

**NOMADIC FIGURATIONS
OF
IDENTITY
IN THE WORK
OF
BERNI SEARLE**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree Magister Artium (Visual Studies)

in the

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

MAY 2005

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SUMMARY

Title of dissertation: Nomadic figurations of identity in the work of Berni Searle
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Degree: Magister Artium (Visual Studies)

This study focuses on Berni Searle's art, in which she searches for alternative figurations of identity. For Searle, identity as a category seems insufficient, as it cannot account for individuals of mixed heritage. Searle's body of work testifies to an attempt to position and locate herself and marginalised subjects within post-apartheid South Africa. History, tradition, culture, race and gender are pivotal to Searle's visual examination of her body and her identity, as these inscribe the subject at both symbolic and physical levels. Identity was investigated within South African context and the contexts of various postcolonial, postmodern and feminist debates. Searle's works were investigated revealing nomadic subjectivity, as philosophised about by Gilles Deleuze and theorised about by Rosi Braidotti. Nomadic subjectivity promotes the notion that identity is fluid and located in the interstitial spaces between dichotomies and various debates. The habitation of such liminal spaces in the interstices between binary oppositions and views relates to what Homi Bhabha has defined as the "third space" and the notion of hybridity. Searle constructs her identity by affixing disparate aspects of her self. This is a continuous process whereby the artist inserts and erases her body. Searle's works are investigated by using the film as a format. In *Cinema 1: the movement-image* (1986) Deleuze outlined three core cinematic elements, namely the frame, shot and montage, which are employed in an attempt to investigate the various processes at work in Searle's artistic production. In addition to this, these filmic components were considered for their conceptual implications both in terms of the medium of film and symbolically. The concept of time, as discussed in *Cinema 2: the time-image* (1989) was utilised to investigate the implications of time for the nomadic subject and the notion of memory.

Hierdie studie fokus op die kunswerke van Berni Searle waarin sy alternatiewe vorme van identiteit ondersoek. Vir Searle is identiteit as 'n kategorie onvoldoende, aangesien dit nie voldoende rekenskap gee oor individue wat 'n gemengde erfenis het nie. Deur middel van haar kunswerke probeer Searle om haarself, asook die gemarginaliseerde subjek te lokaliseer en te positioneer teen die agtergrond van post-apartheid Suid-Afrika. Geskiedenis, tradisie, kultuur, ras en gender is sentraal tot Searle se visuele ondersoeke van haar liggaam en haar identiteit, aangesien dit haar identiteit vorm op beide 'n simboliese en 'n fisiese vlak. Die genoemde aspekte van identiteit word hier ondersoek binne die grense van die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks, asook die konteks van verskeie post-koloniale, postmoderne en feministiese debatte. Searle se werke is gebruik om nomadiese identiteit te ondersoek, soos gefilosofeer deur Gilles Deleuze en geteoretiseer deur Rosi Braidotti. Nomadiese subjektiwiteit beskou identiteit as 'n vloeibare konsep wat mens vind tussen die spasies van verskeie debatte. Hierdie lokalisering van sulke "tussen-in" spasies kan herlei word na dit waarna Homi Bhabha verwys as die "third space", asook sy bekende teorie van hibriditeit. Searle vorm haar identiteit deur verskeie aspekte van haar erfenis aanmekaar te las. Hierdie kunswerke word ondersoek deur na film as formaat te kyk. In *Cinema 1: the movement-image* (1986) identifiseer Deleuze drie basiese elemente van film, naamlik die "frame", "shot" en "montage", waarvolgens Searle se werke ondersoek is. Hierdie filmiese konsepte word in ag geneem op 'n simboliese vlak, asook in terme van die filmmedium wat die kunstenaar gebruik. Die idee van tyd, soos bespreek in *Cinema 2: the time-image* (1989), is aangewend om die implikasies van nomadiese subjektiwiteit, asook geheue, te ondersoek.

KEY TERMS

Absence; Body politics; Collage; Deleuze (Gilles); Erasure; Exoticism; Ethnography; Figuration; Film; Framing; Gaze; In-between; Montage; Memory; Objectification; Post-apartheid; Postcolonialism; South African art; Searle (Berni).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The financial assistance given to me by the University of Pretoria towards this research is hereby acknowledged. The opinions expressed in this thesis and the conclusions arrived at are those of the author and should not necessarily be attributed to the University of Pretoria.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Elfriede Dreyer of the Department of Visual Arts (University of Pretoria), for her continued guidance, support, encouragement and constructive critical input during the writing of my dissertation.

I would also like to thank Berni Searle for taking an interest in my project and for the unpublished articles and many catalogues she mailed to me.

Furthermore, I am most appreciative of the efficient service and extensive searches conducted by the library staff of both the University of Pretoria and the University of South Africa.

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