler's engagement with Freud's work on mourning and melancholia, and the enigmatic aspects of loss.⁸⁴⁵

Affects and sensations of disorientation and displacement are central to the experience of Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger*, which entered into a dialogue with the traumatic effects of apartheid classificatory practices on subjects who elude fixity. Broader narratives of citizenship, of belonging/not belonging were also affectively experienced through the deployment of found-footage film-making, which signalled multiple geographical sites, across space and time, randomly presented without context. Catherine Russell's analyses of found footage filmmaking and allegory was brought to the work's refusal to root meaning through time and place.⁸⁴⁶ These affects/sensations of disorientation/displacement in relation to place are also present in Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* work and Vári's *Chimera*. In Ractliffe's work the joins of the photograph are uneven, and her deliberate manipulation of the camera producing light spillages and obscured distinctions between the constituents of the landscape she photographs are ambiguous. Vári imagined here as Sara Ahmed's 'willful' subject and Donna Haraway's cyborg works to unhinge fixity of place and time bringing ephemeral and fluid materialities, and non-dualistic figuration, to the white marble of the frieze in the Hall of Heroes with its rendering of the worldview propagated by Afrikaner Christian Nationalism.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁵ Butler, *Prearious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 2002.

⁸⁴⁶ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, 1999.

⁸⁴⁷ Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 2014); Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 2008.

In paying attention to historical narratives of racial trauma I mobilised Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in relation to Siopis' *Obscure White Messenger* and Vári's black and white editions of the *Chimera*.⁸⁴⁸ Siopis' work, through the device of the subtitles, brought into view particular aspects of the psychic trauma produced by historical and political conditions of white supremacy, its ideologies, discourses and everyday functioning. The found footage the significance of which is contingent on who looks and how brought into view the social, political and economic operation of whiteness as a theoretical concept, and ordinary and insidious manifestations of power relations differentiating white and black subjects. The visual manifestations of an all-consuming ideological, discursive and epistemological whiteness opposed to blackness, and the psychic affects of what Fanon refers to as narcissism, is de-centred by Vári in a number of ways including the construction of a black edition and the technological exaggeration or diffusion of black and white colour.⁸⁴⁹

My interest in the works I selected was shaped, at the outset, by their opaque-ness. I was conscious, through my encounters with them, of feelings, sensations and affects. Each resisted, obscured and disrupted the historian's relationship - even if this is always necessarily under scrutiny - to objectivity, empirical truths, facts and the evidentiary. Each video presented me with extreme methodological difficulty. This difficulty, which challenged and motivated me, coupled with the absence of sustained histories and theories of South African video art, shaped my mode of engagement. In grappling with the conceptual difficulty of individual works I began each chapter with a highly subjective and experimental description of my encounter with them. I discovered a methodological departure point in Pollock's reading of Bracha Ettinger and the idea of '*fascinace*' - 'a prolonged, aesthetically affecting and learning encounter'.⁸⁵⁰ I was also engaged by Bennett's resistance to the imposition of a

⁸⁴⁸ Fanon, (translated from the French by Charles Lam Markmann), *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁸⁵⁰ Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, 2013, preface.

didactic reading of an artwork that seeks to identify what it is about, or what it means. Bennett foregrounds the idea that art is 'always productive of ideas'.⁸⁵¹

In exploring the idea of the artworks as a 'learning encounter' or a site 'productive of ideas' I remained attentive to each work, to its visual/sonic/temporal/spatial languages and to the feelings, emotions, sensations and affects it produced. I also endeavoured to engage each artist directly through interviews and email conversations, and was able to do so with all with the exception of Searle. This mode of engagement produced, in conclusion, a multi-sited conceptual and theoretical encounter with the videos, which aimed to be alert to the particular capacities of each while cogniscent of the histories engaged, and their historiographic significance to South African discourse. I attempted to negotiate art objects and historiographic concerns navigating both apparently amorphous territories of feeling/emotion/sensation/affect, and the historian's commitment to analytical modes of inquiry. This process brought me to the identification of particular theoretical concepts, which were then mobilised.

The ethics and politics of representation, whether as artist or scholar, and the potential for reinscribing historical and epistemic violence, concerned me throughout the writing of this dissertation. I was also concerned, from a psychoanalytic perspective, with the unconscious processes through which violence related to race, gender, and prejudice more broadly can be inscribed, even insidiously and unconsciously. Okwui Enwezor's essay 'Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Art' (1997) is a landmark text, which makes a significant contribution to the ethical questions as stake in art and representation following the sustained experience of racial violence in South Africa. It is applicable not only to the practices of artists but also to methodological problems embedded in the constitution and writing of art history following the transition from apartheid.⁸⁵²

⁸⁵¹ Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005, p.8.

⁸⁵² Enwezor, 'Reframing the black subject ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African representation', 1997.

Dominick LaCapra's concept of 'empathic unsettlement', explored in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), and Jill Bennett's work on art, trauma, and empathy underpinned my argument for the ethical and political potential of each work, which rests in their refusal to objectify or speak on behalf of those tortured and killed, and for survivors transformed, in different ways, by lived experiences of racial violence and trauma in South Africa.⁸⁵³ I considered the aesthetic dimensions of LaCapra's 'empathic unsettlement' and thought about its significance not only to the historian but also to the artist mobilising it in my reading of Ractliffe's Vlakplaas in particular.⁸⁵⁴ I conceived of the artist as LaCapra's 'attentive secondary witness' and imagine how she might enter into a 'virtual experience', which resists claiming experiences that are not her own while at the same time being able to empathically engage.⁸⁵⁵ Through the process of writing this dissertation I paid attention to how each work materially, affectively, and conceptually registered the artist's presence. This occurs overtly through the performances of Searle and Vári, and opaquely through registers of movement or decisions that informed the making of the works, and that marked them materially. For example, I noted how Ractliffe's presence in the construction of the work is registered through the uneven action of manually pulling the photographic strip beneath the video camera. Vári's action of filming the frieze as she walked with her hand-held camera is present in uneven, and at times shaky movements. These aspects of the works enriched the subjective and personal narratives of the artists that emerged from the interviews, and Ractliffe, Siopis and Vári's lived encounter with apartheid as women, and as subjects classified white.

Situating my study within the politics and ethics of feminist thought, and its art historical significance, I sought through the writing of this dissertation to formulate a methodology that is resistant to positivism and empirical understanding, and indeed, within the particular context of apartheid and its aftermath, to authoritarian modes of understanding. I chose to pay attention to a specific generation of women artists

⁸⁵³ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001; Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 2005.

⁸⁵⁴ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.78.

located in South Africa all of whom have deployed the medium of video to explore the subjective experience of historical events/episodes and figures. I am now concerned with the project of thinking across generations of women artists encompassing younger generations born in the 1970s and 1980s who, similarly to the artists engaged in this dissertation, explore the medium of video art in their encounter with history: Tracey Rose (b.1974); Sharlene Khan (b.1977); Lerato Shadi (b.1979); Dineo Seshee Bopape (b.1981). I hope in future work, and through engaging with video art in the work of South African women artists, to develop the ideas of temporality and opacity, and their potential for our understandings of the relationships between art, trauma and history in South Africa.

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